

Beyond straight/gay divide – a trinitarian vision of love¹

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I. Introduction.

The culture wars regarding LGBTQ (in the broadest sense – as sexualities, romantic orientations, gender identities) have not subsided – rather, they have gone global. In some parts of the world, gays and lesbians may live their lives casually; in other countries, sex between persons of the same sex is a crime punishable by death. Public expression of LGBTQ identity is also a matter of political strife: in the USA, or in Sweden, public officials, even military brass embrace the rainbow flag as a symbol of democracy and the good life, whereas in Russia one may pay a hefty fine or even go to jail for waving such flag in public (as such act is seen as the propaganda of unhealthy sexual relationships).

These fierce and high-stakes struggles make it really hard to pursue any novel questioning of the meanings of the difference between things "straight", "gay" and "queer" – and thus questioning politically entrenched categories (be they praised or condemned, no difference). The very inquiry on what homosexuality is, what causes it, and how it is different from heterosexuality, is treated as outmoded academically and suspicious politically. Yet it is exactly what we try to do in this book.

We, however, do not intend to switch the clock back to the discourses of "perversions", or the debates on natural/unnatural, blessed/sinful. Rather, we join the ranks of such diverse figures as Catholic theologians² and post-structuralist queer theorists who go against the grain of

² E.g., Michael W. Hannon. Against Heterosexuality. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/03/against-heterosexuality>

orientation essentialism and argue that “straight” and “gay” are conceptual schemes, culturally constructed, and prone to critical evaluations.

In this book, we take the homosexual experience (inasmuch as it is reflected in art, i.e., a cultural phenomenology of homosexuality in the West), and the question of what makes sexual relations between people of the same sex something special, as a starting point in a journey toward drafting a new conceptual scheme of seeing love, sexuality, and, more generally, relationships between human beings.

In a nutshell, we argue that the key source of distinction is not the sexual object (i.e., the primary division is not between those who are attracted to persons of their sex, of the opposite sex, or both sexes) – it is whether the relations are **dualistic or trinitarian. A trinitarian relationship, in love, is not necessarily a relationship of three, but a relationship where there is room for the Third: be it a child, another loved one, the world, or the word.**

We start (Chapter II) by challenging the notion of the natural, biologically determined, innate nature of sexual orientation, following the paths blazed by contemporary critical theory. We suggest that the question of what homosexual love is remains open – and neither biomedical discourse nor religion nor the political stance of “born this way” close the issue. We suggest turning not to nature, but to culture.

Art, unlike any individual life history, creates a common ground with our audience: these are familiar and cherished works that are easy to turn to. In addition, art provides more historical, geographical, and cultural diversity than any form of sociological or ethnographic study available to us could. Finally, following Freud and Heidegger, we believe that art reveals important truths, both about its creator and about the world.

In Chapter III, turning to the corpus of literary and cinematic works created by homosexuals in the 19th-21st century, we describe conspicuous motifs in these texts: the lover/beloved as a reflection or projection of one's own body, as a mirror; as a mortal body, a body doomed to age and die; the desire to remake one's own body – or the lover's body; the fixation on body parts; the comparison of the lover with food; finally, the speechlessness of love, the difficulty of speaking directly, equally and non-formally with one's partner.

It is not to say that these traits were not noticed by anyone before us. On the contrary, they have provided arguments for some ambitious psychoanalytic interpretations of homosexuality – e.g., treating it as an instance of narcissism or the death drive. However, those theories are too straightforward and totalistic, and have been rightly criticized for being one-sided, and for failing to capture the full diversity of homosexual experience.

We shift the focus: it seems that the above-mentioned properties in homosexual art/love are not exhaustive explanations, but primarily different facets of one attitude, varying manifestations of one structure. **This structure can be labeled as the negation, rejection, or non-distinguishing of the partner as the Other in love in the flesh:** a partner as a unique person, different from oneself, with whom one enters into a unique relationship, with whom one communicates on an equal footing, and with whom love promises (or shows) the features of immortality/eternity.

In Chapter IV we define the concept of the Other, grounding our interpretation in the landscape of phenomenology, existentialist philosophy and psychoanalysis (the Other is not the Self, but also not an element/force, but a person). So why does homosexual art reveal the disappearance of the Other? We disagree with the most obvious – and heteronormative – answer to this question (man and woman are basic Others in relation to each other), and propose the following key hypothesis: **the condition for the discernment of the Other is the presence of a Third**, e.g. the possibility of a conception of a child (Chapter V).

We further surmise that the indiscernibility of the Other on the bodily level is related to the breakdown of trinitarian love, the catastrophic experience of the father-mother-child relationship – the basic relationship in which a human being comes into the world, learns the language, and realizes oneself. Trinitarian relationship is not necessarily a relationship of three, but a relationship where there is room for the Third, or for the desire for the Third. If the structure of bodily love presupposes the Third, presupposes that the beloved can love the Other (the child) before your eyes, in your presence, and with your participation, no less than you, and in a very different way – then your beloved becomes the Other, is perceived as an independent person who has an independent relationship with the Third.

In a fundamental distortion or disintegration of the trinitarian relationship, the person falls into what we call the duity. In this structure, there is only one subject (usually the self), and to love is to merge, to be part of it. The other is perceived as part of the self, as a projection, a reflection, a property of the self – or is rejected, excluded, or treated as an enemy.

The disintegration of the primary trinity ‘father-mother-child’ leads to the rejection of the Third at the level of the body, in love and sex – and the heroes and authors of the texts we have analyzed have a fraught experience of trinitarian relations in the family, and have formed protection against them in the body. The craving for physical possession of one object of love persists and intensifies, with a physical inability to accommodate, to want the Third – and, accordingly, to want the Other, to distinguish the Other in the beloved (we will talk about this in Chapter VI).

The protective structure of those who have experienced the catastrophe of trinitarian love (in their own or their parents' family) can be expressed in different ways, not just in the form of homosexuality, but in any case, it leads into the duity – the ability to love only one person, rejecting the Third. The duity may have various forms (Chapter VII) – it can be expressed as asexuality, as homosexuality, as the inability, for heterosexuals, to choose the exact partner with whom one wants to have a child, or as the inability to want a child from the person one loves, or as the inability to live in a trinitarian relationship with a husband (wife) and a child, if the child is born.

Oscillations between the trinity and the duity, as a protective structure, do not depend on sexual orientation and can constitute the dynamics of any person's mental and love life – as we will show in the examples of Leo Tolstoy, Horace, and Ovid. However, while heterosexuals may indeed exist in a duity, we argue that sexual relationships between people of the same sex constitute a potent catalyst for this structure, embodying it in the partners. Thus a separate chapter (VIII) is devoted to **the theory of sex as an incarnation: not a mere act of attaining**

bodily pleasure, but an event that changes a person's personality depending on what exactly happens to the body and soul during the sexual act.

Finally, we show (Chapter IX) how the duality – before, apart from, and alongside homosexuality – is established as a basic structure of relationships and worldviews in a wide range of fields, from literature and art to ethics and politics – and its relationship to the normalization of divorce and contraception in the twentieth century.

A few important caveats must be made.

We do not consider the concepts of (un)normality, (anti-)naturalness, and sickness/health to be relevant in our research. We are against any discrimination and violence against people who are and identify as homosexual. A basic axiom for us is the freedom of the individual in relation to their soul and body; only by accepting this axiom, without external coercion, is an unconstrained discussion and the search for truth possible. Also, we do not address the issues of transgender persons and transsexuality.

Our book is not a presentation of a complete system and does not pretend to provide scientific theories/inquiries. Rather, we propose a few hypotheses based on our own observations and our reading of cultural texts; we give some food for thought rather than a totalizing theory. Yet we hope that the paths that we have tried to pave will prove fruitful for further discussion and will provoke a desire to pursue them further, perhaps even in a different direction than we had in mind.

II. Nature, Nurture, and Narratives: Debating the Origins

A very influential view – in popular culture, in the media, among activists, and in political debates – holds that sexual orientation is natural, biologically determined, and innate. This position is succinctly expressed by the slogan “born this way”: homosexuality is not a matter of choice, it is more like skin color. However, there is no indisputable scientific proof of the innateness and biological determination of sexual orientation, i.e., the proverbial “gay gene”. The up-to-date scientific consensus rather points to a complex, multiple causation. According to a statement by the American Psychological Association (APA), “there are numerous theories about the origins of a person’s sexual orientation; most scientists today agree that sexual orientation is most likely the result of a complex interaction of environmental, cognitive and biological factors... There are probably many reasons for a person's sexual orientation and the reasons may be different for different people”³. “Encyclopedia of Homosexuality” states that “More than a century of medical and biological research has failed to discover any common denominator in exclusively homosexual subjects other than their sexual orientation. If a specific

³ APA. Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality. Source: <http://www.csun.edu/~psp/handouts/APA%20on%20Sexual%20Orientation.pdf>

cause underlies the sexual orientation of such individuals, genetic science has thus far been unable to identify it”⁴.

However, the belief in the innateness and immutability of hetero- and homosexuality has powerful political reasons – such a belief provides a powerful weapon in the fight against discrimination against LGBTQ persons, along the lines of women or people of color, i.e. those discriminated on the basis of their innate characteristics⁵. It also takes the issue of homosexuality beyond the moral issues of choice, free will, and responsibility: there is just “biology”⁶.

Still, the innateness, immutability, and naturalness of homosexuality are already being challenged – even in LGBTQ- and queer theory. In this paradigm, any clear-cut categories – not only “man”, “woman”, “father”, “mother”, but also homosexuality and heterosexuality – are seen as social constructs: something historically contingent, imposed by society and enacted by an individual⁷. The ruses of power hidden behind those seemingly “natural” categories are exposed and deconstructed. And there's a celebration of this fluidity and plurality, not just deconstruction: everybody is invited to realize themselves through shifting and recombining sexual identities, genders, and roles. “Let a thousand categories of sex/gender/desire begin to bloom in any and all fluid and permeable configurations”⁸.

Not surprisingly, the notion of “biologically determined” homosexuality is frequently subject to devastating criticism in LGBTQ- and queer studies – and labeled as essentialism⁹. “Arguing that we were born that way (or might as well have been) is intended to suggest that homosexuality is “natural” (as natural as heterosexuality!), the assumption being that what is natural is both ethically acceptable and politically unchangeable. Feminists have spent more than a century challenging concepts of the natural which relegate women to the kitchen and the bedroom and justify and condone male subjugation of women”¹⁰.

Indeed, it is hardly consistent to argue for both essentialism and constructivism: i.e., to affirm the fluidity, instability, and constructedness of supposedly indisputable gender categories (such as man and woman), while at the same time insisting on the objectivity and innateness of homosexuality. However, such a contradictory stance is sometimes taken for political reasons:

⁴ Warren Johansson. *Etiology* // *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*. Edited by Wayne R. Dynes. Garland, 1990. Vol. 1. P. 370. A decade later things have stood the same: “Based on current knowledge in biology, there is little evidence to support the concept of a biological substrate as the foundation of the choice of intimate partner” (*The Course of Gay and Lesbian Lives: Social and Psychoanalytic Perspectives*. Bertram J. Cohler and Robert M. Galatzer-Levy. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2000. P. 140ff).

⁵ Brubaker, Rogers. *Trans: Gender and Race in an Age of Unsettled Identities*. Princeton University Press, 2016. P. 65.

⁶ Anna Moir, David Jessel. *Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men and Women*. (1989). P. 112

⁷ The classic reference is Butler, *Gender Trouble*, but this vision represents the common ground of contemporary critical theory and associated worldview.

⁸ Bem S. L. *Dismantling gender polarization and compulsory heterosexuality: should we turn the volume down or up?* // *The Journal of Sex Research*. – 1995. – Vol. 32, № 4. – P. 329–334. P. 330

⁹ E.g., “Perhaps in the future studies will emerge that present compelling support for the essentialist position with regard to lesbianism, but such work does not exist at present” (Faderman, L. (1991). *Odd girls and twilight lovers: A history of lesbian life in twentieth-century America*. London: Penguin. P. 8.)

¹⁰ Kitzinger C. (1995) *Social Constructionism: Implications for Lesbian and Gay Psychology / Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities over the Lifespan: Psychological Perspectives*. Anthony R. D’Augelli (ed.), Charlotte J. Patterson (ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. 153.

deconstructing the naturalness of the gender binary is deemed possible and necessary, whereas LGBTQ categories are too strategically important to be deconstructed¹¹.

Eventually, the question of the **origins** of homosexual desire has become marginal (if not outright taboo!¹²). Same-sex attraction simply is there; once it's there, a person may only accept it (and follow the stages of the coming-out described many times – to accept one's sexuality, to confess it to one's relatives, finally, to open up to society¹³). Any critical scrutiny of this desire, and revealing what caused it, let alone resisting it, is considered traumatizing for a person and therefore unwelcome.

The obviousness and indisputability of homosexuality (as an orientation and identity) have become so self-evident in contemporary culture.¹⁴ that for a person the transition from an event to structure – from relatively vague, diffuse, situational drives and desires to clear “things” (identity and orientation) appears something natural and liberating¹⁵. Further, the mechanism of interpellation described by Louis Althusser is at work: a person's place in the LGBTQ spectrum becomes the core of their being, their true essence, which society or parents did not allow them to accept before.

Of course, one must admit that a frank discussion on the causes and origins of homosexual urges has been severely compromised, primarily by the medical and psychological theories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many of them relied on the outdated idea of homosexuality as a pathology (disease), the etiology of which the psychiatrists wanted to clarify (heredity, parental vices, childhood fears, and traumas...). Quite a few of those theories, however, were free from the dictates of “pathology” and contained valuable observations and patterns – for instance, the positive-negative Oedipus complex (Sigmund Freud); the imbalance in relations with parents (cold, alienated father and overprotective, overbearing mother in future

¹¹ Some texts by LGBTQ scholars explicitly recognize that the values of scientific truth are less important than the values of political struggle: «It seems that the oppression of lesbians and gay men can be effected by both essentialist and social constructionist alike; and, equally, the struggle against that oppression, can make use of both (albeit logically incompatible) frameworks. My own solution is to be a radical lesbian feminist first, a social constructionist (or essentialist) when it suits my radical feminist purposes» (Ibid. P. 155).

¹² David Halperin, a prominent gay historian, asserts that "the search for a 'scientific' aetiology of sexual orientation is itself a homophobic project" (David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990. P. 49).

¹³ Cass, V. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4, 219–235; Coleman, E. (1982). Developmental stages of the coming-out process. In W. Paul, J. D. Weinrich, J. C. Gonsiorek, & M. E. Hotvedt (Eds.), *Homosexuality: Social, psychological, and biological issues* (pp. 149–158). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

¹⁴ We refer here, of course, to the developed economies of the global North (Europe, North America, Japan, South Korea, Australia). In other countries of the world, such a "naturalness" of the LGBTQ spectrum is the process of formation, struggling with the pre-modern treatments of homosexuality, based on the ideas of sin and "unnatural vices".

¹⁵ As in Robert Isay's classic account: "Alan's experience was similar to that described by others who acknowledged their sexual orientation after a relatively sudden and dramatic breakthrough of barriers of denial and repression. This "aha" experience, caused by the coming together of a long established sexual arousal pattern with a sexual object, feels like the pieces of an old puzzle falling into place. "Until then I had felt I could never fall in love, that I had no sexual feelings, and that they weren't what they should be." A sense of relief, wellbeing, and "rightness" follow" (Richard A. Isay (1986) *The Development of Sexual Identity in Homosexual Men, The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 41:1, 467-489. P. 475).

homosexuals) as described by Irving Bieber, his followers and opponents¹⁶; the interpretation of lesbianism as a special bond with the mother, and the sublimation of incest (Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva).

Alas, the authors of such theories often try to generalize vivid conjectures, to make a single explanatory theory that would explain homosexuality – and, obviously, failed to make a lastingly persuasive point. This is partly due to the fact that the question of the origins of homosexuality is tainted by the biomedical paradigm: the search for indisputable causality (A → B) and uniform laws, determinism, and indifference to individual life histories.

But none of these things implies that it is no longer possible to talk about the causes of homosexuality – or that homosexuality must be embraced as one's destiny or true nature. We might suggest that attraction¹⁷ to people of one's own sex is **an event** that can happen at any time **in anyone's life** (and not just in the life of some individuals who are “born gay”), – and such an event is not accidental.

Why such an event happens, and how it affects a person, is a purely individual, unique story. In our attention to the multiplicity of paths, the complexity of human psychic life, and the departure from biological determinism, we are in agreement with the contemporary queer theory. We locate sexual attraction, as will be shown below, not in genes and hormones, but in a person's mental life, in their relationships with other persons.¹⁸ However, non-biological nature does not render attraction/desire (i.e. the structure where a person finds herself) any less powerful and irresistible. But then comes a moment of personal, existential choice – whether to agree to these desires or not¹⁹.

III. Homosexuality Through the Lenses of Art

¹⁶ Irving Bieber et al., *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytical Study* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962); Ray B. Evans, “Childhood Parental Relationships of Homosexual Men,” *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology*, 33 (April 1969).

¹⁷ Such an attraction is not necessary sexualized: one may desire a body, or fall in love, or may just start seeing only beautiful girls around (when one is a woman), and, if one is man, suddenly start seeing men around as bright, deep and exciting people, and women as dull and indistinct.

¹⁸ It is another matter that genes, hormones, and other forms of biological “matter” should not be dismissed: on the contrary, they can be perceived not as a driving force with an independent agency, but as a substrate, something through which the shifts caused by psychic life are realized. In this light, it makes perfect sense to investigate them, e.g. in Yan Wang, Haoda Wu, Zhong Sheng Sun. The biological basis of sexual orientation: How hormonal, genetic, and environmental factors influence to whom we are sexually attracted // *Frontiers in Neuroendocrinology*, Volume 55, 2019, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0091302219300585>

¹⁹ Yes, choice – even though we acknowledge that human beings are far from being able to reflect on what happens to them, and the moment of choice itself (and the our culture provides a ready-made legitimate form of acceptance of desires, a superstructure of “orientation” and identity). Yet even LGBTQ authors, such as sociologist David Greenberg, refute the “coercion” of genes and insist that homosexuality is situated in society, not nature – and the whole dialectic of the pressure of social structures and individual choice applies to it.

“However, in the absence of any evidence linking the peculiar sexual practices of Melanesia with genetic difference, it is reasonable to suppose that if a bunch of Melanesian infants were to be transported in infancy to the United States and adopted, few would seek out the pederastic relationships into which they are inducted in New Guinea, or take younger homosexual partners when they reached maturity. Similarly, American children raised in New Guinea would accommodate themselves to the Melanesian practices. Where social definitions of appropriate and inappropriate behavior are clear and consistent, with positive sanctions for conformity and negative ones for nonconformity, virtually everyone will conform irrespective of genetic inheritance and, to a considerable extent, irrespective of personal psychodynamics” (David F. Greenberg. *The Construction of Homosexuality*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London, 1998. P. 487.).

But why is this choice even worth contemplating? What is so special about homosexual relationships, and what becomes of the human being who gets engaged in them? We believe that this question remains open – and it is not closed neither by biomedical discourse, nor by the notions of (non-)normality, nor by an a priori assumption that “there is no difference between straight and gay relationships, the only thing that counts is mutual love, respect, consent, etc”. In order to explore this issue, we propose **to turn not to nature, but to culture**.

So what makes homosexual relationships, sex between people of the same sex, homosexual love something special? Or, on the contrary, there is no difference from heterosexual love – no special qualities, but only an infinite variety of individual expressions and life stories? To answer this question, we will turn to art (literature and cinema, above all) created by indisputably homosexual authors – or bisexual authors with a significant homosexual experience.

We basically take as our source material the whole canon of gay and lesbian classics – Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, Marcel Proust, Jean Genet, Virginia Woolf, Patricia Highsmith, etc – plus quite a few contemporary artists whose creativity and lifestyle no longer constrained by the need for secrecy or by fear of repression. Our references are more or less evenly split between American, English, French, German-language, and Russian authors, and the timeline is the 19th-21st centuries. That is, we are looking at “our” culture, in the broad sense of the word – the (post)modern culture of (post)Christian countries – and not touching upon antiquity and the cultures of Asia, Africa, and Oceania.

The testimony of art is valid, first of all, because it provides more historical, geographical, and cultural diversity than any form of sociological or ethnographic research could. Secondly – and this is the main reason – art gives a unique expression of a person's inner self, their outlook on reality. In this respect, we subscribe to the psychoanalytic tradition, where art is seen as a reflection of the author's unconsciousness, a truth of their inner world. We follow Freud who was “interested in artworks from a formal perspective but in their "subject-matter," in the intention that is expressed and the content that is revealed”²⁰. We, however, do not endorse the symptomological approach that sees art just as a set of clinical cases – Martin Heidegger, and his vision of artwork as something that reveals the truth about the world, is more relevant here²¹.

1. A reflection and a mirror

With all necessary caveats about our limits, and fully subscribing to the dictum from a classic study of gay aesthetics (“the argument is meant to be, not exhaustive and definitive, but

²⁰ Jacques Rancière. *The Aesthetic Unconscious*. Translated by Debra Keates and James Swenson, Polity, Cambridge, 2009. P. 54.

²¹ Heidegger, Martin; trans. David Farrell Krell (2008). "The Origin of the Work of Art". *Martin Heidegger: The Basic Writings*. New York: HarperCollins. pp. 143–212. blee also Kenneth Dörter. Conceptual Truth and Aesthetic Truth // *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Winter, 1990), pp. 37-51.

exploratory and suggestive”²²), we start with the question: what does art reveal about the homosexual experience?

About one of the first things that catches the eye: a person of the same sex, the object of love, a passionate love, a love for which the protagonist can give his/her life, appears not as “you”, but as a **reflection** and projection of one's body, as a mute twin, someone who infinitely amplifies and reflects ego's feelings.

Marcel, the protagonist of Proust's “In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower” (1918) is fascinated by Albertine – but the stronger his feelings, the more he focuses on himself, and the girl merges with his favorite places and moments, she “was scarcely more than a silhouette, all that was superimposed on her being of my own invention, to such an extent when we are in love does the contribution that we ourselves make outweigh—even if we consider quantity only—those that come to us from the beloved object”²³.

To enter into an intimate relationship with a person means either not to touch the his/her personality or to completely dissolve it into one's own (or, on the contrary, to merge with it). This mode of interaction is articulated by Henry in “The Picture of Dorian Gray” (1890):

“To influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him”.

Basil Hallward, the artist, and Henry's apparent moral antagonist, is also in love with Dorian Gray – and for him, too, there is no subject. He paints Dorian but feels and sees only himself. “Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself” – says he.

The beloved is seen as a mirror image of one's own body: the mirror is a persistent motif²⁴ in a great many works of queer literature. For instance, in Jean Genet's largely autobiographical novel “Miracle of the Rose” (1946), an ecstatic account of homoerotic liaisons, violent and voluntary, in an adolescent colony and a prison:

I came to know my face through his. His height—he was taller than I—and his age—he was eighteen and I sixteen —instead of troubling me made me regard myself as a replica of him

²² G. Woods. ARTICULATE FLESH. MALE HOMO-EROTICISM AND MODERN POETRY. P. 5

²³ Marcel Proust. In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower. Translated by Charles Scott Moncrieff. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015. P. 476.

²⁴ “A recurrent word, phrase, situation, object, or idea. Most frequently, “motif” is applied to a situation that recurs in various literary works” (Barnet S., Berman M., Burto W. Dictionary of Literary, Dramatic and Cinematic Terms. Boston, 1971. P.71).

*with a two-year lag... I was continuing him. I was being projected by the same ray, but I had to focus myself on the screen, had to make myself visible, two years after him*²⁵.

The mirror is a key image in “Orpheus” (1950), a film directed by Jean Cocteau, and starring his lover Jean Marais. There are many mirrors in the film – the mirror as a magical portal to the realm of the dead, mirrors in the car and in the room. Once Orpheus enters or simply looks in the mirror, he either loses his love for Eurydice, or Eurydice dies: the mirror renders him incapable of loving his wife. (Jean Cocteau himself admitted in his essays that he did not like his reflection in the mirror, and that he was embarrassed by his looks). The mirror, in the homosexual experience, “doubles” one’s own body – and one of the poetic phrases Orpheus listens to on a special radio tuned to the wave of death is, “Mirrors reflect twice. Repeat twice. Mirrors reflect twice.” Orpheus has no will of his own to save Eurydice, no words of his own – he only hears the echoes of the dead poet Cégeste’s lines, which themselves are duplicated as echoes.

The mirror structure (the beloved as not the Other, but a projection and reflection) is expressed in the story of Narcissus – an important queer myth (along with the figures of Ganymede, Saint Sebastian, and Antinoe). Narcissus initially rejects the Other: the nymph Echo falls in love with him, but he does not see her, and she becomes invisible; he does not hear her words, and she loses her words; she is only able to repeat, to reflect, as in a mirror, his words. If the inability to speak was caused, according to Ovid’s “Metamorphoses”, by the curse of Juno, it is the relationship with Narcissus that causes the loss of Echo’s body. Narcissus is unable not just to hear the woman, but to discern her – to such an extent that Echo, who is in love with him, loses her flesh. The feelings for the woman, and the reaction to the feelings of the woman cannot be realized because Narcissus does not recognize the woman. And his unfulfilled love turns on itself – Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection and drowns trying to touch it.

Thus, Narcissus’ insane, deadly love for his own body arises as a reaction to the impossibility of loving the Other in the flesh. To die for love is a classic tragic narrative. But Narcissus dies not because he is unable to possess a human being, but his own reflection. In a similar way, Dorian Gray wants to become his portrait; he is in love with his image, like Narcissus, and gives his soul (like Narcissus gives his life) for that image. Dorian (like Basil or Harry) does not distinguish himself from his portrait:

- You really must not say things like that before Dorian, Harry.

- Before which Dorian? The one who is pouring out tea for us, or the one in the picture?

- Before either.

²⁵ Jean Genet. *Miracle of The Rose*. Translated from the French by Bernard Frechtman. New York: Grove Press, 1966. P. 223.

Dorian, like Narcissus, confuses subject and object, body and its reflection (image). In the same sense, Proust's narrator confuses Albertine with the terrain: "I cannot say whether it was the desire for Balbec or for herself that overcame me at such moments; possibly my desire for her was itself a lazy, cowardly, and incomplete method of possessing Balbec"²⁶.

In queer prose, **"I love you" often means "I am you," "I want to be you."** A teenage protagonist of "The Center of the World" (1998), a coming-of-age novel by Andreas Steinhöfel thinks of his lover lying next to him: "I want to be the air that Nicholas breathes, to be his blood, his heartbeat, everything without which he can't exist"²⁷.

The need to look in the mirror, the alienation from oneself, the simultaneous attraction to and rejection of one's image, the desire to become the "beautiful person" one is in love with, to possess his facial features, is also peculiar to thirteen-year-old Joel, the protagonist of Truman Capote's "Other Voices, Other Rooms" (1948):

For long periods each day, he studied his face in a hand mirror: a disappointing exercise, on the whole, for nothing he saw concretely affirmed his suspicions of emerging manhood, though about his face there were certain changes: baby-fat had given way to a true shape, the softness of his eyes had hardened: it was a face with a look of innocence but none of its charm, an alarming face, really, too shrewd for a child, too beautiful for a boy. It would be difficult to say how old he was. All that displeased him was the brown straightness of his hair. He wished it were curly gold like Randolph's²⁸.

Randolph plays the role of a mentor in this mix of a Gothic novel and Bildungsroman. Homosexuality is muted in the text; it only comes to the fore in Randolph's confession and in the way Randolph behaves with Joel, as he caresses him in passing, protecting him from the aggressive world of women in the form of his aunt and the neighborhood girls. It is to Randolph, and not to a teenage girl he fancies, to whom Joel confesses his love, despite the fact that it was Randolph who maimed his father. His feelings for Randolph are not strong, but clearly queer: Joel not only admires Randolph but wants to be his reflection, his copy.

So in these texts to love is either to love one's own body (there is no other person in this love), or to desire to become a mirror image, to turn into the body of the beloved person, or to turn into the body that the beloved would be pleased with. "I love you" means "I become you", that is, I absorb, displace, and replace you. Or vice versa: "you" replaces, displaces, duplicates "I". "*Je est un autre*" ("I is another"), says Arthur Rimbaud²⁹. Even in translation the poet's alienation from his "I" is clear: the verb "to be" here does not agree with "I", its being is taken over.

²⁶ Marcel Proust. *The Guermantes Way*. Part Two. Translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff. London: Chatto and Windus, 1973. P. 57.

²⁷ Andreas Steinhöfel. *The Center of the World*. Translated by Alisa Jaffa. Delacorte Press, 2005. P. 245.

²⁸ Truman Capote. *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. New York: Random House, 1968. P. 207.

²⁹ A. Rimbaud. *Correspondance : Lettre du Voyant, à Paul Demeny, 15 mai 1871*. Texte établi par Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, Éditions des cahiers libres, 1929 (p. 51-63). P.53.

2. A mortal body

In 1911 Thomas Mann, a renowned German man of letters, spent a holiday in Venice with his wife. Mann was married and fathered five children but experienced intense homosexual feelings throughout his life (in one of his letters he admitted that real eroticism for him is possible only with men). In Venice, he became enraptured by Władysław Moes, a 10-year-old Polish boy. Just as von Aschenbach, a writer, the protagonist of "Death in Venice" (1912), Mann never dared to speak to the boy; his infatuation was burning in silence³⁰.

Von Aschenbach is gripped with passion, but he does not see Tadzio as a human being – he does not speak to him, he does not try to protect the boy when he is brutally beaten by another lad, he does not warn Tadzio's mother about a deadly cholera epidemic. Tadzio is not an Other for Aschenbach, not a human being but an image of tortuously divine beauty, an intensification of bodily sensations, and a fulfillment of the writer's desire for beauty³¹.

And the more attractive young Tadzio seems to Aschenbach, the more obnoxious he finds his own aging face in the mirror:

The presence of the youthful beauty that had bewitched him filled him with disgust of his own aging body; the sight of his own sharp features and grey hair plunged him in hopeless mortification; he made desperate efforts to recover the appearance and freshness of his youth and began paying frequent visits to the hotel barber. Enveloped in the white sheet, beneath the hands of that garrulous personage, he would lean back in the chair and look at himself in the glass with misgiving. "Grey," he said, with a grimace³².

