Disciplining Desire: the Fluid Textuality of Annie Proulx's "Brokeback Mountain"

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> Nature undefiled – this is the inevitable setting of the Sacred Marriage of males. Ishmael and Queequeg, arm in arm, about to ship out, Huck and Jim swimming beside the raft in the peaceful flux of the Mississippi – here it is the motion of water which completes the syndrome, the American dream of isolation afloat.
>
> Leslie Fiedler

Taking a break from my dissertation, which explores the tropic deployment of water in twentieth-century gay male American fiction, I read Annie Proulx's novella "Brokeback Mountain." Being a gay male, who studies gay American narratives, I thought the novella would offer an informative diversion from my studies. I hardly expected to find myself mired in the concerns of my thesis, but as I read, I was struck by the narrative's persistent invocation of water imagery and tropes. If the fact of Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist's euphemistic "fishing trips" were not enough to trigger my detection of the water trope, I discovered the narrative is simply suffused with fluid metaphors. I found myself questioning what it meant to encounter these tropes in a text by a self-identified straight woman. Did the presence of these tropes in this narrative negate my thesis? If I am arguing a modern gay male American subjectivity availed itself of a water trope to express itself textually at the turn of the twentieth-century, how exactly does this trope figure for a contemporary woman writer, who occupies a different position on the sexual continuum?

As the quote from Fiedler indicates, there is a significant tradition of nineteenth-century American male writers deploying water to express homoeroticism, if not something akin to homosexuality. This tradition runs from Herman Melville through Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, and Charles Warren Stoddard—not to mention the tradition's intertextual appearance, for instance in the paintings of Thomas Eakins. What was this tradition doing in contemporary writing? What was this tradition doing in Proulx's writing? Perplexed, I reread the novella to convince myself I was making something out of nothing, but upon a second

reading, I discovered even more tropes. As much as I wanted to defend the validity, if not the mere territory, of my thesis, I could not deny the narrative's liquid characteristics. This prompted me to further question what claim Proulx had to this tradition, especially since the commonality of a shared sexual orientation or sexed position was seemingly foreclosed. The answer I stumbled upon is quite simple. Proulx—like her literary front-runners—is narrating a condition of male-to-male desire in America. After all, a writer does not necessarily have to be gay—or male—or American—to attempt the expression of a gay male American subjectivity. Success here depends on the pen, not the penis or the passport. Remembering this, I resisted the oft nugatory, yet necessary, imperative of identity politics and reread the novella. This time, I let go of the author's gender, sex, and sexuality, and letting go, I read the narrative as it deploys fluid tropes to express a subaltern textual subjectivity.

With this analytic refocalization, I developed a reading of the fluid motif in Proulx's "Brokeback Mountain," as the novella expresses the disorder of sexual desire under the ordering rule of cultural hegemony. Ennis' struggle for sexual self-actualization suggests, if not reveals, that sexual subjectivity is deeply imbricated in a complex multifaceted confrontation with culture. Desire may disrupt culture, but culture also disrupts, if not delimits, desire. These dueling tenets of sexual subjectivity drive the narrative's plot, as Ennis alternates between homoerotic desire and heteronormative proscription. The narrative investment in limning Ennis' sexual subjectivity produces a sustained interrogation of sexual politics, as the individual libido is revealed as being culturally bound. This constructs a balance between what Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky would term a minoritizing and a universalizing perspective.[1] The narrative may delineate a minor subjectivity; however, this impulse is particularized in terms of larger ideological concerns, which include masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality. Ennis' conflict is as much about sex and gender as it is about sexuality; conversely, the narrative is also about sexuality. Reading the narrative solely in terms of a universal theme minimizes the productivity of its minority import, which informs the larger triumvir of gender, sex, and

[1] For more on the distinction between a universalizing and minoritizing perspective, see Kosofsky Sedgwick.

sexuality. If the story was only about Ennis and Jill, its specific narrative complications—which are evidenced through the narrative's deployment of water tropes—would become irrelevant, if not merely sentimental. This creates the imperative behind this critical accounting of the narrative's investment in a fluid textuality, for the narrative's polemic—its potential to produce more than a mere aesthetic effect—largely functions through its construction and exploration of a transgressive textual sexuality, and this sexual subjectivity is expressed through a fluid textuality.

