

In A Queer Place in Time: Fictions of Belonging in Italy 1890-2010

By

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Abstract

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*In a Queer Place in Time: Fictions of Belonging in Italy 1890-2010* maps the “elsewheres”—spatial, temporal and intertextual— that authorize same-sex desire in modern Italy. Tracing a genealogy that spans from nineteenth century travel writing about Italy to contemporary Italian novels, I argue that texts exported from the Northern Europe and the U.S. function as vital site of affiliation and vexing points of discrepancy for Italy’s queers. Pier Vittorio Tondelli’s *Camere separate* (1989), for instance, cites the British novelist Christopher Isherwood as proof that – somewhere else – silence did not yoke homosexuality. Rather than defining sexuality as a constant set of desires, I demonstrate it to be a retroactive fiction. It is the fleeting affinity that the reading of inherited texts can evoke. In examining the reception of transnational gay narratives in the national context of Italy, this dissertation argues that the concept of “Western” homosexuality is internally riven. Ultimately, *In a Queer Place in Time* illuminates how local histories – including affective differences like shame, estrangement and backwardness – continue to haunt gay culture’s global fictions.

## Introduction

In the opening pages of Pier Vittorio Tondelli's *Camere separate*, the book's protagonist, Leo, mentions to a friend that he had just met someone at a party. His friend's response is worth dwelling on:

'E com'è questo nuovo?' dice Rodolfo fra i singulti. 'Un Chez Maxim's? No, no... Spero non sia un *wrong blond*. [...] O forse è ... non dirmi Leo che hai trovato...'

Leo tace, preferendo eccitare la sua curiosità. [...]

'Voglio sperare che non si tratti di un Whitman. Sei a Parigi per riciclarci un poco e non trovi niente di meglio che cadere su un Whitman' (15).

All of the homoerotic types listed here allude to an Anglo-American writers or Northern European locales. A Chez Maxim's comes from a remark made by the gay writer Christopher Isherwood, a "wrong blond" was coined by W.H Auden and a Whitman references both the author of *Leaves of Grass* and a comment made by Allen Ginsberg.<sup>1</sup> Not a single Italian writer is cited. In discussing same-sex attraction, these men mention stories penned in another place.<sup>2</sup>

This scene is emblematic of one of the central queries of my dissertation: why do so many Italian writers look beyond Italy's national horizon for literary models of same-sex desire? I address how "l'omosessualità [...] giunge ad essere pensata" (Giartosio, *Perché non possiamo non dirci*, 50) in modern Italian literature. My dissertation asks, how is same-sex desire talked about in these texts? What are the stories and ellipses – a snarl of "teorie, racconti, ragionamenti, conversazioni, atti concreti e anche fantasie, sogni, incubi" – around which it has been told (Giartosio, 50).

A principal way it has been told, I argue, is by pointing out what subjectivities seem easier to live *elsewhere*. Gianni Rossi Barilli sees an absence in Italy's literary tradition of "spazi reali per affermare una positiva immagine della coppia omosessuale."<sup>3</sup> When Tondelli was composing *Camere separate* (1989), that "space" seemed to many gay and lesbian Italians to exist – chiefly – on other shores, in others' words. *Al di là dell'Italia* (in US cities like San Francisco and in northern Europe) homosexuality is figured as less weighed down by finger-wagging disapproval.

The narrator of Matteo B. Bianchi's *Generations of Love* (1999), for example, represents his desire for other men in terms of a desire for some place else. He writes: "riconoscevo che a a me piacevano i ragazzi. [...] Sapevo che al di fuori, nel mondo, da

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<sup>1</sup> A word about terminology: In the course of this dissertation, I will use a few key words to describe the historically contingent embodiments of same-sex desire. When appropriate, I will use the noun

<sup>2</sup> Tondelli's novel relates Leo's struggle to deal with Thomas' early death and his difficulty in imagining that two men could ever live happily together. In terms of plot and overriding themes, *Camere separate* can be read as an AIDS era rewriting of two earlier gay novels: Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964) and James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956). While Isherwood's text centers on the protagonist's effort to recover from his lover's sudden death, *Giovanni's Room* treats the tumultuous and tragic love affair between two young foreigners in Paris. *Camere separate* both explicitly thematizes allusions to other "queer" writers in its narration and, more subtly, reworks the plots of two widely read queer novels.

<sup>3</sup> See, Gianni Rossi Barilli, Gianni, *Il movimento gay in Italia* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1999) 129.

qualche parte, dovevano pur esserci prosperose opportunità che mi attendevano, ma per il momento ero intrappolato lì.”<sup>4</sup> Gay desire is *altrove*. Home is not where the homo is.

My dissertation engages the ambivalent, fraught relationship many Italian writers have with “i testi chiave della letteratura omosessuale” (Bianchi, 97). Drawn to them for inspiration and aware that – written about someplace else – they can’t convey Italy’s peculiarities, these writers both allude to a foreign literary tradition and invent one that speaks to what is different about Italy. This project is, as a result, comparative. My dissertation looks at Italian writers’ reliance on queer novels written outside of Italy and show how in their works certain tales – i.e. the coming-out narrative – are revisited, problematized or outright discarded once imported.

At the same time, I analyze the privileged place Italy holds in earlier generations’ homoerotic topographies. An understanding that Italy was *once* deemed a homosexual Promised Land inflects the stories *contemporary* gay writers tell about Italy.<sup>5</sup> While for others Italy had seemed a land of sexual plenty, to many Italians an Italy more receptive of queer desires a still unreached horizon – a bygone past or future not yet arrived at.

And yet, the very idea of this lack evidences some of the profound cultural shifts Italy underwent in the second half of the twentieth century. Pasolini, for example, rejected as too limiting schemas of sexuality in which “un omosessuale ama, o fa l’amore, con un altro omosessuale.”<sup>6</sup> The “coppia omosessuale” was to him an oxymoron, because – he said – “homosexuals” long to sleep with straight men.<sup>7</sup> Arbasino claimed that the silence garbing homosexuality in Italy – “si fa ma non si dice” – made it Europe’s most “bisexual” nation.<sup>8</sup> Whereas Pasolini’s homosexuality was

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<sup>4</sup> Matteo B. Bianchi, *Generations of Love* (Milano: Baldini & Castaldi S.p.A., 1999) 47.

<sup>5</sup> While on vacation in Portugal, the narrator of *Generations of Love* encounters a young man named Ricardo. Their conversation is worth citing here:

“‘Turista?’

‘Si.’

‘Di dove?’

‘Italia.’

‘Aaaah, Itaaliala!’ sospirò lui, come se il pronunciarne il nome evocasse paradasi perduti’ (44).

Italy is a land once famed a male-male paradise. The gay Italian tourist, traveling abroad, is aware of this fantasy, further accentuating his idea of ‘home’ as somehow ‘lacking.’ The Italy he left behind to realize his desire for other men is the same place that, in different era, others had invested with longing and desire. That ‘paradise’ is the home he experiences as wanting.

<sup>6</sup> Qtd. in Barbagli, Marzio and Colombo, Asher. *Omosessuali moderni: gay e lesbiche in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001) 246.

<sup>7</sup> Pasolini questioned the “discutibile ideologia” of Italy’s emergent gay culture. He claimed that “l’omosessuale, in genere (nell’enorme maggioranza de, almeno nei paesi mediterranei) ama, e vuol fare l’amore con un eterosessuale disposto ad un’esperienza omosessuale, ma la cui eterosessualità non sia minimamente in discussione. Egli deve essere ‘maschio.’” Pasolini’s (questionable) words should be a reminder that analyses of gender should compliment studies of sexuality. Gender norms, after all, are one of the axes shaping/constraining desire. Qtd. in Barbagli, Marzio and Colombo, Asher. *Omosessuali moderni: gay e lesbiche in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001) 247.

<sup>8</sup> In his *Epistola ai froci romani* (1978), Arbasino wrote:

Fate, fate gli spiritosi o gli sciocchini, compagni... Eravate come ‘pesci nell’acqua,’ integrati nella società più bisessuale d’Europa, perché qui il sesso era facile e diffuso, spontaneo e disponibile, allegro e sportivo, pagano e gentile, privo di colpe cattoliche di rimorsi puritani e di complessi borghesi, soprattutto perché finché una cosa non viene nominata dunque non esiste e rimane invisibile anche se la si fa ... Non bastavano tre notti – ricordate? – per girare tutti i posti di incontro polimorfi molto facili e molto

pederastic, non-minoritarian and eroticized Italy's working class, Italians of Tondelli's generation came of age exposed to a minority model of gay identity. No longer the safe screen behind which men might realize homosexual desire, silence was, now, a problem.

There is a profound irony to all this. As recently as the start of the 1900s, Italy was envisioned as a permissive playground for many well-to-do northern Europeans: a homoerotic *locus amoenus* where one could, with relative impunity, have sex with other men or youths.<sup>9</sup> Various factors nourished this reputation: 1) unlike Germany and Great Britain, Italy had no laws forbidding sex between consenting men, 2) Italy was believed to be the site where 'classical' notions of beauty, exalting the male nude, had been reborn and 3) a persistent belief that Italy (and, particularly, southern Italy) wallowed in an almost pagan *gioia di vivere*, redolent of the Orient. Many famous writers (Oscar Wilde, Karl Ulrichs, Frederick Rolfe, John Addington Symonds, André Gide, E.M. Forester) went to Italy in search of this male-male *paradiso*.

Italy's privileged position in the northern Europe's homoerotic imaginary, though, would be of little comfort to the gay and lesbian Italians much later in the twentieth century. Many continue to decry Italy's relative 'arretratezza' when compared to the rights and cultural acceptance LGBT people have – in their eyes – achieved in the United States and the rest of Western Europe. In *Il gay: dove si racconta come l'identità omosessuale è stata inventata*, Paolo Zanotti claims that northern Europe and U.S. cities have come to supplant the role Italy once played in the European homoerotic imaginary. "E' San Francisco la principale tappa del Grand Tour gay nel secondo Novecento, non più l'Italia," he writes.<sup>10</sup>

In *Generations of Love*, a group of 20-something Italian gay men plan a trip, after flipping through "la più famosa guida gay del mondo, che porta il nome di un gladiatore". The friends opt to go to Amsterdam, referred to as "la cosiddetta San Francisco d'Europa, omosessualmente parlando" (90). They playfully call the gay guide "la Bibbia." Condensed in these lines is one of the contradictions facing gay and lesbian Italians today. In search of a country, a place, an elsewhere more receptive to "omosessuali," these friends set their sights on Europe's 'San Francisco.' At the same time, the very guide directing them to Amsterdam is a reminder of the homoerotic allure Italy had once held for earlier generations.

Bianchi's characters set out on an inverted Grand Tour – southern Europeans visiting the north, having imagined it as more tolerant of homosexuality and a necessary

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simpatici, e le divisioni o differenze classiste c'entravano davvero poco, in quelle spiagge e stazioni e terme e parchi e bastioni e colossi, giacché si era vestiti tutti in modo molto 'casual,' senza una lira adosso, e vigeva semmai il razzismo di centimetraggio. E adesso, come se non bastassero i falsi problemi e i tormentoni provocati dai giornalini 'liberati' o zozzi, ecco tutti questi gruppi che facendo i collettivi sul discutere e mai sul vivere si costruiscono giorno dopo giorno i loro ghetti.

Qtd. in Rossi Barilli, Gianni. *Il movimento gay in Italia* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1999) 54.

<sup>9</sup> Paolo Zanotti describes Italy's peculiar place in homosexual Northern Europeans' erotic imaginaries. He writes that: "da un lato, il Sud [dell'Europa] contava poco, perché gli stessi omosessuali meridionali non si consideravano tali; dall'altro però, occupava un posto d'onore nell'immaginario omosessuale nordico. Il Mediterraneo era al tempo stesso la patria perduta [...] e una semipatria presente, il luogo ideale dove dirigersi per una vacanza di carattere culturale o sessuale o, a seconda delle disponibilità economiche, per un esilio più o meno dorato." See, Zanotti, Paolo. *Il gay: dove si racconta com'è stata inventata l'identità omosessuale* (Roma: Fazi Editore, 2005) 206-207.

<sup>10</sup> Zanotti, 2005. 215.

site of pilgrimage for modern gays. If not at home, then maybe there they will find sexual liberation. Whereas their generation looks to San Francisco or northern Europe, men in another age saw Italy as the *meta* of their same-sex peregrinations. Once the liberating point of arrival for elite European homosexuals, Italy is for these young men the *casa* they are trying to leave. Italy cannot embody for them a sodomical *paradiso*. Its norms (the demands of family, Catholic sexual mores and silences) are just too close to home.

But the novel does more than just invert the “tappe” of homoerotic travel, replacing one libertine locale with another. Instead, it challenges the narratives of flight that, according to Judith Halberstam, govern many recent gay American novels and films.<sup>11</sup> Protagonists in these tales tend to move to the big city in search of another life, leaving behind their hometowns. Metonymically, urban centers come to embody queer liberation while the small town incarnates small-mindedness and, more broadly, the constraints of compulsive heterosexuality.<sup>12</sup> Despite its protagonist embarking on a journey of sexual discovery in northern Europe, *Generation of Love*'s narrator does *not* find happiness *altrove*. He falls in love in the town he grew up in. He realizes that this place, which he had seen as foreign to his longings, was —unbeknownst to him— ‘home’ to other, albeit clandestine, gay men.

Bianchi complicates the gay narrative of flight by transplanting it into and translating it for an Italian context. Even while *Generations of Love* cites foreign gay writers like E.M. Forster and David Levitt, the novel's emphasis on the local stresses the contingency, not universality, of such imported queer narratives. In Italy, many children (and especially male children) live at home and are financially dependent on their parents well into their 30s. Those who attend university often commute to local schools while continuing to stay under their parents' roofs. Compared to places like New York, London and Paris, Italy has no full-scale “gay” neighborhoods that might be seen as the metonyms of sexual liberation. Given all this, stories built on a trajectory of escape —with urban gay life as the liberated point of arrival— don't match the experiences of or the possibilities available to many lesbian and gay Italians. This does not mean *home* goes unproblematicized in their accounts, but for many Italian queers the problems *a casa* must be lived through and not fled.

Italy's strong regionalism, lack of urban gay centers and its role in others' lusty imaginaries all shape the way the narratives of same-sex desire dominant in America and northern European —often told as equivalent to *the gay experience everywhere*— have been received there. Ample attention, then, should be paid to the discursive particularities and internal fissures in the Italian case.<sup>13</sup> But even as we look at what makes these novels distinct from the stories of same-sex desire told elsewhere, we should keep in mind that gays and lesbians in Italy have in recent years begun to coalesce around a civil rights

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<sup>11</sup> See, J. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) 13-16.

<sup>12</sup> A clear example of this is the lesbian novel *Rubyfruit Jungle*. Some American texts that problematize this plot include Randal Keenan's *A Visitation of Spirits*, Michael Cunningham's *A Home at the End of the World* and Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*.

<sup>13</sup> I have *no* interest in seconding those who see in Italy an essentially different, more ancient breed of “Mediterranean” homosexuality. For a discussion of this, see the chapter entitled “Omossuali ieri, omossuali oggi” in Barbagli, Marzio and Colombo, Asher. *Omossuali moderni: gay e lesbiche in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001) 223-279.

movement that sees the U.S. and the rest of Europe a role model to follow. There coexist a supranational trend, evidenced by Italian writers' citing of foreign authors, and an inward-looking effort to represent queers' experience *in* Italy. These texts ask what stories can be told about Italy and what tales, here, seem harder to tell.

One contradiction relayed in recent novels is the wish for Italy to be more like the rest of Europe (gain civil marriage rights, maintain a stricter separation of church and state and increase the acceptance of LGBT people) and the understanding that Italy's current social institutions (close-knit nuclear families, the Catholic Church and a right-leaning government) make that an unrealized reality.<sup>14</sup> However, this *is* precisely the cultural context that has produced in Italy a distinct lesbian and gay literature. While some Italians say that Italy has much to learn from the LGBT people's "progress" in other countries, perhaps the inverse is true too – a reminder that, even as gay and lesbian identities have become a global phenomena, often aping the American ethnic model, context continues to disorient this *homogenizing* trend.

Italy's perceived "backwardness" apropos lesbian and gay issues is the "condition of possibility" generating the stories told by a new generation of queer Italian writers. Lesbian and gay "subjectivity" in Italy emerges, I claim, out of the perceived progress of other nations and Italy's supposed stagnation in this camp. Desire for elsewhere, then, is also a desire for the recognition Italian queers feel eludes them at "home." That sense of self, I argue, entwines two main threads: the normative tales of sexuality present *a casa* and the idea of a particular type of self, the 'liberated' gay subject, seen as easier to find somewhere else.

Both Italy's cultural norms and what seems possible elsewhere imbue this subjectivity.<sup>15</sup> To paraphrase Judith Butler, the accounts Italian gays and lesbians might give of themselves hinge on the stories of the self – who do I think I can become? – available and not available to them. Stories tell us as much as we tell them. At the same time, some stories also tell what it feels like to be left out of the tales of desire all subjects, gay and straight, are urged to repeat. They voice the desire to live in a different world.

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<sup>14</sup> As recently as September 2009, members of Arcigay, Italy's principal gay organization, asked for "asylum" from the Spanish government, citing growing homophobia in Italy and the Italian government's failure to grant basic civil rights to its LGBT citizens. In a statement released on the Arcigay website, they say:

Non desideriamo fuggire da una nazione che sentiamo pienamente nostra, ma rompere quel muro di silenzio e di colpevole omertà con cui la classe politica ha risposto in questi anni alle nostre molteplici sollecitazioni. Chiederemo ad una nazione civile come la Spagna, che ha saputo riconoscere piena cittadinanza alle persone e alle coppie lesbiche, gay e transgender, di portare la nostra voce in Europa. La tutela della nostra integrità fisica, la dignità dei nostri amori e la realtà delle nostre famiglie necessitano di risposte legislative concrete, in grado di collocare l'Italia fra le nazioni che già hanno raggiunto quel livello di civiltà e diritto capace di sconfiggere definitivamente il pregiudizio omofobico.

See, <http://www.arcigay.it/chiediamo-asilo-a-paese-civile>.

<sup>15</sup> The "I" that speaks the phrase "sono gay/lesbica" seeks recognition inside Italy's prevailing cultural narratives and, acknowledging these tales' failure to affirm their worth, also looks "beyond" Italy's discursive confines. The "I," Judith Butler claims, "repeatedly finds itself outside itself." It is not the mouthpiece of some complete and stable subject, but the symptom of a longing to be recognized "outside" my self. See Judith Butler, "Giving an Account of Oneself." *Diacritics* 31.4, (2001): 23.

Heather Love has identified the continued allure for gays and lesbians of what she calls “negative” queer accounts.<sup>16</sup> By that, she means tales the experience of living in a world whose institutions and ruling stories deny the worth and, in extreme cases, the very existence of same-sex desire. The emotional impact of the often-invisible violence of homophobia becomes here a topic of narration, making legible the omissions and imposed silences that pass for the status quo. An experience of trauma, in other words, can produce very a specific strain of story. That story, in turn, can appeal to readers who crave narratives that affirm their experience of being left out. Desire-laden representations of *casa/altrove* articulate are one such ‘negative’ account, whereby “elsewhere” accentuates “home’s” ostensible inadequacy.

Although dominant in recent decades, tales of gay and lesbian identity are not the only stories told about same-sex desire in Italy. Emerging from the lesbian and gay movements of America in the 1970s, coming-out politics urge a very particular speech act – a speaking out – as a necessary step towards liberation. Although the coming-out story has its roots in that context, this particular narrative has outlived the radical politics that first advocated it. Its current ubiquity shows that the coming-out story itself has accrued a certain normative force.

That the coming-out story is often told today as though it were *the* representative gay story does not mean that other accounts of same-sex desire do not exist alongside it. I do not focus only on books penned by gay and lesbian writers. To do so would be dually foolish; it would limit me only to those “gay” novels published in the last forty years and ignore homoerotic Italian fiction written before the emergence of a gay politics in Italy.

Indeed, numerous Italian writers made same-sex attraction a motivating theme in their literary production prior to the coming-out story’s ascension. Writers as canonical as Giorgio Bassani (*Gli occhiali d’oro*), Elsa Morante (*L’isola di Arturo* and *Aracoeli*) and Natalia Ginzburg (*Caro Michele*) allude to it. Long before a gay and lesbian movement took root in Italy, a handful of bisexual and homosexual *scrittori* – Pier Paolo Pasolini, Sandro Penna, Giovanni Comisso, Alberto Arbasino – had made homoerotic attraction (and its polymorphous embodiments) a theme in their writing. During that same period, other more phobic accounts tended to figure homosexuals as symptoms of fascist/bourgeois excess, sign of cultural decay, castrated *mammoni* or symbols of impotence. Homophobia, in other words, is a key chapter of the tangled tale of homosexuality and Italian literature – as much, if not more, as the “libratory” tales told in the last decades.

In the first half of the twentieth century in Italy, it is hard to talk about a gay identity as conceptualized today.<sup>17</sup> Gianni Rossi Barilli argues that Italy’s lack of anti-homosexual legislation, what made the country once seem so inviting to northern European men, “[ha] fatto sì che in Italia non si sviluppasse una coscienza [omosessuale] altrettanto forte, e dunque nemmeno un movimento politico in proporzione” (*Il movimento gay in Italia*, vi). Absent overt legal oppression, there was less of a common

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<sup>16</sup> Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the changes homosexual embodiment have undergone in Italy in the last century, see, Barbagli, Marzio and Colombo, Asher. *Omosessuali moderni: gay e lesbiche in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001).

cause for like-minded people to coalesce around. Of course, homosexuality and people experiencing same-sex desire are not recent phenomena in Italy. Rather, the hard-and-fast boundary between gay and straight, a compulsory either/or logic, does not govern all time periods.

To talk about male-male desire in Italian literature often means entering the murky borderland that joins homo-sociality, antagonistically, to homoeroticism. F.T. Marinetti's *Mafarka le futuriste*, Giorgio Bassani's *Dietro la porta* and Mario Soldati's *La confessione* reside in this realm of ambiguous intimacies. Consequently, in tracing the various stories about same-sex desire in the twentieth century Italian literature, it is crucial to look at texts written *before* and *after* the advent of gay and lesbian identity politics. Even when such identities became more vocal in the 1970s, some of Italy's most prominent homosexual intellectuals lambasted efforts to found a "comunità omosessuale." Both Pasolini and Arbasino voiced concern over modern homosexuals' self-styled 'ghettoization.' Nostalgic for a time when "homosexual" and "heterosexual" men were not bound by either/or identities, both writers romanticize a type of male intimacy that, while sexual, was not "esplicitamente omosessuale."<sup>18</sup> By that, they mean sexual relations between men were possible, even if one partner did *not* identify as homosexual.

Pasolini's and Arbasino's anxieties attest to the fact that something in Italy was changing. As early as 1949, the narrator of Malaparte's *La pelle* parodies the "schiere di omosessuali" he sees arrive in "liberated" Naples. Malaparte's narrator is shocked to see an unprecedented mingling between these visitors and the local homosexual "operai." Despite *La pelle*'s homophobic portrait of homosexuality, aligning same-sex desire with corruption and effeminacy, the text is prescient in one respect – it recounts an emergent homosexual identity that, unlike Oscar Wilde or Walter Pater's haute and heroic homoeroticism, had begun to spill across class lines. The modern homosexual was coming into focus.

Beginning in the 1970s, a growing *corpus* of writing by lesbian and gay Italians began to surface. Authors in this category include Pier Vittorio Tondelli (*Camere separate/Altri libertini*), Giuseppina Mandolfo (*Desiderio*), Maria Schiavo (*Discorso eretico alla fatalità*), Margherita Giacobino (*L'educazione sentimentale di C.B.*), Andrea Mancinelli (*Solitudini imperfette*) and Walter Siti (*Scuola di nudo/La magnifica merce*). Earlier in the *Novecento*, homosexuality tended to be coded as an unmentionable secret or regrettable straying of desire. In these novels, though, an identity rooted in same-sex desire is an accepted fact of life. The emergence of gay identity politics in Italy changed the tales being told, passed down and repeated about homosexuality.

And yet, the narratives of gay identity that had become normative in America (i.e., the coming-out story / tales of flight) were not repeated word for word by lesbian and gay Italian writers. 'Home's' constraints and possibilities dictated a revision of those plots. In recent decades, contemporary Italian writers have sought to "bend" the narratives of gay liberation reining elsewhere, often explicitly citing foreign LGBT in their own novels. Such inter-textual entanglements on the one hand affirm a belief in a gay identity legible across national borders. They are also, I argue, deployed strategically to show what marks Italy off from a –presumably– more tolerant *altrove*. What makes

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<sup>18</sup> Francesco Gnerre, *L'eroe negato: omosessualità e letteratura nel Novecento italiano* (Milano: Baldini Editore, 2000) 7.

the Italian case a bit queer is Italy's simultaneous depiction as "home" to a bygone homoerotic utopia and behind the times compared to the "acceptance" of lesbians and gays elsewhere. That double knowledge, caught somewhere between nostalgia and a yearning for a different future, frames accounts by writers like Matteo B. Bianchi, Aldo Busi and Pier Vittorio Tondelli.<sup>19</sup>

Rather than tracing an unfaltering genealogy from one era to the next, my dissertation looks at these tales' internal continuities and departures. While we should not conflate literature written by gays for a (largely) gay readership with earlier books that just allude to homosexuality, even that divide is not so cut and dry. Readers, after all, bring their own desires and identities to the texts they consume. Many of the texts treating same-sex desire before the emergence of gay identity politics in Italy were, nonetheless, read decades later by a generation of self-identifying lesbians and gays, hungry for representation.

Longing for a representation that might confirm their desires as a shared reality, many lesbians, gays and bisexuals have, moreover, read desire into books that others might call platonic. Reading, itself an act steeped in desire, can make opaquely homoerotic texts into sites of explicit identification. As much as writing, reading can point to the homoerotic potential in normative same-sex plots, queering as it were these purportedly straight tales. Some of these readers would later go on to pen their own books, translating their desire for narrative into acts of narration.

References to what is lacking in Italy pervade most of the (scant) scholarship on same-sex desire and the Italian context. That 'lack' is both a rhetoric and a social reality – a story told about Italy's "backwardness" and a sign of what some queer Italians think is "missing" in their country. With an eye elsewhere, Italian intellectuals and activists cite Italy's "unsuccessful" LGBT civil rights movement, bemoan Italian universities' refusal to consider homosexuality/homophobia "worthy" of study and complain about the relative dearth of books (fictional and scholarly) on this theme. When discussing gay rights in Italy, Giartosio, for example, says that "siamo il fanalino di coda dell'Occidente" (41). Topography, temporality and teleology elide in this account; Italy is depicted here as the last car on the road to progress – behind the times and the rest of Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Even in arenas more versed in Italian literature (i.e., Italian departments in the States or Italy), "mainstream criticism has largely overlooked and/or stepped around the inherent queerness at the center of [Italy's] canon" (Cestaro, 2).<sup>21</sup> Giartosio seconds this opinion, stating that "gli studi italiani sulla letteratura gay mostrano un ritardo," echoing

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<sup>19</sup> Since Italy did not hold as central a position in the lesbian imaginary, the same statement cannot be mapped as easily onto the stories of same-sex desire between women told in Italy.

<sup>20</sup> In an intriguing inversion of this rhetoric, David Fernbach complains – with envy – that the Italian gay and lesbian movement maintained its radical roots much longer than in countries like the United States, where the gay liberation movement failed to "resistere al proprio dissolvimento in un'apolitica 'comunità gay' e in un mansueto movimento per i diritti civili." Fernbach's critique is that the "progress" made by the "gay community" in the States came at too high a cost: the abandonment of a radical critique of homophobia in favor of an increasingly consumerist model of gay identity, aspiring for inclusion not revolution. Qtd. in David Jacobson's "Venir Fuori venir dentro." In Mieli, Mario, *Elementi di critica omosessuale*. Ed. Gianni Rossi Barilli and Paola Mieli. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002. 268-269.

<sup>21</sup> A figure as foundational in America to the emergence of queer / gay and lesbian studies as Michel Foucault had little impact on the study of literature in Italy's universities. See, Dean, Tim. "'Il mio tesoro': note a posteriori." In Mario Mieli's *Elementi di critica omosessuale*. (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002) 253-260.

once again the rhetoric on Italy's "arretratezza" when it comes to queer issues. Elsewhere, he says, scholarship on gay and lesbian literature has reached "un livello di complessità molto alto" (111). Discussions on lesbian and gay lives, it would seem, are voiced outside of Italy. Italy in these accounts is both belated and behind, when compared to the "altezza" of thought achieved *altrove*.

My own approach, admittedly, comes out of Anglo-American queer theory and gender studies. I hope in my dissertation, though, queer theory and Italian novels might dialog with one other. I have no interest in reinforcing the teleology whereby Anglo-American theory is "advanced" and Italian publications are "behind the times." Each has something worth saying to the other. Major scholarship, indeed, has been published in Italian on same-sex desire and lesbian/gay sexuality. In this field, Mario Mieli, Francesco Gnerre and Teresa de Lauretis stand out. In English, the most nuanced study is Derek Duncan's superb *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality*. I share Duncan's contention that sexuality in Italy sits at the nexus of local and global discourses. Duncan argues Italy represents "a case of possible difference" wherein a "something like a gay subject" begins to be seen. I depart from Duncan, however, in my claim that this difference is largely affective (not anthropological) – a felt distance from the discourses of progress regnant in the U.S. and much of Western Europe.

Mieli's *Elementi di critica omosessuale* (1977) challenges a sexual-social system that he says aims suppress same-sex desire.<sup>22</sup> Marxism, French feminism and psychoanalysis guide his critique of sexuality and power. Francesco Gnerre's *L'eroe negato: omosessualità e letteratura nel Novecento italiano* (1980 and 2000) represents the only monograph published in Italian on homosexuality in Italian literature.<sup>23</sup> Gnerre tries to show the continual presence of homosexuality in twentieth century Italian fiction, despite the homophobic stereotypes attached to it and silences demanded of it. In *Soggetti eccentrici*, Teresa de Lauretis posits an "ex-centric" subject, steeped in dominant discourses of heterosexuality and offering an estranged perspective – a view, that is, from "elsewhere."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> An exuberant exercise in gay liberationist thought, Mieli's text critiques what he sees as the growing 'mercificazione' of gay identity: how capitalism offers the false promise of tolerance, while really co-opting homosexuality within the market system. *Elementi di critica omosessuale* is exceptional as Mieli sees lesbians' and gays' struggle for liberation as intimately tied to the feminist cause, since both queers and women, he says, are forced to live in a phallogentric patriarchy that denies their desires. Advocating what he calls 'transessualità,' a polymorphous sexuality that refuses to see homo- and hetero- desires as mutually exclusive, Mieli presages the arguments of Anglo-American queer theorists who, decades later, argued for a more fluid schemas of sexuality. Mieli, moreover, stresses the central role gender plays in the various embodiments of same-sex desire, highlighting effeminate gay men's derision even within homosexual circles.

<sup>23</sup> Although Giartosio's *Perché non possiamo non dirci* references many Italian novels that allude to homosexuality and desire between men, it is more of a philosophical treatise on representation and its limits. Both Derek Duncan's *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality: A Case of Possible Difference* (2006) and *Queer Italia* (2004) address Italian literature and same-sex desire; the former focuses on texts penned primarily in the twentieth century and the latter strives to trace a queer literary tradition in Italy from the medieval time on.

<sup>24</sup> See Teresa de Lauretis:

- *Soggetti eccentrici* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999)

- *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

- *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

In *Technologies of Gender* and *Alice Doesn't*, de Lauretis wonders whose desire is at work in narrative. Her inquiry drives an ancillary concern in my dissertation – the relationship between same-sex desire and desire in narrative. Sexual desire is, after all, the motor in so many modern plots. But the fact both novels and literary critics have understood readers' desire for narrative through sexual metaphors is not without problems. Whose desire gets told as synonymous with "our" desire to read? Whose desire, to repeat de Lauretis' query, are we compelled to identify with? Desire, in other words, does not exist in the neuter; it speaks to and comes from particular desiring subjects.

Desire is the structuring force of narrative, Peter Brooks says.<sup>25</sup> Narratives compel readers to traverse a series of deferrals in plot, he claims, before gratifying them with an ending. These detours "arouse" readers' urge to know how things will turn out. In his view, narrative's end (*telos*) is to sustain reader's desire, which is the desire for a satisfactory climax. The end of a narrative (*la fine*), then, would coincide with the death of readers' desire for narrative. Because texts are invested in eliciting/frustrating readers' desire, novels often relay stories of desire, representing at the level of action "the motors of desire that drive and consume their plots" (61).

Brooks' account acknowledges that a relationship of desire binds readers to texts. He is asking how narrative pulls us in and keeps us interested. However, he fails to pose a key query: how might different desiring subjects respond to narrative? If readers bring their own investments to texts, would some plots "satisfy" certain readers more than others? Might some of us, in other words, want an entirely different tale of desire than the one normally plotted out? And, if some tales leave certain subjects wanting, might their still-unrealized desire for narrative produce an altogether different story?

Even as Brooks generalizes about the "anatomy of human desire," his metaphors convey a specific desiring subject. Repeated sexual references tinge his language. "Narratives," he says, "lay bare the nature of narration as a form of human desire: the need to tell as a primary human drive that seeks to seduce and to subjugate the listener, to implicate him in the thrust of a desire" (61) On the surface, Brooks seems to be imagining a non-gendered reader, male or female. Inevitably, though, his metaphors figure "human" desire vis-à-vis an active denuding that segues into a penetration.

Narrative desire, in Brooks' account, is synonymous with male desire for climax. Behind this "human" desire, in other words, is the heterosexual male subject – presumed universal enough to stand in for the human.<sup>26</sup> Brooks has crafted a narrative in which a specific form of male ardor and narrative desire itself are interchangeable. Judith Butler's words are worth keeping in mind. "To what extent," she asks, "do narratives driven by desire presume heterosexuality?"<sup>27</sup> And, to re-frame her question, how has the scholarship on readers' desire for narrative presumed heterosexual longing as a "universalizable" point of departure? "Whose desire speaks and whom does that desire

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<sup>25</sup> See Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> The example cited is Balzac's explicitly heterosexual *Le Père Goriot*; this plotting of desire, furthermore, is incarnated in the male figure of Vautrin (40). Far from generalizable, that "anatomy" is, actually, quite phallic.

<sup>27</sup> Judith Butler, "Desire." In *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 370.

address?” de Lauretis similarly wonders.<sup>28</sup> This question is fundamental when discussing same-sex desire in representation and queers’ desire *for* representation.

Stories told about same-sex desire, I am arguing, map out the very (hetero) normativity of narrative desire, which in many texts is synonymous with male heterosexuality. Stories that give voice to the frustration (as much as the realization) of same-sex desire might, in turn, foil our expectations of how narrative are supposed to end; they might show how our desires for narrative, like our intimate sexual desires, are directed. As they frustrate readers’ desire for satisfaction, some of these texts enact the difficulty queers face in realizing their own desires.

As shown earlier, the figure incarnating the machinations of narrative desire in many novels is the heterosexual male actor –not queers, not woman. What form might narrative take, then, if the desire that speaks there *cannot* presume its universality? If narrative desire is represented often in terms of heterosexual climax, is it possible that some queer novels might stray, in plot and form, from the “satisfactory” realization of that desire? What happens to narrative desire if deviation *is* the story’s point of departure?

Might these texts bend the plot that drives us ‘straight’ to the end, opting instead to frustrate our desires as much as they ‘arouse’ them? Because no single story can ever counteract heterosexuality’s hegemony in representation, the desire for *more* queer tales never finds full satisfaction. And, so, more queer tales get told, troubling – albeit partially and temporarily – the elision of representation and heterosexual desire. And, so, more tales get told that long for a horizon, an elsewhere, another world not yet arrived at.

Directed toward and estranged from the dominant stories of desire, queers reside somewhere between “home” and “elsewhere” – intimately aware of the stories of desire we all are urged to live up to and aware that their desires often go untold in the tales others call human. That longing for representation is a desire for recognition. Quite often this desire gets relayed as a yearning for elsewhere. Implied is the idea that home is insufficient. The *casa/altrove* couplet will return over and over in the narratives analyzed in my dissertation.

This metaphor simultaneously articulates a longing for the future and a present sense of non-arrival. It evidences what one could call a queer relation to home. For LGBT people, home does not always mean a comforting, safe return. *Casa* can compel a return to the closet. Sarah Ahmed writes that “in living a queer life, the act of going home [...] has a certain disorienting affect.”<sup>29</sup> Home, she says, seems “so full of traces of heterosexual intimacy that it” is hard not to feel “those traces as points of pressure” (11-12). Home becomes a metonym here for compulsory heterosexuality. Inverting this logic, some queers narrate going elsewhere as a sort homecoming.

For many LGBT Italians, “home” is not the site of an occasional, disorienting return. It is the here-and-now where they must reside – both familiar and alienating. The subjectivity they voice, then, is very much “ex-centric,” both inside and out. Through spatial metaphors, these novels articulate the feeling of being drawn in one direction while rooted in another place. But even as “elsewhere” seems to promise a life not inhabitable at “home,” Italians’ experience of being estranged from and inescapably tied

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<sup>28</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1984) 112.

<sup>29</sup> Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). 11.

to *casa* produces its own narrative trajectory. These tales are neither free from the tales of flight dominant abroad nor fully at home in them. Deployed for varying ends in different texts, the “home/elsewhere” trope traverses my entire dissertation. It underwrites earlier generations’ fantasies of a libertine Italy and contemporary fantasies of more tolerant horizons. It is also a privileged vehicle for voicing both same-sex desire, often relayed as a deviation from the straight path, and queers’ desire for another world.

Chapter 1, “Same-Sex Tourism and the Manufacturing of Queer Elsewheres.” examines queer Italian writers’ representations of North Africa, focusing especially on Franco Buffoni’s novel *Zamel* (2009). In the Maghreb, the same-sex tourist sees a land of primal (s)excess where the norms of home — exclusive heterosexuality, homophobic violence, and monogamous coupling — need no longer apply. Crossing the Mediterranean, this subject hopes to flee the discursive borders (gay versus straight) that supposedly domesticate desire in Italy. Eros not bound by either/or labels is thought still to flourish in North Africa. Turning to the Maghreb, the same-sex tourist longs to approximate the homoerotics Italy once housed. North Africans do not represent for the Italian tourist an impossibly distinct Other but, rather, they are made to signify a return to Italy’s imagined erotic past. While certainly questioning the progressive plots of Europe’s LGBT movements, where the act of coming out is considered equivalent to the forward-movement of history, *Zamel* presents North Africa as a land of sexual surfeit and archaic eros. It continues, that is, to repeat colonial scripts. Who is allowed to travel? Who, instead, gets made into a ventriloquized metaphor of eros’ erratic stray?

Chapter 2, “Italy and J.A. Symonds’ Contagious Autobiography,” examines how earlier generations of North Europeans envisioned Italy as more receptive to same-sex relations than their places of origin. Since the 1800s, Italy has been depicted as a homoerotic Promised Land. Displacement, going abroad, coincides with a straying from domestic paths of desire. *Casa*, once again, is the metonym of compulsory heterosexuality. Italy functions as both *elsewhere* (a destination) and *home* (a homoerotic point of origin). Earlier examples include *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds* (1893), André Gide’s *The Immoralist* (1902), *Death in Venice* (1912), Frederick Rolfe’s *Venice Letters*, and Forester’s *Maurice* (1913). Italy is more than just a sexual playground in these; it, too, is a source of alternate accounts of the self.

Symonds claims he was inspired to write his *Memoirs* after reading Cellini and Gozzi. His text alludes to Dante, Ariosto and the poetry of Michelangelo. Dante, in particular, is a vital point of reference. In the Dantean journey, the desired goal is reachable only by traversing disorienting terrain. Erring from the path he thought he had to follow, the pilgrim arrives at a new understanding. Exiled from home and blocked from the *dritta via*, Dante serves here as a metaphor of deviation that leads to re-orientation. In Dante, detour transforms the self. Aligning travel and deviant desire, Symonds’ account bends through Italy.

Chapter 3, “A Plague By Any Other Name: AIDS and the Politics of Illegibility in Tondelli’s *Camere separate*,” analyzes the competing discourses of legibility and illegibility in Pier Vittorio Tondelli’s *Camere separate* (1989). Published at the height of the AIDS epidemic, *Camere separate* relies on readers’ awareness of this context to render that malady “legible.” Strangely, though, the gay plague narrated on its pages is never given a name. Instead, it is described. Why have American/British scholars read the novel as an AIDS allegory while Italian scholars have not? Is AIDS *the* specter here

or must it, in part, be read retroactively into a text that never names it? In this chapter, I argue that critics' *ex post facto* knowledge of Tondelli's eventual death from AIDS-related illnesses (1991) has led to a privileging of symptomatic readings of the novel. Such readings foreclose the productive illegibility that the novel insists on producing – its description of an unnamed illness / gay mourning in the era of AIDS *and* its refusal to give a name the text's central malady. The critical debate over AIDS' presence (or absence) has obscured other forms of legibility that mark the book – Tondelli's reference, for instance, to queer texts of mourning like James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" and Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man*. Decades after Tondelli's death, the novel is an archive of competing feelings – an affirmative fiction for survivors of AIDS *and* a work that others find shamefully silent about that very epidemic.

"Pasolini's Ghost," which serves as this dissertation's conclusion, builds off work on queer temporality and queer spectrality. Specifically, "Pasolini's Ghost" examines the cultural afterlife of Pier Paolo Pasolini in contemporary queer Italy. Instead of focusing on Pasolini's corpus, I trace the way that Pasolini has become a figure of representation. His name haunts writers like Nico Naldini (*Come non ci si difende dai ricordi* and *Mio cugino Pasolini*), Dario Bellezza (*Morte di Pasolini*), and Walter Siti (*Il contagio*). Pasolini is made – post mortem – into a symbol for the queer forms displaced by coming-out politics. Indeed, Pasolini is presented as a prophetic voice – a man who, even back then, saw the cultural forms Italy was about to lose.

Reading Pasolini's ghostly afterlife, I argue that these writers reject the future-oriented narratives of gay progress that migrate out the U.S. and Northern Europe. Appropriating Pasolini, they look to Italy's recent past and to the Mediterranean South for an eros unbound to identity. *Arretratezza* (backwardness) is not a source of lamentation here but, rather, a means to feeling closer to the erotic worlds lost to Italy's industrialization. Pier Paolo's specter — the ghost of his memory — is made to articulate a bygone way of thinking. Rather than voicing nostalgia for a more perfect past, the figural hereafter of Pasolini lets these writers (dis)identify with the present they inhabit – to think through same-sex desire without the need to laud history's progress.

## Chapter 1

### “Voglio Sedurre Quelli Che Stanno di Là”: Same-Sex Tourism and the Manufacturing of Queer Elsewheres

Since the nineteenth-century, northern European and American travelers have set their sights on the Mediterranean, lured by the promise of unbridled permissiveness, lusty bodies and uncertain sexual identities. For some, the object of desire – the *mèta* of their excursions – was men, at once ‘Other’ (Arab/Southern) and the ‘similar’ (male).<sup>1</sup> Within Europe, itineraries in this fantasy included Venice and southern Italy, chiefly Naples, Capri and Sicily.<sup>2</sup> In North Africa, European men directed their erotic escapades toward the Maghreb and, in particular, modern-day Morocco and Tunisia.<sup>3</sup> North Africa is presented as a place where male-male sex, instead of confined to homosexual spaces, is everywhere. The Italian tourist traveling to North Africa is, thus, in a bit of queer position -- a European looking elsewhere for sensuous horizon and aware of Italy’s past figuration as a land of southern sexual excess.<sup>4</sup>

Traveling tales about North Africa (*Sodomie in corpo 11*, *Zamel*, *Le rondini di Tunisi*) penned by Italian writers are, indeed, troubled by competing topographies. On the one hand, North Africa is a land of sensual excess – a place where, we read, a stable “border” between heterosexuality and homosexuality, unlike in Europe, has not yet been erected.<sup>5</sup> The narrator in Aldo Busi’s *Sodomie in corpo 11* says that “in Marocco, sessualmente, se sei straniero e bianco, non c’è niente da negare, niente da affermare tutto è secondo la propria borsa e gli psicologismi li si lascia a casa occidentale” (48). Eros – still perverse, still polymorphous – veers, here, from the straight path. To encounter this negative excess – what can’t be found *a casa* – the visitor simply opens his wallet. On the other, North Africa is also where social taboos (Islam forbids male-male sex) obstruct

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<sup>1</sup> See: Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Ian Littlewood, *Sultry Climates: Travel and Sex* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> In André Gide’s homoerotic novel, *L’immoraliste* (1902), the main character, Michel, stops in Sicily before disembarking in Tunis. While in Taormina, Michel encounters young man and tells him in Italian “anche tu sei bello, ragazzo!” He then kisses the youth. Sicily is here a bridge between Europe and a sensual south. During the same time period, Wilhelm Von Gloeden, a German aesthete, was photographing young Sicilian boys and adolescents in Taormina, dressing them as satyrs, ancient Greeks and Arabs. Sicily evokes classical cultural *and* the Arab Orient; it is traveled to and a point of departure for journeys further south.

<sup>3</sup> See: Robert Aldrich, *Homosexuality and Colonialism*. New York: Routledge, 2003; Boone, Joseph A. “Vacation Cruises: Or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism.” *PMLA*. 110. 1. (1995): 89

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of southern Europe’s “marginal” place and central role in Europe’s self-constitution, see Roberto Dainotto, *Europe (in Theory)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Brian Edwards has argued that a U.S.-based form of Orientalism fixated on the possible “queer excess” of Tangier. The texts examined in this chapter are not penned by American writers but by Italian citizens. Nonetheless, I am sympathetic to Edwards’ claims that 1) the Maghreb came to be associated with a threatening surfeit and that 2) analyses of Orientalism must be read within the exigencies, continuities and divergences created by *particular* national contexts. Italian Orientalism, as a result, might share some inherited images with British or French Orientalism but the desires and anxieties such images evoke would differ in significant ways. See, Brian Edwards, “Queer Tangiers.” In *Morocco Bound: Disorienting America’s Maghreb, from Casablanca to the Marrakech Express* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 79-120.

the articulation of a homosexual identity. Vincenzo Patanè writes of Arab gays who, “emigrat[i] in Occidente, hanno avuto finalmente l’opportunità di comunicare i propri problemi.”<sup>6</sup> Europe, we read, is where homosexuals more easily lead their lives.

Later on, though, he wonders if homosexuality “è più diffusa [nei paesi islamici] che altrove?”<sup>7</sup>

North Africans are considered “più” disposed to homoerotic trysts and simultaneously more repressive of homosexuals.<sup>8</sup> Europeans, in contrast, are depicted as both too tame when it comes to sex and more accepting of exclusive homosexuality. In the novel *Le rondini di Tunisi* (2005), for example, the European visitor goes to North Africa in pursuit of abundant eros while Arab homosexuals flee to Europe in search of a society tolerant of their identities. The Maghreb is, thus, considered *at once* indulgent of homosexual acts (here sex between men is not strange) and prejudiced against homosexuals (here a stable orientation towards men is condemned). Homophobia and homoeroticism, though, are not mutually exclusive in these texts. Jasbir Puar has shown how Muslims get represented as “perversely sexualized [...] (pedophilic, sexually lascivious and excessive, yet perversely repressed).”<sup>9</sup> Their “perversity” is here both a source of homoerotic fetishizing and deemed “an *especial threat* to homosexuals.”<sup>10</sup>

In the novels *Zamel* (2009) and *Sodomie in corpo 11* (1988), the objects of this chapter, silence regarding male-male sex (“si fa ma non si dice”) is thought to *sustain* the ubiquity of same-sex erotics in North Africa.<sup>11</sup> As opposed to coming-politics, silence is now presented as the screen behind which libertine homoeroticism flourishes. It is not *the* obstacle to sexual liberation. “Prenderlo in culo – che è l’unica cosa veramente essenziale – ed essere discrete, disponibili e silenziose come geishe. Questo è molto rassicurante per i maschi. Altrimenti perché sarei venuto ad abitare in Tunisia? Restavo a Roma...,” says Aldo, the ex-pat co-narrator in *Zamel*.<sup>12</sup> Silence, not identity, is the only essential thing to keep in mind in Tunisia. There, identity no longer constitutes the essence of sex. Speech obstructs sex. In North Africa, Aldo, an Italian man, imagines going “oriental,” appropriating and aligning himself with a far-off culture. Even as the

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<sup>6</sup> See *Arabi e noi: amori gay nel Maghreb*. Ed. Vincenzo Patanè (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2002) 13.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Aldo Busi’s book, it should be remembered, is called *Sodomie in corpo 11: non viaggio, non sesso, scrittura*. In going to North Africa, he seeks out “sodomies.” The odd pluralization of “sodomia” in the title underscores the protagonist’s quest for something *more* than home’s purportedly homogenized homosexuality. That more is thought of as a plentiful negativity. Despite a long history that associates sodomy primarily with same-sex erotics, sodomy is something that both men and women (regardless of their sexual identities) can do. The term’s non-specificity endows it with an excess of meanings. It can signify anal sex *or* oral sex, sex between men *or* non-procreative sex in general. Indeed, sodomy signifies all of these and *none* all at once.

<sup>9</sup> Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 20.

<sup>10</sup> Puar, 2007, 20. Original emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> Franco Buffoni, *Zamel* (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 2009); Aldo Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11: non viaggio, non sesso e scrittura* (Milan: Mondadori Editor S.p.A., 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Through most of *Zamel* Aldo continues to describe to himself with female-inflected adjectives; North Africa, he says, attracts him because there the divide between “real men” and *froci*, active and passive is still firm. The policing of the gendered boundaries, Aldo says, opens up homoerotic possibilities, allowing the same-sex visitor to sleep with men who, at home, would be out of reach. Buffoni, *Zamel*, 71.

text imagines Europe as more willing to accept homosexuals, the same-sex tourist does not value this recognition.<sup>13</sup>

Tolerance of “homosexual” identity – of its existence, not its worth – is not a sign of Europe’s *a priori* superiority here but rather a constraining *boundary* mapped onto male eros. Obligatory identities, Aldo says, limit desire’s “natural” tendency to go astray. They domesticate sex. The same-sex traveler ventures to North Africa to sleep with men who do not identify as gay. His travel is *not* the pursuit of other homosexuals – men like him – but the quest for eros in excess of the familiar. “Eh, sì, oggi si fa il coming out... Mi procura solo irritazione: inutile perdita di tempo. E in più distrae i veri uomini dall’unico risultato che mi interessa: che si svuotini i coglioni non solo con le donne, ma anche con me,” Aldo complains.<sup>14</sup> Coming out, the compulsion to confess a homosexual identity, distracts “veri uomini.” To distract implies to draw aside or to move off track. According to Aldo, “real” men are inclined to empty their “coglioni” in both men and in women. The need to name an identity diverts —setting off course— the phallus’ capacity to wander from women’s bodies.<sup>15</sup> Sexual labels are understood as a “boundary” mapped onto errant the flux of desire.

North Africa is here imagined as porno-utopic elsewhere where the tourist flees the rules of home, including exclusive heterosexuality, homonormativity and homophobic violence.<sup>16</sup> In searching elsewhere for sex with men who otherwise sleep with women, *Zamel’s* and *Sodomie in corpo 11’s* strive to shatter the presumption that male-male sex and homosexual ontology are one and the same. Sex allures because, via this counter-experience, the visitor longs to queer heterosexuality: to prove, that is, that there are some places where seemingly straight men are more than willing to bed another man. Same-sex tourism to the Maghreb aims to arrive at “the disruption of heterosexuality through visible and mobile homosexuality.”<sup>17</sup> Trespassing the anus – typically the same-sex tourist being penetrated by an Arab man – is thought to lead to identity’s dissolution, all while affirming local men’s masculinity.

According to Joseph A Boone, the “Arabic Orient bec[a]me a psychic screen on which to project fantasies of illicit sexuality and unbridled excess,” including – quite often – homoerotic longings.<sup>18</sup> Aligned with Europe/U.S., a minoritarian homosexual identity is, in contrast, read as a symptom of eros rendered too stable. North Africa tempts because the tourist believes, upon arrival, familiar labels will *no longer* have

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<sup>13</sup> I will alternately use the terms “same-sex tourism” and “same-sex tourist” to describe Western men traveling to North Africa – in search of easily bought male-male sex and a culture that is more receptive to homosexuality than home. This neologism acknowledges both the economic inequity that drives “sex tourism” and that these men desire a “same-sex” encounter.

<sup>14</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 70.

<sup>15</sup> In response to his friend’s exultation of the need to come out, Aldo responds: “più coming out del mio, nei fatti... Sono venuto qui a vivere!” (74)

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of homonormativity, see: Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 2003); Susan Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity.” *Radical History Review*. 100 (2008): 145-157. Adrienne Rich defined “compulsory heterosexuality in her now foundational essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” Adrienne Rich, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 5 (1980): 631-60.

<sup>17</sup> Puar, Jasbir. “Circuits of Queer Mobility: Tourism, Travel, Globalization.” *GLQ*. 8. 1-2. (2002): 102.

<sup>18</sup> Boone, Joseph A. “Vacation Cruises: Or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism.” *PMLA*. 110. 1. (1995): 89.

much purchase on erotics. Aldo lauds the ease of sex in Tunisia against a supposedly more tolerant U.S. “La differenza è che non ho bisogno di andare da nessuna parte, che non ci sono luoghi deputati. Qui c’è la vita e basta, perché i maschi sono ancora normali, come Allah comanda, e guardano le femmine e i froci col desiderio di farsele e – se proprio vuoi – di farseli.”<sup>19</sup> North Africa’s “lack” (the purported absence of homo-/hetero- identities) is eroticized here as a source of sensual “plenitude” (more men are available) for the queer visitor. In America, in contrast, desire between men is *confined* “all’infuori di qualche club, una discoteca, un paio di ristoranti – gay per definizione, dove trovavi solo gay.”<sup>20</sup> For Aldo, same-sex desire in North Africa is still considered “normal,” even holy. It does not limit itself to self-contained ghettos. It is everywhere.

Discussing gay tourism, M. Jacqui Alexander states that “the getaway place is located elsewhere, outside of the West, and is envisioned as having something that can be used, however temporarily.”<sup>21</sup> Both North Africa’s use-value (its utility) and its surplus-value (its seeming excess) draw visitors there. To encounter his pre-departure fantasy of sexual excess, the tourist must buy (into) the fantasy, commodifying both the Arab body and his own. This commodification, however, is narrated as a movement towards lawless eros. “Lo *charme* marocchino per casalinghe e impiegati europei [consiste] nell’essere abbordate da voi per strada,” Busi’s narrator says.<sup>22</sup> Morocco’s allure: the promise of being simultaneously accosted, picked up, approached and boarded like a ship. This experience, we read, takes place “per strada,” further accentuating the elision of travel and transgression. There, the tourist comes closer to desires that *trespass* what is imaginable at home.

North Africa, for him, is not a paradise of gay sex. On the contrary, the same-sex tourist goes there in search of polymorphous “sodomies.” There, being penetrated transports visitors away from staid sex “gay” sex, male-male sexuality bound to a “fixed” identity, is precisely what he is trying to escape. Whereas identity is thought of as curb mapped onto eros, sex is still that which can overrun the normative limits – the socially-constructed boundaries – of home. North Africa’s “negativity,” then, is its desired ‘surplus,’ which the tourist hopes will supply him with an unfamiliar way to desire. Busi’s narrator, for example, writes exuberantly to a friend that “questo *niente* val bene una vacanza.”<sup>23</sup> North Africa’s value: the promise of a vacation from identity. Home is instead made coterminous with an immobile ontology.

In these novels, the queer subject draws attention to his exceptionality by trespassing the “borders” placed on sex in his point of origin. Travel is thought to expose the ‘distance’ separating hetero- and homo- sexualities as a learned limit, *not* a natural distinction. Jasbir Puar argues that queerness in the U.S and Europe has represented itself as a “freedom from norms” that gets narrated via metaphors of motion, transgression and border crossing.<sup>24</sup> Travel is made to signify a simultaneous uprooting from familiar rules and sexual deviance. “Io gli dicevo che è così *thrilling* rinunciare a un qualsiasi sistema

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<sup>19</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 154

<sup>20</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 154

<sup>21</sup> See, M. Jacqui Alexander, “Imperial Desires/Sexual Utopias: White Gay Capital and Transnational Tourism.” In *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 80.

<sup>22</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 69

<sup>23</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 48.

<sup>24</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 22.

di pensiero e di abitudine, sentire la propria tradizione genetica in tutta la parzialità spirituale, e che il turismo serve anche a questo: a sradicare, che lo si voglia o no.”<sup>25</sup> Travel promises deracination, understood as an exhilarating distance from home’s habitual system and a turn towards more ‘biological’ sensibilities.

Mobility, perversion and deviation become normative markers of queerness. Indeed, travel represents *the* structuring metaphor of queerness both in these fictional works and in contemporary (queer and post-modern) theory.<sup>26</sup> Edo, one of *Zamel*’s co-narrators, says that “*queer* – rispetto a gay e *homosexual* – è un termine [...] ben al di là del sistema binario sesso/genere.”<sup>27</sup> Queer is beyond. Eros, not bound to identity, is, like the traveler, said to overstep.<sup>28</sup> Swerving and turning come to signify desire’s flux. Explaining “cruising” in Tunisa, Aldo tells his friend: “mio caro, quando si ha un po’ di calo del desiderio, qui, si prende la metro.” In transit, the tourist recharges his desire. Home’s sexual system—gay versus straight—is posited in *Sodomie in corpo II* and *Zamel* as a stultifying norm the tourist traipses past.<sup>29</sup> “Ma io voglio uscire dalla categoria, non lo capisci?” Aldo avers. “Io voglio sedurre quelli che stanno di là” (103).

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<sup>25</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo II*, 101

<sup>26</sup> Cindy Patton, for example, claims that queerness is “a subterranean place.” Moreover, queerness is for her “beyond, even, *against* identity.” Both identity and queerness are narrated in Patton’s account via spatial metaphors. Queerness lurks below the surface, oozing outwards with little respect for established borders. Identity, in contrast, is the demarcated space that queerness seeps under and into and *beyond*. One page later, Patton states that “perhaps we should imagine how a Queer Nation might prepare to expatriate itself, to become alien, as a means to substantially challenge the very idea of the nation.” Although her suspicion of the pat narratives of identity and the nation is welcome, Patton’s image of queerness is questionable. Queerness accrues its force *against* identity, *against* the nation. Those purportedly far-removed categories are, instead, necessary for its presentation as that which transgresses. It cannot go beyond unless it names the space it steps past. Moreover, the “alien,” a subject estranged from the nation of origin, is made into little more than a metaphor, transformed into the *figure* of queerness. This move evacuates the “alien” of any specificity beyond of its metaphorical utility. In making the “alien” the fetishized figure of an oblique relation to the nation / identity, Patton ventriloquizes this subject. See “To Die For.” In *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) 344-345. Rosi Braidotti, author of *Nomadic Subjects*, has stated that “my greatest fear is to become petrified: to become a tree, to put out roots and not be able to move. I have a fear of immobility, of being stuck in one spatio-temporal dimension. It is a variation of a fear of death, a kind of death, of turning to stone and not being able to move again.” Death, here, is “not being able to move.” The exalted subject, instead, is “nomadic,” capable of constant re-territorialization. See *Women’s Education des femmes*. Spring 1996 (12, 1): 35-39. Nomadism means neither homelessness nor the exile, though. Instead, it is purports to reflect the “decline of metaphysically fixed, steady identities” and the refusal to stick within disciplinary boundaries (5). Though Braidotti is careful not to collapse her notion of the “nomadic” subject with that of the “migrant,” her use of the term is largely metaphorical; the “nomad,” like Patton’s “alien,” is *useful* insofar as it allows the theorist to re-conceptualize seemingly fixed “borders.” The “nomad” is, again, made a figure without a history. See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 56.

