"In the dark camp," Or: Straight with a (Pastoral) Twist: American Western Masculinity in *Brokeback Mountain*

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Abstract:
Tracing both the fascination and the discomfort that tend to engulf a mainstream audience confronted with "Brokeback Mountain," this article contends that the major source of controversy concerning both the short story and the movie resides in a yet unacknowledged generic crisis rather than in the scarcely innovative postulation of a gay American Western masculinity as such. In a line of reasoning that explores the potentials of generic camp, this crisis is shown to result from a subversion of the Western itself whose conventions have been infiltrated and thoroughly undermined by the sentimental homoeroticism of an altogether different genre, the pastoral elegy. In "Brokeback Mountain," then, this camp invasion of normative generic traditions eventually culminates in the polarisation of two dissimilar stereotypes of masculinity, namely that of the anti-sentimental American Western cowboy, Ennis del Mare, and that of the sentimental pastoral shepherd, Jack Twist.

1 And if you can't stand it, you have got to fix it. A chief misjudgement concerning "Brokeback Mountain",[1] both the short story and the movie, probably lies in the widespread preconception that the queering of the cowboy in the American Western tradition is unanimously considered an unprecedented subversion. In fact, this tradition has long been invaded by gay characters, both subtly homoerotic or overtly camp.[2] Thus, both the fascination as well as the discomfort that engulf a mainstream, predominantly heteronormative, audience confronted with "Brokeback Mountain" must reside in some yet unacknowledged generic crisis. Suppose then: What if this generic crisis results from the undermining force of a totally different tradition? What if the American Western tradition and its model masculinities merely serve as stand-ins that in due course turn out to be insufficiently equipped to completely reduce, and thus tame, the emotional impact of a more overtly homoerotic, and therefore much more patrolled genre? In other words, what if "Brokeback Mountain" first and foremost requires to be understood as a pastoral elegy? Evidently, this generic viewpoint will do better justice to the short story both in terms of its bucolic settings as well as its examination of the dynamics of love and loss. Furthermore, in

[1] Quotations from "Brokeback Mountain", the short story, are taken from Proulx's collection *Close Range. Wyoming Stories*. Quotations from the film, respectively the screenplay, will be indicated by a note referring to all the screenwriters, Proulx, McMurtry and Ossana.

[2] Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet*, for example, discusses the American Western masculinity of late-1960s buddy films, in particular *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), arguing that their depiction of the cowboy permanently "calls into question the innocence of this ultimate masculine ideal" (81), even to the degree of an implanted fear, a homosexual panic, whose angst-ridden anticipations predict the erasure of the "difference between the cowboy hero and the faggot on Forty-second Street" (ibid.). More recently, the masculinity of the cowboy has developed into a camp cliché, especially in queer movies such as *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994).

contrast to other rigorously homosocial genres, such as the American Western but also the seafaring tradition, the pastoral elegy is generically predetermined to suggest a homoerotic subtext, or connotation, exactly because the intimacy between men within this genre is so exceptionally intense that homosocial and homosexual bonding become virtually indistinguishable. By evoking the pastoral tradition, "Brokeback Mountain" testifies to much more than just a homosexual presence in the realm of straight American Western masculinity: It invests this masculinity with both a subversive sexuality and a generic sentimentality, thus exposing what Judith Butler calls "a foreclosure of possibility which produces a domain of homosexuality understood as unlivable passion and ungrievable loss" (135). In other words, the pastoral elegy forces the American Western tradition to admit to the fact that not only is there a homosexual attachment but it is both livable and grievable. This admittance turns out to be indispensable, for it enables us to further examine the short story's sentimental investment. And this examination is all the more necessary, since the sentimental investment within both the short story and the movie is by no means unambiguous. In fact, it polarises the positions of the increasingly gay-identified sentimentality of a pastoral shepherd, Jack Twist, and the tenaciously straight-identified anti-sentimentality of an American Western cowboy, Ennis del Mar.

