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Representations of Homophobic Violenceⁱ in Anglophone Caribbean Literature

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Abstract

Diasporic writers in England, Canada and the United States who have explored the theme of alternative sexuality, realistically portray how homophobic violence in the Caribbean region arises from heterocentric and heterosexist attitudes that are ingrained in institutionalized discourses of Church, home and school. Representations in the literary discourse show how these agents of socialization bear culpability for the ways in which they influence society's silences, adherence to doctrine, masculinist views, patriarchal hegemonies and peer pressure that contribute to the persecution of the male homosexual. The paper mainly explores depictions in prose fiction of the homosexual *youth* being the victim of effeminophobia and homophobia, and the dire consequences that ensue. *Aelred's Sin* authored by Trinidad and Tobago's Lawrence Scott is a focal text under analysis, along with his short story "Chameleon". Works by his compatriot, Shani Mootoo, and also by H. Nigel Thomas and Patricia Powell—writers originally from St. Vincent and Jamaica, respectively—give support to how gender-based violence occurs against *non-heterosexuals* in the Anglophone Caribbean, an aspect that is usually overlooked in discourses on domestic abuse, for example. Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and "Lemon Scent"; Thomas's *Spirits in the Dark*; Powell's *A Small Gathering of Bones* and *The Pagoda* are explored in the paper, along with a short story "Baby" by another writer originating from Jamaica, Makeda Silvera, who portrays Caribbean-born characters in a foreign setting. Vraisemblance and irony regarding the topic of homophobic violence are seen to be evident in these selected novels and short stories.

Key words: hegemonies, effeminophobia, homophobia, vraisemblance, irony

Introduction

Homophobic attitudes and practices in the Anglophone Caribbean stem from underlying and ingrained heterocentrism and heterosexism. Heteronormative discourses of Church, State, home and school are the underpinnings of the society's prejudicial and discriminatory views and actions against non-heterosexuals. Violence—whether in the domestic or public sphere—is at times a direct consequence, taking the form of verbal and/or physical abuse. Literary discourse from the diaspora written and published in England, the United States and Canada has employed realism to poignantly portray this plight of sexual minorities.

Homophobia, the fear and hatred of homosexuals, is a term that was coined during the modern gay liberation movement that burgeoned in 1969 with the Stonewall Riots in New York. Rachel Alsop, Annette Fitzsimons and Kathleen Lennon in their discussion of gay men as subordinated masculinities observe that homophobia is interrelated with hegemonic masculinity and heterosexism (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon 2002, 146). The heterosexual male is considered to be the “real man” (147) and the homosexual is deemed to be feminine because he is perceived to be “lacking in masculinity” because, they note, “masculinity is constructed in opposition to femininity” (143).

Stephen M. Whitehead cites Carl Jung's essentialist and archetypal theories on gender in which effeminate men and “mannish” women typify a psychical and gender imbalance (Whitehead 2002, 26–29). Jung was a disciple of Sigmund Freud, and Freud theorized that the young boy in the pre-Oedipal stage of sexual development views the world through the eyes of his mother, but when having to identify with the father “has to come to terms with having seen his father through his mother's eyes and therefore as an object of desire. Desire for the father and therefore men generally is seen as feminine desire and therefore has to be quelled” (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon 145). Hence, the suggestion is that the homosexual transgresses gender, sexual and social taboos. Additionally, society views homosexuality as antithetical to the institution of the family and the perpetuation of human civilization. Predating the influence of psychoanalytic and sociological studies on homophobic beliefs and the coining of the word “homophobia”, however, would be scriptural texts in both Christian and non-Christian traditions that vilify homosexuality and which for most persons proscribe the condition as sinful and immoral.

Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon cite Sylvia Walby's multi-causal model of patriarchy in which six determinant structures underpin patriarchal relations: “paid work, housework, sexuality, culture, violence and the state” (73). Relevant to this paper are particularly sexuality and violence—or the threat thereof—as they pertain to male aggression against lesbians, or suspected lesbians. Consequently, the construction of femininity is neither more secure nor less policed than the construction of masculinity; for example, as Judith Halberstam says, tomboyishness in adolescent and adult females is not acceptable and, as Gill Clarke suggests about the fate of some women who partake in male-dominated sports, homophobia also plays a part in the construction of femininity (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon, 163).

Therefore, there are gay men and lesbians who are forced into lives of compulsory heterosexuality, closetedness and duplicity to avoid persecution. Yet, in demanding heteronormativity and in producing homophobia, heterosexual hegemonies ironically betray a fragile control that is challenged and subverted, as evidenced by the defiance of the codes of marriage and an ideal masculinity that is unattainable and feels threatened by homosexuality, transvestism and lesbianism, for instance.

