

A Queer (Re)Turn To Nature? Environment, Sexuality And Cinema

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*Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of English in the Faculty of Arts at Stellenbosch University*

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December 2014

Declaration

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is interested in the potential of (New) Queer Cinema, with its often cited subversive qualities, as a means to delineate the historical and discursive dimensions of an ongoing relationship between the politics of nature and sexual politics, and to articulate the complex array of ideas that result from this relationship. In this thesis, I investigate how a selection of films actively reproduce, question, deconstruct, or reinforce particular constructions of nature and/or epistemologies of (homo)sexuality, often demonstrating such ideas through particular expressive modes, such as nostalgia, mourning, melancholia, and postmodern play, and by referencing certain literary forms, such as the pastoral, georgic and elegy.

To facilitate the analysis I outline above, I have chosen to investigate three films which enable me to move from national to transnational and postcolonial cinematic contexts. I read these films alongside a selection of literary/historical texts that I feel inform or preface each filmic text. The first film is James Ivory's adaptation (1987) of E.M. Forster's novel, *Maurice*. The second is Derek Jarman's elegiac film, *The Garden* (1990), which I read alongside the English filmmaker's journal, *Modern Nature* (1991). And finally for my third chapter I turn to the work of Canadian filmmaker, John Greyson; specifically *Proteus* (2003), his recent collaboration with South African activist/filmmaker, Jack Lewis. This final filmic text prompts questions of postcoloniality and Eurocentric modes of knowledge production. I provide context for my argument by outlining recent developments in the history of Queer Cinema and by introducing two distinct but related areas of recent academic enquiry – firstly the notion of Queer Ecology (alongside related studies on the “gay pastoral”) and, secondly, the field of Green Film Criticism or Ecocinema.

Key terms: Nature, Sexuality, Ecology, Ecocriticism, Queer, Cinema, Homosexuality, Nostalgia, Mourning, Melancholia, Elegy, Pastoral, Historiography, (Post)Modernism, Postcolonial, Gender, Masculinity, Forster, Merchant Ivory, Jarman, Greyson.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis handel oor die potensiaal van (Nuwe) “Queer Cinema”, met sy bekende ondermynende eienskappe, om die historiese en diskursiewe dimensies van ’n voortgesette verhouding tussen die politiek van die natuur en van seksualiteit af te beeld, en om die komplekse verskeidenheid van idees wat volg uit hierdie verhouding, te verwoord. In hierdie tesis doen ek ondersoek na die wyse waarop ’n versameling films sekere konstruksies van ‘natuur’ en/of epistemologieë van ‘(homo)seksualiteit’ aktief herproduseer, bevraagteken, dekonstrueer of versterk. Hierdie idees word dikwels uitgebeeld deur middel van sekere ekspressiewe modusse soos nostalgie, rou, melankolie of postmoderne speelsheid, en deur verwysing na sekere literêre vorme of genres soos die pastorale of landelike gedig en die elegie.

Die bostaande analise is gebaseer op drie films wat my in staat stel om te beweeg tussen nasionale, transnasionale en postkoloniale kontekste. Ek beskou elk van hierdie films in die lig van ’n gepaardgaande versameling literêre/historiese tekste wat volgens my sentraal staan tot die volle verstaan van die filmiese tekste. Die eerste film is James Ivory se aanpassing (1987) van E.M. Forster se roman, *Maurice*. Die tweede is Derek Jarman se elegiese film, *The Garden* (1990), wat ek tesame met hierdie Engelse filmmaker se joernaal, *Modern Nature* (1991), beskou. Laastens kyk ek na die werk van die Kanadese filmmaker John Greyson, met spesifieke fokus op sy onlangse samewerking met die Suid-Afrikaanse aktivis en filmmaker, Jack Lewis, in die verfilming van *Proteus* (2003). Hierdie finale filmiese teks vra vrae oor postkolonialiteit en Eurosentriese vorme van kennisproduksie. Ek kontekstualiseer my argument deur ’n beskrywing te bied van die onlangse verwickelinge in die geskiedenis van “Queer Cinema” en van twee afsonderlike, maar verwante akademiese gebiede wat onlangs aandag geniet, naamlik die idee van “Queer” Ekologie (en die nougeassosieerde ‘gay pastorale’) en Groen Film Kritiek of “Ecocinema”.

Sleutelwoorde: Natuur, Seksualiteit, Homoseksualiteit, Ekologie, Ekokritiek, “Queer”, Film, Nostalgie, Rou, Melankolie, Elegie, Pastorale, Historiografie, (Post)Modernisme, Postkoloniale, Geslagtelikheid, Manlikheid, Forster, Merchant Ivory, Jarman, Greyson.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my supervisor, Dr Louise Green, for her professionalism, academic guidance and her patience and understanding when this project took a few unexpected turns. Furthermore, I would not have been able to complete this thesis without the help of and insights gained through conversations with the following people: Prof Shaun Viljoen, Jeanne Ellis, Dr Dawid de Villiers, Dr Riaan Oppelt, Bernard Nolen, Dr Tilla Slabbert and the students of my 2013 English 278 elective. Lastly, I wish to thank my family as well as my greatest supporters – Robert Carstens, Weybrandt Aucamp, Tamsyn Allies and Colette Knoetze – for their patience and confidence in me. Finally, the writing of this thesis was made possible by the monetary support of the Harry Crossley Foundation.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Outlaws in Nature, Gangsters at the Cinema

In paths untrodden,
In the growth by margins of pond-waters,
Escaped from the life that exhibits itself,
.....
No longer abashed—for in this secluded spot I can
 respond as I would not dare elsewhere. (Whitman 74)

“The fantasy realms of cinema have [...] proved to be especially fertile for subversive re-imagining, and have allowed for the appropriative cultivation of liminal modes of spectatorship that disavow the recuperative hetero-normalising impetus of the popular mainstream” (Griffiths 5).

In a much quoted afterword to *Maurice*, his then unpublished novel of homosexual love, E.M. Forster muses over a world that had disappeared sometime after the first decade of the twentieth century. Writing in 1960, almost half a century after the completion of the novel, Forster recalls an “England where it was still possible to get lost” and describes how the “last moment of the greenwood” had ended “catastrophically and inevitably” (*Maurice* 223). Forster declares that “today there is no forest or fell to escape to, no cave in which to curl up, no deserted valley for those who wish neither to reform nor corrupt society but to be left alone”; he adds that “people do still escape, one can see them any night at it in the films. But they are gangsters not outlaws, they can dodge civilization because they are part of it” (*Maurice* 224). This link that Forster makes, from an escape to nature to the escapism afforded by the silver screen, provides a useful starting point for outlining the central concerns of this thesis. Indeed, the author’s comments suggest two distinct but related sets of ideas.

The first is the fact that Forster’s fantasy of escape is linked to a marginal sexual identity.¹ Forster’s nostalgia for a pre-war Edwardian idyll, specifically his fantasy of retreating into the liberatory space of a wild England, can be read in terms of Byrne R.S. Fone’s descriptions

¹ Forster’s ideas of queer outlaws in the backwoods are comparable to the sentiments expressed by Walt Whitman’s cluster of “Calamus” poems, in which his outlaws are radicals only in so far as they dwell “in paths untrodden” and live far from “the life that exhibits itself” (74). In my second chapter, I point out how Whitman and his English counterpart, Edward Carpenter, were key influences on Forster’s novel of homosexual love.

of queer Arcadia or what Rictor Norton labels “the homosexual pastoral tradition”.² In other words, Forster’s nature nostalgia needs to be read in terms of the text and context that the terminal note addresses; that is, the posthumous publication of his homosexual novel. Like the protagonists of his novel, Forster’s “outlaws” are sexual outlaws in the sense that their escape to nature, in the form of the Greenwood, affords them their sexual freedom. While some might describe Forster’s ideas as homosexual fantasy, in which nature only offers an easy escape from a homophobic England, such a summation does not recognise the subversive politics of reclaiming nature as an inherently queer space. This relationship, between discourses of male homosexuality and nature is the central concern of this thesis.³ As I outline later in this chapter, there exists a diverse body of scholarship that probes the meanings of a queering nature and the possibilities of reassessing fiction in terms of a queer ecological imagination.

The second set of ideas expressed by Forster relates to his recognition of cinema’s importance to modern (queer) life. The author suggests that cinema is a means both to escapism and, it would seem, subversion. His choice to describe filmgoers as “gangsters,” signals cinema’s potential for undermining dominant cultural narratives. The author’s description suggests that cinema holds imaginative even political purchase for those who do not conform to society’s (sexual) norms. Indeed Forster’s comment on cinematic gangsters seems a fitting description for the developments in film in the latter half of the twentieth century; specifically, the queer cinematic projects of the 1980s and 1990s. The late-twentieth century is a significant period in the development of Queer Cinema, as filmmakers negotiate shifting notions of sexual identity and political visibility increases.⁴

² I discuss these two authors’ claims in more detail later in this chapter.

³ The complexities of the concept of “nature” and the way I use it in this thesis requires some attention. The following chapters attempt to use literary, filmic and cultural texts to explore various threads of nature discourse in relation to issues of gender and sexual politics. In *What is Nature?* (1995), Kate Soper tries to disentangle the various threads of nature discourse and in her introductory chapter she reflects on the multiple uses of the term. She explains that “nature refers us to the object of study of the natural and biological sciences; to issues in metaphysics concerning differing modes of being of the natural and the human and to the environment and its various non-human forms of life” (2). Most often I when I refer to nature in the following chapters I refer to this final dimension of the term that Soper describes; however, when I explore other aspects of the concept the shift in meaning will be clearly indicated in text. Soper adds that “the natural is both distinguished from the human and the cultural, but also the concept through which we pose questions about the more or less natural or artificial quality of our own behaviour and cultural formations; about the existence and quality of human nature; and about the respective roles of nature and culture in the formation of individuals and their social milieu” (2). Soper emphasises that “nature also carries an immensely complex and contradictory symbolic load; it is the subject of very contrary ideologies, and it has been represented in an enormous variety of differing ways” (2).

⁴ As a noted scholar on this period points out, gay and lesbian audiences are “cathected to the screen” in ways that are different from heterosexual audiences (“B. Ruby Rich”, *Youtube.com*). In the second half of the

What is more, there are films in this period that demonstrate ideas similar to those I have just outlined in relation to Forster's afterword to *Maurice*. Some present us with representations of nature similar to or, in some cases, inspired by queer literary traditions of pastoral fantasies or mythic Arcadias. Yet the scope of these filmic texts is not restricted to these literary ideas of nature and invites a larger investigation of the relationship between cultural discourses of nature and sexuality in Western society. It is often the renegade impetus of Queer Cinema that unsettles heteronormative formulations of both concepts. Thus I want to show how recent films in this category of cinema map out the complex meanings of (homo)sexuality, nature, identity, and queer desire.

In other words, I am interested in the potential of Queer Cinema, with its often cited subversive qualities, as a means to delineate the historical and discursive dimensions of an ongoing relationship between the politics of nature and sexual politics, and to articulate the complex array of ideas that result from this relationship. In this thesis, I investigate how a selection of films actively reproduce, question, deconstruct or reinforce particular constructions of nature and/or epistemologies of sexuality, often demonstrating such ideas through particular expressive modes such as nostalgia, mourning, melancholia, and postmodern play, and by referencing certain literary forms such as the pastoral, georgic or elegy.

To facilitate the analysis I outline above, I have chosen three films, which enable me to move from national to transnational and postcolonial cinematic contexts, as my primary objects of investigation.⁵ Furthermore, I read these filmic texts alongside a selection of literary and historical texts that I feel inform or preface each film. The first film is James Ivory's adaptation (1987) of E.M. Forster's novel, *Maurice*. The second is Derek Jarman's elegiac film, *The Garden* (1990), which I read alongside the English filmmaker's journal, *Modern Nature* (1991). And finally for my third chapter, I turn to the work of Canadian filmmaker,

twentieth century the issue of representation becomes increasingly important for gay and lesbian film audiences and eventually for the gay liberation movement itself. This development is clearly seen in two landmark documentaries on queer lives before and after the 1969 Stonewall riots, a date which is often cited as the birth of the gay liberation movement. *Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community* (1984, dir. Greta Schiller) and *After Stonewall* (1999, dir. John Scagliotti) traces the development of this political movement and also shows how important the silver screen was to the development of gay and lesbian identities.

⁵ I limit my investigation to a selection of filmic texts that depict male homosexuality. I would argue that literary or filmic representations of lesbian subjectivities or female homosexuality require the outlining of a different set of histories and conceptual frameworks. Thus I feel that limiting my scope to male homosexuality is a strategic choice through which I hope to achieve a more focussed discussion of particular traditions, histories and discourses as they inform each film's treatment of homosexuality and the various links to ideas of nature.

John Greyson; specifically, his recent collaboration with South African activist and filmmaker, Jack Lewis, namely, the 2003 film, *Proteus*. This final filmic text prompts questions of postcoloniality and Eurocentric modes of knowledge production. However, before I explain my argument in more specific terms, I want to provide context for my argument by briefly outlining certain developments in the history of Queer Cinema and introducing two distinct but related areas of academic enquiry – firstly the recent notion of Queer Ecology (alongside related studies on homosexual pastoral traditions) and secondly, the field of Green Film Criticism or Ecocinema.

Screening (New) Queer Cinema

As his comments suggest, E.M. Forster witnessed the beginnings of cinema and its development into a hugely popular form of entertainment.⁶ While Forster clearly recognises its significance as a popular form of escapism, as I have argued that Forster's use of the word 'gangster' at least anticipates the political potential of cinema, Forster did not witness cinema's increasing role in engaging issues surrounding homosexual identity and the representation of queer experience.⁷ It is important to consider the fact that when he had written his terminal note, the most lucrative producer of films, Hollywood, was experiencing a comprehensive censorship of any deviant sexualities or non-normative gender identities. From the 1930s to the 1960s the development of a queer cinema, in terms of mainstream visibility and viability, was delayed or forced to remain underground as a result of the strict

⁶ While I have read Forster's reference to cinemagoers as "gangsters" as suggesting subversion, I have to point out that other accounts often show that Forster's attitude towards cinema was rather ambivalent. Thom D. Chesney provides us with a brief survey of Forster's ideas on cinema (strangely, Chesney does not mention the section I have quoted from Forster's terminal note to *Maurice*) and he points out that "more often than not Forster was less than fond of the motion picture medium" and that "there is good reason for his own works' appearance on the silver screen only after his death" (Chesney 35). Chesney notes several experiences Forster had of cinema theatres and some direct contact with the filmmaking process in the form of a project Christopher Isherwood was involved in, the 1933 film, *Little Friend*. It seems Forster was critical of the stage and later cinema, especially when it involved the adaptation of a literary text. Chesney notes how a "concern for the fine lines separating overacting, realism and literal illusion was never lost on Forster, either as a critic or patron of the arts" (36).

⁷ In his discussion of British Queer Cinema, Griffiths points out that "gay film historians from Dyer (1977, 1990, 2002), to Vito Russo (1981) and, more recently, Brett Farmer (2000) have quite effectively illustrated how the cinematic medium (and the multifarious practices of film spectatorship) plays a vital role in the formulation and covert articulation of queer identity and desire" (5). "Cinema has long been a forum for the circulation of sexual meanings and pleasures With its congregation of bodies in close, darkened spaces; its simulation of patently voyeuristic structures; and its lush supply of erotic visual spectacles, cinema has, from the beginning, been marked as a profoundly sexualised form" (Farmer in Griffiths 5).

censorship imposed by the Movie Picture Production Code or “Hays code”. Hollywood filmmakers had to rely on subtext and subtle visual clues if they wanted to circumvent the production code and represent homosexual characters.

In Vito Russo’s famous book on homosexuality and Hollywood, *The Celluloid Closet* (1981), the author charts the movement from gender-deviant stereotypes in early Hollywood films, to the coded representations of homosexuality mid-century and, finally, to the more affirmative representations of gays or lesbians in the last few decades of the century.⁸ Russo explains how the majority of representations of homosexuality in early Hollywood cinema depended on certain stereotypes, most notably, the figure of the sissy or the pansy. He adds that homosexuality was most often represented with “the sissy and not the tomboy because homosexual behaviour onscreen, as almost every other defined “type” of behaviour has been cast in male terms. Homosexuality in [early Hollywood] movies, whether overtly sexual or not, has always been seen in terms of what is or is not masculine” (Russo 8). In early Hollywood cinema American masculinity was often defined by the visibility and denigration of the sissy character (Russo 8). For example, in the popular Western genre, the manly cowboy, who represents American masculinity in its ‘natural’ state, is often contrasted with an effeminate sissy character to emphasise the masculine traits of the former. Such representations often reflect a cultural imagination that specifies the wild outdoors as an exclusively heteromasculine space.⁹ Thus as an inversion of the natural state, and usually depicted as comical, weak and/or threatening figure, the sissy functions as a reminder to the audience of what ‘real’ and ‘natural’ manliness should not look like.

Early Hollywood also includes an interesting number of cross-dressing or gender role-reversal films, like Charlie Chaplin’s *A Woman* (1915), Sidney Drew’s *A Florida Enchantment* (1914), Ed Wood’s *Glen or Glenda* (1953) and the successful, *Some Like it Hot* (1959), featuring Tony Curtis, Marilyn Monroe and Jack Lemmon. These cross-dressing or gender role-reversal films used the gender anxieties around the sissy figure to entertain

⁸ Also refer to *Behind the Screen: How Gays and Lesbians Shaped Hollywood, 1910-1969* (2001) by William J. Mann, in which the author looks at the significant role of out or closeted gay men and women in shaping Hollywood. Gay directors, producers and actors certainly had an influence on the visual motifs or thematic content of some Hollywood films. Also take note of Richard Barrios’s *Screened out: Playing Gay in Hollywood from Edison to Stonewall* (2003) and Eric Braun’s *Frightening The Horses: Gay Icons of the Cinema* (2002) for further information on Hollywood and homosexuality.

⁹ Even the recent *Brokeback Mountain* (dir. Ang Lee 2005), which has been described as a “shift in scope and tenor so profound as to signal a new era,” might be read as a response to these earlier cinematic representations of cowboy masculinity (B. R. Rich, Hello Cowboy). In other words, in *Brokeback Mountain*, a film which continuously underscores the ruggedness and manliness of its queer protagonists, the spectre of the (unnatural) sissy cowboy still haunts contemporary depictions of rural (queer) masculinity.

audiences. However, it is important that in most cases the gender norm was restored by the end of these films, as real gender deviance was equated with immoral homosexuality. Russo points out that when characters did not revert back to gender normalcy, and homosexuality was thus implied, then it was often required that such characters meet a fatal ending.¹⁰

Russo's discussion ends with the shift in attitudes brought about by the politics of gay liberation in 1970s and a subsequent generation of mainstream films that dealt more positively with queer characters or the issue of homosexuality. Gary Morris points out that "the representation of homosexuality in mainstream American film did, gradually, improve during the 1970s, especially if the film was directed at a gay audience (i.e. *A Very Natural Thing* (1973)), or a more cosmopolitan-liberal audience (i.e. *Something for Everyone* (1970), *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971), *Cabaret* (1972) and *Ode to Billy Joe* (1976))" (Morris).¹¹ And in the 1980s, several commercial films dealing directly and affirmatively with the issue of homosexuality emerged; these include *Making Love* (1985 dir. Arthur Hiller) and the lesbian romance based on the Jane Rule novel, *Desert Hearts* (1985 dir. Donna Deitch) (Morris).¹² Eventually, the 1970s and, more so, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a new stage in the development of Queer Cinema fuelled by and contributing to the phenomenal growth of American independent cinema.

The last decade of the century witnessed a significant shift in the development of Queer Cinema, as several factors contributed to a wave of queer independent films, later dubbed the New Queer Cinema by noted film critic, B. Ruby Rich. Independent and underground cinemas often demonstrate significant experiments in cinematic form, and in some cases this relates to a queer sensibility. Film critics point out that some of the key forerunners of New Queer Cinema are the underground cinema of the late-1940s and 1950s, with critics often citing the work of Andy Warhol and Kenneth Anger – specifically Anger's film, *Fireworks*

¹⁰ There are many films in which characters are designated as queer in some covert way (as homosexuality was rarely stated openly) and then these characters were killed off in some way. Refer to the film noir classic, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and Alfred Hitchcock's account of two infamous (and queer) serial killers in *Rope* (1948).

¹¹ Please take note of in-text referencing of online sources as outlined by *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers 7th Edition* (2009). When citing a "web publication that has no pagination or other type of reference markers—it is often preferable to include in the text, rather than in a parenthetical reference, the name of the person ... that begins the corresponding entry in the works-cited list" (220). When the works-cited page includes more than one online source by the same author, a short title may be used to differentiate between the different sources.

¹² In 1985, *An Early Frost* (dir. John Erman) was the first major film, made for television or feature films, to deal with the topic of HIV/AIDS. Shot in 1984 and released in 1986, *Parting Glances* (dir. Bill Sherwood) is a realistic look at urban gay life in the Reagan era in the US and at the height of the AIDS crisis.

(1947) – as early milestones.¹³ The experimental forms of Warhol and Anger should be mentioned alongside the irreverent, camp sensibilities of George Kuchar and John Waters.¹⁴ And across the Atlantic, notable influences include the modernist experiments and queer sensibilities of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Pier Paolo Pasolini.

B. Ruby Rich cites the breaking down of conventional distribution channels, the availability of cheaper film equipment, the activism of the gay liberation movement, and the arrival and impact of AIDS in the late 1980s, as cultural factors that enabled a new generation of filmmakers to tell new stories and to challenge both the silence and stereotypes regarding homosexuality in mainstream Hollywood films. These films were also an important shift in tone and actively questioned the limited scope of films that were only interested in positive, affirmative representations of lesbians and gays. In Rich's recently published collection of essays, entitled *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* (2013), the author revisits her initial reaction to this phenomenon, which, as I have mentioned, she had labelled the "New Queer Cinema" in an essay written for *Sight and Sound* magazine in 1992.

In her original essay, republished in her latest book, Rich remembers how:

A renaissance of film and video arrived, just when the passionate energy that had characterized AIDS activism was flagging. Made by some of the same people, it was a fiercely serious cinema, intent on rewriting both past and future, providing inspiration for whatever and whoever was going to come next. (*New Queer Cinema* 280)

Rich includes a diverse collection of films under this label and some of these films received a great deal of attention from mainstream media, or so-called 'straight' media; of particular note is Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning* (1991) and Todd Haynes' *Poison* (1991), with both films winning awards at the same Sundance Film Festival. Other films, which include Tom Kalin's *Swoon* (1992) and Derek Jarman's *Edward II* (1991), blur history with modern-day concerns as they explore sexual politics through experimenting with different aesthetic forms. Kalin's *Swoon* foregrounded a homoerotic subtext in its take on the 1924 Leopold and

¹³ See Vincent Brooke's essay entitled "Puce Modern Moment: Camp, Postmodernism, and the Films of Kenneth Anger" and Mark Allen Svede's description of Kenneth Anger on www.glbtc.com.

¹⁴ Also refer to Matthew Tinkcom's *Working like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital, Cinema* (2002). Tinkcom's book investigates the films of Vincente Minnelli, Andy Warhol, Kenneth Anger, and John Waters and the author argues "that camp—while embracing the cheap, the scorned, the gaudy, the tasteless, and what Warhol called "the leftovers" of artistic production—is a mode of intellectual production and a critical philosophy of modernity as much as it is an expression of a dissident sex/gender difference" (232).

Loeb murder case, challenging both the official and Hollywood rendering of the events (See Alfred Hitchcock's 1948 film, *Rope*). Jarman's adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's play, *Edward II*, directly addresses a climate of Thatcherite homophobia and through anachronistic visual cues connects the present to the past in novel ways. Other films often cited as examples of New Queer Cinema include Greg Araki's *The Living End* (1992), Marlon Riggs' *Tongues United*, Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), Isaac Julien's *Young Soul Rebels* (1991), Laurie Lynd's *R.S.V.P.* (1991), Christopher's Münch's *The Hours and Times* (1991), as well as work by filmmakers Monica Treut, Sadie Benning, Su Friedrich, Cecilia Dougherty and, as I discuss in my third chapter, John Greyson.

Rich describes this surge of independent films in the early 1990s as "doing something new" and explains how these films were "renegotiating subjectivities, annexing whole genres [and] revising histories in their image" (New Queer Cinema 53). According to Cüneyt Çakırlar, the New Queer Cinema of the early nineties demonstrates "a narrative shift of political emphasis [...] in gay-lesbian cinema from an affirmative minority identity politics to a much more sceptical critique of shame and stigma 'unit[ing] discrete communities of outsiders under the commonality of perversion'" (162). As mentioned, New Queer Cinema represents a radical departure from the existing 'tradition' of lesbian/gay cinema.¹⁵ In Rich's definition of this new trend in queer cinema, she also emphasises that:

New queer films aren't the same and don't share a single vocabulary or strategy or concern. Yet they are nonetheless united by a common style, call it 'Homo Pomo': there are traces in all of them of appropriation and pastiche, irony, as well as a reworking of history with social constructionism very much in mind. (New Queer Cinema 16)

While it may be considered "an ontologically problematic category," in part because of its "overdependence on the highly debatable and unfixed meaning of queer," Çakırlar argues that a "distinguishable characteristic of New Queer Cinema is its critical stance towards any

¹⁵ In her introduction to a collection of essays on the topic, Michelle Aaron identifies five distinct elements that define New Queer Cinema. "Firstly, despite the fast rules of acceptable subjects dictated by western popular culture, these films give voice to the marginalised not simply in terms of focusing on the lesbian and gay community, but on the subgroups contained within it" (3). Secondly, "these films are unapologetic about their characters' faults or, rather, crimes; they eschew positive imagery. *Swoon*, *Poison* and *The Living End* beautify the criminal and (homo)eroticise violence" (4). Her third point is that such "films defy the sanctity of the past, especially the homophobic past" and her second last point is that these "films frequently defy cinematic convention in terms of form, content and genre" (4). Finally, in many ways these films defy death. And often the key way in which death is defied is in terms of AIDS. For example, in *Zero Patience*, a film I briefly discuss in my chapter on Greyson's *Proteus*, the first victim of AIDS comes back to life (5).

cultural and visual constructs of heteronormativity and its performative gesture to memory and history, which is to be performed by a reflex that Rich considers as a new *Queer historiography*” (166, my emphasis). These elements of revisionism, a focus on social constructionism and a fashioning of queer historiographies prompt my investigation to ask how these films engage with the aforementioned historical relationship between the politics of nature and sexual politics. The three films I investigate in this thesis demonstrate a preoccupation with the past. As I explain later, each film engages with cultural and/or personal histories of nature and queer desire; and in each film such an engagement with the past is expressed by referencing certain expressive modes and literary traditions, which include nostalgia, mourning, melancholia and forms such as the pastoral and the elegy.