2 Alluding to a traditional triangular structure, the short story creates two dichotomous spheres, the pastoral space containing the homosexual bond between Ennis and Jack, and the urban space containing the heterosexual bond between Ennis and Alma, or respectively, between Jack and Lureen. In accordance with generic conventions, the pastoral space offers the resources of sublime nature, thus forming a locus amoenus that eventually culminates in the idea of a present-day arcadia not yet ruined by the inevitable experience of loss. And still, even in the very beginning the delineation of the pastoral space is provided with the undertones of doom:

> During the day Ennis looked across a great gulf and sometimes saw Jack, a small dot moving across a high meadow as an insect moves across a tablecloth; Jack, in his dark camp, saw Ennis as night fire, a red spark on the huge black mass of mountain. (Proulx 256-257)

Plotwise, this passage already anticipates the future estrangement of Ennis and Jack with both its portentous reference to the "great gulf" between them and its mutually telling comparisons. More significantly, however, the allusion to the "dark camp" contains a double entendre that discloses the pastoral idyll to be literary, indeed fictitious. After all, many contemporary representations of the pastoral genre include strategies of camp that playfully evoke an

artificial refuge ultimately unavailable to everyone, including both cowboys and shepherds.[3]

3 These representations deliberately play with the wilful confusion of the literal and the literary, thus aiming to extract what Eve Sedgwick calls a "surplus beauty" ("Paranoid" 150) from the camp tendency to take the allegory for real. Following Sedgwick, pastoral camp can be seen to pursue precisely this, the mobilisation of reparative resources:

> The desire of a reparative impulse […] is additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self. To view camp as, among other things, the communal, historically dense exploration of a variety of reparative practices is to do better justice to many of t he defining elements of classic camp performances […]. (ibid. 149-150).

In "Brokeback Mountain," the awareness of the discrepancy between the allegory and reality is deceptively foreclosed from the start. Both the short story and the movie initially evoke the misleading notion that these two spaces, the sphere of the allegory and the sphere of reality, may indeed be co-existent. Paradoxically, reality even seems to surpass the pastoral promise, offering sexual pleasures whose fulfilment would certainly transgress the strictly patrolled limits of the pastoral. And thus, it is somewhat delightfully camp to learn that after their first sexual encounter both Ennis and Jack "knew how it would go for the rest of the summer, sheep be damned" (Proulx 260). Simultaneously, however, the compatibility between allegory and reality is acutely threatened by a rapid intensification of the mechanisms of homosocial order, whose omnipresence is made manifest both physically, in the policing gaze of Joe Aguirre, and psychologically, in Ennis' disturbing account of the literal castration, and brutal murder, of an elderly gay man presumably conducted by Ennis' father.

4 In fact, these two examples of homosocial policing accurately illustrate the twofold threat occurring with a lack of awareness concerning the discrepancy between reality and allegory, because in "Brokeback Mountain" the literal unpredictably intrudes on the literary and the literary uncannily turns into the literal. Consequently, the resources of pastoral camp undergo an increasingly depressing revaluation, both in terms of a reparative quest for a palimpsest romance whose tenor becomes gradually more melancholy and forlorn and in

[3] The link between camp and the pastoral genre has already been put forward by Susan Sontag in her famous "Notes on Camp," first published in 1964. Although Sontag initially argues that "nothing in nature can be campy […]. Rural camp is still man-made, and most campy objects are urban" (55), she nevertheless admits to the fact that "they [campy objects] have a serenity - or a naïveté - which is equivalent of pastoral." (ibid.). Thus, Sontag herself proposes a commonality between camp objects and the pastoral genre that eventually puts her first claim about the absence of camp in nature into perspective. In other words, even though nature, according to Sontag, is essentially un-camp, its representations, including the literary representations of the pastoral genre, may well be marked by the extravagances of this particular mode of perception. More recently, depictions of pastoral camp can be observed in the works of authors such as Alan Hollinghurst, whose AIDS-elegies make vast use of camp in order to simultaneously claim and question traditional routes to grief.