<sup>28</sup> Isaac B. Rosler claims that eros is “beyond an exclusionary discourse of opposites.” In his book, Rosler complicates the Freudian narrative of eros, which attempts to imagine eros’ “progress” towards heterosexuality. He claims that “all allusions to the origin of sexuality tend to elude the very origin that Freud would like to establish. Eros instead “twists” and “turns,” its home nowhere and everywhere. See Isaac B. Rosler, *Eros Revisited: Love for the Indeterminate Other* (Lanham MD: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2007). 249.

<sup>29</sup> Scholarship on gay and lesbian writing has also repeated this depiction of queer travel. Rather than unpacking the economic and racialized inequities that underpin same-sex tourism, scholars at times seem almost to justify these dynamics. Jonathon Dollimore writes:

Via travel, the same-sex tourist hopes to gain both an *affirmation* of male-male sex (there it is ubiquitous / plentiful) and a *disorientation* (there sex doesn't follow the same path). Edo, the co-narrator in *Zamel*, explains his trip by saying that “avevo bisogno di un po' di dis-vertimento, appunto di volgermi altrove” (73). Disorientation is narrated as tourist re-routing himself, a turning away from familiar terrain and towards a distant horizon. Diverting, moreover, is shorthand for sexual diversion. Queer travel is, thus, understood as following a path that bends. More explicitly, Busi writes that “avevo bisogno proprio di questo: farmi inculare tanto da non riuscire più a star seduto e quindi essere obbligato a star in piedi o poggiato su un fianco.”<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere, he is “incula[to]” so much that he can no longer sit in place. In the tourist's economy of travel, roving is thought to give him access to a sexual system that diverges from home's orienting of desire.

## 1. Desiring Economies, Economies of Travel

Travel, Georges Van den Abbeele has argued, is a central topos of Western epistemology.<sup>31</sup> Journeys, quests and voyages are the plots through which the acquisition

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[T]he homosexual is involved with difference ... because, contrary to what the foregoing theory implies, she or he has, in historical actuality, *embraced both cultural and racial difference*. The relationship to these other kinds of difference has, for some homosexuals, constituted a crucial dimension of their culture. *Sexual exiled from the repressiveness of the home culture ... , homosexuals have searched instead for fulfillment in the realm of foreign*. Not necessarily as second best. ... That this has also occurred in exploitative, sentimental, and/or racist forms does not diminish its significance; if anything, it increases it. Those who move too hastily to denounce homosexuality across race and class as essentially or only exploitative, sentimental or racist betray their own homophobic ignorance (my emphasis, qtd. in *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb*, 29).

According to this logic, since homophobia is a worthy of critique, then travel seeking to escape it is admirable. Homosexuality can represent a crossing of borders that leads to proximity with the other. It welcomes difference and holds it close. The verb “embrace” implies that this respect for other cultures is the direct result of sexual intimacy “in the realm of the foreign,” happily skipping over the problematic fetishizing that marks many of these texts. It, moreover, makes no reference to the actual routes of travel that European same-sex travelers opted to take, routes that often brought the tourist into colonized, occupied or impoverished spaces.

Since sexual encounters abroad “constituted a crucial dimension” of a emerging homosexual culture, the occasional “racism” or “exploitation” reproduced via travel can, in Dollimore's account, be explained away. While rightly points out the performative value of queer travel (what same-sex travel *does* for tourists), he dismisses the way that Western tourists have continually imagined the “realm of the foreign” only via its use-value. The foreign(er) remains a “realm,” a land, a topos. Homosexuals, instead, are homeless travelers, seeking “fulfillment” *via* that space. His account continues to represent Western homosexuals, regardless of the anti-homophobic impulses motivating their journeys, as *the* mobile subject. The visited space, in turn, is a realm *useful* for surmounting home's “repressiveness.” That elsewhere's “use-value” gets retroactively presented as a mutual, equitable embrace between two similarly “different” people does not efface the subject / object, traveler / traveled-through logic that still seeps into Dollimore's sunny sketch of queer travel. Dollimore fails to imagine a non-Western, traveling queer subject. The “foreign” stays a “space-through” that the “heroic” – queer – subject traverses in order to overcome the obstacle of “homophobia” and arrive at a new “home.”

<sup>30</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo* 11, 51

<sup>31</sup> Georges Van den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor: from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

of knowledge is recounted. Understanding, for example, is often narrated as movement towards an end-goal, staying on the right path, broadening one's horizons or the arrival at truth. Similarly, failure to attain knowledge is told as getting stuck in place, being off-course or aimlessness. The alignment of knowledge and the journey, Van den Abbeele says, amounts to "an economy of travel." Via the voyage, the traveler opts to exchange the familiar (home) for what can be gained (enlightenment, discovery, conversion). Travel, subsequently, is thought to afford the traveler something that can't be encountered before departure.

In these novels' desiring economies, eros, considered that which transgresses stable sexual 'borders,' gets narrated vis-à-vis errancy.<sup>32</sup> Leaving behind home's division of homo- and hetero- sexuality, the tourist hopes to access desire that, like him, goes where it wants. North Africa, we read, is where compulsory heterosexuality does not bar homosexual acts. If anything, the separation of the sexes gives license to plenty of same-sex erotics. Over there, even a married man – provided he is the "active" partner – will entertain sex with other men. "L'arabo dà per scontato che un'erezione è sufficiente a soddisfare se stesso, e, quindi, chiunque lo copra," Busi comments.<sup>33</sup> Erratic eros arises, so to speak, from the phallus' desire for external satisfaction, not from long-occluded and internal homosexual longings. Sex is what you do there. It is not who you say you are or, for that matter, who you do.

In these narratives, the proper itinerant subject is he who matches the texts' presumption that travel and transgression are coterminous, that wandering leads to the crumbling of fixed positions.<sup>34</sup> This logic participates in an unequal economy of travel in

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<sup>32</sup> Frank Browning, author of the collection of autobiographical essays entitled *Queer Geography: Journeys toward a Sexual Self*, claims that, "as a peripatetic wanderer," he "look[s] at desire as a geographer." He writes that, "I seek its contours, its ragged shorelines, its mud and crystals, the arrangement of its caves and hiding places, the artifacts of its past, the sketch pads of its imaginings, the moorings of its departures." Moreover, "as physical geographers know, none of these features are fixed. Shorelines erode. Caves collapse. Desire is the enemy of identity, of certainty, of indelible maps." Despite Browning's claims, his title implies a voyage *towards* something. Although this movement's goal is not the declaration of identity, he imagines arriving at a notion of desire's instability as the journeys' endpoint. Queerness, too, has its own theological tales. Here, its paths may be many but its "end" is mapped out in advance *against* identity's presumptive stability. If desire, like geography, shifts, then "identity" represents a topos, anchored in place, that, functioning here as obstacle, desire can set adrift. Desire is an outward wallowing in movement. Identity is represented as normative limning/limiting of desire's drift. See Frank Brown, *Queer Geography: Journeys toward a Sexual Self* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998) 14-15.

<sup>33</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 123

<sup>34</sup> In *Strange Encounters*, Sarah Ahmed argues that "the experiences of migration, which can involve trauma and violence, becomes the idealized basis of an ethics of transgression, an ethics which assumes that it is possible to be liberated from identity as such, at the same time as it belongs to an authentically migrant subject." See Sarah Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 82. We find a ripe example of this in Iain Chamber's *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*. In that work, he writes that "for the nomadic experience of language, wandering without a fixed home, dwelling at the crossroads of the world, bearing our sense of being and difference, is no longer the expression of a unique tradition or history, even if it pretends to carry a single name. Thought wanders. It migrates, requires translation. Here reason runs the risk of opening up to the world, of finding itself in a passage without a reassuring foundation or finality: a passage open to the changing skies of existence and terrestrial illumination." Now, migrancy is the generalizable state of post-modernity. Unlike the reassurances guaranteed by a "fixed home," which seem to include the assurance of reason and teleological tales, migrancy implies a dwelling in "passage" (4). Travel without the guarantee of return, a constant de-

which the queer tourist – via movement – hopes to *gain* distance from home’s “fixed” identity *through* the desired Arab (he who transgresses home’s identity positions) and *against* the improper Arab (the gay local who “replicates” these fled positions).<sup>35</sup> “Tutto quello che non sapevo di andar cercando in questo viaggio l’ho trovato: ho recuperato interamente la sensibilità prostatica,” Busi says.<sup>36</sup> Before travel, the tourist *lacked* “sensibilità prostatica.” Now, after experiencing the cobra-like “sesso a torciglione” of two Arabs, he has fully re-gained feeling there. What was once wanting is now made whole.

This transgression of ‘boundaries,’ however, moves only in one direction: the *same-sex* tourist desires men who, despite sleeping with women, will still bed him. Notwithstanding the texts’ lauding of eros’ itinerant flow, the tourist’s desires are solidly homo. Initially, the tourist represents himself as he-who-strays from the limits of home, rendering the traveler a privileged figure of queerness. Like the texts’ depictions of eros, he imagines himself as nomadic.<sup>37</sup> Busi, for instance, says that “gli ebrei *erranti* e io, invece, ci integriamo in un battibaleno ovunque veniamo a trovarci e non ritorniamo mai a casa perché abbiamo capito che ogni casa è un posto diverso della stessa vacanza che abbiamo dentro di noi”<sup>38</sup> Homelessness now signifies queerness. In order to narrate his queasy relation with home, however, the same-sex tourist must first ventriloquize “gli ebrei *erranti*,” imagining his own alienation vis-à-vis a nomadic figure whose specificity is henceforth evacuated. They are full of “vacanza,” in other words, because the text has emptied them out and made them the figure of queer errancy. They signify what the tourist wants.

Presumed in this account is the notion that errancy / migration / travel “already destabilizes and transgresses forms of boundary making, [...] a dwelling [...] in identities that are constantly subject to mutation.”<sup>39</sup> But, as a European homosexual, the same-sex tourist is always traveling reminder of the “domesticated” system he has purportedly left behind. This constitutive contradiction plagues the traveler’s movement towards his objective: distance from home. That contradiction raises a series of relevant questions. In producing proximity between itinerant deviance and queerness, how do these texts necessarily present “the homosexual” as a static category confined to Europe? Do the

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centering, becomes here *the* sanitized metaphor of the erratic post-modern subject. See Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> Anna McClintock notes that “race gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other – if in contradictory and conflictual ways.” See Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995) 5.

<sup>36</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 73

<sup>37</sup> Puar notes in *Terrorist Assemblages* that queerness wants to see itself as “as singularly transgressive of identity norms” (22); “the focus on transgression, however, is precisely the term by which queerness narrates its own exceptionalism. [...] queerness has its own exceptionalist desires: exceptionalism is a founding impulse, indeed the very core of a queerness that claims itself as an anti-, trans-, or un-identity. The paradigm of gay liberation and emancipation has produced all sorts of troubling narratives: about the greater homophobia of immigrant and communities of color, about the stricter family values and mores in these communities, about a certain prerequisite migration from home, about coming-out teleologies” (23).

<sup>38</sup> Busi, *Sodomi in corpo 11*, 56

<sup>39</sup> Sarah Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Chapter 3, “Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement” (London: Routledge, 2000). 81-82.

texts depict a fictively ‘tamed’ homosexual as a “stable” point in order to then claim distance from him?<sup>40</sup> Inversely, how might queerness also need the fantasy of “far-removed” eroticism – *not* gay, *not* familiar, *not* straight, *not* close – to narrate its own supposedly negative alterity? Can the fetishizing of “fluid” sexuality, aligned here with Arab (s)excess, actually lead to a *denial* of identity’s instability at home and a repetition of colonial scripts?

Sarah Ahmed rightly cautions against the “metaphoric treatments of migration.”<sup>41</sup> Feeling ill-at-ease at ‘home’ and choosing to be homeless, she says, is not the same as being forced to leave one’s home due to economic and political pressures. Moreover, in making “nomadism” or “migrancy” into a *generalizable* condition, indeed *the* condition of post-modernity, fictional and theoretical works can produce “the [problematic] conflation of migration with the transgression of boundaries in the impossibility of arriving at an identity.”<sup>42</sup> This move presumes that migration has a singular meaning – “it constructs and essence of migration in order to theorize that migration is a refusal of essence.”<sup>43</sup>

Such an evacuated ideal of errancy, moreover, constructs “authentic” and “inauthentic” migrant subjects, with the “inauthentic” being “one who believes in fixed identities and refuses to transgress.”<sup>44</sup> In this vein, Iain Chambers has written that migrancy:

means to conceive of dwelling as a mobile habitat, as a mode of inhabiting time and space, not as though they were fixed and closed structures, but as providing the critical provocation of an opening whose questioning presence reverberates in the movement of the languages that constitute our sense of identity, place and belonging. [...] So this is not necessarily even an account of travel. For to travel implies movement between fixed positions, a site of departure and a point of arrival, the knowledge of an itinerary. It also intimates an eventual return, a potential homecoming. Migrancy, on the contrary, involves a movement in which neither points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of homecoming – completing the story,

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<sup>40</sup> Does the “fixing” in place of the homosexual – presuming that identity means being limited / stuck – actually produce queerness’ ‘constitutive outside’? That “outside” is here envisioned as the tourist’s point of origin – his ‘home.’ How might this move be structurally similar to Michael Warner’s discussion of the denigration of “naughty” queers as some gays’ means of displaying their own “normalcy”? Is the “domesticated” homosexual the necessary “limit” against which the eccentric “queer” then lauds his/her non-normativity. Does the “fluid” queer subject need to invoke homosexuality as the staid orientation that s/he moves past? Might this “moving past” demonstrate that queerness’ supposed self-constitution is always-already in relation to == imagined against or beyond == a notion of *the* homosexual or *the* heterosexual? How does queerness come to cohere around identity positions it claims are too coherent? Might identity’s figuration as “outside” queerness actually be symptomatic of queerness’ reliance on identity as foil? More specific to these texts, how might the eroticization of the Arab male’s “errant” and “mobile” eros actually cover up the tourist’s position as the mobile actor?

<sup>41</sup> Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 82

<sup>43</sup> Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 82

<sup>44</sup> Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 82

domesticating the detour – becomes an impossibility. History gives way to histories, as the West gives way to the world.<sup>45</sup>

Chambers claims that his theorization is “not necessarily even an account of travel,” but the narrative he sketches establishes an economy of travel at any rate. In his account, what is lost and gained by making migrancy – errancy without a promise of return, movement without a definite point of arrival – into the privileged metaphor of de-centering, mutability and multiplicity? In stepping away, perhaps permanently, from the familiar, the migrant is said to show us that “identities that are constantly subject to mutation.” Presumably, this subject is “always in transit,” never safely arrived. What knowledge does Chambers’ gain by representing this subject as the figure of non-return? I would argue that the knowledge gained is precisely a longed-for awareness that identity is not-fixed, that epistemology is not stable, that borders are not sacrosanct, that aimlessness has supplanted teleological plots. This, however, is its own myth. It has its own plot in which the migrant is still useful for de-centering “our” – the West’s – understanding of the world at large. Through this ventriloquized figure, there is no stable point of reference, no guaranteed return. This is a story Chambers wants to hear. It is, indeed, one of the meta-narratives of post-modern thought. It is a story he tells by making the migrant into metaphor – a vehicle – for the disorientation of knowledge that, we read, is at once a general (everyone’s) and a particular (the migrant’s) condition.

The metaphorization of the Arab male—making him into the vehicle of queering—reaffirms a myth very much at home in Europe’s sexual imaginary: the Orient *is* where sex exceeds. Images of his anthropological distance, rather than reflecting North Africa’s cultural difference, participate in a European fantasy of North Africa’s otherness. North Africa entices because it is imagined as “not-Europe.” But, when the tourist discovers that this “not-Europe” is not what he wanted, he responds by attempting to stage the fantasized place he had anticipated, clinging onto his pre-departure “reality” by purchasing it on site. In making the Arab into the metaphor of nomadic eros, the texts continue to fix the Arab in terms of his utility for the same-sex tourist. Encountering a world whose excess does not line up with “reality” he had expected, the same-sex tourist – in a very Orientalist move – tries to produce the errant “reality” he has heard about.

Longed-for distance is, in other words, a desire for proximity to the strange. “The journey towards the stranger,” Ahmed says, “becomes a form of self-discovery in which the stranger functions yet again to establish and define the ‘I,’ [...] whereby some others are designated as *stranger than other others*.”<sup>46</sup> Narratives of flight, however, “fix” certain subjects into the embodiment of errancy, continuing to demarcate a border between “authentic” (errant / non-identitarian / elsewhere) and “inauthentic” (domesticated / identitarian / home). But, in claiming that only those Arab men whose desires *stray* are valid, the texts continue to map a proper orientation, aimlessness in this case, onto their sexuality. Fetishizing the Arab male invokes fluidity as his *fixed* trait. This representational move works to “fix others in regimes of difference.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Iain Chambers, *Migration, Culture, Identity*, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 6

<sup>47</sup> Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 8

He, consequently, is expected to stick to a line that swerves.<sup>48</sup> M. Jacqui Alexander discusses the ways that Western gay tourism can lead to “the production of a ‘queer fetishized native.’”<sup>49</sup> Nativization is “an ongoing process through which an essential character is attributed to the indigenous – the ‘native’ – which derives largely from relationships to geography or to a particular territory, which in turn structures the context within which the ‘native’ is to be imagined and understood.”<sup>50</sup> Queerly, the “essential character” of the fetishized Arab male is, now, his assumed lack of a set orientation. “His” purportedly innate deviance is valued insofar as it wanders from the tourists’ mapping of home-bound sex.<sup>51</sup> Insofar, that is, as he affirms the tourist’s definition of deviance.

Because these tourists’ sex partners are almost all men who also desire women, the representation of their straying both queers heterosexuality, showing men’s potential for sex with other men, and naturalizes same-sex erotics. If people aren’t stably straight, then heterosexual identity can be re-presented as a social fiction that – only in some places -- has managed to domesticate men’s potential for same-sex relations. In this logic, queerness is the “natural” state of desire that exclusive heterosexuality *later* diverts. Same-sex desire, not heterosexuality, becomes originary. Aldo says that “prima il maschio vero non ci pensava neanche a definirsi.”<sup>52</sup> Exclusive heterosexuality, not homosexual longings, is the “veering” away from “nature.” This queering still projects “natural” desires onto a seemingly anachronistic, virile Arab elsewhere. “Lo preferisco così: *nature!*,” Aldo goes on.<sup>53</sup> If queering demands a place where heterosexuality is felt to have less purchase on sex, that same logic assigns North Africa to the time of the other, whose desired ‘nature’ is understandable only *against* home’s / homos’ wanting present.

Following this logic, the texts imply that European cultures have evirated same-sex desire by cordoning it off exclusively into the homosexual. By confining homoerotic longings within the homosexual, the texts say, Europe has limited all men’s capacity for male-male pleasure. “Incontri così, qui, ne capitano continuamente e ovunque. *Non c’è bisogno di andare in alcun locale, anche perché i locali per fortuna non ci sono. Non ci sono ancora,*” Aldo states.<sup>54</sup> The “authentic” Arab man is used to show that same-sex desire is everywhere, not just inside identifiable homosexuals. His propensity for same-sex erotics and his desire for women are *not* a contradiction – a homosexual lying to himself. Instead, the seemingly angst-free co-existence of homoerotic urges alongside “heterosexual” ones is thought proof of the “straight” subject’s potential for same-sex relations. Proof, that is, of the instability of heterosexuality abroad. Still, the tourist worries if this still-ubiquitous tendency might soon get displaced by “outside” identities.

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<sup>48</sup> Alexander notes that the “nativized fetish, as constructed, must not only remain at home [elsewhere / destination], in ‘spectacular natural wonder,’ he must also remain silent, the same ideological requirement imposed on lesbians and gay men.” Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 85.

<sup>49</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 70

<sup>50</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 70

<sup>51</sup> Claiming that the Arab man’s sexuality *is* essentially more fluid, closer to desire in its natural state, the texts stay within what Said identifies as the “simple copula *is*” (72).

<sup>52</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 36

<sup>53</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 36

<sup>54</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 155. My emphasis.

Since the tourist's point of origin is also considered the site of desire's domestication, he longs for an encounter that will push him past familiar sex. He, in other words, is too close to domesticated desire to be *the* primary figure of eros unhinged. The same-sex tourist needs someone *queerer*, someone *less homosexual*, than himself. For him, that subject is the Arab male. "La sua *bite* si muoveva, da sola," Aldo longingly recounts, "di sotto al blu del gabardine. Una cosa commovente e sconvolgente. Il suo cazzo era contento di vedermi."<sup>55</sup> His phallus, we read, moves to the itinerant flow of eros, following pleasure wherever it pulls him -- even into another man's body. The Arab is, thus, reduced to his penis. He *is* interchangeable with "il suo cazzo." Evidently, it (he) will cross a 'boundary' that most men in Europe still shy from: men's anuses.

## 2. The Fetish of the Arab Body

A detour through Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's thought is useful here. She argues that modern Western culture (literature, knowledge, social relations, etc) is fragmented by the question of homo- / hetero- definition.<sup>56</sup> According to Sedgwick, a "minoritarian" view of homosexuality -- seeing the homosexual as a distinct "species" -- never fully displaced less "identity-bound" concepts of male-male sexuality. The homosexual did not supplant the sodomite. Instead, both notions co-exist in tandem and in tension with one another. She writes:

At the same time that this process of sexual specification or species-formation was going on, [...] less stable and identity-bound understandings of sexual choice also persisted and developed, often among the same people or interwoven in the same systems of thought. [...] an understanding of their *irresolvable instability* has been continually available, and has continually lent discursive authority, to antigay as well as to gay cultural forces of this century.<sup>57</sup>

A universalizing idea of homoerotic relations (all men are capable of same-sex sex) persisted after the historical emergence of the homosexual (homosexuals = a minority). The 'line' between both is volatile. Such ambivalence is productive, underwriting both the apotropaic violence of "gay panic" and homosexual fantasies of "seducing" seemingly straight men. This "irresolvable instability," Sedgwick claims, make homo- / hetero- definition a central, not marginal, concern.

In *Zamel*, ambivalence around the homo- / hetero- definition feeds the fantasy of homoerotic straying: any man, provided he is the penetrating partner, is open to sex with other men. The "active" Arab male personifies a universalizing homoeroticism for Aldo. He does not want to imagine the Arab as gay. "Loro," Aldo claims, "non hanno il concetto di omosessuale attivo."<sup>58</sup> If the unstable 'border' between the homoerotic and the homosocial leads to homophobic disavowals back home, then, maybe, someplace else, instability might create more erotic possibilities. Indeed, heterosexuality's presumed "instability" in North Africa is what makes the Arab so appealing to the

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<sup>55</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 180.

<sup>56</sup> See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>57</sup> Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 9-10. My emphasis.

<sup>58</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 18.

traveler. Volatility, though, can do more than open up erotics. As Sedgwick notes, both understandings (identity-bound and sodomy) can be “interwoven into the same system of thought.” Locals’ willingness to have sex both with men and with women seems, at first blush, proof of desire’s drift. At the same time, the tourist wonders if the Arab might be less queer – either more homosexual or more heterosexual – than hoped for.<sup>59</sup> Home’s sexual system hounds his fantasy of homo-erraticism.

Even as Aldo paints Arab men as the embodiment of a primal prurience loosed from Europe’s domesticating norms, the tourist can never fully convince himself that the Arabs’ famed (s)excess and the encountered Arabs, some of whom profess recognizable sexual identities, are one and the same. Aldo complains that “le cose cambieranno anche qui. Stanno cambiando. Troppo turismo, troppa televisione, troppo invadente il modello occidentale. Ahimè sarò costretta a emigrare in Arabia Saudita.”<sup>60</sup> North Africa’s endemic excess – its purported distance from and negation of home’s binaries – is itself at risk, corruptible in the face of excessive tourism, T.V. and the *invasion* of Western sexual models. Rather than civilizing the desired Orient, the West is here presented as a threat to the Orient’s contrarian excess. Although the Arab is supposed to embody eros that strays, the tourist worries that, perhaps, that “difference” no longer inheres in him or, worse, that he is no less erratic than home’s homosexuals. Aware of this disheartening prospect, Aldo sardonically comments that he will have to emigrate to Saudia Arabia. The ‘threatened’ elsewhere can no longer supply the tourist with a satisfactorily ‘strange’ horizon. Now, he longs for an even more oriental *altrove*. There, perhaps, sexual plenitude can still be found.

Queerness is found only on the horizon. Narrative anxieties like these confirm Homi Bhabha’s argument that colonial discourse is composed of volatile, polymorphous representations of racial and cultural otherness.<sup>61</sup> Stereotypes, he argues, simultaneously announce what is “already known” about the “other”, what needs no proof, and get “anxiously repeated” because the stereotype’s truth can never be satisfactorily proven. “Ambivalence,” Bhabha writes, gives the stereotype “its currency, [ensuring] its repeatability.”<sup>62</sup> Otherness is an effect of representation and desire, “as anxious as it is assertive.”<sup>63</sup> Colonial discourse, moreover, follows the logic of the fetish, producing a

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<sup>59</sup> I am indebted to Joseph A Boone’s reworking of Homi Bhabha’s notion of the colonial stereotype. Boone argues that encounters with the sexual epistemologies of non-Western cultures both de-centered earlier generations of European men’s notions of sexuality – showing that heterosexuality is *not* universally lived out as the natural state of desire – and have the potential to displace the Euro/US-centric focus of lesbian and gay studies. He traces “a series of collisions between traditionally assumed Western sexual categories (the homosexual, the pederast) and equally stereotypical colonialist tropes (the beautiful brown boy, the hypervirile Arab, the wealthy Nazarene)—*collisions that generate ambiguity and contradiction rather than re-assert an unproblematic intellectual domination over a mythic East as an object of desire*. For many white gay male subjects, the object of desire remains simultaneously same and other, a source of troubling and unresolved identification and differentiation. It is precisely in the space opened up by this gap that a critique of orientalist homerotics may usefully locate itself and begin the work of dismantling those paradigmatic fictions of otherness that have made the binarisms of West and East, of heterosexuality and homosexuality, at once powerful and oppressive” (my emphasis, “Vacation Cruises” 91).

<sup>60</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 155.

<sup>61</sup> See Homi Bhabha. “The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse.” *Screen*. 24.6. (1983): 18-36.

<sup>62</sup> Bhabha, *ibid*, 18.

<sup>63</sup> Bhabha, *ibid*, 22.

purportedly obvious knowledge about the other while also disavowing the need to defend that fixity by means of continual representation. Fetishism, here, denies the *construction* of the very “difference” it names/tames.<sup>64</sup>

Arab men’s desired sexual instability is, in other words, itself subject to a sort of constitutive ambivalence. In *Zamel* and *Sodomie in corpo II* the fetishized body’s excessive “difference” is desired and produced. The Arab’s “difference” is a form of knowledge that emerges within the tourists’ expectations of and yearnings for sexual “otherness.” Alterity, we read again and again, inheres in the Arab. An encounter with the desired difference can never be guaranteed, though. Representations of “difference” are, subsequently, better understood as attempts to invoke, via repetition and citation, the surplus the traveler has read so much about and wants to find. Encountering men whose noticeable “difference” is their departure from the visitor’s fantasy of Arab alterity, the tourist wonders if the promised “reality” is anywhere.

Bhabha’s discussion of the productive ambivalence of colonial discourse reworks a brief passage in Said’s *Orientalism*.<sup>65</sup> Said notes that the discursive and textual practice of Orientalism produces “an internally structured archive” of “typical” images, which gain the appearance of “unity” across time by virtue of their internal “vacillation.” He writes:

Something patently foreign and distant acquires [...] a status more or less familiar. One tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well-known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as version of a previously known-things. In essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things. [...] The threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves upon themselves, and in the end the mind reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating things to itself as either ‘original’ or ‘repetitions.’ [...] The orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West’s contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in – or fear of – novelty. (58-59)

Even when experienced for the first time, the Orient feels “familiar” to the visitor, as though it were already known. This response at once domesticates local differences that stray from the “typical” place the traveler anticipates and compels the traveler to understand what is unknown via what s/he already knows, Western points of reference. The latter response, however, also risks “taming” the expected “differences” that entice the visitor in the first place. What is “unfamiliar” is both a source of delight and dread, desire and disavowal.

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<sup>64</sup> In a 1927 article on fetishism, Sigmund Freud argues that the fetish object lets the subject, understood *a priori* as male, to acknowledge his mother’s “lacking” phallus all while denying this realization. The fetish functions as a substitute for this absent-but-imagined penis. It, Freud says, represents “a double attitude,” since fetishism necessarily involves both “the denial and recognition of castration” (209). Rather than erasing that disturbing knowledge, awareness “has persisted and [...] a very energetic action has been exerted to keep up the denial of it” (206). Fetishes constitute sort of psychic compromise, allowing the boy/man both to continue believing in his mother’s penis (a fantasized reality) and to respond erotically to continual evidence of woman’s sexual difference. See Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

<sup>65</sup> See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books Inc., 1994) 58-59.

Vacillation, in other words, can structure the tourist's vacation. Depictions of "difference" are representations of the desire for difference and, simultaneously, a defensive response to the fear that elsewhere does not actually match the desired difference. Drawn to the famed instability of sexuality in North Africa, the same-sex tourist is now disturbed by the possible vacancy of elsewhere's supposedly endemic "difference." If a minoritizing understanding of homosexuality is said to encumber male-male sex at home (same-sex sex → am I gay? /I'm *not* gay!), a similar logic besets the tourist's universalizing depiction of male intimacy in North Africa (sex → is he gay? is he straight?) Since the Arab allures because he is supposed to veer from familiar sexual categories, an understanding that he might be *less* different (or more different from the expected otherness) troubles the tourist travels. Sexuality's productive instability, what initially drives the tourist's sojourn, also impels a sort of homo-/hetero-panic in the same-sex tourist: is Arab sex not so erratic after all? Pursuit of homoeroticism, not its violent eschewing, now underwrites this alarm.

Both understandings of male-male sex co-exist here, compelling and confounding the tourist's fantasy of (s)excess. Because the tourist imagines the Arab *against* an identity-bound sexual system, flight from identity is never possible. Every effort to "escape" the sexual schemas dominant in the tourist's point of origin are negatively beholden to them as foil. A narrative of flight must name the point departed from. An awareness of this is known and refused, represented and repelled. Homoeroticism's nearness to an identity-bound model of homosexuality at home means that, even when abroad, male-male erotics can remind the tourist of *the* homosexual. As disturbing, once in North Africa, the tourist is continually reminded that locals continue to see him as an interchangeable European homosexual -- the very ontology he has gone far to go beyond. Going there to come closer to a "foreign" sexual system, the tourist is disappointed to be interpellated by others as an "outsider." Identity-free sexuality, allegedly widespread in North Africa, might not extend to the tourist after all.

Realizing that the polymorphous Arab may have no "real" referent outside the tourist's own wishes, the same-sex traveler attempts to "fix" the space he, now, finds wanting, producing/purchasing a simulated porno-utopia. What is denied is that homo-/hetero-definitions continue to structure the tourist's experience of a sexual culture that is supposed to be more sodomical than home. To believe in his fantasy of excess, linked here to the absolute "difference" of Arab male sexuality, the tourist must constantly disavow the idea that the norms of "home" (homo-/hetero-) might guide sex elsewhere. The "difference" denied is not cultural or sexual otherness but rather Arabs' repeated deviation from the tourist-defined fantasy of acceptable Arab-ness. Both this disavowal and the fetishization of the perverse Arab male, I argue, emerge in relation to the "irresolvable instability" interior to the homo-/hetero- definition and the vacillations that constitute orientalist discourse.

Fetishism is typically understood as "maintain[ing] a fantasmatic unity and sameness in the face of contradiction and difference."<sup>66</sup> Whereas 'gay panic' can be understood as a fetishistic disavowal of the male subject's potential for same-sex intercourse, a response to the dangerous proximity between the homosocial and the homoerotic, the same-sex tourist's fetishization of Arab represents a denial of Arabs'

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<sup>66</sup> See Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 28.

potential for identitarian sexuality. The “unity” maintained is, thus, the desired / perceived distance between us and them, here and there, now and then. Sameness and proximity, not unsettling difference, are denied. Belief in the intrinsic “strangeness” of Arab eros is, temporarily sustained via the fetish. Since identitarian homosexuality is thought to domesticate eros back home, the tourist does not want to believe that Arabs’ eroticism is synonymous with homosexuality.

And yet, because the schema of home follow him wherever he goes, the tourist cannot help but consider the possible proximity between homoeroticism and homosexuality abroad, a proximity that, we also read, does not reside there. Consequently, in order to believe Arab men’s extrinsic excess, the tourist must constantly disavow the idea that familiar notions (homo-/hetero-, sentimentality, monogamy) guide sex elsewhere, all while encountering locals whose actions and behaviors contradict this belief. The fetishized body, in other words, never attains satisfactory distance because the fetish must acknowledge/disavow the unsettling knowledge that compels it. Because the fetish can never expel the knowledge it responds to, it resides in volatile ambivalence. Representations of sex in North Africa repeatedly cite the stereotyped images the tourist struggles to actually come close to once there.<sup>67</sup> Facing elsewhere’s possible lack, the tourist responds with money.

### 3. Purchased Excess, Simulated Fantasies

In *Sodomie in Corpo 11*, Aldo Busi composes a hodgepodge of literary allusions, sexual vignettes, meta-narrative detours, and base imagery. Like many other same-sex tourists, Busi’s narrator projects his desire onto a Moroccan landscape. Describing a father and son pair, he writes: “Oh, le buone creanze arabe! [...] entrambi irradiano luminosa fragranza: belle vesti, bei visti, belle mani, belle gambe nerborute che escono da sotto le vesti – non portano mutande, entrambi col sesso a torciglione come un cobra – bei denti, bei capelli neri.”<sup>68</sup> Even though the narrator has by now realized that he is an actor in a staged “counter-experience,” which is secured by money, he still wants to believe that local men’s availability is a matter of local “creanze.” Fetishization in *Sodomie in corpo 11*, leads to the commodification of bodies and the denial of money’s role in producing the “excess” encountered upon arrival. Paying for sex with men he is convinced *do not* consider themselves “omosessuali,” Busi’s narrator strives to uphold North Africa’s detachment from identitarian sex.

On the surface, the text passes of its fetishization of the Arab male as respect for “local” norms and manners.<sup>69</sup> Busi describes “due ragazzi che, uno per parte, mi

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<sup>67</sup> The desired Arab, he who confirms the tourist’s fantasy of elsewhere, is metonymically exalted, made into the synecdoche of “reality” over there. The Arab whose desires / sexuality stray from the tourist’s fantasy of that “reality” is, instead, denigrated as a corrupted exception to the “real” North Africa.

<sup>68</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 73.

<sup>69</sup> In *Strange Encounters*, Sarah Ahmed claims that the discourses surrounding the “alien” represent a sort of “stranger fetishism.” The “stranger,” she says, is never fully other since s/he must be proximate, on site but imagined out of place. Moreover, the alien’s “strangeness” can be desired as much as it is dreaded. She cautions, however, that discourses that attempt to laud the strangers’ difference as a source of increased “diversity” risk of reaffirming the logic of fetishism. “The turn to the stranger as a figure who should be welcomed does question the discourse of ‘stranger danger,’ but only insofar as it keeps in place fetishism upon which those discourses rely” (4). This fetishism, she says, “is a fetishism of figures: it invests the

chiavano a turno” after he has supplied them with “proviste alimentari da sfamare cinque persone.”<sup>70</sup> After this description, he wonders: “non so se c’è libidine da parte mia o buona creanza, devono pur *sdebitarsi*, a me sembra solo di ottemperare a delle regole fra ospite e anfitrione in paese arabo quando l’ospite è europeo.”<sup>71</sup> Anal sex pays back what they owe the European tourist who, in offering abundant gifts, can now claim he is obeying regional rules for guest and host. This move confirms Alexander’s point that tourism relies on “the belief that the foreign currency spent is [...] vital for the local population” all while “eras[ing] the role of the tourist in the production of tourism itself.”<sup>72</sup>

Bartering for sex, the tourist ensures contact with North Africa’s compensatory ‘difference’ – sex unlike what he is used to *a casa*. Busi says: “Sia come sia, per via del burro, del latte, del pane, della carne di montone, dello zucchero, caffè, peperoni e insalata, dadi per brood, olio, aceto, coca-cola, aranciata e gomme americane a gustolungo, sono amato.”<sup>73</sup> The same-sex tourist presents his desiring economy of travel, what *he* hopes to gain proximity while abroad, as an economy of exchange. Giving away commodified objects, the tourist hopes *in compenso* to receive something for the “debt” earned via gift-giving. Dependent on a divide between poor locals and the moneyed visitor, the tourist-directed “affar[e]” is, however, then presented as adherence to locals’ notions of hospitality.<sup>74</sup> A *scambio economico* is re-imagined as a *scambio culturale*. But, like the long-lasting gum he packed, North Africa’s “gusto” – a seemingly endless chain of “cazzi” – can only be extended as long as the visitor has enough funds to buy “contatti [...] con i native.”<sup>75</sup>

Indebted to the foreign tourist’s largesse, the local men are said to “sdebitarsi” with their errant members, the very thing the tourist thinks the West is lacking. Rather than narrating the youths’ willingness as a product of the tourist’s capital, their eagerness is interpreted as a symptom of Arabs’ culture. For Busi, the “via” opening the way to North Africa’s seemingly endemic excess – “ecco che qui uno dopo l’altro arrivano tutti i maschi di casa, fratelli, cugini, nipoti, e amici dei summenzionati, una sfilza di cazzi duri in fila indiana” – are the aforementioned commodities.<sup>76</sup> At once named and disavowed, the distance between those with too much and those who are *famati* underwrite his “hospitable” exchange. Longing for excess, the same-sex tourist now exchanges one Arab “cazzo” for the next. Similar to the commodities listed earlier on, the Arab penis has become a substitutable object. This represents what Alexander has called “a sexual economy of gay desire where ‘native’ bodies are made to assume, as in satisfy, the anxieties of colonial scripts and gay capital accumulation simultaneously.”<sup>77</sup>

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figure of the stranger with a life of its own,” all while denying the very production of that “life” at home (5).

<sup>70</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 45-46

<sup>71</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 46

<sup>72</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 59

<sup>73</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 46

<sup>74</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 46

<sup>75</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 45

<sup>76</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 46

<sup>77</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 11

Commodity fetishism allows the tourist to believe he has gained proximity to elsewhere's ways even as he, on some level, knows he must buy entry into its phallic glut.<sup>78</sup> Psychic disavowal, colonial fantasies and purchased bodies tangle together here.<sup>79</sup> The tourist's desire for cultural "difference" cannot easily be split from the consumption and representation of "strange" cultures within consumer culture. Capitalism, Ahmed says, produces "the stranger as a commodity fetish through the representation of difference."<sup>80</sup> Commodification of the "strange," a fetishizing of cultural difference, helps produce the belief – through consumption – one can actually participate in a "far-off" world.<sup>81</sup> Commodity fetishism, the purchasing of sexual encounters abroad, is the

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<sup>78</sup> See, *Arabi e noi: amori gay nel Maghreb*. Ed. Vincenzo Patanè (Rome: Derive Approdi, 2002). Miming the rhetoric he claims simply to be reporting, Vincenzo Patanè says that many North African boys "accettono volentieri, se non addirittura con entusiasmo, di andare a letto con gli occidentali, soprattutto perché hanno voglia di farlo, con la scusa, magari, che per loro non è facile avere rapporti con ragazzi o ragazze del luogo. In cambio non chiedono niente, quantunque non disdegnino piccole somme a piacere, un pranzo al ristorante o qualche regalino, più o meno spontaneo (per esempio, degli abiti usati, come jeans, polo o scarpe da ginnastica, acquisiti in loco o, meglio, trovati nella valigia del partner)" (48). These "ragazzi" opt for sex with Western men because they feel like it, asking for nothing in exchange. Well, they might also ask for little gift *in compenso* – dinner or used clothing (preferably from the partner's suitcase). If the memory of sex is a sort of souvenir the traveler hopes to gain while abroad, his partner, here, plucks a worthless memento from the tourist's *valigia*. In exchange for a cheap object, the tourist aims to encounter sexual excess, which is thought to be *both* endemic *and* something that must be bartered for. Patanè's book is a sort of how-to guide for same-sex travelers to the Maghreb. But, he warns, don't spend too much. "Elargendo somme troppo conspicue si può infatti sviare la semplicità di quei ragazzi, creando loro non pochi problemi nella esistenza futura; essi, se prima vivono con una certa tranquillità la loro vita, contentandosi di poco, in seguito, attratti invece dalle malie del danaro, finiscono con l'essere stritolati da desideri che rimangono inappagati o, se soddisfatti, ne richiamano a loro volta altri ben più costosi e per loro irraggiungibili" (48). Traveling in search of deviance, the tourist is cautioned not to "sviare" the locals with too much money. Doing so might upset their "semplicità." Indeed, it might spark desires in them that cannot be extinguished or never reached at all. Applying a desiring rhetoric of travel to the men/boys whose bodies he commodifies, Patanè argues that it is best for them to stay put in their tranquil, impoverished ignorance than for the visitor to stoke "irraggiungibili" longings. The local stay fixed in the tourist's imaginary, even as the tourist's wallet threatens to undo the Edenic elsewhere he has bought into. Deviance is desirable insofar as it does not veer from the tourist's idea of a sensual and not too costly *altrove*. Supposedly, this is done for the locals' own good. In order to maintain a land of easy sex, though, the tourist needs the very economic disparity that he says he wants to avoid drawing attention to (48).

<sup>79</sup> McClintock has argued that European cultures' invention of race and the production of sexual deviants are not separate historical developments. She writes, "the invention of *racial* fetishism became central to the regime of sexual surveillance, while the policing of *sexual* fetishism became central to the policing of 'dangerous' classes, both in Europe and in the colonies. Colonized peoples were figured as *sexual* deviants, while gender deviants were figured as *racial* deviants. 'Fetish-worshippers' in the colonies and sexual fetishists in the imperial metropolises were seen as the visible, living evidence of evolutionary degeneration. Identified as atavistic *subraces* within the human race, fetishists were, all too often, seen as inhabiting an anachronistic space in the linear time of evolutionary progress, warranting and justifying conquest and control." McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 181.

<sup>80</sup> Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 116.

<sup>81</sup> Ahmed again: "the process of consuming the strange does not mean that the strange is the 'real' origin of the commodity object: the 'stranger' is precisely that which is produced, marketed and sold in order to define the value of the commodity object. In other words, through the commodity, the stranger becomes a fetish: it [the presumption of 'strangeness'] becomes consumed as something the object simply *has*. This perception of objects *having* difference is itself an effect of the very processes of production and exchange embedded in consumer culture" (original emphasis Strange Encounters 116).

main way the tourist strives to cling onto his pre-departure fantasy of Arabs' innate (s)excess.<sup>82</sup>

Simulation, an indistinguishable imitation of an original icon or image, plays a role in the fantasy and consummation of same-sex tourism. The "original" replicated upon arrival is the tourist's inherited fantasy of North African prurience. The simulation is the tourist's purchase of experiences that look like the sensuality he had hoped to encounter *altrove*. Busi writes:

Comperare il sesso col denaro è come comperaro un chilo di bucce a forma di mele: il chilo è sempre un chilo, ma la polpa non è compresa nel baratto. Abulia di prepuzi deliziosi truffaldini. Per fortuna che le vitamine sono contenute solo nelle bucce.<sup>83</sup>

Described is an apple made up entirely of its peel – at once an imitation of the 'real' apple and dubbed just as nutritious as the 'real' fruit. Purchased sex is the superficial rind, but that exterior shell is, now, what satisfies. Distinctions between *real* sex and *purchased* sex cease to matter. Because simulation evokes the 'original,' it has the power to deceive experience. The tourist settles for the simulated fantasy as if it were interchangeable with his initial expectations of excess. The borders separating fantasy and copy collapse.

Alexander argues that, in addition to material consumption, queer travel involves the "construction of an erotic subjectivity that seeks and produces itself through

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<sup>82</sup> In *Capital*, Karl Marx describes the symbolic ascription of value to commodities in terms of the religious fetish object. He dubs this commodity fetishism. Etymologically the term derives from the medieval Portuguese *fetiço* (charm, sorcery) and *feitiço* (made artfully, artificial) and later used by sailors to name the talismans or charms used by the inhabitants in coastal West Africa. As other scholars have noted, the word fetish already carries within it echoes of European imperialism and colonial expansion, a project motivated in part by the desire for capital accumulation. For a history of the term, history, see: McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 185-187. For Marx, the religious fetish is an object invested with desire, fantasy and value by its worshipper, who believes that power naturally inheres in the charmed item. In an 1842 article, Marx wrote: "the fantasy of the appetites tricks the fetish worshipper into believing that an 'inanimate object' will give up its natural character to gratify his desires. The crude appetite of the fetish worshipper therefore smashes the fetish when the latter ceases to be its most devoted servant." See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. *On Religion*. Atlanta: Scholars, 1982. 22. It is a source, then, of both allure and disappointment. In *Capital*, Marx uses the word "fetish" to describe how social relations between people, including the labor invested in producing a commodity, become mystified. Eventually, people come to believe that value actually inheres in the exchanged object. Value, of course, cannot be intrinsic to a thing. Rather, it is phantasmatically projected onto the object by people, believed in *as though* it resides there and is "outside" human relations. This "as though," however, is perceived as an objective worth. In that work, Marx writes:

[...] the existence of the things qua commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism, which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.

See Karl Marx, *Capital*. Volume 1. 1867.

<sup>83</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 81

fetishization at the same time that it produces commodities as queer feminized and nativized fetishes.”<sup>84</sup> Busi’s narratives produces an itinerant queer subject vis-a-vis an economy of travel that depends upon the economic inequities underwriting different types of mobility and rootedness – travel, migration, expatriation, native soil. At the same time, the text fetishizes local bodies as the embodiments of a naturally errant virility that, for the tourist, is “raggiungibile” *via* an exchange of capital. Representing locals’ erotic errancy, the tourist manages to deny the fact that certain bodies, like the visitor’s, travel for leisure while others cannot afford to do so.

Capital, however, can stir anxieties while it staves off others. Looking for bought-and-sold sex, the tourist admits there is a ‘lack’ in *altrove*’s plenitude -- purportedly ubiquitous, Arab prurience must be bought to be found. Responding to this realization, Busi’s tourist re-imagines purchased sex as already interior to the fantasy, temporarily evading this unsettling realization. Aldo, instead, blames Western tourists for ruining “questo paradiso” by giving out too much money. “Quanti gli hai dato?,” he asks his friend. “Troppi! [...] Voi turiste alle prime armi rovinare la piazza!” Once affordably within reach, Arab excess is increasingly harder to procure. *Other* tourists’ capital – not his own – corrupt Tunisia’s erotic wonderland, Aldo insists. Even as Aldo turns Arab bodies into commodities to be bartered for, he insists that he, unlike “voi turiste,” affirm the local men’s virility. Other visitors distract, corrupt or spoil them. Commodity fetishism allows him to efface his own money’s role in the “reality” he creates, all while cordoning off money’s unavoidable threat in tourists who, he says, are nothing like him.

In doing this, Aldo erases his role in the production of the “paradiso magrebino,” all while attempting to invoke distance between his actions and those of misguided European visitors. As a supplement, purchased sex at first reassures the tourist that North Africa is the (imagined) space of unbridled desire, a place where the ‘borders’ of home no longer apply. Opening his wallet, Busi’s narrator pursues encounters evocative of “difference.” Still, in proffering money for sex, the tourist is faced with the knowledge that fetishizing capital strives to stave off: the Arab “paradiso,” if consumed by enough tourists, could become “as standard a commodity as any other available in the mass culture.”<sup>85</sup> If money secures an encounter with North Africa’s famed (s)excess, it also draws attention to the *vacancy* of vacation.

Even as the exchange of money guarantees an encounter reminiscent of elsewhere’s desired excess, the continual need for capital to “prove” this imagined place’s contours also reminds the tourist of the role he plays in producing the “inherent” and “external” world he moves through. Initially a solution to elsewhere’s possible lack, commodity fetishism can itself become the source of deep anxieties, anxieties that can only be staved off as long as the tourist’s bank account is not empty.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 86

<sup>85</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 190

<sup>86</sup> Jasbir Puar argues for the need to foreground queer tourism’s “relations of production beyond the producers of the tourism industry,” stressing also “those toured upon” who maintain the tourist locale through their labor (“Circuits of Queer Travel,” 126). Moments in which the “consumption practices of queer tourists” are connected to “the sites of production,” moreover, have the potential to “strain the fetish at its most vulgar level,” demystifying tourism’s role in the production of the very “reality” visitors then pay to come close to (126).

Relying on purchased “contacts,” the tourist necessarily wonders if his ‘experience’ has any reality ‘outside’ the otherness performed for the tourist. “Come godere, quindi, comprando?” Busi asks.<sup>87</sup> Much like the tourist’s camera excludes “intrusive” details that might mar a “typical” vista, sex-tourism purchases sex that conforms to an (imagined) ideal of sexuality. This act responds to and denies the absence of expected sensual surfeit. Beset with a “reality” that ‘fails’ to follow the tourist’s desires, the traveler pays for the pleasure of “enter[ing] the Orient’s image repertoire as a participant.”<sup>88</sup> Busi comments: “bisogna ognitanto far accadere nella vita quello che accade solo nei romanzi ... altrimenti a che vale leggere.”<sup>89</sup> Money, by simulating the fantasy, makes “fiction” seem to become “reality.” Money helps the traveler reproduce an unstable, fictive and inherited knowledge of elsewhere’s “strangeness.”

Reading’s *value*: to serve as the script the tourist strives to act out “nella vita.” But, if North Africa’s sexual “excess” resides over there, why would the tourist need to make it happen? If erotic errancy is so common elsewhere, why does the visitor need to perform what he reads in fiction? Same-sex tourists’ desired North Africa is not coterminous with the cultures, practices and people encountered in that place. The desired North Africa is, instead, the exotic / erotic “reality” told *about* that space.<sup>90</sup> Because that place is a fantasized horizon, it can never be satisfactorily come across. At the same time, as a fantasize ‘reality,’ its imagined “unity” continues to exert sway over the tourist’s desires. That the places visited and described in these two novels have actual referents “outside” of the books does not mean that inherited tales about elsewhere stop directing their portrayals.

The tourist buys encounters with the “difference” he has anticipated so that he can, then, re-narrate that experience as though it were locals’ endemic reality. “La scrittura ha bisogno ogni tanto di vestirsi a festa con il giubbotto anti-prioettile della *realtà* più che con lo smoking della versomiglianza,” writes Busi.<sup>91</sup> This is both a response to ‘vacancy’ and a production, on the page, of the destination’s expected “realtà.” Intriguingly, Busi points to his text’s apotropaic realism. Writing must dress itself up in “reality” in order to fend off a threatening assault. Garbed in “realtà,” writing is made impervious. While Busi constantly pays for sex that matches his pre-departure (s)expectations about Morocco, he still denigrates “lo smoking della verosimiglianza.” The place recounted on his page *supplies* his writing with more “reality” and compensates for the misleading aestheticism of other writers. And yet, the thing that protects him (“il giubbotto anti-prioettile”) and the thing defensively denied (“lo smoking”) are themselves commodities. “Reality” is relayed in terms of a garment that, figuratively, serves to at once to cover over and shield, repeating the double logic of the fetish.

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<sup>87</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 111

<sup>88</sup> Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994) 24.

<sup>89</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 338

<sup>90</sup> Interestingly enough, the same-sex fantasy of North Africa is one that draws the Italian tourist South along routes first charted by French and British writers, during both colonial and post-colonial periods. Places like Libya or Eritrea, once Italian colonial possessions, have no place in this fantasy. Traveling to Tunisia or Morocco, Italian same-sex tourist re-trace a route textually mapped by writers like André Gide, Oscar Wilde, Jean Genet Norman Douglas, Sir Richard Burton, T.E. Lawrence, Roland Barthes, etc.

<sup>91</sup> Busi, *Sodomi in corpo 11*, 142

Indeed, the longed-for horizon often does not correspond to the “reality” encountered upon arrival. “Se la realtà supera la fantasia, il Terzo Mondo supera la realtà,” Busi wryly comments.<sup>92</sup> Reality exceeds the fantasy. And, Morocco *exceeds* the tourist’s expectations of ‘reality.’ “Reality” is, thus, shown to be an imagined topography whose “verosimiglianza,” via writing and via commodities, can masquerade as the truth of a place. Simulated “realities,” supposedly that which the writer is dismissing, are in actuality the longed-for “reality” that *scrittura* helps him defend. Elsewhere’s inherent vacancy – the knowledge that it offers no more plenitude than a believed-in simulation – is both owned up to and compensated for via the exchange of capital. Because home and elsewhere can never be cleanly divided, because the homo-/hetero- divide continues to structure the tourist’s thoughts about North Africa and because the tourist exchanges money to gain access to the Maghreb’s sensual glut, such a narrative gesture never arrives at the absolute distance it chases.

*Vacanza* never achieves that plenitude because travel always entails a simultaneous distancing from and transplanting of the norms of home. The estranged same-sex tourist, then, vacillates between the imagined *casa* and the elusive *altrove* just beyond his reach. The narrator comments:

Gli ebrei *erranti* e io, invece, ci integriamo in un battibaleno ovunque veniamo a trovarci e non torniamo mai *a casa* perché abbiamo capito che ogni casa è un posto diverso della stessa vacanza che abbiamo dentro di noi. Certo i nostalgici di *una patria* ci saranno sempre, ma non c’è come avere, hélas, la possibilità di andare a stare in Paradiso per rendersi conto che si stava definitivamente meglio dove si stava prima. Questo consapevole sradicamento senza più sogni mi sembra strepitoso ... Le radici uno se le trapianta dentro come le lumache porta con sé la propria casa. E’ come fare scorta di terra ideale nei ventricoli del cervello e lasciare a se stessa la terra dove siamo nati e cresciuti perché l’uomo gagliardo e spirituale cresce soltanto *altrove*.<sup>93</sup>

Alluding to the Jews allows Busi at once to evoke images of Exodus, a people in constant pursuit of the Promised Land, and the Jews’ post-WWII displacement from Europe. Israelis, he says, are a people neither at home in their point of origin nor at home in their place of arrival, modern day Israel. In this figuration, even home embodies exile. No home is possible. Each home is “la stessa vacanza che abbiamo dentro di noi” – at once an escape (vacation) and an emptiness (vacancy).

In the absence of home, *elsewhere* incarnates “la terra ideale” and a continually-deferrable place. Elsewhere is the closest the wandering “io” comes to fulfillment.<sup>94</sup> But

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<sup>92</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 111

<sup>93</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 56

<sup>94</sup> I do not wish to align myself with Deleuze’s description of “nomadism,” in which nomads are viewed as antithetical to the stable borders established by the state. Although Busi’s sexuality positions him as an outsider to heteronormative culture, his journey through Morocco exploits economic inequities whose roots go back to European colonialism in North Africa. In Boone’s words: “In narratives where the occidental traveler by virtue of his homosexuality is already the other, the presumed *equivalence* of Eastern homosexuality and occidental personal liberation may disguise the specter of colonial privilege and exploitation encoded in the hierarchy of white man/brown boy” (104). Earlier, Boone notes: “the intersection of this ‘sanctuary’ for gay men with certain historical and economic factors of Western colonialism allowed for a level of exploitation potentially as objectionable as the experience of marginalization and harassment that sent these Western voyagers abroad in the first place. Sex for sale provides an obvious but far from simple example” (100). While never unidirectional, such practices feed

even a willed deracination cannot efface the tourist's roots, the mores and memories that bind him to "dove siamo nati e cresciuti." *Altrove*, like *casa*, is out of reach because echoes of home resound no matter where he steps foot. Home is inadequate because there is always some other place to imagine as more complete. Elsewhere is unrealized because the memory of 'home' constantly haunts travel. The fantasy of a home someplace else highlights *casa*'s inadequacy. Returning home can be a return to disappointment. What is gained via the voyage in this text is an understanding of what home does not supply.

For Busi, North Africa's initial allure comes from its refusal to conform to the Western binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Here, for enough money, the tourist imagines that his sensual itinerary could include *any* man. The size of the tourist's bank account – not the labels or identities assigned to sex – is what matters here. He recounts:

Qui in Marocco sessualmente, se sei straniero e bianco, non c'è niente da negare, niente da affermare, tutto è secondo la propria borsa e gli psicologismi li si lascia a casa occidentale. [...] È bello usare i corpi umani col proprio e azzerare i desideri più globali della parte non illuminista del cervello. Però bisogna sempre far presto a tagliare la corda e a passare di nuovo in banca prima di ristenderla.<sup>95</sup>

Participation in the fantasy is available for the right price. "Tutto è secondo la propria borsa," the protagonist declares. Money buys the brief illusion of estrangement from "[la] casa occidentale," while still guaranteeing a safe way out once most his funds have been spent. At the same time, purchasing sex can also remind the tourist that Morocco's prurience, by all accounts limitless, must be paid for or risk suddenly being nowhere.

Commodification, thus, at once enables and limits the same-sex tourist's encounter with sexual "excess." Busi writes:

Dalla capanna dell'Alto Atlas a questo elegante mercato della carne, per vecchi europei e giovanotti di mestiere che arrivano, depositano le loro carte d'identità, vengono smistati a vari piani, entrano nelle camere, escono, scendono, risalgono nella camera accanto. È questo il percorso classico per un turista come me?<sup>96</sup>

"Il percorso classico" includes perusing the local *flesh market*. Before stepping out, the European tourists "depositano le loro carte d'identità" – markers of their point of origin and its norms – with the hotel's staff. These symbols of their identities are at once shed and shielded. The hotel serves, then, as both a point of transgressive departure and a site of reassuring return to the tourists' safely stored and temporarily discarded identities. Even while same-sex tourist say they want to exchange sexual identity for the sexual surfeit imagined in another, they safeguard the document guaranteeing their national identity – the very object that lets him to cross international borders and travel as a tourist.

To leave behind their identities and participate in "questo elegante mercato della carne," the European visitors must empty their wallets. Purchasing sex initially reassures the tourist that Morocco is still the space of unbridled desire. The tourist reins in the threat of disappointment by purchasing practices that shore up his vision while

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off economic inequities that allow Westerners to represent North Africa as an "affordable" (poor) stage for satiating their desires.

<sup>95</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 48

<sup>96</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 134

disavowing practices that exceed his imagination of this place. Busi says: “la verità qui è dura da ammettere per chiunque... che qui il misero obolo, uomini o donne che siano, lo pagano tutti mettendo la mano direttamente al portafoglio.”<sup>97</sup> Buying sex strives to defer disappointment by directing the tourist’s towards an experience reminiscent of the North Africa he had previously read about.

For the right price, fantasies can still be bought and, temporarily, believed in. Exhibiting money strives to muffle unsettling threats to the imagined Morocco, the place the tourist had hoped to find. Busi at first sketches Morocco as a land of inexpensive excess, ripe for consumption. Writing to a friend – with echoes of nineteenth-century travel letters - the protagonist claims:

Caro Bertolli,

Le direi di prendere il primo aereo e di volare qui – ci sono appartamenti per due persone con camerieri per quattro. Costa meno di un’entrata in discoteca dove non combini niente o di una scattola di cioccolatini quando si reca da una delle sue amabili vecchiette miliardarie. Tutto ciò che i ragazzi chiedono è di chiudere la porta a chiave – perché nessuno deve sospettare... – e farti delle domande su Rommenighe intanto che ti chiedono se è dentro tutto. Lei, che a differenza di me, sa tanto di calcio potrebbe per un po’ scodarsi dei fasti editoriali in cui è rimasto incagliato un ventennio e fare il cronista per la gioia di tutti i marocchini che pensano – non a torto – che l’Italia è solo un grande stadio col Papa col fischiato. Ne trarrebbe delle belle soddisfazioni, però dovrebbe smetterla con la solfa ‘non l’ho mai fatto’. ... Qui in cambio di una T-shirt – ma di nessuno consiglio D.O.C o aforisma perugino – ti fanno camminare anche sull’acqua e toccare il cielo con più di un dito. Salameleccamente suo.<sup>98</sup>

In Busi’s imaginary, North Africa embodies a profane paradise of cheap orgasms. Boys here will only ask for a few words about soccer and that the door stays locked. Unlike Italy, weighed down by the Pope’s disapproval, Morocco promises sex between men unhampered by Christian morality. Reveling in Morocco’s “soddisfazioni,” the narrator claims, can help the same-sex tourist forget about the calamities of home.

