Introduction

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1. Narratives of gender, sexuality and embodiment

This issue of *Textus* concentrates attention on several recent strands of feminist, queer, and LGBT-orientated criticism in relation to a broad range of English, Irish, and Scottish cultural texts that appeared between the 1880s and 2014. The seven essays adopt different critical approaches to representations of gender difference, homoerotic desire, and transgender embodiment in works that span the late Victorian aesthetic theorist Vernon Lee's *Euphorion* (1884, revised 1885), which focuses on Renaissance art, and the inventive fictions of contemporary Scottish writer Ali Smith, whose most recent novel, *How to Be Both* (2014), devotes part of the narrative to the fifteenth-century painter, Francesco del Cossa. Perhaps it is not coincidental that both Lee and Smith share a fascination with the sensual possibilities that the Italian Renaissance presents to the modern literary imagination. In *Euphorion*, Lee conjures up the fine decorative details of the Palazzo Schifanoia, where del Cossa's artistic partner Cosimo Tura completed the marvellous frescoes that include "a little crowd of pages with doublets and sleeves laced with gold tags, of sedate magistrates in fur robes and scarlet caps, of white-dressed maids with instruments of embroidery frames and hand looms" (Lee 1885: I, 312). As she points out, this was the universe in which the "licentious amours" that modern readers – especially those who are immersed in the literature of this period – tend to attribute to the legendary poets Matteo Maria Boiardo and Ludovico Ariosto (p. 313). Yet, instead of focusing on the author of *Orlando Furioso* (an epic whose masterful *ottava rima* has always distinguished it as one of the greatest works in the European poetic

tradition), Lee reserves her praise for the "real fairyland [...] the fairyland of the Renaissance" that she discovers in the exhilarating (though somewhat less polished) poetry of Boiardo: a vivid world in which "every quaint and beautiful fancy" has been "mixed up together, as in some Renaissance picture of Botticelli or Rosselli or Filippino" (pp. 320-21). In Boiardo's transformative poems, "knights in armour descend from Pegasus before Roman temples, where swarthy white-turbaned Turks, with oddly bunched-up trousers and jewelled caftans, and half-naked, oak-crowned youths, like genii descended, pensive and wondering from some antique sarcophagus, and dapper princelets and stalwarts knights, and citizens and monks, all crowd round the altar of some wonder-working Macone or Apolline or Trevigante" (p. 321). The pageant of figures that transfixed Boiardo's romances clearly has an infectious influence on Lee's prose, which records – with passionate enthusiasm – poetic characters that are at once the stuff of orientalist fantasy, chivalric romance, and pagan eroticism.

By comparison, Smith's fine novel contains an episode involving a similarly detailed aesthetic contemplation of another Italian masterpiece from the Renaissance. Half way through the story, the protagonist George locates one of del Cossa's finest paintings in the National Gallery, London. As George studies del Cossa's *Saint Vincent Ferrer* (the central panel of an altarpiece that originally hung in the Griffoni chapel in Bologna), she gradually realises that it contains several small but revealing details that strike her as both sexually baffling and erotically thought-provoking:

> There's a Jesus at the top in a sort of gold arch, he looks weirdly old, a bit rough and ready for a Jesus, a bit friendly, like a well-worn human being or a tramp who's been dressed up as Jesus. He's wearing salmon pink which somehow makes him (Him?) look like nothing else in the picture and he's surrounded by angels who are floating, but very unostentatiously, on clouds. Their wings are bright red or purple or silver. They could all be either male or female. They're holding torture implements like the people in an S&M session online but really unlike an S&M session in their calmness, or in their sweetness? (Smith 2014: 155).

In *How to Be Both*, this extract belongs to a long ekphrasis that brings the minutiae in the distant background ("[t]here are very small people [...] behind the saint's legs") right into the descriptive

foreground ("they make [...] it look like this man is a giant") (p. 156). Once George has scrutinised these particulars, she reaches a striking conclusion about the uniqueness of del Cossa's work of art: "when you look away from this painting at others in the room it's like they've all been dwarfed" (p. 156). Del Cossa's altarpiece makes a stirring contrast with the "stale dramas" that she detects in the contemporaneous Renaissance works that she finds in room 55 of the gallery: "This one at least admits that the whole thing is a performance" (p. 156). It is the theatricality, the performative energy, which enlivens George's response to *Saint Vincent Ferrer*, in ways that produce certain resonances with Lee's elation in detailing Boiardo's poetry, some one hundred and thirty years before.

Both Lee and Smith belong to a recognisable tradition of modern queer writing that treasures the peculiarity of details that might otherwise go missing in more conventional accounts. Lee's attention to the "half-naked, oak-crowned youths" makes it plain that she was hardly inhibited in responding to desirable forms of male homoerotic beauty that might embarrass some of her more conservative contemporaries. Meanwhile, Smith's protagonist embodies a perverse sensibility that refuses to settle on the idea that the figures that crowd into the background of *Saint Vincent Ferrer* should be pigeonholed as either male or female. Published three decades after the "sex war" (as *Signs* characterised the divergence between radical and libertarian feminisms in the mid 1980s [Ferguson *et al.* 1984]) that generated heated debate among feminists, *How to Be Both* also makes no apologies for characterising del Cossa's angels as sexually indeterminate figures that might also be likened to the participants in a modern sadomasochistic scene, in which beauty and cruelty, pleasure and danger, exhilaration and pain generate a powerful economy of desire that remains hard to contain within fixed descriptive categories. Even more to the point is George's inference (after she has compared del Cossa's art with that of his contemporaries in room 55) that what makes *Saint Vincent Ferrer* exceptional is its 'performance'. The word 'performance', which has enjoyed such powerful critical reverberations in studies of gender since the early 1990s, perhaps signals Smith's responsiveness to some of the most significant turns that types of queer and feminist criticism have taken in recent decades. Very possibly, the complex gender performance that George grasps in del Cossa's angels carries

an echo of the massively influential work of Judith Butler, whose *Gender Trouble* (1990) undertook the bold task of demonstrating that the very category of 'sex' has never been born of nature but is always produced through culture, in ways that involve performative bodily significations. As Butler suggests, we can comprehend the performativity of gender by attending to the theatrical practice of gay male drag: "As much as drag creates a unified picture of 'woman' (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalised through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency*" (Butler 1990: 137, emphasis in the text). On this basis, it proves impossible to imagine that 'sex' and 'gender' are anything other than representational fictions, ones modelled on the surface of the body, that often produce the illusion of coherence or fixity.