terms of a paranoid alertness towards discovery and disclosure whose impact eventually initiates the intra-generic fall of the pastoral elegy - with all its dynamics of love and loss now looming over Ennis and Jack like a dim self-fulfilling prophecy. Positioned between these two forces, reparation and paranoia, Proulx's use of pastoral camp indeed grows dark.[4] In contrast to other contemporary representations of pastoral camp, then, "Brokeback Mountain" illustrates how the characters' incapacity to deal with the incoherence between the literal and the literary denies them the comforting potential of pastoral camp to the uncanny degree that the pastoral elegy is suddenly reinvested with an outwardly uncamp, in fact dead-serious, and thus all the more dangerously melodramatic, (anti-) sentimentality whose impact is especially noxious, since it exposes and intensifies the increasing divergence of two very different masculinities and their conflicting tendencies towards both paranoia and reparation.

5 Ennis' initiation into paranoid processes has been thoroughly accomplished right from the start, beginning with a Freudian landmark, the fear of castration, that is already inherently connoted in his conspicuously abbreviated first name. Bluntly spoken, then, not only does the initial addition of a voiced plosive produce a far more common first name, namely (D)ennis, but furthermore, one might just as well imagine another preceding initial, a voiceless plosive, whose omission eventually suggests that castration has already occurred, especially since the emasculating effect of this very omission results in an audible remainder that comes precariously close, phonetically, to /einəs/. Easily the most traumatic incidence of a literary, indeed metaphorical, fear suddenly turning literal in "Brokeback Mountain," the internalised threat of castration looms over Ennis ever since his father took him to see the corpse of Earl, an elderly gay man, whose violated body apparently had been on display for quite a long time as an affirmation of the Symbolic order and as a rite of passage for boys to visit on their route to proper manhood. Unsurprisingly, this dire socialisation turns out to have been perversely successful, for when Ennis reveals his traumatic experience to Jack the night of their reunion, his paranoia instantly stirs up the policing presence of the Father, literally his father:

> "I was what, nine years old and they found Earl dead in a irrigation ditch. They'd took a tire iron to him, spurred him up, drug him around by his dick until it pulled off, just bloody pulp. What the tire iron done looked like pieces a burned tomatoes all over

[4] Sedgwick distinguishes between two camp practices, a reparative imagination that aims at amelioration and the healing of traumatic damage as well as a paranoid imagination that aims at the anticipation and disclosure of the workings of heteronormativity, including its classified gender performances. By using the term "dark camp," I suggest a continuity of these two forces, reparation and paranoia, albeit with regards to a different, a previous, Sedgwickean distinction, namely that between the sentimental and the anti-sentimental. "Dark camp," as applied in "Brokeback Mountain," thus marks a sinister variation of the original distinction, for it eventually depicts both a reparative sentimentality whose struggle for amelioration gives way to constant dissatisfaction and frustration and a paranoid anti-sentimentality whose gender performances, in this case that of the American Western masculinity, no longer anticipate the heteronormative workings in society in order to subvert and disclose them, but indeed in order not to be disclosed by them.

> him, nose tore down from skiddin on gravel." "You seen this?" "Dad made sure I seen it. Took me to see it. Me and K.E. Dad laughed about it. Hell, for all I know he done the job. If he was alive and was to put his head in that door right now you bet he'd go get his tire iron." (Proulx 268)

In the course of the short story, it becomes increasingly apparent that Ennis' subjection to the law of the father, the Symbolic order, is indeed too profound to be completely cast off. In fact, the conflict that results from his feelings for Jack on the one hand, and his persistent need to sustain a straight-identified self-conception on the other hand, in time builds up an escalating psychic structure that drives him further and further into the bottomless pit of paranoia. Many references in the story comment on this development.