Secular laws, in tandem with religious ones, legislate against non-heterosexuals in the Anglophone Caribbean. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago—as in Jamaica—homosexuality is illegal. Sodomy—whether consensual or not, whether it occurs between homosexuals or heterosexuals—is unlawful under the Sexual Offences Act.ⁱⁱ Attorney Dana Seetahal has noted that the Equal Opportunities Act “protects persons from discrimination by reason of status”; but “while ‘status’ includes things such as sex, race, origin, religion, and disability, it does not include sexual orientation.”ⁱⁱⁱ In addition, she cites Section 8 of the Immigration Act, which excludes certain classes of persons who are non-residents and non-citizens from entering the country, such as homosexuals, criminals, drug addicts, beggars, those who may commit a treasonous act, the disabled, and those suffering from a contagious disease. Therefore, Seetahal observes how “disabled persons and homosexuals are equated with criminals and traitors.” Heather Smyth identifies M. Jacqui Alexander’s analysis of how certain Caribbean states, through legislation, get involved in sexual politics. Alexander brings together “Caribbean nationalism and sexuality” and shows how the Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago “naturalize heterosexuality by criminalizing lesbian and gay sex, thereby revising the terms of citizenship to exclude lesbians and gays” (Smyth 1999, 145).

Linden Lewis observes how, as regards homophobia, “tolerance levels vary, with places such as St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, Trinidad and Barbados [being] at the higher end of the continuum of tolerance, while Jamaica, St. Vincent and St. Lucia occupy the lower levels” (Lewis 2003, 109). He recounts various, and some well-known, homophobic incidents in Jamaica and Barbados, and draws reference to the homophobic sentiments and lyrics of some reggae and dancehall artistes. One related reason for this, Tara Atluri explains, is that black Caribbean males, having already faced an emasculating subordination under colonial rule, generally harbour resentment and intolerance towards homosexuals who most times are considered to be less than men.

Although this paper devotes more space to the gay male, as outlined above both male *and* female homosexuals are victims of homophobia—the latter especially so because they literally or symbolically eschew the desires of men and defy androcratic and patriarchal control. An analysis of prose fiction—by Lawrence Scott and Shani Mootoo from Trinidad and Tobago; H. Nigel Thomas from St. Vincent; Makeda Silvera and Patricia Powell from Jamaica—reveals how vraisemblance and irony are used to convey fictional representations of gendered violence against male homosexuals. They are victims of crime and punishment because they fail to conform to societal constraints of compulsory heterosexuality and ideal masculinity.

The paper begins with a brief discussion and analysis of lesbophobic and spousal reactions, which include threats of violence, towards women who are suspected of being lesbians, with the novels *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *The Pagoda* and the short stories “Baby” and “Lemon Scent” used as illustrations. In the latter examples, the trope of irony and—in one story—the author’s skilful manipulation of paralipsis and psychological perspective serve to both foreground and undermine the heterosexual male’s disgust and fear of the female homosexual.

The paper then segues into its major focus of the violent threats and/or acts towards male homosexuals in the novels *A Small Gathering of Bones*, *Spirits in the Dark*, *Aelred’s Sin* and the short story “Chameleon”. In the first book, it is the author’s use of spatial perspective and the metaphorization of names and a park to convey the homosexual’s private intimacies in a public place that is explored. In the second, attention is given primarily to the language used to denigrate the homosexual and the homosexual act; how communal violence is used to silence the homosexual; and how institutionalized religion fuels homophobia. Finally, analysis of the latter two discourses highlights, as a whole, how other societal institutions—the school and the family—are also culpable in conveying as punishable and deserving of persecution those behaviours of adolescent males that betray signs of homosexuality, effeminacy and cross-dressing.

***Cereus Blooms at Night* and *The Pagoda*: Stigma and Threat by Suspicion**

In Shani Mootoo’s novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), violence is a marked theme, whether in the form of Mala Ramchandin’s form of self-directed violence on each anniversary of her mother’s elopement with another woman or Chandin’s physical and sexual rage against her, his own daughter, as an act of vengeance for his wife’s action. Throughout her adulthood, Mala carries the stigma of “a woman whose father had obviously mistaken her for his wife, and whose mother had obviously mistaken another woman for her husband” (109). The homosexual narrator-protagonist and Mala’s caregiver, Tyler, faces “malice” and “hostility” (15) from the female nurses with whom he works and is shown “disdain” and pelted with “verbal rocks” (10) by Toby the handyman. Although she is heterosexual, Mala in her youth is doled out a similar treatment by her peers and the townsfolk in a collective reaction to the incest, adultery and lesbianism that are associated with her parents. She becomes guilty by association and is accused by her schoolmates of being a lesbian as well: “You giving Boyie or you like girls?...Ey. Look here, if we catch you near any girl we go cut ass!” (87).

