Reading Bisexually

Acknowledging a Bisexual Perspective in *Giovanni's Room*, *The Color Purple*, and *Brokeback Mountain*

Maiken Solli

A Thesis Presented to
The Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages
in partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree

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http://www.duo.uio.no/

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Abstract

In literary theory, literary criticism and in the Western literary canon there is evidence of an exclusion or erasure of a bisexual perspective, and this has also been the case within much of the written history of sexuality and theory, relating to gender, sexuality and identity. This thesis examines and analyses three literary classics; 'Giovanni's Room' by James Baldwin, Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple,' and 'Brokeback Mountain' by Annie Proulx, from a bisexual perspective. I have sought out to reveal, emphasize, and analyze bisexual elements present in the respective texts from a bisexual literary standpoint. This aspect of the texts has been ignored by most critics, and I believe it is paramount to begin to acknowledge the importance and significance of reading bisexually. The hetero/homo binary systematization of sexuality has contributed to this bisexual invisibility, as this has become a strict standardization of sexual identity, and a bisexual approach to the three texts reveals and emphasizes the negative effects of this. The thesis also presents a brief account of bisexuality in history, theory and, sociological and anthropological research, as well as the issues concerning bisexuality and conceptualization.

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Introduction

The Western literary canon has often been criticized for being biased and fiercely excluding, and usually in favor of the white heterosexual man, and this issue was perhaps first drawn attention to by the white feminist/lesbian movements of the 1960s (Kolodny, "Dancing" 144; Naylor 55; Smith, "Black Feminist Criticism" 168-9). This movement grew over time and branched into different areas throughout the 1970s and on, but some of the commonalities were that they criticized the Western literary canon of excluding the female authorship and even more so the female experience, and furthermore there was an understanding that the general aesthetics and critical methods used in relation to literature was heavily influenced by this (Kolodny, "Dancing" 144-49; Naylor 55). Some of the solutions to this involved including more female authors to the male dominated canon, but also to reinterpret much of the literature written by men from a female perspective, and an attempt to create a new framework for analyzing and reading literature (Kolodny, "Dancing" 145-49). Next to the feminist revolution and the development of a feminist literary theory, there have been many other marginalized groups engaged in criticizing, reinterpreting and giving voice to their own experience in the battlefield of literary theory. From the 1960s and on racial minorities such as African Americans and Native Americans were also beginning to criticize and claiming their part of the Western literary canon (Smith, "Black feminist Criticism" 169-74). Barbara Smith summarize these events in the following words: "The necessity for nonhostile and perceptive analysis of works written by persons outside the 'mainstream' of white/male cultural rule has been proven by the Black cultural resurgence of the 1960s and 1970s and by the even more recent growth of feminist literary scholarship" (169). In other words, there was a general acknowledgment of the need for change within the white male dominated Western literary canon.

Black women began to emerge as literary critics and works by black female authors such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Zora Neal Hurston came into focus (Smith "Black Feminist Criticism" 174). In the aftermath of these events, the emergence of homosexual, lesbian and queer literary theories was inevitable, but not without a struggle. For instance, in questioning the current literary faction, Smith argued that there were still critical perspectives missing. In her case, she decided that it was time that someone wrote about her own experience, namely that of a black lesbian woman, and she did so herself in 1985 in an article named "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (168-69). In this article she boldly criticized both

white and black feminists, as well as white lesbians, of not acknowledging or purposely excluding the perspective of black lesbian women within literature and theory. In the light of all this I want to draw attention to another marginalized group which seems to be in a position of exclusion from literary theory and the Western literary canon, namely bisexuals. I would argue that a bisexual perspective has much to contribute, and I find it perplexing that a "bisexual literary theory" has not been established at the same rate as other similar literary theories. I find myself wondering why, and if there is a solution to be sought?

Bisexuality and the Western Literary Canon

A common idea amongst many theorist and critics is that there is very little written about bisexuality. In *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader* Merl Storr argues that this is completely wrong, and that there is in fact a whole range of published works on bisexuality (2). She claims that there is a lot of work on bisexuality within the fields of medicine, psychology, psychiatry, epidemiology, sexology and biology, while the field of literature and literary theory *lacks* this type of "bisexual" work (2-3). In the article "Historicizing (Bi)Sexuality" Steven Angelides also argues that there has been very little written about bisexuality in relation to the field of *literature*, at least until more recently ("Historicizing" 127). This coincides with my own experience while doing research for sources on the topic of bisexuality. Most of the search-results on bisexuality that came up were works that related to the fields of study that Storr mentions, and there was indeed very little written about bisexuality in terms of literary theory, criticism and interpretation. This is not to say that bisexuality in the field of literature is non-existent. For instance, in the article "Gone Are the Days: Bisexual Perspectives on Lesbian/Feminist Literary Theory" Ann Kaloski Naylor presents the existence of bisexuality in fictional literature and claims that several critics have acknowledged this (58). However, Naylor explains that most of the literary fiction which involves bisexuality has been concerned with bisexuality defined as a state where femininity and masculinity are both present in an individual, and *not* in the sense of a fluid sexuality where an individual is attracted to both women and men (58).

Therefore, Angelides is correct in his claim that very little has in fact been written about bisexuality[1] in literary theory and fiction, but he emphasizes that this has started to slowly improve ("Historicizing" 127-8). In *Lgbt: Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History in America*, Marc Stein argues that it was not until the 1990s and

[1] Bisexuality defined as being attracted sexually and emotionally to both women and men.

beyond that: ". . . bisexuals began to make greater inroads into academia and literature" (144). This corresponds to the surge of books and texts written in the early 1990s, concerning the topic of bisexuality, such as Jo Eadie's *Activating Bisexuality: Towards a Bi/sexual Politics*, Storr's *Bisexuality: A Critical Reader,* and Eva Cantarella's *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* (Angelides, "Historicizing" 127). However, I suspect that so far this pool of new theoretical texts on bisexuality may not have had a great impact or influence on literary theory, criticism, and the Western literary canon.

I must admit that this tendency of marginalization or exclusion of bisexuality from literary theory, criticism and research corresponds with my own experience, both as a bisexually identified woman and as a student of literature at the University of Oslo. For instance, there was not one single text, presentation or discussion about bisexuality used in any of the classes I attended from the spring of 2006 until present time, and I severely doubt that there were any in use before my time at the University either. This is interesting because many of the classes I attended were concerned with topics such as sex, gender, sexuality and identity, as well the development of the different literary theories. Perspectives such as homosexuality, queer theory and lesbianism, on the other hand, were frequently in focus. Many of the courses consisted of the interpretation of a range of "canonical" literary texts. Not once was the word bisexual mentioned, and not one fictional book was presented from this point of view. Literary fiction concerning race, class, gender, homosexuality, lesbianism and not least feminism, was however abundantly supplied. Naylor points out that in the context of the bisexual readership and in this case of bisexual women, there seems to be an ambivalence in the encounter with lesbian texts, because the reader: ". . . is simultaneously inside and outside the text . . ." (56). There are always going to be fractions of heterosexual, homosexual or lesbian texts that a bisexually identified individual could be able to relate to. However, because a text for instance has been categorized as lesbian, then this interpretation and labeling of the text both excludes the bisexual reader and erases the bisexual perspective. I believe this is a very important point, because in such a case a bisexual woman will not be able to fully relate the text to her own experience, and a specific bisexual experience is unrecognized and thus devaluated. Obviously, this idea is just as relevant when considering bisexual men reading homosexually categorized literary fiction.

Consequently, it seems to me that the bisexual experience has been very much excluded from the fictional literature in the Western literary canon. Furthermore, I find it likely that there are other people out there who feel the same way as me. In other words, many

bisexual readers have probably found a lack of literature relating to their own "bisexual experience." I believe that literature, and especially fiction is very important in the development of the self, and that it may be helpful and comforting in a world where people may find themselves in a marginalized minority group with the difficult task of negotiating a sexual subjectivity and identity of their own. Literature can give words to difficult experiences, unite the marginalized and even be helpful therapeutically. Therefore I ask: as feminist, African Americans, homosexuals, lesbians and others have fought to become part of the literary canon, must bisexuals also do so? I believe so.

The bisexual experience is underrepresented in much theory and literature, and therefore in order to change this, it is important to read and interpret novels and characters from a bisexual perspective. Also I believe that there is much work already included in the literary canon that could be reread and reinterpreted from a bisexual perspective. Debora Kolodny argues: "What we . . . choose to read –and, by extension, teach and thereby 'canonize' –usually follows upon our previous reading" ("Dancing" 154-55). Therefore, by reinterpreting already canonized books from the standpoint of a bisexual literary theory, or a (*Bi)literary theory*[2], one could open the canon to more readings of this kind in the future. This is not something that has been done on a large scale, but there are a few writers and critics who have published work of this kind, such as Brett Beemyn and his article with a bisexual perspective on *Giovanni's room*, as well as Marcy Jane Knopf's project of rereading *Two Serious Ladies* by Jane Bowles bisexually. *Two Serious Ladies* is a book that has mostly been read as lesbian, and the fact that someone has approached this texts from a bisexual perspective is important and noteworthy. She claims that: ". . . rereading and reclaiming Bowles is an important first step in beginning to read bisexually: to read and reread beyond dualistic hierarchies of binary desire" (158). In "Bisexual Literature" the writer and critic Donald E. Hall emphasizes the importance of reading literature bisexually, as he performs a brief examination of literary history and the lack or erasure of a bisexual perspective within it (1-5). He argues that there is an abundance of bisexual elements imbedded in literature from the past and present, and provides an extensive list of examples, but unfortunately he never moves into a detailed analysis of such works. The emergence of critical works such as this comes to show that there must be a space or position within literary theory where something is missing, and that it has become an important task for some critics to fill this void.

[2] This is a term is my own invention, which is somewhat inspired by Angelides' work-title: "Historicizing (Bi)Sexuality." I will continue to use this term to refer to a bisexual literary theory.

All of this coincides very much with my own aim in this thesis; to show how already acclaimed literary fiction can be interpreted and reread from an additional perspective, namely that of bisexuality. As shown above, this thesis is not the first to enter the project of reading bisexually, but it will to some extent move deeper into analysis than some of the above mentioned works. In the thesis I will argue that *Giovanni's Room*, *The Color Purple*, and *Brokeback Mountain*, which are already part of the Western literary canon, could be reread and reinterpreted from a bisexual standpoint. These texts have been read and analyzed as exclusively homosexual and lesbian, and a bisexual reading could illustrate the exclusion of a bisexual perspective in the Western literary canon. Throughout this thesis I want to show and comment on the importance and value of acknowledging this perspective in literature, especially in relation to the heterosexual/homosexual binary[3] division of sexuality, the bisexual identity, the expansion the Western literary canon, as well as the representation of a bisexual experience. But as Naylor words it: "Can literary theory cope with another reading identity?" (54). I will now continue to discuss this issue, but with a specific focus on the history of bisexuality, the theoretical development within different fields of study, the process of conceptualizing bisexuality, and the emergence of a hetero/homo binary. I will also draw on research from social science in relation to bisexuality, because even if this is not directly linked to literary theory and literary fiction it is still important in terms of bisexuality linked to identity politics, social structures and society as a whole. Such topics will be paramount to discuss in this thesis in order to create a proper background for a literary analysis of *Giovanni's Room*, *The Color Purple*, and *Brokeback Mountain* from a bisexual perspective.

The History of Bisexuality

The term bisexuality is not of recent date, but its meaning has changed with time (Angelides, "Historicizing" 127-136; Firestein xx; Stein 141; Storr 3). Charlotte Wolff claims that Charles Darwin was the first person to ever use the word bisexuality, but the term was only used in relation to biology (9). In line with this, Storr describes how the earliest use of the term bisexuality was in a biological and medical context, especially in relation to traits of maleness, femaleness and hermaphroditism (Austin 132-136; Herdt, "Social Change" 269-70; Naylor 57). The term bisexuality dates far back and has been an important concept in early research within biology and medicine, but its actual meaning was far removed from what we today label as bisexuality. Moreover, there have been influential researchers, professors and

[3] From this moment and on this term will be referred to as hetero/homo binary.

scientists, such as Sigmund Freud[4], Wilhelm Stekel and Fred Klein, who transferred the "bisexuality-question" into the field of psychology, and towards the notion of femininity and masculinity as psychological characteristics (Storr 3-4; Naylor 57). There have been beliefs ranging from understanding bisexuality as a prehistoric human origin in terms of human anatomy and hermaphroditism, to considering bisexuality as the universal human sexuality (Angelides, "Historicizing" 130-2; Austin 134; Storr 2-5).

The pioneering American professor Alfred Charles Kinsey mentioned bisexuality twice in his studies and described it as individuals: ". . . who include both homosexual and heterosexual responses and/or activities in their histories" (Wolff 32). Kinsey revolutionized his contemporary society's notion and classification of sexual orientation by introducing a linear continuum with heterosexuality and homosexuality as two polarized opposites, and with the possibility of movement between these categories (Mulick and Wright 47). However, in such a system bisexuality would simply be a combination of the two orientations, but with different degrees according to where on the scale the individual would be placed (47). Stein claims that the use of the term bisexual to describe an individual with an attraction to both women and men did not begin until the early 1900s (141). More recent discussions of bisexuality have shifted more towards "object" choice[5] and fluid sexual desire, but this has not made the debate less complicated, probably on the contrary (Storr 2-5; Angelides, "Historicizing" 57).

The Creation of a Hetero/Homo Binary

Angelides describes the second half of the nineteenth century as a time of conflict and controversial debate within Western society, with an emergence of different movements which challenged the ". . . patriarchal boundaries of race, gender and sexuality" ("Historicizing" 130). He argues that during this period and onwards there was a new organization of sexuality developed, which he has names "the economy of (hetero)sexuality," and gender boundaries were in a crisis, as one was shifting away from understanding gender as strictly male/masculine and female/feminine (130). In an effort to codify and contain sexually deviant behavior, there emerged a distinction within sexuality between sex role behavior[6] and sexual

[4] Sigmund Freud also believed that everyone was born with a "natural" bisexual disposition that by early childhood would develop into heterosexuality or homosexuality, see Stein 141.
[5] The term *object choice* points to the gender in which a person is attracted to, and in this context I must specify that my use of gender here is the somewhat generalizing distinction between man and woman.
[6] Angelides defines sex role as active/passive and masculine/feminine sexual behavior

"object" choice (130). In other words, an individual was not only bestowed a gender/sex[7], but also an object choice, which referred to the gender of one's partner. However, in Western society the only "normal" or "natural" object choice was considered to be heterosexual. This is an important development because one is no longer only a man or woman with feminine or masculine qualities, but one is also recognized by one's sexual desires and object choice/s. Nils Axel Nissen describes this phenomenon in his book *hetero/hetero*: "Towards the end of the 20th Century a radical condensation of sexual categories took place, resulting in the binary structure of sexuality which is still very much present today" (23, my translation). The main focus today in relation to sexuality is gender, more specifically; it is the gender of one's sexual partner, understood within the context of the hetero/homo binary, which indicates sexual orientation.

Since the late 1960s we have seen an increase in research and development of theories within the field of gender and sexuality. Especially during the 1970s there was a focus shift from the polarized relationship of feminine/masculine, to an equally polarized pair, namely hetero- and homosexuality (Storr 3-4; Angelides, "Historicizing" 126-127; Firestein xx). This dichotomous division of sexuality became the focus of much feminist, gay/lesbian and queer theory, and there was a general focus on the impacts of a hetero normative society in the Western world and the oppression of sexual minorities (Storr 3-4; Angelides, "Historicizing" 126-127; Firestein xx). As mentioned earlier, this oppositional relationship between hetero- and homosexuality has created a binary that is extremely exclusive when it comes to other forms of sexuality, in this case bisexuality. Ronald C. Fox explains this in the following words: "The predominance of a dichotomous view of sexual orientation . . . constrained the development of a comparable theoretical and research literature on bisexuality and bisexual identities" (7). Critics such as Angelides, Naylor, and Beth A. Firestein have also argued that this hetero/homo binary does not leave any room for alternative sexualities, such as bisexuality, and that this has not only constrained the development of research and theory, but the actual lived lives of individuals who identify as bisexuals ("Historicizing" 125-130; 51-56; xix-xxii).

How should we understand bisexuality in relation to the hetero/homo binary? Does it exist as a separating point on a linear scale in which homo- and heterosexuality are completely disconnected from each other? Or perhaps bisexuality should be understood as a

[7] There is much debate surrounding the distinction between sex and gender, but I will not move further into this, and will use these terms somewhat loosely.

combination of the two polarized categories of homo- and heterosexuality, being placed at the center of the linear scale and thus functioning in degrees? On the other hand, could bisexuality exist on another plane entirely? These questions show some of the difficulties in attempting to place bisexuality within an already socially and culturally established system of sexuality. It becomes obvious that this is a difficult area in which to draw conclusions or to create adequate answers. It could be that searching for such answers is regressive. For instance, Nissen wants to move away from a system were gender is the focus and indicating force in relation to sexual identity (16). He believes that the solution to this binary understanding of sexuality, is not to include a third or fourth sexuality such as bisexuality, but rather to deconstruct the sexual system, along with its terminology. In fact, Nissen seems to view the term *bisexual* as a short-term solution[8], and he rejects a trinary understanding of sexuality (31). I agree very much with this point of view, but the reality is that there are many individuals who use or identify with the label bisexual, and thus one has to address the array of questions and debates concerning this somewhat controversial "new" sexual identity. As a starting point one might ask questions as to why there has been a tendency for bisexuality to be excluded, ignored, marginalized and misunderstood.

Angelides argues that there are two factors responsible for the marginalization and exclusion of bisexuality. Firstly, he claims that one factor is the strain between queer, gay/lesbian and feminist theory and their individual use of the axes of sex, gender and sexuality ("Historicizing" 126-27). Basically, he is blaming the erasure of bisexuality on the other literary theories and their individual development of a historical and theoretical framework, in combination with the lack of communication across the different fields of study. For instance, he explains that there have been texts written about bisexuality from a historical perspective, but he argues that most of these texts have only been concerned with how to conceptualize, theorize and represent bisexuality, and not with attempting to include bisexuality into the "already told tale" of the history of sexuality ("Historicizing" 128). Secondly, he argues that another factor has been the poor historicizing of bisexuality, especially in comparison to hetero/homosexuality: "The emphasis on identity and the fact that, as far as we know, bisexuality has been barely (if at all) visible as a palpable cultural identity until recent decades have meant that in constructionist histories bisexuality is mentioned only in passing by a few theorists of sexuality (Angelides, *Bisexuality* 9).

[8] The Norwegian term used in the original text is "nødløsning".

One of Angelides' fundamental claims is that the general field of historiography of sexuality is flawed because it fails to recognize bisexuality as a sexual identity. Furthermore, Angelides believes that one of the reasons bisexuality has been excluded from the historiography of sexuality is because of the general misconception that bisexuality is only a by-product of the system of hetero/homosexual counterparts ("Historicizing" 128). Angelides wants to historicize bisexuality, which he describes as a deconstructive project of breaking down the categories of sexuality and the binary structure inherent in this system. Furthermore, he argues that bisexuality as a concept cannot be viewed as separated from hetero- and homosexuality, but rather that all of these concepts of sexuality are intertwined and conceptually dependent on one another (128). These concepts of sexuality are not something natural; rather they should be understood as something which is constructed both socially and culturally. If this is a fact, then the binary logic of hetero/homosexuality is flawed and the dichotomous relationship should be dissolved, and perhaps only bisexuality could have such a strong deconstructive power.

Conceptualizing Bisexuality: The Process of Defining and Understanding Bisexuality

I would claim that one of the most difficult aspects of bisexuality is trying to define and understand this term. Michael du Plessis discusses the difficulty of giving an adequate definition of bisexuality, and points to the never ending confusion surrounding this concept (19-21). For instance, Malcolm Bowie describes how bisexuality commonly has been understood in three separate manners:

> This term [bisexuality] has at least three current meanings, and these can easily produce confusion. As used by Darwin and his contemporaries it represented an exclusively biological notion, synonymous with hermaphroditism, and referred to the presence within an organism of male and female sexual characteristics. This meaning persists. Secondly, bisexuality denotes the co-presence in the human individual of 'feminine' and 'masculine' psychological characteristics. Thirdly, and most commonly, it is used of the propensity of certain individuals to be sexually attracted to both men and women. (qtd. in Naylor 57).

This extract illustrates that the term bisexual is defined and used in very different and separate manners. It is important to note that some of these definitions have become somewhat

outdated, and that in this thesis it is the last understanding of the term, as a sexual orientation or identity, which is in focus. However, this does not narrow down the complexity of the term, on the contrary. Naylor illustrates some of the general notions generated around the concept of bisexuality as a sexual orientation: "Bisexuals exist as a separate group, bisexuals cannot exist as a separate group, or bisexuals move in and out of bisexuality, and a bisexual identity" (Naylor 54). The confusion does not end there. In their work, Patrick S. Mulick and Lester W. Wright Jr. describe four conflicting beliefs about bisexuality, namely that: Bisexuality could be a valid sexual orientation, or it could be a transitory state, or rather it could be a transitional state; for homosexuals or lesbians who are confused about their true orientation (48). Paula C. Rust, an American sociologist which has been particularly focused on bisexuality in her research, gives several options in defining the term:

> Defined by behavior, bisexuals are people who engage in sex with both women and men. Defined by feelings, bisexuals are people who are attracted to or capable of loving both women and men. Defined by preference, bisexuals are either people who have preferences for both women and men or people who lack a preference for one over the other. These definitions of bisexuality retain the emphasis on the gender(s) of one's partner(s), an emphasis derived from the gender-specific definitions of homosexuality and heterosexuality (Rust 69-70).

These conflicting notions and definitions create an array of difficult questions concerning bisexuality. Do bisexuals exist? Who are they? Can bisexuality be understood as a sexual identity on the same level as a lesbian or gay sexual identity? Is bisexuality just a stepping stone between sexual identities? Or are they in fact just confused lesbians/gays? And how can bisexuals claim to be oppressed and marginalized when they have the element of choice? In connection to all this I will attempt to discuss some beliefs, understandings and common misconceptions concerning bisexuality which I find important. Throughout the thesis I will attempt to define and discuss some important terms linked to bisexuality, such as sexual fluidity, biphobia, identity versus behavior, double discrimination, and object choice.

Sexual Fluidity in Relation to Bisexuality

Fluidity is a word indicating the ability to flow, or to be in a state of constant change or

motion[9], and it is a term which is frequently used in relation to sexuality. Gilbert Herdt describes the dangers of a generalizing use the term fluidity in relation to *sexuality*, especially as this term has been used differently by many critics and theorist, and thus has become misleading and somewhat confusing ("Fluidity" 162-3). In this thesis I will use the term fluidity quite frequently in relation to sexuality and desires, and its meaning will been almost synonymous with bisexuality. Lisa M. Diamond also uses the term in her book *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire*. She views bisexuality as a sexual orientation on the same basis as heterosexuality and homosexuality, while she uses fluidity to describe her theory that individuals operate with a separate degree of sexual fluidity within their own sexual orientation (Diamond 3-9). While I will use sexual fluidity almost as a distinct quality of bisexuality, Diamond seems to claim that fluid sexuality exists within all sexual orientations. Also, she argues that the individual's sexual orientation does not change, whether or not an individual experiences fluid sexuality. In other words, if a lesbian identified woman has sex with men also, she is still a lesbian as this sexual fluidity in no way jeopardizes one's sexual identity. I acknowledge that there are several ways of understanding the term fluidity, and that to link this term directly to bisexuality might be somewhat misleading and even incorrect. However, in this thesis fluidity will be used in this manner because it illustrates important qualities of bisexuality, both in theory and in bisexual behavior and most of all because the concept is paramount in relation to the analysis of the fictional characters in this thesis.