6 However, probably no passage is more adequate to illustrate his paranoid condition than this excerpt from the screenplay of the film, written by Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana. The scene depicts one of the later reunions of Jack and Ennis on Brokeback Mountain. Ennis wonders:

> ENNIS You ever get the feelin', I don't know, when you're in town, and someone looks at you, suspicious … like he knows. And then you get out on the pavement, and everyone, looking at you, and maybe they all know too? (Proulx, McMurtry, and Ossana 71)

Ennis thus learns to perceive his environment through the lenses of paranoia. Permanently on his guard against the threats of discovery and disclosure, he exhausts himself in anticipation without ever realising that paranoia can never offer adequate protection against discovery and disclosure, not only because the paranoid condition may well turn out to inflict a more crucial and self-destructive damage on him than any exterior menace possibly could, but also because even the most exhaustive sense of anticipation must sooner or later fail to defend his open secret. Discovery and disclosure may lurk behind the most trifling object such as a handwritten note on a fishing rod. The vicious crux of paranoia, of course, lies in the fact that its failure inevitably leads to its headlong intensification, rather than to the reconsideration of paranoid practices themselves. Within this uncannily twisted logic, therefore, it is always the paranoid who fails, never paranoia itself. The sad climax of this development can be observed in Ennis' perception of Jack's death. Whereas the movie version of this event introduces a moment of ambiguity by including the snapshot of a gay bashing scene, the short story essentially depicts it as an affirmation of Ennis' paranoia. Learning about the accident, Ennis' instinctive reaction is unambiguous: "No, he thought, they got him with the tire iron" (Proulx 277). Prior to any other affective response, paranoia reinforces a subjection to the law of the father, a behaviour that is doubly evident when this subjection is later repeated in the presence of another father figure, John C. Twist, who denies Ennis the right to grieve over his lost

lover, even at the expense of thwarting the last will of his own son.

7 Still, however sad his condition, on must not blind oneself to the fact that Ennis' paranoia and his incapability to forsake a straight-identified self-image simultaneously lead him to perform exactly those mechanisms of homosocial policing that shape the sources of his own suffering. In fact, Ennis' will to submission steadily results in ever more hostile, and violent, expressions of heterosexual self-pity and homophobic anti-sentimentality. As a straight-identified cowboy whose same-sex desire exemplifies an endemic crisis of American Western masculinity itself, Ennis indeed turns out to be a prototype of contemporary attributions of (anti-) sentimentality. As Eve Sedgwick has pointed out, the category of the sentimental is subject to permanent transition "from its origins when it circulated free among genders, through the feminocentric Victorian version, to the twentieth-century one with its complex and distinctive relation to the male body" (*Epistemology* 150). Penetrating present discourses on masculinity, the impact of sentimentality turns out to be inescapably paradoxical, for it characterises and questions straight masculinity at the same time. As a result, the relation between heterosexual masculinity and sentimentality has become one of excessive denial, or anti-sentimentality, whose violent shadow projections - despite being utterly sentimental themselves - are directed against two traditional stereotypes of sentimental ascription, namely women and gay men. Sedgwick consequently identifies the most urgent dilemma in the fact

> that since anti-sentimentality itself becomes, in its structure, the very engine and expression of modern sentimental relations, to enter into the discourse of sentimentality at any point or with any purpose is almost inevitably to be caught up in a momentum of essentially scapegoating attribution […]. It would hardly be surprising if gay men, like all women, were a main target of [these] scapegoating projections - viciously sentimental attributions of a vitiated sentimentality. (*Epistemology* 154/145)

The victims of Ennis' sentimental battle for anti-sentimentality are thus easily made out. First, his treatment of Alma, his wife, testifies to "the astonishing proportion of male violence done on separate wives, ex-wives, and ex-girlfriends [which] seems sanctioned and guided as much as reflected by the flood of books and movies in which such violence seems an expression not of the macho personality but of the maudlin." (ibid., 145). In fact, Alma's suffering at times appears to be shamefully neglected in both the short story and the movie, whose significant examinations of homosociality nevertheless tend to repeat the homosocial exclusion of women.