Histories of the decisive transformations in feminist, queer, and LGBT-affirmative literary criticism often acknowledge that Butler's *Gender Trouble* – a work that is largely philosophical in orientation – marked a turning point in modern theoretical conceptions of sex and gender, especially in the English-speaking world[1]. Prior to that time the most significant feminist interventions in literary history had largely taken for granted that the sex that defined the tradition of women's writing was the marker of anatomical difference, upon which gender – the categories of masculinity and femininity – were culturally constructed. This is not to say that the assumptions about sex and gender that major studies of the 1970s and 1980s made were politically naïve when it came to discussing conventional hierarchies that have subjected women within male-dominated culture. It is simply to observe that there was a tendency in the most significant scholarship from this period (much of it American in origin) to assume that Western literary history made sharp, if not irreconcilable, hierarchical distinctions between male and female.

[1] There has been useful debate about the position that Butler's path-breaking research on gender occupies within genealogies of feminist thought. Mary Eagleton, for example, points out that Butler recognises that *Gender Trouble* bears a crucial relationship with earlier thinkers, such as Monique Wittig (Eagleton 2010: 36, and Wittig 1992).

This point is evident in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's imposing *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), in which the co-authors assert that modern critical scholarship on the literary past "*is* overwhelmingly male – or, more accurately, patriarchal" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979a: 47, emphasis in the text). In the late 1970s, it was plain to Gilbert and Gubar that the institutions of criticism that shaped modern literary history had either dismissed women's literary endeavours or conspired with masculinist stereotypes of femininity, in which women routinely appeared by turns as idealised angels or monstrous harridans. To establish their foundational beliefs in the ways in which sexism afflicted literary history and exerted brutal force over women's writing, Gilbert and Gubar appealed to 1970s social scientists and social historians (they name such figures as Phyllis Chesler [1972] and several contributors to Gornick and Moran [1971]) whose studies revealed "the ways in which patriarchal socialisation literally makes women sick, both physically and mentally" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979a: 53). For this reason, "like most women in patriarchal society, the woman writer does experience her gender as a painful obstacle or even a debilitating inadequacy"; accordingly, they quote the psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell in order to support the belief that women writers are the victims of "the inferiorised and 'alternative' (second sex) psychology of women under patriarchy" (p. 50; Mitchell 1974: 402). (Mitchell's remarks, which largely focus on Freudian thought, also owe much to her reading of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* [1949], as well as several other prominent feminist theorists from the 1960s and 1970s, including Betty Friedan). They add that "such sociosexual differentiation means, as Elaine Showalter has suggested, [that] women writers participate in a quite different literary subculture from that inhabited by male writers" – a subculture that has its "own distinctive literary traditions" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979a: 50).

Throughout their richly documented study, which makes remarkable sweeps through English and American literary history, Gilbert and Gubar defend the principle that sexual subjugation shapes both English literary history and the production of a recognisable tradition of women's writing, in which female authors remain to some degree at odds with men's cultural, political, and sexual dominance. Their language, too, reverberates not only with

de Beauvoir's famous analysis; their critical discourse also takes several of its cues from Virginia Woolf's influential essay, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), which is based on lectures that she delivered at Newnham College and Girton College, both of which provided higher education for women at Cambridge. Woolf expresses contempt towards the misogyny of an unspecified (though probably not entirely imaginary) professor whose "monumental works" include a tome titled *The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of Women* (Woolf 1991: 33). "One does not like", Woolf observes, "to be told that one is naturally the inferior of a little man" like the professor (p. 34). Furthermore, Woolf takes careful note of the sexist assumptions about literary history that Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (who held The King Edward VII Professorship of English Literature at Cambridge) readily articulates in *On the Art of Writing* (1916): "Who are the great poetical names of the last hundred years or so? Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Landor, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Morris, Rossetti, Swinburne – we may stop there" (qtd. in Woolf 1991: 117; Quiller-Couch 1916: 46)[2]. Evidently, in his view neither Elizabeth Barrett Browning nor Christina Rossetti (who commanded much critical respect in the Victoria era) may join this group of male poetic luminaries. Woolf clearly wanted to redirect this male-dominated literary history. Towards the end of her essay, Woolf meditates upon the possibility of a future in which modern writing might summon an obscure figure such as Shakespeare's sister (a woman who died young and whose name does not appear in Sidney Lee's imposing 1898 biography of the Bard), since this marginalised sister embodies a representative female spirit (even if "she never wrote a word") that is shared throughout the lives of innumerable women who are to this day "washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed" (Woolf 1991: 124). Mindful of the material needs that a woman

[2] It is perhaps also worth noting that Quiller-Couch was aware that his list contained the names of men who had benefited from privilege: "nine out of those twelve were university men; which means somehow or other they procured the means to get the best education England can give [...] [T]he poor poet has not in these days, nor has had for two hundred years, a dog's chance" (Quiller-Couch 1916: 45-46). In his critical discussion, he mentions George Eliot and Jane Austen in passing (pp. 13, 202), although Austen's name does not appear in the index.

author requires in order to produce writing that can at last contest women's sexual subordination (this is writing that represents the value of the otherwise eclipsed Shakespeare's sister and countless other women), Woolf addresses her audience of female university students: "She lives in you and me […] she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences" (p. 124). All that is needed for Shakespeare's sister to make her way into modern literary culture is the professional opportunity ("five hundred a year [...] and rooms of our own") that is "coming within your power to give her" (pp. 124-25). By imagining a literary history in which "Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down" (p. 125), it will – in Woolf's view – become possible to read and celebrate visionary forms of feminist writing. Published half a century later, Gilbert and Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* in many respects fulfilled Woolf's ambition to establish an ambitious form of criticism that traced the subjugated woman writer's struggle against male sexual dominance, in the name of also spurring debate about the need for ever-expanding types of feminist literary production.