On the other hand, Diamond's use of the terms same sex, other sex and both sexes instead of homosexual/lesbian, heterosexual and bisexual are refreshing and agreeable. And these terms will therefore be used frequently in the thesis. Her reasoning for this approach is based on the idea that sexual identity and sexual desire might not always be consistent. Someone might have sexual desires or attractions of some form towards the opposite sex, but may not identify with labels such as gay and lesbian. And in relation to bisexuality, individuals who feel desire and attraction towards both sexes may not find the label "bisexual" appropriate or adequate. Also, some people prefer not to be labeled at all. The matter becomes even more complex if one includes transgendered and transsexual people into this discussion. These predicaments have led to new identity labels such as "queer" and "pansexual[10]," which

[9] Herdt defines fluidity accordingly: "Fluidity denotes that which is capable of flowing or is easily changeable, not fixed or solid" (162-3).
[10] Also referred to as "omnisexual," and is a new term which refers to individuals who have a potential for sexual attraction, desire, and love towards people of all gender identities and biological sexes.

are perhaps less specific and restrictive, and might be more fitting for some people (Diamond 12-13).

Biphobia: Prejudices and Common Misconceptions

The ambiguity imbedded in bisexuality, and this sense of inconclusiveness has had an extensive impact on how this particular sexual identity is viewed. Sue George points out: "The fact that bisexual people may not be so easily classifiable is often a cause for anxiety" (102). In line with this, Robyn Ochs explains that such anxieties can occur when people are confronted with ambiguous gender or sexuality in which they are not able to classify (224). An ambiguous sexuality such as bisexuality becomes troublesome because it does not abide and conform to the strict categorical system of sexuality. In relation the anxiety often brought forth by bisexuals, Robyn uses the term "biphobia," which she understands as the discrimination, misconceptions and animosity directed towards bisexuals, and this term that has been embraced by many other theorist as well (217, 224-232; Fox 19; George 101; Storr 3). In line with this, T. Israel and J.J. Mohr[11] found that the discrimination and prejudice directed towards bisexuals is mostly based on the same reasons as with gays and lesbians, which is the same-sex desire (qtd. in Lewis et. al. 977). Considering this, then biphobia seems to be quite similar to homophobia, only that it is a less known and used term, which is directed towards individuals who identify as bisexuals, as opposed to homosexuals and lesbians who have been the main targets of homophobia. Then why not use homophobia in relation to bisexuals as well? There seems to be one important difference between these terms, namely that biphobia includes discrimination and prejudice from the gay and lesbian community, *in addition* to the heterosexual society (Lewis et. al. 977-978). In connection to this, Ochs emphasizes that bisexuals have been receiving prejudice and hostility from both heterosexuals *and* the gay/lesbian community, and that this has created a "double discrimination," which has rarely been acknowledged (217).

Through the invention of the Biphobia Scale[12], Patrick S. Mulick and Lester W. Wright Jr. proved the existence of biphobia, and they were able to show that it functioned as a form of double discrimination (50-61). In connection to this, one professor named Gregory M.

[11] For more information on their work see: Israel, T. & J.J. Mohr. "Attitudes Towards Bisexual Women and Men: current Research, Future Directions." *Current Research on Bisexuality*. Ed. R.C. Fox. New York: Haworth Press, 2004. 117-134. Print.

[12] For more information about the formation and function of the Bihopbia Scale, see Mulick: "Examining the Existence of Biphobia in the Heterosexual and Homosexual Populations."

Herek found, in his research of 2002[13], certain indications that heterosexuals actually had more negative attitudes towards bisexuals than they had towards lesbians or homosexuals, as bisexuals were thought to "play both sides of the fence" (qtd. in Lewis et. al. 978). In the book *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer Psychology: An Introduction*, there were similar findings of prejudice: "Bisexual people have often been marginalized in LGBTQ[14] research and communities. For instance, some lesbians and gay men have expressed concerns that a focus on bisexuality and bisexual history will draw attention away from lesbian and gay experiences" (Clarke et. al. 87). In other words, bisexuals find themselves in an particular position in which they are be targets of negative attitudes and prejudice, as well as exclusion, from all camps, and this could indicate that bisexuals are subjected to more prejudice and discrimination than other marginalized sexual identities.

Bisexuality seems to pose a threat to other sexual identities, but what is it about bisexuality that makes it so dangerous? Bisexuality has become a threat to the established dichotomous system of sexuality, because this sexual orientation is impossible to place or label adequately. Furthermore, the issue of properly conceptualizing combined with the general lack of knowledge and understanding concerning this particular identity, has made bisexuality even more threatening. There are many different and complex dynamics at work when it comes to prejudice towards bisexuals, and the misconceptions are numerous. The very existence of bisexuality has been denied by many, and in other cases, such as the gay and lesbian community, there has been a tendency to view bisexuals as a threat, or as more privileged because they can choose *not* to be in the marginalized group, by only acting on their same-sex desires (Ochs 217-224). Kolodny claims that at the root of biphobia is the element of choice and the notion that one can simply directs one's desires in the "correct" direction, namely the path of heterosexuality ("Bisexuality" 62). I will return to this discussion of choice and biphobia in more detail in Chapter One in connection to *Giovanni's Room*.

Mulick and Wright claim that much of the prejudice directed towards bisexuals is based on negative stereotypes (48). For instance: "There may be . . . assumptions made about the bisexual as a promiscuous person due to attraction to same- and other-sex partners" (Lewis et. al. 978). In other situations bisexuals have been portrayed as disease spreaders, with immoral and provoking attitudes towards sex, and as people who disrupt families with

[13] For more information on his work see: Herek, G.M. "Heterosexual's Attitudes Toward Bisexual Men and Women in the United States." *Journal of Sex research* 39:4 (2002): 264-274. Print.
[14] Short for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer.

their behavior (Ochs 217, 226-32). This stereotyping is based on common misconceptions and can easily be compared to the same stereotyping black women have suffered before, being portrayed as sexually deviant and promiscuous. This topic will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two, in relation to *The Color Purple* and the character of Shug Avery. All of this very interesting because it points to the idea that much of the prejudice can be linked to the lack of understanding and information, and thus is something that potentially can be improved. Therefore, the project of exposing and examining the bisexual perspective must be taken seriously, and more importantly it must be a continuous process.

In Summarization

In Chapter One of this thesis I want examine to what extent and on which grounds one can argue that James Baldwin's famous novel *Giovanni's Room* could represent a bisexual perspective. The characters of David and Giovanni will be examined in some detail in an attempt to reveal bisexual elements in the novel. I will focus on heteronormativity and forced conformity within a binary understanding of sexuality, and the negative effects this could have on bisexual individuals. This will be emphasized through an analysis of David and his constant obsession with a masculine identity, combined with his internalized homophobic attitudes and his constant refusal of his same-sex eroticism. Giovanni's character will be subjected to a close reading in order to establish the meaning of his ambiguous emotions and fluid sexuality. Also, this chapter will be a continuation of the discussions in the Introduction concerning terminology, as there will be an examination of the distinction between behavior and identity, and concepts such as biphobia and fluidity will be discussed in the context of the fictional book.

In Chapter Two, the award winning book *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker will be in focus, as the thesis moves into lesbian literary theory as a contrast to bisexuality and a potential (bi)literary theory. Much of this chapter deals with the marginalization of lesbian women in literature, and how this particular struggle illustrates much of the future endeavors and toil bisexuals will encounter as a marginalized group fighting for representation and inclusion in the canon. The character of Shug Avery will be the focal point of this chapter, as this character quite forcefully represents a bisexual experience, both in a negative and positive manner. Furthermore, I will argue that Walker intentionally portrays Shug as sexually fluid, and thus potentially bisexual, as a response against the heteronormativity of society and the hetero/homo (lesbian) binary understanding of sexuality.

In Chapter Three I will perform a close reading of Annie Proulx's *Brokeback Mountain*. This is an attempt to move beyond the previous chapters by moving into the actual use of a (bi)literary theory on a text in practice. *Brokeback Mountain* poses more of a challenge to a (bi)literary theory than *Giovanni's Room* and *The Color Purpl*e, as this story both in the original short story and the popular film, has been announced as exclusively gay. I will focus on the character of Ennis and examine his ambiguous and fluid sexuality I detail. Furthermore, I will argue that a bisexual reading changes the meaning of the story. Thus, if *Brokeback Mountain* can be read bisexually, in a manner that changes or illuminates new aspects of the story, then this could open the door to (bi)literary theory as a different, valid and important contribution to the establishment of literary theories and the canon as a whole.

Chapter 1: Changing the Canon a Book at the Time: Rereading *Giovanni's Room* Bisexually

First published in 1956, *Giovanni's Room* is a famous novel by the African American writer James Baldwin. The book has been both praised and condemned by critics, but one thing they all have in common is a mutual understanding that this fictional piece of literature represents a homosexual experience (Beemyn 57-58; Phillips v-xi; Degout 425-35; Weatherby 117-18). In other words this book has been interpreted with homoerotic love as one of its main themes, among many others such as nationality, Freudian psychoanalysis and self-denial (DeGout 426). It is important to emphasize at this point that my intent is not that it is wrong to interpret this novel from a homosexual perspective. In fact, the homosexual perspective is very logical, as well as useful, for understanding this book, and relates very well to the historical, social and cultural context. Also this perspective is very closely linked to the author's own sexual orientation, because many critics and biographers have defined him as a homosexual man (Leeming 45; Phillips x). Interestingly this has been debated by some critics in more recent times because even after Baldwin himself proclaimed that he was gay, he continued to have affairs and to fall in love with women throughout much of his life, and in fact he seemed to be quite wary of identity politics in general (Leeming 45). As mentioned in the Introduction, Beemyn is the only critic who has interpreted *Giovanni's Room* from a bisexual perspective, and in his work he presents an interesting tendency within literary interpretation: "Seemingly, it is assumed that any intragender desire automatically makes a person, and by extension a text, gay" (58). In other words, if a character in a book has sex with people of both sexes, then usually the focus of the critics will be on the same-sex experience, and often this will influence the overall reading and understanding of the text. This is a tendency I myself have encountered during my own studies of literature at the University, and to me it is a problematic one because it excludes a whole range of other interpretations and meanings. In line with this I think it becomes evident that to label a novel, such as *Giovanni's Room*, as strictly homosexual is simplistic. Therefore, in this chapter I want to show that this ". . . nature of David's sexuality . . ." (Phillips viii) does not necessarily have to be interpreted as

homosexual, and that a bisexual perspective could be just as valuable and enlightening in understanding the book, as well as exposing the bisexual experience.

In the Introduction of the thesis I have discussed bisexuality in terms of conceptualization, historical developments, and biphobia, as well as binary logic and its impact on sexual orientation. I have also touched upon bisexuality in relation to the Western literary canon and its erasure or exclusion from this. Some critics would claim that the concept of bisexuality is revolutionary in the context of the Western world because of how it "embodies sexual and gender diversity," as well as its deconstructive powers in terms of how we today see gender, sexuality and sexual orientation (Queen 120-121; Firestein xix). Furthermore, as Marjorie Garber explains in her book *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*: "The nature of sexuality . . . is fluid not fixed, a narrative that changes over time rather than a fixed identity, however complex. The erotic discovery of bisexuality is the fact that it reveals sexuality to be a process of growth, transformation, and surprise, not a stable and knowable state of being" (66).

Angelides speaks of Garber in his introduction to *A History of Bisexuality*, and agrees with her general approach towards bisexuality, namely not to get caught in a process of theorizing, politicizing and promoting bisexuality as the new sexual identity (2-3). Both Garber and Angelides believe that the field of sexuality's oppositional distinction between hetero and homosexuality is obstructive to the understanding of sexuality in general, but that to simply add bisexuality as a third term solves nothing. However, Angelides distances himself from Garber in her use of bisexuality as a synonym to "the nature of sexuality," and he also condemns her efforts to deconstruct the hetero/homo binary opposition through a new set of opposites, namely sexual identity and fluid difference (*Bisexuality* 3-4). She is moving away from one polarized dichotomy and right into another equally polarized opposition, and Angelides believes her deconstructive efforts are in vain because she rectifies the same binary logics she is in fact attempting to dissolve. In line with all this, it becomes important to encourage and further the project of exposing and understanding bisexuality, and to acknowledge the importance and value this can have to people. I think all contributions to this project are important, and I will myself attempt to expose bisexuality and to show its excluded position in literary criticism. I believe there is great value in reading both old and modern classics with new eyes, and to let them speak to us in an entirely new fashion.

First, I would like to make a distinction between the terms *behavior* and *identity*, in relation to sexuality. These terms will be in use throughout this thesis and therefore it is

important to clarify and specify in terms of meaning. Herdt and his anthropological accounts of ritualized homosexuality amongst young boys in Melanesia proved that the Western notion of sexual orientation, as something stable and concrete, was culturally specific (Diamond 5). Therefore, Herdt's research was perhaps what led to the very distinction between sexual behavior and identity. Angelides claims in his article "Historicizing (Bi)Sexuality" that those who have researched the history of sexuality, and in particular constructionist historians, have created a distinction between sexuality as either identity or behavior (128). Simply defined sexual behavior is something universal, while on the other hand, sexual identity is something culturally and historically specific (128; Storr 5). In other words, the sexual behavior of one man having sex with another man will always be just that act in universal terms. However, how a specific society and culture describes, understands and defines this behavior gives shape to a more specific sexual identity, as in this case a homosexual identity. Nissen makes a similar distinction, but between *sex* and *sexuality*, in which he considers sexuality to be an organized systemization of sex, similar to that of identity, while sex is something one *does*, which is perhaps more similar to the idea of sexual behavior. Hence, sexuality is something you *are*, while sex is something you *do* (19-20). Furthermore, he describes how this system of sexuality is probably no older than a hundred years, and that this system is therefore difficult and biased to use in relation to sexual behavior prior to its invention. This reveals how young our current systematization of sexuality truly is. Angelides believes that this differentiation between sexual behavior and sexual identity is harmful to concepts such as bisexuality, and he even goes as far as to argue that this "identity paradigm" is one of the reasons that bisexuality has been marginalized and excluded, especially because: ". . . bisexuality merely vanishes into the categories of hetero- or homosexuality" ("Historicizing" 128). I think this is a valid argument because there is a certain tendency for people to label an individual's sexual identity according to the sexual act they perform. In other words, it seems like the hetero/homo binary also influence and control the understanding of sexual behavior in such a way that bisexuality becomes an impossibility. In this line of thinking sexual acts between same-sex individuals results in a homosexual or lesbian identity, and sexual acts with the opposite sex results in a heterosexual identity. Bisexual behavior as something universal is thus erased and never brought into existence as a culturally and socially constructed identity.

There are some theorists who make this distinction within a more current framework, describing sexual behavior as an individual's experience and sexual interaction with men or women, and sexual identity as the act of identifying oneself with one of three categories,

namely homosexual, lesbian or bisexual (Lewis et. al. 974). This distinction between sexual behavior and identity is more inclusive of bisexuality as an option because it recognizes it as an identity, but nonetheless it abides to a strict system of categories that becomes generalizing. For instance, there are many people out there who cannot identify sufficiently with any of these sexual orientations, and many people actually reject a categorical system of sexual identities, and moreover, it would seem that some people change their sexual orientation and thus their identity over time. Another difficult aspect in this discussion is that some individuals might have a certain sexual behavior, but will not identify with the designated sexual identity label (Storr 5). There is no clear answer to all of this, but I think it is important to be aware of these ideas and their implications.

I will be using the terms sexual behavior and sexual identity quite frequently during my analysis of *Giovanni's Room*, *The Color Purple* and *Brokeback Mountain*. These terms become quite complex in relation to fictional literature because the reader and the literature at hand is often separated in time and space, and perhaps even more so culturally and socially. Along with this, the reader carries internalized perspectives and concepts which do not necessarily coincide with those of the fictional literature and its context. Despite the fact that much in fictional literature is universal and transcends time and space, it is important to acquire an understanding of the time and setting one is accessing through literature as a reader. Nevertheless, this does not make the interpretation of non-contemporary literature pointless; rather I think it gives literature another level of depth. In this context, it is important to emphasize that in using *Giovanni's Room* in my interpretation, I am well aware that the concept of a bisexual identity did not exist, at least as we understand it today, in 1950s France. George explains that "there was always a recognition that some people (men) were 'really' homosexual, and that some acted that way only part of the time, a recognition which appeared in the Wolfenden Report on homosexuality in the 1950s" (101). This comes to show that there was awareness of the existence of what we might today call homosexual and bisexual behavior, but that there was no contemporary label or identity to ascribe to this. Neither the characters in the book, nor the author, have the same understanding of gender and sexuality as we do today, and that is important to keep in mind. It is important to note that Baldwin himself was aware of a range of variations of sexual behavior, which would coincide with current use of sexual identities such as homosexuality, lesbianism and bisexuality (Leeming 123-4). Baldwin identified himself as a homosexual for parts of his life, but overall he was unable to properly identify with this label and continued to be sexually ambivalent (123-27).

In the case of *Giovanni's Room* there seems to be somewhat of a consensus amongst critics that this novel should be interpreted as homosexual. In the following section I will argue that the two main characters of the novel *Giovanni's Room*, David and Giovanni, can be read and understood as bisexuals, just as well as homosexuals. I will strengthen my argumentation by showing relevant passages from the book, combined this with theory from Angelides, Fox, George, Ochs and Naylor, as well as remaining in a dialogue with Yasmin Y. DeGout, Beemyn and Caryl Phillips articles on the book. However, it is important to mention in this context that to simply reinterpret and label this or any other novel as bisexual instead of homosexual is not my goal. In fact, as mentioned earlier, Baldwin himself was quite uncomfortable with identity labels and was more focused on moving away from these narrow categories (Beemyn 58). Therefore I only want to show that this bisexual analysis is another possible reading, and to consider the implication this reading has towards the understanding of the book, the politics and theory of sexual identity, and also to the literary canon as a whole.

David and a Bisexual Identity

David is a white American man living abroad in France, he is also the narrator and it is through his words we as readers come to learn of his sexual orientation, and his "object" choice/s[15]. Most critics of *Giovanni's Room* have interpreted David's sexual orientation as homosexual, and his encounters with women, which are numerous if we are to believe the narrator, are only to be seen as a meek attempt to adapt or fit into the heterosexual norm of Western society. DeGout claims that Baldwin's novel implies that David's natural sexual orientation is that of homosexuality, and that many of the inner struggles he experiences are a result of his divided mind (427-28). I think this image of a divided mind is very significant, but not in its original sense, because this division in David's mind does not necessarily have to entail the classic struggle of a person caught in a personal battle within the hetero/homo binary. David could just as well be struggling with a fluid sexual desire, feeling attracted to both women and men.

Herdt claims that the term fluidity has been used frequently and casually in most of the writing concerning bisexuality, and that this poses a range of problems, especially because of the problematic tendency of understanding fluidity as a metaphor for bisexuality ("Fluidity" 162-3). Herdt is onto something quite important here, and this is emphasized if one attempts

[15] See footnote 5.

to define any changeable or fluid qualities of a bisexual identity. Which elements of the bisexual identity should we consider to be changeable: is it for instance the object choice, or perhaps the sexual technique used, or the gender role? Such questions clearly reveal the ambiguity of a bisexual identity, but it also shows some of the loop holes of defining this particular sexual orientation as fluid, which Herdt seems particularly concerned with. In short, I want to show that I am aware of the fact that the use of the term fluidity can at times be unclear and ambiguous. Nevertheless, I have decided to use the term in my thesis because I believe it is suitable in certain discussions concerning bisexuality, and perhaps especially in terms of object choice and sexual desire.

In the book David is a character who is fluid in his sexual behavior, without the means to describe his experience. Historically, the term bisexual would not be recognized as a universal sexual behavior, nor a sexual identity as it is today (George 101). Thus David would perhaps interpret his own attraction to men as exclusively homoerotic, and as something that would erase his heterosexuality if acted upon. In other words, David or any other person within that cultural, social and historical context would not consider bisexuality, understood as an identity where it is legitimate to feel emotionally and sexually attracted to both women and men, as a possible outcome, because it simply did not exist as a sexual identity at that time. The view of *Giovanni's Room* as a homosexual novel was further strengthened by the protagonist's negative and detached narration concerning women and his sexual encounters with them (DeGout 427; Phillips vii-xi). David describes many of his encounters with women with a mechanical language, where he seems to be emotionally distant and only participating physically. This reading of the novel ignores many passages that reveal that these encounters with women are not wholly negative experiences, and that David also feels desire, sexual attraction and love for women. Early on it becomes apparent that David has been in a romantic relationship with a woman named Hella. He refers to her as "my girl," and he has even asked her to marry him. At one point in his narration he reflects: "I told her that I had loved her once and I made myself believe it. But I wondered if I had. I was thinking, no doubt, of our nights in bed, of the peculiar innocence and confidence which will never come again which had made those nights so delightful . . ." (Baldwin 10). In this passage David is questioning if what he once felt for Hella truly was love, but this in no way needs to be interpreted as David not being sexually or emotionally attracted to women. Rather, it could be read as a retrospective view of a failed relationship, where much of the memories of love and sexual emotions have faded, which would be a normal reaction. It could very well be that at

one point in David's life he did love Hella and desired her sexually, but that his intense affair with Giovanni, and the fact that Hella left him to go travel and "find herself," has erased much of his emotions towards her. At one point, during an argument with Giovanni, David actually proclaims his love for Hella: "'She's not a little girl . . . . She's a woman and no matter what you think, I *do* love her . . .'" (Baldwin 133). This statement shows that to simply label David's sexuality as gay is not sufficient, because it is obvious that David also experiences emotional and sexual attraction towards women. Either way, David does describe nights in bed with a woman as delightful, as something he enjoyed, and this has never been taken into account.

David is constantly drawn between his emotions and desires, and he is in a constant battle with himself to control his urges and desires towards men. However, throughout the novel it becomes clear that David is not new to sexual encounters with women. One gets the impression that for periods during his life he has been preoccupied with drinking and having sex with women, and he even claims that at one point in his life he was ". . . wearied of wandering through the forests of desperate women . . ." (Baldwin 25). This can be interpreted as David's attempt to fit into a heterosexual identity and to live up to his father's ideal of a "real" man, while at the same time battling his true homosexual identity, and this is in fact how most critics have read the novel (Phillips v-xi; DeGout 425-435). However, it could also be that David is equally attracted to women, as to men, and that his inner turmoil is a result of these conflicting desires and his inability to identify or define this experience. In a heteronormative society, where same-sex desire was met with fierce prejudice, it would not be uncommon for individuals with homosexual desires to suppress and hide these emotions, and this would of course apply to bisexuals as well. Moreover, the reason why David's sexual encounters with women are described so mechanically and detached does not necessarily imply that he is exclusively homosexual, but rather that these encounters are examples of meaningless and loveless sex. With the historical context in mind, it is quite understandable that his attraction to men frightens him, and that this leads him to more frequently approach women. This notion of emotionally detached sex is explicitly shown in David's narration of his sexual encounter with a woman named Sue:

> I also approached Sue as though she were a job of work, a job which was necessary to do in an unforgettable manner. . . . *The end is coming soon,* her sobs became even higher and harsher, I was terribly aware of the small of my back and the cold sweat there. I thought *Well let her have it for Christ sake, get it over with,* then it was ending and I hated her and me. . . . I wanted only to get out of there

(Baldwin 96).

