Queer Stories of Europe
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ vii
Editors’ Introduction ..................................................................................................... 1
Kārlis Vērdiņš and Jānis Ozoliņš

Part I: Queer Narratives in Contemporary Literature

Chapter One ................................................................................................................. 6
The End of Gay and Lesbian Literature as a Happy End
Martin C. Putna

Chapter Two .............................................................................................................. 36
The Mainstream, the Sidestream and the Irrigation Ditch: British Gay
Literature and the Parched Reader
Gregory Woods

Chapter Three ............................................................................................................ 50
Fact and Fiction, Insistence and Resistance: Germany’s Struggle
with Queer Interventions
Dirk Schulz

Chapter Four .............................................................................................................. 64
Articulation beyond Representation, or, What’s Queer about Queer
Narratives?
Tomasz Sikora

Chapter Five .............................................................................................................. 81
Death Penalty or ‘Death and Transfiguration’?: Thomas Mann’s
‘Death in Venice’ and its Reception in English-Language Literature
(‘Ganymede’ by Daphne du Maurier)
Rolf Füllmann

Chapter Six .............................................................................................................. 100
Queer Melancholia and the Limits of Identification in Andra Neiburga’s
Short Story “Man-doll”
Jānis Ozoliņš
# Table of Contents

## Part II: History of Central and East Europe Revisited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Literary Queer Mésalliances in Riga around 1900</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liina Lukas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>The Harden–Eulenburg Affair and the Latvian Image of Germans</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kārlis Vērdiņš</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Import from the West vs. Import from the Past: Queer Movement in the First Half of the 20th Century in Slovak Context</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jana Jablonická-Zezulová</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Communication of Non-normative Sexuality in Inter-war Latvia (1920s and 1930s)</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ineta Lipša</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Decriminalization of Homosexual Acts in Czechoslovakia in 1961</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jan Seidl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Latvian Queerness Mirrored: Andris Grīnbergs vs. Andy Warhol</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laine Kristberga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Ukrainian Queer Culture: The Difficult Birth</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vitaly Chernetsky</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>The Story about “A Minority in Minority”: The Case of Christian Lesbians in Latvia</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ilze Jansone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contributors</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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EDITORS’ INTRODUCTION

KÄRLIS VĒRDIŅŠ AND JĀNIS OZOLIŅŠ

This volume brings together scholars from several European countries whose work investigates various representations of queer culture over a period of more than one hundred years—namely the entire 20th century. This century saw, on one hand, the modernization of attitudes towards sexuality as well as emancipation and recognition of LGBT people, but on the other hand, the creation of totalitarian regimes that tried to erase this category of people from everybody’s consciousness both ideologically and physically.

This is the first volume on this subject that presents the history of the Baltic region among other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The editors of the book encountered the same challenges as, for example, the editors of Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe since 1945 (2014), who found it extremely difficult to arrange their chapters, dedicated to various European metropolises, in a particular “logical” order. Attempts to systematize the multilayered historical material of each location did not follow the dictates of such an arrangement.1 Although that highly valuable book includes chapters dedicated to Moscow, Ljubljana, Budapest and Helsinki, other urban queer cultures of Central and Eastern Europe are not represented. Another recent collection of articles, What’s Queer About Europe? (2014), looks at the countries of this region only because they participated in the Eurovision song contest.2 The guide Queer Prague (2014) written by four Czech scholars can be regarded as a swift response to such omissions,3 and it includes 100 places connected to the city’s queer past.

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Despite the geographical and thematic variety of the present volume, it still has some uniting elements. First of all, its central field is literature and literary culture—the written word that until recently was the most important medium for exchanging ideas and preserving information. Other media have played their roles in queer history as well—the visual arts, cinema, video art and TV etc. Although a significant part of our volume is dedicated to literature, many of the authors in this book view the central question from the perspectives of history, art history, culture studies, communication studies, theology, narratology, etc.

A varying historical experience determines the theoretical framework and social context of contemporary research work in each European country. In the United Kingdom and Germany, on the one hand, it is possible to talk about the central question because here the LGBT community is more or less integrated into a society that advocates its rights whereas, on the other hand, Ukrainian queer culture is extremely provocatively to the majority of Ukrainian society. Taking into account these differences, we use the word “queer” as an umbrella term that deals with all kinds of non-normative sexuality, even covering periods of the past when other designations were used.

Historically, since the end of the 19th century, Germany has been a pioneering country in the research field of sexuality. The issue of homosexuality was made visible there relatively early. Thus, nations close to German culture also experienced the presence of gay movement activists in the first half of the 20th century. However, in the Baltic provinces and other areas which were part of the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century, as far as we know, gay movements were not established until the end of the 20th century. This volume is one of the first attempts to address the queer elements of Baltic history.

In the last twenty-five years, Western theories of sexuality and gender have entered the academic research of Central and Eastern Europe. The ideas of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and others have influenced scholars in various countries and fields of interest. Their concepts have turned into a kind of language that has become a shared basis of queer studies. Nevertheless, the experience of LGBT activism or the presence of queer studies is still quite different to that of the West. While Western scholars have already produced an exhaustive amount of publications concerning the historical heritage of their countries, the Central and Eastern European region is a territory where such studies have been published only in the last few years. Countries that experienced the collapse of socialism a quarter-century ago still need to be “discovered” both by the local community of researchers in the field of humanities and
their Western colleagues whose information about the construction of gender and sexuality in the region is still very limited, as Dagmar Herzog finds in her survey on Europe’s modern sexuality. No successful generalization can yet be made without deeper knowledge of East European queer history.

Establishing queer studies as a discipline in, for example, Baltic universities, is still only a vision—it could yet take quite a while to achieve. Furthermore, LGBT activism in this region still gathers only small numbers because many LGBT people prefer to remain in their closets and reject political activism and public discussion which would only make them feel even more vulnerable.

This volume is the outcome of an international conference Queer Narratives in European Cultures that took place in Riga on June 18, 2015, in Pauls Stradiņš’ Museum of the History of Medicine, during Europride 2015, and was organized by the University of Latvia’s Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, and the Latvian LGBT association Mozaika. We hope this book will illuminate some aspects of Central and Eastern European queer history, at the same time accentuating the connection of this history to the history of other regions of Europe, especially those where debates on queer issues have a longer tradition. We believe such a comparative approach could be useful for other researchers who will continue exploring the themes that our colleagues have raised in the present volume.

References


PART I

QUEER NARRATIVES IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE
CHAPTER ONE

THE END OF GAY AND LESBIAN LITERATURE AS A HAPPY END: AN ATTEMPT TO COMPARE DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

MARTIN C. PUTNA

Gay and Lesbian Literature as a Historical and Geographical Phenomenon

Many books have been written about what gay and lesbian literature is.¹ Now, in the second decade of the 21st century, the question of where gay and lesbian literature is becomes more relevant. In my opinion the centre for gay and lesbian literature is not in Paris or New York anymore, instead this centre is now in cities like Budapest or Riga.

What I mean by that is that I do not understand gay and lesbian literature (GLL) as a category of literary aesthetics, but rather as a category of literary sociology and anthropology. GLL is an example of “community literature,” or more precisely, it is one of the types of literature cultivated by subcultures in modern and post-modern society. These “community literatures” are not primarily driven by aesthetics, but by a function of community building and of representing the community in the cultural mainstream. In some cases this type of representation can take on a rather missionary accent, in other cases it can take on more of a self-defensive tone, or a combination of both.

Among these “community literatures” we can find literature by Catholics in a secular society; literature by aristocrats in a civic society; literature by dissidents in a communist regime; GLL in a society that does not include gay and lesbian identity as a legitimate anthropological choice. (I do not want to use the term “heteronormative society,” nor do I want to get caught up in debates about identities in the spirit of queer theory). My academic work has been dealing with several “community literatures” which enables a comparative perspective.

The formation of GLL takes place during the 20th century against the backdrop of the formation of gay and lesbian identity (GLI). The literary description of the gay and lesbian topic is used as a vehicle for self-emancipation of the homosexual community within the framework of specific national cultures. The personality and identity of the author is not of primary importance: the works of authors who do not belong to the homosexual community, or who at least do not declare it publicly, are also taken into account as “external” witnesses of the relevance of the topic. GLL gains certain autonomy within the framework of national literature and rediscovers its own history (including works and personalities from earlier periods, long before the establishment of homosexual identity). The literary critics interested in GLL develop methods relevant for academic examination. GLL attracts attention and respect from the “mainstream” of the same national culture. The role of authors and critics who declare their personal engagement with the topic, and with the gay and lesbian movement, is typical in this phase. This process is usually interconnected with the successful fulfilment of the process of political self-emancipation and general acceptance of the homosexual community in the same country.

However, at the same time, gay and lesbian literature is losing its main purpose. It is allowed to end happily and peacefully. So, if the gay or lesbian topic appears in literary works now, it is mainly because of the individual, post-emancipation literary strategies of each particular author. In the Anglo-Saxon and Francophone cultures a status has been reached where gay and lesbian topics are perceived as completely neutral, that is when the presence of gay and lesbian themes, or the GLI of an author, does not influence the critical response to the work in question. Let us

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name just a few authors from recent years: Michael Cunningham, Chuck Palahniuk, and Benoit Duteurtre.

There are other authors who write primarily for the gay and lesbian (GL) community. What they publish, however, is basically trivial erotic fiction to be consumed quickly, or non-fiction (psychological, sexologist, spiritual etc.). The response to this type of literature does not extend beyond the core of the community, because this literature usually does not possess any significant aesthetic value. To differentiate between these two types of authors, I use the following distinctions: “an author who happens to be gay,” and “a gay who happens to be an author.” In practice this means that the works by the authors from the first category can be found both in standard bookstores as well as in bookstores specializing in GLL—whereas works by the authors from the second category can be only found in specialized bookstores.

Now, let us turn our attention to the other part of Europe—to the one that used to be a part of the so-called Soviet bloc. Naturally, the communist regimes did not allow their subjects to participate in the GL emancipation happening in the free Western world. A similar emancipation process started as late as 1989, or 1991 in the countries of the former USSR. In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) the process was quite specific.

On one hand, emancipation had a much easier starting point as local gay and lesbian movements, both political and cultural, had ready-made patterns of working which could be transferred almost completely from the West. This pattern included both the concept of GLL itself and it challenged the status quo by applying queer theory. It included a canon of terms, symbols and political requirements, a canon of classical literary works and literary strategies, and also a growing academic production concerning the GL topic. Subsequently, what arose in CEE is, to a large extent, a translation of Western patterns. It is good to remember that the English language is not only the common academic language, but also the main language of the GL movement and of academic production. In no other language can this topic be discussed as easily and naturally since all the key terms, from “gay” to “same-sex marriage,” are taken from English.

On the other hand, the position of the emancipation process is much more difficult. Not only did the communist era delay the formation of the GL movement, but even before the communist era CEE had slower development in terms of general modernization and secularization than other parts of Europe. It is mainly for those historical reasons that the societies of CEE have been comparably conservative, and not only with respect to the topic of GLI. Moreover, there were forces in these societies
which made the anti-GLI movement into a political tool, intended to appeal to the conservative, less educated strata. In some countries the anti-GLI agenda has become a part of the cultural politics of the state. It is no coincidence that the former centre of the Soviet bloc, namely Moscow, represents the centre of organized homophobia in CEE.

Development in CEE is a part of a development within a broader geopolitical context. A line divides the globe from North to South. West of this line, new laws have been established in more and more countries to protect same-sex partnerships, homosexuality ceases to be regarded as an issue and the same-sex experiences of artists or politicians have become just another item of no particular note in their biographies. East of this line, by contrast, new laws tend to criminalize or re-criminalize homosexuality. Homosexuals are bestowed the role of “scapegoats” historically given to persecuted communities making them magically responsible for all the troubles of these societies.\(^5\) In heathen Rome, Christians were made the scapegoats, and in Christian Europe it was the Jews—in CEE today, it is gays and lesbians.\(^6\) The supposedly Orthodox Russia, the Islamic Near and Middle East and the supposedly Christian black Africa are diverse in the colours of their ideologies, but in their rhetoric they match one another—cursing alleged Western decadence, as seen particularly in GLI. Vladimir Putin’s law prohibiting “homosexual propaganda” is just a soft version of laws in Iran or Uganda, threatening gays and lesbians with the death penalty.

In this context the GL movement and the GLL in the countries of CEE acquire an extraordinary importance. What matters now is exactly where this dividing line will fall. The countries of CEE, or more specifically, the countries between Germany and Russia once again represent a border between ideologies. It is through this seemingly secondary topic that the specific societies symbolically formulate their decision, whether they mentally belong to the West or the East.

In this context GLL in CEE in the last quarter of a century can, and will, be regarded as a whole. The main tendencies which appear in particular national literatures can, and will, be compared. Conversions and diversions can, and will, be stated across the whole vast multinational area

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of CEE. The result of this comparison can, and will, be not only of purely literary importance.

I am fully aware of the risks of taking a comparative perspective, if the viewpoint is of a representative of one of relevant national literatures. I am also aware of my linguistic limitations: my experience in Slavic studies enables me to read all Slavonic literatures, whereas my knowledge of Hungarian is limited and in Baltic literature I, unfortunately, fully depend on translations. Yet, I firmly believe that it is necessary to make this attempt. If other fellow academics follow it, complete it, and eventually fully transform it, we will all be the better for it.

The Czech Republic

Let me start with my “home”: Czech literature. Up till 1989 no openly gay author figured in the mainstream of publicly available Czech literature. Those authors desiring to depict a homosexual theme used different literary strategies in the line of duality: “mask” and “signal.”7 “Paths of Sublimation” meant a transformation and only implicit expression of the topic, either through hermetic, allusive language (like in the poetry of Richard Weiner or Věra Linhartová) or through a substitutive topic (like Jewishness, as related to gayness, in its marginality and persecution, in the work of Ladislav Fuks). “Paths of Stylization” involve open discussion of the topic but in more “acceptable” historic or exotic backgrounds: antiquity in the work of Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, “romantic friendship” set in the milieu of medieval chivalry in the work of Julius Zeyer, imitation of medieval Hebrew homoerotic poetry in the work of Jiří Langer etc.8

Aside from mainline Czech culture, a group of authors formed around the first Czech GL activist magazine, issued in the 1930s, in the epoch of the relatively liberal interwar Czechoslovak Republic. However, it was about “homosexuals who happen to be authors,” and thus activists who occasionally became writers. Although the texts by these activists are quality-wise only on the margins of Czech literature of this period, they represent an important period document and also report on the mentality of

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that time. This group, the first self-conscious generation of GLL, was heavily influenced by the example of neighbouring Germany, the homeland of the very first GL movement under the leadership of Magnus Hirschfeld. In the way Czech activists mentally followed German models of this period we can see another example of the “secondary” role of CEE.

When the fall of the Communist regime in 1989 liberated the publishing environment, primarily those GLL texts were published that had been written in the previous Communist era, but had remained as manuscripts or were circulated only in samizdat. Among these texts appeared works by several, usually pseudonymous, “authors of their own coming-out stories,” who have written their coming-out novel, which fulfilled and exhausted their literary activity (though, some of them possessed a genuine lyrical talent, such as pseudonym Jiří Pastýř). Thus they proved to be only “homosexuals who happen to be authors.” Several works by respected authors also appeared which included personally tuned homosexual motifs, but which were intentionally left aside by their authors. This was, for instance, the case of the lyrical poetry of the well-known dramatist Josef Topol, published as late as the 1990s. Josef Topol finally consented to publish his early “private” texts, but definitely did not want to be classified as a writer of GLL and never commented on homosexual topics in his autobiographical texts. At the same time, in the early 1990s, three significant personalities appeared who considered homosexuality to be main topic of their work.

The first one was Václav Jamek, primarily a bilingual intellectual-philologist, closely connected with French culture not only as a translator, but also as a Francophone writer. Being formed more in the French than in the Czech literary context, Jamek’s literary work probably represented the first example of a “Path of Manifestation” in Czech literature, which meant an open, “realistic” discussion of the topic, combined with gay activism. Jamek published, inter alia, the very first Czech attempt at a homosexual topic in European literature. In his essay *Krkavčí múza* (*Raven’s Muse*, written 1976–1977, published 1992) he expressed his will to leave his Czech work unpublished rather than to have its homoerotic dimension censored, calling

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himself “the impossibilist.” This work contains many genres and various styles: absurd drama, “French” purist philological criticism, grotesque parodic poetry. In Jamek’s perception, the homosexual experience itself is often grotesque, specifically in its marginalization in Communist society. Yet even in this grotesqueness it is worth defending and should be brought into literary speech. This emphasized grotesqueness, the bizarre aspect of the homosexual lifestyle—and through this prism the grotesqueness and bizarreness of the whole world—loosely connects Jamek with the archetypical Czech tradition of Hašek and Hrabal. Similarly, as in the works of Hašek or Hrabal, the depiction of seemingly trivial, popular and vulgar environments veil the author’s sophisticated cultural background. Yet, in contrast to Hašek and Hrabal, Jamek is not primarily a born narrator, but a critical and sceptical intellectual. Symptomatically, in the Czech literature of the 1990s, Jamek has been designated the gay author, respected by the broader cultural public. In fact, he was more respected than popular. In this respect it seems as if in the 1990s Czech society wished to prove to itself its tolerance: Behold, we can accept one homosexual author in our midst.

The second openly gay author is an entirely different personality in many respects: Jiří Kuběna expresses both the crucial meaning of gay love for his poetry and his distance from modern European GLI and GLL. Homosexuality is omnipresent in his autobiographically tuned work, but entirely separated from the usual problems of homosexuals in modern society. Homosexuality is elevated to a mythical level: in a happy relationship between two contemporary men Antiquity is revitalized—the utopic Golden Age of mythological couples. “Profane” society has no access to this happiness, to this living-in-Greece. This insularity is an intentional poetic choice. At the same time, it has been made possible by the exceptional opportunities the author has had. Kuběna is a professional conservationist. He spent most of the Communist era in castles. He transformed one castle in his region of South Moravia, Bitov, into a central point of his personal mythology, into an idealized “castle of male love,” praised in sophisticated rhetorical poetry, which is both classical and experimental in the style of the late avant-garde.

To make Kuběna’s case even more complex, not only homosexuality and Antiquity, but also Catholicism belong to his mytho-poetic system. Kuběna’s Catholicism is culturally extremely conservative (see his

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rejection of the Second Vatican Council)—but also extremely audacious in re-interpretation: Holy Maria is for Kübena the patron saint of gay love; Jesus and John are a mythological gay couple; the spear of Longinus serves as a phallic symbol; the first couple in Paradise was originally male, and the punishment of “the other Adam” consisted in his castration—in his transformation into a woman.

To the Czech public Jiří Kübena seemed an extremely exotic phenomenon. It took the whole of the 1990s for him to be accepted as a legitimate author. However, non-literary circumstances made this acceptance possible. Firstly, Kübena was a close childhood friend of Václav Havel, who repeatedly defended Kübena’s person and work. Secondly, Kübena, as warden of the Bitov castle, organized grandiose congresses of poets, in which all the mainstream Czech literary figures—after some hesitation—took part. Thanks to the immediate contact with the fascinating eccentric personality of the poet-warden-rhetorician, the Czech literary public found a way to his poetry. Ironically, this poet’s later poetry is increasingly more verbose and less and less appealing—unlike the poetry of his youth, written in complete isolation.

The third personality, Svatava Antošová, started her career in the last years of Communism as a Beatnik-style poet. However, she reached her literary peak in fiction, written in a post-Communist era, in novels Dáma a švihadlo (The Lady and the Jump Rope, 2004) and Nordickou blondýnu jsem nikdy nelízala (I Have Never Gone Down on a Nordic Blonde, 2005). In these novels, Antošová turns all the stereotypes about homosexual inspiration in literature upside down. Instead of sadness and pathos, she writes a “lesbian-killer parody with some elements of autobiography” and “grotesque porn from the terrorism era,” which are the subtitles of two of her novels. Her novels are built on the writer’s familiarity with a raw “post-underground” environment of industrial North Bohemia, characterized by post-Communist poverty, worker’s pubs, and little islands of cultural creativity. However, the text flows freely from critical realism to sexual and violent phantasies, nevertheless still full of absurd humour. Both the “external” environment and the “internal” GL milieu are made into objects of mockery. The authorial voice says about a fellow lesbian: “Píča! Pořád chce založit nějakou organizaci, který by mohla šéfovat.” (“This bitch! She is always eager to found an [activist] organization in order to become a boss.”) The quasi-autobiographical person herself is not excluded from this mockery. She comments her performance in a provocative drag-show: “Vypadám jako buzna, transka, agent CIA a Fidel Castro dohromady!” (“I

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look like a faggot, trans, agent of CIA and Fidel Castro at the same time!”) In real life, Antošová is not only the lesbian author of Czech literature, but a known author engaged in many mainline cultural projects, particularly in those of new left political inclination.

Around these three gather many “lesser” authors, of different quality and success. In general, however, it can be said that the homosexual topic was established in the mainstream of Czech literature and gradually lost the distinction of being something provocative or taboo. It is associated both with the liberalization of Czech society and with the success of the Czech GL movement. 2006 was the year of the promulgation of the law about registered partnerships. Symbolically, it can be regarded as the year of the peak and of the end of the main phase of the GL movement and literature. Paradoxically, yet logically, the GLL could end because it had reached its main extra-literary goal.

This situation of “the happy end” has also been sealed in the academic field. An international conference about homosexuality in Czech history and culture took place at Charles University in 2009. Three monographs have been published as an outcome; one about homosexuality in Czech literature and other artistic disciplines; one about the history of GLL in Czech lands; one about sociological and anthropological dimensions of GL communities in Czech lands. Both academia and the broader public accepted these monographs thankfully or with partial scientific criticism, without a hint of scandal. In this way, the phenomenon of the GL movement and GLL have been “historicized.”

Indeed, new writers dealing with homosexual topics continue to appear. But the context has changed. They are authors who are published and who are critically accepted in the literary mainstream, regardless of the topic. They depict homosexuality if they intend to, but do not present it as anything controversial. One example is Františka Jiříková in her novel Výhnanci (The Exiles, 2011), where the main plot is the struggle between Catholicism and homosexuality in the life of a group of Czech youths and the main message is the reconciliation of both. The poet Jiří Kubéň appears in the book as an episodic character. Another example is Adam Borzič, editor-in-chief of an important literary magazine, who includes bisexual stylization in his poetry, but whose thematic centre lies elsewhere—in social criticism and in unorthodox spirituality. Neither

Jirousová nor Borzič are considered to be “homosexual authors.” Through their work and its critical response they confirm a surprising fact: if there is any specific accent in Czech literature with a gay topic, it is its connection to Catholicism or, more generally, to Christian (or Jewish) religiosity. The religiosity appears not as a virulent opponent, but as a spiritual background and driving force of gay characters and/or authors.

Or, another type of writer appears: those who emphasize that they are “gay authors.” However, what they produce is merely commercial, entertaining literature (Jan Folný and his short stories Buzičci [The Little Faggots], 2013), or a foiled scandal. The last is the case of wannabe controversial writer Adam Georgiev. Georgiev published a series of half-pornographic novels with immense literary ambition and extraordinary self-promotion, but with a lack of literary talent. Czech critics mentioned him because of his topic, but after some hesitation they had to state that he was a bad writer. This was said as if it were an excuse: We have to reject him, even though he is gay. The Georgiev case proves that homosexuality can be used as an advertising tool for literature in contemporary Czech culture, but that this advertising tool is ceasing to work. Thus, the Georgiev case proves as well that the Czech GLL really did end happily.

Slovenia

Let us move to Slovenia. Former Yugoslavia used to be comparitively the most liberal country under a Communist regime and in the frame of Yugoslavia, Slovenia used to be the most liberal part of it, having the closest links to Western Europe. Similarly, the situation of the local GL movement and of GLL started by following Western patterns. While the Czech scene started with the publication of local literary works, written during the Communist era, and finished with the academic “historicization” of local traditions, the opposite was the case in Slovenia. In Slovenia the scene started with the translation of Western GLL and cultural theory. In the very beginning of the free era, starting in 1990, the independent prestigious publishing house ŠKUC launched the Lambda series. From that time on, Lambda has primarily been publishing translations of Western authors from the GLL canon (Michel Foucault, Konstantinos Kavafis, Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich, Leslie Feinberg and others), with the financial help of the Slovenian state.

17 Suk, Jan. „PR v českém pekle,” Host, 2013, 24, 4, p. 75.
Naturally, this ambitious plan of translating the GLL canon should serve as encouragement for Slovenian creativity, both artistic and academic. Significantly, two of the founding personalities of Lambda Suzana Tratnik and Brane Mozetič, were at the same time editors, translators, literary historians, political activists, and writers. A typical trace of Slovenian culture reappears in this “accumulation of functions,” which, even with a small number of culture bearers, tried from the 19th century onwards to embrace all the main tendencies and genres of period European culture.

Tratnik and Mozetič, therefore, attempt to re-construct the Slovenian branch of GLL. In her monograph Lezbična zgodba—literarna konstrukcija seksualnosti (A Lesbian Story—Literary Construction of Sexuality, 2004) Tratnik summarizes Western theories about “female writing” and “lesbian texts” in order to apply them to a very few works with (potentially) lesbian topics, which she found not only in Slovenian, but in South-Slavic literatures in general. Similarly, but with less scholarly sophistication, Mozetič tries to gather all homosexual narratives in Slovenian literature. His anthology, Modra Svetloba. Homoerotična ljubezen ve slovenski literaturi (The Blue Light. Homoerotic Love in Slovenian Literature, 1990), was featured in the very first issue of Lambda. The introduction indicates an openly activist, even “didactic” purpose of the anthology: “Vzemi v roke dobre knjige […] Zavedaj, da nesi sam.” (“Take a good book in your hand […] See, you are not alone.”)

The anthology starts with several narratives from Slovenian modernism which could be classified as examples of “romantic friendship.” In only one case is Mozetič able to find a “real,” developed story of a homosexual relationship as the central plot of a novel by the almost forgotten author, France Novšak, Dečki (Boys, 1938). In other cases, Mozetič has to be satisfied with marginal episodes, often depicted in a rather negative way. Only in the newest literature can a positive, or at least a neutral, approach be found. Mozetič wants to show the Slovenian scene as broadly as possible. This is why he also includes highly problematic persons and/or texts, such as Vitan Mal. This author published “normal” youth literature

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under his real name, and ephebophilic pornography under the pseudonym Ino Knabino.

Among recent authors collected into Mozetič’s anthology, the most significant name is Tomaž Šalamun. Šalamun is a poet, biographically connected to America, who introduced an “American” touch into Slovenian poetry. Sentimental relationships with male friends appear among many other motifs in Šalamun’s verses. However, Šalamun distanced himself from being labelled too explicitly as a “gay poet.” Mozetič commented on this distance with bitterness.22

On the other hand, Mozetič was able to persuade Ciril Bergles, a respected translator of the older literary generation, to publish, after some hesitation, his own homoerotic verse. Thus Bergles became the third representative local author of the Lambda edition. Mozetič did not, however, support the cultural traditionalism and religious tones in Bergles’ meditative poetry: “Rad me je drezal s svojo religiozno liriko ali s prevodi take lirike, saj je poznal moje odklonilno stališče do vere.” (“He liked to tease me with his religious poetry or with translations of such poetry, although he knew about my negative attitude to the faith.”)23

The editorial and interpretative work of Tratnik and Mozetič were designed primarily for a domestic audience and for the increasing visibility of the GL topic on the Slovenian scene. Interestingly, their poetic and fictional work has become the most important and most broadly translated “export article.” What specific, personal and/or Slovenian influences do the Slovenian gay poet and the Slovenian lesbian writer introduce to the Western general patterns?

In the work of Suzana Tratnik we can observe the ways in which she introduces gender concepts from her academic work into her fiction. The hero of her most successful novel, *Ime mi je Damian* (My Name is Damian, 2001), deals with rough teenage life, *Trainspotting*-style, using the male gender. Gradually it becomes evident that Damian is biologically a woman. Her novel, *Tretji svet* (The Third World, 2007), however, might be regarded as more originally “Slovenian.” This is because the main plot consists of the meeting and confrontation of two cultural mentalities: a Slovenian heroine is given the possibility of attending an international lesbian congress in Switzerland in the last years of the Communist era. She has been both enchanted by the self-consciousness of modern lesbian identity as well as confused by some patterns which she is expected to

follow that she finds too complex (e.g. the racial question in the lesbian scene). Her mental world suddenly comes across as “third world”—underdeveloped, and in need of advice and help. It is due to this confrontation that the heroine decides to build a lesbian movement in Slovenia. This confrontation also gives rise to many humorous and grotesque scenes which give another level to the novel. Suzana Tratnik at the same time describes and promotes lesbian activism, similar to Svatava Antošová in the Czech Republic.

The vast literary work of Brane Mozetič, on the other hand, does not deal with political or gender questions. Its only subject is sex, often coupled with violence and drugs. Mozetič’s texts are “cruising texts”; in form—not marching from a beginning to an end, but stumbling in endless circles; in content—depicting monotonous and polyvalent, anonymous and cruel, “cruising” sexual relations. Mozetič has proven to be a studious disciple of the Classics which he has translated, particularly the masters of “cruel erotics” like Foucault or Genet. The example of Genet shows that it is possible to create great literature from this subject. However, Mozetič’s problem lies in the banality not only of his stories (see volume Banalite [Banalities], 2003), but also of his language. It is “pornographic” in the metaphorical sense—banal, flat, monotonous, tiresome descriptions of corporal organs, acts, and fluids. Perhaps the only original motif in Mozetič’s work is how he paints Ljubljana as a city of darkness and of drastic sexuality, clearly reminiscent of Genet’s Paris: “Ljubljana is as bad as a nightmare.” Ljubljana figures in Slovenian tradition as a “locus amoenus,” an idyllic place of sleepy provincial beauty. Mozetič’s “re-labelling” of Ljubljana makes sense only as an intentional “anti-myth.”

Regarding the problematic quality of Mozetič’s texts, it is awe-inspiring to observe how firm his position in the Slovenian literary scene is. The reason is mainly extra-literary: Mozetič is not only the gay writer, and the organizer and supporter of young “gay poets,” but also a functionary of the Slovenian literary association. It is as if the Slovenian literary scene feels afraid to criticize him properly in order to not run the risk of criticizing his gay identity which he so loudly emphasizes.


There is a paradox: although Slovenian gay cultural personalities complain about persistent homophobia, even if “soft” and hidden, on the public level, Slovenian society has liberalized itself to a great extent. This positive development was sealed by the promulgation of registered partnerships (2006) and same-sex marriage (2015), but on the Slovenian literary scene a specific vision of GLL, dating back to the 1990s, has been conserved through the dominant position of Mozetič. It is this “living classic” who, thanks to his influence and his status as “the gay author,” unintentionally obstructs the Slovenian GLL from maturing—and from being allowed its happy ending.

Hungary

Hungary in the Communist era was also a country comparatively open to Western culture, even if to a lesser extent than Slovenia. Concerning GLL, however, after 1989 it became apparent that Hungary possessed neither a treasure of texts written originally for samizdat, as was the case in the Czech Republic, nor a group of dedicated intellectual activists/writers or pronounced state support as in Slovenia. It was only during the 1990s that several poets who openly dealt with gay topics appeared, and who did not repudiate the “gay poet” label. The most significant among these are András Gerevich and Ádám Nádasdy. Typically, quotes on book covers of English translations of Nádasdy say that he is “not to be categorized narrowly as a fine gay poet, which he undoubtedly is.”

András Gerevich is one generation younger than Nádasdy, but it is he who shall be discussed first because he represents a more typical approach of modern poets dealing with homosexuality. Several levels are present in his cultivated, melancholy, lyrical poetry. One level can be found in motifs of transience, of fleeting sentimental meetings and partings, and of death covertly approaching, which are omnipresent. This tonality corresponds with the mainstream tradition of Hungarian literature, also found in texts by authors like the “Hungarian Proust” Gyula Krudy. One of the poems that exemplify Gerevich’s tonality is a poem about meeting a shy teenager dreaming of his life-long love, while the narrator sees in the boy his own, younger and purer “Self.” Another level is a unified commercial pop

culture, including gay pop culture. Gerevich sets several poems in night clubs or in fitness centres. One can ask whether something as anti-poetic and banal as a fitness centre can be the subject of a poem unless an ironic distance is present. Yes, apparently it can be, as seen in Gerevich’s poem California Sun Fitness. Symbolically, the Hungarian poem has an English title. A third level is a confrontation between the lost world of childhood mingling with religion in the Hungarian countryside—conservative, but emotionally attractive nonetheless—and the experience of a multicultural, particularly Anglo-Saxon, West. The West is also a place of sentimental disappointment, but not of social alienation. For instance, the American “gay resort,” Provincetown, appears as a “locus amoenus,” where men kiss each other in the presence of families with children. In this third sense, Gerevich’s poetry is also political poetry. Usually this political engagement is only implicit. It is the dream that Hungary could one day be transformed into a “Provincetown,” where gays would not feel social alienation. Occasionally Gerevich is explicit in his criticism, for instance, when he quotes a homophobic and anti-Semitic saying of the Hungarian far right: “A buzikat a Dunába, a zsidókat meg utána,” (“Chuck the faggots into the Danube, and then the Jews.”)29

Ádám Nádasdy is much more rooted in pre-modern culture; he is a philologist-Anglicist. His poetry contains numerous allusions to classical European literature and formally follows classical patterns like sonnets or hexameters (but with less experimentation than e.g. Jiří Kuběna). The basic tonality is melancholy, similar to Gerevich, and the feeling of alienation is even stronger than in Gerevich’s work. In Nádasdy’s work, the alienation from the Catholic, religious world plays a particular role (see the poem Éjféli mise [A Midnight Mass]). In Nádasdy’s case Catholicism is also a part of “class identity,” since he is a member of a historically aristocratic Hungarian family. Nádasdy’s poetry is also even more impressionistic than Gerevich’s, focusing on details in form and sensation. Last but not least, his eroticism is verbally even more chaste than Gerevich’s.

Nádasdy’s eroticism actually follows the tradition of the sublime, “platonic” eroticism that early modernism inherits (Thomas Mann, R. M. Rilke) among other examples see repeated motifs comparing a young man to a Greek sculpture. At the same time, Nádasdy unmasks this tradition: he demonstrates how “literal” carnal eroticism is always present under the sublime platonicism. The carnal eroticism is, however, neither tragic nor

embarrassing. It is just a hidden level of humanity. Gay identity is nothing too specific in this context, it just offers some more refined sensitivity, see the poem *Udvarlás hűvős összel* (*Courting in the Autumn Hall*). For a young man the lyrical protagonist assumes the role of a glamorous charming intellectual, but he is aware that the mask is:

not the real me
(that comes later, one foggy, snow-smudged evening)
as if I had no lips, and he no body.30

Nádasdy’s work is crucial not only for his own sake, not only for his mastery of melancholic poetics, but it is crucial for understanding deeper Hungarian traditions. Explicit declarations of homosexual identity in the modern sense are quite rare in Hungary. (Paradoxically, it was a Hungarian writer, Károly Mária Kertbény, who invented the word “homosexual,” though the word spread through German culture.) It was, however, a young literary scientist, Zoltán Csehy, who proved that the “stronger” is something else: regarding the extremely “masculine,” aristocratic and military culture of the country, there is a very strong tradition of homosociality, often very sentimental male bonding in the spirit of “romantic friendship.”31 This concept of homosociality—or, “what existed before homosexuality”—was invented within the frame of Western “constructionism.”32 Czech academia just briefly suggested that this concept deserves to be applied to CEE as well.33 Hungarian academia already realized this application. The detailed monograph, *Szodoma és környéke: Homoszocialitás, barátságrétorika és queer irányulások a magyar költészetben* (*Sodom and Environs: Homosociality, Rhetorics of Friendship and Queer Orientation in Hungarian Poetry*, 2014), primarily explores pre-modern and classical Hungarian literature. Csehy traces the mental and poetic paths leading to these first self-consciously “gay poets,” typical for their melancholy impressionism and undemonstrative eroticism, although the tonality of provocative eroticism to the pornographic also

exists in Hungarian poetry (see the volume of János Rosmer Hátsó ülés (Rear Seat, 2010)).

Csehy’s monograph focuses only on poetry. The best proof of the continuity between the pre-modern homosocial poetics and modern homosexuality, however, can be found in fiction, namely in the work of one of the internationally best known Hungarian writers, Péter Nádas. In his post-modern novel, Emlékiratak könyve (Book of Memories, 1986), the motto, taken from John’s gospel, “But he spake of the temple of his body” (2:21), indicates that the subject of the novel is the human body. Not sexuality specifically, but a body: perception of one’s own and others’ bodies, and also the language of the body, more eloquent than words. In the frame of this “corporeal” knowledge and understanding, homosexual experience is also perceived to be a part of general human experience, as a sharpened version of truly natural and omnipresent sentimental bonding among males. The “homosexual” hero does not feel alienation from other males, he just more intensively experiences the all-male brotherhood, the homosociality, naturally present in the symbol of a joyfully erect phallus. Love for the same sex has an aspect of brotherhood. All males are brothers; and male-loving males are doubly brothers.34

In his newest work, Párhuzamos történetek (Paralel Stories, 2005),35 Nádas follows this vision of spontaneous male-to-male intimacy, among other motifs, but also shows homosexual subculture in its extreme, repulsive, pornographic form. One of the characters plunges into nightly homosexual orgies on Margaret Island in Budapest. These orgies are depicted with the same accuracy as heterosexual scenes, but also with the narrator’s intention to reach the depths of human experience, in this way regaining full humanity: “He enjoyed the horror of his body. […] Pleasure is probably one of God’s attributes.”36 This “dark side of Budapest” may remind us of the “dark side of Ljubljana,” depicted by Mozetič, but there are two main differences. Firstly, it is only one of many facets of human corporeal experience, according to Nádas. Secondly, Nádas’s description of the orgy is a masterpiece of colourful language and excited style.

Thus, Hungarian literature is a literature of paradoxes. Péter Nádas is undoubtedly the most famous of all the Hungarian, Slovenian and Czech writers named so far. Homosexuality represents one of the central subjects of his work. The work can be read also as an apology for the “naturalness” of homosexual experience, and yet Nádas cannot be categorized as a “gay

writer.” It is not only because he does not comment on the topic and does not join specifically gay cultural activities, but, more substantively, it is because he emphasizes that homosexual experience does not exclude other experiences and that homoerotic attraction is “natural.” That, de facto, denies the thesis about specific gay communities and about a specific GLL, if this is to be perceived as “community literature.”

Poland

The Polish situation is even more paradoxical than the Hungarian one. On the one hand, Polish literature in the 19th century was the most modern, “Westernized” one among the Central European literatures. Numerous urban elites were preserved during the Communist era—partly in exile, partly in the country. Therefore, searching for any traces of homosexuality in Polish literature can bring up a series of names and texts. The relevant texts were written either in the politically most liberal interwar era (works of Jan Parandowski or Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz) or in exile after 1945 (works of Witold Gombrowicz, Marian Pankowski or Jan Lechoń). On the other hand, in the second half of the 20th century, Poland styled itself as the main European stronghold of Roman Catholicism. This self-identification is based particularly on the prevailing Catholic turning of the Polish opposition against the Communist regime and on the mighty influence of the Pope, Karol Wojtyla. Consequently, after 1989 Poland presents itself as the most determined opponent of the GL community.

This has naturally shaped the style of Polish GL activism in the cultural and academic fields. The more the Polish mainstream emphasizes the uniformity of Polish national tradition as being Catholic and conservative, the more GL activists emphasize the militant leftist, anti-clerical aspects of GLI, including anti-traditional rhetoric and anti-normative queer theory. Typical Polish GLL is closely connected to activism by being provocative and extremely sexual, even going so far as being “proudly” pornographic. In this way, GLL wakes greater outrage in conservative circles. The Polish case is a vicious circle.

Because of this context, it is quite understandable that it is the novel of Michal Witkowski, *Lubiewo* (*Lovetown*, 2005), that has become a cult work of Polish GLL. *Lubiewo* is an intentional provocation. It offers a drastic, vulgar, grotesque, pornographic picture of aging homosexuals living on the margins of Communist society, addressing each other in the

female gender and obsessed with sexual acts, specifically with seducing drunken heterosexual men. If the Catholic conservative propaganda depicts homosexuals as vulgar oversexed effeminate beings without any dignity, then here is a hyperbolically distorted caricature of this prejudice in camp style.38

Nevertheless, thanks to these extremes, Lubiewo played the role of a battering ram which broke the norms of Polish literature and opened the way for the wave of novels by other authors over the next years. Usually the texts are both provocatively sexual and “anti-normative.” Their authors (Bartosz Żurawiecki, Marcin Szczygielński, Mikolaj Milcke and others) are mostly young and actively connected to the GL scene. The literary quality of these texts is varied. What matters is the topic, not so much the writing. Significantly, in the context of this wave, the Polish GL community even accepted translations of the stylistically primitive, but sexually charged books of Adam Georgiev, the problematic Czech author mentioned above.39 Maybe it was the easy translatability of Georgiev’s flat pornographic language which aided his relative success.

Yet, this is not the end of the Polish story. It seems that it is literary criticism, which might play a corrective role. Those few Polish academics who were engaged in the uneasy work of GL emancipation in the 1990s were trying to translate and adapt the newest and possibly most radical versions of gender and queer theory. In the present, they analyze domestic Polish traditions and the cultural scene in a more systematic, less activist way. The literary academic Blażej Warkocki not only investigates homosexual narratives in contemporary Polish literature,40 but he also brings a critical view into GLL. For instance, he rejected Georgiev’s translated books.41 This rejection of “politically useful,” but artistically unsuccessful work marks an important step for the internal maturation of the Polish discussion of GLL.

Literary historians, Tomasz Nastulczyk and Piotr Oczko, undertake detailed research of pre-modern Polish literature, analogous to the work of

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Zoltán Csehy in Hungarian literature. In their monograph, *Homoseksualność staropolska. Przyczynek do badań* (Old-Polish Homosexuality. A Contribution to Research) they chose to approach the topic via “essentialism.” Instead of speculating about gender identities, they tried to gather all relevant texts from the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period which relate behaviour or feelings that roughly correspond to the modern definition of homosexuality. In this task, the authors expressed their awareness of the main risks: both the risk of the polyvalence of pre-modern “sodomy” and the risk of “over-interpretation,” which could both distort the work of those academics who are too eagerly engaged in political activism. This well-balanced approach by these young literary historians offers some hope that both the Polish GL cultural and academic scene and the general Polish scene proceed to find a similar balance.

**Other countries of Central and Eastern Europe**

In no other country of the region, as far as it can be stated, does there exist an analogous broader movement in literature and/or in the academic discourse. Only solitary personalities appear, or at most small circles. Those personalities, however, can be successful even on a European level. This is the case of Estonian novelist Tõnu Õnnepalu, a.k.a. Emil Tode, who won international literary attention with his novel *Piiririik* (Border State, 1993). Again, as in so many cases, the main plot revolves around the cross-cultural confrontation of a gay hero from “the other Europe” with a gay-friendly West, this time exemplified by France.

In these “backward” countries the “accumulation of roles” by one intellectual is typical. This person works at the same time as an activist, an academic, a critic, and a writer. In Latvia, the writer Kārlis Vērdiņš is a case in point. In his academic work, he analyzes existing attempts at GL emancipation in Latvian culture. The most specific, and curious, attempt was of the linking of modern GL identity with Latvian “Neopaganism.” In the same vein the main topic of Vērdiņš’ poetry is neither sexuality, nor homosexuality in general, but rather a cross-cultural confrontation of rural Latvian traditions (subtly mocked by the poet), with the modern urban world. The result is a feeling of misunderstanding and nostalgia. Perhaps the most typical of Vērdiņš’ poems is *Māmiņ, man ir plāns!* (Mummy, I

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Have a Plan!) which depicts the subject’s dream about returning back to his traditional family and the impossibility of re-approaching this, because of the new and “foreign” language learned by the subject: “Mum, in my system of values there’s no such category as manliness! Mum, I want to reconstruct my identity as a consciously-marginalized personality! Mum, my tactic is the most deviant of all modes of self-destruction!”

In Slovakia, Derek Rebro profiles himself primarily as a feminist literary critic and theorist. He works as the editor-in-chief of the feminist magazine, “Glossolalie,” and has published a monograph about female writing. As if an afterthought, he also started to publish poetry under the protection of feminism, which is for conservative Slovak society still a bit more acceptable than a “bare” GL identity. Intimate homosexual motifs appear in Rebro’s volume, Ako tieň na pľúcach (As a Shadow on the Lungs, 2014). These motifs are, however, portrayed under protection—namely under the protection of fragmentary, hermetic, only half-understandable language. The young Slovak poet follows the old “Path of Sublimation” of many Czech poets of previous generations.

There is one rather curious aspect of the GL cultural scene in Slovakia: since there is an absence of a domestic “gay fiction,” this role is filled not only by Czech literature (which is the traditional link between these two countries), but also by the Slovak translation of the diaries of László Mednyánszky (2007). Mednyánszky lived in contemporary Slovakia, but when Slovakia was a region of Hungary. His language was also Hungarian. Furthermore, Mednyánszky was primarily not a writer, but a painter. Apart from the focus on painting, a love relationship between this Hungarian aristocrat and a working class boy is the main topic of the diaries. The relationship is of a particular nature, since it grows, as per the author’s intention, into a mystical dialogue after the boy’s death. A text which was not intended to be literature now works as an extraordinarily daring and impressive piece of literature a hundred years later.

In Serbia, one of the even more “developmentally delayed” countries, a radical author suddenly appeared. Jordan Cvetanović was born in Sarajevo and survived the Bosnian civil war as a child. This influenced the topic of one of his first and most shocking stories: the hero of the story Tribojove chlavice (Three Warheads) has sex with three soldiers from three of the

troops participating in the war. “Three Warheads” are the three glands of the soldiers which he cuts off. Later Cvetanović profiled himself as a dramatist. His dramatic work, loosely inspired by British and American “cool drama,” is both brutal and humorous, cleverly balancing between high culture and pop culture. The play *Dilovanje emocija. Analni rodoslov (Dealing Emotions. Anal Genealogy, 2006)*, has a special place in Cvetanović’s work. The plot takes place in a “homophobic Belgrade,” partly in public toilets, partly in fashionable apartments. The provocative, sexually charged language is reminiscent not only of “cool drama,” but also of Witkowski’s *Lubiewo*. However, in this case the homosexuals, both open ones and hidden ones, are just as laughable as any other of the characters. General hypocrisy and superficiality is the core topic of the play, not homosexuality as such.

When it comes to other countries of CEE—Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and others—local GL movements and/or literature is sporadic. A story from Croatia is typical: a writer, Predrag Raos, was “suspected” of being gay, because he translated a book with a gay plot which subsequently forced him to “defend” himself.47 GL topics in these countries often only get a voice indirectly, through a Western, mostly American, “detour.” This is the case in Bulgaria. The poet Alex Dimitrov is Bulgarian, but he lives in New York where he founded the literary gay club, Wilde Boys. Dimitrov’s work, however, belongs rather to community literature, or, more specifically, to the category “someone gay who happens to be an author.” Bulgaria is the setting in a novel *Mitko* (2011) by Garth Greenwell. Bulgaria is depicted here as a hostile and homophobic country.

This is also the case in Ukraine. The most well-known novelist of Ukrainian origin who is openly gay is Chuck Palahniuk. He has, however, nothing in common with Ukraine, apart from his name and ancestors, and the gay topic does not play a greater role in his novels. Similarly, homosexual traces in Ukrainian cultural history are not explored by any local academic, apart from Vitaly Chernetsky, an American literary scholar of Ukrainian origin. What Chernetsky finds, basically corresponds to the model of “pre-homosexual” romantic friendship (the case of modernist poet Olha Kobyljanska).48 Chernetsky has also stated that the translation of Witkowski’s *Lubiewo* played an initiating role in the


**Comparison and conclusion**

This overview shows that GLL in all countries, specifically in the first phases of its development, looks westward for identity models, literary models, and also for critical and analytical methods. In the second phase, writers and critics search local literary, cultural or even religious traditions, looking for partial “domestic” specificities of an expression of GL identity. The more “backward” and conservative the particular country is, the more importance is given to the Western, specifically American, pattern. However, this uneven development gives unexpected importance also to direct links between particular CEE countries. Texts from more “successful” literatures can serve as a substitute for weak or non-existent local literature with a GL topic (Czech literature and Mednyánszky’s diaries in Slovakia, Witkowski’s *Lubiewo* in Ukraine etc.). The literary scene in more “successful” country can also serve as a vehicle for writers from less “successful” countries (Slovenian translations of Cvetanović, Czech translation of Vērdiņš etc.).

Across CEE, similar types of writers appear—similar in style, in topics, and particularly in socio-cultural function.