For the gift of a t-shirt, the same-sex tourist can gain proximity to ecstasy. Morocco’s excess, his friend reads, costs less than the cover of a dance club back home. Whereas in Italy same-sex desire is cordoned off inside gay discotheques – places that rarely lead to sex – Morocco promises sex with any *ragazzo*, provided the tourist takes on the “passive” role and packs his suitcase with appealing apparel to barter with. Writing the letter, the protagonist advertises Morocco as the place to consummate and consume same-sex desire. Morocco, in Busi’s mind, has become a no-man’s-land, a space of ambiguity and uncertainty that the visitor can flee to and then leave once satisfactorily spent. It is one of “le piccole zone franche o terre di nessuno dove nessuno sappia cosa ne fai della tua umanità e subiscile lì le umiliazioni di routine.”<sup>99</sup> Morocco is here the post-modern subject’s screen for projecting (and buying) dreams of non-fixity. This move, rather than upsetting Orientalism, reasserts the drive to fix the “oriental” other.

Arriving in his hotel room late at night, the protagonist finds the door ajar. Puzzled, he walks in. A noise – a bottle falling – startles him. The narrator imagines the

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<sup>97</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 50

<sup>98</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 47-48

<sup>99</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 157

intruder is “un ladro di dopobarbo.”<sup>100</sup> Instead he finds two terrified thieves. “Ssst,” he whispers, closing the door. He does not flee. He does not yell for help. This moment, on the contrary, is a chance to fulfill another fantasy – the rapacious Arab raider. “Sono così belli entrambi che mi sembra un pensiero dell’Ente Turismo per rendere più emozionante il mio soggiorno,” he brags. The enticing thieves complete an unrealized fantasy of his journey. With the protagonist’s complicity, the two men raid and seduce him – imagined under the threat of harm. “Senza la mia collaborazione non sarebbero mai riusciti a derubarli, impossibile portarmi via il malloppo, è nel *safe*.”<sup>101</sup> What follows is an exchange of money, sex and threats. He writes: “Vorrebbero rifarlo, gratis, non appena gli ho allungato i 100 dirham. [...] Alla fine riappare il pugnale: fuori gli altri! Gli dò gli altri 50 che avevo messo sotto la cornice dello specchio. Mi salutano entrambi alla francese con tre bacce guance. Tutto calcolato.”<sup>102</sup> A promise of “free” sex is – of course – an excuse to continue the narrator’s cravings, somewhere between an actual robbery and a staged fantasy.

Maintaining a veneer of violence allows the protagonist to figure the men as both willing and menacing accomplices in his fantasy of marauding Arabs. Before they leave, the men ask him what he is doing tomorrow. Busi’s protagonist narrates:

Nasconderò 50 dirham nello stesso posto, gli rispondo. Ma per favore, passi dalla *reception* e non sia così stupido da aprire la porta della camera per vedere se arriva qualcuno. Qui il turismo è di massa e loro applicano ancora un romanticismo da assalto di predoni nel deserto. Li richiamo indietro entrambi con un fischio: il pugnale, se lo sono dimenticati!<sup>103</sup>

On the surface, the narrator acknowledges a disconnect between “i predoni nel deserto,” image of a bygone romanticism, and the “turismo è di massa” now dominant in Morocco. Although the marauding scenes narrated by earlier travelers are no longer available, locals are still said to “applica[re] un romanticismo da assalto” reminiscent of an earlier era. Arriving too late to encounter first-hand any marauding intruders, the narrator nonetheless continues to represent local men in terms of these inherited images – images whose time, he claims, has come and gone.

The protagonist proceeds to rattle off a series of instructions - *come back tomorrow, I’ll leave the money in the same place and don’t be dumb enough to check the door, and don’t forget the dagger!* The tourist directs and stages an encounter with reminiscent of the “predoni,” even though, by his admission, such figures no longer exist. Giving back their dagger, he rehearses an experience that evokes the titillating danger prior travel writers once relayed. At the same time, the dagger also functions as a prop, a reminder that this “danger” is now domesticated within the confines of a simulated, scripted, and purchased fantasy. Even in the “absence” of the bygone marauding Morocco, images from that textual place continue to imbue and structure his simulation of a transgressive, errant North Africa. At the same, the fantasy’s absence in the present tense drives the same-sex tourist to pay for a simulacrum, a copy of a non-existent original.

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<sup>100</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 66

<sup>101</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 66

<sup>102</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 66

<sup>103</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 67

Money frames the tourist's imagination of possible sexual encounters. Even when Moroccan men do not ask or even expect to be paid, the tourist continues to imagine sex as something that must be bartered for. At the Hotel Mentaga, Busi's narrator sees a young engineer enter his room, leaving the door ajar. The narrator follows behind. They discuss Camus, share hashish and have sex. There is no talk of money. Kissing this engineer, Busi's protagonist thinks: "Vorrei baciarlo, lui lascia fare. Penso: baciare non gli va." All the while, the narrator is convinced that "tutto ciò mi costerà una fortuna, specialmente per via del discorso sulla *dignità*. Di solito gli arabi che criticano i loro connazionali per via della questura si predispongono a un ricato incalcolabile, mettono le mani in avanti come a dire, io non mi accontenterò di così poco..."<sup>104</sup> The narrator expects that each act – especially the kiss – will cost him a fortune. He assumes that sexual intimacy already participates in an economy of exchange: for the right sum, Moroccan men *allow* the tourist to perform his fantasy.

Imagining his partner as a greedy blackmailer, hands held out to solicit more cash, the narrator limns their encounter in terms of haggling. After they climax, he is confused:

Davanti alle sue braccia che si staccano esauste e cadono aperte all'indietro sul letto non so come comportarmi. Sfilare il portafoglio? Andarmene? Salutarlo o dire niente, chiudere la porta senza dire niente? Quante ore siamo qui insieme. Gli chiedo, con grande imbarazzo, se mi permette di dare un contributo per la mia parte del hashish – io ho aspirato una volta su cinque. Guardando altrove, contro la parete, dice a denti stretti "ça vaut pas la peine." Deglutisco, capendo il grave errore, l'offesa fattagli. Avvampo, questa è l'emozione più forte di tutte: era tutto gratis. Mi sento un verme...<sup>105</sup>

The tourist does not know how to react. Leave? Take out his wallet? Say goodbye? Under the guise of paying for his portion of hash, the narrator offers up some money. Their encounter, which until that point had been ambiguous and mutual, now becomes a commodity. Rather than leave in doubt, unsure whether he should have offered to pay, the narrator opens his pockets. Better to return to the familiar purchased fantasy than admit that sex can take place outside of its staged, predictable confines.

He soon sees his error. "Era tutto gratis." For the protagonist, even the absence of an economy of desire is thinkable only in financial terms. Ashamed, he invites him to dinner "dove vuole lui, anche nel famoso hotel da mille e una notte nell'oasi vicina."<sup>106</sup> Once again, the economy of desire structures his emotive response. He begs forgiveness and, to pay for his mistake, offers recompense. Without the guarantee of money, which institutes a limit beforehand on the tourist's expectations, sex now threatens to overstep, frustrate or stray from the tourist's imagined Morocco. That encounter causes the protagonist to realize that not all sex there conforms to the tourist's imagined landscape. Stepping outside of the fantasy's borders carries with it the ancillary fear of collapsing the entire fantasy of sexual excess.

Sex outside of the tourist-directed economy of desire is unsettling, because it cannot be staged the same way as a purchased encounter. Its limitations are not spelled out. Paying for sex guarantees a predictable, albeit simulated, encounter. When sex is

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<sup>104</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 85

<sup>105</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 85

<sup>106</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 85

not paid for, however, its “non-stagedness” threatens to disappoint or challenge the fantasy’s content. The same-sex tourist who expected to pay for a counter-experience does not know how to navigate sex outside of economic exchange. Uncertainty motors an urgent disavowal.

Returning to his own floor, the narrator sees a man nod at him. “Ci sto subito,” he writes, “per dimenticare alla svelta l’unicità del sentimento di prima e di rientrare al più presto nella ripetitività della commedia dell’arte di porgere il corpo a quarti, ognuno col suo nome e funzione, fino a obliterarne la nozione stessa *spirito*.”<sup>107</sup> Having veered from the fantasy’s itinerary, the narrator rushes to re-enter familiar terrain, where his body serves a gratifying, not romantic, purpose. If sex is only the offering up of objectified bodies there is no chance for sentimental attachment and its ancillary disappointment. Re-entering the unsentimental fantasy, however, entails an initial displacement or distancing from it. Only after mistaking sex “tutto gratis” for merchandise can the narrator re-enter the fantasy’s familiar and reassuring tropes: sex without complication, sex without attachment, sex without labels.

Through anonymous sex, quickly followed up by an orgy with eight village teachers, the narrator hopes to return to the promise of sensual excess with no emotional entanglement. By immediately returning to the fantasy of excess, by performing its bodily rituals, the narrator convinces himself that he has left behind the mores and restraints at home. Re-entering is only possible retroactively, after leaving behind “la commedia dell’arte di porgere i corpi a quarti.”<sup>108</sup> The return to the familiar is haunted by the “forgotten” memory of its lack. Demarcating the fantasy’s terrain as a “re-entering” is only possible through its displacement. According to Van Den Abbeele, return can “domesticate the transgressive or critical possibilities implied in the change of perspective travel provides.”<sup>109</sup> But no return is free from anxiety. Performing the unsentimental fantasy, even if initially conceived as a return (re-entering) cannot efface the recent detour with the engineer. Transgressing the fantasy allows for a retroactive remembering of the fantasy as somehow more complete and, in the same breath, reminds the narrator of the fantasy’s lack – the irrecoverable loss of *altrove*.

North Africa embodies at once a pursuit of pleasure that surpasses what is available at home and the panic of transgressing the fantasy’s “safe” limits. The prospect of experiencing what Dean MacCannell dubs a “back region,” a place that mass-tourism has yet to commodify, where the tourist believes he is the first outsider to view its “unadulterated” authenticity, entices Busi’s narrator. Unlike him, other tourists “spendono per il sole e *le plaisir*, a nessuno verrebbe in mente come a me di andare nelle baraccopoli a sentire le testecalde.”<sup>110</sup> To prove that he is not the typical tourist, the narrator accompanies one of the teachers from the orgy to “un piccolo villaggio berbero dove mai turista ha messo piede.”<sup>111</sup> This trip immediately follows his disillusioning encounter with the young engineer, which came dangerously close to replicating both “European” notions of coupling and the romanticism he claims to loathe.

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<sup>107</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 86

<sup>108</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 86

<sup>109</sup> Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor*, xx

<sup>110</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 61

<sup>111</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 87

Travel to the back region, then, can be understood as a further disavowal of that encounter: a physical distancing from the hotel as a means of repressing its disturbing memory. Even the orgy with the school teachers, lacking all romantic traces, was an insufficient return to the imagined Morocco. Since that Morocco cannot be found in the Hotel Mantega, it must exist in some other place. In Ali Behdad's words, the pursuit of Oriental excess is characterized by the "discovery of its absence, engender[ing] a new kind of orientalist praxis, one marked by ambivalence and uncertainty."<sup>112</sup> This disappointment compels the tourist to seek out the fantasy in a continually-deferred elsewhere.

For Busi, the *real* sensual Morocco, the truest escape from European mores, exists only in those places where no other tourist has stepped foot. True excess is *altrove*. In that space, finally, the tourist's fantasy and material reality will coincide. Riding on the bed of truck, he says: "sono così vivo perché oso non pensarci più istante per istante."<sup>113</sup> But, midway through his trip, the narrator realizes that "non sono considerato un amico."<sup>114</sup> Upon arrival, he thinks: "mi sento solo e indifeso, in mezzo a gente bellissima dai costumi sconosciuti."<sup>115</sup> Entering the back region, whose customs and signs he can not read, elicits doubt. This place does not match the Morocco he imagined before departure. Alone and without friends, he feels adrift in a world that does not fit in his fantasy of *altrove*. He is far from home and even further from finding "i remoti paradisi."

What follows is a detailed and brutal description of rape. In violating the back region, the same-sex tourist is violated in return. The narrator's rape by the three youths who accompanied him on the truck is an encounter with a sexual *excess* that goes beyond the fantasy's safe boundaries. As a counter-experience which does not conform to the tourist-directed economy of desire, rape infringes on the promise of a comfortably transgressive Morocco. Rape is excess without consent and without restraint. The rape reminds the narrator that even *altrove* he is seen as a *pédé* – a fag to bugger and scorn.

He writes: "Nemmeno qui è possibile dimenticare che sono un *pédé*, qualcuno da inculcare e disprezzare, non esiste serenità nemmeno nei remoti paradisi e ormai sento la mia presenza qui artificiale, estranea e tutto, sgradita."<sup>116</sup> *Altrove's* promise to compensate for the lack of home is illusory. Seeking out proximity to a far-removed alterity, the tourist realizes he is still considered a denigrated outsider. Lured by a culture that he thought ignored homosexual and heterosexual identities, the same-sex tourist is now reminded that even here his difference, his homosexuality, is spurned. He feels estranged from a place that, before disembarkment had embodied the promise of sensual plenitude. Ultimately, the narrator concludes, the villagers "mi esclud[ono]."<sup>117</sup> Neither *casa* (Italy) nor *altrove* (North Africa) satisfy.

The rape is narrated as a mistranslated fantasy. After confronting Saïd, one of the three assailants, the young man says: "No, è normale invece, questo che volevi?" (97). The narrator's presence is imagined as a solicitation of sexual excess. All along, his assailants thought he wanted it, assuming they were realizing the tourist's fantasy.

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<sup>112</sup> Behdad, *Belated Travelers*, 25

<sup>113</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 87

<sup>114</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 88

<sup>115</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 89

<sup>116</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 90

<sup>117</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 93

Without the directing mediation of money, what secures the fantasy's performance and the boundaries of transgression, sex chafes the tourist's expectations. Thus, the mist-translated fantasy is actually the loss of *altrove*'s promise to fulfill what home cannot. Encountering *altrove*'s lack forces the narrator to reevaluate his opinions of home and elsewhere.

Experiencing an excess over which he has no power to direct, the narrator, unsurprisingly, re-imagines home, embodied in a rigid heterosexual / homosexual binary of desire. The narrator's return to home is performed immediately following his escape from the village and un-tamed excess. Instead of sleeping with a man who might desire or abuse him, the protagonist opts to sleep with Salah, "il quale non ha nessuna intenzione di scoparmi, né di farmi scopare questo torello qui a fianco perché vuole restare vergine sino al matrimonio."<sup>118</sup> Unlike the ambiguously identified rapists, Salah is figured as unassailably heterosexual. "Oh, l'eterosessuale! Questa sì che è una buona idea."<sup>119</sup> Lauding the heterosexual attempts to compensate for the loss "home" envisioned in "altrove," the promised land of affirmative excess.

Up until this point, the narrator has relished the apparent non-fixity of desire in Morocco, the belief that all men will sleep with another man. But, having experienced an excess of non-fixity, its threatening incarnation when not regulated by money, the narrator is comforted by a return to a fixed binary of sexuality. In this thinking, there are homosexuals and there are heterosexuals. Desire does not drift. Sleeping next to Salah," then, recalls for him the "Western" construction of homo- and hetero- sexuality. The loss of the fantasy experienced in the rape is filled in by exalting a confirmed "eterosessuale" as safe terrain. It is a homecoming. This re-evaluation of the familiar, however, is only possible after an unsettling estrangement from it. Only after realizing that sometimes money cannot make reality into the fantasy, that sometimes money cannot direct desire, can the narrator remember home as a consoling return.

#### 4. A Threat on the Homoerotic Horizon

*Zamel*'s protagonist, Aldo, conceptualizes Tunisians' difference in terms of their spatial, temporal and sexual distance from Europe. Since difference is the very thing he eroticizes, any admissions of Arabs' sameness, narrated as proximity to European mores, is vociferously disavowed. According to Ahmed, "what is 'not here' shapes the desire for what is 'there,' such that 'there' becomes visible on the horizon as 'supplying' what is lacking."<sup>120</sup> The Orient's difference tempts, here, not because it needs the West's patronizing plenitude but, inversely, because the West sees 'there' what it presumes not to have at home. After Edo tells Aldo that France, Denmark, Holland and Switzerland are "gli stati pionieri" for gay rights, Aldo replies that those places "[sono] quelli dove io non sono mai riuscito a combinare niente, neanche da giovane."<sup>121</sup> Emblems to Edo of the forward-moving progress of gay rights in Europe, such countries are for Aldo instead signs of what is missing in the West – ample male-male sex.

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<sup>118</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 99

<sup>119</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 99

<sup>120</sup> Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 114.

<sup>121</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 114

“Quei culi lattei. Lo sperma acquosa,” he says, describing men in Europe. “Il mio desiderio pulsa su quella fascia del globo che parte da Marocco, costeggia il Mediterraneo – compresa la Turchia – giunge in Medio Oriente e si chiude in Afghanistan: culi stretti e neri, poche gocce di sperma che ti bruciano dentro. Pakistan nulla, per carità: già troppo molli e colorati.”<sup>122</sup> In these few lines, Aldo outlines the confines of his desire. His “preferenze,” he says, traverse a particular swath of the globe. Their point of departure is not Europe but Morocco. The outer edge of his desiring topography: Afghanistan. Men in Pakistan are not virile enough – “nulla.” Instead, his desire “si chiude” at the place where men with “culi stretti,” closed off to penetration, are thought to end. Milky asses, aligned with the European nations Edo exalts as advanced, rouse no itinerant longings in Aldo. Metonymically personified in watery sperm, European men represent, instead, a diluted virility.<sup>123</sup> Whiteness lacks allure. His desire chases “culi stretti e neri,” rendering the objects of his lust into the destinations visited (or side-stepped) by his traveling eros.

Non-proximity, the promise of countering desire’s domestication, lures the traveler. Conversely, proximity is read as sort of “sameness.” Since sameness is tied with home and home is considered lacking, sameness reminds the tourist of home’s purported lack—the tethering of eros to identity. Desire in excess, which gets projected elsewhere, is imagined as that which substitutes for what home does not have. “La casa [a Roma] l’ho venduta e ho comprato qui la mia villetta col piccolo giardino: un paradiso. Un paradiso ben frequentato, devo dire!,” Aldo says.<sup>124</sup> Aldo sells his house in Rome in exchange for a “paradise” of ample sex. The surplus in eros abroad *compensates*, he says, for the loss of home. North Africa is, thus, at once a substitute, the fetishized replacement for the fantasmatic *casa* never found back home, and a supply-point for the moneyed ex-pat. Men perceived as most distant are, as result, most desirable. Aldo fetishizes difference not to deny or domesticate it but in order to *sustain* a fantasy of distance.

Sameness, the risk that the Arab male is closer to the familiar than the tourist desires, is what fetishism disavows. Because the Arab male performs the work of untaming desire, his distance—a metaphor for difference—must be continually announced. To admit his similarity is to admit that eros, even there, can be domesticated, undermining both North Africa’s promised prurience and promised plenitude. It would mean acknowledging that *here* (domesticated, tamed) and *there* (excess, natural) are closer than the traveler wants. Fetishism here tries to *fix* the Arab male as the embodiment of nomadic desire. But, as Sara Ahmed has elsewhere argued, that “the idealization of movement, or the transformation of movement into fetish depends on the exclusion of others who are already positioned as *not free in the same way*.”<sup>125</sup> Even as the text claims that Europe, not North Africa, is the site where eros is fixed in place, it demands that the desired Arab man *always* signify eros as errancy. It demands that he not stray from the tourist’s fantasy that there, unlike at home, eros moves free from identity.

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<sup>122</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 114

<sup>123</sup> The only Europeans he finds attractive are “i bosniaci,” recognizable by their “tratti rudi e un po’ crudeli, di tradizione slava con tratti arabo-semiiti” (114-115).

<sup>124</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 56

<sup>125</sup> Sarah Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004) 151-152.

Textually, the Arab man has become is the fixed emblem of erratic desire. As Ahmed notes, othering is not just about pushing the foreign ‘further away.’ It can also draw the other ‘in’, pulling it ‘closer’ to ‘home.’ Desire for the other expresses at once the hankering for proximity (intimacy with what is perceived as different / there) and the establishment of borders (they/there entice because of their non-proximity). In the Italian case, drawing the “other” closer to “home” is already a touch queer. For the Italian tourist, the line between Arabic “other” and Italian “subject” is murky. Perceived subject-object / self-other dynamics that structure many “Western” travelers’ interactions with and fantasies of the Third World are present *and* unsettled when the Italian travels southward. For the Italian subject, the North African is never completely other. He is abject – externalized and already part of the peninsula’s past and present.<sup>126</sup> This understanding is a source troubling ambivalence: he is at once tantalizingly close (we were like that) and too close to be different (he, too, might be like us).

Although Aldo exoticizes/eroticizes Arab “difference,” this alterity is something the Italian tourist not only wants but believes Italy once had. Queer nostalgia, a longing for a past not found in one’s present, drives the tourist South. His travel reworks the discourse of Italian backwardness, which sees Italy stuck in a retrograde past vis-à-vis Northern Europe’s progress. Criticizing Aldo, Edo says to him: “te ne sei venuto via dall’Italia, coltivando il sogno di ritrovare – su quest’altra sponda del Mediterraneo – i rapporti erotici della tua giovinezza.”<sup>127</sup> Backwards sexuality represents a state the tourist aspires to return or revert to – a sexuality that, supposedly, once ruled in Italy. Awareness of Italy’s sodomical “past,” accessible largely via earlier Northern Europeans’ desire-laden representations of Italy’s mytho-erotic excess, underwrites the nostalgia behind the tourist’s trip.

Oddly, Italy’s prior orientalizing in Europe’s homoerotic imaginary guides modern-day Italians’ orientalist fantasies of elsewhere.<sup>128</sup> In the Maghreb, they seek a

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<sup>126</sup> In the introduction to *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality: A Case of Possible Difference*, Derek Duncan cites Italy’s peculiar position – both within Europe and on the edge of Europe’s imagined topography. He writes: “Italy attracts upper-middle class aesthetes, but it also attracts aspiring rent boys from North Africa and the Balkan States convinced that gay men will offer them a reliable source of income. In both instances, sexual identity is imbricated in complex economics of class, national difference, and cultural capital. It is not just the case that foreigners have somehow got hold of the wrong end of the stick. Northern Italians project similar fantasies onto the South. All Southern Italian men, it is sometimes asserted, have sex with each other although none of them is gay. The idea is that this is a kind of compensatory activity because the general backwardness of the South makes unmarried women sexually unavailable.” In this fantasy’s logic, the effect of the South’s “backwards” misogyny – women are not sexually “liberated,” virginity is hyper-valued, etc – make male-male easier to find down there. See, Derk Duncan, *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality: A Case of Possible Difference* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006) 4.

<sup>127</sup> Buffon, *Zamel*, 97

<sup>128</sup> Karla Marlette has argued that southern European nations like Spain and Italy have a different historical relationship to the Arab Mediterranean than northern European countries. She highlights the fact that Arab cultures once settled swaths of Spain, southern Italy and Malta. Such subjects’ interest in the Arab world, consequently, represents a search through the past of their own countries, not the pursuit of a conceptually far-off realm. See Karla Marlette, *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean Toward a New Philology and a Counter-Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

return to a “difference” that was, once, at “home” in Italy.<sup>129</sup> Edo longingly states that, in an earlier age, “chi poteva, si rifugiava in Italia, *anche* per amare liberamente... E oggi che ci siamo imborghesiti, siamo diventati il paese più omofobo d’Europa!”<sup>130</sup> Once a refuge for men who desired men, Italy has *now* become the most homophobic country in Europe, propelling its own citizens’ search abroad for erotic “liberazione.” Italians, too, are and were traveled to by others, desired for their supposed contiguity with the past (Magna Grecia, Ancient Rome, Renaissance) and the Orient (Naples, Sicily, Southern Italy).<sup>131</sup> Derek Duncan notes that “the idea of the South as a pastoral haven of unfettered homoeroticism roots the region in a state of archaic underdevelopment.” That

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<sup>129</sup> In “Turismo, omosessualità e fascismo,” historian Lorenzo Benadusi argues that Italy, as the object of North Europeans’ homoerotic fantasies, was slowly supplanted by “new” destinations in North Africa and the far East. He writes, “a poco a poco, [...] quel turismo basato sull’intreccio tra bisogni economici ed emozioni, tra prostituzione e amore, sceglieva nuove mete, come i paesi del Maghreb o i luoghi esotici dell’Estremo oriente, dove poter trovare più facilmente i propri partner sessuali”. Here, Italy is *displaced* by other spaces in the homoerotic Orient. Desires once pursuable in Italy are *now* pursued elsewhere, a shift that Benadusi’s links to Italy’s increasing industrialization and cost for foreigners. Such “nuove mete,” however, are scarcely “new” sources of erotic fascination for European travelers: they are a road oft traveled. See Lorenzo Benadusi, “Turismo, omosessualità e fascismo.” *Storia e problemi contemporanei*. 43 (2006): 80.

<sup>130</sup> Discussing the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Edo writes: “Fu anche il periodo in cui i paesi più avanzati come l’Inghilterra e la Germania applicarono la legislazione più infame contro l’omosessualità, mentre in Italia si veniva a praticarla *nature* per la ‘naturale’ disponibilità dei nativi, proprio come fai tu oggi in Tunisia” (124).

<sup>131</sup> Orientalizing fantasies of southern Italy persist – in particular about Naples, Capri and Sicily. The 2010 *Spartacus Guide International*, the largest tour guide aimed at tourists, describes Naples in the following terms: “Many myths are told about Naples and *unusual* things can happen in this city on the Vesuv, leaving an everlasting impression. Even from a gay point of view, Naples is *unconventional*. An ‘Arabian’ attitude toward homosexuality exists here: of importance is whether one is active or passive and *not whether homo- or hetero- sexual*. Piazza Bellini is a good starting point at night to discover the scene. Here is the meeting point for youth and the gays.” (emphasis added). Naples allures because of its “not-ness”; the homosexual is drawn there, in other words, since in this city “unusual” things happen, unlike in the U.S. or the rest of Europe. It doesn’t matter, we read, whether or *not* you are homo- or hetero-. Indeed, Naples sexual culture reminds the tourist of an “Arabian” attitude; its attraction is mythic. And yet, presumably, it matters quite a bit if you are “active” or “passive” there, implicitly aligning “the gays” with the penetrated position and local “youth” with the penetrator’s position. Things are “unconventional” here, we read, but the conventions of the myth of the sensual, identity-free, oriental South still reign. Frank Browning, author of *A Queer Geography*, describes Naples as “perhaps the most phallo-centric city in Europe” (5). There, “a [Neapolitan] gay doctor, two petty gangsters, and transvestite *femminielli* find the American sex system *as bizarre as the tribal practices of New Guinea*” (emphasis added 4). Naples fascinates Browning because a visit there promises to de-center – to queer, one might say – his ‘American’ understanding of gay identity; going there, estranges him from the familiar, making him and his presumptions into ‘strangers’ in a ‘bizarre’ land. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Browning’s rhetoric veers towards the anthropological, highlighting Naples supposed difference in terms of a distant, tribal culture whose sexual system seems odd to the outside visitor. In the chapter devoted to Naples, Browning goes on to say that, “as countless travelers have discovered for themselves, the easy sex available on the streets and in the parks is not particularly furtive; if anything, it is just another face to the famously robust and guileful sensuality that has distinguished Naples since the Greeks and Romans built there summer resorts there” (49). Not only does Naples remind visitors of ancient Greece and Rome, famed in homoerotic writing for their exalting/libertine attitudes toward male-male erotics, even for the Romans and Greeks its “robust” sensuality lured them South. Naples is not just a vestige of Greek “sexuality” surviving into the present, but rather almost innately sensual, attracting even the pagan ancients with its excessive sex.

imagined topography once *included* the Italian peninsula, especially its southern-most regions.

“Modern or Northern versions of homosexuality,” Duncan writes “both long for and repress this sense of difference that might be termed racial as much as sexual for the object of desire is determined more by geography than by gender.” The homoerotic fantasy of the South proposed by Northern European and northern Italian men, Duncan points out, is nourished by notions of racial, economic and temporal distance. This fantasy is bound up with the desire for and the denial of difference. What does it mean, then, for the Italian tourist, who knows that Italy is at once emblematic *per eccellenza* of Western culture and belatedly European, to travel? Moreover, how might inherited discourses on the South (North = European / white / modern / gay vs. straight and South = orientalized / brown / premodern / sodomical) bubble up when this traveler moves through North Africa? In terms of queer travelers, Italy’s perceived “distance” from Europe and modernity becomes here a source of nostalgia and mourning.

At the same time, the traveling Italian knows that he is perceived *by locals* as European. Seeking estrangement from home, the tourist ends up realizing that those he desires consider him an outsider. If, as Sedgwick notes, Western culture is fragmented around homo- / hetero- definition, the very notion of the “West” is fissured by the murky, constantly contested borders between East and West *and* North and South.<sup>132</sup> Italy is no exception, riven discursively and economically between a more industrialized north and a less developed south. Both Northern Europeans (Goethe, Wilhelm Von Gloeden, Gide, etc) and Italian nationals (Pasolini, Carlo Levi, etc) have seen in southern Italy a pagan, sensual and pre-capitalist world; Southern Italy, moreover, evokes inherited images of the Orient in many visitors and writers. In a similar move, Italians traveling tales about North Africa often describe local spaces as reminiscent of Italy’s *mezzogiorno*.

It is possible to read this as a domestication of difference, filtering the foreign through the familiar. But, as Nelson Moe shows, Southern Italy has historically been depicted – both by foreigners and other Italians – as on the margins of Europe – oriental, peripheral, belated.<sup>133</sup> Jane Schneider calls stereotypes about southern Italians a case of “Orientalism in one country.”<sup>134</sup> The prevalence of references to Italy’s *mezzogiorno* in Italian gay travel writing about North Africa can also be read, then, as an effort to “queer” home, drawing attention to an “undomesticated” elsewhere already within the nation’s established confines. If Italy is geographically proximate to the Orient and the Orient is imagined as more homoerotic, then a queer eros can retroactively be projected *inside* Italy. For traveling Italians, North Africa is at once “not me” – different from home – and fantasized as already somewhere *within* their point of origin, either in Italy’s south or its past.

By figuring this desired proximity, however, in relation to Italy’s south, the tourists can at once imagine the unfamiliar at home and keep it at a safe distance from the maligned “modern” Italy the tourists is trying to move away from. Italy’s ambivalent place in the European imaginary guides the presumption that Italy’s sodomical past and North Africa’s homoerotic present are proximate, even if contemporary Italy is said to

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<sup>132</sup> See Roberto Dainotto, Roberto M. *Europe (in Theory)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>133</sup> See Nelson Moe, Nelson, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>134</sup> See Jane Schneider, *Italy’s Southern Question: Orientalism in One Country* (New York: Berg, 1998).

have strayed from the peninsula's once libidinous ways. Responding to Edo's question about sex roles, Aldo replies:

E bravo: sei in Africa, Tesoro! D'altro canto, quando l'Italia era ancora un paese serio – mi riferisco all'Italia penninsulare e in particolare al Sud e alle isole... [...] Voi a Milano a sciommiettare stili di vita nord europei e americani: bel risultanto. E li avete esportati pure a Roma, che è diventata invivibile anche da questo punto di vista. Se non ci fossero gli immigrati rumeni e albanesi non si caverebbe più un ragno dal buco.<sup>135</sup>

Inverting the rhetoric of Italian backwardness, Aldo claims that Italy was once a “paese serio.” Its laudable places are not the North – proximate to France, Switzerland and Austria – but Italy's South. Exemplified by Milan, one of Italy's more industrialized cities and home to country's largest gay communities, the North buffoonishly apes Northern European/U.S. “stili di vita.” Only the presence of foreign immigrants – frequently maligned in the Italian press as an invading, backwards force – leads to any one getting ‘fucked.’ In a similar inversion, it is now the *extracomunitari*, not the supposedly imitable northerners, that return Italians to their glory days. The homosexualization of Italy, Aldo complains, has even reached Rome, represented as a foreign encroachment inching south.

North Africa's proximity to Italy, however, can raise questions about the Maghreb's potential domestication. *Zamel's* protagonist denigrates local homosexual men as corrupted, unmanned and Westernized Arabs. Quarantining homosexual identity into a slim minority of the Arab men allows *Zamel's* Aldo, ironically, to maintain his fantasy of Arabs' ubiquitous (s)excess. “Non inquiniamo le teste di questi maschi magrebini...,” he says. “[L'uomo magrebino] ti va bene purché sia cosciente di essere bisex: ma perché deve imparare questa nuova parola; non basta che si senta maschio, come da generazioni – nella sua cultura – tutto gli fa credere?”<sup>136</sup> Discrete sexual categories – the hetero-, the homo- and the bi- sexual – threaten to “inquin[are]” the “maschi” who, as it stands, will penetrate another man because it makes them feel more virile. Outside labels, Aldo says, can “corromperlo.”<sup>137</sup> Presently, the active Arab feels timelessly masculine. Identity still doesn't direct the flux of his phallus. Rejecting the idea that North Africans need to “learn” from the West's (and Western gay movements') purported progress, Aldo paints European mores as a sullying imposition.

This rhetoric of pollution, however, voices more than a selfless concern for the imperialist consequences of migrating labels. It represents an attempt to cling on to the fantasized “unity” of North Africa, understood as a “pure” time and distant place not yet tainted by home's domesticating schema.<sup>138</sup> Arab sexuality, in its unadulterated state, is

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<sup>135</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 89-90

<sup>136</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 128-29.

<sup>137</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 129

<sup>138</sup> Puar writes that the presumed homophobia of other cultures “does not, after all, deflect the lure of an exotic (queer) paradise; instead it encourages a continuity of colonial constructions of tourism as a travel adventure into uncharted territory laden with the possibility of sexual encounters, illicit seductions and dangerous liaisons—a version of what Renato Rosaldo terms ‘imperial nostalgia.’ Thus, the desire to be free of homophobia comes up against the primitive vision of the tourist imaginary of an unspoiled, undiscovered paradise, while fantasies of sexual fluidity of preidentity, precapitalist, premodern times conjoin nicely with the tourist agenda, leaving intact a queer modern-versus-primitive native binary” (“Circuits of Queer Mobility,” 113)

virile, as it has been for generations and generations, he says. In claiming this, Aldo must also reaffirm the boundaries between sodomical men and the staid homosexual – supposedly the very ‘border’ his travel has overstepped. His account presumes the stability of gay/straight identity in Europe and that Arab sexuality, somehow, has gone untouched by Western influences. To believe in the “uncorrupted” Arab elsewhere, Aldo must erect a fictive divide between “here” and “there” that, in an increasingly globalized world, does not reflect the transnational circuits of travel, migration and sexual labels in which he himself is a participant. This move, moreover, is his response to the very *collapsing* of the distance desired between these places.

Complaining about *other* tourists’ tendency to “corrupt” the locals, the same-sex traveler manages to believe (albeit temporarily) that, unlike them, he is safely detached from home’s mores. Even as he empties his wallet to gain entry into the locals’ “unchanging” ways, Aldo insists that he is simply partaking of a culture that existed long before the arrival of his capital. Endemic eros, not economic inequities, drive the Arabs’ “disponibilità.” Exalting the “absence” of coming-out politics in Tunisia in the name of opposing Western cultural imperialism does not displace the fact that Arabs’ “difference” is valued here *against* Europe’s “lacking” sexual system. ‘Respect’ for cultural difference is, in part, symptomatic of imagining North Africa as a “supply” point for sating the tourist’s wants. It is imagined as close enough to Europe to be within reach and far off to feel different from home. This polyvalent figuration leads to questions over whether North Africa might be *too* influenced by invasive ‘Western’ notions to furnish the tourist the “distance” he desires – a “difference” that, we read, is supposed to inhere over there.

Despite exalting the errancy of Arab eros, the same-sex visitor is the mobile subject in these plots.<sup>139</sup> Even when he is penetrated, the tourist stays he-who passes through elsewhere, encounters excess and overcomes the obstacles to desire that, according to him, vex home. “Io vado con gli uomini,” Aldo says. “Semmai il turismo sessuale lo fanno con me. [...] Lo fanno molto volentieri.”<sup>140</sup> Here, there is an erasure of the tourist’s mobility precisely in the moment when he fixates on the others’ presumed “fluidity.” Representing Arab men as sexual tourists who trespass the boundaries of the male body, Aldo continues to figure them as symbols of eros’ flux, uninfluenced by the flow of capital. In the text’s narrative economy, the Arab and the tourist are exchanged. Aldo’s anus becomes, thus, the space-through that, once penetrated, establishes the

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<sup>139</sup> M. Jacqui Alexander persuasively writes that the fetishized native is expected *not* to travel. Mobility is a privilege reserved for the white, moneyed male subject. She comments that “the fetish cannot live and breathe, ideologically that is, for purposes other than the foreign or the sexual, nor is he permitted to travel. Nativism operates best in its own place. Nor can the ‘native’ be his own sexual agent, for that would contravene one of the basic tenets of the imperial script. [...] [T]he subject /agent/producer/citizen within this gay tourist economy is almost always imagined as a white, able-bodied, and upwardly-mobile man who lives in the West. There are presumably no cultures of whiteness in the Third World. This traveling agent presumes his rightful place in the competition between two segments of capital. He is the same agent/citizen that white heterosexual capital has produced as the quintessential gay consumer, possessing a perennially changing set of needs and desires that only capitalism can satisfy. [...] In this universe, whiteness and masculinity operate together through a process of normalization that simultaneously overshadows lesbians, working-class gay men, and lesbians and gay men of color of any class. This erasure is necessary to produce this above average homosexual consuming citizen.” Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 70-71.

<sup>140</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 131

Arabs' virile "difference": a phallic eros not hexed by sexual labels.<sup>141</sup> In the economy of travel behind Aldo's (s)exile, the Arab's value is his continued distance, which can only be guaranteed by depicting him as "far-off."

In one breath, Aldo has disavowed the extent to which he has naturalized "mobility" as mark of Arab sexuality. This move helps Aldo to deny his own position as moneyed and homosexual visitor. The Arab, we read, is the traveling body. Describing Arab eros as itinerant, Aldo produces the fantasized erratic Arab he then can claim is synonymous with North Africa's corpo-reality. As Said states, Orientalist discourses tend to "create not only knowledge but the very reality they appear to describe."<sup>142</sup> Dismissing the role of their wallets in the "reality" they see abroad, the same-sex tourists strive to hold onto a fantasy of this space (N. Africa *is* like this; it's not my money) even as they must constantly buy encounters with "excess" to approximate that "reality" (is it just purchased?). Two interlaced desires drive this: 1) a desire for the Orient as supplement (it supplies the visitor with what home wants) and 2) a wish for a pure space where neither compulsory heterosexuality nor homo domesticity have blocked desire's flow. "Io desidero che restino *nature* loro," Aldo tells his friend.<sup>143</sup> Fantasies of a homoerotic elsewhere, though, are haunted by the realization that frequent sexual contact with other men does not necessarily bypass homophobia or homosexuality.

Since the tourist left Europe to get away from the "limits" of identity, the idea that locals might *only* think of him as just another Western homosexual is distressing. What if the tourist is the very thing he has gone so far to escape? Because the Arab male is believed to compensate for what the tourists wants, the only authenticate Arab is he who authenticates the visitor's pre-departure expectations; presented as a synecdoche of "reality" over there, these portrayals of Arab men are symptomatic, if anything, of the "reality" the traveler wants/attempts to encounter. That the tourist can imagine such men overstepping the fixity of "Western" homo- and hetero- identities does not mean that they are expected to stray from his fantasy of North African excess. Expectations of excess institute a line between "authentic" and "inauthentic," desirable and non-desirable Arab men. He who fits the fantasy is deemed most "authentic," while he who 'veers' from it is worthy of disapproval.

'Difference,' it is worth remembering, is largely an effect of the texts' representation of elsewhere – produced by, for and in the tourist's fantasy. His fantasy, moreover, passes off the repetition of Orientalist fantasies (North Africa = perversity, excess, sensual glut) as an adoption of the rules of elsewhere. I am arguing that such depictions of "difference" cannot be cleaved from the tourists' longing for difference.

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<sup>141</sup> According to Teresa de Lauretis, narrative desire is often structured around a movement of Oedipal desire. In this mythical journey, the hero:

crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space. In so doing, the mythical subject is constructed as human being and male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, a matrix and matter (*Alice Doesn't*, 119).

In her account, woman serves as a space traversed. Once overcome, she is irrelevant. She served her role: to confirm the hero as *he-who* defeats *her*. What might happen then if the imagined penetrated space is also a man? Does queering undo this plot? Or, might "queering" just tweak the heroic plot, substituting the hero's "phallus with the tourist's "anus"?"

<sup>142</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 94

<sup>143</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 131

Initially, elsewhere's promised "lack" (there, homo-/hetero- limits don't exist) motivates the tourists' journey. Proximity to that "lack" is seen as a way of arriving at sexual plenitude. Upon arrival, however, an awareness of elsewhere's other lack – the material place is never excessive enough – motivates the text's subsequent commodification of Arab bodies. In these novels, fetishism holds up the Arab man as the vehicle through which the visitor transports himself away from familiar sexuality.

My point is not to deny cultural, sexual or economic differences. Distinct local sexual cultures and subcultures do exist. Concepts of sexuality are culturally shaped and can, indeed, follow norms that contrast the sexual system now dominant in the U.S. and much of Europe. It should be remembered, however, that local sexual cultures also quite often "fail" to match the tourist's inherited expectations of other cultures. Narratives that offer travelers' takes on such "differences" are tales guided by desires, including the yearning to see absolute "difference" inhering other places. Such desires can lead to an exaggeration of "difference" (Arab sex = no identity) and the denial of "similarity" (no gays in North Africa) and, as problematically, the presumed interchangeability of home's labels and the sexual terms prevalent elsewhere (same-sex always = gay). In these books' case, other cultures' value is its negative utility for the tourist, albeit a "lack" now fetishized as plenty.

Expecting the "strange" allows the tourist to deny the presence of bodies, identities and norms that do not line up with his fantasy of elsewhere, all while necessarily glossing over the fissures, contradictions and ambivalences that always inflect sex and identity back home. Once abroad, he attempts to map his pre-departure fantasy of "lack" (North Africa has what Europe wants) onto the post arrival encounter with an unexpected "absence" (North Africa is not the "reality" I wanted). Unlike in colonial rhetoric, North Africa's "backwardness" -- not "moving" at the same pace or in the same "direction" as European history -- no longer signifies inferiority. Perceived through an oblique gaze, "backwardness" comes to exemplify how desire, imagined as inherently bent, used to move *before* the fictive fixity of "modern" sexual identities. This fantasy, however, requires a space where sexual and temporal *arretratezza* still rules. Travel to the Maghreb, a movement through space, is, thus, conceptualized as a movement backwards across time – a movement that will bring the Italian traveler closer to the way things used to be in Italy.

Even as Aldo critiques the supposedly "linear" teleologies of lesbian and gay identity politics, he projects an imaginary stability backwards onto lesbian and gay identity (U.S. / Europe) and paints queerness, in contrast, as more free-moving.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>J. Halberstam has shown how queers occasionally exalt sexual "flexibility" against *earlier* (and now overcome) "rigid" identifications. This emphasis:

marks people with strong identifications as pathological in relation to their rigidity and that the binary of flexible and rigid is definitely a temporal ascribes mobility over time to some notion of liberation and casts stubborn identification as a way of being stuck in time, unevolved, not versatile. These are symptoms of subtle homonormativities[...]; they cast sexual liberation as time-bound sexual practices. Many of these characterizations of homonormative desire also presume a white subject and then cast anachronism onto communities of color ("Theorizing Queer Temporalities" *GLQ* 13:2-3 190)

The "proper" queer subject is s/he who moves free from stable identification. Imagining this subjectivity as more "evolved" still repeats a progressive notion of history.<sup>144</sup> According to Halberstam, the white queer

Anachronism, now desired, gets mapped exclusively onto southern and Arab bodies. Queerness, allied with the *pre-identitarian*, becomes travel's longed-for *destino*. Identity, inversely, is imagined as a stable point away from which queerness moves. Modernity, aligned with Europe, represent for Aldo the fixing in place of desire, not its laudable liberation: "poi, le cose sono cambiate. A Roma, negli ultimi tempi, a darmi il gusto della vita era rimasto solo il fiorista egiziano."<sup>145</sup> The only thrill *still* left in Italy is an Egyptian man. Without his "outside" ways, Italy would have lost all homoerotic lure. Having sex with him is a "return" to the way things were prior to recent changes. The longed-for era is, then, not some *gay* future. It is a time and place *before* heterosexuality, a time and place *before* the need to identify as 'gay.' "In una donna e in un omosessuale ci sta sempre un po' di desiderio arcaico: essere prese per i capelli, tirate dentro la caverna e sanamente scopate" (83). Presently, this prehistoric virility, we read, can still be found in North Africa.

While the narrators imagine the Arab man as he-who-veers from "rigid" identification, the Arab must stay out of synch with the modernity. This move repeats what Barbara Spackman has called "the figuration of the Eastern/African other as belonging to a time period different from that occupied by the West."<sup>146</sup> Rather than that "past" being what Western nations will help Africa overcome, North Africa is now the place/culture that will help the Westerner overcome what modernity has domesticated (male-male sex). Since queerness is imagined here as that which *precedes* the arrival of modern/Western sexual identities, being out-of-synch marks the Arab as *more* queer than the traveling homosexual. What is considered more "anachronistic" – most distant from modernity's social 'boundaries' – gets eroticized.<sup>147</sup> Such plots, however, *invert* without subverting a progressive idea of European history. For Aldo, modern Europe embodies a regression away from desire's wayward movement not its laudable liberation.

A turn to what Anne McLintock has dubbed "anachronistic space" is thought, on the other hand, to transport the visitor to a primordial queerness far-removed from today's / Europe's progression towards "fixed" sexual identities.<sup>148</sup> In producing this riven topography of desire, that which is considered "non-anachronistic," same-sex sexual identity, is pathologized and refused as a possible source of desire.<sup>149</sup> Once in

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subject is allowed to wriggle "free" from sexual identity and *move on* to the next stage of sexual evolution. The homosexual/lesbian of color is thought "stuck" in an outdated, bygone identity.

<sup>145</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 83

<sup>146</sup> Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 53.

<sup>147</sup> Criticizing Aldo's longing for an active/passive system, Edo says "concettualmente, esiste un'enorme distanza tra una distinzione di generi e una distinzione di sessualità" (41). According to Edo, "poiché non è così, o almeno non è più così, allora è evidente che la distinzione tra generi nel campo della sessualità è un assurdo anacronismo" (41). Edo chides Aldo for holding on to a system whose time, in comparison to the equitable homosexuality now prevalent in "paesi più avanzati del nostro [l'Italia]" (47), has come and gone. Edo's progressivist narrative is a counterpoint to Aldo's eroticizing of anachronism. He, nevertheless, still aligns North Africa with a bygone sexuality.

<sup>148</sup> McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 9

<sup>149</sup> Arno Schmitt, author of *Sexuality and Eroticism among Males in Arab Societies*, sums up the belief that homosexuals and heterosexuals do not exist in Islamic/Arab societies: "But in [Islamic] societies there are no 'homosexuals'—there is no word for 'homosexuality'—the concept is completely unfamiliar. There are no heterosexuals either" (qtd. in Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* 5). According to Schmitt, a rigid homo-/hetero- binary is out-of-place in Islamic cultures. Homosexuality, understood as an exclusive and ontological identification with same-sex desire, is a foreign, untranslatable

Tunisia, Aldo refuses to consider any Arab man who identifies as ‘omosessuale’ or engages in receptive anal sex a “real man” or authentically Arab. Discussing the emergence of Arab feminist and Arab gay organizations, Edo tells Aldo: “So dell’esistenza della GLAS – Gay and Lesbian Arabic Society – con un sito in funzione all’estero.”<sup>150</sup> Edo calls these developments a sign of liberating progress. “La modernità va in questa direzione,” he says.<sup>151</sup> Aldo, in contrast, replies: “Terribile: non dirmele neanche certe cose!” (160). Aldo associates gay and lesbian identity politics with “l’estero,” an outside importation that has the potential to “svirilizzare” (160) North Africa’s “maschi, maschi veri” (166). Real men, says Aldo, have *not yet* been shaped by sexual labels that, now, direct sex in Europe and—regrettably—have begun to ‘invade’ the Maghreb.

Superficially, this rhetoric questions both the price of “progress”— a perceived loss of once-ubiquitous male-male sex — and the presumptive universality of Western sexual schemas. That “loss,” I am arguing, is not an uncontested historical *svolta*, but rather symptomatic of the tourist’s longing for a time/place anterior to compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory homonormativity. This imagined “loss,” moreover, motivates the text’s economy of travel: the pursuit of a compensatory elsewhere. Queer nostalgia, the urge to return to an era of unregulated homoeroticism, underwrites fantasies of North Africa and the traveler’s bemoaning of home’s sexual system.<sup>152</sup> In eroticizing

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concept. In a critique of Schmitt, Jarrod Hayes claims that, though this may have been true until recent years, the same argument could be made about Europe; homosexuality (and its necessary correlative heterosexuality) is a “modern” invention in Europe/the West, too. In highlighting the uniqueness of “homosexuality” within the West, Hayes warns, scholars run the unintended risk of repeating a narrative of European exceptionalism, albeit voiced here in the nostalgic negative. “Histories of homosexuality,” Hayes writes, “often read like narratives of progress towards the Western model of egalitarian homosexuality, wherein both partners can be active as well as passive regardless of any masculine or feminine identification on either’s part. [...] such observations [...] are remarkably similar to the narratives of progress that established between Europeans and the rest of the world a pseudo-evolutionary hierarchy that justified the civilizing mission and, therefore, colonialism” (*Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* 5). Since the histories of homosexuality penned in the US/Europe are largely Eurocentric, they have presented a movement *towards* a non-sodomical model of homosexuality as synonymous with *the* history of homosexuality. Hayes’ point is twofold. First, he claims that scholars should be wary of presuming too stark a divide between non-Western and Western sexualities, especially since non-Western spaces get limned as stuck in “archaic,” unchanging ways. Secondly, scholars should also avoid generalizing based only on examples culled from European history.

<sup>150</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 160

<sup>151</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 144

<sup>152</sup> In flipping the progressivist narratives of gay identity on their head (acceptance of gay people ≠ progress), these works at once offer a sodomical account of same-sex erotics (sex does not necessarily signify identity) *and* repeat colonial narratives about North Africa’s perversity, anachronism and sensual surfeit. This should be a cautionary reminder to scholars like Joseph Massad, author of “Reorienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World,” who have criticized the universalizing and colonizing tendencies of the U.S.-based gay rights movement. That movement, Massad says, insists that all cultures adopt gay or lesbian identities, denigrating as retrograde any society in which same-sex desire does not follow coming-out politics. He says that the gay rights movement “produces homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not exist,” ignoring local sexual cultures. In *Zamel*, valorizing less identity-bound eroticism does not, however, overwrite the colonial script. Critics of the gay and lesbian progressivist narratives can also reproduce North Africa’s colonial figuration as a sexual playground. Indeed, the idea of a horizon where gay identities *do not exist* motivates the protagonists’ repetition of stereotypes about North Africans’ sensuality. These queer travelers do not desire to make North Africa mirror Europe. There seems little justification for claiming that lesbians and gays do not exist in Arab

the Arab as “anachronistic” and pathologizing sexual identity as European and evirated lack, the texts do not, however, escape the nativizing narrative. The Arab is desired as the embodiment of interchangeable, phallic excess. The tourist draws attention to home’s norms against the *more* that he makes North Africa(ns) signify. The Arab is desired because the same-sex tourist hopes he will supply him with what, he thinks, has, sadly, been supplanted in Europe.

Not considered stuck in at lamentably retrograde stage of evolution, the anachronistic Arab is, here, valuable to the wanting visitor. Considering the texts’ fixation on mobility, though, they create a strangely static image of both North Africa and “home.” Whereas sodomical sexuality is said to persist unchanged in the Maghreb despite the adoption of homo-/hetero- categories elsewhere, Europe is “stuck” in an immobile identitarian system. Both Meyda Yeğenoğlu and Sarah Ahmed have shown how the Orient tends to be depicted in terms of a sexually-inflected “lack” or “absence.” In *Colonial Fantasies*, Yeğenoğlu argues that the “West” came to imagine itself as “superior” by limning the “Orient” as behind the times, backwards and inferior.<sup>153</sup> That discourse positions the “West” as the masculine, phallic subject and the “East” as the feminized lack.<sup>154</sup> Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology* claims that the Orient “is also desired by the West as having things that ‘the West’ itself” is thought not to have.<sup>155</sup> What the ‘Western’ subject presumes to be “‘not here’ shapes the desire for what is ‘there.’”<sup>156</sup> The Orient’s imagined distance / difference is desired, Ahmed states, because the visitor sees it as a “supply point” still within his reach.

While Yeğenoğlu stresses that the Orient’s is conceived of as “other- than the established norm” (104), Ahmed examines the Orient’s so-called “not-ness.” She writes persuasively:

The Orient [...] is full of all that which is ‘not Europe’ or not Occidental, and which in its ‘not-ness’ seems to point to another way of being in the world—to a world of romance, sexuality and sensuality. In a way orientalism involves the transformation of ‘farness’ as a spatial marker of distance into a property of people and places. ‘They’ embody what is far away. Thus, farness takes the direction of a wish, or even follows the line of a wish. The ‘far’ often slides into the exotic, after all. The exotic is not only where we are not, but it is also future oriented, as a place we long for and might yet inhabit. [...] Desire confirms that which we are not (the object of desire) an, while it pushes us toward that ‘not’ which appears as an object on the horizon, at the edge of our gaze, always getting

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countries when individuals with primarily same-sex attractions do exist and organize under such labels in those spaces. Moreover, there seems equally little justification in presuming that gay identity and more sodomical models of sexuality can be cleanly split between the West and the Arab world when both exist in tension with each other – in culturally-contingent ways, of course – in each place. See Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007)160-190.

<sup>153</sup> Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>154</sup> Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, 104.

<sup>155</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 114

<sup>156</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 114

closer even when it is not quite here. If the Orient is desired, it is both far away and it is also that which the Occident wishes to bring closer.<sup>157</sup>

The Orient's "negativity" is not merely the means to exalting the West's progress. Its assumed "not-ness" is also a source of desire. Elsewhere, thus, does not always reaffirm home's way of being in the world as superior. In the case of the queer tourist, the domestic space is fled, not a site of nostalgic return. Elsewhere, in turn, becomes a 'home' substitute just beyond the horizon.<sup>158</sup>

Desire for disorientation, though, can still replicate consumer-consumed / occupier-occupied dynamics. The same-sex tourist goes elsewhere not to "enlighten" North Africa, making it more like Europe, but rather to inch closer to its "distance" from the mores of home.<sup>159</sup> "Chi fa un viaggio per ritrovare se stesso," Busi writes, "è meglio che stia a casa."<sup>160</sup> Making elsewhere signify remoteness from "modern" sexual labels, a remoteness the tourist hopes will rub off on him, fixes the Arab in the time of the other.<sup>161</sup> "Io sono attratto da questa società tradizionale, olistica, gerarchica, al punto che la vorrei ancora più tradizionale e arcaica," Aldo states.<sup>162</sup> Romanticizing this time/place as home to eros unbound from identification does little to trouble the texts' production of the out-of-synch Arab – a colonial trope. Modernity, here, means movement away from polymorphous sexuality.<sup>163</sup> *Zamel* limns "authentic" Arab eros as perverse, neither straight nor gay, and archaic, the way male eros was before the arrival "modern"—Western, that is—sexual politics.

Going there is understood as a return, to some less domesticated, more authentic, state of desire. This is, of course, an Edenic fantasy. Authenticity emerges from tourist-limned "boundaries" of Arabness, not the Tunisian or Moroccan men's experience of desire, sex and identity.<sup>164</sup> Such a fantasy also requires the tourist turn away from

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<sup>157</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 114-15

<sup>158</sup> Since the horizon can never be reached, disappointment with any particular elsewhere can still be deflected. The tourist need simply turn in a different direction to hold on, temporarily, to belief in a satisfactorily far-off *altrove*. Elsewhere is a fantasized point in the distance, deferrable and substitutable if arrival dissatisfies.

<sup>159</sup> Ironically, in striving to leave behind the mores / systems of home, the travelers move to post-colonial spaces – places where European colonizers had attempted, through state-imposed violence, education and legislation, to make *more* akin to Europe.

<sup>160</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 54

<sup>161</sup> For a discussion of how the field of Anthropology has imagined non-Western cultures as belonging to another time, see: Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>162</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 164-165

<sup>163</sup> Although questioning the progressive logic of many lesbian and gay movements (liberation = the future), this inversion continues to present movement to North Africa as a "backward" turn aimed to draw the traveler closer to perverse, primal ways. Here, the most "instinctual" state of desire is queerness. Heterosexuality is, consequently, seen as a culturally-imposed boundary that only *later* and only *in some places* gets mapped onto men's "natural" urges. Nature, aligned here with a space outside / beyond Europe's mores, still authenticates queerness. Although these narratives may de-naturalize exclusive heterosexuality, they rely on an almost Arcadian notion of "nature" in justifying queerness. This "Arcadian" space is North Africa. Rather than representing actual anthropological differences between European homosexuality and a more Arabic/Mediterranean homosexuality, these texts' exotic/erotic figuration of the Maghreb replicate Orientalist and colonial depictions of North Africa's sensual excess. The value of that excess is always understood in terms of what it can provide the wanting tourist with.

<sup>164</sup> Textual depictions of 'strange' sexual systems can respond to actual sexual practices. Other times, desiring to a system in which identity no longer structures sexuality leads to the selective narration of

unsettling objects – namely, the Arab homosexual. He is disavowed because his existence challenges the notion that over there sexuality and identity diverge. According to this logic, a homosexual identity is the mark of deviation from local norms. He is considered perverse, I contend, because he ‘veers’ from the tourists’ expectations of Arab virility and sex. Refusing to see local homosexuals as “real” representatives of Arab sexuality, the Aldo wants to believe they are Westernized exceptions. In Aldo’s fantasy, the homosexual Arab is, oddly enough, unnatural and out-of-place.

By accepting as “real” only those Arabs who are “active” and seem to eschew familiar identities, such works institute a binary as problematic as the homo-/hetero- one: the “authentic” Arab (he who engages in sodomy but isn’t a homosexual) vs. “inauthentic” Arab (he who is a homosexual). “Mi piacciono i maschi veri,” Aldo says. “Temo la loro estinzione. E allora vivo questa contraddizione: mi piace chi lotta per la libertà e i diritti civili, ma al contempo lo temo e lo temo perché mira e mirano a fare scomparire ciò che a me è l’essenziale.”<sup>165</sup> Aldo dismisses the emergence of local gay rights organizations because, he says, they threaten to *undo* the very “verità” he desires. Aldo desires the Arab only insofar as he confirms his own confines of who and what Arabs are supposed to do. Obedience to the European’s fantasy of North Africa becomes the litmus test of Arab “authenticity”; thus, a European’s fantasy of how North Africans *should* be passes itself off as who they really are.

Although most Arab men are imagined as closer to desire’s “natural” state, those Arabs who evoke sameness trouble the text’s fantasy of distance. Whereas the novels present difference in terms of distance, sameness is what is too close to home. Being an Arab male, in other words, is not enough. While racially inflected, the fantasy demands more than the right skin color. To be desirable, proper ethnic difference must also line up with the tourists’ expectations of Arabs’ sexual alterity. “Edo, tu mi conosci,” Aldo writes, “se mi sfiora anche solo il dubbio che il ragazzo con cui sto non ami le donne, io non riesco più a provare attrazione per lui.”<sup>166</sup> Aldo’s desire relies on his belief that the man with whom he is sleeping wants women, too. Doubt, even if unfounded, can stymie his encounters with Arab men. Imagining the excess he desires as Arabs’ innate cultural difference allows tourist to the re-imagine his own fantasy as satisfyingly foreign. The Arab who reminds the tourist of his own homosexuality is, in contrast, imagined as repugnantly proximate. This depiction allows the tourist to root his fantasy “outside” both himself and Europe.