In this part of the novel it becomes apparent that David is merely trying to escape from his own emotions and inner turmoil by engaging in destructive sexual behavior. The language he uses to narrate this episode is loaded with negative words conveying disgust, routine and anxiety. The sexual encounters with both Joey and Giovanni, on the other hand, are described in a more positive manner. However it is not necessarily that those encounters are described more positively due to the fact that is it sex with men instead of women, as many critics have understood it, but rather that it is positive because it is sex in combination with feelings of love and affection.

Heteronormativity, Conformity, and the "Passing" Act

In a study of bisexuality within a homosexual context, two researchers, Martin S. Weinberg and Colin J. Williams[16], found that when compared to exclusively homosexual men, bisexual men were more likely to choose the heterosexual lifestyle in the end. In other words, they found that bisexual men often were more concerned with passing as heterosexual, and thus socialized more with heterosexuals, chose to be in a heterosexual marriage and were less likely to "come out" (Fox 18-19). This connects perfectly with David's situation, considering the cultural and social implications, as it is much more preferable and safe for David to embrace a heterosexual lifestyle. And this is exactly what he does when he constantly attempts to control and suppress his desires towards men; when he proposes to Hella, when he breaks off his affair with Giovanni and when he hides his own inner self. Also fitting into this perspective is the protagonist's constant concern with passing as a heterosexual, among both heterosexual and homosexual company. David is very much tormented with the idea of losing his manhood, and dominated by a need to fulfill his role as a "real" man (Phillips ix). This ideal of a "real" man as a heterosexual, masculine, and almost chauvinistic male has been internalized in David from an early age, especially in his father's expectations of him: ". . . 'all I want for David is that he grow up to be a man. And when I say a man, Ellen, I don't mean a Sunday school teacher'" (Baldwin 20). There are expectations put upon David, both from society and his father, to perform a certain role, the gendered role of a real man, whatever that is. However, David's fluid sexual desire seems to make it impossible for him to

[16] This is *not* from Weinberg and Williams' book *Dual Attraction: Understanding Bisexuality*, as the researchers are mentioned in Fox's: "Bisexuality in Perspective: A Review of Theory and Research," in this case.

perform the role of a "real" heterosexual man, but at the same time he is also unwilling to perform the role of the "homosexual man," represented by characters such as Guillaume and Jacques.

In the article "Sexual Minority Stress, Depressive Symptoms, and sexual Orientation Conflict: Focus on experiences of Bisexuals," bisexuals are identified as a heterogeneous group with a significant difference between the experiences of bisexual men and women (Lewis et. al. 973). In more recent research it has been proven that bisexual men are much more likely to fall victim to heterosexism and gender role limitations than bisexual women (973). The result of this research could in fact imply that there is a much larger and less reconcilable gap between the gender roles of the heterosexual and homosexual man, than there is between the gender roles of the lesbian and heterosexual woman. This could also be related to the fact that women in general, lesbian or straight, have fought for their rights under the unifying banner of feminism. In other words, lesbian women were included in the feminist struggle, and this could have created less of a gap between the gender role of the lesbian and heterosexual woman. I do acknowledge that this line of thinking might be generalizing and even highly provocative to some, but in line with the ideas above this could come to show that the bisexual man would have a harder time assuming a gender role as a man than a bisexual woman would have performing the gender role of woman. It could be that the bisexual man would be subjected to more heterosexism and gender role limitations, because a man with homoerotic desires cannot also be a "real" man, if a real man is synonymous with masculine heterosexual man. If this is the case, then these issues are quite visible in relation to the two main male characters of *Giovanni's Room* when they are interpreted as bisexuals. They are unable to reconcile their own identity and sexual desires with the gender roles and sexual identities prescribed by society, and this becomes difficult, especially in the case of David who is unable to accept his true self and constantly attempts to fit into society and to conform to its norms.

David's attempts to perform masculinity are frequent in the book, and even during the day leading up to his first sexual encounter with another man, he is still preoccupied with coming across as a "real" heterosexual man: "I think we had been lying around the beach, swimming a little and watching the near-naked girls pass, whistling at them, and laughing" (Baldwin 12). This quote illustrates David's excessive efforts to pass as a heterosexual man, and his fear of not being able to live up to that role. He takes part in typical masculine and even to the point of male chauvinistic behavior to fit into a heteronormative society. Phillips

describes this as David having submitted to or "accepted the stereotype of the roles assigned to them [David and Hella] by American society" (ix). But he does it just as much to convince himself of his own sexual orientation and object choice, because the other possibilities frighten him. Beemyn understands and interprets David as an individual who has internalized the homophobic attitudes, imposed on him by the dominant culture (62). The use of the term internalized homophobia refers to the hate, prejudice, and misconceptions directed towards homosexuals by society, and the idea that such attitudes can become part of an individual's own beliefs if one is subjected to these from an early age. This internalized homophobia becomes apparent through David's first and seemingly innocent sexual encounter with another man, because despite the immediate response of pleasure this encounter invokes strong feelings of shame, guilt and even fear (Baldwin 13-15). Also, when David is taking a walk with Giovanni he is gripped by a sudden lust and admiration for a male stranger, but he quickly puts himself in place by evoking feelings of shame, sorrow and panic in relation to this (Baldwin 81). He even goes as far as to say that: "The beast which Giovanni had awakened in me would never go to sleep again . . ." (81). Comparing his homoerotic desire to an awakened beast is a strong image, which shows the feelings David harbors towards homosexuality as something scary, evil and dangerous. The homophobic attitudes of a heteronormative culture are present in David, and these ideas and values conflict heavily with his inner self.

Another interesting passage from the book is the following statement that David makes when he is situated at Guillaume's gay bar: "Well, you may find this hard to believe but, actually, I'm sort of queer for girls myself. If that was his [Giovanni] sister looking so good, I'd invite *her* to have a drink with us. I don't spend money on men" (Baldwin 33). Even here, in the presence of open homosexuals, David is in a state of self-denial and is attempting the heterosexual "passing" act[17]. He does not want to be recognized as a homosexual, in fact, his personal view of openly homosexual men is very negative throughout the book. It seems that a homosexual identity is something he is not able or willing to identify with. For instance, David gives the following description of a gay man from Guillaume's bar:

> It looked like a mummy or a zombie . . . something walking after it had been put to death . . . . It carried a glass, it walked on its toes, the flat hips moved with a dead, horrifying lasciviousness. . . . It glittered in the dim light; the thin black hair was violent with oil, combed forward, hanging in bangs; the eyelids gleamed with mascara, the mouth raged with lipstick. . . . it stank of powder . . . (Baldwin 41).

[17] Refers to the act of attempting to pass as a heterosexual, in order to hide one's true sexual identity.

David describes the gay man as an *it*, as a horrifying and revolting creature or thing, and also as something other, something he cannot relate to. The narrator uses a negatively loaded language full of images of death and horror, almost to a comical effect. It seems as if this openly homosexual man invokes deep and strong emotions in David, which generates reactions of fear, disgust and shame; more evidence of an internalized homophobia. On the other hand, to be ashamed of same-sex desires and to feel obliged to hide them from the world would not be strange considering the historical context. At this point in French history, as the book suggests, it was not acceptable to be gay, it was known to exist, but society did not want it out in the open, and thus it became something hidden and restricted to small arenas in society, such as Guillaume's bar. David states that homosexuality in his own country, the US, is illegal (Baldwin 78). David's sexual desires seem to move between men and women, but the historical context could explain David's fear of embracing his sexual desire towards men in particular. His fear is so internalized that it is even present in the company of open homosexuals in a clandestine bar. David is unable to cope or come to terms with any of his feelings, because he cannot transcend from his belief that homosexuality is dirty and wrong, but at the same time he cannot overcome his mixed emotions and ambiguous sexual desires for both sexes (Beemyn 63). In the end it might seem as if he is doomed because of his inability to embrace his ambiguous and fluid sexuality.

Nevertheless, David finds himself returning to the gay bar in the French underworld, and flirting with the new, young, Italian barman named Giovanni. He is rather happily partaking in this flirtatious conversation until he is disrupted by his friend Jacques who insinuates that David has desires towards men. His reaction to this accusation is to immediately want to leave and to find his girlfriend: "Then I wanted to get out of this bar, out into the air, perhaps to find Hella, my suddenly so sorely menaced girl" (Baldwin 43). David is obviously not accepting or submitting willingly to his desires and emotions towards men, but he is well aware of these feeling within him, as he attempts to control these desires by performing overt heterosexuality. However, as I believe many critics have overlooked, he also seems to be drawn towards women, especially Hella seems to be an important person in his life, someone he loves, longs for and wants to seek comfort in. David cannot identify himself as a bisexual because this was not a concept of his time, at least not how the term is understood today. Thus David is caught in a situation where he is unable to fully explain, understand and negotiate his own sexuality.

Critics would be likely to challenge a bisexual perspective of *Giovanni's Room*,

perhaps because of the notion that if David was in fact bisexual then he would be equally attracted to both men and women, thus he would be able to complete his frequently stated goal; to marry a woman, have children and to live happily ever after. In this opinion David would not suffer inner turmoil if he was bisexual, because he could decide to act exclusively on his other-sex desires and thus solve his problems. This illustrates one of the common misconceptions about bisexuality, namely that a gay or lesbian individual has no choice, while in the case of bisexuality there is the element of choice. As a gay or lesbian individual it is impossible to pass as a heterosexual without compromising one's identity, quality of life and happiness. However, a person who feels both heterosexual and homosexual desires could thus take the easy way out by only acting upon the heterosexual desires, which would then exclude the person from the marginalization, oppression and prejudice homosexuals and lesbians can experience. In other word, a misconception concerning bisexuality is that one can choose and control one's desires to the point of harmonizing with the heteronormativity of society (Fox 17-19; Ochs 217-218). In the following passage one sees an example of this from the text. David expresses the awareness of this "choice" when he says that he knows he could turn away from his homoerotic desires, and to just be with girls, but something in his body and mind makes this an utter impossibility. He cannot remove and erase his own feelings and desires. As David reveals to the reader: "I wished . . . that I had been able to find in myself the force to turn and walk out -to have gone over to Montparnasse perhaps and picked up a girl. Any girl. I could not do it. I told myself all sorts of lies, standing there at the bar, but I could not move" (Baldwin 44). This extract comes to show that bisexuality cannot be reduced to a matter of personal choice; sexuality is more complex than that.

This quote illuminates David's ability to be self-reflective and I believe that this passage could be read from a bisexual perspective. David has to come to terms with this divided or fluid sexuality, he understands that he is different, and that even though he is attracted to women, both mentally and physically, there is an equal attraction to men that he cannot deny or ignore. The autobiographical elements of the novel have been pointed out by several critics (Leeming 127, Phillips vii-ix). For instance, in relation to the character of David, Baldwin also spent many years abroad in France, and he too was engaged to a woman at one point in his life. In my opinion, though, the most interesting similarity between David and Baldwin is that they both display sexual ambivalence. Perhaps Baldwin used David as an extension of himself, purposely putting sexually fluid characters in his novel to make a point.

DeGout has written a critical article that interprets and understands the novel as

homoerotic. In this article I became very intrigued by one sentence in particular: “David’s sexual ambivalence is a constant underlying theme of *Giovanni’s Room*” (427). This sentence was part of a discussion on how David’s sexual behavior is quite ambivalent, because in spite of his obvious attraction to men, he does seek out women to have sex and/or relationships with. Regardless of this information and insight, DeGout, as well as Phillips, have interpreted David as exclusively homosexual. This interpretation is not necessarily incorrect, but I do believe that the exclusion of an additional bisexual perspective on this sexual ambivalence is wrong. This sexual ambivalence could be interpreted as bisexuality, and I think that the character of Giovanni also shows a similar sexual behavior. Baldwin’s agent actually uttered a concern about the novel along the lines of it not having a target audience, because the characters were too sexually ambivalent, and he did not believe that this was something people could identify with (Beemyn 61). I would argue that this ambivalence can be interpreted as bisexuality, and that there are many people out there who could identify with these characters and their experiences. In the end *Giovanni’s Room* did considerably well, which indicates that there must have been a sustainable amount of people who could identify with this fluid sexuality in some form. In fact, the sexual ambivalence present in the novel could be why it became so popular in the first place.

There was also another sentence in *Giovanni’s Room* that caught my eye, and made me aware of the bisexual perspective inherent in the book, namely when David says: “I am too various to be trusted” (Baldwin 11). David utters this thought in the beginning of the novel when he is summarizing and analyzing the key events in the novel from a retrospective view. This sentence can very well be interpreted from a bisexual perspective, where this feeling of being “various” could point to David’s attempt to come to terms with his fluid sexual desire. Moreover, the fact that he insinuates that this “various” behavior is not trustworthy, could be understood as David's inability to fit into any of the two categories available to him; a “real” heterosexual man, or a homosexual man. He is not able to define his own identity in a satisfying manner, resulting in his alienation, and he believes that as an individual who cannot be labeled he also becomes untrustworthy and dangerous to others. This sentence reveals a lot about David’s own interpretation of his sexuality, and that he himself is well aware of his sexual ambivalence, or bisexuality, but has no vocabulary or definition to describe it by. As Knopf puts it: “The 'problem' is wanting to occupy . . . a wide open 'third' or 'queer' space, but being bound to a system of compulsory binary sexuality” (157). In other words, the binary understanding of sexual identity creates a difficult situation for David who is unable to fit into

either of the two polarized options given to him by society. To give a definite answer to what this third or queer space should be is impossible, but I believe that the recognition of a bisexual identity at least is a step in the right direction.

In his article Leeming points out that the character of David "is incapable of treating Hella as woman or Giovanni as a man" (124). It is as if he cannot adjust to any of these relationships, and he is even less capable of embracing his own true self; it scares him. David is in a tragic situation, where he has alienated himself from love and society. Baldwin seems to stress the value of being able to relate to both sexes and to never put restrictions on love. In fact, Baldwin had his own philosophy concerning love, where he believed that love was more risky than safe, as love could reveal, confront and destabilize society's norms and taboos (Leeming 123). It could seem that Baldwin is making a point by casting David as this sexually ambivalent and emotionally wrecked character, who in the end becomes incapable of loving anyone. Perhaps his point is that the way society has constructed a strict system of dichotomous sexuality makes it impossible for individuals who are sexually ambivalent to navigate safely through their lives. This would be quite revolutionary, because at this point in time the idea that there could be individuals in society, such as bisexuals, who did not fit into the hetero/homo binary, might have seemed unlikely to most people. And I believe this would put Baldwin in the frontlines of acknowledging the existence of a sexual position subjected to a double alienation, both from the heteronormative society and the homosexual movement. In my opinion it becomes quite irrelevant if one decides to interpret and label this notion of sexual ambivalence as bisexuality or not, because either way the depiction of such experiences in the book is something that could give voice to the bisexual experience and to perhaps raise understanding and awareness. In other words, the actual contents or "true" interpretation of the ambiguous sexuality present in the book is of little importance, because it can still be used to further the understanding of bisexuality and the difficult situation and existential crisis individuals of this orientation can experience.

Representing Bisexuality: Giovanni

In the following section I will take a closer look at sexual ambivalence from a bisexual perspective, with a specific focus on the character Giovanni. In my opinion, the Italian stallion Giovanni is perhaps the character in the book that lends himself the best to a bisexual interpretation. The ambivalent attitude towards gender and sexuality that this character demonstrates and represents is rather overt, and the fact that this has not been examined more

closely baffles me. In his similar project, of reading bisexually, Beemyn describes *Giovanni's Room* as ". . . a bisexual love story . . . " (61). However, he only discusses the character of David in terms of bisexuality, while seeming oblivious to the value of looking closer at the character of Giovanni in this context. In fact, Giovanni is not even mentioned once in Beemyns work about bisexuality. This is where his article has its shortcomings, because Giovanni could most definitely be interpreted as a bisexual, perhaps more so than David. There are several passages in *Giovanni's Room* that illustrate sexual ambivalence, but I think Giovanni is the character who most explicitly represents this notion:

> "Do *you* have a mistress?" I [David] asked him. "Not now,'" he [Giovanni] said, "but perhaps I will again one day. . . . I don't seem to be very interested in women right now – I don't know why. I used to be. Perhaps I will be again. . . . Perhaps it is because women are just a little more trouble than I can afford right now . . . . That hasn't stopped me from making love to many and loving one or two" (Baldwin 77).

This passage is crucial in relation to the bisexual perspective, because it is here that Giovanni openly pronounces his bisexuality, or fluid desire. Obviously, as mentioned before, it would not be possible for Giovanni to identify himself as a bisexual, but despite this he expresses a view of his sexuality which in our culture would easily label him as one. And unlike David, this idea of sexual fluidity does not frighten him; rather he seems to embrace it wholeheartedly. I believe that his bisexual qualities are portrayed in a positive manner. Therefore, I think interpreting Giovanni from a bisexual perspective is quite productive and profitable, as there does not seem to be much fictional literature that has a bisexual character displaying a positive attitude towards their sexuality. Ochs claims that there are few mediums presenting a bisexual experience, and amongst the mediums that *do* there is a lack of positive bisexual role models (232). This indicates that there is a general lack of positive role models in fictional literature which could appeal to a bisexual readership. However, this does not necessary mean that they do not exist, but rather that these characters have not been recognized as valuable or appropriate in relation to a bisexual perspective. Moreover, it is common knowledge that people tend to search for literature which is able to define their own experience, and which contains characters that are easy to relate to and identify with. Ochs argues that this lack of bisexual role models and positively portrayed bisexual characters can have negative effects that can lead to isolation and a feeling of "otherness" in bisexuals (232). Ochs has a point, because if one's own experience and situation in society, in this case the

bisexual experience, is excluded from most literature then this could alienate the reader and devalue his or hers personal experience. Role models are important factors in people's lives, and Giovanni could very well function as one. Despite many of the flaws in Giovanni's character, he is self-reflective, open and attuned to his own bisexuality.

Towards the end of the novel when David and Giovanni are breaking up, they have a fierce and emotionally loaded argument. This argument and some of the sentences spoken are important indicators of a bisexual experience being very much present in *Giovanni's Room.* In this extract David has decided to leave Giovanni for Hella, and after revealing this, he tries quite spitefully to ruin Giovanni's image of a happy and beautiful future together. David goes on to accuse Giovanni of wanting to make him the woman in the relationship, and this infuriates Giovanni who sees things quite differently:

> "I [Giovanni] am not trying to make you a little girl. If I wanted a little girl, I would be *with* a little girl." . . . . "Why aren't you? Isn't it just that you're afraid? And you take *me* [David], because you haven't got the guts to go after a woman, which is what you *really* want?" . . . . "You are the one who keeps talking about *what* I want. But I [Giovanni] have only been talking about *who* I want" (Baldwin 135).

I understand the previous interpretations of Giovanni as a homosexual in *Giovanni's Room,* which would seem logical to most people, because in the book his sexual behavior is only directed towards men, and also, the love affair he has with David points in the homosexual direction. However, in the previous extract from the novel, Giovanni claims that he has had sexual interest, along with emotional affection for women, and furthermore, he says the he is potentially capable of resuming this sexuality and its lifestyle in the future. In other words, Giovanni is aware of his desires towards both sexes, and he knows that his affection and desires are fluid because he has lusted for and loved both women and men in his lifetime. It could seem as if Giovanni does not view object choice as something stable, but rather as something dynamic and situational. George makes an interesting claim about bisexuality in her article, referring to bisexuality as ". . . a way of expressing a sexuality which sees the person rather than gender . . . Ideally, bisexuality is a way of forming relationships without putting boundaries on them because of gender" (105). Also Kolodny gives a positive description of bisexuality as a state of transcending socially constructed boundaries such as sex and gender identities ("Bisexuality" 62). Such ideas paint a picture of bisexuality as

something without boundaries, free from socially constructed labels and sexual politics, almost as a state of freedom, tolerance and absolute open-mindedness. Such ideas might be utopian and unrealistic in reality, nevertheless such thoughts and ideals could in fact be empowering and function as a positive reinforcement to "come out" as a bisexual. I think that Giovanni mirrors this image of bisexuality in the book, when he himself highlights that he is not concerned with *what* he wants, but rather *who* he wants (Baldwin 135). He does not find it relevant to define an object choice, because this is a fluid matter to him, and in the end, the only thing relevant to him is the person he falls in love with, regardless of gender. Poetically described, he seems to be able to see past all constructs of gender and sexuality, and into the human soul. Giovanni is more focused on love, and the feelings and emotions that arise when one is in love. He loves David very much, but he also loved his Italian wife, and to him this love is quite the same, regardless of gender. An interpretation of this kind could bring more positive aspects of bisexuality into focus, and that Giovanni could function as a motivational force to the bisexual readership because his attitudes towards his sexuality are healthy, quite positive and realistic. When it comes to his sexuality he is unwilling to compromise and he refuses to be ashamed. This could be a strong and empowering message directed to a marginalized and to some extent forgotten readership, namely bisexuals, and that this reading of the novel could be of great significance to many people.

I think this coincides with some ideas from Beemyn's article on the novel. He seems to claim that Baldwin was ambivalent to homosexuality, and that instead he emphasized the value of being able to relate to both women and men, and these attitudes are very much present in *Giovanni's Room* (Beemyn 60). It seems that Baldwin's perception of and approach to sexuality was quite revolutionary, and that he rejected the standardized binary model of sexuality. Furthermore, this could come to show that Baldwin perhaps believed or at least acknowledged the potential value and freedom of bisexuality[18], and that all of this is present in the novel.

Biphobia, Prejudices, and Common Misconceptions

There is a phenomenon quite similar to that of homophobia, which is labeled biphobia and consists of prejudice and negative attitudes directed towards bisexuals in particular. What separates these phobias is the fact that bisexuals have been targets of prejudice from *both*

[18] As described by Kolodny and George on page 31.

heterosexual society and the gay/lesbian community, which is referred to as double discrimination. Biphobia does not necessarily only have to come from factors outside the individual, many bisexuals struggle with an internalized version of biphobia, which can be just as destructive (Ochs 232-235). This could be related to the internalized homophobia discussed in connection with David, and perhaps what he is truly struggling with is internalized biphobia. Ochs states that: “Internalized biphobia can be powerful, sometimes overpowering, and the experience of isolation, illegitimacy, shame, and confusion felt by many bisexuals can be disempowering, even disabling” (232). This internalized biphobia is probably based on much of the prejudices and misconceptions within the double discriminatory biphobia, but what are these exactly?

Perhaps the most used argument within biphobia is the idea that bisexuals have an element of choice, which Kolodny emphasizes in the following quote: "Failing to see worth in every soul-to-soul partnering, this position [biphobia] explicitly declares that if you can "help it," loving someone of the same gender is not valid, is not holy, is not defendable" (“Bisexuality” 62). This quote reveals a general misconception about bisexuals; that they are able to choose who they fall in love with, and that their desire can be directed at their own accord. The main assumptions within this argument are that heterosexuality is the normal and correct position in society, while same-sex relationships are “wrong”. Lesbians and homosexuals are considered to be unable to “help” their desires, as these are exclusively same-sex oriented, and must therefore be “excused”. Bisexuals, on the other hand, can be attracted to both genders and should therefore be able to resist the same-sex desires, and only act on heterosexual attractions. The bisexuals’ ability to choose object choice is then assumed to be a privilege or gift, because it is then possible to choose the safe, uncontroversial, and normative heterosexual option. This notion of bisexuality being a gift or a privilege has its roots in the gay/lesbian community, where there seems to be attitudes towards bisexuals as individuals who are in a better situation because they can conform to mainstream society by engaging in heterosexual behavior (Ochs 223). However, I believe there to be very little truth to such ideas, and this is why I refer to them as misconceptions, and in fact, Ochs found that many bisexuals actually feel that their sexual desires are more of a burden than a privilege or gift (233).