The first type: an intellectual poet, or a writer of fiction, who is at the same time a GL activist and/or an academic and/or a translator. Their preferred topic is not only homosexuality as such, but also the cross-cultural confrontation between the respected GL identity in the West and the traditional society of their native country. Václav Jamek in the Czech Republic, Suzana Tratnik in Slovenia, András Gerevich in Hungary, Kārlis Vērdiņš in Latvia, and Derek Rebro in Slovakia are examples of this type. In the case of Brane Mozetič, he matches this type by way of his organizational, activist and translating work, but his poetic work, with its obsessive sexuality, strongly differs from it, putting Mozetič rather into the third category.

The second type: an “old school” poet, expert in pre-modern cultures, often using pre-modern literary forms to express their erotic and sentimental confessions. They join the GL movement, although with some
reservations. Jiří Kuběna in the Czech Republic, Ádám Nádasdy in Hungary, and Ciril Bergles in Slovenia (with less emphasis on the classical forms) are examples of this type.

The third type: an instigator, emphasizing the over-sexed, pornographic aspect of GL identity, intentionally shocking the conservative society. The range of esthetic levels of such provocations can be extremely broad. Some of them are of a high literary quality, particularly when sexuality is linked with rough grotesque humour (Svatava Antošová in the Czech Republic, Michał Witkowski in Poland, Jordan Cvetanović in Serbia), or when the sexual content is depicted in sophisticated language (János Rosmer in Hungary). However, often the language is flat, bordering on primitive—particularly when the detailed description of sexuality is considered to be the core, the “message,” of their literature (Brane Mozetič in Slovenia, Adam Georgiev in the Czech Republic). At the bottom of this range there are pure “authors-for-the-community’s-sake,” that is “gays who happen to be authors.”

The fourth type: an author, usually of an older generation, who was already rooted in the mainstream of his national literature in the early 1990s, i.e. at the moment of the appearance of GLL. This type of author expresses homosexual (or bisexual) experience in their work but definitely refuses to be labelled as a “gay writer.” Examples of this type include Josef Topol in the Czech Republic, Tomaž Šalamun in Slovenia, and Péter Nádas in Hungary.

The fifth type: an author, usually of the youngest generation, entering the literary scene at the beginning of the 21st century. In his/her personal life, he/she is more or less openly gay or lesbian. In his/her work, he/she includes the GL topic openly. However, he/she does not feel that he/she is a part of a specific GLL anymore. He/she feels he/she is a part of a mainstream, where he/she is accepted as an “author, who is gay or lesbian, and/or depicting GL topics,” without particular attention paid to this fact. In the Czech Republic two authors who exemplify this type are Adam Borzič and Františka Jirousová. This position can be called “post-gay.”

I am not aware of any analogous examples from other countries. This absence can be put down to this type of author being “invisible” to anyone who is not very familiar with the literary and GL scene in that specific country. However, this absence can also be explained by the fact that no country apart from the Czech Republic has reached the phase where a “post-gay” position is possible.

I am of the conviction that this is the situation to which the literatures of all countries of CEE will lead. The question is whether the political and social development is really heading this way. Several CEE countries
evidently follow the Western pattern, at least formally, implementing registered partnerships (The Czech Republic, Slovenia, Estonia) or even same-sex marriage (Slovenia). On the other hand, other countries are leaning towards the opposite Eastern pattern, recently prohibiting same-sex marriage in their constitutions (Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Serbia and others). In some countries, legislation concerning registered partnership and marriage is contradictory (Hungary, Croatia), symbolically showing the mental crossroads the society stands before.

In this regard, the term “CEE” is falling apart. Several countries lean more to the West, fulfilling the traditional role of Central Europe as the “hinterland” of the West. Others are almost returning mentally back to the East. With some simplification, it could be said that where GLL appears, that is still Central Europe, but where there is no place for GLL that is where Eastern Europe begins.\(^{50}\) The uncertainty around “GLL” follows a pre-existing uncertainty about borders already expressed in the works of literary classics who once started defining Central Europe.\(^{51}\)

Indeed, literature is not a simple copy of social and political development—it has its autonomy and its power to influence development. Even though the power of literature now is not as big as it was in the 19th century when the nations of CEE became emancipated with the substantial help of literature.

In at least one case literature skips radically ahead of the development of local society. It is the case of the above mentioned Jordan Cvetanović. No doubt Cvetanović is a typical provocative sexual instigator. Yet in some aspects his work, and his self-stylization, goes beyond the usual definition of a gay writer. He explores the gay topic in some of his plays and stories, whereas in others not at all. He talks about sexuality and society in general, using his gay experience mainly as an unspoken, ironic filter. He primarily addresses the young Serbian “hipster” crowd, not the GL community specifically. In his blogs, he defines himself as “Dramski pisac, provokator i hipohondar” (“A dramatist, instigator and

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hypochondriac”), not as a “gay author.” This way he skips not only the development of the Serbian mainstream, but also the development of GLL as a part of a national GL movement. He jumps directly towards the “post-gay” identity. In his daring, personal way, he also confirms the general thesis that the end of GLL is a happy ending. But GLL in general must go all the long way, before it can end happily.

References


In an important early statement of the principles of gay-liberationist literary criticism, Louie Crew and Rictor Norton wrote: “Homosexual literature is not in the mainstream, not because the mainstream is heterosexual, but because the mainstream is homophobic.”¹ This was fighting talk, in its day, usefully highlighting the existence of sources of discomfort for the gay reader when consuming not only canonical literature itself, but also the critical literature that had constructed and re-affirmed the canon. However, it did not accurately acknowledge the extent to which, throughout history, the various mainstreams of literature contained major works which could be positioned along a spectrum of homosocial/homosexual concerns. Indeed, at the end of the introduction to my book A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition, I later wrote: “This is not a marginal tradition, even if it is sometimes marginalised.”² Since my book traces a line from Homer and Plato, through Catullus and Vergil, Dante and Boccaccio, Shakespeare and Marlowe, all the way through to such major 20th-century figures as Cavafy and Proust, there can be no doubt that “gay literature” as I define it flows at the centre of the mainstream. To an extent, the canon and the male gay canon coincide. (For obvious reasons, the same cannot be said of lesbian literature, which

suffers a marginalization doubled by sexism and homophobia.) But this
gung-ho opening gambit of mine, talking up the quality of what was to
come, could not be maintained for long: for, although Shakespeare may be
canonical, a gay Shakespeare is not. The same with all the rest of them.
The canon and the gay canon cannot be allowed to coincide. If not the
“great men” of the list, who have been amply celebrated, the gayness of
their texts has generally been marginalized or ignored. Even when it came
to writing about the 20th century, my task was to return the gayness to the
mainstream.

The same cannot be said of all national cultures, but no British gay or
lesbian writer need ever waste away for the lack of a tradition to draw on
and contribute to. A canon that includes Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster
cannot be said to have excluded lesbian or gay authors. It cannot even be
said to have marginalized them, even if the dominant critical discourse
needs constant reminding not to marginalize or ignore their sexuality. To
generalize wildly, anguish was never really our national gay style. This is
well evidenced in our gay and lesbian writing. In lesbian fiction, the dour
realism of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* is leavened by the more
sprightly fantasies of Woolf’s *Orlando* and various novels of Sylvia
Townsend Warner. Oscar Wilde’s epigrammatic dialogues, in both *The
Picture of Dorian Gray* and his plays, influence a strong fictional thread
leading through the 20th century, through the likes of Ronald Firbank and
Saki, E.F. Benson’s *Mapp and Lucia* series,3 Evelyn Waugh and Ivy
Compton-Burnett, strongly influencing such major straight authors as
Graham Greene and Muriel Spark. The sharp social comedies of Angus
Wilson showed how gay characters could be fully integrated into the
rounded world-view of post-Dickensian social realism. Iris Murdoch’s
serious playfulness with contingency effected a similar inclusiveness of
sexualities. Brigid Brophy’s metamorphic games with the sex-gender
system, and with its language constraints in particular, anticipated the
innovations of later queer writers.

Our lesbian and gay writers are well-versed in the tradition to which
they are contributing, or against which they may be kicking. It would be
hard to imagine a Jeanette Winterson who had not read Virginia Woolf or
an Alan Hollinghurst ignorant of Henry James and Ronald Firbank.
Through overlapping periods in English and American social history,
important major figures like Christopher Isherwood and Thom Gunn
exemplified in their books, and mapped out for the benefit of their

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successors, the route from imposed circumspection and self-censorship to openness and explicitness. Many of the present generation of novelists and poets learned from the various strategies they had both adopted. My own poetry has its roots in Thom Gunn and, before him, W.H. Auden. In short, we British lesbian and gay writers have the advantage of familiarity with strong precedents.

The consequence of this strong literary tradition in Britain is that conspicuous levels of mainstream acceptance have been achieved. You have only to look at the peripheral awards and honours that our writers have accumulated to be persuaded that lesbian and gay writers of the present day have received many material signs of conventional approval. Carol Ann Duffy is Poet Laureate. She won the National Poetry Competition in 1983, the Forward Prize in 1993, the T.S. Eliot Prize in 2005, and the Costa Book Award in 2011; she was made OBE in 1995, CBE in 2002 and DBE in 2015. Jeanette Winterson won the Whitbread Prize for her first novel in 1985; she was made OBE in 2006. Jackie Kay won the Guardian Fiction Prize in 1998; she was made MBE in 2006. Colette Bryce won the National Poetry Competition in 2003. Alan Hollinghurst won the 2004 Man Booker Prize; and was longlisted for the same in 2011. He has been deputy editor of the Times Literary Supplement (1985–1990). Three of Sarah Waters’ novels have been shortlisted for the Man Booker, in 2002, 2006, and 2009. Ali Smith has also been shortlisted three times, in 2001, 2005, and 2014; she won the Goldsmith’s Prize (2014) and the Baileys (2015), and was awarded the CBE in 2015. Philip Hensher was shortlisted for the Man Booker in 2008; Emma Donoghue in 2010. Neil Bartlett has won a range of theatre awards and was made OBE in 2000. Bernardine Evaristo was awarded the MBE in 2009. She has judged the T.S. Eliot Prize. Val McDermid has won many crime fiction awards. The television screen-writer Russell T. Davies, the writer of Queer As Folk (1999) and widely regarded as the saviour of Doctor Who, which he revived in 2005, has had several BAFTA nominations and one win (in 1997). He was awarded the OBE in 2008. Many of these writers are employed by universities, some at very senior levels. (Indeed, in May 2015 Jackie Kay became Chancellor of the University of Salford.) Taken as a whole, this constitutes something very like an Establishment. It is also pleasing to note that this is very strongly a lesbian achievement, rather than an equally lesbian and gay one. Of our older writers, still adding to

4 The orders of the British Empire are, in ascending order, Member (MBE), Officer (OBE) and Commander (CBE). A Dame is the distaff equivalent of a Knight. The Order of Merit (OM) is “a special honour awarded to individuals of great achievement in the fields of the arts, learning, literature and science”. “In the sole gift
already major careers, there are those who, because of the lack of serious gay media, seem invisible to anyone under the age of about fifty: Paul Bailey and Maureen Duffy spring to mind. (I recently spoke to a lesbian publisher in her thirties who, of the Duffys, knew the work of Carol Ann and Stella, but had not heard of Maureen.) Yet Bailey, for instance, was twice shortlisted for the Booker Prize, in 1977 and 1986—acceptance is not entirely a new thing.

All of the above should be seen in a broader context of gay cultural visibility. Just to mention two conspicuous examples: Neil MacGregor was Director of the National Gallery (1987–2002) and then of the British Museum (2002–); he turned down a knighthood in 1999 but was awarded the far more prestigious Order of Merit in 2010. And Nicholas Hytner was Director of the National Theatre (2003–2015) and received a knighthood in 2010.

On the other hand, the inspirational obliquity and affirmative solidarity of being marginal remains, as it were, central to the gay literature that is read in Britain. Many of the established gay authors are from what are often called the Celtic “fringes” of the nation (i.e. not English): Carol Ann Duffy, Ali Smith, Jackie Kay and Val McDermid are all Scots; Sarah Waters is Welsh. Moreover, it is worth noting how many of the best of “our” gay writers are from the Anglophone diaspora. Leaving aside the Americans, they include Colm Tóibín and Jamie O’Neill (Ireland), Damon Galgut (South Africa), David Malouf and Christos Tsiolkas (Australia), the latter adept as a cartographer of marginality within his own society as a Greek Australian (a “wop”); Stella Duffy’s father is a New Zealander, and she spent her childhood in New Zealand. There are also, on the other hand, writers who, although themselves openly gay, are not particularly known for their gay themes or modes, and whose reputations, therefore, tell us little about the broader reception and trajectory of gay literature. I think of Vikram Seth, for instance, or James Fenton. Perhaps the fact that Fenton lives on royalties from “additional material” he contributed to the musical *Les Misérables* is the gayest thing about his writing career.

The reception of gay male writing in the UK, as in the USA, received an awkward benefit from the worst days of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s. What had been thought a profligate and frivolous lifestyle had suddenly acquired the gravitas of tragedy. While gay love had not been accepted as being “universal,” and therefore fully worthy of...
inclusion in literature, gay deaths apparently were—if grudgingly so. A case in point would be the reverent reception of Thom Gunn’s poetry collection, *The Man with Night Sweats* (1992), after a succession of his collections which, in the UK at least, had been treated with rather haughty disdain.

So it is always worth asking, what is it that has been accepted? For a start, exactly how explicitly lesbian or gay are the works by these authors that won the most enthusiastic approbation? To date, Alan Hollinghurst’s novels have all been principally concerned with male gay relationships, with a good deal of sexual detail to underline the point; but in many careers, the less gay the books, the greater the success. Kei Miller won the 2014 Forward Prize for the best poetry collection of the year, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*; but the book in question has no overtly gay content. Few poetry readers alerted to his quality by the prize will have been alerted to the gayness of his earlier work. Carol Ann Duffy’s *Rapture* (2005), although a sequence of lesbian love poems, is innocuous enough to have provided set texts at A-level in schools. Most of the poems are gender non-specific. Some, although clearly addressed to a woman, could be spoken by a man—especially so when re-using a phrase like “my mistress’ eyes,” borrowed from Shakespeare’s sonnets. The aim appears to be a universalizing generality, an approach which has a perfectly respectable pedigree and may indeed be a smart way of introducing lesbianism to the school curriculum, even if in dilute form. I am not arguing that she should not have written the book she wanted to write, or that it is not an admirable achievement within its own terms of reference. The point I want to raise is its adequacy to the category “lesbian literature” and, no less importantly, the adequacy of the category to it.

It may be legitimate to question whether conventional signs of approval—even such as publication itself, when it is conferred by the major established presses—can be taken as indicators of genuine acceptance of a kind that was implicit in the struggle for the gay liberation of literature. To answer this, we need to revisit past versions of our future.

As long ago as April 6, 1994, Anna Quindlen, a columnist for the *New York Times*, wrote:

> The time has come. You can feel it in a hundred little ways year after year. It is so certain and inevitable, that the next century will be a time in which it is not simply safe, but commonplace, to be openly gay.\(^7\)


\(^7\) Quoted in: Miller, Neil. *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to*
Such understandable optimism raised all sorts of new questions about the future of gay writing. What will be the effect on gay literature when or if “it is not simply safe, but commonplace to be openly gay”? Are we looking at the prospect of a literature which will itself be merely commonplace and safe? Some might say the edge has gone out of being queer. Must gay literature, too, be reduced to narratives of social assimilation and normative romance? Will it grow less and less politicized? Must the central characters of future gay novels—should such a category continue to exist—become increasingly like the protagonist of E.M. Forster’s *Maurice*: conventional, acquiescent, low in profile, and boring; a model of normative acceptability, bourgeois, discreet and, notwithstanding his religious revolt, respectful of institutions? Or will future gay writers capitalize on areas of gay life which are likely to remain strongly tabooed, both within and beyond gay subcultures: promiscuity, male effeminacy and female masculinity, sadomasochism, paedophilia, unsafe sex? Are transgressive shock tactics the only alternative to the blandness of acceptability?

We know that the authors of the Wolfenden Report (1957), and those of the subsequent Sexual Offences Act (1967), which effected a limited decriminalization of male homosexual acts in England and Wales (but not Scotland or Northern Ireland or the armed forces or the merchant navy...), eventually got more than they bargained for. The Report and the Act were grudgingly drawn up to stop the blackmailing of men for being homosexual, and to enable discreet, monogamous couples to settle down together without fear of arrest. What happened instead were the supposed excesses of Gay Liberation. We were never supposed to come out, and we were never supposed to be “promiscuous.” Nor were we supposed to gather in large numbers. Neither the Report nor the Act was even remotely concerned to enable and endorse the further development of a distinct gay subculture. They merely, indirectly, had that effect.

Something similar appears to be happening now. The extent to which lesbians and gay men are being accepted by the dominant culture as being assimilable, the extent to which we are allowed to be “safe” and to become “commonplace,” depends entirely and precisely on the extent to which lesbians and gay men are willing to live together as stable, monogamous couples. Hence the emphasis on “gay marriage.” Yet this is not how large numbers of gay men and lesbian women have any intention of leading their (our) lives. One of the major future debates will have to be—as it has


been in the past—not between homosexuals and heterosexuals, but between straight-endorsed gays and the others. This debate offers productive possibilities for the future of gay and lesbian literature. There are alternatives to the monogamous romance, in both life and books.

Of course, Quindlen’s upbeat piece did not anticipate the culture wars that have developed since the 1990s even in the USA, let alone in Russia, across sub-Saharan Africa and in the Middle East. Even the phrase “culture wars” is too bland for the literal warfare that has been wreaked on the bodies of LGBT individuals in those parts of the world in which it is far from commonplace, let alone safe, to stand out from the norms of sexuality and gender. Our attention is perforce divided between the global, which so often feels as if it is beyond our reach, and the local, which is at least amenable to community activism, whether cultural or other. As writers, we are in a position to intervene at both levels, both beyond and within our own communities.

We gay men and lesbians know the value of community. It really is no exaggeration for someone of my generation to say that it may be that the gay community saved my life in the mid-1980s by circulating the best guesses about safer sex, while governments throughout the Western world were still either pretending that gay men did not exist in significant numbers, or preaching that we should simply stop having sex. We know, too, that lesbian women were quick to commit themselves to their gay brothers even in spite of all the splits and quarrels of the 1970s. Community can protect us against society.

Communities do not just happen; nor do cultures. They have to be developed. They thrive on mutual familiarity—indeed, they tend to distrust the unfamiliar—and they therefore depend on our knowledge of each other and the sharing of that knowledge. Whether we are talking about tightly-knit traditional villages or widely dispersed networks like the Jewish diaspora, connections have to be made between individuals who share a set of common assumptions and practices. Communities need education. You learn from each other, how to and how not to behave, how to survive adversity and how to celebrate success. Engaging in one of a community’s most significant activities, you build on a sense of a common history in order to anticipate future events, good and bad.

We have to talk about the past. We need our young people to know, for instance, that society does not develop in one direction, forever becoming more liberal. They need to be told that in the UK prosecutions of gay men became more numerous after decriminalization, for instance; or that the only anti-lesbian law on the statute books (Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988) was passed not in the late 19th century or the
1950s, but at the height of the AIDS epidemic in 1987. The clock can go backwards at any time, often especially in times of national emergency. We need to protect ourselves and each other against the complacency of thinking ourselves safe, since even where and when we feel safest, there are those who resent us for this very fact.

The recording of our history is no merely aesthetic pursuit, mere sepia-tinted “heritage” literature for readers who prefer their queerness safely over and done with. Many of our most politically engaged writers have made a point of offering their readers insights gathered from past experience. Noël Greig and Drew Griffiths wrote two historical plays for the Gay Sweatshop theatre company (founded in 1974): *As Time Goes By* (1977), its three acts set, respectively, in Victorian England, Nazi Germany, and contemporary America; and *The Dear Love of Comrades* (1979), about the social reformer, sexologist and poet Edward Carpenter (1844–1929). Their play *Only Connect*, largely about Carpenter and E.M. Forster, was screened by BBC2 TV in 1979. Martin Sherman’s *Bent*, about gay men under Nazism, was also written for Gay Sweatshop. Caeia Marsh’s influential feminist novel *Three Ply Yarn* (1986) wound together the threads of three women’s lives, integrating a broad variety of social, familial and sexual relationships into a portrayal of fifty years of British working-class history.


Introducing his book *Gay Novels of Britain, Ireland and the Commonwealth, 1881–1981*, Drewey Wayne Gunn states that “Historical novels remind readers that same-sex relationships are by no means a recent phenomenon.”9 Strangely, he does not add what is, perhaps, the more important point, that homophobia, too, has a lasting history. As much as one may want to read about same-sex couples and their couplings in the past, one of the crucial functions of history, whether fictionalized or not, is to show how such couples fitted into, or were not allowed to fit into, the social context of their times.

Thus, hand in hand with history come the lessons we learn from it with respect to the future. As well as to celebrate and encourage, it may be that gay writers have no more important task than to warn. Much as university-educated, man-loving men of the late 19th and early 20th centuries used to evoke the classical past to argue that a society accepting same-sex relationships could be perfectly viable, and indeed respectable, post-gay-liberationist writers may be needed to evoke the homophobia of the past to show what negative social arrangements are possible: executions, concentration camps, hard labour, electro-convulsive therapies, queer-bashings, and so on. Moreover, as the history of 1930s Germany most definitively shows, the change from a positive to a negative situation (to put it blandly) can be extreme and swift.

So a key task that remains to the gay or lesbian writer, given the extent of recent social change for the better, is one that the literary critic Stephen Adams once attributed to the novels of Angus Wilson: that of “putting liberalism to the homosexual test.”10 It is up to us to test the extent and resilience of the liberty we have so belatedly been granted; and to make sure that the scales of equality have not been fixed to cheat us of our due.

(We also need to evoke the cultures of the present that do not share the Western-liberal, predominantly urban view of such matters.)

A sense of the past. And, of course, of the future: of future strategies not only for the building of gay liberation but also for how we are going to live out our old age. For a while in the 1980s it looked as if gay men might not even have a future. It was only the gay press and the gay community that stood between us and the evaporation of all hope. For sure, reading about AIDS in the mainstream newspapers was not going to keep anyone’s spirits up. To equip young people for lives as lesbians or gay men must involve planning for some kind of communitarian existence beyond, on the one hand the pub/club scene and, on the other, the quiet, suburban coupledom that straight, liberal society wants us to embrace. We should not be planning for an invisible assimilation into the heterosexual norm, because that is where we are most at risk and most isolated.

Boiled down to its essentials, queer culture is a matter of representing our lives; and representing ourselves not as respectable, monogamous social democrats with no desire to upset the heterosexual apple cart; but as different creatures, who do often conform to straight people’s worst fears about us. Writing in the early 1990s, I was making a distinction between gay and queer culture: unlike the former, the latter was no longer concentrated on the production of “positive images” of ourselves for the education of receptive heterosexuals. The time had come for some celebratory negative images. Of course, for gay men, such images had long been available in a parallel, transgressive literary tradition leading from Jean Genet, through William S. Burroughs, to the likes of Dennis Cooper, Pierre Guyotat, Juan Goytisolo. But one also thinks of American writers like the Lavender Quill group (including Edmund White and Andrew Holleran) in New York in the late 1970s, who set themselves a series of challenges with a view to creating fresh conventions for the writing of gay literature: they would always write about gay men, who would be spoken of and addressed as “we” rather than “they”; a shared understanding of certain behavioural conventions, including those of sexual “promiscuity” would be assumed; as would a shared vocabulary (“the closet,” “coming out,” “cruising”) and shared, or at least assumed, liberatory politics. White has managed to build a strong literary career on this basis. Across the nation, the far more socially conservative Armistead Maupin did something similar, remarkably tailoring his original periodical stories for a general audience to satisfy both a subcultural audience of gay men and lesbians and the broader market. In England, Patrick Gale has achieved comparable cross-over popularity.

The fact is that, for the most part, acceptance into the mainstream was
only ever going to be achieved at the expense of subcultural specifics. (Perhaps Maupin is the rule-proving exception.) It can be difficult for writers with a subcultural allegiance to orientate themselves within a marketplace open to the wider generality of publications, especially when the latter is still subject to the demands and vagaries of homophobia. Given the global reach of English, it is tempting for British writers of fiction (and, I would guess, screenplays) to try to access a global audience by writing plots that reach beyond the national cultural context—the intercontinental thriller, for instance. There is a real danger that writing for the wider audience might involve settling on a compromise with homophobia, in particular by surrendering with half-voluntary cringes of self-censorship.

That said, while major social changes for the better have improved the lot of LGBT people in the UK in recent decades, as we have seen, there has without doubt been a flourishing of LGBT-themed literature in all its themes and genres. Yet, notwithstanding the visibility of many LGBT writers, the problem has been how to find it. There is a vast amount of relevant bibliographical and critical information, as well as a lot of new creative writing, on the internet, but the indiscrimacy of the online environment tends to militate against easy access to an informed choice. The more gay literature there is, and the more information there is about it, the less likely it is to be clearly labelled for the LGBT reader. At the risk of over-extending the fluvial metaphor: whether mainstream or sidestream, some of the point of gay literature must be being lost—evaporating away, as it were—if it does not reach gay readers, regardless of whether they were the market to which the author originally aimed the work. Mainstream or sidestream, one of its purposes is to irrigate the parched consciousness of the gay common reader. She or he merits the construction of some kind of irrigation ditch, a delivery system to the parched earth of individual isolation. Even as an authority on gay literature, I often wonder where the new books are to be found; and I worry about new readers, young or not, and how they are to identify the books they might enjoy reading.

In the 1970s I used to read the literary pages of the fortnightly newspaper *Gay News*. Edited by Alison Hennegan, these pages reviewed all of the new books with any significant gay or lesbian interest. Most of them could be ordered through *Gay News*. (It was in these pages, also, that I published my own first book reviews.) In the 1980s I knew I could find gay male writing among the books published by Gay Men’s Press, founded in 1979—both in their contemporary list and in their “classic” reprints. Both gay and lesbian books were issued by Brilliance Books (at
which Jeanette Winterson was the women’s editor), founded in 1982. And, of course, publishing houses like Women’s Press and Onlywomen Press issued plenty of lesbian writing. But now the few survivors of that wave of progressive publishers allied to the causes of identity politics have either gone out of business altogether or been subsumed into the big conglomerates (as Virago was eaten by Little, Brown, which was eaten in its turn by Hachette Livre). Meanwhile, independent bookshops have gone out of business, and there are very few specifically gay bookshops left in the world. Of these, Gay’s the Word in Bloomsbury, London, is an important survivor for us in England.

The issue of categorization is starkly on display in the organization of bookshops—or, at least, in those that recognize the existence of an issue to be resolved. Fiction, drama and poetry are routinely given their own clearly-designated sections. But if a shop chooses to have a section specifically for lesbian and gay (or LGBT) literature, what should go in it? Experience shows that, if not curated alertly and with frequent updates, LGBT sections are soon reduced to a dull selection of travel guides and genre (erotic) fiction. The mainstream books—those by the authors of whom I have been speaking—are kept in the general sections, on the reasonable grounds that that is where they belong. 11 So the LGBT sidestream is left to silt up and become an unvisited oxbow lake. Any new reader hoping for guidance from such a section is likely to be disappointed.

At the same time, the gay press have either vanished altogether or, in their self-transformation into “lifestyle” magazines, stopped reviewing serious books (or any books). Yet literary editors and journalists in non-gay media do not seem to know this. They imagine gay books get gay reviews for gay readers and therefore do not need, or even merit, mainstream attention. In theory, the books of all the writers I have mentioned are easily available to all readers by way of Amazon or the major bookshop chains. In practice, however, to many potential readers around the country, who do not belong to informed gay networks, they might as well be so much a part of the mainstream as to be indistinguishable from it. I have always valued the role of chance in my book-buying habits; but that cannot be the best way of happening to deliver a lesbian book into the parched hands of a needful lesbian reader.

11 I have often been asked whether I prefer to see my poetry books in the Poetry section or the Gay section. I am pleased by and proud of both, and would most like to see copies in both sections at once. Only in a shop like Gay’s the Word, in Bloomsbury, London, are the general poetry section and the gay poetry section one and the same.
Russell Christie, a writer I know in Nottingham, has just published his first novel.\footnote{Christie, Russell. \textit{The Queer Diary of Mordred Vienna}. Charleston, SC: IDQ International, 2015.} Working on a shoestring to publicize his own book, he cannot afford to send out review copies to the mainstream literary press in the forlorn hope of securing a review; and what remain of the gay print media no longer have books pages. His publisher being based in the USA, the book is listed with Amazon, but will not come up if requested in one of the mainstream chain bookshops in the UK. (Independent British bookshops can find it via Instagram.) Immediately after publication, it would come up on Amazon if the search word “queer” were used. In a “gay fiction” search, it appeared in the august company of William Burroughs. A dozen copies having been sold over the first weekend, it rose to second place on the list. This suggests that very few books are being bought under this search term. Meanwhile, Christie is trying to progress from the local to the global: approaching local print and broadcast media, he is hoping to get local reviews, which he will then be able to post in extract on the Amazon page. He is also hoping to give readings from the novel on the regional spoken word scene in the East Midlands. As far as possible he is mentioning the book on Facebook and Twitter, tagging promising messages on the latter, but there is little evidence that this is shifting copies of the book. As he has said to me (June 7, 2015), “The internet seems to make nothing happen.” This is, at least in part, because the internet provides such a wealth of competing materials, swifter to access and briefer to consume. Online, it would be easier for Christie to find places in which to publicize his novel if it were of a clearly identifiable genre, such as romance or horror.

Christie adds: “The other thing, I’ve been considering at the moment is that, while LGBT people have been, in the West, increasingly assimilated to the mainstream the other end of that is a decreasing need to identify particularly as LGBT and, not thinking that this is an issue, many young people do not even search on these terms.” One might concede, of course, that gay and lesbian literature is not as urgently needed as in previous decades. Today, you can see real gay people on television, doing ordinary and/or weird things in a wide range of programmes. Soap operas have positive gay characters. There was none of this visibility when I first turned to books, as a boy, for representations of the kind of man I was going to become. Given the additional wealth of informative material—never mind the pornography—on the internet, who needs gay books at all? Has this become a redundant category altogether? I have become
accustomed to asking this question of myself whenever I complete a new poem or struggle to complete a conference paper about contemporary gay and lesbian writing.

References


CHAPTER THREE

FACT AND FICTION,
INSISTENCE AND RESISTANCE:
GERMANY’S STRUGGLE
WITH QUEER INTERVENTIONS

DIRK SCHULZ

Being part of a gathering entitled “Queer Narratives in European Cultures,” I must excuse myself right at the start. The following considerations are first and foremost not dealing with “queer narratives,” but on the contrary, on instances and discourses countering them. To be sure, it might be necessary to provide a definition (although the aim to define a subject usually runs counter to the aim to queer or foreground the queerness of a subject) of what the term “queer” signifies to me since its current employment in different contexts speaks of rather different understandings. I have always situated “queer” within a poststructuralist understanding of reality, truth, knowledge, and identity as concepts not being given, factual, objective but rather made up, performative, temporary and changing, naturalized only through convention, reiteration and a discursive ordering in the service of power maintenance. A queer understanding of science, politics and personhood therefore should form:

the juncture from which critique emerges, where critique is understood as an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living, not to celebrate difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation.¹

In my view—and of course what can only follow is a generalizing and biased account—German culture is particularly fond of order, definitions and categorizations, obsessed with facts, clarity and certainty. The already

telling belated and “controversial” rise of Gender—and even more Queer—studies at universities and other institutions in this country therefore continues to be viewed sceptically. It now even results in public panic. Many efforts continue to be necessary for promoting the implementation of gender studies at universities and quite often have only been successful through the rise of gender mainstreaming, gender equality politics, and diversity management in recent years. Indeed a lot of academics feel, and sometimes voice the feeling, that they are forced to integrate gender concerns due to the pressure from the state governments to do so.

This has led to ambivalent results. On the one hand it has explicitly and emphatically brought gender studies onto the academic agenda in Germany—and not only within those disciplines where they may be said to already have gained a certain place and status, as, for example, within the social and cultural sciences. On the other hand, the linking of gender mainstreaming, diversity management, and gender equality politics with gender and particularly queer studies remains an ambiguous enterprise. Their “successful” coexistence or cooperation depends on rather individual, personal constellations and oftentimes the willingness to accept rather than deny underlying controversies. Be that as it may, in academia and the public arena gender and queer studies in Germany are now often lumped together with gender equality politics, gender mainstreaming and diversity management, not taking into account the rather different histories and in many cases different concerns and challenges. Furthermore it is the sense of being forced to deal with gender issues, a “coerced” engagement with gender studies that, of course, has begun to build up ever more resistance. Thus, what has initially helped gender and queer studies gain access to university structures and programmes, may now also lead to a growing unwillingness to really deal with their insights and take their concerns seriously.

Most recently, gender and queer studies have even been met with violent assaults in the public media and in social networks right down to threats of rape and murder in anonymous writings. In most of these articles, letters, postings, and emails queer theories are accused of contributing to the “perversion” and “degeneration” not only of science as an enterprise of “pure, factual, objective” knowledge but even more of the “natural—and that means heterosexual—order” of human sociality. And identity! As Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*:

The “coherence” and “continuity” of “the person” are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility. Inasmuch as “identity” is assured
through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of “the person” is called into question by the cultural emergence of those “incoherent” or “discontinuous” gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined.²

The recent attacks on gender studies and scholars, on queer activists and narratives can thus be seen as reactions caused by the fear of discovering the artificiality of all “identities” instead of their alleged natural foundation. The harsh responses to gender and queer theories in Germany thus speak of ambivalent developments since, on the one hand, to provoke such reactions can be perceived as an achievement and recognition of queer interrogations. But of course, on the other hand, the rhetorics of “hate speech” are rather degrading, discriminating, frightening, and—for the individual target—hardly bearable.

It appears that the increase of rhetoric violence and the evident rise of new “conservative” social movements and public demonstrations in Germany are evidence of a general social climate of growing impatience. A growing impatience with uncertainties and ambivalence. A growing impatience with a perceived coerced political correctness and all those do-gooders that, in the eyes of many, go too far, or rather, are covering or silencing the “real problems.” The “real problems,” those voices seem to suggest, are effected by the reigning political indecisiveness and inaction brought about by queer, postcolonial, subaltern, and intersectional discourses. Their narratives are said to deny evident and important differences between human beings and instead promote chaos and disorder through an equilitarianism based on fiction or fantasy. The clear-cut distinctions and oppositions between fact and fiction, science and fantasy, true and false are largely held up by the increasingly alarmed guardians of order. They need to be held up in order to lock out other potential modes of being in and seeing the world. They need to insist on the hard facts of life, the hard sciences, to shun alternative visions and fantasy since:

fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not yet actualizable. The struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy, and the foreclosure of fantasy—through censorship, degradation, or other means—is one strategy for providing for the social death of persons. Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of

reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home.3

What Butler brings to the fore in this quote is that we—and in this context I would stress queer activism—need and should encourage fantasy. We need writings, readings, performances, and discourses against the grain of “reality,” “nature,” and “fact” to escape the “straightjacket” of reiterated discourses, representations, narratives, concepts, and categories that form our notion of “the real” and therewith hinder potential “other” modes of being and existence. In this context it is troubling to see that—at least this can be said for many public debates in Germany—the problematizing of language within gender and queer studies as a decisive, performative means of significance and insignificance, of representation and exclusion, survivability and death generally becomes ridiculed at best by public discourses.

That identity and other categories become naturalized and positioned only through their repeated employment rather than being intrinsically meaningful is either underplayed or not taken into account at all. It is not surprising then that movements such as PEGIDA (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes)—while, particularly in Germany, being careful not to appear too nationalist but at least European—are claiming to call by name again what needs to be named, to do some straight instead of queer talking, to give voice again to the political and social “realities” that in an era of political correctness and categorical uncertainties have become silenced. The evident backlash discernible in the current new conservative movements is based on reading queer interrogations and performances as onslaughts on, or perversions of, an alleged natural order. Instead of seeing queer discourses and performances as attempts at expanding possible modes of being and survivability, they are rather viewed as unfounded and unsustainable, paving a path to chaos, anarchy, and degeneration. In Bodies That Matter, Butler ponders the profound and paradoxical entanglement of political mobilization, language, and political realities:

a political signifier gains its political efficacy, its power to define the political field, through creating and sustaining its constituency. The power

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of the terms “women” or “democracy” is not derived from their ability to describe adequately or comprehensively a political reality that already exists; on the contrary, the political signifier becomes politically efficacious by instituting and sustaining a set of connections as a political reality.⁴

PEGIDA certainly manifests the strong desire to reclaim a language and politics that again are able to set boundaries where there now appears to be an overabundance of potentialities. This “movement” detects a hazarding of “Western” values through an alleged increasing Islamisation and aims to draw a line between Europe and the Middle East, freedom and entrenchment, Islam and Christianity or secularism. PEGIDA rests and insists on notions of differentiations and polarities that evidently and ironically have already been proven to be inseparable. Indeed, PEGIDA and other recent movements that are aiming to reclaim an “us” versus “them” politics may not only be driven by but rest on the dangerous denial of a general not-knowing as the condition of human existence, as Butler upholds:

There is always a dimension of ourselves and our relation to others that we cannot know, and this not-knowing persists with us as a condition of existence and, indeed, of survivability. We are, to an extent, driven by what we do not know, and cannot know, and this “drive” is precisely what is neither exclusively biological nor cultural, but always the site of their dense convergence.

PEGIDA is one example of a political mobilization brought about by the fear of the unknowability of boundaries, of differences, of identities. Those who base their sense of self on the reiterated markers of identities clearly must fear the blurring and deconstruction of their foundations brought about by queer, postcolonial, subaltern, and disability interventions to name but a few. Unable to see, or unwilling to admit, their own paradoxical enterprise—to thump the alleged essentially and naturally given differences, on the one hand, while at the same time needing to erect and name them again and again—they are hardly inclined to embrace their very own uncertainty and vulnerability. Such openness would invite those dialogues and complexities that PEGIDA aims to close down and simplify. Their insistence on realism, identity, and order in the face of their alleged perversion or contamination, their invocation of the “hard facts” speak of a bourgeois ideology that

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promotes a pretense of transparency or illusionism (in disguising its mode of production, the fact that it is production), naturalizes its perspective (in presenting itself as commonsensical), fixes a narrative closure (in aspiring to determine the interpretation of its reader or viewer), and either empties the reality which it represents of its contradictions or organizes these hierarchically, thus reconciling them, rather than permitting them to interrogate and critique each other.5

**Besorgte Eltern (The Concerned Parents)** are another recent pooling, in this case of parents who form another troubling movement grounded on bourgeois—in this case explicitly heteronormative—ideologies and mechanisms. They have recently drawn public attention in Germany by their demonstrations in bigger cities. Like PEGIDA, their formation is also based on similar self-denying and contradictory logic and defence mechanisms. But whereas PEGIDA has been more or less silent on its standing in terms of sexual politics and rather focusses on the problem of an alleged religious and cultural appropriation and contamination of “Western values” through so-called “external” forces, the Concerned Parents focus explicitly on sexuality. They are deeply concerned that their children could be perverted, at least sexualized, by a suggested reform of school curricula that aim to take “homosexual” and “transgender” concerns into account.

Confronting children with options other than heterosexuality and two genders endangers the maintenance of a binary order. In their understanding, to uphold an essentially dichotomous structure of sexual and gender identity is indispensable for the healthy development of children who otherwise could be confused and over-sexualized, losing the guidance they apparently need, their orientation, and direction. What becomes evident in the demonstrations of the Concerned Parents is the uneasiness with alternative narratives and discourses that may bring into question the naturalness and certainty of heterosexuality itself. To bring non-heteronormative sexualities and gender performances into school curricula would pose a threat to heteronormative, bourgeois ideology. They would make it more difficult to fix a narrative closure, to determine the interpretation of its reader, to empty the reality of its contradictions or organize them hierarchically. It is interesting to note that whereas heterosexuality not only acts as the norm against which other sexualities are measured, all

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non-heterosexual potentials of “identity” are regarded as sexuality per se.

Heterosexuality, however, is seemingly emptied of sexuality, at least of any threatening, misleading potentials of sexuality. Heterosexuality therefore performs as both the “normal” destination as well as the narrative closure that cannot seriously be interrogated by means of its continued invocation of its own naturalness. The paradoxical but necessary enterprise of always upholding the “naturally” and “biologically” given differences of the sexes on the one hand while, on the other, continuously needing to articulate, perform, and signify them unambiguously to make them natural is striking. However, as has been argued before, heterosexuality needs to disguise its own discursive mode of production, the fact that it is discursive production to maintain its status as the norm, the natural, the incontestable. While distancing themselves from homophobia in general, the key concerns listed on the webpage of the “Concerned Parents” betray this stance, at least from the point of view of queer interrogations. A selection of their demands read as follows:

Besorgte Eltern ist gegen jede Form der Frühsexualisierung ihrer Kinder in Kitas, Kindergärten und Schulen. (Concerned Parents are against all forms of early sexualization of their children in day-care centres, kindergarten and schools)

Besorgte Eltern fordert das Recht ALLER ELTERN, ihre Kinder altersentsprechend und sensibel bei der Herausbildung ihrer Sexualität zu begleiten. (Concerned Parents demand the right of ALL PARENTS to accompany their children in the individual development of their sexuality in a way appropriate to their age, and in a sensitive manner)

Besorgte Eltern lehnt jede ideologisch motivierte Umerziehung, Indoktrination und Entmündigung auf das Entschiedenste ab. (Concerned Parents resolutely repudiate all ideologically motivated reeducation, indoctrination and incapacitation.)

Besorgte Eltern fordert, die für die Kinder, Familien und die Gesellschaft schädlichen, auf dem Genderismus basierenden unwissenschaftlichen Maßnahmen in allen Bildungseinrichtungen zu beenden. (Concerned Parents demand that measures based on genderism that are unscientific and damaging to children, families, and society be stopped in all institutions of education.)

Again, the binaries on which the worries and demands articulated rest here are far more suggestive of an underlying fear of their instability, artificiality, and the possibility of their undoing. While claiming the norm and “Nature” to be on their side, they apparently counter fire with fire. Queer and gender studies are ideology, not science, queer genders and sexualities sexualize children in contrast to heterosexuality, parents accompany their children in the emergence of their own, seemingly authentic sexuality, whereas hearing about “other” sexualities amounts to indoctrination and reeducation. So instead of seeing the suggestions to reform the curricula as efforts to encourage children not to be afraid of a reality with all its contradictions and uncertainties, to maybe help those who may not emerge as “straight,” they denounce gender studies and queer narratives as ideologies, unscientific, and dangerously sexual. However, it remains unclear again why parents would need to be afraid of narratives alternative to straight ones, if heterosexuality was naturally and essentially given.

One more recent example of bourgeois, heteronormative ideology defending its authority on the grounds of an essential and natural difference between the sexes, genders, and sexualities can be viewed in another highly publicized debate in Germany. It runs along similar lines of binary oppositions, resulting from similar fears and concerns and has become a major topic in the media and social networks of this country. In the aftermath of the ground-breaking result of Ireland’s referendum on the equalization of same sex marriages, the ensuing heated debates in Germany testify again to the deep underlying fear of a profound destabilization of heteronormativity. For those aiming to guard marriage as a privilege of the two-sex model, an institution that has assisted in demarcating heterosexual and homosexual relationships, an equalization of them means loss and disorder. As Lee Edelman points out in his study *Homographesis*, juxtaposing heterosexuality and homosexuality, majority and minority, normal and abnormal follows a:

> cultural imperative to produce, for purposes of ideological regulation, a putative difference [which would] otherwise count as the same if sexual identity were not now interpreted as an essence installed in the unstable space between sex and the newly articulated category of sexuality or sexual orientation.7

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The current debates on marriage equality are not predominantly about whether or not it forms a subsidized place for reproduction. They do not tackle the—maybe more interesting—question as to whether this institution and its privileging of certain relationships and care arrangements over others should not be reconsidered as a whole. Rather the controversy appears to be brought up by the question as to whether the idea of heterosexuality may finally be seen in its own fragility, performativity and ideological backup or not. What should have become evident by now then is that queer theories, politics, narratives and interventions abstaining from essentialist notions—staged as radical, oppositional, and unfounded by the mainstream—thus may actually be able to provoke the fragile status of heteronormativity. Indeed queer narratives oftentimes are met with extensive criticism or are ridiculed as helpless poses of the “outlaws” who display willful ignorance of facts rather than providing profound interrogations of them. But the apparent disbelief displayed so blatantly and vigorously, the threats voiced, and acts of violence perpetrated hint at

a profound desire to keep the order of binary gender natural or necessary, to make of it a structure, either natural or cultural, or both, that no human can oppose, and still remain human. If a person [or text] opposes norms of binary gender [...] and that stylized opposition is legible, then it seems that violence emerges precisely as the demand to undo that legibility, to question its possibility, to render it unreal and impossible in the face of its appearance to the contrary.8

In addition to the distancing from and oftentimes violent opposition to queer theories and politics within apparently heteronormative discourses, it is also troubling to see that in academia as well as in the public realm, queer interventions—at least in my view—have become “naturalized” and “identified as LGBTI concerns,” sometimes in self-professed terms. This upholds the idea of some sexualities as “other,” “deviant,” and in need of justification, as if “heterosexuals” or “heterosexuality” would not figure or partake in the same discursive and performative productions of truth-effects. It appears that the deconstructive potential of “queer”—the genuine deconstruction of naturalized concepts and identities, the radical interrogation of the binary order—can never, or only very briefly, escape a heteronormative matrix of discourse. “Queer” meanwhile thus figures either as “identity politics” or a sophisticated but artificial pose (or sexuality).

8 Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*, p. 35.
It is along these lines that I would like to argue for a critical appraisal of the current status quo of queer. We need a thorough return to the force of denaturalization and deconstruction, a genuine embrace of, and imaginative engagement with, the ultimate uncertainty and ambiguity of identities. As guiding principles for such queer politics and narratives I would like to resort to epigrams by literary icon Oscar Wilde, drag superstar Ru Paul and historian Michel Foucault. The three quotes—to me—sum up what queer studies, politics, narratives, and sexualities should never forget to maintain:

“Being natural is simply a pose and the most irritating pose I know.”
(Wilde, 1890)
“We’re all born naked. The rest is drag.” (Paul, 1996)
“I’m no prophet. My job is making windows where there were once walls.”
(Foucault, year unknown)

The correlation of queer and poststructuralist ideas, its anti-identitarian foundation is a bitter pill to take or at least a controversial outset for most, and that holds true not only for straight but also LGBTI identified or identifying people. The unwillingness to admit performativity, ambiguity, and the not-knowing as the condition of human existence, instead of looking for facts, truth, and essential identities is obvious. It appears that after a period of academic popularity in the 70s and early 80s, poststructuralist stances in general retroactively are viewed as sophisticated but ultimately unrealistic and apolitical discourses. They may have been good exercises in thinking—not unlike the sophist tradition in early Greek philosophy—but were unfit to really tackle, let alone solve, serious issues. Instead they are commonly accused of rather putting forward anarchist, alienating, and fatalist notions of human existence and society that do not allow for critical interventions, at least in terms of social movements.

But why is it unrealistic to genuinely dismiss “the natural,” to counter “the normal” and “the true” in public discourse? Why should it be apolitical to seriously problematize social discipline, regulation, and punishment effected by coerced performative and discursive means that result in naturalized heteronormativity? Why should it be silly to instead emphasize and invite playfulness, parody, and artifice instead of striving for an alleged authenticity and “realness”? The abiding uneasiness with queer interventions that disavow identities as naturally given, their evident exclusion from popular discourse or their alternative marginalization as phantasmatic or perverted poses, seems to be based on precisely those premises which Foucault already points up in his study The History of
Sexuality. Sex, in his reading had—within Western thought and history—increasingly become:

an object of great suspicion; the general and disquieting meaning that pervades our conduct and our existence, in spite of ourselves; the point of weakness where evil portents reach through to us; the fragment of darkness that we each carry within us: a general signification, a universal secret, an omnipresent cause, a fear that never ends.9

Sexual identity politics also embrace the thought of sexuality providing a deeper truth of a person, signifying a natural and essential divide. By this notion, they have been able to make claims for “their” rights and means of protection. But what is troubling and downplayed by many is that by the same token sex, sexuality—and, since they are viewed as being related or even responsible for one’s sexual inclinations, gender—were, and as I would argue incessantly continue to be, monitored, disciplined, classified, and regulated in order to keep them under control—and heteronormative. Even, or maybe even more, in a cultural climate that has been termed a pornographied culture, available sexual and gender attributions are limited. Heterosexuality and gender dichotomy remain the norm against which other possible “identities” are measured. A binary order that signifies as the “law of nature,” from which the “others” differ as exceptions to the rule, delinquents, outlaws, minorities. It is also uncertain, how many potential possibilities of being are foreclosed by the continued invocation of essential and categorical identities since:

“[i]ntelligible” genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the “expression” or “effect” of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice.10

Therefore, the apparent replaceability of queer interrogations with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersexual identity politics is troubling on two grounds. First, it may assist in prohibiting more potential modes of

10 Butler, Judit. Gender Trouble, p. 23.
being. Secondly, claiming the rights for so-called minorities, basing the argument on identities as naturally given, admitting sexuality to be biological and heterosexuality to be its norm leaves heterosexuality unquestioned, assists in granting it the discursive place of a regulatory apparatus, from which the “others” are viewed, monitored, and measured. While identity politics may promise an exercise in freedom, an ultimate liberation from the closet, the price that needs to be paid is not a small one, as Butler likewise notes:

One must be subjected to a regulatory apparatus, as Foucault would have called it, in order to get to the point where something like an exercise in freedom becomes possible. One has to submit to labels and names, to incursions, to invasions; one has to be gauged against measures of normalcy; and one has to pass the test.\footnote{Butler, Judith. \textit{Undoing Gender}, p. 91.}

To tackle heteronormativity we thus need queer narratives and interrogations that embrace the performative the discourse, and fiction. As argued before, heteronormativity—after all—can be viewed as a fiction that has become a governing myth through its claim on nature and the norm. It is a reiterated discursive product created to sustain an order as natural where otherwise the general unknowability of gender and sexual “identities” would be laid bare and therefore would impede governmental efforts at control, discipline, and regulation. The continued, and in recent times increasing, recourse to “nature” in public debates on gender and sexuality in Germany can be seen as a helpless—but unfortunately effective—disavowal of performativity and ambiguity.