Queer Ecologies and Reclaiming the Pastoral

Some of the deconstructionist ideas regarding nature and sexuality presented by New Queer Cinema link to the concurrent emergence of the academic fields of Queer Studies and Queer Theory (as opposed to the previous gay-lesbian studies).¹⁶ Queer Theory becomes a distinguishable body of work in academia in the early 1990s. In an online essay, Anna-Marie Jagose explains that “in recent years ‘queer’ has come to be used differently, sometimes as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies”. Jagose explains that “broadly speaking, queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire,” and she adds that “resisting that model of stability – which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect – queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire” (Jagose). Queer Theory emphasises the performative dimension of both gender and sexuality; and Judith Butler, a theorist often cited as a key figure in the development of Queer Theory, makes the distinction

¹⁶ Robin Griffiths explains in his discussion of British Queer Cinema that “in parallel with the rise of queer theory as an institutionalised academic discipline, a newly legitimised ‘Queer Film Studies’ has similarly positioned itself at the ‘cutting edge’ of new and progressive debates within the field. Griffiths continues by stating that “since queer theory’s modus operandi is not only to limn the performative complexities of gender and sexual identity, but also the wider historical conditions and cultural practices that characterise and propagate our understandings of them, the defining and representative role of cinema plays an important part in the process — for as Richard Dyer has already established, ‘no social group can afford to ignore the importance of cinema . . . [for it] has acted as a repository of images of how people are and how they should be, images that are both produced by and help to produce the general thought and feeling of our culture’” (5).

between performance and performative. Butler explains that performing gender is a wilful act or role-playing that may or may not affirm one's appearance as man or woman. However, with her claim that gender is performative, she argues that gender is not a natural pre-existing condition, even though it purports to be exactly that; instead "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (*Gender Trouble* 25). In this way, gender is not an internal reality but rather a phenomenon that is being produced continuously.¹⁷ In other words, Queer Theory's focus on performativity suggests the impossibility of any 'natural' gender, or sexual identity for that matter, as sexuality often depends on the reiteration of certain gender ideals.

Queer Theory is then primarily interested in those individuals or communities that disrupt the naturalisation of particular gender ideals or sexual norms. Bob Nowlan adds that Queer Theory frequently "conceives of homosexual queerity [...] to represent the historically most unsettling, disturbing threatening instance of 'the other' at work within – and upon – the (post)modern social and cultural imaginary" (9).¹⁸ Nowlan sees queer critical praxis as "a critical intervention into the discursive construction of sexualities and gender in terms of binary oppositions of normal versus abnormal, dominant versus subordinate, included versus excluded and familiar versus strange" (5). For such "binary opposition, contends Derrida, is a 'violent hierarchy'" (Dollimore 5). It is the natural versus unnatural binary that often informs white (colonial) heteromascularity's need to assert itself against a homosexual-queer racialised other.¹⁹ Significantly, a similar critique of binary oppositions has been put forward by the ecofeminist scholar, Greta Gaard.

Gaard, like many other ecofeminists, argues that hierarchal constructions of nature have historically aided the patriarchal oppression of women.²⁰ I single out Gaard because her critique of Western ideas of nature also identifies itself as queer. She points out that there are

¹⁷ The notion of performativity is introduced at the beginning of *Gender Trouble* (1999) when Butler argues that "gender proves to be performance— that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (25). Butler argues that "a political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender" (*Gender Trouble* 26).

¹⁸ Admittedly, Nowlan's argument is limited to a Euro-American context.

¹⁹ Homosexual intercourse has historically been described in terms of both its status as unnatural but also in terms of its closeness to animality. Colonial discourses have often emphasised similar anxieties around native sexual practices.

²⁰ Also refer to Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (2002).

parallels between the ‘othering’ of women, nature and queer subjectivities. Although not arguing a quantitatively measurable relationship between heterosexist attitudes and the destruction of the natural world, Gaard, in “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism,” points out that “that many systems of oppression are mutually reinforcing and that “dominant Western culture’s devaluation of the erotic” and the queer “parallels its devaluation of women and of nature” (138).²¹ Here, Simon Estok’s notion of ecophobia and Gaard’s own notion of erotophobia could be understood as closely related concepts. Estok defines ecophobia as “an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism” (208). Gaard offers the term “erotophobia” as “the larger problem [...] of Western culture, a fear of the erotic so strong that only one form of sexuality is overtly allowed; only in one position; and only in the context of certain legal, religious, and social sanctions” (118). Gaard’s joining of Queer Theory and Ecofeminism is significant here, and suggests how queer critical praxis might be extended into new areas. The emergence of these hybrid concepts seems to affirm Judith Butler’s earlier claim about the future of the term ‘queer’. Butler, explains that “if the term ‘queer’ is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered” (*Bodies* 19).

In a similar way to Gaard, Polk Danne responds “to the West’s preoccupation with difference” in her essay, entitled “Ecologically Queer: Preliminaries for a Queer Ecofeminist Identity Theory.” She proposes a “conceptual field within which we might investigate the relationships between various historically and culturally conditioned ontologies of difference—including those of space/time difference, of species difference, and of human sexual difference—and the identities, both human and nonhuman, that logically follow or conceptually flow from such ontologies” (73). As such, her inquiry is an attempt to understand how these ontologies depend upon historically contingent and culturally specific concepts of nature. For Danne, an ecologically queer approach would examine how certain literary artefacts demonstrate “the ways in which modernity has framed our debates and inquiries,” specifically those related to sexual identity and nature, and it would “take heed of

²¹ Also refer to more recent essays by Gaard: see “New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism” in the *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* journal and her informative review of the recent Queer Ecologies anthology also mentioned in this chapter, entitled, “Green, Pink, and Lavender: Banishing Ecophobia through Queer Ecologies.”

the ecological impossibility of a purely human or merely human realm within which discussions about identity tend to circulate” (73).

Gaard and Danne’s arguments are not the first to bring together Queer and Nature. The 1994 issue of the journal, *UnderCurrents*, can be seen as an important landmark in the development of more recent articulations of Queer Ecology, Queer Environmentality or Queer Ecocriticism.²² Produced by graduate students at York University, this journal of “critical environmental studies” devoted an entire issue to the theme of “queer/nature” and insisted that “a politics of nature can no longer be an articulation of white, male, heterosexual prescriptive or descriptive privilege” (O’Donnell 2). The essays collected in the issue demonstrated “the disruptive power of any examination of the normative categories and the natural from the perspective of queer identity” (2), the issue included a piece on “queer(y)ing environmental politics” by then doctoral student, Catriona Sandilands, in which she reflects on what it would mean to queer nature. Sandilands argues that “to queer nature is to question its normative use, to interrogate relations of knowledge and power by which certain “truths” about ourselves have been allowed to pass, unnoticed, without question” and that it is a process “by which all relations to nature become de-naturalized, by which we question the ways in which we are located in nature, by which we question the uses to which “nature” has been put” (22). Sandilands states that such politics “would have us celebrate ‘strangeness’ and “would place queer at the centre, rather than on the margins, of the [environmental] discursive universe” (23). Sandilands revisits the topic several times during her career and has been a key contributor to the expansion of this area of enquiry.

Sandilands, or Mortimer-Sandilands as she is known now, is also the co-editor, with Bruce Erickson, of the recent volume devoted to the subject, an anthology of essays entitled, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (2010).²³ In the introductory chapter of this volume, Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson see Queer Ecology as a theoretical approach with dual

²² York University recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Queer/Nature issue of *Undercurrents*. To celebrate they invited creative and scholarly contributions for an anniversary issue of ‘Queer/Nature’, which they envision “as both a retrospective moment and timely opportunity to highlight the continued ethical and political creativity that springs from thinking about the queer and the ecological together” (Call for Papers).

²³ Also refer to Greta Gaard’s review of this anthology, entitled “Green, Pink, and Lavender: Banishing Ecophobia through Queer Ecologies” (2011).

considerations in which the politics of the sexual are linked to the politics of the environment.²⁴ They define Queer Ecology as a mode of critical thinking that

probes the intersections of sex and nature with an eye to developing a sexual politics that more clearly includes considerations of the natural world and its biosocial constitution, and an environmental politics that demonstrates an understanding of the ways in which sexual relations organise and influence both the material world of nature and our perceptions, experiences and perceptions of non-heterosexual individual and communities. (3)

Timothy Morton's guest column on Queer Ecology in the March 2010 issue of *PLMA* also needs to be mentioned here. Morton argues that "to undermine the false dichotomy of Nature and history on which papal homophobia depends, scholarship must research the ways in which queerness, in its variegated forms, is installed in biological substance as such and is not simply a blip in cultural history" (273-274). Morton further states that caution should be taken so that Queer Ecology does not fall into the neo-romantic notions of the "web of life" and should instead explore new metaphors for the relationships between nonhuman and human beings. Morton argues that Queer Ecology should not fall into the ideologies of interconnectedness (which he sees as unsound ecological thinking). He critiques organicism for relying "on touchy-feely ideologies of embeddedness" and, more importantly, on a heterosexual teleology (in which all life is organised around heterosexual reproduction) (Queer Ecology 278). Morton critiques "organicism" in the way it "policing the sprawling, tangled, queer mesh by naturalizing sexual difference" (Queer Ecology 278).

At the 2011 Annual Convention of the Modern Language Association (MLA), a panel of scholars provided their insights on the relationship between "queers" and the environment. The panellists examined representations of nature and queer sex in literary and cultural texts. Allie Duzett mentions, in an online report on the event, that of particular note was Katie J. Hogan's "Green Angels in America: Aesthetics of Equity," in which "Hogan argued for 'environmental justice,' and used as her vehicle the controversial play *Angels in America*

²⁴ Soper warns that the constructivist agenda of Queer Theory might prove the most difficult aspect to reconcile with an ecological perspective. Soper explains that "it is anti-realism rather than metaphysical anti-naturalism that is the major obstacle in any rapprochement of the two perspectives" (130). I would emphasise that Queer Theory and ecological criticism both demand at their most basic level, although each in a different key, intimacies with other non/human beings and, in a sense, interrogate or at least negotiate differences between different non/human beings.

which she read as a ‘contribution to this queer environmental effort’ because it ‘links beauty, environment, and social justice’ with an ‘esthetic of equity’”. Duzett also singles out a lecture by Jill E. Anderson, entitled “‘Warm Blood and Live Semen and Rich Marrow and Wholesome Flesh!’: A Queer Ecological Reading of Christopher Isherwood’s *A Single Man*,” in which “Anderson argued that the novel ‘naturalizes queerness’ and showed the ‘importance of ecological preservation’ in its portrayal of the beach which in the novel is ‘a safehaven for queerness and also the natural world’.”²⁵ “Anderson showed that Christopher Isherwood’s *A Single Man* represents heterosexists as ‘guilty of destroying the environment; reproducing; and focusing on the future’” (Duzett). Jill E. Anderson’s discussion of *A Single Man* was later expanded on as a chapter in her doctoral dissertation, entitled *The Gay of the Land: Queer Ecology and the Literature of the 1960s* (2011). In her thesis, Anderson argues “not only that queer ecology is a legitimate and important next step for ecocritics and queer theorists but also that its literary application does a great amount of good in exploring and dismantling the natural/unnatural binary” and “exposing the ecological impact of the choices humans make every day” (iii). In her dissertation she investigates “works traditionally read as either environmental texts or queer texts” and outlines that her “task will be to claim each work for both the queer and environmental side, as well as a combination of both” (Anderson iii).

Robert Azzarello’s book, *Queer Environmentality: Ecology, Evolution, and Sexuality in American Literature* (2012), offers “a model for meaningful dialogue between queer studies and environmental studies,” as it “traces a queer-environmental lineage in American Romantic and post-Romantic literature” (Ashgate.com). With the term “queer environmentality,” the author “points towards a queer sensibility in the history of environmental literature to balance the dominant narrative that reading environmental literature is tantamount to witnessing a spectacular dramatization of heterosexual teleology” (Ashgate.com). Azzarello’s study is focused on “four key figures in the American literary tradition: Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, Willa Cather, and Djuna Barnes” and he argues that “each of these writers problematizes conventional notions of the strange matrix between the human, the natural, and the sexual” (Ashgate.com). Azzarello’s book demonstrates “the ways in which the queer project and the environmental project are always

²⁵ The space of the beach is something I return to in the chapters that follow. Anderson’s argument regarding the beach in *A Single Man* as a “safehaven for queerness” and for the natural world is in some ways similar to my own arguments regarding the opening scenes of *Maurice*, the lingering shots of Dungeness’ shingle beach in *The Garden* and, finally, the moments of edenic eroticism on Robben Island’s beach in *Proteus*.

connected or, put another way, show that questions and politics of human sexuality are always entwined with those associated with the other-than-human world” (Ashgate.com).

In a more recent book on Queer Ecology, Nicole Seymour’s *Strange Natures* (2013), the author “identifies a tradition of queer environmentalism in contemporary fictions,” she finds “that novels and films generally categorized as queer— including Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), Todd Haynes’s *Safe* (1995), Ang Lee’s *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), and Shelley Jackson’s *Half Life* (2006)— explicitly link the queer to the natural world through an empathetic, ethical imagination” (Kindle Locations 113-116). Seymour’s readings thus make a unique contribution to the queer-ecological paradigm, while taking up what Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson defines as its general task. Seymour’s “readings perform what David Mazel calls poststructuralist ecocriticism: ‘a way of reading environmental literature and canonical landscapes [...] that attends concurrently to the discursive construction of both [...] environment and [...] subjectivity’ and that analyzes environment ‘as a powerful site for naturalizing constructs of race, class, nationality, and gender’” (Kindle Locations 126-128). In her (re)reading contemporary queer literature and film as environmental literature and film, Seymour “adds ‘sexuality’ and ‘gender identity’ to Mazel’s list of dominant identity constructs” and “shows that the environment can function as a site not just for establishing such constructs, but for challenging them” (Kindle Locations 124-131). *Strange Natures* suggests “that queer ecology exists not only to provide a new lens, but to make use of the gaps in and overlaps among existing lenses” and Seymour’s book “offers more broadly as a scholarly work: not just a reconceptualization of the human relationship to the non-human natural world, but a reassessment of how we draw critical-theoretical boundaries” (Kindle Locations 141-144).

In their introductory chapter to *Queer Ecologies*, Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson use Ang Lee’s film, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), to demonstrate the possibilities of Queer Ecology as a methodological approach. They describe the collection of essays which make up the book as an investigation of how “ideas and practices of nature, including bodies and landscapes, are located in particular productions of sexuality” and how “sex is, both historically and in the present, located in particular formulations of nature” (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson 5). They argue that the film “displays quite dramatically three important junctures at which lgbtq (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer) and environmental politics intersect” (2).

Firstly, they argue that “Jack and Ennis’s shared refusal to name themselves as ‘queer’ is part of an ongoing narrative strategy by which the film distances both men from the taint of urban, effeminate – what Judith Halberstam has called – metronormative articulations of gay male identity” (2).²⁶ The film’s “romance is based on the story’s effective disarticulation of same-sex love from gay identity, the former of which is presented as natural – masculine, rural, virile – in opposition to the latter’s spectral invocation of historical and ongoing discourses of perversion” (2). Their second point relates to the pristine wilderness of *Brokeback Mountain*. Jack and Ennis’s virility is linked to the virility of the wild landscape and thus Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson argue that the film is “a subversion of the dominant discourses that attach wilderness spaces to performances of heterosexual masculinity” (3). And their final point is about the fact that Jack and Ennis are shepherds, as this “locates the film in a long history of pastoral representations of male same-sex eroticism. Starting with ancient Greek “lyric poetry [such as Theocritus’ *Idylls*] depicting the life of Shepherds or herdsman” (4). Mortimer and Erickson’s example of *Brokeback Mountain* informs my approach to filmic texts I have selected. Their discussion demonstrates not only a theoretical approach concerned with how current cultural-sociological constructions of nature and sexuality are evident in a particular text, but it is also concerned with how certain literary forms inform and form such constructions. To read *Brokeback Mountain* only as a text that reflects on a specific sociological reality, the situation of gay men in rural America, is to ignore how it reworks and depends on the pastoral as a literary genre. Indeed it is through a consideration of, what David Shuttleton terms, the “queer politics of the gay pastoral,” that we locate such a text in a literary lineage that can be traced back in time and across national borders.²⁷

²⁶ In *A Queer Time and Place* (2005), Judith Halberstam explains that “the notion of metrosexuality as a cultural dominant in U.S. theorizing about gay/lesbian lives also gives rise to the term metronormativity” (36). For Halberstam, “this term reveals the conflation of “urban” and “visible” in many normalizing narratives of gay/lesbian subjectivities. Such narratives tell of closeted subjects who “come out” into an urban setting, which in turn, supposedly allows for the full expression of the sexual self in relation to a community of other gays/lesbians/queers” (36). Halberstam quotes John Howard in *Men like That* and explains that “the rural is made to function as a closet for urban sexualities in most accounts of rural queer migration” and that “in reality, many queers from rural or small towns move to the city of necessity, and then yearn to leave the urban area and return to their small towns; and many recount complicated stories of love, sex, and community in their small-town lives that belie the closet model” (37).

²⁷ As I have pointed out *Maurice* brings this literary trope of the gay pastoral to the screen. As I argue in the following chapter, in this way it is significant in our understanding of how ideas of nature are expressed through gay sensibility.

Shuttleton points out that “for some time gay scholars have been reclaiming the neo-classical generic pastoral tradition as a homosexual tradition” (124).²⁸ Notable scholarship on the homosexual pastoral tradition, includes Rictor Norton’s work and Byrne R.S. Fone’s essay,²⁹ titled, “This Other Eden: Arcadia and the Homosexual Imagination” (1983), in which Fone argued that Arcadia serves as a sanctuary for the homosexual imagination and that it suggests certain underlying spiritual values. Fone argues that “the homosexual imagination finds a special value and a particular use for this ideal, employing it in three major ways” (13). He explains that it is used “to suggest a place where it is safe to be gay: where gay men can be free from the outlaw status society confers upon us, where homosexual love can be consummate without concern for the punishment or scorn of the world” (Fone 13). Secondly, it has been used “to imply the presence of gay love and sensibility in a text that otherwise makes no explicit statement about homosexuality. And lastly, “to establish a metaphor for certain spiritual values and myths prevalent in homosexual literature and life, namely, that homosexuality is superior to heterosexuality and is a divinely sanctioned means to an understanding of the good and beautiful, and that the search for the ideal Friend is one of the major undertakings of the homosexual life” (13). Fone then traces this queer Arcadian lineage back to various antecedents, which include; Virgil’s *Eclogues*, the Renaissance poet, Richard Barnsfield, Christopher Marlowe, *The Divided Path* by Nial Kent (1949) and Gore Vidal’s *The City and the Pillar* (1948) and Walt Whitman’s “Calamus” (1860) He also refers to the Arcadian scenes in Forster’s novel, *Maurice* and Xavier Mayne’s *Imre* (1906).

Shuttleton points out that the romantic pastoral sequences in recent examples of Queer Cinema are often constructed through “an appropriation of pastoral visual grammar” which is in some cases an appropriation of the familiar visual grammar from the heterosexual romances of classic Hollywood cinema, but which in other cases also belong to a history of queer pastoralism in film. This includes the woodland fantasies in Jean Genet’s darker *Un Chant D’Amour* (1950). And includes, as I point out in my second chapter, Derek Jarman’s “queer appropriations of English pastoralism, as exemplified by two of his most lyrical films; *Angelic Conversation* (1985), structured around Shakespeare’s Sonnets and *The Garden*”

²⁸ David Shuttleton argues that “pastoral conventions have been invoked at least as much in rejection of a minoritizing homosexual or gay identity as they have been employed for any coded endorsements or overt celebrations of same-sex desire” (126). In other words, Shuttleton would question any simplistic reading of the pastoral as a transhistorically ‘gay’ liberatory genre, and instead he would emphasise that the pastoral has celebrated a queer diversity of sexual pleasures, and has been used to both affirm and reject homosexual love (Shuttleton 11).

²⁹See Rictor Norton’s essay, entitled “A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages,” in *The English Historical Review*.

(Shuttleton 124). Shuttleton argues that “these cinematic precedents ultimately derive their pastoral iconographic language from a classical rooted tradition within western literary and visual art” and points out that such pastoral iconographic language, although “conventionally concerned with such primary binarisms as ‘Nature’ and ‘Culture’, ‘Innocence’ and ‘Experience’, has since its classical origins been intimately associated with male-male desire” (124).

This final point suggests that certain literary genres are a more productive means to mapping out cultural discourses that inform and form the complex and often contradictory concept of nature, and the ways in which certain expressions of desire, homosexual love or sexual identity rely on the different understandings or appropriations of this concept. Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson explore some of queer ecological dimensions of both literary and cinematic incarnations of the pastoral. As I have mentioned, elements of the pastoral (and with it the pastoral elegy and the georgic) are present in my selection of filmic texts.

The Green Screen

While the Queer Ecological perspective I have outlined above is the primary motivation for my analysis, I should also point out that my choice to use filmic texts has also been influenced by a number of recent ecocritical studies of cinema. Most notably, Adrian Ivakhiv, Salma Monani, David Ingram and Paula Willoquet-Maricondi have recently added to the way we think about cinema’s relationship to the natural world.³⁰ Noteworthy publications on Ecocinema include, *Ecocinema Theory And Practice* (2012) edited by Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt and *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film* (2010) edited by Paula Willoquet-Maricondi.

As suggested, literary Ecocriticism has often been interested in the representation of nature by specific literary texts and genres. Film criticism devoted to the critical analysis of representations of nature has similarly been interested in specific cinematic/visual forms or genres. However, Ecocinema scholarship has moved beyond focussing solely on the more conventional cinematic forms associated with nature, namely the natural history film or wildlife documentary (the equivalent of nature writing to early Ecocriticism), and has instead

³⁰ Also refer to MacDonald’s essay “Toward an eco-cinema” in the journal *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*.

begun to theorise what a more general ecocritical approach to cinema would look like. Adrian Ivakhiv points out that cinema can be read in terms of its material relationship to world; how it functions in terms of capital, natural resources and environmental impact. He describes an ecocritical analysis of film that takes into account the “cultural circulation” of meaning (Green Film 21). He reminds us that “at the level of the text, a variety of analytical traditions have developed to probe into the form, the content, and the discourse of film—its representation of gender, race, class, ethnicity, nation, sexuality, power and agency, normalcy and deviance; the generic, semiotic, and ideological codes by which these meanings are mediated; intertextual relations between this film and others of the same genre, author, or cinematic tradition; and so on” (Green Film 21). Ivakhiv also argues for a consideration of “cinema as world making” (Anthrobiogeomorphic 125). He formulates “a working definition of cinema that recognizes the medium’s richness and efficacy in material, social, and perceptual ecologies”, as he defines cinema as “a cultural instrument for producing worlds through the sequential presentation of moving sound-images” (Anthrobiogeomorphic 125). Accordingly, I am interested in films that produce worlds that eschew normative assumptions regarding nature and human sexuality. In a way, Ivakhiv comments on the world-creating effect of cinema link back to Forster’s views on the escapism provided by cinema. However, as Ivakhiv and other Ecocinema critics point out, film offers its audience not only flights of fancy but an opportunity to view alternative social configurations and also alternative ecological possibilities. I argue that certain films produce worlds that help us rethink our definition of certain literary forms, such as pastoral or georgic, and also to recognise how contemporary cinema is able to present us with queer natures and strange intimacies.

My study is one which tries to open up new ways of describing different ontologies as they are represented in a selection of filmic texts. I ask how ecology, with its methodological focus on biological communities, structure and the relational, might be combined with Queer Theory’s focus on fluidity, ‘strange familiarity’ and (erotic) intimacy. As Giffney and Hird point out, Queer Theory is a “collection of methodologies to unpick binaries and reread gaps silences and in-between spaces” and reiterate its “unremitting emphasis on fluidity, uber-inclusivity, interdeterminacy, indefinability, meaninglessness and that which is unrepresentable” and thus an “attempt to undo normative entanglements and fashion alternative imaginaries” (Giffney & Hird 4). It could be a potent ingredient to contemporary environmental discourse which often utilises metaphors or imagery that serve an exclusively reproductive rhetoric or heterosexist agenda.

Ecocritically Queer?

Moving beyond an analysis of the historical/filmic dimensions of the gay pastoral, I want to argue for an approach to cinema which, if I can appropriate, Adrienne Rich's term, encourages "re-vision" (22).³¹ In light of the current environmental situation, I want to (re)assess each filmic text as a mapping out of the divergent and complex ways nonhuman life and landscape inform our experiences and understandings of sexuality and how sexuality influences our view of the more-than-human world.

In a recent roundtable on Queer Ecology, Michael J Morris argues that "queer ecology" seems to turn towards an "eco-sexuality", an ecological perspective of sexuality that accounts for the nonhuman material relations that condition, enable, and affect the practices and possibilities of sexuality. Considered ecologically, such material relations cannot be considered to be the setting or accessories of sexuality; rather, such relations must be recognized as internal to the formation of both sexualities and subjectivities" (Anderson et al 99).³² Morris's point here echoes my own view of sexuality as informed not only by cultural discourse and performative gestures, but also by material configurations of space, place and nonhuman life. With Adrian Ivakhiv's idea of cinema as "world-making" in mind, and with the thematic focus on dissident sexuality in each film, it is possible to map out or to delineate how "nonhuman material relations [...] condition, enable, and affect the practices and possibilities of sexuality" (Anderson et al 99). I read ideas about sexuality in relation to each film's use of *mise-en-scène* – which include landscapes and nonhuman life – to highlight a complex entanglement of nature, desire, identity and (natural) history.

³¹ See Adrienne Rich's essay, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," in which she explores this idea of "re-vision" or "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old" text from a new critical direction (22).

³² Morris reflects on a point made by Gavin Brown during the roundtable discussion. He explains that "Brown directs our attention towards the possibilities of a 'political ecology of sexualities', towards an examination of resource availability and consumption as conditioning factors in the practice and formation of sexualities and sexual identities, and towards a consideration of how contemporary sexualities impact 'ecological systems at various geographical scales'" (Anderson et al 99) Morris adds that "this suggests a provocative intervention in how we might understand sexuality itself. From queer theory – primarily from the work of Judith Butler – comes the appreciation of sexuality as performative, as enacted, and iteratively produced over time. Sexuality is never reducible to desire or object choice; it is an assemblage of ongoing performative practices. These performatives do not only produce sexualities; they produce the very subjects of such sexualities as well Brown's suggestion of a 'political ecology of sexualities' would seem to consider the roles of materials and objects within the performativity of sexuality, and thus the formation of subjects themselves" (Anderson et al 99).

