

Examining Bisexuality in *Saccage* by Eric Jourdan, *Call Me by Your name* by Andre Aciman, and *Un Garçon comme une Autre* by Joël Breurec: An Anthropological Approach

การขบคิดและทำความเข้าใจอัตลักษณ์ไบเซ็กชวลใน *Saccage* โดย Eric Jourdan
Call Me by Your name โดย Andre Aciman และ *Un Garçon comme une Autre*
โดย Joël Breurec ผ่านวิธีการมานุษยวิทยา

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Abstract

Objectives: In contemporary LGBT studies, bisexuality remains rarely explored compared to other sexual identities. This article aims to investigate bisexuality, specifically in literature where it continues to be shadowed by gay and lesbian representations despite the burst of LGBT literature throughout the last few decades. It also emphasizes the universal aspect of bisexual experiences and practices which transcend national boundaries through a comparative study of literary works from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, while remaining conscious to the particularities of each social and cultural context.

Methods: In an attempt to broach bisexuality in literary studies, the necessity to look to social sciences is unavoidable despite their markedly different approaches and methods. Therefore, the question is how can we articulate between knowledge from other disciplines and the apprehension of bisexuality in literary works without putting aside the nature of literature: literariness. In this difficulty, anthropological approaches prove adequate in allowing literature to interrogate extra-literary questions, making use of knowledge from other disciplines while simultaneously putting forward its literary aspects, since literature and anthropology share the same tool: writing or composing. The anthropological approaches used in this study – imagery, gaze, and bodily pleasure – are conjugated with literary strategies and techniques in the analysis of three contemporary French and American novels – *Saccage* (2006) by Eric Jourdan, *Call Me by Your Name* (2003) by André Aciman, and *Un Garçon comme une Autre* (2013) by Joël Breurec.

Results: The results of this research show that knowledge in social sciences, though essential, is insufficient in grasping bisexuality represented through literary works. The use of anthropological approaches helps us grasp bisexuality both as human practices and experiences, and as a subject for literary creation, which shed light on the construction and legitimacy of this sexual identity.

Application of this study: This study contributes to literary research and gender studies by emphasizing the necessity of interdisciplinarity in thinking sexuality in literature, and provides one possible approach to do so without losing sight of the particularities of literature and what it can do.

Keywords: bisexuality, bodily pleasures, contemporary novels, LGBT studies, interdisciplinarity

บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์: ในการศึกษาเกี่ยวกับเพศหลากหลายในปัจจุบันนั้น มีการศึกษาและทำความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับอัตลักษณ์ไบเซ็กชวลหรือรักร่วมสองเพศค่อนข้างน้อยเมื่อเทียบกับอัตลักษณ์เพศหลากหลายอื่น ๆ บทความนี้จึงมุ่งหวังที่จะศึกษาและทำความเข้าใจอัตลักษณ์ทางเพศนี้ผ่านตัวบทวรรณกรรมที่ซึ่งอัตลักษณ์ดังกล่าวก็ยังถูกบดบังโดยภาพแทนของเกย์และเลสเบียนแม้ว่าจะมีวรรณกรรมที่นำเสนอเกี่ยวกับเพศหลากหลายมากขึ้นในช่วงสามทศวรรษที่ผ่านมา งานวิจัยนี้ยังมุ่งหวังที่จะเน้นย้ำถึงความเป็นสากลของประสบการณ์และกิจวัตรของ

ปัจเจกที่เป็นไบเซ็กชวลซึ่งก้าวพ้นความเป็นชาติผ่านการศึกษาเชิงเปรียบเทียบระหว่างงานประพันธ์ที่มาจากบริบททางภาษาและวัฒนธรรมที่ต่างกันโดยยังคำนึงถึงเอกลักษณ์ของบริบททางสังคมและวัฒนธรรมแต่ละแห่ง

วิธีการศึกษา: การพยายามทำความเข้าใจอัตลักษณ์ไบเซ็กชวลในวัฒนธรรมอาจนำไปสู่ปัญหาในเชิงวิธีวิทยาเนื่องด้วยความจำเป็นที่จะต้องประยุกต์องค์ความรู้จากศาสตร์อื่น โดยเฉพาะสังคมศาสตร์ แม้ว่าจะมีวิธีวิทยาในการศึกษาต่างกันมากก็ตาม ด้วยเหตุนี้ คำถามที่ตามมาคือเราจะสามารถผสมผสานองค์ความรู้จากศาสตร์แขนงอื่นให้เข้ากับการทำความเข้าใจอัตลักษณ์ไบเซ็กชวลในวัฒนธรรมโดยยังให้ความสำคัญกับความเป็นวัฒนธรรมได้อย่างไร เพื่อเชื่อมต่อภาพแทนอัตลักษณ์ทางเพศในวัฒนธรรมเข้ากับองค์ความรู้ทางสังคมศาสตร์นั้น

วิธีเชิงมานุษยวิทยาถือเป็นหนึ่งในเครื่องมือที่ทำให้วรรณคดีศึกษาสามารถตั้งคำถามกับประเด็นต่าง ๆ ที่อยู่ นอกเหนือจากความเป็นวัฒนธรรมได้ในขณะที่ยังให้ความสำคัญกับแง่มุมทางวัฒนธรรมเนื่องจากมานุษยวิทยา และวรรณกรรมใช้เครื่องมือเดียวกันคือการเขียนหรือการนิพนธ์ วิธีทางมานุษยวิทยาที่ถูกนำมาใช้ในการศึกษารังนี้ ได้แก่ จินตภาพ การจ้องมอง และความสุขสมทางร่างกาย ผนวกกับกลวิธีการประพันธ์เพื่อวิเคราะห์นวนิยายฝรั่งเศส และอเมริกันร่วมสมัยสามเรื่องได้แก่ ใน *Saccage* (2549) โดย Eric Jourdan *Call Me by Your Name* (2546) โดย Andre Aciman และ *Un Garçon comme une Autre* (2556) โดย Joël Breurec