Thus, merely the *suspicion* of an alternative sexual orientation can make an individual, male or female, vulnerable to homophobic violence. Like the Ramchandin house, too, the home that Lowe and Miss Sylvie share in Powell’s *The Pagoda* is viewed by some in the community as a nasty and ungodly place (Powell 1998, 15). This is based on the suspicion that Lowe and Cecil are in a homosexual relationship. Lowe, whom they think is a man, is ironically a woman *masquerading* as a man to conceal her identity as an illegal immigrant from China, and Cecil is her benefactor and the father of her daughter. These examples emphasize how sexuality, which is perceived to be deviant, is linked

with evil and biblical condemnations. In an act of wilful violence, Lowe's shop is subsequently burned to the ground by the overseer who is filled with spite and greed, and Cecil is killed within.

“Baby” and “Lemon Scent”: Harmful Ironies

Mootoo's short story, “Lemon Scent” (1993), is used here to further demonstrate that lesbians can also be potential victims of violence, particularly by men who feel that lesbianism threaten their masculinity and patriarchy. It can be compared alongside fellow Caribbean-Canadian Makeda Silvera's “Baby”. Although set in Canada, this latter story deals with characters who are Caribbean immigrants. Thematically, it is not just about the belief that homosexuality is against God's will and is of the Devil and that it is a way of life associated with foreign, White culture; but, it is also about lesbians needing to be set straight by men forcibly having sex with them and the way in which some men feel hatred toward lesbians. It is a short story that is rich in dramatic irony, for while the two female protagonists are together arguing and making love and conversation, unbeknownst to them a male intruder is outside their bedroom door with murderous intentions. There is further irony in the fact that he needs to be sexually aroused in order to commit the intended physical violence; and although he despises them, the lesbian lovers are his source of arousal. He has snuck into their apartment to carry out a hate crime, yet the reason for the hate induces sexual excitation within him. He is unable to execute the crime when this excitation wanes.

His moral indignation is therefore satirized, and a reductionist effect is made of his masculinist views and of the chauvinism that surrounds male sexual desire in relation to lesbian eroticism. It is implied he harbours the belief that homosexuality is an indulgence of white people and of the metropole, and is a sin not to be associated with blacks and Caribbean people. For him, blackness and gayness are incompatible bedfellows, and when blacks do indulge in same-sex desire they are stooping below their nature. Like Frantz Fanon, he seems to think that homosexuality does not exist in the Caribbean,^{iv} and he yearns to return home to escape the immorality of Canadian urban life or at least to find a space there that is akin to a Caribbean environment with which he is familiar.

At the beginning of “Lemon Scent”, the gender identity of the first-person narrator is not revealed and is left to conjecture. There is a shift in perspective to third-person narration in the two remaining sections of the story. Thus, it is only in the first section that the reader hears the “I” voice of who later turns out to be Anita, the lesbian lover of the married Kamini who is also not named in the opening section. Here, the sensuous play and flirting between the two, at what is obviously a cocktail reception at the married couple's home, could easily have been mistaken to be between a man and a married woman in the presence of her husband who is visible in another room. Thus, the use of the cataphoric “I” with its resultant gender indeterminacy is a subversive technique that is full of irony and somewhat of a leveller because it indicates that opposite-sex and same-sex erotic desire may not be easy to differentiate if the sex of the parties involved is not known.

The notion of irony is also furthered in the story when in the third section we see Anita's reaction to Kamini's news that her husband is suspicious of their relationship and has threatened to kill them both if he finds out that they have been sexually involved. The tension-filled second section of the story focuses on his fear and anger as his suspicions grow regarding the nature of the relationship between Anita and his wife. It is symbolic that he remains unnamed, a reductive technique that mocks his position as husband and emphasizes Anita's as cuckold.

Anita is unappealing to men (27)—which brings to mind the theorist Monique Wittig's view that a lesbian is not a woman^v—and adopts a domineering, butch role in the relationship. For example, she remonstrates against Kamini for having marital relations with her husband (31). The irony arises because a lesbian is the unexpected rival to a heterosexual male who hitherto was secure in his possession of his wife. Anita revels in the inversive effect that this has created (30). This situation is reminiscent of Susan Donner's explanation that "Politically, a lesbian sexual identity can be seen as a challenge to patriarchy, with its control of female sexuality" (Epstein 1987, 29).^{vi}

Hence, by the close of the story the reader understands why only the first-person perspective of a paramour with an initial anonymous gender identity is presented and then juxtaposed with the fears of a married man that he is being cuckolded by his wife with another woman. This stylistic technique reinforces the irony and further highlights the role of Anita as subverter and competitor—although her life has been threatened and even as the story ends, the reader leaves Kamini in the arms, not of her husband, but of her lesbian lover. As the lesbian feminist theorist Adrienne Rich says in her influential paper, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", regarding married women who deal "in a profoundly female emotional and passionate [sic] world": "We may faithfully or ambivalently have obeyed the institution [of marriage], but our feelings—and our sensuality—have not been tamed or contained within it" (162).