8 It is up to the reader, respectively the viewer, to imagine what her account of the story would look like, even though we do get a pretty good idea of her increasing desolation when Ennis corners his ex-wife in the kitchen of her new partner Bill:

> "Don't lie, don't try to fool me, Ennis. I know what it means. Jack Twist? Jack Nasty. You and him -" She'd overstepped his line. He seized her wrist; tears sprang and rolled [whose?!], a dish clattered. "Shut up," he said. "Mind your own business. You don't know nothin about it." "I'm going to yell for Bill." "You fuckin go right ahead. Go on and fuckin yell. I'll make him eat the fuckin floor and you too." (Proulx 271)

Judging from the above, one is indeed inclined to wonder whose tears spring and roll in this scenario, the tears of the ex-wife, or perchance, as Sedgwick puts it, "[t]he sacred tears of the heterosexual man" (*Epistemology* 145)? We do not know. We do know, however, that in the movie Ennis' frantic fits of rage often tend to be accompanied by silent sobbing, especially in the scene that marks his last meeting with Jack in their rapidly disintegrating pastoral sanctuary.

9 Secondly, then, the increasingly gay-identified Jack becomes the target of Ennis' shadow projections, especially since Ennis considers the melancholy sexual adventures of his lover both a narcissistic insult and a homosocial transgression. The covert conflict, long seething underneath, suddenly surfaces during what has by now become a pastoral routine rather than a pastoral pleasure, and develops into a final showdown, to borrow from the language of the American Western tradition, between Ennis' paranoid anti-sentimentality and Jack's reparative sentimentality. Learning about Jack's Mexican escapades, Ennis' need to sustain a straight-identified self-image produces a homophobic scapegoating of sentimentality whose force exceeds everything that has already come to pass. His fury grows out of control, as the following passage evidently demonstrates:

> "You been a Mexico, Jack?" Mexico was the place. He'd heard. He was cutting the fence now, trespassing in the shoot-em zone. "Hell yes, I been. Where's the fuckin 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)

This threat marks the final surge of anti-sentimentality before its predictable, and inexorable, collapse. And despite all the soothing and calming that he will later offer his shattered lover, Jack immediately knows how to respond to it. In fact, his melancholy reply responds to more than just a verbal threat. It responds to a pseudo-liberal attitude assumed by heteronormative readers, or cinemagoers, who suppose themselves non-judgmental and unbiased, while being over-involved in the allegedly heroic impact of the all-masculine battle against sentimentality. It responds to a frequently unnoticed form of bias that considers a sexual attachment between men a welcome narrative variation, and an emotional attachment between them an unmanly, somewhat pathetic, shamelessness. At last, it responds to an American Western masculinity whose generic performance of anti-sentimentality falsely claims to have completely reduced,

and thus erased, the ultimately irreducible impact of homoerotic sentimentality associated with the masculinity of the pastoral elegy.

10 Jack's poignant and touching response to the tenaciously straight-identified Ennis culminates in a plain assertion: "I wish I knew how to quit you!" (Proulx 276). And without doubt, this wish is exemplary of a more extensive resistance against a heteronormative regime Jack himself can never entirely dissociate from. On a superficial glance, Jack is thus forced to lead two lives: Inwardly, he assumes a palimpsest existence that safeguards the homoerotic sentimentality associated with the pastoral shepherd, and outwardly, he takes up a surface existence that displays the heteronormative anti-sentimentality indicative of the American Western cowboy. However, at a closer look one may well detect that the relation between inward and outward existence, between palimpsest and surface, is constantly destabilised, indeed tellingly twisted, by a number of dissident interventions. And as we will soon realise, their spontaneous and impulsive rebuffs of heteronormativity do not primarily protect his feelings for Ennis as such, but indeed the fragile resources of his reparative sentimentality in general and, consequently, their autonomy from heteronormative infiltration. Put simply, he defends his sentimental view of Ennis both against the compulsory regime of heteronormativity and, as a consequence, even against Ennis himself.