At some point, Aschenbach decides to do something about his torment over Tadzio's body – but he doesn't confess his love to Tadzio, doesn't tell him anything, makes no move nor even a gesture towards the boy. Tadzio remains just the perfect body that makes him feel like an ugly creature. So when Aschenbach decides to act, he does something with his own body – and its reflection in the mirror. He visits the hotel barber who makes a perfect portrait of him – Mann compares the barber with an artist, for a good reason: "The dry, anemic lips grew full, they turned the colour of ripe strawberries, the lines round eyes and mouth were treated with a facial cream and gave place to youthful bloom. It was a young man who looked back at him from the

³⁰ Gilbert Adair, *The Real Tadzio: Thomas Mann's Death in Venice and the Boy Who Inspired It*. New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2001.

³¹ The author of a classic treatise on gay poetics comes to the same conclusion: "He never sees the boy's beauty in human terms. Tadzio is never as lovely as some remembered boy or girl, but always as a sculpture of a mythological subject... No merely human relationship between them can be established. If they met, what could either say of interest to the other?... Despite all the comparisons with art, he does not possess the gift of immortality. He is sickly and will, doubtless, die young" (G. Woods. *Articulate Flesh. Male Homo-Eroticism And Modern Poetry*. Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1987. P. 115-116).

³² Thomas Mann. *Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories*. Translated from the German by H. T. Lowe-Porter. New York: Vintage Books, 1963. P. 69.

glass – Aschenbach’s heart leaped at the sight”³³. The most important thing about Tadzio for Aschenbach is the boy's stunning beauty of young age, something he entirely lacks. The body of the beloved boy is not worth caring about, it is first and furthestmost a mirror in which Aschenbach sees his own decaying body.

Such an intense experience of the body's mortality and imminent decay in gay aesthetics is not due to age difference. Stephen Fry, in his autobiography of his adolescence, thinks of his boy crush:

I missed Matthew, I wanted him and I knew he had gone. He had literally gone, that was the Pelion on Ossa... My Matthew had disappeared, Matteo was no more. |

I saw a photograph of him in a school magazine in Roger’s bedroom. Matthew’s face in a cricket photograph, a hockey photograph and a photograph taken from the school play. Three pieces of evidence to prove irrefutably that he had gone. The features had coarsened, he had grown in height and build and stockiness. He was now descending from the peak which, while I had known him he had always still miraculously been making towards³⁴.

Gabriel Marcel, French existential philosopher defined love in a succinct formula: “to love someone is to say to them: ‘you will never die’” (*Aimer quelqu'un, c'est lui dire: “Toi, tu ne mourras pas”*). And in these queer narratives, the message is reversed: “I love you” means “I love your body, and I know that it will die”.

Henry, in love with Dorian, foresees the inevitable senility and physical decay of his body, and he seduces Dorian by speaking of the transience of beauty. Dorian falls in love with his own image, as Henry does – and divines in his own fair shape a coming ugliness and death:

Dorian made no answer but passed listlessly in front of his picture and turned towards it. When he saw it he drew back, and his cheeks flushed for a moment with pleasure. A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time. He stood there motionless and in wonder, dimly conscious that Hallward was speaking to him, but not catching the meaning of his words. The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation... Then had come Lord Henry Wotton with his strange panegyric on youth, his terrible warning of its brevity. That had stirred him at the time, and now, as he stood gazing at the shadow of his own loveliness, the full reality of the description flashed across him. Yes, there would be a day when his face would be wrinkled and wizened, his eyes dim and colourless, the grace of his figure broken and deformed. The scarlet would pass away from his lips and the gold steal from his hair. The life that was to make his soul would mar his body. He would become dreadful, hideous, and uncouth.

³³ Ibid. P. 70.

³⁴ Stephen Fry. *Moab is My Washpot*. Arrow Books, 2004. P. 380

This ambivalence – the repulsion towards one’s “ugly” body and its mortality, and at the same time delight in the attractiveness of that very body (or the body of a lover into which one wants to transform) – is played out in Mikhail Kuzmin’s “Wings” (1908). Kuzmin, an openly gay poet, musician, and novelist, was one of the prominent contributors to the Silver Age of Russian culture (an exceptionally creative period lasting from the late 1890s to 1920s – a Russian *Belle Époque* of sorts).

The turning point of the story occurs when the protagonist, young Vanya Smurov, goes to swim naked. “‘How well-formed you are, Vanyechka!’ said Sasha, getting undressed and looking at the naked figure of Vanya”. And these words of admiration prompt Vanya (like Henry’s praise of Dorian) to homosexual/narcissistic initiation: Vanya looks at his reflection in the water and becomes excited about his body.

*The latter looked at the reflection, made to undulate by the spreading circles in the water, of his tall, supple body with its narrow hips and long, shapely legs, tanned by bathing and the sun, at his untrimmed fair curls above the slender neck, at the big eyes in the round, leaner face – and, with a silent smile, he entered the cold water*³⁵.

In the water, he beholds a “paradise” of flesh. The bathing children and adolescents around become “delicate pink bodies” that resemble “pictures of paradise in the manner of Thoma”. And a moment later, in the same waters, Vanya sees the disgusting swollen corpse of a drowned boy of sixteen.

Vanya falls in love with his body in the water like Narcissus, while the reflection in the river turns out to be a dehumanised corpse. The drowned boy is a reflection – he has no face (“slime-covered corpse with its face already formless”) and no name – he is also called Vanya. Kuzmin gives him the same name as the protagonist, and Vanya does not see the dead man as the Other, even his name repeats his own, like the disembodied nymph Echo. Vanya does not discern the boy as a human being, as the Other: he is shocked not by the boy’s death, nor by the grief of his sobbing mother – he is frightened as if it were his own corpse, and mourns the imminent decay of his own body. He runs home and rushes to the mirror(!), looking at his body in horror and mourning it. When Marya Dmitrievna, who is in love with him, arrives, Vanya does not notice her, and speaks only of his body:

‘What ever will happen? What ever will happen?’ he rushed to her. ‘The cheeks will sink and turn pale, the body will swell and become slimy, worms will eat out the eyes, all the joints will fall apart in a dear body! But there are ligaments, muscles in the human body that cannot be seen without a tremor! Everything will pass away, perish! And I don’t know anything, I’ve not

³⁵ Mikhail Kuzmin. *Wings*. Translated by Hugh Aplin. London: Hesperus Press Limited, 2007. P. 64.

*seen anything, and I want to, I want to... I'm not unfeeling, not just some stone, and now I know my own beauty! I'm frightened! Frightened! Who will save me?'*³⁶

Just as Narcissus, Dorian Gray or Aschenbach, Vanya discovers the beauty of his body and its mortality at the same time: **there is only my body, and it is mortal**. They all look at the beautiful young man as in a mirror, or they look directly into the mirror – and foresee, through the perfect beauty, the imminent ugliness.

The fixation on oneself, the momentary shift of attention from the beloved to one's own body, which brings pain and death, appears as early as the 6th century BC in Sappho's famous poem:

He seems as fortunate as the gods to me the man
Who sits opposite you and listens nearby;
To your sweet voice

And lovely laughter. Truly that sets
My heart trembling in my breast.
For when I look at you for a moment,
Then it is no longer possible
For me to speak.

My tongue has snapped, at once
A subtle fire has stolen beneath my flesh,
I see nothing with my eyes,
My ears hum.

Sweat pours from me, a trembling
Seizes me all over, I am greener
Than grass, and it seems to me that I am little

³⁶ Ibid. P. 66.

Short of dying³⁷.

Sappho looks at the girl with whom she is in love. She is jealous of the one who sitting next to the girl – but in her monologue, the poetess is not talking about her lover, her soul or body. She is focused on her own body and its physical sensations – about what happens to her tongue, skin, ears, and eyes. She looks at the girl – and sees her own body, the painful processes of her senses.

In queer texts, the beloved appears as an extension and reflection of one's own body. However, that does not necessarily imply the egocentric narcissism to which Dorian Gray or Vanya Smurov are prone. The heroines of the "Portrait of a Lady on Fire" (2019) by Céline Sciamma (an open lesbian) – Héloïse, an aristocratic girl who is forced into marriage, and Marianne, an artist who paints her portrait and becomes her lover – are, on the contrary, self-sacrificing, attentive to each other. Moreover, they interact as equals with the maid Sophie and even help her to have an abortion. Critics have noted this egalitarian attitude, sisterhood, and the female gaze in the film – as an alternative to the male gaze, with its objectification, inequality and (scopic) exploitation of women³⁸.

Sciamma deconstructs the classic unequal pairing "active creator versus silent submissive model" in the scene where Héloïse parries that she is as observant of Marianne's facial expressions and gestures as the artist herself. This scene, like the scenes of playing cards with the maid and helping her with an abortion, represents a remarkable equality, hardly imaginable in eighteenth-century France. Sciamma creates an alternative history that would have been possible if there had been no patriarchal world. Men are almost absent from the film, except in the first scene – the rowers who take Marianne to the island watch indifferently as the crates with her belongings fall into the sea (she herself jumps overboard and retrieves them). There is only an invisible male presence, in the form of heteronormative coercion (Eloise must marry a Milanese noble she does not know, and Marianne is forced to sign her paintings with her father's name).

Exceptional, striking equality is evident in many lesbian texts, both fictional (for example, the protagonist of "Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café" (1987) gives a generous meal to the first tramp she sees and tells her whole life story to absolute strangers) and theoretical³⁹. The erasure of hierarchies and distinctions, absolute equality is conspicuous in lesbian poetics, whereas the corpus of gay texts is often marked by hierarchy, juxtaposition of active and passive roles – starting from Plato, with his ideal pair of an *erastes* (an older active partner) and *eromenos* (young, beautiful and passive partner), exchanging the fruits of youth for the wisdom of old age.

However, in lesbian texts, with their inclination towards egalitarianism, and in gay texts, emphasizing the inequality of roles, we see the same thing: the beloved as a reflection of oneself,

³⁷ Sappho, 31 // Greek Lyric I. Sappho And Alcaeus. Edited and translated by David A. Campbell. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990. P. 79-81.

³⁸ E.g., in Exploring the Female Gaze in Portrait of a Lady on Fire //

<https://visualculture.blog.torontomu.ca/exploring-the-female-gaze-in-portrait-of-a-lady-on-fire/>

³⁹ Elizabeth Grosz stresses the horizontal principle of lesbian relationships – contrary to the hierarchal power relations peculiar to heterosexual penetrative sex (Elizabeth Grosz. Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies. Routledge, 1995). Simone de Beauvoir expressed a similar idea in "The Second Sex".

an extension of one's own body, a mirror. Héloïse and Marianne do not argue, do not resolve their relationships, do not quarrel or reconcile, do not tell their story, and do not express their dissenting opinions, amazing and revealing themselves to each other. The tension simmers tacitly, non-verbally, around whether or not they – the customer and the servant, to whom fate has given only a few days of freedom, during Héloïse's mother's departure – will decide to move on to a loving relationship.

The only episode where Marianne shows her mettle is the scene when she paints a portrait, and boldly spells out the peculiarities of Héloïse's facial expressions, breaking down the rules of social etiquette, and revealing an artist's quick eye and a lover's audacity. And then Héloïse mirrors Marianne's remarks, like water reflects Narcissus – and it is the body that is reflected: "When you don't know how to answer, you touch your forehead. When you're lost, your eyebrows go up. When you're anxious, you breathe through your mouth." Marianne verbally "explodes", with a flurry of words – but she does not speak about herself, about her view of the situation, she speaks only about Héloïse's face. In doing so, she shows her rebellious character, her passion, that is, she reveals herself as the Other – but this otherness is immediately erased by Héloïse's mirror-image response. Héloïse is not shocked when she hears Marianne's revelations, she does not run away, does not say what she thinks in response, does not cry – but mirrors the artist's words. Just as in Sappho's poem – the poet looks at her lover but does not see her, and does not say anything about her, it is as if she is looking at her own reflection and talking about her own body in minute detail.

The experience that strongly encouraged intimacy between Marianne and Héloïse was reading and discussing the story of Orpheus and Eurydice together. This myth of the ruinous backward glance, along with the episode of Lot's wife, is one of the key myths in queer aesthetics.

In this episode, no words are "mirrored": each of the three participants expresses her own independent interpretation of this myth. Sophie, the most heterosexual of the girls, is horrified by Orpheus' behavior and wonders why he did what he did, disobeyed the good advice, and ruined Eurydice, while condemning himself to eternal sorrow. Marianne, the artist, declares that Orpheus did not make a mistake, but made a conscious choice: "He chooses the memory of her. That's why he turns. He doesn't make the lover's choice, but the poet's".

And then Héloïse joins the conversation and says something weird and illogical – "Perhaps she was the one who said, 'Turn around'." – that is, that Eurydice herself wanted Orpheus to abandon her in Hades. This remark evokes a strong emotional response from Marianne (her eyes light up, and she becomes excited). Eloise completely denies Orpheus' subjectivity, she does not even accuse him, as Sophia does – she simply eliminates his agency from the myth. The classical myth is the story of Orpheus' tragedy – he is the one who loves Eurydice, he overcomes the ruler of Hades, and even after looking back, he tries to get permission to rescue her again. In Héloïse's version, Orpheus is simply absent. There is only Eurydice, and it is she who decides everything. Héloïse ignores Orpheus, with his story, his love, and his tragic mistake (caused by worrying about Eurydice and wanting to look at her). She does not understand Orpheus, and cannot imagine his insistence on seeing the Other. Eloise sees only Eurydice, who is similar to her, as a woman, and a mirror image (it is Héloïse who does not want

to marry a man). And the negation of the Other attracts Marianne, just as she was attracted by Héloïse's mirroring of her words.

3. A fragmented body

The lover is not perceived as the Other, at the level of the body – he/she is a projection of ego's needs, sensations, or memories.

The narrator of Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" is obsessed with Albertine, her name is repeated more often than any other, and two volumes are devoted directly to their relationships – yet she has no character, Marcel does not single her out as a unique person. She is one of a flock of girls, and even when Albertine becomes his mistress and prisoner in his house, she is still one of the girls on the beach to him. As Marcel prepares to kiss her, it seems to him that she turns into ten different Albertines in succession. The most pleasant to him is Albertine asleep, as devoid of subjectivity as possible – but even then he cannot accept that she is a whole body: she is a plastic mass for him, he wants to change her face, he takes her nose in his hands and wants to mold it differently. Even in the death of Albertine, her uniqueness is not revealed. On the contrary, her image is splintered further: "For the death of Albertine to have been able to end my suffering, the shock of the fall would have had to kill her not only in Touraine but in myself... To find consolation, it was not one, it was innumerable Albertines that I must first forget. When I had reached the stage of enduring the grief of losing this Albertine, I must begin again with another, with a hundred others"⁴⁰.

The desire to reshape one's own body – or the body of a lover, to remove or add a body part – is indicative of queer poetics. For Marcel, Albertine is not something whole but is made up of body parts, and one of them can be removed. This **dismembering gaze** is very vivid: there is no subject – just body parts; they are perceived distinctly and singularly, as independent subjects. Stephen Fry falls in love with the "head seen from behind", even before he has seen a boy's face, let alone spoken to him: "Looking at it coolly one can say that anyone might be drawn to such a fine head of fair hair, seen from behind. One might say that anyone could see that this was a classy, peachy and supreme pair of buttocks confronting us... And at that moment, before his face came into view, it happened. The world changed."⁴¹

Ernesto, the protagonist of the novel "The Perfect Waiter" (2004) by Alain Claude Sulzer, is besotted with Jakob, an apprentice waiter. And from the first encounter the most intense feelings of Ernesto are directed at disjunct body parts:

It was Jakob's handshake that wrought this change at a stroke, the cool, firm grip of the long, slender fingers that clasped his own... While Jakob was buttoning up the shirt, which smelled faintly of starch, Ernesto smoothed it down for him. As he patted it down over his

⁴⁰ Marcel Proust. In Search of Lost Time, Volume 5. The Captive and The Fugitive. Translation by C. K. Scott Moncrieff. Yale University Press, 2023. P. 518-519.

⁴¹ Stephen Fry. Op. cit. P. 268-269.

*shoulders and back with both hands, he could feel what lay beneath them: little protrusions and hollows, shoulders, shoulder blades and armpits, alternations of firm and soft*⁴².

As in Stephen Fry's book, this is a story of love at first sight, but the narrator's eyes are focused not on the beloved one, but on his hands. In the revelation of love, one can see the beloved as a unique person ("only you..."), one can see the beloved as a unique body ("you are the most beautiful") – but Ernest's revelation is about "hands".

When Marianne and Héloïse (in the "Portrait of a Lady on Fire") implicitly confess their love for each other, they also talk about body parts. They do not say "I love you", nor "I feel and understand you" nor "You are this or that", but "your eyebrows", "your mouth". Sappho in the poem also describes her love affair in such a way that even at the level of grammar the subject is neither the beloved girl (she is mentioned in the adjectival sentence) nor Sappho, but the speaker's body parts – tongue, eyes, ears.

"I" and "you" (the object of love) are not a whole unique person, but body parts: this motif constantly occurs in queer texts. Vanya Smurov over again recalls the phrase: "there are muscles, ligaments in the human body that cannot be seen without a tremor". **Tremor, awe is not aroused by a particular person – but by ligaments and muscles.** This experience is aptly captured in a classic work on gay poetics:

*The focus of desire is narrow and operates obsessively in close-up. As soon as my lover is close to me, he is the sum of his parts. Each hand of mine can touch only a hand's breadth of his flesh. My eyes can see only a part of him at any time. My mind is unable to touch the whole body but must wander over it from part to part, as though the parts were disconnected, and the whole a hypothesis. My lover disintegrates in my embrace, and I in his*⁴³.

Walt Whitman (the great American homosexual poet) brings this vision to the utmost eloquence in "I Sing the Body Electric": first he speaks about the bodies of men and women, but they are all typified and conventionalised, they are types, they are all the same, as "hundreds of Albertines" – "the armies of those I love". But as Whitman, in the final section of the poem, exclaims "Oh my body!", his love for his own body bursts through – and simultaneously the body falls apart, the hymn to love turns into a textbook on anatomy and physiology:

Head, neck, hair, ears, drop and tympan of the ears,

Eyes, eye-fringes, iris of the eye, eyebrows, and the waking or sleeping of the lids,

Mouth, tongue, lips, teeth, roof of the mouth, jaws, and the jaw-hinges,

⁴² Alain Claude Sulzer. *A Perfect Waiter*. Translated from the German by John Brownjohn. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2008. P. 28, 51.

⁴³ G. Woods. *Op. cit.* P. 31.

Nose, nostrils of the nose, and the partition,
Cheeks, temples, forehead, chin, throat, back of the neck, neck-slue,
Strong shoulders, manly beard, scapula, hind-shoulders, and the ample side-round of the chest,
Upper-arm, armpit, elbow-socket, lower-arm, arm-sinews, arm-bones,
Wrist and wrist-joints, hand, palm, knuckles, thumb, forefinger, finger-joints, finger-nails,
Broad breast-front, curling hair of the breast, breast-bone, breast-side,
Ribs, belly, backbone, joints of the backbone,
Hips, hip-sockets, hip-strength, inward and outward round, man-balls, man-root,
Strong set of thighs, well carrying the trunk above,
Leg fibres, knee, knee-pan, upper-leg, under-leg,
Ankles, instep, foot-ball, toes, toe-joints, the heel.

4. A body dismembered and devoured

The body of the beloved is lusted after and accessible – but the Other is inaccessible, does not exist. This inaccessibility is also expressed in the fact that the motif of the **dismembered body** is combined with the motif of **death**. Thus Sappho looks at her beloved girl, but sees only the one she is jealous of and in whose place she would like to be; the beloved disappears – and immediately Sappho's own body disintegrates into the sensory organs, and each of them, in turn, experiences the catastrophe. Finally, as soon as she reaches the subject, the "I" – she says *τεθνάκην... φαίνομ*: "I am little short of dying".

In queer texts dismemberment sometimes is enacted in a literal sense, as in Oscar Wilde's "Salome": Salome covets the body of John the Baptist and, having failed to get anything from him, demands his head on a plate and kisses the dead head on the lips. The playwright's imagination is aroused by a minor detail, "the head on a platter": the body, and dismembered body, is related to food. The wholeness of the Other is absent – there is just a part of the body, an object to be savored, and the experience of loving (possessing) is like eating food.

In "The Story of Sonechka" (1939), Marina Tsvetaeva's semifictional account of her relationship with the young actress Sonechka Holliday, the author gives a vivid and detailed portrait of her beloved girl – Sonechka is no reflection, nor a mere body, she has an independent personality of her own, her relationships with other persons are narrated without jealousy, etc. However, when, at the end of the story, the narrator talks about what Sonya was to her, she says

to her son Mur: “She was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen in my life, the sweetest thing I had ever eaten in my life...”.

It turns out that Sonechka is food, i.e. something that can be enjoyed and simultaneously destroyed, piece by piece. In the same dialogue with Mur, Marina recalls Sonia confessing her love for her – and this confession is addressed to a separate body part: “Marina! How I love your hands, which should only be kissed, but they move cupboards and lift weights...”.

Again the hands play the key role. Mur replies: “But what if she had, for example, written... which should only smell the flowers... And having realized what he said, he starts laughing embarrassedly.

- Yes, yes, Mur, there are two nostrils on each finger! How many nostrils in all, Mur?”.

Mur cannot imagine that a confession of love refers to hands. He imagines a man, a woman, who “should smell the flowers,” not move cupboards – whereas Tsvetaeva loves this metonymy, the reduction of a person to a body part, and she cheerfully continues, “there are two nostrils on each finger.” The same dismemberment, the violence against a part of the body (cf. Marcel’s desire to “mold Albertine’s nose” or Joel’s yearning for the hair like Randolph’s) as in the metaphor “the sweetest thing I had ever eaten in my life”. **The body is delicious while one eats it – and then it no longer exists, it is devoured, there is nothing and no one left of it.**

Tsvetaeva revives Sonechka in her memory, but when she learns of her death, she wants to finally destroy and deprive her body of subjectivity. “If it were my will – I would take her ashes and scatter them from the top of the highest mountain (still destined to me) – to all ends of the globe – to all the loved ones: the never-been and the future”. She wants to dissolve Sonia’s body – and to dissolve Sonia herself, to mix her with all the never-been and the future, just as Walt Whitman, with his dismembering gaze, sees all men and women as perfectly identical, replaceable, without the unique “thou” – “the armies of those I love”, just as Marcel sees his Albertine as one of the hundreds of Albertines.

The comparison of the lover (beloved) with food, or rather the relationship with her with eating, is extremely common in queer literature. The body parts are explicitly referred to as food in Dorothy Allison’s “A Lesbian Appetite” (1988):

She tasted like frybread — thick, smoked, and fat-rich on my tongue. We ran sweat in puddles, while above us the salted eggplant pearled up in great clear drops of poison. When we finished, we gathered up all the eggplant on the floor and fried it in flour and crushed garlic. Lee poured canned tomatoes with basil and lemon on the hot slices and then pushed big bites onto my tongue with her fingers. It was delicious... ‘Gonna bathe you/ she whispered, ‘put you in a tub of hot lemonade. Drink it off you. Eat you for dinner.’.”⁴⁴.

A similar identification of lesbian relationships with eating – in Amy Lowell’s poem “A Decade” (1921):

⁴⁴ D. Allison. A Lesbian Appetite // Penguin Book of Lesbian Short Stories. P. 290, 293.

When you came, you were like red wine and honey,
And the taste of you burnt my mouth with its sweetness.
Now you are like morning bread,
Smooth and pleasant.
I hardly taste you at all for I know your savour,
But I am completely nourished.

From Peter Wells' "Perrin and the Fallen Angel" (1989): "His cock a courgette left on the vine too long and grown tautly too large, the pillows of his chest a perfectly ripe pawpaw he loved to lick and gnaw on, the cleft of his arsehole, well, not to be too ridiculous, moistly pink as perfectly cured Christmas ham. He could go on, his Matthew, his banquet, his feast"⁴⁵. The body parts of the beloved/loved one are seen as separate objects that are eaten.

Dismemberment/food motifs are most abundant in "Fried Green Tomatoes". Ninny tells of "a woman over in Georgia" who chopped off her mother's head with a knife, little Idgie pranks her family on the first of April by claiming to have found a box with a severed finger; a grown-up Idgie arranges a funeral for Buddy Jr.'s arm, with the inscription on the gravestone – "Here lies Buddy Jr's arm. 1929-1936. So long old pa". A person is equated with the (severed) body part, and this brings hilarity and delight to the protagonist and the author – as it does to Tsvetaeva in her dialogue with Mur. Ninny bequeaths kidney stones to her interlocutor, and a recipe for fried green tomatoes – here again eating is linked to dismemberment. There are nightmarish moments where dismemberment and eating are combined: Artis sends a cut-out heart in an envelope, and Ruth's husband, who has beaten and humiliated her, not only has his head cut off, but his arm is barbecued, and later served to the detectives. All these gruesome episodes are presented as something funny and exciting.

The act of eating, dismemberment, and death go together for Jean Genet. In the "Funeral Rites" Genet's cannibalistic appropriation of a dead soldier turns out to be a continuation of their lovemaking.

"Genet was already "eating him up," and what he was eating was, so to speak, Jean already dead. It is as if, in his oral passion for his lover's anus, for the bits of fecal matter clinging to the opening, Genet was expressing a preference for what his lover's body had rejected, for what was no longer of any use to the living Jean. In rimming, the other is momentarily reduced to an opening for waste and to the traces of waste. Genet's fantasy goes further: not content merely to eat what Jean expels, he fantasizes transforming all of Jean into his own waste... The violence of this fantasy is ambiguous: Genet's excitement is murderous, but

⁴⁵ P. Wells. Perrin and the Fallen Angel // Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories. 1994. P. 527.

murder itself serves an ideal of perfect identity between the lovers. Genet's attack is, true enough, the treacherous transformation of a form of sexual servicing into a serving up of the lover's entire being"⁴⁶.

Yet Genet stands apart in his conscious celebration of gay sex as an epitome of death and self-destruction. However, even in the authors who are far from such aesthetics, who describe deep, committed, and loving homosexual relationships, the theme of death appears suddenly, unexpectedly – and precisely at the moment of lovemaking. John Cheever, in his novel "Falconer" (1977) about a university professor and drug addict who is serving time in prison for the murder of his brother, narrates a love affair with the cellmate:

But if in loving Jody he loved himself, there was that chance that he might, hell for leather, have become infatuated with his lost youth. Jody posed as a youth, he had the sweet breath and the sweet-smelling skin of youth, and in possessing these Farragut possessed an hour of greenness. He missed his youth, missed it as he would miss a friend, a lover, a rented house on one of the great beaches where he had been a young man. To embrace one's self, one's youth, might be easier than to love a fair woman whose nature was rooted in a past that he could never comprehend. In loving Mildred, for example, he had had to learn to accommodate her taste for anchovies at breakfast, scalding bathwater, tardy orgasms, and lemon-yellow wallpaper, toilet paper, bed linen, lamp shades, dinner plates, table linen, upholstery, and cars. She had even bought him a lemon-yellow jockstrap. To love oneself would be an idle, an impossible, but a delicious pursuit. How simple to love oneself!

*And then there was to think upon the courting of death and death's dark simples, that in covering Jody's body he willingly embraced decay and corruption. To kiss a man on the throat, to gaze into a man's eyes with passion, was as unnatural as the rites and procedures in a funeral parlor; while kissing, as he had, the tight skin of Jody's belly, he might have been kissing the turf that would cover him*⁴⁷.

5. A speechless love

Finally, homosexual narratives reveal another ambivalent motif : love is speechless, wordless; it is difficult to talk directly, equally, and non-formally to one's partner.

Albertine does not speak to Marcel. He utters her name obsessively; she does not call him by his name even once. She does not speak at all, behaving, as poet Anne Carson observes, like a

⁴⁶ L. Bersani. *Homos*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996. P. 157-158.

⁴⁷ John Cheever. From "Falconer" // *Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories*. P. 191-192.

pet – “a domestic animal which enters any door it finds open or comes to lie beside its master on his bed”⁴⁸.

Michael Cunningham’s characters in “A Home at the End of the World” (1990) use vivid imagery, metaphors, and comparisons in their speech – as long as they are speaking to themselves. But when they talk to each other, they produce hollow jokes and platitudes – a stark contrast between the inner monologues and dialogues of the characters.

Consider Jonathan’s first sex with Eric (the latter would become his permanent partner and a member of their extended queer family. Cunningham masterfully narrates Jonathan’s loneliness, his confusion – it was the first time he did not want to run away after a date. But what precedes the sex, why did it turn out differently than usual? Jonathan and Eric didn’t have a meaningful conversation or any interpersonal experience – Eric just gave him a massage. They communicate in stereotypical phrases: “relax”, “I think you’re very tense”. This barrenness has nothing to do with Cunningham’s style – on the contrary, his prose is full of unexpected plot twists, vivid metaphors, and complex thoughts. But here the conversation between two lovers slackens. Sometimes the protagonists show some initiative in communication – for example, when Bobby begins to twirl Jonathan’s mother, his lover, in a dance, or when Claire offers to cut Bobby’s hair. But these initiatives, these “remarks” are purely corporeal actions, whereas conversation – real, deep, and risky conversation with the Other, when people open up, and change each other – is fraught with difficulty.

This motif is not peculiar to Cunningham. In a few queer texts shattering sensual experience does not follow the development of relationships, does not follow the conversation; the experience of the flesh does not stem from the experience of the word. Dumbness reigns supreme – for instance, in this detailed description of the teenage protagonists’ first sex in “The Center of the World”:

*Without waiting for an answer, he turns and goes ahead. Dark stains on his shirt mark the damp outlines of his spine. One behind the other, we enter the changing room, where the floor is covered with wet footprints. A forgotten clothes bag dangles from one of the clothes hooks. A cocktail of smells hangs in the air: sweat, deodorant, soap. **I want to say something, anything, but it's as if my mouth is clamped shut** [emphasis ours – A.K. O. B.-Zh.] Instead I watch Nicholas in silence as he gets undressed. His movements flow, smoothly, like a dancer's. He slips out of his underpants, turns toward me, and stands in front of me naked. His body glows. I have a problem sustaining his gaze, even more of a problem not looking all the way down him. He takes a step toward me, uninhibited in his nakedness, and it's as if light and air thicken.*

"Have you showered yet?"