One does not simply choose who to love, and one can definitely not control if a person loves you back, and this shows how ridiculous some of the misconceptions concerning bisexuality actually are. One is expecting human beings to be able to deny a part of

themselves, and to erase feelings and desires in order to conform to society's heteronormativity, and most of all one is assuming that love is something controllable. If one considers *Giovanni's Room* in this context, David does not simply choose to love or not to love Giovanni, it just happens. David does not want these feelings to be present, but he loves Giovanni, and in some ways he loves Hella too, thus the notion of choice becomes a problem rather than a privilege. Due to his internalized biphobia his choice is between a tainted and shameful love for a man and a legitimate but somewhat passionless relationship with a woman, and with neither option being simple or ideal. Choosing between Giovanni and Hella, imagining that David loves them equally in a utopian world without prejudice[19], would still not constitute a gift or privilege, and neither would having to choose between two lovers of the same sex. Giovanni is in a similar situation where he falls in love with David who is not able to reciprocate these feelings in the long run. His love for this man becomes a curse and his downfall, and is most likely not a relationship he would have pursued on if he knew the consequences of it. Giovanni has no element of choice as he unintentionally falls in love with David, and becomes emotionally attached, thus making him unable to choose a better or different option.

It is mind blowing that the notion of choice could induce fear and prejudice, especially as this idea of being able to pick amongst love interests might not even be very realistic. Could it be that bisexuals are considered a threat due to their larger scope of love interests? Kolodny believes so, as she claims that: ". . . our [bisexuals] ability to seemingly choose the sex of our partner has made bisexuals the scapegoats of people who fear abundant possibility" ("Bisexuality" 62). The fear and prejudice directed towards bisexuals could be a result of other people's insecurities, and especially the idea that bisexuals could interfere with one's own love interests, regardless of one's own sexual identity. It becomes evident that biphobia, and its inherent misconceptions and prejudice, is a complicated matter which is difficult to solve or understand empirically. The majority of sources I have gathered concerning bisexuality view discussing and analyzing such misconceptions as an important task (Firestein xix-xxvii; Däumer 152-61; Fox 3-50; George 100-6; Herdt, "Fluidity" 161-3; Lewis et. al. 971-92; Meyer 3-13; Mulick and Wright 45-64; Ochs, 217-239; Queen 103-24 and Storr 1-12). In line with this, the task of defining, exposing, and attempting to dissolve biphobia will be present throughout this thesis, particularly with the fictional characters which will be subjected to analysis.

[19] A world where same-sex relationships would be equal to heterosexual relationships.

Another common misconception about bisexuality is the claim that bisexuality is located on a linear scale in the middle of the hetero/homo binary, thus functioning as a stepping stone between the two polarized sexualities, consequently also claiming that bisexuality and the bisexual identity do not exist; essentially one is either a heterosexual or confused homosexual/lesbian. Scalar systems of this kind operate with a linear structure with two opposite poles situated at each end, and thus any point in between is considered a degree of these polarized categories. This misconception is presents in much of the critical work on *Giovanni's Room*. In the novel the reader learns of Giovanni's past, and how he at one point in his life was in a heterosexual marriage with a woman he loved, and that they even had a child. From this knowledge, as well as Giovanni's own statement about loving people and not gender, one could easily argue that Giovanni's behavior fits to the description of bisexuality. Critics would perhaps argue that this is not the case because Giovanni moves from a heterosexual identity *into* a homosexual identity, and also perhaps point to the fact that Giovanni never returns to a heterosexual relationship in the book, and that he dies as a homosexual.

Mulick and Wright claim that: "Throughout most of the empirical literature, sexual orientation has been categorized as either a dichotomous variable, with individuals classified as heterosexual or homosexual, or as a trichotomous variable with individuals having a heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual orientation" (47). However, through my own observations I would argue that the dichotomous understanding of sexual orientation is the dominant one, and that this concept of a trichotomous system is a more recent idea which is not very widely used. Angelides criticizes how the majority of deconstructionists have described binary structures as always consisting of two co-dependent opposites, which are wholly dependent on each other for meaning ("Historicizing" 135). He emphasizes that bisexuality has ". . . always functioned as the repudiated third term, the internal *Other* to sexuality's logic of binary opposition" (135). In addition, he argues that the hetero/homo opposition is a trinary structure where ". . . there are in fact three interlocking terms . . ." (135). In this line of thinking, bisexuality is a term which is internal to the hetero/homo binary, even if it is erased or not specifically named, and therefore this binary is a trinary structure, where all the terms involved, namely heterosexual, homosexual/lesbian and bisexual, are equally dependent on each other for meaning and self-definition. Nevertheless, one must question if this trichotomous distinction of sexual orientation is any better or exceptional than a binary set of thinking, and even more importantly, is it even a solution? Elizabeth D.

Däumer disputes such ideas and quite strongly asserts that : "Bisexuality is not merely a problem of an unrecognized or vilified sexual preference that can be solved, or alleviated, through visibility and legitimation as a third sexual option" (159). In her opinion, legitimizing of bisexuality as a third sexual option solves nothing.

After their relationship ends, David observes Giovanni several times in the streets of Paris, and he comments that Giovanni has taken on "a fairy's mannerisms," and that he acts "really amazingly giddy and girlish" (Baldwin 139). This behavior seems to disgust David, and this is perhaps because Giovanni is performing a homosexual stereotype in which David is unable to identify with, and furthermore because he senses Giovanni's pain and sufferings. To use the fact that Giovanni never returns to a heterosexual relationship with a woman, and his overt homosexual behavior at the end of the book, as proof of his "true" identity being homosexual is wrong. At this point in the story Giovanni is heartbroken and without a cause, and he seems to be leading a destructive life with a bad crowd. The fact that he ends up committing murder shows the desperate state he is in, and unfortunately this all leads to his execution. If Giovanni's character was a real person, who was not executed, we do not know where his life course would have taken him, and I think this future could potentially have included relationships with both men and women. It is the tragic event of his child being a stillborn that leads him to leave his life in Italy, and adopt a homosexual lifestyle in Paris. In the end, Giovanni is a passionate and emotional man who really only longs for a life of happiness, safety and love. Instead he ends up having his heart broken and his life ruined:

> In Italy I had a woman and she was very good to me. She loved me . . . there was never any trouble between us, never. I was young then and did not know the things I learned later or the terrible things you have taught me. I thought all women were like that. I thought all men were like me – I thought I was like all other men. . . . I wanted to stay forever in our village and work in the vineyards and drink the wine we made and make love to my girl (Baldwin, 131).

This quote illustrates the difficulties of experiencing bisexual feelings, and even more so to comfortably come to terms with this. Also it shows Giovanni's struggle in developing his own sexual identity in a world where there is a lack of information and understanding. In relation to *Giovanni's Room* Baldwin always claimed that it is "not about homosexual love, it's about what happens to you if you're afraid to love anybody" (qtd. in Leeming 125). If this is the case, then perhaps a bisexual interpretation on the novel might not be any more correct than a

strictly homosexual interpretation. Perhaps the novel was Baldwin's attempt to show that the importance is not in what you love, as in which sex, but rather in *who* you love. This message seems to be quite accurate if one considers it in the light of Giovanni's voice in the novel. Despite society's taboos and prejudice concerning same-sex love, and the safety of conforming to heterosexuality, the novel seems to be implying that to not act on love is to deny oneself freedom and in the end happiness. David's rejection of his love for Giovanni ends in death, and not only in the death of Giovanni, but the death of David's emotional life and inner self.

This chapter has brought forth some interesting and problematic aspects of bisexuality, both in relation to literature and the hetero/homo binary, as well as in the lived lives of bisexually identified individuals. Furthermore, I believe that I have shown that *Giovanni's Room* lends itself well to a bisexual reading, and that the characters have illustrated important and difficult aspects of assuming a bisexual identity in relation to a heteronormative society, and people in general. Moreover, I believe that in reinterpreting *Giovanni's Room* and the characters of David and Giovanni from a bisexual perspective, I have proven that this is a valid and useful approach, but by no means intending to replace all other perspectives. Consequently, this literary analysis shows that there is a void within literary theory and criticism where a (bi)literary theory would be fitting. This is not to say that a bisexual literary theory is the only position that needs to be included in the Western canon, because I believe there is still much work to be done, both with the work which is included already and what is to come. However, I do believe one needs to start someplace, and in my case this thesis is a small, but yet important beginning.

Chapter 2: *The Color Purple*: Shug Avery and Bisexuality

First published in 1982, the award winning book *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker has become an important part of American literature. The book has received both the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award for Fiction, and it has also been adapted into the popular and well received film with the same title by Steven Spielberg. Smith argues that "*The Color Purple* is a classic because it covers so much territory and resonates on so many levels" ("Sexual Oppression" 170). However, while *The Color Purple's* place amongst the classics is well-earned, I believe that this book's full potential as a piece of literature has not been realized yet. This novel is different from *Giovanni's Room* and *Brokeback Mountain* mainly because the main characters are women and not men. All these books present a same-sex relationship, but in *The Color Purple* one is dealing with lesbianism as the counterpart to heterosexuality in the binary structured system of sexuality, and male homosexuality is therefore not as relevant to this particular discussion. However, this subject of same-sex romance is not considered to be a main subject in *The Color Purple*, as it is somewhat hidden under a layer of other more prevalent themes, such as religion and the oppressive structures of racism and sexism. In this chapter I will examine the theme of sexuality in *The Color Purple*, and especially in relation to two characters, Celie and Shug Avery. I will discuss the lesbian elements in the novel to some extent, but the main focus will be an analysis of Shug and her sexuality as it manifests itself in the book. My aim is to reveal and emphasize a bisexual reading and interpretation of this novel, and to show the value and importance of this in connection to representing bisexuality in fiction, and how this influences the general understanding of the novel and the Western literary canon as a whole.

Even though this thesis as a whole is concerned with interpreting *literary* works, there are other mediums out there which can drastically influence how we read and interpret a text. In this case I am pointing to the medium of film and more specifically the ones which are based on literary works. Movies have the advantage of reaching a much broader audience in a shorter amount of time, and as a result the impact of a movie might be much bigger than a book. In the case of *The Color Purple*, the book was released three years prior to the film and became quite famous and critically acclaimed on its own. However, the movie received much more attention than the book as it reached a larger audience, and as a result Walker and her book also received more attention in the aftermath of the film's release (Bobo, 332-3). I

watched the film many years before I eventually read the book, and I realized that my initial understanding of the story was strictly linked to the film. As I read the book, there were whole new levels of themes and meanings that appeared, which were modified, excluded, or erased in the film. First of all, the sexual elements such as the explicit and raw sexual details in the book are completely removed in the film, as is the lesbian/same-sex relationship between Celie and Shug. In fact, there is only one short scene in the movie that implies that the relationship between the two women is actually of a sexual nature, and thus potentially lesbian[20]. Apart from this scene, the relationship between Shug and Celie is depicted as a deep, loving, and long lasting *friendship*. The reasons why this film was made in this manner are probably many and complex, and not something I will discuss further in this thesis. My point is that the film did not prepare me for what I was about to encounter as a reader, because what unfolded under my eyes was a beautiful love story between two women, told through a colorful, rich and sexually loaded language. Moreover, the character of Shug Avery stood out as very representational of a bisexual experience, as she is sexually and emotionally attracted to both men and women, and not afraid to act on these desires. The theme of sexuality, more specifically same-sex sexuality and bisexuality, was so strongly present in the novel that one would imagine that the critics of the *book* would find this subject interesting and obvious in terms of analysis. This turned out to be a wrong assumption.

The Color Purple: Initial responses, Reviews and the Exclusion of a Sexual Perspective

In the critical literature about *The Color Purple*, it is apparent that most readings, reviews and interpretations of this particular novel have downplayed or completely disregarded the sexual theme inherent in the book. It is important to mention that there are exceptions, but I will discuss these in more detail later in this chapter. First, there is Mel Watkins' review of the book in *The New York Times*. The review briefly mentions the existence of a triangular love affair, however this is not the focus of the review, and the connection between Shug and Celie is simply described as a loving relationship, similar to an ordinary friendship (Watkins 16-18). He emphasizes the patriarchal structure of this particular society, as well as gender and race, arguing that: ". . . in *The Color Purple* the role of male domination in the frustration of black

[20] See film: *The Color Purple.* Screenplay by Menno Meyjes. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Perf. Danny Glover, Whoopie Goldberg and Oprah Winfrey. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1985. Film. Jovanovich Publishers, 1983. Print

women's struggle for independence is clearly the focus" (17). On the other hand, topics such as sexuality and identity are devalued and excluded through silence. Lauren Berlant and her article "Race, Gender, and Nation in *The Color Purple*," also seem to view sexuality as secondary to the many other themes present in the book. The main focus in her article, as the title suggests, are themes such as race, nationality, politics, and gender, and her discussion is centered on the oppression of black women in a patriarchal, racist and violent world (211-238). There is no acknowledgement of the obvious and powerful lesbian relationship, nor of Shug's fluid sexual desire, except for a brief comment about Shug being Celie's sexual and economic provider (211-238). Adam Gussow in his review of the book is perhaps the most extreme in its exclusion of a sexual perspective. He delivers a plot summary with strict focus on battered and oppressed black women within a society of poverty, racism and violence, declaring gender and race to be the two main themes of the novel. Furthermore, he reduces the relationship between Celie and Shug, and the life they build together, to a mere feminist response to the state of male oppression (Gussow 126). There is no true recognition of the romantic and sexual qualities of their relationship, or of the bisexual elements inherent in Shug's behavior, except for a short comment about Celie becoming Shug's lover (125). Instead the union of the two women is depicted more as a sisterhood, which I find quite disturbing when one considers the amount of sexual details which are used in connection to their relationship in the book.

The following extract from *The Color Purple* illustrates how this relationship between the two women is far removed from any ordinary friendship:

> She say, I love you, Miss Celie. And then she haul me off and kiss me on the mouth. *Um*, she say, like she surprised. I kiss her back, say, *um*, too. Us kiss and kiss till us can't hardly kiss no more. Then us touch each other . . . Then I feels something real soft and wet on my breast, feel like one of my little lost babies mouth. Way after a while, I act like a little lost baby too (Walker, *The Color Purple* 103).

This extract is sexually detailed and reveals an intimate and sensual moment between the two women, where they explore each other's bodies for the first time. This behavior is not considered normal between friends or sisters, but of lovers, which is what Shug and Celie really are. The article "Sifting Through the Controversy: Reading *The Color Purple*" by Jacqueline Bobo is another analysis of the book, which delves deeper than the previously discussed reviews. Considering the title of this article one would assume that the lesbian theme in the novel would be one of the important and controversial topics of discussion. Bobo

investigates many different debates and receptions concerning the book, but in line with the previous articles and reviews, she concludes that the controversy it sparked is exclusively linked to race and gender (332-40). She claims that most critics found the depiction of black people in the novel to be the most controversial, because these depictions have been understood as very negative, and especially in the case of black *men* (333-5). In my opinion, it seems strange that Bobo found no debates or controversy concerning the same-sex relationship and the explicit and detailed sexual narrative of the book. The same-sex relationship between Shug and Celie is at the center of the novel as Walker describes their strong romantic bond, physical attraction and sexual interaction in explicit detail throughout the book. How could someone truly miss this aspect of the novel? In comparison to *Giovanni's Room* and *Brokeback Mountain*, this novel was never pronounced as specifically homosexual/lesbian. Are the themes of sexuality and identity subordinate to those of race and gender in *The Color Purple*? There seems to be a general tendency amongst these critics on *The Color Purple* to turn a blind eye to the obvious lesbian theme of the book, and even more so in relation to Shug's fluid sexual desire, which is also very present in the book, as this character engages in relationships with both sexes throughout her life. It could seem that critics deliberately avoid the subjects of lesbianism and bisexuality.

Few writers have analyzed *The Color Purple* outside the framework of race, gender and religion. In response to this tendency bell hooks[21] has written an insightful article on *The Color Purple*, in which she argues that most critics have read this book with particular focus on gender politics, oppression and race, and that these interpretations have excluded a variety of important themes and possible meanings within the book (284). Her thoughts on the matter quite interesting:

> It is a truly popular work [*The Color Purple*] . . . that has many different meanings for many different readers. Often the meanings are not interesting, contained that they are within a critical discourse that does not resist the urge to simplify, to overshadow, to make this work by a contemporary African-American writer mere sociological treatise on black life or radical feminist tract (hooks, 284).

She criticizes the tendency for critics to describe the book as a modern-day "slave narrative", and how this sort of categorization limits the voice of the book (hooks 284). In connection with this, it is important to mention that this book, as well as the movie, gained a high degree

[21] This author spells her name without capitalization.

of popularity, and this resulted in an audience that crossed boundaries such as race, class, culture and gender. Consequently the readership of *The Color Purple* consists of a variety of different people, with very different life experiences, projecting their own individual meaning into the reading process. Therefore one would assume that this would create a range of interpretations and understandings concerning the novel, but this has not been the case. There are many interpretations and meanings of this book which have not been recognized as important by the critical schools within academia, and have thus not been discussed or analyzed, at least not in any length. In line with this, hooks quite rightfully explains:

> Categorizing in this way implies that the text neither demands nor challenges, rather that it can be adequately and fully discussed within an accepted critical discourse, one that remains firmly within the boundaries of conservative academic aesthetic intentionality. While such discourse may illuminate aspects of the novel it also obscures, suppresses, silences (284).

In this case she understands categorization as the tendency of labeling *The Color Purple* as a book about modern-day slavery with patriarchal oppression of women and racism as its focal points. This limits the full meaning of the novel and it also creates a room for discussion which is restrictive, and excludes other important aspects, as well as simplifying Walker's voice. Either way, it is not the point to claim that one aspect is more valid or important than others, the point is to be open to all possible interpretations and understandings in relation to literature, and this has not been the case when it comes to *The Color Purple.*

Reading *The Color Purple* in Terms of Black Lesbianism

It is not true to say that the lesbian theme within *The Color Purple* has been ignored or erased by everyone, because there are a few exceptions by writers who have both recognized and analyzed this aspect of the novel. Smith's "Sexual Oppression Unmasked" was written in 1984, only two years after the novel was published, and it is perhaps one of the first articles which recognizes the lesbian elements of the book. First of all, Smith criticizes the mainstream criticism and reading of the book as being biased and ignorant: "In their backwardness, their sexism, their homophobia, and in some cases their racism, they write about the book as if they have not read it" ("Sexual Oppression" 170). This reaction towards much of the critical work about *The Color Purple* is very much in line with my own impressions, and I find it interesting that she would label the critics as homophobic. The fact

that so many critics and readers have ignored such an obvious same-sex relationship does point to homophobia. It is almost as if this is a subject that invokes too much fear, provocation and prejudice, even more than race and racism, and thus it is better left in silence. This could perhaps be one of the reasons that such elements were erased in the film as well. Smith believes that the most astonishing, praiseworthy and brave thing Walker did in relation to the novel was that she: ". . . positively and fully depicted a Lesbian relationship between two black women, set in the familiar context of a traditional Black community" ("Sexual Oppression" 170). I think hooks would agree with Smith at this point. She describes *The Color Purple* as a narrative of sexual confession and emphasizes the importance of the graphical and explicit use of sexual language, and how this has been ignored by most critics and readers (hooks 285). Hooks believes that Walker had a specific agenda when she chose to put this sexually detailed same-sex relationship in her book: "Her [Walker] intent is not to sexually titillate but to arouse disgust, outrage, and anger at male sexual exploitation of females to encourage appreciation and acceptance of same-sex female sexual pleasure" (287). Ultimately, she views the lesbian elements of the novel as crucial and Walker is seen as someone who is engaged in breaking down myths about lesbianism and promoting homoerotic love and pleasure (173).

There are a few other critics who also have recognized the theme of sexuality and the lesbian elements of the novel. Linda Abbandonato has written an article on the book where feminist theory, lesbianism and gender politics are at the center, and the fact that lesbianism is considered as an important theme is exceptional in comparison to the range of articles and reviews presented earlier. In the beginning of Abbandonato's article "A View from Elsewhere," Celie is described as being: "trapped in a gridlock of racist, sexist, and heterosexist oppressions" (1106). There is a focus on sexuality from the start, and heterosexuality is understood as the normative and established system of sexuality in society with an immense power to subordinate and exclude other sexualities. Abbandonato talks about feminism in relation to the Western literary canon, and how the feminist struggle for inclusion and representation has had some positive results, but on the other hand they have also been setting themselves up for failure by not recognizing the whole scope of the problem. She argues that: "Feminist attempts to revise the canon and address sexism in discourse are frequently marred by their failure to recognize heterosexism and racism; the counternarratives of femininity that emerge continue to erase women who are not white or heterosexual" (Abbandonato 1107). In her critique of feminism she wants to draw attention to some of short coming as a theory, and

her hope is that this can be used for further revision, improvement, and in the end inclusion for everyone within the Western literary canon. In her opinion the most marginalized and perhaps the most obvious victim of compulsory heterosexuality[22] and the canonical exclusion are black lesbian women (1106). These ideas are quite similar to Smith's opinions on the process of changing and revising the Western literary canon into a more inclusive and representative entity.

In another groundbreaking essay by Smith named "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism," she argues that black women have been excluded from this feminist project, and especially black *lesbian* women (168-70). On this topic there seems to be a general agreement between Abbandonato and Smith because they both seem to view *The Color Purple* as an important book because it represents the perspective of black lesbians in literature. I agree with this and find it relieving that there are several writers and critics who have recognized the important lesbian elements of this book. Such critics want to expose and examine the lesbian perspective in *The Color Purple* because it has the potential to illuminate the situation of black lesbian women, and this is also important because it could contribute to the reshaping of the Western literary canon and could influence academic writing in general. On the other hand, both Smith and Abbandonato have failed to recognize the bisexual elements of the novel and the implications of such an interpretation. Their biggest mistake is their assumption that Shug is unimportant in terms of a sexual analysis and that only Celie remains in focus. Why is Shug's sexuality kept in the dark? Perhaps by engaging in an analysis of Shug's fluid sexual behavior one would simultaneously validate bisexuality as an identity. An analysis of bisexuality in *The Color Purple* might generate too much friction against the established binary system of sexuality

Moving from a Lesbian Perspective into a Bisexual Analysis

Many critics, even Smith and Abbandonato, are operating within a strict binary system of sexuality, more specifically the hetero/homo binary, or in this case the hetero/lesbian, and is thus excluding any discourse concerning bisexuality. Angelides makes some compelling arguments in connection to this and claims that the deconstructive project of much queer theory has devalued the effect bisexuality has had in sexual history and even more so in the

[22] *Compulsory heterosexuality* is a term that was coined by Adrianne Rich. See: "Ch. 16: Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader.* Ed. Henry Abelove, D. M. Halperin and M. A. Barale. New York: Routledge, 1993. 227-254. Print.

creation of the hetero/homo binary ("Historicizing" 125-127). Interestingly, several theorists and critics, especially within the fields of queer, lesbian/homosexual and feminist literary theory, which have all been marginalized groups at one point, have been criticized for ignoring or excluding the bisexual perspective form their work (Angelides, "Historicizing" 125-158; Naylor 51-66). Overall, it seems that the history and theorization of bisexuality has not been equally important in studies of gender and sexuality. Bisexuality needs to be given much more attention as it can be used to explain and understand present theories, as well as revealing their lack of communication and methodological tensions (Angelides, "Historicizing" 125-127). Bisexuality is so intertwined with the terms heterosexual and homosexual/lesbian that to simply exclude or ignore it from analysis seems dangerous in terms of the credibility of such theories. Naylor has written an article by the name "Gone are the days," where she examines two lesbian/feminist theoretical texts from a bisexual perspective. She argues that much of the feminist/lesbian critical approach to fictional literature often seems to completely ignore the bisexual content of such texts, and that this is a simplistic and shallow approach to the complex topics of gender and sexual differences (51-55). I believe this is very much the case with *The Color Purple,* as Shug's bisexuality seems to disappear between the lines in the critical work on the novel. Shug is only briefly mentioned in the critical work on *The Color Purple,* and she continues to be unimportant in terms of close analysis, especially in relation to sexuality. For instance, both Abbandonato and Smith's analysis of the lesbian relationship is mostly centered on Celie, while Shug is left out of focus. However, when Shug is briefly mentioned, she has been analyzed as either heterosexual or lesbian, and the "inconsistency" in terms of her fluid sexual behavior and desire is prescribed to a stereotypical phase of confusion or curiosity. Such descriptions and understandings of Shug's sexuality are quite simple and transparent, and I believe this is a matter of much more complexity.