Even as the tourists’ seek out anal sex in order to “shatter” the “boundaries” placed on male eros, they continue to fetishize the phallus and, in particular, the well-hung Arab cock. Homoeroticism sustains here phallogentrism, even as it queers the presumed stability of the heterosexual subject. Joseph A. Boone identifies fascination with the Arab phallus, generally depicted as exceedingly large, as a defining trope in “the homoerotics of Orientalism.” Erotically-inflected depictions of the “Orient,” Boone claims, echo colonial ethnographers’ and travel writers’ fascination with the anatomical

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encounters that exemplify that longed-for ‘reality.’ Believing in the fantasy, sometimes, means seeing and, indeed, creating that fantasy on site. I am by no means arguing for a wholesale acceptance of gay/straight identity as *the* preferred model of erotics. Rather, it is worth asking: when a visitor represents “different” sexual systems, how much of that narrative reflects extent local norms and how much reflects his desire for a different, distant reality?

<sup>165</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 165

<sup>166</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 226

*extremes* (massive penises, huge breasts, big behinds) of non-European peoples.<sup>167</sup> “The mythicizing of the magnitude of Near Eastern ‘vice,’” Boone comments, “is not unrelated to a Western obsession with the genital size of” north African men (“Vacation Cruises” 94). Their phalluses, we read, make little distinction between a man’s anus and a woman’s vagina. Both are possible sources of satisfaction. His exotically excessive member is *read* as a sign of the lengths his eros will go to.

Arab sex is thought ‘errant’ insofar as he moves back and forth between women’s and men’s bodies. Reduced to his penis, he (it) sees no contradiction in “fucking” a man one day and wanting a woman the next. Aldo comments:

Nessun ragazzo magrebino si vergogna di fronte agli amici se è stato con un turista: tutti suppongono nel ruolo attivo. Anzi, se l’hai messo nel culo a un bianco, sei doppiamente macho. [...] Preferiscono me, anche se sono più vecchio, perché ai loro occhi risulterebbe più tranquillizzante: i ruoli con me sono ben definiti *in partenza*. E loro questo lo colgono *al volo*.<sup>168</sup>

Arabs’ propensity for male-male sex, we read, emerges from a desire to achieve orgasm more than a firm desire for the male body. Sex with a tourist causes no shame because it is assumed – *a priori* – that the “ragazzo magrebino” has taken on the “ruolo attivo,” a role that increases, rather than threatening, his virility. Crossing the national frontiers that separate home and the destination, this same-sex tourist seeks to shore up the boundary between “macho” and “passive,” a border that, he says, homosexuals at home have begun to dissolve. Flying over national borders, Aldo aims to encounter men who are at once exceedingly “macho” and prone to stray from straight sex.

Beholden to this fantasy, the tourist vociferously rejects the Arab male who takes pleasure *in* his anus. Because that possibility is not interior to the tourist’s fantasy of North Africa, the “passive” Arab man, consequently, gets represented as a potentially virile body degraded by “external” influences. Gay rights movements, Aldo says, “stanno distruggendo quello che in alcuni angoli della terra resta della vera bisessualità, come era vissuta nella Alessandria di Callimaco, nella Roma di Orazio.”<sup>169</sup> Aldo’s fantasy inverts the idea of the Orient as a feminized lack, personifying it instead in a phallic surplus that supplies the tourist with what he wants at home. But home’s domesticated ways also threaten to encroach on Tunisia’s “archaic,” almost pagan, ways. Sexual identity is ruining what is left of “la vera bisessualità,” an active/passive eros reminiscent of Alexandrian Egypt *and* Ancient Rome. What once was part and parcel of Italy’s cultural (and imperial) patrimony is now threatened by Western encroachment.

The “macho” Arab penetrates others. The “real” homosexual allows himself to be entered. To maintain belief in North Africa’s phallic plenitude, the text must locate its lack “outside” of the virile corpo-reality that is supposed to compensate for home. Locate it, that is, within the exceptional Arab – the local homosexual. Initially critical of Europe for confining same-sex erotics inside the homosexual, the text now tries to contain anal desire exclusively within that very same figure. He becomes the personification of what menaces the tourist’s longed-for Orient: a reminder that homo- / hetero- definitions might, like the Italian tourist, traverse the Mediterranean. In *Zamel*,

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<sup>167</sup> See: Boone, Joseph A. “Rubbing Aladdin’s Lamp.” In *Negotiating Lesbian and Gay Subjects*. Eds. Monica Dorenkamp and Richard Henke. New York & London: Routledge, 1995.

<sup>168</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 88-89. My emphasis

<sup>169</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 162

Aldo thinks that Arab men who let themselves be penetrated by others must, in reality, be homosexual. Aldo, moreover, likens passive homosexuality to a feminized lack, fulfilled only via submission to the phallus of “un vero maschio.”

The Arab men’s anus, thus, represents for Aldo a fictitiously inviolable limit. As long as it is not trespassed, it seems to establish a safe distance between what is wanting (European sex) and what is self-sufficient (Arab sex), what has been everted and what is naturally virile, what is stuck-in-place and what follows eros’ flux, what is endemic and what is “foreign.” In contrast to the prized homo-erratic phallus, the desiring anus is read as a sign of an “out-of-place” – devalued – sex. To what extent, then, does the narration of Arab sexual alterity involve not just the reading of others’ bodies but the defining and policing the contours—boundaries, one might say—of the “strange” body? How is that ‘distance’ both produced and desired? How might this textual production also require the representation of a “bad” Arab who oversteps the fantasy’s desirable limits? Once penetrated, the ‘border’ imagined betwixt the Orient’s virile “there” and Europe’s deficient “here,” unadulterated manhood and its corruption, “real” men and unmanned ones is less “definito.”

Does penetration make his partner gay?, Aldo wonders. If so, how, then, could he supply the tourist with the “difference” he banks on finding there? Writing to Edo, Aldo worries about his relationship with Nabil, a young man he previously called “macho macho.”<sup>170</sup> Before, Aldo had longingly recounted how Nabil “mi ha fatto assumere tutte le posizioni che nel film [porno] assumeva la donna”, eroticizing Nabil’s imitation and simulated proximity to hetero-sexual *accoppiamento*.<sup>171</sup> Soon, Aldo begins to wonder why Nabil has no girlfriend. He proposes to introduce him to some girls: “gli ho fatto capire che ci tengo che abbia anche la ragazza.”<sup>172</sup> Even when the penetrative Arab male is exalted for a willingness to be other males, the text still needs to present the tourist’s body as the space through which heterosexuality strays.

While the “Arab” is often depicted taking pleasure in sex with men, he is just as frequently shown desiring women. Much of the tourist’s desire for him, indeed, hinges on the fact that he is not homosexual. Since he appears “straight” (married, has a girlfriend, sleeps with woman), the narrator can imagine sex with him as both a trespassing of heterosexuality (this man wants to sleep with other men; heterosexual coupling is not plenitude) and an escape from homonormative pairing (two self-identified homosexuals together). Being “fucked” by a seemingly “heterosexual” man allows the tourist to believe that, through his own body (literally in his anus), home’s divide between homo- and hetero- is temporally collapsed. Vis-à-vis the Arab phallus, the tourist aims to heroically queer heterosexuality, while refusing to let go of virility.<sup>173</sup>

The Arab phallus is a textual prop that lets the tourist imagine himself as trespassing desire’s obstacles. Despite purportedly being attracted to North Africa

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<sup>170</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 225

<sup>171</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 225

<sup>172</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 225-26.

<sup>173</sup> Whereas in the traditional heroic plot the hero goes elsewhere, overcomes a boundary and establishes himself as the active subject, here the same-sex tourist travels elsewhere, encounters obstacles and strives to establish himself as he who exceeds either/or sexual boundaries. This happens in an elsewhere (the plot needs a topos) and in his body (the anus). That the hero who passes through this space is at once he-who-is-penetrated represents of inversion, not deconstruction, of this plot. Does this presumed heroism allow the same-sex tourist to justify his own fixed desire for men as a sort of errant transgression?

because male eros there is neither gay nor straight, the same-sex tourist also wants to imagine his journey as overstepping exclusive heterosexuality. It is impossible to “trespass” heterosexuality, however, without also imagining it. Similarly, it is impossible to conceive of heterosexuality without its constitutive other: homosexuality. Regardless of claims to be abandoning home’s sexual binary, the tourist is compelled to allude to it as the line he is crossing. Homo- and hetero- sexuality, seemingly what the texts flee from, represent, then, his against which his erotic errancy might be affirmed. That “outside,” however, is never external. It inhabits Aldo’s depictions of queerness.

Above all, the same-sex tourist in *Zamel* values virility. “Mi piacciono i maschi veri,” Aldo exclaims.<sup>174</sup> The “realness” of these “maschi” is proved, according to Aldo, by the eventual inviolability of their bodies. They penetrate others – men, women, it doesn’t matter. Once grown up, they never let themselves be penetrated. “Lo *zamel*,” Aldo explains, “è quello che si fa scopare, e quando uno è *zamel* è segnato per sempre. Da molto giovani lo sono tutti, questo è normale. Poi, però, ogni ragazzo sa che per acquisire dignità di fronte al gruppo, alla famiglia (allargata), alla società, deve distaccarsene al più presto, facendosi valere, diventando lui stesso *niek*, scopatore, e dunque uomo.”<sup>175</sup> To become “un uomo,” the *zamel* must distance himself from his earlier position as he-who-is-fucked. To be valued, he must exchange the “passive” role for the “active” *scopatore*. The penis must displace the anus. Attracted to virility, Aldo values only those men who have become *niek*. One’s positionality, not the sex of one’s object, matters in this system.

*Nieks*’ penetrating penises give currency to their manhood. In the text’s economy of travel, this “difference” is North Africa’s promised value. To be “fucked” would put their “manhood,” supposedly secured by the phallus, at risk. In this gendered economy, it would mean regressing to an earlier, less valued, position. It would demand exchanging phallic subjectivity for anal passivity. In the text’s economy of desire, Aldo has exchanged the familiarity of home for the possibility of abundant sex with these “maschi veri.” Here, Aldo envisions the anus as a “boundary” that demarcates “real” (active) from unmanned (passive) men. This “border’s” much-announced inviolability is, of course, fictional. The “realness” of Aldo’s “maschi” depends upon a denial of any similarity between their bodies and those of the *zamel*. Far from being assured by a self-sufficient phallus, virility needs a denigrated opening as supplement.

This anal supplement is defensively limned as innately wanting – wanting a phallus for fulfillment. “Real men” in contrast get called “densamente viril[i],” not open to penetration.<sup>176</sup> By presenting anality as a feminized lack, the text attempts to disavow the phallus’ corporeal proximity to its supplement. Unlike with male-female relations, however, there is no physiological difference between “active” and the “passive” men’s bodies. The absence of anatomical difference haunts the announced “distance” between the two. Such “instability” leads to vocal vilification of the “passive” man: if his body isn’t physiologically different then at least it will be rhetorically produced as such. Confronted with the possibility that his *amante* might desire only men, Aldo says, “preferisco pensare di essermi sbagliato sulle preferenze profonde di Nabil” (229).

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<sup>174</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 113

<sup>175</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 154

<sup>176</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 113

Nabil is supposed to penetrate Aldo, like he would any woman, not to have a deep-seated sexual orientation. Unable to sate his curiosity (is he? isn't he?), Aldo decides one night to put Nabil's sexuality "alla prova":

Un legame omosessuale, un legame tra due omosessuali, sai, mi è troppo difficile – concettualmente – accettarlo. [...] Ma ormai temo sia troppo tardi. Le ultime volte, per metterlo alla prova, l'ho accarezzato lì dove sai che i ragazzi tunisini non gradiscono troppo essere toccati. Ebbene, lui ha gradito, anzi si è anche porto in modo inequivocabile. Così l'ho penetrato a fondo con la lingua (operazione che lui sa compiere magistralmente prima di scopare), poi con un dito, poi con due. Non ha fatto una piega. Anzi quando se n'è andato mi ha baciato con un trasporto ancora maggiore. Se è *zamel* [un passivo] me lo deve dire con onestà, lo aiuterò lo stesso ma non può pretendere che io sia il suo amante. Se ne trovi un altro come lui. Io sono frocia nella testa e ho bisogno di pensare a un maschio vero, non a un omosessuale. Domani sera, lo costringo a dirmi la verità, gli faccio ammettere di essere *zamel*, poi possiamo rimpostare il nostro rapporto su una base di amicizia.<sup>177</sup>

Despite chiding Edo for insisting that local men admit "di essere bisex," Aldo now insists on forcing Nabil to declare "con onestà" that he is, in reality, *zamel* (128). Criticism of U.S.-style coming-out politics, which Aldo earlier on had said would destroy Tunisia's permissive silence, has vanished. A sort of "gay panic" – the unnerving possibility that his Tunisian lover might really be homosexual – lead Aldo to demand that Nabil confess the "verità" of his sexuality. Panic, moreover, pushes Aldo to test his lover's body. Penetrating him "a fondo" with his tongue, Aldo attempts to get to the bottom of his "preferenze profonde," hoping that Nabil, like the other "ragazzi tunisini," will not enjoy being touched down there.

Unfazed by Aldo's probing, Nabil kisses his partner good-bye "con trasporto ancora maggiore." Slowly increasing his "transgression" of Nabil's anus (first a tongue, then a finger, then two), Aldo wants his lover to say "no" – to declare himself the *scopatore*, not the entered *zamel*. The use of the word "trasporto" further accentuates Aldo's belief that Nabil is, now, far from the man he desires. Once internal to his fantasy of "maschi veri," Nabil is now transported "outside" of that fantasy's corporeal limits. Allowing himself to be penetrated, he has crossed a boundary that, despite the text's vocal lauding of border-crossing, "real" men are still expected not to trespass. Subsequently, he can no longer be considered the vehicle – the metaphor – through which Aldo hopes to distance himself from home's "lacking" ways. This takes place, unsurprisingly, exactly at the moment when the "borders" securing virility have been made murky via penetration.

In using the Arabic word *zamel* to wonder about Nabil's erotic orientation, Aldo further strives to externalize his gay panic, presenting it as the internalizing of North Africa's – not Europe's – sexual schema. He cannot admit that his curiosity about Nabil is a sign of his own transporting of the homo-/hetero- divide in all its "irresolvable," productive volatility. Instead, we are supposed to read it as an indication of Aldo's proximity to elsewhere's erotic "difference". His discomfort with Nabil's "passivity" is, thus, re-presented as adherence to local distinctions (*zamel* vs. *niek*), allowing Aldo to *pretendere* that sex between men in the Maghreb is *still* ruled by the "different"

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<sup>177</sup> Buffoni, *Zamel*, 229-30

active/passive divide. At the same time, that disavowal is brought on by his fear that sex with Nabil, in actuality, had represented “un legame tra due omosessuali,” something he has tried to associate with Europe and America.

Once desired for its capacity to disorient heterosexuality, the anus now stirs up the concern that it, too, might “prove” a subject’s homosexuality. Since Aldo wants to imagine Nabil as liking women too, too much queering of his presumptive ‘heterosexuality’ unsettles the ex-pat. Aldo’s recourse to the local term ends tragically: Nabil, upset by Aldo’s pejorative interpellation, murders his lover. Presuming on some level that *zamel* and “omosessuale” are interchangeable terms, Aldo insists on applying an emasculating label to Nabil, a label that, earlier on, locals had derisively used to accentuate Aldo’s availability for “passive” sex. Despite transplanting his life to Tunisia, Aldo fails to consider the negative connotations conveyed by *zamel*. A breakdown in trans-lation – the crossing from one side to another – ends in his death.

Socially-enforced ideals of “proper” masculinity or femininity, legible here in Aldo’s fraught response to Nabil’s now-receptive anus, represent a limit to Aldo’s fetishizing of “trespassing.” The undoing of exclusive heterosexuality does not displace virility as that which is most desired. Such anxieties give the lie to the reputed sufficiency of the idealized Arab, showing that his “authenticity” relies on the text’s denigrating production of other figures (woman, “passive” men, the homosexual etc). Announcing these anxieties, Aldo tries to restore the very “boundary” that, he fears, has been infringed.<sup>178</sup> But, in acknowledging the border’s dissolution, Aldo must also admit the his “macho macho” lover might have, *in verità*, been “omosessuale.” This unsavory realization leads to his attempt to “fix” Nabil as a *zamel*, insisting on his sexual “distance” even as he names the possibility of his “proximity.

## 5. Conclusion

Both in North Africa and in the tourists’ place of origin, the male anus gets represented as a socially-invested ‘border.’ Judith Butler argues that the presumed “impenetrability of the masculine” is a kind of “a panic over what might happen if a masculine penetration of the masculine were authorized, or a feminine penetration of the feminine, or a feminine penetration of the masculine or a reversibility of those positions.”<sup>179</sup> Intriguingly, Judith Butler depicts the transgressing of the normative limits of the body via a metaphor of travel. Subjects veer from “proper” objects and *stray* into “improper” ones. Entering the male body is depicted as a wandering over the body’s socially-imagined “boundaries.”<sup>180</sup> Knowledge that the male body is itself “open” to

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<sup>178</sup> If anything, this very crossing can produce a more fervent policing and defense of what is considered “virile.” Crossing one limit can lead to the erection of other borders (here: some men get penetrated, some do the penetrating). Claiming that men can stably be split between “active” and “passive,” virile and unmanned can disavow the knowledge that *all* men, not only those who willingly engage in receptive anal sex, can be entered. Although not reaffirming heterosexual masculinity, the exultation of the “active” partner nonetheless presents the phallus as that which defines virility.

<sup>179</sup> See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 51.

<sup>180</sup> In *Gender Trouble*, Butler discusses the fictiveness of the body’s boundaries in a section devoted. She asks how “social taboos institute and maintain the boundaries of the body” (170). In particular, she focuses her analysis on the imagined “boundary” between the “inner” and “outer” corporeal realms, a distinction

penetration is frequently disavowed.<sup>181</sup> Male-male penetration, though, does not necessarily lead to the undoing of masculinity.

Anxieties of feminization can lead to a fetishistic reification, not displacement, of the body's fantasized borders. Crossing one corporeal taboo (a man penetrating another man) can provoke defensive attempts to stabilize a 'limit' that the subject, on some level, knows is in theory open to transgression. The novels examined in this chapter rhetorically laud border-crossing as a marker of queerness all while continuing to summon a fictive border between Arabs' distant sexuality and Europeans' domesticated sex. This border, however, is tenuous, further compelling the texts' constant need to *enact* – via the exchange of capital – the “distance” that is supposed to inhere over there. Notwithstanding the texts' explicit same-sex eroticism, the male anus remains a site of potential dread. The binary threatened through it is no longer the imagined distance between hetero- and homo- sexuality but rather that between Arabs' allegedly errant sexual and Europe's presumably identity-bound sex, between virile plenitude and effeminized absence.

Ironically, penetrating the anus can evoke fears of a return to the familiar – presumably domesticated – sexual terrain: the anxiety, that, is that the desired Arab might be closer to the familiar than the queer tourist ever wanted. The queer tourists' fetishizing of Arabs, thus, responds to their own homoerotically-propelled gay panic. In contrast to the tourist's acceptable anality, the “Arab” homosexual's anus is seen as a hindrance to Arabs' “naturally” errant desire. If a “phallic” desire for satisfaction leads to no fixed sexual object (either a man or a woman will do), “anal” desire is thought a

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troubled by bodily openings. Terms like “inner” and “outer”, for Butler, “facilitate and articulate a set fantasies” about the body's purported “impermeability” (170). But “‘inner’ and ‘outer’ make sense only with reference to a mediating boundary that strives for stability. And this stability, this coherence, is determined in large part by cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the object. Hence, ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ constitute a binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject. When that subject is challenged, the meaning and necessity of the terms are subject to displacement. If the ‘inner world’ no longer designates a topos, then the internal fixity of the self, and indeed, the internal locale of gender identity, become similarly suspect. The critical question is not *how* did that identity become *internalized*? as if internalization were a process or a mechanism that might be descriptively reconstructed. Rather, the question is: from what strategic position in public discourse and for what reasons has the trope of interiority and the disjunctive binary of inner/outer taken hold? What kind of figuration is it, and through what figure of the body is it signified?” See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 170-171.

<sup>181</sup> Leo Bersani has also discussed the anxieties elicited by the “crossing” of this taboo-laden corporeal territory. Bersani links the disavowal of the rectum as a site of pleasure to fears of a masculine self, supposedly secured by a self-sufficient phallus, being dissolved *via* penetration. He argues that the “anus” is the site of masculine identity's possible “self-shattering” (“Is the Rectum a Grave?” 30). Men's potential to be penetrated, the reality that the male body too can be entered and *enjoy* being penetrated, is a source of panic and violent disavowal. “Male homosexuality advertises the risk of the sexual itself as the risk of self-dismissal, of *losing sight* of the self” (30). Receptive anal sex pushes the ‘boundaries’ of acceptable masculinity because, once penetrated, a man may no longer be able to see his “manhood” reflected in the inherited contours of the masculine ideal. Pleasure *in* the anus “shatters” the socially-enforced fiction that men's “natural” desire/pleasure comes exclusively from the phallus. Receptive anal sex is “risky” insofar as it *exceeds* both what men are supposed to desire (to penetrate a woman) and where that desire is supposed to come from (the phallus). The rectum, Bersani claims, is a site of *excess* or “jouissance.” Imagined as a site of potential loss, the male anus is both a source of panic and joyous, explosive rupture. See Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?; And Other Essays* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

symptom of an entrenched same-sex orientation. Whereas the “Arab” phallus is thought to lead to interchangeability of “same-“ and “opposite-” sex objects, anal orientation is read as a sign of desire fixed to one. Because the tourists’ desire only those “Arabs” who do not distinguish between objects, the “Arab” homosexual is viewed as less desirable. If the phallus is not choosy, the anus is considered rigidly homo- or hetero – open to penetration or closed off.

Interestingly, the visitor applies this judgment only to the Arab ‘homosexual.’ “Passive” anal sex, if desired by the tourist, is fine. “Passive” anal sex, if desired by an Arab, is not. The texts accept within the confines of what is authentically “Arab” only those locals who affirm what the tourist already expected – excess, errancy, bisexuality. Since virility is what he comes in search of and since virility is presumed to reside in the phallus, the texts present the “passive” Arab as not man enough to be desirable. Since a plentiful phallus is thought a trait of Arab men (and, metonymically, of eros in excess), anality gets presented as proof of him not being “Arab” enough. His sexuality, thus, is rejected because he is considered 1) effeminized, 2) Westernized 3) immovably oriented and 4) *al di là* from the tourists’ fantasy. Rather than articulating the multiple permutations of same-sex desire, these texts often narrate Western gay men’s repetition of colonial stereotypes, stereotypes that masquerade as a laudable appreciation of locals’ difference. The anus, supposedly that which will help the tourist queer heterosexuality through his own body, returns in excess of the tourist’s stereotyped Arab.

On the surface, all this male-male content seems far-removed from the logic of sexual difference that, according to Meyda Yeğenoğlu, structures Orientalist discourse. In her view, Western subjects’ urge to know the “Orient” cannot be cleaved from the Orient’s feminization. “The Orient, seen as an embodiment of sensuality, is always understood in feminine terms,” she writes.<sup>182</sup> Imagined as a space of veiled mysteries, the Western visitor longs to “penetrate” and “know” the Orient. “This equivalence positions the Orientalist/Western colonial subject as masculine: the other culture is always the other sex,” she writes.<sup>183</sup> Since in Western epistemology woman is often a privileged figure for lack, the orient is similarly “associate[d] with negativity, [...] that which is other-than the established norm.”<sup>184</sup>

In both novels, the tourists travel to gain distance from Europe’s presumably inviolable superiority. “[Magari] sapessi quanti ricchi e ricche stanchi morti della loro *superiorità* e di quelli che ci credono,” Busi’s narrator says. “Un bel trauma è quel che ci vuole, pagherebbero per un bello spavento, un souvenir indimenticabile” (original emphasis, 70). Paying for a trip abroad, Western tourists bank on being shocked out of their sense of supremacy. This, Busi says, translates into a desire for sexual belittlement,

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<sup>182</sup> Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, 73

<sup>183</sup> Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, 56

<sup>184</sup> In Yeğenoğlu’s argument, the West aligns itself with “modernity, progress, development and freedom and the East with the opposites of these features” (104). If the West claims to be whole / arrived at, the East is lacking / not yet there. Similarly, Edward Said states that Western discourses on the Orient tend to depict it as “symmetrical to and yet diametrically inferior to a European equivalent” (*Orientalism* 72). Although Said here does not link “its strangeness, its difference, its exotic sensuousness” to sexual difference, Yeğenoğlu claims that Western subjects understand their “superiority” to the Orient in phallogocentric terms. The West (understood as male) presents itself as One by pointing out the East’s (understood as feminine) lack. Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, 104.

scripting themselves as the objects, not actors, in a plot they have paid for. Yielding to another, they eroticize abjection. Travel elsewhere purports to recompense the visitor for the regrettable taming of sex that, we read, has accompanied Europe's rise. On a basic level, this exaltation of North African sex upends the associations of "liberation" with Europe and "lack" with the Orient. Now, North Africa promises plentiful eros.

European ways are said now to "corrupt" the Orient's phallic plenitude rather than correcting its backwardness. Since "passive" homosexuality in an adult Arab is read both as a sign of decadence and the lack of virility, proximity to the West, not the Orient, is most akin with the kind of sexual difference Yeğenoğlu points to. In the anal erotics of these texts, indeed, the European man does not typically "penetrate" the Orient. Frequently, his is the body penetrated by Arabs' famously large members. In *Sodomie in corpo II* and *Zamel* the Italian travelers desire to be penetrated, subjected, that is, to the "Orient's" alleged phallic glut. The same-sex tourist wants his own body—his anus, more specifically—to be the means to heterosexuality's undoing. The tourist, thus, can consider himself the receptive partner and still be the heroic actor in the plot. Sex with another presumed homosexual disappoints, in turn, because it promises to confirm, rather than disorient, home's notions of coupling.

In Aldo's fantasy, anal "passivity" is a sign of feminization, diluted manhood and a troubling Western interference, not a desire naturally internal to the Arab sex. Fluidity, the capacity for erotic straying, is instead thought to exemplify the "authentic" – desirable – "Arab" male. The visitor wants "Arab" men to exceed, not affirm, *his* notion of homosexual identity, all while he undertakes an exclusively same-sex itinerary. "There is no need to shed the European self," Alexander writes, "in order to become the other – rather it is the rabid inhabiting of that self in order to better consume the other."<sup>185</sup> Because the tourist can imagine his body as the space through which seemingly heterosexual men stray, he is able to enact a "homosexual" fantasy all while denying the authenticity of local homosexual men. The anus, then, functions either as the *means* to identity's dissolution (if you're the tourist) or as the space of eros' anchoring (if you're the Arab homosexual). In both cases, the anus has the potential to unsettle either/or binaries (gay vs. straight and active vs. passive), binaries which rely upon envisioning a fictive 'border' between 'inside' and 'out.'

Failing to stick to the confines of the tourist's idea of Arab (s)excess, the Arab "homosexual" is presented as an outsider in the Maghreb. Thoughts of feminization obstruct, rather than inciting, the narrators' desire for North African men. Filtered through a gay gaze, the Orient remains the incarnation of a libertine sensuality the tourist thinks he can no longer find in Europe. Its "difference" is erotic, albeit without imagining the Orient in feminine terms. Sexual difference implies, rather, an imagined distance between homosexuality (Europe/Europeanized) and the homo-erratic (North Africa / "active" Arab male) – a difference in sexual schema, not physiognomy. This difference, nevertheless, is heavily gendered, lining up "active" sex with virility and "passive" sex (in the Arab) with unwelcome feminization. Instead of disturbing the colonial and phallogocentric script, this revision simply adds another mark to the palimpsest of Orientalist writing.

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<sup>185</sup> Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 86.

Busi, for instance, sardonically dubs a sexual outing “una delle mie missioni filantropico-colonialisti.”<sup>186</sup> Formerly he-who-penetrated the Orient, the European now is he-who-is-fucked in the colon by a post-colonial subject. This move inverts with little subversion. North Africa stays the site of exotic/erotic surfeit. Orientalism is, indeed, capacious enough to embrace this perverse inversion. Functioning as foil, Arab sexuality is made to show Europe’s sexual inadequacy. That this imagination fixates on Arab males instead of women does not trouble the “natural” conflation of North Africa with excess and temporal distance. Although such a move certainly “queers” the inherited imaginary of North Africa (traveler = penetrator, Orient = women/penetrated), the North African has now become the metaphor of queerness’ stray.

Depicted as free moving, the Arab male is, thus, textually fixed in place – made into the metaphor of erratic, pre-modern and even post-modern difference. While Aldo lauds Arab men’s sexuality as closer to desire in its “natural” state (flux/fluidity), the protagonist also imagines North Africa as housing sex the way it used to be before today’s domesticating identity categories. Still, as Bhabha reminds us, there is always something the stereotype can never quite contain, a surplus knowledge it incessantly seeks to hold back. Excess – realizing that elsewhere’s ‘otherness’ can veer too far from the anticipated “difference” – is, thus, what Busi’s and Aldo’s fetishism strives and fails to dispel. Given all this, a nuanced queer critique of same-sex tourism is direly needed.

A queer critique would unpack the utopic eroticizing of racial, cultural and class differences. A queer critique, asks how homophobia and homonormativity might cause some sexual subjects to chase affirmation abroad. It would push us to consider which bodies, in pursuit of queer affirmation, are made into consumed commodities and which bodies’ movement is enabled by capital. This critique would resist the lure of presenting elsewhere as *the* fixed embodiment of errant desire. A queer critique would, additionally, refuse to see the ‘West’ as bound only to homogenous homo- and hetero- identities. It would engage homoerotic racism and homophobic xenophobia without presuming an easy homology between the two.

A queer critique would challenge the fiction of the timeless heterosexual nation limned vis-à-vis the “foreignness” of homosexuality. It would seek alliances across differences without dismissing disparities. A queer critique would confront the fetishizing of racial “difference” in the service of exalting the desire’s fluidity, while not assuming that the universality of the same-sex models customary in much of America and Europe. Such a critique would question the political implications of imagining queerness, both in fictional and theoretical texts, via metaphors of travel -- transgression, border-crossing and straying. Who is allowed to travel? Who, instead, gets made into a metaphor? In short, this would demand queering the very act of queering. It would pose a painful but crucial query: how has “queering,” the textual and critical practice of collapsing the homo- / hetero- binary, repeated racist fantasies in its flight from normativity?

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<sup>186</sup> Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11*, 48. Original emphasis.

## Chapter 2

### Off the Straight Path: Italy and J.A. Symonds' Contagious Autobiography

John Addington Symonds—Oxford professor, classicist, invert, poet, husband, historian, father, translator and travel writer—starts his memoirs (1889-1893) in a queer fashion. Parturition, the living Symonds' arrival in the world, is not his story's opening scene. Rather, he addresses his autobiography's textual genesis. Flouting the generic norms of autobiography, birth — the “beginning” of biological/biographical existence — is nowhere in the preface. His autobiography does start with an origin story, though. Specifically, Symonds names the memoirs of the Italians Carlo Gozzi (1720-1806) and Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571), works that he had recently translated, as the inspiration for his current act of “sterile self delineation.”<sup>187</sup> In this move, the reader is directed away from the facts of Symonds' life and towards other autobiographies and memoirs. Instead of tracing Symonds' life back to his mother or father, the preface gives the reader a literary genealogy—a tale about his *life story's* production and precursors, not his *life's* generation

A desire to translate his life into words, Symonds says, first stirred after reading the dead men's memoirs:

It would be difficult to say exactly why I have begun to write the memoirs of my very uneventful life. The most obvious reason for my doing so, perhaps, is that I have been to a large extent occupied during the last three years with the autobiographies of Benvenuto Cellini and Carlo Gozzi, both of these personal histories. I have translated them into English and sent them to press, acquiring in the process certain opinions with regard to the method of self-portraiture and considerably adding to the interest which I always felt for this branch of literature. Other and more important reasons – more important in their bearing on my psychological condition and the anxiety problem of the coming years– will reveal themselves to those who read the ensuing chapters. [...] Without vanity, I may affirm that the author of *Renaissance in Italy* and *Studies of the Greek Poets* has had to refuse lucrative offers and to postpone labours of remunerative literature for many months, in order to produce this piece of sterile self-delineation. (29)

Precisely when Symonds could have justified his story in terms of *his* life's singularity (why *his particular* “I” is worth reading), he cites the Italians' lives. His life-story locates its beginning not at the start of the author/subject's life, as most autobiographies would have readers believe, but in Symonds' recent past—the years spent translating Cellini's and Gozzi's first-person accounts. His ensuing verbal self-portrait is discussed in relation to the Italian men's “personal histories” (29).

Symonds' autobiography, the writer fashioning his life into story, begins by collapsing the distance between reader and writer, translator and translated, then and now. Such an overt blurring of subject and object, however, is not limited to Symonds' autobiographical project. In the introductory essay to his 1888 translation of Benvenuto Cellini's *Vita*, alluded to in his memoir's preface, the English scholar writes at length about the unique role of the translator of autobiography:

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<sup>187</sup> See Phyllis Grosskurth, ed. *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds* (London: Hutchinson, 1984) 29.

The translator of an autobiography, especially if it be a long one like Cellini's, or like Rousseau's *Confessions*, enjoys very special opportunities for becoming acquainted with the mind and temper of its writer. No other method of study, however conventional, can be compared in this particular respect with the method of translation. [...] The translator is obliged to live for weeks and months in close companionship with his author. He must bend his own individuality to the task of expressing what is characteristic in that of another. He tastes and analyses every turn of phrase in order to discover its exact significance. He taxes the resources of his own language so far as they may be at his command, to reproduce the most evasive no less than the most salient expressions of the text before him. In the case even of a poem or a dissertation, he ought, upon this method, to arrive at more precise conclusions than the student who has been only a reader. But when the text is a self-revelation, when it is a minute and voluminous autobiography, he will have done little short of living himself for a while into the personality of another.<sup>188</sup>

Rather than affording the translator "precise" information about the text (form, content, style, etc), translation grants him intimate insight into the writer's interiority – his "mind and temper." Knowledge acquired via translation is not the stuff of objective exactitude. Translation is said to give the translator an almost-sensual familiarity with his subject. Instead of invoking a stable boundary between the translator's own "I" and the "I" he has re-produced on the page, Symonds says that a memoir's translator must live "himself for a while into the personality of another." Autobiography's translator "must bend his own individuality" in order to communicate, "what is characteristic in [...] another."

No stable – and, certainly, no straight – line cleaves the translator from the subject (author)/object (text) he renders. Much like in the preface to his future autobiography, Symonds here imagines readerly reception bleeding into the act of writerly production. A translator of autobiography, though, must go beyond replacing the memoir's original words with his own. He "tastes [...] every turn of phrase," seeking to reproduce both the language and "the man whose spirit he has attempted to convey with the authority of one who has learned to know him *intus et in cute* – bones, marrow, flesh and superficies." Translation does more here than give the translator access into his subject's motives. Significantly, translating autobiography asks the translator to allow the author's voice to enter into and under "his own individuality." Rather than overwriting an autobiographical first-person, Symonds claims that the translator should "bend" his tongue, including an "I" normally used to refer to himself, to transmit the autobiographer's singularity. The translator's "I" is conduit, not source.

Turning to corporeal imagery, Symonds paints a quasi carnal knowledge of his subject's inner workings. Like a doctor versed in a patient's body (bone, flesh, surface), autobiographical translators come to know their authors "intus et in cute" – within and under the skin. This turn of phrase is not Symonds', as it was first penned by the Roman satirist Aulus Persius Flaccus and later employed by Rousseau in the incipit to his *Confessions*.<sup>189</sup> Translation, Symonds says, is simultaneously more exact and more

<sup>188</sup> Benvenuto Cellini. *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini*. Trans. John Addington Symonds. (London: John C. Nimmo, 1888) ix-x.

<sup>189</sup> The Latin quote comes from Persius' third satire, line 30. That line, "ego te, intus et in cute, novi" translates as "I know you inside and out"; more literally, it means within and in the skin. Rousseau titles

subjective than mere reading. It brings its practitioner *closer* to getting inside and under the temperament of the author. Channeled through the translator's pen is the "spirit he has attempted to convey." Conveying that "spirit," however, requires the translator to live with that text and "into the personality of another." If translation is believed to grant Symonds entry into his subject's messy inner life, this familiarity is achieved only after that subject has slipped into and inside Symonds' own individuality and words.

Corporeal metaphors stress that the translator uses his body to invoke an "I" that will at once be a product of his labor and, signifying a now-defunct author, a re-production of a voice from long ago. Symonds' language is not simply figurative, though. Describing his subject in fleshly terms, Symonds writes the translator's body, the hand inking the first-person, back into the act of translation. According to Symonds' theory of intimate translation, the translator can enter "into" the autobiographer's "mind and temper" only after *ingesting* the writer's unique "turns of phrase." Translation modifies not only the original text, altering it to suit the particularities of a new language, it also lets the author's "spirit" touch—to bend, to possess—the translator's tongue. The original author, speaking from the past into the present, is said to be re-produced / reproduce himself by means of the translator's body. That body is imagined here as site of both intersubjective penetration ("I" into "you"/"you" inside "me") and trans-temporal reproduction.<sup>190</sup>

By repeating word "living" twice, Symonds emphasizes that this literary labor has itself been a chapter in his own life. Allegedly another person's singular and solitary first-person, autobiography gets depicted here as both what pre-dates the translator's manual intervention (an original text) and that which is produced anew via the translator's involvement. If, *à la* Rousseau, autobiography gives Symonds entry into the totality of the writer—access to those subcutaneous thoughts illegible even to a person's most proximate companions—it does so by first crossing into Symonds' language. Translation, says Symonds, lets him see under the superficial facade his subject presented to the world. At the same time, Symonds' own "individuality" is affected—altered—by this contact. In citing the Latin phrase "intus et in cute," then, Symonds does not just describe what he has come to know about his subject. More interestingly, he proposes a theory of intimate translation wherein the autobiographical translator is himself entered and transformed by the text he is tasked to faithfully transmit.

Considering Symonds' crafting of the English editions of Cellini's and Gozzi's memoirs, he is not divorced from their material production. But, as a translator, he is not the works' principal authors either. Symonds' re-produces the memoirs in English while never displacing the names behind the "original." Fashioning Gozzi's and Cellini's "io" into an English "I," Symonds dwells in a murky space between reader and writer. To

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the "preamble" to his influential and widely-emulated *Confessions* "intus et in cute," implying that his confessional autobiography would give readers intimate access to his interiority – knowledge that even those who knew him superficially during his life might not have.

<sup>190</sup> Cellini himself described his conversion from artist into writer in explicitly anal terms, describing it as "allora allor della poesia il fuoco/ m'entrò nel corpo, e credo per via/ ond' esce il pan ché non v'era altro loco" (402, Rizzoli edition of *Vita*). Poetry figuratively enters his body, transforming him into something/one distinct than who he was before. Once "inside" him, poetry re-shapes him, inhabiting him from the inside out. Like Symonds, Cellini uses sexually-tinged language to discuss his transformation into a writer; inspired / touched, by written words, the subject is penetrated (and thereby changed); in turn, he produces words that, once received in and by others, might then touch them.

make the Italians speak English, Symonds writes an “I” that refers to someone else. He generates a first-person account that is never his own. Writing this “I” in his hand, he invisibly inhabits another’s first-person pronoun. Cellini and Gozzi’s “I” is simultaneously an effect of Symonds (penned by him) and a mark that we are supposed believe pre-dates t/his current translation (written by long-dead men).

To get inside the author’s “mind and temper,” the translator must let another’s “I” slip —unseen— inside and under his own. He must, in other words, give over his tongue to another, allowing his body and language to be a medium of expressing another’s individuality. Autobiographical translation is a messy matter, Symonds says – in between subject and object, writer and reader, translator and translated, generator and reproduced. David Amigoni rightly notes that for Symonds “the translator’s identification is bodily, so that it breaks beyond the boundaries of mind-led, rationally dispassionate scholarship.”<sup>191</sup> Physical images, including entering the body or becoming infected, recur as metaphors of the intersubjective act of translation (Amigoni, 163). Through the translator’s body and pen, the autobiographer’s tale is reproduced, which here means duplicated and generated.

Reworking Rousseau’s’ citation of a Latin medical metaphor, Symonds paints autobiographical translation as the re-production of a text *inside* the translator’s body. Precisely when Symonds dwells at length on his re-phrasing of Cellini’s words, bits of untranslated text persist in the body of his text. Untranslated Latin, one with a double history (in ancient Roman satire and French memoir), contaminates the translator’s description of the act of translation. Linguistic purity, maintaining a hard-and-fast boundary between English and Italian or English and Latin, is not the goal. The translator does not efface the foreign language with English, supplanting it with his own rendition. He draws attention, rather, to translation as a palimpsestic project. Latin continues to inhabit his description of translation just as that language has entered into his body. If Italian and Latin are bent into English prose, English, too, is made to bear the trace of the foreign – a trace *not* translated. A trace that demands a reader in-the-know capable of reading and understanding it.

For Symonds, the translator’s “duty is to reproduce,” eschewing any “preconceived conception[s] of pictorial harmony.” It is not, he says, the translator’s task to “over-valu[e] his subject,” a sin he derides as the “biographer’s weakness.” In the introduction to Symonds’ 1889 translation of Gozzi’s *Memorie*, he again returns to biographer’s propensity for aggrandizing the lives they try to narrate. Using a literary term en vogue in Victorian England, Symonds calls such zealous hagiographies a “lues biographica,” a biographical plague.<sup>192</sup> Again, corporeal language is Symonds’ privileged metaphor for describing life writing. In the Gozzi essay, however, Symonds turns to a rhetoric of contagion. What is contaminated is not the writer but the biography; a biographer, warns Symonds, can warp a complex life, with too much idealizing investment in his subject. Biographers, Symonds say, must not “contaminate” that life with his own whitewashing whims.

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<sup>191</sup> David Amigoni, “Translating the Self: Sexuality, Religion, and Sanctuary in John Addington Symonds’ *Cellini* and other Acts of Life Writing.” *Biography*. 32.1 (Winter 2009): 164.

<sup>192</sup> Carlo Gozzi, *The Memoirs of Count Carlo Gozzi*. Trans. John Addington Symonds. (London: John C. Nimmo, 1890).

The phrase *lues biographica* was first coined by Thomas Babington MacCauley, a British historian and biographer, to name biographers' penchant for overly heroic terms. Other British texts from the mid- to late- nineteenth-century refer to *lues biographica* as an invasive modern epidemic. Translators of autobiography, "if possessed of any discernment," will instead "speak of the man whose spirit he has attempted to convey with the authority of one who has learned to know him *intus et in cute* – bones, marrow, flesh and superficialities." Here, Symonds critiques biographers for their hagiographic sanitizing of their subjects' lives. Such a lofty approach might sully the otherwise ambiguous details of a person's life with the biographer's retroactive interpretations and personal ideology.

This sanitizing gesture gets depicted oddly enough as a sort of plague. How the biographer wants to remember the individual can, unnecessarily, overwrite the complex realities – including contradictions and disturbing details – that make up a person's life. Hagiographic writing is infectious insofar as the biographer is said to pollute the described life with "preconceived conception." The translator of autobiography, in contrast, is said not to be "exposed to the biographer's weakness for over-valuing his subject." Referencing exposure, Symonds returns to a rhetoric of infection. One can be exposed, after all, to illness. Rather than contaminating his subject's life story with his own interpretations, the translator must instead expose – now in the sense of to reveal or to unveil – both that person's actions, what is superficially known, and the messy inner life not visible to all.

While not creating an ideal picture of the historical subject, a memoir's translator must follow Rousseau's surgical proscription to exhibit the individual's interiority – messy guts and all. Unlike the average reader, the autobiographical translator is tasked with producing and re-producing an "I" that is both his linguistic handiwork and someone else's. And yet, unlike "*lues biographica*," it is here the translator whose "individuality" gets reshaped by this contact/contiguity/contagion. In rendering a first-person from the past, the translator must shun overwriting it with his own subjectivity all while also letting his "I" – the pronoun used to signify his singularity – be a channel for conveying another man's "spirit." He will come in close contact with that voice, allowing it into and inside something as intimate as the "I" inked by his hand, all while resisting the temptation to make that voice speak with his own spirit.

As we shall see, this fleshy description foreshadows Symonds' later metaphors of contagion when he narrates his autobiography's genesis. I pause at length on Symonds' account of the messy touching of subject/object conjured through translation—a transhistorical interpenetration— because in it we find intimations of Symonds' later infectious depiction of his own autobiography. Between 1889 and his death in 1893, while in self-imposed "exile" in Davos Switzerland and Italy, the Briton wrote his memoirs. The decision to put his recollections into writing, Symonds stresses, originated not in himself but after contact with Cellini's *Vita* and Gozzi's *Memorie*. Even the "I" constituting his own memoirs, which in those works refers only to John Addington Symonds, is no solitary enunciation. It locates its origin in words uttered in another age and by other first-person subjects. It locates its origin in contact with others – a contagious contact and infectious intimacy.

David Amigoni in "Translating the Self: Sexuality, Religion, and Sanctuary in John Addington Symonds' *Cellini* and Other Acts of Life Writing" notes that Symonds

uses a metaphor of “a contagion entering the body” to discuss his translations. But, Amigoni and other Symonds scholars have failed to connect this metaphor to Symonds’ larger project of a trans-historical queer touch. If Symonds gets to enter “into” the personality of the textual “I” he translates, in turn “the man whose spirit he has attempted to convey” enters and contaminates his telling of his “own” story. Contagion, however, is a source of desire for Symonds. It is not just a pathologizing metaphor that continues to see homosexuality only in terms of morbidity and illness. Contagion opens up the possibility of an intimacy transmissible across time, languages, space – a blurring of the borders between self and other, then and now, “I” and him.

Translation becomes a means for “reproducing” a voice from the past by means of another man’s body. Although Symonds admits to being touched by words written long ago, he wants to accentuate, even amidst the act of translation, their distance from his present moment. Entering inside another’s voice via translation, Symonds hopes to reproduce by means of his own body (the writing hand, his native tongue, the pages touched) a dead individual’s “spirit” in the 1890s. This represents a ghostly and decidedly queer form of reproduction – something generated between men born centuries apart and words originating long ago that, through another’s body, might yet echo into the present. In translating words from another age, Symonds hopes to come in contact — to touch — a past whose social forms are desired precisely for their difference, their non-contiguity, with his wanting present. In any sequential telling of history, that past would be considered long since done with. But, in conjuring contact with it, Symonds *reads* himself into its forms (generic, sexual, artistic), feeling closer to them than those within reach during the life that—now—fills his present memoir.

### 1) Touching Backwards, Infecting the Future

Symonds’ intertextual note at the memoir’s start frames the ensuing words as about something more than the life he lived between 1840 and 1893. Indexing texts penned in Italy before Symonds’ birth, he externalizes his autobiography’s genesis in a time, place and language explicitly *not his own*. Moreover, by citing dead men’s memoirs—their self-fashioning in writing—as source for his autobiographical undertaking, Symonds subtly draws attention to the inadequacy of currently-available accounts of the self for relaying his “peculiar” development. He raises, in part, the question of formal models. What form will his story take? Why might present plots – e.g. the *bildungsroman*’s developmental narrative or sexologists’ pathologizing case studies – feel inadequate? Despite describing his recent intimacy with Cellini and Gozzi’s tales, Symonds mines them as fountains of inspiration precisely because, in their words, he imagines he can access a *form* of desiring subjectivity different than what feels within reach in his lifetime. (Oddly, that very lifetime is the supposed content of his “self-portraiture”).

In *Never Say ‘I’*, Michael Lucey argues that it is insufficient to discuss same-sex desire in autobiography only in terms of an oppressive silence overcome via liberatory

speech acts.<sup>193</sup> Lucey cautions that first person tales in writing are always “literary act of saying” beholden to generic norms and forms that can have little to do with the social opprobrium around interdicted sexualities:

[It] cannot be reduced to the portrayal of the struggle of certain sexual outsiders to escape from an imposed silence, to wrest the means of expression away from a normatively homophobic social order. The vectors within a social world of what is normative and what is a dissident or subversive opposition to it can never be satisfactorily assigned in such a simplistic way. We are dealing with position-taking and self-figuration within a large group of people who are all finding ways to speak of same-sex sexuality differently and to different ends [...]. [It] involves [...] the literary act of say as well as precisely what is said. It is as much a problem of crafting forms of representation as crafting the matter [e.g. categories, labels, referents] at hand.<sup>194</sup>

The telling of same-sex sexuality in writing, Lucey comments, wrestles with questions of form, readerly reception and the naming of intertextual links to prior legitimating texts.

Lucey does not claim that homosexuality was “unspeakable,” revealed and occluded in relation to a homophobic silence. Rather, he asks: “how is one to write about same-sex forms of desire and same-sex relations? [...] Within which genres? Drawing on which precursors? [...] How, in what you write, will you indicate who your predecessors are, what your ideological position is, what your literary intentions are?”<sup>195</sup> As specific topics in narration, silence and self-censoring are by no means contrary to this act of telling; instead, they represent an integral formal element – an encumbering obstacle allegedly overcome by the very act of narration that figures them as obstructing the tale. Textual reticence, the explicit relaying in language of what can and can’t be uttered, is one form – not an absence – through which same-sex relations have been articulated in the first-person.

The memoir’s preface is not the only time Symonds’ highlights Cellini and Gozzi as source of autobiographical inspiration. In a 1889 letter to his friend Graham Dakyns, Symonds writes:

My occupation with Cellini and Gozzi has infected me with their *Lues Autobiographica*; & I have begun scribbling my own reminiscences. This is a foolish thing to do, because I do not think they will ever be fit to publish. I have nothing to relate except the evolution of a character somewhat strangely constituted in its moral and aesthetic qualities. The study of this evolution, written with the candour & the precision I feel capable of using, would I am sure be interesting to psychologists & not without its utility. There does not exist anything like it in print; & I am certain that 999 men out of a thousand do not believe in the existence of a personality like mine. Still it would hardly be fair to my posterity if I were to yield up my vile soul to psychopathical investigators. [...] I feel it a pity, after *acquiring* the art of the autobiographer through the translation of two masterpieces, not to employ my skill upon such a rich mine of psychological curiosities as *I am conscious of possessing*. [...] You see, I have

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<sup>193</sup> Michael Lucey, *Never Say I: Sexuality and First Person in Collette, Gide and Proust* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>194</sup> Lucey, *ibid*, 55.

<sup>195</sup> Lucey, *ibid*, 67.

‘never spoken out.’ And it is a great temptation to speak out, when I have been living for two whole years *in lonely intimacy* with men who spoke out so magnificently as Cellini and Gozzi did.<sup>196</sup>

Again, Symonds traces his “reminiscences” here to the translation of Cellini and Gozzi’s “masterpieces.” But the letter goes further than the preface. It states that “years of lonely intimacy” with the Italians “infected [him] with their *Lues Autobiographica*.” This “intimacy” helped him “acquire” the urge to “speak out.” Employing a rhetoric of contagion, Symonds legitimates his self-authorship by de-authorizing himself. “My” story is the effect of inhabiting “their” stories. Despite locating inspiration in the act of translation, Symonds opts for untranslated Latin phrase *Lues Autobiographica* to name his derived impulse. “Lues” has two meanings: 1) a Roman literary name for the spirit (*daimon* [δαίμων] in Greek) personifying pestilence and 2) an archaic medical term for Syphilis.

Rooted in a close reading of the Daykins letter, the following section brings Carla Freccero’s notion of “queer spectrality” (*Queer/early/modern*) in contact—a sort of contiguous, contaminating intimacy—with Carolyn Dinshaw’s “queer historical touch” (*Getting Medieval*). I then turn to recent debates over affect in order to unpack Symonds’ privileging of *Lues* as metaphor for a transhistorical queer intimacy – feeling touched by the past and hoping to touch readers in a future unknowable from his lifetime. Employing the figure of *Lues*, Symonds imagines a textual / sexual touching across time. Contagion, the transmission of a disease from one person to the next, comes to signify the (textual) transmission of stories – including queers’ affective investment in the them – from one era to the next.

Infectious intimacy is here generated between men, albeit between the “living” writer (Symonds) and the “dead” authors (Cellini / Gozzi).<sup>197</sup> Given the explicit same-sex content of Symonds’ memoirs, the *Lues* figure is a means to narrate textual generation without recourse to the heterosexual (or at the least self-inseminating) metaphor of creation (writing a text as “birth”). Possessed and infected, Symonds’ memoir is simultaneously the “side effect” of contact between men and what gets generated when texts, originating in the past, outlive their author’s death and, as ghostly traces from a bygone era, affect those inhabiting a later age. Via *Lues*, Symonds represents male-male intimacy, even the seemingly desexualized contact between a (male) reader/translator and (male) authors, as a *generative*, not “sterile,” relation. Even though Syphilis has the potential to render an infected man sterile, foreclosing the possibility of male-female reproduction, the disease can continue to reproduce itself through the infected person’s body and that body’s contact with others. Even if *Lues* were to close off

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<sup>196</sup> Qtd in Grosskurth, 1984, 16. My emphasis.

<sup>197</sup> Because Symonds mentions a *sexually transmitted* disease and because his memoir also limns his experience of same-sex sexuality/sex, it would be tempting to claim that he has simply internalized the pathologizing rhetoric of sexology circulating in Europe during his lifetime. I want to resist reading “Lues,” primarily in terms of morbidity and death. It is worth remembering that Symonds uses the image of a sexually transmitted disease to narrate the origin of his present memoirs. Although Syphilis was the cause of actual deaths in the late nineteenth Europe, it would be reductive to read the veiled reference to it here as principally an expression of Symonds’ anxieties about his mortality / death. *Lues*, I am arguing, must be read here also as something that signifies a generative contact between male bodies (male-male sex can lead to Syphilis, which can then infect another) and the transmission of queer affect—via writing and reading—over time.

the possibility of a male inseminating a female, it might still reproduce itself, passing from one body to the next, by means of male-male sexual contact.<sup>198</sup>

Contagion here breeds writerly textuality and readerly affect; what gets “contaminated” in this move is the very idea of autobiography as autonomous generation—something originating purely in the author. The transmission of an illness from one person to another / others, after all, requires contact between bodies or at least a certain physical contiguity between them. To become “infected,” Symonds first touched others’ bodies of work.<sup>199</sup> Rather than causing death, literary “infection” (internalization of a text) is, for Symonds, a productive and—indeed—desired contamination. Using a sexually-transmitted disease to name what roused his “solo” act of writing, Symonds frames his subsequent autobiography as both an explicitly intersubjective and an *erotically*-invested act. It is no onanistic self-indulgence, undertaken to satisfy the autobiographer’s wish for self-aggrandizement.

Autobiography instead gets imagined as something produced after being touched by others’ life stories. Symonds limns the transmission of texts across time here as a sort of atemporal touching between the present reader and men from another age. Despite the distance between when those texts were written and the “now” in which Symonds later reads them, these authors still feel hauntingly close to him. Cellini and Gozzi are, then, at once Symonds’ literary “sires,” points of origin authorizing his own project within a known lineage, and a source of infection. Far from objective artifacts of another time/place, they are phenomenologically (and fantasmatically) received in the Briton’s present. Reading memoirs penned back then, Symonds *feels* touched by a time that, according to a sequential or chronological understanding of history, “ended” long before his birth. But, because Symonds avers that the past has contacted him by means of his own reading / translating, the temporal relation described also refuses a forward-moving plotting of history.

History is not just the past related in language but a past related to, invested with desires from and in a wanting present. Portraying the telling of his story as the effect of reading others’ life tales, Symonds stresses the phenomenology of his autobiography and, more broadly, the narration / reception of history. One time is not neatly hewn from the next. Through and in him, past ‘voices’—dead men’s words—still speak. The past continues to effect writing, compelling his act of self-narration. Once written, a memoirist’s words can outlive the hand that inks them and, if read later in a time and place different from the autobiographer’s, might yet touch (perhaps even contaminate) some (future) reader’s efforts to tell “his” story. The text’s “life,” in other words, hinges on its ability to be read – received by a living subject other than its author.

Symonds experiences in the aforementioned memoirs something akin to what Michael Lucey has called “a relation of productive *contingency*, [...] the possibility of

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<sup>198</sup> In Symonds’ *Renaissance in Italy* (Vol. 2), Symonds discusses a Latin epic poem called “Syphillis.” In quoting this poem, Symonds’ reproduces the word “luem.” This affliction is also referred to as the “mal Franzese.” In Cellini’s *Vita*, which Symonds translated, syphilis is referred to as the “mal francese” and “quell morbo gallico.” Cellini is a source of literary contagion and – during Cellini’s life – the artist was *actually* infected with Syphilis.

<sup>199</sup> As translator, moreover, Symonds is not in passing contact with the Italians’ words. He (was) inhabited (by) and re-produced them through his own body (the writing hand). Like a person infected, Symonds re-generated a thing that, initially, another person had transmitted.

keeping [...] moments parallel”<sup>200</sup>. He sees in them not so much a mirror-image of himself, but a contingent contiguity – a felt proximity or akin-ship that never displaces Symonds’ need to believe that the past is (culturally) distinct/distant from a present he finds phobic. In reading and translating, he says he is touched by that past and, albeit temporarily, can touch another world. Despite feeling close, those eras are desired because they are imagined as distant from what can now be said and done. Symonds engages here in what Carolyn Dinshaw has called “a repetition with a difference.”<sup>201</sup> Dinshaw defines this as an affective investment in or an appropriation of the past that, despite the present subject’s feelings of akinship with earlier eras or individuals, readily admits the differences between “them” and “me.”

Temporal distance, the knowledge that people lived and told differently in other ages, does not simply lead to the frustration of feeling born in the wrong time. Understanding that lives then are different from (but felt in significant ways akin to) the person reading about them *ex post facto* can stir hope for a different future alongside what we might call nostalgia. Symonds claims that words from another time *feel* closer expressing to the contours of his own life than the plots reigning in the world in which he was born. He relays not just how he relates to voices from another age but how he struggles to relate in existing forms his not-so-straight sense of self. Although certainly about his life, Symonds’ autobiography begins as a story about the encumbered *telling* of a life. It is a story about how he, given the here-and-now’s accounts of the self, looked elsewhere, sifting through bygone tales and long-dead lives, for a shudder of self-recognition—recognition of one’s self inside another’s life and under another’s “I.”

J. Halberstam has remarked that queers often have an “willfully eccentric” relationship to the normative plotting of time.<sup>202</sup> Halberstam’s notion of “queer time” contrasts “the time of reproduction”: a sequential plotting of life that expects birth to lead to marriage, marriage to lead to procreation and breeding to lead to eventual death.<sup>203</sup> Queer time depends on a less linear organization of temporality. Eschewing life envisioned as a straight line passed on by means of male-female reproduction, queer time dwells in “the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance and child-rearing.”<sup>204</sup> According to Halberstam, queer subcultures “produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction and death.”<sup>205</sup> Once transformed into text or image, such temporalities can “open up new life narratives.”<sup>206</sup>

While Halberstam’s discussion of queer time stresses “the here, the present, the now,” other theorists have aimed their arguments backwards.<sup>207</sup> As a site of desire, the “past” is longed for out of both an imagined likeness and for its presumed distance.

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<sup>200</sup> Michael Lucey, “Balzac’s Queer Cousins.” In *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) 170.

<sup>201</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) 156.

<sup>202</sup> J. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Sub cultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) 1.

<sup>203</sup> Halberstam, 2005, 2.

<sup>204</sup> Halberstam, 2005, 2.