My selection of films, each with unique visual and metaphorical landscapes, demonstrates three distinct but not dissimilar queer experiences of nature. The first film, James Ivory's *Maurice* (1987), is a tale of finding queer love in the English countryside and of a subsequent escape into the dark, viridian backwoods of Edwardian England. In chapter two, entitled "From Suburbia To The Backwoods: Connecting Sex And Nature In James Ivory's *Maurice*," I read the opening scene of the film to show how it reflects a particular cultural construction of nature. The visual grammar of this opening scene suggests a filmic strategy in which homosexuality is depicted as natural and spontaneous. The restrictive attire of the characters is juxtaposed with natural scenery to highlight Victorian sexual repression. Yet the critique of Victorianism is also a stand in for Thatcherite conservatism and Prop-8 legislation. I contrast the rhetoric of the film with that of the novel. While the novel is about two competing models of homosexual relationships, they both use the idea of Nature in interesting ways. Ultimately, I concur with Jeff Bush's reading of the novel as a queer ecological text in the sense that the novel opens up a space in the dark, liberatory backwoods of England where queer relationships are possible. The film visually transcribes homosexual pastoral as English heritage in a bid to (re)canonise and naturalise homosexuality. The film draws on the nostalgia of the heritage genre to achieve this. While the novel queers nature to achieve the celebratory final escape of the characters, the film seeks to do the same but relies on a different strategy. In light of the gay liberation politics of the day and the political context of 1980s Britain, one might read *Maurice* as naturalising homosexuality while celebrating what is distinct about England.

The second film, Derek Jarman's *The Garden* (1990) revolves around two gardens, the first a biblical Eden (which is linked to its mirror image in the New Testament, Gethsemane) and the second the real garden at Jarman's cottage at Dungeness. In chapter two, entitled "'Gardening After The Apocalypse' : Queer Ecology And The Elegaic Nature Of Derek Jarman's *The Garden*," I argue that Jarman reconfigures the conventions of the pastoral elegy and georgic through his representation of the harsh, desolate shingle at Dungeness. In this hostile refuge, Jarman grows a garden and it features in his film as a reworking of the edenic myth. Homosexual desire and gay sex becomes the 'other' Eden and the forgotten garden. Jarman's nature is queer as he incorporates the power plant in his back yard and his personal struggle with AIDS into a dark, personal view on the ecological. *The Garden* experiments with a more organic, fragmented filmic form (which I connect to Jarman's experiences of Dungeness and its protean seaside). The film's ambient, postmodern, disjointed aesthetic

makes it a productive site for queer ecological alternatives. *The Garden* draws on the poetic modes of the elegy and the georgic as it expresses the filmmaker's radical nostalgia for a queer past while reflecting on the homophobic present. In the film, Jarman's garden at Prospect Cottage is also used to symbolise personal histories and future desires and celebrates queer-pastoral intimacies threatened by but still flourishing in the harsh landscape of Dungeness (and in Thatcherite England at large). I ask to what extent the film's elegiac nature can be read in relation to ecological elegy and ask how queer melancholia might read as a model of mourning that benefits our modern relationship with nature.

The third film shifts my focus from a national cinema to transnational and postcolonial cinema, as I consider John Greyson and Jack Lewis' botanical, sodomitical feature film, *Proteus* (2003). This Canadian-South African collaboration imagines a fatal love between two eighteenth-century prisoners and frames this with the stark natural beauty of the Southern African coastline. In my third chapter, entitled "Hothouse Specimens And Sodomitical Sailors: Natural History And Queer Historiography In Jack Lewis And John Greyson's *Proteus*," I start my investigation by focussing on two figures of science – a Victorian taxonomist from Greyson's earlier film *Zero Patience* (1993) and the Linnaean Botanist, named Virgil Niven, in the more recent *Proteus*; the latter sets up a polemical investigation of sexual politics and prompts questions about nature, science and heteronormativity. *Proteus* specifically addresses the issue of nomenclature and naming, as it draws parallels between the naming of the natural world through Western classification systems and the historical discourse of sexual categories.

Bringing together these three divergent films is a strategic choice. *Maurice* demonstrates a complex historical relationship between homosexuality and several discourses of nature. The novel and film are both traditional and conservative in terms of form, but are radical and subversive in terms of content. The film naturalises male homosexuality, using a filmic aesthetic that is preoccupied with English heritage, at a time when the issue of gay rights is controversial. The other two films in my study provide distinctly experimental narratives which unsettle certain cultural paradigms. I suggest that these experiments with filmic form enable us to consider questions regarding Western society's treatment of homosexuals and nature. My strategy is to use each film to show how Queer Cinema's subversion of heteronormativity is often located in the deconstruction of dominant cultural narratives and histories of nature. I ask to what extent queer desire (as expressed by the visual grammar used

by the filmmakers I discuss) might aid a larger project that seeks to reassess cinematic, literary and colonial histories of nature and sexuality.

CHAPTER TWO

From Suburbia To The Backwoods: Connecting Sex And Nature In James Ivory's Adaptation Of E.M. Forster's *Maurice*

“Ah for darkness – not the darkness of the house which coops up a man among the furniture, but the darkness where he can be free!” (Forster 169)

“After all, the forests and the night were on his side, not theirs; they not he, were in inside a ring fence” (Forster 190).

Introduction

In the opening scene of James Ivory's *Maurice* (1987), an adaption of E.M. Forster's novel with the same title, the audience is introduced to a group of schoolboys on an excursion to the local beach. The camera pans over a vast wind-swept, colourless shore where a few kites soar strenuously against the ocean sky, and focusses on the group, who seem typical of an all-boys school with some carrying nets and some joyously holding hands with their teacher. Two figures stray from the group; a young boy and a middle-aged man (Simon Callow), each dressed in late-Victorian garb. From their conversation, we come to understand that Mr Ducie, the boy's teacher, wishes to prepare the boy for a now imminent move to public school life and, more importantly, for the onset of puberty. We learn that the boy, Maurice Hall, who has been raised by his mother and sisters, has no father figure in his life who might explain to him, what Mr Ducie calls, the “the sacred mystery of sex” (*Maurice*).³³ So before the boy starts down this new path, his teacher feels that it is his responsibility to educate the boy about the physical changes he will experience and the future duties of marriage.

However, the discussion that follows is anything but an honest talk about the birds and the bees and it suffers from what a present-day audience might describe as a stereotypically Victorian and thus notably reticent attitude regarding sex. Mr Ducie is hesitant to address

³³ With regards to the in-text referencing of the film, novel and Forster's other writings, I use the film's title when referring to dialogue from Ivory's adaptation, I use page numbers to reference text from the novel and I use short titles and page numbers to reference Forster's other writings.

the carnal or erotic aspects of the topic and instead uses formal, scientific nomenclature, i.e. the Latin term for each sex organ, as he awkwardly demonstrates the mechanics of sex with a few diagrams etched in the sand. Mr Ducie adds a religious air to his explanations. He sees the act of reproductive sex as the divine purpose of marriage and adds that this “act” between man and woman is no different from “the procreation of, indeed all creeping things” (*Maurice*). For Mr Ducie, marriage and with it, reproductive, monogamous sex is the ‘natural’, and thus the sacrosanct order of things. He views the bond between man and woman as “life’s chief glory” and accordingly warns Maurice about the dangers of deviance, when he adds that one should never “pollute” one’s body (*Maurice*). The talk ends with the pair on their way back to join the rest of the group, but Mr Ducie remembers that he had not erased those “infernal designs” he made in the sand (*Maurice*). Just as he sets off to right the wrong, Maurice reminds him that the tide will have come in and it would have wiped the beach clean. Mr Ducie nervously agrees with the boy. The moment reveals an intense anxiety about sexuality or the public acknowledgement of sexuality. When the camera cuts back to their previous spot, we see how a group of beachgoers comes across the drawings and they are shocked at what they find. A young girl, aptly named Victoria, is first to inspect the drawings but she is anxiously ushered away when her mother realises what she is looking at.³⁴ From the beach scene, the film cuts to the adult Maurice (James Wilby) at Cambridge in 1909, attending a dinner with his dean and fellow students; the date and location appear briefly to indicate the new century.

³⁴ The girl’s name here is an obvious reference to Victorian attitudes regarding sex; that is the uncomfortable relationship between conventions of respectability and the visibility of any form of sex. In 1914, around the time *Maurice* was written, Edward Carpenter described the Victorian age as “a period in which not only commercialism in public life, but cant in religion, pure materialism in science, futility in social conventions, the worship of stocks and shares, the starving of the human heart, the denial of the human body and its needs, huddling concealment of the body in clothes, the ‘impure hush’ in matters of sex, class division, contempt of manual labour, and the cruel barring of women from every natural and useful expression of their lives, were carried to an extremity of folly difficult for us to realise now” (Rowbotham 41).



Figure 1 - Mr Ducie and Maurice

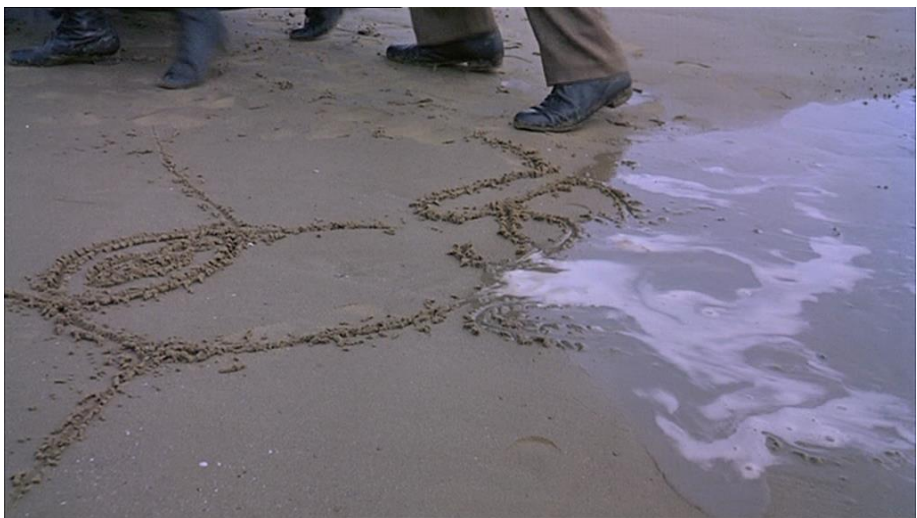


Figure 2 - Diagrams in the sand

Maurice tells the tale of how the boy who obediently answered Mr Ducie's questions eventually develops a sexual disposition which sets him at odds with the 'natural order' which Mr Ducie so fervently outlines. The setting of the opening scene and Mr Ducie's talk provides this chapter with a useful starting point to discuss how the novel and subsequently the film demonstrates that ideas of sex or sexuality are always entangled with complex notions of society, human nature and nonhuman nature. I will briefly summarise the plot of the film, before considering some of the key ideas and connections demonstrated by the opening scene of the film. At the above mentioned dinner, Maurice meets a charismatic and obviously homosexual character, named Risley (he later becomes a sort of Wildean figure arrested for indecent behaviour with working class men). Through

this acquaintance, Maurice meets his first love, Clive Durham (Hugh Grant). Their relationship develops over the years but is ultimately inhibited by Clive's insistence on the ideals of platonic love and is ended when Clive 'turns' heterosexual. Maurice is devastated and eventually consults an American doctor who suggests hypnotherapy as treatment for his homosexuality. However, one night Maurice has a sexual encounter with Clive's under gamekeeper, Alec Scudder (Rupert Graves). This transgression of class boundaries is at first a source of paranoia for Maurice, as such encounters often lead to public cases of blackmail. Through a series of events, this tension is resolved, and by the end of the film Alec and Maurice meet in the boathouse on Clive's estate. One assumes that they eventually escape into the woods and live together at the margins of society.

To return to the opening scene, Mr Ducie's talk with Maurice indicates a dominant ideology of heteronormativity which Maurice must transgress in his move to sexual liberation. Mr Ducie's insistence on heterosexual marriage is backed by a particular view of nature; evident in the way he dictates that husband and wife must unite as it is the way of all "creeping things." Ironically, as the film highlights, the boy must be *instructed* in the 'natural' ways of the world, which contradicts the idea that heterosexual pairing is merely an instinctive, and thus obligatory, configuration. The cinematic nature of the scene further explores this modern, if not romantic, critique of society as restrictive or repressive and nature as a space of sexual freedom. The carefully considered *mise-en-scène* emphasises the 'unnaturalness' of Victorian social codes, as the camera pulls back to show overdressed beachgoers in stark contrast with a vast seascape. This juxtaposition, of the landscape with the actors' restrictive attire, suggests that the film aligns 'nature' with the (sexual) body and Victorian middleclass ideology with a denial of the body. Moreover, we are reminded that Mr Ducie's diagrams will inevitably fall victim to wave and wind. The drawings and what they represent, Mr Ducie's ideas of the 'natural' world, will be wiped out by the surf. Thus, the beach setting, with its ever-changing surface and its primordial and diverse collection of organisms, subverts Mr Ducie's inscribing of a particular sexual order on to the landscape.

As an adaptation of Forster's novel, the opening scene reminds us that Ivory's retelling uses a late-twentieth century lens, especially with regards to ideas surrounding sex and sexuality. Critics have pointed out that in subtle ways the film reflects more recent trends and present-day concerns. Film critic, W. Rohan Quince, describes Mr Ducie's speech as an example of the societal "indoctrination" faced by the homosexual protagonist (108). He

adds that the film reflects the “changes in attitude brought about by nearly two decades of gay liberation,” as it exposes and emphasises the homophobia of Edwardian England (108). He notes that to those familiar with the story, it would be apparent that Mr Ducie’s “innocent advice” is “the start of a process of acculturation which will oblige Maurice to feel uncomfortable and guilty, convinced of his own abnormality” (109). Importantly, Quince reads the opening scene in terms of the film’s narrative strategy, as it sets up the character’s circumstances and anticipates his subsequent liberation. As this chapter will demonstrate, my reading of the film is strategically focussed on the relationship between the literary text and film adaptation. The scene above invites a careful consideration of the corresponding section in the novel and thus a larger investigation of the relationship between the historical context of the novel and contemporary context of the film. Forster’s novel demonstrates a complex relationship between sex or sexuality and the discourse and politics of nature, and it is my aim to explore the dialectic at work in the novel and how the film screens and adapts these ideas to a late-twentieth century context.

Ivory’s *Maurice* is a screening of the multifarious voices, discourses and intertextuality which forms and informs Forster’s novel.³⁵ Here, the term ‘screening’ is used with its double meaning in mind; as both a process of selection and an onscreen display. This chapter might be critiqued for the extent to which I analyse the novel and its historical context. However, I use my reading of the novel as a way to explore a larger historical framework from which contemporary ideas of homosexuality emerge. In this way, the ideas outlined in the first section of this chapter are essential to my subsequent reading of the three films and their more recent cultural or societal contexts.

The novel has been read as Forster’s artistic avowal of the love between men and “to an extent a plea of homosexuality as a ‘natural’ condition” (Harned 50). I ask how the film’s cinematic nature, which stages – what is ultimately labelled – a ‘gay’ romance or an account of homosexual liberation screens the novel’s more complex and notably *queer* (and ecological according to Jeff Bush) imagining of nature and homosexuality.³⁶ Nature,

³⁵ Here I am indebted to Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of novelistic heteroglossia which operates through compositional unities [...] that permit a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogised)” (485). Roland Barthes’, later Julia Kristeva’s, argument is that any text is a permutation of texts, an “intertextuality” (66).

³⁶ My reading of the queer ecological elements of *Maurice* (both the novel and film) has been greatly enriched by Jeff Bush’s argument regarding the novel in his recent essay in the journal *Dandelion*, entitled, “‘I’d rather be dirty’ The Queering of the Greenwood in E. M. Forster’s *Maurice*” (2013). I outline key aspects of his argument later on in this chapter.

in the form of Forster's Greenwood, serves the lovers in their final escape from society's intolerance. Forster's account of same-sex love necessarily gravitates towards the countryside and the final answer to the novel's polemic is found in the seclusion and possibilities provided by the shadowy Greenwood. With this in mind, I ask how this polemic is translated into the late-twentieth century context of the film and I argue that the filmmakers rely on a particular visual grammar and sense of nostalgia (linked to the idea of British heritage) to naturalise homosexuality against a backdrop of Thatcherite conservatism. In the film the evergreen escape of the lovers serves a contemporary notion of gay liberation and it could be viewed as an engagement with the harsh realities of homophobia and the AIDS crisis. Moreover, I consider the novel and film as counter-narratives to the devaluation or disavowal of homosexual relationships. As mentioned, the film is, unlike the novel, marked by a nostalgic world view. I ask if the film, like Forster's retrospective musings in his afterword to the novel, is not symptomatic of two types of cultural melancholia; on the one hand, the process of heterosexual gendering which forecloses the possibility of queer attachments and, on the other, a distinctly modern predilection to produce nature as something which is always disappearing.

Ultimately, I use my reading of *Maurice*, and I refer back to Erickson and Mortimer-Sandilands' definition of Queer Ecology, to start an investigation of how "ideas and practices of nature, including bodies and landscapes, are located in particular productions of sexuality" and how "sex is, both historically and in the present, located in particular formulations of nature" (5). My reading of the film depends on a careful comparison with the central themes and key ideas of the novel. I aim to outline the shifting meanings of nature and sexuality by considering the different contexts and agendas linked to Ivory's adaptation and its source text. I start my discussion of the film's subject-matter by using the novel to explore the influence of natural sciences on Edwardian notions of male sexuality. I then move on to explore the novel's love triangle as it relates to Forster's personal-artistic ideals and the how Forster references the pastoral in his terminal note to the novel. Forster's nostalgic comments in his afterword to the novel, which I cited at the beginning of the previous chapter, indicate an important shift in how nature is imagined. My argument is that while the novel imagines nature as a liberatory space for homosexual love, and here I refer to Bush's nuanced reading of how Forster uses dirt and the dark woods to create a space for the avowal of queer love, Ivory's adaptation relies on nostalgia

for an evergreen Edwardian idyll to legitimise gay love as natural which is linked to its status as part of British heritage.

From Mr Ducie to Lasker Jones: The Question of Un/Natural Sexuality

The concept of sexuality (and the development of such ideas during the Nineteenth Century) is central to understanding the subject-matter and contexts of both the novel and film. In this next section, I want to explore some of its history and extend my discussion of the film's opening scene with a careful consideration of the novel's opening chapter and three important secondary characters. These three characters each represent the voice of science in some form and they inform the novel's dialectic between notions of natural and unnatural desires. In Michel Foucault's *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality* (1976), the author develops his now famous account of the invention of sexual categories during the nineteenth century, driven in part by new kinds of scientific discourse, and his argument provides a context in which we might understand the novel's treatment of homosexuality. In late-Victorian and Edwardian society the problem of sexual deviants and of naming 'unnatural' sexualities became an important public and private issue.³⁷ While the opening scene suggests that the Edwardians were as repressed as their predecessors, Foucault's theory suggests that they were, like the Victorians before them, obsessed with finding new ways to speak about sex. Foucault argues that Victorian bourgeois society's so-called reticence regarding sex was less a denial than a kind of exclamatory affirmation. He debunks the myth that the history of sex in Western society is one of repression, and instead he claims that for the last three centuries talk about sex has proliferated to become the mainstay of Western society. Foucault argues that "sex was driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence" (33).³⁸ Thus while reticence was obligatory in certain social contexts, Foucault argues that talk about sex

³⁷Foucault outlines that the reasons for this discursive explosion around sex or the 'invention' of sexuality lie not only in the comprehensive technologies of specification and regulation offered by sexuality but also in an intensification of pleasures. He adds that "there was certainly an increase in effectiveness and an extension of the domain controlled; but also a sensualisation of power and a gain of pleasure" (44).

³⁸ Foucault describes Western patriarchal society as initially structured by a historical "deployment of alliance"—a system of heterosexual "marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions" which keeps power in the hands of men on micro and macro levels of society (106). However, this family nucleus—husband, wife and children—the site or structure which has dictated gender relations and sexual norms for centuries in order to reproduce patriarchal kinship ties, has from the eighteenth century onwards merely become the anchor for the "deployment of sexuality" (108).

(which he sees as linked to pleasure and power) flourished in other settings. The natural and medical sciences in particular demonstrated an interest in the subject like never before. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a proliferation of ‘discourses’ on sexuality which is dramatically demonstrated by the Victorians’ obsession with the pathological and their search for perversity in the widest variety of contexts, including the psychological, medical, legal and pedagogical domains.

It was through scientific discourse and, specifically, through medical sexology that homosexuality as a concept was established by the turn of the century. As formulated in the writings of Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, P. Moreau, B. Tarnowski and K. H. Ulrichs, the act of sodomy was transformed into the species of the homosexual, “a personage [and] a case history” (Foucault 43). At the end of the century transgressive (homo)sexual practices were not only linked to Christian morality but also to post-Darwinian science and medical discourse in which those who went against ‘natural’ laws were the primary focus of investigation. Jeffrey Weeks similarly observes that “the characteristic feature of late nineteenth-century concepts of homosexuality is that they are increasingly linked to ideas of morbidity and disease,” and, “as the poet and essayist J. A. Symonds, a pioneer of more liberal theories of homosexuality (and himself homosexual) noted, medical science was replacing the Church as a moulder of public opinion” (Weeks 215). Even though the term homosexuality is only mentioned a few times in the novel, hindsight suggests that it looms over plot. Forster’s novel is in part a reaction to this type of discourse. As I later outline, Forster relies on various literary, historical and philosophical discourses to construct a counter-narrative which opposes the devaluation and criminalisation of homosexual relationships.

The novel’s protagonist is an important indicator of the type of counter-narrative Forster sets up. As he reminds the reader in the novel’s terminal note, Maurice is someone “handsome, healthy, bodily attractive” into whom he dropped an ingredient which “torments him” but “finally saves him” (218). The narrative is radical because Maurice’s homosexuality is something that emerges from an English middleclass setting and from within someone considered normal and the masculine ideal. These ideals of English manliness and the parameters of healthy male sexuality became important questions that

generated a great deal of anxiety for men during those early years of the new century.³⁹ Significantly, the late-Victorian and early Edwardian period represents an important shift in how English masculinity is defined. In her paper, “Sex and the Single Boy: Ideals of manliness and sexuality in Victorian literature for boys,” Claudia Nelson shows how late-nineteenth century stories for boys are dominated with phrases like, “a good healthy specimen of British boy” and speculates that by the end of the century, children’s authors were “savouring more of the eugenics laboratory than the confessional” (526). She explains that scientific discourse ultimately shapes how boyhood and, more generally, how male sexuality is perceived.

As Nelson remarks, “in a post-Darwinian universe, nature was no longer ‘what we were put on this world to rise above’ as Oscar Wilde’s *Lady Bracknell* anachronistically remarks; it had rather become ‘what we were put on this world to fit into’” (526). She explains that “as sex moved inexorably out of the domain of the clergy and into that of the scientist,” the idea of “normalcy edged out godliness” (526). The effects of Darwin’s work “overturned the romantic conception of human love and emphasized the animal nature side to human sexual relations...Darwin’s philosophical materialism brought the human mind into nature and viewed it as dependent upon the body” (Kern 62).⁴⁰ Nelson argues that “the new emphasis on biology necessitated a new and approving view of (hetero)sexuality, given that survival depended upon sexual selection, and the ultimate test of biological success was in reproduction” (542). While the ‘natural’ self or the physical self was to be distrusted in the early nineteenth century, as “masculinity in its most

³⁹ In her seminal book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Eve Sedgwick creates the neologism “male homosocial desire” to refer to a continuum that exists between homosocial relations and homosexual relationships between men. She argues that ‘desire’ is present in both homosocial relations, normally defined as male bonding which does not have a sexual component, and in homoerotic relationships (what precisely constitutes this erotic component is, as Sedgwick points out, culture specific and situational), but that from the nineteenth century onwards there is a constant attempt to keep a visible discontinuity between the two. Sedgwick uses the notion of “male homosocial desire” as a “strategy for making generalisations about, and marking historical differences in the structure of men’s relations with other men” (5). Especially from the nineteenth century onwards, male homosocial desire has gone hand in hand with what Sedgwick calls “male homosexual panic” (5). Sedgwick believes that, because the solidarity between men required within patriarchy generates certain intense male bonds that are not readily distinguishable from the most reprobate homosexual bonds, constant “male homosexual panic,” or active homophobia, which can be seen as a vigilant force that keeps heterosexuality the societal norm, exists to keep current patriarchal structures in place” (5).

⁴⁰ In his essay, “English Prose between 1918 and 1939,” Forster makes an interesting point about how developments in science influence the literature of a period. He asks “can literary men understand Einstein,” and answers, “Of course they cannot – even less than they can understand Freud. But the idea of relativity has got into the air and favoured certain tendencies in novels” (281) He goes on to compare Dickens and Proust to show how Einstein’s theory of relativity had “got about and tinged [the novelists’] outlook” (281). Sexology and scientific questions of normalcy and naturalness regarding sex are clearly an influence on the ideas Forster explores in *Maurice*.

exaggerated form was beastliness,” by the turn of the century “whatever is most natural is most manly” (Nelson 533, 545). This shift meant that “no longer [was] sexuality generally judged as male/strong/regrettable against an asexuality that is female/weak/laudable”; but “by the end of the century the usual pattern is natural/heterosexual/good versus unnatural/homosexual/despicable (Nelson 546).

As mentioned, I want to highlight three characters that Maurice encounters during his journey that relate directly to the historical context I outline above. In Ivory’s film adaptation they represent equally important moments in Maurice’s development as the protagonist of the story. The first I have already described in terms of the film’s opening scene but I want to extend that discussion to the way Mr Ducie is represented in the novel’s first chapter. Mr Ducie’s aim to ensure that Maurice develops in a suitable way is linked to these changing ideas of heteromascularity. However, Mr Ducie also demonstrates that with matters regarding sex there is often an ideological appropriation of scientific theory to serve a specifically religious or (hetero)patriarchal agenda. Forster shows how science is often incorporated as an affirmation of the status quo. Among the teachers at Sunnington, the all-boys school Maurice attends, Mr Ducie is described as “an able man, orthodox, but not out of touch with the world, nor incapable of seeing both sides of a question” (5). His views are contrasted to those of the principle, who sees the boys as a procession of New Guinea pygmies, a “celibate, immortal” breed, who are not implicated in adult matters, and with those of another teacher, Mr Read, who warns him that having the ‘good’ talk with a boy is a risky business or “thin ice” (6). However, as the narrator points out, Mr Ducie was sure of his ideas and in reaction to the other teacher’s opinions he “would smile, for he was soaked in evolution” (6). He is sure that certain natural instincts will inevitably awaken in each boy. Thus Mr Ducie’s knowledge of science informs his sense of responsibility towards the boys and, specifically, in communicating the facts of human biology and of marriage to the boys. Especially, if like Maurice, there is no father or uncle to take care of the matter. However, it is also important that Mr Ducie’s scientific conviction is simultaneously underpinned by a religious world view.

On the topic of sex, Mr Ducie’s views, and “whatever his science” as Forster puts it, are influenced by Christian morality and English middleclass mores. He remains ambivalently reticent about the actual sex deed and seems to believe that the carnal should not be aggravated with avoidable explicitness. He says to the boy that he will explain the “sacred

mystery of sex” but later adds that “all this is rather a bother” and, ironically, that “one must get it over, one mustn’t make a mystery of it” (8-9). Mr Ducie’s views of sexuality seem to straddle early nineteenth-century ideas of the “ideal man – chaste with asceticism” and newer end-of-the-century scientific ideas (Nelson 19). Mr Ducie is an ironic contradiction that serves Forster’s aim of showing how Edwardian society’s views on sex depended on a biased view of human nature. Specifically, in the way that science was often used to affirm old prejudices. Throughout the first chapter, Forster employs a subtle, ironic tone to show that this is a society in which science often plays “the subservient pimp,” as Forster had commented in his famous essay, “What I believe” (*Two Cheers* 75).