In *The Color Purple* there is a famous line, which is also linked to the book's title, uttered by Shug in relation to religion and spirituality: "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't noticed it" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 177). As a humorous parody of this famous line, Smith states that: "It probably pisses God off too that so many readers and critics 'walk by' Celie and Shug's relationship in *The Color Purple* without acknowledging its import for the book as a whole" ("Sexual Oppression" 174). What pisses me off is that so many people have walked past Shug's bisexuality! Why has there not been a genuine acknowledgement of the bisexual perspective within *The Color Purple*,

especially in the case of the character Shug? A critical analysis of Shug's explicit bisexual behavior seems to be completely missing from the critical work on *The Color Purple*. It is surprising that this element of the book has not been recognized, and especially when considering how Abbandonato and Smith have used this very book to illuminate another marginalized group, namely black lesbians. Bisexuals are also part of a marginalized group which have been excluded from the literary canon and academic discourse, and in the same way that lesbians have fought to become part of the literary canon, so must bisexuals. There is much to learn from other marginalized groups and their individual struggles towards recognition, acceptance and inclusion, and in this case in relation to the Western Literary canon. Writers such as Adrianne Rich and Smith have been extremely important in such processes, and I think that it is paramount not to become too fixated on what is missing in their work, and rather to relish what they have accomplished. I think Smith's last words in her article "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism" are an inspiration:

> I want most of all for Black women and Black lesbians somehow not to be so alone . . . I finally want to express how much easier both my waking and my sleeping hours would be if there were one book in existence that would tell me something specific about my life. One book based in Black feminist and Black lesbian experience. Just one work to reflect the reality that I and the Black women whom I love are trying to create. When such a book exists then each of us will not only know better how to live, but how to dream (*Black Feminist Criticism* 183-4).

If the words *Black women* and *Black lesbians* were replaced with the word *bisexuals*, then this extract would express the thoughts and feelings of many bisexuals, both men and women of various nationalities and positions in society. It is therefore my project in this chapter to examine the bisexual aspects in *The Color Purple*, because to recognize and analyze Shug's bisexuality could be a contribution of this kind. This and similar bisexual readings could potentially alter the understanding and meaning of classics in literature which are already well established within the Western literary canon. Rereading such books could contribute to representing the bisexual experience in literature. This would perhaps be a valuable approach as it would result in new and fresh discourse in relation to acclaimed and thoroughly read books. Another approach could be to include new texts which present obvious elements of bisexuality in the plot to the literary canon; however this is not something I will discuss further in this thesis.

Celie as a Bisexual Character?

There is one aspect of this analysis I need to clarify before I continue, and that is the fact that in this thesis I will not attempt to argue that Celie is a bisexual character. I do not think Celie represents a bisexual perspective in the novel, but rather a lesbian perspective. Already at an early stage in the novel Celie's lack of heterosexual attractions and desires become apparent as she proclaims to the reader: "I don't even look at mens. That's the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 7). It is understandable that Celie is afraid of men, considering that she has been sexually and mentally abused by both her stepfather and her husband. However, Celie is not an asexual character and her sexuality is quickly established as Shug steps into her life and becomes the focal point of all her sexual desires and fantasies. At this point in the story Celie is in a loveless marriage with Albert who treats her as a house slave and personal sex-object. Through Celie's description of intercourse with Albert her same-sex desires become a reality: "And then I think bout Shug Avery. I know what he doing to me he done to Shug Avery and maybe she liked it. I put my arm around him" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 14). She has to endure the physical and mental abuse by her husband because she has no other option, but her inner life and emotions are out of his reach. Shug becomes her personal sexual fantasy and escape from her everyday struggles. As the previous quote shows, Celie even uses the image of Shug as a relief and transcendental force to endure intercourse with Albert. Many of Celie's descriptions of Shug is definitely in sexual terms: "First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with it black plum nipples, look like her mouth, I thought I had turned into a man" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 47). Celie's sexual attraction to women is quite obvious and through her narrative it becomes apparent to the reader that she has no such feelings towards men. There are many statements from the book to illustrate this: "Mr _____ clam on top of me, do his business, in ten minutes us both sleep. Only time I feel something stirring down there is when I think bout Shug" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 63). Her marriage to Albert was involuntary and arranged by her father, and she is never attracted to Albert sexually or emotionally, while her sexual attraction to women is consistent, even if she is only attracted to one woman in her life. Moreover, it is when Celie experiences love and sexual intimacy with a woman that she becomes an individual of worth in her own eyes, and from there on she truly starts to develop an identity and voice of her own. This lesbian relationship becomes a positive catalyst in Celie's life, and I believe it is important to read her as a positive lesbian role model. She seems to be comfortable with her own sexual attraction, which is only directed towards

women. Therefore it is important to emphasize that Celie will not be discussed in detail in relation to the analysis of a bisexual perspective in the novel, because I do not believe she represent a bisexual perspective, but rather a lesbian point of view.

Analyzing Shug Avery from a Bisexual Perspective

Margaret D. Kamitsuka stands out as the only critic who explicitly recognizes the bisexual element present in Shug's sexuality. She argues that many critics have ignored or denied female sexuality: ". . . with the effect, in the case of Walker's novel, of rendering the black lesbian and bisexual body invisible" (57). Also she argues that bisexuality has been rendered even more invisible than lesbianism by critics of *The Color Purple.* She acknowledges the problem, and briefly addresses its complexity, but she never engages in a close reading and analysis of Shug's bisexuality. Shug is an important character in *The Color Purple*, and especially because of how she represents a bisexual experience, which as pointed out previously, is something quite rare within literary fiction. The first step is to analyze Shug's character from a (bi)literary stand point, and to discuss Walker's intentions in portraying this character as sexually fluid?

First of all, Shug is a character who interacts sexually and emotionally with both men and women. It is impossible as a reader not to notice that Shug has had relationships with many men before she falls in love with Celie, and furthermore, that she commits herself to more heterosexual relationships after she meets Celie as well. Does this mean that Celie is the only same-sex relationship Shug has in her life? Walker implies that Shug has had other female lovers than just Celie. A short extract from the first time the Celie and Shug engage sexually reveals that this is completely unknown behavior to Celie as she explains: "I don't know nothing bout it, I say to Shug" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 103). The interesting part of this scene is Shug's response to this: "I don't know *much*, she say" (103, my emphasis). Shug's response seems to indicate that this is not the first time she has been intimate with another woman. Her choice of the word *much* indicates that she is not experienced in the act of sex with women, but that it is not entirely unknown to her either. This subtle hint from Walker is important because it shows that Shug is consistent in her fluidity. Her behavior might be random, but she does switch between male and female partners. It could be that Walker is attempting to disrupt the idea of naturalized heterosexuality, and even more so the heterosexual/homosexual binary-understanding of sexuality.

I want to continue this discussion with a close analysis of Shug Avery, and especially

the bisexual qualities of her sexual behavior, desire and self-awareness. As discussed earlier most critics who have acknowledged the sexual relationship between Shug and Celie have labeled both women as lesbian. For instance, Smith gives the following narrative description concerning Shug and Celie's relationship: "At first Shug is too evil to pay much attention to Celie, but soon they share confidences, become fast friends and eventually despite Shug's occasional flings with men, lifetime lovers" (Smith, "Sexual Oppression" 172). Some of this is true, but the description of Shug as someone evil and the understanding of her relationships to men as occasional flings seem shallow. Shug is a character who represents a sexuality which should be understood as far more than an exclusively lesbian orientation, with only a few meaningless flings with men. In the book Shug is a character who not only engages in intercourse with both men and women, but she also falls in love with both sexes in a seemingly random pattern. Furthermore, I would claim that the sexual and emotional relationships she has with some of the male characters in the book are profound and deeply meaningful to her. For instance, she has had a lifelong romance with Albert who she claims to have loved very deeply when she was young:

> Nobody dance like Albert when he was young. Sometimes us did the moochie for a hour. After that, nothing to do but go somewhere and lay down. And funny. Albert was *funny*. He kept me laughing. How come he ain't funny no more? she ast. How come he never hardly laugh? How come he don't dance? she say. Good God, Celie, she say, What happen to the man I love? . . . Albert knew as well as me that love would have to go some to be better than ours. Us had the kind of love couldn't be improve (Walker, *The Color Purple* 111).

Through Shug's own description of the relationship one is confronted with a passionate, happy and loving connection between two people, and in this case a man and a woman. This relationship is erotic as well, and the sexual attraction between Shug and Albert becomes apparent through her own narrative, where she describes their sex life as extremely active. Shug has been very sexually attracted to Albert in her younger days, to the point where she could not keep her hands off of him, and this sexual attraction is apparently still there as the two share a bed during many nights in Celie's house. But there is more between the two than just sex. For instance, Albert is the only one who is willing to take Shug in when she is a sick and emotionally ruined wreck after a long time on the road. He cares deeply for her, and does not judge the "sinful" life she has on the road, and he takes her into his home to be nursed

back to health. As Albert himself says: "I love Shug Avery. Always have, always will. I should have married her when I had the chance" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 53). The fact that Shug is willingly taken to Albert's home after all those years and in that state also shows how much she trusts and cares for him. Shug's relationship with Albert seems to have been one of love and trust on both parts. Albert was Shug's first love, and they had three children together, and wanted to get married. However, they never get married because Albert's family disapproves of the fact that Shug has had children out of wedlock and they view her as trash. Albert is talked into marrying another woman by his family, but despite this he and Shug continue their love affair for years. When Shug is in recovery Celie overhears her mocking Albert: "I don't need no weak little boy can't say no to his daddy hanging on me. I need me a man, she say. A man. She look at him [Albert] and roll her eyes and laugh" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 45). This is meant to be an insult directed towards Albert, and how he acted cowardly and submissively when his father demanded him to stay away from Shug, but there is another important element to this. Shug explicitly states that she needs a man in this case, not a woman as one would expect if she was in fact exclusively same-sex oriented, and this is important. Based on all this I refuse to accept Shug's sexual identity as lesbian and her relationship with Albert as a mere fling, but I must also reject to labeling Shug as heterosexual woman, who only engages in one same-sex fling.

Later in the story when Shug returns after some time on the road she has married a man named Grady. Once again she has a relationship with a man, and this time within the context of holy matrimony. To simply claim that this marriage is loveless and a result of society's demand on a woman to be married does not suffice in Shug's case. Walker has not portrayed Shug like the other women in the book, as she is the only woman, except for Sophia perhaps, who has positioned herself above the norms and expectations of society both in her career choice, as well as her general behavior. Furthermore, Shug's character seems untouched by other peoples' prejudice and negative attitudes towards her. Considering this, it seems likely that Walker intended Shug's marriage to Grady to symbolize some form of love and sexual attraction, and not conformity. Also, it seems strange and unlikely to marry someone if they are nothing more than a meaningless fling. An extract from the book where Shug introduces Grady for the first time reveals another aspect of the marriage:

> This Grady, she [Shug] say. This my husband. The minute she say it I know I don't like Grady. I don't like his shape, I don't like his teef, I don't like his clothes. Seem like to me he smell. Us been driving all night, she [Shug] say. Nowhere to stop, you know. But here us is. She come over to Grady and put her

> arms round him, look up at him like he cute and he lean down and give her a kiss (Walker, *The Color Purple* 99-100).

It is important to note that the reader is introduced to Grady through Celie's eyes, and that she is overwhelmed by jealousy and hate towards this person and his involvement with the love of her life. The negative attitudes towards Grady become the reader's as well, and this could be the reason why this relationship between Shug and a *man* is viewed as unimportant. This may not be a perfect marriage, as Grady seems to be spending her money carelessly and at the same time showing sexual interest towards other women, but either way, Shug seems to love this man enough to marry him and bring him back to the people she considers her family.

It is fair to say that the same-sex relationship between Shug and Celie is at the core of the book, and it is perhaps the most important relationship in Shug's life. The relationship between Celie and Shug continues to develop throughout the novel and it becomes one of mutual trust and love, and not least of frequent sexual intimacy, and this is the only life-long relationship Shug ever has. Shug loves, admires and confides in Celie, and she lusts for her and always seem to return to Celie in the end. Also she does everything in her power to improve Celie's quality of life. For instance, she interferes with Albert's physical abuse: "She say, Albert, you been mistreating somebody I love" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 245), and she takes Celie with her to Memphis, giving her shelter, money and a career. In other words, Celie seems to be Shug's ultimate and most important lover in life. However, it is important to note that Shug never ceases to be attracted to men, which both Albert and Grady are evidence of. Additionally, much later in the novel Shug becomes attracted to a younger man and ends up falling in love with him, even though she is well aware of the pain she is inflicting Celie. As Celie herself states: "My heart broke. Shug love somebody else" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 223). Celie is devastated on hearing this news and she is heartbroken when seeing Shug all "in-love looking" talking about a young boy named Germaine (224). I think the discussion between the two women in connection to this reveals and exposes many of the bisexual elements of this novel:

> He's a man, I write on the paper. Yeah, she say. He is. And I know how you feel about men. But I don't feel that way. I would never be fool enough to take any of them seriously, she say, but some mens can be a lots of fun. Spare me, I write. Celie, she say. All I ast is six months to have my last fling. I got to have it Celie. I'm too weak a woman not to. But if you give me six months, Celie, I will try to make our life together like it was . . . Celie, she say, Do you love me? She down on her knees now, tears falling all

> over the place . . . I love you, I say. Whatever happen, whatever you do, I love you (Walker, *The Color Purple* 226).

Celie seems to be aware of Shug's ability to love men and women equally, but from Ceilie's point of view, this desire that Shug feels for men is something she cannot identify with. In this extract Shug is pleading for Celie to wait for her while she has a brief fling with a young man. She explicitly states that she cannot help it, that this heterosexual fling is something she cannot do without. Furthermore, in this extract Shug is attempting to put her bisexuality into words. She states that she understand Celie's same-sex desires and her lack of interest in men, but at the same time she argues that she is not like Celie because she likes men as well. In connection to Germaine, Shug does admit that: "For one thing, it been a long time since I thought about boys and I ain't never thought about men" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 224). Shug explains that she has been in love and happy with Celie for such a long time that she has barely thought about the opposite sex, but she has not though about other women either. She has been entirely committed to Celie for a long period of time, but when she meets Germaine on the road she is infatuated and becomes interested in pursuing a relationship with him. Shug is realistic in terms of the age difference and how this relationship is unlikely to last for long due to this. In other words, this relationship does not end because Shug's partner is a *man*, but rather because of the extreme age difference. Shug's relationships to Albert and Grady do not end because they are *me*n either, but rather because of circumstances such as Albert's marriage to another woman and Grady's interest in Mary Agnes. This indicates that Shug cannot be understood as a lesbian, but she cannot be interpreted as a "curious" heterosexual either. This indicates that a bisexual perspective might be the most appropriate analysis to subject this character to, as she is closer to a bisexual identity than anything else.

Even though Celie never uses the word lesbian to identify her sexual orientation, it is still obvious that this is the most appropriate label to describe her sexual desires and behavior. Shug on the other hand, does not fit into either of the categories available in the binary organization of sexuality, as she is neither heterosexual nor lesbian. In fact she is seemingly closer to a bisexual identity. In connection to this it is important to note that the terms *lesbian* or *bisexual* are never used in the novel, and this is linked to the discourse concerning sexual identity and behavior which I have discussed in some detail earlier. The distinction between behavior and identity has been an important marker in studying the history of sexuality. This distinction has been used to universalize sexual behavior, while defining identity as something

socially and culturally specific. *The Color Purple* is set in rural Georgia in the 1900s, and at this point in history a culturally constructed identity label for lesbian behavior did not exists, at least not at a level of universal knowledge in this specific society. Hooks explains: "Celie may realize she desires women . . . but just as the signifier lesbian does not exist to name and affirm her experience, no social reality exist so that she can express that desire in ongoing sexual practice" (286). Perhaps the same-sex relationship between Shug and Celie is not as threatening because the meaning and impact of this orientation and identity had not yet been established in the society depicted in the book. And furthermore, as many critics have discussed, extremely close bonds between women of all ages was considered natural at this point in time, and perhaps the men in the book are in fact ignorant of the sexual qualities of Shug and Celie's relationship. Also, as hooks points out, lesbianism and the inherent sexual practices were not a social reality, and therefore the idea of two grown women living together and sharing one household would perhaps not be considered a same-sex relationship with sexual qualities, hence the lack of controversy (286). Ultimately, it is clear that women with a lesbian behavior did exist at this point in time, but the significance and cultural understanding of this during that period is different from present time's use and understanding of identity to prescribe such behavior. The term *bisexual* was not a universally known sexual identity at this point in time either, and it was probably more invisible as a behavior as well. Homosexuality and lesbianism are easily identified in terms of behavior and thus also identity, while bisexual behavior switches between being homosexual/lesbian and heterosexual behavior, and thus bisexuality as an identity becomes invisible. Angelides describes this "identity paradigm" in the following extract: "the problem of identity is thus only deferred and displaced. Neither an act nor a palpable cultural identity – at least until the 1960s in the case of the latter – bisexuality merely vanishes into the categories of hetero- or homosexuality" (*Bisexuality* 6-7). Bisexual behavior slides into one of two sexual behavioral categories, namely sexual behavior directed towards the same-sex or the opposite sex, and this complicates the analysis of bisexual elements in fictional and historical literature.

As discussed earlier, some critics have understood Shug's attractions to men as transitional or momentary and of no relevance, as they have suggested that her true identity is lesbian. From this point of view Shug is a lesbian identified woman who randomly engages in emotionally meaningless sex with men. I find this analysis of Shug to be wrong, and several extracts from the novel show that she engages in meaningful and loving relationships with men and that she enjoys these sexual encounters with men on the same level as sex with a

woman. Walker has chosen to portray Shug as sexually complex and fluid. First she has a relationship with a man and a fling with a woman, namely Celie. Then the fling with a woman turns into a more serious relationship, but she still pursuits a serious relationship with a man on the road, which ends in marriage. From there she ends up having a serious relationship with a woman (Celie) again and wants this to continue except for a short fling with a man. If we look at this very short and generalizing account of Shug's relationships, the only factor that is certain is that she is engaged in relationships with both men and women, and thus has an attraction to both men and women. Shug represent a bisexual perspective due to her overtly fluid sexual desires, and to acknowledge this is important, as this character could potentially increase awareness, understanding and tolerance towards the bisexual experience.

Shug Avery: The Stereotypical Bisexual

The American sociologist Rust researches bisexuality, and more specifically the attitudes amongst lesbian-identified women towards bisexually-identified women in her book *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics*. Rust claims that negative attitudes towards bisexuals were far more widespread than positive images (70). She found that there was a tendency, especially amongst lesbian women, to question the validity of the bisexual identity: "Most lesbians who are suspicious of bisexual identity believe that women who call themselves bisexual are really lesbians. They explained that bisexual identity is used by people who can't or won't acknowledge their true sexuality, i.e., lesbianism, usually because of homophobia" (Rust 65). However, she points out that to categorize all lesbians or homosexuals for that matter as negative towards bisexuals would not amount to much, as this would be stereotyping in its own manner, but I think Rust's research results mirror some of the realities in the worlds of many lesbian and bisexual women. Rust describes the venture-point for many marginalized group in society:

> In the past few decades, we as a society have become increasingly sensitive to the dynamics of stereotypy and oppression. One after the other, oppressed groups among us have begun to resist the economic, social, and political structures that cause their disadvantage, fighting to change not only these structures but also prejudice attitudes of the powerful members of society who benefit from the same structures (Rust 71).

According to Rust, bisexuals are a marginalized group in society who are subjected to

oppression, stigmatization, and stereotyping. This is similar to what other marginalized groups in society have experienced, and have had to endure, but also have fought against and resisted. It is perhaps the most beneficial to compare bisexuals and their experiences to that of lesbians and gay men, because these groups have also been stigmatized primarily because of sexuality, even though factors such as race, class and gender do influence the matter. However, as discussed in the Introduction and Chapter One, the bisexual experience differs because of the phenomenon called biphobia, which is different from homophobia, because of a double discrimination, both the heterosexual community and the gay/lesbian community. Diamond reports findings of this kind:

> Men and women who openly claimed bisexual identities have . . . been excluded from lesbian-gay social and political organizations because their 'real' identities were matters of suspicion. This was particularly true within the burgeoning lesbian-feminist communities of the 1970s, in which bisexually identified (or bisexually behaving) women were often distrusted because of their supposed access to heterosexual privilege (Diamond 97).

Phobias and prejudice are usually based on misconceptions, which are validated through stereotyping. Individuals who identify as bisexual have become victims of such tendencies of stereotyping and stigmatizing. But what is the stereotypical bisexual? At the core of stereotyping in the case of bisexuals, is an uncertainty about the legitimacy of the very identity, as Angelides points out:

> Doubts about the veracity of bisexuality as an identity are not new. Variously characterized within dominant discourses of sexuality as, among other things, a form of infantilism or immaturity, a transitional phase, a self-delusion or state of confusion, a personal or political cop-out, a panacea, a superficial fashion trend, a marketing tool, even a lie and a catachresis, the category of bisexuality over a century has been persistently refused the title of legitimate sexual identity (*Bisexuality* 1).

In other words, bisexuals are not truly bisexuals, they are only confused or curious, or consciously taking advantage of the established system of sexuality to avoid unpleasant encounters and prejudice. This misconception concerning bisexuality is illustrated through Smith's and Abbandonato's analysis of Shug as a lesbian-identified woman, where Shug's relationships with men are labeled meaningless flings due to confusion or simply the fear of

embracing her true lesbian identity. Such misconceptions seem to be common amongst many lesbian-identified women, and negative attributes given to bisexuals by some of the lesbians in Rust's research were quite hateful. Words such as mentally ill, insecure and self-abusive were being used as synonyms to bisexuality, and bisexuals were portrayed as people who were very likely to exploit and hurt other people (78). This stereotyping of bisexuals as promiscuous and dangerous home-wreckers is quite interesting, because they seem to be based on many of the same notions as other forms of stereotypy. In relation to the *The Color Purple* hooks argues that many of the characters perform roles which correspond to typical *racial* stereotypes, and she describes how Shug represents the black sexual temptress (288). This argument is based on the tendency of stereotyping black women as over-sexed, promiscuous and seductive, and thus also potentially dangerous to both sexes either as a temptress or a home wrecker. However, is it possible to understand Shug as a character who is portrayed as a stereotypical bisexual instead?