I nod.

⁴⁸ Ann Carson. The Albertine Workout. #33. // <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v36/n11/anne-carson/the-albertine-workout>

He makes a strange, small movement with his hand; for a second I think he wants to put an arm round my shoulders, to draw me toward him. I begin to shiver.

"Phil?"

"Yes?"

It's like bleeding. The rain has got heavier, and thousands of needle tips are pounding on the roof.

"Come on. Get undressed."⁴⁹

T

he contrast between the natural and poetic "inner speech" of the narrator and the scanty, purely technical lines he exchanges with his lover is impressive.

In Proust's oeuvre, this contrast is taken to the extreme. About himself and in relation to himself, Marcel notices the smallest nuances, twists, and turns; an endless auto-phenomenology and reflection. At the same time, Marcel thinks nothing of Albertine and says nothing about her; she bores him until he becomes jealous. He keeps repeating Albertine's name endlessly, to himself – but does not talk to her. The conversation is basically impossible – because his worries about Albertine are reduced to jealousy, and Albertine can't say anything in response to his suspicions, she just lies. She simply cannot speak the truth, she has no words of her own – like the nymph Echo.

Sometimes this disregard for conversation is expressed explicitly, as in "The Perfect Waiter":

I realized he didn't love me, but I needed him. Not his conversation, not his understanding, not even his affection. All I needed was that young man, his smell, his body, his absence of constraint—the fact that he did what I wanted when it suited him, that he was at my disposal, that he was willing: the sheer ownership of that body⁵⁰.

There are no words: not from the very beginning of the relationship, not at the most important moments – and this is not a neutral silence, but a clear-cut inability to hold a conversation. The strength of Aschenbach's feelings for Tadzio is measured precisely by his muteness –even though he is a writer! He does not say a word to the boy, not once, he does not even call the boy by name – the inner dialogue is addressed to Plato's "little Phaedrus". And Tadzio himself is also silent, not only with Aschenbach – his relationship with the boy Yashu, with a homosexual flair (Yashu serves Tadzio as a "vassal" and kisses him) is also marked by the stamp of speechlessness and death: in one of the last scenes, Yashu suddenly beats him brutally, at one point it looks almost like murder – yet Tadzio does not say a word, he stands up in the end, offended, but he does not express his offense with a single word, only a look.

⁴⁹ Andreas Steinhöfel. *The Center of the World*. P. 186-187.

⁵⁰ Alain Claude Sulzer. *A Perfect Waiter*. P. 163.

Characteristically, Aschenbach contemplates this beating in silence as well. Even when he learns of the epidemic that threatens Tadzio's life, Aschenbach does not tell the boy's family. He cannot part with Tadzio, physically, Tadzio's face appears to him as the face he should have, as if he became possessed by the boy's body – and Aschenbach dies when Tadzio leaves, not having said a word to the boy. Indeed, what may one say to a body one longs to possess so strongly as to become this body?

Attraction without words, before and beyond conversation, and getting to know each other, an overwhelming desire that drags one like a whirlpool, is a recurring theme in queer texts – Sulzer, Fry, Proust, and many others. In Patricia Highsmith's "The Price of Salt", the protagonist, a young woman clerk in a department store, feels attracted to a customer, a lady from a wealthy family – but there is no conversation between them other than an exchange of polite remarks.

The lady (Carol) invites Therese to visit her, they drive together in a car, their mutual attraction is in the air, but it is palpably very difficult for them to talk. And even later, when the romance is already blossoming, the conversation is always uneasy. "The weight of what goes unsaid as she and Carol talk about the towns they pass or where they might stop for breakfast builds in an almost ominous way. Like a girl in a fairy tale who has been put under a spell, Therese falls silent on the open road: 'She did not want to talk. Yet she felt there were thousands of words choking her throat, and perhaps only distance, thousands of miles, could straighten them out.'"⁵¹.

The process of seeing a loved one as a person, of developing relationships, and holding a conversation with them is further complicated by sexual alterity. In Stephen Spender's "The Temple" (1929), a semi-autobiographical novel set in Oxford and Germany in the late 1920s, the protagonist is engaged in sexual relationships with persons of both sexes.

In the first chapters, Paul is studying at Oxford, he is gay but still a virgin. He falls in love with the student Marston: Paul is enamored by Marston's unusual features, and his hobbies, by the fact that Marston is someone special. But Paul is unable to confess his love, it is difficult for him to talk to his beloved. On the advice of a friend, he invites Marston for a walk to confess his feelings, but instead of confession Paul suddenly declares that they should stop seeing each other. Later, Paul moves to Hamburg and socializes with local queer bohemians. Ernst, a nerdy neurotic intellectual, falls in love with him, Paul is bothered by Ernst's molestations, but in the end, he loses his virginity to him.

It is with Ernst, however, who irritates and physically disgusts Paul, that Paul's sexual life begins. But sex is something separate from relationships and love, Paul and Ernst do not speak in bed, the very decision to consent to it takes place in silence, and in sex, Ernst becomes a non-Other for Paul – merely a mute body. Paul emphasizes his loneliness after the act, not his feelings for his partner. But to Marston – the one Paul is deeply in love with – Paul is hardly able to say a word.

⁵¹ M. Talbot. Forbidden Love. // The New Yorker. November 22, 2015
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/30/forbidden-love>).

In the meantime, Ernst introduces Paul to a girl, Irmi, and they fall for each other. And with her Paul can't talk at all. Or rather, the author, when writing about Irmi, can't imagine their conversation. Spender solves this problem in a simple manner: Irmi doesn't speak English, and Paul has a very limited command of German. So they just exchange a couple of hackneyed formal phrases. Irmi just kisses Paul the first time they meet at a party; during their second chance encounter, without explanation, they somehow sleep with each other – an hour after Paul had sex with Ernst, for the first time in his life. Paul and Irmi just meet, bathe, and have sex without any words or a meaningful relationship. Paul can't talk to the girl, during sex she ceases to be a person to him at all – he lists her organs, which he touches in one way or another, then someone calls her and she runs away without a word.

The whole plotline seems a bit awkward and psychologically dubious, unlike the other scenes in the book. How can a cautious, delicate gay man who agonizingly lost his virginity an hour ago (“hell was himself” –the author thus described Paul’s feelings after the first sex) make love without a word, to a woman he saw for the second time in his life, who comes running up to him on the beach and runs away immediately after sex, whispering just “Auf Wiedersehen”⁵²?

Apparently, Spender wanted to portray a love affair with a woman – but is unable to visualize a relationship with her as an Other. Paul can talk to Ernst, the one from whom he is emotionally distant; struggles to have a conversation with Marsten, his first love, who is more of an Other to him – someone unique, valuable regardless of Paul’s desires – and can't talk at all to a woman. When Irmi runs away, Paul sees her as “a member of an alien species”, not a human being.

Yet her body differs from his only in that her genitals are designed to carry a child – and it is this difference Paul can't stand, which is why she seems non-human to him **after sex** (before that, he invariably says she is “very nice”). It’s no coincidence that the only fact we learn about Irmi is that she had an abortion (this is the gossip Ernst shares with Paul after he introduces them at a party). Spender does not accept the woman in her Otherness, in childbearing – and needs to force her to have an abortion, emphasizing that she does not have the usual female anxieties about it. Only if Irmi embodies the refusal to procreate can Spender make her a character in his book – and a character without words or personality.

IV. Who is my Other?

The lover as one’s mirror image, as food, as disjointed body parts, as the silent object of attraction without a word said, as the mortal body – not all of these motifs are present in every work of queer fiction, yet their frequent occurrence is at least worth consideration.

⁵² Stephen Spender. *The Temple*. Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1988. P. 99, 101.

These features have not gone unnoticed – on the contrary, they laid the foundation of quite a few overarching interpretations of homosexual love and desire. Psychoanalysis contrasts anal sexuality (with its partial objects and the splitting as the key turn: the sexual object as separate from the person) with genital sexuality, where attention to the Other comes first. Too many authors have written about homosexuality as a form of narcissism. Even prominent LGBTQ authors, such as Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman, and other proponents of the antisocial turn in queer theory, praise the homo-narcissistic subject's attraction to death, and the ensuing destruction of identity and personality in sex⁵³. However, we consider such theories too straightforward and totalizing; they have been rightly criticized for being one-sided, and for failing to capture the full diversity of homosexual experience.

We shift the focus: it seems that the traits described above are not definitive explanations, but are primarily different facets of a single attitude, different manifestations of a single structure. This structure may be defined as **the denial, rejection, or non-distinction of the partner as the Other in love**: as a unique and different person from oneself, with whom one enters into a unique relationship, with whom one communicates as an equal, and with whom love promises (or shows) the features of immortality/eternity.

But what do we mean by the Other? This paramount concept arose in phenomenology, existentialist philosophy, and psychoanalysis, building upon an (anti-Cartesian) insight that a human being is not a self-sufficient rational entity, but a person who is always already situated in the world and the body – an embodied being oriented towards others, whose very “I” is constituted through the Other. There are two divergent genealogies of “the Other”, however. The first stems from G. W. F. Hegel (Lord/bondsman dialectic⁵⁴) to Sartre, Fanon, Lacan, and Deleuze: the Other is treated as an impersonal force, a structure that organizes one's perception of the world, an interiorized gaze of a dominant parent, master or the society in general, a gaze that shapes one's image of oneself – in brief, the Other that speaks of power, impersonality, and submission⁵⁵.

The second (interpersonal) perspective was engaged by Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas: the Other as different from the Self, yet not a thing or an element – the Other as a person, just as the Self is one. For Levinas, both the basic human experience and the path to infinity are based on a relationship with the Other, one that speaks of an encounter, face-to-face contact, humility, and care. Buber, in contrast to Levinas, emphasized the equal, mutual nature of the I-Thou relationship, which is initially a dialogue that transforms an alien, extraneous non-Self into Thou. The essence of the I-Thou relationship is love⁵⁶.

We tend to follow the Levinas/Buber understanding of the Other, and stress that the attitude to another human being as the Other – an equal person, someone whom one recognizes and acknowledges, with whom communication is possible – is not normal or self-evident, but, on the contrary, something unstable, fragile. This point is related to the radical incommensurability of self and others, which Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty noticed: I for myself am

⁵³ Leo Bersani (1987) “Is the Rectum Grave?” October, Volume 43 AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism, Winter 1987: 197-222. Lee Edelman. No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004; Caserio, Robert L., Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Tim Dean. “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory.” PMLA 121, no. 3 (2006): 819–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25486357>.

⁵⁴ Rauch and Sherman, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Self-Consciousness*, 49.

⁵⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 479-544; Spanakos, “The Canvas of the Other: Fanon and Recognition,” 7, 11; Lacan, *The Seminar. Book III*, 274

⁵⁶ Buber, *I and Thou*.

the whole world, something indisputable, whereas other people are only objects in the landscape of this world. Another reason behind the difficulty of communicating for a person as the Other is constant objectification, or reducing people to things, an idea that Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx put on the table.

However, unlike the Marxist (social and political) approach to objectification, we focus on the psychological dynamics. One may perceive another person as the Other, i.e. see and love him/her as a unique person, respect him/her, distinguish him/her against the background of the world, and then instantly lose this vision: a person turns into an object, a threat, a speck in the background, just a body, a tool for ego's pleasure or something to fulfill a need.

Finally, we consider the Other from a psychological perspective – and also in ethical terms. In our perspective, to see a person as the Other is a good thing, and its loss is something negative. Of course, there are philosophical systems where the opposite is true: for instance, Gilles Deleuze, where the Other is equal to the field of perception and the structure of the world, something that must be rejected for the sake of contact with the pure world of the elements; and where the disappearance/destruction of the Other also eliminates the "I", the subject, giving rise to a beautiful perverse world without the Other, with a unity of consciousness and objects, and with an endless flow of thrilling affects and sensations⁵⁷.

If we are right, and the persistent motifs of obliterating/ignoring the beloved one as the Other in queer fiction pinpoint to a somehow important dimension of homosexual love, this by no means implies that, in a homosexual relationship, the objectification of the partner and the egocentric use of their body for one's own pleasure is inevitable – in other words, that true love is impossible.

No, homosexual love can be unquestionable, strong, a lifelong, committed love. **But the stronger the love, the more the rejection/erasure of the beloved as the Other manifests itself.**

This tragic predicament is enacted in Oscar Wilde's short story "The Fisherman and his Soul" (1891). The protagonist fell in love with the mermaid, so much that he renounced his soul and salvation. An enraged soul becomes a torment to him, keeping the fisherman away from the mermaid – but the hero overcomes all obstacles, external and internal, to return to his lover. But when the soul returns to him, the mermaid dies. The fisherman spends the night with her dead body. It is obvious that the fisherman really loves the mermaid – because he is willing to do anything for her. But at the same time, she is deprived of subjectivity, she does not speak a word, and does not show her character in any way: she is merely a body. Through great sacrifices and feats, the fisherman gains the opportunity to have sex with a dead body. The mermaid is not an Other: she does not even reproach him for abandoning, she does not show herself in any way, only as the object of the fisherman's love. He loves her, but she is deprived of subjectivity and he is stripped of his soul; neither the author nor the protagonist can say anything about her – as Proust could not say anything about Albertine.

Another tell-tale example of such an obliteration of the Other is present in "Giovanni's Room" (1956), James Baldwin's novel about the love affair between a young American, David, and a waiter, Giovanni. David lives with Giovanni in Paris for two months, after which he

⁵⁷ Gilles Deleuze (1984) Michel Tournier and World without others, *Economy and Society*, 13:1, 52-71, DOI: 10.1080/03085148400000005; Constantin V. Boundas (1993) Foreclosure of the Other: From Sartre to Deleuze, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*.

returns to his fiancée Hella, because the marriage is socially more advantageous – whereas Giovanni takes up with his old lover, kills him, and is sentenced to death. Both David and his lover have full subjectivity, individuality; their characters are quite delineated, and they talk to each other as equals, argue, and understand each other, in the beginning of the novel – i.e., treat each other as Others. But when they begin to live together, David begins to see in Giovanni perfect impersonal beauty, the same attitude as in "Death in Venice", and this beautiful body is perceived as something obedient, plastic, dependent on him, having no form or existence of its own:

For that moment I really loved Giovanni, who had never seemed more beautiful than he was that afternoon. And, watching his face, I realized that it meant much to me that I could make his face so bright. I saw that I might be willing to give a great deal not to lose that power. And I felt myself flow toward him, as a river rushes when the ice breaks up. Yet, at that very moment, there passed between us on the pavement another boy, a stranger, and I invested him at once with Giovanni's beauty and what I felt for Giovanni I also felt for him⁵⁸.

The greater the attraction, and the intimacy, the more the lovers become impersonal and interchangeable: any young man could become an object of affection. The strength of David's love is directly proportional to the depersonalization of Giovanni.

So, if we are to believe the testimony of art, the beloved one in homosexual relationships evokes real and strong feelings – but he/she is not the Other, neither on the level of body nor on the level of the word. Love lays bare the death, or possession, or the mirror image; both dismemberment and the mortality of the body express the absence of the Other.

But why does this happen, where does the disappearance of the Other stem from?

If homosexuality is defined as an attraction towards a person of one's own sex, it implies the coupling between persons of the **same sex** – and precludes the alterity of the sexes. Hence **a man and a woman are basic Others** in relation to each other, and heterosexual relationships provide the basic form of alterity (whereas homosexuality removes such an irreducible Otherness from bodily communication).

This stance is quite ancient and respected. Alain Badiou, for instance, posits the distinction between male and female as absolute, indestructible: « The two positions are absolutely disjunct. "Absolutely" must be taken literally: nothing in experience is the same for the positions of man and woman⁵⁹ ». The third position, the metaposition, does not exist – but the singular Event of love as the meeting of the sexes is possible.

For Karl Barth, a prominent theologian, the sexual difference is, on a horizontal level, a "rehearsal" of the vertical covenant between God and mankind; this difference reveals the I-

⁵⁸ James Baldwin. *Giovanni's Room*. New York: Vintage Books, 2013. P. 79.

⁵⁹ Alain Badiou. *What Is Love?* // Salecl, Renata, Slavoj Žižek, J.A. Miller, Geneviève Morel, Colette Soler and Éric L. Santner. "Sexuation: SIC 3." Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2000. P. 267.

Other dialectic fundamental to human existence. Moreover, it acts as the primary form of otherness, i.e. the man is the primary Other for the woman, and vice versa. Moreover, a person is constituted as a self precisely in a relationship with the Other – in marriage⁶⁰.

Moreover, the male-female difference is not about **gender binary** (a coercive pattern of two entities), but about **otherness**. Male-female otherness does not require obligatory hierarchy. The latter, of course, is deeply ingrained in our culture. We refer to the so-called phallogocentrism, described and challenged by the likes of Simone de Beauvoir and Jacques Derrida – the binary opposition in which the second term means something subordinate or inferior (mind-spirit-culture-male versus irrationality-body-nature-woman). Otherness, on the contrary, presupposes a foundational equality of I and You.

Remarkably, Emmanuel Levinas, despite the deeply ingrained unequal/asymmetrical nature of the Self-Other relationship in his philosophy, and its non-eroticism (“the stranger, fatherless, and widow” – as its paradigmatic example, not a pair of lovers), near the end of his life revises his prior attitudes, and brings up the love between a man and a woman as a basic form of alterity:

“To cite a biblical verse, once created, man is blessed with a command ‘to multiply’. In ethical and religious terms: it is to have someone to love, to have someone for whom to exist, not to be just for oneself. He created them as man and woman straightaway, ‘male and female he created them’... The meaning of the division of the human into man and woman is not reducible to a biological problem. I used to think that alterity begins in the feminine. That is, in fact, a very strange alterity: woman is neither the contradiction nor the opposite of man. The difference between man and woman is not like other differences. Not like the opposition between light and darkness. It is a distinction that is not contingent, and whose place must be sought in relation to love”⁶¹.

However, the weak point of this vision of man and woman as Others is the a priori, uncritical acceptance of anatomical difference as the foundation of otherness. It is now increasingly problematic to see gender relations in this way. Recent advances in social and critical theory (not limited to LGBTQ- and queer theory) have made a substantial impact, way beyond academia, into the areas of policy, media, and mass subjectivities. The “evident” biological binarism of male and female is increasingly considered a thing of the past, because of the distinction between (biological) sex and gender – the latter is seen as constructed by society, culture, and the subject herself. Gender is imagined as plural, emergent, fluid, dynamic, fragmented, a spectrum rather than a binary; it shares all these properties with sexual identity, sexual attraction, and sexual behavior⁶². According to this point of view, human beings are born

⁶⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, §41.3; III/2, §45.3; III/4, §54.1.

⁶¹ Levinas, *Philosophy, Justice, and Love*, 174.

⁶² The classic reference is Butler, *Gender Trouble*, but this vision represents the common ground of contemporary critical theory and associated worldview. Cf.: “I propose that we let a thousand categories of sex/gender/desire begin to bloom in any and all fluid and permeable configurations and, through that very proliferation, that we thereby undo (or, if you prefer, that we deprivilege or decenter or destabilize) the privileged status of the two-and-only-two that are currently treated as normal and natural (Bem, *Dismantling gender polarization*, 330).

genderless, whereas all sex/gender divisions are assigned to them through nurturing and education, i.e., through culture.

The biological dimension (i.e. nature) is thus accessible to us primarily as a cultural construct, and all references to nature/biology (as something objective, timeless, or true) are not convincing. Once the references to "nature" are removed, the fundamental otherness of man and woman is not at all obvious. Why does gender create Otherness – gender, but not age, race, social status, and a host of other human characteristics?

In society in general, the distinction between male and female is increasingly blurred. Feminist thinkers, starting with Simone de Beauvoir, have reasonably pointed out that the difference between men and women is conditional; they differ only insofar as it is embedded in the norms of heteronormative patriarchal society. Norms have changed – and the differences between men and women have been erased in developed countries. A woman can wear the same clothes as a man, receive the same education, do the same job; she may not give birth to children if she does not want to, and pursue a successful career. It is hardly acceptable now to argue in favor of a certain female and male “character” – once we free ourselves from stereotypes, we see that a woman may well exhibit “male” rigidity and rationality, while a man may cry, show his feelings, and exhibit weakness.

V. The Third as the prerequisite of the Other

Yet still, it is in queer art that we've seen various manifestations of interacting with the beloved one as not the Other – but as a mere body, a mute body, a perfect body, a mortal body, a gustable body, someone exchangeable for another one. Why is that so (once the idea of a man and a woman as fundamentally Others is no longer tenable)?

We suggest the following explanation: **the condition for discerning the Other is the presence of a Third.** If you accept the one who loves you as loving not only you – then he/she is not your property nor your mirror image. In heterosexual relationships, the Third, the experience and desire for them are potentially embedded in the sexual act (though not necessarily realized).

In modern societies, a man and a woman can live as equals, as fellow human beings, just mates – they do the same job and earn the same income, dress the same, weep the same, and visit the therapist the same. They may not notice that they are different – but not in parenthood. Gender difference manifests itself if, in the relationship, there is room for a Third (or the desire for a Third) – a child. In the father-mother-child relationship, a man and a woman are different in their roles. The mother carries the child in her womb and feeds him after birth – her relationship with as child has a unique bodily dimension. The father loves the child as much as the mother does, but he communicates with the child through words. The father is the one who speaks, educates, and introduces difference and distinction.

A woman is not necessarily perceived by a man as the Other, but the mother of his child is the Other. The one you love is not your projection nor your property: she loves, before your very eyes, someone else (whom you love, too) –and with a very different love. A man may

never experience pregnancy and nursing, the unique physical bond between a mother and a child. A woman will never know the experience of a man's jealousy when, before his eyes, a child and her mother are in physical love – and the experience of love that overrides this jealousy. The wife is no longer “a body I possess”, but the mother of **our** child. And a woman will never know what it means to be the father, to gradually acquire contact with a child through words. The woman has power over the child from the very beginning – the man, on the other hand, has no such contact with them at first and has to wait until he can talk to the child and influence him. The child, in turn, is able to understand that their beloved one (the mother) is not just part of his needs, but the Other: she loves their father, too, and in a different way than she loves them. Finally, even if no child is conceived – the very desire for the child makes lovers perceive each other not just as part of one's pleasure, but as something greater⁶³.

For Badiou, procreation is not an evident actor in the relationship between a man and a woman. But for him, there is another third participant in their relationship: truth. Love, according to Badiou, produces the “truth of the disjunction” of the male and female positions. In love, a man and a woman recognize that they are not alone, that they are two, endlessly trying to know and tell the other who they are. From our point of view, love is a relationship of the Two (two completely distinct subjects) if it engenders a Third, if it desires a Third. “Masculine position” and “feminine position” are, indeed, ineffable. But the otherness of the experience of motherhood and fatherhood, the experience of seeing the beloved as a (potential) father/mother is tangible.

So, the condition for discerning the Other is the presence of the Third. The relationship that Badiou calls the Two that generates the truth, we term the Trinity – a relationship that structurally includes the Third and thus discerns the Other. **The Other is the one who is known as also loving someone else – and as infinitely as you.** If the Ego accepts her spouse/child as loving not only Ego, but also another spouse/child, whose relationship with the Ego is fundamentally different, but no less corporeal and permanent, then the lover is no longer Ego's body, possession, or mirror image.

And thus we surmise that the rejection and the indiscernibility of the Other that we have witnessed in queer texts (and not only queer – more on this later) is caused by **the breakdown of trinitarian love**: by the disastrous experience of the father-mother-(potential) child relationship – the basic relationship structure through which a human being comes into the world, learns language, realizes herself.

⁶³ A similar idea, of the impossibility of the Other without the Third, and of the uniqueness of the communion of man and woman in the flesh, was expressed by Luce Irigaray, French feminist philosopher, and psychoanalyst, in her (though not entirely fair) critique of Levinas: “The function of the other sex as an alterity irreducible to myself eludes Levinas... He knows nothing of communion in pleasure. Levinas does not ever seem to have experienced the transcendence of the other which becomes im-mediate ecstasy [extase instante] in me and with him - or her. For Levinas, the distance is always maintained with the other in the experience of love. The other is 'close' to him in 'duality'. This autistic, egological, solitary love does not correspond to the shared outpouring, to the loss of boundaries that takes place for both lovers when they cross the boundary of the skin into the mucous membranes of the body, leaving the circle which encloses my solitude to meet in a shared space, a shared breath... It does not produce in us that ecstasy which is our child, prior to any child [enfant avant tout enfant]. In this relation, we are at least three, each of which is irreducible to any of the others: you, me and our work [oeuvre] (Irigaray, Luce. Questions to Emmanuel Levinas. In *The Irigaray Reader*, edited by M. Whitford. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991. P. 180).

A trinitarian relationship is not necessarily a relationship of three, but a relationship where there is room for the Third, or for the desire for the Third. If the structure of sexual love presupposes the Third, implies that the beloved can love the Other (the child) before your eyes, in your presence, and with your participation, no less than you, and in a very different way – then the beloved becomes the Other, is perceived as an independent person who has an independent relationship with the Third. A father who accepts the trinity can also love the mother of his child without losing his original attitude to his wife (because of his jealousy towards her love for the child). She is not just a mistress for him, but an independent person, one who loves someone else with a different love than he does; and he loves the child in such a way that the conjugal relationship is preserved and fully realized. The trinity abides “unconfusedly, indivisibly” – when it is impossible to break off the relationship with any of its participants. At the same time, the subjects are “unconfused”, i.e. retain their independence, do not fuse with each other. The parent does not become a function or an appendage to the child, just as the child does not become someone who must be “endured” or “ruled” or simply not planned. For the child, too, each parent is not just her property or a sole object of desire: a child loves the parent who loves her spouse in a different way than the child; the child acknowledges both the love of the parents for her and their love for each other.

When the trinitarian relationship gets distorted or falls apart, a person falls into what we call **the duity**. In this structure, there is only one subject (usually the self), and to love is to merge. The other is perceived as a part of the Ego, as a projection, a property – or is discarded. When the father-mother-child unity is broken, the trinitarian structure of the relationship breaks down and the person collapses into the safe structure of the duity. The latter may manifest itself in communication, in relationships, and in the perception of the world.

Certainly, the trinitarian system, where each member of the family conditions the Otherness of the others, loves differently than the other, and yet all are one family, having been the one initially, the trinity unconfused and indivisible, is in fact a rare and fragile experience. Trinitarian relationships are very delicate, whereas the chances and options of imbalance and fracture are myriad. A mother may cling to the child and distance herself from the father; divorce splits what for the child was a whole, destroys the familial trinity; the child is enthralled by the father and draws apart from the mother; a child may become jealous when a sibling is born, and becomes alienated from her mother; many ways of playing out and resolving the Oedipal conflict⁶⁴.

One caveat is necessary here: if in psychoanalysis and psychology in general the appearance of the father as the third figure in the relationship between the child and the mother is linked to a rather late stage of personality development (2-6 years old), and it fosters the drama of a child’s desire (i.e. attraction to the mother, jealousy towards the father, interest in sexual difference⁶⁵), we speak of the trinity as the drama of the relationship of three equal subjects, the family (and not just the Oedipal attraction to the parent).

⁶⁴ An extensive but not exhaustive catalogue of such fractures is given in: Eliacheff, Caroline, Heinich, Natalie. *Mères-Filles : une relation à trois*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2002.

⁶⁵ Task Force OPD (eds.) *Operationalized Psychodynamic Diagnosis OPD-2. The Manual for Diagnosis and Treatment Planning*. Editor of the English Translation: Matthias von der Tann. P. 204ff.

This relationship arises (and can break down) immediately after the birth of the child: the infant feels the reality of bodily love between the parents (or lack thereof) much earlier than at the age of three. Just as the mother's "discarding" of the father as a third person can happen as early as in the maternity ward, immediately after the child is born. If for Melanie Klein the seminal experience of personality development is the infant's relationship with the mother's breast, and for John Bowlby, it is the separation from and reunion with the mother, then for us three elements (father, mother, child) as the basic initial configuration – even before the Oedipal conflict. The father figure is important even before this conflict. More precisely, not just the father figure, but whether the child sees and feels, in infancy itself, that there is physical love between father and mother, along with the love of both parents (and mother above all) for him/her.

VI. The breakdown of the primary trinity (father-mother-child)

1. The aversion to the Third at the corporeal level

Taking cues from fiction and personal experience, we may argue that quite a few homosexuals passed through a catastrophic experience of trinitarian relationships in their family of birth – and, consequently, have come up with the defense mechanisms against the trinity (and, consequently, the Other) on the level of the body.

"A Home at the End of the World", one of the most famous and profound LGBTQ novels of the twentieth century, begins by describing the breaking of the father-mother-child trinity in the family of Jonathan, the most unambiguously homosexual protagonist (not a bisexual or asexual like the others). The trinity is distorted on several levels at once: the mother is alienated from the father; the child, the Third, who could transform the family structure, dies because the mother didn't want him; and, most importantly, in the conflict between father and mother, the protagonist chooses the father – and the latter begins to be seen as physically, almost sexually attractive, whereas the mother is perceived as unwelcoming and scary. And then, in the situation of the disintegration of the familial trinity, Jonathan, as a teenager, feels attracted to another boy.

"Daddy?"

"Yeah?"

"Mommy doesn't want to have a baby," I said.

"Sure she does."

"No. She told me."

"Jonathan, honey, Mommy and Daddy are both very happy about the baby. Aren't you happy, too?"

*"Mommy hates having this baby," I said. "She told me. She said you want to have it, but she doesn't want to."*⁶⁶

In this situation, nobody distinguishes each other as "son-father-mother". The mother does not discern the child she carries, and does not want him. She does not discern the father as a husband (as she does not trust him enough to talk about such important things); does not discern her son as a child – someone who is not ready to be bombarded with such information. A child is the offspring of both parents, yet the mother destroys the image of the trinity in Jonathan's mind (by driving a wedge between parents: "he wants a baby and I don't"). Mother, submerged in her angst, is blind to Jonathan, the boy tries to talk to the father, but the father puts on a show

Eventually, the infant dies in childbirth.

My father wept. He had never before shed a single tear in my presence and now he cried extravagantly, great phlegmy sobs that caught in his throat with the clotted sound of a stopped pipe. Experimentally, I placed my hand on his forearm. He did not brush it off, or reprimand me. His pale hairs sprouted up raucously between my fingers.