From the novella's opening pages, a fluid textuality permeates the narrative and functions to delineate Ennis' character, particularly as his sexual desires transgress the strictures of heteronormativity. Ennis greets the day by pouring coffee into a pan, turning on the tap, and urinating in the kitchen sink. This scene is striking for the absence of the "Angel in the House," and it is wrought with a transgressive quality, as the kitchen sink serves as a urinal. The nonappearance of a domesticating female figure is contrasted by the narration of Ennis' sexual nostalgia, for instead of a female, he muses over a male: "he is suffused with a sense of pleasure because Jack Twist was in his dream" (Proulx 4). Ennis' musing is interrupted by the rolling boil of the coffee, which threatens to spill out of the pot: "The stale coffee is boiling up but he catches it before it goes over the side, pours it into a stained cup and blows on the black liquid, lets a panel of the dream slide forward" (4). Ennis' handling of the coffee is linked to his memory of Jack through the narrative's playful use of pronouns: "If he does not force his attention on it, it might stoke the day, rewarm that old, cold time on the mountain when they owned the world and nothing seemed wrong" (4). This syntax obscures the third-person pronoun through repetition, and this referential blurring allows the memory of Jack to serve as the pronoun's antecedent but syntactically establishes the coffee as its referent. This overlapping forces a superfluidity of meaning and extends the liquid and other sundry qualities of the boiling coffee to the memory of Jack, providing an expressive fluid metaphor of desire. Ennis' desire is characterized, if not constructed, through a liquid syntax and diction, and this poetic aperture produces a textual ripple effect, which permeates the remainder of the novella and functions to construct a homosexual textuality for Ennis' sexual subjectivity.

The deployment of a fluid trope to narrate a proscribed impulse or subjectivity, in this case a transgressive sexuality, can be productively theorized as a *fluviographic poetics*. A fluviograph, a neologism for the deployment of poetic language that combines the flow of a river with the act of writing, deploys liquid—or otherwise wet—tropes in the content and/or structure of a narrative to negotiate intrapersonal and/or cultural proscription. Although a fluviograph may be deployed to negotiate sundry cultural proscriptions, its ability to rhetorically mimic, if not perform, the psychological defense mechanism of sublimation, as it does in the kitchen scene when Ennis refocuses his psychic energy away from the threatening memories of Jack, may explain its particular utility for the narration of a subaltern sexual subjectivity. This efficacy may well rest in the fluviograph's ability to enact the conscious and unconscious functions of sublimation, which respectively, if not simultaneously, express taboo libidinal impulses by redirecting their content. Accordingly, a fluviograph can be interpreted as poetic language that socializes an unsocial impulse through its ability to reconstitute the repressed. As a literary device, if not a performative speech act, a fluviograph can be theorized as a trope that simulates the archetype *and/or* stimulates the trace memory of the womb experience.

Resting upon the conventional psychoanalytic allowances for the residual unconscious experience of memory and the contemporary allowance for the possibility of body memory, the womb experience, which generates the archetype—if not the actual experience—of a boundless liquid world, can be theorized as what Freud called the oceanic feeling.[2] This expansive feeling, which prefigures the emergence of Freud's primary ego feeling, is the sensory, if not kinesthetic, feeling

[2] Freud interpreted the oceanic feeling as a product of ego development and theorized this feeling could be a vestigial trace memory created by what he termed the primary ego feeling—the first feeling of self as being detached from the "world." Freud adroitly theorized the loss of this connection as being secondary to the oceanic feeling, but having offered this reading, he developed a product-oriented interpretation and redirected its origin as a desire for a protective father. Freud performed a logic error by considering effect without first considering cause; thereby misreading, if not completely overlooking, the other theoretical content for the vestigial memory, which is here theorized as the womb experience, see Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*.

of the developing biological being before it is constituted as a social or sexual subject. As such, its theoretical, if not existential, potential is anterior to Freud's Oedipal, Lacan's symbolic, and Kristeva's semiotic, and may well be the site of Kohut's narcissistic injury.[3] This assertion is made tenable through a rudimentary understanding of modern developmental biology, particularly as the process of neurulation signals the initiation of tissue differentiation and leads to the embryonic development of the central nervous system.[4] This understanding allows for a productive rigorous interdisciplinary consideration of the biology that prefigures the development of the psychic apparatus. Such an analytic impulse finds a precursor in Freud, who speculated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* about a biological process to explain the foundational developmental origins of the human psyche.[5] Accordingly, Freud's oceanic feeling can be theorized as prefiguring the first crack of ego individuation, and this feeling, which may well establish the fluviograph's tropic potential, can be interpreted as the trace memory of the womb experience.