ผลการศึกษา: ผลการศึกษาพบว่าองค์ความรู้ทางสังคมศาสตร์เพียงอย่างเดียวไม่เพียงพอต่อการทำความเข้าใจอัตลักษณ์ทางเพศผ่านวัฒนธรรม วิธีการทางมานุษยวิทยาช่วยให้เราเข้าใจไบเซ็กชวลในฐานะอัตลักษณ์ทางเพศและในฐานะหัวข้อทางการประพันธ์ในเวลาเดียวกัน ซึ่งทำให้เราได้เห็นกระบวนการประกอบสร้างและความชอบธรรมในการมีอยู่ของอัตลักษณ์ไบเซ็กชวลอีกด้วย

การประยุกต์ใช้: ผลการศึกษารังนี้แนะนำแนวทางการใหม่ในการศึกษาอัตลักษณ์ทางเพศผ่านวัฒนธรรมโดยเน้นย้ำถึงความจำเป็นของสหวิทยาการและเสนอหนึ่งในวิธีการที่เป็นไปได้เพื่อทำความเข้าใจอัตลักษณ์ทางเพศผ่านวัฒนธรรมโดยยังคงเน้นย้ำมุมมองและคุณูปการเฉพาะของวรรณกรรมที่เราไม่สามารถพบได้ในศาสตร์แขนงอื่น

คำสำคัญ: ไบเซ็กชวล ความสุขสมทางกาย นวนิยายร่วมสมัย เพศหลากหลายศึกษา สหวิทยาการ

Introduction

After the Gay Liberation Movement from the late 1960s to the mid- 1980s, non-heterosexual identities, especially gays and lesbians, have gained to some extent more visibility and social acceptance. This has led to a more encompassing LGBT rights movement promoting legal recognition of same-sex marriage and a better understanding of LGBT individuals. Despite its presence in the etiquette of the movement, according to Steven Angelides in *The History of Bisexuality*, bisexuality “continues, in fact, to represent a blind spot in sex research” (Angelides, 2001 : 2). This blind spot later extends to sexual politics and cultural representations.

While gay liberationists in the 1960s looked to bisexuality as a counter-construction to psycho-medical construction of homosexuality, the issue of “non-homosexual” starts fracturing the group with the purpose and dynamics of consciousness-raising groups. These groups sought to enable homosexuals to develop an awareness of the pattern of gay oppression through their common experience as homosexuals. This growing mood can be summed up by Steve Gavin in *Come Out* magazine: “The group should be limited at least initially to individuals interested in developing a gay consciousness. Needless to say, straight and ‘bisexuals’ should never be admitted to a gay consciousness raising group; otherwise, the whole procedure is a sham” (1971 : 19). In this attempt, bisexuality is put aside in the LGBT movements due to its non-homosexual characteristics. This political mood seems to have later seeped into literary representations as well.

Despite the burst of LGBT literature and the rise in publication about bisexuality since the mid-1990s, often influenced by the new appearance of bisexual organizations, bisexuality continued to be eclipsed by gay and lesbian in contemporary non-heterosexual narratives (Epstein, 2014 : 110-25). Some novels may choose to represent gay culture as underground ways of life, inscribed in the anti-assimilationist movement, such as *Faggots* (1978) by Larry Kramer, *Dancer from the Dance* (1978) by Andrew Holleran, *Tales of the City* (1978) by Armistead Maupin, while *The Hours* (1998) by Michael Cunningham opts to represent the contemporary homosexual context in the climate of tolerance and

interpersonal relations with non-gay people. In France, Guy Hocquenghem's *L'Amour en Relief* (1981) and *Eve* (1987) mobilize gay subjectivity through homosexual organs to join other parts of the body as organs of pleasure freed from phallic order and from reproductive model. Hervé Guibert in his novels, *A l'Ami Qui Ne M'a Pas Sauvé la Vie* (1990), *Le Protocole Compassionnel* (1991), and *CytomégaloVirus* (1992), also transforms literary aesthetics by its autobiographical subject that defies literary tradition through its negotiation of the body as scientific object and as literary object. Other novels may focus more on gay experience, like Rachid Boudjedra's *La Répudiation* (1969) narrating the childhood of the author/narrator and his incapacity to understand his brother's homosexuality, or Rachid O.'s whose autobiographical novels (*L'Enfant Ebloui* in 1995 for example) represent with honesty and serenity his first homosexual experiences. Another recent one is Edouard Louis's *En Finir avec Eddy Bellegueule* (2014) recounting his homosexual experience during his childhood in rural France. From this brief survey of non-heterosexual contemporary novels in France and in the US, we cannot help but notice that most, if not all, of non-heterosexual novels focus on homosexual subject and experience.

It is this blind spot in research, politics and cultural representations that triggers my interest in further exploring this sexual identity in literature and its dialogue with other disciplines, especially with Social Sciences. Any attempt to tackle the question of sexuality or sexual identity necessarily requires a certain knowledge from Social Sciences such as Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology to name a few. Hence, wanting to broach bisexuality in literary studies, we are obliged to look to Social Sciences for some types of knowledge which may help clarify certain points in our interrogation of bisexuality in literature. The uses of extra-literary knowledge and methods in literary analysis can however be tricky and problematical because they are inadequate in grasping the significant aspects of literary works: literariness. It is therefore imperative to find a well-balanced approach that allows us to think bisexuality in literature without losing sight of its literary aspects nor dismissing knowledge from other disciplines. Therefore, in this article, we will first try to see how bisexuality is epistemologically constructed in Social Sciences and the types of knowledge or discourses they produce. Then we will apply anthropological approaches – namely the imaginary, gaze, bodily pleasures – which may allow us to interrogate bisexuality both as a sexual identity and literary object. These approaches will be mobilized in the analysis of three contemporary French and American novels: *Saccage* (2006) by Eric Jourdan, *Call Me by Your Name* (2003) by André Aciman, and *Un Garçon comme une Autre* (2013) by Joël Breurec.