Particularly in a culture that privileges the so-called natural sciences over the humanities and arts, the hard facts over individual interpretation or fiction, certainty over doubt, queer interrogations in their insistence on the performative have a difficult time. This leaves aside the fact that simply by referring to “nature” the argument does not become intrinsically truer or more significant, but through its reiteration rather becomes a naturalized myth. In \textit{Mythologies}, Roland Barthes ponders on this troubling and suffocating correlation of myth and nature:

What is sickening in myth is its resort to a false nature, its superabundance of significant forms, as in these objects which decorate their usefulness with a natural appearance. The will to weigh the signification with the full
guarantee of nature causes a kind of nausea: myth is too rich, and what is in excess is precisely its motivation.12

The guarantee of nature that—as has been illustrated—the guards of heteronormativity never get tired of invoking in debates on gender and sexuality actually continuously omits and is contradicted by the apparent discursive changes and shifts that are brought about by those voices, texts, and performances that do not follow its logic. But because such questioning and troubling voices are for the most part kept out of the popular and serious discussions or brought in already through accompanying ridicule and scorn, we instead witness a popular backlash leading to an increasingly:

restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field perform[ing] as a regulatory operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption.13

Henceforth, I would like to conclude my contribution with a plea. We need to find ways to draw again on the poststructuralist impetus of queer and to refrain from engaging in the ongoing and tiring debates on truth and reality, fact and fiction, hetero- and homosexuality, science and ideology. Everything is discourse, everything is performative. Our task should be to continuously rattle at the naturalized truths and essentialized identities that are in the service of bourgeois ideologies that prohibit more potential modes of being, thinking, and loving, and therewith different ways of seeing and experiencing reality and truth. We must invite paradoxes and artificiality as part of our being “to make windows,” as Foucault once said, “where there once were walls.” Or, as the “man of words” Lord Henry Wotton in The Picture of Dorian Gray says: “The way of paradoxes is the way of truth. To test reality we must see it on the tight rope. When the verities become acrobats, we can judge them.”14

Let us maintain and not overwrite apparent paradoxes, let us see reality on a tight rope and not as a universal, given or natural truth, let us keep the verities queer.

13 Butler, Judith. Undoing Gender, p. 43.
References

CHAPTER FOUR

ARTICULATION BEYOND REPRESENTATION,
OR, WHAT’S QUEER ABOUT QUEER NARRATIVES?

TOMASZ SIKORA

Introduction

I feel uncomfortable every time I am expected to represent—especially to represent Poland, or Polish culture, or Polish queer culture, or queer theory, or whatever. To “represent” means two things in this context: to act as a living exemplar of Polish queer culture and to create a representation of that culture, a narrative—a coherent narrative—that would shed light on something like “Poland’s queer reality.” Would that be a queer narrative, though? What is a queer narrative, anyway? Indeed, over the last decade or so I have been developing an anti-representational theoretical approach within (and beyond) queer studies. To put it in a nutshell, I have been arguing, in various ways and contexts, against the logics, aesthetics and politics of representation. The basic idea behind it is that queer, by definition, cannot represent (or be represented), since representation is always already predicated on identity, which—as we all know—has been thoroughly problematized, if not bluntly discarded, by queer theory (or, better, theories). In socio-political terms, the representationalist stance translates into a politics of recognition, i.e. a politics that claims social visibility and acceptance together with legal rights. Somewhat paradoxically, it claims the recognition of difference precisely with a view to erasing difference by achieving social and legal transparency. By claiming same-sex marriage and adoption rights, for example, LGBT movements in different places seek to blend seamlessly into the social fabric, but the question still remains whether queers should not instead demand the total abolition of the thoroughly patriarchal-capitalist institution of marriage or at least a form of certified partnership.
that would accommodate a whole variety of interpersonal arrangements, including polyamorous relationships.

Not that I underestimate the importance of local contexts whenever the politics of sexual difference is involved; a local focus is necessary to counter an apparently “universal” model of queerness and queer politics, which means, if anything at all, a predominantly American model. On the other hand, however, being relegated to the position of “locally queer” always borders on re-affirming the colonial Centre–Periphery hierarchy, where it is only when the Centre for some reason condescends to look and listen that the Periphery is taken into account at all; never on one’s own terms, to be sure, but by being selectively re-interpreted and incorporated into the Centre’s agenda. Most of the time the Centre expects the “locals” to provide ethnographic data that it can later analyze and synthesize into a coherent master narrative. The national key (Polish, Ukrainian or Latvian queer culture) is useful in many ways, but at the same time it is highly problematic. Arguably, each geopolitically defined territory constitutes a (presumably) uniform legal space which creates, and to some extent determines, the political and social conditions for particular kinds of activism and theorizing. Moreover, given that the idea of a “culture” conceived of in national terms has largely dominated the way most people map “localness,” it seems that an attempt to localize queer must be, if not coextensive, then at least multifariously bound up with nation-states’ agendas. On the other hand, however, this nationalization of queerness, its alignment with national borders and agendas, may lead to a reterritorialization of the free transnational flows of queer ideas (and desires) and may ultimately contribute to a “homonationalization” of queerness, to adapt Jasbir Puar’s term.1

To place the arguments that follow into a larger perspective, let me outline, however crudely, the distinction I am making between an LGBT “logic” and a queer one, drawing on some insights from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In broad strokes, whereas LGBT thinks in terms of representable molar “wholes,” such as sexual minorities or homosexual persons, queer is actively engaged in the “becoming-queer” of sociality at large through a dismantling of its Oedipal organization, through an implosion of ways and directions of becoming, through enabling new “unnatural” and unthinkable connections. Queer politics does not have a proper constituency of its own, it cannot even claim an actual subject insofar as any subject within the current parameters of

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politics must be a subject of (and to) representation. Instead, queer performs a politics of the virtual and as such it should strategize (in theorizing and in practice) both visibility and invisibility, representation and non-representation, various positivities and negativities, inclusion and exclusion, insideness and outsideness, attachments and detachments. Contra Lee Edelman’s influential argument in No Future, I understand the queer position as neither simply anti-social nor simply pro-social, neither simply inclusionist nor simply separatist, neither simply negativistic nor simply positivistic. As I have argued elsewhere, queer resists the Oedipal reproduction through filiation and instead favours the erratic movements of desire, the productive spread of an epidemic. Through its logic of contagion, queer seeks a mode of connectivity where the pre-existing entities cease to exist: “Rather than seek recognition and protection through (and thus lend legitimacy to) existing social institutions, with their castrating and hierarchizing machines, queer creates its own modes of nonphallic connectivity and collectivity, its own ephemeral institutions and groupings that go far beyond the family, the nation, or even ‘the human race’.”

**Against Representation**

Mainstream LGBT activism in recent decades has been dominated by the representational logic, both in the political and cultural sense, as such representations are believed to secure a stable and “normalized” place for LGBT people in the social order. The cooptation of self- and state-defined gays and lesbians into established social institutions (especially marriage) as well as into national narratives (especially as a marker of Western-type liberal democracies’ civilizational and moral superiority) is just one of the numerous examples of how the politics of representation, firmly based on governable and regulable identities that seek political and social

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recognition, lead to the neutralization of the radical potential of queer resistance. The notion of representation, as I use it, is multidimensional and extends into several spheres, especially the legal-political and the cultural-aesthetic. In all of these uses, representation is undergirded by the urge for recognition: for self-recognition (“I want a mirror,” I want an image of myself I can identify with and project into the external world as an intelligible identity-image) as well as for social, legal, and political recognition in more collective terms (public visibility, legal protection, equal rights, political representation in governing institutions, etc.). The important and much overlooked consequence of this logic is that the political subject becomes a function of representation; or, to put it even more pointedly, the real political subject—as visible to, and recognized by, structures of power as an apparatus of articulation—is not any living substance, but the representation itself. Rights are claimed and granted (or denied) to a representation which is taken for, and conflated with, actual living political entities. The term “politics of representation” takes here a very literal meaning: not only in the sense of representation as a method of doing politics, but also the theatre of representation(s) as the horizon of all possible political action, which dramatically reduces political imagination and the notions of the possible and the desirable.

The politics of representation is sometimes opposed, quite rightly, to a politics of difference—but difference precisely as non-representable rather than a diversity of compartmentalized and internally/externally disciplined “identities” which can be observed in state-managed policies of “multiculturalism.” Paul B. Preciado (formerly known as Beatriz Preciado), for example, describes what she calls a politics of queer multitudes in the following way:

There is no sexual difference, but a multitude of differences, a transversal of relations of power, a diversity of the forces of life. Those differences are not “representable” because they are “monstrous” and thereby they call into question the regimes of political representation, but also the scientific systems of the production of “normal” knowledge.5

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5 Beatriz (Paul B.) Preciado, “Multitudes queer,” *Multitudes* 12 (2003); translation mine. The original reads: “Il y n’a pas de différence sexuelle, mais une multitude de différences, une transversale des rapports de pouvoir, une diversité de puissances de vie. Ces différences ne sont pas « representables » car elles sont « monstrueuses » et remettent en question par là même les régimes de représentation politique, mais aussi les systèmes de production de savoir scientifiques des « normaux ».”
The important point for academics is that the systems of knowledge they produce are as much part of representational regimes as any other text of culture (in art, literature, the media, etc.). They equally co-produce, or else challenge, (representations of) the “normal” and the “abnormal,” for example when it comes to painting an academically authorized picture of “Poland’s queer culture.” What if the picture does not aspire to being a “realistic” one and turns out, instead, to be a surrealist or an abstract one? Hence the question I asked at the beginning of this essay, whether the narrative I am creating here would be a queer or a normalizing one. Specifically in the Polish context, one would expect a discussion of Michał Witkowski’s *Lubievo* (translated into English as *Lovetown*) as a central point of reference in such an account, or the art works by Karol Radziszewski, but what if instead one chooses to centre on an obscure, barely documented event at a queer anarchist squat? But then, why centralize at all? Why, indeed, should centralization and coherence be so essential to any academic or artistic articulation? They certainly help create intelligible representations, but at the same time they obstruct the molecular flows of concepts and desires and they remain oblivious to the ongoing work of differentiation.

In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, difference—or, more precisely, the very possibility of difference—resides in the virtual and it is desire (as an ontological principle, and emphatically not a relation where person X desires person Y or anything else) that produces differentiation. In its transversal, deterritorializing movements, desire is nothing but desire for difference, opposed to the comfort of legible convention (such as identity); it enables the necessary “leakage” or line of flight from an oedipalized social field that is heavily codified, hierarchized, and normativized. Claiming a virtual “outside”—or the reality of what remains unthinkable—is necessary to resist “the conversion of multiplicity into classes and of the thousand sexes into heterosexuality,” as Maurizio Lazzarato puts it, that leads to “the neutralization of the virtualities of other becomings.” Lazzarato concludes that “to confine the outside, to confine the virtual, means neutralizing the power of invention and codifying repetition so as to drain it of all power of variation, thereby reducing it to a simple reproduction.” Importantly, the very same forces of normative codifications operate within the “gay/lesbian community”

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and have famously been dubbed “homonormativity” by Lisa Duggan.\(^9\) Importantly, this confining of the virtual outside and the blockage of the desire for difference are administered and policed by representation. Representation equals castration, which equals oedipalization with all its hierarchizations, centralizations, marginalizations, erasures, repressions, and particularly its regulations of differentiation and desire through a structuralization and institutionalization of acceptable connections and a barring of illicit flows and exchanges. Moreover, representation is a circular movement in which the “image in the mirror” disciplines me into the recognizable person that (I believe) I am, just as I myself police the representations of “me” (e.g. there are narratives I do not wish to be a part of). Representation must be ‘faithful,’ just as I must be faithful to it; it is a reciprocal obligation in which the representation guarantees my intelligibility, while I certify the truthfulness of the representation.

If difference is to become a basis for a monstrous undoing of the socio-political order based on the stability and hierarchy of representation, Dorothea Olkowski observes building on the work of Deleuze and Guattari:

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\text{[m]erely reconceptualizing difference is not enough to restore difference as difference; rather, the ruin of representation can be accomplished only on the level of actual practices. This is why Deleuze claims that the modern work of art, more than anything, ‘tends to realize these conditions’, the conditions effecting representation’s demise.}^{10}
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And so this is where my argument turns towards the question of art (particularly in relation to the “ruin of representation”) and art’s queer political potential.

**Art(í)culations**

I do not dare to even begin to talk about the history of philosophical debates on the notion of *mimesis* and the idea of art as representing

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9 Duggan defines homonormativity as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.” Duggan, Lisa. *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003, p. 50.

whatever is believed to be out there, ready to be represented (and thus always already presumed to be representable in the first place). What contemporary art does more intensely than artistic practices before the late 19th century (or before, and in response to, the invention of photography) is that it problematizes its own relation to imitational representation and the dominant regimes of visibility, and in doing so it never ceases to experiment with the sensible. Deleuze and Guattari were especially fond of quoting Paul Klee’s statement that “art is not about rendering the visible, but about rendering visible.” This idea goes beyond the simplistic notion of the “representable” waiting to be “represented” and proposes instead that art creates various forms of visibility; indeed, it creates the visible as we know it.

There is a point of correspondence here with Jacques Rancière’s well-known concept of the “distribution of the sensible,” which enables Rancière to make a direct connection between aesthetic modes or regimes and political ones. The “distribution of the perceptible” is a questionable proposition as long as it is taken to mean that the visible is already there, waiting to be distributed and then redistributed in another aesthetic-political arrangement; or, in other words, that the visible is a “scarce resource” in keeping with the laws of scarcity on which capitalism is founded. Paul Klee’s insight is crucial to make the concept more multidimensional; to use a simple illustration, a blank page is not about its measurable and variously dividable area (into, say, squares and rectangles), but rather about the infinite virtual field of all the possible drawings that could possibly fill it. Yet I still see the necessity to further qualify Klee’s statement: in “rendering visible” one still privileges visibility over invisibility. Instead, I believe, the act of rendering visible should point to the awareness of how it at the same time renders invisible, and I do not just mean leaving this or that unrepresented (failing to represent), but rather rendering nonrepresentable within the very same framework in which “something” (or, to be precise, the nothing-yet before it gains visibility, i.e. before the virtual becomes actual) is rendered visible. (In)visibility is to a large extent a matter of apparatus: the receptor with variable levels of sensitivity and a perceptual/epistemological framework in which something becomes or ceases to be perceptible at all, or never actually comes to be so.

These abstract ruminations on (in)visibility (or, better, (in)visibilities) may be directly referred to the ever-important question of specifically queer (in)visibilities. To achieve visibility through representation, recognition and canonization has been a strategic goal almost taken for granted by LGBT movements. It is interesting to notice that those claims to visibility have inevitably displayed an internal contradiction: visibility is made possible by marking or claiming difference (different people desire, fuck and relate differently), but the ultimate horizon, within the humanist-liberal paradigm, of these claims to difference seems to be the idea that “after all we are all human,” or—to quote Barack Obama—“love is love,” and thus “gay love” is, at bottom, no different from “straight love,” which explains LGBT movements’ heavy investment in the struggle for legalizing same-sex marriage. As Stephanie Smith aptly put it, the simplified notion of difference as “diversity” has come to mean merely “stylistic or cultural variations on the theme Human,” so if “we are all human,” then we all love in the same way. It goes without saying that what “love” means in Obama’s mouth is a monogamous, presumably middle-class arrangement between two liberal-humanist subjects, whose desires are channelled into such an arrangement and thus barred from the desire for, say, particular practices rather than “persons” (with their gender, race, and other socially constructed parameters). Contra such a radical narrowing down of the concepts of love and desire as well as difference, and in keeping with Paul Klee’s insight, I would argue that the point of queer critique and queer practices (narrative and any other) now is not to render the visible, i.e. to represent a presumably pre-existing community (or constituency) of liberally defined, more or less unified and intelligible LGBT subjects; if a “we” may be claimed to exist at all, it must be understood as the effect rather than the given of representation. The point is, instead, to render visible, or imaginable, “impossible” social arrangements, subject positions and flows of desire by playing with obscurity, invisibility, and unintelligibility. A queer subject, as I understand it, is a subject (or agent) that remains obscure to the ordering and classificatory gaze of the liberal-humanist mind. I am not talking about self-erasure or “staying in the closet,” but about a kind of social presence that diffracts the straight gaze by flaunting around queer unintelligibility. If a queer (narrative) practice does use representation—as perhaps it must—it is precisely with a view to undermining the foundations on which this or that particular regime of representation rests. Drawing on the lesson of

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poststructuralism, all representations are by definition false (just as all recognition is by definition a misrecognition), and if there is anything to be learned from representations, it is certainly not the “truth” of the “things represented,” but rather the way representations may be used as vehicles, always disposable, for the new currents of material becoming.

Art—or experimental art—is anti-representational in that it points to the arbitrariness of any particular representational regime by producing ever new aesthetic modes or taking the existing ones to their very limits, and beyond. Art is never reducible to the representational, as its primary task is to affect, not to represent. More specifically I propose to understand art as an instance of articulation beyond representation, an articulation which is not yet co-opted—and may never be co-opted—into regimes of representation that would give it a “proper” place and a “proper” meaning. Even if art uses representation, I would argue that it uses it precisely with a view to questioning, complicating, or dismantling the representational regime it cannot single-handedly reject. In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, the relationship between art and representation is outlined by Simon O’Sullivan in the following way:

[Art’s] experimentation involves the release of desire (a desire for more and more connectivity) from beneath the repressive apparatus of representation. It is also the blueprint for a new and different kind of politics, a new militancy. … This is not necessarily to completely disavow the political project, the work of representation and of representational critique, rather it is to reconfigure these projects as molar, which, important though they might be, when focused on exclusively, efface the molecular of which they are effectively constituted.13

Going beyond “the repressive apparatus of representation,” experimental art enables a release of the currents of desire that underlie any socio-psychological arrangements. More specifically, it helps to keep open the desire to become Other rather than to reproduce the Same. It is in this sense, rather than in the Platonic one, that the term mimesis is used by Michael Taussig14: it is not about representing (reflecting) “what is” in terms of self-sameness, but precisely about the process of becoming other through a process I like to call contagion. Art can be contagious thanks to the movements of released desire; and so can queer politics.

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The notion of the aesthetic is crucial here—not in the sense that the aesthetic is somehow exclusive to art or that art can be reduced to “purely” aesthetic concerns, for instance in the art-for-art’s-sake tradition. The aesthetic is defined here simply as the capacity to affect and to be affected via the senses. The aesthetic is primary to recognition and representation, which is what art is well aware of. Nothing “is” beyond the aesthetic, even if societies codify distinct modes of the aesthetic and banish the “unaesthetic” or the obscene from social view. It is the aesthetic, I would argue, not the representational, which creates intensities and thus has the capacity to affect in a manner much more visceral than representation. Where representation institutes a closure of (self-)recognition, or a hermeneutical vicious circle, the aesthetic creates ever new decentralized intensities; where representation-derived “identity” depends on the logic of convention (to be recognized, an identity must achieve a self-referential legibility based on representational reproducibility), the aesthetic belongs to the sensorial, the ephemeral and the molecular. To bring the argument back to the (admittedly simplified) LGBT versus queer distinction, while LGBT theory and practice is oriented towards a recognition made possible by representation, queer—as I see it—dwells in the aesthetic. To be sure, I do not mean to depoliticize queer through relegating it to some sort of “high-art” or fashion ghetto. On the contrary: the recognition that has been or may be won by LGBT movements leads to a depoliticization (where the “political” stands for the potential for a radical re-distribution of the sensible and of power), whereas queer always aims to disrupt the visible/invisible and the empowered/disempowered hierarchies by imagining different social and political economies.

What’s Queer About a Queer Narrative?

Let me pose the imminent question at last: what is a queer narrative? Thus posed, the question cannot be answered. There exists (thankfully) no single model of a queer narrative (like that of a meter in Sévres) nor a set of parameters or conventions that would feed the classificatory fever of authorized systems of knowledge and allow disciplinarians to draw a clear and stable line between queer and non-queer narratives. Nevertheless, failing to make any distinction at all misses the point, too: why keep the term “queer” if it either means anything anybody designates as queer or else it is employed (as it often is, regrettably) simply as a synonym of LGBT or, even worse, simply gay? I will thus be balancing (not at all uncomfortably, but gaily) between my aversion to closure and classification on the one hand, and the need to delineate “queerness” in an
open-ended, yet discernable way. The distinction I am trying to make is not intended to be disciplinarian in any sense, or codified into fixed rules and measurable attributes. The distinction itself should be conceived of as nomadic, context-sensitive and perpetually self-subverting, always avoiding a sedimented territory or the temptation to claim an ontological grounding.

One commonsensical criterion for deciding whether a narrative is “queer” or not is thematic: any narrative that features non-heterosexual or same-sex acts or desires is habitually called “queer. However, as should be clear from my earlier discussion of the difference between LGBT and queer, I find such a criterion far from satisfactory. Not that gay, lesbian, or bisexual thematics are contradictory to queerness, but they are neither sufficient nor necessary for a queer narrative, the way I choose to understand it. To be read as queer, a narrative needs to problematize identity-based representational regimes and conventional aesthetics that serve to stabilize molar entities with their essentialized attributes, such as sexual orientation or gender identity. A queer narrative needs to invent a new language and a new audience (an audience yet-to-come) and it must be able to produce articulation beyond representation, especially beyond the representation it seems to be building itself. Just as experimental art, a queer narrative, at least in my perspective, is one that resists the massive production, through myriads of self-reproducing representations, of classificatory knowability and unobstructed intelligibility, and instead mobilizes transversal movements of desire and unnatural connections that challenge established taxonomies.

In the last chapter of my book *Bodies Out of Rule*, I attempted to capture the difference between a queer narrative and a gay-themed narrative that I do not perceive as “queer” at all by looking at two narratives: Randy Shilts’s 1987 “documentary” book *And the Band Played On*, followed by an HBO adaptation of the same title, and the Canadian director John Greyson’s cinematic response to the book *Zero Patience* (both films premiered on the very same day, September 11, 1993). Shilts’s was a sensationalist account (dressed up as a thoroughly researched and reliable one) of the early days of the AIDS epidemic, which embraced and

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Articulation beyond Representation 75

successfully promoted the hypothesis that the AIDS epidemic in North America was caused by a single promiscuous gay man, the Québécois flight attendant Gaëtan Dugas. As a gay man himself, as well as a recognized journalist, Shilts had all the credentials to tell an insider’s story to the general public, so his account became instantaneously the “official” version of the onset of the epidemic. However, his narrative was strongly resisted by activists, writers, and artists who later came to be grouped together and designated as the “queer movement”; Douglas Crimp’s essay, How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic, proved a particularly cogent and influential critique of Shilts’s stigmatizing narrative.

John Greyson is commonly considered a representative of the so-called New Queer Cinema, a loose movement of independent “radical” filmmakers who revolutionized gay-themed narrative patterns and aesthetic conventions in the 1990s and in the following decades. Indeed, through formal experimentation and a sceptical attitude towards established representational regimes, artists such as Derek Jarman, Gregg Araki, or John Greyson redefined “queer visibility” and enabled new anti-hetero- and anti-homonormative articulations of sexual difference. True to Simon Watney’s observation that AIDS spurred not only a social crisis, but also a “crisis of representation itself,” in Zero Patience, Greyson parodies Shilts’s narrative and aesthetics to tell an alternative and queer story of Dugas and the AIDS epidemic without claims to veracity. Against all rules of decorum, the movie is a musical comedy with fantastic and satirical elements that fundamentally unsettle the “truth” of Shiltsian accounts, based on a supposedly “certain knowledge.” A scientifically authorized “culture of certainty,” as one of the songs in the movie has it, is satirized through the character of Sir Richard Burton, a hybrid of the historical figure (a 19th century producer of “reliable” knowledge, explorer and translator) and a fantastic figure (an immortal Burton who works as a taxidermist and diorama designer at the Natural History Museum in Toronto). Burton becomes fixated on an institutionally sanctioned research project that would explain the origin of AIDS and identify the “patient zero” of the epidemic. He concludes that the “Typhoid Mary” or the vampiric monster of the AIDS epidemic was a French-Canadian flight attendant, who never gets named in the movie other than as “Zero.” The character, again, is a mixture of the “historical” Gaëtan Dugas and the fantastic character of a ghost who is invisible to everybody except Burton.

and who first yearns to “appear” again, but after he does appear for a short while, he chooses to permanently disappear at the end of the movie, refusing the role of a prospective “queer hero” (and thus embracing his status as a nameless and ultimately non-representable “zero”).

The American HBO production is, properly, a high drama that capitalizes on sensationalism, sentimentalism, and uncomplicated moralism. With all the parts neatly divided between the “good guys/gays” and the “bad guys/gays,” Spottiswoode’s docudrama, after Shilts’s book, misplaces the question of (sexual) difference onto the question of individual moral qualifications or, at best, the ignorance of “scientific facts.” I would argue that the difference between Spottiswoode’s “gay” stance (which on closer scrutiny turns out to be a product of what I would call, after Monique Wittig, the “straight mind”21) and Greyson’s “queer” one dwells largely in the gap between the naturalizing authoritativeness of the former (“that’s exactly how it was! these are the facts!”) and the shifting renarrativizations and resignifications that Greyson’s movie performs as it evades any final “truth regime.” All facts (if we still want to keep that problematic notion) are hopelessly intertwined with and dependent on fictions, while fictions may offer a profound epistemological problematization of the ways we “know” and classify facts, and consequently they can stop, or at least lay bare, the castrating machine of representation that never tires of creating the “truth.” A queer narrative is aware of how any sayable truth is always an effect of a particular convention that lends it legibility. The playful and shifting convention adopted by Greyson in Zero Patience; however, is precisely one that aims to question the limits of every possible convention, or at least to expose every convention’s provisional and arbitrary character. Spottiswoode’s drama, on the other hand, following Shilts’s book, “adopted a no-longer-possible universal point of view—which is, among other things, the heterosexual point of view,” to quote Douglas Crimp.22 Spottiswoode’s is a heroic, regenerative tale in which the goodwill of the good people prevails, sooner or later, over the ignorance, excessive ambition, and ideological biases of other people. It is about getting things right, so that humanity as we know it can survive within the parameters of the present civil order. In contrast, Greyson’s self-conscious and self-questioning narrative is a

21 According to Wittig, the straight mind “develops a totalizing interpretation of history, social reality, culture, language, and all the subjective phenomena at the same time,” and it produces “general laws which claim to hold true for all societies, all epochs, all individuals.” Wittig, Monique. The Straight Mind and Other Essays. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, p. 27.

22 Crimp, Douglas. How to Have Promiscuity, p. 245.
political intervention into how we see and know “things” as well as how that knowledge and that perception affect the way we practice our everyday lives.\(^\text{23}\)

Certainly, the above characterization of Greyson’s film as a queer narrative is not meant to be an exemplary one, complete with universal and unchanging analytical tools to measure queerness. Instead, let me emphasize that each queer cultural text is queer in its particular way and to particular audiences. If I were to give a more general definition, I would say that a queer narrative is one that implodes its own narrative modes, genre conventions, and cognitive frames, and thus renders the very act of narrativization inherently problematic. It does not abandon narrative, but it refuses to canonize some narrative modes over others. The battle over representation is not about how queerness gets represented i.e. how queer characters and themes have been banned from cultural narratives or, if employed, presented in negative moralistic and pathological terms. This approach cannot but lead to censoring practices exemplified by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, which Bruce LaBruce, another film director often associated with the New Queer Cinema, has called “a quasi-Stalinist organization which attempts to police gay imagery in Hollywood movies.”\(^\text{24}\)

The principal problem in the battle over representation is the logic of representation itself. By being able to escape that logic, if only temporarily, art (including film and literature, of course) points to a

\(^{23}\) This paragraph is a modified and adapted version of a paragraph from Sikora, Tomasz. *Bodies Out of Rule*, pp. 35–36.


A telling example of the censoring logic that underlies every heavy investment in representation is the controversy over an art exhibition during the first Polish Trans*Festival in Cracow, Poland, in May 2015. The artist, Irena Kalicka, known for dealing with the violent consequences of stereotyping, was invited to display her works as part of the festival. The day before the exhibition’s opening some participants (allegedly from Norway, backed by a number of the festival’s organizers) protested vehemently against images of white people painted black and demanded that the images be taken down because—as they responded to every argument of the opposite side—“blackface is always racist.” Since the artist and the gallery refused to hide the images away, on the opening day the exhibition was removed from the festival’s programme, while a group of rather vocal and determined protesters disrupted the opening. The situation deserves a separate lengthy analysis, but the act of dividing representations into “good” or “bad” ones—irrespective of the multilayered ways a work of art “performs” itself and distributes affects, is an alarming tendency I associate with a more general flattening and narrowing, under neoliberal conditions, of relations, affects and concepts.
different practice in which the aesthetic—also as an epistemological and political project within the “distribution of the sensible”—becomes a primary space for molecular flows of desire within the social field.

**Conclusion Without Closure**

The basic insight that has informed this essay is that queerness—whether in art, knowledge production, or politics—is that which avoids and challenges representation, since the latter is always already predicated on identity and bound up with the Oedipal machinery that keeps producing the present (assumedly natural) order of things. If queer is understood as a practice and theory of becoming rather than a cultivation of stable identities, it can never settle itself comfortably within this or that representational order. I would even go as far as to claim that representation is what in a sense kills me and you, or rather turns us into zombies: it obstructs our molecular becomings, such that we end up with a spectral existence in the symbolic order, an order that attempts to maintain its rules of visibility and legibility even as it interminably defers the moment of desire and obstructs that elusive flow of matter called life. Representation is like a portrait photograph which, in Roland Barthes’s account, always points to death-in-life. Greyson’s Zero—a figure suspended between life and nonlife, fact and fiction, visibility and invisibility—seems a perfect realization of the queer potential to suspend any and all representational regimes, and thus question the way sociality is (pre-) arranged and regulated. Zero is the border point where the virtual touches and teases the actual. Just as an experimental artist escapes the regime of representation and creates new maps of the virtual that do not fall into pre-existing frameworks of legibility, so—arguably—queer activism and queer thinking perform a politics that is “not the terrain of the representation of a people … but of their creation,” to use Nicholas Thoburn’s phrase. Art—just as queer politics—is the “production of other possible worlds” through the constant production of new modes of seeing, knowing, connecting, and living.

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References


CHAPTER FIVE

DEATH PENALTY
OR ‘DEATH AND TRANSFIGURATION’?:
THOMAS MANN’S ‘DEATH IN VENICE’
AND ITS RECEPTION IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE
LITERATURE
(‘GANYMEDE’ BY DAPHNE DU MAURIER)

ROLF FÜLLMANN

Thomas Mann’s famous novella, *Death in Venice* (*Der Tod in Venedig*), was published in 1912, in the October and November issues of the Berlin-based magazine, *Die Neue Rundschau* (*The New Review*), which was closely connected to Mann’s publisher, S. Fischer. It was translated into Latvian in 1923 and into English in 1924, and was well received. In German literature there are several works whose titles show a relationship with the demise of Aschenbach, the protagonist of *Death in Venice*—
*Death in Rome* (*Der Tod in Rom*, 1954), by Wolfgang Koeppen, a well-known post-war novel about the Nazi past; *Death in Weimar* (*Tod in Weimar*) (1999), by Henning Boetius, a novella about Goethe’s death and his last love of a young man; *Death in Havana* (*Tod in Habana*) (2008), by Hans Christoph Buch, in which a German intellectual is knifed to death by a Cuban hustler. As far as *Death in Venice’s* influence on French literature is concerned, one might mention the novel *The Erl-King* (*Le roi des aulnes*, 1970) by Michel Tournier.

This essay will focus on the English adaptation of Thomas Mann’s artistic narration about an artist, which is even mentioned in Woody Allen’s film, *Annie Hall* (1976). Alongside Benjamin Britten’s opera, *Death in Venice* (1973), which he composed for his friend Peter Pears, several works can be named that obviously refer to Thomas Mann’s novella about an author’s fatal destiny; *Ganymede* (1959), a short story by Daphne du Maurier; the scandalous one-act play, *Suddenly Last Summer*
(1958), by Tennessee Williams (filmed in 1959 starring Elizabeth Taylor); and the novel The Comfort of Strangers (1981), by British author Ian McEwan (filmed in 1990 by Paul Schrader). Moreover, Michael Cunningham’s novel, Before Nightfall (2010), is also based on Mann’s masterpiece.¹ From Cunningham’s viewpoint, Thomas Mann’s main character, Aschenbach, “is descended from King Lear, the most glorious of all misguided spirits.”²

Because of its explicit references to Venice and to Greek mythology (already present in its title), this analysis will be focused on du Maurier’s novella-like short story, published in the anthology The Breaking Point.

**Thomas Mann’s Death in Venice: Danse Macabre or Hermes Psychagogos?**

Even though Thomas Mann’s novella is symbolically overfraught, structurally it is quite simple. It proceeds in a linear fashion and ends with the death anticipated in its title, making the novella a classical tragedy in the strictest sense. This corresponds to Theodor Storm’s description of the novella as “the sister of drama,” wherein the plot is subdivided into five acts with a turning point (peripety) in the third chapter. In a letter dated March 12, 1913 to Philipp Witkop, a professor of German Philology at Freiburg University, Thomas Mann emphasizes the crystalline structure of his narration (GKFA 21, 515) with an implicit citation of Paul Heyse’s novella theory. The narrative structure of the novella is characterized by leitmotifs. Always the devoted Wagnerian, Thomas Mann adopted this method of composition from Wagner’s operas.

As in most of his other works, Thomas Mann presents the narrative technique in his Venetian novella as a humanistic and humanizing ‘work on the myth’ (‘Arbeit am Mythos’), a concept derived from the German philosopher, Hans Blumenberg.³ Two profoundly different types of messengers of Death, who serve as leitmotifs, transform ‘Death in Venice’ into a narrative *danse macabre*. There is primarily an Apollonian manifestation of human mortality, which is mainly based on transfigured classical mythical figures, such as the handsome god, Hermes psychagogos (Mercury). According to the myths of Antiquity, Hermes guides human souls to Hades, to the realm of the shades. In contrast, the

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reader of Thomas Mann’s narration is also confronted with the medieval iconographical tradition of the ugly *danse macabre*. This art-historical concept was familiar to the author from his childhood in his hometown, Lübeck, which Mann characterized as his “Totentanz-Heimat” (GKFA, 15.1, 435) because of a famous work of art in St. Mary’s Church, painted by Bernt Notke in 1463. A nearly identical *danse macabre*, by the same artist, still exists in St. Nicolas Church (Niguliste kirik) in Tallinn. The iconology of both works of art is rooted in the historical reality of the plague, which appears in *Death in Venice* as the “stalking death” of Cholera (DV 54).

The antithesis of two completely contradictory symbolical and allegorical images of Death, the lovely Apollonian genius and the aesthetically shocking skeleton, both inherited from Occidental culture, have been discussed among German intellectuals since the 18th century. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing underlined the antipodes in the images of Death between classical Hellenic-Roman paganism and the age of Christianity in his essay *Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet* (1769).4 In the context of Weimar Classicism, the Protestant theologian and collector of Latvian folk songs, Johann Gottfried Herder, also reflected on the iconological topic in 1786, and Friedrich Schiller transformed the phenomenon into his antithetical hymn-like poem, *Die Götter Griechenlands* (*The Gods of Greece*, 1788). This poem juxtaposes a warm idyllic ancient Arcadia with a cold and disagreeable present by using two different, yet appropriate, symbols of the end of a life.5

The protagonist of Thomas Mann’s novella, who will eventually die, is Gustav von Aschenbach, a famous German author in his fifties who was widowed as a young man. The nationally renowned writer has recently been honoured with a peerage in recognition of his artistic achievement. Unlike during the time of Weimar Classicism, when Goethe and Schiller had both been honoured in this way, this phenomenon was quite rare in 1912 when *Death in Venice* was published. By including this, Thomas Mann might have been referring to a famous contemporary author and Munich resident, Paul Heyse, who was honoured with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1910 and raised to the peerage in the same year by the King

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of Bavaria. In the second chapter of *Death in Venice* we are also informed of Aschenbach’s neo-classicist aesthetics. In Germany, at the end of the 19th century, this literary movement was connected with names such as Samuel Lublinski (GKFA 14.2, 218-224) and Paul Ernst.

The story opens with Aschenbach, Thomas Mann’s fictional ‘prince of poets,’ strolling outside a cemetery. It is springtime in Munich, the city where Jugendstil dramatists like Frank Wedekind wrote *Spring Awakening* (*Frühlingserwachen*), a well-known erotic drama about youth and its exuberance of feelings, and where the weekly journal *Jugend* was established in 1896, which gave its name to the art-historical concept of Jugendstil. Imbued with the warmth of spring, the protagonist sees a slim red-haired foreigner in a rather sporty travelling suit who stares back at him with a piercing and penetrating gaze. From the viewpoint of queer theory, this situation might be compared to cruising. Moreover, the act of one man fixing his gaze on another man is a gesture of male aggressive dominance, a sign of male homo-social desire which even occasioned duels in *fin de siècle* Germany, e.g. among students (‘Mein Herr, Sie haben mich fixiert!’—‘Sir, you have stared at me!’). Although the figure of the foreigner also contains some aspects of Mercury with regard to his skull-like physiognomy, he is the first mainly non-Apollonian messenger of Death in Thomas Mann’s *danse macabre*:

Moderately tall, thin, beardless and conspicuously snub-nosed, the man was redheaded and had the milky, freckled skin peculiar to that physical type. He was clearly not of Bavarian ancestry: at least, the broad, straight-rimmed bast hat that covered his head lent his appearance the stamp of foreignness, of having come from far away. (DV 2)

Whereas in Germany red hair is popularly believed to be a reference to, or manifestation of, the devil, in many medieval paintings of the *danse macabre* tradition, the figures representing Death preserve their milky skin. Aschenbach walks away, embarrassed but curiously stimulated by the symbolic appearance of the man from the beyond. There is an “absolute primacy of vision” within Thomas Mann’s novella.

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6 Tobin, R.D. Queering Thomas Mann’s Tod in Venedig, p. 78.
Inspired by a kind of impressionistic ‘Frühlingsrausch’ (‘spring-time rapture’), comparable to the feelings in an identically named novelette by Rūdolfs Blaumanis (1892), Thomas Mann’s protagonist imagines an oriental swamp-style wilderness. This Dionysian heterotopy is mystical and full of dangerous and wild animals, like tigers. They might serve as symbols for animalistic erotic desires described by Thomas Mann in a letter to his friend Otto Grautoff (dated 17 January 1896) as “dogs in the basement” (GKFA, 21, 72). Animals are highly symbolic in German literature, e.g. the tiger in Goethe’s Novelle (1828). In Goethe’s drama Faust, a black poodle is magically transfigured into the evil Mephistopheles. In his essay Faust reist an den Lido, Helmut Koopmann points out a profound influence of Goethe’s paradigmatic tragedy on Thomas Mann in general and his Venetian novella in particular.

Soon after this irritating vision of a savage heterotopic world, Aschenbach resolves to take a trip down to the South. The joy of journeying is an emotional desire which he shares with Goethe’s hero. Journeys are an important symbolic act of transgression, even of erotic taboos, and Mercury, the god wearing a bast hat, is Antiquity’s god of travellers. After a false start in travelling to the Austrian “coast of Istria” (DV 11) with its uncomfortable atmosphere, Aschenbach decides to go to Italy and takes a room in the Grand Hôtel des Bains on the Venetian Lido. En route to the island, he sees an elderly man on his steamship. He is in the company of a group of happy-go-lucky patriotic Italian lads. The “old fop” (DV 14) has worked hard to create an illusion of his own youth with a wig, false teeth, makeup, a red cravat and a dandyish suit. Aschenbach turns away in disgust. At the end of the novella he will himself have transformed into a false youngster with a red cravat too, another motif that Thomas Mann adapted from Goethe’s Faust.12

The visions during his transition into the Venetian world seem to be significant to the acclaimed poet:

He felt as if things were not going normally, as if a dreamlike alienation, a deformation of the world into oddness, was beginning to gain ground, and that perhaps he could interrupt this by shutting off his vision for a while. (DV 13)

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12 Ibid., pp. 112–114.
Since the time of old Italian novellas, Shakespeare’s *Othello*, and up to Daphne du Maurier’s horror story, *Don’t Look Now* (1971), the lagoon city of Venice, built on a swamp, has been described as a literary heterotopy of dark intrigue, conspiracy and libertinage. Once he has arrived in Venice, Aschenbach has a disturbing encounter with yet another skull-faced messenger of Death in this *danse macabre*—an unlicensed gondolier. The gondolier has a “short, turned-up nose” (DV 17) and, when Aschenbach orders him to return to the city, answers gruffly: “I’m giving you a good ride” (DV 18). This figure might be associated to Acheron, the pagan ferryman, who navigates souls to the underworld. With reference to Goethe’s *Venetian Epigrams* (HA 1, 176), the gondola is even compared to a coffin (DV 16).

At the Lido, Aschenbach checks into his elegant hotel. While waiting in the lounge before dinner, he sees an aristocratic Polish family sitting nearby. Among them is a long-haired youngster in a sailor suit. The enchanted poet realizes that the sapling is supremely handsome, like the Greek sculpture “Boy with Thorn” (DV 20). His elder sisters, in contrast, are dressed like nuns:

> But on this collar, which did not even match the character of the outfit particularly elegantly, rested the blossom of his head in incomparable loveliness — the head of Eros, with the yellowish luster of Parian marble, with sharply defined, grave eyebrows, with temples and ears darkly and softly covered by the curly hair that intersected them at right angles. ‘Good, good!’ thought Aschenbach with that professionally cool approval in which artists sometimes cloak their rapture and ecstasy when face to face with a masterpiece. (DV 20)

In Aschenbach’s mind, dominated by his “homo-visual desire,” the ordinary Polish youngster is transformed and transfigured into a stony Apollonian ideal in the tradition of German Classicism, with its extreme

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14 Koné, Christoph. Aschenbach’s Homovisual Desire, p. 97.

ambitions of Hellenizing the whole modern world. The “writer’s beautifying gaze is a fetishistic one.”¹⁶ The fantasized Eros is also a messenger of immense beauty and love. Later on in the novella, his “marble” will come alive similarly to the Venus statue in Joseph von Eichendorff’s romantic novella, Das Marmorbild (1818). He will be transformed into queerness like his admirer, the disciplined poet. Regarding the boy and his family at the beach Aschenbach overhears the lad’s name, Tadzio. The “u-sound” of this Polish abbreviation of Thadeusz (DV 26) has a Bacchantic impact. Moreover, the youngster’s “sight inspired mythic ideas, it was like a poetic message telling of primordial times, the origin of form and the birth of the gods. With eyes closed, Aschenbach listened to this chant intoning within him, and again he felt that this place was good and he would stay” (DV 27). The gorgeous figure on the shore inspires atavistic narrations from the Golden Age of Hellenic antiquity, and even Platonic ideas of eternal beauty: “And his heart was filled and lured by a paternal kindness, by the emotional attraction that a man who through self-sacrifice creates the beautiful in his mind feels toward one who possesses beauty itself” (DV 27).

These aesthetic reflections are, however, interrupted by the protagonist’s declining health. The muggy southern weather of the lagoon city begins to affect his health, and he decides to leave Venice early. On the morning of his planned departure Aschenbach watches the godlike youngster again, and a strong feeling of regret comes over him. “‘Adieu, Tadzio’ thought Aschenbach. ‘I didn’t have long to look at you.’ And—contrary to his custom—actually shaping his thoughts into uttered words and muttering them to himself, he added: ‘God bless you!’” (DV 30)

When the poet reaches the railway station, he discovers that his suitcase has been misdirected to Como. He pretends to be upset, but is in truth overjoyed. Aschenbach decides to remain in Venice. He returns to the hotel and thinks no more of leaving the Queen of the Seas. This is the turning point, placed in the middle of the novella’s plot within the third chapter.¹⁷ Its (neo-)classical structure carries the rather subversive content. Additionally, the turning point also represents Aschenbach’s personal reversal of fortune.

At the beginning of the fourth chapter the narration is a triumph of Apollonian imagery, a slightly ironically narrated renaissance of the ancient gods of Greece in one of the few Italian cities without antique roots (Venice was founded in the 7th century):

Day after day now the god with the glowing cheeks, nude, steered his fiery team of four through the regions of the sky, his yellow tresses floating behind him in the east wind that was also vigorously blowing. A whitish silky sheen covered the expanse of the indolently rolling pontos. (DV 33)

Apollo, the god who leads the horse-drawn carriage, is the Olympic and heavenly allegory of Aschenbach’s neo-classicist Apollonian aesthetic principles. The omniscient narrator seems to ironically adopt the distinguished and pompous narrative style of his protagonist, Gustav von Aschenbach, with his mythical symbolism. The poet on the beach feels “as if he had been carried off to an Elysian land, to the ends of the earth, where the easiest possible life is the lot of mankind” (DV 34). The poet’s ‘work on the myth’ is made possible by this atmosphere granting him opportunity “to devote adoration and study to the lovely apparition” (DV 34), which inspires narration as a result of Freudian sublimation: “To be sure, Eros is said to love idleness, and to have been made for nothing else. Yet, at this point in his crisis, the afflicted man’s excitement was directed toward creativity” (DV 37). And so, Aschenbach writes, “that page and a half of choice prose whose purity, nobility and pulsating emotional tension were before long to excite the admiration of many” (DV 38). Poetry survives the poet, but the other “gentle fables” (DV 40), imagined by the poet on the beach, are connected to a Hellenic imagery of death which has nothing to do with the Northern European Dances of the Dead in the Gothic churches of Lübeck and Tallinn:

… it was Hyacinth whom he thought he saw, Hyacinth, who was fated to die because two gods loved him. Yes, he felt Zephyr’s painful jealousy of his rival, who forgot his oracle, his bow and his cithara so that he could constantly sport with the beautiful boy; he saw the discus, directed by cruel jealousy, striking the lovely head; turning pale himself, he caught the limp body, and the flower that blossomed from the sweet blood bore the inscription of his unending lament... (DV 41)

In this metamorphosis, also described by Ovid (X185f.), the handsome youngster is transformed\(^\text{18}\) and therefore transfigured into the everlasting fragrant floral beauty that reappears, growing out of the ground every year in springtime. In this Arcadian context, death does not mean decomposition into a macabre skeleton; it means glorification and apotheosis.

One evening, the youngster directs a charming smile at the homo-visual author. This evokes another fatal, as well as floral, myth in

Aschenbach’s mind. He imagines Narcissus smiling at his own reflection. He regards “that profound, enchanted, long smile with which he holds out his arms to the mirror image of his own beauty—[...] deluded and deluding” (DV 42). Deeply affected, Aschenbach rushes outside and in the loneliness he whispers aloud, “I love you!” His love for the young man appears as a selfish desire for his own lost youth, using the Pole as a reflection of himself. The situation appears as a mutual mirror stage in the psychoanalytical theory of Lacan. There is not only a visual and textual association to Greek Arcadian mythology: the poet additionally inhales “the night-time fragrance of the plants” (DV 42). This is a synesthetic correlation to the odour of the beautiful flower into which Narcissus is transformed and transfigured after his death.

All the classical myths associated with Tadzio, e.g. “Hyakintos, Narkissos, Antinoos,” have one thing in common: the male mythical figures die young and preserve their handsome appearance. They all stand for the time-worn wisdom that the good die young.

Their beauty stands in sharp contrast to Aschenbach’s decline. He is surrounded by hidden signs of cholera in the lagoon city, which is more and more abandoned by its tourists. Warned by their newspapers the Germans and Austrians leave the city first. Aschenbach decides to uncover the reason for the health notices posted in the city. He finds a British travel agent who reluctantly admits that there is a serious epidemic in Venice. Aschenbach considers warning the Polish family about the danger; but he decides not to do so. He fears that if he does, the youngster will leave the hotel and that he will never see him again.