Gilbert and Gubar's acknowledgment of Showalter's scholarship, which focused attention as never before on a distinctive women's tradition of writing, is also important to note, since Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1978) counts among the first full-length studies to chart a woman-centred genealogy of fictions that concentrates on the sexual marginalisation – if not sexist contempt – with which female authors had to contend under modern patriarchy. As the title of Showalter's equally influential book suggests, Woolf remains a crucial point of reference in this study as well. From Showalter's standpoint, one of the most significant advances that Woolf made was to elevate a major woman writer such as George Eliot to her proper place in the canon. Showalter draws attention to a sympathetic 1919 essay, in which Woolf makes the following powerful argument about George Eliot's female protagonists: "The ancient consciousness of women, charged with suffering and sensibility, and for so many ages dumb, seems in them to have brimmed and overflowed and uttered a demand for something – they scarcely knew what" (qtd. in Showalter 1978: 111; Woolf 1919: 657-58). From Showalter's perspective, besides "restor[ing] Eliot to her rightful position after a period of Victorian and Edwardian backlash", Woolf's essay revealed that "a woman

critic was able for the first time to reconcile the two sides of the George Eliot legend, to bring suffering and sensibility in relation to art and knowledge" (Showalter 1978: 111). Consistent in her readiness to give credit to the advances that earlier feminist critics have made in acknowledging women's contributions to literary history, Showalter praises the trailblazing quality of *The Madwoman in the Attic*. In a generous review of an essay collection published in honour of the thirtieth anniversary of Gilbert and Gubar's volume, Showalter recognises that the co-authors ushered in a "revolutionary way of reading", one that "expanded the textual field of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature for students and scholars" (Showalter 2011: 715). To be sure, it is clear to Showalter that Gilbert and Gubar's exclusive attention to white women writers drew criticism from postcolonial commentators, just as left-leaning observers noted the "naïve liberalism" that informed their approach to the identity of the subjected woman writer. Yet, for all its limitations, it remains the case for Showalter that *The Madwoman in the Attic* "was one of the three most transformative works of American literary criticism of the late twentieth century" (p. 715). The others were Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985).

This is a fair claim. Where Said's study established fresh directions in post-colonial critique, Sedgwick's book – which is the work of "a feminist writing (in part) about male homosexuality" (Sedgwick 1985: 19) – provided theoretical tools that considerably advanced the emergence of types of literary criticism that addressed dissident desires. In her remarkable first chapter, "Gender and Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles", Sedgwick provides a revisionary analysis of the triangulated erotic structures that René Girard first elaborated in *Mensonge romantique et vérité Romanesque* (1961), which appeared in an English translation as *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* in 1965. Sedgwick examines the ways in which patriarchy operates through collaborative "relationships between men" (Sedgwick 1985: 25). The "homosocial" bonds that connect men in this gender hierarchy serve to dominate women through misogyny and sexual exchange (or the "traffic in women": the term that Sedgwick draws from Gayle Rubin's research [Rubin 1975]). Such male bonding, according to Sedgwick, is expressly social, and while the "homosocial continuum" (Sedgwick 1985: 24) within which

men consolidate their patriarchal power may on occasion contain a homoerotic element, it is imperative that this sexual system – in order for it to maintain its dominance – exploit mechanisms of homophobia as well. Especially powerful in Sedgwick's critical readings of selected English literary works is her identification of "homosexual panic": "the most private, psychologised form in which many twentieth-century men experience their vulnerability to the social pressure of homophobic blackmail" (p. 89). As this summary of her study shows, Sedgwick provided conclusive insights into the comparative ways in which women's and gay men's subordination within patriarchy relate directly to types of sexual hatred that have preserved patriarchal dominance.

In 1990 Sedgwick published *Epistemology of the Closet*, a work that, together with Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and the first special issue of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* edited by Teresa de Lauretis, contributed to the formation of the queer theoretical movement. In this work, Sedgwick continues her investigation of male homosexuality by joining together the theoretical tools of feminist investigation with the emerging gay and lesbian critical discourses. In so doing, she challenges the order in which the categories of sexual identification of the subject are structured. In her "Introduction: Axiomatic", she chooses to focus on the tension caused by the "chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century" (Sedgwick 1990: 2). She thus investigates both the causes that have led to a definition of homosexuality as a form of sexuality linked to a sexual object, and the nature of the relation between hetero- and homosexuality. By critically engaging with the work by Michel Foucault, she actualises his perspective by assuming that most of the major issues governing the contemporary episteme derive from the discursive fracture which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. However, unlike the French philosopher, she interrogates the cultural and epistemic implications of this fracture in order to clarify the processes of production of knowledge (at individual and collective level) through an analysis of the interplay between homosocial/homosexual desire and the processes of identification that deal with hetero- and homosexual subjectivities. As to the former, she discusses the notion of the closet primarily as referred to the act of coming out, or unveiling one's own sexuality.

The spatial binaries invoked by this movement (in *vs* out) implies a real economy of secrecy and revelation which structures both the homosexual closet and the power dynamics that organise and enclose it. Moreover, she affirms the necessity of investigating the closet through linguistic acts and their performative potential (p. 35). According to Sedgwick, the closet also exercises its influence on who is out, and establishes an ongoing tension with the marginalising and hostile dominant space. In other words, the closet is a mobile, changing and potentially oppressive structure which is ambiguously located between knowledge and ignorance.