The lemon-scented cologne that Kamini wears, from which the story gets its title, arouses both the husband and Anita, but is also symbolic of the bitter dilemma she faces, trapped between her obligations as wife and fear of her potentially violent husband, and her feelings for Anita. Like the wife in Michelle Cliff's "Rubicon" she lives out a double identity—what Rich calls a "double-life" (162)—and is forced to carry on a clandestine relationship with another woman, but there is no guarantee that it will remain secret. The word, Scent, in the title also implies, by its definition, the trail of evidence that the husband has uncovered as he becomes more and more cognizant of his wife's infidelity and with whom.

A Small Gathering of Bones: Private Space / Public Threat

Whereas Mootoo's "Lemon Scent" highlights the *threat* of murder towards a married lesbian from her cuckolded husband in a domestic situation, Powell's *A Small Gathering of Bones* (1994) portrays domestic violence between male homosexuals who cohabit and which takes the form of physical, verbal and emotional abuse and the destruction of personal property. The focus here in the paper, however, is on her representation of the continuous threat faced by those homosexuals who are not domestic partners, but who are strangers seeking anonymous sex in a public park named Nanny Sharpe's.^{vii} Jamaica's

legislation of homosexuality as a crime, and the subsequent withholding of rights for homosexuals to marry, force many to indulge in fleeting intimacies in public places/spaces; and this fictive account captures the resultant intricacies (codes and behaviours used for propositioning partners) and dilemmas (infection with and spread of HIV/AIDS) of the experience.

Spatial perspective is a significant factor, for it is notable that there is a clear division regarding the activities of Nanny Sharpe's—what can be called the normative activities of people walking dogs and strolling around with their babies in prams (80), and the men-having-sex-with-men activity occurring close by. For even when Dale is having sex with the first stranger, people walk by and traffic passes just yards away on the main road (114); thick foliage protects them from view. The section of the park used by the gay men is such that “[a]ll around, trees stand up tall and weeds grow plenty. A foot beaten path trails off into the thickets” (80); “the large limbs of the willow trees served as chameleons in the dark” so that the people passing “quickly back and forth on the narrow dirt road close-by [sic]” cannot see Dale and the stranger engaging in sexual intercourse (114). The park's physical attributes that protect the men from view and provide them with a meeting place—along with its feminine title—give it a kumbia-like essence. This screenable, barrier-like and chameleonic setting is one that allows for dramatic irony and is even tinged with a paradoxical element because the reader knows what the people who are so nearby do not, and the men remain hidden among companies of people.

It is as if this public park, Nanny Sharpe's, is a character all its own in the novel—and the name lends credence to this idea—albeit the park is not personified. In fact, however, Nanny Sharpe's is a combination of the names of two real Jamaican national heroes who fought against slavery and colonialism: Nanny (?–c.1734) was a Maroon who fought viciously against the English and is Jamaica's only female national hero, and Samuel Sharpe (1801–1832) was an informed, educated town slave and leader of the resistance and rebellion against slavery. Therefore, the connotations of the homosexual as a maroon figure or an outsider to mainstream society, and the liberation that the park offers him to engage with those of his own kind are striking in the author's naming of this fictional public park.

A *place* is only a naturally formed location and is a *space* when its meaning-potential is developed and when meanings are imposed upon it by human activity in its various forms and it is transformed into a landscape from its previously neutral terrain; that is, relevant to its locale it becomes a “way of seeing”; in this context *private* and *public* can become relative terms (Leap 7 and 9). In the novel, these dichotomies are evidenced in the area of the park where the men meet and which previously had a sign that cautioned: “KEEP OFF. NO ADMISSION THIS SIDE OF PARK” (80). Here, the men are able to create a private space within a public space; for, whereas the park is a public location for others who use it for relaxation and family outings, the gay men are able to conceal themselves and partake in what is considered to be a private activity in the same location, albeit in a once restricted area. However, like Dale's friend Ian Kaysen, they are always open to the threat of violent hate crimes by gay bashers (17), or of being arrested by police officers

(82). Byrne Fone in his treatise on homophobia observes that: “The increased visibility of lesbians and gay men is said to have made inroads against homophobia. But visibility can also erode tolerance: an encounter on the street—two women kissing, two men holding hands—is still disturbing...” (419). The novel’s title ultimately emphasizes the claiming of a literal and metaphorical space by this homosexual minority in a homophobic culture—a *small gathering*; and the threat posed by discrimination, death and disease—*of bones*.