The choice of these three novels is undoubtedly arbitrary though not completely without certain criteria. The three novels are particularly chosen mainly because they articulate bisexual narrative with coming-of-age trope where the protagonists undergo the process of self-construction, including sexual affirmation. The limitation of the corpus to French and American novels is due to the linguistic and cultural spheres conducted in my current PhD research. It is therefore not exhaustive and do not pretend to cover the greater span of bisexual literatures in other countries. Nonetheless, the comparative study of literary works across national boundaries, at least, already suggests some universal aspects of this sexual identity which, in its cultural imagination and representation, go beyond national boundaries. This analysis may also demonstrate how Social Sciences can be used as tools in literary studies questioning bisexual identity while putting forward literariness and its contribution to the interdisciplinary research on bisexuality.

The Epistemological Construction of Bisexuality in Social Sciences and Literary Studies

The fantasy of having or being simultaneously both sexes has resonated in human collective memory since the dawn of time, even before the constitution of various disciplines on sexual identities, be it Sexology or Gender Studies. This resonance can be heard in foundational mythological or religious texts such as androgyny in Plato's *Symposium* or Ovid's *Metamorphosis* where the myths of human's bisexual origin are described through multiple forms, or even in the

Bible where only God is one, immortal and omnipotent, transcending any sexual difference, whereas mankind lost its bisexuality at its creation (Menahem, 1997 : 21).

The shift in paradigm took place in the 19th century. Due to scientific progress, sexuality, including bisexuality, has then been apprehended based on empirical evidence and experimentation rather than resorting to mythological and religious explanations. This shift in paradigm paved way for the constitution of Sexology or Gender Studies as we know it today. One of the first mentions of bisexuality in scientific research appeared in Aleksandr Kovalevsky's work in 1866 where he discovered the hermaphroditical state of vertebrates' sexual organs in their first cycle (Angelides, 2001 : 32). Charles Darwin also resorted to bisexuality as a link between human descendance and invertebrate organism. However, Kovalevsky and Darwin did not develop their concept further to apprehend human sexuality. And when bisexuality was used to explain human sexuality, it was first confused with homosexuality in the works of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and Carl Wesphal (Angelides, 2001 : 24). Then Richard von Krafft-Ebing established a clear distinction between homosexuality and bisexuality, considering the latter, in his work *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), a sort of psychical hermaphroditism (Aron, 1997 : 37). Henry Havelock Ellis (1999 : 15-9) agreed with this definition and took bisexuality as a biological or psychical coexistence of both sexes. He was also the first one to point out the epistemological dilemma of bisexuality due to its disturbance of classificatory alliance of genders and its dissolution of sexual identity boundary in scientific discourse.

At the turn of the 20th century, bisexuality received a warmer welcome in the study of sexuality. Freud, in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, contributed to the development of bisexual theory by proposing three definitions of bisexuality: anatomical bisexuality, psychical bisexuality and sexual object choice, each operates independently from one another and whose combination offers a diverse variation in each individual (Angelides 66). The most radical concept of bisexuality was that of Wilhelm Stekel (1999 : 29) who considered this sexual category as the true human sexuality whereas an exclusive attraction to one gender, is a form of neurosis. Alfred Kinsey's work *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (1948) was also significant in the development of bisexual theory with its scale concentrated on orgasm as minimal factor. The study shows that 37 percent of white post-adolescent males have experienced homosexual activity to the point of orgasmic discharge. Given human capacity to react erotically to stimuli coming from both sexes, Kinsey (1948 : 199-203) believes that the preference of one sex over another is due to social and cultural factors.

However, bisexuality was also disavowed by some other sexologists like Edmund Bergler (1962 : 26) who rejected the existence of bisexuality beyond the word itself, or Sandor Rado (1940 : 459-67) who favored an environmentalist approach to apprehend sexual identity and rejected the idea of congenital sexual identity. This comes as no surprise and can be understood by Rado's therapeutic optimism in curing homosexuality which he considered as sexual deviance or anomaly. If he accepted that sexual identity is congenital, the ontological explanation of his discipline could be undermined. Moreover, bisexuality in this regard presents a too threatening proximity to heterosexuality and risks suggesting a possible amalgamation between homosexuality and heterosexuality. To avoid this, bisexuality is therefore bracketed or disavowed by these latter sexologists.

Bisexuality later seems to find a discursive space for its articulation in Queer theory, favoring all kinds of sexual identities and practices rejected by western regime of sexuality imbued with heteronormativity and reproductive discourse. However, this could be true on organizational and activist levels, but less so in terms of theoretical development. One of the obvious examples can be found in *The Epistemology of the Closet* by Eve Sedgwick, whose central organizing principle is the motif of "the closet" (Sedgwick, 1990 : 3). Here, the closet proves to be a useful metaphor in an attempt to question the relations between the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit, the bizarre and normality. This binary logic at the origin of Queer theory ends up, involuntarily perhaps, bracketing bisexuality which lies on a different kind of logic (the logic of both/and or ambivalence).

In Social Sciences, as we can see, bisexuality is valued and disavowed at the same time: on one hand, bisexuality is saluted for its ambivalence which undermines strict binary paradigm of sexuality; on the other hand, it is bracketed because of its ambivalence which disrupts binary logic governing the theoretical and epistemological construction of sexual identities. Consequently, bisexuality can be considered a margin in sexual theory developed in Social Sciences. This marginal characteristic of bisexuality is clearly elaborated by Tania Israel in "Bisexuality: from Margin to Center" (2018 : 233-42). In this article, Israel reconceptualizes bisexuality as a sexual margin based on Kinsey's scale. This scale ranging from 0 (exclusively attracted to the opposite sex) to 6 (exclusively attracted to the same sex) places bisexuality in the middle. Bending this scale, bisexuality becomes a distinct sexual orientation whereas homosexuality and heterosexuality get closer to one another and are collectively qualified as "monosexuality," an exclusive sexual attraction to only one gender – male or female. Bisexuality in this regard falls into marginality while heterosexuality and homosexuality form the center in contemporary sexual regime. Israel also insists on the disavowal of bisexuality on sociological ground in what she calls "bi-erasure," based on her survey of the lived-experiences of bisexual individuals who repeatedly feel misunderstood then disavowed due to their ambivalent desires and pleasures eluding all kinds of categorization governed by binary logic.