Sedgwick's work focuses on male same-sex desire, and devotes almost no space to female homoeroticism. In *Between Men,* Sedgwick acknowledges in a footnote that her comprehension of a "male homosocial continuum" echoes the poet Adrienne Rich's observations about the "lesbian continuum" that creates social (not necessarily erotic) bonds between women (Rich 1980)[3]. However, neither *Between Men* – as the book's title suggests – nor *Epistemology of the Closet* have much to say about lesbianism. The only sustained comment that she makes about female same-sex desire appears in parentheses: "(Lesbianism [...] must always be in a special relationship to patriarchy, but on different [sometimes opposite] grounds and working through different mechanisms)" (Sedgwick 1985: 25). Sedgwick's gesture towards the presence of female same-sex desire was certainly greater than that of *The Madwoman in the Attic*. In a powerful 1981 essay, Bonnie Zimmerman observes that Gilbert and Gubar's book "does not even index lesbianism; the lone reference made in the text is to the possibility that [Christina Rossetti's] 'Goblin Market' describes 'a covertly (if ambiguous) lesbian world'" (Zimmerman 1981: 454; Gilbert and Gubar 1979a: 657). She notes as well that anthologies of feminist criticism such as *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets* (Gilbert and Gubar 1979b) and *The Authority of Experience* (Diamond and

[3] Rich comments: "If we consider the possibility that all women – from the infant suckling her mother's breast, to the grown woman experiencing orgasmic sensations while suckling her own child, perhaps recalling her mother's milk-smell in her own; to two women, like Virginia Woolf's Chloe and Olivia [in *A Room of One's Own*], who share a laboratory; to the woman dying at ninety, touched and handled by women – exist on a lesbian continuum, we can see ourselves as moving in and out of this continuum, whether we identify ourselves as lesbian or not" (Rich 1980: 650-51).

Edwards 1977) do not contain "even a token article from a lesbian perspective" (p. 453). Showalter, however, demonstrates "[m]ore care", since her study "uncovers the attitudes toward lesbianism held by nineteenth-century writers Eliza Lynn Linton and Mrs Humphrey [*sic*] Ward" (Zimmerman 1981: 454). To rebalance the situation, Zimmerman turns to several studies that focus exclusively on woman-to-woman erotic desire and lesbian identity in English literary history, such as Jeannette H. Foster's self-published *Sex-Variant Women in Literature* (1956): a comprehensive study that identifies Clemence Dane's schoolgirl story, *Regiment of Women* (1917), as the first novel in English since Henry James's *The Bostonians* (1885-86) that is "wholly devoted to variance" (Foster 1956: 257) (this is the noun that Foster chooses in order to distinguish lesbians from heterosexual women). Zimmerman looks, too, at the novelist Jane Rule's *Lesbian Images* (1975), which "criticises the homophobia in then-current biographies", though fails to engage with the "underground" sources of lesbian literary criticism that emerged in journals such as *The Ladder* (1956-70) (Zimmerman 1981: 453). Moreover, she acknowledges the advances as well as drawbacks of Lillian Faderman's remarkable study, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (1981). In many respects like Rich, Faderman proposes an expansive definition of "lesbian", in such a way that it describes "a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other" (qtd. in Zimmerman 1981: 457; Faderman 1981; 17-18). "Sexual contact", Faderman adds, "may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent" (qtd. in Zimmerman 1981: 457; Faderman 1981: 18). Zimmerman assumes that Faderman's decision not to limit the term lesbian to physical intimacy has much to do (as Rich suggests) with an "attempt to neutralise the 'intense charge of the word *lesbian*'" (Rich 1979: 202, emphasis in the text, qtd. by Zimmerman 1981: 458)[4]. Zimmerman concludes her observations

[4] In the introduction to the 2001 edition of *Surpassing the Love of Men*, Faderman defends her strategic definition of lesbianism because, among other things, "it does not matter for our purposes whether we can be certain that these women had genital sex together since that is not the sole definer of lesbian relationships" (Faderman 2001: 19).

with several noteworthy comments on the possibility of tracing a "unified tradition of thematic concerns" in lesbian writing, "such as that of unrequited longing, a longing of almost cosmic totality because the love object is denied not by circumstance or chance, but by necessity" (Zimmerman 1981: 470).

Central to critical debates about lesbian writing during the 1980s and 1990s was Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), a novel that accentuates a woman's unrequited longing for other women in prose that upholds the dignity of the protagonist's desires. Soon after it appeared, *The Well of Loneliness* became the first English novel to suffer censorship, not because it represented intimacy between women in a pornographic way; the book was condemned because it obliquely alluded to a lesbian relationship. After a vicious campaign in the *Sunday Express*, which claimed that it would be better to "give a healthy boy or girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel" (Douglas 1928: 10), the Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, decided that Hall's British publisher Jonathan Cape should be prosecuted. In what turned into one of the twentieth century's most notable obscenity trials, the state banned *The Well of Loneliness* for perpetrating an "obscene libel". The only words that suggest lesbian intimacy occur at the end of chapter 38, where the main character, Stephen Gordon (who bears a male name because her father wanted a son), enters into physical contact with her lover: "Stephen bent down and kissed Mary's hands very humbly, for now she could find no words any more [...] and that night they were not divided" (Hall 2005: 284). This small part of Hall's novel convinced the presiding magistrate, Sir Chartres Biron, to condemn the book under the Hicklin Test (the 1868 legal provision for obscenity) that clarified the grounds upon which the law could rule against works that would "deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences"[5]. This was an extraordinarily harsh test for a novel that features Stephen's sustained religious struggle to reconcile herself with her God, which is infused with Hall's staunch

[5] The case of *Regina v. Hicklin* focused on an anonymous anti-Catholic work, *The Confessional Unmasked: Showing the Depravity of the Romish Priesthood, the Iniquity of the Confessional and the Questions Put to Females in the Confessional* (1867); the proceedings are recorded in https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Regina_v._Hicklin, last accessed July 15, 2015.

Roman Catholicism. The jurors could hardly have been expected to understand this facet of Hall's narrative, since the court prevented them from reading the novel in entirety. Biron's judgement, which Hall did not hear in court, resulted in the destruction of all copies of her novel that had been published in Britain. In 1949, however, *The Well of Loneliness* appeared once again in a British edition, which was not subjected to any further legal challenge. The novel, which has reached a large readership, has been in print ever since.