The trace memory, or imago, of which I speak, finds its genesis in the archetype, if not experience, of the womb. This memory, which counteracts the individual's encounter with proscription, is the return of the boundless feeling of the womb experience, and this promise is the fulcrum behind the fluviograph's tropic function—as it discharges desires that could not otherwise be discharged, secondary to the base constraints of the superego, the superstructure, and the symbolic order.

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[3] The process of subject formation, delineated varyingly by these theorists, severs the subject-in-development from the oceanic feeling of the womb experience; however, my formation contends that something of this first sensory experience, the pre-individuated feeling of boundlessness, remains in the fully constituted subject's memory, whether this memory is kinesthetically of body or pre-cognitively of the brain. This trace memory may well be anterior to the scission Kristeva posits results in what she terms the semiotized body, which prefigures and leads to her theoretical portmanteau of the semiotic-chora.

[4] This differentiation, which initiates the development of the nervous system, may well be the origin for the primary trace memory of the oceanic feeling. For a succinct discussion of neurulation, see Alters 644-47.

[5] Freud pursued this analytic trajectory when he speculated about the biological developmental process behind the development of the human psyche by likening it to a living organism, see Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

The subjectifying, reifying, and objectifying rule of this triumvirate, influencing as it does the psychological, the material, and the linguistic, delimits Ennis' sexuality by constituting it as transgressive. This process of subjection is narrated through the use of a fluid textuality, which constructs an expressive poetics for Ennis' sexual subjectivity, as it is interpolated between the idiosyncrasy of homosexual desire and the hegemony of heteronormativity. Although contemporary theory has explored fluidity as it has been conventionally associated with femininity, this discussion coupled with a cursory review of the iconography surrounding the sign of the inverted triangle (suggesting as it does water, femininity, and homosexuality in alchemical, ancient, and Aryan discourses), suggests extant theory has missed, if not delimited, the understanding of the form and function of water symbology, as it has been inscribed and deployed by other ideologies. Nonetheless, Proulx's "Brokeback Mountain" is suffused with a fluid textuality, which can be productively interpreted as delineating the flux of homosexual desire.

This assertion is perhaps best evidenced by a reading of the narrative's most provocative wet metaphor, which appears in the tent scene during Ennis and Jack's first sexual encounter. As narrated, this scene may play smoothly on the porn screen of the reader's eye; however, its narration is awkward regarding *mise en scene* and syntax. Finding his hand guided to Jack's erection, Ennis refuses genital stimulation for anal penetration: "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" (14). Unable or unwilling to enact an egalitarian sexuality, which approaches the lover's anus via his face and erection, Ennis negotiates homosexuality by approximating heterosexuality through active anal penetration. Ennis' sublimation, which is echoed by his refusal to embrace Jack face-to-face by hugging him from behind during their final parting, hinges on a wet metaphor, which expresses sex while repressing the sexuality behind it. Ennis' desire literally and figuratively flows with the help of spit and clear slick. Plainly referenced, saliva—the quotidian albeit limited lubricant—feels too easy to consider as a tropic construction, but the clear slick, suggesting as it does the already-constituted erection behind the release of pre-ejaculatory fluid, performs more powerfully as a trope figuring the

sexuality behind the sex. Through this deployment of poetic language, the narrative traces the social demand, which can be summarily understood as Adrienne Rich's compulsory heterosexuality, as it proscribes—if not inevitably prescribes—the sexual.[6] Ironically, while negotiating the transgressive limits of his sexuality, Ennis finds an outlet for his sexuality in Jack's rectum. This—without metaphoric obfuscation—is the location behind the deployment of a wet metaphor, and this poetic formation obfuscates the anus on the level of writing and reading.