Spirits in the Dark: Societal Condemnation and Communal Violence

In the discourse of Thomas’s *Spirits in the Dark* (1993), lexical items and literary tropes depict a collective disapproval of homosexuality on the fictitious island of Isabella. Isabellan society’s view of homosexuality is conveyed by vulgar expressions of ridicule and contempt. Colloquialisms, idioms, metaphors, metonyms, and personification of the male organ are used to describe homosexual desire and activity. Because a homosexual is not considered a real man, Jerome’s mother’s first cousin who is also gay is referred to as “Boy-boy”, and the narrator notes that this relative “was a constant point of reference for what the society would not accept” (94). Those seen in his company are confronted with generic sentences like “You not no man, you is like Boy-boy”, or with the idiomatic question: “Yo’ turning weird?” (94). A homosexual is called a “buller” (117), and Pastor Oberon, who is suspected by the Compton villagers of being one also is called “Pastor O’Bum”. When Jerome joins the Militants someone calls him “Miss O’Bum” (117). The lexical item “bum” denotes not only the American term for a worthless person, but is also a British word for the buttocks or anus—hence the sexual innuendo.

Deborah Tannen suggests that gay men *referring to each other* as “she” or “Miss” is—much like when they use women’s intonational and syntactic patterns—an example of one gender indexing another gender (218–219). However, the villagers bestowing, or rather *imposing*, the title of “Miss” on Jerome has the negative effects of feminizing him—a passive role in the homosexual act is implied—and emasculating him, thereof serving a similar function as the name “Boy-boy” given to his relative; and can be deemed as the villagers’ way of pronouncing their knowledge of his homosexuality that he tries so hard to conceal.

Other offensive expressions used in the novel to describe homoeroticism, homosexual coition, and a male organ that is engaged in such activity include “It gwine raise it head if yo’ promise fo’ let it in by the back door” (94) and references to faecal matter which are meant literally and reinforce the perceived dirtiness of the act (94 and 199).

Intolerance for gay men is not only expressed verbally, but can also take the form of physical violence. Battery and an assault with a weapon—a beer bottle—used as a penile device in a buggery attack (199) demonstrate the disdain and aggression levelled at the homosexual. As a teenager, Boy-boy arranges a canefield rendezvous with another young man only to find that “When he got there, there were ten of them. They took turns bugging him; one even used a beer bottle; then they beat him into unconsciousness and left him there” (199). It is noteworthy that Boy-boy’s attackers brag of the incident without mentioning the sexual assault, and he refuses to identify who they are. The ten

young men are aware of the stigmatization of gay sex and therefore avoid the opportunity for assumptions to be made about their own sexuality, and Boy-boy knows that as a homosexual he will get no justice. This crime occurs when Jerome is eight years old.

Society's social injustice and lack of sympathy for the homosexual are further evident when years later at Jerome's workplace in the civil service one worker slaps another because the latter, who is suspected of being gay, dares to give a retort to the former's vulgar accusation. Jerome's co-workers who are witness to the slapping incident prefer to lie about seeing anything, downplay the slapping to a "misunderstanding", are angry at Jerome for telling the truth and getting the aggressor dismissed, and ostracize the victim. The victim's sexual orientation was formerly a matter of speculation as evidenced by the discourse modes of hearsay and rumour: "They said he was 'so'" (199). The idiomatic term "so" is used adjectivally in Creole dialect to indicate gayness.

In free indirect discourse, Jerome notes as follows: "When they knew you were that way, everyone took liberties with your feelings" (199). Here, Jerome uses evasive language by not calling this sexual orientation by its name—a sign of his own unease with his homosexuality. The demonstrative adjective "that" is an example of distal spatial deixis which shows how homosexuality is considered to be anomalous and antithetical to heterosexuality; hence the implication of distance, disapproval and ostracism in its use by heterosexuals. A similar sense of distanciation and differentiation is conveyed in Jerome's use of the distal deictic pronoun "they" in reference to heterosexuals.

Jerome equates the persecution of homosexuals to the stoning of sinners; an exophoric reference^{viii} is made to Toni Morrison's comment about Blacks not stoning sinners, to which Jerome feels the opposite situation occurs on his island. This reference to the stoning of homosexuals in *Isabella* is only an analogy, but is at the same time an intertextual reference to a form of punishment seen meted out to sinners in the Bible. With specific regard to homosexuals, however, Leviticus 20: 13 declares that "they must die, their blood shall be on their own heads", but does not say exactly *how* the homosexual should be put to death.