Since the 1990s, *The Well of Loneliness* has stood at the centre of a significant debate about the historical relations of lesbian and transgender identity. The reason for this is that Hall's main character Stephen knows that she embodies "sexual inversion": the term that the English sexologist Havelock Ellis developed in the light of his wide reading in largely German-language sources, which advanced the view that men-loving men suffered from a "congenital abnormality" (Ellis 1901: 183)[6]. Ellis turns to the work of homophile campaigner Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who used a Latin phrase to characterise the innate condition of the male "sexual invert": "*anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*" ("a male body co-exist with a female soul") (p. 183, emphasis in the text). Hall, like her character Stephen, believed that she embodied the female model of the sexually inverted subject: a female body enshrining a male soul. It is fair to claim that, in medical circles until the 1950s, the theory of sexual inversion enjoyed wide currency in understandings of male and female homosexuality. As a result, for years after the obscene libel trial of 1928 it remained commonplace to speak of *The Well of Loneliness* as the most famous lesbian English novel. Yet the emergence of transgender criticism in the 1990s began to question whether Stephen's sense of "her own inversion" (the word appears on several occasion in the narrative) had more to do with her sense of gendered physical embodiment than lesbian desire (Hall 2005: 379). This debate came into focus in an important essay collection, *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on* The Well of Loneliness (2001), edited by Laura Doan and Jay Prosser. In his contribution

[6] Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* was first published in 1897, and subsequently banned in Britain for obscenity (Bristow 1998). From 1900 to 1936, Ellis published his study in revised editions within his seven-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* with F.A. Davis, Philadelphia.

to this volume, Prosser – who has written widely on transsexual embodiment – observes: "*The Well* is thoroughly enmeshed in the sexological discourse of inversion" (Prosser 2001: 130)[7]. Not only did Ellis provide a note for the English edition of Hall's novel, in which he stated that hers was "the first English novel which presents, in a completely faithful and uncompromising form, one particular aspect of sexual life as it exists among us today"; in the narrative, Stephen's father turns to Ulrichs's work in order to comprehend his daughter's sexually inverted condition. To Prosser, Stephen's story bears a direct connection with "the emergence of the transsexual – to the interlinked literary and literal constructions of the transsexual" (p. 130): a subject whose desire to change sex could be realised through clinical procedures that dated from the late 1920s, though only became widely available in the latter half of the twentieth century. Such constructions, Prosser observes, involve "the subject telling his or her transgendered story before the clinician in order to access the gateway of clinical treatment" (p. 130). Even though the term transsexual dates from the early 1950s, the story of Stephen's sexual inversion (according to Prosser) adopts a narrative form that relies on the case histories that in turn later produced "the transsexual narrative that has become the very symptom of transsexuality" (p. 130). For this reason, "once the transsexual in *The Well* is read and diagnosed, this subject and this context provide a much better fit for this novel than lesbian" (p. 130). Prosser's comments reveal the ways in which a growing body of what is more widely termed transgender encouraged scholars to rethink the sexual assumptions on which histories of homosexuality had sometimes been based.

As mentioned above, between the 1980s and the 1990s several critics such as Butler, de Lauretis and Sedgwick called into question the relationship between theorisations of gender put forward by

[7] Prosser has produced a sustained transsexual critique of Butler's development of theories of gender performativity; he remarks that her inquiries tend to focus on gender as a matter that engages with bodily surfaces rather than interiorities: "the transsexual narrative […] demands some recognition of the category of corporeal interiority (internal bodily sensations) and of its distinctiveness from that which can be seen (external surface): the difference between gender identity and sex that serves as the logic of transsexuality" (Prosser 1998: 43).

feminist thinkers, and the emerging sexuality studies being developed by gay and lesbian theorists. De Lauretis was the first scholar to critically reappropriate the term 'queer', which had historically been used as a form of hate speech against those who did not conform to the socio-sexual heteronormative paradigm. In her view, queer was a powerful form of resistance to the heterosexual matrix. It called into question the supposed homogeneity of the emerging gay and lesbian studies and brought to light the complex inter-relation between race and sexual subjectivities. De Lauretis thus invited her readers to construct a new discursive field and a different way of thinking sexuality (de Lauretis 1991: IV).

With the passing of time, queer has increasingly been used for its challenging nature, as it undermines the stable and apparently natural relationship between sex, gender, desire and sexual practices (Antosa 2012). While feminist and gay and lesbian movements have worked to redefine the concept of a fixed and coherent identity, queer denotes a resistance to identity categories to become, in Annamarie Jagose's words, "the point of convergence for a potentially infinite number of non-normative subject positions" (Jagose 1996: 101). Queer theories thus acknowledge all forms of identities that differ from the heterosexual model and interrogate the "set of norms that make heterosexuality seem natural or right and that organise homosexuality as its binary opposite" (Corber and Valocchi 2003: 4).

Contemporary debates on queer deal with new challenges such as new ways of thinking the relationship between material bodies, identity politics and cultural norms, which is being rethought and further explored in innovative ways (Ruffolo 2009b). These include: a reconsideration of the very notion of heterosexuality after queer politics (Thomas 2009); the relationship of queer with the human and especially the posthuman (MacCormack 2009); and post-queer politics and its challenges for the twenty-first century (Ruffolo 2009a). Scholars like James Penney have even declared the end of queer and started to explore new theorisations on sexuality and identity for the future (Penney 2014).

One can see from this concise account of decisive transformations in feminist, queer, and LGBT-affirmative literary criticism that the vocabularies that researchers use to speak about gender, sexuality, and embodiment have diversified considerably since the 1970s.

Moreover, the critical discourse that twenty-first-century critics are devising in order to address matters of sexual desire, erotic identity, and transgender (as well as cisgender)[8] subjectivity has become more sensitive and flexible in comprehending the exceptional range of bodily materialities that we find in English literature. The essays that follow explore several fresh pathways that strengthen our understanding that the categories of male and female, masculine and feminine, and heterosexual and homosexual, which have long served as markers for the political asymmetries that still govern many aspects of our lives, are not as static or inflexible as we might at one time have imagined. We hope that the innovative body of criticism collected in this issue of *Textus* will show why this is the case.