One night, a nightmare-ish dream of a Dionysian orgy unveils the pure erotic essence of Aschenbach’s feelings for Tadzio:

The dream began with anxiety, anxiety and pleasure and a terrible curiosity about what would ensue. Night reigned, and his senses listened; for, from far away, a din was approaching, a hubbub, a blend of noises: a rattling, a blaring and a muffled thundering, along with shrill shouts of jubilation and an articulated howl on a prolonged u-sound — all of this interspersed with, and capped by, the eerily sweet tones of a deeply cooing, brutally insistent flute, which bewitched the body in a shamelessly importunate manner. Yet he was aware of a phrase, obscure, but characterizing all that followed: ‘The foreign god!’ (DV 55)

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19 Boschung, Dietrich. Der Tod und der Jüngling, p. 133.
20 Ibid., p. 143.
The imagery of this narrative passage might be inspired by contemporary Symbolist painters such as Arnold Böcklin or Lovis Corinth. The Dionysian principle, the imagination of the subversive oriental “foreign god” (DV 55), is established as an antithetical, anthropologic and aesthetic concept in strict contrast to the Apollonian ideal in Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872). Alongside Schopenhauer, Nietzsche was Thomas Mann’s favourite philosophical guiding star. Even in his subjective and passionate intimacy, Aschenbach’s personal imagination remains involved in traditional stereotypes of Occidental high-brow culture, delivered e.g. by Euripides’ classical tragedy *The Bacchantes* (405 BC). Nevertheless, the ‘work on the myth’ is hereby transformed into a wild dream.

In reality, Aschenbach’s passionate feelings remain unanswered; he never speaks to Tadzio. While there is some indication that Tadzio is aware of his adoration, they both exchange no more than the occasional glance. In order to look younger and more attractive, Aschenbach visits the hotel’s barber shop very often. The barber persuades him to have his hair darkened and his face painted to look more youthful. He becomes an alter ego of the old dandy on the ship who had so repelled him on his transition to the heterotopy of the lagoon city. Freshly painted and rouged, the noted poet has become an odd and queer freak in gender trouble, as far his outer appearance is concerned. The creator of beauty fails tragically in his attempt to become young and beautiful himself. The erratic man shadows Tadzio and his family through the labyrinth of the swamp city in the insane sticky heat of the South.

A few days later, Aschenbach goes to the hotel lobby and discovers that the Polish family plans to leave Venice in the afternoon. He goes down to the beach to his usual chair. Tadzio is there accompanied by another boy. A fight breaks out between the two lads, and Tadzio is rapidly defeated. He angrily leaves his comrade, who already regrets his brutality, and walks alone and proudly, seemingly over the water into Aschenbach’s field of vision. The dying poet on his deck chair has a last vision of the transfigured Polish youngster as a slender Olympic Hermes, not as a chubby Bacchus or a skeleton from a medieval *danse macabre*. That graceful messenger leads the poet’s soul to a realm beyond. Confronted with this mythological imagery, the poet collapses sideways in his chair. He continued his earnest, passionate, and permanent ‘work on

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the myth’ until his death. His last poetic afflatus corresponds to Hellenistic iconology.

The noted writer’s body is discovered a few minutes later. The last sentence of the novella ends on its central theme: “And, before that day was over, a respectfully shocked world received the news of his death” (DV 62).

‘Ganymede’ by Daphne du Maurier: Killing “the Boy in the Box”?

The title of Daphne du Maurier’s (1907–1989) novella, Ganymede (1959), signalizes that an intense ‘work on the myth’ is included in this short story by the British author. Du Maurier was ennobled for her work just like Thomas Mann’s Aschenbach, and her works have inspired the famous Hitchcock films like Rebecca (1940) or The Birds (1963). It was Zeus transformed into an eagle who abducted the handsome young Trojan shepherd, Ganymede, up to heaven for his own pleasure. Ganymede later waited on the Olympian gods’ table. The Ganymede myth is already mentioned in Thomas Mann’s Death in Venice whereby the abduction of the young man is compared with the sublimating process of creative writing:

Moreover, he desired to do this work in Tadzio’s presence, to take the boy’s form as a model for his writing, to adapt his style to the lines of that body, which seemed godlike to him, and to transfer his physical beauty to the intellectual sphere, just as the eagle once bore the Trojan shepherd off into the ether. (DV 37f)

The author as a creator is here likened to the highest Olympic god. Moreover, it should be emphasized that the shepherd’s elevation to a sphere of eternal divinity is an allegorical euphemism of his early death. This kind of glorification is the exact opposite of the decomposition of a corpse into a skeleton. Hence, the young Trojan’s destiny is comparable to other mythical versions of Hellenistic death and transfiguration like the enchanting metamorphoses of Hyacinth and Narcissus.

Daphne du Maurier’s short story about the Ganymede myth, however, does not begin in Arcadia. Its narration starts in a district of London, near Paddington Station, that is called ‘Little Venice.’ This place is described

by the first-person narrator of the novella, which is in some aspects a parody of Thomas Mann’s work in its narrative frame. Since the Renaissance, frame narrative refers to the classical “frame tradition” with regards to the Italian novella:

Many novella collections have a frame […] Frames […] provide a structure which houses many stories and thereby justify the costs of reproduction. If the stories were found offensive, blasphemous, too long, or obscene, the frame allowed the author to dodge responsibility by claiming he was only a scribe. Boccaccio notes that ‘some here might well have been omitted… but I could do nothing but write down the tales as they were told.’

The story about a Venetian waiter in the 1950s, called Ganymede by the narrator, is indeed quite offensive as far as its cruelty is concerned. Regarding the contents of Daphne du Maurier’s frame narrative, the Northern “Little Venice” of London, where the first-person narrator rents an apartment, mirrors the Southern Venice in Italy. London stands for “reality,” the heterotopic Venice stands for the “imagination.”

In reality the first-person narrator, a middle-class employee, loses his job, probably because of his homosexuality, and decides to take a vacation in Venice. The lagoon city is presented right from the beginning of the embedded narrative as a heterotopy without the rules that are valid elsewhere. The narrator muses about “Venetian time, that was outside the rest of Europe and even the world, and existed, magically, for ‘himself’ alone.” (G 91) Moreover, the aspect of transgression is underlined by the fact that the expression “Venetian” was used in Daphne du Maurier’s time, and also by herself, instead of the word “Lesbian.”

The narrator feels that he has a Venice within him. Having arrived in his dream town, the narrator decides to hear some music by Puccini from a live band playing in the Piazza San Marco, where a young waiter immediately attracts his attention in “a moment out of time” (G 96). He feels an instant affection for the young man, and is overjoyed when the waiter appears to single him out for specific attention. The narrator is an ordinary British tourist wearing a Burberry coat, but also a “classical

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scholar,” as he emphasizes to his readers, and therefore develops a very personal “work on the myth” inspired by the young man:

I told you I was a classical scholar. Therefore you will understand—you should understand—that what happened in that second was transformation. The electricity that had charged me all evening focused on a single point in my brain to the exclusion of all else; the rest of me was jelly. I could sense the man at my table raising his hand and summoning the lad in the white coat carrying a tray, but I myself was above him, did not exist in his time; and this self who was nonexistent knew […] that he was indeed Zeus, the giver of life and death, the immortal one, the lover; and that the boy who came towards him was his own beloved, his cupbearer, his slave, his Ganymede. I was poised, not in the body, not in the world, and I summoned him. He knew me and he came. (G 94)

When an ordinary British tourist fantasizes about an ordinary Venetian waiter who in reality prefers Elvis Presley to Shakespeare and Mozart, (G 115–118) and turns him into a mythical figure like Ganymede, and moreover when this elderly man imagines himself as Zeus, the effect of the narration is definitely comic. It is much more amusing than the imagination of a highly renowned national poet like Aschenbach who is inspired by a young Polish nobleman. Therefore, Daphne du Maurier’s novella might be understood to be a parody of Death in Venice. The British author’s “piracy of Thomas Mann”27 is no coincidence. The element of parody is underlined by the fact that “Ganymede” has an incredibly pushy Italian family. The young man’s uncle is a kind of matchmaker, or possibly a panderer, who helps the narrator leave his hotel and be set up in a beautiful apartment where Ganymede can wait on him. Thomas Mann already described “the money grabbing business mentality of the fallen Queen” (DV 29) in his novella, referring to Venice. But the plot of the short story is given a sudden dramatic peripety taking it from the satirical sphere to a shocking bloodbath in the Adriatic Sea. During a Sunday excursion with a speedboat to the Lido with the narrator, who is paying, and the young waiter’s whole greedy family, “Ganymede” feels a desire to go water-skiing. Riding on the water, the young man provides an Apollonian image of beauty to the watching narrator:

I seated myself in the stem of the boat and watched him. He might have been a charioteer, and the two skis his racing steeds. His hands were stretched before him, holding the guide rope as a charioteer would gather

his reins, and as we circled once, twice, and he swung out in an arc on his corresponding course, he raised his hand to me in salutation, a smile of triumph on his face. (G 122)

The narrator, the classical scholar, who imagines himself as an Olympian god, is unable to hold the boy on the water by a rope, as Zeus held Ganymede in the air. The result is a terrible accident. The young man is torn to pieces by the boat’s propeller:

‘Watch the rope,’ yelled the uncle. ‘Pull it clear.’ But he did not know that the boy was beside us, was beneath us, and that already he had slipped from my hands which struggled to hold him, to bear him aloft, that already . . . God, already . . . the water was beginning to colour crimson with his blood. (G 123)

Without mourning, the narrator pays compensations to the family and even pays for the boy’s funeral promptly leaving Venice and returning to London. From a biographical viewpoint this has nothing to do with queer theory.28 The rather unlikely death of Ganymede might be interpreted as a killing or self-punishing destruction of the “boy in the box.” This was the metaphor which Daphne du Maurier used in order to paraphrase her own personal same-sex desire.29 As far as the “work on the myth” is concerned, one is hereby confronted with a mythic destruction of Ganymede comparable with the iconoclasms perpetrated by fanatic Christians, in the last centuries of the Roman Empire,30 upon beautiful Hellenistic pagan statues and temples.

**Death Penalty or Death and Transfiguration:**  
The Principles of Severe Punishment and Classical Idealization of Same-Sex Attraction

The bloody and violent ending of du Maurier’s Ganymede is not an isolated case. Many English-language stories have a common narrative or plot structure: a stranger comes to the shore, he is caught up in forbidden erotic desire, and the whole situation leads to a cruel and fatal ending. In

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the drama *Suddenly Last Summer*, Tennessee Williams’s protagonist, too, is torn to pieces and cannibalized by boys at a southern shore,31 as his cousin Catherine tells his family. The main character of Williams’ drama is even named after St. Sebastian—a saint with whom Thomas Mann’s Aschenbach is also compared (DV 8). To add another example, in Ian McEwan’s novel, *The Comfort of Strangers*, a young British tourist is killed in Venice in a rather sadistic and homoerotic ritual murder. He bleeds to death while his girlfriend watches helplessly.32

All three of these English-language versions of a death in Venice obviously contain an element of severe punishment for crossing the line of sexual taboos. This logic of punishment has been part of the collective memory of European culture since the Sodomite burnings in medieval times, for example by the ‘collegium contra sodomitas’ in Venice,33 up to the Soviet prisons and the concentration camps of Hitler and Franco.34 As far as popular fiction is concerned, the narrations about deaths in Venice, or elsewhere, might be comparable with the tradition of “teenage slasher films,” like the *Scream* series, where handsome, hedonistic and joyful young people are killed and thereby punished by serial killers.

In contrast, Thomas Mann’s staging of a death in Venice is not only peaceful, but also (slightly ironically) described with an element of classical idealization. The imagery of the young Pole is used to transfigure him into Olympic and Platonic spheres:

Separated from the mainland by wide waters, separated from his companions by a caprice of his pride, he walked with streaming hair, completely isolated and devoid of human ties, out there in the sea, in the wind, with limitless haze behind him. A few times he stopped to look into the distance. And suddenly, as if recalling something, as if through some impulse, he placed one hand on his hip, swivelled the upper part of his body in a beautiful contrapposto to the stance of his feet, and looked over his shoulder to the shore. […] But it seemed to him as if the pale, charming psychagogue out there were smiling to him, beckoning to him; as if he were raising his hand from his hip and pointing outward, floating before him into a realm of promise and immensity. And, as he had done so often, he set out to follow him. (DV 62)

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Alongside naturalistic aspects, Thomas Mann underlined the hymnal character of his novella (GKFA 22, 348) in a letter to Carl Maria Weber (4 July 1920). It might therefore be ranged in the tradition of Goethe’s classicism, e.g. his enthusiastic hymnal poem *Ganymed* (HA 1, 46f). With his vision of Hermes psychagogos in particular, and Greek mythology in general, the narration rediscovers the deeper layers of Occidental culture. Hermes was Thomas Mann’s favourite Greek god, whom he himself played in his childhood. Hermes is a god with a multifarious image: he is the god of social bonds and furthermore the god of illusion and travesty. With his hermaphroditic aspects he may also be called the god of gender trouble. Moreover, with regard to the psychoanalytical mythology of Karl Kerényi, Hermes is sometimes able to unify the Apollonian and Dionysian principles (GKFA 12, 2, 326f).

Gustav von Aschenbach, as a degraded representative of the elder generation and its traditional ideas of art, dies naturally and peacefully with an Apollonian vision of Hermes. He does so without punishment and violence, while youth triumphs before his closing eyes and looks out into immensity. The boy is not killed in Thomas Mann’s novella, but survives in glory—the “boy outside the box.” Nobody can regain youth—Aschenbach tried and failed in an embarrassing manner. Hence, youth is separated from the elders, and youth belongs to the young, as Tadzio belongs to his comrades, whether they kiss (DV 26) or whether they fight. (DV 61) This cult of youth is a concept of artistic regeneration that Thomas Mann outlined in the school newspaper, *Frühlingssturm (Spring Storm)*, in 1893, when he was only a few years older than his creation, the young Polish protagonist (GKFA 14,1, 17f). Still, at the end of the novella’s narration, the surviving Tadzio remains “a precious artefact of nature” (DV 25). According to the aesthetic viewpoint of Jugendstil, described by Philippe Thiebaut in an anthology about the German Youth Cult around 1900,35 the idealized and transfigured youngster in his human appearance on the shores of the endless sea might be classified among many other beautiful creatures in Ernst Haeckel’s *Art forms of Nature* (1904). The inspiration of the sentence “every line and pose of that body which was so elegant” (DV 35) furthermore refers to the stylish “art of the line” (‘Linienkunst’) in the sense of Franz Servaes.36

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gesture at the shore is also quite similar to a very popular leading icon of German fin de siècle Youth Movement and “Wandervogel”: the impressing image of the Prayer to the Sun (Lichtgebet) by Fidus, alias Hugo Höppener. 37 Here one might also draw a line from German Jugendstil to Latvian Jugendstils. In his paintings, Janis Rozentāls also evokes a triumping youth in the form of Potrimps, the Baltic equivalent to Apollo. 38

Many different works of art attempt to revitalize the sources of European civilization: at the end of Thomas Mann’s novella, the young Apollonian body is transfigured into a Platonic realm of ideals, totally without bloodbath and obscenity (Plato: Symposium 210d–e): “The lover is turned to the great sea of beauty, and gazing upon this, he gives birth to many gloriously beautiful ideas and theories.”

Writing this novella meant both re-appraising the classical sources of our culture and regarding the contemporary and popular pictorial world of youth in Jugendstil. The “icon and mirror of intellectual beauty” (DV 36) is not broken like the idol of Ganymede. This icon is stable and preserved—even if, under Thomas Mann’s humanist and humanizing perspective of unmasking myths, the teeth of the “godlike image” (DV 36) of youth are in reality “not that fine” (DV 27)—like the teeth of many of us. Simultaneously, the text deconstructs the myths which it emphatically evokes.

References


CHAPTER SIX

GENDER MELANCHOLIA AND THE LIMITS OF IDENTIFICATION IN ANDRA NEIBURGA’S SHORT STORY “MAN-DOLL”

JĀNIS OZOLIŅŠ

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodisism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.

—Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality I (43)

Gender identification is a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition.

—Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (85–86)

Andra Neiburga (1957) belongs to the generation of writers who debuted in Latvian literature in the late 1980s and continued active literary work publishing her oeuvre in periodicals in the early 1990s. Following a break from literary activities that lasted till 2004, Neiburga published her second collection of stories Stum, stum (Push, Push), which gained well-earned recognition both from critics and readers. Among her contemporaries Neiburga stands out as having skill and an ability to create complicated, psychologically nuanced characters, whose traumatic experiences, complexes, and sexuality reveal not only the inner problems of the protagonists, but also their relationship with society. Homosexual characters were rarely portrayed in the works of Latvian authors of classical literature. Also in Soviet era literature such characters were often marginalized and disapproved of because of the ideology of those times. The gradual appearance of homosexuals in literature has been a slow and tentative process. Authors who did not keep their sexuality secret became involved in literary activities only in the late 1990s. As regards queer narratives, Neiburga is one of the few authors who, although not
homosexual herself, has managed to create characters without homoerotic biases or clichés.

This article is a close reading of the short story *Lellis (Man-doll)*, which is one of the stories from the collection *Push, Push*. The theoretical framework is derived from Judith Butler’s readings of Freud, where the concept of gender melancholia has been fruitfully reviewed and reformulated resulting in subsequent conclusions about the limits of gender identification.

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Already from the first sentences of the story *Man-doll* the reader sees the protagonist in a rather humiliating situation—he is crawling out of a cesspool into which he has accidentally fallen upon leaving the ballroom. The overall disgust caused by the smell of faeces intensifies the disgust the protagonist feels towards himself and his body. This feeling is also heightened by the lack of attention and jealousy of a young couple in love—a man and a woman—with whom, it can be deduced, the protagonist arrived at the party. However, the cause of jealousy is not the classic love triangle, but an identity crisis: the protagonist wants to belong to the world of men, yet the initially described inability to attain sexual satisfaction with a woman reveals the opposite—a desire for the male body.

In order to portray the complicated structure of the protagonist’s inner feelings, Neiburga has skilfully utilized the possibilities provided by metamnarrative. The individual fragments or the embedded narratives have been linked with the help of the allegoric image—the man-doll. Neiburga often uses an isolated event or a chain of events as a framework narrative, intertwined with the protagonist’s memories and self-analysis. This method is quite popular in the works of other Latvian prose writers, for example, Gundega Repše, Nora Ikstena and Inga Ābele, who, like Neiburga, debuted in the 1980s and 1990s; however, unlike the texts of her contemporaries, Neiburga’s stories entail more concrete details about time and space, avoiding the overindulgences of conditionality and self-reflection so characteristic of the prose of the 1990s.

The structure of the narrative is made even more complicated by using several narrators and focalizers within the framework of one story. More eloquent paragraphs often alternate with concise sentences, thus outlining certain details, whose significance becomes evident when the story is viewed as a unified artistic system.
The story *Man-doll* has an intradiegetic perspective, alternating the homodiegetic narrator, who reveals his subjective experience to the reader, with the heterodiegetic narrator, who characterizes the most essential events of the protagonist’s life from an onlooker’s position. The transition between the narrator as a character who is involved in the events, and the uninvolved narrator is also marked by a regular shift of grammatical person in the story.

The framework narrative lays out a set of chronological events: the protagonist falls into the cesspool, then crawls out of it and goes home, feeling humiliated in front of passers-by because of his appearance. He then takes a shower, lies down on a sofa, listens to music, and drinks coffee, making plans for the following day. Afterwards he sips brandy, smokes a cigarette, and makes a call (the reader is not informed to whom), but at the end of the story the protagonist returns to the point of departure—the ballroom, which he left before falling into the cesspool.

If the aforementioned framework narrative with a ringlike composition is created from the viewpoint of a heterodiegetic narrator, the protagonist’s inner feelings are revealed with the help of metanarratives. It is essential to note that Neiburga has diversified the viewpoints of the metadiegetic level, using both subjective and observational positions. In certain cases both of these positions are merged with the help of free indirect speech.

Examining the metanarratives included in the framework narrative, one of the most significant characters is the man-doll—a toy with an androgy nous body lacking genitals—with which the protagonist identifies himself:

> Without a doubt, Man-doll was a “he”, a boy, but he didn’t have a willy. 
> [..] He started to suspect that there was some third gender which he simply had yet to encounter.¹

The man-doll is a very special toy. Memories of the man-doll evoke memories of his mother, too. It is not without reason that the protagonist calls them both his best childhood friends. The man-doll’s physical features give some idea of its appearance; however, the protagonist has always wanted to know what is inside the man-doll, yet has never dared find out. The man-doll is the protagonist’s doppelgänger, friend and totem, as well as the boundary in his relationship to the external world. When his mother dies, the protagonist demonstrates his attachment by placing the man-doll in her coffin, thus burying it together with his mother’s body. At

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this moment the man-doll also fulfils the function of a sexually connoted object, as it is secretly placed in the coffin between the mother’s legs.

His mother’s death is a painful experience for the protagonist and a loss hard to deal with due to the close emotional ties:

Mom was always beside him, she was always understanding and caring, and very familiar; Mom was reliable, fair and emotional, she laughed and cried easily [...]. Mom was his world, and her girlfriends from the local newspaper also belonged to this world—they too were nice and familiar.²

The relationship with his mother is characterized as positive. She did not hide her mood swings or her body from her son. The world of women—his mother and four of her girlfriends (Lilija, Sarma, Elīza, and Taņa)—has formed the basis of the protagonist’s perception of men:

Joys were as rare as men generally in this world. Men appeared and disappeared, they were big and strange, they were fearsome and attractive at the same time, but the world revolved around them.³

In this world ruled by females there is no father. There are no hints in the story that the father has ever existed. However, Neiburga’s perspective is not biased and reveals something more than just textbook examples of Freudian psychoanalysis. It is not only the protagonist’s sexuality, but also his psyche that has not matured. In fact, his psyche is stuck in the childhood phase. Mother’s death brings forth melancholia, when the loved one is lost and the protagonist has to come to terms with this situation, yet he is unable to mourn.⁴ The organization of the funeral as well as the consolation provided by his mother’s girlfriends prevent the protagonist from mourning. Although for the first time in his life he has to assume responsibility, the stressful condition of melancholia makes him seek another object of love that could replace his mother. Still, it must be noted that the protagonist’s melancholia is not related merely to his mother’s death. The underlying theme of the story is the unrealized homosexuality

² Ibid., p. 149.
³ Ibid.
⁴ “If one listens patiently to a melancholic's many and various self-accusations, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that often the most violent of them are hardly at all applicable to the patient himself, but that with insignificant modifications they do fit someone else, someone whom the patient loves or has loved or should love.” (Freud, Sigismund. Mourning and Melancholia. The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. 14. London: Vintage, 2001, p. 248.)
of an approximately thirty-year-old man, which gradually unfolds as a complicated precursor to melancholia. This phenomenon has been examined by Freud in his works *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), as well as *The Ego And The Id* (1923). A more contemporary interpretation of Freud’s texts, as well as an overall analysis of gender identification, has been provided by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990):

Consider that the refusal of the homosexual cathexis, desire and aim together, a refusal both compelled by social taboo and appropriated through developmental stages, results in a melancholic structure which effectively encloses that aim and object within the corporeal space or “cript” established through an abiding denial. If the heterosexual denial of homosexuality results in melancholia and if melancholia operates through incorporation, then the disavowed homosexual love is preserved through the cultivation of an oppositionally defined gender identity. In other words, disavowed male homosexuality culminates in a heightened or consolidated masculinity, one which maintains the feminine as the unthinkable and unnameable.5

The protagonist applies his sexual desire scenarios to Anna—a woman he is projecting as an object of love. However, it becomes clear to the reader very soon that the protagonist “would like to be” masculine and “would like to desire” Anna, yet for the protagonist she is only a mediator to the mysterious and enigmatic world of men. He craves physical contact—touching and stroking, which evoke immediate sexual arousal. Yet, he takes the liberty to touch only Anna:

Remember that morning in Jūrmala. We swam up to the buoys and then lay on the sand naked, the three of us, it was me who brought you together, I enjoyed your bodies—they were so beautiful, even the swans at the edge of the water were no more beautiful and no whiter—they were cool from the seawater and smelled of iodine and salt; you laughed when I put my hand on your breast—stop it!—you said; but I did not dare to touch him, although I really wanted to; I love love, Anna, but you don't understand, you have never understood that love is too great to be kept just by two people. Only two.6

The world of men seems mysterious to the protagonist also due to bodily considerations. Although he is a man, the uncertain gender identity

6 Neiburga, Andra. *Stum, stum*, p. 150.
evokes a powerful sexual desire for a male body, which the protagonist would like to become familiar with, but social taboo forbids it.

Only from a short one sentence remark it may be understood that the protagonist has lost his virginity. The sexual act took place outdoors, yet from what is said it is unclear what the partner’s sex was. The reader can only presume, but not verify, these assumptions due to the restricted information. It is significant that memories of the experienced sexual act come to the protagonist’s mind when he remembers his mother’s funeral. The liberty taken to think about it signifies hope and unfulfilled longing. The protagonist wants to fulfill this longing through Anna. However, fulfillment is impossible and it cannot be compensated through the voyeur’s perspective either. Acceptance of masculinity is unsuccessful, since, as a man, he is unable to react to Anna’s touches and become sexually aroused. The protagonist, growing up in a world ruled by women, feels that his body is feminine. Physical contact evokes sexual desire, yet, unlike his contacts with Anna, he can charge these touches with sexual energy on his own. Homoerotic fantasies are formed by a complex system of images:

...he caressed his chest and his belly, his hips were hotter than the water; he remembered the pale accordionist in the corner of the room and then, for some reason, his mother and the silly old doll.7

The protagonist is scared to get to know himself. It is significant that before placing the man-doll in his mother’s coffin he struggles to rip up its stitches in order to inspect the anatomic construction of the man-doll—the androgynous object with which he has identified himself since childhood. Although the mother and the man-doll are buried, they are still present, attesting to unrecognized and withheld mourning, thus reviving their presence with the help of memories “somewhere in the ‘body.’”8 The protagonist translates it as love, although this affection rather serves as an explanation for his vague understanding of his gender:

Clearly, a homosexual for whom heterosexual desire is unthinkable may well maintain that heterosexuality through a melancholic structure of incorporation, an identification and embodiment of the love that is neither acknowledged nor grieved.9

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7 Ibid., p. 148
8 Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble, p. 95.
9 Ibid.
At the end of the story the protagonist returns to the ballroom. Despite the conflict, where he had insulted Anna and her boyfriend, he cannot leave them. He knows his sex, but is unable to accept his gender. The relationship with Anna and her friend is over, but he is unwilling to accept that. In Gender Trouble Butler characterizes it as an internalization strategy practised by a melancholic:

The melancholic refuses the loss of the object, and internalization becomes a strategy of magically resuscitating the lost object, not only because the loss is painful, but because the ambivalence felt toward the object requires that the object be retained until differences are settled.10

The protagonist finds himself in a complicated situation, which has been facilitated not only by family circumstances (growing up without a father, being continuously showered with motherly love and affection), but also by the heteronormativity regulating society.11 An unwillingness to accept the Other is still evident today in Latvian society. At the time when the story was published, the first serious attempts to liberate homosexual persons were carried out. Although homosexuality was decriminalized in Latvia in 1992, the first Pride standing up for LGBT rights took place only in 2005—a year after this story was published. To some extent, this story highlights not only the melancholic state of an individual “as the price of stable gender identities,”12 but also the situation where homosexuality is invisible in society. A part of Latvian society still turns a blind eye to LGBT people, not to mention the condemnation of openly exhibiting one’s sexual orientation! Therefore, Neiburga’s story is an essential contribution to Latvian short prose not only in terms of artistic merit, but also as a sign of changes, albeit slow, in Latvian society.

References


10 Ibid., p. 83-84
11 “The discourses which particularly oppress all of us, lesbians, women, and homosexual men, are those which take for granted that what founds society, any society, is heterosexuality.” Wittig, Monique. The Straight Mind And Other Essays. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, p. 24.
12 Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble, p. 95.


PART II

HISTORY OF CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPE
REVISITED
CHAPTER ONE

LITERARY QUEER MÉSALLIANCES
IN RIGA AROUND 1900

LIINA LUKAS

In my paper, I shall discuss the queer topic in Baltic German literature around 1900, focusing on two Baltic German authors: Guido Hermann Eckardt (1873–1951) and Élisàr von Kupffer (1872–1942). I shall explain the concepts of sexuality (bisexuality, homosexuality, androgyny) in Kupffer’s lyrics and short stories and in Eckardt’s novels against the background of European literature of the time, and explore the first worldwide anthology of homoerotic literature *Lieblingsminne und Freundselsfiebe in der Weltliteratur*, published by Élisàr von Kupffer in 1900 as a protest against the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde.

The question of sexuality was especially topical at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries because in that period much attention was paid to the previously hidden sensuous, urge-ridden side of human nature. My paper shows that Baltic German literature was actively engaged in this discussion.

Although homosexual mésalliance did not have a chance to gain full recognition in the Baltic German literature of the period, the acknowledgement of one’s homosexuality, let alone its literary depiction, embodied a rebellion against the normative code of bourgeois society and a courageous appeal for individual emancipation.

On November 2, 1900, Thomas Mann wrote to his good friend Otto Grautoff, “I would want to give to you to read a new novel, which left a deep impression on my heart and senses.”¹ The book he was referring to was Fritz Geron Pernauhm’s novel *Ercole Tomei* (1900), published at the Spohr publishing house in Leipzig.

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Fritz Geron Pernauhm, or Guido Hermann Eckardt (1873–1951) was a Baltic German writer, born in a well-known Baltic German family of letters. He was born in Pärnu in 1873, attended the Kuldīga (Goldingen) Gymnasium and entered the University of Munich, where he moved within the Munich bohemian scene, the so-called Schwabing circle (named after the city district, which was the favoured area of residence among the artists and writers of modern attitudes); he was on good terms with Thomas Mann, Frank Wedekind, Max Halbe, and other Munich bohemians. Having graduated from the university, he returned home to Livonia, to Riga, where he worked as a teacher of music and as a journalist (a critic of music and theatre at the newspaper Rigašcē Rundschau), and played an important role in the cultural and social life in Riga: no cultural events were held without his participation. He primarily moved within the circles of musicians, he was friends with Hans Schmidt, Monika Hunnius, and Wina Berlin, as well as with Latvian musicians. In 1915 he married the Baltic German poet Elfriede Skalberg (1884–1964), known in Latvian literary history as a translator of Latvian poetry.

Guido Eckardt was also a writer; his three novels, Ecole Tomei (1900), Der Junge Kurt (1904), and Die Infamen (1906) were published at Max Spohr’s in Leipzig, which was one of the more important publishing houses to issue contemporary gay literature.

In all these three novels, Eckardt depicts homosexual relationships with bold straightforwardness and open-mindedness, quite uncommon for that time.

Homoerotics in the literature of the 1900s

The subject of homosexuality was quite strongly discernible in the Germany of the turn of the century (e.g. comp. with Stefan George’s poetry, Thomas Mann’s and Heinrich Mann’s short stories, Hermann Hesse’s works, etc.), but talking about it was, nevertheless, a courageous act. The contemporary medical discourse had declared homosexual

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5 The most authoritative among the treatments of the time was Richard von Krafft-
relationships pathological and the legal discourse\(^6\) had declared them criminal. Eckardt’s first novel was published in 1900, the same year as Oscar Wilde died, and everybody in literary circles still remembered Wilde’s court trials a few years before and his two-year prison sentence.

At the same time, the gay movement was consolidating in Germany. The already mentioned publisher Max Spohr (1850–1905) was among the founders of the Scientific-Humanist Committee (Wissenschaftlich-humanitäre Komitee) in 1897. This was the first organization whose activities were aimed at the legislation about homosexuality. Among the members of the Committee was the German physician Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935), who published a treatise on sexology *Sappho und Sokrates oder Wie erklärt sich die Liebe der Männer und Frauen zu Personen des eigenen Geschlechts?* (*Sappho and Socrates, or how to explain the love of men and women for persons of their own gender.*), where he presented a theory about the interim stages of sexuality, explaining the biological existence of different sexual orientations. Based on this theory, the Committee called for the acceptance of deviations from the binary sexual identity as a human right. In 1896, the first magazine for homosexuals in the world, *Der Eigene. Ein Blatt für männliche Kultur* started appearing, published by Adolf Brand (1874–1945), an advocate of the homosexuals’ right to exist in society. Brand also published a book that is important in the present context—the first anthology of homoerotic poetry in the world, compiled by the Baltic German writer Élisar von Kupffer (pseudonym Elisarion, 1872–1942).

Kupffer’s anthology *Lieblingsminne und Freundesliebe in der Weltliteratur* appeared at Adolf Brand’s publishing house in 1900, the same year as Eckardt’s debut novel, but its second edition in 1903 was issued at Max Spohr’s publishing house, where Eckardt’s novels were also published.

Only a small number of copies have remained of the first edition of the book, and the copies of the second edition are also quite rare, but Verlag Rosa Winkel issued a reprint of the book in 1995.

\(^6\) Starting from 1871, homosexual relations between men constituted a criminal offence and were punished according to § 175 in the German Empire.


Ebing’s *Psychopathia sexualis* which was, in the period of 1886–1902, published in 12 editions.
This is a remarkable publication, and already Kupffer himself has repeatedly said that it had no preceding models. All later similar undertakings have found much inspiration in Kupffer’s anthology. The anthology contains homoerotic love poems from Plato, Virgil, Horace, Hafez, Saadi, Michelangelo, Friedrich the Great, Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin, Byron, Lermontov, Montaigne, Paul Verlaine, August Platen, and others, including a few poems by the editor himself and by his friend and life companion Eduard von Mayer. At the last moment Kupffer found an English translation of the collection of erotic short stories Nanshoku Okagami (English title *The Great Mirror of Male Love*), by the Japanese poet of the 17th century Ihara Saikaku (1642–1693), from which he translated some excerpts for his anthology.

While the word *Freundesliebe*, used in the title, was already circulating signifying same gender love, then *Lieblingsminne* was a neologism minted by Kupffer—he was searching for a suitable term for the genre which would not be misleading or “sullied.”

Kupffer writes a longer preface to his anthology, giving the idea of his aspirations and attitudes, some of which have a surprisingly modern effect. First, Kupffer believes that the task of all reasonable states would be “to bring under the sun of the public life” all phenomena of social life that do not promote violence against society and the state. Because each phenomenon of life which is suppressed (he meant the paragraph of law which criminalized same-sex relationships) may develop into something monstrous in the shadows. He justifies his risky “coming into the sun” with arguments that would tie the hands of his possible attackers. His aim is to fight for men’s rights in “this so unmasculine age,” when talking about “men’s rights, let alone privileges” seems to be an unmodern blasphemy or endangering feminine supremacy. (1) On the other hand, Kupffer strongly opposes Nietzschean or Schopenhauerian misogyny, which can come into being only when a man feels harassed by a woman. He considers himself to be an admirer of feminine virtues and charms, he acknowledges the importance of women and recognizes the fact that

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women have gained both personal and legal rights, but he believes that a time has come for men to become aware of themselves too, and “besides women’s emancipation, where women can be true to themselves, we also need men’s emancipation and the revival of masculine culture” (1–2). He reproves men for having harnessed all their efforts in serving women (including the satisfying of women’s sexual needs), but the masculine character should lie with something else. Kupffer argues that masculine values do not lie with muscle strength, but with personal freedom, self-determination, standing up for general rights, and living one’s life to the fullest on one’s own strength. For the development of culture, also the masculine character is needed. Kupffer understands culture as “the non-violent acting out of our urges and energies” (4). However, it should not be an unrestrained revelry of senses and submitting to sensuous pleasures, but a voluntary self-restriction and control over one’s urges.

While the science of psychiatry of the time saw homosexuality as a pathological manifestation of degeneration and a symptom of weakness or deterioration, Kupffer treats love between men as a relationship of educated, healthy and vigorous men, naming Sophocles, Alexander the Great, Friedrich the Great, and Shakespeare as examples. He believes that relationships between men, between young men, between a man and a young man are “a strong element of culture and the state” (7). The poetry that praises such relationships—Lieblingminne—is not a manifestation of decadence but rather it is a moral, powerful, and healthy phenomenon (6–7) which is dying out in the age of decadence. Kupffer calls for not criminalizing this phenomenon, but taking it as a source of power, because “if these texts deserve disdain, then the whole of our culture deserves disdain.” By reviving such poetry, Kupffer desires to further general well-being and individual free development. He treats his activities as “cultural work” (Kulturarbeit, 17), as an ethical cultural act (eine ethische Kulturtat, 18).

Kupffer’s anthology attracted attention in both the positive and negative sense, confirmed by its second printing, but also by the fact that it was prohibited and then released due to influential advocates. Since that time, Kupffer is often mentioned in the German gay movement media (besides the magazine Der Eigene, another important publication, Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen, edited by Magnus Hirschfeld and published by Max Spohr publishing house, was established in 1899).
Who was Élisàr von Kupffer?

Élisàr von Kupffer was born in Estonia, his father Adolf von Kupffer was a physician; Élisàr first went to school in Tallinn, and later attended the St.Anna German-language gymnasium in St. Petersburg. He had a close relationship with the director of this school, an Austrian Josef von Koening, and he sent him a copy of his anthology as a present. In St. Petersburg Kupffer became acquainted with Eduard von Mayer (1873–1960), who became his adherent and companion for life.11

Kupffer started his university studies in St. Petersburg reading, first, Oriental studies and later, law; in 1894 he went to study history and philosophy in Munich. It is possible that he met Guido Eckardt in Munich—at the turn of the century, this city had become a favourite location of exile for Baltic Germans even to the extent that it has been talked about as the Munich-Schwabing Baltic German community.12 The editor of the popular local satirical magazine Simplicissimus, Korfiz Holm, who had come from Riga, playwright Karl von Freymann, writer Herbert von Hoerner, actor Fritz Mantels, chanson singer and poet Peter von der Osten, Anna von Seidlitz, the probable prototype of the notorious Lulu in Frank Wedekind’s play Erdgeist, 1895, (original title Die Büchse der Pandora), and many others lived and worked in Munich. The most famous Baltic German Schwabingian was undoubtedly Eduard von Keyserling, whose successful first play Frühlingsopfer and also his following plays premiered in Munich.

Sometime later, Kupffer moved to Berlin together with Mayer and devoted himself to literary activities. Starting from 1897, he published plays, collections of poetry and short stories.

Kupffer’s first collection of poetry published in Dresden, Leben und Lieben (1895), contained unpretentious, optimistic and playful odes to love and life, written in simple strophes. Already here we can find a defiant demand not to give in to the hardships of life (“Verzweifle nicht!”), to create one’s own fate and, if necessary, to swim against the tide (“Ich bin der Mensch, der selbst sein Schicksal schafft”).13 In his next collection,
Auferstehung. Irdische Gedichte (1901), the Nietzschean demand “Become what you are!” becomes even more urgent and the main source of his life drive—homosexuality—is clearly revealed. The poet who had destroyed old gods (Prometheisch) and is striving for earthly happiness and earthly beauty does not feel that his love is sinful, he is not ashamed of it but heralds the coming of a new, perfect era which is governed by beauty, harmony, and love (“Ungeweihte Liebe,” “Kommende Zeiten”). The poet knows that “Mein Glück ist nicht von dieser Welt,”14 and in his next collection of poems An Edens Pforten—Aus Edens Reich. Sufische Gedichte (1907), he starts a battle for the new world and predicts a new vitality, a new religion. This collection contains sonnets that glorify beauty, free love, harmony, sensuality, body, and the “trium of health, youth and beauty”.15

Meine Tempel—schöne Leiber,
Frei gebräunt im Sonnenlicht,
Wo aus maskenlosen Zügen,
Ohne falsch geschmückt zu trügen,
Wahre Gotteskindschaft spricht.16

The cult of a beautiful body, youth, and health is, on the one hand, related to art nouveau and, on the other hand, to the German life reform movement in the early 20th century, whose objective was to change society by changing the life style (healthy eating habits, natural clothing, abstinence, body care, hygiene, physical culture and nudism, healthy living environment, sexuality, etc.), and to approve of sensuality, health, physical exercise, sport, etc.

The poem “Am Spiel- und Sportgelände” is carried by a similar spirit: “Floh denn die Seele all die schönen Glieder / Der schönen Leiber, die dort heiter spielen? / Sie muss, die Schönheit muss ihr Recht erzielen / Zu leben, wie die Götter sie erkoren...”17 The poem “Will ich ein Lied auf deine Schönheit dichten” contains bold eroticism:

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15 Ibid., p. 133.
16 My temple – beautiful bodies, / freely tanned in the sunlight, / in their maskless features, / unhidden with fake make-up, / speaks the true [essence] of a god's child. Ibid., p. 17.
17 Did the soul flee from these beautiful limbs / attached to those joyfully playing beautiful bodies? / It must, beauty must gain the right / to live in the way the gods have chosen it for. Ibid., p. 45.
Erst auf den üpp'gen Frühling deiner Glieder
Säng ich vergebens hunderttausend Lieder,
Vom weichen Nacken bis zur Lendenfülle
Ein wogend Meer gefangen in der Hülle!
Der Menschenkinder allerschönste Blume,
Gib mir ein Heim in deinem Heiligtume!18

The poet dreams of a time governed by “the joyful harmony of undivided character which would rule out the fight between the genders”:19 “Wo der Geschlechter Widerstreit / In einer Form gebunden, / Vom Fluch der Zeugung ganz befreit.” 20 The future man, who will carry on his shoulders the world of beauty and harmony, will be a hermaphrodite21, or rather, an “arafrodite,” the synthesis of the male and female essence, an intertwining of equally powerful opposite elements:22

In dir sind Mann und Weib, doch unzerlegbar.
Im weichen Ebenmasze deiner Glieder
Eint sich der Welt gespaltene Seele wieder.
Des Mannes Stürmen ward zu holdem Winde,
Des Weibes Sehnsucht singt befreiend Lieder—
An dem ich alle Reize wiederfinde,
Du Formverkünder froher Zukunftwelten! (Hermaphroditos)23

Kupffer also discusses the subject of homosexuality in his short stories. We can even say that Kupffer was the one who first introduced this theme into Baltic German literature with his collection of short stories Ehrlos in

18 Only for the luscious spring of your limbs / I would in vain sing thousands of songs, / from the soft nape of your neck to the luxuriance of your loins / the surging sea, captured in a shell! / The most beautiful flower of mankind, / lend me a home in your sanctuary! Ibid., p. 29.
19 Ibid., p. 133.
20 Where the antagonism between the genders / would be tied together into one and the same form, / totally free from the curse of procreation. Ibid., p. 26.
22 Ibid., p. 145.
23 Inside you are a man and a woman, but they are not separated. / In the soft proportionality of your limbs / the split soul of the world will become one again. / The man's rashness becomes a kind wind, / The woman's longing sings songs when getting free – / a mature youth who smiles like a child – / in him I can again find all the charms, / You, the herald of the form of the joyous new worlds! Ibid., p. 65.
1898. Among the stories of rather conventional content there is one titled Verlobt, presenting a Wertherian diary of a young man from Riga who committed suicide in a hotel in Odessa. The first entry in the diary is dated in Riga on April 14, 1890, when the young man Hans, who has recently been employed as a civil servant, is nursing a hope of getting engaged soon to a beautiful and lovable young woman. Through doubts and self-observation Hans finally realizes the impossibility of this step and becomes aware of the object of his passion—instead of Marie, a well-brought up “doll,” (in his judgement, such persons are the products of gendered upbringing of women) the object of his desires proves to be Marie’s brother Walter. “The ever-feminine [das Ewigweibliche] is dragging us down,” thinks Hans in an anti-Goethean way, watching this “delicate, refined and truly feminine being.”24 “Is the human soul really so superficial that it can be classified by short or long hair, or by simple habits? Where does the plant end and the animal kingdom begin? […] The spectrum of human feelings is endless.”25 Hans disapproves of rigid gendered patterns of identification and decides to give up the lies that are forced upon him by society. “It is against both human and godly rights that I am not [cannot be] like I am, but I am forced to be different. […] The thing that you want to force upon me is a catastroph for me.”26

Realization of a homosexual orientation was related to a protest against social organization and its main institution—marriage.

The subject of androgyny that Kupffer had already touched upon in his poetry was a central theme in his collection of short stories Novelle aus Estland (1903). In the title story, the first-person narrator goes on a visit to break the winter solitude of a manor in Estonia, and interweaves its only inhabitants—Baroness Antony, her daughter Herta, who had already grown into a young woman and her younger son Herbert—into a peculiar love quadrangle. Having been tempted by the budding feeling of love of the very young woman Herta, “this sweetest creature,” as well as by the mature sensuality of her beautiful mother, a strong and proud woman who had suffered and hardened under the tyranny of her husband, he finally decides to confess his love to the mother, (“I wanted to talk to her, to tell her: I can understand you, I love you, I respect your feelings, our relationship will be like one between persons, not between a man and a woman, a master and a puppet, a servant and a goddess.”)27 but in the end, he embraces Herbert, who had friskily run into the room, “I squeezed him

25 Ibid., p. 85.
26 Ibid., p. 89–90.
in my arms, embraced and kissed the beautiful boy as if he were the mother and the daughter in one and the same person.”

But let us examine also Guido Hermann Eckardt’s work which fascinated, and I dare to argue, even inspired Thomas Mann. The characters of Eckardt’s novel discover that they are “different” only slowly, in the course of time as a result of long inner struggles, and realize that “the lie they have to live with is corrupting them.” While such realization drove the character of the Kupffer’s story to suicide, the characters of Eckardt’s novel plunge into a risky, but so much more passionate and complicated love affair which, by default, cannot last for long: “Our love is already despised by the others, you know how they fight against us, flying a petticoat as a battle flag—ah, these blind and deaf people with their weak ‘health.’”

In Eckardt’s first novel Ercole Tomei, two childhood friends pick up a decade later and develop further their relationship, which was once interrupted by Ercole’s marriage; in the metropolises of Berlin and Munich they suffer from the now even stronger and more disastrous effects of their love that reaches its climax and the tragic end in Italy. In his novel Der junge Kurt, Eckardt tries to plant a similar constellation into the petty bourgeois and conservative city of Riga. I have a strong temptation to draw a parallel with Thomas Mann’s novella Death in Venice (written in 1911, published in 1913).

A middle-aged musician Hehrmeister, who has just returned from Berlin to his home in Riga meets at the seaside summer resort of the Rigans with his onetime friend Krusenstein’s gymnasium-age son Kurt: “It was not his tanned face, but the power which was visible everywhere in his figure, which defined all the outlines, it was beauty that attracted his eyes.”

Hehrmeister, who had “for 15 years lived without feeling anything like that;” first decided to resist, finding a substitute in the young man’s mother. But soon he realizes his self-deception and he is bored by the relationship where “everything had been ready for this. Each of his words had been already repeated over and over, each of his movements had been predetermined. […] But he who wants to be friends with a young man still has to find a style for this friendship.” Irresistibly charmed by the young man, Hehrmeister discovers a new vitality, “Now he almost felt that his

28 Ibid., p. 299.
31 Ibid., p. 40.
32 Ibid., p. 68.
Part II Chapter One

120

life had had no substance, his years had been empty and he had lived as if half-asleep in the world, among his many friends, acquaintances and women.” As a composer, he had hit a wall, but the artist in him was reborn and like Pygmalion, started working with new attractive material: “I shall make you the person that you could be. You will see what your life will look like under my care, when we are together in the wide world. Livonia is only a small pool; we can swim across in a few minutes. But we want to go to the sea together …”

But young Kurt does not go to the sea, he goes into the river. Not knowing how to deal with this relationship that could not follow an already trodden path in society, Kurt finds his only chance in plunging into the River Daugava. At the turn of the century, this relationship had no chance for literary success, but it marked a protest against the bourgeois normative code which oppressed and limited the living world, it was an appeal for individual emancipation.

Conclusion

While Guido Hermann Eckardt’s novels have been forgotten today, we can see that Elisarion’s name has been carved into stone in Minusio-Locarno in Switzerland, where he founded the temple Sanctuarium Artis Elisarion by his own design and philosophy. He lived there with Eduard von Mayer to the end of his life and developed his pedagogical “programme of whole art.” A cultural centre Centro culturale Elisarion is still working in the temple, where Kupffer’s paintings and his archive are located.