<sup>205</sup> Halberstam, 2005, 2.

<sup>206</sup> Halberstam, 2005, 2.

<sup>207</sup> Halberstam, 2005, 2.

Heather Love argues that instead of trying to “overcome” the pain linked to the past, envisioned by many queers as tantamount to the closet, we must wrestle with how the past, including ‘negative’ feelings like exclusion, shape present identities and aspirations for the future.<sup>208</sup> Texts from the past “describe what it is like to bear a ‘disqualified’ identity, which at times can simply mean living with injury – not fixing it.”<sup>209</sup>

In *Getting Medieval*, Carolyn Dinshaw rejects linear gay history while still affirming the “queer desire for history.”<sup>210</sup> There exist “vibrations” felt between contemporary subjects and pre- modern texts. Such resonances, an “affective engagement with the past,” *desire* the different structuring of sexuality common in the past without assuming a one-to-one equivalency between then and now.<sup>211</sup> Dinshaw employs the image of a queer “historical touch,” defined as the “impulse to make contact, even finally a desire for bodies to touch across time.”<sup>212</sup> Queer history, Dinshaw says, is about contingencies, whereby the incongruities accrued between then and now bring about friction and frisson.

Michael Lucey’s image of a parallel contingency is useful here.<sup>213</sup> Parallel implies an alignment that, in spite of proximity, is not identical. Contingency acknowledges envisioning this proximity is itself an uncertain undertaking, dependent on circumstances beyond the present. Both parallel (aligned but not intersecting) and contingent (in dependent contact with something else), Symonds’ imagines a lineage at once contiguous and divergent; in this move, he aligns himself with a past he hopes still to touch (*contact, contagion, contingent*) while acknowledging that his very desire for intimacy with that past depends on its distance from the author’s phobic present. Contingency allows for a felt proximity that, even when touching, never collapses the past and the present into one solitary line.

Even when tracing his autobiography back to “a lonely intimacy” with these men, Symonds does not present a straight line that starts with Cellini and ends with him. Desired as much for their divergence from the author’s present, the textual predecessors invoked remain sources of *current* emotion for Symonds. Here, he desires contact with texts/authors who are, ironically, sites of desire precisely because of their alleged distance from the present in which he must write. Received long after their initial publication, such texts remain simultaneously artifacts from another time (distinct) and incorporated into the tale now unfolding (close). While desired for their temporal distance, these ‘past’ texts nevertheless continue to touch and contaminate the reader/writer’s present. Parallel yet contingent, in contact but never fully conflated, Symonds gives voice to feeling a certain kinship – what I dub akinship – with subjects who died before his life began.

Invoking notions of affinity, Symonds nevertheless eschews a specular homology: “I” = “them.” They are felt close to his “I”—are even said to be already inside him (“infected me”)—but are not the one and the same as him. As Lucey rightly notes, “we”

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<sup>208</sup> Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) 169-170.

<sup>209</sup> Love, *Feeling Backward*, 4.

<sup>210</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 14.

<sup>211</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 14.

<sup>212</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 4.

<sup>213</sup> Michael Lucey, “Balzac’s Queer Cousins.” In *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

do not always understand the (queer) past via a direct “ancestral relation to ourselves,” seeing mirror-images where significant differences abound. Texts composed under the material and narratological conditions of other times/place “might nonetheless provoke in some of us a tremor of recognition.”<sup>214</sup> That “recognition” is not the belief that the “past” and “our” present are identical twins but rather is a desire-laden response to reading; it involves reading oneself – our selves – into “some parallel moment.”<sup>215</sup> In Symonds’ case, others’ works are felt close to his “I” —are said to be inside him— but are also not him. These works provoke feelings of akinship, which is a readerly recognition.

Understood as Syphilis, *Lues* is a disease generated (outside of the text) by means of actual sexual touching. But, as a double sign, *Lues* invokes specter and body, the ethereal and the physiological, the deadly and the generative, the eternal and the moribund. Opting for the Latin *Lues* instead of the English plague, Symonds uses a word whose spectral meaning (a pestilent spirit that can possess/infect) already contaminates its medical connotations (corporeality sans spirit). Since Symonds imagines writing as the side-effect of an act of reading / translation, he collapses corporeal intimacy, the touching of two bodies, and the affect-rife intimacy created between reader and text. In addition to signifying an erotically-charged intimacy felt across the centuries, *Lues* has become Symonds’ figure for a queer desire for history – the yearning, that is, to reach back (and be touched by) a story larger than the individual’s solitary tale and lifespan.

As translator, moreover, Symonds (was) inhabited (by) and re-produced the Italians’ words through his own body (the writing hand). Like a person infected, Symonds re-generated a thing that, initially, another person had transmitted. How do “we” make use of the past? What emotions does the past stir in a queer subject desiring a world different from the one presently available? Why does Symonds’ use a figure of contagion—infection caused by contiguity / touching—to narrate the trans-temporal re-production of stories across time? Theoretical discussions of “queer temporality,” feeling backwards and hoping forward, have thus far guided my reading of Symonds. Given *Lues*’ dual significance (Pestilence/pestilence and spirit), it would be inadequate to analyze Symonds’ working only through / reworking of the past exclusively in terms of pathology and morbidity.

After all, Symonds invokes a polyvalent term signifying infection alongside ghostly possession. Ghost and disease blur together here. Why, then, does Symonds use the spectral figure of possession – another’s voice inhabiting / speaking through “his” – to narrate a queer relation to / relating of the “past”? Carla Freccero has proposed a theory of “queer spectrality.” In *Queer/early/modern*, Freccero describes “intertextuality” as a mode of “intra- and intertemporal articulation.”<sup>216</sup> Citing words from other times allows the writing of temporally-disjointed individuals to touch, rubbing against each other, in a textual present. Queer time, Freccero argues, is marked by desire, identification and anachronism. Rather than tut-tutting such trans-temporal practices as ahistorical, Freccero asserts that some individuals’ relation to history is not guided by “a presumed logic of the ‘done-ness’ of the past”:

I do argue for the possibility that reading historically may mean reading against what is conventionally referred to as history. Not only do I make use of

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<sup>214</sup> Lucey, 1997, 194

<sup>215</sup> Lucey, 1997, 194

<sup>216</sup> Carla Freccero, *Queer/early/modern* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2006) 4-5.

intertextuality, a mode of figural intra- and intertemporal articulation that might be called ‘literary’ rather than historical, but I also invoke identification and one of its common effects, anachronism, as two intimately related and hallowed temporal processes that make up -- like and along with desire -- queer time. These analyses proceed [...] otherwise than according to a presumed logic of the ‘done-ness’ of the past, since queer time is haunted by the persistence of affect and ethical imperatives in and across time.<sup>217</sup>

By “reading historically,” Freccero means an individual sifting through the past from a moment that, according to a sequential telling of time, is long after that historical moment. By “history,” Freccero is referring to a progressive notion of time that sees in the a domain of “then” separated from the present terrain of “now.” Because the relaying of history is a textual practice built in no small part on reading, questions of desire and identification—trademarks of readerly response—must also be considered. This is especially true, Freccero states, of any relaying of queer time. Queer readers, moreover, can often have a vexed relation to the past, wondering who in other ages experienced desires like theirs and what those lives were like.

It is true that Symonds’ erotically-charged invocation of *Lues* lets him index a genealogy that temporally predates his current “I.” And yet, because autobiography is relayed here as the *side effect* of Symonds’ reading—his contagious contiguity with others’ words—the queer kin / kindred queers convoked might better be understood as figures for the affect spawned (feeling proximate to long-dead authors) via the act of reading. Figures, that is, of texts’ ability to “affect” readers and in turn “effect” future textual production. Male-male intimacy, relayed via the metaphor of infection, results in a sort of queer reproductivity; in using the term reproductivity here, I intend to play with its double significance, meaning both something made again (re-produced) and propagation across the generations. Insofar as the *transmission* of stories / knowledge / forms is discussed without reference to heterosexual reproduction, Symonds’ *Lues* queers ruling metaphors of textual generativity.

Contact between men, even if only a booklover imagining to “touch” a (parallel) writer / moment via reading, generates something at once familiar (a life story modeled after prior texts) and distinct (“my” peculiar tale). This generativity is also queer (odd) because it imagines reproductivity via death and ghosting—not just, that is, via life-giving gestation (parent → child → parent → child). Spectral possession, as literary trope, is often linked with a fateful contact—touching a possessed object, entering a haunting space, brushing against a haunted individual. Possession, in other words, is related to being in *physical* proximity to a ghost-imbued place or person. Like the transmission of affect, it is about an outside influence physiologically and psychologically getting inside of individuals who, in practice, did not originally produce whatever has now altered them. Illnesses, similarly, can spread from one individual to the next after a disease has exited (or even killed) the “original” site of infection. Disease has a life that, while “originating” in one person, might henceforth affect (and infect) others.

The double-sign of ghost and illness makes sense when read in context. Symonds’ invocation of *Lues* takes place when he is discussing textual production and readerly reception. Texts can outlive their point of origin (the author / hand / era when

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<sup>217</sup> Freccero, 2006, 4-5.

they were created). Because the figure of *Lues* collapses *textual* transmission across time into *sexual* intimacy, I suggest that illness is a queerly generative—spectrally reproductive—metaphor for Symonds. Anachronistic affect and contagion are intimately laced to each other in Symonds' word choice. Contagion here does not end a life. Rather, it represents the (contaminated) beginning of "his" story — an autobiography affected, touched, and generated by contact with prior "I"s. Beyond allowing the Briton to imagine a relationship with a past that still lives on inside him, *Lues* lets him envision the affect his own writing might yet have on future readers. Texts have a "lifespan" different from that of their authors. Symonds knows that once he "translates" his life into an inked "I" split from his body that his story might outlive the alleged end to the author's story — death.

As something that can pass itself on after the originally "infected" person's death, illness is a convenient metaphor for texts' ability to influence—inhabit, touch, live through— audiences in some far-off future. Autobiography is undertaken precisely because the author aims to "ghost" himself through writing, persisting on as a textual trace after the non-textual self dies. Once transfigured into text, the authorial "I" might find an audience who, via reading, will let his voice (now emanating from the past) speak (once again) in and to that reader's present (the text's future / afterlife). Contagion is also deployed as a figure of the affective "afterlife" of the autobiography — what feelings the text might continue to *generate* once the living Symonds has died. Through it, Symonds imagines his text continuing to touch others long after his death. Through it, Symonds imagines touching a future not knowable in the present of writing. For his text to speak in and to a future, though, the future needs *another* subject -- a person receptive to reading, identifying with and recognizing his words.<sup>218</sup>

Anachronism here is a *means* to feeling historical — linking an individual's life story to an imagined genealogy that precedes this telling and will, subsequently, proceed (persists after) the same individual's lifetime. As an "affect," this feeling of relating to a past (and many pasts) is, however, thinkable only from this person's singular present. Anachronism, then, is a relation to a "past" that persists as an affect in the present. and can, indeed, affect the individual's notion of his present. Reading, which for Symonds

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<sup>218</sup> The reader imagined by Symonds is not just any reader. It is an erudite reader capable of deciphering coded references and intertextual hints. Intriguingly, reticence is a central strategy of queer intertextuality: a gesture toward a text / a work / a writer outside of the present literary work that still declines to *directly* name that "outside" as homosexual. Readers "in-the-know" pick up on the reference. In recent years, this has involved writers or filmmakers coyly reworking the language / plots / names of other queer texts, entangling the present work and the previous ones. In other moments, coded references were a way to name the homoerotic while evading the recognition of phobic readers. Semi-opaque referents, like an allusion to Ganymede or to Plato's *Phaedrus*, have been a source of in-group recognition. Existing somewhere between legible silence and articulated illegibility, they speak in coded murmurs. Depending on the reader, such referents may be a clarion call that situates the current work in relation to an extra-textual chain of queer textuality or an unnoticed turn-of-phrase. Opacity to some is legible to others. Reticence, by requiring a deciphering interpreter, can actually produce *feelings* of filiation in those readers who recognize the extra-textual references. The pleasure of recognition is a reminder of a queer realm (and past) beyond the present utterance, a world of other tales that tell stories of others "like me." *I* see that *I* am part of a "community" of shared referents -- signs that some, indeed, may never notice. The affective response -- a silent shudder of recognition -- emerges from those cues occluded enough to need an interpretant. Because that interpretant is not just any reader but a reader presumed to *share* a set of common referents and in-group terms, the instance of "recognition" can reaffirm feelings of group filiation.

functions as a point of origin for his autobiographical tale, elicits an affective response to a time that, although certainly “done” in the sequential sense of the term, still *does* something for his present.

Claiming that those voices spoke through his translator’s pen, Symonds is—in effect—also saying that they spoke *to* him. To dismiss such imagined filiations as false because ahistorical -- that is that they presume a continuity that ignores major conceptual shifts in the notions of self / sexuality between then and now -- is to, partially, miss the point. It does not address how anachronistic identifications —feeling or imagining an affinity across time— can represent a sort of survival strategy, a necessary fiction and reading practice, for queers for have felt omitted from more heteronormative accounts of history. Believing in affinity that cuts across time *does* something for a person who, for much of his life, found deciphered few desires like his in the tales-of-the-self currently en vogue. Of course, belief does not make this affinity a historical fact. It does generate, however, very real effects/affects at the phenomenological level. Anachronism, reading oneself into a bygone epoch, expresses a *desire* for filiations. As readerly response and textual invocation, it seeks to suture what has already come to pass —history— with what, now, feels like a solitary story of difference.

Fluctuation between reader and writer is not, however, unique to the translator. It is a feature of the autobiographical form. In “A Theory of Autobiography,” Louis A. Renza discusses “the reader self-effacing participation” in autobiographical narratives.<sup>219</sup> By that, he means that, when reading a first-person text about/by someone else, the reader becomes “more or less coincident with the writing self as he [sic] reads the work.”<sup>220</sup> Autobiography invites readers to engage with another person’s life all while ‘seducing’ them into identifying with the “I” on the page. Readers almost come to see themselves as the “actor” in another person’s first-person tale. Factual references to foreign people, places and events (the details of the author’s life), at the same time, let readers know they are not the subject being narrated even when they are drawn to the textual “I.”

In addition to compelling readers to align themselves with the narrating “I,” autobiography also demands that the author, supposedly the life story’s principal *subject*, translate him-/her- self into biographical object. Once written, the “I” becomes a reproducible trace, split henceforth from the non-textual self it is said to signify. For these reasons, even when Symonds *writes* an “I” that refers only to himself, no longer channeling the first persons inhabited in his translations, he does not evoke an autonomous subject on the page. To be recognized as subject, the autobiographical “I” must first become legible (to others and to the writer) as object. It must find a reader willing to believe that the textual mark, the printed “I,” is the same as the person whose name graces the cover. Autobiography, in sum, invites the reader to recognize the textual object, the “I” repeated in writing, as a speaking subject. Allegedly just “my” life, autobiography requires an intersubjective relation between text and reader.

In sum, Symonds begins his life story by describing 1) his affectively charged response to *reading* other memoirs and 2) his self as hermeneutic *reader* of his own life. Thematically, his autobiography articulates Symonds’ wrestling and coming-to-terms with same-sex feelings and longings. Given the text’s queer content, citing Cellini and

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<sup>219</sup> See James Olney, ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 272.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid*, 272

Gozzi as predecessors / antecedents is no accident. Cellini's *Vita* (life story) and Gozzi's *Memorie* (memoir / memories) both explicitly present their author's sexual escapades – “bisexual” (albeit sodomical) in the case of Cellini and with women in Gozzi's text. However, Symonds does more than draw attention to the presence of eros and homo/sexuality in earlier autobiographies. He depicts *reading* – his own reading of works by Cellini, Michelangelo, Gozzi, Dante, Walt Whitman and Ancient Greek poets – as an act imbued with *desire*.

Representing his response to such temporally and generically disparate texts, Symonds limns himself as a subject who has *read* similitude, a fictive affiliation, *into* works penned in other times, places and tongues.<sup>221</sup> Dwelling on the act of reading at the start of his autobiography lets Symonds frame the ensuing first-person account as a thing “generated” *in relation to* other textual “I”s and forms. Autobiography is made to articulate not just the writing down of an individual life but, significantly, has become a form through which its writer relates a readerly *desire* for life stories “like” his own. What happened during the author's life is only part of t/his story. As central to its telling, Symonds highlights, are the other stories in which he came to see some resemblance of his self. Here, the adoption of a textual first-person hinges on a chain of “preceding” first-person accounts—an imagined genealogy—desired and conjured in/via the writing subject's present.

Autobiography tells itself as the enunciation of an “I” that is itself a citation of the “I”s that others, before his life, had used. Thus, Symonds presents an “I” that, from the outset, looks “beyond” his singular life's events for kinship and formal inspiration. Ostensibly an unmediated relaying of the *subject's* life, autobiography ironically asks its practitioners to use a textual product, a crafted and revised literary *object*, as the expression of a life free from dissimulation or self-serving revisions. In interpreting his/her own “life,” the autobiographical “I” ceases to be simply s/he-who-writes. The narrator also becomes s/he-who-reads *meaning* into life's events, imagining order – a beginning, middle and end – in life's otherwise plot-less happenings. Endowed with hermeneutic hindsight, the “elder” writing self comes to script significance onto the “younger” self's seemingly senseless (illegible) deeds. In autobiographical texts, the narrating “I” is made to signify a life's diachronic subject (I = a child → a teenager → an adult) and its synchronic reader (I who, now, make sense of the prior moments).

All along, though, the narrator indexes (points “outside”) a “past” accessible – both to him and to the readers – only *through* and *in* the present narration. “Prior” life events are on the one hand told from a point of recollection that postdates when those events actually took place. The “past” can, indeed, be told only afterwards. And yet,

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<sup>221</sup> Graham Robb, author of *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century*, has argued that “‘gay literature’ if such a thing existed, was not just literature produced by gay writers or devoted to the subject of homosexuality. It was also the body of writing in which gay men and women discovered themselves, regardless of the author's intentions or sexuality” (225). Leaving aside the appropriateness of using the term “gay” in reference to the late 1800s, Robb's point is worth dwelling on. Whether in response to Plato, sexological essays, Renaissance art or exoticized locales, numerous “inverts” and “homosexuals” came to *believe* their desires and lives were refracted back to them in other stories / images / places. This subjective response, *feeling* close to something / someone / somewhere that is not “me,” should be in part differentiated from the cultural objects produced by self-identifying homosexuals (inverts, Sapphists, Uranists, etc). Reading homoeroticism into objects from other times and places was an integral part of numerous nineteenth century homosexuals' development of a sense of self.

relayed from a here-and-now, it is also always an effect of the *present*. The narration of the “past,” however, also invokes a textual present with its own forward-moving and backwards-looking temporality. Invoked by autobiography, then, is both a sequential chronology (life as forward moving plot) and the very confusion of past and present (“I” tell it now). Limning the “past” as a thing that, *now*, “I” can finally tell lets the autobiographical “I” instantiate itself as hermeneutic reader (temporally distanced from the earlier self) *and* the actor who, in the text’s (present) plot, does those “earlier” deeds. Readers in turn must accept the preface’s narrating “I” as discrete from the person speaking in the “early” life and as a constant referent – signifying the same person throughout this life.

His memoir does not just thematize the events of his “life” but also explicitly discusses the form chosen, the moments highlighted and the (literary) antecedents envisioned. To make life’s unordered events into a legible story, Symonds describes a man who has become the “writer” of his own life. In interpreting the actions and desires and thoughts of that same life, Symonds-the-writer figures himself moreover as he-who-reads his life. And yet, autobiography’s predictable subject-as-writer and the writer-as-reader leitmotifs are not sufficient for the yarn Symonds spins here—a tale about a his search for *other* stories (other “I”s) in which the narrating “I” came to “find”—and, eventually, tell – its self. Generically, autobiographies tend to excuse their self-centered tales as the telling of an extraordinary life. Symonds’ memoir, however, narrates his desire to feel that his experiencing of same-sex longings (affect, desire, attraction, love) is *not unique -- no solitary* event. Quite anachronistically, he wants to believe it is a thing legible across the centuries and across various genres.

For Symonds, the telling of his lone life is an act already affixed to other first persons. It is for this reason that Symonds’ begins his autobiography by eschewing a fable of autonomous textual creation. Queerly, he begins his story by exploding the distance between the current “I” (purportedly the mark of his singularity) and the “I”s uttered—invoked, that is—in the intertexts he names. Rather than limiting himself to conflating the written “I” and the living author, his “auto-” biography, confesses its “I”s’ patchwork reliance on *others’* far-flung life stories. Once internalized (by the writing subject and in the text), these indexed accounts affirm that the “singular” events narrated by the autobiographical “I” is no solo experience. Symonds’ “I” is inhabited by—licensed, contaminated and sustained—by other “I”s. At the level of affect, those “I”s are felt poignantly close and, written in other eras/places, tantalizingly distant.

Anachronistic affect, feeling closer to a time other than “my” own, is a queer survival strategy. Rather than outright rejecting this move for presuming a historically invariable sexual subject, I read Symonds’ willful anachronism as a strategic fiction that articulates a readerly longing for “my” story to be a part of “our” story. To dismiss anachronistic affect for being, well, anachronistic is to miss the point. What is the affective effect—the performative work achieved—when a subject imagines lives parallel to “mine” in another time and place? What critiques of the present are voiced through self-consciously anachronistic identification? Anachronism here expresses a desire--a desire for history or to be part of story legible across time. Although Symonds identifies with times/places/texts that have little in common with his *fin de siècle* existence, he is not declaring that “my” life and “their” lives are in, actuality, identical. Identification is as a present *response* that insists on relating to—on intimate relations with—the past.

Earlier accounts are felt integral to the telling of “his” story and, received as voices from another time, also considered “outside” the present writing. Neither fully “I”/“mine” nor “they”/“their,” other first person accounts are cited as sites of abject (dis)identification – a “not me” around which “my” self comes to cohere.<sup>222</sup> Naming proximity to “I”s from another age, Symonds begins his autobiography by displaying, not occluding, the *discontinuity* between the “I” of writerly performance and the first person(s) John Addington Symonds adopted during his life.<sup>223</sup> This move lets the writer recognize his text as a verbal enactment, a thing crafted with words, while assigning to that same textual performance a “truthfulness” that not even the living Symonds gets to claim. On the surface, autobiography relies on the “facts” of the author’s life to endow it with “veracity” different from, say, the novel. Symonds states that in these memoirs “I have written veraciously concerning myself” (29). But it is precisely autobiography’s presumed difference from the living author’s everyday speech, when in theory he might have omitted certain events or lied, that convinces readers that the textual first person gives them a less censored—more candid—accounting of the author’s life.

A thing as constructed (plotted, penned and revised) as autobiographical writing is, thus, thought to make up for the self-censoring lapses that the non-textual self (the “real” Symonds) may have engaged in<sup>224</sup>. In this way, autobiography can claim to be at once text *and* truth, fabricated *and* factual, crafted *and* revealing. Indeed, autobiography promises the reader a truer “I”—a subject stripped of self-protecting evasions—on its pages. Presumably the reporting of a “real” life (as opposed to fictional characters), autobiography is also assumed to correct the everyday “fictions” people tell. Its truth claims, then, rely on a split conception of “real” life, understood simultaneously as less false than fiction *and* more discordant with truth telling than what the textual “I” can say. Symonds’ text promises the reader access to truths hardly uttered in his life. At the same time, in highlighting his need for other first-person accounts, Symonds’ autobiography insists that his “I” alone could never fully account for his queer sense of self.

Articulated is a subject contradicted, promising to bare himself in writing and troubling autobiography’s constitutive fiction – that reading/writing might give us (and the author) unmediated access to the “entirety” of an individual life. More than narrating

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<sup>222</sup> José Muñoz in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* explores the formation of queer counter publics. Responding to certain queer-inflected performances and texts permits the audience, “often a queer who has been locked out of the halls of representation or rendered static there, to imagine a world where queer lives, politics, and possibilities are representable in their complexity” (1). Muñoz calls this a “disidentification” with the toxic representations of gays, lesbians and queers. It is not an erasure of the stereotype but, rather, an inhabiting that evacuates the stereotype from the inside out of its phobic punch. To disidentify means “to read oneself and one’s own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to ‘connect’ with the disidentifying subject” (12). José Muñoz, *Disidentifications* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>223</sup> In the preface, for instance, Symonds distinguishes between the “I” of his autobiography and “the author of *Renaissance in Italy* and *Studies of the Greek Poets*” (29); the “I” populating the ensuing pages is, by implication, distinct from the “I” that the “same” John Addington Symonds published in his essays and historical writings.

<sup>224</sup> I am not saying that I believe autobiography actually gives us a “less censored” or more “complete” account of the self. Rather, as per Rousseau, the text (imagined as a thing to be published posthumously) is presented as less interested in dissimulation / evasion / omission than the living subject’s day-to-day first person. Its “truth” hinges on a contrast with what the daily “I” is thought to omit.

his self (*auto*) or life (*bio*), Symonds describes his dependence on other life writings (*graph*). Autobiography is for Symonds an act *derived*, as intersubjective as it is intrasubjective.<sup>225</sup> What it is not is a task undertaken by a fully-formed and self-sufficient subject. How are *other* author's "I"s invoked, cited and mobilized in order to endow his own with legitimacy? This longing for stories—this mining of far-flung times, places and genres for lives felt akin to mine—makes Symonds' "homosexual" autobiography queer. It is no victorious "coming out" tale, exposing his "true" self to the world at large; rather, it articulates the multiple enactments, neither true nor mendacious, undertaken by his "I" during his lifetime. Symonds' search for other/others' queer tales, however, draws him to places and texts "far" from his country of origin and mother tongue.

Other tales speak to (and through) him, contaminating and constituting the "I" performed on the page. Such a phantasmatic and fantasized kinship with people/texts from and about other times is willfully—*unabashedly*—anachronistic. It is a resemblance felt backwards across time that, nevertheless, gets summoned via the here-and-now of writing and reading. In locating its conception in other texts (not in the "facts" of Symonds' life), Symonds' memoir frames the life subsequently narrated as a textual act -- a literary performance of an "I." Instead of claiming a literal homology between the "I" inking the page and the living author, what we might call autobiography's foundational sleight-of-hand, Symonds "outs" his book as a thing written and not born, produced and not reproduced. By extension, Symonds muddies the continuity between the person called John Addington Symonds and the "I" inhabiting the page. If anything, the main likeness—a sort of felt proximity—that gets imagined here is between Symonds' words and the Italian texts written before his *bio* or *graph* began.

Scholars of the autobiographical form have noted that, in addition to its fixation on and fashioning of the (author's) "past," autobiographies often imagine posterity – what happens to the text after the author's death. Posterity is both a source of dread (the author can no longer revise / direct the words bound to his/her name) and desire (someone might appreciate "my" work, even if only after "I" die). Symonds' work is no exception. Actively choosing not to publish his memoirs during his lifetime, Symonds envisions in his preface an itinerant reader someday stumbling across this current "self-delineation": "Someone, per adventure, will discover it; and if he is a friend, will shed perhaps a tear at the thought of what these lines have cost me – if he is a scientific student of humanity will appreciate my effort to be sincere in the dictation of a document – if he be but a fellow creature will feel some thrill of pity, and will respect the record of a soul who has still to settle its account with God."<sup>226</sup>

Like in his letter to Dakyn, Symonds imagines the possibility of multiple future readers, some phobic and some friendly. In addition to metaphorizing a queer desire for intimacy with previous historical moments and individuals, the corporeal /

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<sup>225</sup> For a discussion on intersubjectivity, see: David J. Getsy's "Recognizing the Homoerotic: Uses of Intersubjectivity in John Addington Symonds' 1887 Essays on Art." *Visual Culture in Britain* 8.1 (Spring 2007): 37-57. Symonds' essays on Michelangelo and Renaissance art, Getsy claims, "outline a theoretical justification for the role of individual desire in art-making and art viewing" (37). The historian of art reads the effects of the artist's desires in the work of art *and* that historian brings his own desires to the act of viewing. This duality is akin to Symonds' notion of reading, which is both a subjective undertaking (what I feel when I read) and an intersubjective act (I touch you; you touch me).

<sup>226</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 30.

decorporealized figure of *Lues* also helps Symonds narrate the posterity—the afterlife one might say—of his current text. Keeping this in mind, it is not enough to discuss *Lues* as simply the figure for the author’s impending death. How is queer memory thought to transmit itself and to be passed down? How might the transmission of queer affect over time – including someone feeling something for a long-dead person born in a time / place far away – make recourse to metaphors that shy from heterosexual reproductivity? What images of queer reproductivity might instead be referenced?

I have thus far argued that it is important to understand the affective work that the *felt filiations* with other times/place do for the queer reading subject. Why might certain readers want to see queer ties as part of a lineage – textual, affective, historical -- that extends deep into the past? In “recognizing” queer content in others’ tales and then citing it within his own memoir, might this reader come to see his solitary story as part of a chain of referents predating his life? Does intertextuality produce feelings of recognition and filiations in certain readers that, while often quite ahistorical, sustain the imagining and narration of queer subjectivity? Could this desire for an “us” drive the textual *production* of a “we” that, retroactively, is thought to somehow precede the story that actually produces it as an effect? Since those earlier texts/events/individuals (the stuff of that “we”) must be relayed via the autobiography’s current “I,” that “before” never fully exists outside or anterior to the autobiographer’s own narration.

Simply because belief in that “we” is produced as an effect of narration -- an intratextual fiction imagined “beyond” and “before” the text -- does not mean that these fictions cease to shape the subject’s present sense of self. Fictitious belonging, an avowedly anachronistic practice, do have -- at the level of feeling and identification -- very real effect in that subject’s here-and-now. It is the dependence of this subject on people / words / texts *felt* both a part of “me” and apart from “me” – inside “my” story and predating its utterance – that drives Symonds’ to turn to metaphors of (sexual) contagion. In the figure of *Lues*, he is able to queer reproductivity (Syphilis can reproduce between men), invoke erotic intimacy with subjects with whom he has found affinity (he is infected by contact with their words) and feel like he has touched and been touched by the past (the origin of this infection long predates his own life).

Transmitted and reproduced across time, infections like syphilis serve Symonds here to narrate feelings of affiliation and the desire to touch the past and infect – contact, that is -- readers unknowable in his present. Rather than seeing Symonds’ mentioning of a sexually transmitted disease (*Lues*) as a sign of fin-de-siècle pathologizing of homosexuality, I propose to read it as a metaphor of queer affiliation – feeling linked, including the possibility of an erotic connection, to men from another age and place. *Lues*, then, would signify not just the risks of the sexual – the possibility of becoming infected with a terminal illness – but the historical feelings opened up by the sexual and the sexual feelings opened in by the relaying of a queer past. Both in reading and in sleeping with other men, Symonds acknowledges the possibility of a chain of intimacy – a line, a lineage, a genealogy – extending through time, predating his own life and quite possibly persisting after his own death.

Commonly understood as the telling of “my” singular and exceptional tale, autobiography here rubs against queers’ desire for a sense of self that *feels* less solitary. How, then, do the generic demands of autobiography (my tale = unique enough to tell/read) snarl together with the desire for a shared, commonly experienced, story? Might

this desire for an “us” drive the textual production of a “we” that, retroactively, is thought to somehow *precede* the story that actually produces it as an effect? Since earlier texts/events/individuals (the stuff of that “we”) must be relayed via the autobiography’s *current* I, that “before” never fully exists outside or anterior to the text’s narration. And yet, simply because belief in that “we” is produced as an effect of narration -- an *intratextual* fiction imagined “beyond” and “before” the text -- does not mean that such fictions cease to shape the subject’s present sense of self. Fictitious belonging, an avowedly anachronistic practice, can have -- at the level of feeling and identification -- very real effects.

Might “ahistoricism” -- the imagining of continuities across different times -- be a central strategy in queers’ narration (and imagination) of “others like me”? Can certain writer’s insistence on citing a “shared” tradition be read not just as a sloppy historical elision but, more productively, as a strategy of queers’ feeling historical – imagining, via reading, a recognizable line legible across time? Even when the reader/subject knows that this “continuity” is a necessary fiction—imaginable perhaps only through fiction—what does this imagined contiguity do for the reader’s present? This infectious smudging of past and present, subject and object, “me” and “you” happens for Symonds both in the erotic realm and in the eros-rife space of reading. It is for these reasons that *Lues*, which is both a sexually-transmitted sickness called by an archaic name *and* a disease capable of ghostly possession, names Symonds’ relation with and relating of the past.

Infected in his present, Symonds still presumes that, via contagious contact with these authors’ text, he might yet contact a past desirously distinct from his here-and-now. Encountered via reading and translation, the Italian men’s echoes are re-transmitted—textually reproduced, that is—in and through Symonds’ body and tongue— like sickness reproducing itself outside its site of origin, like a ghost that speaks through a body not its own. While blurring the distance between then and here, those voices never quite fuse into one indistinct entity. One may enter into another, transforming it through contact, but Symonds is not Cellini, Cellini is not Symonds. And, indeed, it is the persistent belief in this difference—my “now” does not equal your “then”—that underwrites Symonds’ continued desire for contamination. Difference underwrites, queerly enough, his ahistorical feelings of akinship.

## 2) Dante and Deviance

This chapter agrees with Robert Aldrich that Europe’s imaginary topography was also split along a North-South axis.<sup>227</sup> The “South,” for many northern European travelers, is a place where male-male sexuality, instead of being deviant, is thought endemic, easy to come by and goes largely ignored. . In *The Seduction of the Mediterranean*, Robert Aldrich states that “the writers and artists who lived in the Mediterranean created and perpetuated the myth of the homoerotic South, conflating ancient and modern images” (x). Seen in this light, the “South” is both an actual place – composed of real sites – and an idealized “elsewhere” where one hopes to bypass the norms of home.

Italy holds a central place in northern Europeans textual and artistic mapping of same-sex desire. Writing in this genre is nourished by the illusion that Italy, a land

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<sup>227</sup> See Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

littered with ancient Greek and Roman ruins, is a bridge between a pederastic past and the modern age. This homoerotic imaginary sees Italy both as a distant point of origin – a time/place where male-male love was exalted – and a current destination. Many men went to Italy, enticed by the promise of reliving the past in the present. Italy is the place where appetites once exalted might once again be indulged.

In his essay *Amalfi, Paestum, Capri*, John Addington Symonds describes the “mythopoeic” lure of the southern Italian landscape:

It was thus, we feel, upon these southern shores that the gods of Greece came into being. The statues in the temples were the true fine flower of all this beauty, the culmination of the poetry which it evoked in the hearts that feel and brains that think. In Italy, far more than in any other part of Europe, the life of the present is imposed upon the strata of successive past lives. Greek, Latin, Moorish, and mediaeval civilizations have arisen, flourished, and decayed on nearly the same soil. It is common enough to find one city, which may have perished twenty centuries ago, neighbour to another that enjoyed its brief prosperity in the middle of our era.<sup>228</sup>

According to Symonds, the Greeks, inspired by “what is wonderful in nature,” endowed the natural world with “all their pent-up longings, all passions that consume, all inspirations that inflame – the desire for the impossible, which is disease, the day-dreams and visions of night.”<sup>229</sup> Greek art, their sculptures of the gods, is the synthesis of human passion and the beauty inhering in nature. Symonds ponders all this while actually in southern Italy, where he sees the vestiges of Hellas and other ages surviving side by side. Beyond the man-made traces, though, Symonds sees in “these southern shores” the land that inspired the birth of the Greeks’ gods.

But Italy, not Greece, incarnates the “borderland” between modernity and the past and between “pent-up longings” and passions “translated into radiant beings.”<sup>230</sup> In the same essay, Symonds paints southern Italy as synonymous with homoerotic imagery. “Everywhere the naked boys, like brown sea-urchins, burrow in the clean warm sand, or splash the shallow brine.”<sup>231</sup> Naked boys are in his view an autochthonous species, emerging from southern Italy’s waters. In Italy, the visitor might glimpse “bare-legged fishermen [...] and naked boys bask[ing] like lizards in the sun.”<sup>232</sup> Landscape under Symonds’ pen is denuded, described as “naked rock.”<sup>233</sup> Nature, what once inspired the Greeks’ “desire for the impossible,” is here transposed onto Symonds’ descriptions of nude youths and scantily clad men. “Bare-chested macaroni makers crowd forth like ants to see us strangers pass.”<sup>234</sup> Male beauty and southern Italy’s soil and fauna merge into the same vision.

For some same-sex tourists who traveled to the Mediterranean, *Wanderlust* and nostalgia for a bygone were one and the same. Same-sex tourists visiting Italy often framed their experiences with local boys, adolescents and men in terms of Greek and Roman myths. When these men wrote about a homoerotic Italy the often-coded

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<sup>228</sup> John Addington Symonds, *Sketches and Studies in Italy* (London: Smith Elder, 1879) 11-12.

<sup>229</sup> Symonds, *ibid*, 11

<sup>230</sup> Symonds, *ibid*, 11

<sup>231</sup> Symonds, *ibid*, 8

<sup>232</sup> Symonds, *ibid*, 2

<sup>233</sup> Symonds, *ibid*, 2

<sup>234</sup> Symonds, *ibid*, 2

vocabulary at their disposal was inherited and abridged, sharing a consistent set of images: the statuesque nude, athletic youths reminiscent of the Greek gymnasium, muscular adolescents with sun-bronzed skin, references to Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, abundant allusions to Antinous, Ganymede, Adonis, Bacchus and other Greco-Roman deities, and citations of erotically-charged sculptures or narratives from classical times and the Italian Renaissance.<sup>235</sup> "In this way," Aldrich claims, "the South as visited by northerners became a reincarnation of Antiquity, a classical theater in which they cast themselves as heroic actors. The visitors, modeling themselves on the ancients, were philosophers and kings, while the Italian youth were athletes, warriors, students and cup-bearers."<sup>236</sup>

These allusions frame the same-sex tourist's pre-departure expectations of Italy, delimiting the imagery he banks on finding there. Vis-à-vis nineteenth-century scholarly treatises on Renaissance art, Italy came to be seen as the place that gave rise to a renewed exaltation of male beauty and the male nude. There, a rebirth of the "Greek spirit" took place in relatively modern times.<sup>237</sup> As a must-see stopping point on the Grand Tour, Italy had long been linked in the British imagination with young men's sexual coming of age and outright prostitution.<sup>238</sup> Southern Italy, moreover, was often represented as the edge of Europe, where occidental civilization gives way to the oriental excess.<sup>239</sup>

Italy promised at once a return to antiquity, a first-hand encounter with art that exalted male beauty and a land tantalizingly close to the orient. Same-sex tourism can be seen as a willed estrangement from home, where sex between men is imagined as limited by familial obligations, oppressive laws and social opprobrium. The fantasy of a foreign land where homosexuality is more widespread and heteronormativity appears displaced, in turn, can be seen as the quest for a new "home" somewhere else.<sup>240</sup> English

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<sup>235</sup> Robert Aldrich comments that "homosexual longing, and the portrayal of it, has been obliged to assume a greater or lesser degree of coding or outright disguise until very recent times. [...] [Classical statuary or homoerotic myths...] provided vehicles for paintings evoking homoerotic desire, especially since majority social attitudes forbade more direct representation." Aldrich, *Seduction of the Mediterranean*, 7

<sup>236</sup> Aldrich, *Seduction of the Mediterranean*, 167

<sup>237</sup> Will Fischer has argued that both John Addington Symonds' and Walter Pater's "invention" of the Italian Renaissance, an epoch that purportedly took pleasure in and exalted the male form, "legitimated the newly emergent notion of the homosexual" (42). Symonds' depictions of the Renaissance, Fischer claims, legitimated the homosexual by aligning a moment of artistic and literary production with overt homoeroticism. Indeed, Symonds wrote, "it was due again in great measure to their demand for imaginative excitement in all matters of the sense, to their desire for the extravagant and extraordinary as a seasoning of pleasure, that the Italians came to deserve so terrible a name among the nations for unnatural passions" (qtd. in Fischer, 46). By painting this "unnatural" passion at the heart of the artistic culture of the Renaissance, Symonds "naturalizes" homosexuality for his present moment. Will Fischer, "The Sexual Politics of Victorian Historiographical Writing about the Renaissance." *GLQ* 14.1 (2007): 41-66.

<sup>238</sup> John Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* (1851-1853) compares the city to a woman "drunk with the wine of her fornication." Venice, Ruskin writes, is consumed "by the inner burnings of her own passions, as fatal and fiery as the fiery rain of Gomorrah" (qtd. in Fischer, 43).

<sup>239</sup> For a thorough discussion of orientalizing representations of southern Italy, see: Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and Italy's Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>240</sup> Most recent Symonds scholars have paid attention to the Victorian narrative strategies structuring his memoirs. None has discussed the Italian narrative models (Dante, Cellini, Gozzi and Michelangelo) that also inflect and, one might say, "infect" his autobiography.

intellectual John Addington Symonds traveled through Italy – both literally and through Italian literature – on one such quest.

Before turning to Italian territory, a brief detour through ancient Greece via England is necessary. In his posthumously published autobiography, John Addington Symonds does not locate his soul's "home" in England.<sup>241</sup> He may have been born and raised there, but he says his soul resides in "Hellas." Symonds stresses that was able to resist the "crude sensuality" and "animalisms of boyish lust" that his male classmates indulged in by "the gradual unfolding in myself of an ideal passion which corresponded to Platonic love."<sup>242</sup> In Symonds' retelling, this passion did not arise either from literary contamination, reading a suggestive text that seduced him into homosexuality, or from sexual play with schoolmates. "While I was at school, I remained free in fact and act from this contamination. During my first half year the 'beasts,' as they were playfully called, tried to seduce me. [...] I was not game," he writes.<sup>243</sup>

It instead "sprang up spontaneously proving that my thought was lodged in ancient Hellas."<sup>244</sup> His desire for other young men, not textual or sexual proximity, motivates his erotic fancies. Ancient literature and mythology, Symonds claims, "awoke the Greek in me."<sup>245</sup> Imagining young Apollo among the shepherds, he writes that "his divine beauty penetrated my soul and marrow."<sup>246</sup> His childhood yearning for sailors' bodies assumed in Apollo "an objective and idealized form."<sup>247</sup> Fantasies of Adonis, Hermes and Apollo allow Symonds to distance his "cravings" from the other students' "animal lust" and "shamelessly priapic" conduct.<sup>248</sup>

Reading himself into classical myths, Symonds presents his desire as beyond brute corporeality and originating instead from "some deeper fountains of eternal longing in my soul."<sup>249</sup> This desire, he claims, was born in Hellas and, unbeknownst to him at the time, allied with Platonic love.<sup>250</sup> Through "aesthetic idealization of erotic instincts," Symonds admits he sought to expel from his nature the "appetites" in which the so-called "beasts" had "unthinkingly indulged."<sup>251</sup> Symonds' language repeatedly aligns bodily sexuality with animalistic hunger. One boy has a "Satyric exterior" and another is called "a good-natured longimanous ape, gibbering on his perch and playing ostentatiously with a prodigiously developed phallus."<sup>252</sup>

Describing a fellow student, E. Dering, who attracted him, Symonds says "his body was powerful, muscular, lissome as a tiger. The fierce and cruel lust of this magnificent animal excited my imagination."<sup>253</sup> Via this description Symonds

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<sup>241</sup> Phyllis Grosskurth, ed. *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds: The Secret Homosexual Life of a Leading Nineteenth-Century Man of Letters*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1984.

<sup>242</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 96

<sup>243</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 95

<sup>244</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 96

<sup>245</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 73.

<sup>246</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 74

<sup>247</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 75

<sup>248</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 94

<sup>249</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 74

<sup>250</sup> For a discussion of homosexuality and Greek classicism at Oxford, see: Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>251</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 96

<sup>252</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 94-95

<sup>253</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 95

externalizes his own yearnings onto his classmate: he, not Symonds, hungers for flesh. Incarnated into the image of a tiger, lust is an at once voracious and alluring predator. Animal adjectives are not the only terms Symonds deploys to depict E. Dering. “He resembled a handsome Greek brigand in face. I remember noticing a likeness to his features in the photographs of one of the decapitated Marathon cut-throats.”<sup>254</sup>

Attraction to another male inevitably provokes allusions to Greece. But here, unlike his idealized fantasies of Apollo or Adonis, Dering is represented as an outlaw. His handsome head, the first part of his body Symonds opts to depict, has been effectively cut off from any earlier reference to the mytho-poetic and ideal male forms of ancient Greece. Dering’s contaminating lust, which metonymically stands in for Symonds, at least for now must be severed from Symonds’ “aesthetic idealizations” of male love. The lust E. Dering excites in Symonds, for now, is quarantined to the animal kingdom.

Those who engage in sexual acts are called “beasts,” whose “animalisms” threaten to devour and sully Symonds’ ideal desire or, more ominously, infect him and make him one of them. Only later on does Symonds realize that “I was wrong in imagining this *species* of vice formed only a phase of boyish immaturity.”<sup>255</sup> Classical mythology here and in much of Symonds’ autobiography, poetry and travel writing serves to mediate, name and in some respects tame the “beast” lurking within – desire for a sexual encounter with another man. And yet Platonic idealizing never fully domesticates the “beast.” Certain cravings continue to stalk Symonds’ effort to conceive of a male-male love that both originates in and flies above the physical. Like Dante in canto 1 of the *Inferno*, whose ascent to Eden is blocked by the famished she-wolf, Symonds must find another path – a path that, for him, involves facing, not expelling, the “beast” within.

Symonds goes on to narrate “one of the most important night of my life,” when he says he first read Plato’s *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*.<sup>256</sup> He says:

I went to bed and began to read my Cary’s Plato. It so happened that I stumbled on the *Phaedrus*. I read on and on, till I reached the end. Then I began the *Symposium*; and the sun was shining on the shrubs outside the ground-floor room in which I slept, before I shut the book. [...] Here in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* – in the myth of the Soul and the speeches of Pausanias Agathon and Diotima – the I discovered the true *liber amoris* at last, the revelation I had been waiting for, the consecration of a long-cherished idealism. It was just as though the voice of my own soul spoke to me through Plato, as though in some antenatal experience I had lived the life of philosophical Greek lover.<sup>257</sup>

Symonds’ narrative follows the tropes of the Augustinian spiritual autobiography: a lost soul who, stumbling upon the Good Book, hears the divine speak through the text to him. Such a trajectory tends to culminate in revelation and a moment of conversion, when the old self is shirked off in lieu of the reborn self.<sup>258</sup> Symonds claim that “the Confessions

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<sup>254</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 95

<sup>255</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 97. My emphasis.

<sup>256</sup> Plato. *Dialogues on Love and Friendship*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. New York: The Heritage Press, 1968. 99.

<sup>257</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 99

<sup>258</sup> For a discussion of Dante and the conversion narrative, see: John Freccero’s *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1986).

of St. Augustine lay side by side upon my table with a copy of the *Phaedrus*" confirms this reading. Augustine's autobiography, after all, traces his journey from youthful errors and lust to his conversion to Christianity, which takes place after he hears a child's voice proclaim "take and read."<sup>259</sup>

This passage sanctions Symonds' earlier fantasies and desire as always-already in line with Platonic ideals. Symonds' ability to claim they "corresponded to Platonic love" before he had even read the *Phaedrus* or the *Symposium* is only possible as a retroactive and textual move. In other words, only after reading Plato can he then, looking back, reinvent his "inborn cravings after persons of my own sex" (63) as "a long cherished idealism" perfectly in tune with Plato's philosophy of *eros* (99). It is useful to recall here that in Symonds' earlier retelling of his Adonis fantasies he acknowledges that "I was in fact reading myself into this fable of Apollo."<sup>260</sup>

Similarly, Symonds now writes/reads himself (and his earlier "I") into Plato, claiming that the "voice of my own soul spoke to me through Plato."<sup>261</sup> Symonds "revelation" vis-à-vis Plato is both a confirmation of his "congenital inclination towards persons of the male sex," offering a historical and idealized model of male-male love, and a burden. After this reading, he would continue to distinguish between "the brutalities of vulgar lust" and "aspiration after noble passion."<sup>262</sup> Male-male love after Plato would mean chasing "an impossible dream" – a love apotheosized in the male form that draws the lover heavenward and, since it is supposedly distinct from bodily lust, barred from sexual realization.<sup>263</sup>

Symonds' repeated references to his classmates' animalistic lust should be read alongside his Platonic conversion. Later in the *Phaedrus* Socrates says that when mortal man looks on beauty's "earthly namesake" he "is given over to pleasure, and like a brutish beast he rushes on to enjoy and to beget; he consorts with wantonness" (170). Not informed by reason or the soul, lust is personified in Plato in a "brutish beast" who cannot control its urges, wallowing in base pleasures. The trained spectator, however, "is

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<sup>259</sup> Augustine writes:

I was . . . weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo, I heard the voice as of a boy or girl, I know not which, coming from a neighbouring house, chanting, and oft repeating, "Take and read; take and read." Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began most earnestly to consider whether it was usual for children in any kind of game to sing such words; nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So, restraining the torrent of my tears, I rose up, interpreting it no other way than as a command to me from Heaven to open the book, and to read the first chapter I should light upon. For I had heard of Antony, that, accidentally coming in whilst the gospel was being read, he received the admonition as if what was read were addressed to him, "Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." And by such oracle was he forthwith converted unto Thee. So quickly I returned to the place where . . . I had put down the volume of the apostles, when I rose thence. I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell, -- "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended, -- by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart, -- all the gloom of doubt vanished away.

<sup>260</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 75

<sup>261</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 99

<sup>262</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 99

<sup>263</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 100

amazed when he sees any one having a godlike face or form, which is the expression of divine beauty.”

“My thoughts were lodged in Hellas,” Symonds repeats, “but centuries rolled between my soul’s home in Athens and the English places I was born again to live in. Only too well enough I knew, alas! that if I avowed my emotion to my father or his friends, I should meet – not merely no sympathy or understanding or credence – but I should arouse horror, pain, aversion” (106). Symonds rhetorically paints himself as an exile, estranged from his – now gone – true home. He simultaneously positions himself here as born too late and the reincarnation of a once-lauded love. The new self “born” from Symonds’ Platonic conversion is a self that sees itself, retroactively, as the “reborn” embodiment of a lofty tradition of male love, which he reads into the philosophical foundations of Western thought.

As discussed earlier, Symonds takes a literal and literary sojourn south into Italy and the transgressive potentials of expatriation. In a letter written to his dear friend Henry Graham Dakyns in 1889, the English scholar discusses undertaking his own *Memoirs*. He writes of translating the autobiographies of the Italians, Benvenuto Cellini and Carlo Gozzi. Cellini’s autobiography is a self-narrated hagiography, extolling his guile, artistic mastery, and in part his ‘bisexual’ life. In the *Memoirs*’ introduction, Symonds again references Cellini and Gozzi, saying “the most obvious reason for my [writing my memoirs], perhaps, is that I have been to a large extent occupied during the last three years with the autobiographies of Cellini and Carlo Gozzi.”<sup>264</sup> But Symonds is quick to note that his memoirs are sure to be useless, since “I shall not publish them; and it is only too probable that they will never be published.”<sup>265</sup>

Twice, Symonds links his memoirs’ imagined Italian literary predecessors. His language is peculiar, claiming contamination from their “*Lues Autobiographica*” or Latin for autobiographical plague. Years spent in “lonely intimacy” with these men have infected Symonds, stirring in him the desire to scribble “my own reminiscences.” Contagion here is the result of intimacy – and proximity to – other men. The word *Lues*, I have argued, carries sexual and spectral valences. Tracing an autobiographical lineage to “intimacy” with Cellini and Gozzi, Symonds alludes to venereal contagion. Intimacy with men, albeit the touching between translator and text, bears a taint of sickness. Male-male desire is here personified as the pestilent demon that, having plagued Symonds, drives him now to speak out “veraciously [...] concerning myself.”<sup>266</sup> And yet, that same pestilence is also the thing that permits him to believe in the possibility of intimacy – even if only a feeling of akinship – transmitted across time. Translating their words, he too is infected with a desire to narrate. His subjectivity is, thus, bent by ingesting their

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<sup>264</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 29

<sup>265</sup> The “I” signifying the living Symonds will never publish these memoirs. That “I,” however, will persist, after Symonds’ death as testimony to his life. If he is to “speak out” at all, it must be by means of an “I” that outlives the grave. In sum, the constraints of Symonds’ own lifetime, which make the publication of his *Memoirs* an impossibility, might recede with time; in some unforeseen future his written “I” might speak. This future and posthumous divulgence is thought to compensate for the reticence the current age demands from him. Speaking out for Symonds, then, must take place via writing, which here is understood as a means of “ghosting” his words – allowing them to travel across time and, some day, reach an audience not knowable in the present of writing.

<sup>266</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 29

words. At the same time, he claims to reproduce through his body an “I” both all his own and not quite originating in him.

Although most of this chapter has thus far centered on Gozzi and Cellini, they are not the only Italian writers to populate Symonds’ work. Dante Alighieri, the medieval author of the first-person *Divina Commedia* and *Vita nuova*, is also mentioned and at times directly cited. Describing his feelings future wife, Symonds comments:

I loved her ardently [...] But was it not too pure, too spiritual, too etherealized, this exquisite emotion? It would endure till death, I know. But I missed something in the music – the coarse and hard vibrations of sex, those exquisite agonies of contact by which God in man has subsumed into himself the beast and makes that God-like. These vibrations I had felt in dreams for male beings and in intercourse with Willie. Not discovering them now some qualms came over me. Was my love perfect for her, such a holocaust of self as she had right to expect? The doubt troubled me. But I turned my thoughts to Dante and his Beatrice, and told my heart it did not signify.<sup>267</sup>

Symonds again uses the image of the beast to incarnate his sexual longings. “For a long time previously,” Symonds writes, “I had treated the purely sexual appetite (that which drew me fatally to the male) as a beast to be suppressed and curbed.”<sup>268</sup> His cravings for other men contrast his chaste feelings for his wife, marked by a spiritual – but not carnal – love. Symonds wonders if his love for Catherine, in other words, might be too Platonic; too removed, that is, from sex and the “exquisite agonies of contact.” Musing on his relationship with his wife, Symonds thinks of Dante and his beloved Beatrice, a woman who guides Dante through Purgatory and finally to salvation in Paradise.<sup>269</sup> Unlike Dante, Symonds cannot reach God through the adulated and beatific woman. Indeed, the “beast” is made “God-like” not by fleeing from sex and the body, but in molding desire and corporeal sexuality into something worthy.

Dante re-emerges later on in the *Memoirs* in a letter to Henry Sedgwick that Symonds cites at length. Symonds writes:

Moreover, this great shadow, not of the past, whereof I spoke today, still threatens. [Probably my sexual difficulties]. Oppressed thus, I am often numb and callous; all virtue seems to have gone out of me, the spring of life to have faded, its bloom to have been rubbed away. I dread that art and poetry and nature are unable to do more for what Dante with terrible truth called *li mal protesi nervi* [the ill-strained muscles/nerves]. These darkneses, in splendid

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<sup>267</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 155

<sup>268</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 154

<sup>269</sup> In Symonds’ essay “Dantesque and Platonic Ideals of Love” (1893), the Briton draws a direct comparison between “Greek” love and medieval courtly enamoration. In spite of the Christian connotations of Beatrice, Symonds reads a parallel between Dante’s out-of-marriage longing for Beatrice and the idealized “Greek Love” (male lover, male beloved) voiced in Plato. He writes: “Frankly admitting that Greek love was tainted with a vice obnoxious to modern notions, and that mediaeval love was involved with adultery, the true critic will declare that, strange and incomprehensible as this must always seem, there were two brief moments, once at Athens and once at Florence, when amorous enthusiasms of an abnormal type presented themselves to natures of the noblest stamp as indispensable conditions of the progress of the soul upon the pathway toward perfection.”

scenery, among pictures and statues, wherever in fact I ought to enjoy most and be alive. It is only the intercourse of friends that does me any good.<sup>270</sup>

Indeed, Symonds later on will refer to this period of darkness as “that *infernal* experience of the Riviera.”<sup>271</sup> His citation of Dante is not casual; it directs the reader to Canto XV of the *Inferno*, one of the two Cantos devoted to the divine punishment of sodomites.<sup>272</sup> In it, the pilgrim-poet Dante stumbles across his former teacher and friend, Brunetto Latini, who in due course recounts the prophecy of Dante’s future exile from his native Florence.

On the same page as this letter, Symonds cites a passage from his diary in which he represents himself as an exile of sorts, stuck in the wrong time and with no way back to Hellas. “We cannot be Greek now [...] So bad are the times we live in,” he says, “so faulty our ideas, so far more excellent the clear and bright atmosphere of antique Hellas”<sup>273</sup> Like Dante, Symonds sees himself condemned to exile and expatriation. Like one of Dante’s sodomites, Symonds describes the burden of his existence, encumbered with “so much physical and mental malaise.”<sup>274</sup> Rhetorically fusing these two figures, the exiled Dante and the eternally damned sodomite, Symonds – vis-à-vis Dante – positions his homosexual self as simultaneously he who suffers and he who is unjustly expelled from home.<sup>275</sup> Only later, after experiencing “the exhausting errors of his earlier pilgrimage,” does Symonds start to see the ‘darkness’ dissipate “under the keen breezes of what I condemned as sin.”<sup>276</sup> So-called sin turns into Symonds’ path to salvation.

Before this realization, when Symonds would come in contact with pictures or statues of male figures, he says, darkness – a figure of his unresolved sexuality – would cast a pall over him. Art and scenery, rather than quieting his “nervi,” indeed strain and arouse them.<sup>277</sup> Describing a visit to Italy, Symonds depicts the young men as part of the scenery. They represent a visual banquet that Symonds consumes, only further rousing his “appetite”:

I find, by notes in my diaries that the congenital bent of my temperament was perpetually causing me uneasiness. All kinds of young men – peasants on the Riviera, Corsican drivers, Florentine lads upon Lungarno in the evenings,

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<sup>270</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 169.

<sup>271</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 173. My emphasis

<sup>272</sup> Much scholarly ink has been spilt to assign meaning to the phrase “mal protesi nervi” [“ill-protended muscles”]; many scholars have argued that this image is, in part, is priapic, alluding to an erect penis.

<sup>273</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 169-170.

<sup>274</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 169

<sup>275</sup> *Canto XV* connects sodomy to sterility via the image of lands that are unable to bear fruit. Early on, Symonds’ refers to his own autobiography as a “sterile” self-depiction. *Canto XV* also represents a man associated with Sodom – Brunetto Latini – in immensely personal, almost warm terms. Symonds’ identification with this passage is, thus, understandable. While naming Sodom, Dante the character does not sanctimoniously condemn its condemned practitioners.

<sup>276</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 170

<sup>277</sup> Symonds’ letter recalls an earlier passage in his memoirs in which he describes the desire stirred in him as a youth, when he would look at his father’s images of classical, neo-classical and Italian sculpture:

The vision of ideal male beauty under the form of male genius symbolized spontaneous yearnings deeply seated in my nature, and prepared me to receive many impressions from art and literature. [...] I was very fond of picture books and drew a great deal from Raphael, Flaxman and Retzch. Our house was well stocked with engravings, copies of Italian pictures and illustrated works upon Greek sculpture. Lasinio’s Campo Santo of Pisa, Sir William Hamilton’s vases, the Museo Bourbonico and the two large folios issued by the Dilettante Society. (77-78)

*facchini* at Venice, and especially a handsome Bernese guide who attended to a strong black horse I rode – used to pluck at the sleeve of my heart, inviting me to fraternize, drawing out of me the sympathy I felt for male beauty and vigour. The sustained resistance to these appeals, the prolonged reversion to mere study as anodyne for these desires, worried my nerves.<sup>278</sup>

Each tourist destination is aligned with an attractive youth. Place and the object of desire bleed together. Symonds' recalls each Italian locale by the genre of young men he saw there and who –in retrospect– stand in for that place. Most of these places and boys are found in Italy or a land that, like Corsica, had recently been an Italian territory.