Isabellans would also be aware of the attitude to homosexuals and the perceived notoriety of some of their actions abroad. This could only serve to further fuel their own intolerance and put them on the *qui vive* for such behaviour on their island:

Some of them would have read in The Isabellan where a preacher heard all across America and around the world said that God struck California with an earthquake to punish it for not taking action against the homosexuals in San Francisco. "No God-fearing city would permit the International Gay Games. No God-fearing city would let the demons of Sodom in their gates to practise their abominations." (italics in original, 167)

The preacher's strong, unmodalized, categorical assertions that make reference to fearing God and to the biblical text most commonly associated with the condemnation of homosexuals would no doubt be highly provocative and persuasive. The quotation is also reminiscent of the idea of divine judgement and punishment meted out to a whole community because of the perceived wrongdoing of one or a few individuals (Sontag 41).

***Aelred's Sin* and "Chameleon": Peer Persecution and Parental Punishment**

Growing-up stories have long been a staple in Anglophone Caribbean literature, but emphasis was heretofore given to non-homosexual characters. The portrayal of gay adolescent masculinities as represented particularly in Scott's *Aelred's Sin* (1998) and "Chameleon" (1994) and in Thomas's *Spirits in the Dark* show that the gay youth faces extreme pressure to adhere to a compulsory masculinity in preparation for manhood. Jean Marc and Ted in *Aelred's Sin* and Jerome in *Spirits in the Dark* face emotional, psychological and public pressure to conform to male, heterosexual standards. Jean Marc and Ted, adolescent lovers, endure public ridicule at school; and Jerome, who has wet dreams about his classmates Errol and Peter, overhears his friends joking about his lack of interest in girls and what they perceive to be his homosexual nature. Foucault observes that sexuality was regulated in eighteenth-century secondary schools.^{ix} In *Aelred's Sin* one sees, too, how the secondary school, albeit in the twentieth century and on a fictitious Caribbean island, Les Deux Isles, regulates adolescent sexuality—particularly male heterosexuality—in private spaces like the toilets and in public ones like the playing field, study hall and refectory. Also, Fitzsimons and Lennon note what can easily be applied to Jerome's situation in *Spirits in the Dark* when they identify being perceived as a swot—an informal, derogatory term for someone who is felt by others to be too studious—as one of the ways boys may be thought to flout rules of masculinity, and as therefore one of the reasons why they are subjected to homophobic taunts (144).

What they further have to say about how boys in the school environment exhibit homophobia in verbal and physical ways can, however, be applied to what occurs in *Aelred's Sin*. They refer to Nayak and Kehily's study of the "performative, ritualistic nature of homophobia" with respect to routine homophobic behaviour among young schoolboys, which include "[h]omophobic humour, language and insults, and exaggerated actions" displayed by the boys to convince themselves and others of their heterosexual masculinity (145).^x Wesley Crichlow also deals with his first-hand experience of such behaviour among Trinidadian schoolboys (183–222). He wilfully claims and appropriates the derogatory Trinidadian terms "bulla man" and "bullers", and recounts the homophobia, heteronormativity and heterosexism he encountered as a youth in his home, school, church and community and how he dissimulated—not always successfully—by engaging in performances of hypermasculinity, compulsory masculinity and heterosexuality.

In the novel, Robert de la Borde painfully remembers Ted Salter's death and how he and others at the school were all culpable. Ted, a captain of the college's football and cricket teams and a head boy, is affected by the "scandal" (126), "jeering, taunting" (385), and "the writings and drawings" (127) associated with his homosexual relationship with Jean

Marc. The boys rebel against him on the playing field and express their knowledge of his sexuality on the lavatory walls.

As a high-profile student at an all-male school, Ted, more so than Jean Marc, faces greater scrutiny and a more severe obloquy because of his homosexuality. His “authority was threatened and challenged everywhere” (127); he becomes bulimic, and in order to once again be “everyone’s hero” (126) he dives off a cliff while being taunted and dared by the other boys, and is killed in the pool below. Robert, in his early teens when the incident occurred, sums it up in part: “...denial, punishment, death. Suicide? Self-killing? Murder?” (388). He admits that the “Headmaster, dean of discipline, house captains, parents, everyone was involved. But they let it run. No one said a word. No one dampened the stamping feet in the study hall. No one put a stop to the hissing in the refectory...I saw and heard all that and I said nothing” (127). Robert was at the time ashamed of and confused by his brother’s involvement with Ted, having also actually spied them engaging in a sexual act. And so, quite likely in an attempt to preserve his own image and reputation, he also participated in the boys’ harassment of and rebellion against Ted.

Whitehead explains in his discussion of masculinity and the body that there is with the male subject “a preparedness to put one’s body at risk in order to achieve expectations. The male/boy/man is *expected* to transcend space, or to place his body in aggressive motion within it, in so doing posturing to self and others the assuredness of his masculinity” (original emphasis, 189). This is certainly the case with Ted and his fatal plunge off the cliff. Ted feels compelled to convince the other boys of his masculinity, thereby partaking in the codes of a compulsory heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity.