Elisarion’s relations with the Baltic German literary field were ambiguous. His poetry was not entirely unknown on the Baltic German literary field; it was published in Heimatstimmen and Lucie von Staël-Holstein’s anthology; it was positively reviewed in the St. Petersburger Zeitung, where Elisarion’s interesting and unique poetic personality and lyrical talent were duly admired. Eduard von Mayer introduced the

33 Ibid., p. 33.
34 Ibid., p. 87.
35 In his Baltic German literary history Gero von Wilpert only briefly mentions the three novels by Eckardt without giving their titles (Wilpert 2005: 252). The Latvian-language Vācu literatūra un Latvija 1890–1945 (Riga: Zinātne, 2005), which contains a comprehensive overview of the Baltic German literature of the period, does not give the titles of Eckardt’s novels.
36 http://www.minusio.ch/elisarion.asp
principles of Klarism in the Baltic media.\textsuperscript{37} Complicated political events in Kupffer’s homeland—the revolution of 1905—have a central role in his drama \textit{Feuer im Osten} (1908). At the same time, in his poems dedicated to his homeland, Kupffer says that he has no homeland and calls his homeland “a land that is lost for me.”\textsuperscript{38} In the sonnet written in 1933 and dedicated to his family\textsuperscript{39} \textit{An die Ahnen und Enkel unseres Geschlechtes}, which remained unpublished, the author turned to his family members, seemingly talking about himself:

\begin{quote}
Sei treu dir selbst und deiner innern Stimme! \\
Dies sei der Wahlspruch mutigen Geschlechtes. \\
Den Andern hilfreich, nie besiegt vom Grimme, \\
Lasst uns als Mehrer wahren Menschenrechtes \\
Dem eignen Glauben leben sowie sterben, \\
Des edlen Rufes hochgemute Erben.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

\textbf{References}


\textsuperscript{38} von Kupffer, Elisàr. An Edens Pforten, pp. 77–78.

\textsuperscript{39} The fact that Élisàr von Kupffer’s relations with his Baltic family were more than tense and that Elisarion is even now still an unwelcome theme for the family was told to the author of this paper by a relative of Kupffer’s, whom I accidentally met at one of the book antiquariats of Bern.

\textsuperscript{40} Remain true to yourself and your inner voice! / Let it be the motto of the brave lineage. / Helpful to the others, never submitting to anger, / being the spreaders of true human rights / let us live and die for our faith, / the cheerful inheritors of noble reputation. Elisar von Kupffer. An die Ahnen und Enkel unseres Geschlechtes, in F. K. Kupffer. \textit{Die baltische Familie Kupffer}. 1933 (manuscript), p. 37.


Sometimes sexuality studies and queer studies can be useful to cover wider contexts of international relationships and political turning points. As the theory of comparative imagology shows, images are not studied in terms of an isolated national culture, as products of national essentialism, but as resulting from the interweaving of transnational contexts.¹ So, according to this notion, we can draw parallels, for example, between such seemingly distant phenomena as accusations of male pederasty in Wilhelm II’s German military government and the Latvian attitude towards the German aristocracy in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Baltic Germans were still an elite minority which dominated political and social life in Russia’s Baltic provinces and was torn between conservative and liberal strategies of coexistence with the Russian government and other peoples in the Baltic region.² This period also saw a growing national awareness and demands for social changes by the peoples of the Baltic provinces, including Latvians, climaxing in mass revolts in 1905.³

In 1907 a huge scandal began in Germany when some high military officers and close friends of Wilhelm II were accused of having “unnatural” sexual practices among themselves and also with soldiers. This so called Harden–Eulenburg scandal developed into a string of trials and was widely discussed for at least two years. It was also frequently covered in Latvian periodicals; however, the social, political, and scientific context was different. Anonymous journalists who rushed to report the breaking news of German “depravity” lacked the knowledge of actions of sexual enlightenment and the homophile movement that was taking place in Germany led by sexologists Magnus Hirschfeld and his allies, so they interpreted these accusations rather as evidence of shameful behaviour by the German military elite disgracing their country.

**Background of the scandal**

After the Revolution of 1905, the Russian Empire experienced some legal changes, one of which was the weakening of censorship institutions. So the scope of information accepted for newspapers broadened and some new themes appeared that could not have been discussed previously. Latvian newspapers were also permitted a little more freedom that meant not only publications on political issues but also moving a bit towards the subjects that later became the speciality of tabloids.

Already in the very first years of the 20th century, themes such as sexuality could occasionally be mentioned, as could problems associated with prostitution. The years after the 1905 Revolution saw other themes emerge—among them decadence in art, the spread of pornography and the battle against it, as well as more detailed information about various kinds of sexuality, including homosexuality. However, informative articles in popular newspapers were quite unusual—one of the exceptions was an article, “Science and Life,” published in a working-class newspaper where the ideas of Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll were presented to a wider audience. Same-sex desire was explained as being an atavistic phenomenon inherited from ancient times that is found in all eras and in all cultures.4

At the beginning of the 20th century, male homosexuality was criminalized in many European countries including Russia, Germany, and the United Kingdom. When this theme made newspaper headlines across Europe, it was connected with scandals like the trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895 or the suicide of the German steel manufacturer Friedrich Alfred

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Krupp in 1902, as well as accusations of depravity against the French writer Jacques d’Adelswärd-Fersen in 1903. The next scandal also took place in Germany in 1907 and over the next three years was frequently featured in newspapers—the so-called Harden–Eulenburg affair.

At the beginning of the 20th century, German speaking countries were where scientific interest in the phenomenon of homosexuality flourished. Karl Heinrich Ulrich, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Magnus Hirschfeld, and other scholars researched the lives of homosexual people. They attributed this sexuality to medical causes, not to depravity or criminality, and looked for a legal basis for removing the notorious paragraph 175 in German law which criminalized male pederasty. For that purpose, in 1897 Hirschfeld and his confederates founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, the first significant gay rights movement in Europe whose membership rose to 500 people in ten years.

Maximilian Harden (1861–1927), a German journalist and editor of the journal Die Zukunft, became a critic of the politics of Kaiser Wilhelm II at the beginning of the century. In his journal he published numerous articles on the homosexual behaviour of the Kaiser’s entourage—notably Prince Philip of Eulenburg (1847–1921) and the military commander of Berlin, Count Kuno von Moltke (1847–1923). They were accused of homosexual liaisons with elite soldiers of the Prussian Gardes du Corps, a criminal offence according to Paragraph 175 at that time. Harden’s publications led to a series of libel trials that took place mostly in 1907 and 1908; some military officers committed suicide while others were court-martialled. This controversy caused major damage to the reputation of the German military forces and also resonated in the foreign policy of Germany that led to the First World War some years later.

As Norman Domeier notes, despite making same-sex relationships a subject of discussion throughout Europe, “The Eulenburg affair, still seen as the homosexuality scandal of the 20th century, did not change moral notions of homosexuality but instead confirmed homophobia.”

These trials were covered by Baltic German as well as Latvian newspapers which made their readers accustomed to the term “homosexuality” (German Homosexualität), a rather new word in the Russian Empire—as Dan Healey puts it, ordinary educated Russians apparently did not begin to use the word “homosexual,” which had only entered the language in 1895,

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until after 1905. Still, the stereotype that German aristocrats and officers were libertines persisted in the public mind, not only in the few years when Latvian newspapers reported on the progress of the trial in their foreign news sections, but long afterwards.

Of course, people in the Baltic provinces were not completely unaware of such phenomena as same-sex relationships—as the pioneering research of Liina Lukas shows, there was a secret underground community of Baltic Germans that engaged in cultural productions using gay themes. It was not uncommon for male homosexuality to be mostly associated with the local German aristocracy—as in other parts of Europe at the time, the aristocracy had more opportunities for privacy and the ability to control their lives than other social classes. Same-sex relationships of the time were characterized by a structure of domination and subordination: Healey shows how youths from lower classes and men of different professions engaged in paid sexual activities with members of the aristocracy.

The Latvian actor Roberts Tautmēlis-Bērziņš (1873–1915), who worked in diverse small theatre troupes in Riga, was suspected of having secret affairs with local German men, given his flamboyant appearance and desire to look elegant despite being poor. As his fellow actress Tija Banga recalled, "He looked like a German, although he did not want to. German men frequently came to visit him. So these ugly rumours started. But, who knows, maybe they just supported his talent.”

### Latvian press on the scandal (1907–1910)

Between 1907 and 1910 articles dedicated to the Harden–Eulenburg scandal appeared regularly, not only in the Baltic German newspapers Rigasche Rundschau, Rigasche Zeitung, and Düna Zeitung that informed their readers about current events in Germany on a day-to-day basis, but also in Latvian periodicals (among them Dzimenes Vēstnesis, Liepājas Atbalss, Jaunās Latviešu Avīzes, Tēvija, Baltija, Jaunas Domas, Latviešu Avīzes, Zemkopis). Thirty-six articles that contained interpretations of accusations of homosexuality were analyzed for this paper. They are mostly short and informative articles in columns covering foreign news, and rarely provide the reader with a broader analysis of events which also

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7 Ibid., pp. 21–49.
include the author’s (mostly anonymous) subjective interpretation of this process.

A journalist at *Latviešu Avīzes*, a newspaper published twice a week in Jelgava, praised Harden for his courage in unmasking the depraved upper classes but disapproved of Harden’s tolerance towards homosexuals in general:

Harden has the undeniable merit of fearlessly revealing stinky abscesses in the highest places. However, he is not eligible to assume the role of guardian of virtue because during the same trial he has declared his opinion that the law which penalizes unnatural desires among men should be annulled. [...] Whereas the court is responsible [...] for its inability to make the trial less obscene that could be achieved at least by not allowing the general public to attend the hearings. On the contrary: this court has chosen the biggest possible court-room to accommodate a large audience who has crowded in pugnaciously eager to hear all the obscenities. So we may take a different perspective in looking at the Moltke–Harden trial but it still remains a huge and dirty stain on Germany’s life.9

According to the author, the trial’s biggest problem was its public accessibility, making it possible for “obscenities” to be widely recognized and discussed. The Latvian press willingly related ongoing processes at the same time, asking for censorship that would have made the spreading of such information impossible.

The only reasonable solution, as the liberal democratic Latvian newspaper *Dzimtenes Vēstnesis* argued, was to make homosexuality invisible again:

The best achievement of Harden is the serious battle against homosexuality in the army. [...] The order given to all commanders of companies, batteries and squadrons to teach their soldiers what to do if superior officers suddenly start to embrace them and kiss them like beautiful girls will also have a positive effect.10

These articles do not mention any similar cases or problems in the Russian Empire and its Baltic provinces. The only local feature to appear is in an article that recalls a statement of Bismarck’s doctor and friend Professor Schweininger who remembered Bismarck’s designating Eulenburg’s clique with the Greek word “cynaedes.” The Latvian equivalent for this word, according to the author, would be “suņapakalņas”

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(dog’s arses). This vulgar metaphor echoes some of the imagery in Latvian folk songs where the presence of wolves and dogs goes hand in hand with rude sexual imagery and ridicule of old, unmarried men and women.11

Another article, published some months later, uses the same common imagery to describe the ongoing trials: “It seemed that the stinking dirt hole has been closed up because of the diplomatic actions of interested parties but now this hole has been opened again and its disgusting smell flows not only along all Germany but even across its borders…”12

German military men who became the subject of many caricatures in newspapers across Europe were also depicted by Latvian humourists. Zvārguļa Zobgala kalendārs, an annually published humorous calendar, included in its 1909 edition a “Political overview of the year” that contained a couplet dedicated to Germany:

New times, new stories:
Futile are women caresses—
Homosexuality
Now is the noble’s luxury.13

After three years, news of the progress of the trial gradually petered out; the most lasting subject was the information about Eulenburg’s health, which prohibited him from giving evidence and aroused suspicion of simulating high blood pressure and other problems: “Germans can’t get rid of their sensational trial,”14 sighs the reporter.

Afterwards: the image of the German libertine

Reflections of the scandal took place soon after the Revolution of 1905 when widespread violent protests against Russian officials and the local German aristocracy had taken place in the Baltic provinces, so there was extreme tension in the relationship between Baltic Germans and Latvians. As early as November 1907 the Latvian newspaper Zemkopis repeated Harden’s tactics of linking political opponents with pederasty. When Baltische Tageszeitung, a Baltic German newspaper, denounced Lutheran

pastors of Latvian origin as useless for being either “red” (socialists) or Latvian nationalists, Zemkopis reminded its readers that a certain anonymous German school teacher B. in Jelgava and a teacher K. in Riga had recently been accused of pederasty (articles 995 and 996, according to Russian law), and asked rhetorically: “After several such cases, could somebody accuse all German school teachers of the crime of pederasty and remove them from their teaching positions?”

Some years later the link between homosexual behaviour and promiscuity was raised again. In 1912 the newspaper Dzimtenes Vēstnesis published an article about the Vatican that was based on information from the Italian newspaper L’Asino; it described a “homosexual scandal in aristocratic circles of the Vatican.” However, other publications did not report this.

The following year saw a much more serious queer-related scandal in Europe: the detection and prosecution of the Austrian counter-intelligence officer Alfred Redl (1864–1913), who committed high treason by spying for the Russian Empire and selling vital Austrian military plans. This treason influenced the military performance of Austria-Hungary during the First World War; later Redl became a symbol of treason and entered mass culture as a hero in spy books and movies. Latvian publications highlighted his posh lifestyle as well as his relationship with both “discreditable” women in Prague and his “strange friendship” with a lancer lieutenant in Vienna, as well as the blackmail he was the target of because of such friends.

The humorous poem about homosexuality being a nobleman’s luxury came up again in 1913 when the Latvian newspaper Tēvija published an article “Depravity in Germany.” Its anonymous author signals that, “although we consider the French the most depraved of all nations, in recent years there has been more depravity in Germany than in France: it has increased and adopted totally unnatural forms.” After hinting at the Harden–Eulenburg scandal, readers are informed of two cases in different areas of Russia when elderly Germans have attempted to “rape” young Latvian men—a young actor in Odessa and a travelling artist in the colonies of the Steppe region. The article also worries about the growing

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15 Par bazničas tiesību. Zemkopis, 1907, November 7.
18 Izvīrēja Vācijā. Tēvija, 1913, October 5.
number of abortions and the desire of German women to form interracial relationships, judging both to be equally disastrous.

Such national stereotypes let us foresee the change of attitude, described as “panic hatred towards Germans” \(^{19}\) that overtook the people of the Russian Empire when the First World War broke out and Germany declared war on Russia on August 1, 1914. In 1915, German troops partially invaded the Baltic provinces including Courland and later also Riga. One year later, in an anti-German article, published in the Latvian newspaper *Baltija* in St. Petersburg, Maximilian Harden was praised as being an eminent journalist who appreciated the importance of a good relationship between Germany and Russia and, among other things, revealed the “ugly things” that had happened in the circle of Prince Eulenburg. \(^{20}\) The reason for such praise was Harden’s harsh criticism of Germany’s foreign policy and his warnings that wartime food shortages could create a revolutionary situation in his country.

The same “ugly things” were recounted again three months later in the same newspaper when a prisoner of war, German soldier Fritz, was asked his opinion of current events, emphasizing his pessimistic prognosis for Germany’s chances of winning the war. The correspondent is curious as to:

what Germans themselves think of obscenities discovered among some closest friends of Wilhelm some years ago; for example, the lawsuit against Count Eulenburg can’t be completed even now because he constantly simulates illness and doctors do not permit him to leave his palace and appear in court. \(^{21}\)

Fritz in his reply relates conspiracy theories, supposedly widespread among German Social Democrats (as he himself was one)—the first to be convicted should have been old Krupp himself who had just pretended to commit suicide and, after changing his name, was living somewhere else safe and sound. Protecting him, Kaiser Wilhelm II stopped Socialist efforts to conduct an exhumation. So the Kaiser is represented in this publication as a friend of libertines, which made his reputation questionable by attempting to be a painter, pulpiteer, poet, and composer rather than a clever politician. Such publications once more confirmed the assertions of Prince Eulenburg’s wife Augusta that accusers were striking at her


\(^{21}\) Bergs, I. Kurzemes saimnieki svešas mājās. *Baltija*, 1916, September 17.
husband, but their target was the Kaiser himself;\textsuperscript{22} i.e. the political and military capacity of Germany.

One and a half years later the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was signed on March 3, 1918, giving Russia the province of Latgallia and Germany the provinces Courland and Riga; on September 22, Wilhelm II declared the Baltic-German-led United Baltic Duchy a free and independent province.\textsuperscript{23} After Germany’s capitulation these plans were abandoned and the independent Republic of Latvia was proclaimed on November 18, 1918. Subsequent land reforms reduced the economic significance of manors, owned by Baltic Germans, and reinforced the political tension between Latvian and Baltic German parties once more.

Deriding Germans as degenerate homosexuals was still traditional in the 1920s when some echoes of the Harden–Eulenburg scandal still appeared in Latvian press publications and literature: an article depicting the homosexual subculture of Riga described Baltic ex-aristocrats as the most passionate customers of hustlers cruising in the city centre and the Old Town.\textsuperscript{24}

Sensationalist tabloid stories of Berlin’s gay subculture were a part of the quasi-liberal urban literary culture that existed in Riga in the 1920s. The Harden–Eulenburg scandal was talked about again in a novel, \textit{Koenigsmark} (1918), by French writer Pierre Benoit and its Latvian translation appeared serialized in the newspaper \textit{Latvijas Vēstnesis} from 1924 to 1925. A shocking fictional story of the perversion of a young girl, “Travelling Naked Club in Riga,” included not only lesbian episodes but also gossip about the gay scene of the spoiled Berlin: “Miss, you can’t imagine how licentious all of Berlin is. Depravity prevails in all social classes, lesbian love is widespread among women and pederasts can be easily found among men.”\textsuperscript{25}

A more experienced observer, one Tatarinov, explained German virtues in the Russian newspaper \textit{Segodnia vecherom}, published in Riga: “Before the war, homosexuality was a privilege of licentious aristocrats,

\textsuperscript{24} “Melnā nelķe”. \textit{Jaunā kūs Zīgas}, 1924, November 21.
now it is widespread among lower classes too.”26 Even as late as in 1935 the conservative author Voldemārs Reiznieks in his book dedicated to solving issues around women by placing them back in the role of good mothers and wives, among other bizarre “truths,” explains homosexuality:

Each perversion is a sign of a certain aristocracy, so it gets invented and cultivated on purpose. [...] In Kaiser Wilhelm II’s time in Germany the aristocracy even cultivated homosexuality, however, young aristocrats were forced into homosexuality highly unwillingly.27

In the late 1920s and early 1930s the image of perverted German aristocrats was replaced by gossip about sexual orgies among Nazi movement leaders and their juniors, spread in Latvian Social Democrat newspapers. However, after 1934, under the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis, public debate on homosexuality was silenced.

Conclusion

The Harden–Eulenburg scandal and its coverage in Latvian newspapers was the case that led to the concept of homosexuality as a specific sexual identity being introduced into Latvian public discourse. However, it had clearly negative connotations. In newspaper articles, Germans were presented as a nation of libertines and German military power was questioned because of the supposed “femininity” attributed to its officers. The scandal did not evoke open discussion about the phenomenon of same-sex desire in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire since homosexuality was usually called “shameful,” “dirty,” “disgraceful” etc. These tactics were probably connected to the relationship between Latvians and the local German aristocracy that had become increasingly difficult during the Revolution of 1905. Later, when the First World War broke out in 1914, homosexuality was one of the negative characteristics, attributed by propaganda to higher German military officers, that indicated their supposed femininity and inability to win the war.

References


CHAPTER THREE

IMPORT FROM THE WEST
VS. IMPORT FROM THE PAST:
QUEER MOVEMENT IN THE FIRST HALF
OF THE 20TH CENTURY IN SLOVAK CONTEXT

JANA JABLONICKÁ ZEZULOVÁ

Democracy is a government of the majority, but the bulwark of all minorities, hence the protector of sexual minorities as well!

—Imrich Matyáš, 1956

The research of Slovak queer history is still a relatively new topic. Had it not been catalysed by three particular events, we would hardly be able to contribute to the common European queer memory, nor could we refute what is often claimed by the opponents of legal recognition of same-sex couples in Slovakia, in that “homosexuality does not belong here, nor has its roots or history here: it is purely a modern import from the ‘immoral West.’”

Before describing the events that lead to the onset of this research, I would like to clearly state my intentions and where I stand regarding the topic. I currently work for an LGBTI rights organization in Slovakia where I conduct research on the problems that same-sex couples have to face every day, and I also run LGBTI educational training, advocacy, and lobbying. The activist background of my job clearly affects my motivation and the manner in which I do historical work, including all the stumbling blocks which this kind of job inevitably brings about. “Methodological and interpretative pitfalls of a historian who also happens to be an activist (or rather vice-versa)” could well be a contribution topic on its own. However, for the time being, I can only state that I do my best in trying to reflect and work on these hindrances, however challenging they might be.
Research Catalysts

The first and primary incentive of my interest in Slovak queer history, whether it meant simply collecting memories from people in the community or capturing the first efforts at raising awareness, was discussions I had with Hana Fábry, a female activist from the 1990s, about a persisting discontinuity in our work in the last 25 years. This included the lack of anchorage and a general feeling of the weak-rootedness of this topic in Slovak cultural and political discourse, as well as repeated beginnings leading to no visible progress, especially in laws. All this meant that Slovak LGBTI activism never really used or even needed national queer history. So, what I decided to try and see was what would happen if a historical perspective became a part of our work.

This brings me to the second and a very essential catalyst of my work, namely the results of my Czech colleagues’ research into the history of homosexual emancipation in Czechoslovakia. In 2012, we started organizing LGBT History Month in Slovakia and the paradox of this was that it was more about the present than about the past. During the event, however, our Czech colleagues Jan Seidl and Martin C. Putna presented us with their publication¹ and drew our attention to the so-far unknown existence of a Slovak activist Imrich Matyáš who was a contributor to the first Czechoslovak magazine of the inter-war period, called The Voice of a Sexual Minority (Hlas sexuální menšiny, in Czech). As my research would later show, Imrich Matyáš sought to decriminalize homosexuality in every possible way in order to make the lives of queer people in Slovakia better.

The third and final catalyst was a mere coincidence from about the same time as we found out about Matyáš’s existence. As it turns out, the cellar of the long-deceased activist guarded several historical treasures, including his personal diaries and numerous documents written over a period of almost 30 years, from the 1930s to the mid-1960s. I thus began a detailed examination of them and tried to find some connections, a job which was made much easier thanks to the research of Jan Seidl.² My original thought was to gather information and explain 1990s queer activism to the Slovak public, but what I gained with Matyáš was a completely different and much older perspective. In today’s context, the ideas of this 1896-born social worker and advocate for sexual minorities have proven to still be valid, completely modern, and up to date, despite being written in archaic Slovak. The research into his diaries and other

documents was even more interesting in that it resembled detective work, especially because not all his diaries were found in the cellar and it became clear that the work discovered was not complete. And, although it might sound a bit romantic, I am still secretly hoping I can find the missing pieces one day.

**Imrich Matyáš (1896–1974), Slovak queer pioneer**

Imrich Matyáš was born to a well-off family with aristocratic roots, he graduated from a secondary school for clerks and soon after that, he joined the Italian front in World War I. Having returned from the war, he began his two lifelong careers: one at the Social Security and Retirement Benefits Institute and the other, being involved in the pursuit of the decriminalization of homosexuality in Czechoslovakia. As for these beginnings, in his manuscript he mentions that “in the spirit of Dr. M. Hirschfeld’s and Dr. Kurt Hiller’s teachings,” from 1919 he assumes the advocacy for sexual minorities in Czechoslovakia:

> The movement which I supported was intending to gain equal treatment for homoerotes. Therefore, I supported these events morally and materially, the more so because I was convinced that it was an ethical fight. Hence, for several decades I’ve been proudly fighting for equity, true humanity, and particularly for the abolition of the anti-homosexual law, as well as for a proper assessment of the homosexual problem.³

As Matyáš further mentions in one of his writings, it was on the war front that a Romanian officer, who happened to be homosexual, saved his life. According to his own account, it was because of this incident and out of gratitude to this gay officer that upon his return home he decided to lead this “ethical fight on a scientific basis” in order to decriminalize homosexuality. The interesting thing about this interesting story is the fact that Imrich Matyáš—apparently inspired by Hirschfeld—never explicitly referred to himself as homosexual. In his diaries, one can find lists of celebrities who supported the decriminalization of homosexuality, many of them labelled by Matyáš as supporting heterosexuals. And it is as one of them that he identifies.

In the 1920s, Matyáš acquired professional contacts and built intensive friendships with various Czech social workers and advocates for sexual minorities, but also with German pioneers such as Magnus Hirschfeld,

Kurt Hiller, Adolf Brand, and others. He was a member of the German Scientific Humanitarian Committee, the World League for Sexual Reform and Radszuweit’s League for Human Rights. He was a subscriber to perhaps all existing German gay magazines issued in the 1920s and 1930s. Sure enough, these were a source of arguments for his own articles and reflections, which he would publish in *The Voice* or send to doctors, psychiatrists, and lawyers whom he tried to convince for cooperation. In the case of a significant Slovak psychiatrist Karol Matulay, he managed to do so. By some witnesses, this doctor was remembered as the psychiatrist who “was not prejudiced in this topic.”

However, it was precisely Kurt Hiller, a later chairman of the German Scientific Humanitarian Committee, who would become a key figure in Matyáš’s life. Hiller inspired and mentored him, and I could tell from the snippets of their correspondence that they maintained long-term contact. And this too is where my investigation was headed: I contacted Kurt Hiller Gesellschaft and Dr. Lützenkirchen in order to find out whether there had been, perchance, any of Matyáš’s letters found in Hiller’s estate. Eventually, I gathered about fifty—assorted letters and postcards from the period of Hiller’s exile in Prague and London during World War II, others from the period of his return to Germany after the war. The letter exchange between the two seems to have lasted well into the late 1960s.

So, while on the one hand I managed to gather information about Matyáš’s public life as an activist and advocate from his diaries and other documents, his correspondence with Hiller, on the other hand, has offered me a peek into his private life and his love for a man who collaborated with Slovak fascists during the war.

Apart from studying Matyáš’s diaries, reflections, articles, and now even correspondence, I searched further to get a more comprehensive picture of his life, his activities, and cooperation networks. It is certainly interesting to note that shortly after the war he made contact with the Swiss editorial of the magazine *Circle* (Kreis, Le Cercle) which he had subscribed to but lost contact with after the police had intervened in the

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4 He had given Matyáš a portrait of himself with young lads in the background, which Matyáš put in a very splendid frame.


7 http://www.hiller-gesellschaft.de/

8 http://schwulenarchiv.ch/home/
correspondence in the 1950s. Some of his correspondence with Hiller was also lost, according to complaints found in his writings.

**Work for the queer community**

Matyáš had a considerable voice in Bratislava’s queer community, eventually helping many of those prosecuted and investigated for same-sex intercourse. He put all this experience down in a practical, several-pages-long manual which was meant for gay people to learn how to best defend themselves when at the police station, how to testify in court, what helpful phrases to learn, how to master psychological techniques, etc.

Matyáš also invited the community to what we now call a *coming out*, both towards one’s inner self as well as before family members and friends. In this regard he describes how, for instance, many gay people try to “get rid” of their orientation (which Matyáš refers to as “the core of one’s being” or “one’s constitutive nature”) and seek medical advice from the doctors or from the church, and even try to “cure” themselves by getting married. Matyáš advises against indulging in such false help since it only causes more pain and he emphasizes that the only true help is “making friends with one’s destiny”:

> Willy-nilly must homosexuals go the way Mother Nature determined for them. Thus, when they realize their unalterable condition, what occurs to them is a sort of coming to terms with it and befriending their unchangeable destiny.⁹

At the same time, however, Matyáš names the real culprit responsible for the persecution, degradation, and ill-treatment of homosexuals, which produce the internal feelings of shame and denial of their identity:

> The homosexual nature is not something anyone should be ashamed of, but shame should be on those who despise, persecute, and—I shall utter it openly—judge homosexuals!¹⁰

Based on his friends’ and his own experience, as well as on findings from more than 40 years of activity, he formulates pieces of “good and proven advice” for the community “to be kept and lived by”:

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⁹ Matyáš, Imrich. *Pohlavný život...*, p. 64.
¹⁰ Ibid., p. 65.
The first and most important rule is to come to terms with self, that is, to accept this fate. We believe that even homosexuals can live happily and contentedly. For this we have many examples.

Let them be proud! But let them not boast about their homosexual nature. They shall behave as “normals” do. Those of heterosexual nature do not boast of it, nonetheless, they don’t hide it either. In any case, no homosexual should despise and condemn homosexuals who are effeminate.

When there is an opportunity and people are talking about homosexuality, it is their duty to clarify and give a scientific explanation of the homosexual nature. Accordingly, when they hear people talk badly about and slur homosexuality, they should refute these falsehoods and lies, and uphold homosexuals in a fearless, but objective, manner. It is really condemnable when some homosexuals slur their own people, only to cover and justify themselves.

One should confide their homosexual nature to their parents and close relatives. But be warned; do not enter matrimony, not even if you do it “only before the world and upon settlement with the future wife.” Any manner of curing homosexuality, although suggested by distinguished physicians, must be rejected and such doctors mocked.

Solidarity and mutual help in difficulty be the creed of all homosexuals.

Massively support the movement, both morally and materially. Honour and cherish the speakers and past combatants who had set a goal of emancipation for sexual minorities.

Decriminalization of homosexuality in Czechoslovakia

As Kurt Hiller writes in one of his letters to Matyáš, the homosexual movement suffered greatly because of World War II. Lost human lives, the destruction of union activity, and interrupted magazine publishing, all meant that it took a very long time to resume and pursue the former efforts. The emerging communist regime in Czechoslovakia would not allow a restoration of any first-republic union activities, not to mention the queer movement. Historian Jan Seidl notes that the pioneers of the First Republic Movement as well as homosexuals could expect the significantly left-leaning New Republic to be fairer and undo all the old wrongs. Despite the fact that during the First Republic the Communist Party

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11 Underlined by Matyáš.
repeatedly adhered to the ideas of decriminalization of homosexuality.\textsuperscript{14} after World War II they did not share these progressive views anymore. First-republic communists considered the criminalization of homosexuality a bourgeois relic. By contrast, post-war communists, apparently following the Soviet model, considered homosexuality a bourgeois element which had no place in the socialist society.

In 1950, the new Penal Code came into effect, with its Paragraph 241 punishing relations between adults of the same sex with up to one year of imprisonment. Should one of the persons be younger than 18, the penalty could reach five years of imprisonment. In his writings, Imrich Matyáš strongly reflects on this change in attitude by the Communist Party and considers it one of the biggest disappointments in his long-term educational work. In addition, his fifties were marked by frequent interrogations at the police’s morality department, where he was accused of spoiling the youth and he was repeatedly intimidated and blackmailed: if he did not stop his awareness raising activities (which at that time only comprised private lectures in his apartment and occasional letters to the authorities), he would stop receiving his pension and his apartment would be taken away from him. Even so, he did not give in and continued tirelessly in the pursuit of the decriminalization of homosexuality. In the late 1950s, he sent several letters to the Ministry of Justice in which he tried to convince the Commission staff about the absurdity of punishing same-sex intercourse and demanded an amendment of the Penal Code. He also contacted leading Czechoslovak sexologists Josef Hynie, Kurt Freund and Karel Nedoma and asked them to continue their work and persist in seeking the annulment of Paragraph 241 by means of scientific argumentation against it.\textsuperscript{15} In the context of the New Republic, it was precisely the scientists—psychiatrists and sexologists—who had the greatest chance to influence the revision of legal rights. The experience of scientific research eventually led them to the finding that homosexuality

\textsuperscript{14} As an example, Matyáš cites an article from September 1931 called “The rights of sexual minorities” published in Rudé Právo, the newspaper of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, where the body of the party spoke for the submission of a bill in order to repeal Paragraph 129b, one that punished same-sex intercourse. The later communists, however, never submitted such a proposal.

\textsuperscript{15} Matyáš transcribed the full text of the letters addressed to the sexologists into his diaries.
could not undergo reparative changes and that this phenomenon was not
dangerous to society.\textsuperscript{16}

The decriminalization of homosexuality finally happened on November
29, 1961 when a new Penal Code was adopted. As for that day, Matyáš
wrote in his diary:

Today [is] a very fateful day because after many years of promises,
Paragraph 241 of the Penal Code was repealed in Parliament [..] It’s
definitely some progress and by 70% it’s humane. Still, I cannot comment
on the amended act any further until I read the official text.\textsuperscript{17}

Later, he wrote that those who were preaching humanity and social
justice took the original proposal apart and thus Paragraph 244, punishing
same-sex intercourse with a person under 18, came into effect. The phrase
“I have no words and words I lack, for what I could say about Paragraph
244” terminates his diary entry about this important event.\textsuperscript{18}

After the notes in his diary on the decriminalization of homosexual
acts between adults, the next entry does not appear until several months
later. It mourns the loss of one of his last friends from the same generation,
who also belonged to the gay community.

Among Matyáš’s diaries and other works found in the basement, there
was a letter dating back to 1975 between two acquaintances of his, Jozef
Rosivál and Dr. Ján Majerský. It sets out the background of Matyáš’s
sudden suicide and his funeral in 1974. It was but my further investigation
and contact with people whom Matyáš knew personally that shed some
light on the possible causes of his suicide.

More clues in the search

After two years of research on Matyáš’s written work and its subsequent
media coverage the following year around LGBT History Month, I was
pleasantly surprised to hear from Matyáš’s relatives, in particular from his
great-nephew, his wife, and others. These people thus complemented my

\textsuperscript{16} For more on the influence of Czechoslovak sexology on the decriminalisation
of homosexuality, see Seidl, Jan (ed.). \textit{Od žaláře k oltáři}, pp. 286–295.
\textsuperscript{17} Matyáš, Imrich. \textit{Diary}, pp. 86–87.
\textsuperscript{18} It was only in 1990 that the annulment of Paragraph 244 came into effect and the
age limit of 15 years for legal heterosexual intercourse began to apply to
homosexual practices as well.
research with more valuable information. In order to make Matyáš’s life more accessible to the current queer community as well as to the activists themselves and, of course, to the youth and the public, I prepared a travelling exhibition, a theatre play in collaboration with the queer theatre, and published a few historical-political commentaries in the opinion-making press. My intention of implementing a historical perspective into the modern-day activism in order to get a reference point for activists, as well as for the present state of the human rights of LGBTI people in Slovakia has been fulfilled, yet only partially. People’s reactions ranged from surprise to interest of the young in their “own” national queer history, not to mention the interest of the media in the topic. For myself, being biased, I cannot conclude whether Matyáš has managed to be our “anchor,” but we have definitely gained a symbolic background as activists, a future perspective as young people (an *it gets better* perspective), and a chance for reflection as the general public.

As I mentioned above, Matyáš’s writings found in the cellar were not complete. However, several months ago I was contacted by Mr. Morvay who had met Matyáš as a young man. Thanks to Mr. Morvay, I am now in possession of several other works in which Matyáš describes experiences of gay people who underwent homosexuality “treatment” in Bratislava and Vienna’s psychiatric clinics in the 1930s. Mr. Morvay, who himself is a rich source of amusing gay stories from the 1970s, mentioned to me that Matyáš wanted to make sure that at least part of his work would remain safe. So, he divided the originally ordered writings and distributed them among his trusted loved ones. This, of course, means that a part of his work remains somewhere out there. And I still believe it will be found eventually.

**Conclusion**

Matyáš, and with him the whole history of the emancipation of homosexuality in Slovakia, is awaiting its systematic historical written processing. This will partly be achieved in a publication I am currently

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19 They pointed out that during an otherwise ordinary visit the evening before his planned suicide, Matyáš indirectly bid a long farewell to his grand-nephew, which was previously not accounted for. As for the reason for him deciding to end his life, it was the developing eye disease that would eventually lead to blindness. Matyáš supposedly hated the idea of no longer being able to read or watch television, which he considered a great invention. He even reportedly remarked to the ophthalmologist that examined him that he wouldn’t live to see his blindness, even though the physician tried to persuade him to the contrary.
working on, which should be a kind of a culmination of the studies I have conducted on the diaries found and other written works. My writing certainly continues to be affected by my work as an activist and by my primary motivation which might mean taking sides, is becoming a major challenge in the interpretation and in the linking of his efforts for decriminalization of homosexuality and our current efforts for the legal recognition of same-sex couples.

Simply put, if the travelling exhibition and the theatre play about Matyáš contained more of us and our time, it is my all-out effort to put into the writing about Matyáš more of Matyáš himself.

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CHAPTER FOUR

COMMUNICATION OF NON-NORMATIVE SEXUALITY IN INTER-WAR LATVIA
(1920S AND 1930S)

INETA LIPŠA

Research on non-normative sexuality is only in its initial stages in Latvia, but is in a relatively better situation than in Estonia and Lithuania, with whose experience I would like to compare Latvia’s inter-war past, because all three, as former provinces of the Russian Empire, declared their independence after the First World War. However, in Estonian historiography non-normative sexuality in the inter-war period still awaits research attention, while in Lithuania one case study has appeared on gender identity and homosexuality in inter-war Kaunas, based on the life story of one particular woman who dressed as a man. In the cultural space of Latvia in the 1920s and 1930s there were frequent references to Russia and Germany. In Russia, the Soviet authorities de-criminalized pederasty in 1917, after the Bolshevik coup, changing this policy in 1934, when sodomy was once again criminalized. Comprehensive studies on Russia have been authored by historian Dan Healey and sociologist Igor Kon.

Germany had a strong gay liberation movement which did not, however, succeed in achieving the decriminalization of sodomy.\(^5\) Research has also been undertaken on transvestism in the sexual cultures of Europe,\(^6\) and on the reflection of non-normative sexuality in the press,\(^7\) whereas in Latvia this article is the first attempt to examine aspects of the communication of non-normative sexuality, based on such sources as the major Latvian- and Russian-language newspapers\(^8\) and documents created within the judicial system. The civil, administrative, or criminal proceedings have specific outcomes, materialized through the legal fact of filing a complaint. The complaint has for centuries been an accustomed form of communication between the individual, the community and the authorities.\(^9\) This represents an important component of the legal system; among other things, it liberates tensions arising from the inappropriate use of power by institutions and individuals. The complaint as a genre of communication

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\(^8\) Jaunākās Zīgas, 1918–1940, Pēdējās Brīdi, 1927–1936, Segodnia Vecherom, 1924–1940.

also served as a means of resolving issues arising in the context of non-normative sexuality.

This article looks at the communication of non-normative sexuality in inter-war Latvia, viewed in the context of public communication and internal communication among experts on homosexuality, on the life stories of transpersons and on two problematic marriages involving transpersons (legal cases that served to focus official attitudes towards female same-sex sexuality and intersexuality).

Public communication of homosexuality

The first account dealing with homosexuality in the Latvian-language press appeared in the newspaper Jaunākās Zīnas in 1924. The journalist referred to male same-sex relations as “criminal vice” and “pederasty,” not even mentioning the word “homosexuality.” The journalist’s source was a police officer; accordingly, he used the term “pederasty,” as inscribed in the criminal code. Pederasty (anal intercourse between men) had been criminalized. This legal norm had been taken over by the Latvian state from the Russian Empire when recognizing as its criminal code the “Penal Laws of March 22, 1903,” under which pederasty was punishable by a prison term of no less than three months. Starting from August 1, 1933, when Latvia’s new Penal Law came into force, the penalty was imprisonment, without stipulating any specific length of sentence. This meant that a judge could impose a sentence of less than the three months that had been compulsory before. In this article, the journalist related the rumour that there was a “pederast club” in Riga, known as the “Black Carnation.” To enter the club one had to have a special badge with a black carnation depicted on a green enamel background. No further publications followed; though the motivation behind this article is unknown, it proved sufficient to inspire a metaphor: henceforth, homosexual men in Latvia were referred to in the press as “black carnations.”

Two years passed before the press returned to the subject of homosexuality. In late 1926 several men were arrested for pederasty in

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10 The analysis covers longer news items and descriptions, not taking into account information in the crime news (only one to three sentences) or the mention of the subject by a phrase in articles on other themes.
11 “Melnā neļķe”. Jaunākās Zīnas, November 21, 1924.
Riga. The case came to trial at the end of 1927, and the press dubbed it “the case of the Black Carnation Club.” The reports on the case revealed the existing stereotypes and served to uphold them. Attention in public discourse was focused on the older, richer man, who paid young boys and soldiers for sexual services. The journalist discussed homosexuality through the scenario of the seducer/offender and the seduced/victim. The newspaper Jaunākās Zīņas, and likewise Sociāldemokrāts, the voice of the Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party, stereotyped homosexuals as seducers: well-to-do, elderly foreigners, born degenerates or dirty old men, who were seen as enticing their victims—poorly educated Latvian youths—with offers of money and seducing them into “unnatural sexual contacts.” Opinion leaders were concerned that gender roles were not being observed; it was not acceptable to them for a man to be subordinated or “used” in a passive role, thus placing him on the same level as a woman. It was possible to uphold the “naturalness” of hegemonic masculinity, which required finding an explanation for such a situation, only by asserting that the men had been tricked and seduced into playing a passive role.

Stereotyping of this kind shaped the view that same-sex relationships between men always represent male prostitution. The idea that such a relationship might not be purchased for money but might instead be based on mutual affection or other motives was not mentioned. Homosexuality was communicated as a social phenomenon (rather than in the form of individual life stories), involving a criminal offence, without distinguishing what was legal and what was not. Neither doctors nor lawyers were interviewed; nor did the journalists talk to the people detained or to potential witnesses. The journalists supplied their readers only with information regarded as suitable for public dissemination by their information sources in the police. Namely, they put across the view maintained by the authorities that a same-sex sexual act between men is a criminal offence, and that men engaging in such relationships must be viewed as criminals. The criminalization of this particular sexual act and the mention of same-sex sexual relationships in the press solely in this particular context led to homosexuality as a sexual orientation and homosexual behaviour of a kind not mentioned in the Penal Laws being viewed as criminal. This was expressly unidirectional communication, with no expectation of feedback. In contrast to Germany, where social democrats were at the head of the movement for the repeal of “Article

14 Iznicināts netikības zaķis. Sociāldemokrāts, November 9, 1926.
175” (criminalizing sodomy), in Latvia the social democrats supported the position of the authorities.

The Russian-language newspaper *Segodnia* took a freer view of the subject; in contrast to the Latvian press, rather than expressing indignation, it formulated its attitude with benevolent irony, noting that homosexuals were all of a sudden being prosecuted, even though they had been known as such for many years and had been regarded with a degree of sensitivity, since their very presence had given foreigners the impression that in Riga things were just as in Paris. This could be perceived as a hint that the criminalization of homosexuality was hypocritical. Moreover, in contrast to the Latvian press, the evening edition of the newspaper, *Segodnia Vecherom*, permitted an expert to present his views. This was Prof. Ferdinand Neureiter, Head of the Institute of Forensic Medicine of the University of Latvia, who supported his opinion by citing Magnus Hirschfeld, German sexologist and activist in the movement for the decriminalization of sodomy. The professor writes that homosexuality is an inborn tendency, but is also influenced by the milieu and the first sexual experience. Homosexuals cannot be regarded as mentally ill; the intensity of their sexual desire varies just as greatly as that of heterosexuals; moreover, there are even homosexuals who never perform a single homosexual act during their lifetime. Neureiter explains that the criminalization of homosexuality forces many people to suppress their desires or to live in constant fear that their “crime” will be brought to light, something that opens the possibility of blackmail; accordingly, in many countries of Europe campaigns for abolishing criminal liability are growing stronger. He argues that the state should not concern itself with the way adults live, as long as it does not undermine public morality. Thus, the Russian press provided a plurality of opinion—which, however, probably did not reach the Latvian readership.

The communication of homosexuality in the Latvian press was not a consciously directed process, since the press was only reacting to events. Apart from the Black Carnation Club trial, which gave rise to publications in late 1926 and again in late 1927, there were only two further reflections in the newspapers of the opinion that the view of homosexuality as a crime should change, and once again this opinion was voiced only in a Russian-language paper, while the Latvian press simply did not mention it. These two publications relate to lectures read in Riga by the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld.

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Hirschfeld made his first visit on May 17, 1926, when he was on his way to the Soviet Union. On May 18, he gave a lecture on sexual issues (his work was not published in Latvian). The magazine Aizkulises introduced Hirschfeld as the “famous specialist on homosexuality, who has his own particular reputation in Europe,” dubbing him a superlative pornographist.

The newspaper Segodnia Vecherom related what the lecturer had said: that the state has no right to interfere in the activities of consenting adults who exploit only themselves, and that the punishment of homosexuals is altogether senseless and unacceptable. It should be borne in mind, Hirschfeld had suggested, that nature creates not only pure female and male sexual types, but also intermediate types, represented by mental and physical cases of female masculinity and male femininity. Hirschfeld considered that treating this peculiarity was impossible at the time, and emphasized that diverse sexual types should not be forced into the frame of heterosexuality, a frame that had been created by people. The paper Jaunākās Žīgas did not even mention the word “homosexuality”—its readers learned only that Prof. Hirschfeld, researcher into sexual life, had discussed as-yet unresolved sexual problems. Neither Sociāldemokrāts nor Aizkulises covered the visit by Hirschfeld. This time the word “homosexuality” was not mentioned by

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20 Dzimuma un mūlas dzīve. Jaunākās Žīgas, May 19, 1926.
21 Dr. M. Hiršfelds par „seksuālo mazākumu” tiesībām. Jaunākās Žīgas, April 27, 1929.
22 Tiesība uz mūlu. Pēdējā Brīdi, April 28, 1929.
23 Dr. M. Hiršfelds par „seksuālo mazākumu” tiesībām.
24 Seksualitāte un kriminalitāte. Pēdējā Brīdi, April 30, 1929.
any of the papers reporting on the lectures. Hirschfeld had explained that present-day science does not consider sexual perversion as criminal, because it is wrong to punish people for a disease or a congenital trait departing from the norm.25 Sexual offenders, so long as they have not done harm to others, should be committed to the care of a doctor, rather than taken to court. These accounts do not mention women’s same-sex sexuality (in the inter-war years only one such account was related, in 1927, where same-sex relations between women are described as abnormal love, and the women concerned are viewed as abnormal).26 The press did not reflect the views of Hirschfeld in the Latvian context; it did not indicate how his views were perceived by medical doctors and lawyers in Latvia, and did not attempt to establish whether there was a homosexual subculture in Riga, whether a homosexual community was developing or whether it had any leaders whose views might be worth ascertaining. Thus, in reporting on the views of Hirschfeld that homosexuality should be decriminalized, the press gave the impression that they bore no relation to the reality of life in Latvia.

In the 1930s the question of homosexuality was not discussed in the press, although, for example in 1933, the newspaper Jaunākās Žīgas published the opinion of a homosexual in a survey of views regarding suicide. He writes that he is once again contemplating suicide, since he is forced to conceal his feelings, these being abnormal, and their expression a crime, and that normal people cannot even imagine the suffering of abnormal types such as himself.27 The paper did not comment on his views, and so the message was the same as before: that homosexuality is a form of abnormality. The same view was presented in an article in 1933 on a reform project to prevent homosexual behaviour among prisoners.28 Thus, there is no basis for discussing the communication of homosexuality in the inter-war press as a process occurring over a period of time: actually, there were only a few episodes of unidirectional communication during the 1920s. The press did not consider homosexuality a theme that should be given any dynamism. The existing order was not questioned. Male same-sex sexual behaviour was communicated as a crime and was discussed in the structured internal communication among experts in law

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27 Mūsu lasītāju sarunas. Jaunākās Žīgas, March 11, 1933.
28 Teofilis Rudzīšs prasa reformē seksuālo dzīvi cietumos. Pēdejas Brīži, January 6, 1933; Ko autoritātes saka par seksuālās dzīves pārveidošanu cietumos. Pēdejas Brīži, January 14, 1933.
enforcement institutions and the courts (policemen, lawyers, and doctors), as recorded in the documents they produced.

**Internal (expert) communication of homosexuality**

The population communicated with the authorities on men’s same-sex sexual relationships through the genre of communication represented by the complaint, in the form of submissions and letters to the police, which provided the basis for an investigation. If the facts ascertained were sufficient for further legal proceedings, then the material was transferred to the prosecutors of the regional courts, who initiated acts of supervision. Records were produced of the interrogation of men who were arrested, which document the statements made by the homosexuals themselves. In the 1920s and 1930s the Prosecutor of the Riga Regional Court initiated at least twenty-one acts of supervision (the records of the other three regional courts—Liepāja, Daugavpils and Jelgava—have not yet been studied). Of these, thirteen were initiated during the time of parliamentary democracy, and the remaining eight under the authoritarian regime. Those initiating the investigation were acquaintances of the homosexuals, whose aim was revenge for failed blackmail, and spurned lovers. Only in one case did an official file a report on such a matter, motivated by moral concerns. This was in the above-mentioned Black Carnation case in 1926: in this instance it was the Head of the Main Munitions Store of the Service Unit of the Ministry of War, who was concerned about the “seduction” of soldiers.