The metaphor of the clear slick socializes the sexual telling by veiling the contents of the sexual tale. The narrative focus remains on the metonymically rendered penis, and the location of penetration, which via a hermeneutic of suspicion is quite present, is subordinated to an anthropomorphic direct object: "entered him." This obscures the rectum by refusing to specifically mention it. Accordingly, the narrative negotiates the reader's homo/sexual anxiety, which was expectedly feverishly high just one year after the development of protease inhibitors.[7] First published in 1997, "Brokeback Mountain" may be chronologically set before the emergence of the AIDS epidemic, thereby sparing it the contentious charge of eroticizing unsafe sex; however, Proulx's narrative is inevitably delimited, if not deformed, by the epidemic. As such, it risks invoking the contemporary specters surrounding homo/sexuality, particularly as they were detected by Leo Bersani's questioning the burgeoning status of the rectum as a grave in the Age of AIDS.[8] There may be no condom in the tent scene, but there is plenty of lube, for its protagonist is as transgressive in the world of the narrative as he is in the world of the narration, and this bi-directional writing and reading complication is negotiated in the narrative's structure and content with a fluid motif.

As Ennis' wife Alma obliquely notes, a transgressive non-procreative recreational sexuality lies at the heart of Ennis' character:

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[6] For a further discussion of compulsory heterosexuality, see Rich 227-54.

[7] This use of the backslash gestures toward the sundry social and sexual ideologies that conflate under homosexuality, as it is inscribed by the overlapping discourses of gender, sex, and sexuality. For a discussion that disentangles the notion of sex and sexuality from gender, see Rubin 3-44.

[8] For this discussion, see Bersani 197-222.

"And under that, thought, anyway, what you [Ennis] like to do don't make too many babies" (31). Alma's understanding is symbolically echoed in Ennis' name, which can be interpreted as a wet metaphor. The name "Ennis," which is nearly a homonym for the word anus, invokes an island in the Celtic naming tradition, and the surname "del Mar" translates readily in several romantic languages to mean "of the sea." This naming, which simultaneously invokes the location of the anus as well as an island, suggestively symbolizes Ennis' sexually transgressive character. The narration of similar characters has been historically marginalized in the history of American publishing, especially when it comes to describing the sex act behind the sexual subjectivity, and such writing has often been labeled pornographic and has often been charged with obscenity. Proulx's deployment of a fluid textuality, as in the tent sex scene, spares the narrative the contentious charge of prurience to which it would be prey, if not prone, if the act of anal penetration was narrated using more revealing quotidian sexual language like erection, penis, cock, asshole, etc. On the level of the narrative's content and structure, the metaphor of the "clear slick" negotiates a controversial sex act, a proscribed sexuality, and the location of the rectum, particularly as this thorny trio holds the potential to invoke the specters of passive recreational anal sex in the Age of AIDS.

The danger surrounding this transgressive potential is gestured toward when Ennis and Jack reunite after a four-year separation. During the reunion, their desire for one another continues to be conveyed with a fluid textuality; however, the water motif eventually bifurcates, providing a tropic valence that combines the expressive and repressive aspects of their union. Upon seeing one another once again, Ennis and Jack impulsively kiss, and the kiss, which is observed by Alma, is described fluidly, as liquids literally drip from their lips: "Jack's big teeth bringing blood, his hat falling to the floor, stubble rasping, wet saliva welling" (21). The saliva and the active streaming participles narrate the kiss in imagistic fluidic terms, but the presence of blood suggests, indeed it foreshadows, the peril behind it.

This danger is not lost on Ennis, and in the Motel Siesta, he shares this understanding with Jack in a scene that continues tropic potential of water. The setting of the hotel immediately invokes the presence of water: "A few handfuls of hail rattled against the window followed by rain and slippery wind banging the unsecured door of the next room then

and through the night" (23). This watery imagery continues in the room's description, which is additionally a veritable flow of fricative consonants: "The room stank of semen and smoke and sweat and whiskey, of old carpet and sour hay, saddle leather, shit and cheap soap" (23). This onomatopoetic consonance, which sounds the flow of breath and may well be a fluviographic characteristic, continues when Ennis and Jack's post-coital bodies are also cast in fluid terms: "Ennis lay spread-eagled, spent and wet, breathing deep, still half tumescent, Jack blowing forceful cigarette clouds like whale spouts" (24). As in the tent scene, fluidic tropes permeate the scene to express a textual homo/sexual desire. However, the motif accrues significance when it is deployed to express the repressive functions of homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality. This tyranny is first hinted at when Ennis tells Jack: "I never had no thoughts a doin it with another guy except I sure wrang [sic] it out a hundred times thinking about you" (26). The past participle "wrang," which denotes the act of drawing water from a wash cloth, also signifies as a common turn of phrase for male masturbation, suggesting as it does the drawing out of fluid and an autoerotic technique involving the same hand movements. Ennis' containment of his transgressive sexual desire for Jack is channeled to "jacking off," which simultaneously expresses sexuality while repressing the sex behind it.[9]