"It's okay," I whispered, though I don't believe he heard me over his keening. "It's okay," I said again, in full voice. He did not derive any visible comfort from my reassurances.

I glanced at my mother. She was not crying. Her face was drained not only of color but of expression as well. She might have been a vacant body, waiting dumbfounded to be infused with a human soul. But when she felt my eyes on her she managed, in a strong-limbed, somnambulistic fashion, to draw me to her breast. Her embrace caught me off guard, and I lost my hold on my father's forearm. As my mother crushed my face into the folds of her coat I lost track of my father entirely. I felt myself being pulled down into the depths of my mother's coat. It filled my nose and ears. The sound of my father's laments grew muffled and remote as I was impelled deeper into my mother's clothes, through the outer layer of cold toward the scented, familiar-smelling core. I resisted a moment, tried to return to my father, but she was too strong. I disappeared. I left my father, and gave myself over to my mother's more ravenous sorrow".⁶⁷

A man who discerns his wife would not just weep on his own. He would be worried about his wife, who has gone through the pain of childbirth and the calamity of losing a child – but there is no hint of that in the story. The father does not embrace the mother, and does not distinguish her as his wife. In response to the father's sobs, the mother does not react in any way, does not approach him – but clutches her son. The son does not accept her embrace; for him it is violence. Father and mother are unable to pity and embrace each other even in such a grave situation, they do not act as parents – and thus Jonathan cannot accept the trinity.

⁶⁶ Michael Cunningham. *A Home at the End of the World*. Penguin Books, 1990. P. 11.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* P. 14-15.

Jonathan feels that he is giving himself over to his mother's "ravenous sorrow" because she is pulling him away violently, "she was too strong", and that he is losing his hold on his father – although in fact there is no loss, nothing is stopping Jonathan from approaching his father after the mother's embrace. His mother is frigid towards his father, and this distortion of sexual love affects him, as well.

The mother is not a mother for Jonathan, the one who takes pity on him and whom he takes pity on – but a "vacant body", he doesn't feel like hugging her, and her embrace is violent for him. And his father is not his father either, but merely a body, or rather a body part: Jonathan concentrates on the father's forearm, which seems unattainable and tantalizing, he dares to touch, and feels the pale hairs with his fingers.

Jonathan has lost the ability to love both parents at the level of the body: if he embraces the mother, he loses the father. There is no room in his body for a Third. That is why later he can't have sex with Clare, with whom he wants a child – he does not accept the trinitarian relationship at the corporeal level, he rejects the woman as the Other – as the possible mother of his child.

Interestingly, it is after the scene of the breakdown of the father-mother-child trinity, in the "ravenous" embrace of the mother, the father becomes for Jonathan not a father, not a person, but a beautiful body. He ceases to recognize the Other in his parents. The mother has become a repulsive raping body for him, his father – a perfect unattainable body. He specifically stresses that it is the body parts that are important to him in his father, not his personal characteristics:

*I want to talk about my father's beauty. I know it's not a usual subject for a man—when we talk about our fathers we are far more likely to tell tales of courage or titanic rage, even of tenderness. But I want to talk about my father's frank, unadulterated beauty: the potent symmetry of his arms, blond and lithely muscled as if they'd been carved of raw ash; the easy, measured grace of his stride*⁶⁸.

The father is irreconcilable with the mother, love for the father is physically incompatible with love for the mother – and the father ceases to be the Other. In the absence of the Third, he becomes merely a body, a dismembered body: "A father's throat, speckled with dried blood, the stubbly skin loosely covering a huge knobbed mechanism that swallowed beer... his lean arms, each lazily bisected by a single vein"⁶⁹.

"Giovanni's Room", a semi-autobiographical novel by James Baldwin, also commences with the disintegration of the primary father-mother-child trinity, a breakdown at the corporeal level. First, the protagonist's mother dies, but still remains a scary and frightening figure:

⁶⁸ Ibid. P. 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

My mother had been carried to the graveyard when I was five. I scarcely remember her at all, yet she figured in my nightmares, blind with worms, her hair as dry as metal and brittle as a twig, straining to press me against her body; that body so putrescent, so sickening soft, that it opened, as I clawed and cried, into a breach so enormous as to swallow me alive. But when my father or my aunt came rushing into my room to find out what had frightened me, I did not dare describe this dream, which seemed disloyal to my mother⁷⁰.

David is fearful of maternal embrace, just as Jonathan is (the protagonist of “A Home at the End of the World”). In both cases, the bodily relationships of the parents are also disrupted – Jonathan's mother is disgusted by intimacy with her husband, and David's father is not faithful to his dead wife, which is repugnant to David. Child-parent relationships are fractured in both word and flesh: Jonathan's mother cannot be sincere with the boy, and double binds constantly slip into her speech. Jonathan himself hopelessly tries to find out from his parents the truth about their attitude to his unborn brother, and in vain tries to express condolences to his father – but the latter does not hear him. Likewise, David cannot be confident with his father – he keeps his dream secret, and would not tell him the truth about his personal life.

In David, trinitary love for the parents is “frozen” in him; and the relationship with his fiancée cannot melt this ice: both David and Hella are quite cold-hearted, calculating, and independent. The “block” is removed only in love with Giovanni and only in sex. On a mental level, David remains a calculating individualist – he does not want to share money with Giovanni, to risk his well-being and reputation for him. He, nevertheless, opens up to a bodily love that he did not enjoy with his parents and did not see between them parents. Yet David's love for Giovanni is dualistic, impersonal: the longer they live together, the more Giovanni becomes just a body, one of many bodies (see above).

If the capacity for trinitarian relationships is curtailed, the fullness of love in the flesh lays bare the inability to see the Other. Baldwin's character recalls one day when he was playing in the street with Giovanni, they were blissfully happy (it is almost the only time he says “I loved Giovanni”), but then the Other immediately becomes just a body among bodies, and every passing youth merges with Giovanni. David does not distinguish Giovanni as the Other – just as Marcel does not distinguish Albertine, she merges for him with all his previous and subsequent mistresses, with his favorite landscapes and his own bodily movements, transforms into hundreds of Albertines⁷¹.

In the novel “The Center of the World”, the breakdown of the familial trinity is the starting point of the narrative: the protagonist does not know who his father is. In Phil's picture of the world there is no room for the Third, love is linked to absolute jealousy (he is rushing to hit his mother for simply waving at a boy he fancies). Both Phil and his sister Dianne do not accommodate the Third in the family: Dianne hates her mother for having many lovers, whereas Phil envies her and feels attracted to these lovers.

⁷⁰ James Baldwin. *Giovanni's Room*. New York: Vintage Books, 2013. P. 16.

⁷¹ Earlier, in the first volume of “In Search of Lost Time”, Marcel, as a child, is endlessly frustrated by his inability to kiss his mother goodnight, and his mother doesn't understand his worries. But when suddenly his father feels sympathy for him and breaks the rules by offering his mother to stay up late with the boy, Marcel is unable to kiss his dad, unable to express his love and gratitude in any way.

Mother and father are one whole. More to the point, the presence of a parent who loves another parent makes the parent precisely a parent for a child – the Other, who has his own relationships, and who may be loved as the Other, not just possessed and obsessively desired. **The desire to possess the body of a parent is transformed, through the taboo on incest, into a desire for the body of a substitute parent, someone of the same sex.** According to Lacan and Freud, it is the father who implements the cultural prohibition on incest. In the absence of the father, the cultural prohibition on incest loses its obviousness, both for the mother, who replaces her husband with a child, and for the child, who develops an endless, insatiable desire to possess a parent, without distinguishing him as a parent, and his endless replacement. In the absence of a parent who physically loves the other parent and who has his own relationship with him, the parent becomes obsessed with the body – and this body wants to be replaced by someone similar, indistinguishable from oneself, of the same sex. The characters in Steinhöfel's novel clearly formulate this:

"Sometimes I think I didn't really want a father," says Dianne, "Or I did, but only when I was small."

"You liked Kyle, didn't you?"

"I thought he would stay with us. But he left, and after that ..." Her face gives nothing away. Only her hands flit and dart along the porch railing, as if possessed with an independent life.

"And after that?"

"I stopped believing in a father. I just wanted a different mother."⁷²

An object of love (in childhood – parents, later – one's partner) becomes indistinguishable, it acts as a substitute for a substitute – and is not identified as a living person, as a whole body. One's sensations is the only reality, as the part of the body with which one's part of the body is in contact, and the objects of love are presented not as a whole body and a whole person, but as disjointed parts. Phil, the protagonist of "The Centre of the World" writes:

So Glass engaged a gardener by the hour. Martin was not much older than her—a young man with black hair and brilliant green eyes. God only knows where he came from, and that's exactly where he disappeared to. Right from the start, Dianne made no bones about the fact that she couldn't stand him, and avoided him accordingly, but I was enthralled by Martin. When he used to come into the cool kitchen after work on hot summer days, Glass [Phil's mother; she is never called mum, only by her first name] would hand him iced lemonade, and I would bury my face in his sweat-soaked vest. I loved his scent; he smelled of grass and the wide blue sky. As he spoke to Glass he would run his hands down my neck. His fingers had a soft and pleasant touch, in spite of the hard gardening. Later he would tell me stories as he showered, laughing at the

⁷² Andreas Steinhöfel. The Center of the World. P. 158-159.

*end of each sentence; his skin glistened with beads of water, and I would sit on the lid of the toilet, my head propped in my hands and look at his strong arms, his broad suntanned shoulders, and the place where his slender legs joined. Secretly, I used to take the towel he dried himself with to bed with me and use it as a blanket. That Glass took him into her bed filled me with previously unknown pangs of jealousy, keeping me awake for nights on end.*⁷³

Thus we propose to see homosexuality not as an attraction (to a person of the same sex), but as one of the outcomes of the crisis of the "father-mother-child" trinity – the structure that forms and realizes the ability to love and distinguish the Other at the level of the body and at the level of relationships (with the loved ones and with the world).

Another striking case is presented by the auto-fiction of Oksana Vasykina, a contemporary Russian lesbian writer. As follows from the novel “Wound” (2021), which tells the story of her mother’s death, Oksana’s parents separated when she was nine years old – and then her relationship with her mother and her own body underwent a change. Oksana stops feeling like a child of her parents, the flesh of the flesh of their love – and her own flesh becomes repulsive to her. She becomes embarrassed of her body, embarrassed of her love for her mother, a love that becomes an obsessive and unquenchable desire after the divorce. Before the divorce they were “mum-dad-daughter”, after the divorce she sees herself as a body craving for her mother, who also turns into body parts – legs, arms, hands, breasts, nails, nipples:

*With her pretty long fingernail she’d scoop up a round of pink sausage, raise it high, and somehow especially, triumphantly, feed it to herself. I’ve written “feed it to herself” specifically because in those moments it was like she split into two, hands and head. The hand was the feeder; it deftly held the kolbasa slice at eye level. While the head with its heavy square chin, like an animal, adjusted itself, snatched the slice with its teeth.*⁷⁴

Vasyakina writes about harmonious relations with her mother only once, when she describes the photos before the divorce, where they are all together – her mother, father, and her, and next to a fish that her father caught and her mother boiled. This was before the divorce, and she is about five years old in the photo. All subsequent memories are after she turns nine, and they are imbued with her unquenchable longing for her mother, for her mother’s body. The first and most vivid such episode is in the summer, on the beach, when she was nine, apparently just after the divorce (elsewhere in the book and in interviews she says her parents divorced when she was nine):

Usually she went sunbathing with friends, and sometimes she’d bring me along, but I was only an inconvenience: I’d either block the light or sprawl next to her heated body and annoy her with my wet, ice-cold feet. Little me always had to be supervised—the amount of time I spent

⁷³ Ibid. P. 21.

⁷⁴ Oksana Vasyakina. *Wound. A Novel*. Translated by Elina Alter. New York: Catapult, 2023. P. 71.

in the water, the bucket hat on my head, which had to be worn at all times. I was always hungry and constantly begging for food. I devoured the day's supply of sandwiches within the first half hour, then whined that I wanted ice cream or cotton candy. I was always a nuisance. I wanted attention, but Mama wanted some peace and quiet, or a leisurely conversation with her friends, gossip or recommendations for cucumber eye masks⁷⁵.

And that summer without a father, on this beach, suffering from the fact that her mother is annoyed by her icy wet feet – she falls in love with a girl with whom she swims on this beach. Moreover, the girl is completely irrelevant to her, not a person, not an Other. She does not remember her face or her name. But the longing for her mother's body, is transferred to the girl – Vasyakina wants to eat her body, to possess it completely (something that is impossible with her mother):

I lay on the blanket and the girl knelt in front of me. Her mother also shouted at her to settle down and lie there. Then the girl lowered her arms, bending them at the elbows, adjusting her torso on the warm blanket. Her narrow jutting pelvis remained in the air. Having found a spot for her chest on the blanket, she lowered it, too. Once I'd seen a show on TV about the fawns of roe deer or some other kind of deer; they were small and graceless, and their skeletons seemed to be made of the most delicate spokes. The fawns were coming to rest on the grass. First they lowered the front parts of their bodies, then the rear. I thought then that this girl was like a fawn. And I said to her that her movements looked like a baby deer's. I marveled at her like my own love. I liked her body so much. It was all like a tender lozenge that I wanted to put in my mouth.

The glitter of her skin in the sun and the dimples at the small of her back still hover before my eyes. Was I aware in that moment that what I felt about this girl was erotic excitement? Did I know such a thing existed? I don't remember, but I remember that the feeling didn't scare me at all. It elevated me, made me something very expansive. I wanted to die for her⁷⁶.

The heroine of "Wound" falls in love with a girl, wants to die for her – but that girl is not a person to her, but a idol or an animal. She is acutely aware of the beauty of the girl's body parts:

The girl was different. She was entirely different and separate from me, as though we were two creatures of a different order. My skin was marble-white, while she was breaking out here and there in spots of raspberry-colored sunburn. The girl's skin was taut, firm, and golden.

⁷⁵ Ibid. P. 50.

⁷⁶ Ibid. P. 57-58.

*Her bones were long and neat, her movements flowed, while I was angular, uncomfortable, and very ashamed of my body, awkward in my mother's uncompromising view*⁷⁷.

Vasyakina sees her body as something that does not exist in its own right, but merely as her own **reflection** in her mother's gaze. The mother's strict eyes no longer reflect the father, there is no room for the Other – and the daughter is ashamed of her body in her mother's uncompromising gaze. She wants a different body, wants to be a different body – and transfers this desire to the first, almost accidental girl (the daughter of a distant acquaintance with whom they only played once). Just as Cocteau saw his imperfections in the mirror and wanted to be/have the bodies of beautiful young men, so Vasyakina looks at herself through her mother's eyes, feels her body to be a failed image, and wants to be/have the body of a beautiful girl.

That lesbian attraction is connected with a longing for the mother is almost a commonplace of psychoanalytic and feminist theory⁷⁸. But our argument is slightly different: both the attraction to the female body as the substitute of the mother, and gay aversion towards the female body are phenomena of the same order, and they are connected with the absence of the Third. With the disappearance or rejection of the father (not the father as a parent with whom a child has separate relationship, but the father as the husband of the mother, as the Third in the father-mother-child trinity), the mother becomes an indistinct and indistinguishable super-body, a substitute and reflection⁷⁹. Thus the presence of the Third is the condition for the discernment of the Other.

Something similar was expressed, in his own peculiar language, by Lacan. In his later theories (beginning with the "Rome Discourse" of 1953), subject relations arise when there is access to the register of the symbolic – which is first discovered in the oedipal conflict. Only if there is a place for the father, the "name of the father", only if the child discerns and hears the father, who forbids total possession of the mother – only then, says Lacan, does the **law** emerge, as well as the possibility of social, discriminating interpersonal **relations** and language. Only "name of the father" makes trinitarian relations possible – and in this relationship the Other arises and the language emerges. Lacan describes the figure of the father not as an instance of prohibition, a bearer of impersonal and demanding law, but as a saviour: the child is inside the

⁷⁷ Ibid. P. 57.

⁷⁸ E.g., Amsberg K., Steenhuis A. An Interview with Luce Irigaray // Hecate. 1983. Vol. 9. P. 201; Wolff Ch. Love Between Women. London: Duckworth, 1971; Rich A. Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution. London: W. W. Norton & Company. 1995. P. 218-255.

⁷⁹ A similar disposition emerges, for example, in Susan Sontag's diaries (Reborn: Journals and Notebooks, 1947-1963. Ed. by David Rieff). She does not love her stepfather, does not accept him as her mother's husband. And her mother for her bodily is not the Other, because she does not accept her bodily relationship with the Third - to her husband, to her younger sister. As for Vasyakina, her mother is first of all a body, a body as a thing-in-itself, in her relations with her she is not independent (either submitting or rigidly alienated). She does not perceive her mother as an Other - and looks for other women who would satisfy her desire for possession of a female body. Another striking example: "Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit," an autobiographical novel by Jeanette Winterson, a British girl raised in an ultra-religious Pentecostal family. At 16 she became a lesbian and ran away from home. The heroine's mother has no love in the flesh with her father, she married him out of convenience and treats him with disdain; her mother tells her daughter how she loved another man but rejected him as "improper" - and she didn't want to give birth to a child (her daughter) either. That is, the heroine, for all her love for God and passionate desire to become a missionary, initially grows up in a broken familial trinity, where there is no love between mother and father - and in the finale, when she severs ties both with God, and with the church, and even with her family because of her lesbian relationship, the longing for her mother persists.

mother's desire, as in the jaws of a huge crocodile, in a subjectless symbiosis, while the father protects it from being swallowed up, from the clamping of its jaws⁸⁰.

Without a “name of the father”, a mother does not distinguish the child as a child, and the child does not distinguish his parents. In turn, the mother does not distinguish her husband as the Other if she does not distinguish him as the father of her children, and the father does not distinguish her as the Other, that is, as the mother of the children. **In other words, the discernment of the Other in sexual love is possible only if there are three distinct persons (father, mother, child).** Without the “name of the father,” what Lacan calls the symbolic register is inaccessible, and the person gets stuck in the register of the imaginary – the mirror stage. Speaking of the mirror stage, Lacan names the same patterns that we have identified in queer texts – “imaginary, narcissistic, mirror identification – all three of these adjectives are synonymous here⁸¹”. Without the “name of the father” the child remains in a state where she did not distinguish her body from the mother's body, where he could not experience herself as a whole body.

If there is a grain of truth in Lacan’s vision, then Vasyakina cannot identify herself without her father – and becomes dependent on her mother's cold gaze. She loses the world, the “order of the symbolic” – after her father's departure, there is no more place for the world in her love for her mother, and she no longer accepts her mother's love for the Other:

That was my mother entirely. She chose men, and not me. I observed her selections with fascination, and was bitterly, passionately, furiously jealous. She was mine, but she didn't belong to me, just as I didn't possess her quiet, mysterious smile. What was left for me was only a cold gaze, slipping through space, looking through me⁸².

So it is in the first summer of her father's absence, on the beach, that Vasyakina tries to cling bodily to her mother and beats herself up over the impossibility of complete possession - and redirects her craving to the first girl she comes across, to another mother with whom she can “lie down next to”.

All this leads us to question the idea that the main point in sexual orientation, attraction, and identity is the sexual object; that the main distinction is between those who are attracted to persons of their own sex, of the opposite sex, or of both sexes. **The fundamental categories are not about the object of attraction, but whether the relations are dualistic or trinitarian. A trinitarian relationship, in love, is not necessarily a relationship of three, but a relationship where there is room for the Third, be it a child, another loved one, the world, or the word.**

If the child accepts the parents’ love for each other, then she accepts the parent as an Other, as an independent person – i.e. not as her property: a person who can have their own

⁸⁰ Lacan, Jacques. The Seminar. Book III. The Psychoses, 1955-56. Translated by R. Grigg. London: Routledge, 1993. P. 112.

⁸¹ Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.,). The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I. Cambridge, 1988. P. 188.

⁸² Oksana Vasyakina. Wound. P. 60.

independent relationship with the Third. And this Third for the child is – initially – the father (he is the Other in relation to the mother), or the mother (the Other in relation to the father). If the child decides that the father and mother do not love each other, this breaks her image of the trinity, her ability to perceive and fit into the structure of the trinity – that is, free and infinite love, open to a Third. Then a child falls into a duity with one of his parents, enters into a symbiotic relationship, and rejects the other parent – and her existential experience becomes permeated by death (finitude).

Such was the experience of our acquaintance, let's call him X. His mother did not perceive her husband as a husband, she first became attached to one child, then to another. She had too close relations with her youngest son, she held him for her husband, looking for support in him, but she did not really discern her husband - and the main childhood experience for X was death, the fear of his parents' death.

Another acquaintance, let's call her Y, had a similar symbiotic relationship with her father, whom her mother respected, but the bond physical passion united not the parents, but the father and his daughter. And she also saw death in the world. This doesn't necessarily lead to a homosexual orientation - X fell in love with girls, but lived with his mother all his life. And, characteristically, if he dreamed of children, he did not see them as Other - he imagined that the child would be a copy of him. Y had two marriages and several affairs - and yet the relationship was built on the model of a duity ("superior-subordinate", "I-part of me"), and it was difficult for her to decide to have children, but it was easy to abort. Although children eventually appeared, she had a separate relationship with them, and a separate relationship with her husband, and in her children, she saw either a copy of herself or her property. So, we may argue that if a child sees that parents do not love each other, and she becomes the "property" of one of the parents, then a duity is formed – a structure that hinders trinitarian love, the desire for a child (as an equal independent individual) and the perception of love as something infinite.

This structure can manifest itself, among other things, as homosexuality. Such a pattern was described by Cunningham in "A Home at the End of the World": the protagonist's mother rejects his father on a physical level. And he sees death, with the image of the child's death linked to his childhood experience of the impossibility of the family trinity. His newborn sibling dies – and his parents cannot embrace each other, Jonathan himself is unable to embrace both father and mother, his mother's embrace is repulsive and makes him long for his father's body.

Another factor conditioning the creation of a duity structure is parental divorce. Parents could live in love during the child's childhood, both for each other and for the child. In such a family a child has the experience of the trinity, the experience of love discerning the Other, the experience of infinity (anti-death). The stronger becomes a shock from the parents' divorce: finitude turns out to be stronger than infinity; parents who loved each other part not from death, but from abandonment/rejection. Such a divorce provokes in the child a fear of trinitarian love as such – because it ends in all too traumatizing a catastrophe. This trauma and the defensive reaction it provokes against trinitarian love may not be articulated, may not be expressed in the apparent well-being of a child's development, but it "pops up" as soon as the person encounters a chance for her own trinitarian love – someone whom she loves so much that she wants to have children with (at least on the bodily level, not on the level of conscious planning). The defense mechanism of those who have experienced the catastrophe of trinitarian love (in their own or

their parents' family) can be expressed in different ways, **not necessarily** in the form of homosexuality – but in any case, it will be a falling out into the duity: into the ability to love only one person, rejecting the Third, into the unwillingness to have a child, or into the loss of the relationship with the spouse after the birth of the child.

Quite often the consequence of one's parents' divorce is the ensuing catastrophe of the trinity: when a child is born, one of the parents is unable to accept that her beloved loves the child. One may see in the child her own copy or mirror image, or a projection of her own unmet needs, and reject the husband/wife, or simply begin to be distressed by the family as such.

Another variant of the trinity breakdown – when parents do not become alienated from each other, but reject the child, so much so that the child rejects his/her gender, as the basis of identity. Such was the case in Leslie Feinberg's "Stone Butch Blues" (1993).

So there are various forms of duity, as we will discuss in more detail – it can be expressed as asexuality, as homosexuality, as the inability, despite heterosexual orientation, to choose the partner with whom one wants to have a child, or as the inability to want a child in the presence of a heterosexual relationship with a loved one, or as the inability to live in a triune relationship with a husband/wife and a child, if the child is born.

2. Jealousy, abortion, parricide

The crisis of love, which subjects a person to the rejection of the Third as the Other, into the duity, into the homosexual craving for the reflection of one's own body, can be related not only to the experience of the catastrophe of the father-mother-child triangle. **The emergence of a sibling and subsequent jealousy may just as easily disrupt the trinitarian relationship.**

In the case described by Freud⁸³, a girl from a wealthy family changes dramatically when her father has another child with her mother – and falls passionately in love with an older lady, a high-society cocotte. Regardless of Freudian and subsequent psychoanalytic interpretations of this story – a disappointment and a sense of betrayal on the part of the father forces the girl to "give" him, and with him all the men, to her mother, or the girl surrenders all men to her mother in order to reconcile with her and stop hating her, or she looks for a replacement for her mother in a mature woman – here one may see the connection of homosexual attraction with the crisis of the family trinity, the inability to accommodate a new child (sibling).

The aversion towards the sibling and the subsequent rejection of the Third (other) is due to the parents' inability to stand the test of the trinity and support the child. If there is no harmonious verbal-sexual relationship between the parents, they are stuck in a duity with the child. In such a case, when a new child is born, the parent, usually the mother, "switches" to the

⁸³ Freud S. The psychogenesis of a case of female homosexuality // The International Journal of Psychoanalysis. 1920. Vol. 1. Number 2. P. 149. A detailed biography of this patient has recently been published: Ines Rieder and Diana Voigt, The Story of Sidonie C.: Freud's Famous Case of Female Homosexuality (trans. from the German by Jill Hannum and Ines Rieder) (Reno, NV: Helena History Press, 2019).

younger sibling – as she is often incapable of a trinitarian relationship herself. The father may be unsupportive, or supportive in a dualistic way (e.g., withdrawing into interdependence with the elder sibling: "we don't need anyone else"). And as a result, the child cannot accept the Third, the brother/sister, because the parents do not help, but prevent the child from overcoming her inherent jealousy. If the mother's hugs and attention suddenly turn out to be intended only for the younger child, not for the father or the older one - then the older one hates the embrace with the Third, ceases to distinguish him/her as a brother/sister – and crashes into the dualistic structure.

For instance, the mother of a lesbian friend of ours treated her with a mixture of hyper-empathy and cruelty, and her husband with a cold and indifferent attitude. And when their youngest child was born, it was a disaster for our friend: she did not accept her sister, especially since her father did not help her to discern her sister as an equal Other, but arranged a duity with the older one, idolized her and emphasized that she was a being of a different order from her mother and younger sister. And our friend loved her sister - but did not distinguish her as an Other, i.e. as a sister, as a child of her parents.

Another vivid example: Ursula Tidd, Simone de Beauvoir's biographer, tells us that her first encounter with the Other was the birth of her younger sister H  l  ne, "against whom she began to define herself"⁸⁴. Although de Beauvoir's most famous work on the Other, "The Second Sex", describes the Other as a woman in a relationship with a man, biographical experience suggests that she initially experienced the threat of the Other in a more universal sense before understanding or theorizing relationships specifically between men and women. The Other for de Beauvoir, according to research, is the person who threatens her place in the world⁸⁵. (Incidentally, the sister as the primary Other explains not only the 'war of the sexes', the vision of male-female relations through the prism of the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave, but also de Beauvoir's subsequent antipathy to procreation – to the child as the emergence of the Third). And further, this structure (either she or I) became established in adult relationships: de Beauvoir's first novel ("She Came to Stay", 1943) is almost overtly biographical – about the attempt and failure of a three-way love relationship, about the horror of the fact that the one I love loves someone else, and about the ultimate impossibility of the trinity, ending with the murder of the Third:

*And yet it was only necessary to pull down this lever to annihilate her. 'Annihilate a conscience! How can I?' Fran  oise thought. But how was a conscience not her own capable of existing? If it were so, then it was she who was not existing. She repeated 'She or I.' She pulled down the lever*⁸⁶.

⁸⁴ Tidd, Ursula. 2009. Simone de Beauvoir. London: Reaktion Books, p. 18.

⁸⁵ Katz, C. (2020). Women, Jews, and Other Others: The Influence of Hegel on Beauvoir and Levinas. In: Stewart, J. (eds) The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism and Existentialism. Palgrave Handbooks in German Idealism. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. P. 523-554. P. 523.

⁸⁶ Simone de Beauvoir. She Came to Stay. Translated by Yvonne Moyse and Roger Senhouse. Harper Perennial, 2006. P. 413.

Thus, homosexual attraction, as we assume, is one of the possible consequences of a broken trinity in the family (basically, the trinity "father-mother-child"). In this path, the craving for physical possession of the object of love persists and intensifies, accompanied by the corporeal incapacity to accommodate the Third – and, accordingly, to want the Other, to recognize the Other in the beloved. This is how Jonathan in "A Home at the End of the World" embraces his mother and immediately "loses his father", beginning to hate his mother; is in love with Claire but is unable to sleep with her, unable to realize the desire for the Third (a child).

This is why Orpheus in Cocteau's film cannot love two people – since he has fallen in love with Death, he cannot see his wife, and cannot pity her, who is pregnant. As soon as Death rejects him – he immediately returns to Eurydice. In the final scene they lie side by side, cuddled together, talking about the child – but Orpheus not only has no memory of the Third, of Death, but he cannot think of the child as the Third. "He'll be as obnoxious as his father," Orpheus says cheerfully of the baby. He still does not think of the baby as his wife's child, does not see that she is pregnant, does not worry about her, and so does not think of the child as an Other, but sees him as a copy of himself. And it is at the moment when Orpheus speaks of the child (the Third) that he becomes alienated from himself – throughout the film he speaks of himself in the first person, "I", and there he suddenly uses the detached formula: "like his father".

That the male-female relationship involves a "trinity", a father-mother-child relationship, is not obvious in our era of contraception and family planning – but queer art testifies to this, too. One piece of evidence is **the motif of abortion** when it comes to the woman the protagonist loves. Thus, in Truman Capote's novella "Breakfast at Tiffany's" (1958), the hero is platonically in love with the vulnerable and extravagant Holly Golightly – but does not dare to court her, only admires her at a distance. And as soon as she gets a flatmate, she has an abortion. A child, the Third is the one who makes the woman Other: if love for a woman comes into the scene, she aborts the baby and doesn't care about it.