The debate on bisexuality in Social Sciences is still ongoing, haunted constantly by the ambivalent characteristic of this sexual identity which threatens to dissolve classificatory alliance of genders and sexual identity boundary. In this ongoing debate, what does literature has to say or to offer in order to better understand bisexuality? The apprehension of sexual identity, bisexuality in this case, in literature can to some extent be problematical. The studies of bisexuality in Social Sciences are based on empirical facts and evidences, as seen in Kinsey's and Israel's works which are conducted from their surveys of real people's lived experiences. Literature on the other hand, preoccupied mainly with language as means of representation, cannot resort to any empirical evidence beyond the language itself. As a consequence, empirical approaches (surveys, interview, positivist methods, to name a few) in Social Sciences are inadequate in apprehending bisexual representations in literary works which are based on different types of logic (poetics and aesthetics in literary writing).

The question is then how literature depicts and offers news perspectives on the reality of bisexuality or bisexual subjects without any empirical evidences in the same manner as those in Social Sciences, which is the aim of this article. It would however be misleading to suggest that there has been no research on bisexuality in literature before this article. Though not as numerous as research on literary representations of homosexuality, some research on bisexuality in literature can still be found, though rather sparsely. In French literary studies, the scholarly works of Frédéric Monneyron – *L'Androgyne Romantique. Du Mythe au Mythe Littéraire* (1994) and *L'Androgyne Décadent: Mythe, Figure, Fantasmés* (1996) – manifest the first glimpse of research on bisexuality in literature by tracing the myth of androgyny as aesthetic principles in combining both sexes representing an ideal and complete world. However, the analysis in this study focuses more on bisexuality as a myth and on an aesthetic exploration and less on bisexuality as a sexual identity. It was in his later work – *Bisexualité et Littérature. Autour de D. H. Lawrence et Virginia Woolf* (2000) – that Monneyron started addressing bisexuality as a unified identity through psychoanalytical lens in the study of Lawrence's and Woolf's novels. Yet, the main focus of this later work on the psychological state of the characters tends to put aside some other aspects of bisexuality, namely bisexual practices and experiences. On the other hands, Clémentine Brenart's master degree thesis – *La Bisexualité dans la Littérature. Étude Comparative de Romans du XXe et du XXIe Siècle* (2021) – discusses bisexuality as a sexual identity and its experiences in monosexist society. Similarly in American literary studies on bisexuality, most works analyze the tension and negotiation between bisexual characters and monosexual norms in society, as we can see in *"The Case of the Missing Bisexuals": Bisexuality in Books for Young* (2014) by B.J. Epstein and *Resisting Monosexism: Representations of Bisexuality in Literature* (2020) by Audrey T. Heffers. Nonetheless, these studies tend to take literary

works, through its narrative, solely as socio-cultural contents or sociological documents in their analysis and overlook the literary aspects of the works. In this dilemma, anthropological approaches – namely imaginary, gaze, and bodily pleasures – prove adequate in the interrogation of bisexuality in literature both as a sexual identity and a literary object, and shed light on its particular contribution to the understanding of this sexual identity in broader interdisciplinary research.

Thinking Sexual Identity in Literature: An Anthropological Approach

In his “Introduction” of a collaborative work *Littérature et Anthropologie*, Alain Montandon declares that “L’anthropologie s’intéresse à l’homme, tandis que la littérature s’intéresse d’abord aux formes d’expression et d’écriture qui modèlent les différents types de discours” (2006 : 8; Anthropology is interested in mankind, whereas literature is interested primarily in the forms of expression and of writing which shape different types of discourse). A distinction between the two disciplines is established here by Montandon before he moves on to suggest the articulation between them as he points out that literature is also concerned with mankind, in general and in particular, and Anthropology makes use of language for its organization of “un savoir en texte, son faire voir, son regard” (2006 : 11; knowledge in textual form, its demonstration, its gaze). Writing is therefore the first focal point between literature and anthropology because of their textual nature as means of producing knowledge. An anthropological approach also opens up a dialogue between literature and social sciences on the question of mankind, here a particular group of mankind known as bisexuals. This approach turns our attention thereby to the ways in which literary discourse on bisexuality is formulated and its contribution to the interdisciplinary debate on this sexual identity.

If the writing process is here at the center stage as means of acquiring knowledge on mankind and not empirical evidences in the manner of social sciences, an appropriate approach that allows literature and anthropology to apprehend bisexuality is then to be determined. Daniel Henri Pageaux in “Littérature Générale & Comparée et Anthropologie” proposes a particular anthropological approach that scholars from both disciplines can comfortably share: the imaginary (2006 : 29). This approach implements the interrogation on humanity and its means of expression allowing the manifestation of all that cannot manifest in scientific discourse. The interest of this approach lies therefore in the analysis of the modes of representations and their contribution to the question of bisexuality.