The police turned over to the prosecutor those cases in which sufficient evidence had been obtained. Six cases out of the twenty-one were brought before the courts (one trial took place in the time of parliamentary democracy and another five under the authoritarian regime). The charges were generally also substantiated by forensic examination. Examination of the detained homosexuals was carried out by the medical experts of Latvia’s county and town courts. The statistics show that over the course of seventeen years, from 1922 up to 1938, a total of eighty-seven examinations were conducted.29 The initial homosexual act was viewed as constituting seduction,30 so the experts sought, through bodily examination, to establish who was the passive and who the active partner. The medical experts in the cases heard before the Riga Regional Court

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30 “Melnās nelces ordeņa” bruņinieka varā. Jaunākās Žīgās, November 9, 1927.
cited the works of German sexologists Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll, which referred to homosexuality as a form of vice. Police doctor Alberts Lokenbergs, the medical expert in the case of the Black Carnation Club, classified homosexuals into masturbators and “lower-category homosexuals,” the practice of pederasty serving as the basis for distinguishing the latter group. It was this group he regarded as presenting a danger to society; he asserted that, in paying for sexual services, they were corrupting people who wished to earn money, and moreover, like drug addicts, they were incapable of suppressing their desires. The prosecutor cited this opinion in the indictment, and the judge returned a guilty verdict.

The details of the opinions expressed by the experts were not reported in public, because the trials were closed to the press and the public. However, since police officers were the main sources of information for the press, the conclusions of the forensic experts and the judgements determined the message put across by the press.

Public communication of gender crossing

Crossing gender boundaries was not criminalized in Latvia, and so attempts by contemporaries to do so were reported in the press with a degree of sympathy, the accounts being presented as individual life stories. Intersexual behaviour was not highlighted as a social issue, because information was focused on the individual’s sexual identity, without mentioning sexuality. On the other hand, the descriptions of the experience of transpersons do contain hints regarding sexuality. For example, in 1935 the newspaper Rīts reported that the police had detained a man of unusual appearance in the Vērmane Gardens, who was strolling in a friendly manner with two Swedish seamen. The police established that the detained person was a 21-year-old woman dressed as a man, but the newspaper did not provide any further information. However, the interwar press related more or less detailed accounts of seven transpersons. These people had assumed names that did not correspond to their sex, and so I have assumed that this indicates an awareness of having a special

31 The National Archives of Latvia, the State Historical Archives of Latvia, Records of the 1st Criminal Division of the Riga Regional Court in the case on Harijs Michailovskis, Alfrēds Normanis and Jūlijs Teodors Johans Jākobsons, accused on the grounds of Article 516 Part 1 of The Penal Laws, 1536. fonds, 23.a apraksts, 4159. lietas 1. daļa, p. 86, The Minutes of the hearing of the 1st Criminal Division of the Riga Regional Court on November 15, 1927.
sexual identity. I have identified transpersons as a group, without seeking to distinguish potential transsexuals and intersexuals among them. Based on the interpretations in the press of the life stories of these people, I have (re)constructed the life histories of the transpersons: Pēteris/Millija (farm labourer from Trikāta Parish), Alvīne/Arvīds (worker from Valka), Lūcija/Jānis (craftsman from Riga), Elza/Pēteris (farm labourer from Valmiera County), Tamāra/Sergejs (from the middle classes in Riga), Efīmija/Efīmjs (farm labourer from Ogresgals Parish) and Rozālija/Ēvalds (farm labourer from Lielauce). Only one of them crossed the gender boundary from male to female; the other six crossed from female to male gender. The biological sex of the transpersons, which did not correspond to the gender with which they identified, was revealed when the person ended up in hospital or prison, where men would be separated from women; when they evaded military service; or when they were informed upon by someone else or observed by a policeman.

Articles about them were published in the inside pages of newspapers and were not given prominence. The reporters’ tone was neither mocking nor sensational. The narrative focused on cross-dressing, which was not presented as a social problem. The papers reported on such cases with titles such as “Woman in male dress turns the heads of many Riga ladies,”33 “An arrested man in Valmiera Prison turns into a woman,”34 “A man who considers himself a woman,”35 and so forth. The reporters used gendered language: thus, Millija was not referred to as a woman, but as a man, and as a woman in quotation marks, thus emphasizing that she was “fake” and that her gender did not correspond her biological sex. This account promoted the idea that gender appearance could not be changed despite the best efforts of the transpersons.36 In the Latvian press, too, detailed descriptions of outward appearance were the central message in such cases.

The journalists point out that these people correspond to the category of “assumed gender” (e.g. maleness), listing masculine traits as evidence of this: not only the consumption of alcohol and smoking,37 but also the

34 Arestants Valmieras cietumā pārvērties sievietē. Jaunākās Žīgas, October 6, 1937.
35 Vīrietis, kas atzīst sevi par sievieti. Jaunākās Žīgas, March 18, 1940.
demonstration of physical strength. The “true” sex of Elza/Pēteris was revealed in 1937, when he spent 14 days in prison for brawling at a fair. He had beaten up two men, one of whom was badly injured. When the arrested man was to be sent to his cell, someone noticed that the passport had been issued in the name of Elza rather than Pēteris. He had been working as a male labourer for 12 years already and explained that he felt “completely male” when wearing men’s clothing, that he wished to be a man, that he had never in his life worn female clothing and had only ever done men’s work.

It is necessary to separate women’s and men’s motivations for cross-dressing, because the former could be linked to women’s lack of economic and social freedom. Possibly, hegemonic masculinity was the reason why six out of seven known transgender persons had crossed the gender boundary from the subordinate (female) to dominant (male) gender. Efimija/Efimijis stated in 1929 that he would not give up “living as a man,” because he could do the better-paid work done by men, and moreover had found it easier to get work as a man. The public could view the wish for higher pay as a pragmatic choice, whereas it seemed senseless from this perspective for a man to seek to be a woman. The farmer’s son Millija was the only one of the seven transpersons in the 1930s openly living as a woman in rural Latvia, not seeking to conceal the difference between sex and gender. Millija was characterized as a gifted youth who had honourably completed his military service in the cavalry regiment, but then suddenly began asserting to his father that he was in fact a woman. Millija worked as a female farm labourer, which meant lower pay; moreover, she herself had asked to be paid the wage usual for women.

In the above-mentioned cases the journalists conveyed their message as straightforward information, refraining from value-judgements concerning these people in the context of existing tradition. This meant that the readers obtained information that was positive-neutral in character, permitting them to decide for themselves what it could all mean. Readers were also offered a limited insight into such cases elsewhere in Europe.

38 Arestants Valmieras cietumā.
39 Oram, Alison. Cross-Dressing and Transgender, p. 258.
42 Virietis – sievietes brunčos; Virietis, kas atzīst sevi par sievieti.
1932 the paper *Jaunākās Ziņas* reported on the sex-change operations carried out by the Dresden surgeon Kurt Warnecros on Danish painter Einar Mogens Wegener/Lili Elbe, and related that three operations of this kind had also been carried out at the Berlin Institute of Sexual Sciences, described to the newspaper by surgeon Felix Abraham. In 1935 readers learned of a case in Poland where two women had been betrothed. And in 1936 the newspaper *Pēdējā Brīdi* reported that the Čzech athletics record-holder Zdenka/Zdenek Koubkov had become a man.

These stories reported in the papers showed the possibility of divergent gender practice, but at the same time they conveyed a clear message that these people’s lives were problematic. In the case of Millija, the account described how, in order to free herself from the strong desire to be a woman, she had dug herself into the ground and tortured herself, and had seriously disfigured herself with a knife. Most probably, this was an allusion that she had tried to cut off her penis. Moreover, in order to be able to wear women’s clothes, she not only left her parents’ house (according to other reports, she was forced to leave), but also gave up her inheritance—a prosperous farmstead. Only Sergejs is described as having a romantic relationship.

A second problem faced by transpersons was the occurrence of misunderstandings in cases where they had to present personal identification. Millija had such problems on several occasions, and so in 1935 she asked the parish board to issue her with a new passport with a photograph in women’s dress. The parish board refused the request and turned over the case to the institutions supervising such matters. It has not been possible to establish what decision was taken in the end.

Cross-dressing tended to attract the attention of the police, since it aroused the suspicion that the person was wearing a disguise in order to conceal a crime. Cross-dressing was sometimes also described using the word “mask.” In 1934 Sergejs faced an accusation of concealing his identity, since he had presented himself to a policeman as a man. However, the court agreed with the lawyer’s argument that Sergejs was using the male name solely as a pseudonym, and he was acquitted. On the question of criminal prosecution against Efimis, the reply was that this

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46 Saimnieka dēls, kurš nēsā...; Vīrietis, kas atzīst sevi par sievieti.
47 Vīrietis – sievietes brunējos.
was unnecessary, because any citizen of Latvia may dress as they pleased; and because Efīmijs was registered in the passport as being of female sex and was not wanted by the police. However, the attitude of local authorities in Latvia could be different. The press reported that the local authority had taken action against Millija’s peculiar behaviour, and so she had asked an institution higher up in the hierarchy—the county board—to be allowed to wear women’s clothes. In 1933 this was permitted, with the proviso that she should not dress too conspicuously.

In the context of the discourse on sexuality in Latvia, it is unusual that there was no moralizing. This indicates that living as the opposite gender was not being connected with sexuality. For example, Efīmijs and Pēteris, in changing to the opposite gender, had not become active sexual subjects. In Latvia, as in Britain in the 1930s, occurrences of women dressing as the opposite gender were regarded as a “harmless oddity.” This was not seen as having a definite association with homosexuality. A gender-crosser was viewed not from a moral perspective (as a degenerate) but from a medical perspective (as having an inborn defect), because the attitude towards transpersons was regulated by the authority of medical experts.

**Public communication on the married transpersons**

Rather different are the cases of Alvīne/Arvīds Osis and Lūcija/Jānis Bergmanis, because these also involve sexual identity. In the case of both transpersons, they had been able to cross the gender boundary more easily under the conditions of the First World War, and both of them had married people of their own sex: Arvīds married in 1920, and Jānis married in 1923. They were married by Evangelical Lutheran pastors, who were ignorant of the sex of the groom. The life story of Arvīds was exposed in the press in 1921, while Jānis remained unnoticed until 1932.

Arvīds’ story was reported by the press in 1921, when his sex was revealed during his military service and he was detained as a woman. One article in 1922 reported his spouse as claiming that they were living platonically as a married couple. Arvīds had to take into account that the authorities acknowledged a person’s change of gender only if the “new” gender had been proven to correspondent to their actual biological sex. He asserted that he was a hermaphrodite. Arvīds may have been inspired by a

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48 Sieviete, kurai iepaticies vīrieša tērps un darbs.
49 Saimnieka dēls, kurš nēsā.
50 Oram, Alison. Cross-Dressing and Transgender, pp. 265, 274.
51 Sieviete ar sievieti salaulājas un piedzīvo bērnu. Jaunākās Zīgas, July 22, 1922.
precedent reported in the press in 1921. An eighteen-year-old farm labourer had asked the authorities to recognize her as a man and to issue a male passport.\textsuperscript{52} Based on reports by doctors, the Consistory of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church agreed to this. The paper \textit{Jaunākās Zījas} reported that Rozālija Krīgere had been designated as male by the Health Department of the Ministry of the Interior and that the Cabinet of Ministers had permitted her to take the name Ėvalds.\textsuperscript{53} The authorities had agreed to change Rozālija’s gender, because her sex had changed due to physiological rather than social processes.

The press focused on Arvīds once more in 1924, because another examination had been carried out to determine his sex. Gaston Backman, Head of the Institute of Anatomy and Histology of the University of Latvia, who had taken part in the examination, explained to the paper \textit{Latvijas Kareivis} that an individual such as Arvīds Osis, who did not have visible reproductive organs of both sexes, may be described as a psychic hermaphrodite.\textsuperscript{54} His conclusion corresponded to the position of Magnus Hirschfeld, who had already in 1910 refuted the assertions of psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Freudian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel that transvestism is definitely linked with homosexuality.\textsuperscript{55} Backman said that Alvīne had begun to regard herself as a man and to dress accordingly from the age of seventeen (in about 1915). The expert emphasised that Arvīds was not using his desire to be a man for selfish ends, and that his sexual instincts were determined by a congenital peculiarity of the sexual glands, something he referred to as “degeneration.” The euphemism regarding the absence of selfish intentions was a hint that Arvīds was not homosexual. The journalists did not report on how the result of the examination would affect Osis’ marriage, or what the representatives of the church had to say about the matter. The message that the reader could glean from this report might have been as follows: in this marriage of two women, the husband is not a homosexual woman. The press did not continue to follow the case of Osis during the 1920s, whereas in the early 1930s, during the years of the global economic crisis, the attitude of the authorities towards transpersons had changed.

The first to experience this was Lūcija/Jānis in 1932, when the paper \textit{Pēdejā Brīdī} suddenly reported on a marriage of a kind never seen before

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\textsuperscript{52} Rets gadījums. \textit{Jaunākās Zījas}, March 3, 1921.
\textsuperscript{54} Vīrietis vaj sieviete. \textit{Latvijas Kareivis}, February 16, 1924.
\textsuperscript{55} McLaren, Angus. National responses to sexual perversions, p. 128.
\end{flushright}
in Riga: a woman had apparently married another woman. No other paper reported on this case. Jānis’ marriage was interpreted as an almost unbelievable joke and complication that life had played out, where a woman had been prompted by economic considerations to marry another woman, describing how the ministries of Justice and the Interior, along with the Riga Regional Court, were trying to resolve this situation. The journalist reported how before the First World War the widowed cobbler Vilhelms Bergmanis had raised his son and daughter on his own. He had brought up his daughter as a son, and she had gone to school as a boy. After the father died, Lūcija began making use of her brother’s passport, became Jānis and made a living as a cobbler. During the First World War, Jānis had voluntarily served in the Ukrainian army. Jānis had worked in his cobbler’s workshop, had made a good living, but had not liked cleaning his flat. At a ball, aged 22, he met a certain Marija and subsequently proposed to her.

Henceforth, the journalist refers to Jānis as the husband (in quotation marks), and as the “female husband.” Neighbours and colleagues regarded Jānis and his spouse Marija as an ideal couple. When it was Jānis’ turn to do military service, he deserted, and sometimes visited his wife in secret. On one such occasion a woman recognized him and reported him to the police. Apparently, the army medical commission could not decide whether they were dealing with a woman or a man. He had bandaged his breasts from an early age, and so they had not developed. The experts from the Health Department of the Ministry of the Interior designated him a woman. The reporter emphasized that the problems had continued because the Law on Marriage did not contain any provision for annulling a marriage between two women.

The views of the legal consultants of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior and the registry office differed. One suggested that Bergmanis’ wife should start divorce proceedings on the basis that her husband had deceived her. Her refusal to do so was described as strange by the paper. Another recommendation was that Bergmanis should be tried for misleading the authorities and the pastor. However, the medical commission had already decided he was not culpable, because he had “acted under the influence of psychic motives—from an early age, the girl had been accustomed to the idea that she was a man, and so had

57 Sieviete pielaulētā savu „vīru” pīlīgi vēl nav redzējusi. Pēdējā Brādi, February 24, 1932.
subsequently succumbed to an illness, as it were, falling under the delusion of being a real man.58

The first article had influenced Jānis’ spouse. In this report the journalist had written that Marija did not wish to divorce, since she regarded Jānis as an ideal husband; two days later, however, in the second article, she is reported as saying that there was no hope of any happiness in such a marriage. The newspaper reported that Marija had behaved towards Jānis like a mother and a suffering woman, and that she was happy that now “the unnatural marriage between two women was to be annulled.”59

In contrast to the first article, in which the neighbours described them as an ideal couple, the second article reported that the neighbours had initially found the couple rather odd, but that they had become accustomed to them. Jānis was described as having a very high-pitched voice for a man and the broad hips of a woman, but in all other ways he had behaved as a man: drinking vodka and smoking in company. In describing the sexual relations between Jānis and Marija, the article stated that the couple had initially slept in one bed, but since the man’s sex had become known they had slept separately, although she had never seen her husband naked. Marija asserted categorically to the journalist that she had no abnormal desires and had married a woman only through a misunderstanding. The next step reported by the paper was an instruction from the Interior Ministry for the Riga Prefecture to confiscate Bergmanis’ passport and issue him with a new one as the woman Johanna Bergmane. In parallel with this, official institutions not named by the paper submitted a request to Riga Regional Court to disregard the Law on Marriage, and to annul this marriage concluded between two women. The case was to be heard before the regional court in the days following, but the paper did not report on whether it actually took place. The reader could only assume that “abnormal desires” meant homosexuality, since this word was not used at all. This account did not provide answers to such questions as: why had the authorities suddenly decided to resolve the matter of Lūcija/Jānis in 1932? Which individual or body had focused attention on it, and with what motivation? Was this related to the practice of sexuality? And if the marriage was annulled, then what grounds were given?

The sequence of publications in the press suggests that the press coverage of the Bergmanis case prompted somebody to recall the case of Ārviīds Osis. The press started writing about him in 1933. Ārviīds had successfully assumed the male gender. He had worked as a railwayman,
building worker and wagon driver, and had a family: his wife Alvīne had borne three children in the years 1927 to 1931. But in 1932 the “neighbour’s watchful eye” had observed that Arvīds was rather strange, and talk began that he was a woman. Now his name was placed in quotation marks, thus conveying the message that he was not a real man. Jaunākās Zīņas even published a photograph of Arvīds, referring to him in the female gender in the caption, a family photo was also published. In 1933 the Valka Registry Office brought a court case against Arvīds, accusing him of falsifying documents and misleading the authorities. The view of the registry office was that Arvīds, as a woman, could not have fathered the children listed as his in the registers of the Valka Town Registry Office. The registry office asked the Riga Regional Court to permit amendment of the entries in the civil register regarding the children of Osis, indicating that they were illegitimate, and to dissolve the marriage.

Writing about the married life of the Osis couple, journalists placed the term “marriage” in quotation marks to indicate that it was a false one, emphasised that, according to medical experts, the women could not have had sexual relations, and stated that it was not known who had fathered Alvīne’s children. However, Alvīne continued to insist that Arvīds was a man and that she was satisfied with their marital life. The doctor Miķelis Veidemans explained to the reporter that women pretending to be men are known as transvestites, and that doctors in Latvia had already studied a few such cases. He stated that some individuals “based on abnormal sexual desires” (meaning homosexuality) take on the outward appearance of the opposite sex in order to more easily attain their aim, and that these were bisexual homosexuals, but that Osis had no such desires. However, medical examination did not support Arvīds’ assertion that he was capable of a sexual relationship, and ruled out the possibility that children could have been born from the sexual relationship of the Osis couple.

Osis, however, regarded himself as a hermaphrodite with variable sexual characteristics. Several examinations had concluded that he was a woman, but in 1933 it was suddenly reported that some doctors had designated him a man. The reporter had also established Osis’ own view:

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60 Divas sievietes laulībā piedzīvojušas bērnu. Jaunākās Zīņas, November 8, 1933.
61 Par savādo laulāto pāri Valkā. Jaunākās Zīņas, November 9, 1933.
63 Par savādo laulāto laulībā.
64 Tomēr ne vīrietis, bet sieviete. Jaunākās Zīņas, November 10, 1933.
he said that the doctors had wished to take a semen sample for examination, but he had refused, because he found it abhorrent. According to Osis, this had, unfortunately, occurred during an intermediate period, on account of which he had not been able to prove his male potency. Osis refused to enter a clinic for observation, “because he did not know how long he would have to wait until he became a man once again.”

The neighbours of the Osis family maintained that the wife had not been seeing other men, and so Jaunākās Ziņas suggested that perhaps the medical examination had been erroneous. The local community regarded the fidelity of Osis’ wife as the most significant argument. Likewise, the newspaper Pēdējā Brīdi reminded its readers twice that the fact nobody could prove Osis’ wife had a lover might also be useful as evidence in court, and that this was significant, because such liaisons could not remain secret in a small town like Valka.

The Osis couple themselves wanted a new examination carried out. In 1934 Jaunākās Ziņas suggested that the situation did indeed point to the conclusion that the children were those of Arvīds Osis, whereas doctors were asserting that such periodic males are unknown to medicine. Soon the newspaper came out with the prediction that Osis would prove his rights as a man, because the Estonian doctor Pulikovskis had undertaken an analysis of Osis’ sperm, and in view of the children’s blood type, hair and eye colour, and body structure, had identified them as the children of Osis. However, the regional court ordered yet another examination, which concluded that Osis was incapable of fathering children. The Osis couple continued to maintain the opposite. And since sexual relations between man and woman in marriage were considered the norm, there was no reason to qualify him as degenerate. Public sympathy was on Osis’ side, because the press presented the case as a medical condition, rather than an example of homosexual vice.

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66 Liedzas atzīt savu vīru par sievieti.
69 Liedzas atzīt savu vīru par sievieti.
71 Brīžiem vīrietis, brīžiem sieviete?
73 Trīs ārsti atzinusi Arvīdu Osi par sievieti. Jaunākās Ziņas, August 30, 1934.
The favourable attitude taken by the press is explicable, since transpersons were not demanding the right to make use of their sexuality and had not organized themselves into a movement in order to achieve this—something that could have been regarded as threatening to hegemonic masculinity. The demand for such rights would have changed this attitude. At one point, for example, the journalist from Pēdējā Brīdī came to view Osis’ insistence on being recognized as male as provocative. He asserted that Osis was not a hermaphrodite, since such people “are never absolutely convinced to which sex they actually belong” and consider “their strange condition” as an embarrassment and a misfortune to be carefully concealed, rather than going out into the street and proclaiming that they are not the same as everyone else. The comment by the paper Jaunākās Zīnas that “two persons of the same sex cannot be married or registered, but the law does not forbid them from living together and providing for one another,” in response to the demand from Valmiera Registry Office for the marriage to be dissolved, testifies that the request by homosexuals to be allowed to marry would not have been satisfied.

A judgment by Riga Regional Court in 1933 in favour of the Valmiera Registry Office was followed by a cassation complaint and a new trial, until finally in 1936 the Senate of the Supreme Court decided that the initial judgment was to be disregarded. This was a decision by the supreme judicial instance in Latvia, so readers could assume that the Osis couple continued to live in a marriage recognized as lawful. However, the report did not actually state whether Osis did have male reproductive sexuality, or what happened to their marriage, considering that only a year earlier the authorities had dissolved the marriage of Lūcija/Jānis. The press simply ceased to discuss the story of Osis, thus indirectly showing that it did not see this as a socially significant issue.

The answers to the questions that the press did not raise can be obtained only through analysis of the internal communication among experts. But it has to be taken into account that the public did not receive answers to these questions at the time.

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74 Ne vīrieši, nedz sievietes, bet dabas pārpratumi. Pēdējā Brīdī, January 9, 1934.
75 Tomēr ne vīrieši, bet sieviete.
76 Ārveda Oša un Alvīnes Kalniņas laulību lieta Senātā. Latvijas Kareivis, April 21, 1936.
Internal (expert) communication on the married transpersons

Internal (expert) communication on non-normative sexuality involved three kinds of discourse—political, legal, and medical. The political discourse was shaped mainly by the legal experts of the Legal Consultative Body of the Ministry of Justice, the officials of the Administrative Department of the Ministry of the Interior, and the heads of town registry offices. In legal discourse, this role was played by the lawyers of the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court. Medical discourse was shaped by the medical experts appointed by the Health Department of the Ministry of Popular Welfare. These were both the senders and the recipients of the message. The Church did not participate in the internal communication on non-normative sexuality. The decision of the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court was received by the Board of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior, which saw that the pastor of the congregation concerned struck the entry regarding the marriage from the church register.

Communication among experts on non-normative sexuality may be reconstructed from four archive files produced in the years 1931–1936 by the Legal Consultative Body of the Ministry of Justice, the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court and the Senate of the Supreme Court. An insight into the medical examinations undertaken to ascertain the sex of Osis and Bergmanis, carried out in 1924 and 1925 in the frame of the criminal cases heard before Riga Regional Court, in which they were accused of falsifying documents and concealing their identity, can be obtained from the published scientific study by medical expert Miķelis Veidemanis.77 Currently, I have no information giving the perspective of the police, but it was these organizations in particular that began the initiative to resolve the issue of the sex of Bergmanis and Osis and to identify this in their passports.

The Bergmanis case was initiated by the Head of the Passports section of the Administrative Department of the Ministry of the Interior on March 17, 1931 with a letter to the Legal Consultative Body of the Ministry of Justice, posing the question of how the marital status of the Bergmanis family should be given in their passports: whether they should be regarded as married or unmarried, and whether the Legal Consultative Body might

77 Veidemanis, Miķelis. Dzimuma kārtas noteikšana.
Part II Chapter Four

initiate legal proceedings to annul the marriage. The Legal Consultative Body prepared its conclusion. The most important statement was written by Nikolajs Savičs, lawyer of the Legal Consultative Body. The first argument was that already in the criminal case of 1925 it had been established that Bergmanis should be regarded as a homosexual woman. Secondly:

neither physical laws nor legislation permit two women [...] to be or to count as man and wife. The cohabitation of two persons of the same sex does not bring about a marital relationship, and accordingly the law does not envisage the necessity of providing a legitimate course for dissolving this kind of union. [...] The law does not recognize such a “marriage” as dissoluble or as null and void; it does not actually equate such a condition with a marital relationship.

Thirdly, a request should be submitted to the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court for permission to make corrections in the civil register. On this basis the Passports Section of the Administrative Department informed the Riga City Registry Office that the Administrative Department had instructed the Riga Prefecture to issue Bergmanis with a female passport and requested the registry office to see that the entry regarding their marriage was struck from the marriage register. The corresponding request from the head of the registry office to the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court is dated May 20, but he himself requested that it be returned. Unfortunately, the documents do not tell us why the head of the section, Fromholds Braunšveigs, acted in this way, or why he, nevertheless, re-submitted it in November after receiving another conclusion from the Legal Consultative Body. The Administrative Section passed a resolution on 19 January 1932 to remove the entry (there was no question of dissolving the marriage or anything of that kind, since the legal experts considered that there had been no marriage, and that the entry in the official records was erroneous). On April 23, the Riga Prefecture issued Johanna Bergmane with a passport as a woman. The case of Bergmanis shows that in inter-war Latvia, as in Germany, Britain and

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78 The National Archives of Latvia, the State Historical Archives of Latvia, Records of The Legal Consultative Body of the Ministry of Justice on correspondence with the registry offices for registration of marriages, births, deaths and adoptions, 1533. fonds, 1. apraksts, 265. lieta, p. 213, The Letter of the Administrative Department of the Ministry of Interior to the Legal Consultative Body of the Ministry of Justice on March 17, 1931.

79 Ibid., p. 207, Conclusion of the Legal Consultative Body of the Ministry of Justice on October 20, 1931.
France at the end of the 19th century the message from doctors was that healthy individuals had to demonstrate heterosexuality and a corresponding gender, whereas those who could not were regarded as suffering from an illness.\(^80\)

This decision indicates the importance of the 1925 judgment, in which Bergmanis was designated as a lesbian, regardless of the fact that the examination classified Bergmanis as a transvestite. He had for years been bandaging his breasts, as indicated by scars, and had tried unsuccessfully to have them removed. He had used wooden tube in order to urinate like a man. At the time, the medical expert concluded that from a biological and medical perspective Alvīne/Arvīds and Lūcija/Jānis corresponded to the group of transvestites in the broad sense of the term, in accordance with the classification of Magnus Hirschfeld, because not only did they visually correspond to the opposite sex, but were also living as the opposite gender. In court, both of them should have been regarded as women on account of their anatomy and physiology. Nevertheless, Veidemanis pointed out:

> We do not have sufficient reason to force them to live as women, because they have already proven that they can perform the functions of men just as well, if not better. Were we to force on them a feminine way of life, then this action would make their lives bitter and make them mentally ill, as is often the case. On the other hand, if we let them follow the way of life they have chosen, neither society nor these individuals is harmed. Accordingly, it is necessary to bring about that in such cases these individuals are given administrative permission by the institutions concerned to dress in men’s clothes and pass themselves as men in social life as well.\(^81\)

The press reported on the Bergmanis case a month after the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court had made its decision,\(^82\) without even bothering to establish that the decision had already been taken.

The result achieved in the Bergmanis case had inspired the officials. On 3 February 1932 the Administrative Section of the Ministry of the

\(^{80}\) McLaren, Angus. National responses to sexual perversions, p. 126.

\(^{81}\) Veidemanis, Miķēlis. Dzimuma kārtas noteikšana, p. 15.

\(^{82}\) The National Archives of Latvia, the State Historical Archives of Latvia, Records of the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court in the case of Registry Office of Riga City in the request to allow to delete the entry in the marriage register of the Office for the year 1923 of marriage registration between Jānis Bergmanis and Luize Marija Kraulis, 1536. fonds, 29. apraksts, 1173. lieta, p. 7, The Resolution of the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court on January 19, 1932.
Interior also sent the Ministry of Justice a letter on the matter of Osis’ passport. The medical examination performed on May 19, with the aim of establishing the person’s sex and answering the question of whether Osis was capable of male reproductive function, designated him a woman. On October 5, 1933 the Juridical Department of the Ministry of Justice used literally the same argumentation as the lawyer Savičs had advanced in the case of Bergmanis and recommended that Valka Registry Office submit a request to the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court to declare the three children of Osis born out of wedlock and their marriage null and void.

In the years 1933 to 1936, Osis defended his right to be recognized as a man in six different courts, until the Senate of the Supreme Court confirmed the decision of the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court that the submission from the registry office was to be disregarded.

The string of reasons for the judgment included the argument that the regional court could conclude that Osis was to be regarded as a male individual and thus also the father of three children.

Osis had informed the doctors already at the time of the 1924 examination that when he was sexually aroused “a male member appeared similar to a male penis” the size of a little finger, and that his wife was satisfied with this kind of sexual intercourse. In 1932 and 1934 a total of

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83 The National Archives of Latvia, the State Historical Archives of Latvia, Records of the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court in the case of Registry Office of Valka city in the request to make corrections in Office’s files on birth registration for the years 1927, 1929 and 1931 to recognize Ausma, Imants and Jānis Oši as born out of wedlock to Alvīne Kalniņš, 1536. fonds, 29. apraksts, 1400. lieta, p. 2, The Letter of the Administrative Department of the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Justice on February 3, 1932.

84 The National Archives of Latvia, the State Historical Archives of Latvia, Records of the Senate of the Supreme Court in the case of plaint of Arvīds Osis on the sentence of Riga Regional Court, made on November 7, 1933 in the case of Registry Office of Valka city in the request to make corrections in Office’s files on birth registration for the years 1927, 1929 and 1931 to recognize Ausma, Imants and Jānis Oši as born out of wedlock to Alvīne Kalniņš, 1535. fonds, 1. apraksts, 22148. lieta, p. 2. The plaint of Arvīds Osis to the Administrative Department of the Senate of the Supreme Court on December 5, 1933.

85 The National Archives of Latvia, the State Historical Archives of Latvia, Records of the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court in the case of Registry Office of Valka city in the request to make corrections in Office’s files on birth registration for the years 1927, 1929 and 1931 to recognize Ausma, Imants and Jānis Oši as born out of wedlock to Alvīne Kalniņš, 1536. fonds, 29. apraksts, 1400. lieta, p. 124, Sentence by the Administrative Department of the Senate of the Supreme Court on April 20, 1936.

86 Veidemanis, Miķelis. Dzimuma kārtas noteikšana, p. 7.
twelve doctors took part in the repeated medical examinations of Osis, two of whom had recognized in 1934 that he had male functions. Dr Herbert Fegesack, doctor of internal diseases at Valka Town Hospital, had performed microscopic study of the fluid that Osis produced when he had an orgasm, and had found “living human spermatozoids with partially live movement,” proving that he had a gland that produced spermatozoids.87 The doctor concluded that Osis was a pseudohermaphroditus masculinus with outward female genitalia but male reproductive function. Since Osis was producing viable sperm, he was a man.

The main difference was that Bergmanis was designated a homosexual woman, whereas Osis was deemed a man. This was important in the 20th century, when experts declared a person’s sex as the most absolute aspect of an individual’s identity.88 Since the 19th century, biological science, the law, and administrative authorities had all considered that a person is either female or male, and they strove in doubtful situations to establish whether the person’s sex corresponded to their gender. Doctors sought to ascertain the “true sex” of hermaphrodites, based on bodily evidence and on the concept that sexual identity resides in the body and “glands.”

Expert communication on non-normative sexuality differed from public communication in that it revealed the significance of sexuality in providing the motivation behind the court judgements, whereas in public communication the sender of the message either did not touch on this question or else mentioned it so vaguely that the recipient of the message might not have been able to pick it up.

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87 The National Archives of Latvia, the State Historical Archives of Latvia, Records of the Administrative Section of Riga Regional Court in the case of Registry Office of Valka city in the request to make corrections in Office’s files on birth registration for the years 1927, 1929 and 1931 to recognize Ausma, Imants and Jānis Oši as born out of wedlock to Alvīne Kalniņš, 1536. fondo, 29. apraksts, 1400. lieta, p. 62, Testimony to Riga Regional Court written by the physician of internal diseases at the hospital of Valka city Herberts Fēgezaks on September 6, 1934.


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Arvīds Osis neatlaidīgi grib pierādīt, ka ir vīrietis [Arvīds Osis incessantly wants to prove that he is a man]. *Pēdejā Brīdi*, March 22, 1934.


Divas sievietes laulībā piedzīvojušas bērnu [Two women in a marriage have had children]. *Jaunākās Zīgas*, November 8, 1933.

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Ko autoritātes saka par seksuālās dzīves pārveidošanu cietumos [What do authorities say about reforming of sexual life in prisons]. *Pēdejā Brīdi*, January 14, 1933.

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CHAPTER FIVE

DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMOSEXUAL ACTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN 1961

JAN SEIDL

This paper seeks to analyze the chain of events that, in 1961, for the first time in the history of Czechoslovakia, led to the abolition of the general criminalization of homosexual acts. The abolition, through a new Penal Code, was something that had been advocated for almost the last hundred years. At the same time, it was practically the only measure (and an extremely important one) taken by the communist Czechoslovak regime (1948–1989) to effectively improve the structural conditions under which the homosexual minority lived.

In the case of Czechoslovakia I intend to demonstrate the specifics of the decriminalization of homosexuality in the context of a communist regime. The reform examined here was based on an entirely different set of ideological postulates to those in democratic countries. The secondary goal of the paper is to describe how the reform affected the lives of homosexuals and how it is reflected in the narratives of gay seniors today.

Homosexual emancipation efforts in a new post-war context

After the climax of civic activism in the 1930s, the “sexual minorities movement” in Czechoslovakia suffered many causalities under Nazi occupation. A number of leaders died and others went through concentration

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1 With the temporary exception of Těšinsko, a territory in Cieszyn Silesia annexed by Poland in 1938–1939.

2 An anonymous letter sent in 1868 to leading Czech physician Jan Evangelista Purkyně.
Decriminalization of Homosexual Acts in Czechoslovakia in 1961

or correction camps. After the country’s liberation in 1945, no one resumed the publication of a sexual minorities journal or re-established the Czechoslovak League of Sexual Reform (1932–1938). Only two pre-war activists are known to have engaged in explicit (but no longer organized) efforts to emancipate homosexuality after WWII: attorney František Čeřovský (1881–1962), who consulted the Ministry of Justice on homosexuality issues and defended homosexual clients until the mid-1950s, and Imrich Matyáš (1896–1974), a public official at the Social Security Administration, who wrote a number of petitions to public authorities in the 1950s and 1960s, advocating a more liberal policy on homosexuality.

There are several factors that determined the failure to resume homosexual emancipation efforts in their pre-war form and to do so to the same extent. The above-mentioned causalities among the movement’s key figures are of primary importance. Moreover, among those who survived, the suffering experienced during the six years of occupation was often much worse than that caused by the criminalization of homosexual acts (in accordance with Article 129 (b) of the Penal Code of 1852, which was still applicable at the time). The survivors possibly experienced a shift in values, and the effort to decriminalize homosexuality was no longer among their personal priorities. Finally, with a strong shift of public sentiment towards left-wing politics, there was a pervasive general expectation in post-war Czechoslovakia that all kinds of injustices would soon be abolished and the country would achieve a higher level of social justice than before WWII. It was in that atmosphere that František Čeřovský became a member of the rising Communist Party. Looking back, his son Miloš has said: “He believed in the progressive nature of Communism and thought his thirty-year struggle would soon come to a breakthrough [the decriminalization of homosexuality].”

Another reason for optimism was that the criminal justice policy of the Third Republic (1945–1948) prioritized retribution for the crimes committed by officials and collaborators of the Nazi occupation regime. In contrast to the period of increased repression during WWII, official authorities now paid much less attention to homosexual acts. The situation changed again after the communist coup d’état of 1948: although

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3 However, most of them were imprisoned for reasons other than homosexuality or homosexual activism.
5 Based on statistical probes undertaken by the author of the present paper and Lukáš Nozar (published in Seidl et al. 2012).
the Soviet Union had recriminalized homosexual acts in 1934, Czechoslovak homosexuals and their supporters remembered instances of support for decriminalization voiced before WWII by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). Therefore, the prospects of the homosexuals’ situation appeared even more promising when that party seized power in the country.

The Penal Code of 1950

In July 1948, the new communist government adopted a programme which foresaw that, within two years, new codes in the domains of civil, criminal, and family law would be drafted and enacted to implement the new regime in Czechoslovak law. The programme, referred to as a “legislative two-year plan,” was successful and the new laws were passed within the deadline. Unfortunately, the general criminalization of homosexual acts was upheld under Section 241 of the Penal Code of July 12, 1950, which provided for prison sentences of up to one year (or of one to five years for acts between adults and minors, or for pay).

In other words, the recodification of criminal law failed to meet the hopeful expectations of Czechoslovak homosexuals. Given the current state of research, with limited access to archival sources, it remains unclear why the communist government chose to preserve the general criminalization of homosexual acts. In an interview in 2003, Miloš Čeřovský gave the following account: “Shortly before the motion to repeal Article 129 was passed by the Recodification Committee, there were […] claims that socialist Czechoslovakia could not legalize homosexuality as long as the Soviet Union considered it a bourgeois phenomenon which could only be committed by antisocial individuals in a communist society and which was punishable.”

Due to restricted access to archival sources, we know little about the reasons for the decision to uphold criminalization, the role of the Soviet example, and the process of the “legislative two-year plan” as a whole. It seems that the plan’s implementation process was considerably chaotic and it was the factor of chance that decided the fate of certain provisions. The actual wording of those laws probably came into existence somewhere

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6 As Imrich Matyáš emphasized in his post-war diary: “During the First Republic, KSČ representatives repeatedly voiced the same opinion [on criminalization of homosexuality as German Communists and Social Democrats] and demanded the abolition of Article 129 in their election campaigns.” Fanel, Jiří. Gay historie. Praha: Dauphin, 2000, p. 438.
among a number of committees with variable membership and unclear powers. Individual members of those committees did not believe they could fulfil the plan within the deadline, and some of them were not interested in the recodification project because their participation was mandatory. In any case, the specific mechanisms behind the emergence of laws at that time are not the focus of contemporary Czech legal historiography. For the purposes of this text, I am merely going to characterize the 1950 Penal Code as a whole and outline the ideological context in which it was embedded. I am going to argue that the Code indeed only rose and declined within that context.

In a criminal law textbook from 1953, which was mandatory for all college programmes in Czechoslovakia, the central motifs—Marxist dialectics, Stalin and destruction—are outlined in the very first paragraph:

Popular-democratic criminal law is an important component of the legal superstructure—of the legal system of a popular democracy. After the destruction of the old base and its superstructure, a new legal system has been formed to ensure that our state gradually develops towards socialism. The following ingenious idea of comrade J. V. Stalin formulated in his work, *On Marxism in Linguistics*, is applicable to the formation of a popular-democratic legal system: “Every base has its superstructure that answers to it. The base of the feudal order has its superstructure, and so does the socialist one. When a base is changed or destroyed, a new superstructure emerges immediately after the new structure.”

Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that “the purpose of criminal law in a popular democracy is to protect the economic base and an adequate superstructure of the society of a popular-democratic state in the stage of building socialism.” In other words, the “legislative two-year plan” sought to create criminal law that prescribed draconian penalties to deter the population from acts of resistance against nascent communist totalitarianism. As a top priority, the Penal Code stipulated harsh punishment for political crimes such as treason, “association against the Republic,” “sedition against the Republic,” sabotage, espionage, “endangering an official secret,” abuse of diplomatic office, unauthorized emigration, “harming the interests of the Republic abroad,” etc. Lifetime imprisonment or the death penalty were prescribed as mandatory sentences for a number of those crimes, with the death penalty the only option in some cases. Suspended sentences were often not allowed.

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9 Ibid.
According to the official narrative, crime in a popular democracy was to be blamed either on “residues of the exploiting classes” or on “backward members of society.” While the former category of criminals was primarily involved in acts of resistance against the communist dictatorship, i.e. political crimes, the latter committed mostly traditional crimes. As the textbook explains: “The crimes committed by workers arise, above all, from relics of capitalism in the consciousness of some backward people (e.g., stealing of collective property, theft, violence, intoxication)—a difficult heritage of yesterday’s capitalism.”

For instance, theft was allegedly motivated by the thief’s prospect of making an easy profit (just like a capitalist’s business operation), but in a popular-democratic state, it deprived individuals of things they had earned through their hard work, thus violating “the interests of the working class, the peasantry and the working intelligentsia.”

It is in this context that homosexual wrongdoings are implicitly framed by the new criminal law. In a general introduction to crimes against morality (referred to as “crimes against human dignity” by the new Code), the textbook states:

In a broad effort to protect the personality rights of the citizens of a socialist state, socialist criminal law wages a decisive struggle to protect human dignity in the field of sexual relations. Crimes against human dignity constitute a grave violation of socialist morality, often reflect sexual perversion on the part of their perpetrators, and are regarded as heavy, despicable relics of yesterday’s capitalism.

On the crime of same-sex sexual relations (Article 241) specifically, the textbook’s authors merely stated the following: “The danger to society arises primarily from the fact that such acts are often a source of income, a reason for blackmail etc.”

**Critique and erosion of the 1950 Penal Code**

The ideological context of the Penal Code of 1950 can be referred to as the “culmination of Stalinism in Czechoslovak criminal law.” I will now examine the relationship between the Penal Code’s viability, on the one
hand, and the context and the extreme extent to which it was reflected in the Code, on the other.

In February 1956, the 20th General Assembly of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was held. The KSČ leadership was explicitly challenged by Nikita Khrushchev to review its policies and get rid of some elements of Stalin’s heritage. Soon a process of destalinization was launched, and one of its main goals was to make the state abide by its own laws. This was referred to as “socialist lawfulness.” In a speech on March 29, 1956, First Secretary of the KSČ Central Committee, Antonín Novotný, criticized Stalin’s principle of making class conflict ever harsher:

Stalin’s incorrect and one-sided thesis was reflected in our country, too. […] As a result, some members of the criminal justice system were misled to believe that they are the main force of the class conflict. They didn’t understand that the main force is indeed the working class, led by the Party. They were misled to believe, and acted upon the belief, that they could circumvent the Party’s authority, set themselves over the Party, commit wrongdoings, abuse power, violate socialist lawfulness, and claim that the working class had charged them with cleaning up the Party and the state.14

Khrushchev also challenged communist leadership to make the destalinization process public and transparent, rather than keep it behind closed doors. KSČ soon demonstrated its abidance with this suggestion by publicizing a series of resolutions and speeches on the topic, giving a strong impetus for an informal public debate about what should be changed in the country. A meeting of the KSČ Central Committee on 19–April 20, 1956, could not but reflect the emerging debate in society. According to an official report from the meeting, the debate was taking place in bodies and chapters of the KSČ “with active involvement of members” and centred on “sharp criticism of problems in the life of the Party and in public life.”15 Repressive exercise of public authority was also subject to criticism because, as stated in the report, the Central Committee “issued a guideline to strengthen socialist lawfulness by preparing, as soon

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14 Rudé právo. April 10, 1956, p. 4. An excerpt from the conclusions of a KSČ conference in June 1956 is also revealing: “it is necessary […] to make sure criminal proceedings are based on the principle that the accused is considered innocent, as if he did not commit the crime, unless proven guilty as a result of the criminal proceedings; all authorities involved in preliminary proceedings as well as courts are obliged to examine not only incriminating evidence but also evidence that is favourable for the accused” (Collective author, 1958, pp. 334–335).

as possible, a number of measures applicable to courts and public prosecution, and by establishing the institution of the investigating judge.”16

The Minister of the Interior, Rudolf Barák, was responsible for transposing the Central Committee guidelines from April into draft laws and regulations. In late spring his proposals were debated twice by the Politburo of the Communist Party. Interestingly, it was here that the Politburo for the first time considered the option to abolish the general criminalization of homosexual relations. It is currently still unclear how that item got into Minister Barák’s proposal, but in any case, on June 4, 1956 the Politburo, including Barák himself, decided to “keep old provision for homo; abortion—decriminalize,” to quote the minutes from this meeting which are preserved in the National Archive.17 Other items were related primarily to structural aspects of substantive and procedural criminal law, and a vast majority of them were approved.

The Politburo’s resolution was transposed into an amendment to the Penal Code enacted on December 19, 1956. The provisions that were most severely affected by a Stalinist perspective on criminal justice were either deleted or amended. For example, all provisions prohibiting suspended sentences or parole were deleted; an option of twenty-five years’ imprisonment was added to provisions with mandatory death penalties; courts were given the option to discharge offenders instead of sentencing them; some acts were decriminalized and some others newly criminalized. The amendment came into effect on January, 1 1957. The general criminalization of abortion was abolished by another law enacted on December 19 1957.

These developments were necessarily reflected in a new edition of the college textbook on criminal law. Some passages were rewritten completely. From the new theoretical perspective it was no longer necessary to elevate the role of criminal repression or to set criminal justice authorities over the Party—because “the bourgeoisie was gravely affected by progress in the building of socialism, which pushed it out of its economic positions and increased the standard of living of the working class, and which was achieved by the working class and peasantry under the leadership of the Communist Party.”18

Other passages only underwent minor rewrites, and some of those rewrites perhaps best exemplify the change of perspective. Positive references to Stalin were deleted and the proportion of references to Lenin

16 Ibid.
was increased. Another example is the sentence “new methods applied in the codification process helped accelerate the process and increase its quality” which was transformed as follows: “Application of the principles of Marxism-Leninism, extensive transfer of Soviet experience and application of new methods in the codification process helped accelerate the process.” The major shift resonating in this rewrite is that in 1959 the authors of the textbook no longer insisted that the process of preparing the Penal Code had been of high-quality. Perhaps the rewrite also reflected the contemporary debates that were taking place among the power elite, namely whether or not to prepare and enact a brand-new Penal Code again.

Preparation of the 1961 Penal Code and abolition of the general criminalization of homosexuality

The Ministry of Justice considered the criminal law amendment, enacted in late 1956, as a mere provisional arrangement to undo the most striking wrongs. In the following spring it started preparing a more in-depth reform of criminal law. The Ministry emphasized that the new codification effort should be preserved from chaos, comply with established guidelines and methods, and follow a realistic time schedule. Until 1960, the Ministry intended “to collect, examine and evaluate information, both practical experience [with the implementation of existing laws] and theoretical and scientific evidence, and to study and summarize information on existing laws in the Soviet Union and popular-democratic countries.” Then, based on that information, the Ministry anticipated drafting a series of specific provisions and enacting them before the end of 1962.

It seems that an open-minded approach to the reform was debilitated, for some time, by the country’s conservative Prime Minister, Viliam Široký. Instead of the planned comprehensive review of the ways existing laws were implemented within the practice of the Czechoslovak judiciary, the Ministry only managed to briefly survey the Chief Justices at regional courts in late 1959. I want to emphasize a motif that occurs in the survey’s cover letter. To justify the intended recodification of civil and criminal law, the Ministry stated, among other things:

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21 National Archive, Ministry of Justice, document box Leg. 28. Unless otherwise specified, this document box is the source of all archival records that underlie the information and quotes below.
Moreover, in the review process, attention should be paid to provisions that are incomprehensible, difficult to interpret, and applied with uncertainty. An effort to remove incomprehensibility is especially relevant now that members of the working class are going to be more and more involved in the implementation of such provisions.

The policy of involving ordinary citizens in the making of justice was officially referred to as “popularization of the judiciary”\textsuperscript{22} and emerged in public discourse shortly after the coup d’état of 1948. In the late 1950s, the effort of communist authorities to further strengthen the policy importantly shaped the context of the efforts to decriminalize homosexuality.

The process of drafting the new laws commenced in late winter and early spring of 1960. The Ministry of Justice assembled nine working groups dedicated to the different norms, and the Criminal Code group was led by Štefan Breier of the Justice Directorate in Bratislava.\textsuperscript{23} According to a memo circulated in the Ministry in May 1960, “practically all major provisions of the Penal Code have been prepared, especially ones incorporating changes to the current version.” The Breier group had already distributed some of its proposals for consultation and intended to prepare a complete draft of the Penal Code by June based on the consultants’ comments. Importantly, with regard to the abolition of the general criminalization of homosexuality, there were either no comments raised at this stage or any comments raised were not considered significant by the Breier group.