In Stephen Spender's autobiographical novel "The Temple", when the hero falls in love with a girl, Irmi (right after a tumultuous homosexual initiation), the author does not forget to mention that she had an abortion. Moreover, the abortion is the only thing we learn about the girl. In the relationship with Irmi, the patterns we have described (infanticide, wordlessness, dismembered body) are manifest. The more "Other" the lover turns out to be for Paul, the more difficult it is for him to communicate with. Irmi is even more "Other", a woman – and with her verbal communication is reduced to zero. As soon as their intercourse ends, she immediately runs away – some male voice calls her (which is not very plausible: who and why would look for her on a deserted beach in the morning, and if she knew that her, presumably, young man would be looking for her – why have sex on this beach, with a virtually unknown Englishman with whom she has never talked before?). For all the absurdities, one detail is symptomatic – when they make love, Paul is fixated on certain parts of her body, and when Irmi runs away, Paul sees her as a non-human, "a member of an alien species"⁸⁷. The woman, the potential mother of the child, triggers the utmost 'block'; causing the writer to be tempted to strip her of her distinctive features, so he deprives her of speech and the capacity for maternal feelings. She has not just had an abortion, as Paul learns from Ernst when they meet, but has taken it lightly – like Holly Golightly from "Breakfast at Tiffany's".

⁸⁷ Stephen Spender. *The Temple*. P. 101.

Finally, the abortion, which is not plot-driven, becomes the preamble to the bonding of Eloise and Marianne, the protagonists of Céline Sciamma's film "Portrait of a Lady on Fire", which we have already analysed. The film shows in great length and detail how the heroines try to induce a miscarriage in Sophie (the servant girl), how they help her to run until she is exhausted, how they look for the right herbs by the sea together and brew a potion. And, characteristically, for the first time they talk about what love is (and then, as we learn later, Eloise wanted to kiss Marianne for the first time), right after hours of efforts to have an abortion. This - the destruction of the fetus - turns out to be what eventually brought the two heroines together. A short time later, there follows a detailed scene of an abortion performed on Sophia by a midwife, with Marianne and Eloise watching (later, back at the estate, Marianne captures the scene in her new picture).

Within the film, the abortion story takes up a disproportionate amount of space, which left even critics a little puzzled – why this separate subplot, which is not necessary for the development of the love story and the revelation of the protagonists' character? And the critics resorted to sociological/political explanation – abortion is interpreted as a symbol of women's lack of freedom under patriarchy, the cruelty of society, or the prison of marriage and motherhood. What is abortion in "The Portrait of a Lady on Fire" – a symbol or a reality? A symbol of a woman's subordinate position, of her lack of freedom, of inequality, of something social, of subordination to circumstances – or reality itself? In our opinion, it expresses a certain truth about the structure of homosexual relations – the rejection of the Third.

There are at least three levels of cinematic narrative: the mimetic, or the logic of historical plausibility (the maid has her third abortion because she cannot afford a child or marriage due to her poverty); the author's intention in conceiving this or that scene; and the internal logic of the film, the way scenes and words are constructed in the end, what it reveals. And "The Portrait of a Lady on Fire" shows that abortion, the cooperative destruction of a fetus, shown sympathetically, becomes the symbolic basis of both the sisterhood and the love of the female protagonists. But again, the divide between heterosexual and queer characters is visible: Sophia, the most hetero-orientated of the three, has some kind of feelings for the child, despite what is happening. Her state of mind is expressed in a very unusual scene in which, during the abortion, she looks lovingly at the baby crawling on the bed next to her and kisses it, while for Marianne and Eloise, the abortion is mere "fuel" for their mutual attraction and for the art⁸⁸.

Certainly, abortion is not an indispensable element of the plot in queer texts. **Any of the parties in the trinity of father-mother-(potential) child may be aborted, discarded, or dismembered.** This could be the father – for example, in "Fried Green Tomatoes," Ruth's husband and the father of her child are murdered by the good guys sympathetic to Ruth. Interestingly, Ruth's husband had done many bad things – he raped, abused and tortured Ruth. But he is killed exactly at the moment when he did not commit any violence but came for his child, that is, he behaved like a father. For the characters and the author, he is intolerable in the role of the father – and he is killed at that very moment, after which the maid cuts off his head and her eleven-year-old son cuts off his hand and puts it into the meat stew with which they treat

⁸⁸ In another contemporary popular film about lesbian relationships, "Saving Face" (2004), directed by Alice Wu, after the happy ending, reconciliation, and acceptance of all involved (the female protagonist and her lover, her pregnant out-of-wedlock mother and grandfather), in the final scene, hearing the words about the possibility of having a child, the heroine chokes and spits out her drink (spit-take).

the policemen. So it is not just the murder of a rapist, but specifically of a father, and he is turned into food and body parts (typically queer motifs – see above). Ninnie's friend also cuts off her own mother's head and teases the policemen with it (challenging the patriarchal order). In this case it is the parent who is separated from the family and dismembered.

In Virginia Woolf's "To the Lighthouse" (1927), a novel with autobiographical elements, the rejection of the trinity is expressed in the desire to kill not the child nor the mother, but the father. Again, an apparently unmotivated desire. James, the six-year-old son of the protagonist, hates his father for being a bore and putting obstacles in the way of the trip to the lighthouse. He doesn't accept that his father doesn't strive to make everyone happy like his mother, that his father thinks about other things, and is preoccupied with obsessive neuroses. And when James' father says that the trip to the lighthouse will not take place, the boy dreams of killing him – and he singles out his father's chest as his target: "Had there been an axe handy, or a poker, any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it". The mother guesses the boy's desires, interiorises them in her empathetic hyper-care (like Proust's mother). James is in an emotional duity with her – and so he rejects the Third, hates the father as soon as he interferes with their common plan, their common dream, and rejects him as the Other, even at the level of the body: he sees the father as a dismembered body. The trinity is impossible – and the family cannot go together to the lighthouse. James reconciles with his father, and they only reach the lighthouse when his mother dies.

3. "The Gospel According to St. Matthew" by Pier Paolo Pasolini

All these themes – the rejection of the Other, the exclusion of the Third, the mortal body, and dismemberment – are explicit in Pier Paolo Pasolini's "The Gospel According to Matthew" (1964). As critics have noted, the only scene of dialogue in the film, is played out between pregnant Mary and Joseph, who thinks she has cheated on him. Only in a situation where there is a Third in the body is there a relationship. Although the characters interact, characteristically, in silence – the whole drama unfolds in a glance, and the saving denouement occurs thanks to the angel of the Lord. As in Cocteau's *Orpheus*, everything is decided by a *deus ex machina* – a sexless angel appears and says to Joseph: "fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife".

But in the rest of the film, there is no child, no Third –and no psychological interaction. Jesus acts obliviously to the Other. In the text of the Gospel, Jesus is compassionate ("But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them" - Matthew 9:36), he heals out of pity or admiration for faith, he constantly expresses admiration for particular individuals ("Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole" - 9:22; "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" - 8:10). But in Pasolini's film Jesus doesn't pity people – he doesn't see them as Others, the miracles shown are minimal. Most of the time he utters desperate, almost cursing exhortations.

Pasolini's Jesus has little dialogue with those being healed, his listeners, or his disciples. The film consists almost entirely of quotations from the Gospels, there is no ad-libbing – but the quotations are shuffled in such a way that there is practically no dialogue, Jesus delivers his

tirades to nobody in particular, not in response to questions, without any reaction from the people around him. The disciples are not individuals to him, he does not speak to them in person.

In the Gospel, in the scene of the calling of the apostles, Jesus addresses the brothers Simon and Andrew, throwing in a cheerful tongue-in-cheek metaphor: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," making play of the brothers' craft. He singles out four disciples, and addresses one of them in a particular way – and only after this personal address of Jesus does the evangelist name all the apostles. In Pasolini's film, however, the names of the apostles are listed by Jesus, not by the narrator – in a row, in a list, they are all the same to him, in one row. In the same way, in a formal list, he lists the names of the apostles at the end – they break down for him into a series of names, just as Albertine breaks down for Marcel into "a hundred Albertines".

The scene of walking on water is particularly significant. In Matthew this is an extremely psychologized communication: Jesus is walking on the water, Peter is frightened that Jesus will drown, he is globally frightened that it is not Jesus, he urgently needs to be sure, he wants to run to him immediately, but he lacks his own will, confidence in his own self – and confidence that it is Jesus. Peter feels a dash towards Jesus, but he does not dare to realize it of his own free will. So he asks: "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." And he runs, but is afraid and drowns, and he cries out: "Lord, save me." Jesus supported him, and pulled him out - he gave Peter the opportunity to realize his doubt and his urge. He, too, was nervous - both because Peter doubted that it was him and because Peter almost drowned; Jesus, being nervous, allows himself to vent his emotions and rebukes Peter - "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?".

In Pasolini's film, this scene is very much blurred. There are almost no words, we don't even see Peter's face when he is rescued by Jesus – we see him from the back. And this is no accident. Pasolini finds it hard to imagine running through the water towards each other - just as it is hard to imagine a serious risky conversation with the Other, when the two look at each other and "walk on water" of mutual misunderstanding; a face-to-face conversation. Similarly - from the back – Orpheus is shown leading Eurydice out in Cocteau's *Orpheus*, being held by the shoulders from behind by Ardebise. Cocteau cannot imagine sex when the two are looking at each other – nor can he reproduce the urge of Orpheus, who walks through death like water and looks back at Eurydice. His Orpheus walks looking at Ardebise's back and holding on to him with his hands, as in a doggy style position.

The characters in Pasolini's film hardly look at each other. If he occasionally depicts a dialogue, the camera shows a close-up of one speaker, and then another, they do not meet in the same frame. The only scene where the speakers are in the same frame and look at each other is, again, Joseph and Mary – and their mute conversation is about the Third – a child. Typically, Pasolini avoids the Third in the film. During the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is supposed to appear, whom John sees as a dove, and it is only at this moment, at the moment of the Third's appearance, that everyone hears God's voice: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". But there is no dove in the film.

Pasolini's Jesus hardly ever talks about the "Father in heaven", unlike the Jesus of the Gospels (the word "father" is mentioned 63 times in Matthew's Gospel). But Pasolini displays the mother of Jesus more than once – the elderly Mary is portrayed by the director's mother,

Susanna. The family trinity was disrupted for Pasolini: he was three years old when his younger brother was born, he was terribly jealous of the boy – and at the same time he experienced a violent conflict with his father, who himself was jealous of his mother's infant son. Pasolini began to be drawn physically to his mother, slept in the same bed with her – but in the absence of his father and with the rejection of his brother (the Thirds) – she became for him not an Other, not a mother, i.e. his father's wife and his brother's mother, but just a body, parts of a body. It was then that he began to look at boys, and it was the body parts that attracted him:

*“In the first three years of my life he was more important to me than my mother. He was a strong, reassuring presence. A truly affectionate and protective father. Then suddenly, when I was about three, the conflict broke out. Ever since then there was always an antagonistic, dramatic, tragic tension between him and me.”*⁸⁹

The conflict erupted when Pasolini's mother was pregnant with her brother.

*“When my mother was about to give birth, I started to suffer from smarting eyes. My father made me hold still on the kitchen table, opened my eye with his finger, and put collyrium in it. It was from that ‘symbolic’ moment that I began not to love my father... I remember my mother being pregnant and myself asking, ‘Mamma, where do babies come from?’ And she, sweetly and gently, replied, ‘They come from the mamma’s belly.’ That was something that of course at the time I didn’t want to believe.”*⁹⁰

And at the same age that his brother was born and the conflict with his father began, Pasolini felt an attraction towards boys (note the motif similar to Oksana Vasyakina's childhood memories):

*“I was attracted by their legs, in fact precisely by the hollow of their knees. I had called this feeling of love Teta-veleta. A few years ago Gianfranco Contini pointed out to me how in Greek tetis means sexual organ (whether male or female.) and how Teta-veleta would be a ‘reminder’ of the kind used in archaic languages. I had this same feeling of ‘Teta-veleta for my mother’s breast.”*⁹¹

In Pasolini's film, there is just one occasion to display dismembered body – the beheading of John the Baptist. The execution is shown extremely naturalistically and takes up a lot of screen time (as does the slaughter of the infants at the beginning). According to the text,

⁸⁹ E. Siciliano. Pasolini: a biography. New York: Random House, 1982. P. 37.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid. P. 38.

Herodias, Salome's mother, hated John because he called her daughter's cohabitation with King Herod Antipas a sin. When Herod said that for her daughter's beautiful dance, he was ready to give any gift, Herodias asked that Salome demand as a reward the head of John the Baptist on a platter. "And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her" (Matt. 14:9). Pasolini shows the execution in detail – but, unlike in the gospel, there is no dialogue, no attempt by Herod to object, no conversation between Herodias and her daughter. She does not negotiate with Salome – but silently kisses her on the lips, thus setting in motion the machine of hatred of men – a single homosexual gesture that Pasolini incorporates into the Gospel story.

For Pasolini, the family as a whole, the love of a man and a woman conceiving a child, is disintegrated. Hence Pasolini's favourite motifs of body dismemberment, cannibalism, and sex with animals – constant themes in other films (most notably "Salo, or 120 Days of Sodom", "Pigsty") – and motifs of "dismemberment of the family", the murder of one of its members by another. Medea kills Jason's children, and Oedipus kills his father. In "The Gospel According to Matthew" Pasolini has no opportunity to show the dismemberment of the body and the disintegration of the family – he follows the biblical text. He does, however, expressively show the massacre of the innocents at the beginning of the film, emphasizes the corporeality of the crucifixion of the robbers and Judas' suicide, emphatically and vividly repeats several times the maxim, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37), and expressively shows the scene where Jesus says that his real brothers, father and mother, are those who do his will, not the mother and brothers who have now come to him.

The way Pasolini interprets the image of Jesus reflects his vision of the body. His Jesus is not a person who speaks and responds, he cannot pity or admire, he is above all a beautiful body (remember how Proust insisted on the impersonality of Albertine, how Jonathan in Cunningham's novel insisted that he wanted to talk not about the character but about the physical beauty of his father, how Whitman insisted on the primacy of the body). Jesus is perfectly handsome, with spiritualised facial features that do not change. And this ideal, otherworldly countenance is contrasted with the ugly faces of the crowd and the disciples. As we have already shown, the lover in homosexual, especially in gay art, is marked by an ideal inhuman beauty. The rest of the characters are the ugly, expressionless faces of Italian peasants (Pasolini did not take professional actors as a matter of principle). The binary optic, contrasting the ideal and the ugly, the heavenly and the earthly, is extremely characteristic of homosexual aesthetics, starting with Plato - we will talk more about this dualistic picture of the world.

One of the very few miracles of healing in the film is the healing of the leper. This is the only scene when an ordinary man is given a lot of attention, and the dialogue with him is conveyed exactly – because the leper is shown as ugly as possible. He doesn't have the sores characteristic of leprosy – he has a swollen face with distorted proportions, he looks not like a sick person, but like a freak. And when he Jesus heals him in response to his request, the leper rejoices – one of the few instances of "feedback" in the film. Pasolini probably rendered this episode of the book in an unusually detailed manner because of the dualistic antithesis "ugliness-beauty": just as Dorian Gray's perfect beauty correlates with his ugly real face, just as the beauty of Vanya Smurov's body correlates with the hideous, slimy corpse in the same water. The same applies to the "passions": in Pasolini's film, the physical suffering of people, disfiguring the

body, is shown in an emphatically naturalistic way, with screams and grimaces – this includes the nailing of those crucified with Jesus, the execution of John, and the suicide of Judas.

Yet the "Passion of the Christ" itself is not included in the film – although it is the most important episode in the Christian tradition, and in the Gospel of Matthew it is depicted in detail: Jesus was put on a crown of thorns, spat on, beaten on the head with a cane before being crucified (Matt. 27:31). But there is no scourging in the film, no depiction of Jesus' suffering during the crucifixion – the robber screams shrill as they hammer nails into his hands, but in the next scene Jesus is calm on the cross. For Pasolini, unlike the Evangelist, Jesus is not a human being, not a body like the bodies of other people, but **a perfect body**.

For Pasolini's Jesus, there is no passion nor compassion: he exists in an ideal dimension separate from human beings – and that is why he cannot resurrect. We have already said that in the homosexual gaze, the lover appears as "mortal"; at the moment of love's climax, replaceability and mortality of the body, impending decay, are revealed. And so Pasolini is unable to depict either the Transfiguration or, for that matter, the resurrection of Jesus – Love incarnate. The episode of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17: 1-8), when Jesus, in the presence of the chosen disciples, suddenly took on a different body and "raiment as white as light", rose into the air and began to communicate with Elijah and Moses, is simply removed from the script. Pasolini cannot imagine that a body can be transformed, cannot imagine that Elijah and Moses can communicate, as if alive, with Jesus.

Pasolini cannot imagine immortality and resurrection – nor of Elijah and Moses, nor of Jesus, nor of ordinary people. The episode of Jesus' raising of ordinary people like Jairus' daughter (Matthew 9:18-19, 23-26) – just as Pasolini does not film the miracle of the five loaves and two fish, which occupies a significant place in the Gospel (14: 13-21). The cursing of the barren fig tree is shown in great detail, however. So Pasolini's view of food and the body is that it is mortal: the matter cannot be transformed.

Pasolini rejects, at the level of the body, the transformation of the duty of love into a trinity when the third is conceived, refuses to be the child of both parents, has no experience of love that gives birth to a child – and is unable to depict the Transfiguration and Resurrection. Of course, the film can't completely eliminate the Resurrection, but the director doesn't show Jesus rising, we see him once, almost in a glimpse. In the center of the frame, there is a crowd of indistinguishable people who are rushing frantically to spread the Christian doctrine. The protagonist in the final scene is a beautiful and sexless angel who appeared at the beginning of the film. It is the angel, not Jesus, who tells about the Resurrection (in the Gospel the message is not only carried by him – Jesus says "do not be afraid" and "rejoice" to his disciples, who react in different ways). And the beauty of the angel seems to frame and finish the story – the fairy tale is over.

VII. Beyond straight/gay divide: duty and trinity in relationships

1. The basic structure of love

But now is the time to make a U-turn and pose the question – are the patterns, the forms of perception of the world, and the human being that we have seen in homosexual authors not found anywhere else? On the contrary, they are! The beloved as a non-other, the ideal body replacing the parent's body, the dismembered body; the rejection of the Other, of the family trinity of husband-wife-child, and objective linear time – these marks of the duty are strikingly evident in heterosexual authors.

Take Leo Tolstoy, for instance. He questioned, mocked, and denied the Christian dogma of the Trinity⁹² (one of the reasons he was anathematized by the Russian Orthodox church). Tolstoy finds it hard to fall in love with the Other who gives birth to the Third – i.e. with a woman. He confessed that since adolescence he had fallen in love with boys, much more often and more passionately than with girls, although there had never been any thought of engaging in a homosexual relationship⁹³. Tolstoy does not feel a woman is a bearer of a child – and he is cruel to his pregnant wife⁹⁴ (she twice almost lost their first child, in the fifth and seventh months of pregnancy). But this attitude reflects not selfishness nor cruelty: Tolstoy acutely feels only his own body. “Not the thing!”, – Tolstoy wrote in his diary after the wedding night (it was an embarrassment to both of them).

Probably, for Tolstoy, sex was not an experience of encounter with the Other, the infinity of love/life in the Other that conceives the Third. On the contrary, sex for him must have been an experience of encounter with the absence of the Other – with death. His ultimate sexual and existential experience is death: hence the revelation of “Arzamas horror”⁹⁵, and the persistent theme of death in his work and the persistent theme of death in his work. The protagonist of “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” lives alone with his death, communicates only with it, and his wife and children only cast a shadow on his loneliness.

Pozdnyshov, the hero of “The Kreutzer Sonata,” does not feel his wife, and his love for her awakens only in jealousy – and in death: “Only when I saw her dead face did I understand all

⁹² My Confession, Critique of Dogmatic Theology. (The Complete Works of Count Tolstoy- Volume XIII). J.M. Dent and Sons, 1904.

⁹³ “I have very often been in love with men; my first love was the two Pushkins, then the second – Saburov, then the third Zybina and Dyakov, the fourth Obolensky, Blofeld, Slavina, then Gautier and many others. Of all these people I still love only Dyakov. For me the chief sign of love is the fear of offending or not pleasing the object of one’s love; simply fear. I fell in love with men before I had any idea of the possibility of pederasty; but even when I knew about it, the idea of the possibility of coitus never occurred to me” (Tolstoy’s Diaries. Volume I: 1847–1894. Edited and translated by R. F. Christian. Faber & Faber, 2015. P. 72-73).

⁹⁴ “That summer Lev Nikolayevich was fond of bees, and when he invited me to the bee-farm, he ordered me to harness a cart, put in it various things needed at the bee-farm, and put me in it, taking the reins himself. I was already five months pregnant with Tanya, but I was not taken care of, on the contrary, I had to get used to everything and adapt to the village life, and forget my pampered lifestyle of the city” (Sophia Tolstoy. My Life (in Russian)).

⁹⁵ “In 1869, just after he finished War and Peace, Leo Tolstoy experienced a profound spiritual crisis as the result of an incident during a journey through the city of Arzamas, which is on the Tyosha River about 250 miles east of Moscow. As he described it in his unfinished story Notes of a Madman (so titled because Tolstoy was convinced his readers would find the tale implausible), a few hours after midnight he awakened “seized by despair, fear and terror such as [he had] never before experienced.” After asking himself what there was to be afraid of, none other than Death himself answered, “I am here.” Tolstoy, confronting the inescapability of his own death, panicked and raged against its power. That evening stayed with Tolstoy for the rest of his life; he became permanently preoccupied with mortality”. (Smith J. A Night in Arzamas // <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2012/02/02/a-night-in-arzamas/>).

that I'd done. I understood that I, I had killed her; it was my fault that she who was once alive, moving, and warm, was now motionless, waxen, and cold; and it would be absolutely impossible to remedy"⁹⁶ – only when his wife has become a dead body, when no children, no Thirds interfere, does Pozdnyshev feel his love for her. Just as the protagonist of Wilde's fairy tale "The Fisherman and His Soul" makes love to a dead mermaid all night long – when his soul (the Third) does not interfere.

For Tolstoy, love between a man and a woman is love for a solitary dead body. Tolstoy directly compares Vronsky's sex with Anna to murder: he cannot imagine an encounter of two equal subjects in the flesh: one of them must be a dead object:

"He felt what a murderer must feel when he sees a body he has deprived of life. This body he had deprived of life was their love, the first period of their love. There was something horrible and loathsome in his memories of what had been paid for at this terrible price of shame. Shame at her spiritual nakedness was crushing her and was being communicated to him. Despite the full horror of the murderer before the dead body, though, this body had to be cut to pieces and hidden, advantage had to be taken of what the murderer had gained by murder.

*And with an animosity akin to passion, the murderer throws himself on this body, drags it away, and cuts it up; thus did he cover her face and shoulders with kisses. She held his hand and did not stir"*⁹⁷.

Notably, Anna "did not stir" – in duty, the beloved is a passive/subjectless/dead object. The familiar motif of dismemberment is also present. Further, Anna sees her husband in the same "dismembered" way. After meeting Vronsky at a ball, she returns home – and is disgusted by his ears⁹⁸. The subject is absent from the relationship – and there is no whole body, the parts of the beloved's body are felt only at the moment when they touch the lover, and this vivid sensation immediately dies as soon as physical contact ceases. There is no memory and image of the "whole body" – because there is no place for the Third. Probably, that is why Tolstoy did not care about his pregnant wife: he does not remember, does not feel that there is a Third, that his wife is pregnant, for him, she is real only insofar as his body touches her body.

Duty defines the moral philosophy of Tolstoy. He sees the world in binary categories: as an insoluble conflict between Good and Evil, as an antagonism between the oppressors (landlords) and the oppressed (peasants). He is sympathetic towards Anna Karenina, and makes an effort to portray her as a complex, psychologically nuanced person, not in black and white. Yet the epigraph to the novel "Vengeance is mine, I will repay" betrays the author's intention:

⁹⁶ The Kreutzer Sonata Variations. Lev Tolstoy's novella and counterstories by Sofiya Tolstaya and Lev Lvovich Tolstoy. Translated and Edited by Michael R. Katz. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014. P. 69.

⁹⁷ Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenina. Translated from the Russian by Marian Schwarz. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014. P. 138-139.

⁹⁸ "In Petersburg, no sooner did the train stop and she get out than the first face that caught her eye was her husband's. "Oh, my God, where did he get those ears?" she thought, looking at his cold and imposing figure and especially at the cartilage of his ears, which now amazed her and which propped up the brim of his round hat". (Ibid. P. 96).

God is “punishing” Anna, she has committed an evil deed. Not only Tolstoy considers adultery evil, but every instance of physical love between a man and a woman (in “The Kreutzer Sonata” and “The Death of Ivan Ilyich”).

For him, there is no place for a child in sexual desire (that is why Tolstoy hardly grasps that he should take care of his pregnant wife), there is no place for the Other. Tolstoy is fascinated by his wife’s body, yet her grievances and experiences are not really comprehensible to him⁹⁹. All these observations throw some peculiar light on Tolstoy’s aversion towards the Christian doctrine of the Trinity¹⁰⁰.

But by no means we are trying to argue that Leo Tolstoy was a latent homosexual or a queer person¹⁰¹. On the contrary! The key point of this book is to move away from the categories of homo-, hetero-, and bisexuality as non-alternative and descriptive of the truth about human beings. We question the idea that the main thing about sexual orientation, attraction, and identity is **the sexual object** (and thus the principal distinction is between those attracted to people of one's own sex, the opposite sex, or both sexes. What matters (the fundamental thing) is not the object of attraction, but whether relations of the flesh and of the heart express a binary or a trinitarian structure.

As we have shown above, any relationship may incline toward the perception and acceptance of one’s partner as the Other, as a unique person, and the assumption of the possibility of the Third. Or it may tilt towards seeking, in the partner, someone similar to oneself, an extension or a copy of oneself; an object that addresses one’s lack – moreover, a relationship unequal and static; a relationship that actively opposes the Third (the child, the world...). In such a relationship, one interacts with the partner not as a unique and immortal person, the Other, but as a body, a beautiful body among other bodies, a set of attractive body parts, edible as food, in other words, as an object. **These two opposites are what we call duity and trinity.**

The idea of juxtaposing binary and ternary structures in regard to human relationships has indeed been expressed before. Renowned German sociologist Georg Simmel, in his discussion of the dyad and triad, gave an apt description of the features of the duity – fusion, interdependence

⁹⁹ in her diary, Sofya Andreyevna complains that her husband does not appreciate her and does not see her, “and yesterday he kissed me madly, saying that he always admires the beauty of my body” – entry of the 8th of October, 1899).

¹⁰⁰ In fact, the attitude to the seemingly rather abstract Christian dogma of God as Trinity can be an eloquent ‘symptom’ of a **personal, psychological duity**. Isaac Newton actively rejected the Trinity and leaned towards Arianism (the Son, Christ is not God, but one of the Father’s creations), following in this respect the poet John Milton (who, which was very rare at the time, passionately defended divorce). «Passionate in their private confutations of this most central of Christian doctrines, the poet and the physicist both denied the existence of a Trinity that tied the Son to the Father and Holy Spirit in a shared essence.» (John Rogers. Newton’s Arian Epistemology and the Cosmogony of Paradise Lost. ELH, Volume 86, Number 1, Spring 2019, pp. 77-106. P. 77). Newton not only never had a romantic relationship and probably died a virgin, but also experienced the cruel breakdown of the family trio: he hated his stepfather, and even his mother, for marrying that man (Keynes Milo 2008. Balancing Newton’s mind: his singular behavior and his madness of 1692–93 // Notes Rec. R. Soc. 62289–300). The most uncompromising in defiance of the Trinity among the modern philosophers was Immanuel Kant, a man who had no experience of fatherhood or love with a woman in the flesh (and who saw marriage only as a quasi-commercial contract between two autonomous subjects). CM.: Kant, Immanuel. Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone. New York: Harper and Row, 1979. P. 67; Kant I. The Conflict of Faculties. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1979. P. 133-134.

¹⁰¹ J. S. Castro. Queer Tolstoy. A Psychobiography. London and New York: Routledge, 2023.

(unfreedom), a premonition of death, endless fear (above all, of the third, who can destroy it the dyad):

“A union of two, certainly not with regard to its life but with regard to its death, depends on each of its elements for its very being... For the feeling of bonding [in the dyad], there has to be a tone of peril and of indispensability... That a third thus added to the two persons of a group interrupts the most intimate feeling, is significant for the more delicate structure of the groupings of two; and it is valid in principle that even marriage, as soon as it has led to a child, is sometimes undermined... So it is that cold, internally estranged marriages desire no child because it binds: its uniting function highlights the foundation of that dominant estrangement all the more effectively, but also all the more undesired. Sometimes however very passionate and fervent marriages also want no child—because it divides. The metaphysical oneness, into which both sought to fuse only with one another, has now slipped through their fingers and stands over against them as a third physical presence that intrudes between them”¹⁰².

Simmel moves on and depicts a third as the disruptor of the dyad, or as an accessory to the conspiracy of the first against the second party, and vice versa (*tertius gaudens*). Simmel is capable of imagining other forms of relationship, apart from the dyad, yet he tends to views describes the Third as an enemy and a destructive force: “Simmel's third element comes from the Hobbesian world of selfish independent egos: he can be malicious and could become both a conciliator and a source of conflict between the ego and his partner”¹⁰³.

Roland Barthes, in his lecture course at College de France (1976/1977), also came up with a concept close to what we call duity. He named it “pairing” (*couplage*), and drawing on examples from “Lausaic History” and Proust, emphasized the interdependence of two people, the sexual and erotic meaning of any secluded couple, the interchangeability of roles in the duity (rapist/victim)¹⁰⁴.

Yet our concept is broader than these ideas. Throughout the book, we have sought to find out how the duity operates, and what makes it different from the trinity. Binary structure can manifest itself in communication, in relationships between people, and in the way we perceive the world. It is not just rigid binary oppositions, such as “us – them”, or Gnostic dualism (separation of soul and body, opposition of the world and God), and not only inequality – relationships where reciprocity of equals is impossible and cannot be conceived, while their participants are perceived as superior and inferior, or as rapist and victim.

Duity	Trinity
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¹⁰² Simmel G. (2009) [1908] Sociology. Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms. Volume 1. Leiden: Brill. P. 83, 86, 87.