Forster’s narrator adds that despite the attention he has paid to Mr Ducie’s explanations, Maurice does not fully comprehend them. They are unrelated to his physical experiences and we are reminded that for Mr Ducie it is “useless to break in upon that trance” and “useless to describe it, however scientifically and sympathetically” (19). For the boy, “a plump, pretty lad, not in any way remarkable,” will develop his particular sexual preference, and the novel suggests that this is a ‘natural’ process which Mr Ducie has no control over (16). Mr Ducie’s views are later echoed by the more extreme views of the Halls’ friend and family physician, Dr Barry.

In both the novel and film, Maurice approaches Dr Barry (played by Denham Elliott in the film version) for advice on his condition and confides in him, revealing himself as “an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort” (139). While the conversation between the two men is almost identical between the novel and film, the novel is more interesting as Maurice questions Dr Barry’s status as figure of science (Forster’s narrator informs us of Maurice’s thoughts). Dr Barry’s initial reaction is in a similar vein as Mr Ducie’s warning against polluting the body. He tells Maurice to “never let that evil hallucination, that temptation from the devil, occur to [him] again” (139). Even in his despondent state, as Forster’s narrator shows us, a part of Maurice questions the validity of Dr Barry’s reaction. Maurice considers how “the voice impressed him” but asks “was not Science speaking?” (139). Maurice approaches Dr Barry, a man of medical science, hoping to find a logical answer to his condition. However, Dr Barry, whose voice sounds formidable, only provides religious doctrine as an answer. Maurice is left uncertain about the position that science should take in matters of sex; to the reader it is clear that Dr Barry’s response is hypocritical. To the film’s modern-day audience Dr Barry’s reaction is not surprising. The

film audience views Dr Barry from the sexually liberated present and thus expects him to act in this way.

Yet Forster does not portray science as essentially antithetical to the novel's project, and adds another scientific-minded voice to contrast with the biased account of sex provided by Mr Ducie and Dr Barry. We read that the adult Maurice visits another doctor, called Lasker Jones, to consult him on his 'condition'. In the novel and in Ivory's adaptation Lasker Jones has a slight American accent and in the film he is played by the enigmatic Ben Kingsley. After Maurice is jilted by Clive and desperate for a solution to his abnormality he hopes that Jones might be able to treat his deviance. Before his consultation Maurice writes an account of his condition and at the first session Jones names Maurice's condition as "congenital homosexuality" (158).⁴¹ During their second session, after Maurice's encounter with Alec, Jones adds that England has always been disinclined to accept "human nature" and that Maurice would be better off in a country where homosexuality is no longer illegal (188). Lasker Jones's comments suggests that while science is always entangled in ideology in some way, there are times when science works against a dominant ideology.

Society and Nature: From Clive to Alec

Forster wrote *Maurice* in 1913, but he continued to make revisions during the following decades and the novel was only published posthumously in 1971. Forster resisted publication during his lifetime because of public and legal attitudes towards same-sex love. A note found on the manuscript read: "Publishable, but worth it?" Aside from Forster's anxieties that the book would cause great scandal, he also felt that the book had over the years become dated and that it belonged to a very different world. The novel was shown to friends and like-minded individuals over the years and was criticized by some and praised by others. As his letters to Forster show, Christopher Isherwood thought highly of the novel and even considered that it is "in some ways, [Forster's] very best" (74). Isherwood felt that "in those scenes with Alec, [Forster is] positively clairvoyant—

⁴¹ This reminds one of Foucault's descriptions of the homosexual as "a case history," showing how illicit sex acts were transformed into perverse "implantations" and understood as revealing a certain truth about the individual (43-44).

nothing like them has even been written about the class war, by anybody. And Maurice himself is a masterpiece—one of the few truly noble characters of fiction” (Letters 74).

Isherwood’s comment might seem like exaggeration but it does point to Forster’s strategy in the crafting of his novel and its message. As I mentioned in chapter one, the positive representation of gay characters is important issue to queer filmmakers and audiences. Forster was similarly concerned with how the reader of his novel (for some the novel would be their first encounter with homosexuality) would relate to Maurice and his ‘condition’. Forster’s strategy with Maurice, Clive and Alec demonstrates a particular reliance on notions of what is natural and Forster’s relates Maurice’s plea repeatedly through a close association with untamed nature. In order to understand Ivory’s take on this strategy and how the film naturalises Forster and Maurice’s queerness through a particular visual grammar and the nostalgic style of British heritage cinema, we must first unpack the Forster’s strategy with regards to the three main characters and ask how Forster’s utilises the concept of nature in the novel.

Forster sets out Maurice’s story as a realistic account of a middleclass man, in which nature has placed forbidden desires. While Maurice starts out as unremarkable, by the end of the novel he embodies Forster’s ideals for the love between men. On the whole, novelistic realism serves Forster’s project of evoking sympathy for, or at least tolerance of, his homosexual protagonist. Yet the novel is also interspersed with romantic moments through which Forster communicates certain artistic and personal-philosophical ideals. Joyce Hotchkiss argues that *Maurice* should be read in terms of realism and romance, and that “the novel’s main thematic concern is the conflict between two modes of coping with life” – “the prosaic, realistic, or practical mode, on the one hand” and “the imaginative, poetic, or romantic mode, on the other” (163).⁴² In terms of my focus, this second mode often employs Romantic descriptions of nature as it demonstrates the novelist’s ideals of (sexual) connection.⁴³

⁴² In a critical piece on English prose written during the interwar period, Forster mentions “the special character of prose.” He explains that “prose, unlike poetry, does two things. It serves us in the daily life and it creates works of art” (*Two Cheers* 281). “He goes on to say that “one of the problems the critic has to tackle is that these two uses of prose are not water-tight, and one of these is as it were constantly slopping over into the other. The practical popular prose is always getting into the deliberate artistic prose which makes books” (*Two Cheers* 281).

⁴³ Personal relationships and with them the idea of connection are central themes to the novel and the rest of Forster’s oeuvre; summed up in the motto of “only connect,” as emphatically explored in Forster’s *Howards End* (1910) which precedes *Maurice*.

Hotchkiss explains that this “thematic dissonance is reinforced by stylistic tension,” as “two distinct styles are operative”; on the one hand, what she calls a “plain” style, which “is used for purposes of realistic description” and the other hand, what she terms as an “elevated” style which “occurs in passages that are intended to suggest a dimension to experience beyond the commonplace” (164). She explains that the realist mode “makes its own sort of demands on the reader – they are intellectual and moral” (166). The “elevated” mode, which is more evocative and literary in terms of style, appeals to the sensory/emotive side of life and explores certain artistic ideals. These ‘elevated’ moments suggest an alternative value system to reader, in which feelings and personal relationships trump political ideologies and staid cultural norms.⁴⁴ Maurice is the heroic embodiment of this, as he defies the restrictions and biases of society and places the personal above societal codes and English law.

As mentioned, Forster’s account initially depicts Maurice as someone unexceptional except for his sexual preferences, but by the end of the novel Maurice embodies a set of ideals which sets him apart from the mass element of (sub)urban society. A key aspect of this transformation is Maurice’s reconciliation with his sexual/physical self. For most of the novel, Maurice and his desires are strung between the restrictions, responsibilities or ideals of the human world and the unexplainable forces of nature and the body. This dialectical struggle is eventually resolved, but only after connecting with Alec, his second and more controversial choice of lover, and only by an escape from society. However, his first love, Clive, serves as the first step towards Maurice’s ‘new’ life in which spiritual and physical love is unified. His relationship with Clive provides Maurice with a set of spiritual ideals for the love between men. Yet these are also shown to be unsustainable if they ignore the physical/sexual side to life. Forster suggests that when physical desire is unheeded, these ideals for romantic companionship are ultimately unsustainable, if not sterile. In his relationship with Clive, Maurice never reaches sexual maturity and Forster makes it clear in his terminal note to the novel that Maurice’s physical yearnings were never fully addressed. In the terminal note, Forster sums up the period with Clive and he explains that “Maurice at this stage is humble and inexperienced and adoring, he is the soul released from prison, and if asked by his deliverer to remain chaste he obeys.

⁴⁴ Forster outlines some of this in his essay, entitled “What I believe” (1939), written with war looming on the horizon. For Forster, “tolerance, good temper, and sympathy” is essential if the “human race is not to collapse.” He then proclaims that he believes in “personal relationships” which are “despised today” and seen “as bourgeois luxuries, as products of a time of fair weather which is now past” (76).

Consequently the relationship lasts for three years – precarious, idealistic and peculiarly English: what Italian boy would have put up with it? Still it lasts until Clive ends it by turning to women and sending Maurice back to prison” (221).

Significantly, it is often Maurice’s experience of or relationship to nature that act as key indicators of his sexual development. His relationship with Clive is established at Cambridge and in the surrounding countryside, and the bucolic landscape reflects the nature of their relationship. Matthew Curr argues that “the marriage of true minds between Clive and Maurice is sanctified during their college days, and Forster places them in nature to testify to their mutual bond” (62). He goes on to explain that “its beauty, fern and stream and towering tree, is the right setting for their natural union” (62). When the couple escape from Cambridge life and spend a day in the surrounding countryside, they share a Whitmanesque moment as they loaf “on a grassy embankment [...] above them the waters of a dyke moved imperceptibly, and reflected interminable willow trees” (73).⁴⁵ Using Hotchkiss’s term, the “elevated,” also more poetic, mode is used here to express the erotic/spiritual connection between the two men. They are in nature, and their relationship seems to be sanctified by the landscape. Their day in the countryside suggests a sort of harmony with the natural world. However, this idea is complicated by the countryside itself. The countryside is a product of human history and society’s laws still loom over the lovers. What Curr does not point out is how the countryside is still fixed in the domain of history and human law. Even if the narrator explains that, “man who had created the whole landscape was nowhere to be seen,” the Cambridge countryside is still a product of a history which includes institutionalised homophobia (73).

To briefly return to the film, it should be noted that this scene in the countryside is similarly pivotal in Ivory’s conservative screening of Forster’s story. The scene reads in terms of a pastoral visual grammar. The two lovers’ newly-found and innocent love appropriately framed by verdant nature and with their slightly open shirts and the focus on their hands touching the sensuality of the moment and place is emphasised. The camera lingers on the beauty of the landscape but also moves in to focus on Maurice’s face as he put his head on Clive’s chest. However, Clive’s repression of his desires is signalled when

⁴⁵ In *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Walt Whitman creates a space for the avowal of what he describes as ‘adhesive’ or ‘manly’ love. In 1860 he added the Calamus section to *Leaves of Grass* and it would speak to successive generations of men who found themselves developing intense feelings for their fellow men. Whitman saw same-sex love and heterosexual love as not opposing forces but merely two types of affections that function in very different spheres of a man’s life.

Maurice tries to kiss Clive and Clive refuses. Here the film reworks dialogue from the novel. In the novel, during Maurice's first visit to Clive's estate, Clive is upset by society's inability to see that he feels for Maurice as Pippa, Clive's sister, feels for her fiancé, "only far more nobly, far more deeply, body and soul, no starved medievalism of course, only a particular – a particular harmony of body and soul that [he doesn't] think women have even guessed" (84). In the above described scene in the film similar ideas are evident when Clive stops Maurice from kissing him because he feels that it would "bring them down" and would interrupt the harmony they have between "body, mind and soul" (*Maurice*). A contemporary film audience reads Clive's actions in terms of sexual repression. However, in the novel Forster suggests how Clive's theory of love is ultimately flawed.



Figure 3 - Maurice and Clive in the countryside

Clive's reluctance to fully embrace the physical or sexual side to life and his insistence on a platonic relationship relates to this. However, Clive is aware that history provides an alternative account of same-sex love, in the form of classical literature and scholarship. He relates himself to Greek and Roman histories that legitimise, or celebrate, relationships between men. These literary/historical legacies are, as I later argue of the pastoral, repositories that more recent constructions of homosexual identity often appropriate. While the dean asks his students, during a translation class, to "omit: a reference to the unspeakable vices of the Greeks," again showing the extent to which talk of homosexuality is taboo (50), Clive finds a solace in his first reading of the Phaedrus, in

which he saw “his malady described exquisitely, calmly, as a passion which we can direct, like any other, towards good or bad” (67). Clive’s unorthodox sexual disposition finds expression in Hellenic ideals. Thus for Maurice, Clive represents not only the moneyed erudite culture of Cambridge but an alternative history for the love between men, an account of same-sex love which contrasts to the silences provided by Mr Ducie and the restrictions of his middleclass background.

However, as their relationship takes its course, we realise that Clive’s safe, spiritual ideals sit uncomfortably with the physical forces at work in Maurice’s body (here specifically, sexual desire). While Clive’s high ideals signal a break from conventional middleclass norms, they are not able to accommodate Maurice’s physical or sexual needs. From the start of their relationship this disjunction in Clive is evident. When he first declares to Maurice that he loves him, he unexpectedly finds Maurice shocked at the announcement. The narrator reminds us that “had [Clive] trusted the body there would have been no disaster, but linking their love to the past he linked it to the present, and roused in his friend’s mind the conventions and the fear of the law” (70). By the end of the novel, before absconding with Alec, Maurice tells Clive he does not want “ideas and thoughts” but that he is “flesh and blood,” if Clive “will condescend to such low things” (212).⁴⁶ This tension relates in some ways to Forster’s own life and, as I explain later, in some of his shorter fiction he explores this idea of the ‘tame’ cultured world he knew, set against the physical and sexual life he desired.

Clive’s idealisation of platonic love might also be read as a sublimation of the erotic into the ideals of spiritual love. For Clive, sex is part of heterosexual marriage and thus a necessary utilitarian act. It does not accord well with his spiritual ideals. The sex act relates to the mundane, every day and the unavoidable processes of the body, the opposite of Clive’s Hellenic ideals. However, this harmony of his ideals belies the erotic nature of his relationship with Maurice, an energy always denied but felt both intensely and ambivalently. When Clive ‘turns’ heterosexual and thus turns away from Maurice, his

⁴⁶ During that first day in the countryside, Maurice asks Clive about the link between romantic love and sexual reproduction, Clive reiterates that their love lies outside the realm of the physical. We read that “he had meant not to trouble Clive, but out it all came as soon as they lay in the fern. Clive did not agree. “Why children?” he asked. Why always children? For love to end where it begins is far more beautiful and nature knows it.” “yes, but if everyone—” (88). Later the narrator adds that “they had won past the conventions, but Nature still faced them, saying with even voice, “Very well, you are thus; I blame none of my children. But you must go the way of all sterility” (87). While the narrator’s comment suggests Maurice recognises that nature is an indifferent but at least accepting force, it also voices Clive’s belief that their love lies outside nature’s fecundity; it is, according to Clive, not part of the life of the earth.

relationship with Anne Woods lacks this erotic dimension. The narrator explains that “though he valued the body the actual deed of sex seemed to him unimaginative, and best veiled in night”. Sex is “inexcusable,” between men but “between man and woman it may be practised since nature and society approve, but never discussed nor vaunted (144). Clive is unable to connect his Hellenic spiritual ideals (which are loaded with homoerotic energy) to the actual sex act and unable to fully reconcile himself with the sexual body. So if Maurice is to have a happy ending, he must be able to formulate a new set of values regarding the relationship between body and spirit, and with that, negotiate the relationship between nature’s ways and society.

When Clive experiences his “blind, alteration of life” and turns to women (in itself a sign that Forster views nature in terms of unexplainable and indifferent forces), Maurice initially feels separated from and even disgusted with the ways of nature. Here it is not the nature of the Greenwood into which he escapes, but instead the nature that is part of Clive’s domain and in which Maurice’s physical desires are seen as a failure. When Maurice thinks of Clive’s alteration, the narrator explains that “it was nothing to him that nature had caught up this dropped stitch in order to continue her pattern,” Maurice sees himself as a “dropped stitch” or an abnormality (124). In one particular scene, he recognises nature’s imperfect ways in the “dog roses” which line the road at Penge.⁴⁷ After a visit to Clive and his new fiancée, the narrator describes Maurice’s carriage ride out of Penge:

Not far from the lodge there was a nasty little climb, and the road, always in bad condition, was edged with dog roses that scratched the paint. Blossom after blossom crept past them, dragged by the ungenial year: some had cankered, others would never unfold: here and there beauty triumphed, but desperately, flickering in a world of gloom. Maurice looked into one after another, and though he did not care for flowers the failure irritated him. Scarcely anything was perfect. On one spray every flower was lopsided, the next swarmed with caterpillars, or bulged with galls. The indifference of nature! And her incompetence! (166)

The dog roses, some scarred by caterpillars and others malformed, reflect Maurice’s dejection when recognises the fact that he is a missed “stitch” (124) and that nature, within

⁴⁷ These are the same flowers behind which he and Clive had hid their motorcycle, that day in the countryside outside of Cambridge (73).

which there is still the potential for perfection, is also incompetent and inconsistent.⁴⁸ Maurice's melancholic observations highlight the difference between nature tainted by society's norms and the dark nature associated with freedom which Maurice is moving towards. Fortunately, this moment of scrutiny is interrupted by Alec. Maurice leans out of the window "to see whether [Nature] couldn't bring it off once" and "meets the bright brown eyes of a young man" (166). Clive's under gamekeeper who at first glance we might mistake for a pan-like creature of the woods, is the means by which Maurice reconciles the ideal or spiritual dimension of life with the physical side to life or material reality.

In *E.M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism* (1962), Frederick C. Crews argues that in Forster's novels a "combination of pessimism and idealism is rendered in terms of a dialectic struggle" (34). Forster's best characters yearn for sure knowledge and a sense of absolute order, they would like to become "sacred and separate" from the chaos of nature, "Forster's plots remind them, however, that they are very much involved in nature, all attempts to falsify their subjection to natural process end in catastrophe" (34). Crews' account of Forster's novels does not account for Maurice, as it had not been published. I would argue that in *Maurice* these questions are divided between the two lovers, Clive and Alec. Clive wishes their love to be sacred and separate from the chaos of physical desire, a 'natural' force. Alec embraces the physical and sexual side to life; he works and shoots in the outdoors. He embodies the opposite of Clive's sterile ideals.

Forster suggests that for Maurice "flesh" must "educat[e] the spirit" (132). Maurice must learn the importance of physical or sexual life, if he is to eventually realise Forster's ideals for personal relationships. Maurice thinks of his relationship with Alec as part of "the life of the earth" (188). Norman Page explains that "as well as representing a different class from Maurice, it is needful that Alec represents another way of life—'the life of the earth', repeatedly associated with woods, fields, gardens and rain" (97). Alec thus links with "the recurring 'greenwood' references, so that an escape to the forest is seen as simultaneously a declaration of fearlessly homosexual freedom and a renunciation of the stifling commercialism and conventionality of bourgeois existence" (Page 98). Page argues that Forster associates ever more closely four ideas which are not necessarily linked but which

⁴⁸ At the end of the novel, when Maurice tells Clive about Alec, Forster utilises flowers (an important motif throughout the novel) to show the ornamental nature of Clive's spiritual ideals of love. The narrator describes how "the volume of their past must be restored to its shelf, and here, here was the place amid darkness and perishing flowers" (229).

come to form aspects of a single decisive action: “the homosexual condition; the impulse to escape from artificial society; the attractions of the natural life ... and the breaking down of class barriers” (98). Thus the sexual/physical lack he experienced in his relationship with Clive is later contrasted to the life he starts with Alec.

During the transition period from Clive to Alec, Maurice needs to resolve the tension between his ‘natural’ sexual self and his social self (his class position and social responsibilities). In the end, for Forster, society dictates a choice not a compromise between the two. While walking in London, Maurice would like to connect his social self with his ‘natural self’, but the sunset vista “melts into one huge creature that had fingers and fists of green”; a symbol of nature dislocating social arrangement (188). This description contrasts to the way nature had occurred to him at Cambridge, at the time of the emergence of his homosexuality. Maurice’s desire for a friend and with this Forster’s ideal of personal relationships is only allowed outside society. Accordingly, their escape is less a romantic than it is a necessary one. If he is to be united with his lover, Maurice must dislocate himself from his class position and must accept nature’s ways and its hardships.

In *E.M. Forster’s Modernism* (2002), David Medalie explains that, “Maurice is not a novel about the search for a habitation in the modern world for liberalism and humanism, as is *Howard’s End*.” Instead “it seeks to find refuge for the self that has been sexually oppressed, but in doing so it deracinates the self to such an extent that, in so far as they aim to be pragmatic and responsive ideologies, liberalism and humanism cannot possibly accompany it on its journey” (53). Forster’s treatment of homosexual love signals “another instance of the failure of ‘connection’, of the organic society and the inclusiveness which it promised” (Medalie 54). He argues that “the novel becomes a fable in order to grant them the ‘ever and ever’ after that its homosexual polemic requires” and that “it is a flight into a secessionist realm of existence because the world of human affairs will not permit the particular form of ‘personal relations’ which Maurice and Alec need in order to find happiness” (Medalie 52). Medalie’s conclusion is that “Maurice is a modern novel, but not a modernist novel” (52). However, while the novel’s nostalgia for the countryside and its fantastical escape to the woods resemble other Edwardian nature fantasies, Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) comes to mind, Medalie’s argument ignores the queer (ecological) possibilities of the novel’s ending. Alec and Maurice’s life outside society suggests an ongoing relationship between non-normative sexualities and nature. Here, this relationship might be criticised for being an escapist

fantasy, and certainly it is that, but the utopian ending is a powerful antidote for the depression or despair experienced by those who are not accepted by society. Indeed, Medalie does not consider the queer politics and possibilities of Forster's Greenwood. It allows Forster to formulate a sense of outlaw sexuality linked to an existing lineage in the form of the homosexual pastoral tradition. The politics of the "gay pastoral," as Shuttleton terms it, is utilised by Ivory's film and informs a visual grammar which is defined by the contrast between the different spaces Clive and Alec inhabit. I want to briefly outline these pastoral antecedents and explain how Ivory's uses some of these ideas in the film.

"The Life of the Earth?": The Politics of the Greenwood

In his terminal note, Forster explains that *Maurice* was a "direct result" of a visit he had made to simple lifer, socialist poet and proponent of 'Uranian' love, Edward Carpenter and George Merrill. Forster describes Carpenter as an idealist who "strove to destroy existing abuses such as landlordism and capitalism, and all he offered in their place was love" (*Two Cheers* 217). Carpenter's poetry expresses "his faith and his love for the individual and for the beauty of nature" (*Two Cheers* 218). Forster who was struggling with reconciling his sexual longings with his upbringing and education was impressed by Carpenter's whitmanic beliefs and his endorsement of what he, at times, called the "intermediate sex." The union of Carpenter, who was from an upper middle-class milieu, and Merrill, who came from a working class background, echoes Forster's thematic and personal concern with these types of relationships.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Carpenter and his lover, George Merrill, lived openly living together in the countryside near Millthorpe in Sheffield. The account of Carpenter and Merrill is crucial to any reading of the novel. It suggests that the novel is a working out of Forster's own desires and longings. There is a clear link between Forster's repressed sexuality and his upbringing in and his experience of Victorian society. For Forster, Millthorpe was certainly the first (or at least, the most convincing) indication that it was possible for two men (from different

⁴⁹ Class is an important issue to consider when assessing Carpenter's ideas of nature and ultimately Forster's Greenwood. It is no coincidence that both Carpenter and Forster choose working class men, who were considered closer to nature, as figures of desire, fantasy or escape. Thus, here, the homosexual pastoral as a construction of nature is influenced by issues of class. Kate Soper reminds us that cultural representations of nature depend on "relations of class" that "are not only inscribed physically within the landscape itself, but have also had major impact on the production and consumption of its cultural representation" (234).

classes) to be sexually happy together. The link between sexual desire and nature is demonstrated in the way some of Forster's short stories express an eroticisation of working class men and the physical life they represent.

Some of Forster's early short stories, for example "Ansell" (1902/1903) and "The Story of a Panic" (1911), reveal an eroticisation of the 'naturalness' or physicality of working class men and construct the countryside as space of purity, sensuality and an escape from the stifling nature of academic life and societal respectability. June Perry Levine argues that his, more overtly homosexual, posthumously published work is often concerned with the idea of "the tame in pursuit of the savage" and that this is an important theme which should be considered in light of his complete oeuvre.⁵⁰ Whereas the less desirable 'tame' inhabits lecture halls and (sub)urban enclosures, Forster's shorter fictions fantasise about the 'wild' in their woodland or rural setting. In *Maurice*, Forster's answer to the question of such an erotic union was to let two men escape into "the Greenwood": a utopian abstraction inspired by the remaining forests of a once 'wild' England and Forster's visits to the countryside of southern Italy.

Such a 'queer' escape into nature may be seen in light of the tradition of the 'gay pastoral' which I have outlined in the chapter one. As I have mentioned, some argue this tradition stretches as far back as Theocritus' *The Idylls* (written in the late third century BC) and Virgil's *The Eclogues* (composed between 42 and 39 BC). However, David Shuttleton warns that in searching for a 'silenced' homosexual literary tradition, the danger exists of mistakenly imagining a "gay sensibility" or the "homosexual imagination" as transcultural or transhistorical or as "essentialist conceptions" (125). Shuttleton explains that "subsequent homophobic Christian and humanist ethical prescriptions and later bourgeois codes of politeness have repeatedly sought to erase or veil the pastoral's queer libidinal economies to produce heteronormative Arcadias" (125). In other words, Shuttleton sees these Arcadian spaces as not an exclusively homosexual but as spaces to which a diverse and ultimately queer range of sexual desires is linked.

More recently, Jeff Bush has asked that we re-examine *Maurice*'s insistence on dirt, and consider the novel's queer ecological potential accordingly. In *Maurice*, the love between

⁵⁰ In the short story, *The Life to Come* (1972) a young missionary is seduced by a native prince but then later denies the attachment. Just before his inevitable demise, the prince Vithobai pleads with the patronizing missionary Pinmay: "my body and the breath in it are still yours, though you wither them up with this waiting. Come into the last forest, before it is cut down, and I will be kind, and all may end well" (75).

Maurice and Alec is best expressed by the dirt and shadows of the wooded outdoors. Throughout the novel there are references to nature and the “anonymity” that it can provide (Bush 2). Homosexuality has historically been seen as “dirty” by heteronormative society. This emphasis on “dirt” is in part a moral issue in terms of it not being clean and pure, and in part due to the physical act of gay sex. Forster, however, has used the term in the novel in the way it relates to the earth, the woods and “open spaces.” The term which was previously negatively associated with homosexuality, is appropriated and turned it into something affirming. Forster also links this to loyalty. In his “Terminal Note”, Forster writes that “in [his] experience though loyalty cannot be counted on it can always be hoped for and be worked towards and may flourish in the most unlikely soil” (222). Bush argues that “The dirt in *Maurice* is the dirt of the greenwood. In *Maurice*, as in *As You Like It* and *Under Greenwood*, we get a sense of a green and pleasant land that is also anarchic ... Through *Maurice*, Forster presents a queer identity not simply based upon debauchery or dysfunction but which is inclusive of history, literature and myth” (Bush 4). The greenwood’s dirt links to liberation and thus to the mythic outlaws who had in past times sought freedom with an escape into the woods.