Preoccupied with all aspects of humanity, Anthropology interrogates the problems or questions of mankind, both in particular and in general. One of the recurrent themes in Anthropology are body and otherness. Christoph Wulf, in “L’Anthropologie Historique et les Paradigms d’Anthropologie : Perspectives pour la Littérature Générale et Comparée”, proposes several anthropological themes, ones of which are body and otherness. On the question of body, Wulf (2006 : 119) specifies that we can problematize it from two perspectives: physiological (neotony, ectopic premature year, hiatus between stimulus and reaction, upright walking, brain size etc.) and historico-cultural (individual body, body as product of history and culture). This approach is also suggested by Pageaux: “Un premier niveau d’interrogations envisagerait la problématique du corps ; plus précisément comment l’homme, dans sa dimension physiologique, subsiste dans les transcriptions littéraires, pris dans un double processus de littérisation et de socialization” (the first level of investigation would be to consider the question of the body; more specifically how a human, in his physiological dimension, is perpetuated in literary transcriptions, grasped in a double process of textualization and socialization), and then body as “un nouvel objet de l’histoire, pour interroger la littérature, les rêves et réfléchir sur l’anthropologie passée à l’histoire. [...] une histoire de la culture alliant histoire matérielle, histoire du biologique et histoire de l’imaginaire, cherchant à saisir l’homme en société tout entière” (a new object of history, in order to interrogate literature, dreams, and to reflect on anthropology passed on to history [...] a history of culture linking material history, biological history and history of the

imaginary, with the aim of grasping mankind in an entire society) (Pageaux, 2006 : 39). Body plays hence, following Pageaux and Wulf, a significant role in the multiple investigations of mankind to which bisexuality as a human sexual practice and identity rightfully belongs.

Another anthropological theme which could be useful for the interrogation of bisexuality is otherness. It is one of the primary themes in Anthropology since its constitution as pointed out by Pageaux: "L'anthropologie, spécialement celle de Claude Lévi-Strauss, m'apportait quelques raisons d'entreprendre. Elle était, pour moi, le prolongement évident de ce qui est le plus spécifique, le plus dynamique dans l'interrogation comparatiste : la dimension étrangère, l'altérité, la présence de l'autre. [...] L'écriture de l'altérité intègre un sentiment, une conscience identitaire, plus ou moins clairement exprimés" (2006 : 21; Anthropology, especially that of Claude Lévi-Strauss, gave me a few reasons to undertake. It was, for me, the obvious prolongation of what is the most specific, the most dynamic in comparatist interrogation: the dimension of the foreign, alterity, the presence of the other [...] Writing about otherness includes a feeling, an identity consciousness, more or less clearly expressed). Otherness is in this regard fundamental in Anthropology in its attempt to apprehend the other, an attempt which is also constantly present in literary creation when a writer by means of imagination and representation creates a character that could be different from himself or herself on different grounds, be it class, race, gender or cultural background. Adopting the imaginary as an anthropological approach, the theme of otherness can prove useful in thinking bisexuality in literature because "On crée des différences à l'aide de délimitations et de catégorisations qui délimitent l'autre ou même l'excluent. La raison pour laquelle on considère quelqu'un comme autre, dépend du contexte historique et culturel ainsi que des classifications symboliques que l'on utilise" (Wulf, 2006 : 110-19; we created differences with the help of delimitations and of categorizations which circumscribe or even exclude the other. The reason why we consider someone as the other depends on historical and cultural context as well as the symbolic classifications we use). On the ground of sexual identity, the theme of otherness can be applied to bisexuality due to its marginal characteristics in contemporary sexual regime where monosexuality is dominant and normalized. Bisexuality can therefore be considered the other in this context where monosexuality is the normative sexual orientation. By adopting an anthropological approach, we can hence aim to grasp the symbolic classifications deployed in the text to constitute bisexuality as the other and demonstrate the imaginary construction of this sexual identity.

With an anthropological approach, literature can hence extend its field of interrogation to social world by means of representations rather than reflect exclusively upon its literariness. The anthropological framework serves in this regard as a scientific caution to consider literature not only as "un agencement de formes et de signes mais aussi comme un savoir particulier" (Wulf, 2006 : 28; an arrangement of forms and signs but also a particular knowledge). However, we must keep in mind that a literary work, though taken as an anthropological object of study, does not become a document. It is not, to quote Pageaux, "un ensemble illustratif de problèmes, elle n'est pas la somme de contenus socio-culturels, elle ne va pas être instrumentalisée au nom d'une réalité autre que celle des mots qui composent un espace textuel" (2006 : 35; an illustrative set of problems, it is not a general survey of socio-cultural contents, it won't be instrumentalized in the name of reality other than that of words which compose a textual space). In an attempt to address issues which exceed literature, literary studies must therefore not "oublier la nature verbale du texte, sa dimension poétique, et qu'il faudra, au bout du compte, expliquer une 'pensée solidifiée', mais aussi expliquer selon quelle logique poétique elle a été conçue, mise en mots et mise en œuvre." (Pageaux, 2006 : 36; forget the verbal nature of the text, its poetic dimension, and it is imperative, at some point, to explain a *solidified idea*, but also to explain the poetical coherence behind its conception, wording and textualization). In order to discuss bisexuality in literature and to not take literary text as a document to affirm or to simply repeat what is already said in Social Sciences, we must therefore also pay a rigorous

attention to the singularity of literature: literariness, before any other aspects, which may later lead to a better understanding of bisexuality as represented in literary studies.

The Literary Configuration of Bisexual Gaze: Thinking the Sexual Other

Since our aim here is to explore how literature thinks or rethinks bisexuality, we will first attempt to analyze how this sexual category is textually constructed in three contemporary French and American novels of which the protagonist manifests bisexual inclination: *Saccage* (2006) by Eric Jourdan, *Call Me by Your Name* (2003) by André Aciman, and *Un Garçon comme une Autre* (2013) by Joël Breurec.