Public life in Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1960 was infused with one particular official narrative: after twelve years of building socialism, the country was about to cross the threshold to a socialist system. The new system was to be governed by the principle that “each individual shall give according to his ability and get according to his work.” The building of socialism was officially declared complete by the Communist Party at a national conference in early July. In this interpretation, Czechoslovakia became the second socialist state in the world, after the Soviet Union. Since the declaration was allegedly substantiated by actual achievements, the communist leadership also decided to adopt a new “socialist” constitution for the country. The draft constitution was first broadly

\textsuperscript{22} As early as in 1948, court senates in criminal proceedings were extended to include “people’s judges.” As individuals with a working class background, they were supposed to decide on the basis of their “class notion of justice and class instinct.”

\textsuperscript{23} Directorates were quasi-ministries with jurisdiction in the semi-autonomous territory of Slovakia.
disseminated among the general public, then on July 11, 1960 it was adopted unanimously by the National Assembly. Propaganda immediately presented the Constitution as a fait accompli, even before it came into effect. The official discourse became infused with more and more references to the strengthening of “socialist lawfulness” and “popularization of the judiciary” as the central themes of Czechoslovak criminal justice policy at that time.

In order to advance the popularization of the judiciary, the new constitution contained a provision on “local people’s courts” with jurisdiction over petty criminal offences. The communist leadership envisaged that these courts would be established at the level of workplaces or in communities, and the justices, ideally respected working-class role models with moral authority, would be elected by citizens. The Constitution also entrusted “societal organizations” with the responsibility to guide citizens towards “law abidance, discipline in the workplace and socialist civility” and to “prevent and stop violations” against those principles.

In order to better understand the Communist Party’s ideological framing of the criminal justice reform, I have examined documents from a Central Committee session on December 8, 1960. On the agenda was the effort to “further advance socialist lawfulness and popularization of the judiciary.” Central Committee Secretary and Politburo Member, Jiří Hendrych, the Party’s second man after President Novotný, presented a report on the topic and his message was then affirmed by a resolution of the Central Committee.

The Hendrych report was centred upon the theme of a “moral and political unity of the people” arising out of the socio-economic changes that culminated symbolically in the summer of 1960 with the declaration of the completion of socialism in Czechoslovakia. The unity of the people,
along with improving living standards both materially and culturally, had logically resulted in a decrease of “antisocial phenomena and the fact that the norms of life in a socialist society are not only more and more respected voluntarily and consciously, but also actively asserted by a vast majority of citizens.”\textsuperscript{26} Such “continuous growth of socialist consciousness” among citizens was creating “ever better conditions for an ever more effective application of the means of social control and education so that lawbreaking is prevented and the governmental means of law enforcement are only used where such moral and educational control by the society is insufficient.”\textsuperscript{27} In other words, after the partial liberalization of the draconian 1950 Penal Code in 1956, the country’s communist leadership intended to liberalize it again, this time somewhat more significantly. As for the above-mentioned educational effects of “social control” on the “socialist person,”\textsuperscript{28} the Central Committee found it “necessary to rely on collective-based moral control, on positive examples of hard work and civic altruism, on the gravity of moral condemnation of antisocial actions by the entire collective.”\textsuperscript{29} In practice this thesis translated into the institution of local people’s courts which, according to the resolution, were supposed to “facilitate the development of comradery relations among workers, protect citizens’ dignity and honour, and use comrade-to-comrade control and moral appeal to educate citizens’ collectives towards developing an uncompromising attitude to any actions detrimental to society.”\textsuperscript{30}

The Central Committee’s December meeting was perceived as an important symbolic event. Both the Hendrych report and the subsequent resolution of the Central Committee were formulated in general terms, with few mentions of specific criminal law provisions to be changed (as an exception, relatively detailed attention was paid to local people’s courts). However, by presenting the two texts at its top-level meeting and subsequently publicizing them, the Party legitimized the preceding preparations of the criminal law reform by the Ministry of Justice. At the

\textsuperscript{26} Collective author, 1960, p. 29. Contemporary legal historiography confirms that crime rates in the early 1960s decreased, compared to the early 1950s (the number of sentenced perpetrators of general crimes in 1960 was 54% of the level of the year 1951), but explains it by the existence of a police state, not by shifts in collective consciousness. Kuklík, Jan, et al. \textit{Vývoj československého práva 1945–1989}. Praha: Linde, 2009, p. 405.
\textsuperscript{27} Collective author, 1960, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 32.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 39.
same time, it implied the communist leaders’ intention to finalize the reform as soon as possible. Available sources suggest that after issuing its general approval, the KSČ leadership refrained from further interventions into the recodification process taking place in government authorities. Apparently, the Ministry of Justice now sought to accelerate the process as much as possible. Based on the previous year’s informal consultations, the drafts of the Penal Code and the Penal Procedure Code were prepared. On March 14, 1961, the Ministry submitted both drafts for a consultation procedure including all government ministries, the Justice Directorate, and various other central authorities, setting the deadline for comments to May 15.

The draft of the Penal Code submitted for consultation in March 1961 still provided for the general criminalization of homosexual relations. Unfortunately, the sources at our disposal did not include individual comments obtained through the consultation procedure, although they were crucial to the fate of the provision on homosexuality. When the procedure was concluded, the Ministry of Justice convened a meeting on June 29–30 to decide on the different comments raised, and minutes from that meeting were preserved by the National Archive. Twelve items from the Penal Code were on the meeting’s agenda including the criminalization of homosexuality on which the minutes state the following: “In contrast to the provisions of the existing Penal Code, criminal sanctions will not apply to homosexuality in general. However, sexual relations for pay will be criminalized.” Apparently, between March and May 1961, someone had raised and asserted the demand to abolish the general criminalization of homosexuality and had won the support of individuals in the decision-making circle and, at the end of June, that circle agreed to meet his/her demand.

From that moment, until the end of the legislative process, the draft version of the Penal Code included a provision which criminalized homosexual relations only under specific and defined circumstances. On September 8, 1961, the Minister of Justice, Alois Neuman, submitted a report to the KSČ leadership on the drafts of the Penal Code and the Penal Procedure Code. The report listed the most important changes proposed to the existing criminal law. It also outlined the rationale behind selected changes that the report’s authors thought could be met with objections.

After the Central Committee received the Neuman report its Unit 11 formulated an opinion. It stated that it had been “monitoring the process of preparing the new penal codices and making sure throughout the course of that process and the consultation procedure that the codices are prepared in full compliance with the Central Committee Resolution of December 1960
and with the recodification objectives set by the Politburo."31 It forwarded both drafts to Secretary Hendrych arguing that since both drafts complied with the guidelines formulated by the KSČ leadership, they did not have to be submitted to the Politburo for approval and, should Hendrych agree with its opinion, Unit 11 would instruct Minister Neuman to table the drafts in the Government. It is likely that secretary Hendrych agreed with the opinion of Unit 11 because the Politburo did not discuss the draft Penal Code again. It remains unclear how risky such a discussion would have been for the fate of the provision on same-sex relations (rewritten following the consultation procedure). As mentioned above, the Politburo had rejected the same proposal in the year 1956. Therefore, the fact that Hendrych agreed not to submit the Penal Code and Penal Procedure Code drafts to the Politburo, and raised no objections against the provision on homosexual acts (although it had been brought to his attention explicitly in the Neuman report), can be interpreted as Hendrych’s implicit approval of the decriminalization of homosexuality on behalf of the communist leadership.

On October 20, 1961 the draft Penal Code and the draft Penal Procedure Code were discussed by the Government. On November 29, 1961 they were passed by the National Assembly following a highly formal debate. After President Novotný’s signature they took effect on January 1, 1962. From that day consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex were no longer a criminal offence. In accordance with Article 244, the Penal Code still criminalized homosexual acts between adults and minors under eighteen years, for pay, or under circumstances that could be deemed a public offence.32

Let us now return to the report of the Minister of Justice, Alois Neuman, of September 8, 1961 which was submitted to Hendrych along with the opinion of the Central Committee’s Unit 11. Among other things, the report expounded the reasons for deleting the general criminalization of homosexuality from the draft:

According to the existing wording of the Penal Code, all manifestations of homosexuality are punishable. Criminal penalties, in their existing scope,

32 The complete Article was deleted from the Criminal Code in 1990. Thus, equal conditions were established for homosexual and heterosexual relations (with the threshold age of 15 years).
result in unintended consequences, including mental disorders and some perpetrators committing suicide. Individuals with homosexual inclinations are often used or even blackmailed by criminal circles. Medical evidence shows that these perpetrators suffer from a sexual deviation that is untreatable given the current state of medical science. In consideration of the consequences of existing penalties, the Jan Evangelista Purkyně Psychiatric Society and the Ministry of Health, after several years of work on the problem, recommended to address the problem as proposed in the draft. All parties to the consultation procedure agreed with the draft provision.

According to the new provision, perpetrators of same-sex relations will only be prosecuted if their actions damage the moral development of individuals under 18 years of age, if they commit homosexual relations for pay, or if they abuse a dependent individual for such relations (Article 244 of the draft). Consensual homosexual relations between adults without pay and without abuse of dependence will be punishable if such actions are publicly offending in their effects or if someone is forced to such relations in any way. Thus, the law proposed will guarantee criminalization of all cases of homosexual relations that pose a threat to society. In other cases, it will be up to societal organizations to work effectively towards rehabilitating the perpetrator.33

This explanation is very important for two reasons. First, it names the circles which claimed that the general criminalization of homosexuality should be abolished34 and it shows how they argued. Second, it illustrates the relativity of the 1961 decriminalization. According to the last sentence quoted, “societal organizations” were expected to “rehabilitate the perpetrator.” If this was meant seriously by the report’s authors (staff of the Ministry’s Legislative Section, not the undersigned Minister Neuman), then the question remains whether they really believed that NGOs could motivate people to abstain from homosexual behaviour (or even to stop feeling that way) or whether they offered such prospects merely to satisfy the decision-makers. The former interpretation appears implausible because the authors also stated that homosexuality could not be treated by state-of-the-art medicine. At the same time, it was probably not a mere

33 National Archive, Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Defence and Security Section, document box 155, folder MS-1-135.
34 There is a narrative among Czech sexologists that the decriminalization of homosexuality was pushed through by the Czechoslovak Psychiatric Society (at the initiative of its members, Kurt Freund and Karel Nedoma, see below). To the best of our knowledge, no other source ascribes the key lobbying role to anybody else.
ornamental phrase, considering the ideological background of criminal law re-codification in 1961.

The promise of “societal organizations [working] effectively towards rehabilitating the perpetrator” may indicate that consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex were understood by the new Penal Code’s authors as the type of acts posing “no threat to society” yet contradicting the ideal of a new “socialist person”; for the latter reason they still deserved public intervention. The authors intended to change the form of intervention from traditional methods of criminal law (administered by the criminal justice system) to unspecified, probably rather informal methods, administered by organizations in one’s social environment. This intention should be interpreted in the context of contemporary expectations that in the process of building an ever more advanced socialist society, up to the stage of communism, the state would gradually wither away and its role would gradually be taken over by grassroots social networks and organizations (cf. etymology of the word “communism”).

The deletion of consensual homosexual relations between adults from the Penal Code was not enabled by a supposed liberalization of the regime but by the following conceptual figure: from a certain stage of Czechoslovakia’s social development, which was declared by the power elite as completed in the wake of the 1960s, some offences could be transferred from the system of government control, with its enforcement potential, to the scope of a new parallel system of “societal” control, represented by “organizations” and “collectives” with their “educational” potential. However, the fact that homosexuality was deemed something disagreeable did not change—cf. the use of the word “perpetrator” in the last sentence of our Neuman quote.

Recall that the so-called “comradery courts,” as predecessors of local people’s courts, also had the status of “societal organizations.” For that reason the authors of the Neuman report may have ascribed the same status to local people’s courts. It is unclear whether any homosexual acts were specifically prosecuted by the local people’s courts established after July 1, 1961. That hypothesis could only be verified following an examination of archival sources collected from their activities. If such an examination confirmed the hypothesis, it would mean that no actual “decriminalization” took place in 1961.

In contrast, if further research demonstrated that local people’s courts or other “societal organizations” (such as labour unions) did not intervene

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35 It was also believed that there would be no more crime in a communist society.
in the lives of homosexual citizens significantly, then we would see if this was caused by these entities’ incompetence (local people’s courts were abolished in 1969 because their measures were not effective), or by the fact that socialism theorists’ ideas of a new society were met with disillusionment in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the latter case, we might conclude that the communist leadership in fact decriminalized homosexuality unwittingly. Let us further note that Neuman’s text also argued that homosexuality was incurable “given the current state of medical science.” Here we might hypothesize that those who approved the decriminalization did so with the belief that homosexuality would become “curable” in the future; if that was the case then their decision would have been once again based on false assumptions.

A reflection of decriminalization in the gay community’s collective memory

In the absence of evidence on the above questions, I will use another perspective to help clarify the effects of abolition (the deletion of general criminalization of homosexual relations from the Penal Code). I will start by examining a number of cultural accounts of homosexuality that emerged over time.

As for fiction and poetry, most books that treated the topic of homosexuality openly under the communist regime were only published after the fall of the regime. These include the poems of Bohivoj Kopic (1931–1982), Josef Topol (1935–2015) or Jiří Kuběna (b. 1936). The three closeted poets presented a relatively open account of homosexuality, and there is no reason to assume that the year 1961 marked any change in their writing. The works of other authors thematized homosexuality through sublimation. Ladislav Fuks (1923–1994), for example, an outstanding fiction writer known primarily for a number of books on the holocaust, wrapped up hints about homosexual experiences in the ways he told the story of the Jewish nation. Another writer, Václav Krška (1900–1969), worked primarily as a film director after 1945. In the 1950s, when homosexual relations were still criminalized by law, he made two movies about the world of students based on the novels of Fráňa Šrámek. Professor Putna argues that in those movies, he created a “sublimed homoerotic constellation in which young men exchange hugs, roll down hills and skinny dip in rivers.” Moreover, the lead parts in both movies

were played by Eduard Cupák (1932–1996), a young actor whose homosexuality was common knowledge in Czech gay circles. Thus, Cupák’s work too could be perceived by insiders as an account of homosexual desire.

Generally speaking, however, the decriminalization of homosexuality in Czechoslovakia did not have an impact on the ways it was thematized in art. In works intended for publication open references to homosexuality were still impossible, and authors who wanted to talk about it still had to resort to various indirect strategies.

Did the decriminalization have an impact on homosexuals’ everyday lives? In a series of oral-history interviews with gay and lesbian seniors, they remembered taking it for granted that the situation improved after 1961. These interviews were part of a number of projects that have taken place since about 2000. None of the seniors interviewed were incarcerated after 1961, but many told stories of friends and acquaintances who were—even after 1961—harassed by the Police or subject to various inquiries, albeit not prosecuted before a court. In any case, the police maintained lists of homosexuals (those files got discarded after the fall of communism in the early 1990s). The police were known to blackmail people on the basis of their orientation and recruit them for different kinds of collaboration if they saw the use of certain individuals.

When today’s gay and lesbian seniors speak of a kind of “thaw” affecting the homosexual community after 1961, then this feeling was probably caused not only by the new Penal Code but also by a more general trend of liberalization of the communist regime in the 1960s, especially in the realm of culture. One of the narrators explicitly associated the improvements in the life of Prague’s homosexual community in the early 1960s with the decriminalization of 1961 and with the opening of Viola—a “poetic café,” a relatively independent cultural space primarily for an intellectual audience, and in part also an unofficial gay club. Other narrators recalled “noticeable” liberalization in the years 1968–1969 when homosexuality was no longer taboo, even in mass media, but this short intermezzo was ended by the Soviet invasion which halted the reform process in the country.

Certain developments that preceded the post-1961 “thaw” occupy a much more significant place in the collective memory of today’s oldest generation of gay Czech men. In the 1950s, many homosexuals were involved in various research studies by the psychiatrist and sexologist Kurt Freund (1914–1996). Perhaps his rather bizarre experiments have a better storytelling potential than any post-1961 improvements in everyday life. The declared goal of Freund’s studies was to find treatment for
homosexuality. The word in homosexual circles was, however, that Freund’s actual goal was to gather scientific evidence in support of decriminalization. The reason why many homosexuals got involved was to make a difference.  

Freund applied the method of “conditioning positive and negative responses” which proceeded as follows: patients (men only, because few lesbian women attended the initial examination and none of them wished to change their orientation) were served coffee or tea with emetine, then injected with a mixture of emetine and a nauseating substance subdermally. Then, while the patients were vomiting, they were shown life-size or larger-than-life-size pictures of dressed men, men wearing swimsuits and naked men, and were asked to imagine these men as their sexual partners. This procedure took thirty to forty-five minutes. In another test the patients got an injection of testosterone before going to bed and were then shown pictures of women. Both tests were alternated several times. Heterosexual adaptation was the main goal. Even if the patients remained basically homosexual, it was hoped that their future sexual relations would more often be heterosexual than homosexual.

Other clinical studies by Freund and his colleague, Karel Nedoma of the Institute of Sexology, focused on different aspects of homosexual men’s bodily and mental constitution, their sex life, and the associations between them. From 1950 to 1956, a sample of 222 men was examined for that purpose, and in 1959–1961 Freund published the results in several articles in Czechoslovak and international psychiatry journals. Of particular relevance to the abolition of general criminalization of homosexuality was a 1959 publication in which Freund stated that “one can consider the age of desired partners to be sufficiently invariant to serve as a characteristic of the different pictures of the homosexuality syndrome in men,” and argued that “adult men who have sex with adults of the same sex are rarely a threat to minors and perhaps never to children.”

As for the durability of heterosexual adaptation among his patients, Freund admitted in 1957 that “the number of adapted homosexual men […] is very small,” decrying the fact that many “patients” had misinformed him about their post-treatment sex life.  

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37 These memories of senior gay men were collected through Franz Schindler's oral history project in 2003–2004.
38 One of the treatment’s pitfalls was that some patients lost motivation for changing their sexual orientation once hospitalized with others. Interviewed in the 1990s, Mr. Ota Tasinato recalled: “There was an inpatient unit with four beds. But soon, our people figured it out and changed the unit into a dating centre.” (Meer, Ad. Láska až za hrob. Soho revue, Vol. 4, 1994, 7, pp. 6–7.) One of Franz
established narrative told among Czechoslovak sexologists, which differs somewhat from the gay seniors’ narrative, it was precisely this finding, that homosexuality is untreatable, that motivated Freund to help promote decriminalization.

In any case, Kurt Freund became a mythical character in the Czech homosexual community. According to a number of preserved testimonies, most homosexuals were truly happy about the new Penal Code. Eduard Cupák, for example, the actor mentioned above, welcomed decriminalization by exclaiming “Father Novotný has just abolished our Article.”38 Visitors of T-klub, a gay establishment in Prague, sang an aria from Bedřich Smetana’s Dalibor as their homosexual anthem,39 and utmost exuberance characterized the 1962 New Year’s celebration at Šroubek café which marked the night during which the law came into effect.41

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Schindler’s narrators contributed another account: “The situation was somewhat grotesque. For instance, some people were hospitalized there to obtain treatment and they were allowed to go outside. And on Sundays, they normally went outside with that nurse and they always told her, ‘let’s go to Šroubek café’ [a well-known gay establishment at that time]. She had no idea what she was getting into, so she was OK with going, and they all rushed into the café, yeah. And they were getting this and that while she was sitting there and sipping black coffee, or perhaps coffee with cream. And in the meantime, they were running around and hanging out who knows where. And eventually, they all came back and continued their treatment procedure. And when asked by the doctor how they were doing, they said they were doing great, that the treatment had been successful, and then they were released again. It was basically a fun time.” (Himl, Pavel, Seidl, Jan and Schindler, Franz (eds.). Miluji tvory svého pohlaví. Praha: Argo, 2013, p. 290.)
39 Himl, Pavel et al. Miluji tvory svého pohlaví, p. 288. Cupák referred to “Father Masaryk,” a once widespread informal title of Czechoslovakia’s first president which was despised by communist propaganda.
40 Seidl, Jan; Jochanan Weiniger, Ruth; Zikmund-Lender, Ladislav and Nozar, Lukáš. Queer Prague. Brno: Černé pole, 2014, p. 64–65. In a scene entitled, “I won’t deny it, lies are not my province!” the lead character, Dalibor, recalls his passionate friendship with the deceased Zdeněk, singing: “I have always resisted the enchanting gaze of women; a soulmate was the only thing I longed for.”
41 Author’s interview with Mr. Ota Tasinato, March 12, 2009.
Schindler, Franz. 2003. František Čeřovský, otec boje za dekriminalizaci homosexualů v Československu [František Čeřovský, the founding father of the struggle to decriminalize homosexuals in Czechoslovakia]. Sousvislosti, 14, No. 4, pp. 70–79.

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Rudé právo, April 10, 1956.

CHAPTER SIX

LATVIAN QUEERNESS MIRRORED:
ANDRIS GRĪNBERGS VERSUS ANDY WARHOL

LÄINE KRISTBERGA

In this essay I would like to address two queer artists each living on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain and producing works of art echoing their personalities and lives.

Everyone knows who Andy Warhol (1928–1987) was—he would usually be our first association with Pop Art and preoccupation with American consumer culture manifested through the silk-screened images of canned tomato soup, superstars, celebrities, and his own self-portraits. Andris Grīnbergs (b. 1946), on the other hand, would only be known to those who have a particular research-related or other interest in Latvia or the post-Soviet region and performance art, as Grīnbergs is mostly quoted as the pioneer of performance art in Latvia with the first Happening dated 1969.1

Perhaps, it is wise to mention at the very beginning that Warhol played a major role in Grīnbergs’s life and creative work as an idol, role model, gay artist, and proof of living art.2 It can be said that Warhol was to Grīnbergs what Shirley Temple was to Warhol. If this equation sounds too obscure, a little episode from Warhol’s childhood might help. When Warhol was only eight years old, he suffered from disorder of the central nervous system—St. Vitus Dance. As a result, the illness left him with large reddish-brown blotches on his face and upper body that periodically plagued him for years.3 The physical appearance and bullying at school laid the grounds for his life-long insecurity and even self-hatred. It was during this illness that Warhol began to collect movie magazines and stills. Hollywood stars such as Shirley Temple, his favourite, provided him an

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1 Romeo and Juliet (1969).
2 E-mail correspondence with the author on June 12, 2015.
imaginative escape into a better life, and the material for erecting a compensative, idealized self.\(^4\) I propose that for Grīnbergs, in his turn, it was Warhol who provided an equally imaginative escape into a better life. Through the mythical persona of Warhol as a commercially successful artist and a gay man, Grīnbergs could also project an idealized self and a dream that he could not materialize in the prevailing conditions in the East—namely, the non-existence of the art market\(^5\) and the strictures of the state-ideological apparatus.

One of the aspects that unite both artists is the eccentric self-dramatization and even construction of identity manifested through style and fashion. Indeed, through their, what some scholars would perhaps deem frivolous preoccupation with looks, they can both be characterized as dandies of their time.\(^6\) It must be noted, though, that in Warhol’s case the issue of personal transformation implemented through plastic surgery, bodybuilding, constant wearing of wigs and cosmetics revealed his very low self-esteem, inferiority complex, and continuous attempts to reinvent himself as somebody more handsome and attractive. Grīnbergs, on the other hand, never suffered from such insecurities or lack of self-confidence, however dandyism is one of the common aspects of both of them. In one of the interviews Grīnbergs mentions it and refers to Oscar Wilde and Andy Warhol as his idols: “I was interested in Oscar Wilde—not as a gay person or writer, but as a dandy. I was curious about Andy Warhol as a visual image and gay person. I copied them! I didn’t know anything about Wilde at that time, but I was interested in his aristocratic style as opposed to the cult of proletariat that was present here.”\(^7\)

Already from youth, both have championed individualism and loved standing out from the crowd. Warhol, for example, during his last two years at college, in 1948 and 1949, lacquered his fingernails in a different colour almost every day and once even dyed his hair green. In 1954, when he was working in New York as a graphic artist, he liked to create a stir by doing things like slashing his expensive suits with a razor and spattering

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\(^4\) Collins, Bradford R. Dick Tracy and the Case of Warhol’s Closet, p. 68.
\(^5\) Though Grīnbergs states that his performances were never commissioned and never intended for exhibiting in art galleries or museums. http://fotokvartals.lv/2012/03/02/yesterday/
\(^7\) The Self. Riga, 2011, p. 258.
them with paint. As indicated by Hubertus Butin, with these performative acts, not only did Warhol create a distinctly unusual look, he also specifically and demonstratively drew attention to his homosexuality and lived his public life as though he were a character in a play.

On the other side of the Iron Curtain, Grīnbergs, too, manifested his eccentricity as the flagman of the hippie subculture in Latvia in the 1960s. As a graduate of the Department of Costume Production and Modeling of the Applied Art School in Riga, Grīnbergs enjoyed practicing his fashion designer’s ideas and skills on his hippie friends. Surely, as art historian Mark Allen Svede has noted, “hippies were particularly ill-served by the state-planned economy, [thus] their performance was more improvisational than most.” However, restricted means and a tight budget often resulted in a creative outcome. Grīnbergs, for example, often shopped in flea markets and used second-hand materials such as parachute fabric to sew classic trench coats and wide, backless mini-dresses. Even in Grīnbergs’s happenings, the motto “life is a fashion show” was followed, and he implemented his ideas on participants as a fashion designer: “I dressed my models and created an environment, where they could express themselves and which could to some degree ‘rip’ them out of their masks, turn them into live human beings, containing more than you see on an everyday basis.”

Grīnbergs openly admits that he admired and copied Warhol, but by emphasizing this statement I do not want in any manner to diminish or undermine Grīnbergs’s oeuvre, especially in the queer context. The copycat qualities were only manifested as similar gestures that Grīnbergs tried to replicate or embody as an homage to Warhol. One of such gestures, for example, was exhibited as a Duchampian strategy of the “found people.” If in Warhol’s films there were no stars and the cast,

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9 Ibid.
11 The Self, p. 250.
13 “I only wanted to find great people and let them be themselves and talk about what they usually talked about and I’d film them for a certain length of time and that would be the movie.” Warhol, Andy and Hacket, Pat. Popism – The Warhol Sixties. Orlando: Harvest Book – Harcourt, 1980, p. 139.
consisting of his friends or acquaintances, played themselves, in Grīnbergs’s
case he addressed random people on the streets asking them to participate
in his happenings that often took place in his apartment at Ģūnijas Street
5/1 (termed ‘the Saloon’ in KGB records). By inviting these people who
had met accidentally to embody a different character or to adopt a different
identity, Grīnbergs offered them a chance to feel like a star, thus also
appropriating the famous expression “15 minutes of fame” credited to
Warhol in 1968.

Furthermore, with the open door policy that was also characteristic of
Warhol’s studio “famously dubbed ‘the Factory’, set up as an open
playground of subcultural denizens, mass-cultural divas, and ‘superstars’
of his own making somewhere in between,”\(^\text{14}\) Grīnbergs, too, was trying to
imitate the creative and often wild party atmosphere, where artists, poets,
writers, and such could mingle. This approach in both cases located
Warhol and Grīnbergs in the middle of subculture or even counterculture,
as Grīnbergs was the flagman of the Soviet hippies in Latvia and Warhol
was surrounded by, as he states, outcasts and “odds-and-ends misfits,
somehow misfitting together.”\(^\text{15}\) As Catherine Russell points out, “in
the renewed interest in Warhol’s queer aesthetics, he emerges as an
ethnographer of a particular subculture—one that was obsessed with
exhibitionism, stardom, and theatricality.”\(^\text{16}\)

Also, by contributing to newspaper columns *The Emperor of Fashion*
(*Modes imperators*, in 1995), as well as *Grinbergs Lives*\(^\text{17}\) (*Grīnbergs
dzīvo*), *The Lives of Celebrities* (*Slavenību dzīve*) and *Grinbergs’s Diary*
in the newspaper *Vakara Ziņas* (around the 2000s), Grīnbergs tried to mimic
Warhol’s magazine *Interview*, which was, in fact, a gossip magazine,
running “utterly superficial articles with the emphasis on fashion and
lifestyle, luxury, and glamour, embellished with more or less indiscreet
snapshots of the rich and famous”\(^\text{18}\) and also served “as a vehicle for
Warhol’s calculated self-promotion,” affirming “his social progress to the
heights of major celebrity.”\(^\text{19}\) Surely, if Warhol constantly worked on his
“Andy Warhol’s myth project” employing quite aggressive branding
strategies and mass media, Grīnbergs did not achieve—and did not even

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\(^\text{17}\) In these series appearing transcribed as “Grinbergs” as opposed to “Grīnbergs”.
\(^\text{19}\) Ibid.
try to achieve—the same cult figure status in the post-Soviet society. However, Grīnbergs tried to copy Warhol’s outer appearances, sporting the same hairstyle as Warhol and trying to look like the glamorous, mythical cult figure he adored.

Even in terms of women, Grīnbergs and Warhol had similar attitudes. If for Warhol it was Edie Sedgwick as a “female doppelgänger,” whose ambiguity as both femme and boyish toyed with gender, for Grīnbergs it was his life-long partner, now ex-wife, Inta Grīnberga, whom Grīnbergs quotes as his muse, playing as significant a role as “Monica Vitti to Michelangelo Antonioni, Giulietta Masina to Federico Fellini, Yoko Ono to John Lennon, and Gala to Salvador Dalí.” The American cultural critic and professor at the City University of New York, Wayne Koestenbaum refers to this kind of relationship as “twinship” and a “homoerotics of repetition and cloning.” However, he also accentuates that it might be seen as “a play with all kinds of likenesses that are only similar enough to be subversively other.” In Grīnbergs’s case, though, it is questionable whether the legitimate form of kinship ascertained in a heterosexual marriage was not a form of gender performance, in order to adapt to the homophobic Soviet rule.

Finally, another common aspect between both is the desire to collect. Warhol was known as a keen and even obsessive collector. He constantly scoured auction houses, antique stores, and particularly flea markets for new treasures to add to his many collections. Warhol collected Fiesta ware, World’s Fair memorabilia, Art Deco silver, Native American objects, and folk art. He often acquired large collections as well—Hollywood publicity stills, crime scene photographs and dental moulds. In the spring of 1988, Sotheby’s Auction House sold 10,000 items from Warhol’s art collection. However, Warhol’s largest collecting project consisted of 610 cardboard boxes called Time Capsules accumulated over the last thirteen years of his life, which consisted of daily newspapers, plane tickets, gifts, souvenirs, photographs, etc.

21 http://fotokvartals.lv/2012/03/02/yesterday/ (2015.10.06.)
23 Grīnbergs talks openly of his sexuality and queerness only in interviews after 1992.
24 http://www.warhol.org/edu_additiona1.aspx?id=7016#ixzz3dLRS9cBZ (2015.10.06.)
All of these activities reflected Warhol’s interest in Pop art and his inspiration: consumer culture. However, they can also be read as a queer archival impulse. By accumulating collections, which consequently serve as a basis for archives, queer artists can produce alternative narratives and counter-archives, producing knowledge in a Foucauldian manner. As Michel Lobel states:

In the collection objects are accumulated, ordered, and narrativized into a coherent whole, an activity that echoes the attempt to construct a stable unity out of the heterogeneous elements. [It is] a sort of playspace of the artist’s mind, a space of privacy and retreat.25

Furthermore, Koestenbaum proposes, through reading Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, that collecting is, indeed, a queer activity:

Collecting is a code for homosexual activity and identity [...]—the collector who, like the libertine, has no family, no social ties, no loyalties, no interior. It’s not clear whether Oscar Wilde’s Dorian Gray obsessively collects exotic musical instruments, jewels, perfumes, embroideries, and ecclesiastical vestments because he’s gay, or whether Wilde tells us about collection because he can’t mention homosexuality.26

However, collection can be manifested not only through objects, but also through collecting the stories of one’s life and the desire to turn one’s life into a document. This necessity for documentation is characteristic of both Grünbergs and Warhol, as they produced numerous photographs to document their lives and work. They also made films, and though Warhol was more prolific for economic reasons—he made eighteen films from 1963 to 1964, and twenty-six in 196527—and in Grünbergs’s account there are only three, their commitment to these forms of documentation show how important it was for them. If we prefer to interpret it from a psychoanalytic point of view, such a necessity can be read as a latent need for a sensation of belonging to a group and a self-protecting mechanism in a homophobic world. For example, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu draws attention to photography’s performativity. He argues that it creates the family unit it depicts, gathering the group together to be preserved forever in the family snapshot, whatever the rifts that precede and succeed it.

27 Ibid., p. 170.
“Photography itself,” he asserts, “is most frequently nothing but the reproduction of the image that a group produces of its own integration.”28

Queer content in works of art, especially manifested as homosexual desire, was problematic for Warhol, as he had to struggle against the prejudice and stereotypes of Western homophobic society in general and the art world in particular. This fact can be illustrated by the subjects he chose for his artwork, as they carried not only public meaning, but subcultural connotations as well, which he neither expected nor wished the general public to discern. According to Bradford Collins:

Warhol’s images of Marlon Brando as a motorcyclist and Elvis Presley as a gunslinger, for example, carried two meanings, one of which was unavailable to heterosexuals. Because the “macho” cyclist and the cowboy with gun and holster were standard characters in gay erotica at the time, Warhol knew that readers of such materials would see in his works both an homage to Hollywood and its star system and objects of desire.29

However, given that homosexuality was decriminalized in Latvia only in 1992, queer content in works of art was even more hazardous for Grīnbergs in the East. Although most of Grīnbergs’s performances have been documented in photography by a dozen Latvian photographers, he also produced two films under, I would say, quite Warholian titles: Self-Portrait (1972) and Self-Portrait. Testament (2003) and is currently working on the third. Since Self-Portrait films contain open homosexual scenes, Grīnbergs was subjecting himself to a huge threat at the time when the first Self-Portrait film was made. As indicated by art historian Mark Allen Svede: “The risks that Soviet artists faced if they dared to express affirmative homosexual content were horrific, including incarceration in a psychiatric prison or a staged “suicide” at the hands of KGB agents.”30

When the 1972 Self-Portrait film was restored in 1996 and premiered at Anthology Film Archives in New York, filmmaker and independent film authority Jonas Mekas proclaimed Self-Portrait (1972) to be “one of the five most sexually transgressive films ever made.”31 Svede emphasizes that Mekas’s judgement is all the more impressive in light of his own arrest record for screening landmarks of queer cinema in the mid-1960s.

29 Collins, Bradford R. Dick Tracy and the Case of Warhol’s Closet, p. 54.
30 http://www.glbtq.com/arts/grinbergs_a.html (17.06.2015 no longer accessible); http://www.glbtqarchive.com/arts/grinbergs_a_A.pdf
31 Ibid.
According to Svede, the 1972 Self-Portrait must be placed in the company of films by Warhol, Kenneth Anger, Jean Genet, and Jack Smith.

As regards the differences between both artists, there is one crucial aspect that needs to be taken into account. To Warhol the question of identity, and especially that of gender identity, was one of the central subjects in his oeuvre. With his films The Chelsea Girls (1966) and the Paul Morrissey-directed trilogy of Flesh (1968), Trash (1970), and Heat (1972), as well as with his management of The Velvet Underground, the content of the band’s songs and its performances, Warhol positioned himself at the forefront of cross-dressing, in which gender identity was “conceived as an impersonation, a role, a put-on.” Moreover, in 1981 Warhol appeared as a woman in a photograph Altered Image taken by Christopher Makos. In this image Warhol is seen wearing a wig and make-up, namely drag attributes, and it is an homage to Marcel Duchamp, who also was photographed in drag and under a different (female) identity as Rrose Sélavy by Man Ray in the 1920s.

According to Jennifer Blessing, there can be several explanations for Warhol’s self-presentation as a woman or in the role of a woman. One of them was the manifestation of delight in high camp. The definition of camp was provided by Susan Sontag in her well-known essay Notes on Camp (1964), where she stated that camp is “Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre.” In her list of camp’s features, Sontag also states that “the most refined form of sexual attractiveness [...] consists in going against the grain of one’s sex. What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine.”

Thus, camp through the image of dandysome provocateur posed some challenge to traditional masculinity by laughing at the masculine image and ridiculing strict patriarchal roles. According to Blessing, this “challenge was significantly informed by camp’s relationship with flamboyant male homosexuality.” Another reason for the campy female impersonator in Warhol’s case was not so much an artistic expression, as a political act, which must be seen in the context of the contemporaneous gay liberation movement and especially the Stonewall Riots in 1969.

34 Ibid.
35 Very vividly manifested in glitter rock, which Warhol influenced.
36 Blessing, Jennifer. Rrose is a Rrose is a Rrose, p. 70.
Blessing emphasizes that in the 1960s and 1970s “female impersonation was against the law in some American cities, presumably because it was perceived as the domain of homosexuals,” \(^{37}\) thus such gay-identified performances can also be seen as deliberate political acts.

Grīnbergs, on the other hand, never recognized cross-dressing as a strategic decision in art. In his heavily documented performances, he often appears naked before the camera, but never dressed as a woman. There was, however, one regular participant in his Happenings—the artist Eižens Valpēters (b. 1943), who can be credited as the first performer of cross-dressing in Soviet Latvia. There are only two photographs from the performance titled *The Old House* (1977) taken by photographer Māra Brašmane, where Valpēters can be seen wearing a woman’s dress. In an interview with the author of this essay, Valpēters admits that, perhaps, it was some kind of subconscious act, when he decided to impersonate a female, because in his childhood he was once dressed as a girl in a carnival impersonating a popular girl character in opera at the time. Valpēters states that his cross-dressing performance was not in any way strategic or political and should be seen in light of carnivalesque masquerading. \(^{38}\) However, the visibility of alternate gender presentations in Latvian photographic culture should not be underestimated, especially in the context of Soviet rule and the fact that, similarly to the USA in the 1960s and 1970s, such female impersonation acts would be difficult to explain as “art” to law enforcement agents.

Despite the difference in gender aspect present or missing in the oeuvre of Warhol and Grīnbergs respectively, both artists in their eagerness to work with new media at the time—photography and film—employed quite similar strategies in creating works of art in the sense that the notion of an artist as a skilled producer is replaced with the artist as a consumer of new picture-making gadgets. \(^{39}\) Grīnbergs claims that he started to photograph his performances as his “unrealized paintings”: “I could not draw well to express myself, write well or express myself well in music, yet I had ideas.” \(^{40}\) Thus, it was more the question of organizing and managing all the stages of the processual art—or creating the necessary environment—, inviting the photographers and participants, finding the venue and accessories, setting the time, etc., as opposed to creating a work of art on his own in a studio manifesting exquisite craft skills, for example, in

\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 71.

\(^{38}\) Interview with the author of the essay on 15.06.2015.


\(^{40}\) Meistere, Una. [Interview.]
painting. Warhol, too, with his silk-screened images that reiterated or appropriated photo-journalism and a team of assistants around him exhibited similar gestures, claiming that “picture-making skills were of minor importance in making significant pictorial art.” In this strategic choice, Warhol was, of course, following the ideas of Pop art, depicting empty, banal images and dropping all the aspects that “had been known in modern art as seriousness, expertise, and reflexiveness.” Consequently, it can be stated that art as a project and team-work is what characterizes Warhol’s and Grīnbergs’s works best.

As regards queer aesthetics, they have both succeeded in creating self-portraits, which require close and informed reading to peel the visible surface off layer-by-layer hoping to find the “real” Andy or Andris. Whether it is possible at all, can be epitomized by the following quote from Grīnbergs:

> Of course, I have often thought that entire life is a theatre and all that we get depends on how well we play our roles. Where is that place where one can be real? This double life continues endlessly.

References


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41 Wall, Jeff. *Marks of Indifference*, p. 41.

42 Wall reminds us that “the empty, the counterfeit, the functional, and the brutal” were nothing new as art in 1960, as they were all tropes of the avant-garde entering the art scene via Surrealism.


44 Una Meistere. [Interview.]


CHAPTER SEVEN
UKRAINIAN QUEER CULTURE: THE DIFFICULT BIRTH
VITALY CHERNETSKY

The road to the development of modern queer culture was not an easy one anywhere on our planet. Historical and anthropological research demonstrates that while there is a rich spectrum of queer cultural practices in traditional societies worldwide, modern queer identities and cultural practices as we know them developed primarily in metropolitan urban environments.1 This has created a unique set of challenges for nations with a colonized, stateless status in the 19th and 20th centuries. Using Ukraine as a case study, this paper looks at the complexities of the development of a

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queer culture during the shaping of a modern national culture over the past two hundred years, as the quest for queer self-expression intersects with, and often comes into conflict with, the construction of dominant cultural paradigms. What are the roles of creative intellectuals in the development of modern queer cultures in the context of colonized societies? How is this development affected by the situation in which the national language faces obstacles to its public use and is stigmatized as being allegedly backward and second-rate? How does a queer cultural producer face a situation when her or his project is deemed suspect both by the ruling imperial/totalitarian ideologies as well as by the dominant trends of the national resistance movement? What are the specific challenges of the unique overlap of the post-Soviet and post-colonial condition for the development of queer cultures in recent years? How do these challenges affect the ties of a formerly colonized nation with the former colonial power, as well as hopes for European integration? What aspects of the global LGBTQ rights movement, and the role of cultural producers within it, can be strategically appropriated in the post-Soviet post-colonial context? How can imperialist practices be avoided in the interaction between globalized queer culture and the local/national context? What is the role of literary translation in developing a new queer canon in the national language? How does one approach rethinking the relationship between “high” and mass culture specifically in the queer post-Soviet/post-colonial context?

The case of Ukraine provides unique insights into these and related questions. Ukraine recently moved to a place of prominence in global news as a result of mass pro-democracy protests that eventually led to the collapse of the corrupt and repressive Yanukovych government. However, the hope associated with the momentum of the transformation became mixed with the profound trauma of unprecedented suffering and loss of life during the later stage of the Euromaidan when, for the first time in Ukraine’s post-Soviet history, political clashes led to civilian deaths. The trauma intensified shortly thereafter with the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the mixture of civil war and escalating Russian intervention in the Donbas region. What could constructive strategies for queer activism and queer cultural producers within this ongoing crisis be? How do we imagine the future of queer culture in Ukraine? These questions have become especially pertinent now since despite the promise of change articulated by the Euromaidan Revolution, Kyiv Pride was cancelled in 2014, and the equality march portion of Kyiv Pride 2015, which took place on June 6, although successful, faced numerous threats and violence from militant extremists that resulted in injuries, mostly to the police, but also to some of the marchers.
Traditions and Origins

In 1991 Ukraine became the first ex-Soviet country to get rid of sodomy laws, a few weeks before the official dissolution of the USSR. This happened without much discussion and caught the nascent local LGBT liberation movement by surprise. Moreover, the decision was not communicated effectively across the country and, especially in locations outside the major metropolitan centres, members of the LGBTQ community continued experiencing intimidation and harassment by the police—a practice long established during the Soviet era.

As in other post-Soviet nations, it would be difficult to speak of the existence of a coherent LGBTQ community in Ukraine at the time of the break-up of the Soviet Union. This problematizes the possibility of speaking of a queer culture. During the recovery from a history of stigmatization and institutional discrimination, however, we see several key aspects of a dynamic cultural development.

To begin with, there is the recognition that sexuality and sexual orientation could indeed be grounds for building a community. This is no place to rehearse in detail the arguments Foucault makes in *The History of Sexuality*, or the views of pioneers of the gay rights movement, like Karl Heinrich Ulrichs or Magnus Hirschfeld. What is crucial here, however, is a recognition that sexual orientation is an identity marker that could be seen as linked to cultural practices, shared histories, and community formation. As with other communities, this community is of necessity “imagined,” in the sense that Benedict Anderson meant it. In other words, it is a horizontal community that requires a certain consensus of its members and a shared set of cultural referents, helped in their dissemination by media accessible to the community. It also requires a set of certain borders that help imagine both belonging and non-belonging.

Here, of course, we come to the challenge of squaring the development of LGBT communities with those of national identities and cultures. This requires thinking of homosexuality and queerness as simultaneously global and local, and seeking to understand the complexity of interacting with developing nation states in the era of globalization, especially in postcolonial societies.

As Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan write in the introduction to their influential volume, *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*:

[the position] occupied by queer sexualities and cultures in our globalized world as a mediating figure between nation and diaspora, home and the
state, the local and the global [...] has not only been a site of dispossession, it has also been a creative site for queer agency and empowerment.²

The challenge is to embrace and creatively utilize this resistant “globalization from below” and in the process re-imagine national cultures. A productive case study to consider in this respect, as recently explored by Kevin Moss, is provided by Croatia. As Moss notes in his article, recent critiques by some Western-based scholars who “argue that claims for tolerance of LGBT identities reproduce Orientalizing discourse that establishes (Western) Europe as the wiser, more progressed culture to be imitated by local, more backward peoples,” result in an even more problematic “refusal to allow local LGBT citizens to identify as they choose.” “In fact,” he continues, “the critics of homonationalism erase local Central and East European queer experience and ignore Central and Eastern Europe in their analysis [...] It is because the LGBT activists ‘challenge the traditionally heteronormative boundaries of national belonging, asserting that they too, although both ‘gay’ and globally connected, are members of the Nation,’ that the right-wing nationalists react with increasing violence.”³

Ukraine, the largest nation in Eastern Europe outside Russia, entered modernity with a complex predicament: while persons who identified as Ukrainians constituted an overwhelming majority on its territory, as they were dominant in rural areas and small towns, they were, however, a minority in all the larger cities, whether in the parts of Ukraine ruled by Russians or by the Habsburg Empire. As elsewhere in stateless nations of the region, there was a steady tendency of migration to urban centres and upward social mobility which was associated with assimilation into the dominant imperial culture in all its aspects, including linguistic. National Ukrainian culture was stereotypically associated with rural and archaic cultural elements.

These stereotypes were resolutely challenged by several writers and artists associated with Modernist movements in Ukraine who sought to discard this simplistic understanding of national culture. Their pioneering

Part II Chapter Seven

210 efforts, that took place from the 1890s through the 1920s, were then suppressed for another half century when, in the Stalinist Soviet context, many of them were silenced and even physically eliminated, and the Ukrainian nation-building discourse outside the Soviet Union took a decidedly conservative turn. Only in the early 1990s, and frequently through the efforts of straight allies of the LGBT community, these earlier steps began to receive greater recognition.

It is highly symbolic that these efforts were spearheaded by the founder of contemporary feminist literary scholarship in Ukraine, Salomea (Solomiia) Pavlychko. In 1991, half a year before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, she published her groundbreaking essay, *Chy potribna ukrain'skomu literaturoznavstvu feministychna shkola? (Does Ukrainian Literary Scholarship Need a Feminist School?)*, which launched a powerful school of feminist literary criticism in Ukraine. In her work Pavlychko, trained as a scholar of Anglo-American literature, can, among other influences, be seen building on a classic essay by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship,* which outlines the dilemmas of authorship for writing women. Gilbert and Gubar proceed by emphasizing the otherness of the writing woman within the literary tradition through challenging Harold Bloom’s theory of literary history that postulates the artist’s “anxiety of influence,” the “warfare of fathers and sons,” as the key to its dynamics. They argue that in reaction to the hegemonic masculine authority of the tradition, the female poet experiences an “anxiety of authorship”—a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a ‘precursor’ the act of writing will isolate and destroy her”, the female artist, they continue, “must first struggle against the effects of socialization which makes conflict with the will of her (male) precursors seem inexpressibly absurd, futile, or even [...] self-annihilating.” She has to react to the tradition with a revision that is far more radical than that performed by her male counterpart—frequently and actively searching for a female tradition which, “far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible.” Hence for women writers and artists, and, I would argue, for artists representing other non-hegemonic identities (in

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7 *Infection in the Sentence,* p. 49.
terms of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, etc.), a crucial step is to seek out allies and precursors that can be seen as hallmarks of an alternative, resistant canon.