¹⁰³ Kostrova Elizaveta. 2018. "The Dyad and the Third Party: The Traces of Simmel's Distinction in Phenomenology and Family Studies." AVANT, 9 (2): 187-202. P. 195.

¹⁰⁴ R. Barthes. How to Live Together: Notes for a Lecture Course and Seminar at the Collège de France (1976–1977). Columbia University Press: New York, 2013. P. 67-71.

Love as an experience of death	Love as an experience of immortality
The body separate from the soul	The body and soul together
Isolation	Openness
The world disappears	The world appears
Speechlessness, muteness	Communication, word
The Other as a master, a servant, an idol, a thing, merely a body	The Other as an equal person
Static, predictable relationships	Dynamic, unpredictable relationships
Interchangeability of those who participate in a relationship	Uniqueness of those who participate in a relationship
Focusing on oneself, on one's own feelings	Focusing on the Other
Exclusion/disapproval of the Third	Desire/acceptance of the Third

In the binary structure of love, there is only one subject (usually the self), and to love is to merge in empathy, to become part of the self. The Other is either a part of oneself or she is discarded. If the other subject chooses something third (communicates with someone else, sympathizes with someone other than the main subject, the "I"), then in the binary optics the Other is instantly transformed into something inferior, hostile, or simply absent. Hegel's master-slave dialectic also describes this structure.

The relationship boils down to conflict – a conflict where the Other is dehumanized, becomes simply “evil,” “the enemy,” they must be destroyed or at least shut up, they have no right to speak. Or – to possession and power: a master and his object. In the duty, the partner is not a unique Other, love with whom means immortality and infinity, but a function; and a mortal body whose beauty is transient – a body that can be replaced by another body. In the duty, the lovers are closed off from the world and from time; the duty is hostile to the flow of time. The duty, however, is neither a prolonged preoedipal stage, nor an inability to "establish a healthy relationship", in common psychological parlance, nor an instance of a narcissistic personality. We consider the duty a **protective relationship structure** – and a viable one.

A structure. i.e., duty is a holistic unit, and not merely a set of disparate attributes. Let us suppose that there is a world in which we live, and this world consists of a multitude of unique entities connected to each other by a myriad of complex relationships. At some point, a person's relationship with their key significant Other (mother, friend, beloved) breaks down. Then love becomes impossible, and a person **falls out of the world**, with its complex relationships, complicated histories, and passage of time, into a simpler structure – a duty. This structure is stable and predictable: it satisfies one's need for love, but the Other in it is erased, desubjectified, “**tamed**”, turned into a mute body in one's possession. And this relationship must not be threatened by any Third and by the world.

2. Ideal types: Horace and Ovid versus Catullus and Propertius

Whereas the aesthetics and the experience of homosexuality as a distinct identity (as well as the very concept of homosexuality) is more of an attribute of modernity (the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries), **the duity and the trinity, seen as traits of personality and relationships, have probably been there throughout the history of humankind.**

Take Horace, for instance. He views the relationship between the poet and society in binary categories; the poet and the rabble are ontologically separate for him, as the philosopher and the rabble were for Plato. Horace does not accept the love of man and woman, in which there is room for a Third. He does not see a woman as a personality. In his odes and epistles, there are many heartfelt, ironic, sad, and funny addresses to friends – but there is not a single serious (not formal or pejorative) address to a woman. Regarding the love of man and woman, Horace is skeptical. Many women (Lalaga, Chloe, Lydia, etc.) are mentioned in the odes, but they are portrayed as either treacherous, or as ex-lovers, or as abstract mythological images. All of these women, in Lacan's terms, are partial objects: they occupy only a part of the poet's life, and he sees their bodies, too, as separate parts. “Wry nail, black tooth”, “yellow hair”, “rosy-tinted neck”¹⁰⁵. And his own body – in the face of love/death/eternity – Horace also sees as dismembered: in the first Ode, he is going to touch the sky with “the top of the head” (*sublimi vertice*).

The link between dismemberment (un-wholeness), mortality, and the indiscernment of the Other becomes particularly clear when we compare Horace's love lyrics with the poems of his older contemporary Catullus, dedicated to his beloved, whom he calls Lesbia. Catullus, for all his homoerotic invectives and quarrels with Lesbia, clearly articulates the difference between the perception of the body “in parts” – and the body “as a whole”. In the epigrams, he subjects both girls and men to dismemberment and crude objectification – but above all males. Catullus foretells Fabullus being transformed into “all Nose” (Poem 13), and associates Rufus with a grim goat for his armpits¹⁰⁶.

Yet it is only Lesbia who is the Other for Catullus. Their relationship is equal, complex, changing. With her Catullus sees, if not the birth of a child, then its analog, immortality: in the fifth poem, after a ridiculous bargain for hundreds and thousands of kisses, he writes *nox est perpetua una dormienda* (“destined to sleep an eternal night together”). Catullus loves Lesbia even when he is displeased with her (*cogit amare magis, sed bene velle minus*, “such wrongs drive a lover to love the more, but less to respect”, poem 72), even after the breakup and betrayal he continues the inner dialog. **Lesbia for Catullus is the Other**, with whom there is verbal communication, there are many changing forms of their relations¹⁰⁷ – and her body for him is whole, unified.

Catullus clearly articulates the difference between the body of the one he knows whole – both in tears and in joy, betraying and dependent, whom he loves and hates, *odi et amo*. in other words, with whom he has a relationship – and the body of, for example, Quintia, which is seen as just a body: fair, tall, beauteous – but not whole:

¹⁰⁵ Dente si nigro fieres vel uno // turpior ungui (Od. 2.8); cui flavam religas comam (Od. 1.5); cervicem roseam (Od. 1.13).

¹⁰⁶ “totum ut te faciant, Fabulle, nasum” (Poem 13); “valle sub alarum trux habitare caper” (Poem 69).

¹⁰⁷ They argue, joke, then Catullus pities her sparrow, then remembers what she used to be like, and now she is serving soldiers in the back alleys, then he says that he still loves her, etc.

Quintia beautiful seems to the crowd; to me, fair, and tall,
 Straight; and merits as these readily thus I confess,
 But that she is beauteous all I deny, for nothing of lovesome,
 Never a grain of salt, shows in her person so large.
 Lesbia beautiful seems, and when all over she's fairest,
 Any Venus-gift stole she from every one¹⁰⁸.

For Catullus, Lesbia is not an object, nor an extension or reflection of the needs of his body, but an equal subject of relationship. The body is whole, and there is equality in both physical and verbal communication. Horace, on the other hand, thinks of girls as body parts – and these girls are replaceable. He has no experience of a whole body – and he imagines his own body as disjointed. In the “Monument” Horace proudly proclaims that “the greater part of me”, *multaque pars mei*, will escape death. For Catullus, it is unthinkable to say *pars mei*. Even Attis, the eunuch, weeps after the castration: what, am I now to be *pars mei*, a part of myself? And there Attis laments the wholeness of identity, both gender and national:

Patria o mei creatrix, patria o mea genetrix ...

Patria, bonis, amicis, genitoribus abero...

Ego Maenas, ego mei pars, ego vir sterilis ero?

Mother-land, my creatress, mother-land, my begetter...

From country, goods, friends, and parents, must I be parted?...

I a Maenad, I a part of me, I a sterile trunk!¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Quintia formosa est multis, mihi candida, longa,
 recta est. haec ego sic singula confiteor,
 totum illud “formosa” nego: nam nulla venustas,
 nulla in tam magno est corpore mica salis.
 Lesbia formosa est, quae cum pulcherrima tota est,
 tum omnibus una omnis subripuit Veneres.
 (Poem 86. Translation by Richard Burton).

¹⁰⁹ Poem 63. Translation by Leonard C. Smithers.

It is significant that Catullus correlates “partiality” with infertility, i.e., the inability to conceive a Third person. Horace, who did not love any woman *totidem* (whole) in the flesh, could not have said such a thing, even on behalf of the mad Attis. Horace wrote: *Caelum, non animum, mutant, qui trans mare currunt*, (“the sky, not the soul is changed by those who run beyond the sea” – Epistles I.11). For Catullus, on the other hand, it is unthinkable to change soul or body or country, or even to counterpose them. For him, unlike for Horace, there is the one with whom soul and body are one – and whom one can “hate and love”, not forgetting, not abandoning.

So, in Roman love poetry, there are the poets of the duality (Ovid and Horace) and the poets of the trinity (Catullus and Propertius). Horace has no unique Other in his love poems – and the body is disjointed. He is focused on the parts of the body; time for him is unreliable, “envious” (*invida aetas*), it must be plucked like the fruit of the vine (*carpe diem* – from “Ode to Leuconoe”), because only death lies ahead. For Horace, death, not love, is the main existential experience.

Ovid is less focused on existential problems and posterity: he stands firmly on his feet in this world. Yet Ovid does not have one beloved, the Other. There are many women for him – objects of seduction in “Ars amandi”, or women as types (“Heroides”). And the body in Ovid’s poetry, as in Horace’s, also falls apart, and mutates – hence his “Metamorphoses”, where the protagonists are transformed into another being, gradually, member by member. Horace undergoes the same gradual mutation – in the light of posthumous poetic eternity (not the eternity of love).

In one ode on his own immortality Horace touches the sky “with his forehead,” and in another he imagines himself turning into a swan. Horace, on the one hand, asserts his poetic immortality, as he emphatically repeats the pronoun “I” (*ego*), which is rare in Latin. On the other hand, in the context of eternity, Horace renounces his body and the trinity with his parents: upon my death, I will no longer be me, no longer the son of poor parents, but a swan:

iam iam residunt cruribus asperae

pelles, et album mutor in alitem,

superne nascunturque leves

per digitos umerosque plumae.

E'en now a rougher skin expands

Along my legs: above I change

To a white bird; and o'er my hands

And shoulders grows a plumage strange¹¹⁰.

Note that a similar metamorphosis, the appearance of an animal body part during the transition from time to eternity, occurs in Plato's "Phaedrus" and Kuzmin's "Wings" –the body mutates, and loses its wholeness.

For Propertius, the contemporary of Horace, the mutation of the body, "partiality" is unthinkable – because he has a beloved Other, a body that is whole for him and guarantees the wholeness of his own body. He loves Cynthia, she is his first and last love – *Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit* ("Cynthia was the first, Cynthia will be the last"¹¹¹). She is not an episodic role model, as in Horace and Ovid, but a real Other with whom a variety of relationships – quarrels, reconciliations, resentments, jealousy, intellectual conversation – take place.

The first three books of his elegies are devoted to Cynthia, then she dies, and in the fourth book Propertius writes about Rome (a set of etiological elegies in the tradition of Callimachus). And then suddenly, in elegy 4.8, Cynthia (or rather her ghost) comes to Propertius. It is remarkable that a real resurrection takes place: not a shadow, not a part of a body or a part of a person, not a ghost, but a full-fledged Cynthia. She remains as she was in life, with the same jealousy, resentfulness, passion, and enterprise.

The poem consists almost completely of the speech of the ghost of the beloved – a touching and slightly comic list of grievances, excuses, and jealous admonitions. But in the last two couplets, the monologue turns into a dialogue, and Cynthia and the narrator each have an elegiac verse (hexameter and pentameter lines): they are equal in love in the flesh:

nunc te possideant aliae: mox sola tenebo:

mecum eris, et mixtis ossibus ossa teram."

haec postquam querula mecum sub lite peregit,

inter complexus excidit umbra meos.

For now, let other girls possess you: I alone will hold you soon:

you'll be with me, and I'll rub my bones against yours, enmeshed."

After she finished her bitter complaint against me,

¹¹⁰ Od. 2. 20. Translation by John Conington.

¹¹¹ Prop. 1.12. Translation by Vincent Katz.

her shade slipped away through my embrace¹¹².

In the last two lines, the Other appears – Propertius himself. He listens to Cynthia's aggrieved speech for a long time, but when she speaks of love in the flesh, “my bones against yours,” he can no longer sit still it and rushes to embrace Cynthia, responding to her speech with action. And although she slips away, disappears in his attempt to embrace her, like the dead in the “Odyssey” and the “Aeneid”, love in the flesh has the last word – *complexus meos*, my embrace. Propertius responds to Cynthia's rebuke with action, embracing her and thus giving her what she dreams of, what she craves for. That is communication, a Trinitarian love – and it is immortal.

VIII. Sex as incarnation

1. An autonomous realm of pleasure

If we assume that duty, as a structure, is a universal response to traumatic relationships that anyone can fall into, does that imply that sexual orientation and behavior don't matter? And there is no significant difference (in love, in how they treat the world, their own, and their lovers' bodies) between heterosexuals in duty (such as Leo Tolstoy) and homosexuals? Such a difference exists, nevertheless – yet in order to discuss it, we should first look at the root of these words (homosexual and heterosexual). **What actually is sex and how does it change a person?**

Sexual intercourse, lovemaking, fucking, copulation, love in the flesh – these terms may denote the same thing, yet they imply different attitudes and experiences. Much has been written about the multiple cultural meanings of sex (this very word has started to refer to intercourse only since the 19th century, having supplanted forms such as “will and pleasure”, carnalia facta, l'acte vénérien, etc). Yet now in the global North (Europe, Northern America, Japan) the apparatus, or *dispositif*¹¹³ of sexuality is firmly established. This apparatus implies the treating of sex as an autonomous sphere connected simultaneously with physiology (something “natural”), individual liberties¹¹⁴, personal pleasure, and psychological self-expression¹¹⁵ (not to mention an

¹¹² Prop. 4.7. Translation by Vincent Katz.

¹¹³ Pollis, C.A. (1987). The apparatus of sexuality: Reflections on Foucault's contributions to the study of sex in history. *Journal of Sex Research*, 23, 401-408. The formation of such a system (*dispositif*) of sexuality was outlined by Michel Foucault, who juxtaposed the ancient practice of *ars erotica*, the transmission of experiential sexual truth from one unique body to another, to the modern *scientia sexualis*, a generalized, impersonal system of knowledge about sex (Foucault, Michel (1979) [1976]. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. London: Allen Lane).

¹¹⁴ Dabhoiwala F. Lust and Liberty. *Past & Present*, Volume 207, Issue 1, May 2010, Pages 89–179.

¹¹⁵ R. Dreher. *Benedict Option*. P. 203.

impressive set of industries exploiting this disposition, from psychotherapy and advertising to pornography and sex toys).

“In disentangling sexuality from kinship system, that is, from most rules of endogamy, from the cosmological vision in which men, women, sexuality, and the cosmos form one single entity, and from the view of married bodies forming a single flesh, ‘free’ or ‘emancipated’ sexuality created a new plane of immanence in which the sexual body became its own self-referential point, disconnected from other bodies and persons. If sexuality was a ‘natural instinct,’ the sexual body could become pure physiology, governed by hormones and neural endings... a matter endowed with an agency of its own, aiming at its own pleasure now conceived as a biological force (or as a drive) and as property of a separate individual”¹¹⁶.

Contemporary Western societies share certain basic attitudes toward sex: it is a relatively autonomous sphere, under the sway of a sovereign individual, where no society, law, religion, or other extraneous authorities should ever intervene (“my body my right”). What's more important, sex has its own (scientific) laws that operate independently of the individual (and that can be taught as part of sex education); sex is about the body, independent of the soul, it has its own sensations and pleasures (one can just “have sex” with another person – love, marriage or any similar “complications” need not be involved).

However, one may challenge this structure by **questioning the very concept of “sex” – and by assuming that there is no uniform impersonal system; there are only unique relationships between individuals, relationships that involve both the soul and the body.** And every corporeal act within these relationships is first and furthestmost a part of that unique story (and only then – an instance of certain general systems, such as physiology, sexology, etc). Bodily love is a story to be revealed with a specific person – not only every person is a sacred history¹¹⁷, but every sexual act, too.

In a sense, we advocate radical nominalism here, in the footsteps of Duns Scotus and G. M. Hopkins. “Everything in the universe was characterized by... an inscape, the distinctive design that constitutes individual identity. This identity is not static but dynamic. Each being in the universe ‘selves,’ that is, enacts its identity. And the human being... recognizes the inscape of other beings in an... instress, the apprehension of an object in an intense thrust of energy toward it that enables one to realize specific distinctiveness”¹¹⁸.

2. What’s incarnation?

However, if we don't treat sex as an impersonal psycho-physiological domain, then what is it? We argue that **any coitus is an incarnation.** What does this mean? Human individuals experience complicated relationships with each other, experience various sentiments and emotions, and finally, through the most intimate form of contact (that implies culmination or

¹¹⁶ Illouz E. *The End of Love. A Sociology of Negative Relations.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. P. 76-77

¹¹⁷ J. Vanier. *Toute personne est une histoire sacrée.* Paris: Plon, 1994.

¹¹⁸ Stephen Greenblatt et al., Ed. "Gerard Manley Hopkins." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature.* 8th ed. Vol. 2. New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 2159.

consummation), the actual psychic reality is incarnated, i.e., imprinted into the bodies, changing them – and the whole being of the participants in the act. In other words, through incarnation (the reality of one's "soul" becomes the reality of the "body") the sexual act drastically transforms a person.

A similar idea was voiced by the British theologian and psychiatrist Jack Dominian. He understood (and described) sex as a form of communication between people. "This is its predominant characteristic, sexual intercourse is an encounter between persons and its meaning is inter-personal... This is a communication of love. But what are they saying to each other?... Words reveal the inner world of a person and the consequent awareness of that world wishes to find concrete expression. Sexual intercourse becomes that channel... Sexual intercourse after verbal communication is a form of assent that the communication has been received. The body affirms the word and, through sex, there is a total communication of the whole person"¹¹⁹.

However, if sex is a form of human communication, where soul and body come together, then not only "good things" (openness, trust, mutual recognition) but everything that is present in a person (in themselves and in their attitudes toward one another) can be communicated – and embodied. Dark, scary, and tragic things, too.

These effects of a sexual act are quite tangible. "When a couple make love they are intentionally fusing together, communicating mentally and physically that which they cannot find the words for", writes Stephanie Cacioppo, a neuroscientist¹²⁰. And there are plenty of scenes from literature, film, and other arts to demonstrate it.

"I experienced the same agitation that I had felt earlier, before I came into the apartment. But like my wait outside the door, the one outside the doors of love couldn't possibly last for long. Besides, my imagination had been promising itself such exquisite sensual delights that it was no longer able to picture them... So her happiness was greater than mine. But as soon as we were unentwined, the look in her wonderful eyes made all my discomfort seem worthwhile. Her face was transfigured. I was amazed not to be able to even touch the halo that surrounded it, like in religious paintings"¹²¹ ("Le Diable au corps", a 1923 novel by young Raymond Radiguet, a friend of Cocteau).

Or "Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles" (1975), a Chantal Akerman film, recently named the greatest movie of all time by Sight & Sound poll¹²²: the female protagonist gradually begins to awaken from the automatism of her daily life (thanks to a letter from her sister, and frank questions from her son), but only in sex with one of her clients does she, through an unexpected orgasm, finally senses the covert horror of her reality – and then stabs her client with the scissors.

¹¹⁹ Dominian J. *Sexuality and Interpersonal Relationships // Embracing Sexuality*. Authority and experience in the Catholic Church. Ed. by J. A. Selling. P. 16-17.

¹²⁰ Stephanie Cacioppo. *Wired for Love: A Neuroscientist's Journey Through Romance, Loss, and the Essence of Human Connection*. New York: Flatiron Books, 2022. P. 74.

¹²¹ R. Radiguet. *The Devil in the Flesh*. Tr. by C. Moncrieff. New York: Melville House Publishing, 2012. P. 48.

¹²² R. Ugwu. Chantal Akerman's 'Jeanne Dielman' Named Greatest Film of All Time in Sight and Sound Poll. The New York Times. December 1, 2022. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/01/movies/jeanne-dielman-greatest-film-of-all-time-sight-and-sound-poll.html>

Sex may be seen as an experience of transfiguration that is open to all human beings, regardless of religion or culture. Here, in some miraculous way, the self becomes exposed and comes into contact with another self; the psychic reality is embodied in the corporeal one, and then the whole human being changes. In light of this interpretation, it is no wonder that sex has been perceived as sacred, i.e. something at the same time sublime and dangerous¹²³ in the majority of human cultures. And, arguably, this dimension of sexual act is always present, regardless of the will or intentions of its participants, *ex opere operato*. Even in rape: the reality of being nobody, just a piece of flesh for another's pleasure is embodied in a victim, whereas the desire for power at any cost, the negation of the Other is embodied in a rapist.

That is to say, we contest both the modern *dispositif* (sex as a separate neutral-positive sphere of physiological pleasure and psychological fulfillment) and the traditional dualistic attitude (the spirit is good, the flesh is evil, as the source of corruption, sin, servitude to this world, etc). Our stance is closer to philosophers and psychoanalysts who describe sex as a liminal experience, an experience of transcending, of stepping out of the self, beyond one's own boundaries. In sex, partners may witness and affirm each other's absolute being in the flesh ("to love someone is to say to them: 'you will never die'") – or they may erase their personality, dissolving into the impersonal element of desire, reducing each other to body parts (breasts, penis, etc.), experiencing the mortality of the flesh¹²⁴. The outcome of such an encounter in the flesh is always risky.

The idea of sex as incarnation can also be described in this way: **a coitus is an Event, and there are no guarantees that it would be "just sex", any intercourse may alter a person and their relationships in unpredictable ways** – and how exactly cannot be calculated in advance. In Spike Lee's "Summer of Sam" (1999), a film about the lives of a few friends and neighbors in an Italian neighborhood in Bronx, set against the backdrop of the hot summer of 1977, the blackout, and the panic over the serial killer "Son of Sam", the main storyline concerns the relationship between a hairdresser Vinny and his pretty wife Dionne. They are 22-25 years old, and married for two years, but Vinny constantly cheats on his wife with his clients, the salon owner, and even her cousin – because of his insatiable sexual appetite, and because he doesn't get the sex he wants from his wife. But a chance encounter with a maniac during one of his trysts makes Vinny mend his ways – he decides that God saved him miraculously, and he must stop adulterating. Afterward Vinny and Dionne try to have a frank conversation, to discuss each other's sexual desires, and their relationship seems to have improved.

¹²³ R. Otto. *The Idea of the Holy*. Translated by John Wilfred Harvey. London: Oxford University Press, 1923; G. Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998. P. 71-90.

¹²⁴ The importance of the verbal dimension in love, as an antidote to the objectification of the Other and the duty, was well understood by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: the gaze and the body in relationship with the Other inevitably create inequality and struggle, as well as the objectification of the Other. Or the loss of the Other, its dissolution into one's own affects and desires - the ultimate case is that of the Marquis de Sade, for whom the Other exists only at the moment of genital contact ("Sade seeks to dissolve all ties with the other... By admitting the necessity of the other only for the duration of the sexual act, Sade reveals that the importance of the individual does not extend to the other" (Lawrence J. SADE-OMIZING SEXUALITY: DECONSTRUCTING THE GENDER BINARY THROUGH THE SADIAN SEXUAL PREDATOR. Doctoral Dissertation. University of Pittsburgh, 2013. P. 176. URL: <http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/18280/>); or sex as an element that unites people only to throw them into a destructive, impersonal desire (jouissance), as Leo Bersani puts it. That is why language, words, and communication are important in sexual relationships: they allow the partners to stay "unconfusedly, indivisibly", whereas the duty gravitates towards either speechlessness or formal, hollow words.

Yet one night they find themselves at a swingers' party (more on Vinny's initiative, due to his unquenched appetite for sex) – and their marriage does not survive this sexual experience. The important thing here is that the husband cheated with many women, before the party the wife guessed about it, and even admitted it to herself, yet only after she had slept with a stranger once (opening up her body to another man), she irreversibly changed. She started cursing at her husband, became ruthless to him, and made a quick and easy decision to leave him. That is, a single sexual contact with another man was enough for Dionne's husband to become a non-entity to her.

But the act of not having sex, of **an incarnation that was not realized**, can be just as dramatic. Viktor, a Soviet geologist, the protagonist of "A Long Happy Life" (1966), a film by Gennady Shpalikov, accidentally meets the Lena, a single mother in a Siberian town (she is younger than him). They have a mutual sympathy, a series of tragicomic meetings and conversations, even, as one can understand, love at first sight, and he expresses his desire to abandon his wandering life and stay with her. Viktor takes Lena home, and offers to go up to her place, but she refuses (her daughter is asleep), then he offers to go to his place, she also refuses, but not because he is unpleasant to her – on the contrary, she is euphoric and full of hopes and plans for their "long happy life". And early in the morning, Lena comes to his hotel with her daughter, ready to quit her job – yet Viktor already looks at her and talks to her as if she were a stranger, has a semi-ironic conversation, and eventually runs away, lying that he just went to a phone booth.

But why did it happen this way? Love comes – or rather, two people fall into the maelstrom of love, into a powerful flow that carries them to each other, beyond calculation and plan, into something different and capturing their whole being. And then, at some point, there comes the moment of truth, the possibility of a final bonding, of transcending a certain persistent isolation and the figures of a lover's discourse – the very moment of incarnation, when one can touch, take the last step – and love will become incarnate and transform the lovers. But on the verge of this embodiment and transformation, human beings often falter, slow down. It could be really scary – like jumping into a stormy river. It is scary to lose oneself, it is scary to become a completely different person. And then, after the incarnation does not happen, the lovers may suffer – be it some unfortunate events in life, someone can get sick, or there can be just a huge alienation, love dies, despite their plans and expectations to live, as if nothing happened – "well, we'll meet again soon". This is clearly shown by Shpalikov in the final scene of the movie, when Victor is no longer enchanted by Lena's simplicity, she already irritates him and becomes uninteresting, alien.

The contemporary *dispositif* of sexuality acts towards eliminating the transformative potential of the sexual act; subduing as much as possible the way the mystery of love in the flesh changes a person – reducing this experience to the bodily sensations, to "just sex" as a fulfillment of some physiological need. But even in this case, the sexual act remains an incarnation: it just embodies in a person the belief that the matter is the only reality, that the only thing that counts is their body and its pleasures.

3. Tove Jansson and Marina Tsvetaeva

We break unexplored ground here. The question pertains: whether what gets incarnated is always purely individual, depending only on the personalities and attitudes of the participants, the specifics of their relationships – or whether there are more general patterns and regularities¹²⁵. Perception of the world, attitude towards the Other, the story of love, getting into the structure of the duty or trinity – all these things are arguably affected by the sexual experience with a person of the same or the opposite sex. So what about **same-sex intercourse**, what does it embody, and how it affects one's personality?

This very thought first came to us after a friend of ours moved into a lesbian relationship. Unlike her previous affairs with men, which were flashy but short-lived, this was love forever: she has not parted from her lover for many years since then. But her relationship with the world changed immediately. She began to shy away from her acquaintances on the playground (where she took her child), and from friends to whom she had previously easily sympathized and opened her heart. After the first sex with her lover, she was sitting for a long time, shocked, and felt that he did not want to talk. Soon she realized that she had fallen out of love with foreign languages. She could not and would no longer rush to sympathize with people, to become absorbed in their lives. "My poor battered soul, it's been like being on a string, fretting, I want to give it a rest," she said.

Other people, irrespective of their sex, began to appear to her somehow scary, violent, dangerous – or distant, "on the other side of the glass". Subsequently, she developed a distanced relationship with people. These changes in her world occurred vividly in the early days of their affair. "Look at the stars," she said to her lover. "Give me your hand. I want you to remember this moment – look at the stars, look around you. It's like all the people died."

And then it first occurred to us that the sexual embodiment of love with a person of one's own sex – someone who is not perceived as the Other, because there is not even potentially a place in sex for the Third, a child – draws a person into the duty, and out of the world.

This is only our hypothesis, based on a few individual life histories. But if we turn to the authors who recorded their experiences in their works and letters, we would see similar things, concomitantly with the transition from heterosexual to homosexual relationships.

The first case is Tove Jansson, a Swedish-speaking Finnish novelist and painter, famous for her *Moomin* books for children – the tales about a family of joyful adventurous trolls and their friends. What's important here is that Jansson, until her late thirties, was not a lesbian and had numerous affairs with men, and was engaged to a journalist and politician Atos Wirtanen.

¹²⁵ This idea is partly present in the psychoanalytic tradition. Robert Stoller, in his book "Perversion: The Erotic Form of Hatred," (New York: Pantheon, 1975), treats perversion as not only and not so much as homosexual fantasies and sex, but also sado-masochism, domination, submissiveness, fetishism, pet-play, crossdressing, etc., which are now considered normal elements of a vigorous sexual life. Stoller's main argument is that perverse sex (not love and relationships, but sexual practices themselves) turns both the other person and the subject into objects, i.e. dehumanizing all participants. They embody an action with the Other's body, not a relationship with him/her. And there is no such thing as "just" sex - what is embodied, even in playful and fantasy form, has its own meaning and impact on the participants, and has its own individual psychic history (drives and fantasies generated by certain childhood experiences); according to Stoller, certain sexual practices ex opere operato imprint on the body the experience of dehumanization, objectification, erasure of self and partner.

It was in the midst of the love affair with Wirtanen that the first famous book of the cycle, “Comet in Moominland” (1946), was written, a book which not only outlines the charming Moomin valley and its main characters (including the family trinity of mom, dad, and Moomintroll) but also shows an amazingly harmonious world. There is room for the comforts of home, and for heroic adventure; time to go on a quest, and time to come home; the characters do not despair, do not fall into despondency, love their neighbors and save them. At the same time, the world is not idyllic, there is a real disaster looming – a comet, with all its consciously arranged associations with the Apocalypse and the World War II. Yet the comet does not crush the world of the Moomins, optimism is stronger than disaster, and in the end, life wins out.

Wirtanen is present in the book in two ways – he is both the comet, epitomizing the absolute, awesome, and terrifying force of love, and vagabond Snufkin, full of unwavering optimism and love of life, but also a wanderer, always ready to leave, unconnected to anyone¹²⁶. Yet Tove and Atos’ relationship has been fragile and uneasy: he was “almost incapable of love,” in Jansson’s own words; and she was reluctant to marry and especially to have children.