These young men, says Symonds, “pluck at the sleeve of my heart.” Such language could easily be overlooked as an insignificant, florid turn of phrase. In light of Symonds' earlier allusion to phallic “*mal protesi nervi*” in Canto XV of the *Inferno*, however, this paragraph merits a closer look. In that Canto, Dante sees Brunetto Latini only after his *maestro* tugs on his robe. Dante writes “Così adocchiato da cotal famiglia, / fui conosciuto da un, che mi prese / per lo lembo e gridò: “Qual meraviglia!”” [“Looked over in this way by such a company, I / was recognized by on, who seized me by the hem / and cried ‘What a marvel!’”] (*Inferno* XV. 22-24). These young (and mainly Italian) men seize the sleeve of Symonds' heart, placing him in the position of the exiled Dante-pilgrim.<sup>279</sup> At the same time, Symonds' kindred feelings for Dante's sodomites positions him as a member of “cotal famiglia.”

In Canto XV, Brunetto Latini sees and recognizes Dante. Here it is Symonds who recognizes a facet of his self in the tug of these youth. In the earlier passage where Symonds quotes from Canto XV, his desire for men *per se* brings on darkness and malaise; traversing this visual mapping of male beauty, Symonds comes to realize that his repeated attempts to oppose or deflect “the congenital bent of my temperament” and not his proclivities in themselves had been what “worried my nerves.” Desiring men still stimulates his nerves but only abjuring this desire can “ill-strain” him. Indeed, only a “stoical acceptance of my place in the world, combined with Epicurean indulgence of my ruling passion for the male” restored “my broken nerves,” says Symonds.<sup>280</sup>

But the “beast” he had earlier tried to muzzle returns. Wandering “through the sordid streets,” Symonds says that his eyes were “caught by a rude *graffito* [...] so concentrated, so stimulative, so penetrative in character – so thoroughly the voice of vice in the proletariat – that it pierced the very marrow of my soul.”<sup>281</sup> (187). This graffiti read “prick to prick, so sweet.” The *graffiti* speaks with the “voice of vice,” a voice, like Plato's words, penetrates Symonds to his core. Until Symonds sees this lurid sketch, he had tried convince himself that the “beast” had retreated and would no longer hound him. He writes:

Since the date of my marriage I had ceased to be assailed by what I called ‘the wolf’ – that undefined craving coloured with a vague but poignant hankering after males. I lulled myself with the belief that it would not leap on me again to wreck

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<sup>278</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 177

<sup>279</sup> Beyond the linguistic homology between “pluck at the sleeve” and “seizing the hem,” Symonds cites Dante's *Inferno* only two pages earlier, when he describes “the impossible love” (175). He writes that “now I find that neither in heaven nor in hell is my portion. The perfect spue [sic] me forth, the damned will not receive me” (175).

<sup>280</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 173

<sup>281</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 187.

my happiness and disturb my studious habits. However, wandering that day for exercise through the sordid streets between my home and Regent's Park, I felt the burden of a ponderous malaise. [...]

As Jonathon Kemp notes in "A Problem in Gay Heroics," J.A. Symonds "lycanthropizes his homosexual desire as brutal and savage, something which preys tyrannically on the precariously maintained stability of his heterosexual marriage."<sup>282</sup> Queer desire is imagined as a feral beast menacing to feast on his supposed marital bliss. Symonds thus projects his desire for other men into an outside predator that could devour his respectable life.

Still, in the *graffiti*'s blunt "voice of vice" Symonds also hears the howl of a wolf that, no longer chained, sates—at long last—its appetite. Alimentary imagery pops up again when Symonds narrates the scopic pleasure of watching nude swimmers in London. He says that "there I *feasted* my eyes upon the naked bathers, consumed with a longing for them which was not exactly lust. The breath of lust had not passed over my earlier ideal of sentiment at that stage. . . ."<sup>283</sup> Symonds presents himself as both the consumer of male beauty, actively feeding on the young men's lithe forms, and consumed by homoerotic yearnings—both the desiring subject and subjected to a desire beyond his control.

In Canto 1 of the *Inferno*, the pilgrim-poet Dante, wandering through a dark wood, learns that he must descend beneath the earth and enter into the realm of shades. Before learning this, the poet encounters two beasts: a leopard and a she-wolf. Ravenous, the she-wolf blocks Dante's intended route along the straight way. Dante paints the *lupa* in the following language: "ed una lupa, che di tutte brame/ sembiava carca nella sua magrezza,/ e molte genti fé già viver grame,/ questa mi porse tanto di gravezza/con la paura ch'uscia di sua vista,/ ch' io perdei la speranza de l'altezza [...] tal mi fece la bestia senza pace/ che, venendomi 'ncontro, a poco a poco/ mi ripegnava là dove'l sol tace" ["And a she-wolf, that seemed laden with all/ cravings in her leanness and has caused many/ peoples to live in wretchedness,/ she put on me so much heaviness with the fear/ that came straight from the sight of her, that I lost hope of/ reaching the heights . . . so she made me, that restless beast, who, coming/ against me, little by little was driving me back to/ where the sun is silent"] (*Inferno* 1.49-60). Embodying an insatiable appetite, the she-wolf obstructs Dante's most direct path to God.

To get there, he learns, "a te convien tenere altro viaggio" ["you must hold another path"] (*Inferno* 1.91). The she-wolf incarnates both hunger and unbridled lust – "ha natura sì malvagia e ria,/ che mai non empie la bramosa voglia/ e dopo 'l pasto ha più fame che pria./ Molti son li animali a cui s'ammoglia" ["and she has a nature so evil and cruel that her/ greedy desire is never satisfied, and after feeding she/ is hungrier than before. / Many are the animals with whom she mates"] (*Inferno* 1. 98-100). Terrified, Dante seeks to flee from her and ends up stuck deeper in the darkness. The threat posed by the wolf is hunger never satisfied and an all-consuming desire.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates also cites the figure of the wolf. "Consider this, fair youth," he tells Phaedrus, "know that in the friendship of the lover there is no real kindness; he has an appetite and wants to feed upon you: *As wolves love lambs so lovers*

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<sup>282</sup> See John Addington Symonds: *Demon Desire*. Ed. John Pemble. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) 54.

<sup>283</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 191. My emphasis.

*love their loves.*” In Socrates’ example, the lover’s appetite makes his love suspect; his love is merely the love for the thing to be consumed. And yet, in the same dialogue Socrates posits the relation between lover and beloved as the vehicle for soaring heavenwards. “For those who one begun the heavenward pilgrimage may not go down again to darkness and the journey beneath the earth,” Socrates avers, “but they live in light always, happy companions in their pilgrimage.”

It should be recalled here that earlier in his memoirs Symonds had called his sexuality “darknesses” and a menacing “shadow.”<sup>284</sup> In that same paragraph, Symonds’ cites *Inferno XV*, the Canto devoted to the literary sodomites. That *canto*, intriguingly, is also the first time that Dante relates to any of the inhabitants of hell his experience in Canto 1, when he had come across the she-wolf. Speaking to Brunetto Latini, Dante says “Là sù di sopra, in la vita serena, / rispuos’ io lui, ‘mi smarri’ in una valle / [...] questi mi apparve, tornand’ io in quella, / e reducemmi a ca per questo calle” (*Inferno XV.49-54*).<sup>285</sup> Forced off the straight path by the she-wolf, Dante now represents his journey on the untrodden road as a way “home.” Dante’s self-referential oratory points the reader back to the start of his trek through the afterlife. Similarly, Symonds’ repeated imagery of a ravenous wolf point his readers back to Plato’s love dialogues and Dante’s *Inferno* – literary trajectories that disembark in Hellas and Italy, respectively.

In the letter to Sedgwick in which Symonds quotes from Canto XV of the *Inferno*, he admits that art and literature do little to calm his “mal protesi nervi.” Later, he notes that his academic studies are “exhausting to the nerves.”<sup>286</sup> Trying to evade “the congenital disease of my moral nature in work, work has drained my nerves and driven me to find relief in passion.” Sublimating his desire for men into academic work has only further stressed his already “ill-strained” nerves. He says:

The subjects with which I have been occupied – Greek poetry, Italian culture in one of the most lawless periods of modern history, beauty in nature and the body of man – stimulate and irritate the imagination. They excite cravings which cannot be satisfied by simple pleasures. [...] *The pulses beat, the nerves thrill and tingle.* To escape the tyranny of the impossible vision which keeps the mind upon a rack, ‘libidinous joys’ present themselves under seductive colours, and the would-be hierophant of artistic beauty is hurried away upon the wings of an obscene Chimaera.<sup>287</sup>

Studying Italian and Greek cultures, in other words, can rouse the “beast” from its slumber. In prior passages Symonds personifies these “cravings” alternately as the beast, the wolf, and the demon.

Symonds closes this chapter with a paragraph that contains the phrase “it is not possible upon this path or that to satisfy the insatiable within the mind.”<sup>288</sup> Considered alongside the numerous hints guiding the reader back to the initial “wolf” scene, this sentence in particular pulls Dante back into the mix. It is the *lupa*’s avid hunger Dante from his “straight way”; Symonds autobiography has effectively rewritten Canto 1 of

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<sup>284</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 169

<sup>285</sup> “‘Up there above, under the clear sky,’ I replied, ‘I lost myself in a valley [...] he [Virgil] appeared to me as I was returning there again/ and is leading me back home by this road’”

<sup>286</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 239.

<sup>287</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 239-240. My emphasis.

<sup>288</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 241.

Dante's *Inferno*. Once he had sought to leash the wolf, apotheosizing his wife into the noble Lady who, like Beatrice, he hoped would immure him from the wolf's assault. Now, Symonds sees such an idealizing move, void of "libidinous joys," as a futile redirecting of his desire. Keeping his desire locked away in "self-built cages" will always fail to sate the ravenous wolf.<sup>289</sup> The "straight way" to satisfying his "cravings" is not straight at all. For Symonds, it meant listening to the wolf's howl and following a rarely trodden path "home" – a path that bent rhetorically and literally through Italy.

Italy is a place Symonds frequently turns to both in his writing and in his actual travels. There, he sought out a different trajectory of desire – a return to a longed-for and absent "home." This place, of course, exists largely in Symonds' imagination. But, at the same time, in Italy and abroad Symonds came to know the touch of men, sometimes freely given and sometimes paid for. We may never know if, like Dante, he found there Paradise or simply felt he had found another not-so-straight path back to the living. A path he traces, queerly enough, via getting in touch with men long-since dead.

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<sup>289</sup> Grosskurth, 1984, 218

## Chapter 3

### A Plague By Any Other Name: AIDS and the Politics of Illegibility in *Camere separate*

Pier Vittorio Tondelli's elegiac novel, *Camere separate* (1989), opens with the protagonist in transit. Leo looks out of a plane's window, seeing himself in the glass. "Un giorno, non molto distante nel tempo, lui si è trovato improvvisamente a specchiare il suo viso contro l'oblò di un piccolo aereo in volo fra Parigi e Monaco di Baviera."<sup>290</sup> The reader encounters Leo in the limen. Afloat between France and Germany, he occupies an in-between space and an indefinite place in time. On his way but not yet arrived, Leo scrutinizes his facial features and the ground below: "Inquadrato dalla ristretta cornice ovoidiale dall'oblò, il passaggio gli parlava del giorno e della notte, dei confini fra i mondi della terra e dell'aria e da ultimo, allorché si accese una luce nella caralinga e su quell'olografia boreale apparve il riflesso del suo volto appesantito e affaticato, anche del sé." Topographical ambiguity, the reader soon learns, reflects Leo's daily life. He is an itinerant journalist, having lived abroad (Paris, London, Berlin) and in Italy.

Leo has no familiar point of return: "Non è radicato in nessuna città. Non ha una famiglia, non ha figli, non ha una propria casa riconoscibile come 'il focolare domestico.' Una diversità ancora. Ma soprattutto non ha un compagno, è scapolo, è solo" (8.) Despite being an ex-pat, Leo has found no "casa" abroad. The text goes to lengths to stress that both Italy (where he is from) and Europe (where he lived) fail to incarnate a "focolare domestico." In Paris, where he had used to live, he is a foreigner. When he goes back to Italy, he feels "distaccato" from the house in which he was born and raised. Returning to "l'ambiente in cui è cresciuto," Leo "si sente sempre più solo, o meglio, sempre più diverso" (8). He feels neither reflected in the place he grew up nor in the countries that house him elsewhere.

We begin in this uncertainty – in between, in motion, overlaid. In addition to mirroring, the plane's glossy window also refracts. It is an item through which he sees and, reflecting the plane's interior, a contortion of the boreal world beneath. Places "outside" the self – in this case the Germany where Leo's ex-lover, Thomas, grew up – literally frame him. As he looks out of the window, Leo cannot disassociate the image of his face from that which is external. Flipped and filtered, Leo's reflection is a visual palimpsest: a man seated on a plane, watching himself mapped atop the world below. In order to see the world outside, Leo must look through his face's reflection<sup>291</sup>. In order to glimpse his face, he must also note what lies "outside" of him. Here, he is not just the subject of the gaze. He is an object reflected elsewhere.

Depicted in this scene is a doubled and homeless vision. Leo's sense of homelessness is stressed through an inversion of the logic of travel. Instead of returning to a comforting and familiar point of origin, Leo must go back to a country that is not his own. Rootless and linked to more than one locale, Leo is an alien ("diverso" [8];

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<sup>290</sup> Pier Vittorio Tondelli, *Camere separate* (Rome: Bompiani, 1989) 7.

<sup>291</sup> See Gary Cestaro, "Self-Shattering in a Queerer Mirror: Gaze and Gay Selfhood in Pier Vittorio Tondelli," *Modern Language Notes* 123, 1 (January 2008). 96-124.

“distaccato” [8], “distanti” [8]) wherever he goes. In this scene, geographic alienation – feeling out-of-place at home *alongside* being housed abroad – functions, in addition, as a metaphor for queerness. The text moves from describing Leo’s alienation in Italy to his current lack of a fixed address. Topographical isolation morphs quickly into a discussion of his private life. Not only is Leo “scapolo,” he lacks a “compagno,” a male partner.

Leo is flying towards Munich, Germany. He recalls that two years earlier his ex-“compagno,” a German named Thomas, had died there. Leo’s spatial in-betweenness on the opening pages, somewhere between Paris and Munich, can be read in light of melancholic time.<sup>292</sup> The past did not stay put in the past. The present refuses to stay fixated on the present. Elegy is, thus, sketched as a sort of transit. His thoughts stray between remembering Thomas’ life and the persistent knowledge that he is dead; the border between different times is porous. Indeed, much of the novel relates Leo’s struggles to accept Thomas’ demise – to translate the knowledge of his passing (the end of a life) into the passage towards closure (the end of mourning).

We begin in a melancholic present — a here-and-now moved by the memory of a dead man. Returning to Munich, Leo is reminded of that Thomas died in that city two years prior. “Non ci sarà Thomas ad aspettarlo all’aeroporto con la sua Citroen scassata,” the narration remarks. “Poiché Thomas, o almeno tutto ciò che sulla terra aveva questo nome e a questo nome, per lui e per chi lo amava, era riconducibile, non c’è più” (9). Notwithstanding time’s plodding passage, Thomas, on an emotional level, has not been left behind. And yet, Thomas’ name – the word used to evoke his memory – also reminds Leo of his material absence. This word is a substitution, a linguistic replacement, for the man who is dead. Named and not there, Thomas has become a trace – a word, utterable in the present, but indexing someone who does not exist. “Thomas è morto. Da due anni ormai” (9).

## 1. Reading for the Unnamed

Published in April 1989, *Camere separate* is the last novel inked by Pier Vittorio Tondelli. Its main character, Leo, is an Italian journalist who travels frequently abroad. Structurally, the novel is split into three “movimenti” (Tondelli’s term): *Verso il silenzio*, *Il mondo di Leo* and *Camere separate*. Rather than proceeding in a chronological fashion, the novel unfolds as a series of melancholic recollections, emotional flashbacks and fragmentary digressions. Despite relaying the inner life of Leo, the tale is told in the third-person. Eschewing the forward-motion of traditional narrative, in which plot moves from beginning to middle to end, *Camere separate* opens with a reflection: Leo recalling the death, two years prior, of Thomas. Thomas’ end, in other words, is at the beginning of Leo’s story.

In the novel’s opening pages, that untimely death is alluded to but not described. Its cause is unclear. Instead of narrating the instant of Thomas’ demise, the text pulls the reader further backward in time—to Paris, where Leo and Thomas had first met. Opening with the image of Leo’s face framed by a foreign horizon, the novel invokes a sort of textual frame – hinting at the themes it will then plumb: identity / non-identity, exile / home, and decipherment / illegibility. I want to pause on the opening scene – to

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<sup>292</sup> For a discussion of melancholic time, see Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (London & Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

contrast the illegibility of discrete borders (inside/outside, self/other, foreign/familiar, here/elsewhere, etc) with the debates that took place outside of the novel. To be more specific: I want to contrast it with critics' efforts to detect *one* meaning in *Camere separate*.

Following the novel's publication, a few schools of interpretation emerged: 1) seeing the book as an AIDS allegory, 2) reading it as an account of writers' alienation from society, and 3) Catholic critics who stress the religious aspect of the text. In the first two cases, critics sought to diagnose *the* singular meaning behind *Camere separate*'s layered and refracting representation. In the latter, the homosexual content of the text – as Sciltian Gastaldi notes – is overlooked in order to present the novel as a conventional tale of conversion and redemption.<sup>293</sup> Unlike its opening scenes, in which borders are crossed but discrete boundaries remain absent, early criticism of the novel tend to see one ruling significance reflected in it – to find mirrored there a singular, solitary meaning. Yet, the novel narrates the uncertainty of borders—the difficulty of determining where one begins and where others make us.

Readers like Edmund White and Sciltian Gastaldi affirm that the illness sans name must be AIDS.<sup>294</sup> Illness is not for them a metaphor of something else but, rather, a veiled testimony of gay men's experience of AIDS (death, mourning, silence, and social stigma). Gastaldi writes that “la sindrome è presentata nelle vesti di una serie di sintomi,” all while acknowledging that the illness “mai dichiarata ma [...] tipico dell'HIV che diventa AIDS.”<sup>295</sup> Dall'Orto and James Cady read *Camere separate* symptomatically – attempting to attach a stable signified, AIDS, to the novel's stated and unstated content.<sup>296</sup> This vein of interpretation reads fiction as testimony, existing in parallel relation to the social reality that influenced its production. Whether in interpreting *Camere separate* as about AIDS or in *not* reading significance into the illness, readers encounter a text that leaves much unstated.

Those who call *Camere separate* an “AIDS novel” must inevitably address the book's linguistic “discretion.” In the introductory essay to a 2004 translation of the book, the gay American writer Edmund White says that “*Separate Rooms* is an AIDS novel that barely mentions the disease.” Quoted on that edition's book jacket, Jonathan Keates dubs it “an AIDS novel of dignified beauty, rejecting gay parish boundaries in favour of more generous celebrations of common humanity.” The gay journalist-cum-historian, Giovanni Dall'Orto, describes *Camere separate* as “infinitamente reticente ma costellato

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<sup>293</sup> [https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/44076/1/Gastaldi\\_Sciltian\\_201203\\_PhD\\_thesis.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/44076/1/Gastaldi_Sciltian_201203_PhD_thesis.pdf)

<sup>294</sup> In his 2012 dissertation, Sciltian calls *Camere separate* “the last and most important Tondellian novel [...] in which the writer addresses the theme of death from AIDS” (xv). Earlier, he argues that *Camere separate* is “the love story of a gay couple in which one partner has to survive his lover's death, due to an illness that is demonstrated in this thesis to be AIDS, while fighting against the homophobia of their families, institutions, society, and religion” (iii). One of Gastaldi's major claims, which I share, is that *Camere separate* can be reread as a “social denunciation novel” (xv). Rather than highlighting the text's alleged “internalized homophobia,” Gastaldi demonstrates how the protagonists oblique position, both in Italy and in institutions like the family, allows the novel to lodge a *denuncia* of homophobic exclusions. See Sciltian Gastaldi, *Pier Vittorio Tondelli: Letterature Minore e Scrittura dell'Impegno Sociale*. Dissertation, University of Toronto. 2012.

<sup>295</sup> Gastaldi, *ibid*, 323

<sup>296</sup> See Joseph Cady, “AIDS Literature.” In *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage. A Reader's Companion to the Writers and Their Works from Antiquity to the Present*. Claude J. Summers, ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995) 16-20.

di insistiti indizi che permettono al lettore di capire che chi parla è Tondelli stesso” (1991). Galstaldi claims, instead, that “Tondelli non ebbe il coraggio di chiamare la malattia col suo nome – né nella vita e né nella letteratura.”

Both a nominal presence *and* an aching absence, Thomas’ memory remains perceptible to Leo and is unseen by others. It is not until a later textual moment (p. 34) that Thomas’ dying days are narrated. Sequence (the succession of events between, say, page 9 and page 34) and chronology (the forward motion of time – i.e., 1989→1990) do not align. While Thomas’ death is stated upfront, the novel initially avoids representing his final moments. In relaying Thomas’ dying days, the texts never specifies what is the cause of his terminal ailment. His emaciated body, as seen by Leo, is nonetheless described in visible detail. Still, here the disease behind the German’s wan appearance stays ill-defined.

Derek Duncan has noted that the novel’s language does not explicitly point to HIV or AIDS-related illnesses.<sup>297</sup> The narration says: “Sono trascorsi cinque giorni dall’intervento chirurgico e dieci da quando Thomas ha avvertito per la prima volta degli insopportabili dolori al ventre. Fitte che gli scorticavano la carne, bruciori, come dei veleni, che gli dissolvevano l’intestino. E l’addome così innaturalmente dilatato” (34). This much is known: Thomas suffered stomach pains, underwent surgery and has something wrong in his intestines.<sup>298</sup> Even as the text describes what has happened to Thomas’ body, much remains undiagnosed. It is left to readers to decide whether Thomas is dying from a gastrointestinal disease or something else—something unnamed.

Visible illness and verbal indeterminacy interlace. Watching Thomas, Leo notices that his body has become skeletal:

Leo non si sarebbe mai aspettato di trovarlo così sfiancato. Dimagrìto in modo osceno, quasi mummificato. Il volto scavato, tirato sugli zigomi. Le labbra quasi scomparse, ridotte a un esile filo di pelle che non riesce a ricoprire i denti. I capelli rasati a zero. Le braccia e le gambe simili a quelle di un bambino denutrito. E quel ventre enorme, rivoltato e squartato. Del Thomas che ha conosciuto restano solo gli occhi, se possibile ancora più grandi, più grandi, più neri. Sono occhi che si muovono a fatica, che restano quasi scomparse. Sono due buchi neri spalancati sul vuoto e che sembrano ossessivamente ripetere una sola

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<sup>297</sup> Duncan writes: “Whatever illness Thomas dies from, AIDS is not mentioned. Yet there are elements in the novel that do seem to tie it on an obvious level to familiar narratives of AIDS. [...] Can we, therefore, conclude that Tondelli is writing about AIDS by encoding a semiotics of loss already familiar to a gay readership who consequently are attentive to its hidden registers and articulations? [...] An affirmative response is premature for competing with these elements that seem to echo quite specifically the experience of gay men affected by AIDS in the 1980s is the sense that homosexuality, especially Leo’s, functions as a metaphor for the gradual discovery and acceptance of the essential solitude, not of the human condition, but of the writer.” See Derek Duncan, *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2005). 122-123.

<sup>298</sup> In his nuanced analysis of *Camere separate*, Derek Duncan declares that Thomas did not die from AIDS. He writes: “In my reading of the novel, the young Thomas does not die from AIDS (AIDS is in fact never mentioned nor even alluded to in any particular way), but rather from what I understand to be a fatal stomach illness (perhaps cancer) diagnosed too late to be treated. [...] What factors bring an American reader to understand *Camere separate* as an AIDS novel, particularly when it has not been read as such in Italy? What broader cultural resonances are to be gleaned from the desire, or refusal to, associate gay men, disease and AIDS?” See Derek Duncan, “Pier Vittorio Tondelli: An Art of the Body in Resistance,” *Italica* 76 (1999): 60.

cosa: 'Non posso, non posso credere che stia succedendo a me.'

The repetition of the word "scomparse," attached here to Thomas' body parts, underscores his impending death. In Italian, the term means both "disappeared" and "deceased." Literally, the narration uses this adjective to evoke Thomas' declining appearance. But, a surplus – more morbid – meaning inhabits it. Surrounding this term are cadaverous or moribund images: a mummified body, a boney frame, and lips that no longer cover the teeth. In dwelling on Thomas' physique, the text verbally decomposes him. The Thomas who Leo remembers gets dismembered in this passage into a succession of wasting features: the sunk-in face, receding lips, emaciated limbs, and a bloated stomach. Thomas' corporeal disintegration is further stressed by the fragmented phrases used to describe him. Textual form, including a chain of incomplete sentences, is made to mirror the disintegrating state of Thomas' body.

Even as the text makes Thomas into a collection of limbs, the gaze found here is not entirely medical. Leo, Thomas' former lover, watches him. Thomas', Leo's ex-companion, gazes around the room. If the medical gaze treats human subjects as objects of diagnosis and decipherment, the gazes in this scene do more than objectify. Here, a dying man is watched and looks back. In describing Thomas' eyes, which are the anatomical source of his gaze, the text animates them, assigning spoken words to these silent "buchi neri." Clearly, eyes cannot articulate sound or convey a voice. "Sembrano ripetere ossessivamente una sola cosa: 'Non posso, non posso credere che stia succedendo a me,'" the narration comments. Up until this point, the language of the passage had disassembled Thomas into a series of bodily objects. The face, the lips, the limbs and the stomach are individually described as a spectacle that Leo is shocked to "trovare" in the hospital room.

Grammatically, they are objects and Leo is the viewing subject. But, upon shifting to Thomas' eyes, the text's language too transforms. Earlier in the passage, Leo's scrutiny renders Thomas into a catalog of symptoms -- a verbal decomposition of his still-whole body. Toward the end of the passage, Thomas' eyes become the grammatical subjects of the sentences. They are what remains ("restano") of Thomas. They move ("si muovono") about the room. They are ("sono") two "buchi neri." Underscoring the transition from being perceived as objects to being a subject is the text's ventriloquizing of the eyes. Not only do the eyes animate the verbs but, in the narration, seem to speak with their own "I." Here, the text undergoes a second key shift: the eyes as grammatical subjects morph into fountains of human subjectivity. They voice anxieties that cannot be said but can be read.

When they do "speak," they articulate a message that is discernable to some but remains unseen by others, including Thomas' family who is present in the hospital room. The hyper-visibility of the illness-ravaged body, thus, contrasts the eyes' selective legibility. Contained within this passage is a mappable movement. It begins with Leo's bemused viewing of Thomas' gaunt and bloated body. Then, the narration verbally decomposes Thomas' form, translating him into segmented pieces and fragmentary phrases. In splitting the body into a series of discrete diseased images, the text initially presents it as a riven object of Leo's sight. Rather than dwelling in medical objectification, the narration then transfigures Thomas, who had been a thing seen, into the subject of the gaze. Although at first linguistically disarticulated, Thomas' body in the end is made to articulate his pain – albeit through the reticence of a shared glance.

Rather than staying a horror-inducing object, Thomas' frightened gaze recasts him as a sympathetic person. Put another way, the mummy is restored to a man. Given *Camere separate*'s date of publication, this deathbed scene has, understandably, evoked echoes of AIDS for numerous gay readers. But, AIDS must be read into the novel's ambiguous account of loss, illness, and silence.<sup>299</sup> To do this, readers must overlay AIDS' cultural legibility, its ruling images, onto a text that leaves much unsaid. In his 1987 essay, "The Spectacle of AIDS," Simon Watney explains AIDS' competing "visual registers": the hard-to-see HIV retrovirus, discernable only through the tools of modern science, and the hyper-visible "AIDS victim" (hospitalized, gaunt, and skeletal).<sup>300</sup> For Watney, the visual spectacle of AIDS identifies the gay male body as *the* deserving site of infection. A consequence of this is to render actual infected people into objects of a "punitive gaze"—unworthy of being identified with:

It is from this perspective that we may glimpse something of the political unconscious of the visual register of AIDS commentary, which assumes the form of a diptych. On one panel we are shown the HIV retrovirus (repeatedly misdescribed as "the AIDS virus") made to appear, by means of electron microscopy or reconstructive computer graphics, like a huge technicolor asteroid. On the other panel we witness the "AIDS victim," usually hospitalized and physically debilitated, "withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage"—the authentic cadaver of Dorian Gray. This is the *spectacle of AIDS*, constituted in a regime of massively overdetermined images, which are sensitive only to the values of the dominant familial "truth" of AIDS and the protective "knowledge" of its ideally interpellated spectator, who already "knows all he needs to know" about homosexuality and AIDS. *It is the principal and serious business of this spectacle to ensure that the subject of AIDS is "correctly identified" and that any possibility of positive sympathetic identification with actual people with AIDS is entirely expunged from the fields of vision [my emphasis].* AIDS is thus embodied as an exemplary and admonitory drama, relayed between the image of the miraculous authority of clinical medicine and the faces and bodies of individuals *who clearly disclose the stigmata of their guilt [my emphasis].* The principal target of this sadistically punitive gaze is the body of "the homosexual."

Visual representations of AIDS, Watney argues, are ideological. They contain and also repeat "overdetermined images," which work to "ensure that the subject of AIDS is 'correctly identified' and that any possibility of positive sympathetic identification with actual people with AIDS is entirely expunged from the fields of vision." These accrued images come to constitute the "truth" of AIDS, meaning here a shared set of cultural assumptions about the syndrome's cause / natural locus.<sup>301</sup> Specifically, the proper

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<sup>299</sup> Sciltian Gastaldi claims that "il testo di Tondelli [*Camere separate*] fornisce sufficienti elementi per alludere all'AIDS. Si noti che nel romanzo la malattia che uccide il 25enne Thomas non è mai dichiarata ma il racconto del suo apparire e del suo progredire è tipico dell'HIV e diventa AIDS" (323). Later, he claims that, Tondelli was "parlando di AIDS in modo implicito e non esplicito" (325).

<sup>300</sup> See Simon Watney, "The Spectacle of AIDS." In *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 202-211.

<sup>301</sup> In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault describes "regimes of truth" in the following terms: "Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to

“subject of AIDS” is presumed to be “the homosexual.” In his turn of phrase, subject signifies something like the subject of a painting or the main person depicted. Once represented, “the homosexual” is never just a solitary infected person. Metonymically, he is made to stand for all gay people.

In this regime of knowledge, the body’s visible infirmities are not interpreted, principally, as signs of the syndrome. Rather, they are viewed as a perverse “stigmata” – a retribution for and revelation of sexual depravity. Homosexuality is thought to instigate AIDS. Sustained in this system of representation is the spectator’s visual pleasure. The debilitated body of “the homosexual” affirms for the onlooker what he already knew: “the homosexual” (i.e., all gay people) deserves his terminal infirmity. By identifying “the homosexual” as both the cause and the natural locus of AIDS, such images defensively invoke a border between “them” (infected/gay) and “us” (safe/straight). This border is, of course, a social fiction. It shores up two interlaced falsehoods: the belief that AIDS affects only “them” *and* the notion that the illness is largely legible upon the body’s surface. The “homosexual” is transfigured from a living person into a visual illustration of inner depravity.

In its depiction of a gay man on his deathbed, *Camere separate* quotes – without directly naming – inherited images of the AIDS-ravaged lover. Thomas’ face is gaunt and skeletal. His body is described as cadaver-like. His limbs waste away. But, even while Thomas’ corporeal degradation is portrayed in list-like detail, the sickness for which he is hospitalized stays implicit. Illness’ effect on the body is visibly evident but the *cause* is not. Here, we have homosexuality alongside illness but, unlike the images described by Wentley, “the homosexual” is not necessarily the cause of the impending death. If he is the subject of anything, he is the subject of a terrified glance – a glance that invokes identification rather than abject horror. Given the widespread circulation in the 1980s of images (and metaphors) tied to the HIV virus, including gay men marked with the legible “signs” of infection (*Carposi sarcoma*), what might be achieved by penning a story in which a gay patient’s terminal illness stays indecipherable? In *Camere separate*, it is impossible for any reader to diagnose definitively what ails Thomas. And yet, I am convinced that it is precisely the novel’s non-specificity that stimulates critics’ desire to assign a stable meaning to his otherwise illegible illness. In fact, the unnamedness of the malady, especially since it is depicted both in terms of silence (what Thomas doesn’t say) and homophobic isolation (his family’s grudging admission of Leo into the hospital room), has compelled gay readers to see AIDS in the words that are never said.<sup>302</sup>

Keeping in mind the time of the book’s publication, years in which gay men were dying en masse from a mysterious and still “unspeakable” sickness, why might an author *confound* the very legibility of an ailment? As Susan Sontag notes in her controversial essay “AIDS as Metaphor,” gay men’s bodies became sites of medical decipherment – scrutinized for visible signs of an often-invisible plague. Sontag notes that the virus

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distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.” Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>302</sup> Gastaldi, for example, claims “*Camere separate* narra la storia di un amore omosessuale e poiché Tondelli lascia anonima la malattia che uccide il giovanissimo Thomas, proprio questa omissione, questo eccesso di pudore che conduce il silenzio, è l’indizio più forte che spinge a sospettare dell’AIDS” (326)

evoked mass anxiety in the 1980s/1990s precisely for its dual traits: imperceptibility alongside hyper-visibility. In the early stages of infection, HIV is undetectable to the human eye. Present in the blood, it cannot be seen on the body. Later, when HIV morphs into “full blown” AIDS, the faltering immune system can make an infected person legible.<sup>303</sup> Quite literally, lesions on the skin could reveal a malady that, earlier, had gone unseen—even by the infected person. While troubling the legibility of Thomas’ illness, *Camere separate* also cites images that, in the U.S. and Europe, were coded with AIDS-related significances: the emaciated male body, a deathbed visit, and relatives’ reluctant “admission” of the gay lover into the hospital.

*Camere separate* refrains from naming symptoms that would more definitively mark Thomas’ malady as HIV/AIDS (i.e., skin lesions). Reproducing without labeling *some* coded images, *Camere separate* skirts easy legibility — it invites extra-textual associations with HIV/AIDS, while also leaving up it to readers to make (or not make) that diagnostic leap. To critics like Joseph Cady and Edmund White, the hospital scene *specifically* recalls gay men’s experiences of exclusion during the AIDS epidemic. That HIV goes unnamed here scarcely matters to them, as mainstream society had also treated AIDS as “unspeakable.” When they note AIDS in *Camere separate*, they do not point out sickened body. Rather, they identify AIDS in the novel’s illustration of the erasures imposed on gay intimacies if one partner, suddenly, were to die. In the novel, social exclusion finds its most pained expression when Thomas is dying in the hospital. AIDS is interpret in the social isolation experienced by the gay men, including the family’s refusal to recognize the reality of Leo’s pain. Criticism in this vein detect AIDS in the novel because they identify with its tale of gay mourning/social isolation due to illness.

All along, AIDS’ physical symptoms remain far less identifiable in the novel’s language. Illness’ unnamed nature led few early critics in Italy (1989-1991) to grant it a political significance. In a 1989 review in *La Repubblica*, Paolo Mauri notes that “la faccenda della morte viene aggirata e la morete stessa, non legata a nulla di carnale, ad una malattia precisa, per esempio, è lasciata fuori campo” (qtd. in Duncan, “Art of Body in Resistance,” (61). Claudio goes as far as to claim that “*Camere separate* non mi ha mai fatto pensare alla specificità dell’amore omosessuale” (1991, qtd. in Duncan, 61). Laura Fontini, posthumously, remarked that the novel’s portait of couplehood, attraction in tandem with “conflitti,” reflect “l’esperienza di vita di tutte le coppie, etero e non” (1991, qtd. in Duncan). Tondelli himself downplays the sexual specificity of the story in 1980, saying that “non ho voluto scrivere un romanzo omosessuale, né sull’omosessualità.” He claims that “davanti all’amore e alla morte, siamo tutti uguali” (qtd. in Duncan, 61). Early criticism in Italian, including essays written after Tondelli’s publicized death from AIDS, tend to interpret the book as a *general* meditation the writer’s existence difference or as a universal account of love/loss. Terminal illness, when rarely mentioned, is metaphorized—made to signify, as in Mauri’s account, something other than sickness: “un sostituito romanzesco della cris della scrittura” (1989, qtd. in Gastaldi, 339).

The novel can evoke both responses – queer specificity alongside universalizing non-specificity – by plumbing AIDS’ cultural legibility (i.e., extra-textual associations) and illness’ textual unintelligibility (i.e., we do not know exactly what Thomas suffers

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<sup>303</sup> Leo Bersani notes that “nothing has made gay men more visible than AIDS.” This visibility, Bersani claims, “is the visibility of imminent death and of promised invisibility.” Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) 18.

from). Narrated but unnamed, sickness sparks contradictory readings. Like Leo's reflection in the planes' window, no one view dominates. Multiple meanings refract around this illegible illness. Faced with *Camere separate*'s imprecise language, numerous gay readers like Giovanni Dall'Orto prefer to affix a stable meaning to the affliction: it must be AIDS. In the absence of definitive textual evidence, symptomatic readings turn to extra-textual proof in order to proffer a diagnosis — the author's biography, the social context of the 1980s or Tondelli's personal writing. But, all along, illness' illegibility is never – satisfactorily – overwritten. Given this, criticism has tended either to ignore the hospital scene (a la' many early Italian critics) or decode AIDS where it is never named.

## 2. Writing the Illegible

Afloat between diagnoses and textual illegibility, *Camere separate* invites and frustrates symptomatic readings. This chapter argues that critics have substituted the novel's constitutive illegibility – is it AIDS? is it something else? is it both? – by “diagnosing” an undiagnosible illness. Whether on the part of writers who read *Camere separate* as AIDS novel or critics who never discussed it in relation to AIDS, numerous readers proposed symptomatic readings. Such readings at once respond to the text's linguistic ambiguity and attempt to “cure” the linguistic uncertainty legible in the novel. I propose instead a queerly doubled view – taking seriously gay critics' reception of *Camere separate* as “mirroring” their AIDS-era losses *and* respecting the textual obfuscation of Thomas' illness. It will analyze the novel in the context of AIDS while, in the same breath, acknowledging the impossibility of assigning “one” definitive meaning, including AIDS, to the book.

Illegibility, I am arguing, is a productively political element in the novel. Nameless and described, illness dwells somewhere between the legible (described in written words) and illegible (sans a stated name). Whether in interpreting *Camere separate* as about AIDS or in *not* reading that illness into the text, readers encounter a text that leaves much unsaid. Even those who call *Camere separate* an “AIDS novel” must address the book's linguistic “discretion” or “reticence.” In the introductory essay to a 2004 translation of the book, the American writer Edmund White says that “*Separate Rooms* is an AIDS novel that barely mentions the disease.”<sup>304</sup> Quoted on that edition's book jacket, Jonathan Keates similarly dubs it “an AIDS novel of dignified beauty, rejecting gay parish boundaries in favour of more generous celebrations of common humanity.” The gay journalist-cum-historian, Giovanni Dall'Orto, describes *Camere separate* as “infinitamente reticente.” And, most recently, Sciltian Gastaldi says that “è necessario verificare [...]: se la malattia che porta uno dei due protagonisti a morte sia decifrabile come AIDS.”

*Camere separate* is a text that enacts queer illegibility on its pages – inviting (and then frustrating) the reader to detect its “hidden” meaning. The novel achieves this, I have argued, by staying in part inexplicit: containing an illness and allusions that are unnamed but also noticeable. Furthermore, *Camere separate* explicitly brings up the topic of legibility. This occurs, principally, in relation to the follow subjects: same-sex attraction, illness, and queer intertexts. When Leo visits Thomas at the Munich hospital,

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<sup>304</sup> See Pier Vittorio Tondelli, *Separate Rooms* (London: Serpent's Tale Press, 2005).

the narration makes note of Leo's queer position in that space: invited and unwelcome, present and out-of-place, known to the relatives and not recognized as family. In representing Leo's limited interaction with Thomas, the novel engages in a prolonged meditation on who – which subjects – are inscribed / admitted / read as familiar—both in the literal/legal sense of being part of the family and in the sense of being read as “admissible” in a given context.

Leo is, physically, allowed in the hospital. But, on a symbolic and on a legal level, he is granted entry and then excised. Thomas' father calls Leo to say that the German musician is about to die, saying: “Mio figlio la vuole vedere. Faccia presto perché non abbiamo molto tempo” (34). The Italian conjugations accentuate the social distance between Leo and his ex's father, who uses the formal “Lei” (you) to address Leo. In asking Leo to come Munich, a subtle linguistic division is made between “Lei” (you) and “noi” (we). When the father says “non abbiamo molto tempo,” it is unclear – and questionable – whether “noi,” an inclusive pronoun, includes Leo or refers only to Thomas' family. Leo's lack of inclusion in the family tragedy is further stressed when Thomas has to ask his father to leave the two of them alone: “Il padre guarda Thomas facendogli capire che uscirà. ‘Solo cinque minuti,’ aggiunge. Aspettano in silenzio che l'uomo esca” (35) Whatever time “we” have left, it seems, does not include Leo. He is allowed just five minutes.

In describing the hospital scene, the novel stresses how certain individuals – namely blood relations -- are inscribed and then read as worthy of immediate recognition. Others, such as Leo, are also present. Their presence, though, is subsequently overwritten—deemed ineligible. In dying, the “reality” of Thomas' life – which had included a three-year relationship with Leo – is amended in order to render him, once again, legible to a system of heterosexual kinship (i.e., Thomas = son). In this space of familial suffering, Leo receives fleeting admission. In the place of familial suffering, Leo is there but not intelligible. Because he is not “really” family, he must go: “Il padre rientra. Leo capisce che deve andarsene. Thomas è restituito, nel momento finale, alla famiglia, alle stesse persone che l'hanno fatto nascere e che ora, con il cuore devastato dalla sofferenza, stanno cercando di aiutarlo a morire” (36-37). The literal return of the father coincides with Thomas being returned (“resituito”) to a symbolic order in which only the bonds of blood – not those of affect or from shared history – are read as real.

The novel calls the symbolic reordering of Thomas' life a revision that effaces his lived history (“storia”). Intriguingly, the novel lodges this critique by mentioning who is inscribed and who is not inscribed in the official documents. The erotic/amorous bond once shared by Thomas and Leo is represented in terms of what is expected to stay illegible or, at least, unmarked:

Non c'è posto per lui in questa ricomposizione parentale. Lui non ha sposato Thomas, non ha avuto figli con lui, nessuno dei due porta per l'anagrafe il nome dell'altro e non c'è un solo registro canonico sulla faccia della terra su cui siano vergate le firme dei testimoni della loro unione. Eppure per oltre tre anni si sono amati con passione, hanno vissuto insieme a Parigi, a Milano, in giro per l'Europa. Hanno scritto insieme, hanno suonato, hanno ballato. Si sono azzuffati, si sono strapazzati, anche odiati. Si sono amati. Ma è come se improvvisamente, accanto a quel letto d'agonia, Leo si rendesse conto di aver vissuto non una grande storia d'amore, ma una piccola avventura di collegio.

Come se gli dicessero vi siete divertiti e questo va bene. Ma qui stiamo combattendo per la vita. Qui la vita è in gioco. E noi, un padre, una madre, un figlio siamo le figure reali della vita. (37)

This passage maps out how social intelligibility materializes as the real: via repeated acts of inscription. It then plumbs the effect of such inscriptions—that some social actors, like parents, come to be recognized as “reali” all while others are said to have no real importance. Illegibility is not absence or untruth here. It is, rather, a presence or lived reality that is not recorded. What has been made illegible – Leo and Thomas’ “storia” – is, biographically, very real. But, between these realities, one affective and one genetic, only the familial past/name is treated as “real.” Only it will become part of Thomas’ official “Storia” (history). Only it can efface its own constructedness—its being a “story” told and retold as reality.

The narration lists why others will read Thomas and Leo as unreal: “Nessuno dei due porta per l’anagrafe il nome dell’altro e non c’è un solo registro canonico sulla faccia della terra su cui siano vergate le firme dei testimoni della loro unione” (37). Others’ ability to recognize the “realness” of their union is distinct from the historical/factual “reality” of their life together. Whereas the latter is defined by years of actual experiences, the former is the result of official inscription. Only some realities, the narration avers, are recorded within the confines of the “reale.” Only certain “figure” are deemed “reali” enough to be named in the law. Reality is cast, then, as a normative “composizione”—an artful arranging of the social within language that frames some beings as “reale,” while consigning others to the ever-present edges of enunciation and illegibility.

Each of the absences listed above – no marriage, no child, no joint last name, and no legal record – is enmeshed in inscriptive rites. In matrimony, one spouse’s last name can become the other’s. After birth, a child is given the name of one or both parents. In Catholic weddings, the pair’s signatures are “vergate” in a “registro canonico.” Subjects’ social intelligibility – or, in our case, some groups’ lack thereof – surfaces due to their inscription in the records of the real. In the case of marriage, names are handwritten in a public register—recorded in writing. This rite literalizes a theme raised in this scene: the imprinting of some beings as intelligible and some as unintelligible. Ritualized inscriptions, the novel implies, reproduce certain “figure” as “reali.” Being figured within the “real” leads others then to read a person as being “real.” *Camere separate* claims that what we assume to be “reality” accrues legitimacy through recurring acts of nomination/omission. Thought by many to describe reality, such rituals *write* its contours into being. Legitimacy is the result of being made legible.

The text differentiates here between people, like Thomas’ parents, who are immediately perceived as legitimate and those whose pain is said not to be as real. This is most evident when the subjects of the verbs swap from “loro” (when discussing Thomas/Leo) to “noi” (when mentioning blood relations). A few pages earlier, Thomas’ father had used a “noi” of dubious referent when he phoned Leo. In switching the verbal subjects here from an ostensibly neutral “they” (“si sono amati,” “hanno scritto,” etc) to the typically inclusive “we” (“qui stiamo combattendo per la vita”), the narration reminds the reader of that prior phone call. Now, though, the *noi* of enunciation is not enclosed in quotation marks. The shift in grammatical subject goes visibly unmarked. *They* bleeds almost imperceptibly into *we*. And yet, instead of denoting Leo and Thomas’ inclusion,

this move stresses their continued exclusion. The disembodied *noi* of enunciation patronizingly says to them “vi siete divertiti.” Their “storia d’amore,” while a biographical fact, was not “reale.”

When Thomas’ father called Leo, his *noi* was opaque – did it include Leo? did it refer only to the family? This time, the social actors referenced by “we” are explicitly designated. The text states: “E noi, un padre, una madre, un figlio siamo le figure reali della vita” (38). Unambiguously, *noi* omits Leo. “We,” the reader now sees, was never inclusive. “They,” which at first seems a banal reference to Leo and Thomas, comes now to connote alterity. This instance of non-inclusion is linguistically legible (“sono” [they are] shifts to “siete” [you all are] to “siamo” [we are]). But, in terms of punctuation, it stays unmarked. No inverted commas frame the speaking *noi*. Even when *noi* stays graphically unadorned, the text aligns being (“siamo”) with a semantic/visual composition (“figure” and “ricomposizione parentale”). “E noi siamo [...] le figure reali”— *we are real figures*. In employing a term of artifice, the novel claims that what “we” think *is* “real” exists as an effect of figuration. Dominant figurations of the real, like the *noi* sans quotation marks, go largely unmarked. Via writing, the constructedness of the “real” can be made legible.

In this scene, the institutions of the “real” overwrite Thomas and Leo. In effacing their intimacy, queerness is not literally expunged. Desires not deemed “real” do in fact dwell, ill described, inside the spaces of the “real.” They are literally present but figuratively excluded. To align Thomas with the “real’s” ideal contours, then, his past life must first be inked over. When Thomas’ father returns, the narration stresses that in death Thomas will now get *re-inscribed*:

Leo allora sente l’interezza della propria vita abissalmente separata dai grandi accadimenti del vivere del morire. Come se avesse sempre vissuto in una zona separata della società. Come se il suo star male al mondo, o il suo essere felice, il suo vagabondare, tutto si fosse svolto su un palcoscenico. Ora finiva la rappresentazione. I padri e le madri, la chiesa, lo stato, gli uffici d’anagrafe ristabilivano il loro possesso. Riordinavano, seppellivano, consegnavano tutto alla polvere azzerante degli archivi. Tutto meno l’insignificante dolore di un ragazzo estraneo. (37)

Leo sees that whatever “zona separata” he and Thomas had sought to carve out for themselves had been illusory; although they had tried to escape society’s imposed limits, their “storia” had always been circumscribed by the nameable. As Thomas’ death approaches, “ora finiva la rappresentazione.” In these two passages, figural images depict both the social actors who are thought “reali” (i.e., father/mother/son) and those whose story/history is treated as less-than-real. Nuclear family is called a “ricomposizione parentale” or a reassemblage of recognizable “figures.” Leo’s recent life is called artificial but not fake. With Thomas’ end in view, the central fiction (“rappresentazione”) of their years together – believing that they could live entirely beyond the bounds of the real – comes to its discomfiting close.

Striving to remake “reality” in their own image, Leo now sees, had been akin to actors trying to pass off a staged show (“palcoscenico”) as the real. It failed to acknowledge that the “real” is not some feeble ideal. It is institutionally reproduced. As a result, the “real” can affect those individuals who seek to flee the toxic bonds of its taxonomies. And, even when individuals do manage to lead their lives in part as the

“unreal,” this does not necessarily mean that others, especially those already lauded as “reali,” will easily recognize this form of life as legitimate. So, on one level, *Camere separate* sketches the “real” as a social fiction that styles itself, via unmarked repetition, as synonymous with all of reality. On the other, it claims that marginal subjects cannot sidestep by choice the “real’s” constricting contours. To live as the unreal is to remain largely unrecognized, even when present. To live as the unreal is to be illegible – unintelligible – inside institutions that confer legitimacy.

In order to make Thomas’ legible within the “real,” he must be inscribed in its archives. Post-mortem, the “unreality” of his life will be transfigured into a recognizable/legible shape: the dead son. In death, he will get retraced. “I padri e le madri, la chiesa, lo stato, gli uffici d’anagrafe ristabilivano il loro possesso. Riordinavano, seppellivano, consegnavano tutto alla polvere azzerrante degli archivi,” the narration reads (37). Each institution named here – parents, the church, the state, and the civil registry – correspond to the absences cited above in the earlier block quote: “i padri e le madri” = “non ha avuto figli”, “la chiesa” = “registro canonico,” “lo stato” = “non ha sposato Thomas,” and “uffici d’anagrafe” = “non porta per l’anagrafe il nome dell’altro.” Contrasted, then, is the non-inscription of certain subjects – both in the sense of a speaking subject and in the sense of a subject of discussion – from the records of the “real” and the re-inscription of one life, Thomas. In explaining what will now become Thomas, the text binds the question of legibility/legitimacy to official acts of writing.

When Leo arrives at the hospital, he feels out of place. This is because he has no official status there. As Thomas’ ex lover, there is no familiar term to denote the contours of their relationship – neither at the state-sanctioned level nor in everyday speech. Intelligibility – being *read* as legitimate presence – is an effect of how and where one is marked in the records of the “real.” One can be present, it is worth repeating, as the “unreal.” We do not have a clean split, then, between what legible (presence) and what illegible (absence). Rather, we have what is read as real and what is inscribed as false or unintelligible. In death, the recent “reality” of Thomas’ life is rewritten in official ink. Interlacing institutions of the “real” – the nuclear family and the state registry, for instance – turn him into a nominal trace. They yield an annihilating legibility. The “real” archives biography, treating queerness as a “story” to be buried.

Whatever life is made legible to posterity is a retroactive fiction: an existence (re)composed of “le figure reali.” Articulated in this scene is a tension between being present (being there) and having no clear name (being read as out-of-place). There is an unresolved friction between lived reality, the actual histories that make up a person’s life, and what details in the end will permanently recorded inside the “real.” Ideal contours brush up against brute experience. The novel depicts this tension through descriptions of space and movement. It repeats the verbal phrase “non c’è” to indicate Leo’s non-place within language and then cites the former couple’s itinerant years “a Parigi, a Milano” (37). Physically present in the space of family suffering but symbolically unmarked in the records of the real, Leo *transits* between omission/occlusion (“non c’è...”) and partial recognition (when he is allowed entry). The mobility of their prior life, “in giro per l’Europa,” is contrasted with the potent immovability of the “real’s” true social actors. Their “storia” was a fact, yes, but it will find no subsequent mention.

Via repetition, certain subjects emerge as immediately intelligible. Via repetition, other subjects are inscribed as illegible beings. In terms of queerness, one can be

perceived as hyper-visible (notably “out of place”) *and* illegible (hard to decipher within the social world’s dominant codes). So, in this sense, illegibility is not the same as absence or invisibility. It is the social world’s incapacity to admit certain subjects into the realm of the legitimate or the comprehensible. It consigns certain beings to the margin – the blank space of text that, ever present, is rarely perceived as part of the story. The illegible subject, then, is not so much one who cannot be seen. Rather, it is one whose difference is inscribed (and then read) as *unintelligible* or *illegitimate*. Legibility is a volatile inscription produced in language. To draw attention to this process of inscription is to render legible the discursive violence that enables certain social actors to emerge as intelligible and others to be reproduced as unintelligible.

Leo is neither physically absent (he was begrudgingly invited in) nor figuratively included (he is not “noi”). Butler’s words are, again, instructive in evaluating this ambivalence:

Even within the field of intelligible sexuality, one finds that the binaries that anchor its operations permit for middle zones and hybrid formations, suggesting that the binary relation does not exhaust the field in question. Indeed, there are middle regions, hybrid regions of legitimacy and illegitimacy that have no clear names and where nomination itself falls into a crisis produced by the variable, sometimes violent boundaries of legitimating practices that come into uneasy and sometimes conflictual contact with one another. These are not precisely places where one can choose to hang out, subject positions one might opt to occupy. These are non-places where recognition, including self-recognition, proves precarious if not elusive, in spite of one’s best efforts to be a subject in some recognizable sense. They are not sites of enunciation, but shifts in the topography from which a questionably audible claim emerges: the claim of the not-yet-subject and the nearly recognizable (108)

Although his affection for Thomas is read as less “real” than the family’s love, Leo is still let into the hospital. Linguistically excluded from “noi,” Leo is nonetheless granted spatial entry within the site of familial suffering. The text stresses, though, that his brief presence will not enter him into the family’s symbolic confines. And yet, as Butler notes, there “are hybrid regions of legitimacy and illegitimacy” where competing social “practices [...] come into uneasy and sometimes conflictual contact.” The hospital room, I am arguing, represents one of those “non-places” or “middle zones.” Recognition “proves precarious” in this non-place, though. This is not just the case for Leo and Thomas. The confines of the “real” are rendered briefly unrecognizable by Leo’s presence.

He shares the site of familial suffering but does not dwell within the family’s figurative confines. Granted entry sans inclusion, Leo is symbolically “unreal” in a place reserved for “real” family. Because his presence is allowed due to the father, Leo does not occupy a “site of enunciation.” When he was asked to come to Munich, Thomas’ father said “mio figlio la vuole vedere.” Leo enters this space, then, not quite as a subject. In the father’s words, Leo alternates between being “la” (you, object) and “Lei” (you, subject). Leo enters a place occupied, both literally and symbolically, by those already recognized as “real.” Once in the hospital, the narration claims, there “are no clear names” for Leo: “non esiste nemmeno una parola, in nessun vocabolario umano, che possa definire per lui chi è stato non un marito, non una moglie, non un amante, non

solamente un compagno ma la parte essenziale” (38) But, his nameless presence continues to smudge the “topography” of the real. Who “really” counts family if Leo is asked to be there? Which desires must be admitted – however curtly, however glibly, however momentarily – as “real” once Leo enters? Is his grief “nearly recognizable” -- pained enough to open a breach, however briefly, in the phobic bounding of the real?

In *Camere separate*, the legibility at issue is not that of sex or gender. But, Butler’s work is apposite to my argument insofar as the novel spotlights how certain subjects – specifically male-male couples – are symbolically excluded from the “real.” The novel narrates how homosexual subjects get rendered “illegible,” un-noted and overwritten, even when they *are* present. This is most evident in the scene of Thomas’ hospitalization. In relaying Leo’s visit, the text describes how their bond – the years they spent together – will not be inscribed in the record of his death. Inscription, here, is a normative act. It dictates which bonds will receive recognition (being legible to the law) and whose presence will go unnoted. Leo’s illegibility to the law is not, of course, a concrete absence. In reality, he lived with Thomas. His illegibility is the effect of a linguistic inscription. In omitting Leo from the record of Thomas’ life, “l’ufficio d’anagrafe” delimits the ideal confines of “la famiglia.” It overwrites the couple’s lived reality with the symbolic order of the “real,” which the novel shows to be a social fiction.

What is made unnoticeable is not just the homosexual pair. The act of inscription, the novel stresses, goes undetected. Thomas’ past life as a gay man is not the only thing buried under the archive’s “polvere azzerrante.” Although inscription reproduces legible and illegible individuals, its architecture of omitting/admitting remains unseen by those it deems subjects. Here, the novel writes from the perspective of the unnoted/the overwritten in order to show how language 1) can efface its own obliterating omissions and 2) consign some beings to continued il/legibility.<sup>305</sup> But, while the novel does critique the illegibility engraved on gay relations, the text also considers what Butler calls “the advantages of remaining less than intelligible.”<sup>306</sup>

Opprobrium is not the only consequence of unintelligibility. Butler claims indeed that when dominant categories are thrown into question, or troubled, “it becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal.”<sup>307</sup> According to Butler, this is when “we come to understand that what we take to be ‘real’ [...] is, in fact, a changeable and *revisable* reality” (ibid, xxiii; my emphasis). Famously, Butler refers to bodies’ capacity to be rendered uncertain – is that a “he”? is that a “she”? – as gender trouble. Troubling individuals have been regarded as “what is ‘impossible,’ illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate.”<sup>308</sup> Exclusion from the bounds of the intelligible does not necessarily

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<sup>305</sup> In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler writes: “There are advantages to remaining less than intelligible, if intelligibility is understood as that which is produced as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms. Indeed, if my options are loathsome, if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred. It may well be that my sense of social belonging is impaired by the distance I take, but surely estrangement is preferable to gaining a sense of intelligibility by virtue of norms that will only do me in from another direction. Indeed, the capacity to develop a critical relation to these norms presupposes a distance from them, an ability to *suspend* or defer the need for them. [...] That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility.” See Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 3.

<sup>306</sup> Butler, 2004, 3.

<sup>307</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1999) xxiii.

<sup>308</sup> Butler, 1999, viii.

imply a failure to mention what has been excluded. In fact, one of Butler's key insights is that "unintelligible" bodies are *necessarily* cited in order to cast other bodies as intelligible or real. The trouble haunting gender is the existence of system that must name (in order to refuse) the very bodies who are called not real.

Being "illegible" within this system can mean to have one's difference considered hyper visible. Butler identifies beings who "fail to comply with the categories that naturalize and stabilize" the received limits of the body (*GT*, 140). To "fail" to stay legible within the social world's "defining limits" can show the ways that some bodies' preferred status is shored up through the production, in language, of unintelligible others.<sup>309</sup> In fact, marginal groups also *invoke* trouble in order to call attention to the exclusions upon which the social world, language included, is ordered. Trouble here works as a verb – meaning to *trouble* the social world's oft-repeated contours. "The strange, the incoherent," the illegible "give us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted" world "as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might be constructed differently," she writes (*GT*, 140).

Unintelligibility is in part normatively produced. For queer lives to be called/thought "incomprehensible," heterosexuality must constantly name itself as synonymous with the "real." Unintelligibility remains also a tool of subcultural critique. Queer representations, whether inked or performed, often seek to scramble – via citation or re-enactment – reality's much-announced limits. In doing this, what is said to *be* "real" is made alien – displayed as an ideal proscription of how the world *should act*. Immediate intelligibility is bestowed on those bodies that repeat, sans troubling, the "real's" social fictions. In failing to stay legible within these confines, though, certain marginal subjects continue to show the "unreal" to be a "densely populated" terrain.<sup>310</sup> Queer scrambling can aim to make the "real" unrecognizable, even if fleetingly so. Such scrambling seeks to make legible the architectures of inscription and exclusion that, scarcely detected, buttress the "real."<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Judith Butler writes that "this exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject being, those who are not yet 'subjects,' but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here the precisely those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is *required to circumscribe the domain of the subject*. This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute that dreaded site of identification against which – and by virtue of which – the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life. In this sense, the subject *is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation*" (my emphasis). See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 3.