In this respect Pavlychko’s arguably boldest and most memorable move was to radically reinterpret the figures of Ukraine’s two leading women writers from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Lesia Ukrainka (1871–1913) and Oľha Kobylians’ka (1863–1942). It was a project of feminist reevaluation and reappropriation of these two authors who have long been part of the national canon but who found their legacy distorted as a result of this process of canonization. Her bold move helped put feminist literary scholarship at the forefront of the national cultural debate in the mid-1990s. The publication of Solomiia Pavlychko’s reading of the lives and works of these two remarkable women, later incorporated into her book, *Dyskurs modernizmu v ukrains’kii literaturi* (The Discourse on Modernism in Ukrainian Literature), produced a commotion in the national media, as Pavlychko emphasized the gynocentric worldview informing the writing of the two authors and their explorations of female bodily experiences, sexuality among them. The more conservative camp of cultural commentators was shocked in particular by her drawing attention to the strongly homoerotic elements in Ukrainka and Kobylians’ka’s intense and passionate friendship. These elements are present in the surviving correspondence between them that began in 1899 and lasted until Ukrainka’s death from tuberculosis fourteen years later, as well as in homoerotic motifs in their published work, most notably in Kobylians’ka’s story, *Valse mélancolique* (pub. 1898), which focuses on a passionate friendship between three independent and open-minded young intellectual women.⁸

Pavlychko’s “outing” of Ukraine’s two greatest women writers, as the publication of her study was interpreted in the Ukrainian media, became one of the biggest cultural news stories in Ukraine in the 1990s. In the

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course of her discussion of the evolving Ukrainian discourse on modernism, Pavlychko consistently draws attention to the role politics of gender and sexuality played in the work of major Ukrainian authors, both women and men. Her final book was published posthumously, and is a critical biography of Ahatanhel Kryms’kyi (1871–1942) who was an important early modernist writer and Ukraine’s leading Orientalist scholar and whose life ended tragically in the Gulag. In it Pavlychko places the construction of gender and sexuality at the centre of her argument by insisting that the impact of Kryms’kyi’s psychosexual traumas, stemming to a large extent from his repressed homosexuality, played a key role in determining his literary and scholarly career, as well as his nationalist politics. She finds the keys to understanding Kryms’kyi in the evolving collection of his Orientalist poetry, *Pal’move hillia* (*Palm Leaves*, 1901, 1908, 1922) and his semi-autobiographical novel, *Andrii Lahov’s’kyi*, which was published unfinished in 1905, and only published in its entirety in 1972. In her study, she draws a convincing parallel between the thematic and aesthetic concerns of Kryms’kyi’s two key works and those of the pioneering Russian gay writer, Mikhail Kuzmin (1872–1936). Her focus is mostly on Kuzmin’s groundbreaking novel, *Wings* (pub. 1906), and his poetry cycle, *Alexandrian Songs* (although Kryms’kyi wrote his novel before Kuzmin, and there is no record of personal acquaintance or contacts between the two authors).9

The next major milestone identified by Pavlychko is associated with the 1920s and the so-called “executed renaissance” (“rozstriliane vidrodzhennia”), a flowering of Ukrainian culture in the early days after the Revolution that was brutally cut short by Stalinist terror. In particular, Pavlychko highlights the theme of sexuality in the work of several writers who sought to create new modern urbanist Ukrainian prose; Valerian Pidmohyl’nyi (1901–1937) and V. Domontovych (the pen name of Viktor Petrov, 1894–1969). In the case of the former, it was an interest in 19th-century French literature (especially Balzac and Maupassant), as well as a fascination with Freudianism that brought Pidmohyl’nyi to discuss homosexuality (interestingly, not so much in his own fictional writing, but in critical essays about other authors, especially the 19th-century classic

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realist author Ivan Nechui-Levyts’kyi\(^\text{10}\). However, an even more radical and fascinating case is presented by V. Domontovych. As Pavlychko notes, in his novel, *Doktor Serafikus* (written 1928–29, published in exile in 1947), we see the first “posing of the question of love between two men in the Ukrainian context” in a work of literature.\(^\text{11}\) While this is but one of the many plot lines in the novel, its presence in a work that draws a very vivid and memorable portrait of Kyiv intelligentsia in the 1910s–1920s is hugely consequential.

As in the case of other East European nations that came under Soviet rule, the diaspora, or émigré, community provided a possibility for continuing free development. It is true, however, that criticism was often advanced of the strictures for models of national culture dominant in the diaspora, most cogently by the great Polish émigré author, Witold Gombrowicz, in his work, *Diary*, and his novel *Trans-Atlantyk*. It was, however, only in the context of the diaspora that his devastating critique and radical openness to the new possibilities of what he called *synczyzna* (“land of the sons,” as opposed to “fatherland”), became fully possible, including the outspoken presence of queer elements within that culture.

Between the core territory, which was under repressive and stigmatizing Soviet rule, and the diaspora, whose aesthetic and political views skewed towards the conservative throughout much of the 20th century, Ukrainian culture created few opportunities for exploring queer themes. Interestingly, when it did happen it often came through translations of major works of world literature into Ukranian or through projects masquerading as translations. The most important instance of the latter can be found in the work of the leading Ukrainian female poet in the diaspora, Emma Andiievs’ka (Andiyewska, b. 1931). In two of her collections, *Ryba i rozmir* (*Fish and Dimension*, 1961) and *Khvyli* (*Waves*, 2002), she included beautifully executed and erotically charged cycles of poems presented as translations of two invented gay male poets—a Cavafy-like early Modernist Greek author, Aristodimos Likhnos, in the former, and a classical Persian one, Khalid Khatami, in the latter.

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\(^{10}\) For more on these two authors, see two studies by Maxim Tarnawsky: *Between Reason and Irrationality: The Prose of Valerijan Pidmohyl’nyj*. University of Toronto Press, 1994, and *The All-Encompassing Eye of Ukraine: Ivan Nechui-Levyts’kyi’s Realist Prose*. University of Toronto Press, 2015.

\(^{11}\) *Dyskurs modernizmu v ukrains’kii literature*. 2nd ed., p. 227; on Pidmohyl’nyi and Freudianism, see p. 260ff.
Challenges of the Post-Soviet Period

The rebirth of uncensored and innovative cultural practices in the late 1980s created a window of opportunity in Ukraine, as elsewhere in the region, to explore a wide range of themes, including queer ones. Yet for a variety of reasons this path remained rather thorny. For mainstream cultural producers this remained either a taboo topic or a source of cheap titillation. The LGBT community itself remained fragmented and deeply underground, although the first Ukrainian gay periodical, Odyn z nas (One of Us), was launched in 1994 and continued to publish for twenty years. (It is now on a, hopefully temporary, hiatus for financial reasons.) While there was a strong interest in LGBT topics in the nascent field of gender studies and feminist scholarship, here too there were many divisions and fractures. I explored some of these challenges in Chapter 8 of my book, Mapping Post Communist Cultures, in particular the problematic argument, advanced by a group of Russophone scholars based in Kharkiv, that Ukrainian culture (understood by many of them in rather reductionist and colonialist terms) was both misogynist and homophobic, while Russophone culture for them represented a path to global engagement. By contrast, a group of feminist and gender-focused scholars embraced the liberationist anti-colonial vision of national culture-construction, and argued for diversity and inclusion (with Pavlychko spearheading this trend). Growing international ties led to increased contact and familiarity with the evolution of LGBT culture and the LGBT rights struggle elsewhere in Eastern Europe and around the world. Here contact with the experience of immediate neighbours within the region became particularly crucial. Thus queer cultural products from countries like Poland or Slovenia, when they appeared in the Ukrainian context, became arguably even more consequential than those from Western Europe or North America.

Queer texts pose a particularly unique set of challenges for translators. In his influential 1998 article, Translating Camp Talk: Gay Identities and Cultural Transfer, Keith Harvey focuses on a number of challenges posed by literary texts that draw on traditions of self-articulation within the gay community, stemming from:

- a cluster of factors that go beyond close attention to the source text and involve cultural and even autobiographical issues for the translator. These issues include: (a) the existence, nature and visibility of identities and communities predicated upon same-sex object choice in the target culture; (b) the existence or absence of an established gay literature in the target culture; (c) the stated gay objectives (if retrievable) inherent in the
undertaking of the translation and the publication of the translation (for example, whether the text is to be part of a gay list of novels); (d) the sexual identity of the translator and his or her relation to a gay subcultural group, its identities, codes and political project.\textsuperscript{12}

In this article, Harvey focuses specifically on the tradition of “camp talk” (verbal performance including parodying and exaggerated reimagining of stereotypical femininity) which is frequently contrasted with normalizing behavioural strategies that are associated with being “in the closet” or with a desire to blend into mainstream society. As Harvey demonstrates, camp talk can be used either as a strategy of othering a character in the text or as a defiant strategy of affirmation and resistance by creating “ironic distance around all semiotic practice, constituting devices of ‘defamiliarization,’” signaling “a suspicion of all encodings of sincerity.” Additionally, they “reinforce gay solidarity between interlocutors” (407). In his research, Harvey focuses on examples of English to French and French to English translations, where complications arise due to the feature of French culture whereby “gayness—construed as a defining property of a distinct group of human beings—conflicts in France with the philosophy of the universal subject inherited from the Enlightenment” (415). As a result, an additional macro-level challenge is created for rendering such polyvalent, code-blending textual elements. These specific challenges, faced by translators, are similar to those of displaced/diaspora gay persons in the process of reconstituting their identities, such as those of Filipino gay men in New York described in the work of the anthropologist Martin Manalansan.\textsuperscript{13} In the Slavic context, arguably the best-known example of the challenge of cultural transfer associated with the traditions of camp talk can be found in the work of the Polish writer, Michał Witkowski (b. 1975), especially in his debut novel, 

\textit{Lubiewo} (2004), which challenges the normalization and accommodation strategies by the reevaluation of socialist-era camp talk and the behaviour of an older generation of Polish gay men. This book presents formidable challenges to a translator, and we are fortunate to have the Ukrainian translation, \textit{Khtyvnia} (pub. 2006), ambitiously taken on by the Ukrainian writer and translator, Andriy Bondar (b. 1974). Bondar is a straight ally of


the LGBTQ community who in essence had to invent a Ukrainian-language camp gay slang as it might have sounded in the 1970s.

Another important avenue for change came through the world of cinema. Paradoxically, even in the Soviet era some foreign films with decidedly queer sensibilities opened in wide release. Most famously, perhaps, *Some Like It Hot*, whereas others, like *Cabaret*, although released, were “de-gayed” through the dubbing into Russian and the editing out of undesirable scenes. The post-Soviet period brought many more international films that broached queer topics onto Ukrainian screens, and in 2001 the Kyiv-based international film festival, *Molodist*, introduced an LGBTQ programme, modeled on the Berlin Film Festival’s Teddy, which got the name *Soniachnyi zaichyk* (Sunny Bunny). The rethinking of Ukraine’s own film history helped bring the fate of Ukraine’s greatest film director of the post-World War II era, Serhii Paradzhanov, into public discourse. Paradzhanov was persecuted under Soviet-era sodomy laws after his arrest in 1973.

Finally, it was the rethinking of Ukraine’s modernist legacy, in literature as well as film, associated with the Odessa-based VUFKU film studio in the 1920s, that gave us the most accomplished queer-themed Ukrainian novel so far, Ivan Kozlenko’s *Tanzher* (*Tangiers*, 2007). This ambitious novel, and so far Kozlenko’s only one, overlays two bisexual love triangles, one set in the 1920s, the other today, both taking place in the artistic milieu of Odessa. In this openly and provocatively intertextual work, Kozlenko reaches out to both innovative Ukrainian writers and filmmakers from the 1920s as well as to international classic and contemporary authors, from Gertrude Stein to Michael Cunningham. This text has attracted relatively little international attention so far and in my opinion deserves far greater recognition.

The milestone of Ukrainian queer culture-building that has received the greatest renown so far came in 2009. In September of that year something unprecedented in the history of publishing in independent Ukraine took place. Four events held to commemorate the publication of a literary anthology resulted in violent protests, physical attacks, and vandalism. The first event was a press conference on September 10, in L’viv on the premises of the Zaxid.net information agency in conjunction with the L’viv Book Forum, which for many years has been Ukraine’s most important book fair and literary festival. Several young men in the audience attacked the presenters of the anthology, which included a representative of the publishing house, two of the three coeditors, one of the translators, and one of the authors featured in it. They destroyed books and microphones, broke glasses, and pelted the presenters with tomatoes
and mayonnaise. Police, when called, at first declined to intervene and restrain the vandals, and when they did, acted rather half-heartedly.¹⁴

The next day, the festival programme included readings by authors featured in the anthology. This time several aggressive youths tried to break into the building of the theatre where the reading was taking place. Given the course of the previous day’s events, security had been increased. Nevertheless, two of the vandals managed to break into the hall where the reading was taking place and tried attacking one of the poets, who in this case fought back and helped subdue the attacker before the attacker was escorted out. In the building’s foyer and by the police cars outside, the protesters fought the theatre’s private security guards, while the police again took a “wait and see” approach.

Two weeks later the anthology was also presented in Kyiv. The first event was held on September 24 at Ye Bookstore near the opera house—a location that in recent years has become one of the leading venues for book presentations and readings. The event was billed as a public debate and included Mariia Maierchyk, an anthropologist working in gender studies who wrote the afterword to the anthology, as well as one of Ukraine’s most respected senior literary scholars, Tamara Handozorova. Given the history of what had happened in L’viv, police were called, but initially remained outside the building. Once again, a group of young men doused the presenters with water, overturned tables, and destroyed books. It transpired later that the men were activists of the Kyiv branch of the extreme-right Svoboda [“Freedom”] party.¹⁵ They were restrained by other guests at the reading and taken away by the police; later another young man tried to spray ground black pepper at the presenters but got most of it on himself. Still later, aggressive youths attacked a group of people leaving the discussion by the subway station.

The next day another event took place during which the anthology and the events surrounding it were discussed at Ya Gallery, run by the rock musician and entrepreneur Pavlo Hudimov. Due to security measures, no disruption took place, but later, in the middle of the night, the gallery’s window was smashed with a brick and its wall was defaced with graffiti. Four days later, again in the middle of the night, arsonists set the gallery on fire.

What is this book that generated such persistent violent protests, even if those protests were undertaken by relatively small groups of people?

¹⁴ For details, see http://khpg.org/index.php?id=1252781733.
How can a book generate such an aggressive, violent desire to destroy it and attack the presenters?

The book is a slim volume of about 150 pages. Its content is comprised of poetry and prose by contemporary authors from Europe and the US (altogether thirty authors from fifteen countries); a prefatory essay and a scholarly afterword accompany the literary selections. The bullying response by groups of thugs was caused by the fact that this is an anthology of lesbian/gay/bisexual and queer writing; indeed, the first such anthology in Ukrainian and the first anthology of international LGBTQ writing published anywhere in the former Soviet Union.

Violent attacks at lesbian- and gay-themed events in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have, sadly, been frequent in recent years, from Moscow to Vilnius to Belgrade. Yet even among the various manifestations of this sad trend, what happened in L’viv and Kyiv in September 2009 was hard to fathom. What additionally made this a unique situation, in the case of Ukraine, was the fact that these were groups allegedly proposing a strong Ukrainian identity attacking a Ukrainian-language publication. In other words, this was a clash not between a faction nostalgic for the “good old days” of Stalinism with a radical group of anti-Soviet roots, as has often been the case, but rather a case of avowedly Ukrainian right-wing extremists attacking a no less avowedly Ukrainian, yet liberal and demographically-oriented, cultural project.

The public events surrounding the anthology were almost completely ignored by the mainstream Ukrainian media. Only the newspaper Den’ published a brief article by Dmytro Desiateryk, the day before the arson incident, with the telling title, Mezha tolerantnosti: Natsystry bezuspishno namahalysia zirvaty prezentatsiu pershoi v SND antolohii svitovoi gei-literatury (Limits to Tolerance: The Neo-Nazis Unsuccesfully Tried to Disrupt the Presentation of the First Anthology of Global Gay Writing Published in the Commonwealth of Independent States). The burning down of a famous art space received more coverage, albeit of a peculiar kind; the TV channel TSN, for instance, reported on it in the section “Hlamur” (Glamour) in the subsection “Scandals.”

The events around the anthology received much more energetic coverage in the Ukrainian blogosphere and in online publications, but it was primarily news reporting rather than analysis. Only a few weeks later did the first thoughtful analytical responses begin appearing, such as Marta Varykasha’s thoughtful and detailed review published by the site

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16 See http://www.day.kiev.ua/280700/.
litakcent.com on December 3. Sadly, that publication was followed, on the same site, by a virulently homophobic screed by Petro Ivanyshyn, one of the most notorious figures in contemporary Ukrainian culture. This text did not discuss the anthology but rather mixed personal attacks on prominent literary critics (Tamara Hundorova, and Harvard University’s Prof. George Grabowicz) with paranoid ravings about the threat of “homodyktatura” (“homodictatorship”). Fortunately, many prominent figures in the Ukrainian blogosphere called the site’s leadership on it, resulting in its editor, and a Kyiv Mohyla Academy professor, Volodymyr Panchenko, printing a statement, several weeks later, where he alleged that Ivanyshyn’s text was “an invitation to a discussion,” albeit a failed one. As one of the comments on Panchenko’s statement rightly noted, true dialogue with a person like Ivanyshyn who denies the other the very right to exist, let alone speak, is impossible.

A surprisingly thoughtful and detailed discussion of the anthology can be found on the pages of a periodical, the Kharkiv-based Russian-language journal, Gendernye issledovaniia, that in the past had frequently had a problematic relationship with Ukrainian-language culture. Its issue no. 19, dated 2009 but published in early 2010, carried a portfolio about the book which includes Russian translations of the afterword by Mariia Maierchyk and of the above-mentioned review by Marta Varykasha. It also included two specially commissioned reviews. One of them, by the Dnipropetrovs’k-based poet and translator Viktoriia Narizhna, was particularly instructive.18

In her essay, Narizhna drew a distinction between this anthology as a text per se and as a conscious act/deed (vchynok, postupok). She argued that there was a tension between these two aspects of the book since, in her opinion, the book-as-act here is much more daring and provocative, while the book-as-text, with the exception of its title, the preface, and the afterword, is “moderate, indeed cautious.” While I beg to differ with her in respect to some of the literary texts included (more on this shortly), I agree with her characterization of the book-as-act. Let us take a closer look at the book and its composition.

The translated texts are framed by a brief introductory statement by the editors, a longer preface by the poet and essayist Andrii Bondar and, as was mentioned earlier, a scholarly afterword by Mariia Maierchyk. The book also includes statements by translators on their involvement in the project. The book’s title is 120 storinok Sodomu (120 Pages of Sodom).

I have not delayed mentioning this title for the sake of suspense. Many among those who have commented on the book and greeted its publication, have stumbled on the title. It is deliberately and uncomfortably radical, and references some of the most transgressive works of world culture (a novel by the Marquis de Sade and a film by Pier Paolo Pasolini). It is an in-your-face statement that echoes the provocations of the leader of Ukrainian Futurists in the 1910s, Mykhail’ Semenko, and western counterculture of the 1960s—1970s. Its radical revolutionary spirit is emphasized by the book’s coeditors, three young poets, who describe this book’s goal as a celebration and expansion of plurality/multiplicity (mnozhynnist’) and refer frankly to its textual contents as a joyful “explosive mix” (vybukhova sumish). These young poets are Oles’ Barlih from Zaporizhzhia (b. 1985), Al’bina Pozdniakova from L’viv (b. 1983), and Iryna Shuvalova from Kyiv (b. 1986).

All in all, a key determinant of the anthology is that it was a collaborative effort of a large group of people, many of whom do not self-identify as LGBT or queer. In fact, for the majority of Ukrainian participants the book was a gesture of support for the diversity of voices and subject-positions they hoped to hear loud and clear in Ukrainian. This was what led the publishing house Krytyka to support and publish the book and what guided the work on the project.

The anthology’s coeditors drew on two main sources. Firstly, they were helped by a well-established LGBT literary presence in Slovenia. Slovenia is the East European country that has been able to demonstrate the most advanced level of openness to ideas and of awareness and acceptance of LGBT voices. Simultaneously to the Ukrainian anthology, a Slovenian anthology of modern European gay poetry was being put together by Brane Mozetič; it was released within weeks of the publication of the Ukrainian one. A result of this cooperation is that men’s voices outnumber women’s in the book, and modern European poetry overshadows other genres. Secondly, the editors endeavored to bring contemporary Russian-language LGBT writing into Ukrainian discourse where men’s and women’s voices, as well as poetry and prose, are more balanced. Finally, the US is represented by three authors: one of them, the Russian-language poet, Yaroslav Mogutin, who has been living in exile in the US since 1995, recommended me as a translator of his texts. Therefore I need to disclose that I too was involved in this project as a translator. It is an honour to have my translations of Mogutin appear side-by-side with

earlier ones by Serhii Zhadan that the anthology reprinted. The editors also asked me for suggestions on one or two other American poets for inclusion, thus, I also contributed the translations of several texts by the San Francisco-based poet, Aaron Shurin.

In his preface to the book, Andrii Bondar calls it a project that is “selfless, experimental, and rather risky” (“podvyzhnyts’kyi, eksperymental’ni i dosyt’ ryzykovanyi”), given the strength of homophobia in contemporary Ukrainian society. This book asserts resistance to aggressive phobias through literature; the literary texts emerge as manifestations of hopes, desires, traumas, and identities of resistance (sometimes melancholy, sometimes confrontational). In his own earlier translation projects, notably his work on the Polish Modernist classic, Witold Gombrowicz, and the contemporary radical prose writer, Michał Witkowski, Bondar made it possible for other queer and queer-friendly authors to find an authentic voice in Ukrainian. The anthology helps accomplish the same for thirty new names, among them such outstanding authors as Poland’s Jacek Dehnel and Izabela Filipiak, Germany’s Mario Wirz, Hungary’s Ádám Nádasdy, Russia’s Faina Grimberg and Aleksei Purin, and many, many others.

Mariia Maierchyk’s essay that concludes the book brings the topic of homosexuality—and sexuality more broadly—into the context of everyday cultural practices, past and present, including notably Ukrainian ethnographic traditions. This aspect of the volume puts it in touch with the nascent, but growing, discourse on the intersection between post-colonial studies and queer theory that confronts a double dilemma: many founders of post-colonial thinking, especially Frantz Fanon, were openly hostile to manifestations of homosexuality, while the dominant gay culture in the West has frequently been accused of a troubled relationship with race and geographical origin. The 20th century offers us several examples of a complex identity struggle by major gay writers in the context of the politics of resistance, such as James Baldwin, an African-American from a deeply conservative Pentecostal family, and the Algerian poet Jean Sénac.20 Bearing in mind their struggles, hopes, and dreams, let us hope

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Parts II Chapter Seven

(against all odds—as the recent cultural and political developments in Ukraine can be very depressing indeed) that their utopian impulse carries forward.

Fast-forwarding six years from the publication of 120 storinok Sodomu, the situation with regard to LGBTQ rights and queer cultural presence in Ukraine remains precarious. Kyiv Pride has now taken place four times, but only twice, in 2013 and 2015, was it able to include public marches advocating equality and non-discrimination for the LGBTQ community, and both times it required heavy police protection. In 2012, the far-right Svoboda party made it into Parliament for the first time, getting slightly over 10% of the vote in the parliamentary elections. While in the post-Euromaidan era its role has dwindled, other far-right groups, including Pravyi Sektor, a loose organization that united many smaller groups, including those that had been active in the 2009 attacks described above, was very vocal in its opposition to the 2015 Kyiv Pride, and appears to be one of the main forces behind the violence perpetrated against the marchers. Yet the marches did take place and the community’s rights to freedom of assembly were for the first time publicly affirmed by President Poroshenko, and this year two MPs participated in the march for the first time. As in neighbouring Russia, during the Yanukovych rule (2010–2013) several bills were introduced at both regional and national levels prohibiting “propaganda of homosexuality to children.” Fortunately, growing international protests and opposition from human rights groups, and even branches of the Ukrainian government (most notably from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) prior to the Euromaidan revolution, led to the defeat of those bills.

While these pressures continue, LGBTQ culture in Ukraine is still in a precarious, struggling situation. The country’s only gay bookstore, a branch of the Russian Indigo, has closed. Ukraine’s only gay magazine, Odyn z nas, published since 1994 is now on an indefinite hiatus. Still, a number of remarkable examples of queer creative writing have appeared in Ukraine in recent years.

The most active persons in this respect are primarily identified as poets. One of them, Oles’ Barlih, the coeditor of 120 storinok Sodomu, published his first book of poems in 2012. Barlih is also active in other literary genres, and a play he wrote won a major prize at the nationwide
Ukrainian Queer Culture: The Difficult Birth

contest Drama.ua in 2012. Vitalii Iukhymenko, based in Kyiv, has been publishing regularly in periodicals. While in the past he wrote mostly in Ukrainian, now he writes more in Russian reflecting the situation that the urban gay subculture in Ukraine is primarily Russophone which has been one of the barriers for developing an original Ukrainian queer discourse. Iukhymenko’s Russian-language poetry, while undoubtedly talented, positions him as but another voice among contemporary Russophone gay poets (next to Mogutin, Anashevich, Chepelev, and others); the dilemma is whether to be a lonely pioneer or a follower in a more established community, and Iukhymenko appears to have chosen the latter path. Although post-Euromaidan Ukrainian community-building actively seeks to transcend linguistic divides, the problem of language remains unresolved. In this respect Barlih’s recent writing projects display particularly admirable courage and dedication in my opinion. While an active participant in international literary dialogue, who has also translated poetry from several other languages, his insistence on developing a queer Ukrainian-language literary voice, especially given his continued residence in the gloomy post-industrial city of Zaporizhzhia, is striking. *Odyn z nas* definitely deserves recognition in this respect as in contrast with the more commercially-oriented Russian *Kvir* (now also defunct), it has granted a significant amount of space in its pages to the publication of original literary texts, translations, and interviews with writers and literary scholars (in both Ukrainian and Russian). I was particularly heartened to see an impassioned manifesto by Barlih.21

Sometimes it is the persistence of just a few, hoping against hope, that eventually creates a true renaissance—in literature as well as in the broader cultural sphere. In the few years since then, we have seen a bold and energetic new generation of LGBT rights activists emerge publicly in Ukraine. The increase in violence accompanying the increase in visibility does not deter them. Moreover, we see the building of an unprecedentedly strong and effective coalition now taking place, bringing together both those working in the field of human rights and NGOs, and a broader strata of society, with an increasingly active role played by cultural producers (writers, visual artists, filmmakers, musicians). Here’s to hoping that a queer Ukrainian renaissance is just around the corner, and that we are already witnessing its first vigorous sprouts.

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References


Whenver issues about homosexuality show up in the public space of Latvia, the church always has some important comment to make, and has done so frequently over the last fifteen years. Frequently, the rhetoric of the church refers to the abstract term “Christian values” (i.e. morals, the heterosexual family, and sex for reproduction) and several paragraphs in the Bible (usually Romans 1:18–32 or Genesis 19). For example, as Europride 2015 in Riga was being organized, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in Latvia, Zbignevs Stankevičs, published a call to pray for homosexual people and their healing. All in all, the attitude of the church could be described as arrogant and exclusive towards homosexual people.

In spite of that, it is quite clear that there are homosexual people in Latvia who believe in God. More than ten years ago, in 2004, the book, *Let Our Voices be Heard! Christian Lesbians in Europe Telling their Stories* (ed. Randi Solberg), was published, and three stories from Latvia were included. It means that there are at least some Christian lesbians in Latvia, and the main aim of this article is to tell the story of their life in the 21st century.

Taking two of these stories as a starting point for the analysis, and doing qualitative interviews, the article tries to answer several questions, such as: what was the identity of Latvian Christian lesbians back in 2004? What can be said about their identity now? Are they still a minority in a minority, as they characterized themselves back then? If a lesbian in Latvia is also a Christian, is it possible for her to be out of the closet, or

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are they still inside? Also, the future prospects of Christian lesbians in Latvia will be evaluated.

Since the beginning of the 21st century (and earlier) the churches demonstrated intolerance and an inability to engage in open dialogue on issues around homosexuality. The possible beginning of such an attitude, of course, has deeper roots which have already been described in academic sources, so in my article I will only sketch the main tendencies. The church joined in the discussion at the end of the 20th century and, as theologian Valdis Tēraudkalns puts it in his article,

it can be seen not as a proactive, rather as a reactive act which was provoked by the public character of discussion [about homosexuality] and the attitude of several popular persons who were connected to church.²

Christian society’s attitude towards homosexuality has been and still is highly influenced by the opinions of religious leaders and churches. The attitude of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church (LELC) and the RCC can be described as “you can be a Christian and gay if you are celibate.” In 2002 the leader of the LELC, Jānis Vanags, and leader of the RCC, Jānis Pujats, contributed articles to the book Homosexuality: Disgrace and Misery of Humankind (Homoseksūalisms – cilvēces negods un posts). The book was published by the publishing house “Vieda,” owned by Latvian ultranationalist Aivars Garda. The book was meant for school children, and its aim was to “educate” them about the “danger of homosexuality.”³ Still, because of his opinions and mode of expression, Jānis Pujats became the butt of various jokes from intellectuals, and a large part of society did not take him seriously.⁴ The rhetoric changed and became more theologically sophisticated in 2010 when Zbignevs Stankēvičs became Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church.

The LELC has a special attitude towards women—after the sudden death of the previous Archbishop, Kārlis Gailītis, in 1992, Jānis Vanags was elected Archbishop of the LELC in 1993. From the very beginning he declared that he was against the ordination of women, and the LELC began developing a conservative theology.⁵

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² Tēraudkalns, Valdis. „Aizliegtās” seksualitātes diskurs Latvijas kristietībā. Čelī, Nr. 59, p. 173.
⁴ For example, a false profile (or joke-profile) of Jānis Pujats in Twitter became very popular. See: http://www.ebaznica.lv/kardinalspujats-pieminai-7098/
In 1996 the Synod of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church voted for the declaration stating that practising homosexuals cannot hold any post in the church and are not allowed to have any roles in worship services.\(^6\)

The LELC has also had two “scandals” connected with homosexuality—the first one is the story of Lutheran pastor, Māris Sants, who came out as a gay in 2002. He had to leave his job in the church. He then established the Open Evangelical Congregation (OEC), the first congregation for LGBT people in Latvia where they could have roles in worship services, also, the place where it was possible for LGBT people to partake in the Eucharist. Māris Sants left the country in 2006\(^7\) and the congregation had ceased to exist by 2009. The interesting fact which, to my mind, says something about the role of Christian lesbians in Latvia is that women stayed in the congregation till the very end. In a private conversation in 2009, one of them told me that it is very hard to be a “minority in a minority”—she felt that this congregation was of no use, either for Christians or for LGBT people. When asked to explain her feeling, she answered that the reason was that LGBT people tended to be negative in their attitudes towards churches was because of the churches’ homophobic rhetoric.

Another scandal followed the Gay Pride in 2005, when pastor Juris Čālītis lost his position in the LELC after conducting a service connected with the Pride, and also, after he participated in the visit to Latvia of Sun Myung Moon (the leader of the Unification Church), praying for him and taking part in Moon’s holy wine ceremony. The decision to exclude him said that Čālītis had been in opposition to the church on various occasions, not only by participating in Moon’s ceremony, but also that he had publicly said that homosexual relationships were acceptable.\(^8\)

By that time, Juris Čālītis was also a dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Latvia, and this was also an important turning point in the relationship between the Faculty and the LELC:

A tolerant position on homosexuality was one of the issues that distanced the main churches from the Faculty of Theology because churches

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\(^7\) Ibid.

associated that with liberalism, an umbrella term used by church leadership to classify a list of dogmatic and ethical issues it considered unacceptable.9

As we can see from this very short overview, at the beginning of the 21st century the relationship between LGBT people and churches is still complicated. Traditionally, public rhetoric about homosexuality concentrated mostly on gays and less on lesbians, transgender persons, or bisexuals. Both the RCC and the LELC have similar opinions about a woman’s place in congregations and churches.

Let Our Voices be Heard!

More than ten years ago, in 2004, the book, *Let Our Voices be Heard! Christian Lesbians in Europe Telling their Stories* (ed. Randi O. Solberg), was published with the inclusion of three stories from Latvia.

There are two stories which I will take as a starting point for trying to begin to tell the story of a Latvian Christian lesbian. The author of the first story, which is very short (only two pages) is Astrida Indricane—the first Latvian woman who “married” a woman at the Freedom Monument in 1995. She talks about Roman Catholicism and her desire to become a Catholic priest—that, and a strong belief that the church can change, was the reason why Astrida chose to study at the Catechesis Institute in Riga. Also, her story includes an important fact about lesbianism and Christianity, i.e. the invisibility of Latvian Christian lesbians and the necessity of choosing between homosexuality and Christianity: “When my lesbianism became public, the female director of the Institute politely proposed a simple choice: either stop being a lesbian and continue to study, or leave. I left.”10

In the end, Mrs. Indricane left Latvia and decided to live in Germany, and, as she writes, returned to her studies of Catholic theology.

Another story is published under the pseudonym, Waterlily (as she explains, it is because of homophobic attitudes in Latvia), and also relates the experience of being Roman Catholic and a lesbian. Like Mrs. Indricane, Waterlily points out that she became aware of her sexuality very early on—in childhood, and had even asked her mother why girls cannot marry girls. Although she is sure that she is a lesbian, her story also includes bisexual experience. Waterlily became a Christian only when she


was twenty. The story of Waterlily includes another story of a Christian lesbian in Latvia. Her name is Linda, and after they break up she not only becomes a Roman Catholic, but goes on to become a nun in the Carmelite Order and leave Latvia. Waterlily writes:

I saw how a person got rid of her homosexuality ‘in the name of God’ and left everything. I began to think about a convent myself. [...] For the first time I confessed about my homosexual relationship. I did so and received absolution for all my sins. [...] I decided to live in celibacy and someday enter the convent, if it were God’s will. [...] The question about my sexual orientation stayed unanswered. I didn’t think that homosexuality was a sin.11

Then she met people from the Open Evangelical Congregation, and put everything in God’s hands, using the phrase, “Yet not my will but Thine be done!” (Luke 22:42) as a guideline for her life. When she met her new girlfriend Galadriel, she interpreted it as an answer to her prayers, or as a gift from God. Waterlily concludes:

My Galadriel often says that she sees this connection—a Christian and a homosexual—as a task given by God. A task to prove to the whole world that love is still alive, that Christianity can be connected with homosexuality. And I agree with her. For God is Love.12

Both Astrida Indricane and Waterlily assert that they became aware of their homosexuality when they were very young. Also, both of them are Roman Catholics; still, they represent different narratives. They emphasize different periods of time in their stories—Mrs. Indricane concentrates on the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, while Waterlily writes more about the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. As Waterlily points out, in public she is still in the closet. Also, her story is full of rumination about modern society. For example, she points out that society thinks that it is OK to sleep with somebody of the same sex, but if, being a woman, you speak about sharing a life with a woman, “they” call you a pervert and mentally ill. Also, the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church, for her, is “very cold and condemning.”13 Mrs. Indricane, on the other hand, is way out of the closet—her “marriage” with Birgit is a political act, not a real

12 Ibid., p. 198.
13 Ibid.
The Story about “A Minority in Minority” 231

marriage, and she was also an active member of the Latvian Association for Sexual Equality in the early 1990s.14

Of course, it is hard to try to portry Christian lesbians in Latvia, using only two stories, but I will point out similarities in their stories:

1) They are both Roman Catholics;
2) They both have considered the clerical life, although in different ways: Mrs. Indricula wanted to become a Catholic priest, Waterlily considered the possibility of becoming a nun;
3) They both think that their prospects are not very good—they cannot be both Christian and lesbians in Latvia. Mrs. Indricula chose to leave the country while Waterlily stayed in the closet in society as well as in church with a faint notion about some “mission” which ought to be carried out as a Christian lesbian.

You can’t be both: the results of the inquiry

Inspired by this book, I decided to ask open questions to Christian lesbians in Latvia. The inquiry was anonymous and twenty-five respondents answered on-line; twenty-one answers were fully suitable. In addition, there was one face-to-face interview. Respondents answered eight questions. The first two were about their denomination and activity in congregations. The third and fourth—whether it is possible to be a Christian lesbian in Latvia and what attitude the Church has towards Christian lesbians. In the fifth question I asked them to describe problems they had faced being both Christian and lesbian. The sixth question was about being “out of the closet” in congregations, and the eighth—how would attitudes change if they came out? The seventh question was about attitudes of the church or congregations. They were asked to explain their answers to all questions, except the first.

As it turned out, the results about denomination were: 20% LELC; 16% RCC; 20% Orthodox Church; 4% Baptists; and 40% chose to answer “Other.” “Other” included a wide diversity: one respondent not answering the question; three atheists (which meant, these answers were excluded from further analysis), one from the Latter Day Saint Movement, one from

the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church outside Latvia, and Riga Reformat Brother Congregation.\textsuperscript{15}

The sixth question let me calculate some statistics from the answers to the question of whether they were open (or “out of the closet”) in their congregation. One answer was of no use, and the others were: 4% yes; 28% no; 28% I am open to several members of the congregation; 40% other. Most of these 40% said that they were not active in any congregation.

Only three respondents were active members of the church, and everyone had their own reasons. One person simply liked to be an active member of the church; another said it was a habit, while one explained that they (she and her non-Christian girlfriend) participated in everything because they wanted to see the changes in the congregation’s attitude towards gay people. All other respondents gave negative answers. Two answers can be interpreted as not being connected with their homosexuality—one person did not like the pastor of the church, and another asserted that there was no need for a congregation in her faith. All other answers demonstrated the way respondents felt about the attitude of their church: “I cannot accept the Church as an institution”; “Because my relationship is not accepted”; and also showed inner conflicts, similar to those on which Waterlily reflects in her autobiography: “I think I would blaspheme by being active because I am a lesbian”; “I do not want to hide, and do not want to be called a sinner because of my sexuality”; “In my congregation homosexuality is a sin, and one must get rid of it”; “Since I have a relationship with a woman [I am not an active member of the congregation]. I could attend the service, but that’s all.” In my opinion, these answers show the serious problem in Latvian congregations and their attitudes—because of their sexual identity it is impossible for a Christian lesbian to feel accepted and wanted in the congregation, and to feel equal to other members of the congregation. So it seems that, although they identify themselves as Christians, they are not active in the church which does not want them. Naturally, a Christian lesbian wants to keep the wholeness of her identity, and she does not want to leave her homosexuality at home or choose celibacy.

The answers to the third question, “Is it possible to be a Christian lesbian in Latvia?” were positive. But the explanations to the answers still

\textsuperscript{15} Since 1995 the leader of the congregation has been Juris Ķālītis; the congregation was in the LELC until 2006 when after the Pride and Moon’s ceremony it was excluded from the LELC. Then the congregation registered as an independent congregation. For more information see: http://reformatudraudze.lv/par-mums/, seen on July 16, 2015.
showed that, in fact, it is not possible to be fully Christian (in order to be a Christian, there are some very important aspects, such as the possibility to receive Eucharist, to be a part of the congregation etc.) and an active lesbian. Most answers said “yes, secretly, if you keep silent about your sexuality and stay ‘in the closet,’” or, more precisely, “yes, as long as you are not active in one of the roles. You must be either a lesbian without relationships, and then you can participate in the congregation, or you can be a sexually active lesbian who cannot participate in the congregation, and this will give the feeling of exclusion and inferiority.” Still, in this case, the temporary nature of such a lifestyle and the personal problems faced by those who try to practise Christianity, being lesbians, was mentioned. Also, respondents said that it was possible to be a Christian lesbian in Latvia if the pastor/leader of the congregation accepted it (Juris Čālītis was mentioned as an example).

Various answers also included solutions. Some of them: to practise a religion without a church (to my mind, disputable because of the reasons mentioned above). Another: to join the Anglican congregation in Latvia. Three answers suggested finding an alternative way of practising Christianity: “There is no need for a church to be a Christian, but you do need at least some Christians with whom you can be in a community”;

“[..] You have to do something yourself, you must find a woman who thinks alike. You must break through patriarchal thinking. The Moravian (Brethren) church in Latvia shows that you can make an alternative structure of a Christian community. Only now it must be called Congregation of Sisters.” Also the answer: “Yes, because everyone can be a Christian, and there is nothing to explain. The question is about the understanding of Christianity and the consequences of your actions’ demonstrates an alternative way of thinking about being a Christian and a lesbian by stressing personal religious involvement in opposition to the institutional. The emphasis on personal experience, in fact, is an answer to the conservative attitude of the church which labels homosexuals “sinners.” In short—yes, we have the right to have a personal religious experience, and we are ready to find a way to legitimatize it.

The fourth question: What attitude do you think the Church has towards Christian Lesbians?

Sixteen answers said: negative, bad, conservative, “children of Satan,” “compassion.” Others said that the attitude was inclusive, also that the Latvian Lutheran Church outside Latvia is tolerant, or “more inclusive if you compare to homosexual men. Still, I feel a desire to ‘remake’ me.” Three answers were that the attitude of the church was “adequate; because the congregation does not know they’re lesbians and gays.”
The fifth question, about problems which the respondents had faced in their experience as Christian lesbians, was the broader one, and included a wide spectrum of problems. Eight answers were of no use, still, the others described discrimination, emotional problems, and demonstrated how hard it is for a lesbian to try to be a member of the congregation, or, in other words, “It is not possible to be a happy Christian lesbian.” These answers were: “I must keep silent, because I am afraid of rejection”; “It is uncomfortable to speak about my sexuality and my faith at the same time”; “All the time somebody wants to change me, to get me married, to do an exorcism. It is psychologically hard. All the time, you have the feeling that you are not welcome in the congregation”; “We are considered evil”; “The hardest thing is to act as if I were ‘normal’”; “When I told my priest about my sexuality, he did not think it was serious”; “Homosexual Christians cannot be confirmed”; “I have faced abusive arrogance from the Christian world, and this makes the dialogue difficult. For me, the desire to win over, not to participate in conversation, testifies to that”; “I was active in my congregation and did several duties, but it all ended suddenly one day when I told them that I am in a relationship with a woman”; “I do not have a congregation, there is no place where I can live as a Christian; my girlfriend and I cannot participate in pastoral courses for couples. It is not possible to have a prayer for us as a couple”; “I was on the council of a Christian organization and then left, because I knew the attitude of the organization towards homosexual people. [...] Honestly, the most serious problem for me are my Christian friends who say that they cannot accept us, that they won’t come and visit us, that they find it hard to be with us, and on Facebook they like, share, and comment on pages which ‘unmask’ gay families and children who grow up in such families (we have two daughters in our family, my girlfriend’s biological children)”; “Thanks to the condemning attitude [of the church] I’ve stopped going to church.”

These answers demonstrate arrogance in the communication of the church and also a shallow and even light-minded attitude from priests/pastors and congregation members. In fact, even in 2015, Mrs. Indricane’s old problem persisted—either you stay in the church and stop being a lesbian, or you keep living in accordance with your sexuality, and stop being a Christian. Also, the answers demonstrate a desire to be accepted and knowledge that it is currently impossible.

Only two answers were, if I may say so, positive, at least, relatively so: “No problems, because I do not care what ‘dry old sticks’ think, and I am created by God, so the others must accept me. I am out of the closet, everybody knows about my sexuality, and if somebody does not like it, he/she can always look at my finger”; “I do not want to tell or explain
The seventh and eighth questions were about the attitude of the church and congregations, and the possibility of a change of attitude in a case where a respondent became an open lesbian.

Not surprisingly, most answers were negative, explaining that congregations were “reserved, suspicious,” “negative.” Three answers said “positive,” and one “neutral,” explaining that the reason for such an attitude was that nobody knew about their homosexuality. Another two said: “I think pastor Juris Cālītis does not care about my sexuality,” and “I do not care what strangers think of me.” Answering the last question, 70% said that the attitude would be negative; 20% “I do not know”; 9% were positive (one is out of the closet, and another one: “To my mind, in my congregation, as well as in the Anglicans, the attitude would be peaceful and understanding: ‘Thank you for telling us’”). Another answer was: “I think everybody would understand and they would suggest various hobbies in order for me not to think about homosexual relationships, if I agreed to that.”

Changes and prospects?

As we can see from two Christian lesbian biographies from 2004 and the results of the 2015 questionnaire, it would be far too optimistic to say that there are many positive changes in the ability to be a Christian lesbian in Latvia. If I try to construct a Latvian Christian lesbian narrative, there are at least four alternatives.

The first alternative: she lives in a constant inner conflict: she is either pessimistic about her chances to be redeemed, or constantly tries to heal her homosexuality. If she is a Lutheran (or Catholic) she can feel pushed aside because she is a woman (and cannot become a pastor or a priest). Since she is also a lesbian, she cannot see any chance of becoming fully involved in the Church (because she cannot do things in the congregation, she does not receive communion etc.). On the other hand, if she wants to belong to the congregation, she can try healing or “hobbies” in order to “forget” about her homosexual identity. Of course, there is a solution: she can always leave her homeland, as Mrs. Indricane did.

The second alternative: the Latvian Christian lesbian is invisible. At home, she lives with her partner and stays in the closet in the congregation. In fact, she leads at least two lives: one in the congregation
and another in her home (probably with friends and family). Again, we are
back to the inner conflict, because one must be very strong in order to live
such a life for long.

The third alternative: she attends the Anglican Church in Latvia or
belongs to the Riga Reformat Brother Congregation. There she can be
herself primarily because everybody thinks that being a good Christian is
more important than a person’s sexual identity.

The fourth alternative: long ago, she stopped attending church. She has
found her own way of modern spirituality and keeps developing it.

The attitude of the LELC and the LCC—one must be either an active
person in your sexuality or a Christian—of course, concerns both gays and
lesbians. As it has been historically around the world, also in Latvia,
church rhetoric and opinions are mostly related to gays, at least in the
public sphere. The reason for this has deep roots in the times of Early
Christianity—a church basically (and especially in Latvia) is an institution
run by men, and they cannot imagine that sexual acts are possible without
a penis. On one hand, it is good—lesbians can feel safer than gays
because of this invisibility. On the other hand, as one of the questionnaire
answers illustrates, lesbians are often not taken seriously, and the question:
do they feel accepted in church is not a priority of the Christian
community. Besides, as we can see from the examples of biographies, one
of the most psychologically dreadful things that can happen to a Latvian
Christian lesbian is that she has a “calling” to be a priest or a pastor. In the
best case, she can be a nun (and probably have fun in a cloister).

A thing that was much harder to imagine back in 2004, and is much
easier now, is a formation of an alternative congregation. Of course, if we
keep in mind the destiny of the OEC the question is, How many members
would such a congregation have and how long would it exist? As we can
see from the questionnaire, only three women out of twenty-one are active
members of the church. Others use theological explanations for why they
are not, so the chances are that probably renewing such a congregation
could be effective.

The second option—invisibility—goes together well with the
realization that there is no such thing as a lesbian feminist theology. As
pastor and theologian Kerstin Söderblom puts it:

Lesbian Feminist Theology is shaped by many different lesbians and
various movements in diverse contexts and surroundings whose common
goal it is to fight against discrimination of LGBT and for the liberation of

16 Brooten, Bernadette J. Love between Women. Early Christian Responses to
237

those who are oppressed and who suffer because of their sexual orientation in and outside churches and Christian communities. Thus, the Lesbian Feminist Theology does not exist! One should therefore rather speak of tendencies or fragments of Lesbian Feminist Theologies. Those tendencies and fragments do not consist of static and unhistorical truths, and do not want to set up new dogmatic theories and closed systems with strictly defined content. Instead, they comprise work in processes which can be reshaped and changed.17

Such a definition of lesbian feminist theology is also probably the answer to the question about the prospects of Latvian Christian lesbians—to approach theology as an art, which can be reshaped and changed, using the sources which are gained by personal experience and by re-reading the Scriptures and studying church tradition. Also, stories of similar experiences throughout the world would be of great importance.

All Latvian authors of the stories included in Let Our Voices be Heard! are creative people: Mrs. Indricula is a photographer, Waterlily is an artist and a writer. The third story which is not analyzed in this article is written in the form of a play. Probably telling such—visual or literary—stories could also slowly change the attitude of the church, by eliciting the viewer’s/reader’s emotional involvement. And not only as an expression of art—personal stories, daring to come out of the closet and courage to ask uncomfortable questions of members of the congregations as well as of church leaders—could move Christian society’s ability to think and to be more open to dialogue. Simultaneously, of course, such stories can stress something the LELC and the LCC have totally forgotten—the humanness and uniqueness of each human experience. If all humans are created in God’s image, the responsibility of the churches would be to struggle for human rights and a life of dignity for all. For now, Christianity in Latvia is in a very poor state—in fact, it is a religion of men and for men. If there is no place for women in such Christianity, how could it possibly let a lesbian in? It means that the task of a Christian lesbian actually is to break down the limits not only of patriarchy but also those of heterosexism—by telling her own stories, analyzing the experience of her forerunners, and re-reading Scriptures, keeping in mind that “because retrieving women’s experience is such a pivotal task for feminist theology, a critical examination of how this task is being carried out is crucial.”18

17 Söderblom, Kerstin. The promise of the rainbow – thoughts about lesbian feminist theology. Let Our Voices be Heard! p. 22.
Of course, as we can see from the questionnaire results, invisibility is still the main characteristic of the Latvian Christian lesbian. According to the official standpoint of the LELC and the RCC, she should either stay at home as a lesbian or come to church and leave her homosexuality at home. There is no room for Christian lesbians in the LELC or the RCC. How true can a Christian be if she is a Christian only with one part of her personality? Is it not cheating against what Christianity should be? It seems that in Latvia truth and infallibility are still a monopoly of heterosexual men, so I do not see much opportunity in Latvian churches for Christian lesbians. To my mind, a clever step would be an alternative form of religiosity. What it should look like and how it can be put into practice is a field of further theological investigation.

References


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