As readers we do not sympathize with Shug in the same manner as Celie, perhaps most of all because she is not the narrator. Celie is the one telling her own story with her own words and therefore her struggles and difficulties in life almost becomes part of the reader's own experience, and the feeling of empathy is intensified. Thus the reader easily identifies with Celie and cheers her on in her struggle for independence and individuality. In other words, Celie is the picture-perfect role model for women, regardless of sexuality and color. On the other hand, many readers and critics seem to describe Shug's character in negative terms, as it has been a tendency to read this character as egotistical, promiscuous and to some extent evil. For instance, Smith characterizes Shug's behavior towards Celie as evil ("Sexual Oppression" 172), while Gussow describes her as: ". . . a whore-with-a-heart-of-gold . . ." (125). Even though Gussow does describe her as someone with a good heart he still chooses to focus on her sexual behavior as something promiscuous and comparable to prostitution. The fact that Shug as a character is uncompromising and selfish in her individuality at times, and that she breaks many hearts throughout the book is indisputable, but does this make her an evil whore? Such negative attitudes towards Shug are probably a result of the manner in which Walker presents Shug in her novel. There are several incidents in the book where Celie gives voice to the negative attitudes towards Shug that seem to flourish in the community. One report is from Albert's sister Carrie: "Shug Avery, Shug Avery . . . I'm sick of her. Somebody say she going round trying to sing. Umph, what she got to sing about. Say she wearing dresses all up her leg and headpieces with little balls and tassles hanging down, look

like window dressing" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 21). Here Shug is presented as someone promiscuous with short dresses and without talent, and as someone who always wants to be on display. Albert's father is also condescending is his description of Shug: ". . . she ain't even clean. I hear she got the nasty woman disease" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 52). And when the word comes to town that Shug has become seriously ill, there is little sympathy to gain, according to Celie: "Shug Avery sick and nobody in town want to take the Queen Honeybee in. Her mammy say She told her so. Her pappy say, Tramp. A woman at church say she dying – maybe two berkulosis or some kind of nasty woman disease" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 42). Celie continues to describe the negative attitudes towards Shug with conviction: "Even the preacher got his mouth on Shug Avery . . . He talk bout a strumpet in short skirts, smoking cigarettes, drinking gin. Singing for money and taking other women mens. Talk bout slut, hussy, heifer and streetcleaner" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 42). All of these accounts show the negative opinions the people have about Shug *inside* the book, and these attitudes are subtly transferred to the reader. It seems that Shug is described and understood along the same terms as the bisexual stereotype presented above, and thus she can be seen as representative of this stereotype.

Another aspect of prejudice and stereotyping in relation to bisexuality is based on the norm of monogamy, or the misconception of bisexual's inadequacy to comply with this norm: "The implication that bisexuals are incapable of committed relationships bother many lesbians, who conclude that bisexuality is a symptom of an inability to commit oneself to a single partner. These lesbians often have moral objections to bisexuality as nonmonogamous by definition" (Rust 61). In the introductory book *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer Psychology* there is a chapter on social marginalization in which parts of a bisexual experience is represented: "Another accusation leveled at bisexual people is that their sexual relationships or practices are inherently promiscuous and unstable" (Clarke et. al. 87). This notion of instability is a direct indication of nonmonogomy, and the book explains that this is a common misconception about bisexual behavior. In other words, the stereotypical bisexual is not able to maintain a monogamous relationship, because monogamy restricts an individual to one partner only, and thus this singular partner is either male or female and unable to fully satisfy his or her bisexual partner's fluid sexuality. Shug's character illustrates these stereotypical bisexual traits. Hooks states that: ". . . Shug's free floating lust shared with many partners, each different from the other, challenges the notion of monogamous coupling . . ." (286). This comes to show that some of the controversy sparked by Shug's actions might be

connected to her fluid sexuality and the potential threat this compromises to monogamy. Shug seems to struggle with monogamous relationships, and there are several incidents in her life where she has either ruined her own or someone else's relationship. Shug is in a healthy and loving relationship with Celie and they share a house together, and live together in bliss, but even in this happy and equal union with Celie, Shug is unable to be monogamous. Thus, Walker has portrayed Shug as a stereotype of bisexuality; someone who is unable to commit to one partner. However, it is important to mention that Shug's behavior in the novel is not non-monogamous in the worst sense. Shug is always honest and open about her sexuality and sexual partners, and she never engages in affairs without informing her partner/s. Shug's behavior then corresponds with research on this particular topic: "In bisexual relationships that *are* nonmonogamous or polyamorous, research suggests that most bisexual people openly negotiate consent and have clear boundaries with their multiple partners" (Clarke et. al. 87). Considering this, it seems that Walker is extremely comprehensive and aware of bisexuality, both as sexual behavior and sexual identity, in her portrayal of Shug's character.

Celie is perhaps the person who loves and admires Shug the most, and she seems to be patient and understanding no matter what she has to endure, but she is also harboring elements of prejudice towards Shug. For example, Celie constantly reports the negative attitudes towards Shug in the community to the reader, which could indicate such prejudice. Furthermore, she judges Shug from the moment she meets her:

> Under all that powder her face black as Harpo. She got a long pointed nose and big fleshy mouth. Lips look like black plum. Eyes big, glossy. Feverish. And mean. Like, sick as she is, if a snake cross her path, she kill it. She look me over from head to foot. Then she cackle. Sound like a death rattle. You sure *is* ugly, she say, like she ain't believed it (Walker, *The Color Purple* 44).

Here Shug is described in a negatively loaded language which depicts her as something evil, even comparing her to images of death. But on the other hand, this is Celie's first impression of Shug as a living being, and Shug is sick to the point where death could be an outcome, and therefore this account might not be Celie's true attitude. Celie also judges Shug when she is washing her for the first time: "She say, Well take a good look. Even if I is just a bag of bones now. She have the nerve to put one hand on her naked hip and bat her eyes at me. Then she suck her teef and roll her eyes at the ceiling while I wash her" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 47). Shug is acting flirtatious towards Celie because she notices that Celie is perhaps showing her more attention that a woman normally would. Celie states that Shug "have the nerve" to act

sensually towards her, deeming this behavior as negative or offensive, but simultaneously and secretively she is admiring and lusting for her. This seems to indicate some form of a double standard.

Furthermore, Celie's prejudice does not disappear once she gets to know Shug, which is revealed through sentences like the following: "That when I notice how Shug talk and act sometimes like a man" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 77). This extract is taken from the scene where Celie is watching Shug when she is performing her musical act in Harpo's bar. At this point Celie compares Shug to a man, and her reason for doing this is because she observes Shug using suggestive language, being sexually provocative and flirty. This is something she has only seen men do, and she has often been in the receiving end of such behavior, and the idea of a *woman* acting and speaking in this way is foreign to her, and viewed as outrageous and wrong by most of the other women in her society. Furthermore, comparing Shug to a man is difficult to understand as a compliment if one considers Celie's experiences with men. Celie has been raped by her step-father and forced to have intercourse with her husband, and furthermore she has been physically abused by men throughout her life. However, Celie also seems to admire this quality in Shug and to some extent identify with it. She continues to narrate: "All the men got they eyes glued to Shug's bosom. I got my eyes glued there too. I feel my nipples harden under my dress. My little button sort of perk up too. Shug, I say to her in my mind, Girl, you looks like a real good time, the Good Lord knows you do" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 77). Suddenly Celie begins to perform a different role, she is acting similarly to Shug and the men in the bar. Indirectly she states that she is similar to the men in the room in relation to her lust for Shug, and in fact she is objectifying her. Celie might be innocent in terms of her sexuality at first, but as the plot proceeds Celie grows stronger and she develops a sensual side to her personality, where she allows herself to be more open, sexual, and promiscuous. There is a predicament here, because as a reader one automatically judges and condemns Shug because of her overtly sexual behavior and sense of freedom in her choices and desires. Celie on the other hand, is applauded for taking her sexuality back and following her emotions, desires and lust. There is a double standard, because Celie is never judged by the reader, or the other characters in the book, for her thoughts and actions, but Shug always is. In a way it is almost like Walker is trying to make a point by punishing Shug for her strong will, individuality and fluid sexuality. Why is Shug constantly portrayed as provocative, controversial and insensitive, to the extent where other characters in the book, as well as the general reader, dislike her? I believe this could be linked to Shug's refusal to conform.

Perhaps Walker is trying to make a point concerning the negative effects of "compulsory" heterosexuality and the binary division of sexuality.

The Non-Homophobic World of *The Color Purple*

The manner in which same-sex sexuality is treated in *The Color Purple* is noteworthy. Hooks claims that "Celie's sexual desire for women and her sexual encounter with Shug is never a controversial issue even though it is the catalyst for her resistance to male domination, for her coming to power" (285). In her opinion the same-sex elements of the narrative do not generate any homophobia within the fictional world of the novel, and this is something she finds very problematic. She criticizes Walker for letting fantasy triumph over imagination, and she wishes she would have chosen a more realistic approach at this point. I agree that there is no controversy generated within the book in relation to the same-sex relationship of Shug and Celie, and I must admit this struck me as a bit puzzling. The men who exist in the lives of Shug and Celie seem to be accepting and to an extent understanding of the same-sex relationship, and there is no hostility or prejudice displayed towards the women by their relatives, friends or society due to this relationship. Albert actually acknowledges and accepts Celie's sexual orientation without a trace of controversy or homophobic prejudice: "He say, Celie, tell me the truth. You don't like me cause I'm a man? . . . Take off they pants, I say, and men look like frogs to me. No matter how you kiss 'em, as far as I'm concern, frogs is what they stay. I see, he say" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 230). In fact Albert comes across as extremely open and tolerant on the subject of Celie's sexual identity, which is a strong contrast to the sexist and female-oppressive attitudes earlier in the book. This lack of homophobia is also visible in Celie's description of how people around her conceive her sexuality: "Sofia and Harpo always try to set me up with some man. They know I love Shug but they think womens love just by accident, anybody handy likely to do" (Walker, *The Color Purple* 236). This lack of response from the characters in the book to the same-sex elements results in an erasure of both the lesbian and the bisexual aspect as something controversial *inside* the book. This is very different from the worlds *inside* the books of *Giovanni's Room* and *Brokeback Mountain*, where the main characters experience a homophobic, prejudiced and violent world, more similar to reality. While Walker's fictional world in *The Color Purple* seem more removed or disconnected from the real world. However, I think Walker was conscious in her choice to exclude homophobia from the world she invented in her novel. Perhaps she thought that *The Color Purple* would generate so much homophobia in the real

world no matter how she portrayed the same-sex relationship in the book that she decided to create a neutral and almost utopian attitude in the book towards the same-sex relationship. This could be Walker attempt to create this fictional world with a sexually deconstructed reality; an existence without sexual-identity politics and heterosexual privilege, and thus simply letting sex be sex.

Perhaps Walker has portrayed Shug's fluid sexuality as stereotypical and provocative on purpose, because she how threatening and disruptive this could be towards heteronormativity and the dichotomous understanding of sexuality. This could also be an attempt to invoke self-awareness in the individual reader of their own internalized notions of a binary sexuality, followed by prejudices concerning bisexuality The manner in which Walker presents Celie and Shug's sexuality in her book disrupts and almost erases the notion of heteronormativity, but even more so the dichotomous understanding of sexuality, because these concepts are nonexistent in the story itself. Considering the manner in which critics and the general readership of *The Color Purple* have interpreted both Celie and Shug's characters, it becomes apparent that the reader is the one who introduces the concepts of heteronormativity and binary sexuality to the story, as well as homophobia. Is this Walker's way of showing the reader how internalized and all-consuming this understanding of sexuality actually is? Interestingly, in relation to sexuality it is only Shug who truly invokes negative feelings, both inside and outside the text. The only prejudice or phobic-like attitudes invoked inside the fictional world of the book is linked to Shug's fluid sexuality, which could also be labeled bisexuality. Walker has placed Shug's character in the crossfire of prejudice and biphobia, where she is left to navigate through a judgmental and hostile world. Shug is the only character who constantly has to fight for her right to her sexuality, and who is constantly under scrutinizing observation by everyone, even the reader.

However, there seems to be some ambivalence in Walker's portrayal of Shug in *The Color Purple.* In the book she creates characters that represent negative stereotypes, such as the oppressive and abusive black man through Albert and Celie's father, the strong lesbian "feminist" through Celie, and the black female temptress and stereotypical bisexual through Shug. However, many of these stereotypical characters are presented ambivalently, because they seem to randomly break away from their stereotypes at some point in the plot. For instance, Albert is portrayed as an evil, abusive and selfish man early in the plot, but by the end of the story he becomes a sweet, emotional and remorseful character who ends up befriending Celie, regardless of the amount of oppression and abuse he puts her through.

Shug's character also seems to reject her stereotypical traits in the story, as sometimes appears to be a warm, supporting, and loving person, who helps the people around her. Also, Shug is rewarded with a happy ending, which is a strong contrast to the tragic endings of *Giovanni's Room* and *Brokeback Mountain*. Why does Walker do this? She could be trying to show that stereotypes are not real, and do not hold up. Moreover, Walker's agenda could be to invite a bisexual reading of Shug's character, as this changes the overall meaning of the character, as well as *The Color Purple* as a whole.

Walker also authored another well-known book by the name *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, which consists of a collection of her own essays, articles, reviews and other texts. She begins this book by giving four separate definitions of the term "womanist," and the second definition is extremely interesting in relation to *The Color Purple* and a bisexual analysis of Shug:

> . . . A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility . . . and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not separatist, except periodically, for health (*In Search* xi).

Walker's definition of the word is surprisingly similar to the definitions of bisexuality, and it is safe to say that Shug fits this description of womanist perfectly. She loves both men and women, sexually and/or non-sexually, but she is perhaps more drawn to women's culture and emotional life. Shug does destroy the lives of some women around her in the role as a seductive "home-wrecker," but she also engages in helping and supporting the women around her. For instance she creates a strong bond with Harpo's insecure and timid girlfriend Squeak. Shug helps to build up her self-worth and encourages her to pursue a singing career, and in the end Squeak becomes a strong and independent woman who reclaims her own identity as Mary Agnes, and ends up leaving Harpo to make it on her own. Shug is also a positive and motivational force in Celie's life, as she helps Celie regain her self-worth and to develop herself as a person. The important point here is that Walker's use of the term womanist is one of a positive nature, and the fact that Shug is a direct representation of the term creates an array of questions. What were Walker's intentions when she created this womanist character? This could indicate that Shug should be read in a more positive manner, as someone unique, strong and empowering, and perhaps also as a representative of a bisexual experience.

In my opinion Shug is a character with many positive characteristics. She is a strong and independent woman who does not conform to people's expectations and demands, and who exercises her right to individuality, sexuality and free will excessively. Today these traits are usually considered to be praiseworthy and admirable, and as something that would categorize a good role model. Interestingly, Walker has chosen to portray Shug as extremely in tuned, positive and self-reflective in relation to her own sexuality, desire and needs. In other words, the many positive qualities inherent in Shug's character, and her potential as a role model have been ignored by most critics and readers, and a bisexual approach changes this. Shug is a character who refuses to conform to heteronormativity, and who openly expresses and performs her fluid sexuality. This indicates that Shug's fluid sexuality, or bisexuality, was something Walker used intentionally in the book, and that Shug could be viewed as a positive role model and a positive representation of a bisexual experience.

In conclusion, *The Color Purple* is quite different from *Giovanni's Room*, as the main characters in *The Color Purple* are women set in an almost non-homophobic fictional world. It is only the character of Shug Avery who displays what I would refer to as a bisexual behavior, and she is therefore the main focus of this chapter. This character displays a fluid sexuality which manifests itself through a range of sexual and emotional relationships with both women and men. One of the most important characteristics of Shug is perhaps that she is described in negative terms throughout the novel and represents a negative bisexual stereotype in many aspects of her behavior, such as promiscuousness, inability to be monogamous, and the denial of her true lesbian identity. This negative stereotypy of bisexual individuals is a recurrent phenomenon both in the heteronormative society, as well as the gay and lesbian community, which comes to show that bisexuality as a valid sexual identity has some way to go. However, I do question if to simply establish bisexuality as a third sexual term or identity is the answer to the strict binary understanding of sexuality. But either way, this chapter has shown that by reading fictional literature bisexually one can contribute to promoting and representing a different experience. And furthermore, this bisexual approach has the ability to change and expand the Western literary canon, as well as functioning deconstructive in relation to the current binary understanding of sexuality.

Chapter 3: (Bi)Literary Theory: A Bisexual Approach to *Brokeback Mountain*

Annie Proulx's short story *Brokeback Mountain* was published in the *New Yorker* in 1997 and is perhaps her most famous work. The short story is set in Wyoming where two young "farm hands" come together to herd sheep on Brokeback Mountain in the summer of 1963. The two men engage in a passionate affair in the solitude of the mountains and they end up falling in love and becoming lifelong lovers. This is a tragic love story with no happy ending, but the main focus of the critics has been on the homosexual elements instead of the romance in its own right. This text differs from *Giovanni's Room* and *The Color Purple*, as it is a short story rather than a full-length novel. Similarly to *Giovanni's Room* this story depicts a tragic love between two men without a heartbreaking ending, and the theme of same-sex sexuality in these stories has been acknowledged to a larger extent than with *The Color Purple*. It could seem that *Brokeback Mountain* and *The Color Purple* are literary works which have had more of an impact, mostly because both stories have been made into important and successful Hollywood films, which in return have increased the readership and popularity of the texts. This chapter will focus on a close reading and analysis of the short story from a bisexual perspective, with focus on the main characters Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist, their relationship, and the fluid sexuality present in the text. In connection with this, I will emphasize the importance and significance of approaching fictional literature such as *Brokeback Mountain* from a bisexual perspective. Following this there will be some comment and discussion on the topic of bisexual analysis in relation to fictional literature in a larger and more general sense: Why *should* we read bisexually?

In the Introduction and the previous two chapters I have discussed bisexuality in relation to the binary division of sexuality, the history of sexuality, current literary theories and literary fiction, as well as research within the fields of sociology and anthropology. I have shown that there is a void within literary theory and the Western literary canon, when bisexuality fails to be represented. I believe there should be a bisexual literary theory which should stand side by side with feminist critical theory, gay/ lesbian theory, queer theory, and many others. I have analyzed *Giovanni's Room* and *The Color Purple* from a bisexual perspective, combining theory and a practical approach, and highlighting the appearances of

bisexuality in the text. In this chapter I would like to move beyond the two previous chapters, and carry out an in-depth analysis of a text, from the standpoint of a (bi)literary theory. As this is not an established term, I will present the main ideas and concepts that will be used for the analysis. The reasons I have chosen *Brokeback Mountain* are simple. Firstly, this is a short story and not a full length book, and therefore it is easier to perform a detailed analysis in the length of one chapter. Secondly, *Brokeback Mountain* is perhaps the text of the three which has been most strongly viewed as exclusively gay, or same-sex oriented, and therefore it presents the largest challenge to the validity and usefulness of a bisexual approach. If it is possible to do a bisexual reading of this short story, would that not imply that this theory could be applied to a large range of other texts as well? It is not my intention to argue that a homosexual reading of this story is wrong; instead of discrediting one literary approach, I want to emphasize the possibility and value of an alternative approach. The point is that *Giovanni's Room*, *The Color Purple*, and *Brokeback Mountain* have been pronounced as homosexual or lesbian by the majority of critics and readers, but they can still be successfully subjected to a bisexual analysis. And I firmly believe that a bisexual approach to literature has something new and fresh to contribute to literary theory and criticism, and to the Western literary canon in a larger sense.

Presenting a (Bi)Literary Theory

Today there are a range of different theories and approaches to analyzing fictional literature, which are rooted in separate fields of study, such as history, race, feminism, gender and sexuality. These theories have well established critical schools within Anglo-American literary theory, and have had a huge impact on how literature is read, interpreted, analyzed, and understood. A bisexual approach to literature is similar to some of these critical approaches, as it focuses on gender, sexuality, and identity, but a specifically bisexual perspective and critical analysis has never been established or recognized. This must be changed. Literature is a representation of experiences, and it has the ability to shape views, bring awareness and challenge preconceptions, as well as being something to identify with on a personal level. People are able to connect emotionally with characters and their personal experiences in the text, which in return can generate empathy, and a higher degree of understanding in the reader, even if the reader's reality is far removed from that of the book's fictional world. Fictional literature creates a possibility for people to visit and experience another environment and state of mind through words and imagination. Literature also has a

political function as it assumes a voice and power through a narrative, in which marginalized groups can be represented. In the case of bisexuality, especially within fictional literature, there has been a lack of representation and awareness concerning the topic, which may be a contributing force to why bisexuals find themselves in a marginalized group, without a voice of their own. The problem is not that there is a complete lack of bisexual elements in fictional literature, but rather, that these elements are not recognized for what they are, and become categorized as either heterosexual or homosexual/lesbian, thus erasing the bisexual perspective entirely. Consequently, the bisexual, as an individual or group, is denied meaning and sexual identity in the literary experience. As mentioned earlier, this bisexual erasure is a phenomenon also visible in the real world. When bisexuality is not recognized, examined, and given voice to, it becomes invisible, which in return justifies its omission, because it does not "exist." This cycle of erasure must be broken. Bisexually identified individuals need and deserve this source of representation, identification and understanding which fictional literature has the potential to provide. And it could be that a bisexual approach is more inclusive in comparison to a heterosexual, homosexual or lesbian approach. A bisexual approach encompasses a notion of gender blindness, as well as a lack of stigmatization and prejudice in dealing with thematics of sex and sexuality. Also, a bisexual perspective recognizes and acknowledges heterosexual and homosexual/lesbian elements as important in the analysis. Reading bisexually could provide an alternate viewpoint. Furthermore, it could perhaps begin to demolish our preconceptions which are based on the established system of sexuality and heteronormativity, and this would be a step towards a more democratic field of literary studies.

In a more social and political sense, defining a bisexual approach is critical because it establishes bisexuality as a viable identity and not as an "other" in relation to other accepted sexual identities. Naylor discusses this tendency of categorizing everything which is not heterosexual, gay or lesbian as an "etc," and she argues that this attempt to be inclusive automatically excludes and subordinates any marginalized group within this category of "other" (53-4). In other words, it is crucial to establish some common ground or arena in which bisexuality as a perspective and sexual identity, can be recognized and represented, because if not this sexual orientation loses its legitimacy. When describing this predicament, Naylor notes that ". . . bisexuals have neither a consistent and distinct identity, nor are they either straight or gay – instead, bisexuality can best be understood as a perspective, though also containing within it the possibility and indeed necessity for a strategic and non-essential

identity" (54). To simply include bisexuality into the established system of sexuality as a third term, thus creating a tripartite system of sexuality, does not really solve any problems in the long run. But, no matter how limiting, problematic, and excluding identity politics and the system of sexuality may be, these ideas are the reality of Western society, and sexual orientation continues to adhere to strict sexual categories such as gay, lesbian and heterosexual. Therefore, it is imperative to aim towards a future where bisexuality is accepted, respected, and represented as a valid and equal sexual identity, and I have chosen to fight this battle within the arena of literature. Fictional literature is essential in terms of topics such as gender, sexuality and identity, and I believe it is meaningful to apply a bisexual approach to fictional literature, because it provides a view from elsewhere. But how do we define the main ideas and components, as well as practical approaches to this (bi)literary theory?

Firstly, one must locate a text where there are indications that there might be a bisexual perspective present. Then continue with close reading, attempt to recognize and locate explicit and implicit elements of fluid sexuality, ambiguity, and bisexuality, in relations to things like characters, plot and symbolism. Analyze these elements and the fluid characters in detail to establish hidden meaning, as well as exposing the significance of these elements in relation to bisexuality. Through reading bisexually, and exposing bisexual elements, there could be a potential change in meaning in the text, and this must be examined closely. Also, be aware of how the bisexuality becomes visible in the text and

Homosexuality: The Main Theme in *Brokeback Mountain*?