So the comet, associated with Wirtanen, seems to be a cosmic danger, and yet it is like God – its signs are everywhere. Jansson opens herself up to her terrifying love affair with a man – and opens herself up to the world. In this book, more than in any other, many new friendships are made. Moomintroll risks his life twice: once when he fights a poison bush to save his future love interest, Snork Maiden. The second is when he, like a self-sacrificing hero, runs out of the shelter in search of Monkey, a complete stranger, who isn’t even a friend to their family, a silly chatty creature. Moomintroll is in love with Snork Maiden, the heroes are open to the Others, and Moomintroll risks his life for the Others.

In the next book, “Finn Family Moomintroll” (1948), written when Jansson had a homosexual experience, the Moomin world changes. Even during her relationship with Wirtanen, Tove fell in love and experienced a stormy secret romance with a woman, Vivica Bandler (who was also married at the time). She was then writing the third book of the cycle, and there she introduced Thingumy and Bob – two inseparable creatures of uncertain gender, sleeping together in a dresser drawer, speaking a special language that no one understands (in a letter to Vivica Tove explicitly acknowledges that these characters refer to them). And it is precisely Thingumy and Bob that bring the Groke, the embodiment of cold and death, to Moomin valley.

So, with Tove Jansson’s first lesbian relationship duty (indistinction, symbiosis) and death appear in her work. In the book, Moomintroll no longer recognizes Snork Maiden. Nominally she remains his beloved girl – but he is no longer a knight, the fact that they are a couple is not revealed in any way, she is just a friend among other friends. They find themselves in a child’s world – playing games, but not saving the world like in “Comet in Moominland”.

However, Tove did not desert Atos and Vivica did not abandon her husband, and the intimacy between the women stopped after a while (they remained friends, though). Then Tove finally took a brave step of proposing to Atos, but he stalled, she left for France and Italy, and when, in 1952, he was finally ready for marriage, Tove turned him down. In the ruins of this

¹²⁶ Boel Westin. Tove Jansson. Life, Art, Words. The Authorised Biography. Translated By Silvester Mazzarella. Sort Of Books, 2014. P. 201 (Wirtanen as the inspiration for the comet is explicitly mentioned by Jansson here).

unfulfilled relationship, Tuve's desire to move over to the "spook side" (her code word for lesbianism) intensified. In 1956 she began a relationship with the artist Tuulikki Pietilä, with whom she cohabited for 45 years.

Then, thanks to Pietilä, Jansson came out of her creative crisis and wrote "Moominland Midwinter" (1957). The Moomin valley is deep in winter, cold, and snow; all the characters are absent, except the Moomintroll who is lonely, miserable, and full of fear. What's more, Jansson told her biographer explicitly that she "tried to write a book about how **hellish** things can be"¹²⁷.

Moomins hibernate in winter, the "Finn Family Moomintroll" ends with the preparation for hibernation. In "Midwinter" Moomintroll suddenly wakes up – but his Mom, Dad, and all his friends and family are asleep. He wanders around the house as if everyone is dead and finds new friends, animals he didn't know existed, in the world of cold and death.

Whereas in "Comet in Moominland" written during Jansson's affair with Wirtanen, Moomintroll fell in love with Snork Maiden – and from that moment on he couldn't stand death, risked his life for his beloved and for the Monkey – in "Moominland Midwinter", created after Jansson's relationship with Pietilä begins, death surrounds Moomintroll – and that's perfectly fine with him. Moomintroll's relatives are "as dead," they lie in rooms as he explores the winter world. But at some point, a real death takes place – a baby squirrel dies. And then Too-Ticky, the main character of "Moominland Midwinter", whose prototype was Tuulikki Pietilä, teaches the Moomintroll that there is no tragedy if someone dies. When one's dead, then one's dead,' said Too-ticky kindly. 'This squirrel will become earth all in his time. And still later on there'll grow trees from him, with new squirrels skipping about in them. Do you think that's so very sad?'¹²⁸

"Moominland Midwinter" is "the only Moomin book to talk directly of death, through the beautiful Lady of the Cold, a real snow queen in the tradition of Hans Christian Andersen"¹²⁹. Finally, the character who explains to Moomintroll that death is inevitable and that he should not mourn the death of his friend is Too-Ticky, whose prototype was Tuulikki Pietilä, Jansson's lesbian partner. Hell, loneliness and death enter her novels concurrently with her embrace of lesbianism.

Another important "otherworldly" episode of the book is the protagonist's encounter with an ancient ancestor – a dark, strange, and, most importantly, wordless figure. Characteristically, he appears in a mirror – one of the key images of queer fiction that we analyzed earlier. There is no real family, no future – only the chthonic ancestor from the looking-glass, from the past.

It can be assumed that the effect – and the image – of immersing with a loved one in the mirror-world, in the realm of the "Snow Queen", in the duity, outside of which "all people are dead" – arise precisely in all-consuming, full-fledged homosexual relationships, in deep homosexual love. It is no accident that such love is often associated with the Snow Queen. A lover is happy and content, yet he/she resides in a world outside of time (as Kai is alone and does not communicate, but forms the word "eternity" with figures of ice), outside of this world, out of contact with the reality of the Other.

¹²⁷ Ibid. P. 321.

¹²⁸ Tove Jansson. *Moominland Midwinter*. Translated by Thomas Warburton. Puffin Books, 2019. P. 40.

¹²⁹ Ibid. P. 332.

The tale of the Snow Queen is also recalled by Marina Tsvetaeva, one of the most famous Russian poets of the 20th century. In 1914-1915 she, despite her marriage to Sergei Efron, had an intense lesbian affair with the poet and translator Sophia Parnok (1885-1933), whom Tsvetaeva met at a literary salon in 1914.. In one of the poems she addresses her lover: "Your little Kai is frozen, / O snow queen."

Before the love affair with Parnok, Tsvetaeva's poetic world was populated by heroes of the past – Pushkin, Edmond Rostand, the generals of 1812, Napoleon, Joan of Arc – with whom she communicates, gives her hand, swears allegiance. Then, when she falls in love and has sex with Parnok, her poetry withdraws from the world of human beings, and its heroes:

I know the truth – give up all other truths!

No need for people anywhere on earth to struggle.

Look-it is evening, look, it is nearly night:

what do you speak of, poets, lovers, generals?

The wind is level now, the earth is wet with dew,

the storm of stars in the sky will turn to quiet.

And soon all of us will sleep under the earth, we

who never let each other sleep above it¹³⁰.

.

Tsvetaeva distances herself from people and the memory of them, all the heroes of the past (some of whom, before her affair with Parnok, were for her an object of adoration) become nothing compared to this evening, her evening here and now.

In this poem, written in the second year of Tsvetaeva's first homosexual affair, there are similarities with "Moominland Midwinter", written at the beginning of the strongest homosexual love of Jansson's life: "No need for people anywhere on earth to struggle". It is a revelation – a powerful, almost musical revelation – that the Other does not exist and that is fine, there is no need to fight with him and no need to fight for him either, "as if everyone were dead"; we are earth and will fall asleep under the earth, the squirrel will turn to earth and then trees will grow out of it, as Too-ticky says. There is an element of sisterhood, of otherworldly equality in this revelation – the living are equal to the dead, we are all equal and we live among the dead, and that is beautiful. **Arguably the embodiment of homosexual desire in the body creates such a worldview.** There is no sense of movement leading to conception – instead, an overwhelming tenderness that ends in a great nothingness, never ending in the conception of human life.

So I stood there in the fog -

¹³⁰ Marina Tsvetaeva. Selected Poems. Translated and Introduced by Elaine Feinstein. Penguin Books, 1994. P. 3.

Distant from good and evil,
I tapped my finger quietly
On the tinkling glass.

I'm no better or worse with my soul
Than the first man I meet, this one here, -
Than the pearlescent puddles,
Where the sky is splashing¹³¹.

Tsvetaeva wrote these poems in 1914-1915, creating a cycle of love poems under the title "Girlfriend" (*Podruga*): a detailed, sensual poetic diary, where the only protagonists are women. Loneliness, detachment, indifference, and the transition from life to death is felt and declared by Tsvetaeva as the only natural thing. We may assume that this indiscriminate equality ("sisterhood") with all things, animate and inanimate, is a result of sexual act as incarnation. In lesbian sex there are less pronounced "top" and "bottom" positions, little exercise of power – it gives an experience of total absence of power, subordination, identification. We've written about this before in connection with Céline Sciamma's movie (and Simone de Beauvoir). Ashes are equal to the squirrel, the tree, and the new squirrels in "Moominland Midwinter"; Tsvetaeva's poetic avatar is distant from good and evil, she equalizes itself to puddles and the first person she meets, she does not distinguish the animate from the inanimate, she does not distinguish the Other.

At some point, Tsvetaeva explicitly names this loneliness, being in a world of non-distinction of people of the other sex and non-distinction of people as such – human beings are indistinguishable from the phenomena of nature, puddles and trees, human beings are just natural bodies – as hell. Hell is a state or dimension where people are together but unreachable; in hell there is no possibility of love, no contact, no hope. Yet hell is not perceived as such: because in the world described there is no Other, no distinction of the Other. And, likewise, with death, Tsvetaeva accepts and embraces hell:

We shall not escape Hell, my passionate
sisters, we shall drink black resins –
we who sang our praises to the Lord
with every one of our sinews, even the finest,

¹³¹ «Сегодня таяло, сегодня...» (1914). Our translation.

we did not lean over cradles or
spinning wheels at night, and now we are
carried off by an unsteady boat
under the skins of a sleeveless cloak,

we dressed every morning in
fine Chinese silk, and we would
sing our paradisal songs at
the fire of the robbers' camp,

slovenly needlewomen, (all
our sewing came apart), dancers,
players upon pipes: we have been
the queens of the whole world!

first scarcely covered by rags,
then with constellations in our hair, in
gaol and at feasts we have
bartered away heaven,

in starry nights, in the apple
orchards of Paradise.

– Gentle girls, my beloved sisters,
we shall certainly find ourselves in Hell!¹³²

“Sisters”, “gentle girls” – during her affair with Parnok, in Tsvetaeva’s poetic universe only women act and think. In literature, she singles out Ovid’s “Heroides”, which rewrite history from the point of view of women, and identifies himself with them: *Do mistresses read, Ovid?!*

¹³² Marina Tsvetaeva. Selected Poems. P. 5.

*// Did yours read you? - Do not reject // The heiress of your heroines!*¹³³ The Amazons are the symbol of current historical events, i.e. the Great War (*“And I hear thunderstorms somewhere in the world // That the spears of the Amazons are shining again”*¹³⁴). Even when, in late 1915, Tsvetaeva writes about metaphysical concepts, i.e. Fate, it is portrayed as a woman, and erotically:

I was given a sweet voice
And the delightful curve of my forehead.
Fate kissed me on the lips
Fate taught me to excel

I paid a generous tribute to the lips,
I've sprinkled roses on coffins.
But as I ran, a heavy hand grabbed my hair
I was grabbed by my hair by Fate!¹³⁵

Any Other, any man, even Christ, in this world where there is room only for a sense of “me” and “those like like me,” is dismissed:

I've never honored commandments, never went to mass,
- Until a psalm is sung and I'm returned to ashes,
I'll continue to sin – like I sin – like I've sinned in the past
With all five of the God-given senses: with passion!

Friends! – Accomplices! – Whose instigation left scars!
Gentle teachers! – Partners in crime and in mirth!
Gentlemen, ladies, clouds, constellations of stars, -
On Judgment Day, we'll answer together, Earth!¹³⁶

¹³³ «Как жгучая, отточенная лесть...» (1915). Our translation.

¹³⁴ «Лежат они, написанные наспех...» (20 December 1915). Our translation.

¹³⁵ «Даны мне были и голос любой...» (31 December 1915). Our translation.

There is a unity with the world (gentlemen, ladies, clouds...) – but a characteristically homosexual one: no distinction of the Other; gentlemen, ladies, clouds are indistinguishable. And merge into the image of “co-conspirators, gentle teachers”, obviously referring to Parnok (but in the plural). Tsvetaeva addresses this multitude with the same enthusiastic intonation, which does not discern individuality and meaning, with which she said “We shall not escape Hell, my passionate sisters”. In the poem about hell, she actually recognizes that the Last Judgment will end badly for her – but she hardly recognizes the meaning of the word “hell.” There are no consequences, no Other – only the self and bodily sensations she revels in, “with all five of the God-given senses”.

And in the poem “In a perilous folio...” Tsvetaeva rejects the very possibility of judgment, but even this means nothing - only the emotion matters:

In a perilous folio

No temptation for

Woman. - Ars Amandi

To Woman is the whole earth.

The heart is love potions

The potion is the truest of all.

A woman from the cradle

Is someone's mortal sin.

Ah, far away from heaven!

Lips – close in the twilight....

- God, don't judge! - You were not

A woman on earth!¹³⁷

The protagonist of the poem refuses to recognize God as a judge because, in this world of indistinction, there is no criterion. She loves a woman, and for her, the Other disappears: **the female body is the only criterion**. She justifies her refusal to recognize God's right to judge not

¹³⁶ Marina Tsvetaeva. *My Poems...* Translated by Andrey Kneller. Boston, 2011. P. 57.

¹³⁷ «В гибельном фолианте...» (1915). Our translation.

because she refuses to believe in Him, nor because the world is unjust, nor for any existential or psychological reason – but simply because God is not a woman.

“Don’t judge,” she says, because judgment is only possible when there is a criterion for relating to the Other. But here there is no Other, the female body is the only thing to be reckoned with (“lips – close in the twilight”). Therefore, one cannot conceive of judgment, punishment, or repentance; the heroine sincerely does not perceive, does not recognize the value of a person of the other sex, even if it is God.

At the same time, the very idea of “sin” and “hell” certainly comes from religious tradition – which considers homosexuality a mortal sin. Tsvetaeva, with her Christian upbringing, cannot help but think of her first homosexual romance in these terms – but the emotion remains extrinsic to them. For her, what the Church considers a sin – homosexuality, lying, betrayal, stealing an icon – is morally neutral, and subservient to the passionate emotion of her love for Parnok, seen from the point of view of a cheerful conspiracy of the two against the world.

The indiscrimination between good and evil is constantly declared in the poems of 1914-1915 (“*so I stood in the fog... distant from good and evil*”¹³⁸). Betrayal and lies (“*And how can I not lie – since my voice is more tender when I lie...*”) are celebrated and absorbed by sensual emotion in the poems of 1914-1915:

No one, searching through our letters,
Didn't understand to the core
How treacherous we are, that is.
How true to ourselves¹³⁹.

There is no declaration of immorality or shtick here – this verse is simply a very precise poetic rendering of the homosexual experience, where at the level of the body, and at the level of worldview, **one can only be true to oneself, where there is only “I” and no Other.**

Such motifs could be considered a manifestation of the rebellion, a common theme of Tsvetaeva’s poetry throughout her life – if it were not for the chronology. All of Tsvetaeva’s poems we analyze here were composed in 1914-1915, when she was in a relationship with Parnok. That is, judging by the poems, the incarnation of homosexual love in the flesh changed her inner world: only women were present in her verse; the heroes of the past, whom she admired in poems just a year before (Napoleon, Pushkin, Byron, etc.) are absent; the lyrical heroine becomes indifferent to people, “far from good and evil”, stands against God, and explicitly but indifferently speaks of hell.

¹³⁸ «Сегодня таяло, сегодня...» (1915). Our translation.

¹³⁹ «Цыганская страсть разлуки...» (1915). Our translation.

4. Being rejected in love and falling into the world without the Other

However scarce the evidence, we may argue that same-sex relations **embody** similar features in the worldview of authors who were almost certainly unaware of each other: death (mortality, perishability), loneliness (including separation from the world), the reality of only one's own body and its sensations

But can we say that homosexuality, or more precisely, relations between homosexuals are completely anathema to the trinity? No, absolutely not. We must emphasize once again that the mere fact of having a child and the experience of the family does not guarantee anything in the sense of trinitarian relationship – rather, it gives a chance for the trinity, opens up a new contingency, the outcome of which is not predetermined.

Yet sexual experience is indeed important. The structure of the duty is strongly embodied in contact between people of the same sex. Those who claim that there is no love between homosexuals, only sexual desire, a fleeting attraction, are wrong. But it is precisely love (not mere lust, sexual attraction in a one-night stand) that makes the embodiment of the duty more profound and encompassing: **it is love, but love without the Third**. Homosexuality in no way excludes sincere and full love. But whatever the attitude towards the beloved, whatever the disposition, whatever the attitude towards the world and God, it is the incarnation of such love that leads to the rejection of the Other at the bodily level.

Neither do we claim that homosexuals do not want children. But one thing is a plan, a desire, including a child for oneself, and another thing is what happens at the level of the body between two, in love; whether this desire for a third can reach an incarnation in love between the two.

The crisis of trinitarian love that kicks one out into the intolerability of the Other and the desire for “controlled” relationships – things that manifest themselves as homosexual attraction – may be related not only to the father-mother-child triangle. It may occur in adolescence and adulthood as well. **Being rejected by the Other – the one with whom the child and the trinity are possible – throws a person into a world where there is no Other, and one recognizes and desires only those similar to oneself.**

This is what happened to Ludwig II of Bavaria, the protagonist of the final part of the “German trilogy” by Luchino Visconti (“Ludwig”, 1973). The decisive event of the movie, the beginning of the plot and the king's tragedy, is Ludwig's youthful infatuation with his cousin, the Austrian Empress Elizabeth (Sisi), who at first reciprocates his feelings, they even share a kiss, but then she abruptly withdraws, for social reasons, and in addition orchestrates the marriage of the prince to her sister. And that non-incarnation, the inability to realize love throws Ludwig out of reality into a world of romantic fantasies, castles and extravagant acts. The attraction to persons of his own sex also turns out to be a form of escaping reality, where his love has been rejected.

The protagonist of David Plante's autobiographical story “The Princess from Africa” (1985), Daniel, an American student, travels to Europe to spend his junior year at a university.

On the ship, he meets and falls in love with Angela, a black woman older than himself. She is a real Other for him: different in race, in social status (she is a frequently unemployed cabaret singer); with her there is love, and conversation, and an unpredictable heroic deed – she writes to him in Paris, and he rushes to her place in Barcelona, into the unknown. There is also the acceptance of the Third: the hero likes Angela's two children, he plays with them and takes care of them. But Angela is divorced, and hesitates at the most critical moment: when Daniel took the leap and came to her, they did not make love, she just shows him his bedroom and goes to work.

And it is precisely after such a fiasco, **a non-incarnation of love**, the protagonist sleeps with a young man, one of Angela's guests, just a random person with whom Daniel has no conversation or relationship or love – they just went swimming together once in the sea and went straight to bed afterward¹⁴⁰. All the elements of the structure of the duty are activated: speechlessness, withdrawal from the world, fixation on oneself, separate body parts¹⁴¹.

The next morning, Angela, almost in tears, bluntly asks why Daniel didn't sleep with her in the first place (although he was in love with her). But then it's too late, and all she could do is sing sad blues for Daniel.

The experience of being rejected, of the non-incarnation of trinitarian love, and subsequent falling into a world where only people of one's own sex are attractive, is not something extraordinary, much less reserved only for persons with a homosexual orientation – it can happen to anyone. One of the authors of this book (Olga) recalls her unrequited love for a boy who then chose someone else – then she met him when they were seventeen. A long walk in the countryside ends in nothing. On the way back, her eye catches the beauty of a person sitting next to a train – Olga literally fell in love with her, for nothing but her beauty. The need for love remained, but it turned to people of the same sex, and it is not the Other's personality that is magnetizing, bright, significant, but the body, the beauty as such.

This experience is accurately captured in Honoré de Balzac's novel “Seraphita” (1834). The protagonist is either a girl or a young man who, in the eyes of the girl who loves him, looks like a man, Seraphitus, and in the eyes of the man who is in love with her, a girl, Seraphita. This plot has more to do with transsexuality than with homosexuality, but one thing is important for

¹⁴⁰ Note the motif of an acute, almost physiological awareness of the body and its sensations in this encounter – the telltale sign of the disappearance of the Other: “Alone, Daniel sat and watched Oci emerge from the sea... Oci's wet body shone as with a fine oil, an unguent, lightly smeared all over his skin, and this shine made his body appear very solid and, again, delicate. Oci's shoulders shone, and his chest, and his thighs and shins. Daniel was aware, too, of Oci having internal organs, of his heart and lungs and liver. The presence of Oci made Daniel aware of his own presence, and he felt the solidity of his own body. When Oci spoke, Daniel was as attentive to the liquid-pink inside of his mouth, of his tongue and teeth, as to what Oci said. Daniel felt the warm saliva in his own mouth, and when he swallowed he felt the swallow go all the way down into his stomach.” (D. Plante. *A Princess from Africa* // Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories. 1994. P. 402.)

¹⁴¹ “The door to the bedroom was shut. Daniel and Oci reached for the handle together. Oci put his hand on it first, then he went still. Daniel, his extended fingers almost touching Oci's hand, also went still, and the moment fixed them.

(It was, for Daniel, a moment that would fix them forever, even, years and years later, beyond the death of Oci in New York, where he, an American citizen, finally made his home.)

Oci opened the door.

Daniel took off his damp, warm clothes and lay, naked, on his bed, his hands, palms down on his thighs, at either side of his erection. Oci, naked, didn't get into his bed, but went to the window, opened the shutters and leaned out. He said, “How strange,” and when he stood back from the window he left the shutters open and, outlined by the bluish night light, came towards Daniel, who raised his hands to him” (Ibid. P.408).

us here. At the beginning of the novel, Seraphitus appears not as an androgyne, but as a man. He leads Minna to the dangerous mountain, they make the ascent, and the girl confesses her love to him (they are at the summit, in both spiritual and physical senses). But Seraphitus does not reciprocate her love, it becomes obvious that there will be no love – and on the way down it turns out that those around him, starting with the first person he talks to, see him as the girl Seraphita.

And later, among adults, the crisis of relationships in the family can lead not only to divorce, to search for a new partner, or to disappointment in relationships in general, or to cynical generalizing alienation from persons of the opposite sex (“all men are jerks”, “all women are sluts”, etc.), but also to sexual alienation – and, accordingly, to sexual attraction to persons of one's own sex.

The crises of love, moments of relationship breakdown and intolerance of the Other, of falling into a world where only people of one's own sex are visible and desired, have probably always happened to human beings through history – but such moments could pass unnoticed, as mere affects, fleeting sensations. The difference is that a system has emerged in our societies, a system that installs a powerful structure of meaning, an ideology even, beneath these sensations and attractions – that is, a system that satisfyingly explains the whole world and a subject's place in it. Now the power of culture, science, art, economy, and social institutions supports these desires, framing them as a person's true essence, identity, and life choice.

One example of how this system works. Elif Batuman – a contemporary American writer and literary scholar, famous for her two semi-autobiographical novels about the soul-searching of a Harvard student in the 1990s. Like her heroine, Batuman struggled with complex and torturous relationships with men until the age of 38, and at some point, apparently, she “had enough,” and fell in love with a woman – and then everything became simple for her, both her own experience and the whole world. (Romantic) love does not exist, it is a myth, a sort of male propaganda (Batuman was inspired by a radical feminist Shulamith Firestone, and especially by Adrienne Rich, the author of “Compulsory Heterosexuality”); love is no different from war. That is, for Batuman, only the duty structures – men against women, inequality, power, violence – became real:

“From my youth, I thought it was ‘novelistic,’ aesthetic, and productive to spend all my emotional energy on relationships with men who were limited in their ability to love, men who could not reciprocate my feelings or perceive our relationship as deeply as I did. I aestheticized such relationships. I thought it was interesting, beautiful, meaningful, complicated, necessary, and inevitable. When I fell in love with a woman at 38, I worried at first that it wouldn't last, that I couldn't live without the love of men. I worried that I “needed” to be around men. To my surprise, this turned out to be different.

Once I accepted this, I began to think of love as a kind of propaganda. The novel tells men and women that they can't live without each other (though it also tells them that they are doomed to make each other miserable). The classic novel lures little boys into surrendering themselves to the army or to the state, encourages little girls to give their bodies and souls to

*their husbands and children. We are raised to be vulnerable to romance, to a very particular type of romance... It is essentially a way of making enslavement attractive so that children (who have no power) are free to “choose” it for themselves*¹⁴².

The basic point we are trying to highlight is **that homosexuality may be seen not just as a person's true essence, nor an indisputable property of his personality, but the outcome of a choice (to realize the desire or not) – a choice that comes to the fore after a certain existential event of a person's life – the crisis of love and the breakdown of a trinitarian relationship.**

Of course, we realize that it is impossible to prove whether homosexual attraction is a manifestation of a person's primordial nature or an event caused by life's collisions. This is not a question of science, but rather the clash of two starting points, as in the film critics' discussion of Donna Deitch's 1985 film “Desert Hearts”: was the protagonist's lesbian infatuation a hysterical reaction to her divorce, or was her marriage itself a hysterical reaction to a repressed homosexual attraction? This is probably an irresolvable conflict of two standpoints – either homosexuality “just is there and always has been, repressed”, is something essential, or it happens, it is something eventual.

Moreover, now the point of choosing to make love with a person of one's own sex is much more relevant than it was fifty or a hundred years ago. Recent (2010-2020s) surveys in the United States, show a dramatic increase in LGBTQ identity among new generations. While the percentages are about the same among older people (born before 1946), baby boomers (born 1946-1964), and Generation X (born 1965-1980), ranging from 1.5 to 3.3%, millennials (born 1981-1996) and especially Generation Z (born 1997-2004) have seen a dramatic increase of persons identifying themselves as LGBTQ – 11.2% and 19.7%, respectively¹⁴³. Yet a closer look at these statistics show the rise not of “definite” orientations (gay, lesbian, transgender) – they remain within 3% of the population, but of the “fluid” ones: bisexual (11.9%, with 4% among males, 20% among females), and especially “Other/Questioning” (9% among the whole student population, 3.7% among males, 13.7% among females)¹⁴⁴. This data demonstrates the paramount importance of urges, fantasies, and fleeting desires – and why it is important to understand the roots of these desires and the dynamics of one's inner life and relationships.

Trinitarian love is not something “normal”, or “natural” – it is an extremely fragile thing. To sustain a relationship with the Other is hard, and there are many reasons, ranging from a troubled relationship with a parent, the breakdown of the family trinity, rape (especially for girls), the breaking of a relationship with one's spouse due to the birth of a child – there are many reasons why one ceases to be able to be with the Other in love.

¹⁴² Элиф Батуман: «“Художественное” — это разновидность цензуры». В дни московских чтений colta.ru расспрашивает писательницу о любви, #metoo и русской литературе // Colta.ru. <https://www.colta.ru/articles/literature/22563-written-in-the-usa-intervyu-elif-batuman>

¹⁴³ Jeffrey M. Jones. U.S. LGBT Identification Steady at 7.2%. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/470708/lgbt-identification-steady.aspx>

¹⁴⁴ The data on high school students, a survey conducted within the framework of Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), CDC, USA, 2021: https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/supplemental-mmwr/students_by_sexual_identity.htm

However, there is a fundamental difference (in intensity) between the duty and its incarnation – in homosexual intercourse. **It is one thing to fall, because of some experience, into a transient state, when the bodies of others like you became attractive to you, and quite another – to imprint this state in the body.**

IX. Duty triumphant: divorce and contraception

Our age has become the age of the duty, when this structure becomes the main structure of love and, more broadly, the perception of the world, not because of homosexuality. The explosive growth in the number of LGBTQ people now, especially among the new generations¹⁴⁵, is rather a consequence. The reason is different: never before the twentieth century had a man-woman relationship been formed – and broken – with such ease.

First, in the 1970s, there was the normalization and legalization of the divorce at the will of one of the spouses, without grave reasons (no-fault divorce¹⁴⁶). More and more countries on Earth, if not returning to the short-term pairings of other primates, have already gone beyond the historically average divorce rate for human societies: in the USA, China, Europe, about half of marriages now end in divorce¹⁴⁷.

This process was related, among other things, to the sexual revolution of the 1960s: it trumpeted not only the right to love whomever one wants but also the right to sleep with whomever one wants. But the same right began to mean that you one leave whoever one wants and whenever one wants¹⁴⁸. This could not but increase the traumatizing power of love, and then the gradual displacement of love (as something unpredictable and painful) by contractual “relationships” on comfortable terms.

¹⁴⁵ Number and percentage of high school students, by sexual identity (USA survey conducted by the CDC, 2021): heterosexual – 74,2%, gay or lesbian – 3,2%, bisexual – 11,9%, other/questioning – 9%). Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/results/2021-supplementary-tables.html>

¹⁴⁶ *Parkman A.* Good Intentions Gone Awry: No-Fault Divorce and the American Family. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000; *Wilcox W.* The Evolution of Divorce // *National Affairs*. 2009. №1. P. 81-94.

¹⁴⁷ <https://news.cision.com/abcd-agency-ug/r/data-analysts-on-world-divorce-rates--ranking-of-countries-from-highest-to-lowest-risk-of-getting-di,c3747396> <https://ourworldindata.org/marriages-and-divorces>

¹⁴⁸ Around the same time (1970s and beyond), the theme of breakup appeared in Western music, from the most mainstream pop to the rather refined indie rock, while the theme of parting and the love that overcomes it was dying out. The lyrical hero (more often the heroine, by the way) leaves her lover, and then a huge variety of emotions and thoughts are extracted from this act:

“Breaking up is never easy, I know // But I have to go // Knowing me, knowing you // It's the best I can do”: (ABBA, 1977);

“Go on now, go, walk out the door // Just turn around now, 'cause you're not welcome anymore // Weren't you the one who tried to break me with goodbye? // Did you think I'd crumble? Did you think I'd lay down and die?” (Gloria Gaynor, 1978);

“I want to be a good woman // And I want, for you to be a good man. // This is why I will be leaving // And this is why, I can't see you no more. // I will miss your heart so tender // And I will love // This love forever” (Cat Power, 2003).

More important, however, is that **contraceptive sex and the increasing frequency of divorces and breakups are strengthening the structure of the duty in our societies.**

For millennia before the discovery of effective contraception, male-female relationships implied conception. Thus love in human society is potentially trinitarian. The Third comes in the guise of a child: however strongly the spousal relationship is frozen in stable patterns, a child reshapes the system, and creates a relationship, something more dynamic than the pair abuser/victim, or the master of the house/the submissive housewife.

When human beings are born out of the love of their parents, they grow in it. This love is the mystery of the union of two, I and Thou, where there is a place for the Third, a child who embodies the parents, in whom the parents overflow – an embodied bond of love¹⁴⁹.