Bush also cites Alec’s recurring link to the darkness of the woods at Penge and his animal-like qualities, and argues that

terramorphism is a recurring theme in the novel—people become part of the landscape or immerse themselves in the landscape, or emerge from the landscape as though they are a part of it. The novel attempts to articulate the complex ways people behave outside. The outside is a place where people can embrace anonymity and escape identification, a place where true subjectivity, and sexuality, can be experienced. (Bush 6)

Furthermore, Bush argues that “in the final scene of the novel, Forster appeals to the greenwood to formulate his own philosophy of sexuality which is indebted to, and extends, Carpenter” and that “in an image that attempts to synthesise both the delicacy and the strength of the natural world, a pile of evening primrose petals scatter at Clive’s feet on Maurice’s exit ... the message is that sexuality and environment are inextricably linked” (11) For Bush, the novel is “a modern pastoral infused with queer sexual politics” (11). Bush’s point about how the characters relate to the landscape or “emerge from the landscape as though they are a part of it” and that the novel is about outdoor life are also

elements imagined in a particular way by the film adaptation. Ivory's film relies on a visual grammar in which Alec (linked to the spaces he inhabits) is visually contrasted to Clive and Anne's restrained domestic relationship and the indoor spaces they reign over.



Figure 4 – Alec killing a wounded hare and the greenery around the boathouse

In Ivory's film, Alec is often framed by the dark woods on Clive's estate and more generally by wild nature. There are several scenes in which we find Alec watching Maurice from the shadows between the trees (in ways that some audiences might see in terms of modern-day gay cruising). In one such scene, the visual grammar that Ivory's film sets up is clear. During one of Maurice's visits to Clive and just before Maurice meets Lasker Jones, there is a scene in which Maurice leans out of his window in the pouring rain and relishes the feeling of the rain on him. He had been writing his letter to Jones and had an awkward moment with the now married Clive. In this scene the camera switches between Maurice leaning out of the window soaking himself in the refreshing rain and Alec who is staring from the dark woods. Alec, who is clearly interested in Maurice sexually, enjoys the sight of Maurice's wild moment in the rain. Here, we might read the rain as it links to the water at the boathouse, symbolic in the way it represents Alec's connection to the outdoors and the sexual preference he shares with Maurice.



Figure 5 - Maurice in the rain



Figure 6 - Alec watching from the shadows

The scene described above and, specifically, the kind of looking Alec is doing, is contrasted with a subsequent scene between Clive and Anne. After his conversation with Maurice, Clive returns to his bedroom and Anne is in bed apparently asleep. While Clive undresses, Anne wakes up and calls out to him, as she turns toward him she sees Clive's naked backside. Anne quickly looks away. Here Anne's gaze is the opposite of Alec watching Maurice in the rain. Alec's looking emphasises the shared qualities between the two men; both seem to relish the sensual and visceral feeling of the outdoors. Anne's looking away from Clive emphasises their difference and the physical disconnect in their relationship. Furthermore, Anne and Clive's relationship is throughout the film defined by

indoor spaces. Windows, doorframes and ornamental pot plants emphasise the repressive or awkwardly restrained nature of their sexual relationship.



Figure 7 - Clive from Anne's point of view

In the film, Alec watches from the woods and shadows to see if Maurice is a like-minded and similarly inclined creature. Maurice is unaware of this until the climactic scene in which Alec climbs through the window and seduces Maurice. By the end of film, the *mise-en-scène* has moved from the lush, erotic and romantic greenery of the countryside to the unknowable world of shadow provided by the woods. The film nostalgically imagines, like Forster in his terminal note, nature as a space for the outlaw, where the woods and undergrowth are aligned with a queer love.

Queer Melancholia and Merchant Ivory's Edwardian Idyll

James Ivory – who founded Merchant Ivory Productions with his long term partner, Ismail Merchant – chose to revive Forster's narrative at a time when gay politics was at odds with conservative government agenda and the gay community crippled by the emerging AIDS crisis.⁵¹ The film duo is associated with the emergence of British heritage film, and due

⁵¹ An online account of the Merchant Ivory production company states that “over the years, Merchant and Ivory have adapted novels by such writers as Henry James, E. M. Forster, and Kazuo Ishiguro into sophisticated works in their own right—their multiple—Oscar-winning *Howards End* (1992) is often considered their artistic

to the seemingly conservative nature of this filmic genre their films are not often considered as vehicles of social critique. British heritage cinema is often suspected of merely acting as repositories for conservative politics or exclusionary histories. Yet, it is exactly this expectation of the genre that makes it a powerful tool for minoritarian issues. The heritage film, with its stylised representation of the English countryside, and with it, the literary film adaptation might be seen as invoking past worlds. Yet, these films are, as Belén Villasur comments, “symptomatic of the contemporary imagination” (5). I argue that Ivory’s film is inescapably caught up in the ‘gay’ politics of the 1980s, and represents a particular kind of affirmation of homosexual love and it shows how the issue of homophobia is historically rooted. The year after the film’s release, Margaret Thatcher’s government would propose the now infamous Section 28, which prohibited local authorities from “promoting” homosexuality or gay “pretended family relationships”, and prevented councils spending money on educational materials and projects perceived to promote a gay lifestyle (Gillan). Ivory’s film relates directly to this political context. It is a revisionist history, as it demonstrates a ‘gay’ literary tradition, and it is an unabashed portrayal of homosexuality. It suggests that to acknowledge one’s sexuality demonstrates moral integrity. Significantly, the filmmakers had engaged in similar social issues and politics in their previous film projects, so this is not their first exploration of contemporary ideas of gender and sexuality through looking back at the literary past.

Ivory’s film before *Maurice* was an adaptation of E.M Forster’s novel *A Room with a View* (1986) and it dealt with feminine sexuality in ways which exceeded its Edwardian context. Claire Monk writes in *Close Up*, an online journal, about *A Room with a View* and how “the events played out through the narrative progression of the protagonist Lucy – from repression, via a mistaken engagement to a snobbish and implicitly sexually unsuitable fiancée to final marriage to the socialist, more passionate, and sexually compatible George Emerson – explicitly encourage us to equate the ‘room with a view’ of the title with the sensually gratified female self.” Thus, she adds, “in contravention of the usual rules of mainstream cinema, looking is presented as a specifically *female* pleasure” (Monk).

pinnacle. Merchant died in 2005, but Ivory has kept the company going; *The City of Your Final Destination*, released in 2010, was the first “posthumous” Merchant Ivory film” (Ismail Merchant and James Ivory).

Thus the period drama with its reliance on costume and historical setting (which is often a greener past) provides a productive stage in which latter-day sexual politics may be explored. Anne Morey points out

that critics such as Monk and Richard Dyer see an exploration of sexuality, including homosexuality, as key to many heritage films. At the very least, it is fair to say that one of the major plot engines of the heritage film is the *Bildungsroman*, the coming to maturity of the young protagonist, typically dramatized at a moment of difficult self-discovery, as in *Maurice* (Ivory, 1987), *The Wings of the Dove* (Iain Softley, 1997), or *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, 1998), all of whose protagonists possess desires that are difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with social expectations. Stories of homosexual desire and illicit female pursuit of agency or control fit very naturally into the framework of the *bildungsroman*. Significantly, the protagonist of the film often moves towards some romantic realisation and towards sexual emancipation. (“New Understandings of the Heritage Film”)

In an overview of Queer British Cinema, Griffiths explains that “iconic celluloid moments such as the all-male nude bathing sequence” in *A Room with a View* or “the passionate, boundary-crossing love-triangle of *Maurice*, present us, as Williams argues, ‘with a tantalisingly queer glimpse of Utopia’” (12). He adds that “by placing these texts within mythically Arcadian settings, ‘of both pleasure and beauty and danger and panic’, an iconographic queer frame is thus constructed for ‘legitimizing a homoerotic desire that is often all but spoken’” and that “this aesthetically lush and fluidly symbolic mise-en-scène subsequently allows these texts to invoke a world of forbidden desire that was conversely inconceivable in their Victorian or Edwardian socio-historical and generic contexts” (12). In other words, these films are utopian in the way they recreate the past as onscreen spaces in which contemporary fantasies or dilemmas might be explored and experienced.

Ivory is faithful to the novel’s utopian ending. Forster wrote in his “Terminal Note,” it was imperative that his novel should have a “happy ending” and he “was determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love and remain in it for ever and ever” (218). Thus Ivory provides his audience with such a romantic ending. After revealing his plans to Clive, Maurice makes his way through dark woods to the dimly lit boathouse where Alec awaits him. They embrace and kiss, and the audience is sure of their happiness. However, as in the

novel, Clive's fate is unsure; a fact that serves the film's aim of establishing homosexuality as a choice of moral integrity.

Maurice and Alec represent the triumphant lovers who defy English society and Clive is the repressed (some might say 'closeted') homosexual who is unable to escape his class position and the responsibilities of heterosexual marriage. This is hinted at in the novel, but the film makes it clear and suggests that Clive is a lesson English society should take note of. In the final scene we are shown Clive closing up the window shutters, with Anne at her dressing table. He closes the shutters one by one. The setting is in stark contrast with the preceding image of the blissful lovers at the boathouse, surrounded by the woods, on the edge of society. Instead of the open woods which suggest freedom; here, ornamental plants and Edwardian décor suggest Clive's entrapment in a life as Anne's husband and in a particular social position. His unfulfilled longings are made clear when he pauses for moment at the window to gaze into night. The image of him staring then cuts to a glowing Maurice at Cambridge beckoning him to come. It cuts back to Anne resting her head on his shoulder. This final image suggests the tragedy of a life not lived.



Figure 8 - Clive and Anne



Figure 9 - Maurice beckoning Clive to join him

As mentioned, at the time of the terminal note, *Maurice* was still an unpublished manuscript. A half century after writing of the novel, Forster's stance towards publishing the novel had remained unchanged. He points out in the terminal note in 1960 that although society's attitude towards homosexuality has changed, it has been a "change from ignorance and terror to familiarity and contempt." For the novelist, homophobia is still ubiquitous in English society and he speculates that "what the public really loathes in homosexuality is not the thing itself but having to think about it" (221). Forster laments the fact that in the fifty years since his writing of *Maurice*, "there has not been a generous recognition of an emotion" nor a "reintegration of something primitive into the common stock"; ideals which he had shared with homophile socialist and anti-industrialist Edward Carpenter (221). The film suggests that had Clive lived in a more tolerant world, he might have chosen a different life. Internalised homophobia and class expectations are to blame for his sad ending. In this way the film is clearly linked to a modern and thus liberated sense of sexuality. However, the question remains to what do we ascribe the historical devaluation of homosexual or queer lives and attachments? Judith Butler's theory of gender melancholia provides a possible explanation for the cultural conditions responsible for this devaluation.

In his essay, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1915), Sigmund Freud distinguished between the necessary process of mourning and its alternative melancholia (which Freud initially viewed as pathological). By the process of mourning the ego is able to resolve the grief of a loss and is free to attach itself to a new love-object. In melancholia the ego is not able to 'fully' grieve the loss of an object, a place or an ideal and according to Freud repudiates the finite process

of mourning, languishing instead in the refusal to grieve. David Eng explains that Freud's "melancholic is so militant in his or her denials that the lost object is finally incorporated into the self, turned in to the shelter of the ego, and preserved as a form of ghostly identification. Loss denied is incorporated into the ego, and the ego thus becomes a remainder of unresolved grief" (1276), Eng explains that in later work Freud realises that melancholia is a far more prevalent psychic mechanism and revises his position. Freud theorises that "the ego is created through an originary loss predicated on a melancholic incorporation and identification" (1277). Therefore, the ego cannot exist without or preceding melancholia. Melancholia is the privileged psychic mechanism by which 'abandoned' and 'forsaken' objects are simultaneously preserved by and as the ego. Eng adds that "in 'The Ego and the Id,' Freud comes, then, to recognize this psychic entity as one of melancholy's effects" and that "in this respect, melancholia cannot be regarded as pathological" but "must be thought of as entirely normative – as a constitutive psychic mechanism engendering subjectivity itself" (1277). Butler theorises that heterosexual gender identity is formed by a cultural foreclosure of the possibility of homosexual desire. Gender is formed by forfeiting or a loss of the same-sex love object. However, there is no mourning of this loss. Instead, gender is stabilised through a melancholic identification or incorporation of the impossible same-sex love object in the ego. Butler uses an analysis of drag to outline a theory of "the mundane psychic and performative practices by which heterosexualized genders form themselves through the renunciation of the possibility of homosexuality, a foreclosure that produces a field of heterosexual objects at the same time that it produces a domain of those whom it would be impossible to love" (*Bodies* 235). Butler reads this melancholic process of heterosexual gendering in broader, cultural terms when she examines the illegibility and liveability of homosexual/queer lives and a failed cultural recognition of queer attachments (*Bodies* 236).

David Eng makes a related argument about this idea of melancholia and its relation to minoritarian identities. He explains that while "Freud states that melancholia comes about through the loss of – and the inability to relinquish – an object, a place, or an ideal [...] he makes no social distinctions between the various lost objects engendering melancholia" (1278). It is important, as Eng explains, that we make this distinction:

In a society organized by compulsory heterosexuality, the little boy has tremendous support—indeed psychic pressure as well as material incentive—to cede the father as an object of desire for a socially sanctioned identification with him. Here, melancholia functions to regulate, to normalize, and to designate a sphere of prevailing gender

norms and acceptable attachments. At the same time, it also delimits a sphere of unacceptable objects and abjected identifications. (1278)

Butler and Eng suggest that those individuals who do not choose acceptable love objects or who are forced to deny their desires suffer greatly from it. Maurice and Alec can only be happy *outside* of society and Clive is miserable because of his choice to abide to society's norms. If we return to the biographical context of the novel, Forster's tale is clearly a way of dealing with the implications of this type of cultural melancholia and its effects.

In Nicola Beauman's biography of Forster, she speculates that *Maurice*, his fifth but posthumously published novel, owes its existence to an experience he had in 1909 with a young man named Ernest Merz. According to Beauman, Forster was introduced to Merz one evening at Cambridge while dining with friends. After dinner he accompanied Merz on a short walk during which they conversed casually and after which Forster retired to his room. The next morning, however, Merz was found dead, he had committed suicide. Certain evidence suggests that Merz's death was a result of his inability to deal with his homosexual tendencies and/or he was being blackmailed with the public exposure of his 'indecentencies'. Beauman suggests that for Forster writing *Maurice* had been a way of dealing with Merz's death and a way of rewriting Merz's life. She imagines that the image of Merz hanging provided the main impetus for Forster's writing of the novel, more so than his visit to Edward Carpenter as he had claimed in the much quoted terminal note to the novel. Beauman argues that Foster fictionalised Ernest Merz and Max Garnett (his supposed love interest) into Maurice Hall and Clive Durham, the two central characters of the novel.⁵² Thus Merz's death had triggered an artistic project through which Forster tries to mourn a loss not recognised by mainstream society. The open-ended finale to the novel and its cinematic reimagining at the hands of Ivory suggest that fiction is able to provide spaces in which queer lives might be mourned, imagined or fantasised about when they are threatened by institutional homophobia. The same could be said in terms of Ivory's film adaptation – it clearly responds to a social context in which queer attachments are devalued and through its nostalgic imagining of Forster's tale it tries to mourn this cultural loss.

⁵² Besides a detailed biographical account of Forster's relationship to Merz, a brief account of Merz's life story and the impact of his suicide on Forster, Beauman also points out the similar number of syllables when we compare Clive Durham and Maurice Hall to Max Garnett and Ernest Merz

Finally, in Forster's terminal note and Ivory's film adaptation utopian fictional spaces also relate to a second type of cultural melancholia. In her essay in Erickson and Mortimer-Sandilands' *Queer Ecologies* anthology, Mortimer-Sandilands appropriates Butler's theory of gender melancholia to describe the way modernity recreates "nature" as *lost* in ways that "signal" a collection of "melancholy natures," in that they are losses in which we cannot fully 'recognize what has been lost' and relatedly, in that they allow us to preserve the lost object in the present, and thereby avert its complete loss (339). While I return to this idea in the following chapter when I consider Jarman's engagement with nature as an alternative to this particular kind of nature melancholia, I want to end this chapter with highlighting how this notion of nature might also relate to Merchant-Ivory films' representation of British nature. One could argue that ideas of nature as something we have lost are present in Forster's terminal note to the novel and Merchant Ivory's film aesthetic. Forster's terminal note suggests that he is deeply concerned with and affected by the disappearance of English nature. As heritage cinema, Ivory's adaptation reveals a similar nostalgia for a greener past and presents us with cinematic nature in which happy endings are inevitable. The lush visuals present the audience with an eternal Edwardian summer.



Figure 10 - Maurice on his way to the boathouse

To conclude, the novel and film offer different strategies to counter the queer melancholia which I have outlined above. Both texts use nature in a particular way, but the conception of nature in the film is different to the conception of nature in the novel. Forster is not mourning the loss of nature (although this is signalled in the terminal note which was added later). In

the novel, nature still functions as the outside of society. In the film, nature is both a queer ally and a preoccupation of postmodern nostalgia. However, as the next chapter demonstrates, this nostalgia is too readily consumed by the audience in terms of the niche heritage film genre. A more sustained (and political?) engagement with society's devaluing of queer sexuality and nature is needed. In the next chapter, I consider Derek Jarman's elegiac garden film, which was released three years after *Maurice*, as a possible alternative.

CHAPTER THREE

“Gardening After The Apocalypse” : Queer Ecology And The Elegiac Nature Of Derek Jarman’s *The Garden* ⁵³

“I walk in this garden / Holding the hands of dead friends” (Jarman 69).

“Butterflies and flowers, the deep red earth of the Quantocks, and the little whitewashed houses in the woods. Days without end, no purpose but to wander wide-eyed across the fields to the sea and wade through rock pools. Why can’t my film return to this Eden?” (Jarman 136)

Whereto answering, the sea,
Delaying not, hurrying not,
Whisper’d me through the night, and very plainly before day-break,
Lisp’d to me the low and delicious word DEATH;
And again Death—ever Death, Death, Death,
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird, nor like my arous’d child’s heart,
But edging near, as privately for me, rustling at my feet,
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears, and laving me softly all over,
Death, Death, Death, Death, Death. (Whitman 124)

Introduction

The coast of Kent, or more specifically, the shingle and surf of Dungeness, appears early on in Derek Jarman’s avant-garde film *The Garden* (1990). I started the previous chapter by discussing how the beach scene at the beginning of Ivory’s *Maurice* introduces the central conflict around which the film’s narrative revolves; that is the status of heteronormative society as artificial and oppressive versus the naturalness of queer sexuality. *The Garden* is interspersed with several scenes of shoreline or surf and, in ways that are both similar and dissimilar to the opening of *Maurice*, these scenes function symbolically and communicate some of the key ideas and themes of a film in which nature and queer desire is

⁵³ The phrase, “gardening after the apocalypse,” is from Thomas Rainer blog’s on Jarman’s gardening at Prospect Cottage. The blog can be found at the following web address: <http://landscapeofmeaning.blogspot.com/2013/02/gardening-after-apocalypse.html>

closely linked. In *The Garden*, a skeletal narrative is only one aspect of an experimental filmic form which, as I demonstrate later in this chapter, is closer to painting or poetry than it is to narrative prose. Thus the film explores certain ideas and themes through a complex symbolic language – a melange of images, sounds, and colours.

Early on in Jarman's film there is a surreal scene of Jarman waking up on a hospital bed marooned on a beach, surrounded by half-naked, almost pagan-like figures carrying torches. When read in relation to the other parts of the opening section of Jarman's lyrical film, the above scene clearly signals the personal, intimate nature of the cinematic journey the audience is about to take; the womb-like ocean an ideal metaphor for the creative process which gives birth to the film (which seems to be on one level a dream sequence as experienced by the filmmaker). Later on in the film, two handsome men blissfully play on a pebble beach, their happy intimacy echoed by the idyllic peace of the surroundings. They eventually become the innocent lovers at centre of what could be described as both an idiosyncratic, queer imagining of the Christian passion (they later become martyrs who suffer homophobic lashings from dark, authoritarian figures) and an elegy for the loss of queer lives and for a vanishing England. However, these two scenes which I have highlighted here are not only important to the audiences' understanding of some of the film's central ideas, but I would also like to argue that such thalassic elements in Jarman's film can also be used to describe the film's structure, which includes a cyclical repetition of certain imagery and recurring ambient sounds.⁵⁴ So before I discuss Jarman's film, I want to emphasise how *The Garden* is different to the linear narrative structure of *Maurice*. Furthermore, I want to make the argument that the film's organic form, which include the above described thalassic elements, relates directly to how the film enacts or automates mourning for several kinds of losses as experienced by the filmmaker (these include human intimacies and intimacies with the environment or with nature). In other words, the recurring motifs, ambient sound loops, lingering images, affect the audience in a way to intensify the film's melancholic atmosphere and elegiac features.

⁵⁴ I would argue that thalassic elements of the film underpin the elegiac aspects of the film; waves of grief, mourning, celebration, memory, intersperse a "thread-bare narrative." It reminds me of Walt Whitman's elegiac poem, "Out of the cradle endlessly rocking," in which the sibilant sound of the ocean and a bird's cries echo back the poet's grief and his own sense of loss.



Figure 11 - Jarman awakes



Figure 12 - The Christ couple

So while the previous chapter explored how *Maurice* is a celebration of gay identity through a visual grammar in which nature is full, lush, saturated with colour, romantic and erotic and in which, I argued that heritage cinema's nostalgia works well with the optimistic strategy of the novel of queering nature as liberatory space. In this chapter, I view Derek Jarman's work as a different way of considering the relation between gay subjectivity and nature. In this film, both Jarman's experience of queerness and his experience of nature are marked by a profound sense of loss.

I have divided this chapter in three sections in which I examine key questions regarding Jarman's film, and his closely linked journal, *Modern Nature* (1992). I use these two texts to further explore the relationship between nature and queer subjectivity. The first section explores the film's experimentation with narrative structure and filmic form which relates directly to Jarman's queer sensibility and his experiences of gardening at Dungeness. Here I want to highlight how Jarman's experience of gardening, queerness and his diagnosis with HIV/AIDS finds expression in an avant-garde film aesthetic; the film's lyrical style facilitates a poetic exploration of the relationship between experiences of queer desire, the environment, sickness and mortality. The second section outlines recent readings Jarman's film in light of the emergence of queer ecology. I consider Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Greg Garrard's arguments about Jarman's gardening and his journal as a form of queer nature writing. Mortimer Sandilands uses Jarman's journal to articulate her notion of Queer Ecology and Garrard responds to this by reading Jarman's journal and film through the lens of "Queer Georgic." The third section of this chapter is my response to the arguments put forward by these two critics. I focus on the film's referencing of the pastoral elegiac tradition and more specifically, the film's melancholic mourning of the loss of queer lives which is concurrent to the loss of a more rustic England. I respond to Mortimer-Sandilands claim that the film provides an alternative model for ecological mourning, and draw on Timothy Morton to make the claim that the film is useful in dealing with the "loss" of nature because of the way it engages with and politicises queer melancholia. I appropriate Morton's idea that Nature needs to stick in the throat, not be processed into some commodity, which is to be sold as nature spectacle. Instead we need more lingering, uncertain, melancholic (and ultimately queer) intimacy with the natural world. Jarman's film suggests there are ways to undermine 'straight'-forward understandings of environmental loss, which often aim to make environmental crisis easy and digestible (or consumable).

(Post)Modernism, Queer Cinema and The Garden at Dungeness

As a filmmaker, Jarman might be situated at the margins of the British film industry, as he was one of a small number of truly independent filmmakers in Britain during a period which stretched from the late 1970s to the early 1990s.⁵⁵ Indeed, as Jarman admits, for most

⁵⁵ Also refer to Tony Peake's singular book on the filmmaker, *Derek Jarman: A Biography* (1999).

of his career his work was not acknowledged by the British cinema establishment. Robin Griffiths argues that “the history of *queerness* in British *sinema* [...] represents a history of erasure and marginality, a struggle over meaning and interpretation, and a questioning of the very ‘nature’ of desire and identity on the screen” (3). Jarman’s disconnect from mainstream film practice enabled him to express a queer sensibility and depict homoeroticism on screen during a period that was decidedly homophobic. In a review of one of his films, B. Ruby Rich fondly describes Jarman as the “King of Queer” and explains that “as an artist and activist, Jarman has a life history that seems to encompass the very development of modern gay culture” (49). Rich points out that “Jarman’s first feature, *Sebastiane* (1976), was certainly nothing short of radical. It was spoken entirely in Latin, shot in Sardinia with money supplied by a sympathetic industrialist, and shown in gay porn houses in the United States due to all the naked and seminaked boys in his decidedly S&M interpretation of the iconic saint’s life” (50).⁵⁶ His next film, *Jubilee* (1978) was similarly unconventional in subject-matter, with its unabashed depiction of the Punk movement and social anxieties of modern-day Britain, and the film signalled, as Rich suggest, “the real start of his cult following” (50). However, even the critically acclaimed *Caravaggio* (1986) did not open “the doors to an ironclad art film career for Jarman” and according to Rich, Jarman contends the reason was “overt homophobia” (50). Nonetheless, Jarman’s output as an independent filmmaker continued and “his decidedly avant-garde films— *The Angelic Conversation* (1987), *The Garden* (1990), and *The Last of England* (1988)— found their way to international film festivals, while his work in music videos with groups like the Pet Shop Boys won him a new audience among the younger generation” (Rich 50).

Jarman’s experimental films draw on the modernist aesthetics of earlier avant-garde cinema. Susan Hayward’s describes modernism in cinema as “privileging formal concerns” and thus making visible and questioning “its meaning production-practices” (227).⁵⁷ For Hayward “modernist cinema questions the technology it uses, questions its power of the gaze, questions its power to represent” (reality, sexuality etc). It questions how it represents and

⁵⁶ *Sebastiane* is comparable to *The Garden* in several ways; both films rework religious imagery (the former queers the life story of a Christian saint and latter is a radical retelling of the Christian Passion) with a distinctly queer visual language and the sexuality represented in both films is informed not by the urban but by Jarman’s take on pastoral motifs and unconventionally beautiful natural landscapes. The eroticism between rugged Roman soldiers in *Sebastiane* is informed by the equally rugged landscapes that frame them; and there is a sexual innocence between Antony and Adrian in *Sebastiane* that, although highly eroticised, resembles the tender relationship between the gay Christs in *The Garden*.

⁵⁷ For more on modernist cinema refer to András Kovács’s *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (2007).

what it represents” (227). Similarly, Siska and Savarese characterise ‘modernist’ cinema in terms of a new kind of self-reflexivity, one that challenges the traditional Hollywood variety of movies about movie-making that retain the orthodox, realist notion of the transparency of narrative structures and representations” (285). Jarman’s experimented heavily with Super 8mm film, through which he emphasised the camera as both physical and artistic lens and as the site of the filmmaker’s gaze.