[9] This is perhaps an effective place to comment on how this reading begs the question of authorial intent, especially given the predominantly "inside" nature of male masturbatory practices and Proulx's sexed position. Given the digressive potential of this question, it will have to suffice to summarily rehearse the theoretical assertion behind this paper's thesis, which hypothecates the tropic deployment of water as a literary device that simulates the archetype and/or stimulates the trace memory of the womb experience. Accordingly, whether it is an intended or unintended act of authorship, a fluid textuality may be equally imbricated in the conscious and unconscious deployment of a textual sexuality, in Proulx's case a textual homo/sexuality. Furthermore, although male autoeroticism accrues to a rather specifically sexed position, the discourses of sexual slang are commonly available for androgynous authorial access. Either way, the textuality of "Brokeback Mountain" is whetted with water tropes, and this fluid poetics can be productively interpreted as signifying a male homo/sexuality, despite the text's female authorship or the perennial identification of fluidity with femininity.

With this fluviographic formation, the text provocatively and effectively condenses the repressive and expressive aspects of a transgressive male homo/sexual desire through a fluid textuality.

The Motel Siesta scene also expands the water trope's figurative purview to incorporate the proscriptions placed on homo/sexual desire under the strictures of heteronormativity. The implicit danger Ennis detects behind the uncontained expression of his sexual desire is narrated with yet another fluid trope when he describes his fears to Jack: "'You and me can't hardly be decent together if what happened back there'—he jerked his head in the direction of the apartment—'grabs on us like that. We do that in the wrong place we'll be dead. There's no reins on this one. It scares the piss out a me'" (27). In this formation, water appears to express the repressive power of heteronormative culture, conflating as it does the fear and violence behind such incidences of incontinence.

This riffing on the water motif acquires further resonance, when the proscriptions placed on male desire are narrated through the punishing absence or the penalizing presence of water. The apprehension behind the urine scared out of Ennis is revealed as being the consequence of his father turning a man's castrated and mutilated body, lying lifeless in a waterless irrigation ditch, into a preventive "teachable moment." The liminal location of the ditch was made to flow with an arid patriarchal power, as the nine-year-old Ennis was forced to view the bludgeoned bloody body. Ennis' father turned the scene into a lynching spectacle by taking his son to see it.[10] This "lesson" was clearly not lost on Ennis, as he later recalls witnessing the price for transgressing the prescribed use of the penis under patriarchal heteronormative culture. This prohibition penetrates the motel scene, when Ennis tells Jack: "If he [Ennis' father] was alive and was to put his head in that door right now you bet he'd go get his tire iron" (30). The decidedly non-wet phallic trope of the tire iron

[10] Trudier Harris' discussion of the literary lynching spectacle provides a powerful analysis of lynching in black American literature and additionally provides insight into the function of literary lynching, as it also appears in works like "Brokeback Mountain." Harris' work establishes how such textual constructs enable an author to contextualize the historical and cultural attitudes of bias and destruction toward the subjectivity under sympathetic narrative focalization, see Harris.

is here introduced, as a punishing patriarchal trope that literally and figuratively dams up the potential for a fluid male sexuality.