Several years after *Brokeback Mountain's* initial release, the author Proulx was contacted concerning a possible adaptation of the short story into a full length Hollywood film. In September of 2005, the film *Brokeback Mountain,* directed by Ang Lee, was released and became a huge success[23]. The cast were young and up-and-coming Hollywood actors such as Anne Hathaway, Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger. The film received far more publicity than the short story, as it was seen as groundbreaking in the film world because of the homoerotic main theme, and in return the film made the short story much more famous. This notion of homoerotic love as the main theme, both in the short story and the film, has stirred everything from controversy and homophobia, to appraisal amongst critics and audiences

[23] *Brokeback Mountain.* Screenplay by Larry McMurtry and Dianna Ossana. Dir. Ang Lee. Perf. Jake Gyllenhaal, Heath Ledger, Michelle Williams and Anne Hathaway. Focus Features, 2005. Film.

(Wood 30; Miller 51-52; Rich, "Brokering Brokeback" 44-48 & Streitmatter 167-71). The first question of importance then is whether or not *Brokeback Mountain* should be read exclusively as a gay love story? Most critics and audiences seem to view the same-sex relationship between the two main characters, Jack and Ennis, and their romance as the main theme of the short story.

The main characters first meet at Brokeback Mountain where they are employed as sheep herders during the summer of 1963. As time passes in solitude, the two men begin to grow fond of each other's company, and having to sleep in separate camps at night becomes an irritation. One night Ennis is too drunk to return to his own camp, and passes out on the ground in the base camp. It is this night that their lifelong relationship begins:

> Ennis ran full-throttle on all roads whether fence mending or money spending, and he wanted none of it when Jack seized his left hand and brought it to his erect cock. Ennis jerked his hand away as though he'd touched fire, got to his knees, unbuckled his belt, shoved his pants down, hauled Jack onto all fours and, with the help of the clear slick and a little spit, entered him, nothing he'd done before but no instruction manual needed. They went at it in silence except for a few sharp intakes of breath and Jack's choked 'gun's goin *off*,' then out, down, and asleep (Proulx 259).

The language in this extract is of a very physical and emotionally removed nature, and the sexual encounter appears rough and without romantic feelings. As time passes their relationship evolves into a strong romantic bond, and the emotional qualities of their connection become more evident throughout the story. For instance, when the two men finally meet after a separation of several years, Proulx shows how much passion, lust, and love this same-sex connection actually inspires in the two:

> A hot jolt scalded Ennis and he was out on the landing pulling the door closed behind him. Jack took the stairs two and two. They seized each other by the shoulders, hugged mightily, squeezing the breath out of each other, saying, son of a bitch, son of a bitch, then, and easily as the right key turns the lock tumbler, their mouths came together, and hard, Jack's big teeth brining blood, his hat falling to the floor, stubble rasping, wet saliva welling . . . they clinched, pressing chest and groin and thigh and leg together, treading on each other's toes until they pulled apart to breathe and Ennis, not big on endearments, said what he said to his horses and daughters, little darling (263-4).

The men run towards each other in almost child-like anticipation, and display their longing for each other through a warm embrace and a passionate kiss. The men have missed each other so deeply, that they for an instant forget about the homophobic attitudes of their community as they indulge in a public display of affection which could get them into serious trouble. However, it is only Ennis's wife Alma, who to her own surprise and disgust, witnesses this tender moment. Ennis and Jack's love affair continues throughout the short story, and only death truly tears them apart, and then perhaps only physically.

Considering all this, it is obvious that this relationship was something Proulx viewed as paramount to the short story, and to claim that this is a gay love story, regardless of the tragic elements, is very logical. Homosexuality is clearly at the center of the novel as this love affair takes place between two men. The element of same-sex sexuality is perhaps more visible and marked in this story in comparison to *Giovanni's Room* and *The Color Purple*, because the world this story is set in is by far the most homophobic, and thus anything homosexual is automatically emphasized. In *Giovanni's Room* Baldwin depicts a society which is more mixed in its attitudes towards same-sex sexuality, but perhaps more in the "out of sight - out of mind" sense. In Paris there had evolved an underground gay scene which was left alone as the public turned a blind eye to this movement, and thus homophobia becomes less visible in this story, and is mostly represented through David and his internalized version of it. In *The Color Purple* on the other hand, there is a complete lack of homophobia, which results in a relative erasure of the elements of same-sexuality in the story, or at least the controversial aspects of it. The story of *Brokeback Mountain* is set in Wyoming in the early 1960s and the homophobic attitude of the community is quickly revealed, and stands out as a strong contrast to the social movements of sexual freedom and love which were flourishing other places in the world during the 60s. Both Jack and Ennis are from poor backgrounds, without any education and only fit to do ranch related work. This "cowboy" society which Proulx created in *Brokeback Mountain* is built on values such as extreme masculinity and hard work, and liberal ideas and people of such alternate beliefs are nowhere to be found.

The extremity of the homophobic attitudes of their community is illustrated through Ennis's description of a childhood memory, where his father takes him to see the dead and mutilated body of a man who is indicated to be was gay. This strikes fear in Ennis from an early age, as he is probably traumatized by the mere sight, and because of this he is much more reluctant than Jack to embrace his homoerotic desires and his love for another man. Ennis is well aware of the dangers such behavior could subject both of them to, and he refuses

to risk his life and health to be with Jack permanently. Jack on the other hand, is willing to sacrifice everything to be with Ennis and throughout the story this character relentlessly presents different solutions which will let them be together.

Jack proves his dedication in love, as he ironically ends up sacrificing his life for his sexuality and love-life. When Ennis is informed of Jack's cause of death, which is described to him as a fatal accident caused by an exploding tire, he immediately draws a different conclusion: "The huge sadness of the northern plains rolled down on home. He didn't know which way it was, the tire iron or a real accident . . . Under the wind drone he heard steel slamming off bone, the hollow chatter of a settling tire rim" (Proulx 278). Ennis's suspicion is validated as he goes to pay his respects to Jack's parents: "The old man sat silent, his hands folded on the plastic tablecloth, staring at Ennis with an angry, *knowing* expression . . . . So now he knew it had been the tire iron" (279-80, my emphasis). Ennis's fears have come true, the only man he ever loved is dead, and it is because of homoerotic desires, which he both identifies with and hates. Either way, this constant focus on homophobia also results in an equal focus on the same-sex elements in the story, making this the most evident and forceful theme throughout the story. Therefore it is not strange that the story has been labeled as gay by critics, readers and audiences. However, could there be more to this love story? Could this homosexual categorization of the story limit the meaning of *Brokeback Mountain*? I would say yes. Perhaps Ennis's character does not represent a homosexual man suppressing his homoerotic desires in a homophobic and hostile world. I think Ennis should be read and analyzed bisexually, because in the story he is drawn between a man and a woman, and the love and sexual attraction he feels for both of them. This could indicate that his personal tragedy is linked to ambiguous sexual desires and his constant suppression of such feelings. Could Jack's character also be interpreted from a bisexual perspective? And more importantly, what would this bisexual reading of *Brokeback Mountain* entail and how would it change the story? I want to begin this discussion by examining Jack and the sexuality this character displays, before moving into a more detailed analysis of Ennis's sexuality and his relationship to women.

Jack Twist: A Bisexual Perspective

After reading *Brokeback Mountain* it becomes clear that Jack Twist is the character with the strongest or most visible homoerotic desires. Early in the story both men are in denial and are repressing their erotic same-sex desires:

> They never talked about the sex, let it happen, at first only in the tent at night, then in the full daylight with the hot sun striking down, and at evening in the fire glow, quick, rough, laughing and snorting, no lack of noises, but saying not a goddamn word except once Ennis said, 'I'm not no queer,' and Jack jumped in with 'Me neither. A one-shot thing. Nobody's business but ours' (Proulx 260).

In this extract Proulx clearly shows that Ennis is terrified of embracing his same-sex sexuality, despite the fact that he obviously enjoys it and has strong feelings for Jack. Jack on the other hand, seems less eager to proclaim his heterosexuality, but agrees with Ennis and his apprehensiveness about their secret sexual affair. Ennis is primarily worried about being labeled as a homosexual, while Jack is more focused on their sexual behavior being "nobody's business," and he uses the term "ours" to describe what the two men share, thus indicating that this is something intimate and of substance to him. In fact, Jack is the one who initiates the first sexual encounter between the two men, which could indicate that this is not his first time with a man. It is also only Jack who dreams, searches and longs for a stable future together with Ennis, while Ennis is extremely reluctant to even think such thoughts: "Come on, Ennis, you just shot my airplane out a the sky – give me something a go on. This ain't no little thing that's happenin here" (Proulx 269). Jack constantly proclaims his love for Ennis, and emphasizes that what they have together is not a fling, but true love. This could indicate that Jack is more passionately and truly in love with Ennis, than the other way around. Perhaps Jack is more willing to embrace his homosexuality, and that he identifies with this sexual identity at a much higher degree than Ennis. In the light of this, is it possible to read Jack's character from a bisexual perspective? Perhaps not.

Later in the story, both Jack and Ennis marry women, Alma and Lureen, and have children. It becomes clear early on in the story when the two men are working on Brokeback Mountain that Ennis intends to marry Alma and have a family, while Jack never talks of women or family life at this point. However, when the two men reunite, Jack has suddenly married a woman and started a family: "'I got a boy,' said Jack. 'Eight months old. Tell you what, I married a cute little old Texas girl down in Childress – Lureen'" (Proulx 264). However, this heterosexual marriage could be rejected as true love because there are some indications that Jack married her because of the prospect of money. However, there is some inconsistency in such a theory about Jack's marriage, if we are to trust his words: "Lureen's old man, you bet he'd give me a bunch if I'd get lost. Already more or less said it – " (Proulx 268). This short sentence seems to indicate another reality, because Lureen's father hates Jack

and does not provide them with any money, and that he would be willing to give Jack money to simply disappear. Why has Jack not left this marriage a long time ago if money is what he wanted? It could be that Jack has feelings for his wife, and that he married her for reasons other than money, and perhaps he even loves her, since he is standing by her side regardless of her family's condemnation of him. But is this enough to claim that Jack is a bisexual character?

Towards the middle of the story the two men meet again, and both characters claim to have had relationships with other women since they last met: "Jack said he'd had a thing going with the wife of a rancher down the road in Childress and for the last few months he'd slank around expecting to get shot by Lureen or the husband, one" (Proulx 273). It is hard to say if Jack's character is being truthful, but what the reader knows through Proulx's narrative voice is that Jack is the only one of the two lovers who engages in sex with other men, while Ennis only has sex with one man his entire life and that is Jack: "'You do it with other guys? Jack?' 'Shit no,' said Jack, who had been riding more than bulls . . ." (Proulx 266). Proulx provides the reader with hints that indicate that Jack is engaging in sex with other men besides Ennis, and this somehow destroys, or at least taints, the romantic qualities of Jack and Ennis's love affair. Streitmatter analyses Jack's sexuality as different from Ennis' and observes that ". . . Jack finds it impossible to limit his homosexual activities to the occasional times he and Ennis are together. By the early 1970s, he begins having trysts with other married men and with male prostitutes" (Streitmatter 172). Proulx uses Mexico as the location for many of Jack's sexual encounters, but she never goes into detail about his trips and endeavors there. The reader is introduced to this knowledge through an angry argument between the two men:

> 'You been a Mexico, Jack?' Mexico was the place. He'd heard. He was cutting fences now, trespassing in the shoot-em zone. 'Hell yes, I [Jack] been. Where's the fucking problem?" Braced for it all these years and here it came, late and unexpected. 'I got a say this to you one time. Jack, and I ain't foolin. What I don't know,' said Ennis, 'all them things I don't know could get you killed if I should come to know them (Proulx 275).

Ennis's character definitely loves and cares deeply for Jack, and the prospect of Jack having sex with other men evokes strong feelings of jealousy and murderous rage. Also, it seems that Ennis has never done anything similar. This notion that Ennis is faithful, at least to Jack in the sense of not having sex with other men, seems to be something Jack is well aware of:

> Tell you what, we could a had a good life together, a fucking real good life. You wouldn't do it, Ennis

> . . . . Count the few times we been together in twenty years. Measure the fucking short leash you keep me on, then ask me about Mexico . . . . You got no fuckin idea how bad it gets. I'm not you. I can't make it on a couple a high-altitude fucks once or twice a year. You're too much for me Ennis, you son of a whore-son bitch. I wish I knew how to quit you' (Proulx 276).

Jack seems to be unable to suppress his sexual desires towards men, as he seeks out male sexual partners in Mexico and probably in Texas as well. This is obviously not the life that Jack desires, he truly wants to settle down with the man he loves, Ennis, and to live a long and happy life together doing what they love, ranching. His sexual identity encompasses much more than sex: "What Jack remembered and craved in a way he could neither help nor understand was the time that distant summer on Brokeback, when Ennis had come up behind him and pulled him close, the silent embrace satisfying some shared and sexless hunger" (Proulx 276). Furthermore, Jack does not let Ennis's constant rejection crush his dream of a joyous future: "He [Jack] had some half-baked idea the two a you was goin a move up here, build a log cabin and help me run this ranch and bring it up. Then, this spring he's got another one's goin a come up here with him and build a place and help run the ranch . . . . He's goin a split up with his wife and come back here. So he says" (Proulx 280). Jack fully embraces his homosexual desires, wanting to be with men exclusively, regardless of the dangers and difficulties this life may encompass. In my opinion Jack cannot be read as heterosexually or bisexually identified, as he clearly represents an exclusively homosexual experience.

Hidden Reality: Ennis del Mar as a Bisexual?

In Rodger Streitmatter's book *From 'Perverts' to 'Fab Five'* he notes that some publications argued that to simply label *Brokeback Mountain* a "gay" movie was too limiting (169). One article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* commented that the film depicted more of heterosexual sex than "man-on-man sex," referring to the fact that two female actresses bare their breasts in the film, while there was not an equal amount of exposure in the homoerotic scenes (Streitmatter 169). Streitmatter only examines the film version of *Brokeback Mountain* in his book, but this notion of a strictly homosexual label as too limiting is also very relevant to the short story. In Proulx's short story there are many instances of heterosexual attraction and detailed descriptions of heterosexual sex, especially between Ennis and Alma. How should these elements be interpreted? Ennis's character seems to love both Alma and Jack, and this

fluid love and desire indicates that he may represent a bisexual perspective more than a homosexual. Ennis's personal troubles and the tragic outcome of his life could be read as symbols of the difficulties of coming to terms with a fluid desire in a binary sexualized world. This could explain the difference between Jack and Ennis, and their approach to sexuality and their relationship. If one reads and interprets Jack from a homosexual perspective, but at the same time approaches Ennis's character from a bisexual perspective, many elements change in the story of *Brokeback Mountain*.

Heterosexual Love: Ennis and Alma

After having met Jack, Ennis returns home and marries his girlfriend Alma, claiming that this is something that he truly wants. Alma becomes pregnant, and soon after the birth of their first daughter, they have a second girl. Ennis is not obligated to marry Alma, this is something he chooses on his own, and importantly this is something he does *after* having met and fallen in love with Jack. Ennis seems to want to have children with Alma, and the quick succession of childbirths indicates that the couple is frequently sexually active. There is especially one extract from the short story which illustrates the existence of love, as well as sexual attraction and intimacy between the pair:

> . . . sitting on his lap, wrapping her thin, freckled arms around him. 'Let's get a place here in town?' 'I guess,' said Ennis, slipping his hand up her blouse sleeve and stirring the silky armpit hair, then easing her down, fingers moving up her ribs to the jelly breast, over the round belly and knee and into the wet gap all the way to the north pole . . . working at it until she shuddered and bucked against his hand and he rolled her over, did *quickly* what she hated (Proulx 262-3, emphasis added).

In this extract there are explicit sexual details revealed about their relationship, as they engage in passionate intimacy. In the beginning of this passage Proulx describes Ennis as an attentive lover, who is pleasing his wife sexually with graceful skill and love. Ennis is the one who initiates this intimacy, and therefore this is probably something he wants; to have sex with a woman. Ennis seems to be aroused by this act as he feels the need to "do what she hates" afterwards, which probably refers to anal penetration and ejaculation. Some critics would perhaps interpret this action of sodomy as Ennis's suppressed homosexuality coming into play, as this sexual act is a stereotypical trait of homosexual intercourse. This could be analyzed as a recreation of lovemaking with Jack, because this particular sexual act mimics previous

sexual acts he has performed with Jack earlier. In the case of Ennis this may as well be a sexual preference or fetish, regardless of the partner's gender. The focus of this extract is Alma and Ennis's sexual approach to her, which seems loving, yearning, and full of desire. From Proulx's description it seems that Alma's character enjoys everything, except for the last act, which Ennis does *quickly* because he knows this is not something she likes. Regardless of sexual orientation, it is not uncommon in relationships that people like very different things, but attempt to accommodate their partner's desires and fetishes anyway. Another interesting quality of this extract is the language Proulx uses, which is extremely positive in comparison to extracts describing sexual behavior between Ennis and Jack.

In *Brokeback Mountain* Proulx has a tendency of comparing homoerotic sexuality to something dark, menacing and dirty. She frequently uses images of dirt and grime in her narration of Ennis and Jack's sexual intimacy: "The room *stank* of semen and smoke and *sweat* and whiskey, of *old* carpet and *sour* hay, saddle leather, *shit* and *cheap* soap. Ennis lay spread-eagled, spent and wet, breathing deep, still half *tumescent*, Jack blowing *forceful* cigarette clouds like whale spouts . . ." (Proulx 265, emphasis added). This extract resonates images of cheap, meaningless and dirty hotel sex, while the reader knows that there is much more to this relationship than just that. But why has Proulx chosen to narrate these sexual encounters so differently? Perhaps this is supposed to represent Ennis's subconscience coloring the text negatively at this point. Proulx's intentions with this passage might have been to show Ennis's internalized homophobia appearing as he engages in sex with a man, and thus making this sexual act appear less appealing. This sense of the homosexual as dirty, evil and wrong in the story continues: "He could smell Jack – the intensely familiar odor of cigarettes, musky sweat and a faint sweetness like grass, and with it the rushing cold of the mountain" (Proulx 264). This is a really interesting sentence, because it reveals the inherent homophobic emotions internalized it Ennis. He loves Jack, but he also truly fears his homoerotic desires, and this fear is described through a dark image of the cold gust of the mountains. On the other hand, this internalized homophobia does not necessarily have to be read as a validation of Ennis's identity as exclusively homosexual. I believe this element of homophobia would be present in Ennis regardless of him being homosexual or bisexual, because either way it is the aspect of same-sex which is the area of taboo in his society. In other words, Ennis would probably feel the same regarding his same-sex erotic desires, regardless of his "real" sexuality being gay or bisexual, because in the society he lives it is only the same-sex sexual behavior which is condemned and considered wrong. The point

being that Ennis's internalized homophobia in relation to his physical and emotional affair with Jack could point to both homosexuality and bisexuality. Thus the bisexual perspective is still a valid approach to Ennis's character.

Ennis's marriage to Alma starts to crumble, as Alma begins to suspect that Ennis has some form of affair behind her back with Jack. But is Ennis's same-sex sexuality the only reason why their marriage falls apart? In his analysis of *Brokeback Mountain* Mark Asquith argues that to blame latent homosexuality as the main reason for the failure of both men's heterosexual marriages is too simplistic:

> Ennis, at least, shows no inclination for other men, and furthermore, although his sex life with Alma recreates that with the 'bucking horse' Jack, their marriage is not blighted by misogyny. Instead, from the narrator's description, it seems that their marital breakdown has less to do with Ennis's repressed homosexuality than the incompatibility of domestic life with the cowboy genre (Asquith 89).

In this passage Asquith argues that Ennis's anal penetration of Alma is his recreation of sex with Jack, and as mentioned earlier, I believe this can be read differently. It could be that Ennis likes to have sex in this manner, and it is extremely stereotyping to define anal sex as only a homosexual phenomenon. Are there not heterosexuals or lesbians who enjoy the very same sexual activity? On the other hand, Asquith does not read this particular sexual act as degrading or malignant in relation to Alma, in fact he seems to argue that there is a complete lack of misogyny in the marriage. Asquith labels Ennis as exclusively homosexual, which obviously I have some objections with, but he is onto something when he argues that Ennis's and Alma's marital problems seem to stem from other elements than domestic violence, Ennis's homoerotic desires or Alma's suspicion of the same-sex affair. In other words, Ennis is a character who treats his wife in a decent manner, and who seems to love his family with a deep devotion, but who is less capable of handling the more practical areas of life:

> A slow corrosion worked between Ennis and Alma, no real trouble, just widening water . . . . Alma even asked Ennis to use rubbers because she dreaded another pregnancy. He said no to that, said he would be happy to leave her alone if she didn't want any more of his kids. Under her breath she said, 'I'd have em if you'd support em.' And under that, thought, anyway, what you like to do don't make too many babies (Proulx 269).

A close reading of this extract reveals many important elements in Ennis's heterosexual

relationship. First of all, Ennis's sexuality and Alma's suspicion of it does not seem to be the deciding factor in their slow separation, rather is seems to be Ennis's inability to provide for his family economically which is the detrimental force. Furthermore, the fact that Alma asks Ennis to use condoms indicates that they still engage in sexual intercourse, which could be interpreted as sexual attraction still being present between the two. She explicitly states that she would have more children with him if he would be able to support them, which implies that she still loves him, but is becoming increasingly desperate in their state of poverty and hardship.

Their marriage ends in divorce, and Alma marries her boss. At first Ennis attempts to be a part of his children's and Alma's lives, but this ends abruptly after an argument in the kitchen after a dinner he attends at their house: "After the pie Alma got him off in the kitchen, scraped the plates and said she worried about him and he ought to get married again . . . . 'Once burned,' he said, leaning against the counter, feeling too big for the room" (Proulx 270). This comment shows that Ennis is heartbroken after the divorce, but Alma insists that it is his own fault and continues by accusing Ennis of being a homosexual: "'Don't lie, don't try to fool me, Ennis. I know what it means. Jack Twist? Jack Nasty. You and him – '" (Proulx 271). This is too much for Ennis, and he leaves and decides to stay away until his girls are old enough to make their own choices. This argument reveals that Ennis still has feelings for Alma, because he feels like he has been "burnt" by her actions, which involve divorcing him, marrying a new man and taking their children with her. As a result of all of this he is unable to commit to a new relationship with a woman, and even less so another marriage. At this point in the story Ennis has lost his family and stands in a position where he is alone, but free. Wood argues that: ". . . they [Jack and Ennis] *could* live together quietly and unobtrusively, for which the penalty would probably be nothing worse than ostracism, isolation, and a few insults shouted in the streets. They could also move to a less oppressive and bigoted cultural situation . . ." (Wood 31). Could it be that Ennis's internalized homophobia is so strong and generates so much fear that it ruins his one shot at true love? Asquith seems to argue that this is the case: "Since the story concludes in the 1980s, their relationship could indeed have ended differently, if they had moved to the city, Mexico, anywhere where there were no cowboys. But for Ennis this is impossible . . . . Without the elevating dream of Brokeback, he is left having to admit the truth of his own sexual nature" (92). Ennis is thus reduced to a character who is homosexual by nature, but because he has been introduced to homophobia at such a young age, this has become so internalized within him, that to embrace his own

sexuality has become impossible, as it generates too much hate, fear and prejudice. This is in fact how many critics have read Ennis and his refusal to share his life with Jack. Ennis deliberately chooses not to live his life with Jack, and he continues to reject Jack's dream of a bright future, which seems strange as the two men continue to see each other throughout the years. Why is Ennis so reluctant to commit fully to Jack? Perhaps there is something about his fluid sexuality that prevents him from adopting a homosexual role.