Jarman’s recurrent use or incorporation of Super 8 footage into his work gives his films an impressionist/grainy/painterly effect. Jarman’s earlier films demonstrate the development of his unique technique and style of filmmaking. In his review of Jarman’s work, Michael Charlesworth sees the short film, *Garden of Luxor* (1972), as an example that

exemplifies the simplicity of means by which Derek achieved dream-like effects in these early films. Two postcards – of the Pyramids and of a garden in Luxor – form the basis of this film. One was filmed, then projected onto a postcard of the other scene. The result was re-filmed, using filters to make it sometimes red, sometimes blue. This was then projected onto people standing against a wall – a man with a whip, the side of a face, another man – and the result re-filmed. (47)

Charlesworth goes on to explain that in “his Super-8 works starting from this period Derek formed an aesthetics based on dissolve, superimposition, softness, sparkle, the dance of the sun on the water, texture, slow and exaggerated motion, integration of found and borrowed bits, composition, light acting on matter (as when light shines into the lens directly), the addition of colour (not just natural colour) through filters or video transfer, the creation of metaphors. In short, he developed an array of techniques that tended to induce reverie, mental drift and dream” (47-48). Super 8 also enabled Jarman to collect a vast amount of video material and to capture moments that 16mm, which needs a formal crew, would not allow. This was essential in making *The Garden*, as some of the footage of the Dungeness and Prospect Cottage was collected over a three-year period, during which Jarman could experiment with weather conditions and the effects of diverse lighting conditions when filming his environs.

The fact that Super-8 cassettes gave three minutes of film each at normal speed also made it possible to “just film images, symbolism, beautiful sights spontaneously glimpsed, and keep them so that they may be later integrated into a larger project (or not used)” (Charlesworth 49). This archive of personal video material – a collection of sights, textures, movement,

lighting etc. – must be read parallel to the function of the filmmaker’s journal. The visual collecting is supported by an assemblage of quotes, insights, poetry, sections of meditative prose and ideas for the films. The organic nature and contingency of these two processes are paramount to Jarman’s aesthetic philosophy. “‘The script, Derek said in 1984, becomes the first stage of censorship. Added to this, ‘narrative’ – so driven by scripts, in that they serve conversion into ‘treatments’ that convey narrative better than any other element – ‘is the first trap of commercial cinema’” (Charlesworth 83). In his “notebooks poetic words and specific images are planned and placed together. The meditative subjective poet’s notebook has replace[s] the orthodox script as a vehicle for creative work” (Charlesworth 121).

In this way, *The Garden* is comparable to a preceding film, *The Last of England*; as Steven Dillon points out, Jarman describes how “*The Last of England* ‘works image and sound, a language which is nearer to poetry than to prose’ by which he means that the film’s images speak figuratively rather than declaratively and that the film proceeds by association rather than through cause and effect” (4). Jarman “uses poetry as an oppositional term to contrast the shape of his films with that of linear, more regularly narrative kinds of cinema” (4). Dillon sees Pasolini and Jarman as taking part in “a cinematic tradition that emerges at the very origin of film history, a tradition that meditates deliberately on “poetry” in cinema (6). Furthermore, “each director invokes poetry in the name of social responsibility and social transformation” (6).⁵⁸ In *The Garden*, the Super 8 footage of Jarman’s garden, organically structured around key themes and experiences, suggests how this particular style and technology of filmmaking foregrounds personal intimacies with the environment; it gives a sense of place which is unlike more commercial-quality filmmaking. Specifically, the fragmentary sequences of Jarman at work in his garden or around Dungeness interrupt the skeletal Christ narrative and ask the audience to linger and reflect on Jarman’s place in the landscape and in the film.

Of course, Dungeness’s uniqueness and sublime but strange landscapes provided Jarman the means to express nature in a way that is distinctly different from conventional depictions of English countryside.⁵⁹ The garden at Prospect Cottage grows in the shadow of a nuclear power plant and in the harsh landscape of Dungeness. This landscape, a beach shingle that

⁵⁸ Dillon also compares Jarman’s *The Garden* to Pasolini’s *Teorema* (1968), and to an earlier film, Griffith’s *Broken Blossom* (1919).

⁵⁹ Also refer to Chris Perriam’s book, *New Exoticisms: Changing Patterns in the construction of Otherness* (2000), in which he considers *The Garden* in relation to Jarman’s strategies of defamiliarisation and the relationship between the Queer and the exotic.

resembles a lifeless wasteland, sharply contrasts to traditional representations of English nature, especially the kind that involves pastoral scenes and idyllic country towns. After Jarman described Dungeness and his garden to sculptor and painter Maggi Humbling, Humbling concluded that Jarman had discovered “modern nature.”⁶⁰ This concept became the title to the journal mentioned near the beginning of this chapter, in which Jarman documented his experiences of gardening at Prospect Cottage and his making of his “elegiac garden film” (Jarman 149).

One might view *Modern Nature*, his journal, and his garden at Prospect Cottage as companion texts to his film. With the humble Prospect cottage as the central feature, Jarman filled his garden with drought-resistant native plants, rusted and weathered debris found around the shingle beach, and traditional English flora (which include an impressive number of rose varieties). In his garden, flotsam and jetsam complement the forms and shapes of the exquisite plant life, and vice versa. Michael Charlesworth describes Jarman’s found objects as “things that most people would see no beauty in, or would see their value exhausted. They bring a connotation of collage, of *art brut* or *arte povera*, of a garden made by an ‘Outsider’” (136). These items “include barnacled rusty iron shoes on the upturned feet of old posts [...] a rusty old hoe, used for the sake of their triangular shapes, their satisfying red-brown colour [and] their age-value” (Charlesworth 136). Among these objects, Jarman plants sea kale, roses, elder bushes, wild poppies, lavender, helichryssum, santolina and other flowering plants. As his journal reflects, Jarman constructed his garden as a multifaceted metaphor that relates not only to his own life and personal history but relates to the broader gay community and communicates a queer sense of history. He does this in a context where the gay/lesbian community is designated as moral pollution by Margaret Thatcher’s government. At a time when he is losing friends and lovers to AIDS, Jarman uses the natural landscape, man-made debris and ebullient flowers to create “a memorial, each circular bed and dial a true lover’s knot” (Jarman 55).

⁶⁰ The image of the power plant at Dungeness, often looming in the background suggests that while Jarman’s film draws on the modes of the pastoral elegy and the georgic, his notion of what nature means in the late-twentieth century is one defined by a melancholic impulse to always recognise those losses brought about by modernity. As he embraces the power plant as an aesthetic feature in his film, the film also laments the changes the natural world has experienced. Seasons for instance are being altered. What is more, Jarman seems to place homophobia and cold capitalism alongside each other, within the film’s critical look at modern England.

The Garden and Modern Nature as Queer Ecological Texts

Recently two ecocritics have written about Jarman and the garden he created at Prospect Cottage in Dungeness. In the recent *Queer Ecologies* anthology, which I highlighted in my introductory chapter, Mortimer-Sandilands chooses Jarman alongside Zita Grover to demonstrate a queer ecological approach to environmental politics. Mortimer-Sandilands sees the relation between Jarman's gardening, his sexual politics and the mourning of friends lost to AIDS as an example or a template for a radically alternative approach to environmental politics. As briefly discussed in the previous chapter, Mortimer-Sandilands reworks Judith Butler's theory of gender melancholia and she describes certain forms of ecotourism and present-day wildlife documentaries as "nature spectacles" that phantasmagorically preserve the 'lost' object of 'Nature' in the present to avert its complete destruction.⁶¹ For Mortimer this melancholic process hinders any real engagement with the environmental crisis, thus environmentalists "exist in ... a condition of melancholia, a state of suspended mourning in which the object of loss is very real but psychically "ungrievable" within the confines of a society that cannot acknowledge nonhuman beings, natural environments, and ecological processes as appropriate objects for genuine grief (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 332).

She proposes that Jarman's journal is an alternative model of mourning to the melancholia outlined above. She claims that Jarman "write[s] about and act[s] in nature in ways that develop exactly the kind of political, embodied understanding of death and mourning that is missing from the romantic portrayals of loss and salvation emphasized in contemporary environmental spectacle" (334). Mortimer-Sandilands argues that key to Jarman's melancholic art is that he stages "intense and direct conversations between landscape and death, between environment and AIDS, between places and bodies," and that his "natures are not saved wildernesses; they are wrecks, barrens, cutovers, nuclear power plants: unlikely

⁶¹ As outlined in the previous chapter Butler explains "this melancholic condition of the bodily ego in terms of the "loss" of the same-sexed object under prevalent conditions of compulsory heterosexuality. This 'loss' might be better understood on the model of foreclosure, suggesting that it is a loss resolved into a melancholic identification and hence central to the formation of same-sex gender identification" (Melancholy Gender 165). According to Butler, "this account of the melancholic consequences of a disavowed homosexual attachment is then situated in terms of contemporary conditions of grief over the loss by AIDS of so many gay men" and thus the cultural "unreality" of that "loss" may be attributable to the foreclosed status of homosexual love as that which "never was" and "never was lost" ("Melancholy Gender" 165).

refuges and impossible gardens. But they are also sites for extraordinary reflection on life, beauty, and community” (343).

In a recent online essay, Greg Garrard responds to Mortimer-Sandilands’ claims and critiques her reading Jarman’s journal as a radical queer ecological text. He reads Jarman as a “sexual radical” on the one hand, and on the other, “a conservative defender of a vanishing England.” Garrard sees Jarman’s gardening and philosophy as a type of “queer georgic” (Garrard). Furthermore, he points out that “Jarman’s queer rejection of ‘heterosoc’ (Jarman’s term for heteronormative society) and his “radically conservative” love of England were supplemented rather than displaced by the patient, attentive, constructive work of gardening” (Garrard). Garrard sees Jarman not only as a queer activist and but also as conservative atavist. He argues that despite Mortimer-Sandilands’ “eloquent advocacy ... [he] cannot agree that Jarman’s *Modern Nature* is a profoundly radical text that “politicizes remembering by insisting on the queerness of writing and gardening as parallel memorial practices” (Garrard). Garrard points out that Jarman “never relinquished gay pastoral as a nostalgic ideal, even at times a redemptive hope” and that “he continued to align himself imaginatively with a radical conservative tradition with which modern environmentalism – and Ecocriticism in particular – has lost touch with.” Garrard makes a valid point here. In his journal, Jarman situates himself as part of a particular artistic history when he states that

Whitman, Carpenter, Gill and, nearer in time, Ian Hamilton Finlay and John Berger seem all to have set off on that old straight track pioneered by Mr and Mrs William Blake playing Adam and Eve nude in their London Garden. Blake and William Morris... all of them look backward over their shoulders – to a Paradise on earth. And all of them at odds with the world around them. I feel strongly, chose a ‘novelty’ medium – film – in which to search’. (25)

However, my reading of Jarman’s film, alongside his journal and the garden, tends to agree with Mortimer-Sandilands’ argument that *Modern Nature* was “a particular textual-botanical memorial to the queer past, to his generation, and indeed to himself” (354). And that “Jarman held on to his beloveds (individually, collectively, culturally) by bringing them into nature, as Jarman’s “politicized memorial planting of queer sexual histories in his garden” demonstrates (354). My argument regarding Jarman concurs with Mortimer-Sandilands point that “Jarman’s emotionally charged practice of melancholic remembering took [him] from a gay-focused experience of AIDS to a distinctly queer appreciation of nature” (355).

However, I propose that his film, *The Garden*, adds more complexities to the progression of ideas described by Mortimer-Sandilands. His garden takes on new even contradictory meanings as the film muses on several kinds of losses and provides elegy as a mode that reflects these losses. The elegiac elements of the film do not bring the mourning process to an end but instead it celebrates and lingers on in melancholic remembering. There are no “sweet conclusions” in *The Garden* and the film’s hopeful ending belies the melancholic waters the audience are left in regarding those losses signalled by the film. It is my opinion that these diverse elegies in the film are useful models for resisting any easy consumption (which media-driven capitalism so often necessitates) of images of environmental degradation or disappearing nature spaces. However, before I reflect on the queer ecological implications of the film’s elegiac elements, I want to outline the various losses the film reflects on.

Mourning a Queer Eden: Jarman’s Elegy and the Ecological

In *Modern Nature*, Jarman reflects on his boarding school years and the societal norms that had dramatically affected his first sexual experiences. Jarman explains how “Paradise Perverted was intended to set [them] up for life” and that “to divert [them] from the temptations of the flesh a muddy, muscular ‘Christianity’ was employed – ‘healthy body, healthy mind’” (58).⁶² Jarman express this idea of queer sexuality as edenic, the natural state of things, which is threatened or devalued by institutional homophobia or sexual repression. Thus the notion of “paradise perverted” is a key concept in understanding Jarman’s work and, more broadly, the filmmaker’s response to a homophobic England. Significantly, this theme recurs in the aforementioned journal and in *The Garden*, and both these texts suggest that ultimately this queer paradise is something which has been destroyed by homophobia and heteronormativity.

In an interview with Colin MacCabe, Jarman comments that his sexuality gave him a particular “a perspective” and that as a result he “found himself always under attack”; *The Garden* is his response to such attacks and, as Jarman explains, the easiest way for him to retaliate was “through the story of the Passion” because, as he comments, “the context is

⁶²Boarding school life with its emphasis on Christian values and healthy boyhood link directly to the opening paragraphs of my previous chapter. The legacies of the Victorian/Edwardian ideologies of nationhood and healthy masculinity I outline at the beginning of that chapter linger on in mid-twentieth century British society. Homosexuality would only be decriminalised in the 1960s.

absolutely direct” and “no one can escape it” (*Derek*).⁶³ Accordingly, *The Garden*’s “thread-bare” narrative is based on Jarman’s envisioning of the Christian Passion. Mary Magdalen is a man in drag and two gay lovers are Christ-like figures persecuted and punished by authoritarian figures.

Jarman also comments that “paradise haunts gardens” and similarly *The Garden* is haunted by the biblical gardens of Eden and Gethsemane. In the film and journal, both of these gardens are linked to a sense of loss. I argue that Jarman uses the mode of the elegy to reflect on the following: the loss of a prelapsarian childhood state; the irrevocable changes to Time and Nature resulting from global capitalism and late-twentieth century modernity, and, finally, the loss of queer lives as a result of AIDS and the devaluing of queer relationships by the poisonous family-oriented politics of Thatcherite England. *The Garden* is also elegiac, in the way that the term indicates “a serious meditative poem, the kind Coleridge was hinting at when he spoke of elegy as the form of poetry ‘natural to the reflective mind’” (Cuddon 229). Dillon’s argument, which I refer to early on in this chapter, about the formal link between poetry and Jarman’s filmic language, is demonstrated in the way *The Garden* appropriates elements of elegiac poetry.

As I have emphasised, at the heart of the elegiac form is the mourning of some kind of loss, whether it is a person, place or a lifestyle. And it is often nature that echoes the loss experienced by the narrator. As one critic puts it,

the natural world provides a sounding board, an echo chamber for the narrator’s cries of loss. Scholarship has asserted that the reverberation of nature is the way in which elegy imagines how grief is brought into language. Nature becomes an analogue for the objectifying process of writing, which detaches our grief from us and makes it bearable by negating it. (Sacks in Morton 253)

As mentioned, Jarman’s film reflects on and mourns the loss of edenic queer sexuality, alongside other losses, which include, the changes to the English landscape brought about by modernity, the loss of georgic ideals, and, finally the loss of queer livelihoods as a result of AIDS and institutionalised homophobia. Commentators point out that the elegy, first seen in Roman and Greek literature, has since the Renaissance “come to mean a sustained poetic meditation on a solemn theme, particularly death (e.g. Milton’s “Lycidas” or Shelley’s

⁶³ This interview is an extra feature on the DVD version of Isaac Julien and Tilda Swinton’s biopic, *Derek* (2008).

“Adonais” (290). Ian Ousby refers to Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” as one of the best-known elegies in the language, and describes the poem as melancholic and reflective (290). Ousby’s observations about Thomas Gray’s poem could easily apply to several recurring elements in *The Garden*. Ousby explains that “the poet muses upon the conditions of rural life, human potential, and mortality” and that “at its close, the elegy casts forward to the prospect of the poet’s own death, and considers that Art – in the shape of the poem itself – might offer a more durable memorial against time” (290).⁶⁴ Jarman, the filmmaker-poet, functions in a similar way in *The Garden*.

I have previously stated that in the opening scene of the film the audience is alerted to the fact that the film is being dreamed into existence by the filmmaker. Besides the subsequent images of the ocean and beach, the opening section includes a sequence that moves from dark, out-of-focus images of the film set to unconventionally angled shots of the main actors/characters. The film’s opening is a shadowy space from which the constituent parts of the film emerge into view. This montage of scenes and characters is accompanied by ambient sounds, a heartbeat and organic noises. Then a voice-over states the following:

I want to share this emptiness with you, not fill the silence with false notes or put tracks through the void. I want to share this wilderness of failure. The others have built you a highway, fast lanes in both directions. I offer you a journey without direction, uncertainty and no sweet conclusion. When the light faded, I went in search of myself, there were many paths and many destinations. (*The Garden*)

This voice is followed by an affecting, non-diegetic sound – a slow-paced, melancholic score – that accompanies the camera as it cuts to the filmmaker at his desk waking from his sleep. The camera lingers on a close-up of Jarman. There is one moment when he looks up, his arms on his notebook, and meets the spectator’s gaze directly. This is one of several direct gazes at the spectator in the film. In a comment to Jarman, actress Tilda Swinton notes that her experience of *The Garden* had been “quite different” from her work in Jarman’s previous

⁶⁴ Kristi Mckim feels that “given the elegy’s traditional lyrical form and cinema’s relative youth, film has yet to be inscribed within rituals of artful mourning and remembrance” (74). “Regarding the ‘technological innovations that have transformed our relationship to history and memory—namely, the development of films and videos that allow us to see and hear the dead as if they were among the living’,” Mckim quotes Sandra Gilbert who asks: ‘Can the dead be in and of history and memory if we can still see them and hear them? Equally to the point, how can we bear witness to the absolute fact that they are *not* here?’” (74-75). She adds that “Cinema’s endowing a subject with time and movement neither resurrects the deceased nor wholly satiates the mourner’s loss” (Mckim 74-75).

film, *The Last of England*. She explains that it was “as if she was ‘trapped’ in [Jarman’s] dream” and that “she found the film intensely personal” (297). Jarman recorded her comment in his journal and added that he “feels the same way.” He “can’t really talk about the film. It’s like talking about [himself]” (297). *The Garden* is comparable to the self-reflective, meditative mode described by Ousby’s comments on the elegy and the film is intensely personal in the way it represents the filmmaker’s sense of loss and his melancholia.

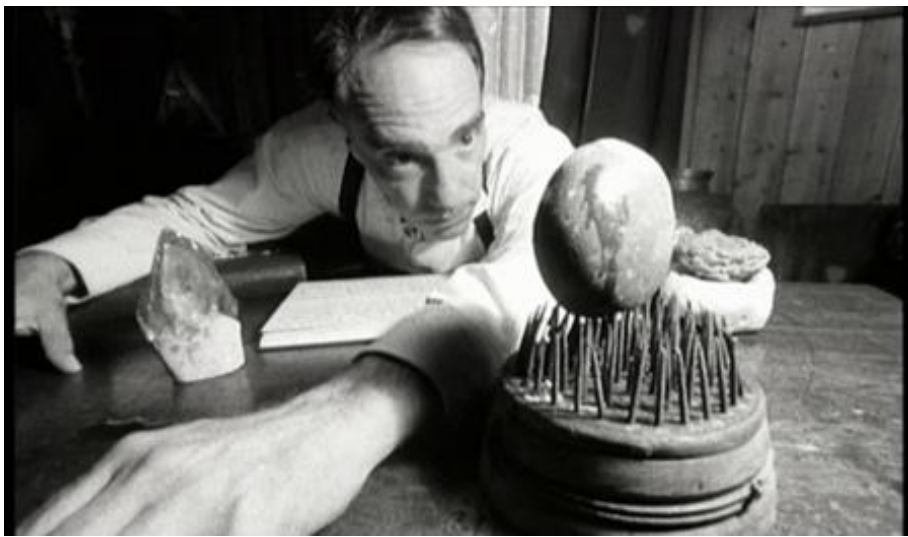


Figure 13 - The filmmaker

The opening scene is also interspersed with images of Jarman’s cottage at Dungeness and the surroundings (which include the beach scene described at the beginning of this chapter). We are also shown a selection of artefacts that the film will employ as part of its symbolic language – these include, a small stone balanced on a bed of nails, a crucifix and an image of Christ’s crucified, bleeding feet. The film’s divergent thematic content is organized around narrative elements from the edenic myth and Christ’s Passion. However, in Jarman’s tale, the real Christ is displaced and becomes a peripheral figure that observes the events from afar and wanders aimlessly through a contemporary world. Two young men, a gay couple, become the Christ-like main characters that move from a homoerotic Eden to homophobic crucifixion.⁶⁵ Their story of suffering and loss becomes an analogy for homophobia and

⁶⁵ Jarman’s biographer, Tony Peake, comments on the development of the film and explains that “the framing device became that of the dream allegory” and that “the garden would be the gardens of both Eden and Gethsemane, while the landscape of Dungeness, with its boats and fishermen, would be the sea of Galilee” (445).

homosexual identity in Thatcherite Britain. Orbiting this main narrative is a complex cast of characters and a collection of imagery, for the sake of my argument I am going to focus specifically on the Christ couple and the closely related and recurring figure of a young boy.



Figure 14 - The boy



Figure 15 - The garden and power plant

In *The Garden* footage of a young boy recurs throughout the film. This prepubescent figure is first seen shortly after the introduction of the filmmaker in the opening scene. He plays with a dried shrub with the power plant looming over him ominously. It becomes plausible that the

boy represents a young Derek. One of his play sessions in Prospect Cottage's garden shows him playing with a snail, and a close up of his face emphasises childhood curiosity and innocence. Notably, the childhood figure also features in a washing scene with the character that later becomes the Judas figure. This scene cross-cuts with a scene featuring the Christ-couple and it seems that the film draws a parallel between the natural innocence of the boy and the innocent love between the two men. In both scenes, water suggests sensuality. This almost edenic sensuality, and the longing to recapture it, is a reoccurring theme in *Modern Nature*.

One of the early entries in *Modern Nature* recounts Jarman's earliest childhood memories – his grandmother's "dark Edwardian shrubberies" (7). For Jarman "these spring flowers are [his] first memory, startling discoveries; they shimmered briefly before dying, dividing the enchantment into days and months, like the gong that summoned us to lunch, breaking up [his] solitude" (7). This first Eden is only interrupted by the regimented time of domesticity. He explains that

the gong brought the pressing necessity of that other world into the garden where [he] was alone. In that precious time [he] would stand and watch the garden grow, something imperceptible to [his] friends. There, in [his] dreaming, petals would open and close, a rose suddenly fall apart scattering itself across the path, or a tulip lose a single petal, its perfection shattered for ever (Jarman 7).

This idea of Eden interrupted by Time reoccurs in his descriptions of the family's time living close to the Borghese gardens, near Lake Maggiore in Northern Italy.⁶⁶ Jarman muses on the builder of the garden and about the nature of all gardens as he comments that "each park dreams of Paradise; the word itself is Persian for garden. This particular shadow of Eden was originally the grounds of the villa that Scipione Borghese built for himself in the seventeenth century" (14). He then tells the tale of the very first house built in Eden – Adam's Wooden hut. This hut, "no doubt built from the timbers of the tree of knowledge," is something that "generations attempted to recapture in a thousand garden houses, rustic summer houses and cottages ornées" (14). He describes the inherent longing in each gardener to recreate Eden

⁶⁶ O'Quinn argues that "in *Modern Nature*, gardening is an emergency praxis whose imperative opens onto a motivated consideration of the relationship between time and community. Jarman's journal writings attempt to rupture monumental history with the reconstitution of the sacred. To modify a passage from 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' [he] argues that the articulation of Jarman's personal history with a fragmented history of gardening does not attempt to recognize the past "as it really was"; rather it "seizes hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (116).

and to escape modernity's sense of Time. Jarman mentions several other Edens or shadow Edens throughout *Modern Nature*. He describes his first sexual experience as "a new orchard and garden was mine" (38). Much of Jarman's adult life it seems tries to recall or recreate the essence of these childhood sensual/sexual Edens. This result in a georgic drive to recreate Eden lost. He asks "Why can't my film return to this Eden" (136). As he points out in his journal, this was also a key consideration when he buys Prospect cottage and returns to gardening (191).

O'Quinn argues that "If we look closely at Jarman's engagement with time, it becomes clear that there is "Time's History" which devolves into monumentality and there is a history that "does not belong primarily to time, nor to succession, nor to causality, but to community, or to being-in-common" (123). Jarman comments that

a personal mythology recurs in my writing, much the same way poppy wreaths have crept into my films. For me this archaeology has become obsessive, for the 'experts' my sexuality is a confusion. All received information should make us invert sad. But before I finish I intend to celebrate our corner of Paradise, the part of the garden the Lord forgot to mention. (23)

Alongside his own garden, Jarman celebrates spaces that enable the idea of the queer edenic. Hampstead heath is one of the public spaces which Jarman saw as recapturing some of this edenic ideal (at least in a sexual way) (172). He recalls his night wanderings, often filled with fantasies or accounts of anonymous sex amongst the greenery. His concern about the Thatcherite government's policing or invasion of these kinds of spaces echoes Garrard's claim about Jarman's "radical conservatism."

For Jarman, one example of this policing of space is "Sissinghurst, that elegant Sodom in the garden of England (15). Sissinghurst, is as Jarman states, "'heritized' in the institutional hands of the National Trust. Its magic has fled in the vacant eyes of tourists. If two boys kissed in the silver garden now, you can be sure they'd be shown the door" (15). He goes on saying "Two young men holding hands on the street court ridicule, kissing they court arrest, so the worthy politicians, their collaborators, the priests, and the general public push them into corners where they can betray them in the dark. Judases in the garden of Gethsemane" (15). O'Quinn points out that "his discussion of the 'heritization' of Sissinghurst essentially repeats the trajectory of the Borghese Gardens material. In both instances 'an elegant Sodom' has been buried and overwritten by the monumentalizing impulse of national culture" (121).

In the film, the edenic scenes of the gay Christs link to this queer sense of community and history.

Moreover, in *The Garden* the death or ‘crucifixion’ of the lovers at the hands of the homophobic ‘Sanhedrin’ result in the skies above Dungeness becoming red and jaundice yellow. The earth mourns the death of the lovers. The damaged biosphere merely parallels the broken bodies of the lovers. The narrator states that

this year the winter never came [...] at Shrovetide, flies swarmed, the rosemary bloomed, eggs soured in their shells. The sky pierced and torn no longer sheltered the naked earth. The seasons changed. Men burrowed deep to hide their shameful poisons. For million years thirty thousand unborn generations bound to the memory of criminal rulers. The secretaries of energy who oiled the wheels of mortgage with dead hands.⁶⁷ (*The Garden*)

Here the landscape mourns the death of the queer protagonists, but a simultaneously the film suggests an elegy for the loss of nature. It seems to imagine a future in which environmental degradation is a radical loss. The moment in the film described above resembles deep green environmental elegies, which often mourns the radical loss of nature as something that will happen in the future.