<sup>310</sup> Butler, 1993, 3

<sup>311</sup> Judith Butler has argued that subjects' legibility is produced through speech acts, whose repetition is so quotidian as to render them largely imperceptible. The legibility of subjects, both in the grammatical sense (i.e., "I am X") and as a topic of conversation, refers to a person being *read* as a legitimate. Legibility emerges, Butler claims, as an *effect* of repeated acts of inscription. Inscription takes place in language, including both the terms that delimit proper attributes and the linguistic production of others as inscrutable. Because inscription accrues the force of "reality" via daily repetition, its reiterative enactment goes unnoted by many. But, to those "bodies that have been regarded as false, unreal and unintelligible," their continued exclusion from the realm of the recognizable remains painfully clear. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiii.

### 3. The Politics Il/legibility

The next section of this chapter examines what might be accomplished, politically, by keeping certain subjects less than intelligible. I dub this the politics of the il/legibile, arguing for the untelligible's potential to collapse either/or divides—blurring the borders between self and other, sane and sick, known and unknowable. If there is a politics to the unnamed here, it is at the level of reception – the transmission of affect from text to reader. Even when leaving the illness unnamed, *Camere separate* does specifically name queer authors: Christopher Isherwood, W.H. Auden, and Walt Whitman. In naming them, it raises the question of selective legibility – who will notice these names? who will glance over them? Significantly, it spotlights the desires that literary texts stir in readers.

Legibility (and illegibility) are *not* limited here to medical decipherment. And, neither is the unnamed. While the text explicitly mentions the above authors, other inter-texts are coyly veiled: principally, Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964), Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" (1955) and both James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) and *Another Country* (1963). Clues to their presence are decipherable in the novel but never specifically named. Here, some authors are explicitly cited while other texts are winked at – legible only to some readers. Raising the question of illegibility in terms of both *literary* works and the gay male body, *Camere separate* forces the question: how does the unnamed direct the *desires* we experience, both as readers and as sexual subjects?

In making its literary inter-texts alternately named and unnamed, *Camere separate* trains us early on how to approach its central malady: a thing legible to some and mysterious to others. The mysterious nature of Thomas' illness cannot be reduced to a shame-filled silence. It is embedded within a literary text that, explicitly and implicitly, thematizes questions of legibility/illegibility. To chastise Tondelli for not being more explicit, for not "outing" *Camere separate*'s illness as HIV/AIDS, is doubly flawed. First, it assumes that Pier Vittorio Tondelli's silence about his HIV-status and the novel's reticence are identical – both being motivated by the same unspeakable shame. Secondly, it does not address the novel's own nuanced *plumbing* of the topic legibility/illegibility, which interlaces questions of invisibility and visibility alongside those of inscription and decipherment. Critiquing Tondelli's fictional tale in light of the ACT-UP mantra "Silence = Death," writers like Giovanni Dall'Orto have assumed, wrongly, that the *effect* of literary reticence and linguistic indeterminacy must be conservative: the occlusion – or closeting – of what goes unnamed.

This chapter seeks to undermine the assumption that illegibility must equal occlusion/absence. I argue instead for il/legibility's *radical* power to unsettle the border between self and other, sane and sick, and visible and invisible. This unsettling – the crisscrossed border between allegedly discrete terms – is where the novel's queer politics can be glimpsed. The very indeterminacy of illness in *Camere separate* – what I call il/legibility – represents a rupture in a system that presumes to know who is "ill" and those who is "safe." Why must we assume that il/legibility is symptomatic of shame-filled withholding? More productively, it can be read as the *blurring* of borders.

A critical example will explain the productive potential of il/legibility—which I define as being inscribed "within" a regime of truth and scrambling, from the inside out, its ruling codes. In *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, Robert

McRuer relays an anecdote from a conference he attended in the Netherlands.<sup>312</sup> While presenting there in 2004, he says that he “came out as HIV-positive” (53). But, he then goes on to say:

I’m not, as far as I know, HIV-positive, though like many other gay men of my generation (coming of age at the very beginning of the AIDS crisis), I’ve had lovers who are positive and, actually, I’ve spent not insignificant periods of my adult life unsure of my serostatus. [...] The interdisciplinary expert meeting where I was speaking was meant to explore ‘the experience of the inside of the body,’ and as the sole representative of queer theory and disability studies, I wanted to draw attention to the politics of looking into queer and disabled bodies. I wanted to raise questions, in other words, about what exactly people wanted to see inside disabled and queer bodies. (53)

McRuer came out as living with a disease that, to his knowledge, he did not have. He did so by donning a t-shirt that read “HIV-POSITIVE” in block letters. This written declaration required onlookers to *read* the presence of HI, un-seeable to the naked eye, into his body. In garbing himself in this shirt, he drew attention to the way that the gay male body has been *discursively* delimited as the expected locus of HIV. Even when not seen, even when illegible on the corporeal surface, its presence can be imagined (and deciphered) there.

And yet, McRuer’s own language is restrained. Rather than conclusively stating “I’m not HIV-positive,” McRuer renders permeable his sero-negativity through the qualifying phrase “as far as I know.” He, furthermore, acknowledges that he has been “unsure” of his status. The politics behind such hedging are clear: a refusal to cleave the world between those who are “positive” and those who are stably “safe” (i.e., HIV-negative). McRuer is not implying that there is no such thing as sero-negativity but is attempting to *trouble* – to confound – our ability to divide the world between those who we assume are infected and those who we assume are not.

That dividing line, McRuer reminds, is a far from stable. People who believe themselves to be negative or “safe” from infection could, without knowing it, already be (or later become) HIV-positive. Sero-status is not often known to an individual, rendering declarations such as “I’m HIV-negative” an unsure (or perhaps fictitious) enunciation. In making his body wear the words “HIV-POSITIVE,” McRuer at once invites others to read him as infected *and* troubles efforts to instantiate a firm boundary between HIV-positive and HIV-negative people. McRuer acknowledges wearing this t-shirt was strategic, describing it as a “contingently universalized HIV-positive identity” (55). By this, he means the linguistic *performance* of an HIV-positive status, even in the absence of the retrovirus within his body. McRuer claims that, in wearing these t-shirts, AIDS activists would often provoke onlookers to ask them: “Do you have HIV?” (55). In subsequently evading a yes or no answer to that query, activists aimed to draw attention to the desires we bring to and project onto others’ bodies. In addition, they sought to throw into doubt – to render illegible – whose bodies might be perceived as HIV-positive. The uncertainty of infection, not its safely-demarcated legibility, was part of their message.

Desires, including the urge to diagnose, are elicited and made palpable by the t-shirt. But, McRuer writes that while the t-shirt “promises a glimpse inside, it also defers

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<sup>312</sup> Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

that glimpse” (ibid, 57). It initially invites the desire-to-diagnose, to render known who is and isn’t HIV-positive, through its linguistic intervention. Simultaneously, the wearers render illegible who is and is not to be read as infected, underscoring the belief that, “if the AIDS crisis is not over, HIV-negative status is never guaranteed” for anyone (ibid, 57). “Coming out” as HIV-positive did not reveal the “truth” lurking, unseen, under the surface of McRuer’s body.<sup>313</sup> It did, however, render legible the “truth of AIDS” mentioned by Simon Watney – people’s desire to limit the retro-virus to a knowable “other” (i.e., the homosexual body). This enunciation of a positive status works in tandem with the wearers’ subsequent refusal to say their HIV-status, guaranteeing that the t-shirts “will not satisfy a desire to locate a picture (or an identity) definitively (safely?) within an individual—even as they nonetheless on some level generate that desire” (ibid, 57). This dissonance aims to spark a crisis in legibility, smudging the boundaries between self and other vis-à-vis the strained interlacing of what can be read and what is not explicitly said or even knowable.

I pause on McRuer’s anecdote in order to stress the following point: legibility, being able to read or to decipher the sign of something, is not synonymous with veracious exposure. Reading something in a given text or on a given body exists in relation to what has already been inscribed as intelligible. McRuer “came out” as HIV-positive *not* in order to reveal an “inner” truth that, otherwise, would have remained undetectable to the gathered onlookers. In this sense, his “coming out” manipulates via tragic parody the logic of closet – wherein verbal declarations (“coming out”) are thought to unveil a person’s long-existing (but hidden/obscured) truth. What McRuer sought to make legible was the *insecurity* of knowledge around his (and others’) HIV-status. By announcing a status legible to all and yet subsequently unconfirmed by him (the subject who bears it), he drew attention to the crowd’s proclivity to read (and not read) some bodies as infected. He also aimed to make legible the fictitious divides between self/safe and other/infected—eliciting and then troubling the audience’s urge to know, with certainty, the “truth” of his status. The politics of this intervention hinge as much upon the refusal to clarify who the t-shirt’s “HIV-POSITIVE” refers to as upon the phrase’s inscription atop the body. Legibility and unintelligibility crisscross productively. Reticence around his actual status – not just the presumably revelatory act of “coming out” – vexes the audience’s ability to, safely, know the “truth” behind the t-shirt.

McRuer’s discussion is useful for the purposes of this chapter as an example of the politics of the unintelligible—of rendering unstable who is and who isn’t to be read in relation to HIV/AIDS. Such interventions are founded on the cultural legibility of AIDS (i.e., certain individuals / groups/bodies = AIDS) and the confounding of the statements that such cultural codes inscribe as “truth” (i.e., straight = safe). A politics of the unintelligible would require either *not* definitively saying something (which others may view as an inhibited or apolitical “muteness”) or rendering murky the borders that, presumably, separate self and other. Such a politics seems to contradict the demand to

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<sup>313</sup> McRuer says that: “In my presentation, I withheld the meta-reflection on my own t-shirt that I am offering in the context of this chapter—a meta-reflection that now entails, for me personally, coming out as HIV-negative. I knew that had been in sexual situations where HIV was unquestionably on one side of the condom, a thin layer of latex (*spatially*, that is, the tiniest barrier) and potentially a split second in time (*temporally*, again, the tiniest of barrier) separating one interior space from the other. But given the ways in which my paper was functioning in that very specific rhetorical context (apparently straight and nondisabled), I declined to say which side of the latex the virus was on.” McRuer, *ibid*, 57.

“come out” -- to break a socially-enforced silences (i.e., what is thought “unspeakable”) via speech. A textual politics of the unintelligible appears to run counter, in fact, to the activism that sprung up around AIDS in the 1980s and early 1990s. Political organizing such as the U.S.-based ACT-UP sought to shatter public institution’s and infected individuals’ collective silence about AIDS. On another level, it seems to go against the specificity that nourishes identity politics: the announced differences that separate “me” and “them.” Viewed from the confessional demands of coming-out politics and the delineating demands of identity politics, the unintelligible has been treated as *complicit* with the continued suppression / erasure of sexual minorities, especially lesbians and gays. Making something unintelligible or illegible is said to obscure it—to keep it quarantined in the closet.

Discussing the differences between the U.S. and Italy, Derek Duncan notes that “an AIDS culture has grown up around [gay men’s] sense of self-identity.” Duncan, says that “an affirmative sense of cultural identity depends on the belief in the value of a visible public presence; nothing, therefore, bedevils AIDS like silence.”<sup>314</sup> Inspired in part by the coming-out politics of the 1970s, activist groups such as ACT-UP declared “silence” to be AIDS’ principal ally. The longer governments and infected individuals remained silent, they claimed, the more people would die. ACT-UP famously declared “Silence = Death.” In this account, visibility is aligned with speaking out and speaking up. Silence, by extension, is considered as a sign shameful invisibility.<sup>315</sup>

But, as Duncan notes, there are many sorts of silence – not all of which can be reduced to a shame-laden secrecy, an oppressive censoring or a deceitful cover-up.<sup>316</sup> It is worth remembering that silence’s social function within everyday speech is, quite often, distinct from its function within fictional narratives.<sup>317</sup> In fiction, silence can be rendered legible (i.e., through “...” or the trailing off of spoken statements). Fiction can render “visible,” in fact, some silences that go unnoticed in the routine social world (i.e., a first-person narrator who recounts, at length, the things s/he *cannot* tell others). Furthermore, omission can function more neutrally to defer the revelation of key plot point – thereby stoking readers’ desire to read on. In each of the above instances, reticence does not imply a failure to come to terms with an uncomfortable truth. It produces effects within narrative/readers, rather than being a lack.

Instead of scolding Tondelli for consigning HIV/AIDS to the closet, I read a *queer* critique in the novel’s insistence on keeping illness, well, il/legible. A novel that does not give its central illness a name can incite different identifications in readers than one in which the main character suffers specifically from AIDS. It may even “open” up the possibility of non-queer readers identifying with the novel’s depiction of gay

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<sup>314</sup> Derek Duncan, “Pier Vittorio Tondelli: An Art of the Body in Resistance,” *Italica* 76 (1999): 55

<sup>315</sup> Derek Duncan writes that “whether expressed through the refusal of governments to take the epidemic seriously and act, or the denial of those potentially most affected by it to come to terms with the situations and relinquish the false comforts of denial, silence is the demon that AIDS activists most want to extirpate. Silence around this most fatal of issues runs counter to every act of self-affirmation and public proclamation that the gay community has learned to embrace.” See Derek Duncan, “Pier Vittorio Tondelli: An Art of the Body in Resistance,” *Italica* 76 (1999): 55.

<sup>316</sup> Derek Duncan, “Pier Vittorio Tondelli: An Art of the Body in Resistance,” *Italica* 76 (1999).

<sup>317</sup> For discussion of silence’s role in literary texts, see: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press) 1990

mourning.<sup>318</sup> I treat illegibility as queer insofar as it trespasses the in-group identity politics of “us” and “them,” refusing to make the gay male body the natural site of AIDS. It may even be possible to read a sort of HIV politics behind the novel’s obfuscation of Thomas’ illness – a politics that de-pathologizes silence.<sup>319</sup>

In leaving Thomas’ illness unnamed, *Camere separate* simultaneously enables gay men to read AIDS into its portrait of queer mourning *and* refuses to make the gay male body the primary locus of that syndrome. It narrates gay loss *and* shirks an assumption, common at the time, that AIDS was confined to the gay male body. Thomas is sick, but of what? In leaving this query unanswered, *Camere separate* troubles the idea of AIDS as a syndrome housed safely in gay body. Its depiction of gay mourning also invites queer readers to see the specifics of their pain reflected in Tondelli’s elegy.

The tendency to offer up symptomatic readings has, in addition, excluded the non-medical forms of legibility treated in the novel. In addition to relaying the emotional aftermath of Thomas’ death, *Camere separate* explicitly depicts the act of reading. Reading remains a vexed site of decipherment. Leo mentions by name writers like W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood and Walt Whitman. All of them were either gay or inked homoerotically-charged works. On the other, it leaves implicit intertexts such as Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl” or James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*. Those texts are alluded to via parallel plots (Baldwin) or linguistic echoes (“Howl”). In this way, the novel at once *names* some intertexts and leaves others unstated (but still legible to some).<sup>320</sup>

Examining this twinned form of decipherment, I demonstrate that legibility and illegibility need not be considered opposites. One can exist alongside – in relation with – the other. This chapter traces *Camere separate*’s productive il/legibility – its narration of an unnamed illness that has somehow remained “legible” to some. Rather than seeking *the* meaning behind this reticence, the cure to its linguistic enigma, I theorize illegibility as a productive presence – a thing that affects readers and troubles either/or divides.

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<sup>318</sup> Antonio Spadaro intuits as much when he writes, of *Camere separate*, “perché la vita del lettore, pur diversississima da quella del narratore e dei personaggi, vibra interioramente fino a identificarsi con la voce narrante e comunque non può restare indifferente? Perché ci si sente coinvolti e ‘interpretati’? Tondelli più che rappresentare, come a volte si è detto, interpreta” (“L’opera di Pier Vittorio Tondelli e i suoi lettori”).

<sup>319</sup> Sciltian Gastaldi questions the impulse to chide Tondelli’s absence of public declarations on AIDS. He argues that contextual factors – emotional, institutional and cultural – allow for and disallow self-revelatory speech acts, especially those that would reveal a terminal diagnosis. He writes that the novel’s evasive treatment of illness should be “contestualizzato nella cornice dell’Italia del 1989. Il tema del dichiarare pubblicamente un proprio grave stato di salute, anche oggi, non è un parametro che possa consentire tra intellettuali (o persone note) socialmente impegnate e persone non socialmente impegnate” (323-324). Writing against “il militante gay Giovanni Dall’Orto,” Gastaldi argues that it is important not to confuse Tondelli’s personal silence about his diagnosis with the continued denunciations found in the novel. Silence, Gastaldi later argues, is not just what Tondelli did not say and did not write. It is a shame-laden *presence* – “il pudore del silenzio sul nome” – within the text’s account of illness (327).

<sup>320</sup> I am indebted to Charlotte Ross’ and Derek Duncan’s analysis. In “Reading Allowed: Contemporary Lesbian and Gay Fiction in Italy,” they argue that the censorship of gay and lesbian subjects in Italy, both at the level of discourse and in terms of which books will be published/deemed officially obscene, has “produced discourses of resistance through the careful construction of gay and lesbian subtexts which remain invisible to, are are ‘read out’ by the heteronormative reader[...], but which leap into relief to those who are sensitized to them—to the reader equipped with ‘lesbian specs’ for example.” See, Gilian Aina and Ann Hallimore Caeser, eds. *Trends in Contemporary Italian Narrative 1989-2007* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) 91-92.

By productive illegibility, I mean the way that the texts *excites* and then *encumbers* symptomatic readings via linguistic non-specificity. Let me be clear, I do not want to say that it is wrong to glimpse AIDS in this novel. Given the cause of Tondelli's death and the epidemic's traumatic impact on gay male communities across Europe and U.S., it would be naïve *not* to mention HIV/AIDS. An effect of the novel's linguistic non-specificity, though, is that readers are left to see or not see the virus. It is certainly possible to argue that such reticence is evidence of the stigma – including shame, unspeakability, silence – tied to AIDS in this era. But, what additional significances might non-specificity convey? Without dismissing the role of gay shame, what effect does il/legibility have on readers? Embedded within a literary text, what work does obfuscation/exposure perform? Is it possible even that gay readers have seen AIDS on these pages *because* Thomas' illness stays unspoken? Is it possible that they have, in fact, identified with the illness' very un-nameability?

Critics' efforts to "cure" this uncertainty overshadow the multiple forms of legibility/illegibility thematized in the novel. Symptomatic readings in this case seek to render *Camere separate* a readable, known, deciphered tale. Textual ambiguity feeds critics' seemingly irreconcilable readings. At the same time, extra-textual factors – what is "outside" a given literary work – continue to frame the diagnoses readers bring to the text. *Camere separate*'s reviewers have applied their own context-specific memories (and amnesias) to the text. In some cases, the novel's language actually sparks symptomatic reading – what is this disease? why is it unnamed? what might it mean? In other instances, the readings arrived at (i.e., *Camere separate* = "an AIDS novel") are shaped by "external" factors such as the distinct histories of the AIDS in the U.S..

As an archive of competing readings, *Camere separate* raises the question: which desires do readers bring to literary texts (i.e., the desire to be reflected or the desire to know)? What drives the desire to diagnose the malady mentioned in the novel? What readings are lost when AIDS' (possible) presence is never considered? Alternately, what surplus meanings get foreclosed —refused even— when Tondelli's layered work is reduced to a collection of symptoms that all necessarily point to AIDS? In all instances, readers are responding to the novel's non-specificity: its dual narration of a terminal sickness that afflicts a gay man *and* its choice not to give that sickness a name. Illness has an overt, corporeal presence in the novel. It is the crux around which *Camere separate*'s first third unfolds. Still, this presence is chimerical – tragically "real" insofar as it kills Thomas *and* hard to locate. Rather than agreeing either with those who would interpret *Camere separate* as an veiled AIDS narrative or those who would see sickness as metaphor of something else (i.e., *not* AIDS), I want to dwell, again, in an in-between place—afloat between both readings.

The il/legibility of illness —that some readers see Thomas' plight as signifying AIDS, while others cannot see AIDS there —demonstrates that something in the novel excites markedly divergent interpretations. This illegibility (ill/egibility?) is, ultimately, never resolved. A desire to render the disease known —diagnosable, identifiable, deciphered— does underwrite many critics' readings. Instead of seeking to cure this non-specificity by pinpointing *the* meaning behind the illness, what if we entertained the prospect of a productive illegibility? Such an approach requires seeing the novel's competing readings as "symptomatic" of an uncertainty that the text (and its critics) can never quite clear up. This chapter explores how the presence of reticence alongside

legibility affects readers, compelling both symptomatic readings and interpretations that see the novel as shamefully silent about AIDS

#### 4. Amended Maladies and Curative Criticism

*Camere separate*'s textual reticence has been read as *symptomatic* of Tondelli's personal inability to speak out about his AIDS' diagnosis and, more broadly, his homosexuality. Soon after Tondelli's death in 1991, Giovanni Dall'Orto penned a commemorative essay titled "Con le Ali Tarbate: Pier Vittorio Tondelli (1955-1991)." The text was eventually published in 1992 in the Italian gay liberation journal *Babilonia* (n. 97, febbraio 1992, pp. 21-23). This piece represents both an elegiac tribute to Tondelli's oeuvre *and* a censure of "lo scrittore che Tondelli avrebbe potuto essere e non è stato" (Dall'Orto, 1992). The title says this much, implying that Tondelli-the-writer could have reached greater heights of achievement had he not been immobilized by Tondelli-the-man. In this metaphor, Tondelli's words are wings—clipped wings at that. What clipped Tondelli's wings, Dall'Orto claims, was his "silenzio" or a failure to "dirlo" (ibid, 1992).

Describing *Camere separate*, Dall'Orto wonders: "Cosa sarebbe stato Tondelli se non fosse stato afflitto dal problema di essere un omosessuale, e per di più uno di quelli che vivono con estremo pudore la loro diversità? Ancora un paradosso: l'omosessualità ha dato (attraverso lo "scandalo") le ali a Tondelli, ma poi gli ha tagliato le gambe." In Dall'Orto's retelling, the scandalous content of Tondelli's texts – including multiple depictions of homosexuality (*Altri libertini* and *Camere separate*) and male-male intimacy (*Pao Pao*) – gave Tondelli his "ali." The scandal mentioned refers to Tondelli's episodic early novel *Altri libertini* (1980). Twenty days after its first printing, the book was accused of "immoralità" and censored by Italian authorities. For Dall'Orto, it was Tondelli's unvarnished account of Emilian youth – drug use, prurient dialog and sex – that made the writer famous. But, Dall'Orto is quick to bemoan Tondelli-the-man – the reticent person who, supposedly, felt "afflitto" by his sexuality. If homosexual content in part underwrote the success of the writer's literary representations, it represented a "problema" for the biographical Tondelli.

Dall'Orto's language sketches Tondelli as a maimed body. Tondelli's silence in life – the decision to "non parlare" in public about his AIDS diagnosis– is literalized by depicting the author as a creature whose continued reticence "gli ha tagliato le gambe" and clipped his wings. Physical impairments here stand in for, exteriorizing, the silences that allegedly "afflicted" Tondelli. Silence is pathological for Dall'Orto – a "lack" of speech conveyed via images of a disabled or damaged body. In this way, a culturally compelled form of "muteness" is re-presented as a sort of visible "deficiency." Reticence, Tondelli's choice not to speak up during his dying days, is figured as a crippling disability. The words that Tondelli never said – a perceived lack in both his public statements and published words – are thus made into severed wings and maimed legs.

In this way, Tondelli's silence be refigured as a lack that Dall'Orto, the critic writing after the author's death, might "cure" by breaking that silence. The job of the critic here is not simply to give an account of Tondelli's life and works but, significantly, to *remedy* what the writer himself never said aloud – to mend the perceived lack in

Tondelli's words. Corporeal language is not limited to chastising the biographical Tondelli. While initially praising Tondelli-the-writer's description of deviant sexuality, Dall'Orto wishes that Tondelli's later literary endeavors would have spoken with *less* reticence. Corporeal "lack" – as stand-in for linguistic reticence – is eventually extended to the *corpus* of Tondelli-the-writer. Dall'Orto writes that the "lack" in Tondelli's body of writing might be best remedied through recuperative reading:

Chi lo ha letto un anno fa, lo rilegga adesso, dopo la morte di Tondelli per Aids, per scoprire come questo sia un romanzo di addio, un faccia-a-faccia con la morte incombente, infinitamente reticente ma costellato di insistiti indizi che permettono al lettore di capire che chi parla è Tondelli stesso. *Camere separate* è insomma una bomba a tempo, un messaggio in codice che solo oggi possiamo decifrare.

Endowed with the post-mortem knowledge that AIDS caused Tondelli's death, the critic can now offer his retroactive assessment of the novel: the voice in the novel "è Tondelli stesso." The novel *is* Tondelli's message to posterity. Before arriving at this declaration, Dall'Orto first acknowledges that *Camere separate* is "infinitamente reticente ma costellato di insistiti indizi." Queerly, then, *Camere separate* remains here a published text that "speaks" the truths that Tondelli, the man, could not publically pronounce. But, notably, it remains "reticente." If it speaks uncomfortable truths (i.e., the writer's looming death from AIDS-related illnesses), it does so "in codice."

On the one hand, "chi parla [nel romanzo] è Tondelli." On the other, the text is said to be defined by its reticence – comprised of "indizi" that "solo oggi possiamo decifrare." According to this essay, Tondelli is able to speak about his actual illness (and its attendant isolation) vis-à-vis the fictional characters in *Camere separate* and, weighed down by "crippling" silence, forced to suggest that illness via a set of discreet allusions. These allusions, Dall'Orto writes, were so opaque that, upon the novel's publication in 1989, no one was able to uncover ("scoprire") their veiled/hidden referent – AIDS and Tondelli's own terminal diagnosis. So, even as the novel is said to speak the truth that Tondelli-the-man could not voice, it is alleged to do so via coded cues ("un messaggio in codice"). Presented as a contradictory patchwork of "crippling" silences and incessant clues ("insistiti indizi"), *Camere separate* speaks the author's pain. In the same piece, *Camere separate* is depicted as symptomatic of Tondelli's regrettable silence. It speaks to his experience but did not speak up and did not speak out enough. The novel's illustration of socially-enforced silence, Dall'Orto implies, conflict with the political demand to speak out about AIDS.

The demand to break the silence around AIDS is famously conveyed in ACT-UP's slogan "Silence = Death"—a phrase that Dall'Orto quotes in "Con le Ali Tarpatate." *Camere separate*, Dall'Orto says, "fa i salti mortali per non nominare ciò di cui parla." Earlier, the essay claims that writing about homosexuality had simultaneously granted Tondelli his "wings" and cut off his "legs." Homosexuality represents for Tondelli, then, a source of literary upwards movement (i.e., the image of flight) and then an incapacitating personal affliction (i.e., clipped wings and maimed legs). On the one hand, Tondelli's text is said to go to extreme physical measures ("fa i salti mortali") in order to remain silent ("non nominare") about its assumed topic ("ciò di cui parla"). Reticence ("non nominare") is evoked via a lithe and flying body—a corpus that takes a mortal leap or makes a full somersault. But, because Dall'Orto is referencing the novel's *regrettable*

reticence, this image is ironic. If the book is *capable* of doing something with its words, it is able *not* to speak up. It is capable of articulating muteness.

Corporeality is used to denote the *novel's* soaring reticence – a textual silence and authorial omission. But, the novel only can be called too reticent because it has already been framed by the critic as being, namelessly, about AIDS. Dall'Orto states that *Camere separate* relays Tondelli's "convivenza con l'AIDS." In these three words, Dall'Orto collapses Tondelli, the man, with Leo, a fictional protagonist.<sup>321</sup> Tondelli-the-man's choice not to discuss his viral status is made synonymous with the novel leaving unnamed one of its characters' illnesses. Both instances of reticence are pathological in critic's view. Reticence becomes a malady in search of a remedy. The remedy, unsurprisingly, is the critic's symptomatic interpretation – deciphering/describing the "indizi" that others could not, at the time, diagnose.

But, the critic does more here than diagnose what less attuned eyes could not spot. By means of retroactive reading, the critic hopes to restore Tondelli's crippled/muted corpus to a body of work that – finally – might speak its whole truth. The shame-stricken Tondelli is said to articulate only some of that truth via fictional stand-ins (i.e., Thomas and Leo). The critic, in contrast, is able to re-member Tondelli in light of what had, previously, not been known. With this in mind, the article's title is worth reconsidering. Tondelli's clipped wings, figuratively, stand in for a lack – muteness? reticence? omission? silences? – that the critic seeks to heal. Said another way, criticism is thought to make whole what had been a partial truth. The critic's function here is not just to interpret but to serve as prosthesis – to compensate for the unnamed ailment (i.e., AIDS) *and* the figuratively failing limbs ("ali tarpate" / "gli ha tagliato le gambe"). Via the critic, muteness becomes speech. Via the critic, symptoms become legible. Via the critic, lack becomes whole.

Describing the novel's reticence, Dall'Orto turns to corporeal images. He says that the novel "fa i salti mortali per non nominare ciò di cui parla." The text takes mortal leaps *not to name* what it *talks about*. Silence ("non nominare") is, oddly, represented here as a lithe body in flight. Because Dall'Orto is discussing *Camere separate's* lamentable reticence, this is an ironic turn of phrase: what the book is *capable* of is shame-filled muteness. It is capable of not naming. It is capable of silence. Given the essay's broken-winged title, the image of the "salto mortale" is no accident. It evokes humans' efforts to achieve – and, inevitably, to fail to achieve – flight. What the novel is capable of doing, Dall'Orto's imagery implies, is a failed or wanting action. Like a bird with clipped wings, it may attempt to rise to great heights but will fall.

Dall'Orto comments that, "leggendo *Camere separate* ci si accorge del fatto che il suo carattere era quello di una persona timida, portata all'introspezione, con una forte vena mistico-religiosa e un gran bisogno di discrezione." Tondelli's published words, the

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<sup>321</sup> Dall'Orto writes that "è insomma Tondelli stesso a volerci fare sapere che il protagonista e l'autore si identificano, in questo romanzo, invitandoci a riferire a lui i pensieri e le vicissitudini del protagonista."

critic notes, are proof that Tondelli-the-man preferred “discrezione” to militancy.<sup>322</sup> Later, Tondelli’s refusal of Dall’Orto’s description of him as “un busone da sbarco” is called “sintomatico.” Tondelli’s supposed discretion is depicted, then, as both absence (what he did not say) and symptom (something to be deciphered). *Camere separate* and Tondelli are sadly silent. Tondelli’s reticence is meaning-rife, if only one knows what to decode.

In Dall’Orto’s reading, it is the critic’s task to decipher and diagnose silent symptoms. Since the novel is said to go to great lengths to “non nominare ciò di cui parla,” it is job of a reader in-the-know to translate the book’s unstated content. Once the novel’s unstated content —“un messaggio in codice”— has been (retroactively) decoded (“oggi possiamo decifrare”), the critic can then make public “ciò di cui parla.” If the novel is *capable* of “non nominare,” the critic – having diagnosed the text’s scattered symptoms – is able to speak in a manner that the original text/language, sadly, could not. The critic envisions his role, then, as a compensatory supplement. He is the interpreter of the text’s regrettable reticence—the words it couldn’t disclose. He is the prosthesis that, despite *and* because of the author’s reticence, might re-form silence into speech, muteness into meaning, and impairment into (retroactive) integrity.

The use of medical language (“sintomatico”) is far from accidental. It frames Tondelli’s published *corpus* as a deficient body of words. Viewed in this light, the critic does more than interpret and evaluate a text. As the decipherer of an allegedly impaired corpus, the task of the critic is presented here as rendering “whole” a textual body “crippled” by the words the author never inked. In writing after Tondelli’s death, Dall’Orto aims to “render pubblico” the truths that Tondelli and the text were incapable of transmitting. Rendering public – “outing” the unstated or the implicit – is, thus, considered not just a recuperative act but a curative one. The critic’s prosthetic prose cannot, of course, replace the words that Tondelli published under his name.<sup>323</sup> But, for Dall’Orto, criticism can enable a sort of reading that affirms the entirety of Tondelli’s oeuvre – including the silences that, “solo oggi,” might be made to speak.

The critic-as-prosthesis is further stressed when Dall’Orto comments that “c’è da sperare che Tondelli sia l’ultimo grande scrittore italiano per il quale un’omosessualità imperfettamente accettata ha costituito un handicap espressivo gravissimo.” Criticism is here a combination of symptomatic reading (i.e., deciphering) and prosthetic prose (i.e., the critic writing what the text/author could not do). Unstated content is both a source of disappointment – a reminder the words that Tondelli could have written (but did not) – *and* the justification for the critic’s curative intervention. Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell write compellingly about depictions of disability as a “narrative prosthesis.”<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> In his critique of Dall’Orto, Gastaldi calls the journalist’s *ad hominem* argument a series of “critiche politiche rivolte all’uomo Tondelli, più che osservazioni critico-letterarie sui suoi testi” (329). Dall’Orto reads in Tondelli’s literary words – words published for all to see – the disappointing signs of “un’omofobia interiorizzata” (333).

<sup>323</sup> Dall’Orto expresses regret for the words Tondelli was *capable* of writing but never wrote. He says “la storia non si fa con i ‘se,’ e Tondelli è stato lo scrittore che è stato. Non è lecito darsi a illazioni, ma certo è lecito esprimere il rimpianto per tanti scrittori che inseguono per anni una scrittura sempre più capace di scavare nel proprio animo, e poi non possono applicarla perché ciò significherebbe mettere a nudo i particolari di un ‘privato’ omosessuale.”

<sup>324</sup> See David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

They argue that disability's literal presence in cultural and literary texts is analogic; disability stays visible in said texts in order to signify something other than itself (i.e., bodily impairment = moral failing, etc). Disability is a "prosthetic" insofar as it enables the narrative's to tell a story about something other the disability that is represented (i.e., blindness). It is the "crutch" on which a tale *not about* disability is told.

Mitchell and Snyder write that "disability is, for the critical enterprise, both promising and discomfoting—as proves true of all prosthetic interventions" (*Narrative Prosthesis*, 15). In Dall'Orto's essay, AIDS, Tondelli's *actual* illness, is textually transmuted into muteness and the crippled body – metaphors that are then used to underscore a "lack" in his corpus/speech. The transfiguring of a hard-to-detect ailment (AIDS) into other impairments (the inability to speak / the inability to walk [or fly]) occurs because AIDS cannot be figured as lack. Having occupied a person's white blood cells, the HIV retrovirus is considered an exceedingly generative *presence*. It replicates and continues to infect new cells. It is an unwelcome surplus that, figuratively, Dall'Orto cannot use as stand-in for deficiency or lack. In order to stress Tondelli's *lack* of writing/speech about AIDS, Dall'Orto ceases to talk about that specific syndrome. In its stead, *figurative* depictions of outwardly impaired bodies (clipped wings, "handicap," no legs) and a man incapable of speech proliferate.

The irony of this is that Dall'Orto chides Tondelli for neither directly representing nor speaking up about AIDS. And yet, constrained by a cultural logic that equates speech with presence/plenitude and reticence with lack/deficit, Dall'Orto himself does not write directly about AIDS here. Tondelli's terminal illness fades from Dall'Orto's published discourse so that the author's other "affliction" ("afflitto"), his regrettable reticence, might then takes its place. Rather than depicting reticence as muteness, as one might expect, Dall'Orto re-figures it into another sort of impairment. Instead of a mute corpus, "Con le ali tarpati" invokes images of clipped wings, severed limbs and "un handicap espressivo gravissimo." So, a hard-to-detect AIDS is supplanted by ineffectual reticence (understood as an authorial shortcoming and personal pathology), which in turn is recast as an outwardly "handicapped" body.

The sequence of these transformations shadows Dall'Orto's critique of Tondelli – his sexuality is hard to read, he stayed too mute, and he did not "rendere pubblico." For the critic, to "rendere pubblico" is equivalent to making visible the words that went uninked or had stayed un-uttered. Omissions are figured by Dall'Orto, in fact, as detectable infirmities; this move literalizes the goal of "visibility" that typified the coming-out politics of the 1980s and 1990s gay movement (and AIDS activism). Activists envisioned visibility ("uscire fuori dall'armadio") as a curative to the closet's forced silences. Silence cannot, of course, be seen. But, in coming out, queers were said to make "visible" the sexualities that society had opted not to see. With this in mind, Dall'Orto attempts in this essay to rewrite Tondelli / Tondelli's corpus within the logic of coming-out – making visible the "expressive" deficiencies that had "handicapped" his ability to "render pubblico" an undisclosed truth during his life.

In depicting Tondelli via maimed bodies, silence—a thing that cannot be seen but might be detected—transforms into a visible deficiency. Rather than acknowledging the presence of silence in *Camere separate* – including scenes that explicitly note how silences imprints onto queer relations – Tondelli's text is called hindered by "un handicap espressivo gravissimo." "Handicap" signifies the words that Tondelli was not able to

render public. Silence is recast, through criticism's recuperative intervention, as a detectable lack. In figuring Tondelli's corpus as a muted body, Dall'Orto aims to expose the "silences" that had hampered the author's ability to write – to make "legible" what had gone undetected/undisclosed. The movement from "invisible" utterances to "visibile" surface stresses the biographical Tondelli's inability to embody the coming-out politics that Dall'Orto lauds. The critic, not the author himself, is capable of transmuting silence into substance—published omission into public avowals.

A scarcely-visible lack, through critical recuperation, is said to be made public. A corpus that had been "crippled" by Tondelli's "expressive" deficiency is made whole via criticism. Because the novel can never be mended/amended by the dead author, its alleged "omissions" remain a source of frustration. Criticism tries then to *inscribe* it within the "visibility" politics of coming-out—the very politics that the text and author are said to fail to embody. Dall'Orto writes that Tondelli's corpus is "handicapped" by hard-to-detect deficiencies. Fictional reticence is thus re-presented as a sign of Tondelli's absentee coming-out politics. AIDS' illegibility in the novel – the fact that it is never outright named – is said to signify a shame-faced silence and apolitical muteness.

Tondelli's flaw, according to Dall'Orto, is too much silence. Queerly, the presence of his silence is also thought proof that *Camere separate*'s unnamed disease must be AIDS. Silence is blamed for the book not depicting the topic of HIV/AIDS. In the same breath, silence is read – symptomatically – as a sign of AIDS' unnamable presence in the text. Thus, the text's "stated" content (i.e., the words published) is chided for being too taciturn/ambiguous all while its "implicit" content (i.e., what is *read* between the lines) is re-presented as indexing a specific malady—considered AIDS *because* of the silence that surrounds it.<sup>325</sup>

To close-read the text in hopes of definitively answering which illness Thomas suffers from is, I am arguing, fruitless. Doing so overlooks the fact that it is *because* his illness is *never named* – stays unspoken – that queer readers, including Americans and Italians, have seen AIDS reflected therein.<sup>326</sup> A strict philological approach, which examines only the language of the text and the author's own notes/letters/drafts, might dismiss such readings as overreaching – a reader projecting his lived reality onto a text. But, it is the borderland between text and reader, between affective responses and words inked that the text repeatedly thematizes. In the absence of textual evidence *Camere separate* has evoked potent feelings in readers touched by the AIDS epidemic.

Desires, including both a longing see depicted what is unnamable and the urge to decode the unuttered, shapes its reception. Rather than assuming that readers' interpretations are direct by the context that frames their different readings, as Derek Duncan has in part argued, I am proposing a reading that is attuned both to the novel's linguistic specificity (and lack thereof) and the messiness of readerly investments in a

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<sup>325</sup> See Ellen Samuels, "My Body, My Closet: Invisible Disability and the Limits of Coming Out Discourse," *GLQ* 9 (2003): 232-255.

<sup>326</sup> Dall'Orto tellingly writes: "Ormai (e questo è un ulteriore segno di quanto abbia influito su di noi l'epoca dell'Aids) siamo bravissimi a leggere dietro il linguaggio ufficiale dei referti di morte. Michel Foucault è morto di 'setticemia del sistema nervoso.' James Baldwin di 'tumore alla pelle' o in alternativa di 'cancro allo stomaco.' Giuseppe Caputo, docente di diritto canonico a Bologna, è morto di 'tumore alle ossa.' Tondelli è morto di 'polmonite bilaterale.'  
<http://www.giovanidallorto.com/biografie/tondelli/tondelli.html>

literary text. The novel itself, I have further claimed, explicitly thematizes the question of legibility – showing there to be many strains, not all oppressive, of illegibility.

To call illegibility context-specific does not imply that Italian readers will decipher one thing while Anglophone readers will detect another. Rather, context, as Michael Lucey has shown elsewhere, allows some particular readers to read meaning *into* a word or a series of images while, simultaneously, allowing for others never to note said meaning.<sup>327</sup> There is no clean split between presence (legibility) and lack (illegibility). The same words that remains linguistically unintelligible to some may evoke alternate meanings to other readers. Legibility and illegibility are contiguous, cleaving together in productive intimacy. What I am proposing is a reading attuned both to the novel's linguistic specificity (including ambiguous descriptions) and to the messiness of readers' investments in a literary text.

Instead of reading *Camere separate* as disappointingly silent about the AIDS epidemic (i.e., chastising Tondelli for his *lack* of HIV politics -- a *la' Giovanni dall'Orto*), I propose that we read in the illness' uncertainty a different sort of politics. Unlike the ACT-UP maxim "silence = death," we have an *il/legible* (legible to some? not-yet-legible?) illness.<sup>328</sup> Il/legibility, I argue, is not shame-filled cover up, especially when in a literary text. The literary function of silence (and its kin reticence) cannot be made synonymous with a refusal to face the truth. Works of fiction often conceal/reveal in order to stoke readers' desire to keep reading. This non-specificity affects readers in multiple ways – reminding some gay critics of the culturally-imposed silences tied to AIDS in the late 1980s and pushing others to read on in hopes of diagnosing what ails Thomas. To paraphrase Foucault, there is not one illegibility but many.

Once embedded in a *literary* text, reticence can function to increase readers' investment in the story being told – specifically, an AIDS-era tale of gay mourning. Far from signifying a lamentable absence, textual omissions – not overtly stating something – can attenuate readers' identification with a tale. This is true for gay readers who see the elusive illness as a commentary on AIDS' un-nameability in the 1980s. It is also true for readers who, unaware of Tondelli's eventual cause of death, may read on in order to discern what malady has killed Thomas. In queer literature silence is not always synonymous with the closet. It can be deployed as a narrative element, stoking readers' desire to know / reveal. (In the case of *Camere separate*, the desire to diagnose is elicited and then frustrated). I propose that we need to "de-pathologize" silence in the interpretation of *Camere separate*. Such a reading is interested less in what Tondelli failed to say during his life (i.e., never coming out as HIV-positive) than in treating the novel's "silence" as a narrative ingredient that, ill-defined, compels readers to want to know more about a tale of gay loss and longing.

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<sup>327</sup> See Michael Lucey, *Never Say I: Sexuality and First Person in Collette, Gide and Proust* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>328</sup> Is silence in a literary text the same as the "closet"? Or, when found in a literary text that aims to stoke readers' desire for narrative, does disclosure serve a different function?

## 5. Context-Specific Readings

In analyzing Tondelli's novel, Derek Duncan writes of the need to keep in mind the "specificity of context."<sup>329</sup> Duncan refers to the fact that Anglophone and Italian critics tend, respectively, to interpret the illness in *Camere separate* as signifying AIDS or a metaphor for the writer's alienation from society (not AIDS). He identifies a variety of reasons for this split, including the novel's ambiguous language and the divergent histories of the epidemic in the U.S. and Italy. AIDS disproportionately affected gay Americans in the early 1990s. They lost friends, lovers, and often their own lives to the illness. But, as Duncan notes, the retrovirus occurred in the U.S. at rates far higher than in Italy. This specific backdrop, which Duncan calls "context" and a "culture of AIDS," shaped how American critics received and subsequently framed Tondelli's novel. It influenced what they read *into* the tale. Italian critics tended *not* to mention or to see AIDS in the work. In contrast to American reviewers, Italian reviewers interpreted the illness – when discussed – as a general symbol for writers' estrangement from society. I share Duncan's insistence that we keep in mind how differing contexts —divergent losses and distinct memories— shape readers' reception of a literary text. History, including the ghosts of the past that visit a particular moment, mold the meanings readers will find in a book.

But, I want to press his context-specific interpretation a bit further. What unites this chapter is an engagement with the linguistic *non-specificity* of Tondelli's work -- a work penned and published, *specifically*, in the epoch of AIDS. I insist on acknowledging how the cultural memory of AIDS has shaped the meanings mined from this tale. Still, to read *Camere separate* primarily in relation to AIDS —an epidemic that decimated gay men across Europe and the U.S. in the 1980s— is at once apposite and inadequate. The text itself never mentions the words HIV or AIDS, leaving the illness a mysterious source of loss. Insofar as some readers want to find signs of AIDS in the plot of Tondelli's tale, they have done so. In contrast, others have stayed faithful to what the novel explicitly mentions, never seeing AIDS because the book at no point names it. When considered present, AIDS is a trace – something that must be deciphered or read *into* the book. When not considered, the historical context surrounding the novel's publication -- including gay men's high rates of HIV infection and Tondelli's own death from AIDS-related illnesses in 1992 -- goes ignored.

The conjunction of the novel's queer specificity (one man mourning his dying ex-boyfriend) and linguistic non-specificity (the illness has no explicit diagnosis) drives critics' diverging readings. What this chapter proposes is a messier business: to read *Camere separate* simultaneously as a tale framed by gay men's losses in the 1980s/1990s and to refuse to read it as, namely, about AIDS. To plumb the layered meanings made by the text, I propose to take seriously the novel's choice never to name its central sickness. My argument demands a dual approach, reading contextual details *into* the text all while addressing the inexact words used *in* the novel. My reading of the novel affirms the need to discuss *Camere separate* in relation to the AIDS epidemic (and its continued aftermath/ghosts). Still, I want to probe which additional meanings are produced through the linguistic refusal to identify Thomas' malady. I seek, then, neither to "correct" the novel's reticence (*Camere* = veiled AIDS elegy) nor to "correct" those who see AIDS

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<sup>329</sup> Duncan, 2006, 117.

reflected on its pages (*Camere* ≠ about AIDS). *Camere separate*'s ambiguous language authorizes both readings.

How does the novel evoke for some readers HIV/AIDS' particular pallor while also troubling attempts to diagnose the book as about any one illness? Which desires does *Camere separate* stir in readers and then decline to satisfy? Is illegibility always the same as shame-filled concealment (i.e., the closet)? Or, given the context of 1989 Italy, might its very non-specificity keep open the possibility of multiple readers, including those touched and not touched by the AIDS crisis, identifying with Leo's loss? Is a critique legible in Tondelli's decision *not* to reduce the gay male body to an archive of symptoms? My interpretation does not seek one significance behind the sickness. It traces the many meanings produced by the novel's non-specificity. Provoking while never satiating a desire to know, *Camere separate* insists on readers' participation in deciphering or disregarding the illness sketched on its pages. In confounding readers' urge to know, the text has much to say about how illnesses are made to signify and the effect this has on those we turn into meaningful maladies.

This is not to say that Tondelli intended the book to be read as an AIDS allegory but to acknowledge that readers have read it as such; they have found on its pages, that is, a *reflection* of a specifically queer experience of loss and mourning. To phrase it another way, what in the text are gay readers identifying with when they call *Camere separate* an AIDS narrative? Is their "diagnosis" of the novel a logical consequence of Thomas' illness going unnamed – readers filling in the "blanks," so to speak? Or, have gay readers appropriated *Camere separate*, finding affirmation of their historically-specific experiences of HIV/AIDS in a book that *never* outright depicts that? If the novel, as Derek Duncan notes, is not about AIDS, what are we to make of multiple readers' assumption that *Camere separate* in fact recounts precisely that illness? What might gay readers see the marks of AIDS in a novel that never, explicitly, names it? Why would they feel certain of its presence despite the "lack" of linguistic evidence to back said diagnosis? Is their reading "wrong" – in need of critical correction? Or, is something more affective – less rational, less factual – at work?

I treat such readings as a sort of dis-identification – reading of oneself into a text that the author may have intended to signify otherwise. The meanings linked to literary objects are both the product of the text's particular language *and* produced via reading. Reading of course is shaped by extra-textual cues, contexts and memories. When read in the novel, AIDS is an affective echo – the story makes some readers *reflect* on their own losses due the epidemic. Queerly enough, some feel emboldened to read AIDS in Tondelli's taciturn tale *because* the illness stays unspoken. This is a readerly response to the "lack" of signifiers for Thomas' odd malady. As others have noted, AIDS was a difficult to mention disease in much of the 1980s. In governmental circles, politicians – including the president of the United States, Ronald Reagan – shied away from *saying* the syndrome's four letters during most of the 1980s. Many were disturbed by the illness' links to gay men and male-male sex. Within gay circles, numerous HIV-positive people remained silent about their status until the sickness became legible on their bodies. Silence, in other words, is intrinsically linked to the AIDS epidemic for many gay subjects.

As a result, *Camere separate*'s choice to keep the illness unnamed is considered as further proof of AIDS' presence in the text. What some read as a "lack" of textual

evidence is, for others, reason enough to call the book “an AIDS narrative.” An argument built on philological reading, analyzing the exact words used in the novel, would necessarily refuse the extra-textual content that convinced some critics to spot AIDS where it is not named. A reader that wants to categorize *Camere separate* as, principally, about the syndrome must in contrast cite evidence from “outside” the language of the text. My chapter seeks to bridge this divide, respecting how gay readers have turned *Camere separate* into an affective archive – finding in it a reflection of their AIDS-related losses – and insisting that AIDS alone cannot explain the text’s layered illegibility. This chapter shows that, in reading the novel either as an allegory about AIDS or as a representation of the author’s general separation from society, other strands of legibility – including the queer inter-texts both *named* and *hinted at* by Tondelli – have gone unread.

Narrating various investments in Anglophone queer texts, including works both named and implicit, the novel theorizes reading as a practice that generates bonds *not* imagined in an author’s original text. The relation of reader to text is here an unstable one in which context is repeatedly overwritten by readers’ need for an elsewhere in which to situate their present pain. To appeal to historical context or to linguistic specificity, then, is to in part miss the point. Neither can account for the ambivalent legibilities at work in Tondelli’s novel. Legibility, according to *Camere separate*, means that meanings are intelligible to some and unnoted by others. It is an act rife with identification and readerly desire – reading what is written *and* projecting yourself into a text that will never quite reflect you back.

In the opening pages of Pier Vittorio Tondelli’s *Camere separate*, the book’s protagonist, Leo, mentions in conversation with a friend he had recently met someone. The friend’s response is worth dwelling on, as he cites foreign authors in order to label Leo’s attraction:

‘E com’è questo nuovo?’ dice Rodolfo fra i singulti. ‘Un Chez Maxim’s? No, no... Spero non sia un *wrong blond*. [...] O forse è ... non dirmi Leo che hai trovato...’

Leo tace, preferendo eccitare la sua curiosità. [...]

‘Voglio sperare che non si tratti di un Whitman. Sei a Parigi per riciclarti un poco e non trovi niente di meglio che cadere su un Whitman’ (15).

Each erotic type—a Chez Maxim’s, a wrong blond, and a Whitman—refers to an Anglo-American writer. The last, Walt Whitman, is explicitly named in their conversation. The others are referenced via in-group allusions. The speakers already grasp the meaning of each term but outside listeners might not.

Chez Maxim’s, the narration clarifies two pages later, “è il tipo che ognuno crederebbe il proprio ideale [...] Si va da Chez Maxim’s, direbbe Christopher Isherwood, già bendisposti. È Chez Maxim’s: dunque è buono” (16). A “wrong blond,” the novel also specifies, was a phrase coined by W.H. Auden. Auden had been expecting a certain blond editor, Walter Miller, to come to his home for an interview. When, in his stead, Chester Kallmann showed up, “Auden passò nell’altra stanza e sibilò a Isherwood, con cui condivideva l’appartamento: ‘È il biondo sbagliato’” (17). For Auden, *wrong blond* came to signify “l’unico biondo possibile” (17). Whitman, the most easily recognizable name in their dialog, does not just refer to the author of *Leaves of Grass*. The narration explains that Rodolfo is referring to “un Whitman nel senso definito da Allen Ginsberg.”

According to the beat poet, “considerando i propri partner e collegandoli a rapporti precedenti, Ginsberg disse che sarebbe stato in grado di risalire fino all’amante di Walt Whitman in una catena di copule successivamente attribuiti come quarti di nobiltà.” In their in-group argot, Whitman signifies the fact that, “nel ghetto omosessuale [...] tutti sono stati a letto con tutti” (17).

Authors alluded to in this scene are not accidental. Auden, Ginsberg and Isherwood were homosexual. Isherwood and Auden were both British ex-pats who eventually settled in the United States. Isherwood, like Tondelli, wrote an elegiac novel of expatriation, *A Single Man* (1964).<sup>330</sup> In this novel, the protagonist – similar to Leo – mourns the sudden death of his male lover. Literal ex-patriation, as in *Camere separate*, functions as a metaphor for queerness: to reside within a society while feeling like an stranger there. The protagonist’s pain is legible on the page but undeciphered by the people who surround him. Since its publication, *Leaves of Grass* has been desirously appropriated by queer readers. In its account of the “love between comrades,” readers like John Addington Symonds have glimpsed a celebration of the intimacies, both erotic and affective, possible between men. Allen Ginsberg writes himself into a sexual lineage that would reach back to Whitman. Whitman is also a named presence in one of Ginsberg’s more famous poems, “A Supermarket in California” (1956).<sup>331</sup>

A Chez Maxim’s is a beautiful boy whose significance, beyond our fantasy of him, “è zero” (16). A *wrong blong* is a lover who, unexpectedly, will come replace all others. A Whitman is shorthand for the sexual histories shared in the gay world. In each of these instances, the text enacts two moves: 1) it mentions the type, unexplained, in the dialog and then the narration 2) defines for all readers the allusions/content behind their argot. The types are *already* legible – intelligibile, that is – to Rodolfo and Leo. The terms, the reader understands, are part of their way of speaking to each other — meaningful to them but opaque to outsiders. The text acknowledges as much when it devotes the two pages after the dialog to individual explanations of each term. In-the-know, Leo and Rodolfo can glean meaning from these terms even while the authors alluded to are not, literally, named by either of them.

In-group “legibility” is defined by shared referents, which include terms that others might hear/read but might not be in the position to decode. Significantly, the terms used by Leo and Rodolfo are embedded within a particular social context: one gay man speaking to another about same-sex desire. Legibility is subject-specific. Readers in-the-know – those familiar with the details of Auden’s life, for instance – might grasp the *wrong blond* allusion before the narrative’s ensuing explication of it. Other readers – those unfamiliar with Auden’s biography, for example – may read the dialog and remain confused by the in-group terms that pepper their conversation. Even as the meaning behind these terms remains opaque, the terms are textually there – we read “Chez Maxim’s,” we read “*wrong blond*,” and we read “Whitman.” Terms like these assign a name to a specific experiencing of desire, all while deploying nomination in order to skirt easy intelligibility.

Intelligibility becomes further complicated when we consider the most lucid term:

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<sup>330</sup> See Christopher Isherwood, *A Single Man* (London: Methuen, 1964).

<sup>331</sup> In part, that poem reads: “Oh, dear father, greybeard, lonely old courage-teacher,/ what America did you have when Charon quit /poling his ferry and you got out on a smoking bank/and stood watching the boat disappear in the black/ waters of Lethe?”

“un Whitman.” As argued above, certain readers will recognize the text’s indexical gestures: when characters or the narration allude to works/authors outside of *Camere separate*’s fictitious world. The naming of “Whitman” seems to be a case of clear intertextuality—it names, sans roundabout hints, the American poet Walt Whitman. But, even readers in-the-know – those with a broad knowledge of Anglo-American gay/homoerotic literature – are not well positioned to decode this nominal reference. Based on the language in Leo’s and Rodolfo’s dialog, the reader has no way to know that Rodolfo was, in fact, alluding to Allen Ginsberg’s story about Walt Whitman. In a 1974 interview, Ginsberg imagines the possibility of tracing a lineage – a legibile line – that would link him, via his previous sex partners (and their prior partners), back to Walt Whitman.<sup>332</sup> “Whitman” does not refer, indexically, to the historical Walt Whitman. His proper name indexes rather a desirous story about gay legibility.

Legibility is not reducible here to named content. Even when explicitly named, as in the case of “un Whitman,” the stated referent and what it is interpreted, interpersonally, do not align. Legibility, as a queer subcultural practice, takes pleasures in both the sharing of certain common referents *and* the evasion of linguistic transparency. Its opposite, then, is not illegibility. Inexact terms can be at once legible to some and unintelligible to others. Legibility’s social mediation is further stressed in what the novel opts not to name. No poems, no novels, no books are called by name—neither in the friends’ banter nor in the detailed explication of their terminology. Instead, the reader learns that Auden whispered *to* Isherwood, Isherwood would say *Chez Maxim*’s, and Ginsberg said things about Whitman. In each instance, there are words uttered and an interpretant.

Naming does not reveal a stable or concealed referent. Nomination excites, rather, the social practice of reception, which is influenced by the desires that readers – like Ginsberg – bring to works. When *Camere separate* points outside of itself, it alludes to what the Anglophone *authors* are quoted as having said. In naming the authors but not naming any of their published texts (i.e., *A Single Man*), *Camere separate* stresses that legibility is a desire-rife relation between people – the utterer (author), the uttered (language) and the interpretant (reader).<sup>333</sup> Legibility, even when the referent is precisely demarcated in language, remains affected by readers’ divergent desires – including the urge to designate the unknown (i.e., Rodolfo’s taxonomic queries) and the desire to leave some thing unstated (i.e., “eccitare la curiosità”). This dialog presents us, then, with a microcosm of the texts’ plumbing of queer il/legibility – pulled between the urge to be recognized by others and the wish to evade language’s proscribed bounds.

## 6. Conclusion

*Camere separate* creates pockets of in-group legibility (ie, named and unnamed intertexts) all while representing the emotional cost of living (and dying) as an illegible subject. The line between legibility, what can be read, and illegibility, what might be guessed at, is not fixed. And, it is certainly not one where legibility signifies absolute

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<sup>332</sup> See Allen Ginsberg, *Sunshine Interview: Allen Ginsberg with Allen Young* (Bolinas: Grey Fox Press, 1974).

<sup>333</sup> Duncan notes that “reading, as well as writing, matters, for it is the activity of reading that makes” meaning. Duncan, *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality*, 126.

presence and illegibility signifies absolute absence. In some moments, the novel does critique the expectation of illegibility, especially in relation to gay male intimacies. In other instances, the unsaid/partially legible remains not just a source of desire but also a means of recognizing others “like me.” In-group decipherment is a source of pleasure--an inclusion forged via decoding shared referents, many of which will stay entirely illegible to the majority.

Selective legibility functions in the novel as both a source of frustration and of sustaining subcultural recognition. Il/legibility is not just critiqued but shown to be part of queer sexuality, including physical seduction (decoding body language) and the narration of queer lives (winking to readers in-the-know). Legibility, I am claiming, is not a truth triumphantly revealed or plainly exposed on the surface. It is instead a permeable relation between text and reader, object and subject. What is legible to one person may go unread by others. Meaning is not objective, something intelligible to all, if only it were adequately revealed. It is —unstably—glimpsed in the space between words and desire.