While Social Sciences perceive bisexuality as ambivalence, even disruptive in some cases, the textual reconstruction of this sexual identity gives us a different perspective by representing it more as an expansion of desire. In *Call Me by Your Name*, Elio, the protagonist, starts fantasizing about his guest, Oliver, shortly after the latter's arrival at his house. Repeatedly throughout the first part of the novel, his sexual desire for Oliver is all over the places and pages, and keeps getting stronger as each page turned:

But I wasn't fooling myself. I was convinced that no one in the world would want him as physically as I did; nor was anyone willing to go the distance I was prepared to travel for him. No one had studied every bone in his body, ankles, knees, wrists, fingers, and toes, no one lusted after every ripple of muscle, no one took him to bed every night and on spotting him in the morning lying in his heaven by the pool, smiled at him, watched a smile come to his lips and thought, Did you know I came in your mouth last night? (Aciman, 2009 : 39)

In this passage, Elio's desire for Oliver can first be grasped through his gaze, starting with his keen observation of Oliver's body and ending up in his sexual fantasizing over Oliver. A similar desire is later in the text directed to a girl, Marzia, who Elio has been simultaneously flirting with:

I held her face with both hands, then leaned into her as we began to kiss, my hands under her shirt, hers in my hair. I loved her simplicity, her candor. [...] I wanted to look at her, stare in her eyes as she held me in her hand, tell her how long I'd wanted to kiss her say something to show that the person who'd called her tonight and picked her up at her house was no longer the same cold, lifeless boy. (Aciman, 2009 : 117)

In this textual reconstruction, Elio's desire is not perceived as ambivalent but rather expansive in the narrative, from one gender to another without any markedly distinction. Though we may see a slight difference in Elio's gazes over his two sexual object choice – carnal for Oliver and more sentimental or romantic for Marzia –, both gazes clearly convey his sexual desire and longing for both sexes.

This expansion of desire is also present in Fraîcheur, the protagonist of *Saccage*: "Puis Fraîcheur sentit qu'il voulait plus, une caresse sur la joue, un baiser, pourquoi réserver aux filles sa bouche ?" (Jourdan, 2006 : 41; Then Fraîcheur felt that he wanted more, a caress on his cheek, a kiss, why reserve his lips only for girls). Fraîcheur starts realizing his expansive desire by contemplating on such an intimate gesture as kissing which can procure him with as much pleasure with men as with women. Then he touches himself while thinking of his male friends: "Et il se caressait en rêvant à eux. C'était clair, il aurait voulu leur appartenir comme Clémence lui appartenait" (Jourdan, 2006 : 44; And he caressed himself while dreaming of them. It was clear, he would have wanted to belong to them as Clémence belonged to him). This

passage is conspicuously revealing in matter of Fraîcheur's sexual identity. He fantasizes about his male friends, yet without forgetting Clémence in his fantasizing. The verb "belong" also amalgamates both sexes as his sexual object choices and underlines his expansion of desire from one gender to another. Then during a scene just before his kiss with François, a carpenter to whom Fraîcheur is also attracted, his sexual identity is represented through his gaze: "Dans son impatience il devint le menuisier et, sans s'en douter, transformant celui-ci en Jeannine, [...] en rouvrant les yeux qu'il avait presque clos comme en faisant l'amour, que c'était non François, mais la petite servante qu'il croyait avoir sous lui" (Jourdan, 2006 : 115; In his impatience he became the carpenter and, without any doubts, transforming him into Jeannine, [...] Opening his eyes that he had half-closed the same way as when making love, that it was not François but the little housemaid that he believed lying under him). Through his gaze, the gender of his sexual object choice becomes blurred and could be a man or a woman, which further emphasizes the contingency of the gender of his sexual object choice.

Ewen, the protagonist of *Un Garçon comme une Autre*, is even more straightforward about his expansive desire, declared by himself since the very beginning of the novel: "J'ai eu la confirmation que les garçons m'attirent autant que les filles" (Breurec, 2013 : 6; I have had the confirmation that boys attract me as much as girls do). Each time he goes out flirting, his expansive desire is repeatedly pointed out in each of his utterance: "Sur la grande plage, j'ai remarqué d'autres spécimens, filles et garçons" (Breurec, 2013 : 12; On the enormous beach, I noticed other specimens, girls and boys). In this passage, the novel points out Ewen's desiring gaze which is not limited only to one gender but expands to both, inviting readers to integrate a new lens in order to follow the development of Ewen's sexual awakening. This theme of sexual initiation is even more obvious as Ewen declares "Le parfum de Wendy sentait la vanille. Comme ma glace préférée. Mais les filles à la vanille – et les autres –, je ne les avais pas encore goûtées. Ce serait peut-être pour cet été, puisque j'étais dans le temps des premières fois. Aimer les garçons et les filles, cela se peut" (Breurec, 2013 : 26; Wendy's perfume smelt of vanilla. Like my favorite ice-cream. But Vanilla-flavored girls – and others –, I hadn't tasted any yet. It would probably be during this summer, for I was in the period of first times. Loving boys and girls, that is possible). Moreover, when Ewen talks about his sexual desire, he always specifies that it's boys "and" girls, as if to permanently textually insert the coexistence of both sexes as his sexual object choice, without one eclipsing the other. In the same manner, after his sexual experiences with both sexes, he always insists on the equivalence between his experiences with boys and those with girls: "J'ai senti le même frisson, l'espèce de vague que j'éprouvais avec Mathis" (Breurec, 2013 : 34; I felt the same thrill, the kind of wave that I experienced with Mathis), and "Quand on a quitté les filles, j'ai fait la bise à Raphaëlle, comme si de rien n'était. Alors qu'elle m'avait posé sur un nuage et que j'y étais encore ; j'avais eu la même impression après la première fois avec Mathis" (Breurec, 2013 : 68; When we left the girls, I gave a kiss to Raphaëlle, as if nothing had happened. When actually she had taken me to the clouds and I was still there; I had had the same feelings after my first time with Mathis). The expansive desire depicted in these passages is especially emphasized by the word "same" that the protagonist uses to compare what he feels during his sexual experience with boys and those with girls.

Through textual reconstruction of a bisexual subject, these three novels offer another way of thinking bisexuality by their configuration of bisexual gaze. In their narrative, bisexuality is not perceived as a disruptive ambivalence but as an expansive desire freed from any binary logic that may cause a feeling of contradiction inside bisexual subjects. This bisexual gaze also invites us to adopt and integrate a new lens to apprehend the protagonists' sexual identity as well as his interaction with the world around him, reconstructed by the projection of his expansive desire. In a context where monosexuality is normative and bisexuality constituted as the other, this literary configuration of bisexual gaze is an

invitation to imagine and to explore the other in the imaginary. With this lens, we may go even further in our interrogation of bisexuality, for it is not only a sexual desire but also a sexual practice involving bodily pleasures.