2. From Vernon Lee to Ali Smith

In the opening essay, Marco Canani draws our attention to the ways in which Vernon Lee has come to take her place among the leading aesthetic critics whose writings began to circulate during the 1880s and 1890s. Given the upsurge in critical studies of Lee's vast canon of work during the past twenty years, her early oeuvre – which includes not only her dazzling essays in *Euphorion* but also the ingenious horror stories that she collected in *Hauntings* (1890) – now ranks alongside the writings of Walter Pater, her acknowledged master, whose critical ideas she nonetheless subjected to scrupulous criticism. It is well known that Pater, who guarded his homosexuality carefully as an instructor at Brasenose College, Oxford, took considerable risks in detailing the queer desires that captivated much of his interest in the Renaissance. Details of the suspicions and tensions that initially surrounded the publication of the 'Conclusion' to his first book, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), have been rehearsed many times.

[8] Susan Stryker introduces the word "transgender" as a flexible term that embraces "people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth"; this movement is one that proceeds "*across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place*" (Stryker 2008: 1, emphasis in the text). Since Stryker's study appeared, the term cisgender has arisen as a complement to transgender; cisgender draws attention to individuals who believe their gender is congruent with the sex that they were assigned at birth.

As is well known, the 'Conclusion' gained notoriety among some of his contemporaries because it characterised aesthetic experience in highly sensuous – rather than sternly moral – terms. In 1875, John Fielder Mackarness, Bishop of Oxford, made a memorable example of Pater's commitment to "getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time" that we have on earth (Pater 1980: 190). Such unbridled hedonism, in the cleric's view, was plainly anti-Christian: "Can you wonder", the bishop inquired in exasperated tones, "that to young men who have imbibed this teaching the Cross is an offence?" (Seidler 1980: 96). "There was", as Pater's Oxford friend Mrs Humphry Ward recalled in 1918, "a cry of 'Neo-paganism', and various attempts at persecution" (Ward 1918: 120). And if the 'Conclusion' suggested to some a dubious philosophy (the epigraph comes from Plato's *Cratylus* where Socrates speaks of Heraclitus's belief in the impermanence of material things), Pater's chapter in the same volume on the eighteenth-century art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann intimated that Pater's erotic attachments may well have been those of his subject: an aesthete who was fired by an "enthusiasm [...] in the broad Platonic sense of the *Phaedrus*", and "whose romantic, fervent friendships with young men" called forth his "affinity with Hellenism", which was not – in words that prove hard to ignore – "merely intellectual" (Pater 1980: 152).

As Canani demonstrates, Lee read the queer content in the bold study that Pater eventually retitled *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* in 1877 with a close eye. Especially interesting to Lee was Pater's account, in the chapter "Two Early French Stories", of the ways in which Provençal poetry devised tales of amatory desire that manifested "a classical revival", one in which this literature sought "after the springs of perfect sweetness in the Hellenic world" (p. 2). This was the universe of Héloïse and Abélard, in fine poetry that reveals "the elements of human passion, its care for physical beauty, its worship of the body" (p. 4). In the face of the criticism he met after publishing the first edition of *The Renaissance* in 1873, Pater brazenly included in the 1877 edition additional paragraphs that compared the intense romance of Héloïse and Abélard to the passionate male comradeship celebrated in the thirteenth-century French story, *Li Amitiez de Ami et Amile*: a tale that records the figure of the *Doppelgänger* that speaks to the "similitude of their

souls" (p. 7)[9]. Pater quotes several paragraphs that record Amis's desire on his deathbed, where he is suffering from leprosy, to be carried away from his wife to his companion Amile's home. In acknowledging Amis's willingness to die before the king for him, Amile slays his own children. He pours their sacrificed blood upon the leprous Amis, who is – through a miracle – cured of his disease. "There", Pater declares, "is the strength of the old French story" (p. 11). Pater then proceeds to the medieval *chantefable* of Aucassin and Nicolette, which tells the tale of a young man whose father (the brutal Count Garin of Beaucaire) will not permit him to marry the "beautiful girl of unknown parentage, bought of the Saracens" (p. 15). To Pater, this is a story featuring "adventures of the simplest sort", including Nicolette's construction of a "little hut of flowers" in the forest "whither she escapes from her enemies, as a token to Aucassin that she has passed away" (p. 15). Pater quotes the long passage that tells of Nicolette ingeniously absconding from her prison by tying together the bedclothes and towels in her room so that she can slip out of the window and run away to find Aucassin in another tower where he, too, has been imprisoned. Apart from these details, Pater appears to assume that his readers probably understand the overall structure of the *chantefable*, in which Nicolette is divided from her lover when Saracen pirates capture them in a foreign kingdom. He makes no mention either of Nicolette's decision to disguise herself as a minstrel in order to secure a safe passage back to Beaucaire, where Aucassin has at last succeeded to his father's estate.

Canani's point is that Lee's much more comprehensive rendering of the *chantefable* concentrates attention on the striking manner in which "Nicolette eschews the passivity and ineffectuality associated with the female sex" (Canani 2015: 44). Put more specifically, Lee's Nicolette emerges as "an androgynous *picara* who transgresses social and gender boundaries" (p. 44). Canani sees some similarities in the sexual counter-discourse that Lee creates in the author's later story, "Dionea", which appeared in *Hauntings*. Here, too, we find a young woman who pursues an unconventional career: "she hates learning, sewing, washing up the dishes, all equally" (Lee 1906: 67). Instead, she earns "her bread

[9] It should be noted that Pater withdrew his 'Conclusion' from the 1877 edition of *The Renaissance*, though he restored it in the third edition of 1888.

working with the masons at our notary's new house at Lerici" (p. 79). In particular, Lee's narrator observes Dionea "mixing the smoking lime with her beautiful strong arms" (p. 80). It is notable that Canani recognises Lee's refusing to represent "monolithic and clear-cut distinctions between the male and female sexes" (Canani 2015: 47). Such insights assist us in understanding not only the non-traditional forms of femininity that recur in Lee's large canon of work; they also throw light on Lee's decision to embrace a male pseudonym in her writing, in a style that challenged the sexual ideology of her time.