Quoting without explicitly naming inherited images of the AIDS-ravaged patient, *Camere separate* provokes (some) readers to see AIDS behind its account of a terminal sickness. Still, its linguistic non-specificity *also* troubles the AIDS-related associations some readers want to bring to the text. Queerly enough, *Camere separate*'s portrait of mourning is capacious enough to elicit gay men's AIDS-era identification with Thomas'/Leo's plight *and* to vex that very desire to identify the illness therein. If AIDS is legible, it is so primarily from the reader's point of view. *Camere separate* plumbs a gay man mourning his dead ex-lover, while never naming the cause behind Thomas' death. If AIDS is legible to some readers, it is *also* never specifically located in the gay male body.<sup>334</sup>

Queer readers – traumatized by the losses of the 1980s and 1990s – have read into Tondelli's plot the symptoms and iconography of AIDS. Given both the timing of the book's publication (1989) and Tondelli's subsequent death from AIDS-related illnesses (1991), it is understandable why numerous critics have felt tempted to diagnose the central malady as HIV/AIDS. And yet, the novel never definitively satisfies such temptations. To confirm this diagnosis, readers typically cite the cause of Tondelli's death or stress the structural parallels to gay men's experiences of loss/alienation due to AIDS. They must cite extra-textual “proof”—reading AIDS where it is not named or, at least, interpreting the novel retroactively in light of Tondelli's biography.

As an archive of competing readings, *Camere separate* raises the question: what gets foreclosed when the body is reduced to a collection of symptoms? Nameless and described, illness dwells here somewhere the diagnosable (its symptoms are described) and illegible (sans a definitive name). Yet, even as it troubles Thomas' malady, *Camere separate* quotes images that, in the U.S. and Europe, were *already* coded with AIDS-related significances: the emaciated male body, a deathbed visit, and relatives' begrudging “admission” of the gay lover into the hospital. Reproducing without labeling these images, *Camere separate* invites extra-textual associations, all while leaving up it to the reader to make (or not make) the interpretative leap. The novel evokes competing readings by simultaneously plumbing AIDS' *cultural legibility* (i.e., extra-textual

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<sup>334</sup> Absent more specific symptoms, gay readers are left to identify with the “negative feelings” – including loss and survivor's guilt – experienced by Leo.

associations) and the illness' *textual unintelligibility* (i.e., we do not know exactly what it is).

Afloat between readers' diagnoses and textual illegibility, *Camere separate* invites only to repel symptomatic readings. This paper argue that critics substitute the novel's constitutive illegibility – is it AIDS? is it something else? – by “diagnosing” an undiagnosible malady. Whether on the part of gay readers who treat *Camere separate* as an AIDS novel or on the part of Italian critics who find no trace of AIDS there, its readers seek to “mend” the novel's constitutive uncertainty – a layered reticence that at once touches those who lived through the losses of the epidemic and leaves enough unsaid to trouble the gay male body as the natural site of AIDS. I have proposed an itinerant view – taking seriously gay critics' reception of *Camere separate* as “mirroring” their AIDS-era losses and respecting the unresolved illegibility that it contains.

We began in-between, in motion, overlaid. In closing, I would like to return to that initial scene – Leo adrift mid-air. He gazes out the window, his reflection superimposed on the glass through which he sees moving smudges of the outside world. But, the plane's glossy window also refracts. Reflecting the plane's interior, it contorts the world beyond it. Flipped and filtered, Leo's reflection is a visual palimpsest: a man seated on a plane, watching himself mapped atop the world below. He is reflected elsewhere. Legibility, I have proposed, is similarly vexed – the decipherment of what is “in” the text and something framed by images, desires and discourses “outside” it. Illegibility or obfuscation, I have proposed, is not so much the opposite of decipherment as its desire-rife instigation. In *Camere separate*, occlusion troubles diagnosis, inciting the reader to look beyond the text and proffering a nameless linguistic terrain. Looking out the plane's window, Leo spots a nameless world below. And, all along his own face overlays that vision – perceptible but not quite there, present but not quite recognizable even to him.

## Afterword:

### Pasolini's Ghost

“E’ assolutamente necessario morire, perché, finché siamo vivi, manchiamo di senso, e il linguaggio della nostra vita è intraducibile: un caos di possibilità, una ricerca di relazioni e di significati senza soluzione di continuità. La morte compie un fulmineo montaggio della nostra vita: sceglie i suoi momenti veramente significativi, e li mette in successione, facendo del nostro presente, infinito, instabile e incerto, un passato chiaro. Solo grazie alla morte, la nostra vita ci serve ad esprimerci.”

- Pier Paolo Pasolini

“... qualunque cosa  
Questo mio urlo voglia significare,  
esso è destinato a durare oltre ogni possibile fine.”

- Pier Paolo Pasolini

For Pier Paolo Pasolini, the history of sexuality in modern Europe is a story of destruction and loss. Describing Italy's industrialization in the mid twentieth-century, he notes a “mutazione antropologica.”<sup>335</sup> The shift from distinct regional and class-based cultures to a national consumer culture, Pasolini claims, displaced pre-modern practices, including erotic ones. Discussing recent changes to Rome's peripheral *borgate*, where Pasolini had set early works like *Mamma Roma* (1962) and *Ragazzi di Vita* (1955), Pasolini admits that Rome “è cambiata e non voglio più capirla.”<sup>336</sup> Pasolini laments the loss of archaic systems of sex in the peninsula.<sup>337</sup> In his understanding, all men used to be able to enjoy sex with another man. Until recently, sex did not need to have a name. It did not need to have a meaning. Eros, instead, was diffuse – a pleasure fleetingly shared rather than a label ascribed.

Under the banner of progress, capitalism is said to have confined erotics to self-identified homosexuals. Pasolini distinguishes between gay sexuality and Mediterranean

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<sup>335</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo. “Gli italiani non sono più quelli.” *Corriere della sera*. June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1974. According to Pasolini, Italian society underwent a radical shift following the 1960s – replacing longstanding class, regional and linguistic differences with the homogenized ‘values’ of consumer capitalism. Pasolini, specifically, notes the emergence of a new “cultura di massa,” which he contrasts with the variegated “culture[e] di classe” that had until recently defined Italian society. He writes that it is no longer possible in 1974 to distinguish the body of a Northern office worker from that of a Southern “operaio.” For Pasolini, this visible absence of class differences does not reflect a victory over bourgeois ideals – an overthrowing of class distinctions due to a more equitable division of labor and capital. Rather, Pasolini describes this societal shift in terms of “conformismo e nervosi.” In Italy's nascent mass culture, Pasolini maps the extinction and extermination of difference. This “mutazione” is a loss.

<sup>336</sup> Pasolini, Pier Paolo. “Quant'eri bella.” In *Storie della città di Dio: racconti e cronache romane*. Ed. Walter Siti (Torino: Einaudi, 1995).

<sup>337</sup> In a 1975 piece for the *Corriere della sera*, Pasolini wrote that “i giovani sottoproletari romani hanno perduto (devo ripeterlo per l'ennesima volta?) la loro ‘cultura,’ cioè il loro modo di essere, di comportarsi, di parlare, di giudicare la realtà: a loro è stato fornito un modello di vita borghese (consumistico): essi sono stati cioè, classicamente, distrutti e borghesizzati.” *Corriere della sera*, October 29, 1975. Qtd in Fulvio Abbate, *Pasolini raccontato a tutti* (Milano: Baldini & Castaldi, 2014).

erotics: “L’omosessuale in genere (nell’enorme maggioranza, almeno nei paesi mediterranei), ama, e vuol fare l’amore con un eterosessuale disposto ad un’esperienza omosessuale ma la cui eterosessualità non sia minamente in discussione.”<sup>338</sup> Unlike the story told in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (Vol. 1), the shift in Italy from a system of sodomy (i.e., sexual acts between men) to sexuality (i.e., “I am gay”) is said to be a very recent one.<sup>339</sup> Its origins, for Pasolini, can be traced to the 1960s, when waves of workers left the rural South for jobs in the rapidly industrializing North. Italy’s passage into the *modern* age – the move from agrarian collectivities to industrialized capitalism – is sketched as a move towards a *reduced* range of sexual options.<sup>340</sup> It represents a loss of cultural and erotic differences.

In what we might call Pasolini’s history of sexuality, the homosexual here-and-now (and the future it will generate) is no upgrade. Modernization is homogenization—not progress.<sup>341</sup> “La Storia,” which calls itself progress, displaced and then effaced sex’s multiform histories. When Pasolini mourns the displacement of premodern worlds – called “pagano” (*Storie della città di Dio*), “arcaica,” and “periferici” – he does not limit his critique a lament.<sup>342</sup> Even as he grieves, he aims to keep legible the collective

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<sup>338</sup> See Marzio Barbagli and Asher Colombo, *Omosessuali moderni: gay e lesbiche in Italia*. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001) 247.

<sup>339</sup> In his seminal *History of Sexuality* (Vol. 1), Michel Foucault discusses the emergence of the homosexual *qua* species in the mid nineteenth century. The French thinker’s point is not that homosexuality did not exist in Europe before the 1800s. Amorous feelings and sexual activity between persons of the same sex is nothing new. But, Foucault argues, the conceptual schemas used to name them vary markedly from one age to the next. It is a common place in LGBT Studies that during the nineteenth century queers began to talk about *themselves* as homosexuals. Foucault’s *specific* history has – regrettably – been repeated as though it tells the history of sexuality in the entire West. Italy, as I have shown, houses a different temporality when it comes to “modern” sexuality: one in which “archaic” notions of sodomy are said to survive well into the twentieth-century. See Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality* (New York: Random House, 1978).

<sup>340</sup> In contrast to Foucault, Eve Sedgwick argues in *Epistemology of the Closet* that a minority model of homosexuality never replaced universalizing notions of male-male sodomy. Although recent discourses of sexuality invoke a clear-cut boundary between a homosexual minority and a heterosexual majority, Sedgwick argues that this dividing line remains contested. Homo/hetero definitions are structured “not by the supersession of one model and the consequent withering away of another, but instead by the relations enabled by the unrationalized co-existence of different models during the times they co-exist” (47). Pasolini’s haunting of contemporary queer Italy, I am arguing, reflects a persistent desire for a system of sex *not yet* organized in terms of either/or identities. His name reminds gay readers that same-sex relations used to be lived in alternate terms. Even as Pasolini is made to signify an erotic realm that no longer exists, Pasolini continues to be cited by current writers. Pasolini stirs actual desires. Gay identity exists here in tension with a more universalizing idea of male-male — the idea that any man is capable of sex with another man. Sedgwick claims that less “identity-bound understandings of sexual choice also persisted and developed, often among the same people or interwoven in the same systems of thought” (9-10). Citing Pasolini in the age of global gay identity allows this tangled interweaving – the tension between articulating homosexual desire and the pleasures permissible when sex is unnamed – to keep surfacing. “Prior” notions of sexuality are mappable *within* contemporary gay Italy—calling into question the “extinction” of earlier erotic forms. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>341</sup> Pasolini comments that “il miliardo di contadini che ancora oggi vivono in una condizione preistorica, pian piano creperanno, o diventeranno un’altra razza umana.” Qtd. in Alberto Arbasino, *Ritratti italiani* (Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 2014) 380.

<sup>342</sup> Pasolini described himself as “un uomo solo davanti a una scelta ugualmente disperata: perdermi nella preistoria meridionale, africana, nei reami di Bandung, o gettarmi a capo fitto nella preistoria del

practices that “modern” history has eroded and has begun to overwrite. Part of the writer’s *impegno* is to resist letting go of what is fading away.<sup>343</sup> As a textual practice, Pasolini’s mourning makes the past’s “dead” forms haunt the reader’s present – relating the possibilities currently unavailable because of the “progress” of History. In this way, writing works to elicit a chronic desire for the past’s out-of-reach difference. Desiring the past is a means of challenging the present’s inherited contours.<sup>344</sup>

Even as Pasolini calls Rome’s “pagan” pockets moribund, a pained memory of the city’s peripheral past gets reproduced in late works like “Quant’eri bella Roma.”<sup>345</sup> His seeming nostalgia does not stick to the past, though. Mourning Italy’s shrinking anthropological diversity, what he calls a “genocidio” of “realtà” of the “popolo,” Pasolini then looks to other places’ presents.<sup>346</sup> In marginal pockets of modernity, especially in Italy’s South and the “Orient,” he seeks an “arcaica” sociability that survives into today. Foreign horizons are desired insofar as they promise a sort of time travel: bringing the author “close” to Italy’s recent past via alternate presents. While vociferously contesting triumphant accounts of Western history, Pasolini’s mapping of time continues to cast the Mediterranean South / North Africa as tantalizing out-of-synch.

Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) critiques the erotic forms (i.e., homo- or hetero-) dominant in today’s Europe by invoking peripheral presents – Rome’s destitute outskirts (i.e., in “La mia periferia”), “l’oriente” (i.e., in “Quant’eri bella Roma” and *Il mille e una notte*), India (i.e., *L’odore dell’India*), the “Terzo Mondo” (i.e., in *Appunti per un’Oresteide Africana*) and Naples (i.e., in “Gennariello”). He seeks elsewhere a world untouched by capitalism – archaic, pagan, and polymorphous. Pasolini frames such horizons as *vestiges* of a social reality now displaced in most of Italy. Discussing Pasolini’s tendency to mourn what is “lost,” Nico Naldini writes:

‘Roma è finita,’ ripeteva spesso e sognava il Terzo Mondo come unica alternativa dopo che aveva visto perire l’anima di due epoche dell’umanità – il mondo contadino friulano e quello delle borgate romane – e assistito dovunque all’estinzione dello spirito popolare. [...] Tuttavia, anche la scomparsa simultanea di tanti aspetti antichi della vita è difficile da realizzarsi, e ogni tanto, per un gioco illusionistico di specchi retrovisori, poteva riapparire qualche bel volto che negli occhi, nel taglio dei capelli, forse in una battuta ilare e ironica

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neocapitalismo, nella meccanicità delle vite delle popolazioni ad alto livello industriale, nei reami della Televisione. I nostri figli si perdono in questo futuro.” Qtd. in Alberto Arbasino, *Ritratti italiani* (Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 2014) 380.

<sup>343</sup> Pasolini writes that “quello che va difeso è proprio questo passato anonimo, questo passato senza nome, questo passato popolare.”

<sup>344</sup> Elizabeth Freeman notes queers’ efforts to invent “possibilities for moving through and with time, encountering pasts, speculating futures, and interpenetrating the two in ways that counter the common sense of the present tense.” See Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds* (London & Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) xv.

<sup>345</sup> Describing the changes he witnessed in Rome, Pasolini said: “Roma sta diventando una città orribile [...]: sulle vecchie borgate sopravvissute come un’indelebile città di sogno, arcaica, nella città, sorgono nuovi strati periferici, ancora più orrendi, se è possibile. Questo è lo spettacolo che mi si presenta ogni giorno davanti agli occhi.” Qtd. in Alberto Arbasino, *Ritratti italiani* (Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 2014) 380.

<sup>346</sup> See, Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Lettere luterane: il progresso come falso progresso* (Torino: Einaudi, 1980).

ricordava quelli amati un tempo.<sup>347</sup>

In Naldini's account, Pasolini bemoans the end of Rome's "periferia" and is moved by ghosts of its memory. Rome's chronic allure – the promise of a social realm not yet adulterated by bourgeois notions of respectability or shame – persisted for Pasolini, Naldini says, long after the anthropological "fine" of Rome's working-class "borgate." Pasolini is said to witness "perire" the death of the Friuli's peasant cultures and the end of Rome's proletariat periphery. He observes an "estinzione," all while being drawn to what remains of the "aspetti antichi della vita."

Longing for the epochs and places he has seen exterminated, Pasolini is said to approach the present with a retroactive yearning. Gazing elsewhere, Pasolini engaged in "un gioco illusionistico di specchi retrovisori" – confusing his backward-glancing fantasy of the world for a reflection of the past's actual persistence. Rather than quoting from Italy's homoerotic history, Pasolini taps other presents as *still* belonging to the "past" he wants to touch.<sup>348</sup> Queer plenitude, if it existed, is glimpsed at the margins – those peripheral pockets of the present where vanished forms are thought to "riapparire."

Grieving the cultural "omologazione" that attends industrial modernity, Pasolini questions the assumption that chronological time moves toward progress.<sup>349</sup> Unlike the civilizing plots of colonialism, Pasolini declines to laud "modern" Europe's cultural superiority. Looking afar, Pasolini extols erotic realms that perished in much of Europe with the arrival of industrialized capitalism. In others' here-and-now, he reads the contours of a sodomical world that mainstream Italy recently consigned to its past. In treating the Mediterranean/Orient/"terzo mondo," as pre-modern, Pasolini challenges the notion that contemporary Europe signifies advancement. The queer time sketched here perverts a straightforward telling of Western history and, in the same breath, relegates peripheral presents to a pedagogical past – an anachronistic elsewhere Europe might yet learn from.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Nico Naldini, *Come non ci si difende dai ricordi* (Napoli: Cargo, 2005) 88.

<sup>348</sup> See: José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>349</sup> In a 1973 article for the *Corriere della sera*, Pasolini commented that: "l'omologazione culturale ha cancellato dall'orizzonte le 'piccole patrie,' le cui luci brillano ormai nel rimpianto, memorie sempre più labili di stelle scomparse. 'Come polli d'allevamento, gli italiani hanno indi accettato la nuova sacralità, non nominata, della merce e del suo consumo': è questa la nuova società nella quale oggi ci muoviamo, testimoni e vittime dei lutti culturali." Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Scritti corsari. Gli interventi più discussi di un testimone provocatorio* (Milano: Garzanti, 1975-76).

<sup>350</sup> Towards the end of his life, Pasolini's topographical *immaginario* begins to stray further from the Roman *borgate* examined in his earlier films and journalistic prose. In "Gennariello," a missive written to an imaginary Neopolitan youth, Pasolini claims to feel drawn to Naples because "in questi anni – e per precisione in questo decennio – [i napoletani] non sono molto cambiati." In fact, "sono rimasti gli stessi napoletani di tutta la storia." For Pasolini, the lure of Naples was also a corporeal one. He writes that "coi napoletani non ho ritegno fisico, perché essi, innocentemente, non ce l'hanno con me." The lure, Pasolini continues, involves a reciprocal "scambio di sapere": he can teach them, just as they can teach him. "Coi napoletani," Pasolini writes, "posso presumere di poter insegnare qualcosa perché essi sanno che la loro attenzione è un favore che essi mi fanno. Lo scambio di sapere è dunque assolutamente naturale. Io o un napoletano posso semplicemente dire quello che so, perché ho, per il suo sapere, un'idea piena di rispetto, quasi mitico, e comunque pieno di allegria e di naturale affetto." A familiar Pasolinian move is at work

## 1. Chronic Presents

Relaying the past must always be told from the present. This is true not just when we (falsely) presume there is a seamless line between the way “we” understand sexuality and the way people experienced it back then. It should also be remembered that, even when “we” stress the past’s difference we speak from and in a particular historical present. Once translated into narrative, the past is not an objective reality. What we say about the past does something for the subject – for us – in the present. How we relate and relate to the past does something for “us” in the here-and-now. Queer history, whether understood as gay people throughout the ages or the myriad ways non-normative sexualities have been imagined, requires a *narrative* deployment of the past. The past may be cited to mourn what we now feel is no longer possible. Or, the past may be pointed to in order to laud the present’s distance from a traumatic earlier era. Pointing backwards, we can either feel better about the “progress” that has been made, the hard times left behind or we can *use* the past, its purported difference from our present, to relate what *used to exist* and now as textual testimony or a spoken memory. In queer plots, the past’s presence is twofold: a site of longing / nostalgia (desire for a return to the way things were) and one of *disidentification* (desire never to return to how bad things used to be).

In bringing my temporally adrift project to a terminus, I want to reconsider the affective pull of the past on the here-and-now. When events that are chronologically removed from the present get told, the enunciations made about that past belong to a particular *adesso*. Put another way, the past spoken of emerges from a present of enunciation – even when the history relayed claims to index the past as it was. Writers like Gian Piero Bona, Nico Naldini (*Meglio gli antichi castighi*), Dario Bellezza (*Morte di Pasolini*), Alberto Arbasino (*Fratelli d’Italia*) and Pier Paolo Pasolini (*Ragazzi di vita*) each recount Italy’s recent erotic past.<sup>351</sup> In their histories, the past is a departed era. Their words claim to retell, via memory, a now “extinct” social reality.<sup>352</sup> A prime example of this is Nicol Naldini’s collection of writings titled *Meglio gli antichi castighi* (1997). In it, Naldini seeks to “rievocare” an “eros mendicante” (11). In the past, Naldini writes in the opening poem, “c’erano anche le sorgenti dell’eros” (10).

Later, Naldini laments that “si sa che dicendole le cose non sembrano più vere,/ come quando si dice:/ dietro il silenzio c’è molta avventura/ e un po’ di mistero” (61). If,

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here: 1) to assign a space/people to a time outside of History and 2) to desire intimacy with them because the places he inhabits have become “cambiat[o].” To speak to Neapolitans now, Pasolini claims, is to interact with the Neapolitans that have always existed – a people made to symbolize a Past that endures in the homogenizing present.

<sup>351</sup> See: Gian Piero Bona, *Eros Anteros* (Milano: Schweiller, 1962); Nico Naldini, *Meglio gli antichi castighi* (Milano: Guanda, 1997); Dario Bellezza, *Morte di Pasolini* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1995); Alberto Arbasino, *Fratelli d’Italia* (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 1963); Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Ragazzi di vita* (Milano: Garzanti, 1955).

<sup>352</sup> In a poem about Rome in the 1950s, Naldini mentions Pier Paolo Pasolini. He writes: “Ma con Pier Paolo, Roma/ fu be presto circoscritta/ alle borgate più lontane/ ai capolinea interminabili/ dove c’era solo polvere e sconquasso/ e poi altra polvere o fango indurito./ Eppure era eccitante / avere due modelli in mano / quello vero e quella della poesia./Non era uno spasso seguirlo in quei meandri/ anche se le gioie del sesso vi fiocavano/ e insieme lo sconforto di calpestare/ tanta immondizia e povertà/ ma nei sui attimi di felicità l’eros/ apriva un libro grande quanto il Vangelo/ per traversare in una buca/ il gran mare della realtà.”

before, eros had formed part of the landscape – a stream of pleasures and bodies not yet fixed to a destination – it is now contained, in part, by words. “Se invece uno parla e dice: io sono gay,” Naldini continues, “sembra agognare a una categoria redenta dalle/ ‘vite non degne di essere vissute” (61). And yet, “altro che dire io sono gay,” there remains an errant eros che “che nessuno può imprigionare” (61). This “essenza” is something that “vaga” – strays, spilling over, like a flooding stream, the options told in language. In Naldini’s account of desire and identity, aimless eros is said to predate the adoption of recent terms such as “gay.” But, in claiming the “gli antichi castighi” were preferable (“meglio”), Naldini is lodging a critique of the gay here-and-now. The past is not simply evoked but re-evoked (“rievocare”) – conjured, anew, for and in a present found wanting.

The aforementioned writers situate this bygone age as part of *recent* memory. The “lost” erotic ways are not archeological relics from an alien epoch. For “now,” they survive in some form in living memory—if only as a desire-laced ruins. Comparing sex after World War II to today, Bona says: “Oggi è un disastro, una tristezza, tutto chiaro, tutto deve essere riconosciuto, tutto deve essere ostentato. [...] Beh, diciamo tra il 1948 e il 1968, vent’anni veramente incredibili, poi è cominciata questa idea di palesare tutto.”<sup>353</sup> Italy’s homoerotic golden age, he says, has come and gone. Back then, there was no need to “palesare tutto.” Sex between men, as a result, took place in abundance. Rather than reading Bona’s words as “anthropological proof” of how sex was enacted before coming out politics, I claim that we need to examine the performative work done by stories like his. How do subjects dissatisfied with their present come to endow the past with a plenty that is believed absent from “oggi”? How does the desire for a different present mold the stories about the past relayed in the here-and-now?

Narratives like Bona’s are tinged with nostalgic desire and retroactive mourning; the past is cited to chide the present. Methodologically, it is insufficient to treat the past “on its own terms.” The “era” Bona names is a fantasy-laden horizon in the writer’s now—a utopic time/place projected *before* present felt wanting. Although depicting that time as now out-of-reach, Bona says he feels closer to that moment than his present. Bona’s testimony of that moment, while possibly evidencing a prior sexual system not thought in homo- / hetero- terms, is as much his disaffected retort to *current* gay politics as it is “proof” of any earlier erotic realities.

In a similar vein, Nico Naldini says: “l’Eros per un lungo tratto di gioventù era un manto cangiante che copriva ogni istante dell’esistenza. Per milioni di ragazzi lungo i millenni, i piaceri del corpo erano da godersi voracemente [...]. In tempi recenti ci voleva lo ‘stupido secolo XIX’ a imporre divieti [...], riducendo la descrizione dell’Eros a verbalità eufemistica.”<sup>354</sup> Eros, Naldini says, used to be a part of “ogni istante” of young men’s interactions with one other. Now, paltry words have supplanted “i piaceri del corpo.” Again, the past bears the weight of a critiquing the present. His account of the years *before* that “verbosità” evidences not just a wish for a lost object. It is uttered from within a present that he can “now” present as lacking.

For, both Bona and Naldini the longed-for era is not a bright *gay* future. It is a time and place *before* heterosexuality and a time and place *before* the need to call oneself

<sup>353</sup> Qtd. in *Noi e gli altri: riflessioni sullo scrivere gay*. Eds. Francesco Gnerre & Gian Pietro Leonardi. (Milan: Il Dito e La Luna, 2007).

<sup>354</sup> Nico Naldini, *Shaharazad Ascoltami* (Naples: Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2011).

as ‘gay.’ Since queerness is imagined as that which *precedes* the arrival of modern/Western sexual identities, what is considered “anachronistic” – most distant from modernity’s social ‘boundaries’ – gets eroticized. Contemporary Europe is by extension made to embody a regression away from desire’s wayward movement -- not home to its laudable liberation. Naldini’s recent writing (i.e., *Shaharazad, Ascolatmi* 2011) idealizes what Ann McLintock dubs “anachronistic space.” These are horizons where what is thought absent from the present might still be found. For Naldini, that place is North Africa, desirable because travel there – quite problematically – seems promise a return to the way things once were *in Italia*. In *Meglio gli antichi castighi*, Naldini comments that “continua il travelling a caccia di erotismo alieno.”

Bona and Naldini highlight a break between the past’s same-sex erotics and contemporary Italy’s sexual schema. Other thinkers, though, have traced a problematic homology between the gay present and the erotic systems common in earlier eras. Initial efforts to tell gay/lesbian history have been repeatedly criticized for their universalizing narratives: identifying “gay people” in epochs that organized sex in desire in less identitarian terms.<sup>355</sup> Anachronism and its kin ahistoricism are a no-no for historians interested in how queerness was lived in previous times. But, the ink spilled in contesting the essentializing gay and lesbian histories has had an unnoticed consequence: the past’s role in less teleological accounts – in accounts that are critical of a progressive telling of history – has gone unexamined.

What work does the “past” do in accounts (both fictional and theoretical) that stress the “difference,” not seamless homology, between the “gay” now and same-sex relations back then? Queers’ *narration* of a time before sexual identity—a citation always made from the present—can be read as an effort to feel closer to a time disconnected from the gay here and now. Writing and reading can conjure bygone eras in order to critique’s the social possibilities unrealizable in the present. Anachronistic affinity can be a means of critiquing – deconstructing even – the stories of the sexuality that are now dominant. Anachronism is not limited, then, to the search for “our” shared homosexual history. Cobbling together asynchronous archives can be a means of surviving in a present whose erotic contours feel too tightly bound. The past can make the present feel more tolerable.

The texts analyzed in this afterword imagine the past as a time before identity’s stricture, before labels, before burdensome binaries. It is the horny plenty before homonormativity. In his *Epistola ai froci romani* (1978), Arbasino wrote for instance:

Fate, fate gli spiritosi o gli sciocchini, compagni... Eravate come ‘pesci nell’acqua,’ integrati nella società più bisessuale d’Europa, perché qui il sesso era facile e diffuso, spontaneo e disponibile, allegro e sportivo, pagano e gentile, [...] perché finché una cosa non viene nominata dunque non esiste e rimane invisibile anche se la si fa [...] E adesso, come se non bastassero i falsi problemi e i tormentoni provocati dai giornalini ‘liberati’ o zozzi, ecco tutti questi gruppi che

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<sup>355</sup> Discussing the writing of gay history, Giovanni Dall’Orto notes that “it was essential to uncover and denounce the suffering of homosexuals through the centuries.” It was first necessary, Dall’Orto says, “to show how homosexuals were an oppressed minority that needed to fight for social equality.” Presently, though, scholars “have begun to recognize the danger of reading gay history simply as a series of persecutions.” Dall’Orto, Giovanni. In *Queer Italia: Same-Sex Desire in Italian Literature and Film*. Ed. Gary P. Cestaro. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 81.

facendo i collettivi sul discutere e mai sul vivere si costruiscono giorno dopo giorno i loro ghetti.<sup>356</sup>

Whereas once homosexual encounters were common between all men, now they happen between self-declared homosexuals. Arbasino evokes an Edenic moment of homoerotic excess that, we read, preceded and came to an end with coming-out politics. But, as with all narratives, the before exists in relation to an after. The past can't be told in its own present tense. It must be relayed *ex post facto*. The plenty presumed to flourish back then cannot be cleaved, then, from the disappointing "lack" which typifies Italy's gay present.

In Arbasino's sequential logic, the homosexual here-and-now pathetically postdates queerness' previous plenty. Arbasino says that there used to be no compulsion to give a name to sex. Silence fed "la società più bisessuale d'Europa." By "bisessuale," he means a sexuality that is neither identifiably gay nor identifiably straight. Back then, Arbasino insists, eros did not choose between two exclusive poles. Desire used to exist in its errant state. Queerness, if we are to believe him, was at once endemic and ubiquitous – the water that surrounds and nourishes a fish. That sort of eros has become a "memory" with no present reality beyond of its textual evocation.

With this in mind, I want now to raise a series of methodological questions. In order to critique identity politics -- pointing out the construction of our present -- how have both queer theorists and fiction writers painted the past as a time when Eros was not yet yoked to burdensome labels? Do our present desires to affirm a certain philosophical stance (i.e. deconstructive / Foucauldian) shape which narratives about the past we find wanting and which tales about the past "we" now want? The queer surfeit that, we read, used to be endemic in Italy cannot be cleaved from the present in which Arbasino, Naldini, Bona, and Pasolini relate to the past.

Let me be clear, I am not advocating a dismissal of all narratives about the queer past. Quite the opposite: for queers the past is a fraught and necessary fiction, looked to (and retold) in order to bolster feelings in the present – including dissatisfaction with the current sexual possibilities. Essentializing temporalities, I am arguing, are not limited to progressive plotting of gay history. In refusing to trace a line between modern-day homosexuality and sex in earlier eras, critics like Pasolini want the "past" to signify an distance from "our" now. The past is lauded as a free-zone before the strictures of identity. In Pasolini's terms, certain peripheral had remained "fuori della storia" (i.e., in "Quant'eri bella Roma").

Relaying that "era" in a subsequent present, writers hope to evoke – albeit in words, albeit temporarily - a felt intimacy with what has come to pass. They use narrative's performative potential to, in Naldini's words, "rievocare le trame di questo eros mendicante," an Eros imagined "nel passato" but uttered for an *adesso*. Dissatisfied with Europe's current cordoning off of eros, Arbasino exalts the possibilities available to men before the need to choose homo- or hetero- labels. Presented as the time/place when eros could be found in its natural state, that "before" is a retroactive fiction – a horizon whose plenitude contrasts the disappointing gay "ghetti" of today. Told as the plenitude before the mistake of "tutto il discutere su ruoli, identità e autocoscienze," the 'past' – invested with mournful resignation and melancholic endurance – is, decades later, made to supplement the present's felt lack.

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<sup>356</sup> See Alberto Arbasino, *Super Eliogabalo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1969).

Supposedly bygone, that past persists – as an unruly affect – in the subject’s present. Embellished in narrative form, the past is resuscitated in the writing subject’s now. Writing from a particular present, the subject presents himself as more at home with the way things used to be. Narrative becomes a means to evoke a felt proximity to a supposedly far-off world. Narration here is no mere telling of what happened, but is instead engaged in calling into being a bond with the past it supposedly indexes. Melancholy, feeling something for something or someone lost, lets affect persist in the absence of the actual object.

The fictions told are both a means to name what is felt irrevocably “lost” and to recover for the here-and-now an intimacy with that imagined plenitude. Anachronism, I have argued, is a part of queer world making – both teleological and explicitly not. We can be cautious of anachronism while also acknowledging that anachronistic affinities – feeling closer to a time that is not my own – function as a crucial survival strategy for queers. What use do we make of the past? What stories do we hope it tells us? Anachronism sometimes warrants critique but also represents a way to make sense out of a present found wanting.

## 2. Spectral Ruins and Haunted Affinities

Supposedly far-off, the past remains, at the level of feeling, a fictive horizon that some queers want to come in contact with in the now. The specter – understood as a dead voice that might yet speak through the living – is a figure for this desired and impossible contact. Specters represent a dual sort of investment in the past. On the one hand, ghosts are disembodied. An immemorial presence, the specter’s subjectivity is no longer limited to the anatomy whose memories or traumas that it pushes the present to relive. The ghost’s lack of a body is proof of its alterity—proof that the dead individual cannot return to life. But, as an entity that affects people and places after its death, the specter also signifies how the past continues to touch, unpredictably, the present. Whether memorialized or forgotten, the specter comes from an unalterable past *and* does something to and in the present. As a literary figure, the ghost denotes affect—the distinction between “I feel” and “I am touched.”

Queer time, Carla Freccero claims in *Queer/early/modern*, “is haunted by the persistence of affect [...] in and across time.”<sup>357</sup> Queer time refuses to respect the presumed “directional flow of temporality” (4). Haunting is a key figure in Freccero’s text. The past is not done with. Unknowable, it persists as a site of desire and anachronistic identification. Freccero proposes, then, a “queer fantasmatic historiography” open to the “affective legacies of trauma” (8) and to ph/antasy’s role in identifying with an unknowable past. In the ghost, Freccero reads a queer desire to be inhabited by the past. Because accounts of national history do not often reference same-sex bonds, erotic practices or social forms, queer readers and queer historians are left to read queerness *into* a past whose present accounts are often heteronormative; they desire to see queerness in an age unlike today.

Pier Paolo Pasolini has come signify this chronic desire for Italian writers. Post-

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<sup>357</sup> See Carla Freccero, *Queer/early/modern* (Durham & London: Duke University Press) 4.

mortem, Pasolini is turned into what Ann Cvetkovich calls “an archive of feeling.”<sup>358</sup> By this, she means objects – invested with feelings such as mourning – that can then serve as the basis for a “counter public.” Archive, in her usage, means the shared set of objects around which queers conjure a collective sense of self. Such archives help queers work through, without ever getting over, the traumas of homophobia. Pasolini, of course, is not a physical object in the way that a letter or a photo might be. But, “he” – his name – remains a topic of subcultural and mainstream of representation in today’s Italy. Pasolini has become a haunted archive: a site of current representation *and* a figure for a past that can still stirs fraught feelings in the living.<sup>359</sup> Feelings archived under the nominal sign of Pasolini can contradict each other, spanning the desire to uncover lost sexual forms and the urge to surpass history’s phobic harm. Rather than consigning Pasolini to an epoch removed from the present, recent cultural production “animates” his figure in order to comment on today’s Italy. Pasolini’s archive is spectral insofar as refuses to accept that the past, because dead, is somehow “done” with.<sup>360</sup>

If we limit ourselves just to narrative prose from the past twenty-five years include, both fantastical and first-person, examples include Nico Naldini’s *Mio Cugino Pasolini* (2000) and *Come non ci si difende dai ricordi* (2005), Dario Bellezza’s *Ricordo di Pasolini* (2009) and *Morte di Pasolini* (1995), Davide Toffolo’s graphic novel *Pasolini* (2002), and Fulvio Abbate’s *Pasolini raccontato a tutti* (2011).<sup>361</sup> Walter Siti’s recent

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<sup>358</sup> See Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (London & Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>359</sup> Alberto Arbasino dedicates multiple chapters of his book *Fantasmatici italiani* (1977) to Pier Paolo Pasolini. He defines the titular phantasms in the following manner: “I fantasmi del titolo rinviano naturalmente ai nuovissimi fantasmi della psicanalisi fantasmatica (‘scenari immaginari in cui è presente il soggetto – l’Italia – e che raffigurano in modo più o meno deformato dai processi difensivi, l’appagamento di un desiderio [...]’) sia a vecchi fantasmi della tradizione popolare che percorrono il nostro caro Paese con lenzuolo in testa e due buchi per gli occhi” (7). Italy’s ghosts include those that haunt the nation’s recent unconscious (“nuovissimo”) *and* older notions of death (“vecchi fantasmi”) from the peninsula’s popular traditions. Following his violent murder in 1975, Pasolini remains for Arbasino one of these lingering ghosts. Appealing directly to Pasolini in the book’s introduction, Arbasino asks Pier Paolo “preferiresti che uno scrittore italiano ti fornisse, di questi tempi, non già una lettura assidua dei ‘fatti italiani’, ma piuttosto molti itinerari in località esotiche e pittoresche? [...] vorresti raggugli sulla sua infanzia, sulle sue passeggiate, sui suoi sogni? O gradiresti – soprattutto – tramonti?” (10). See Alberto Arbasino, *Fantasmatici italiani* (Roma: Cooperativi Scrittori, 1977) 7-10.

<sup>360</sup> I am indebted to Carla Freccero’s questioning of the “done-ness” of history. In *Queer/early/modern*, she argues that intertextuality can be understood as a form of “inter- and intratemporal articulation.” In reading ourselves into a past unlike “our” present, Freccero writes, there is a refusal to bury the “past” over there—consigning it to the dustbin of “done-ness” (5). Certain desires, including the longing to touch a past that has “gone,” persist “in and across times” (5).

<sup>361</sup> Neither Abbate nor Toffolo are gay but their texts remain invested in Pasolini’s corpus. Toffolo’s graphic novel literalizes the ghost of Pasolini. Indeed, Toffolo’s *Pasolini* (2005) articulates a chronic investment in Pasolini by staging a series of fantastic encounters between its protagonist and the long-dead Pier Paolo. In the text’s present, Pasolini returns—recalled but also reanimated in 2005. At one point in the graphic novel, Pasolini’s nude body is floating in a pool of blood. Reiterating the words of the crow from Pasolini’s *Uccellini uccellini*, Pier Paolo declares: “I maestri sono fatti per essere mangiati! Devono essere mangiati e superati!” In 2011, Toffolo created a theatrical performance piece inspired by his earlier graphic novel, *Intervista a Pasolini* (2002). Toffolo paired his own drawings of Pier Paolo Pasolini with Pasolini’s published words, literally evoking Pasolini’s voice alongside recent portraits of the writer. Abbate’s *Pasolini raccontato a tutti* recollects with stalled mourning and melancholic desire Pier Paolo Pasolini. The most literal mourning of Pasolini takes place in the scene when Abbate returns to the site of Pasolini’s violent murder, near Ostia. There, he encounters the makeshift memorials to Pasolini—worn

novel, *Il contagio* (2008), revisits the Roman *borgate* made famous in Pasolini's films (i.e., *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma*) and in his newspaper writings and novels (i.e., *Ragazzi di vita*).<sup>362</sup> Works of essayistic non-fiction, such as Tommaso Giartosio's *Perché non possiamo non dirci* and Marco Belpoliti's *Pasolini in salsa piccante*, also plumb the continued significance of Pier Paolo Pasolini in Italian culture – both as a incisive critic of “modernità” and as an archive of continued temporal fantasies.<sup>363</sup>

Pier Paolo Pasolini occupies a spectral place in contemporary Italy. He is a murdered body. He is a voice that, emanating from the past, speaks into the present. In the closing paragraph of *Morte di Pasolini*, Dario Bellezza writes Pasolini's cultural residue is his “urlo.”<sup>364</sup> This “urlo,” Bellezza says, can be noted in the photographs of Pasolini's bloodied corpse. These unsettling photos “testimoniano, nel suo volto sfigurato, questo urlo destinato a durare nella memoria di chi lo conobbe.” The “urlo” can be heard by those who live on. Although this “urlo” continues to speak to the present, it is not emptied of its own pained history. Outliving Pasolini, the “urlo” recalls the specific horrors witnessed by Pasolini—both in his dying moments and his earlier critique's of Italy's changing society. If this “urlo” lingers on in the memory of the living, it is never fully appropriated by them. The “urlo” can never fuse with the present. Its echo, when heard now, resounds with alterity.

Pasolini is figured here as a body that will remain eternally dead—a slain corpse immortalized in photographic form— and a disembodied voice whose “urlo” resounds after death. Pasolini vacillates in Bellezza's account between a bruised corpse, which functions as metonym of the man who died, and an immaterial corpus. His published words can “durare” long after the man who spoke them has ceased to breathe. In the fluctuation between bruised body and disembodied “urlo,” the spectral contours of Pier Paolo Pasolini can be read. As a spectral trace, Pasolini is neither fully spirit (a ghost sans a knowable body) nor brute materiality (a zombie sans a spirit). What remains of Pasolini is an “urlo”: a voice that continues to resonate, despite the death of the body. The “urlo” is a pained cry—uttered in the past but enduring, as chronic echo, into the present. Pasolini is spectrally present insofar as his “urlo” requires a current audience – present-day bodies – to voice to its cry. His howl speaks *through* the bodies of the living.

Initially, the “urlo” reminds Bellezza of Pasolini's violent death. While watching the televised frenzy that followed Pasolini's professed murderer, Pino Pelosi, Bellezza says that he heard “un urlo infame e dissoluto [...], un urlo terribile” (165). Still, that pained “urlo” – a gasp imagined after Pasolini's death – then reminds Bellezza of an earlier, less tragic, howl: the “urlo” of Pasolini's poems. Bellezza writes that an “urlo” can also be read in the closing lines of Pasolini's book *Teorema* (1968).<sup>365</sup> In that text, Pasolini narrates “un urlo/ in cui in fondo all'ansia / si sente qualche vile accento di speranza.” Corpse and corpus elide, as Bellezza quotes at length from the final poem:

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down by the passage of time. The most literal scene of melancholic desire occurs when Abbate attempts to reimagine what Pasolini would look like “oggi” if he had not died (222-223). Pasolini's aged apparition towards the end of the book refuses to bury Pasolini. Even when dead, he can be imagined here among “us.” See Davide Toffolo, *Pasolini* (Bologna: Cocolino Press, 2005). See, Fulvio Abbate, Milano, 2014.

<sup>362</sup> See Walter Siti, *Il contagio* (Milan: Mondadori Editore, 2009).

<sup>363</sup> See Marco Belpoliti, *Pasolini in salsa piccante* (Milano: Guanda, 2010). See Tommaso Giartosio, *Perché non possiamo non dirci: letteratura, omosessualità, mondo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2004).

<sup>364</sup> Dario Bellezza, *Morte di Pasolini* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1995) 166.

<sup>365</sup> See Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Teorema* (Milano: Garzanti, 1968).

È un urlo fatto per invocare l'attenzione di qualcuno  
o il suo aiuto; ma anche forse per bestemmiarlo.  
E' un urlo che vuol far sapere,  
in questo luogo disabitato, *che io esisto*  
oppure, che non soltanto esisto,  
*ma che so*. E' un urlo  
in cui fondo all'ansia  
si sente qualche vile accento di speranza;  
oppure un urlo di certezza, assolutamente assurda,  
dentro a cui risuona, pura, la disperazione.  
Ad ogni modo questo è certo: che qualunque cosa  
Questo mio urlo voglia significare,  
esso è destinato a durare oltre ogni possibile fine.

The above quotation reproduces, sans alteration, Pasolini's original poem. Bellezza's practice of citation allows him to bring words from a prior era in contact with his current textual project – a book written decades after Pasolini's tragic "morte." Even when incorporated, these lines retain a temporal alterity – pulled from a text that Pasolini published in 1968. The "urlo" cited here is not the same howl, then, that Bellezza had noted on the bloodied corpse of Pasolini. Instead, this howl "è destinato a durare oltre ogni possibile fine." Rather than giving voice to Pasolini's terror-stricken last moments, this "urlo" resounds across the decades. It knows. It demands attention. It endures.

At the level of reception, the meaning behind the "urlo" remains uncertain. Speaking with both "ansia" and glum "speranza," this howl "vuol fare sapere [...] *che io esisto*." In addition to bearing witness to a life, the "urlo" wants others to know "che non soltanto esisto, *ma che so*." If this howl is destined to endure past "ogni possibile fine," including the death of the body that produces it, it does so by affecting others. This howl seeks to make others "sentire" what it knows – to transmit, across time, a specific vision of the world. For Bellezza, the "urlo" represents Pasolini's spectral pull on the present: a ghostlike voice capable of invoking in others what it knows to be true. Despite death, the "urlo" rages on—conjuring a knowledge that did not die with the corpse. Body becomes corpus, as the immaterial voice endures "oltre ogni possibile fine." In turn, Pasolini's corpus continues to speak through present audiences—living bodies attuned to its chronic vision. While Pasolini's body may decompose, his "urlo" persists to conjure affects in the present. In that persistence, Bellezza reads a pained hope—the hope that history's hurt might yet alter the future.

Pasolini's melancholic apparition in Italian cultural production – whether in novels (i.e., Abbate's *Oggi è un secolo*, 1992), films (i.e., Nanni Moretti's *Caro Diario*, 1993) or queer auto/biographies (i.e., Nico Naldini's *Mio cugino Pier*, 2000) – should be read in light of Pasolini's own relation to the past. His haunting of current cultural production, I argue, is not simply a side effect of the "mystery" of his death (i.e., a desire to answer who killed Pasolini). Pasolini, after all, relayed and related to Italy's "passato" in his own writing. His haunting of current Italian cultural production is bound to Pasolini's prior relaying of Italy's Past. In poetry, Pasolini presented himself as the mouthpiece of a past that was vanishing from Italy. Pasolini does not haunt the present only because he died. He haunts because his writing voices desire for "il Passato" – history without progress.

In a 1964 poem, Pasolini calls himself “una forza del Passato”—a force from the Past that lives on. The “Passato” referenced here is said to persist outside of History, untouched by the cultural shifts that cleave one age from the next. It is also vestigial – surviving, stubbornly, into Italy’s modern age:

Io sono una forza del Passato.  
Solo nella tradizione è il mio amore.  
Vengo dai ruderi, dalle Chiese,  
dalle pale d'altare, dai borghi  
dimenticati sugli Appennini o le Prealpi,  
dove sono vissuti i fratelli.  
Giro per la Tuscolana come un pazzo,  
per l'Appia come un cane senza padrone.  
O guardo i crepuscoli, le mattine  
su Roma, sulla Ciociaria, sul mondo,  
come i primi atti della Dopostoria,  
cui io sussisto, per privilegio d'anagrafe,  
dall'orlo estremo di qualche età  
sepolta. Mostruoso è chi è nato  
dalle viscere di una donna morta.  
E io, feto adulto, mi aggiro  
più moderno d'ogni moderno  
a cercare i fratelli che non sono più.<sup>366</sup>

Competing notion of chronology collide in his poem. The “Past” exists on the edge of “qualche età sepolta.” Buried, it is not quite dead. The poet casts himself as the offspring of a dead mother and “più moderno ogni moderno.” While time has passed, it does not progress in a developmental manner. Epochs do not give way to the advancement. Instead, this “feto adulto” – an image of stalled development – seeks those who “non sono più.” Articulated, then, is a vision of history wherein the Past affects what is desired and sought in the present. Voiced is a vision of history where buried ages comprise the present. In fact, the dusk and dawn of each day is called “la Dopostoria”: what happens subsequent to, not improving upon or erasing, history. In calling himself a voice of the Past, the poet says that he is “mostruoso.” On a literal level, monstrosity means to be born of death. Figuratively, it means here that the “dead” world is still alive.

While the feelings archived about Pasolini differ from author to author, they share a melancholic attachment to Italy’s past.<sup>367</sup> This attachment can take the form of a desire for an Italian the Left to resemble the politics voiced by Pasolini. A principal proponent in this camp is the journalist and novelist, Fulvio Abbate. Abbate’s novel *Oggi un secolo* (1992) imagines a Pasolini who returns to behold the televised spectacle of 1990s Italy –

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<sup>366</sup> See Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Poesia in forma di rosa* (Milano: Garzanti, 1964).

<sup>367</sup> In addition to articulating a melancholic attachment to the recent past, the texts collected in this chapter voice an attachment to melancholy – a refusal to move on. I am indebted to David Eng’s and David Kanjanjian’s rethinking of melancholy, as they argue for a depathologizing of what is melancholic. Melancholy, they claim, “generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future.” Melancholy refuses “to abandon lost objects by laying their histories to rest,” providing instead “an open relation to the past.” See David Eng and David Kanjanjian, *Loss and the Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 4.

to behold a mindless mass culture that Pasolini once foretold.<sup>368</sup> In his recent *Pasolini raccontato a tutti*, Abbate again imagines if Pasolini were alive today. He writes: “Senza quella notte all’Idrascolo, forse, Pier Paolo Pasolini sarebbe ancora vivo, e avrebbe adesso quasi novantadue anni. Forse. [...] Certo, è difficile immaginarlo vecchio, nostro contemporaneo, residente in una società ormai compiutamente spettacolare e omologata” (222). Reanimating Pasolini allows Abbate to voice “una metafisica della nostalgia” and “una metafisica della memoria” (223). In reviving Pasolini on the page, via an act of speculative writing, Abbate aims to rouse “una persistenza della sua opera poetica e politica” (223). Despite “la sua assenza,” Pasolini’s corpus continues to exert a pull on the present (223). Abbate literalizes the corpus’ continued pull by fictively imagining the aged body of Pier Paolo: a vestige from “il Passato” who predicted “nostro” future—“nostro” present, that is.<sup>369</sup>

Queer writers like Nico Naldini and Alberto Arbasino, however, cite Pasolini in order to mourn the erotic worlds lost in the age of homogenizing sexual identities. Arbasino claims that:

Allora non esisteva il nome e dunque non esisteva neppure la cosa. Assenza di pregiudizi. [...] I giovani cercavano sfoghi sbrigativi e senza impegno. Al massimo ci scappava una pizza e un pacchetto di sigarette. [...] È stato un periodo relativamente breve. In seguito, il paesaggio sociale si modificherà. E questo avrà il suo peso su Pasolini. [...] I ragazzini non sono più poveri, nascono vere e proprie categorie professionali. Per giunta, si approfondisce il divario fra un cinquantenne come Pasolini e un quindicenne.<sup>370</sup>

In Arbasino’s account, Pasolini is both witness to and an emblem of the anthropological shifts that attended Italy’s rapid industrialization in the 1960s.<sup>371</sup> We read that Pasolini’s “inclinazione” was to have sex with young men, some adolescent. According to Arbasino, “non c’erano termini per l’omosessualità” in those years. Sex was done. It was not spoken about. But, with the passage of time, the “ragazzini” changed while Pasolini’s desires did not.

Pasolini had become an anachronism -- a vestige who had survived into an age that would now organize sex with new terms and rules. Arbasino recalls an erotic way of life removed from the here-and-now that houses him. Citing Pasolini allows Arbasino to tell a story of sexual simplicity and pagan permissiveness as though it were a biographical anecdote about Pasolini. The force of that “Passato,” though, is a retroactive fiction – an affect presently conjured by telling a story about an “earlier” era. Relaying that past now, the writer comes to *feel* closer to an age that, he says, has since ceased.

<sup>368</sup> See Fulvio Abbate, *Oggi è un secolo* (Roma: Edizioni Theoria, 1992).

<sup>369</sup> In *Pasolini raccontato a tutti*, Abbate writes: “Dunque, oggi, Pier Paolo Pasolini avrebbe, se fosse vivo, novantadue anni, l’età dei nonni, l’età della fila in posta per ritirare la pensione, l’età del corpo che stenta riconoscere se stesso, ma soprattutto, sempre Pasolini, lo si è già accennato, avrebbe davanti un Paese che ha corrisposto pienamente le sue analisi sulla mutazione e il degrado antropologici, la tesi del ‘genocidio culturale’” (223). Even if it is hard for “us” to recognize a ninety year-old Pasolini, Abbate insists, Pasolini had recognized “our” present decades before its day.

<sup>370</sup> See: [www.pasolini.net/ricordi\\_AlbertArbasino.htm](http://www.pasolini.net/ricordi_AlbertArbasino.htm)

<sup>371</sup> In 1974, only ten years after claiming to be “una forza del Passato,” Pasolini says that huge swaths of Italy’s population who had remained “fuori della storia” were rapidly experiencing a “genocide”: assimilation into a homogenized consumer culture. In the 1950s and early 1960s, Rome had once incarnated sensual excess for Pasolini. But, by the 1970s, Pasolini had begun to dismiss Rome as lost.

It would be tempting to interpret Pasolini's and Arbasino's accounts as "testimonies." To find in their words a sobering reminder that there once existed an erotic world in Italy that, while plenty queer, was hardly gay. We might find there a sardonic critique of gay liberation's own myths, which tend to paint the past as a space of homophobic silence overcome in the present or in some better future. For both authors, the chronological unfolding of time is *not* synonymous with history's movement towards progress. Desire, described as peripatetic, supposedly had room to move back then. We could cite these authors as "evidence" of how queer things used to be before the "arrival" in Italy of coming-out politics, discrete sexual identity categories and homonormative coupling.

This "textual evidence" could then be marshaled to claim that queerness has often been lived out in ways discrete from the "modern" discursive binaries (homo- / hetero-) deconstructed by queer theorists. We, scholars steeped in queer theory, could use Arbasino's or Pasolini's or Naldini's story about the past to make a point very much at home in our academic here-and-now: queerness blurs binaries, queerness has little regard for either/or identities, queerness contests universalizing notions of "gay people," queerness deviates. We might even want to see *in* such accounts evidence for theories regnant in our present. But, none of this makes the desire-laden past relayed in their *stories* an objective social reality.<sup>372</sup>

Looking backwards, scholars have made vital points about how ruling sexual schemas undergo epistemic shifts over time.<sup>373</sup> We have been reminded to be wary of generalizing the present from which we read and interpret. But, it is crucial to remember, that the past also plays an affirmative role – indeed works as an *essential* and *essentializing* fiction – in texts invested in deconstructing "modern"/contemporary sexual identities. Texts that, to return to the scholarly present tense from which I write, can easily be dubbed "queer" but are not legibly "gay." My point: the past as a site of identification, a horizon of felt affinity, is not limited to gay histories that, when looking back, see smooth homologies where differences abound. The past functions as a site of affinity in texts with no interest in a unitary or progressive telling of gay history.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Naldini and Bellezza acknowledge that their "testimonies" of Pasolini are subjective recollections. Bellezza, in a talk from 1983 titled "Ricordo di Pasolini, says: "Ora devo dire che non sono un critico in senso stretto, non sono uno storico e per quanto riguarda Pasolini, appunto, sono coinvolto emotivamente [...]. A parlarne, nonostante che sia morto da tanti anni, riesco con difficoltà a raccontarlo, perché, più che altro, *lo vedo*: la sua opera è legata strettamente alla sua persona, al suo padre, al suo incendiare, al suo modo di fare, sicché non riesco ad essere completamente libero e obiettivo" (8). Dario Bellezza, *Ricordo di Pasolini* (Pistoia: Via del Vento Edizioni, 2009). When discussing his efforts to edit the collected letters of Pier Paolo Pasolini, Naldini writes: "Questi fogli fluttuano *in un passato ignoto, anche se prossimo, creando miraggi contrastanti*. La difficoltà si aumenta se l'autore delle lettere è un giovanissimo letterato che si guarda nella sua vita e si prioetta in quella esteriore per cogliere alcuni fenomeni *senza tempo*, come il corso di un fiume, una partita di calcio, un temporale, il suono delle campane" (my emphasis). Nico Naldini, *Alfabeto degli amici* (Napoli: L' Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2004) 169.

<sup>373</sup> For a critique of essentializing gay histories, see: David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and, more recently, Halperin's *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>374</sup> Elizabeth Freeman writes elegantly that "I think the point [of queerness] may be to trail behind actually existing social possibilities: to be interested in the tail end of things, willing to be bathed in the fading light of whatever has been declared useless." She continues, stating that "we gather and combine eclectically, dragging a bunch of cultural debris around us and stacking it in idiosyncratic piles 'not necessarily like any

Pasolini is one such locus of chronic affinity—embodying an socio-historical reality distinct from the present in which he is cited. Pasolini comes to signify both the past’s anthropological difference *and* that difference’s ensuing dissolution. During his life, Pasolini mourned the “mutazione antropologica” that he claimed was altering Italy’s ‘timeless’ “popolo.” Pasolini is quoted to stress that, even during his life, the past’s distinctive reality had started to turn to ruins. Both absolute historical distance (Pasolini = an unfamiliar “Passato”) and transhistorical resemblance (Pasolini = just like us) are thwarted in this move. His name works, I am arguing, as a sort fetish. When cited, it allows writers in the present to believe, temporarily, in the past’s persistent difference. But, this difference must then be deflected for identification with Pasolini to be enacted backward across time. What haunts the fetish is the understanding that the past’s difference must be reproduced, linguistically, in the same here-and-now that caused its ruin. Pasolini’s ghost does not just emerge in the present but is made of it.

The archive of feeling that we call Pier Paolo Pasolini comprises writers, like Tommaso Giartosio, who hear in his words “un eco di una realtà storica, politica e culturale.”<sup>375</sup> Re-reading Pasolini, Giartosio says, is one way to expose the reality behind the “mito.” But, Pasolini’s chronic archive also includes those who think that Pier Paolo is too present in Italy’s memory. Inverting the logic of Pasolini’s “Poesia in forma rosa,” where the poet exists in “qualche età sepolta,” Marco Belpoliti claims that “a noi tocca un altro [processo]: seppellire Pasolini.”<sup>376</sup> To bury Pasolini means to “mangiarlo simbolicamente” – to digest his words and to free him from being “sospeso nei nostri pensieri per tre decenni.”<sup>377</sup> According to Belpoliti, we must “dimenticare Pasolini per ricordarlo davvero.”<sup>378</sup> One camp desires to exhume. The other desires to entomb.

Whether in reading backwards to touch Pasolini’s lost world or in trying to inter his post-mortem myth, conflicting notions of history—one drawn to the past’s queer difference and one that desires to move past its wounds—are projected onto the same nominal trace. Pasolini incarnates, in the words of Nico Naldini, “un passato ignoto, anche se prossimo.”<sup>379</sup> Reading can exhume, pushing us to relate, fleetingly, to defunct practices and people. It can also disinter feelings that some of us would like to keep buried.<sup>380</sup> Ghosts can make us feel less alone, visited by a person who has vanished from

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preexisting whole,’ though composed of what preexists.” Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (London & Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) xiii.

<sup>375</sup> *Perché non possiamo non dirci*, Tommaso Giartosio, 190

<sup>376</sup> See Marco Belpoliti, *Pasolini in salsa piccante* (Milano: Guanda, 2010) 17.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.* 17

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.* 100.

<sup>379</sup> Nico Naldini, *Meglio gli antichi castighi*, 169.

<sup>380</sup> Pasolini signifies both responses. He is cited by writers like Naldini because he was the mouthpiece / recorder of an erotic realm that, they wish, had never been displaced. For younger gay Italians, though, is Pasolini is recalled as a famed victim of Italy’s homophobia. Pasolini is publically mourned by younger gays on the day of his death – appearing as a commemorative quote or as photo on social media. Beyond being an object of mourning, he remains an archive of “bad feelings”—signifying both an imagined erotic plenty absent from the present and the phobia of earlier epochs. Pasolini’s continued presence in contemporary queer Italy allows earlier generation of queer writers, many of whom knew Pasolini, and a younger generation of gay Italians to voice competing disappointments with Italy’s present: 1) the past was better off than today (i.e., “si stava meglio quando si stava peggio”) and 2) the present is still “arretrato.” Pasolini has become an archive of public feelings – contradictorily imagined as desired and distant, kindred and unfamiliar.

our “reality.” Other cadavers are cold to the touch—the dead whose absence distresses the living. Queer memorializing, an urge not to forget, scrapes against a desire to entomb the hurt of history. In that scraping, I trace a query central to my dissertation: how do we tell “our” story when both the present and the past leave “us” searching elsewhere?

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