The Textual Construction of Bisexual Bodily Pleasures

The protagonists' expansive desire which transcends any sexual categories shifts its focus later in the narrative from their gaze to their corporeal pleasures. The three novels put forward the protagonists' physiological reaction to stimuli coming from both sexes, taking as minimal factor the arousal that their bodily experiences in contact with another body, regardless of gender. However, despite their concentration on the protagonists' body, different strategies are used in each novel to depict bisexual pleasures: third-person omniscient point of view in *Saccage* and first-person point of view in *Un Garçon comme Une Autre* and in *Call Me by Your Name*.

Saccage is narrated in a third-person point of view by an extradiegetic narrator. By this narrative strategy, Fraîcheur's physiological reaction to pleasure becomes more perceptible than his utterance: "En même temps, ils firent presque le même geste : la main de la femme se posa sur le cou de Fraîcheur, les doigts de Fraîcheur sur la bouche de Clémence comme pour l'écarter. Elle détourna la tête. Fraîcheur sembla soudain la voir et ne voit plus qu'elle. Il fut ému malgré lui" (Jourdan, 2006 : 29; At the same time, they made almost the same gesture: the woman's hand rested on Fraîcheur's neck, Fraîcheur's fingers on Clémence's lips as if to open them. She turned her head. Fraîcheur seemed suddenly to see her and only her. He was aroused despite himself). As we read this passage, we can effortlessly hear the sound of Fraîcheur's aroused body as a result of Clémence's touch which surpasses his mental capacity of controlling it. It is hence his body which speaks up and expresses itself freely and freed from Fraîcheur's consciousness in sexual intercourse. The expression of his body is even more audible when he makes love to Clémence: "Une liqueur semblait lui mouiller le bas du corps. Fraîcheur y glissait et à son tour il se mit à gémir, puis un cri s'échappa de sa gorge et il perdit pied, s'effondrant dans un dernier coup de reins sur celle à qui il abandonnait sa force" (Jourdan, 2006 : 76; A liquor seemed to get her wet down there. Fraîcheur slid in and started to moan himself, then a cry leaves his throat uncontrollably and he lost his balance, collapsing into the last bang on the woman to whom he left all his strength). The sexual pleasure experienced by Fraîcheur is apprehended here by his body with an uncontrollable cry at the moment of orgasm and his convulsive physiological reaction to the pleasure. The same strategy is also deployed when Fraîcheur and François touch each other: "Un instant ils sentirent qu'ils étaient l'un et l'autre excités et en se relevant, comme ils se retrouvaient pour ainsi dire enlacés, leurs bouches se touchaient malgré eux" (Jourdan, 2006 : 115; For a moment they felt that they were each of them aroused and while getting up, as they found themselves thereby entwined, their lips touched despite them). We find in this passage the same strategy used to depict the pleasure felt by Fraîcheur as a response to a man's touch: his aroused body and their kiss "despite them." Once again, his body surpasses him in sexual experience. He then leaves himself entirely to his desire in a sexual intercourse with François: "Soudain la douleur sembla s'envoler ou plutôt se changer en désir que ce soit encore plus douloureux et le plaisir s'y mêla. Puis ce ne fut que du plaisir et il s'abandonna à la sensation d'être l'objet d'un autre garçon" (Jourdan, 2006 : 133; Suddenly the pain seemed to evaporate or rather changed into desire that it be even more painful and the pleasure mixed up with it. Then it was only pleasure and he abandoned himself to the sensation of being another boy's object). The importance of the body in matter of sexuality is further affirmed through a literary discourse detached from the narrative and formulated by the omniscient narrator, noticeable by the use of the present tense: "une attirance, ça ne se commande pas, on la reçoit en plein dans le milieu du corps, au plexus comme un coup de poing" (Jourdan, 2006 : 103; an attraction can't be commanded, we get it fully in

the middle of the body, at our plexus like a punch). This passage also emphasizes the contingent nature of bisexual desire which can come and go in any direction.

Body also plays a significant role in *Un Garçon comme une Autre* in order to represent bisexual desire and pleasure, but in a different manner. The novel is narrated in a first-person point of view by an intradiegetic narrator. The corporeal pleasure experienced is therefore in this case verbalized by the protagonist himself, while always closely related to his physiological reaction: “Nous prenons l’escalier de pierre. J’ai le cœur qui bat. Parce que je le trouve joli et que nous sommes tous les deux ? [...] Je crois qu’on va bien s’entendre. Je le sais. Et je le sens : j’ai la gaule” (Breurec, 2013 : 14; We take the stone staircase. I felt my heart beating. Because I find him cute and that we are together [...] I think we will get along well. I know it. And I feel it: I have a hard-on). In this passage, Ewen utters verbally his attraction to Mathis, another boy. But to validate this attraction, he turns to his physiological reaction – “I have a hard-on” – as proof or sign of confirmation. This attraction is further confirmed later in the narrative by his making love with Mathis: “Ce soir-là, pour la première fois, j’ai ‘couché’ avec quelqu’un. Je n’avais pas imaginé que ce serait un garçon” (Breurec, 2013 : 23; That night, for the first time, I *slept* with someone. I hadn’t imagined that it would be a boy). The fact that Ewen didn’t know that his first time would be with a boy also emphasizes the contingent nature of bisexuality, that his sexual desire could go in any direction and is out of his control. He later finds himself attracted to Raphaëlle, a girl he meets on the beach: “Elle me prend le visage entre ses mains et je goûte ses lèvres, aussi brûlantes que celles de Mathis. [...] J’ai l’impression que mon bermuda a rétréci ! Je crains de ne pas pouvoir me retenir” (Breurec, 2013 : 35; She took my face between her hands and I tasted her lips, as hot as Mathis’. [...] I felt that my shorts tightened up! I’m afraid of not being able to retain myself). In this passage, it is again through his body that his sexual pleasure manifests itself – his reaction to sensational touch and his erection – in the same way as when he is with Mathis.