In a recent contribution to *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy* (2010), Timothy Morton muses on how “elegy appears to be a quintessential mode of ecological writing” (251). He also points out that “if ecology is often elegiac, elegy is also ecological (252). “Whether or not it is explicitly ecological, elegy’s formal topics and tropes are environmental” (Morton 252). According to an entry on Morton’s blog, “Elegies traditionally use all kinds of environmental tropes, the most infamous of which was called the pathetic fallacy in the Victorian period: mountains and trees echoing the woe of Orpheus weeping for Eurydice” (Ecology and Elegy). Morton asks “But what do you do about an elegy for a dying environment? You are talking about trees dying and you are using a form that has living trees echoing human grief” (Ecology and Elegy). Morton argues that elegies for the environment face “a dilemma at the formal level, precisely because [they presuppose] the very loss [they want] to prevent” or in

⁶⁷ Norlin argues that in some versions of the pastoral elegy, the loss is affects the poet in such a way that “Nature is challenged to reverse her usual course and let confusion reign” (299).

other words, “the elegy, weeping for a lost Edenic oneness between humanity and nature, undermines this weeping at the very moment of weeping itself” (254). Morton explains that “deep green elegy” “resembles the heterosexist melancholy Judith Butler brilliantly outlines in her essay on how the foreclosure of homosexual attachment makes it impossible to mourn for it” and adds that “We cannot mourn for the environment because we are so deeply attached to it—we are it. So ecological discourse holds out the possibility of a mourning without end” (254).

Here, I want to agree with Morton’s observation that “elegy works as much against ecology as for it, despite the overwhelmingly environmental quality of elegiac tropes, and the predominantly contemplative mode of its narration, eminently suitable for conveying ecological awareness” (256). Morton goes on to reflect on how the elegiac mode operates, he explains that “elegy aids mourning by weeping for the lost one on our behalf, performing the sadism that we will need for proper digestion to work and that “the text kills the lost one symbolically, burying her [or him] so that she does not come back to haunt us” (256). He then proposes that “instead of providing the poetic equivalent of canned laughter, automating mourning for us on the page, progressive ecological elegy must mobilise some kind of choke or shudder in the reader that causes the environmental loss to stick in her throat, undigested. Environmental elegy must hang out in melancholia and refuse to work through mourning to the (illusory) other side” (Morton 256). This final idea is something that speaks to my own reading of Jarman’s film and the way Jarman’s filmic elegy is an experience that does not allow easy digestion of the loss of neither queer nor nonhuman nature.

In Jarman’s *The Garden* we have both an elegy for friends and lovers lost to AIDS and the loss of a queer Eden, and both are mourned in the film by an apocalyptic landscape with seemingly chaotic elemental forces. But we also have an elegy for a vanishing England, lingering images of the pastoral beauty of the Dungeness landscape where Jarman had made his home and now famous garden. The work of mourning does not however reach a conclusion by the end of the film, although there are glimmers of new beginnings and possibilities, the film does not give the audience a sense of finality or certainty about the losses and precarious lives they had witnessed in the film. Instead, the film’s diverse elegiac elements open up a space in which these losses may be contemplated, mused over, experienced again and again. In this way, the film moves toward the possibility of an ecological elegy as outlined by Morton; a melancholic reflection on the human-nature divide through which we are unsure but simultaneously certain of what we had lost and what we are

losing. An alternative perhaps to commoditised spectacles of disappearing nature, in the way Jarman's film asks for a darker, more complex consideration of loss and mourning, asking to what extent we are, like the filmmaker/poet in *The Garden*, defined by our experience of loss.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hothouse Specimens And Sodomitical Sailors : Natural History And Queer Historiography In

John Greyson's *Proteus*

“On celluloid and magnetic tape, just as in life and culture off-screen, the queer present negotiates with the past, knowing full well that the queer future is at stake” (Rich 27).

Introduction

As I have highlighted in my introductory chapter, Derek Jarman's pioneering artistic vision was an important influence on and force in what B. Ruby Rich described as the New Queer Cinema. Jarman's experiment with the filmic form is often preoccupied with rewriting or appropriating elements of the past, but demonstrates a modernist reverence for high art as Jarman seeks to emulate traditional artistic modes in filmic language. In this way, Jarman is different from the subsequent generation of New Queer Cinema filmmakers, who in typical postmodern fashion imbue their work with popular styles or genres, irreverent pastiche and elements from popular culture. Furthermore, Greg Garrard's point that “Jarman is determined to claim for himself and others a queer past, a queer future [...] and a queer nature,” succinctly articulates Jarman's distinctly idiosyncratic appropriation of a certain national histories, his “radical conservative” vision of England and his fashioning of a queer Eden. In this way, he responds to the threats of Thatcherite ideology and capitalist expansion. However, Jarman's vision of a queer past and future is fixed within these national borders and seeks a continuation of and not a break from the traditions of old England (which Jarman sees as harbouring queer histories).

In this chapter, my investigation shifts from Forster, Ivory and Jarman who engage with the queer past primarily through modes of nostalgia, mourning or melancholia and by referencing certain literary antecedents like a homosexual pastoral tradition or the pastoral elegy, and instead I focus on a different kind of engagement with the past, the fashioning of a “queer historiography” that is distinctly postmodern and postcolonial. As mentioned in chapter one, a key characteristic of New Queer Cinema is its critical stance towards “cultural and visual constructs of heteronormativity” and “its performative gesture to memory and history”

(Çakırlar 166). This a mode of retrospection described by Rich as a “Queer historiography” (Kindle Location 1037). The “queer historiography” I outline in relation to the films in this chapter asks us to critically engage with the historical relationship between colonial-imperial discourses around the naming and specifying of nonhuman nature and the development of sexual categories (and the policing of the queer ‘Other’) in Western society.

In this chapter, I move beyond the English setting of the films discussed in the previous chapters and turn to two films in the oeuvre of Canadian filmmaker, John Greyson. My focus is the more recent one of the two, which is the product of a unique collaboration with South African activist-filmmaker Jack Lewis, namely the film, *Proteus* (2003). I explore notions of historical queerness and discourses of nature as they manifest themselves in a film that has as its setting the dramatic coastline of eighteenth-century South Africa (simultaneously haunted by South Africa’s more recent histories of institutional discrimination). Greyson is a key figure in Rich’s initial outlining of New Queer Cinema and his work resembles the experimental energy of Jarman’s body of work but engages directly with postcolonial politics and demonstrates a more distinctly postmodern sensibility. The films I discuss in this chapter present their audiences with colonial spaces and histories and I utilise Greyson’s films to continue my analysis of the potential of Queer Cinema in exploring (in both narrative and visual terms) the historical discourses of sexuality and nature. In this chapter, I briefly highlight Greyson’s earlier film, *Zero Patience* (1993) through which I demonstrate Greyson’s postcolonial milieu and his experiments with form or genre. This provides a context for discussing *Proteus*, his more recent collaboration with Jack Lewis. I investigate how Greyson’s films probe the historical dimensions of modern-day sexual politics, as they interrogate the legacies of colonial histories and specifically reflect on the legacy of natural history and post-enlightenment science.

I start with *Zero Patience*, a pseudo-documentary/comedy-musical that probes the stigma and shame of AIDS and popular representations of the virus as a homosexual disease and I use this film to explore what is particular about Greyson’s take on the genre of Queer Cinema. *Zero Patience* film brings together two historical figures, the Victorian explorer/sexologist, Sir Richard Burton, and a character loosely based on Gaétan Dugas, a Quebecois flight attendant who was identified by journalist Randy Shilts as the source of North American AIDS. I am interested how the film critiques the colonial discourse of Natural History (in the form of Burton’s museum exhibit) and foregrounds questions of representation, history, politics and knowledge. Greyson’s film does this through a critical intervention in the modes

of representation utilised by Eurocentric productions of knowledge (specifically, the form of museum exhibits and the genre of the documentary). These modes of representation are conventionally associated with reality, empiricism and scientific truth but in *Zero Patience* such notions are complicated by a comingling of the popular film genres, like the ghost story, musical and comedy and by Greyson's subversive "Homo Pomo" (postmodern) aesthetic.

From this brief analysis of *Zero Patience* I move on to the main topic of this chapter, the 2003 film *Proteus*, which expands on and appropriates the formal experiments of the first wave of New Queer Cinema. The film is a liberal portrayal of an interracial affair between two prisoners in eighteenth-century South Africa based on real VOC court records. *Proteus* tells two stories – the relationship between Claas and Rijkhaart (as imagined by the filmmakers and thus demonstrating their interpretation of the court records) and the semi-fictional tale of a botanist, Virgil Niven, who is plant collecting at the Cape but who is also linked to the criminal trails of Dutch sodomites. I start my analysis of the film by outlining how the film has been approached by scholarship. The film brings together disparate images, juxtaposes certain elements but does not entirely explain their relationship. The film does not allow easy connection; it is an awkward film, full of angles and like *Zero Patience* it does not fall into familiar narratives. It is not simply a love story, and not simply a historical reconstruction. Greyson and Lewis also add the semi-fictional character of the plant collector, who is both a student of Carl Linnaeus and a member of a community of sodomites in 1730s Amsterdam, to complicate contemporary notions of sexual categories and reflect on the politics of naming.⁶⁸ *Proteus* invites us to consider present-day sexual categories in light of the emergence of new sexual identities in the Eighteenth Century and the complex relationship between nature and sex in the discourses surrounding Linnaean botany.

In the latter half of this chapter I consider what a queer ecocritical reading of *Proteus* might look like. Firstly, I start by asking how particular (queer) histories require a modification of Foucault's understanding of the history of sexuality (which I outlined in chapter one but now return to here). Then I ask how film as cultural intervention can make visible connections between apparently co-incidental historical events, and in doing so surface personal, erotic histories which are usually ignored or overlooked. Finally, I consider how the history of

⁶⁸ Bewell points out that "during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, South Africa was a popular destination for scientific travellers, such as Anders Sparrman, Carl Peter Thunberg, William Paterson, François La Vaillant, and John Barrow" (9).

classification of plants relates to the classification of sexualities, and how the personal, emotional or erotic element disturbs the apparently systematic work of science.

Vocal Victorians and Contagious Simians: Empire, AIDS and Greyson's Queer Musical

At the time of its release, the Canadian queer feature film, *Zero Patience*, entertained audiences with its playful but critical appropriation of different genres, filmic styles and cinematic conventions; while it also attempted to engage with difficult questions regarding queer representation, public and corporate reactions to the HIV and AIDS crisis and the influence of colonial narratives on modern-day identity issues and sexual politics. The film might be described as ghost story, romance, pseudo-documentary, political essay, and comedy-musical. The central 'romance' is between an immortal version of a famous Victorian sexologist/explorer and the resurrected ghost of "Patient Zero," the man mistakenly identified as the first case of AIDS in North America (based on the real case of Gaétan Dugas). The film, which is difficult to summarize due to its diverse elements, begins with the famous explorer, sexologist and translator of *Tales of 1,001 Arabian Nights* and *The Kama Sutra*, Sir Richard Francis Burton, who is still alive because of "an incident" with the Fountain of Youth. Burton, nicknamed Dick, now works as a diorama artist at the museum of Natural History in Toronto.

At the start of the film, Burton is shown setting up his "Hall of Contagion," a museum display that documents the great plagues and epidemics in Western history. He is obsessed with showing the origin of each epidemic. Each of Burton's dioramas shows an individual or animal 'responsible' for the spread of an epidemic. These include a display of Typhoid Mary, the Tuskegee syphilis experiments on black sharecroppers and the AIDS origin theory in the form of the African green monkey. When a slashed budget denies him the "Dusseldorf Plague Rat" (he had hoped that it would be a sort of "Shroud of Turin" in his collection), he finds a flyer that suggests a suitable replacement – Patient Zero (*Zero Patience*). It is 1987, so with the media frenzy around AIDS, Burton sets out to make the display of Patient Zero the centre piece of his exhibit.

Meanwhile "suspended somewhere between existential limbo and the primordial void," Patient Zero, interspersed with ephemeral scenes of water ballet, sings of his scapegoat status ("tell the story/clear my name/why do they need someone to blame?") (*Zero Patience*).

Miraculously, Zero is transported to and reappears in the realm of the living but is invisible to everyone. However, he is visible to Burton, as we find out when their paths inevitably cross. The film's narrative is centred on these two men and the relationship that develops between them (although this is not the only story that the film tells). Burton initially arranges the 'facts' to create a version of Zero that fits the sensationalist idea of Zero as a gay 'serial killer' who had consciously infected countless victims.⁶⁹ Burton's research is interrupted when he meets the ghostly Zero, and when he tries to document Zero's existence with video camera equipment; Zero does not show up on Burton's equipment. Zero stays at Burton's home at the museum while Burton tries to find a way to make Zero visible. Burton is initially anxious about sleeping next to Zero, but his prejudices are proved wrong as their relationship develops. The film suggests that Burton must first connect with Zero as a human being (in a climactic scene Burton and Zero have sex in one of Burton's dioramas) before he starts to see Zero differently.⁷⁰

The different modes of looking or seeing are a recurring motif or idea in the film. Burton's gaze is initially linked to the institution of the museum, which in turn, with regards to Canada's national history, links to the mode of natural history (a mode of representation deeply connected to colonial discourse). Museums demand a particular kind of seeing. The spectator must follow the visual narrative provided by the exhibit's creators. Thus the traditional museum display installs a certain kind of authority and it does not usually invite a critical or oppositional reading. Both Dellamora and Hallas note the temporal and thematic relationship between Greyson's film and the controversy over the Royal Ontario Museum's 1989–90 exhibition, "Into the Heart of Africa." Whereas the Ontario Museum exhibit's attempts to contextualize colonial history failed precisely because the role of the museum as an institution invested in colonial projects remained uninterrogated, Greyson's film makes this explicit through the fact that Burton remains "alive" and lives within its walls as well as through the active repurposing of the machinery of the museum in "Zero Patience" (Dellamora 530). Furthermore, Greyson's film asks us to review the facts about AIDS and specifically, those 'Othered' groups (the legacy of colonial discourse) who are made into easy

⁶⁹ In a way, Burton echoes my earlier discussion of Forster's character of Mr Ducie, in the way that his representation of the man suggests a scathing view of a society who often justify particular (heterosexist) views using the semblance of science. Burton makes possible a similar questioning of the 'official' discourses of science / history.

⁷⁰ I return to this later in the chapter, when I consider relationship between Virgil's queer desire and his vocation as Linnaean botanist. I explore how the queer erotic disturbs the system of science.

scapegoats by a (white, heteromasculine) society looking for someone to blame for the spread of the virus.

However, in Greyson's film, the misrepresented subjects of Burton's exhibit are able to come alive in a musical scene and provide vocal opposition to the logic behind Burton's "Hall of Contagion." In a key scene in the film, Zero unsuspectingly converses with a stuffed specimen of the African Green Monkey and reflects on the fact that she (a dead animal) can feel no guilt for spreading HIV to humans. At this moment, the monkey suddenly blinks her eyes, transforms into human and challenges Zero's assertion that she feels no blame. Knabe and Pearson explain that the monkey "is quick both to point out the utility of the theory that she was the origin of AIDS and to debunk Zero's suggestion that at some point there must have been some commingling of blood and semen, dismissing the primate primal scene with a scathing "don't be ridic, I'm not into boys." (Kindle Locations 1116-1128) Knabe and Pearson add that

during the first decade of the epidemic transmission was primarily understood (discursively at least) to be synonymous with anal intercourse, so much so that early explanations for the prevalence of heterosexual cases of AIDS in parts of Africa were attributed to Africans' allegedly common practice of anal sex. Thus the green monkey hypothesis was accompanied by an often unspoken, though palpable, frisson of further depravity bringing together bestiality and anal intercourse" (Kindle Locations 1116-1128).

In this scene, Greyson thus relates the cultural popularity of the African origin theory's with a lingering colonial world view which is both racist and homophobic. Africans, their supposedly 'depraved' (and queer) sex practices and their close 'link' to simians makes them easy candidates in the AIDS 'blame game' of the late-eighties.



Figure 16 – The African Green Monkey exhibit speaks for itself



Figure 17 - Burton and Zero connect in the exhibit

This kind of othering of non-Europeans and homosexuals is historically rooted, as the life of the real Sir Richard Francis Burton demonstrates. Burton had an obsession with documenting illicit and exotic sexual practices in what he labelled the Sotadic Zone, which is conveniently located in the warmer climates south of England and suggested that “homosexuality was endemic and climatically caused” (Aldrich 31). Pearson and Knabe argue that

in associating same-sex practice and desire with non-white, non-northern European bodies and places, Burton's theories also operate to underwrite and reinforce a particular form of robust, scientifically sanctioned, Eurocentric power over these "others," one that Burton attempts to reassert in [his musical number] "A Culture of Certainty" when he looks to science to "put us back on top. (Kindle Location 1266)

The phrase "on top" indicates a white (colonial-imperial) masculinity that needs to assert itself against a queer or racialised 'other'.

Knabe and Pearson suggest that "Zero Patience is ... concerned with how we got to the present, whether that of its 1987 setting or of its making in 1993. Hallas refers to this as the film's "genealogical pedagogy" in the way that "genealogy works to historicize its object of study by focusing on the material conditions of discourse, on the institutions and practices dedicated to the disciplinary technologies that utilize knowledge as a function of modern power" (20). *Zero Patience* "historicizes the spectacle of AIDS through a defamiliarization of contemporary self-evidence, situating it in relation to the historical context of nineteenth century scientific positivism, the colonialist construction of the other, and the concomitant emergence of technologies of mass spectacle" (Hallas 18–19). While the history of AIDS is brief and complex due to its imbrications with homosexuality, race, and colonialism (through the geographic othering of Africa, in particular), "it can only be understood through the much longer history of Western epistemological thought as it developed through the Enlightenment and was disseminated by colonialism, the institution of state schools, and the ideology of scientific and social progress" (Knabe & Pearson 899-907). More succinctly put, Greyson's imaginative and playful but also critical imagining of Sir Richard Burton serves as a vehicle to interrogate and explore the making of (queer) history, the production of knowledge and how the gaze of natural history supports colonial ideology. *Zero Patience's* critique of Burton and the colonial histories and knowledge production he represents links to Greyson's more recent film, *Proteus*. In *Proteus*, an eighteenth-century botanist, Virgil Niven, is used to explore themes of nomenclature, classification and Enlightenment empiricism amidst a colonial setting that abounds in mistranslation, (mis)representations of the 'facts' and in-between identities.

Connecting Botanists and Sodomites: Historiography and New Queer Cinema

Almost a decade after *Zero Patience*, Greyson collaborated with Jack Lewis to make a film that deals with the representation of queerness in a very different political context. In an interview with a journalist from the film website *IndieWire*, John Greyson recounts the genesis of the 2003 film *Proteus*. He recalls how the South African filmmaker and activist Jack Lewis had approached him about making “a tri-lingual, sodomitical, botanical, low-budget feature on location” and that the story would be based on actual eighteenth-century court transcripts detailing the incident of the two prisoners on Robben Island, who were tried and executed on the charge of sodomy (Kramer). The court case in question was conducted before the Cape Council of Justice in August 1735. The defendants were Rijkaert Jacobsz of Rotterdam, a sailor in the service of the Dutch East India Company, and Claas Blank, a Khoisan herder from the southwest Cape. According to the court roll they were accused of “mutually perpetrated sodomy” (Newton-King 6). Jacobsz had been charged with sodomy in Batavia, in 1713, but the evidence had been insufficient to allow for the imposition of the death sentence and instead the eighteen-year old was banished to Robben Island for twenty-five years. In 1715, Claas Blank had been convicted of stock theft and sentenced to labour in chains for fifty years on Robben Island. At the time of their trial, in 1735, Jacobsz was forty years old and Blank thirty-six years old (Newton-King 6). *Proteus* is a filmic interpretation of these historical events and the filmmakers imagine the nature of the relationship between the two men, who according to records, had been on Robben Island for about twenty years. The filmmakers are preoccupied with issues of historiography, and the film is critical of both the gaps/silences in the historical record and the dangers of viewing the prisoners through the lens of modern sexual categories.

The film is in part a response to debates around the consolidation of a clause in South Africa’s constitution that protects individuals from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. In a roundtable discussion on the film published in a journal on South African histories, *Kronos*,⁷¹ Jack Lewis explains that when they started making the film (it took them six years to make) in the late 1990s, “they were just in the period when the Constitution was

⁷¹ The participants in this roundtable were Erika van As, Sandra Burman, Harriet Deacon, Gerald Groenewald, Jack Lewis, Antonia Malan, Canby Malherbe, Susan Newton-King and Nigel Worden. All except Jack Lewis are members or associates of the above-named NRF-funded research project, which brings together scholars from the University of Cape Town, the University of the Western Cape and Iziko Museum and is led by Nigel Worden. Sandra Burman acted as moderator of the discussion. Theo van der Meer, who is a research fellow at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, added his critical comments at a later stage.

being ratified” and “the clause concerning non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation was still up for debate” (11). Lewis also emphasises that it was important to make Claas the central character and “restore him to the record from which he was ... absent ...more than it being not about him” (11). One of the other panellists, Susan Newton-King adds that “One of the things that we're all acutely aware of as social historians, and particularly of this period, is precisely the silence of the historical record” (15). She highlights that “there are all kinds of silences, which this film is giving a voice to” (15).

The same year a second roundtable on the film was published, entitled “Screening Historical Sexualities: A Roundtable on Sodomy, South Africa, and *Proteus*.” The journal *GLQ* initiated a “virtual conversation” among the two directors of *Proteus*, Israeli queer legal theorist Noa Ben-Asher, American film scholar R. Bruce Brasell, American film critic Daniel Garrett, and South African historian Susan Newton-King and their “debate explore[d] the precarious and artful interrelationship of histories, nations, narratives, and the law; cinematic intent and spectatorial interpretation; same-sexuality, conjugality, and difference; and even, as one participant dares to put it, *love*” (437).

Also in the same year, a doctoral thesis, entitled “Queer Cinema as Fifth Cinema in South Africa And Australia,” by Ricardo Peach traced the Queer Cinematic histories of South Africa and Australia. Peach provides a well-researched account of the history of Queer Cinema in South Africa and describes *Proteus* as a high-point in the cinematic representation of homosexuality in South Africa. More recently, Jesse Arseneault used her master’s thesis to examine “interracial community and masculinity in South African literature, film and mass media” (iii). Her thesis argues that “masculinity is intimately tied to histories of racialization and, as such, represents a significant site for the deconstruction of racially segregatory practice and ideology” (Arseneault iii). The first chapter of her thesis examines queer masculinity in Greyson's *Proteus* and suggests that “queer narratives have been excluded from the national narrative and that Greyson’s film carves out a space for queerness in the nation where it had previously been effaced” (Arseneault iii).

In an article published in 2013 in the journal *Safundi*, entitled “Queer Desire and the Men of the Nation: Reading Race, Masculinity, and South African National Identity in John Greyson’s *Proteus*,” Arseneault carefully expanded her exploration of the film and argues that *Proteus*’s “unearthing of an actual historical trial is significant in that the film disrupts official narratives of South African history and redraws the lines of national identification

that have privileged particularly hypermasculine modes of orientation, even in anti-apartheid activism” (41). According to Arseneault, “the film both places queerness within South Africa’s historical narrative where it has been effaced and queers the landscape of South Africa’s history by putting a same-sex interracial romance on a geography crucial to South Africa’s post-apartheid national identity” (41). She explains that “the film’s queering of South African history also responds to the nation’s conservative backlash against progressive constitutional protections for sexual minorities in 1996 and the legalization of gay marriage in 2006” (Arseneault 41) She also points out how “the notion that homosexuality is ‘unAfrican’ or a Western import is a mantra, exhaustively discussed in South African media and criticism, that pervades many African leaders’ derision of queerness” (Arseneault 41).

It is significant that *Proteus* locates queerness in a site not only linked to particular national histories but also emblematic of Africa’s natural wealth and beauty. Robben Island’s World Heritage site status is now haunted by the story of these two prisoners. The film’s insistence on a history that includes queer erotic connections questions official narratives which depict Robben Island’s heritage as linked only to a lineage of heteronormative, heteromasculine freedom fighters. As Arseneault rightly points out, the film is an important dissident voice in a milieu in which homosexuality has been described as unAfrican and in which homophobia and racism is not resolved. However, I would add to Arseneault that essentialist notions of sexuality as natural or unnatural, native or alien to Africa, might also be disrupted by the film’s questioning of nomenclature, colonial natural history and history writing. However, this argument requires a more detailed consideration of the film’s visual motifs, the juxtaposition of certain elements and the film’s critical questioning of historical narratives.

The film opens with a montage of images that sets up both the key thematic concerns and distinct historical and narrative temporalities. The opening includes slow-motion sequence of flowering proteas, images of burning fynbos, the actual court documents and a re-enactment of Claas Blank and Rijkaert Jacobz’s trial at the VOC castle. Two historical dates appear onscreen; firstly, Linnaeus’ classification of the King protea in 1735 and, secondly, the date during Apartheid South Africa when the King protea became the national flower.⁷² During the court scene, three 1960s-styled stenographers debate among themselves over the term that should be used to record Rijkaert’s confession. The original eighteenth-century Dutch

⁷² The film ends with the famous quote of Nelson Mandela saying “some things so far told the court are true, and some are not true.” Making a clear link between the prisoners’ sentencing by the VOC authorities and the Apartheid government’s policies.

phrase (“ik het hom in’t gat geneukt”) gives way to various translations, from eighteenth-century legal terminology to modern colloquialisms. Each stenographer suggests an alternative, and they consider the most historically correct description for the prisoners’ crime. The film asks its audience to pay attention to the issue of historiography and the deliberate anachronisms in terms of the period encourage the audience to draw parallels between the narrative’s colonial setting, South Africa’s apartheid past and present-day South Africa.

The issue of naming or classifying the prisoners’ relationship links to the film’s broader thematic concerns. During the above mentioned roundtable published in *GLQ*, Greyson explains that he and Lewis had an interest in nomenclature and that through “a coincidence of history”; “Linnaeus had named and classified *Proteaceae* [which includes *Protea cynaroides*, the giant or king protea which became the national flower of South Africa in 1960], in 1735, the same year that Claas and Rijkhaart were tried and executed in Table Bay [where Robben Island is located]” (Ben-Asher 440). He adds that further research had

led [them] to Virgil, a Scottish plant collector based in the Cape who became the protea king of Europe some thirty years later.⁷³ The liberties [they] took in making his cultivation of that flower family take place on Robben Island at the same time as the decadelong relationship of our prisoners allowed [them] to mobilize the metaphors of binomial classification, and in a broader sense the central question of naming that drove [their] story: what names could Claas and Rijkhaart have for each other, for their feelings, for the sex they shared? (440)

As mentioned, the film is concerned with the idea of nomenclature; firstly, in terms of the name that the two prisoners have for each other, and, secondly, in terms of Virgil Niven’s naming of flowers and the names that Claas provide. This issue also relates to the film’s depiction of a small community of self-identified sodomites in the Netherlands in the early eighteenth century. In the film, the fictional Virgil Niven participates in this historical community in Amsterdam.