One may put forth a historical counterargument: statistically, not all children have been born in loving marriages. Taken to the extreme, this counterargument states that both marriage for love and love for children are historically very recent phenomena, almost as late as the nineteenth century¹⁵⁰, and before that, there were only forced marriages and the production of children as the workforce.

However, the integral structure of love, marriage, and procreation always existed as a **possibility** (even if not as an obligation or norm articulated in culture). If this possibility is not recognized, we would have to assume that before the nineteenth century, there was never love between husband and wife and that parents never loved their children but only produced servants for themselves – and this assumption contradicts an array of historical, ethnographic and literary sources across the globe. What comes to mind is not well-known literary figures (Odysseus and Penelope, Jacob and Joseph), but the cases when the child instilled affection into prior loveless relationships: in *Towazugatari*, an unwanted child from an unwanted casual partner is born, and the samurai father suddenly arrives and embraces the puerpera, warming them to each other¹⁵¹.

Moreover, in the present time, when the idea of marrying for love has become truly universal¹⁵², supplanting forced and arranged marriages, the vision of the family as an image of mutual trinitarian love is no longer a mere abstraction.

¹⁴⁹ In Western philosophy, this intuition (the family as the epiphany of the trinity) was somehow grasped by Hegel – although for him, too, a child was on the verge of becoming an abstraction; his trinity is not complete, there in the child, the father and mother see only each other. "The relation of love between man and wife is not yet an objective one; for even if this feeling [Empfindung] is their substantial unity, this unity does not yet possess objectivity [Gegenständlichkeit]. The parents attain this unity only in their children, in whom they see the whole of their union before them. In the child, the mother loves her husband and he loves his wife; in it, they see their love before them" (Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 211 (§ 173). Furthermore, independently of the philosophical tradition, quite a few studies have been conducted in modern psychological science on various aspects of the transition from the marital dyad to the parental triad, in the paradigm of "transition to parenthood", with an implicit Trinitarian perspective. See, for instance, Cowan C. P., Cowan P. A. When partners become parents. New York: Basic Books; 1992; Twenge J. M., Campbell W. K., Foster C. A. Parenthood and marital satisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2003;65(3):574–583.

¹⁵⁰ Coontz S. *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy, or How Love Conquered Marriage*. New York: Viking Press, 2005. P. 15-23, 145-230; Aries, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. Translated by R. Baldick. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962. P. 363-404.

¹⁵¹ *The Confessions of Lady Nijō*. A memoir of a thirteenth-Century Japanese imperial concubine. Translated by Karen Brazell. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1976.

¹⁵² Coontz S. Op. cit.; Goode W. J. *World Revolution and Family Patterns*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1968.

The trinitarian way in the family means love for the mother of one's child without losing one's original relationship to her through jealousy; and the mother's love for the child so that her relationship with her husband is preserved. The trinity remains indivisible – when it is impossible to sever the relationship with any of its participants, whereas all lines in the relationship are inseparable, that is, all the subjects retain their autonomy¹⁵³. The parent does not become a function or an appendage to serve the child, just as the child does not become someone who must be “endured” or “tamed”. In the eyes of a child, multiple facets of individual differences between the parents are superseded by a foundational one: the mother and the father.

The image of the family as the trinity does not require a child to be single – the trinity refers to a certain quality of relationships, not a sequence of numbers. I would argue that it is the openness of the couple to the Third person that is pivotal here.

The relationships alive at the beginning of a romance, in any marriage, tend to solidify into stable patterns, when each partner is assigned his or her own pattern, his or her own habitual role, impinging free communication. But even if the relationship between husband and wife was eventually reduced to zero, each new child inevitably recreates and changes it, even if on a minimal level. A new child conditioned the need to take care of the wife, discuss new problems, to train the skill of conflict resolution, i.e. the habit of agreement and forgiveness, both between parents and between siblings.

At a certain moment after the birth of a child the family structure becomes fixed and often distorted (for instance, the mother is in symbiosis with the child, and the father is excluded, or the parents are united against the child). Then the appearance of another child disrupts that structure: the father might get more involved, or the children may bond with each other; a third child would again change the structure: the eldest child could bond with the youngest, as he is already far from competing for the mother's breast, he could start communicating with the middle brother, who was his rival (for mother's love) beforehand. After all, the third Person of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit, who “bloweth where it listeth,” her principle being spontaneity, freedom, and unpredictable emergence of the new. The birth of children realizes this principle: the family structure is established, with its dead ends and limits – and then a new child appears, the structure changes, and new relationships form between the parties.

Nevertheless, a child, the birth of a child, is not a necessary prerequisite for trinitarian love. It is also attainable in childless couples and in couples not bound by the bonds of marriage. In the trinitarian structure, the love of two gives rise to a child, in sex, or to a word (conversation) – an immediate, unpredictable communication, that is, an opportunity to invoke a new meaning or a new subject. In other words, in the trinity, a miracle can happen at any time. In verbal relationships, it is also an openness to the third – at any moment a new unplanned thought can appear, changing people, whereas in sex, a person like the one you love, “a flesh of your flesh”, can appear at any moment.

¹⁵³ Familial Trinity as an antidote against engulfment, fusion, and the erasure of the subject – this idea was also expressed by Lacan, in an unusual passage where the Father is no longer a prohibitive figure, the carrier of impersonal and demanding law, but a salvific intermediary. In Seminar XVII he compares the mother to a crocodile with wide-open jaws, while the father safeguards the child from being consumed by these jaws (Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar. Book III. The Psychoses*, 1955-56. Translated by R. Grigg. London: Routledge, 1993.. P. 112).

Nevertheless, children are, biologically and socially, the most common and consistent form of the trinity. Each child is an injection of trinity into relations, a revolutionary, *volens nolens*, reshuffling of them. Therefore, when the experience of parenthood, and especially of non-contraceptive, unplanned parenthood, becomes increasingly rare, trinitarian relationships – on a societal scale – become more and more difficult to experience, to think about, even to imagine.

One might ask – how does trinity stand in comparison to polyamory, for example? The short answer to this question is a contemporary joke: "Polyamory is like communism: everything is great on paper, but in real life, it turns out to be some kind of Pol Pot's Cambodia". Another more detailed answer is that it is the parental family and its experience that is the determining form of the trinity for a person. And further, as we will see in the novel "A Home at the End of the World", tripartite polyamorous relationships are fragile, and are disrupted, among other things, by the participants' experience of their parents' divorce. Finally, polyamory differs from a trinitarian relationship by the former's impermanence, the ease with which partners can be replaced.

If we view the Third as the (spontaneous) word that can always appear and change relationships, or the (unplanned) child that can always appear and change relationships, then it is obvious that there have always been problems with unfettered speech in human societies, both in the state and within families. However, there was always a place for the child in the male-female relationship, right up to the twentieth century – and this supported the minimal basis of the trinitarian structure. It could at least be thought of – in the works of art that often was contrarian to the strict boundaries and institutions of society, art that spoke of love and communication. But now the minimal base of the trinity has disappeared – **contraception** has made it possible not to have a child, and **divorce** has finally consolidated the structure of the duity by creating an internal foundation for it.

Those who have experienced a breakup with a significant Other, and especially children who have experienced a parental divorce, that is, a breakup of love, lose the capacity for a trinitarian relationship. "Research findings have firmly established the association between parental divorce and adult children's fear of commitment... Research in this area suggests that parental divorce not only lowers adult children's commitment to marriages but also lowers their commitment to premarital romantic relationships in general"¹⁵⁴.

To someone who has gone through a divorce, a loved one often seems scary, or ridiculous. Or seems like it's just friendship. Or sort of understand, but it seems like "that's not the right one". Fear of commitment always finds arguments.

The experience of breaking the mother-father-child trinity says: it will break again. It's the scariest thing a child remembers, even though it's all displaced and glossed over by caring parents. This is not the "trauma of divorce," not the consequence of one parent's abusive relationship to the other. A psychologist can help one overcome the trauma – but a psychologist cannot restore one's ability to seek and endure trinitarian love.

¹⁵⁴ Cultural sociology of divorce : an encyclopedia / Robert E. Emery, general editor. SAGE Publications, 2013. Vol. 1. P. 29. See also.: Wallerstein, J. S., Lewis, J. M., and Blakeslee, S. The unexpected legacy of divorce: A 25 year landmark study. New York: Hyperion, 2000.

When children of divorce meet the love of their life, they just won't see it. Or they will see it, but they will not be able to approach the loved one or even think about it, they will suffer and choose someone less challenging, someone who will not affect them deeply. But in a new family, when their child is born, the trinity will fall apart, it will become violent, and one of the three will not be accepted. If the aggression turns to the child, the person will hide it, if to the husband – it would mean that “love just dies” and it’s time for a divorce. Again, the intergenerational transmission of divorce has been noted by many demographers and psychologists¹⁵⁵.

So, divorce epitomizes the breakdown of the trinity in the family, and contraception blocks the very possibility of the Third.

This is probably why heterosexual relationships are moving closer to homosexual relationships in the modern world. The norm has become what sociologist Anthony Giddens calls “pure relationships,” based solely on the pleasure they bring to the participants and which can be terminated by either partner at any time¹⁵⁶. Gay and lesbian unions have always been close to the principles of “pure relationships,” and they were the first to experience what is now becoming increasingly common among heterosexual couples¹⁵⁷ – just two bodies for each other's pleasure, no one else is needed.

“Since the 1960s, there has been a comprehensive equalizing of the life conditions of “heterosexuals” and “homosexuals”. Both groups, and this is true for both women and men, have developed similar lifestyles. Thus heterosexuals, too, understand that marriage and the nuclear family are not necessarily the only choice; they, too, get divorced and establish different types of intimate arrangements and families... They, too, enjoy the pleasures of anal or oral sexuality – or enjoy watching them on public TV. They, too, experience gender as more of a choice or site of play rather than as natural and fixed. In short: any feature that you might consider to be specifically homosexual is becoming increasingly common among all... Thus, the homosexual disappears, but in a specific way. Not primarily by becoming like heterosexuals or “integrated” and “normalized.” Rather the opposite. What was specifically homosexual, or might be imagined to be so, disappears in the sense that everyone... regardless of sexual preference, are adopting similar lifestyles and intimate arrangements”¹⁵⁸.

It is therefore reasonable that more and more people who are quite heterosexual and family-oriented, but who defend the right to contraception and divorce and the freedom to break up relationships, speak with such sympathy about homosexuals. **This is also why parental divorce, the breakdown of the family trinity, becoming an increasingly common**

¹⁵⁵ Dronkers, J., & Harkonen, J. (2008). The intergenerational transmission of divorce in cross-national perspective: Results from the fertility and family surveys. *Population Studies: A Journal of Demography*, 62, 273–288; Amato, P. R., & Patterson, S. (2017). The Intergenerational Transmission of Union Instability in Early Adulthood. *Journal of marriage and the family*, 79(3), 723–738

¹⁵⁶ Giddens A. (1992) *The transformation of intimacy. Sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies*, Cambridge: Polity Press. P. 134-157; Löfström J. (1997). *The Birth of the Queen/the Modern Homosexual: Historical Explanations Revisited*. *The Sociological Review*, 45(1), 24–41. P. 36.

¹⁵⁷ Giddens A. Op. cit. P. 135.

¹⁵⁸ The disappearance of the homosexual. Interview with Henning Bech // *Handbook of the New Sexuality Studies* .Edited by Steven Seidman, Nancy Fischer, Chet Meeks. London: Routledge, 2006. P. 164.

experience, pushes children growing up into the duty structure of love¹⁵⁹, as a more predictable and safer choice – and into homosexuality as one of the manifestations of this structure.

And all these dramas are played out in M. Cunningham's already-mentioned novel “A Home at the End of the World”. The author himself intended (and researchers interpret it the same way) to show the **triple** union of gay Jonathan, asexual Bobby, and bisexual Clare as a model of a new family and a model of child-rearing, better than the traditional American heterosexual family. The very location of their home, Woodstock, emphasizes the utopian ambition. But the truth of the art in the novel just shows how the trio falls apart.

Jonathan, the only gay protagonist, is not accepting of a Third and a child: as soon as Clare and Bobby begin an affair, and more specifically, as soon as Clare becomes pregnant, he immediately, without an obvious reason, runs away from them:

We kept singing. Once, while we were singing “Get Me to the Church on Time,” I glanced at Jonathan and caught him staring at me with an expression I’d never seen before. It was an injured, glowering look, something between anger and sorrow. When our eyes met, he looked quickly back at the sky... The day after we danced on the roof together, Jonathan slipped through the fabric of his life. He left nothing behind but a few words on a piece of notebook paper anchored to the table by the pepper shaker. “Dear B. and C., I wish you great happiness together. That sounds so corny, doesn’t it? Anyway, I’m starting again somewhere else, I honestly don’t know where. I’ll call eventually. Give away whatever of mine you can’t use yourselves. Love, J.”¹⁶⁰

The reason for his flight was precisely the intolerance of the trinity – the fact that the one you love loves someone else: Jonathan admits that he ran away and left his friends precisely because he loved them:

“Bobby, the fact is, I seem to have fallen in love with both of you. That sounds strange, I know. I never expected anything like this to happen. I mean— Well. It’s not what you prepare yourself for. I seem to have fallen in love with you and Clare together. I saw it that night on the roof. I didn’t want Erich to be my date, or anybody else. It’s just hopeless. As long as I know you, I can’t seem to fall in love with anybody else.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Or even to abandon any relationships that are seen as too dangerous and traumatic. Fear of relationships is indicated as the main reason, along with masturbation and pornography, for the growing rejection of sex and any form of living together since the mid-2010s. See: Lei L., South.S. J. Explaining the Decline in Young Adult Sexual Activity in the United States // Journal of Marriage and Family. 2020, n. pag.; Wolfinger N. H. Is the Sex Recession Turning into a Great Sex Depression? <https://ifstudies.org/blog/is-the-sex-recession-turning-into-a-great-sex-depression> (March 24, 2021).

¹⁶⁰ Michael Cunningham. A Home at the End of the World. Penguin Books, 1990. P. 211-212.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. P. 218.

Later, they reunite again, and the driving force behind the union is Clare – she not only gave up brief lesbian and straight affairs but chose to have a baby despite all her fears; and she loves both guys, to no one's exclusion. Finally, she feels the reality of time and being - and accepts the complexity of the relationships – i.e., all the tell-tale signs of the trinitarian love we outlined above¹⁶². Thanks to Clare, the trio was filled with life, and Jonathan came to love Bobby and Clare's baby as his own.

But Clare grew up in a divorced family (her parents were fighting, her father had been drinking and left her mother eventually) – and that laid a mine of fear in her: death is stronger than love. And at a critical moment, the mine of parental divorce explodes: irrational fear (that Jonathan has AIDS) causes her to run away and break off the relationship, even though her child has already started loving the men as her two dads. This is a classic divorce motive – to cover up her inner fear, the impulse to break off the relationship with the idea of “it's better for the child”:

Soon she'd [Clare's daughter Rebecca] leave her disembodied child-world. She'd remember things. She was a camera getting ready to shoot. Click a brown house with a blue door. Click her favorite toys. Click Jonathan coming to get her in the mornings. She'd carry those images around for the rest of her life.

What if she came into her full consciousness as Erich died and Jonathan started to get sick? What would it do to her if her earliest memories revolved around the decline and eventual disappearance of the people she most adored?

<...>

Rebecca kept up her wails in the back seat. Miles ticked away under the wheels. I knew our lives wouldn't be easy. I pictured us together in San Francisco or Seattle, moving into an apartment where strangers argued on the other side of the wall. I'd push her stroller down unfamiliar streets, looking for the grocery store. She wouldn't think of our lives as odd—not until she got older, and began to realize that other girls lived differently. Then she'd start hating me for being alone, for being old and eccentric, for having failed to raise her with a back yard and a restroom and a father. For a moment, I thought of turning back. The impulse passed through me, and if I'd been able to make a U-turn I might have done it. But we were on as straight stretch of highway. I followed the double yellow line until the impulse was absorbed by gathering distance. I kept my hands on the wheel, and didn't think of anything but the next mile and the next. I glanced back at Rebecca. She was finally calming with the motion of the car. Before she went

¹⁶² Her narrative: “Bobby and I and Jonathan and I—our mingled love and friendship, the lopsided family we'd tried to form—had come to seem like just another foolish episode. Another sprayed-concrete house with twigs over the windows. Now, unexpectedly, the weight of the moment filled that rented Honda [italics ours – A.K., O.B.-Zh.]. Bobby and I were driving on a desert highway, second in a makeshift funeral procession. I was pregnant. He was the baby's father. Jonathan, who'd broken both our hearts in some obscure way I couldn't quite name, sat in the car ahead of us, beside his unflinching mother. The radio, playing an old Fleetwood Mac song, glowed orange in the relentless white light of mid-afternoon” (Ibid. P. 232-233).

under, she looked at me balefully, her nose running and her cotton hat askew, and said one word. She said, "Mommy." She pronounced it with a distinct edge of despair.

"Someday you'll thank me, sweetie," I said. "Or maybe you won't."

Now I'm alone with this. This love. The love that cuts like an X-ray, that has no true element of kindness or mercy.

Forgive me, boys. I seem to have gotten what I wanted, after all. A baby of my own, a direction to drive in. The house and restaurant may not be much to offer in trade but that's what I've got to give you.

I turned off the highway and headed west¹⁶³.

And in the final scenes of the novel, when the trio is destroyed, only the bond of the two orphaned boys remains. The two climactic scenes, two almost ritualistic events, turn to the past and death: Bobby and Jonathan scatter the ashes of one of their fathers, and finally the three of them bathing in cold water, together with the terminally ill Eric – there is no future, the mortal body is doomed.

The experience of falling into a duity in personal relationships is becoming more and more common – and vivid. And this structure has already gone beyond individual experiences and saturates the masses – e.g., politics, where one sees only the duity of the rapist and the victim, where those who are declared victims and those who have compassion for them are known to be on the “right side of history,” and those who are declared rapists are on the “side of evil”. The duity also determines the perception of other social spheres: the child-parent relations (where the child is a priori positioned as a victim), and relations with a spouse or sexual partner (where in any conflict situation the male is by default perceived in public opinion as a rapist, an abuser), and these same relationships in fiction and movies (where, on the contrary, women are often the only heroes, without the Other, and men are passive observers), and relationships with any power structures (where subordinates see themselves as victims).

It is important to emphasize that these images and attitudes (the duity) permeate everywhere, **irrespective of the sexual orientation of authors and consumers of cultural products**. In fiction books for preschool children (European and American), this basic structure becomes a relationship where **there are two partners and they do not need the world**. In classical fairy tales, the heroes venture out into the big and dangerous world, pass through many strange lands and ordeals, physical and psychological, with other people, rivals, helpers, and friends, and achieving their goal (love of a beautiful princess, wealth, saving a friend, etc.). In a contemporary children's book, there are often two partners, usually of the same sex, and there are no feats, no ordeals, and no journeys.

For example, in the famous series of books about Pettson and his kitten Findus (by Swedish writer Sven Nordqvist), the protagonists live alone in the countryside, and they perceive

¹⁶³ Ibid. P. 322, 327-328.

other people either as a threat or as something unnecessary. Pettson doesn't have a wife, and he doesn't need her, as he himself explicitly says in the first book. He withdraws into his solitude, and the kitten, a non-Other, satiates him and finally “locks” Pettson's self-sufficient world. Adventures, going out into the big world do not fit there either: only once do the heroes try to go camping, but they reach no further than their garden.

The same abandonment of relationships, adventure, and journeys takes place in the books of the famous German writer Janosch (H. Eckert). The heroes of his popular series are also two 'partners,' Tiger and Bear. Their homosexuality is not explicitly labeled, but the author's illustrations, according to critics, combined with the details, make this book an exemplary example of tolerance for sexual minorities¹⁶⁴. Tiger and Bear take care of each other, then cuddle, then cook together, but they don't need anyone else or the world. They, too, try to go on a journey, like Pettson and Findus, and they too realize that their old home is more beautiful than any country.

We see similar trends in contemporary adult fiction (with all the necessary caveats that this is an extremely complex subject). It eloquently narrates the complexities of life, problems, and conflicts – but almost never the love of two equal Others. At the center of the narrative of key contemporary works are lonely heroes, or more often heroines, survivors of violence, suffering from the consequences of trauma – as in Hanya Yanagihara's “A Little Life”, for example, or in the autobiographical novels of Arnie Ernaux, Nobel laureate in 2022.

In classical Western literature, characters could die or lose their beloved(s), but love triumphed, it continued to 'resound' at any tragic denouement, even in Nabokov's *Lolita*. In modern literature, love between a man and a woman cannot win, it generally becomes something dubious, transient and/or only a source of violence.

In classical Western literature, characters could die or lose their beloved(s), but love triumphed, it continued to 'resound' at any tragic denouement, even in Nabokov's “*Lolita*”. In contemporary literature, love between a man and a woman can hardly triumph; it is often treated as something dubious, transient and/or only a source of abuse. In Elena Ferrante's “*The Neapolitan Quartet*”, relationships with men are something incidental, abusive, and transient, the male lovers appear and disappear without a trace, and the only pivot is the bond between two women – and this relationship is not with the Other, it is based on jealousy, on the eternal unquenchable impulse to appropriate the friend and her gifts, her men, in fact, to destroy her.

However, we by no means want to argue that the duty is a product of our times, whereas in the blessed olden days, people supposedly lived in proper trinitarian families, and everything was fine. On the contrary, historical ethnography of family life speaks of omnipresent duty: the separateness of the male and female worlds, homosociality – men socialize only with other men,

¹⁶⁴ Fleischbein R. Janosch's Tiger and Bear: Teaching and Learning Lifestyle Tolerance // ChLA International Committee. <https://childlitassn.wixsite.com/intlcommittee/single-post/2019/03/05/embracing-and-celebrating-difference-in-janoschs-tiger-and-bear-books>

and women only get sex and beatings, as in 18th century France¹⁶⁵, while women are friends and socialise only with female friends and relatives

One can think of even more extreme forms, like the Greek polis or some Islamic societies: conversation, philosophy, love – only for men, with each other and with young men, whereas women remain silent servants running the household and giving birth to children¹⁶⁶. Nevertheless, the counterbalance to this homosociality was both love and the birth of children, which changed in unexpected ways the frozen relations and feelings of the spouses towards each other – and, last but not least, the culture which, in poetry, songs, fairy tales, held up love as an ideal.

But afterward, in modernity, **first in Europe, then in the rest of the world, trinitarian love established itself** – through the affirmation of marriage for love as the social norm, the autonomy of the couple (husband and wife) from the pressure of society, the affirmation of the nuclear family. Love first became the key theme of Western culture, and then, during the Romantic Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, the main criterion for choosing a spouse and the basis of the family all over the world; marriages of convenience and forced marriages started to be seen as morally wrong and doomed to unhappiness¹⁶⁷.

And then this novel idea of marriage for love spread first across Europe, from aristocracy and bourgeoisie to workers and peasants, and then to other countries, to Russia, India, China, Africa¹⁶⁸. “Deep marital intimacy had been difficult to achieve... in the face of separate spheres for men and women, sexual repressiveness, and the strong cultural, practical and moral limits on a couple's autonomy. Now it seemed attainable”¹⁶⁹. And the discovery of childhood, first the distinction of the child as someone special (not just an uneducated and weak human being), and then, since the 18th and 19th centuries, the love of parents for the child as a social norm¹⁷⁰, along with marriage for love in the West (and then in other countries) changed everything: the trinitarian love in the father-mother-child triangle became historically possible.

Since the 1970s, however, these recent counterbalances to the duty have been largely knocked out by the culture of divorce and contraception – and the duty has taken its reprisal. The personal is political, indeed: the experience of the binary in the body and personal relationships influences structures of thought and forms of political action.

¹⁶⁵ Roderick Phillips. *Women and Family Breakdown in Eighteenth-Century France: Rouen 1780-1800* // *Social History*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (May, 1976), pp. 197-218 P. 208ff.

¹⁶⁶ Khaled el-Rouayheb. *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500 –1800*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. P. 35.

¹⁶⁷ *Stone L.* *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*. London: Harper & Row, 1977. P. 282-358; *Lystra K.* *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. P. 28-54; *Watt J. R.* *The Making of Modern Marriage: Matrimonial Control and the Rise of Sentiment in Neuchâtel, 1550–1800*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1993; *Coontz S.* *Op. cit.* 145-176.

¹⁶⁸ *Goode W. J.* *World Revolution and Family Patterns*, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1968. P. 19.

¹⁶⁹ *Coontz S.* *Op. cit.* P. 203; *Burguière A.* *The Formation of the Couple* // *Journal of Family History*. 1987. №12. P. 39-53

¹⁷⁰ *Aries.* *Op. cit.* deMause, L. 1974. The evolution of childhood. In L. deMause ~Ed.!, *The history of childhood*. New York: Harper. Here we refer not only to the emergence of the child as a special figure, not just a small adult, well known from the classic work of Ariès, but also to the inclusion of children in the process of individualization of the person (the perception of the self and the other as a unique individual).

The systematic ‘replacement’ of partners (of either sex), serial monogamy, and the glorification of the breakup (breakup culture) lead to the fact that the moral dilemmas of loyalty and betrayal, duty and feeling, and the problems of moral choice lose their significance. The very word ‘morals’ comes from the Latin *mos majorum* – ancestral custom, and morals existed in a patrimonial, family, heterosexual society. Now a person is arguably less eager to ‘force’ him/herself into fidelity, complex relationships, giving birth to and raising a child, sacrificing his/her life for the sake of the children, to being faithful to a spouse if that goes against his/her feelings - all that they were forced into by the ‘morality’ of heterosexual society or in an inner dialogue with the conscience (and with the Other).

And the new victories of the duty seem to occur in sync with the loss of the Other. We are talking, firstly, about the fact that in relationships, one's own desires, emotions, feelings, and traumas now become the supreme law, more weighty than the feelings and desires of the other person – this attitude was explained in detail by Eva Illouz¹⁷¹. Secondly, the uniqueness of the human being, the value of their difference from non-humans is being blurred – and this is not just the philosophy of post-humanism in its various guises¹⁷², but the growing indistinguishability of images and texts created by artificial intelligence (primarily by large language models). Moreover, the ‘humanity’ of one's counterpart is no longer perceived as something valuable: AI is more and more seen as a better performer, even as a psychotherapist and an erotic partner (in the form of a customizable sexual chatbot).

In the USA, Japan, and Western Europe, more and more people are abandoning any relationships at all, including sex – and at the same time, there is a huge increase in the popularity of pornography, which is a denial of the Other, in its purest form. “The Other as a sexual object is no longer a “Thou.” It is impossible to have a relationship with it... The pornographic image emanates no resistance to the Other or the Real. It is neither upstanding nor distanced. What is pornographic is precisely the lack of contact and encounter with the Other. Instead, autoerotic contact and auto-affection protect the ego from being touched or seized by the Other”¹⁷³.

We may argue that in all societies before the second half of the 20th century, most people were ground through relationships with the real Others – at first, brothers and sisters, then, as adults, they were sleeping with their spouses, without the pill, feeling the reality of their flesh and blood. Then, the majority of human beings had children – and a child is an undeniable Other: one can't take a break from them and ‘switch off’. A toddler's existence is constantly demanding something from a parent. The family life was indeed full of cruelty and violence, yet the reality of the other person in it was undeniable. In the 21st century, because of the normalization of life outside marriage, childlessness, contraception (and family planning, which in fact means single-child families as the norm), this reality of the Other has begun to erode, and with each new generation more and more strongly.

Of course, in the families of the patriarchal society, not only was there no Other, but there was no ‘self’, either. However, through Christianity, the discovery of childhood, the Romantic

¹⁷¹ E.g., in Illouz E. *The End of Love. A Sociology of Negative Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019

¹⁷² Schaeffer, Jean-Marie. *La fin de l'exception humaine*. Paris: Gallimard, 2007; Rosi Braidotti. *The Post-Human*. Polity Press, 2013.

¹⁷³ Byung-Chul Han. *The Agony of Eros (Untimely Meditations)*. MIT Press, 2017. P. 12, 45.

Revolution, self-reflection, individualization, the formation of an ethical, volitional, loving subject in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, people gradually began to realize both the Other and the self – and love appeared in history as a powerful social fact.

But love, which comes suddenly and takes over the whole human being, relationships between a man and a woman in the flesh, relationships from which children may happen (and the ensuing radical reshaping of one's lives), is a source of such powerful energy and risks (jealousy, revenge, psychological traumas) that there thrives an obvious desire to make such relationships as safe and predictable as possible. If in traditional cultures protection from the unpredictable power and consequences of love was sought in contractual and forced marriages, nowadays it is in avoiding serious relationships, in the ease of breakups, in contraception, in displacing 'love' (as unpredictable and traumatic) with 'pure relationships' on comfortable terms.

* * *

What we argue in this book is basically that the **duity gets incarnated (established) in a person in sex** – and that is why certain forms of the relationships act as its catalyst. Yet this idea by no means spells doom, determination, or condemnation. It's one thing to find oneself, due to certain life circumstances, in a state where the bodies of people like oneself have become attractive – and quite another to have sex with them.

A certain structure arises in a person – they may succumb to it and embody it, affirm it. Or resist it. And anyone, not just some biologically determined persons, can fall into this structure at any moment of their lives: when one does not see the Other, senses only their own body, is attracted to persons like oneself, or is locked in a rigid and unequal relationship with one's beloved, or clinging at mere thought of having a child with a partner, etc.

In this world, Trinitarian love is the fragile absolute. Love in the acceptance of the Other and openness to the Third (the world, the word, the child) is very fragile, it is very easy to break out of it. And fall out – either into the matter, into money, accumulation, which replaces love; or into drugs of any kind (alcohol, video games, etc); or, as in the olden days, into monasticism; or into the mental anesthesia given by antidepressants or psychotherapy. Homosexual relations, as we have tried to show, are another variant of such a protective withdrawal from Trinitarian love. But in some ways, this exit is the most altering one: precisely because it is not a substitute for love, or anesthesia from it, but love, too. But love without the Third, which embodies in the human body, irrespective of its feelings and intentions, of a happy family and adopted children, the intolerability of the Other.

Having a relationship with a person as a unique Other, and allowing for a Third, is a difficult accomplishment and a narrow path; not something natural and guaranteed from birth. Yet this path may be taken.