Like *Un Garçon comme une Autre*, *Call Me by Your Name* is narrated in a first-person narrative by an intradiegetic narrator. However, the relation between Elio and his body is more problematical when it comes to his pleasures with a man. As he kisses Marzia, his pleasure manifests through his body: “There was nothing between our body but our clothes, which was why I was not surprised when she slipped a hand between us down in my trousers, and said, ‘*Sei duro, duro*, you’re so hard’ And it was her Frankness, unfettered and unstrained, that made me harder yet now.” (Aciman, 2009 : 117) The causative structure of the last sentence also emphasizes the reaction of his body to Marzia’s touch, showing that it’s his body speaking out and surpassing him. After his love-making with Marzia, Elio’s mind is entirely fixed on the girl to the point of totally dismissing the desire he previously felt for Oliver:

I loved her smell on my body, on my hands. I would do nothing to wash it away. I’ll keep it on me till we met in the evening. [...] To think that a few nights ago I had felt so strong an urge to host his (Oliver’s) body in mine that I’d nearly jumped out of bed to seek him in his room. Now the idea couldn’t possibly arouse me. Perhaps this whole thing with Oliver had been canicular rut, and I was well rid of it. (Aciman, 2009 : 118)

His desire for Oliver seems here, in Elio’s own words, to be obliterated as a result of temporary infatuation and finally purged from his body. Still, he decides to go through with the idea even though it does not seem to “arouse” him anymore, rather than “to spend the rest of the summer, or my life, perhaps, arguing my body.” (Aciman, 2009 : 123-24) After his first making love to Oliver, he is thrown into a complete confusion and describes his experience as “dread,” “anxiety,” “sick,” and “nightmare”. Yet, he decides not to distance himself right away from Oliver because “I was not sure that within a few hours I wouldn’t be desperate for him again.” (Aciman, 2009 : 141) And shortly after when Oliver starts touching

him again, Elio “was hard in no time.” (Aciman, 2009 : 141) Elio’s words resonating a monosexual discourse that he can only be sexually attracted to one sex is completely undermined by his body that guides his desire and pleasure. His sexual body makes him finally realize, understand and embrace his bisexuality: “How strange, I thought, how each shadowed and screened the other, without precluding the other. Barely half an hour ago I was asking Oliver to fuck me, and yet neither had anything to do with the other except through Elio, who happened to be one and the same person.” (Aciman, 2009 : 145) So, for Elio, after his sexual experiences with both sexes, one doesn’t necessarily exclude the other. Instead, both are actualized through him, a bisexual body.

Deploying different narrative voices, the three novels resort to physiological manifestation to shed light on the protagonists’ sexuality and affirm it as a legitimate sexual identity. *Saccage* uses a third person narrative to let the protagonist’s body express its bisexual pleasure. *Un Garçon comme une Autre*, on the other hand, opts for a first-person narrative to allow the protagonist to realize and verbalize his sexuality himself, confirmed by the sexual pleasure experienced by his body. *Call Me by Your Name* also uses first-person narrative but in a different way. It is here used to create a tension between the protagonist’s utterances and his body before resorting entirely to the body and its pleasures to confirm the protagonist’s sexual identity. For the three novels, body plays therefore a significant role in allowing bisexual subjects to understand their sexual identity. It can also be a site of negotiation with the monosexual discourse which dominates western sexual regime, implicitly in *Saccage* and *Un Garçon comme une Autre*, and more explicitly in *Call Me by Your Name* with the textualized tension between the protagonist’s speech and his body.

Conclusion

While previous works on bisexuality in literature interrogate this sexual identity through psychoanalytical approach to grasp the psychological state of bisexual subjects or through socio-critical approach demonstrating bisexual tension and negotiation with monosexual norms, anthropological approaches provide a new perspective in interrogating bisexuality in literary works. This approach is possible because of Anthropology’s focus on the imaginary through writing, a tool shared with literature. This focus on the imaginary which interrogates mankind through writing gives as much importance to its modes of representation, in other words, its literariness. The imaginary may operate in literary works through different approaches but two are mobilized in this study: gaze and bodily pleasures. These two approaches are conjugated with literary techniques – narrative voice, the selection and arrangement of narrated situations, the invention and agitation of characters – in the analysis of representations of bisexual subjects in literary works. Hence, literary representation of bisexuality does not have to necessarily be true in the same vein as empirical evidences used in Social Sciences, but true in terms of a possible anthropological referent. It must therefore be accurate and pertinent, follow its own progression by respecting its poetic coherence. As an anthropological referent through literariness, bisexuality in these literary works is represented as a unified sexual identity and not disruptive or problematical as perceived in Social Sciences or certain literary research which aims to demonstrate bisexuality as a socio-cultural content focusing solely on the tension and negotiation between bisexual subjects and monosexual norms. Even though bisexuality is not mentioned anywhere in these three novels, its presence can be grasped by the gaze and the desiring body of the protagonists as bisexual subjects. Bisexual gaze and bodily pleasures in literary representation thereby deconstructs completely the normalized binary representation of reality and resists any social or political discourses, namely monosexuality, imposed upon it. Moreover, the comparative study of novels from different linguistic and cultural background – French and American in this case – also suggests that bisexual experiences and practices in terms of human activity (anthropological referent) transcend national boundaries. The approach used in this study may therefore to some extent be applied to bisexual narratives from other linguistic and cultural contexts. However, it would be misleading to believe that all bisexual

experiences, practices and narratives operate the same way in every context. Therefore, while applying anthropological approaches to the analysis of bisexual novels in future research, we should also focus on the differences between bisexual narratives from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

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