⁷³ Virgil seems to be based on James Niven, who was Scottish gardener from Penicuik, Midlothian. He was trained at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. He was employed at Syon House, Middlesex (c. 1796) and commissioned by George Hibbert of Clapham, to collect plants for his private botanic garden from South Africa (1798-1803) (Niven, James). He specialised in *Proteaceae* which were considered very fashionable at the time and he discovered a number of new taxa. Niven spent a few months back in England before being commissioned to collect again in South Africa (1803-1812) by a consortium that included James Lee (1754-1824) and John Kennedy (1759-1842) of the Vineyard Nursery in Hammersmith. (Niven, James)

Botanical Obsessions and Erotic Subversions: From Linnaeus to Foucault

This historical sodomite community predates the nineteenth-century idea of the 'homosexual' and thus becomes an important consideration in our understanding of how Rijkaert and Virgil formulate their sexual identity. In his explanation of the film's inclusion of the community, Jack Lewis refers to the Dutch scholar, Theo van der Meer, to show that the film's portrayal of a self-identifying queer community in the Netherlands although imaginative is not completely anachronistic. Lewis explains that "Van der Meer's work ... challenges Foucault's sort of nineteenth century construction of the notion of homosexual identity. Van der Meer's work is of significance because it asks whether Foucault was theoretically correct but historically wrong, in that identity, as you can see from the Dutch records of the 1730s ... began to emerge much earlier ... Where the nature of gay life, if I can call it that, as described, was incredibly modern. They had bars, songs, lists of who's who that were passed around from hand to hand and little marriages" (Newton-King 19-20). Lewis considers the idea "that gay identity had been emerging as a result of Enlightenment thinking and the growth of trade and ports" and considers how this undermines Foucault's claims about the nineteenth-century origin of homosexual identity (Newton-King 19-20).

In his essay, "Sodom's Seed in The Netherlands," Theo Van der Meer explains that certain national anxieties around minor 'sins' (often indulgence in drinking, gambling etc.) coupled with uncertainties around the state of Dutch national character led to the persecution of sodomy as a sort of scapegoat. Around the 1730s there was a notable increase in cases of sodomy, so much that it became an important topic in the public arena. Van der Meer points out that even though sodomy was initially seen as deviant behaviour that could take hold of any man. The more anxiety, the greater the need to preach moral vigilance was. Immoral practices linked to sexual deviance were scrutinized more closely. As late as 1777 an anonymous author wrote that "the seed of sodomy" hid in each and everybody (Van der Meer 8). It is this discourse of sodomy and the sodomite that gives these men a particular vocabulary to identify themselves with.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ However, Van der Meer adds that "clearly, an etiology in which homosexual behaviour could be the result from card playing is not compatible with modern taxonomies of sexuality" (7). Besides, where more modern concepts would have divided mankind into fixed categories of sexual human beings, eighteenth century

This discourse of sodomy resembles Foucault's theory of how medical categories of aberrant sexualities provided a discourse which could be used for self-identification. The searching for Sodom's seed in eighteenth century Dutch society gave Sodom's children a language for themselves. The authorities who persecuted men for sexual crimes in a sense 'created' what they sought to expunge. Van der Meer argues that the "interrogations of suspects and the trial procedures paralleled the Catholic confession since the Counter Reformation, in which, according to Foucault, the desire for knowledge first emerged" (Van der Meer 10). Authorities and people searched for the "personal motives and life stories" behind the sodomite and thus the "ontology and understanding of homosexual behaviour therein was gradually transformed" (Van der Meer 10). Van der Meer suggests that these European sodomites provided a basis from which nineteenth century sciences would eventually construct or 'invent' the modern concept of the homosexual. "Through their sense of belonging to a separate group [the sodomites] had created subjectivity and folk knowledge that became the very basis of the sexual discourses of the second half of the nineteenth century" (Van der Meer 16).

However, in *Proteus*, Claas and Rijkaert define themselves in terms of omission and the impossibility of describing their feelings for each other. In one scene, Rijkaert asks Claas, to say the name of their relationship, or to say the word that describes them, Claas answers by saying that there is no name. In the absence of a community of homosexual men, such as those described in metropolitan spaces like Amsterdam (to which Niven could return to), Claas and Rijkaert's understanding and definition of their relationship might also be linked to the way colonial spaces are organised and governed. It is important to take note of how VOC authorities dealt with sodomy. Historians suggest the castle and prison demarcated which bodies were legible and which kinds of criminality were erased from colonial society. Execution underlines sodomy's status as a mortal sin and a threat to the health of the colony, and is an act through which sodomites are physically displaced to outer perimeters of the colony. Nigel Worden explains that "the association of the castle with VOC authority was most strikingly demonstrated by the execution ground which lay outside the Castle walls, next to the road inland, where the largest number of people would pass the bodies of those victims who were left 'exposed to the air and the ravages of the birds' in the formulaic words of their sentences (76). However, some criminals sentenced at the castle were considered so

concepts implied that every human being – given the right or wrong circumstances – could indulge in homosexual behaviour."

against the natural order of things, due to the abominable nature of their crimes that their bodies had to be displaced entirely from the colony. As Claas and Rijkaert's execution at the end of *Proteus* demonstrate and other historical cases confirm, "homosexual couples were tied together with leads on their feet and ceremoniously drowned in the harbour, their offending bodies entirely removed from the settlement" (Worden 76). The film is a cultural intervention which aims to recover queer lives erased by this homophobic past.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the film achieves this by making connections between apparently co-incidental historical events, and in doing so surfaces personal, erotic histories which are usually ignored or overlooked. As suggested, the film makes visible connections between specific historical events, the homosexual panic experienced in early-eighteenth Amsterdam, the naming of the King Protea species, the court records of sodomy trials and finally, South Africa's Apartheid. The film tries to imagine the intimate relations between Claas and Rijkhaart, which come to signify various queer and interracial histories not readily available to a national audience. Furthermore, Virgil's study of botany and natural history, and his imagined involvement in the relationship between Claas and Rijkhaart, serves as a vehicle for the film to be critical of Eurocentric knowledge production and 'colonizing' aspects the contemporary gaze looking back at the past. Noa Ben-Asher argues that "the film critically locates the viewer's relationship to sodomites as 'premodern homosexuals,' in parallel with the Dutch colonizers' determination to give scientific names to African plants and races" (441). Thus not merely a critique of the 'violence' of naming that constitutes colonial (natural) histories, the film also reflects on the ways in which the contemporary colonizes the past.

An ecocritically queer reading highlights how the film's engagement with the past makes new connections between histories of sexuality and historical discourses of nature. In my first two chapters I mention Augustan poet, Virgil, when I discuss the idea of the "gay pastoral." Virgil's bucolic *Eclogues* are often appropriated as classical antecedents to modern fictions that imagine the pastoral as a distinctly homoerotic genre. Thus Lewis and Greyson's naming might be read as referencing this particular (hidden) history of looking to natural spaces for queer erotic pleasures. I want to return to the idea that Queer Ecology is a way reading which seeks to make connections and reveal silenced intimacies between humans and between humans and the nonhuman world. However, first I want to draw attention to the fact that Niven's status as queer botanist signals two very different histories of looking. The first is his role in the development of new epistemologies of classification, which starts with the

botanical but later extends to include human intimacies. The second relates to Niven's desire, which threatens to undermine the former, and which I see as central to my reading of the film.

Niven represents the post-enlightenment shift in how the natural world and human nature is viewed. *Proteus* is significant to my argument because it draws interesting parallels between two systems of representation: eighteenth-century natural history and modern-day sexual categories. The film's cinematic presentation asks us to consider how the latter is historically rooted in the former. The development of contemporary sexual categories was not possible without the new epistemological regimes ushered in by eighteenth-century enlightenment; a framework that produces specifically Western notions of legibility (in which queerness is often devalued or seen as a threat).

With the emergence of a new way of organising knowledge of the world, a practice that goes hand in hand with colonial expansion, natural historians and scientific travellers encounter new natures and cultures and new systems of classifications follow. Foucault sees in the post-enlightenment period not an dramatic increase in Western civilisation's desire for knowledge but rather sees the period and its thinkers as designing "a new way of connecting things" or as "a new way of making history" (143). Foucault explains that "the documents of this new history are not other words, texts or records, but unencumbered spaces in which things are juxtaposed: herbariums, collections, gardens; the locus of this history is a nontemporal rectangle in which, stripped of all commentary, of all enveloping language, creatures present themselves one beside another, their surfaces visible, grouped according to their common features, and thus already virtually analysed, and bearers of nothing but their own individual names" (143). The natural history room and the garden, as created in the Classical period, replace the circular procession of the 'show' with the arrangement of things on a 'table' (143). Natural history becomes a new matrix in which all living beings fit into and it is the mission of botanist or zoologist to add to this project.

Carl Linnaeus' sexual system is constructed by first choosing a number of key characters and then sorting the species according to these key characters. In this case, the key characters comprise the number and arrangement of stamens and pistils in the flowers. Linnaeus observed that these characters are stable and very rarely subject to variation within the species (Bremer 5). As Virgil describes Linnaeus to Claas, he explains "the genius of his nomenclature" and that "he sees past the superficial differences of petal colour and leave size

and focuses exclusively on sexual organs” (*Proteus*). It is significant that Linnaeus attached such great significance to plant sexual reproduction. The grounding of sexual difference in the body played to Enlightenment sensibilities that nature prescribed the laws of society.

Garlick argues that “the work of Linnaeus was central to the popularization of plant sexuality, and to its position as central to the understanding of all of nature” (826). He adds that “although, Linnaeus attributes the sex of plants as though self-evident once recognized, it is only through analogy with human sexual categories, which are themselves undergoing significant reconceptualization, that this may be so” (827). As Garlick points out it is interesting how “when plants cannot be unambiguously assigned to either male or female categories, he has no difficulty in recognizing a ‘hermaphroditic’ category as this is conceived simply as the co-presence of male and female elements, rather than a third category that troubles the coherence of the system” (827). Garlick argues that “it could not be otherwise, however, for the framework of the Linnaean system is, in essence, nothing but a technology for the production of (hetero)sexual difference” (827).⁷⁵

Linnaeus drew parallels between plant sexuality and human love: he wrote in 1729 how “The flowers’ leaves . . . serve as bridal beds which the Creator has so gloriously arranged, adorned with such noble bed curtains, and perfumed with so many soft scents that the bridegroom with his bride might there celebrate their nuptials with so much the greater solemnity” (Schieninger 22). Linnaeus’ anthropomorphising of plant sex as heterosexual coupling is also made possible in a world where the true order of things is left for the naturalist or botanist to discover by careful observation. Teute sees the period characterised by “the attempt to demystify secular and religious authority” which “involved another sort of mystification, nature’s rationality, ordering nature naturalized order, establishing categories that erected hierarchies and systematized difference” (Teute 322). Whereas previously God and his law proclaimed the naturalised status of hetero-reproductive sex, scientific rationality started to take over that role.

In a study of the interrelationship between ‘sex’ and ‘nature’ in Enlightenment science and philosophy, Garlick argues that “in response to the withdrawal, absence or ‘death’ of God

⁷⁵ In the course of a provocative commentary on this coincidence of ‘scientization’ and ‘sexualization’ in modern botany, Londa Schieninger alerts us to the implications of “Linnaeus’ anthromorphoism: plant sex equals hetero(sex)” and she draws attention to his obsession with reproductive, heterosexual coupling, noting that “not only were his plants sexed, but they actually became human; more specifically, they became husbands and wives” (23).

that characterizes the Enlightenment worldview, the desire to control sexual expression emerges as a key feature of scientific, aesthetic and philosophical systems of knowledge” (824). It is important to consider the fact that “despite the overwhelming quantity of information produced in the Linnaean system, it is sex alone that determines the reality of the natural world, and which provides it meaning” (Garlick 827). Natural history whereof botany was perhaps the most prolific and far-reaching expanded its reach to the entirety of nature including, if only by analogy, animal and human bodies. Garlick argues that “in an exemplary Foucaultian fashion, botanical science was in the process of becoming consumed by a desire to uncover sex, to name it, to speak it, to find it everywhere in nature” (826). Teute further adds that the “complexity of form and sexual function became distinguishing characteristics informing rational principles for analysing the social organisation of life” (Teute 322).

Ben-Asher argues that “the process of naming is erotically charged, and the named becomes the subject of academic (fill in the blank: racist/botanic/homophobic) desire” (442). In one scene in Lewis and Greyson’s film, the audience is presented with two men standing close to each other. The intimacy between the two men centres on a flower specimen; Virgil, the botanist, explains to Claas, his prisoner-assistant, the genius of Carl Linnaeus system of nomenclature and names the sex organs of the flower. In a subsequent scene, a similar intimacy is shown between the two men. This time they are indoors in a space one might describe as a plant collector or botanist’s workroom. There are dried specimens hanging from the ceiling, and the two men are standing behind a table, with more flower specimens and some glass bottles filled with chemicals. Virgil is pointing at a page in a large book. They are now standing even closer, almost touching and Claas is staring attentively at the pages of the book. This time however, the botanist is explaining to Claas his place in Linnaeus classification system; the fact that as a ‘hottentot’ Claas is not listed as human but as a subspecies or a more primitive variety of man. Claas is the bridge between simian and Homo erectus. Virgil goes on to explain how hottentots are viewed as one of nature’s oddities. As he mentions hottentot skeleton with a tail on display in Amsterdam, the absurdity and the Eurocentric (also dehumanising) nature of his descriptions are clear. However, Virgil’s scientific ‘rational’ discourse is undermined by his desire for Claas. Later in this scene, he shows Claas one of various sketches of protea specimens, focussing on one he named after Claas; a rare and beautiful species that only flowers at night. Claas acts on Virgil’s obvious desire but Virgil resists Claas’s approaches.



Figure 18 – Virgil Niven and Claas Blank



Figure 19 - Virgil shows Claas the flower species that he named “Blaankia”

Indeed, the herbarium in the film marks out a space of order which is threatened by the disturbing relation between Niven and Claas, disturbing because of the colonial power relations which Claas resists and disturbing because of the nature of Niven’s sexual desire which does not fit into Linnaeus’s systematizing of nature and by analogy human sexuality.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Thomas Hallock explores the relations between certain American naturalists and he argues in his essay “Male Pleasure and the Genders of 18th Century Botanic Exchange” how “changes in 18th century identity formation made this channelling of male pleasure through natural history almost inevitable; indeed, it was one of the many ways in which sexual identities proliferated” (701). Hallock quotes ecocritic David Mazer, who notes that, though the individual may forge this identity on the bedrock of nature, the drag, or performance, remains no less socially constituted. Botanic culture exacted such performances, connecting enthusiasts to matters of sexual and gender protocol” (701). “Plants served as conduits of same-sex feeling, supplying pleasures that were at once disembodied and immediate” (701).

Regarding ‘unnatural’ sexual intercourse in the eighteenth century, Randolph Trumbach argues that “sodomy destroyed nature itself defined as that elementary matrix of human culture in which women were exchanged and children procreated” (12). “For women occupied that middle ground between rational humanity and the brute creation. Sodomitical effeminacy therefore threatened the boundaries of culture as much as did sodomy itself” (Trumbach 13).

These ideas link back to Gaard and Estok’s arguments concerning the erotophobia and ecophobia of Western society which I outlined in my introductory chapter. Perhaps science might be described as a way of deflecting desire, in particular this dangerous desire and acts as a refusal of vulnerability. Gaard argues that

the problem of oppression based on sexuality is not limited to the heterosexual/queer dualism. As queer theorists have shown, the larger problem is the erotophobia of Western culture, a fear of the erotic so strong that only one form of sexuality is overtly allowed; only in one position; and only in the context of certain legal, religious, and social sanctions ... The oppression of queers may be described more precisely, then, as the product of two mutually reinforcing dualisms: heterosexual/queer, and reason/the erotic. (138)

Queer desire creates a problem for the rational system of Linnaean nomenclature, which brings us back to the impossibility of finding a name for Claas and Rijkhaert’s relationship. By the end of the film, when they are flung into the Atlantic Ocean, they disappear into the murky waters. Virgil, whose point of view the audience shares is not able to follow them any further. We can only imagine their fate, their deathly embrace which seems ironic among the diversity of life in these seas.

To conclude, Claas, Rijkhaert and Virgil’s shared homoerotic desire undermines Enlightenment science and, specifically, the workings of Natural History’s gaze; which this chapter has shown to be a technology of specification that often serves a homophobic, heteronormative and/or colonial-imperial world view. The queer ecological potential of the *Proteus* lies in the way it allows us to consider botanical nomenclature and sexual categories as part of the same continuum of knowledge production. It offers queer desire as phenomenon which has historically undermined these (Western) systems of legibility and accordingly asks us to rethink how queer experience might influence conventional ideas regarding the relationship between society and nature. Thus while *Proteus* does not offer us

an alternative vision of how humans could relate to nature, it does provides us chance to examine a history and system of knowledge production that seeks to exclude or make invisible the queer intimacies we share with fellow human beings and with nonhuman nature.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Ecological Gays, the Ecocritical Gaze and the Future of New Queer Cinema?

“Some gay activists lament the fading away of the eroticized outlaw mystique of homosexuality” (Holden).

An “ecological perspective of sexuality that accounts for the nonhuman material relations that condition, enable, and affect the practices and possibilities of sexuality,” remains a compelling idea in terms of my argument regarding (queer) spectatorship and the different modalities of looking at film (Anderson et al. 99). Specifically, in the way that this approach invites a closer investigation of how human sexuality is represented in relation to nonhuman nature and nature spaces and how queer spectatorship encourages a mode of looking that makes connections between different marginal intimacies and reads the power structures that veil nature’s intrinsic queerness and its relation to sexual diversity. Through an analysis of the films in this study, all of which focus in diverse ways on dissident sexual identities, I have shown that it is possible to map out or to delineate how we visualise, imagine, screen and write about the complex dialectic between discourses of nature and epistemologies of sexuality. I have explored (homo)sexuality in each film in terms of each film’s discursive contexts and in relation to how each film relies on the use of *mise-en-scène* – which include landscapes and nonhuman life – to highlight a complex entanglement of nature, desire, identity and (natural) history.

In this final chapter, I want to revisit to the title of this thesis as a way of reflecting on some of questions and issues raised by my exploration of a rather idiosyncratic selection of filmic and literary texts. I want to outline some of the various ‘(re)turns’ I have discussed in each chapter. Each film engages with the past in unique ways and I have tried to tease out the meaning of each film in how it depicts, connects and foregrounds particular histories of nature and queer desire.

In chapter one, I outlined a ‘return’ to nature that relates to a literary genealogy of writers who invoke Arcadian ideals or the pastoral to find a refuge for or to express renegade sexual desire. I started by citing Forster’s nostalgia for an England where the possibility of such an escape was still possible and I referred to Rictor Norton, R.S. Fone Byrne’s, and later David

Shuttleton, who have each outlined literary traditions of gay pastoral or queer Arcadia. I demonstrated that these versions of the pastoral have become a productive site for outlining the relationship between queers and the environment within the parameters of the rather nebulous and often interdisciplinary ‘field’ of Queer Ecology.

As I mentioned in chapter one, Seymour suggests “that queer ecology exists not only to provide a new lens, but to make use of the gaps in and overlaps among existing lenses” (141). Accordingly, I have outlined how the beginnings of Queer Ecology can be traced to queer ecofeminist thinking in the form of Greta Gaard’s argument about the mutually reinforcing instances of cultural othering (that is Western society’s devaluation of women, queers, non-white subjects and nature). I then moved on to more recent articulations of Queer Ecology and outlined key ideas put forward by Mortimer-Sandilands. She argues that

a queer ecological project might proceed by *challenging* [the] problematic links between the power relations of sexuality and nature. Queers have, in a variety of ways, challenged the destructive pairing of heterosexuality and nature: by developing “reverse discourses” oriented to challenging dominant understandings of our “unnatural passions”; by borrowing ecological thinking to develop radically transformative gay and lesbian politics; and [...] by taking elements of queer experience to construct an alternative environmental perspective.

(Sandilands, From Unnatural Passions)

Mortimer-Sandilands’ idea of “reverse discourse” was a key consideration in my choice of texts and I argued that each film in my study sets up unique but not dissimilar “reverse discourses” of their own. Here Rich’s views on the queer historiographical impulse of New Queer Cinema became an important element in terms of my reading of each film. I argued that the “reverse discourse” each film constructs or installs is an engagement with the past that makes visible and celebrates marginal intimacies and desire (both in terms sexual and ecological relations).

In my second chapter on James Ivory’s *Maurice*, I extended my initial discussion of queer pastoral through a consideration of Forster’s novel and its adaptation. I pointed out how a radical queer pastoralism underpins the novel and how Ivory translates this polemic through a nostalgic reimagining. I made the claim that the novel’s pastoral motifs are a way of countering a cultural milieu that devalues queer intimacies. The novel constructs Nature as a

dark space beyond the policing (and naming) of England's homophobic laws and Victorian sexual technologies. Here, I highlighted Bush's reading of the novel's queer ecological elements. The film appropriates the novel's pastoral motifs into a visual grammar that naturalises homosexuality and nostalgically aligns queers with the dark green England of old. In the context of Thatcherite England, the film celebrates gay love and warns against an England where people like Maurice and Alec are forced to escape into the woods.

I then moved on to the experiments of two filmmakers who were either part of or influenced the initial New Queer Cinema phenomenon.⁷⁷ Jarman and Greyson's films are experimental in terms of their form and demonstrated the possibility of reading the connection between sexuality and nature in novel ways. Jarman's film invites us to consider the filmmaker's experience of HIV/AIDS, and the loss and mourning of friends and lovers in relation to a restorative but ultimately queer view of gardening. As his journal shows, Jarman's garden is a repository for queer histories and memorialises these in a landscape which itself testifies to great loss or possible apocalypse (with the toxic power plant always looming in the background). *The Garden* extended these ideas into an elegiac reflection on the past – specifically, in re-inscribing historical homophobia in terms of a Christ allegory – and on society, nature, desire and the filmmaker's own mortality. I argued, alongside Mortimer-Sandilands' reading of Jarman's journal as a queer ecological text, that Jarman's film's use of elegiac elements might help us rethink how we mourn the fact that society devalues queer intimacy and provide an alternative model for mourning a loss of intimacy with the environment or even the loss of the natural itself.

In the final chapter I considered how Greyson's earlier film, *Zero Patience*, and his recent collaboration with Lewis ask us to interrogate colonial (and heteronormative) narratives of natural history and I considered the historical violence of colonialism in terms of how it creates various forms of the 'Other', which includes non-white, queer subjects and non-human nature. I argued that the most notable contribution of Lewis and Greyson's *Proteus* to a queer ecological theoretical framework is in how the film's style (which is typically postmodern in its juxtaposition of incongruent or anachronistic elements and its relation to the historiographical essay) makes it possible to reassess and make connections between previously separate histories. In this case, the botanical histories of the Cape are intertwined

⁷⁷ Much can be said on how New Queer Cinema was less a movement in independent cinema and more a discovery of a niche market. The commodification of these films, the channels of distribution and the tyranny of the marketable needs to be explored in relation to any ecological dimensions these films may have.

with hidden histories of queer desire. The film enables a reassessment of the Cape not only in terms how colonialism affected its ecological systems but also how that same system of domination (which hinges on naming, identifying and controlling) sees queerness as a threat. As Arsenault points out, Lewis and Greyson's film is also unique in that it challenges the notion of homosexuality as unafrican and thus not indigenous to the continent. It provides a powerful "reverse discourse" to the homophobia, which sees homosexuality as an invasive or unnatural import, sweeping the continent at the moment.

The final 'turn' I want to consider has to do with the future; specifically, my views on recent developments in terms of the queer cinematic circuit. Although, present-day offerings are yet to match the formal experiments of the early nineties, there are interesting developments in certain national cinemas and independent filmmaking. In several films from last year, nature was, as both abstract concept and as visual motif or framing device, still an important theme in Queer Cinema's exploration of issues and identities relating to male homosexuality. I want to briefly point to three films from last year's international film circuit.

The epigraph to this chapter, from Stephen Holden's review of the German film *Freier Fall* (dir. Stephen Lacant 2013), suggests the value of (and nostalgia for) the renegade status of homosexuality in the way it was imagined during the independent, queer filmmaking of the 1990s. *Freier Fall* tells the tale of a married policeman who starts a sexual relationship with a male colleague. Their sexual encounters initially take place on the edge of the city and these scenes seem to resemble the visual grammar of the queer pastoral (which I outlined at the beginning of this thesis) and accordingly the film situates the eroticism between the two men in the dark, enigmatic woods where they start jogging together. In this way, it is comparable to the contrast in *Brokeback Mountain* between nature or wilderness as sexually liberating or a queer space and domesticity as heterosexual and repressive space.

Throughout the history of Queer Cinema representations of urban or metropolitan queer sexual identities have been more numerous than representations of their rural counterparts. The film, *Pit Stop* (2013), from director Yen Tan, is about a small Texan town and provides an alternative to the more pervasive representation of urban queers. The film "examines the often overlooked state of gay life in isolated, rural areas" and suggests a cinematic lens that is increasingly moving to spaces beyond the urban (Dean).

Finally, in Alain Guiraudie's widely acclaimed film, *L'inconnu du lac* or *Stranger by the lake* (2013), desire and death is intimately connected when a series of murders occur at a gay

cruising spot next to the azure blue waters of a lake in Southern France. The cruising takes place in the lush greenery that surrounds the lake. One reviewer describes the film in terms of how

Guiraudie blinds us with the piercing brightness of the sun, whilst the audibly dissonant presence of nature yields an uncomfortably sequestered ambiance over this homosexual arcadia. The film's remote, lakeside cruising hotspot creates the perfect environment for a tense thriller, the voyeuristic intent of these promiscuous sunbathers allowed to natural evolve from erotic deviancy to murderous resolve.”

(Gamble)

Richard Brody's review of the film in *The New Yorker* comments on how “Guiraudie links nature, eros, solitude, the deepest subjectivity, and death.”

Perhaps these films suggest a new wave of New Queer Cinema which formulate and experiment with new possibilities in terms of a politics of subversion. As certain articulations of homosexuality become more mainstream, I imagine marginal (queer) filmmakers challenging a cultural discourse that normalises certain forms of homosexuality at the expense of other less desirable groups or communities of people. To what extent these future cinematic projects open up new ways of thinking about nature, and about human-nonhuman intimacies, is a project for future research. However, a queer ecocritical gaze has the potential to “re-vision” existing films or filmic oeuvres and thus foreground the radical ways in which our ideas about sexuality are dependent on how we experience, live in and relate to other forms of life and the environment.

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