Having established the ultimate punishment for transgressing the hegemony of heteronormative male sexuality, the narrative also delineates the penalties facing any degree of masculine or sexual fluidity in the novella's second scene of patriarchal discipline. This scene forms a tropic counterpoint to the desiccated ditch by expressing water in terms of its penalizing presence. After characterizing Jack's father as the kind of man "with the hard need to be the stud duck in the pond," Ennis recounts Jack telling him how his father beat him while losing patience with the four-year-old's undisciplined urinating habits (48). After beating him mercilessly, Jack's father urinated on him in a scene that evokes Freud's reading of urination as a vaguely homosexual act that must be repressed to harness the fiery foundational impulse of civilization, further suggesting a transgressive association with undisciplined male fluidity.[11] This violent discipline acts repressively and specifically on Jack's urinary play, thereby eliminating the potential for urolagnia or other fluidity in male desire. It also converts the object of Jack's play into a disciplinary instrument by turning it into a tool of humiliation. This discipline is far from sexual or S/M water play, and the harm resulting from it is shame, thereby obviating any potential for a positive identification, if not *jouissance*, with male fluidity. This discipline, if not delimitation, permeates the ostensibly private space of the bathroom, thereby regulating one of the precious few socially sanctioned spaces for the display of the penis. Accordingly, the extent of this disciplinary act is narrated in terms of castration. Recounting the incident to Ennis, Jack mentioned a difference he noticed between himself and his father: "I seen they'd cut me different like you'd crop a ear or scorch a brand. No way to get it right with him after that" (50). This distinction suggests circumcision, and the castrating power punctuating both scenes of patriarchal discipline involves the "cutting off" of the potential for any fluidity in male sexuality.

Thus, from the expression of desire behind preejaculatory fluid to the repression and apprehension behind blood and urine, a transgressive textual sexuality is narrated with a fluid motif, as the flux of homo/sexual desire is constituted between expression and repression.

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[11] For this complete discussion, see Freud, *Civilization*.

This fluid textuality plainly recurs when Alma confronts Ennis about his fishing trips, but further analysis reveals it generates additional significance when Ennis' fluid homo/sexuality is disciplined in Alma's kitchen. The narrative once again places Ennis in the domestic location of the kitchen, but this time he is joined by Alma, who while washing dishes admits behavior reminiscent of the conventional male intrusion into feminine space: "So one time I got your creel case open the night before you went on one a your little trips—price tag still on it after five years—and I tied a note on the end of the line. It said, hello Ennis, bring some fish home, love, Alma" (33). Alma's continued surveillance of the creel case leads her to the lie behind Ennis' fishing trips: "I looked in the case when I got a chance and there was my note still tied there and that line hadn't touched water in its life" (33). The aridity of Ennis' fishing line prompts a deeper realization in Alma, and as she progresses toward its revelation, the narrative evokes the cleansing function of water: "As though the word 'water' had called out its domestic cousin she twisted the faucet, sluiced the plates" (33). The domesticating properties of water are also suggested by the word "sluice," which denotes the channeling of water, as it is here deployed for the purposes of a sanitary domesticity.

The fluid motif continues to contour patriarchal discipline even when it is deployed by a female character. In the age of the metrosexual, Alma, who is a likely sympathetic character for a generation of anxious women whose unease can be detected behind every female who wonders if her boyfriend, or husband, is secretly gay, is perhaps the novella's second most contentious characterization. A constitutive clapboard casualty of Ennis' sexual closet, Alma also functions as a patriarchal proxy in the kitchen scene. Ennis' transgressive desire becomes an object for discipline in Alma's kitchen, when she responds to Ennis' denial of the implications behind her inspection of the creel case with a judgment: "Jack Twist? Jack Nasty. You and him—" (33). The potential for violence behind Alma's unfinished statement, provoking as it can the aforementioned discipline of the patriarchal order, incites a violent response from Ennis, which forces Alma's realization to remain unspoken. Emotions are often expressed without empathic consideration, but as such behaviors go, neither Alma's judgment nor Ennis' violence hold much of a claim as an empathic response. Both responses rest upon a problematic relationship to power and privilege, and this moment of instability challenges the reader's projection of sympathy, thereby

deepening the narrative's polemic potential, as both characters are simultaneously depicted as perpetrators and victims of patriarchal heteronormative privilege. This delineation functions as a textual hinge through which the minoritizing impulses of homo/sexuality reveal something about the larger ideological universe by implicating gender and sex as variables in the deployment of patriarchal heteronormative privilege. Even when deployed by a matriarch, the disciplining power of this privilege finds itself narrated with a fluid motif.