11 Returning to imminent father figures, one can easily observe that Jack's socialisation differs immensely from Ennis', especially in terms of a noticeable absence of paternal influence. Jack points out that "his father had been a pretty well known bullrider years back but kept all his secrets to himself, never gave Jack a word of advice […]" (Proulx 258). This remark subsequently receives a sexual connotation by Ennis who puns on a double entendre when he indicates that "the kind of riding that interested him lasted longer than eight seconds and had some point to it" (ibid.). Misleadingly parenthetical, this anecdote alludes to two significant preconditions that make all the difference for Jack: First, his autonomy from the Father, literally his father, enables him to resist, at times even to exploit and subvert, the regime of the Symbolic order; and secondly, he grows up in the presence of a masculine, however altogether non-paranoid, sentimentality, implicitly sexual, whose secrecy is protected not so much against discovery and disclosure, but against an outside disenchantment that threatens to absorb and infiltrate the sphere of private detachment. At this point, one can already anticipate that the structure of Jack's open secret will diverge vastly from the paranoid-ridden closet internalised by Ennis. Jack, then, learns how to resist the demands of substitute father figures such as Joe Aguirre, whose working instructions concerning the herding of the flock he boycotts instantaneously, and L.D. Newsome, his

father-in-law, whose unrestrained outbursts of patriarchal despotism, as the movie unmistakably shows, are at length successfully countered by Jack's disobedience. From the very onset he is identified as a trouble-maker, an unpredictable source of irritation, to the unhindered progress of patriarchy in the Newsome household, a fact which in due course empowers him to subvert and exploit its heteronormative foundations:

> "Listen. I'm thinking, tell you what, if you and me had a little ranch together, little cow and calf operation, your horses, it'd be some sweet life. […] I got it figured, got this plan, Ennis, how we can do it, you and me. 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)

Jack is thus willing to dissociate himself from the compulsions of a heteronormative matrix. He would perform an act of detachment, a desertion. Faced with the problem of the naysayer, he even realises that the act of saying no, as lately proclaimed by Lee Edelman[5], for example, will easily fall short of a scope of action that goes beyond a performative gesture of rejection, if it fails to designate a space outside heteronormativity.

12 Within his sentimental imagination, the space outside is, of course, the pastoral idyll. Unaware of the discrepancy between the literary and the literal, Jack is thus relentlessly moving towards dark camp. As a consequence, he initially appears to follow an escalating psychic structure as self-destructive as Ennis', since his reparative sentimentality leads him to pursue the myth of an original compatibility between allegory and reality, even as the gap between them grows, steadily and inexorably. And indeed, Jack is to pass all the traditional stages of pastoral-elegiac suffering on his route to permanent frustration and death, thus satisfying an obligatory Freudian register including, among others, the loss of the love object, the pursuit of substitutions, however deficient, and the refusal to retract from a libidinal attachment to the degree of its incorporation, as implied in the touching picture of the two shirts: Ennis' shirt "stolen by Jack and hidden […] inside Jack's own shirt, the pair like two

[5] In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman creates the latest specimen of nay-saying, the *sinthomo*sexual, whose independent death-driven existence eventually "forsakes all causes, all social action, all responsibility for a better tomorrow or for the perfection of social forms" (101), performing against them an "act of repudiating the social, of stepping, *of trying to step* beyond the future and the snare of images keeping us always in its thrall." (ibid.; emphasis added). Rhetorically impressive and insightful in its condemnation of futurism, Edelman nevertheless fails to designate a space where "no future" can be realised, even lived, with the exception, of course, of its paradoxical fulfilment in literal death. *Sinthomo*sexuality, then, is itself a performative gesture, an enduring attempt to step out of heteronormativity, never realised, and thus certainly no less illusory, or naïve, than any other form of escapism. The sinthomosexual's claim to the death drive, not unlike the shepherd's claim to the pastoral idyll, imagines a social outside, both literarily detached, and nevertheless literally uninhabitable. Indeed both, the *sinthomo*sexual and the shepherd, may have been looking for answers in all the wrong places, for if there is no social space outside the heteronormative matrix, no homosexual space prior to homosociality, then the impact of this disastrous social formation may perhaps best be alleviated by a psychic investment, deliberately and intentionally artificial, of beauty, theatricality, and even sentimentality, that knowingly disrupts this social formation from within, temporarily and locally. Camp, however, is a precondition of this investment. And thus, the *sinthomo*sexual and the shepherd both seriously claim what they might as well playfully subvert, namely the death drive and the pastoral elegy.