Thus, in the face of peer pressure, homophobia and adult complicity, Ted sacrifices his life in a show of masculine bravado so that he could regain the respect of his schoolmates who now call him “*buller* ... the word we boys used for sodomites, the double-backed beast” (127). This obvious Shakespearean allusion—an example of an intertextual reference—to Iago’s phrase “making the beast with two backs” in *Othello* highlights the boys’ perception of the homosexual act as an abominable unnaturalness, akin to what Iago thought of interracial marriage and lovemaking. Ultimately, one may say that Ted experiences what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms a “homosexual panic”, defined as “a flight from full individuality (because it might at certain points embrace the reprobated patterns of homosexuality) for the safety of traditional roles that do not threaten the enabling fictions of gender distinction.”^{xi}

Michelle Cliff’s title story in her short story collection *The Store of a Million Items: Stories* (1998) touches upon effeminophobia and the feminization of the young male. Since the main character displays sensibilities and pursuits that are considered feminine rather than masculine, his father has concluded that he is a pansy—a derogatory term. Also, Fitzsimons and Lennon cite Michael Kimmel’s use of Freudian child development theory to link “the repudiation of the feminine directly with homophobia” (144).^{xii} The implicature arises in the story that it is only when Gerald shows the ability to verbally and

physically challenge a rapist and to rescue and comfort the ravaged female that his father recognizes masculine traits within him. Scott's "Chameleon", in his short story collection *Ballad for the New World* (1994), addresses similar issues of ideal and compulsory masculinity that arise in *Aelred's Sin* and "The Store of a Million Items". Whereas in his "I Want to Follow My Friend", Scott shows how peer pressure within the school environment places sanctions on homoeroticism, in "Chameleon" a young boy's effeminate and transvestite tendencies are policed by paternal expectations through physical punishment.

In "Chameleon", irony exists on the levels of characterization and the outcome or dénouement of the story. A deferred military dream is the reason for the lead character, Monty, being named by his father after General Bernard Law Montgomery, a famous British field marshal and a commander of the Allied Forces during World War II. Monty grows up as a sickly and weak child—an image completely opposite to his namesake, much to his father's chagrin and disappointment. General Montgomery, however, was known for being particular about his clothing and appearance, which is a characteristic shared by the fictional Monty—but with an ironic and bizarre twist.

Monty belongs to the Monagas family, one that we meet again—at least they carry the same surname—in Scott's novel *Witchbroom*, and in which there are family members who also indulge in transvestism. It is through the focalization of the autodiegetic narrator,^{xiii} whom the reader infers to be a psychiatrist or psychologist, that one becomes aware at the close of the story that Monty harbours an innate interest in female clothing rather than in the female body. That is, the reader and the narrator are the last to know, and find out together, that Monty was physically punished by his father years earlier, not because of his voyeuristic tendency—that he had the indecency to spy on the nude body of his unsuspecting neighbour while she took her habitual, open-air afternoon bath—but because his father knew his real interest was in the dress she would put on afterward. This is conveyed via implicature when the adult Monty says to the unnamed narrator as he reveals to him/her the "lingerie, satin scarves, lace handkerchiefs and a white mantilla" that are his "treasure" and "solace" (39): "He whipped me, but he cannot take *them* away from me" (original emphasis, 39).

Thus, unlike the more common incidence of dramatic irony entailing the reader knowing more than a character in a story or play, in this instance two characters, the father and son, know more than the reader and another character does at first—the latter being the "I" or mediating voice, since s/he is the one to whom Monty relates his story.

The significance of the story's title thus becomes apparent because young Monty is indeed like a chameleon, fooling the reader and the narrator into believing that he is just a voyeur or simply an adolescent boy smitten by the body of an adolescent girl, when indeed his preoccupation borders on transvestism. The irony becomes even more palpable when one considers that Scott is quite apparently undercutting or mocking the perceived heterocentric perspective of the reader and the narrator who would have taken for granted that Monty was looking upon Bernadetta with a (hetero)sexual gaze.

In the interview with this researcher, Scott describes “Chameleon” as a “dark story about different kinds of maleness”. The reader can identify these as the military commander, the priest (Monty’s mother had wanted to name him “Jesus”) and the cross-dresser, which represents a diminishing order of virility and toughness associated with masculinity. Scott notes that Monty is interested in Bernadetta’s femininity rather than in her body and in later life he still holds on to the items that embody “the sense of the feminine which he has not been allowed to enter.” Scott expresses his interest in how restrictions are placed on gender crossing, how genders are policed—that is, a man must walk, dress, etcetera, in a certain way—and how men are “not allowed to enter the feminine world”.