Ennis engages sexually with another women after the divorce with Alma: "Ennis said he'd been putting the blocks to a woman who worked part-time at the Wolf Ears bar in Signal where he was working now for Stoutmire's cow and calf outfit, but it wasn't going anywhere and she had problems he didn't want" (Proulx 273). The reason this relationship does not continue is obviously because of the lack of love, which might not be so strange as Ennis describes this woman as someone with a lot of personal issues. However, what is interesting here is that instead of seeking out a male lover, Ennis chose to engage emotionally and sexually with a woman. The fact that this woman works in a bar indicates that Ennis probably picked her up in that very same place, which in return shows that Ennis is actively taking part in heterosexual courtship. Ennis has the possibility of going to Mexico or other more liberal areas of the US to live out his "true" sexuality in a more open and safer surrounding. However, Ennis never does, in fact he only has sex with one man as far as the story goes, and that is Jack. If Ennis is exclusively homosexual, then what should one make of all these predicaments? In Robin Wood's article "On and around Brokeback Mountain" he argues that there is some difference between Ennis and Jack, and how they understand and accept their sexuality: "Ennis carries the heavier burden because he fights against himself – against his *real* self . . ." (Wood 31). In other words, Jack has to some extent accepted his homoerotic desires, while Ennis is constantly fighting his emotional and physical attraction to Jack. In line with this, how should one understand Ennis's "real self"? I think Ennis's character is sexually and emotionally fluid, as he finds himself attracted to both women and men, both sexually and emotionally. Instead of analyzing this character as an exclusively gay man, who is constantly suppressing his homoerotic desires, Ennis's "real self" could be interpreted as bisexual. But does this bisexual reading change the story, and the reader's perception of Ennis's character?

Ennis as a Bisexually Identified Man: A Change in Meaning?

I have examined *Brokeback Mountain* in detail from a bisexual perspective, and have found

many elements within the short story which could represent a bisexual experience. I have revealed such elements and then discussed and analyzed them in detail, but there is little comment on how such elements alter the meaning and understanding of the short story. In comparison to a homosexual approach, the short story *Brokeback Mountain* changes when it is read bisexually. The love story and the tragic elements of the short story are still in focus, but a bisexual approach can illuminate other important areas than an exclusively homosexual reading can. I think especially Ennis's character invites a deeper and more profound analysis of both sexuality and emotional life through a bisexual approach. In the story it is clear that Ennis is the character with the most complex emotional life, as he is in a constant personal crisis of conflicting desires and hopes. In my opinion, this inner turmoil is not sufficiently and adequately explained through a homosexual approach, as this perspective has prescribed his emotional despair as a direct result of suppressed homosexuality together with strong internalized homophobia. From a bisexual perspective, this inner turmoil could be interpreted as a direct result of being unable to come to terms with and understand one's fluid sexuality.

When the sheep herding job is over, Jack attempts to reach out to Ennis and asks him what his plans are during the next summer, strongly hinting that they should spend the next summer together again. Ennis replies that he is getting married to his girlfriend Alma, and probably will get a new job on a ranch. The following extract depicts their separation:

> . . . they shook hands, hit each other on the shoulder, then there was forty feet of distance between them and nothing to do but drive away in opposite directions. Within a mile Ennis felt like someone was pulling his guts out hand over hand a yard at a time. He stopped on the side of the road and, in the whirling new snow, tried to puke but nothing came up. He felt about as bad as he ever had and it took a long time for the feeling to wear off (Proulx 261-2).

This extract is important because it shows the mixed emotions and difficulties Ennis's character encounter as he parts with Jack. He is returning home to his girlfriend who he loves and intends to marry, but he is also leaving a man who he unintentionally has fallen deeply in love with during the summer. Proulx has put her character in a limbo of love between two people, where there are no clear solutions or happy endings available. Ennis's inner turmoil is so strong that it is embodied physically, and the pain this inflicts is severe as he compares it to someone pulling his intestines out of his stomach, little by little. Ennis must have some reason to marry Alma other than passing as a heterosexual, and this reason could quite realistically be

love. This could also explain the forcefulness and discomfort in Ennis's emotional response to leaving Jack. He is in a situation where he is obliged to choose between two individuals, whom he loves deeply. This despair is probably worsened by the knowledge that he chooses the female lover instead of the male, because this is the safer option. This could be compared to the emotional turmoil and difficulties David in *Giovanni's Room* encounter when he becomes involved in two romantic relationships, one with a man and the other with a woman. David is also placed in a state of personal crisis when his longtime girlfriend Hella returns from her vacation, and it is time for him to choose between his female fiancé and male lover. His despair and inner turmoil is probably worsened, as with Ennis, because he chooses the heterosexual relationship as this is the normative and safe choice in their respective societies. These characters make their final romantic choices based on society's norms and expectations (which may also be internalized), and to avoid any negative attention. Thus one of the main sources of their inner turmoil and personal tragedies are due to the fact that they do not give their male and female lovers equal chances, as society does not allow for this.

There is an ambiguous and mixed sexuality present in David, which also appears in the character of Giovanni, as well as Ennis. This notion of mixed emotions and ambiguity echo a fluid desire in the characters which cannot be suppressed or overcome. Most critics have interpreted this sexual and emotional ambiguity as a mere consequence or side effect of a homosexual individual suppressing their true homoerotic desires, and that the heterosexual instances only are acts of conformity, denial or "playing it safe." In Chapter One I argued that this sexual and emotional ambiguity could be directly linked to fluid sexuality and bisexuality, and I would argue that this is also the case with Ennis in *Brokeback Mountain.* The element of mixed feelings or ambiguity in Ennis's character surfaces several times in Proulx's short story: "Even when the numbers were right Ennis knew the sheep were mixed. In a disquieting way everything seemed mixed" (Proulx 260). This emotional notion that "everything seemed mixed" could be indicative of bisexuality, and the inability of the character to realize and come to terms with the complexity of this sexuality. Bisexuality and the possibility of fluid sexuality is an unavailable option to Ennis, because bisexuality is invisible within the binary system of sexuality in which he has been indoctrinated. Thus the concept that a person can feel attracted to both sexes is impossible in his society and in his state of mind, even more impossible than homosexuality. At a later point in the story, Ennis again expresses mixed feelings and confusion in relation this sexuality and erotic nature:

> Ennis pulled Jack's hand to his mouth, took a hit from the cigarette, exhaled. 'Sure as hell seem in one

> piece to me. You know, I was sittin up here all that time trying to figure out if I was-? *I know I ain't.* I mean here we both got wives and kids, right? I like doing it with women, yeah, Jesus H, ain't nothing like this. I never had no thoughts a doin it with another guy except I sure wrang it out a hundred times thinking about *you* (Proulx 266, emphasis added).

The first remark about "seeming in one piece" refers to Jack and his bodily injuries due to rodeo work, but in his second remark Ennis uses this idea more symbolically, when he questions his own (sexual) composition. His conclusion seems to be that something is wrong with him because he enjoys having sex with both women and men, and he believes he is somehow mixed or not in one piece because of this fluid desire or bisexuality. Some critics would perhaps read this extract as Ennis proclaiming his homosexuality, but I believe his remark about enjoying sex with women should not be ignored. First of all, he openly admits that he has had sex with more women than men, as there has only been one man in his life in a romantic and sexual manner. Secondly, this feeling he expresses about sex being completely different with Jack (in a positive manner), does not necessarily indicate that Ennis prefers sex with men. Ennis truly loves Jack, but rarely has the opportunity to see him, and could this not perhaps heighten the intensity of the sexual experience? Ennis is in a marriage with Alma, where there are children, work, responsibilities and the unglamorous everyday life, which could result in sex becoming less passionate and more of a routine act. While with Jack, everything is intense, mysterious and passionate, and always in a "vacation" setting, which perhaps creates an illusion of this sex as something unique and better than any other sexual experience. The main point here is that Ennis does not refer to sex with *men* as "nothing like this," but sex with *Jack*. And I believe this changes the meaning of this passage, because through close reading one can find strong elements of a fluid desire in Ennis's character's sexuality, which is more indicative of bisexuality than exclusive homosexuality. And furthermore, Ennis's inability to understand and to come to terms with this sexual and emotional fluidity becomes his downfall, more than anything else.

The last sentence of the text is also quite important and reveals some interesting areas of Ennis's understanding of his sexuality: "There was some open space between what he knew and what he tried to believe, but nothing could be done about it, and if you can't fix it you've got to stand it" (Proulx 283). This notion of an open space between reality and the self-inflicted illusion could point to homosexuality in Ennis, but it could also point to bisexuality. A bisexual perspective could explain this notion of "open space" more

sufficiently, because it presents sexuality in a more complex manner than a strict binary understanding. Ennis's open space and understanding of sexuality is not clear-cut and easily identifiable to him; the binary structure of hetero/homo does not describe his complex emotional and sexual qualities. This interpretation of the last sentence in the short story is more profound, as it reveals the difficulties, hopelessness and pain which potentially can inflict bisexual individuals in a sexuality dichotomous world. A bisexual individual, in such a world, is unable to achieve self-realization and self-worth, because there is no arena or common ground for those who cannot conform to heterosexuality or homosexuality. In Ennis's life nothing is resolved, perhaps mostly because he is only given two completely opposing options; a heterosexual life or a homosexual life. These are two polarized realities, and he cannot truly identify with any of them. Ennis knows that he is different from most heterosexual men, but he is also different from Jack and the homosexual reality this character represents. Ennis lacks both the tools and the framework to navigate his sexual desires, and he believes that his sexuality is something that cannot be fixed and thus he must learn to live with it. He acknowledges his uniqueness in relation to his sexuality, but as there is no arena to unfold his bisexual desires, he decides to suppress all non-normative sexual desires. Ennis's final price to pay for his inability to conform to Western sexual standards is alienation, depression and sorrow.

Reading Ennis's character bisexually illustrates the destructive and discriminatory effects a strict sexual system can have on individuals who cannot fit into the designated categories. Ennis's situation could be used to illuminate the reality of many bisexual or sexually fluid people in the Western world today, whom are unable to identify or define their sexuality in the terms of the hetero/homo binary. This does not only apply to bisexuality, but also to other varieties of sexuality which are in a position of exclusion. An exclusively homosexual reading of *Brokeback Mountain* lacks interpretational force in dealing with the sexual ambiguity of the main character Ennis. Sexual ambiguity and fluidity can be analyzed and described in stronger and more persuasive terms from a bisexual perspective, because this perspective recognizes fluid sexual behavior as valid in its own right, and acknowledges the pain which conflicting erotic and emotional desires can generate. Also, a bisexual approach to literature acknowledges the aspect of alienation, and emphasizes the negative effects of being drawn between "two worlds." This being understood as being sexually fluid and drawn emotionally and erotically towards both men and women, and *not* understood in the sense of a homosexual/lesbian individual suppressing his/her sexuality in a heterosexual world.

Fluid sexuality is quite common, whether or not one chooses to label this as bisexuality, and a bisexual perspective offers a more positive comment on this phenomenon. This ambiguity embedded in much of human sexuality is interesting, but within gay or lesbian approaches to literature it is erased, as the fluidity and ambiguity is merely prescribed to an inability in an individual to accept his/hers true sexuality identity. Then fluid sexuality reduced to a byproduct of internalized homophobia, curiosity, or an attempt to conform to homo- and heteronormativity. Ambiguous and fluid sexuality appears in a lot of fictional literature, and a (bi)literary perspective may not offer the "correct" interpretation, but it does give a view from elsewhere, and accepts a much broader sense of human sexuality. A bisexual reading of *Brokeback Mountain* opens up to a broader understanding and interpretation of sexuality, as well as identity, and thus the story may have a larger sense of meaning than originally thought. Through a bisexual reading, *Brokeback Mountain* becomes a literary representation of the difficulties of being sexually different, and still having to navigate oneself within a strict binary comprehension of sexuality. The character of Ennis could be viewed as representational of a bisexual experience, and thus be important to a bisexual readership and their personal experiences, both good and bad. The themes and meanings within the short story, read from a bisexual perspective, could have the potential to reach a larger audience in an experiential sense, and is thus more inclusive of different sexualities and erotic desires. Recognizing such representations in literature could further the process of acknowledgement, awareness, and positive understand in terms of a bisexual identity and fluid sexuality.

Conclusion

In literary theory, literary criticism and in the Western literary canon there is evidence of an exclusion or erasure of a bisexual perspective. This has also been the case within much of the written history of sexuality and theory relating to gender, sexuality and identity, until more recent date, where there has been a slight emergence of work concerning bisexuality. Much of this bisexual invisibility is a result of the current system of sexuality and identity which is of a dichotomous nature, meaning that sexual identity is divided into two opposite categories, heterosexual and homosexual/lesbian. In such a system bisexuality becomes invisible, because a bisexual individual's sexual behavior can be labeled as either heterosexual or same-sex based, depending on the gender of the particular sexual partner. Hall describes this tendency of a bisexual exclusion or erasure in the following extract:

> Although experiences that can be termed "bisexual" appear in works throughout literary history, they are rarely discussed from that perspective. Instead, explicit scenes or implicit evidence of erotic activity in which a single character is involved with members of both sex is usually considered as evidence indicating a primary sexual orientation that is either hetero- or homosexual (1).

This predicament presented by Hall emphasizes the injustice and erasure which bisexuality has been subjected to by much literary analysis. This thesis has developed a strong argumentation towards the need for and value of a bisexual literary theory, or (bi)literary theory. Also, I have sought to use a (bi)literary theory in more practical terms to show its significance and exceptionality as a critical tool in connection to literature. This thesis is based on a close reading of three important and canonical works, *Giovanni's Room*, *The Color Purple* and *Brokeback Mountain*, which all fit Hall's "works throughout literary history" category (1). The main focus has been on locating such "implicit scenes" and "implicit evidence" of bisexuality, and to proceed by rereading and analyzing these elements from a bisexual perspective. All three texts contain large amounts of bisexual elements, and through recognizing and analyzing this content, an entirely different and new level of meaning emerged. Nevertheless, the topic of bisexuality in these texts has been completely disregarded or ignored by most critics and readers alike.

Reading Bisexually: The importance and Significance of Acknowledging Bisexuality in *Brokeback Mountain*, *The Color Purple* and *Giovanni's Room*

Perhaps it is easier to label David, Giovanni and Ennis as homosexuals, than to explore the implications fluid desire and bisexuality have towards both the individual and society on a larger scale. This is also the case with Shug and the lesbian identity she so often has been prescribed. To recognize and examine this ambiguous and fluid sexuality in these fictional characters, one must simultaneously admit to the existence of bisexuality, and this is difficult as bisexuality has no set or valid position within the established systematization of sexuality. Both *Giovanni's Room* and *Brokeback Mountain* have tragic endings with death and unresolved emotions, and I think this could be read as symbolic of the underlying destructive forces of the current system of sexuality, and the erasure of bisexuality. The bisexual characters in these two stories bring awareness, through their painful experiences, to the dangers and potentially detrimental outcomes of forced conformity within such a system. Consequently, one could argue that these texts cast some form of negative judgment towards the strict categorical forces lodged within a binary understanding of sexuality. Interestingly, *The Color Purple* is the only text with a happy ending, and this could be because Shug is the only bisexual character who refuses conformity and suppression of her fluid desires. Moreover, despite the negative portrayal and attributes Shug is given by Walker in the book, there seems to be an ambiguity in this character's impact and significance in the book as a whole. On one hand, Shug is described as sexually promiscuous and provocative, and as someone who appears to be egocentric, conceited and even narcissistic. On the other hand, if *The Color Purple* is read from a bisexual perspective, then Shug becomes a strong, sexually free and fluid, and nonconformist character, and more importantly someone void of internalized homo/bi-phobia. In Chapter Two I suggested that through a bisexual perspective Shug could be read as a role model, and this positive aspect of Shug has not been recognized by other literary approaches to the book.

Giovanni's Room, *The Color Purple* and *Brokeback Mountain* have all been read, interpreted and established as important contributions to the Western literary canon, but the bisexual analysis in this thesis shows that there is an entire sexual and emotional perspective which has been left in the shadows. Also, this indicates that there most likely are many more acclaimed fictional books which could be subjected to a (bi)literary reading and thus have much more to contribute, especially to the fields of sexuality, identity and gender, than perhaps originally thought. This is not to say that all fictional books within the canon should

be submitted to bisexual analysis, as many books in the canon may not be suitable for this perspective, and also it could come across as a "mechanical" approach. Rather, the thought is to generate awareness to the existence of bisexuality, both in fictional worlds and the real world, and that by recognizing this fully, one is opening more doors and including a larger scope of sexuality as valid and legitimate. Thus rereading a suitable selection of canonical books from a bisexual perspective could have a profound effect on literature, critical theory and the Western literary canon, as well as bisexuality both as sexual behavior and as a legitimate identity.

Expanding the Western Literary Canon

Reading bisexually and establishing a (bi)literary theory is paramount in order to improve and expand the Western literary canon. As I have discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two this is an entity which has been under constant attack and revision as a result of demands from the marginalized. For instance, feminist and lesbian struggles for inclusion and representation have changed the canon extensively, and have increased the amount of texts which are considered important in the Western literary setting. Such struggles have opened for debate concerning what we read and thereby canonize, but I would argue that there is still a long way to go. Bisexuals as a marginalized group are not represented in this literary tradition, and this must be changed. It is always important to challenge the *status quo*, and especially with a perspective such as bisexuality which embodies more sexually comprehensive approach to literature. Including a bisexual perspective and a (bi)literary theory to the Western literary canon would be a step towards creating a more democratic literary entity.

Deconstructive Efforts Towards the Binary System of Sexuality

Throughout this thesis I have presented the existence of a general notion that there is something dangerous and disruptive about bisexuality. Herdt comments on this notion: "Bisexual fluidity may point to a paradigm of eroticism that suggests a broader field of arousal than is normative in western societies" ("Fluidity" 164). I think Herdt's quote reveals the importance of bisexuality in a larger sense, because this specific concept can be used to break with established systems of gender, identity and sexuality. However, it is more complex than that, as one begins to realize that this concept of bisexuality both deconstructs and upholds the hetero/homo binary simultaneously. In other words, bisexuality exists both inside

and outside of this system, and its role is indefinable. I would argue that to create a legitimate space for bisexuality within this system, for instance as a third term, solves nothing. Rather one should attempt to leave any such categorical and identity-based thinking concerning sexuality. However, it should be said that most people are colored by this sexual binarism, as it has become an internalized "truth" in the Western world.

My own analysis throughout this thesis also follows this strict sexual binary, whether I like it or not, because the (bi)literary analysis still focuses on gender as an indicator of sexuality and sexual identity. It is difficult to break away from such thought, and this could be evidence that the notion I have presented of bisexuality as a utopian state of gender blindness, is in fact only wishful thinking. Can gender and sexuality ever be separated? Can sexuality ever become something which is simply fluid, changing, and without restrictive labels? Human beings seem to have a natural tendency, or obsession, with labels and categories, and that which cannot be easily identified and labeled becomes a dangerous element which becomes subjected to erasure or ridicule. Bisexuality is ambiguous and fluid by definition and thus it has the potential to reveal a larger sense of sexuality, as it can be used in referral to sexuality in general, regardless of sex, gender and identity. Therefore it is important to remember to not only use bisexuality as a strict new sexual identity, but also as a perspective and view from elsewhere, to potentially alter and open the current ideas about sexuality.

Bisexuality in Literature: Creating Political Awareness and Representation

By exposing the bisexual perspective in fictional literature I hope to have shown the urgency and value of such projects, and that this can become one step on the way to understanding and respecting bisexuals and their experiences. As I have discussed earlier in the thesis, bisexuals have become victims of a phenomena named biphobia, where bisexuals are reduced to an alienated and illegitimate group. Bisexuals are not accepted into the normative heterosexual world, but they are not anymore welcome into the gay and lesbian community. This double discrimination has cast many bisexuals into a situation of displacement, as there is a lack of common arenas for bisexuals. Often bisexuality is included by name in lesbian and gay organizations, but usually only as "an other" amongst categories such as queer, transsexual and transgendered, always subordinate to the gay and lesbian contents. The bisexual-label has almost become a bad word, which many do not want to be associated with, and this must change. Bisexuals must fight, as most marginalized groups have in the past, to gain acknowledgment and representation, and to become a legitimate and recognizable entity in

society. By reading bisexually, one is simultaneously authenticating bisexuality as a sexual identity with validity and rights. As I have stated earlier in this thesis, to simply establish bisexuality as a legitimate sexual identity might not be a drastic improvement, as it truly does not solve the current systematization of sexuality. However, this seems to be the only correct direction considering the state of sexuality, and the need for acceptance and recognition amongst bisexuals as a marginalized group in society.

Kinsey has made a comment about sexuality which I find enlightening and inspiring in relation to the topic of this thesis: "The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. The sooner we learn this concerning human sexual behavior the sooner we shall reach a sound understanding of the realities of sex" (qtd. in Fox 8). I believe that reading bisexually is another step along the way towards sexual tolerance. Using literature to represent and to expose the urgency and value of a bisexual experience is imperative. Literature can be a forceful weapon in the struggle for recognition and inclusion, as it can reach a large audience on a personal level. Great literature has the potential to challenge our preconceptions and prejudices, and perhaps in a more personal and persuasive manner, as reading is an experience of the individual. Recognizing and establishing a bisexual perspective in literature generates an arena for bisexually-identified individuals: An arena where one's emotional and sexual experience are represented, and which can invite personal epiphanic moments, give comfort or just be something to relate to. Not everyone identifies with being *either* straight *or* gay/lesbian, and a bisexual identity may not be the ultimate answer, it could cater to some of those individuals who feel uncomfortable with the current set binary, sexual identities. A bisexual perspective to literature offers a view from elsewhere, and has a more inclusive potential, as this approach has the potential to relate to many shapes and forms of sexuality, sex and gender.

Another important tendency which surfaced while reading these books from a bisexual approach is that homosexuality and lesbian elements remain vital in the stories. In fact the characters that represent same-sex sexuality are essential, because it is through and in comparison to these characters that the bisexual characters become visible. The bisexual characters appear more fluid and prone to other-sex sexuality, and this is emphasized *in comparison* to the gay or lesbian characters such as Jack and Celie. *Giovanni's Room* appears slightly different as both main characters, David and Giovanni, could be read and interpreted from a bisexual perspective, but in line with the other two texts, the bisexual elements become visible and evident through a comparison with the elements of homosexuality also present in

these two characters. In other words, a (bi)literary approach in relation to the three texts, recognizes, validates, and analyzes hetero/homosexuality as well, establishing that these are important components to understanding and interpreting sexuality. A bisexual approach does not erase other perspectives, rather it emphasizes and adds a new level of complexity, and this is important as the point is not to destroy other literary approaches and interpretations of literature, but rather to contribute a view from elsewhere. Hall is of a similar opinion:

> And in recognizing the unique interests of the bisexual community, as well as the numerous ways such interests intersect with those of gay and lesbian communities, we can come to a better understanding of social history and the rich heritage of literary traditions and representations that counter heterosexism and challenge the narrow, tradition-bound, and oppressive categories through which society identifies and thereby judges people (5).

It is important to keep in mind that in a bisexual struggle towards recognition, inclusion and representation, both in literature and real life, it is not the gay/lesbian community which is the enemy, but rather the socially and culturally constructed norms, prejudices and the oppressive system of categorization. Therefore it becomes crucial to understand a (bi)literary theory as far from restrictive, exclusive and confined to one sexual identity. In fact, this approach should be understood as receptive, as it takes into account the binary system of sexuality as well as the possibility and value of a range of other sexual options. In other words, this approach can teach us to read more openly, as well as it could contribute to a constant questioning of our internalized preconceptions as readers. Reading bisexually is paramount in the process of representing and acknowledging bisexuals as a marginalized community, as this can potentially increase positive focus on the bisexual experience of fluid sex and love, both in literature and real life.

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