skins, one inside the other, two in one" (Proulx 281). Sedgwick comments on these stereotypical depictions of gay sentimentality, pointing out that although "a very specific association of gay male sexuality with tragic early death is recent, […] the structure of its articulation is densely grounded in centuries of homoerotic and homophobic intertextuality" (*Epistemology* 144). She sustains her view in an extensive footnote that refers, among others, "to Virgilian shepherds, […] to elegiac poetry by Milton, Tennyson, Whitman, and Housman, as well as to the Necrology of Vito Russo's Celluloid Closet" (ibid.). Her argument thus exemplifies the omnipresence of a mode of perception, a visibility, that ultimately counters the effort to foreclose and denounce homosexuality as an unliveable passion, and an ungrieveable loss, exactly because "the underpinnings here have long been in place for both a gay sentimentality and […] a sentimental appropriation by the large culture of male homosexuality as spectacle" (ibid.). One might as well say, therefore, that to the degree that "Brokeback Mountain" evokes and reiterates the gay sentimental tradition of the pastoral elegy with both its homoerotic as well as homophobic undertones, this tradition is reinscribed, inerasably and irreducibly, into the normative masculinity of the American Western tradition. And thus, whereas Ennis' paranoid anti-sentimentality fails to shelter him from discovery and disclosure, a failure that is made manifest in the last uncanny incident of a literary threat turning literal, namely a closet whose open-secret structure has long been penetrated both by his ex-wife and the Twist family, Jack's reparative sentimentality succeeds in safeguarding a detachment whose aloof privacy, prior to secrecy, escapes an intrusion of the heteronormative regime.

13 The endings of both the short story and its adaptation affirm the unresolved incompatibility between the masculinity of the American Western on the one hand, and that of the pastoral elegy on the other. In the closing scene we watch Ennis uttering the portentous performative "Jack, I swear -" (Proulx 283). This speech act has often been viewed as a substitute wedding vow, especially by cinemagoers who have immediately before been informed of the wedding of Ennis' daughter, Alma junior. If this interpretation is accurate, its implications however must be set straight, for they tend to be absorbed in the melodramatic emotionalism of the ending. Ennis, despite his alleged catharsis, still attempts to sanction his feelings for Jack with an echo that alludes to the rituals of heteronormativity. And it is because of this compromised attempt that the narrative voice reacts with a nonconformist, indeed a periperformative[6], speech act, whose dissidence once again rejects the

[6] In "Around the Performative: Periperformative Vicinities in Nineteenth-Century Narrative," Sedgwick uses the periperformative to counter the Althusserian concept of interpellation, arguing that "to disinterpellate from a

heteronormative absorption of pastoral detachment, for Jack, we are unmistakably reminded of, "had never asked him to swear anything and was himself not the swearing kind" (Proulx 283). In the end, "Brokeback Mountain" thus displays two different keys of camp: dark in terms of plot, since its characters cannot evade the generic part assigned to them by two divergent masculinities, the American Western and the pastoral one; and subversive as well as ameliorating in terms of genre itself, since it is precisely the strict performance of these parts that finally undermines the masculinity of the American Western tradition and invests it with a subversive homoeroticism with regards to both sexuality and sentimentality. And thus, it is the short story itself, rather than its characters Ennis and Jack, that ultimately "moved the herd to new pasture, shifted the camp" (Proulx 258) right towards the very heart of heteronormativity.

performative scene will usually require, not another explicit performative nor simply the negative of one, but the nonce, referential act of the periperformative" (70).

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