Conclusion

Heterosexual and gay masculinities are shaped by gender scripting and male socialization; and the effects of defying masculine codes include homophobia that may entail physical punishment, taunting and labelling. Gendered violence or the potential threat thereof toward females and males of an alternative sexual orientation can therefore be both verbal and physical and can be equally devastating. It can result in strained or damaged relationships among parents and their children, married couples, schoolmates, and colleagues; internalized homophobia; closetedness in order to avoid the discovery of one’s true sexual orientation; and risky behaviour such as anonymous, public sex that increases the spread of HIV/AIDS and, ironically, further opportunities for random violence by strangers, to name a few. Ultimately, the fictive representations of homophobia effect an unsilencing of the problem of a culture of violence against non-heterosexuals in the Anglophone Caribbean.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ This entire paper is adapted from the author's doctoral dissertation "A Discourse of Alternative Sexuality in Anglophone Caribbean Literature" (2007).

ⁱⁱ Currently, there is a debate and the voicing of objection in religious quarters to the Draft National Gender Policy, which some feel by its wording seeks to re-define gender and have same-sex unions and the adoption of children by same-sex couples legalized. The document proposes in part that the special needs of those with alternative sexualities be catered for by the government; that same-sex unions be included in the Rape and Sexual Offences Act; and that the fundamental human rights and freedoms of all persons irrespective of their sexual preference or orientation be promoted and protected. The authors of the draft document—staff at the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, St. Augustine campus of The University of the West Indies—note the confusion that still prevails regarding the term "gender", and also express their concern that the Equal Opportunities Act excludes, and in so doing discriminates against, the gay and lesbian community. Julien Neaves, "Gender policy draft under fire", *Trinidad Express* September 18, 2005. <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article_news>

ⁱⁱⁱ Dana Seetahal, "Homosexual Conduct and the Right to Privacy", *The Trinidad Guardian Online Edition* June 29, 2003. July 1, 2003
<<http://www.guardian.co.tt/dana.html>>

^{iv} See Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003). Nagel cites Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1986) 84, in which he made "the

psychoanalytically based conclusion ... that homosexuality was ‘an attribute of the white race,’ and did not exist in the Caribbean because blacks there don’t experience the oedipal tendencies that putatively give rise to same-sex desire” (123–124). She also makes reference to Eldridge Cleaver, the former Black Panther Minister of Information, who “attacked black author James Baldwin’s homosexuality as ‘somehow un-black.’ In doing so Cleaver equated black homosexuality with white forced miscegeny and charged gay blacks with participating in a kind of racial suicide” (122).

^v See Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind* (New York: Beacon, 1992).

^{vi} Donner cites S. Epstein, “Gay politics, ethnic identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism”, *Socialist Review* (93/94): 9–54.

^{vii} Sections of this analysis regarding the depiction of public sex in Patricia Powell’s novel are adapted not only from the thesis, but from a paper entitled “Realism and a Discourse of Alternative Sexuality in *A Small Gathering of Bones*”, presented at the Society for Caribbean Studies Conference at Warwick University, UK, in 2002 and found on the website <<http://www.sbsonline.freemove.co.uk/carib.htm>>

^{viii} As opposed to an endophoric or textual reference, an exophoric reference refers to contextual or situational reference; these terms were popularized in *Cohesion in English* (1976) by M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan (Wales, 141).

^{ix} Foucault (1978) notes:

On the whole, one can have the impression that sex was hardly spoken of at all in these institutions. But one only has to glance at the architectural layout, the rules of discipline, and their whole internal organization: the question of sex was a constant preoccupation. The builders considered it explicitly. The organizers took it permanently into account. All who held a measure of authority were placed in a state of perpetual alert, which the fixtures, the precautions taken, the interplay of punishments and responsibilities, never ceased to reiterate. The space for classes, the shape of the tables, the planning of the recreation lessons, the distribution of the

dormitories (with or without partitions, with or without curtains), the rules for monitoring bedtime and sleep periods—all this referred, in the most prolix manner, to the sexuality of children. (27–28)

^x See A. Nayak and M.J. Kehily, “Playing it Straight: Masculinities, Homophobias and Schooling”, *Journal of Gender Studies* 2 (1996): 211–230.

^{xi} Nigel Wood, introductory note, “Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: The Beast in the Closet” in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edition, ed. David Lodge, 448 (Essex: Longman, 2000).

^{xii} They refer to Kimmel’s “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity” in *Theorizing Masculinities*, ed. H. Brod and M. Kaufman, 119-141 (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1994).

^{xiii} An autodiegetic narrator is the narrator-protagonist of a first-person narrative (Prince, 9).

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