The violence ambuscading behind Alma's unfinished statement is revealed at the novella's end, as the repressive aspect of the fluid trope, which was established by Ennis and Jack's bloody reunion kiss, culminates with an act of mortal discipline. Calling Jack's wife Lureen, Ennis learns the details of Jack's death: "By the time someone came along he had drowned on his own blood" (45). Caught between understanding the discipline of the tire iron and the accident behind the tire rim, Ennis detects, if not recalls, the blood drawing potential of the former. Thinking of the simple act that might have saved Jack, Ennis fingers the fluid fulcrum behind Jack's brutal death in a phrase that recalls his negotiation of homo/sexual desire in the tent scene: "blood choking down Jack's throat and nobody to turn him over" (46). Jack drowned in the blood he was willing to shed by "turning over" for love. If Ennis del Mar symbolizes the anal island of the sea, then Jack Twist reads as the eddying current of defiant sexual desire. Jack risks his fluid desire, and he literally and figuratively drowns in its discipline.

Having expressed the terminal side of the fluid motif in its penultimate climax, the novella's final climactic moment quickens the wet metaphor with tears and semen. Visiting Jack's childhood room, Ennis discovers the two blood stained shirts from his and Jack's last day on Brokeback Mountain. The shirts are symbolically placed not only in a closet but in a closet nook, suggesting the depth of repression behind the act. Finally, the expressive fluid that would not previously flow, when Ennis dry heaved after first being separated from Jack, streams down his face, and he swears an oath before the memorial he has constructed from the two shirts. The nature of Ennis' oath is hinted at through his tears, but its content is more clearly suggested through his nighttime imaginings: "And he would wake sometimes in grief, sometimes with the old sense of joy and release; the pillow sometimes wet, sometimes the sheets" (55). Between tearing eyes and nocturnal emissions, the narrative gestures

toward a sense of productivity for Ennis' character by replacing his emotional stasis with a dynamic sentience, which is expressed through a fluid textuality. The narrative underscores this expressive evolution by reversing the understanding of the axiom Ennis shared with Jack during the Motel Siesta scene: "If you can't fix it you've got to stand it" (55). With this reiteration, the narrative frames a point of resistance for Ennis' character, as he resolves to let his desires flow.

Although hopefully comprehensive, this reading is by no means complete, and the analysis of the narrative's investment in a liquid poetics should be continued. Perhaps, this discussion will have provided some basis for future efforts in this area. A continued examination holds the potential to further theorize the narrative deployment of fluid tropes, as they are consciously and unconsciously deployed to construct a male homo/sexual textuality. I suspect the tropic potential of the wet metaphor can express any number of proscribed subjectivities, but my work thus far convinces me it holds a particular potential to express a male homo/sexual desire. In an effort to demonstrate the productivity for a continued fluviographic analysis beyond the confines of this novella, I would like to quickly gesture toward the extra-textual deployment of the water trope in the novella's film adaptation. In addition to soundtracking Ennis and Alma's kitchen confrontation scene with the sound of dripping water, the movie extends the novella's investment in fluid metaphors by offering an original visual rendering of the motif. Having reunited with Jack after their four-year separation, Ennis returns home to inform Alma he and Jack are going on a fishing trip. The camera then cuts to the next scene and shows a naked Ennis and Jack jumping off a cliff and into a lake—like a *tableau vivant* drawn from an Eakin's painting.

Although well over one hundred years separates them, Ennis and Jack are intimately related to Melville's sailors, Eakin's swimmers, and Whitman's bathers. The basis of this aesthetic kinship can be detected in the tropic deployment of water to express a transgressive male sexuality, particularly a homo/sexuality. The presence of this motif in American literature was first detected by Leslie Fiedler, whose quote opens this essay. Fiedler fingered the water trope as it folds sexual and racial discourses, thereby framing it as a literary tradition that defies the central ideologies of the American symbolic order regarding interracial and intrasexual relations. The persistent productivity of this trope has less to do with the narrative expression of an essentialized homosexual identity,

which changes according to the sundry gender, sex, and sexual discourses of time, place, and person, than it has to do with a pervasive transhistoric cultural anxiety surrounding a transgressive male sexual desire, particularly as this desire threatens to include a passive and/or non-procreative sexuality. Herein, we find Proulx's claim to this American literary continuity, as she crafted a narrative that interrogates culture as it orders and disorders individual desire. After all, you do not have to be gay to craft a homo/sexual textuality, for that subjectivity inheres in objects other than pens.

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