Colette Colligan's essay shifts the focus from Vernon Lee to Oscar Wilde, and to the reporting of his trials in the expatriate Parisian press during April and May 1895, which drew attention to the extent of homosexual blackmail (and, as Sedgwick observed, 'homosexual panic') that terrorised vulnerable gay men in London. The trials, which resulted in Wilde's two-year imprisonment for committing unspecified criminal acts of "gross indecency" with other males (most of them prostitutes and extortionists), constituted the most widely publicised sex scandal of the *fin de siècle*. The increasing availability of digitised newspapers has revealed that British press reports of the trials were uneven. Some newspapers, such as the deeply conservative *St James's Gazette*, vowed not to indulge in communicating anything about the proceedings that began with the arraignment at Bow Street Magistrates' Court on 5 April 1895 and ended with Wilde's sentence at the Old Bailey seven weeks later. Others, however, such as *Reynolds's Newspaper*, which had its political roots in the working-class activism linked with the legacy of the Chartist movement in the mid nineteenth century, were forthright when reporting on the startling testimony that several of the young male witnesses gave in court. Even though no journalist had permission to print the word 'sodomy' in public, *Reynolds's* came as close as possible when it commented on the evidence that the disreputable Alfred Wood gave in court: it stated that Wood had committed "[an act of indecency]" with Wilde (April 28, 1895: 1). The square parentheses marked out the space where 'sodomy' should be inserted.

In her close analysis of the *Galignani Messenger* (1814-1904), which had a modest circulation of 1,500-2,500 copies a day, Colligan demonstrates that it tended to relay somewhat censored reports

on the sexual information that it gleaned from the London press, while providing what were – at least for the time – short features with the title "London Echoes", which were not as judgemental as one might imagine in their criticism of Wilde. These editorials provided a surprisingly open account of Wilde's evident lack of insight in taking John Sholto Douglas, the 9th Marquess of Queensberry to court for defaming him as a 'sodomite'. As Colligan reveals, the hazardous libel suit that Wilde pursued in early 1895 seriously backfired. Queensberry's defence team, which exploited the resources of former police detectives to unearth Wilde's homosexual contacts, discovered that Wilde had become intimately involved with men who belonged to London's queer male subculture: a clandestine network that was more extensive than most members of the public ever presumed. "After the first day of cross-examination", the *Galignani Messenger* observed, "it was plain that [Wilde] had walked into a morass of infamy from which there was no escape" ("London Echoes", April 6, 1895: n.p.). This was arguably a more open-minded assessment than one might find even in *Reynolds's*, on which this expatriate newspaper depended for some of its information. By comparison, the *Paris Herald*, which began in 1887, made much of its skill in securing exclusive interviews with Queensberry. Colligan's invaluable research reminds us that an inclusive understanding of the press reports of Wilde's trials must look well beyond Britain's domestic journalism.

Ellen Ricketts's essay turns to the twentieth century in order to examine a little-known lesbian novel that predates Dane's *Regiment of Women*. In *Hungerheart: The Story of a Soul*, Christopher St John presents a woman-loving female protagonist whose desires express "a more fluid portrayal of same-sex desire in relation to religious faith" than we find in Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (Ricketts 2015: 85). Ricketts traces the "erotic spirituality" that arises from the protagonist John-Baptist Montolivet's "sanctification of same-sex love as honourable suffering", especially in this main character's "devotion to numerous beautiful and unattainable women" (p. 89). As Ricketts shows, even if there is no sexual consummation in St John's narrative, the desire that drives the story emanates from the "androgynous soul" that John-Baptist embodies (p. 91). And the power of the character's unrequited longing proves irrepressible: "It was *to love* I yearned more than to *be loved*" (St John 1915: 88,

emphasis in the text). The patterns of desire that Ricketts uncovers in this critically neglected novel follow paths that do not comply with traditional expectations of homosexual and heterosexual eroticism. In the part of the narrative that focuses on John-Baptist's intimacy with a male character, Jerome Sales, Ricketts identifies the female protagonist's articulation of "male homosocial desire", which – as we can see from the narrative – derives from the protagonist's knowledge of Montaigne's famous essay, "On Friendship" (1580). In other words, this novel of intense, though unfulfilled, lesbian passion articulates aspects of John-Baptist's desires through male same-sex friendship, which is on occasion inflected with erotic passion. At the same time, the Catholicism that pervades St John's novel culminates in John-Baptist's "final friendship with an unnamed nun who is immured in a convent" (Ricketts 2015: 98). Ricketts contends that the focus on Catholic faith in the end enables John-Baptist to enter into a spiritual realm that "surpasses the dyad that affixes a gendered logic to romantic roles" (p. 99), since there is a third term – the presence of God – that brings John-Baptist and her object of desire into a Holy Trinity.

The essay by Paulina Palmer inaugurates the second part of this issue, which focuses on queer writing in the second half of the twentieth century up to today. Palmer analyses the intertextual connections between the work of two of the most acclaimed and influential women authors who have animated the literary scene from the 1960s onwards: Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson. Widely known as a feminist and postmodern writer who demythologised the patriarchal and misogynist themes conveyed by traditional fairy tale discourses, Carter developed a unique approach to narrative. The feminist aspects of her work are here examined especially in relation to the influence they have exercised on Winterson, a contemporary queer-lesbian writer who has reimagined and expanded some of Carter's main themes through a queer feminist lens.

By taking into account several works by both authors, ranging from Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman* (1972), "The Loves of Lady Purple" (1988) and *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), to Winterson's *The Passion* (1987) *The PowerBook* (2000) and *The Stone Gods* (2007), Palmer examines the different ways in which the two writers have developed the motifs of the carnivalesque and the grotesque body. In particular,

she discusses the similarities as well as the different approaches that they adopt to queer experience in their work. As Palmer points out, whereas Carter focuses mainly on queer forms of gender, which include transvestism and transsexuality, Winterson privileges forms of representation of lesbianism and female same-sex relationships. Palmer discusses different textual examples of the several ways in which these forms are shaped by starting with the carnivalesque arena or space. The fairground in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman* is a case in point, as it is described, in Palmer's words, "not in terms of a particular geographical location but as a universalised utopian space that is inhabited by the eccentric and the marginalised", thus pointing "to the transgressive dimension of queer life" (Palmer 2015: 106). Similarly, according to Palmer, in *The Passion* (1987), Winterson develops some key features of Carter's text, especially when she "signals the transgressive gender roles associated with carnivalesque festivity and lifestyles" (p. 109) with her choice of setting her novel in Venice during the Carnival. Furthermore, she discusses the connections between *The Passion* and Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, as both novels challenge the Bakhtinian association of the grotesque body with misogynistic notions of the monstrous feminine and because they are both historiographic metafictions. Palmer pays special attention to several hybrid constructs that inhabit Carter's and Winterson's works, such as the interrelation between human and animal, human and plant, and the interplay between human and technological and virtual reality. In Palmer's view, all of these, in different ways, "[furnish] ample scope for the representation of the shifts of identity, transgressive sexual adventures and grotesque bodies in the act of becoming that we associate with the Bakhtinian carnivalesque" (p. 114).

Ardel Haefele-Thomas discusses *Heartstone* (2010), the fifth book in the series written by British historic crime writer C.J. Samson. It is a series set in Tudor England which focuses on the cases investigated and solved by its protagonist, Matthew Shardlake, a Lincoln's Inn lawyer. Shardlake is a liminal figure who is socially marginalised because of a physical disability and has connections and support from social outsiders, or 'freaks', who, like him, are held at the margins of the social scale. However, it seems that it is precisely his social position as an outsider that gives him a privileged focus on his cases. In *Heartstone*, as Haefele-Thomas aptly suggests,

C.J. Samson explores "the intersections between the rigid social constructions of masculinity […] and the perceived monstrosity of gender transgression […] within the context of Henry VIII's increasingly strict laws against any subject who did not fit within the gender binary or adhere to a heteronormative model" (Haefele-Thomas 2015: 123). As Haefele-Thomas underscores, C.J. Samson's choice of the Tudor setting is strategic, as it is under the reign of Henry VIII that for the first time in history sexual behaviours are strictly regulated through the 1533 Buggery Act, the first civil anti-sodomy law.

Haefele-Thomas's analysis focuses on the figure of Hugh Curteys, a transmasculine figure that displays the complex and shifting interplay between the performative construction of masculine identity, cross-dressing, homosociality and same-sex desire. As Haefele-Thomas argues, Samson underlines and critiques the ways in which socio-cultural rules strictly regulate gender embodiment, gender roles and sexual orientation, by unveiling the unstable tensions that surround these aspects of human experience. In addition, Haefele-Thomas's examination of the figure of Hugh Curteys also makes space for a broader consideration of the marginalisation and the criminalisation of queer identities in the twenty-first century.

The last two articles take into consideration Irish and Scottish texts. Silvia Antosa's essay investigates the debut novel by Irish writer Eimear McBride, *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* (2013) by focusing on the notion of trauma as a key element that governs the narrative structure. The novel is about the coming-of-age of a young girl who lives in the strongly Catholic environment of a 1980s Irish provincial town. As the story progresses, readers discover that the unnamed girl has been subject to various types of abuse, ranging from the verbal to the sexual, since her childhood. In exploring the traumatic experiences suffered by the protagonist, Antosa discusses the impact that they have on both her self-representation and McBride's development of a new form of narration. Drawing on recent trauma theories, which "question the literary unrepresentability of traumatic experience" (Antosa 2015: 147), Antosa analyses "how the novel engages with the paradox of articulating the so-called unspeakable core of trauma by fictionally re-enacting it through narration" (p. 147). In particular, Antosa

critically examines McBride's innovative adoption and reworking of the Modernist style as a way of exploring and staging an effort to understand the absence of meaning.

As the title of Antosa's article indicates, the struggle and the unstable tensions between trauma, the construction of gender and sexual identities and the adoption of language as a vehicle which attempts to grasp its 'meanings' are closely examined in order to unveil their reciprocal construction. However, according to Antosa, ultimately "the novel's ending seems to suggest that the absence of meaning ultimately prefigures the death of the subject. Therefore, the final suicide of the protagonist gestures towards the impossibility of overcoming sexual trauma, whose only effect is the dissolution of individual identity" (p. 147).

In the final article, Maria Micaela Coppola focuses on two novels by Scottish writer Ali Smith: *Girl Meets Boy* (2007) and *How to Be Both*. These texts explore the notions of gender mutability and identity metamorphoses. Starting from the visual, pictorial image of the fresco as a composite picture in which "a whole other spectrum of colours new to the eye" (Smith 2007: 84) can be portrayed, Coppola analyses Smith's narrative investment in the dismantling and redefinition of identity and gender binaries. The starting point of her analysis is "[t]he combinatory relations among multiple and sometimes opposing concepts (self/world, individuality/multiplicity, sameness/metamorphosis) […] in Smith's work" (Coppola 2015: 170). According to Coppola, Smith builds two narrative frames by combining multiple dimensions of time and space, joining together several literary genres and by mixing literal and allegorical interpretations. In so doing, the Scottish writer invites multilayered and open interpretations of her texts.

Girl Meets Boy is part of the Canongate series in which Greek myths are retold by contemporary writers; among them, Karen Armstrong's *A Short History of Myth* (2005), Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005), Jeanette Winterson's *Weight: The Myth of Atlas and Heracles* (2005), David Grossman's *Lion's Honey* (2005), and Michel Faber's *The Fire Gospel* (2008) (the entire project can be found at http://www.themyths.co.uk/). As Coppola convincingly demonstrates, Smith "takes Ovid's story of an impossible marriage between a girl raised as a boy and the girl she loves (the marriage becomes possible only when the goddess Isis transforms Iphis into

a man), and sets it in contemporary Scotland" (pp. 171-72). Thus, Smith's postmodern narration of the mythical account becomes "a tale of multiple possible impossibilities". *How to Be Both* further develops this opening up of identities by giving space to and intermingling "genders, dimensions of time and space, […] literary genres […] [m]ale and female voices; Renaissance Italy and contemporary England; tales, poems, art history essays, ghost and spy stories" (p. 177). As we emphasised at the beginning of our introduction, in this novel Smith – like Lee – develops some of the possibilities offered by Italian Renaissance art to contemporary literary imagination. As Smith's recent novel shows, Italian art of the sixteenth century still provides a real source of inspiration for contemporary authors' investment in challenging and subverting heteronormative and fixed gender roles and identity definitions in order to free them from rigid restraints by queering them in ever-unexpected and innovative ways.

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