

A kind of bitter longing Masculine bodies and textual female masculinity in Brokeback Mountain and Memoirs of Hadrian¹

Pia Livia Hekanaho

Ennis del Mar wakes before five, wind rocking the trailer, hissing in around the aluminium door and window frames. The shirts hanging on a nail shudder slightly in the draft. He gets up, scratching the grey wedge of belly and pubic hair, shuffles to the gas burner, pours leftover coffee in a chipped enamel pan; the flame swathes in blue. He turns on the tap and urinates in the sink, pulls on his shirt and jeans, his worn boots, stamping the heels against the floor to get them full on. [...] He might have to stay with his married daughter until he picks up another job, yet he is suffused with a sense of pleasure because of Jack Twist was in his dream. (Annie Proulx, "Brokeback Mountain", 255.)

The setting of the first quotation is rural Wyoming. In the beginning of Annie Proulx's short story "Brokeback Mountain" (BbM), Ennis del Mar, an aging ranch hand, is beginning yet a new morning in his shabby trailer. The narrator gets straight to the point, to the loneliness of the poor aging cowboy – or a ranch hand between jobs, to be more precise. For Ennis the good things are irrevocably in the past, the present being wretched and monotonous. He finds the only solace in the recurrent dreams in which Jack Twist visits him. In Ennis' dreams, Jack appears as he had seen him for the first time – young, curly-haired, smiling and bucktoothed. It is Jack of the days up on Brokeback Mountain. (BbM, 285.)

The following quotation also involves a man with an aging body. The man is Publius Aelius Hadrianus (76–138), the Roman emperor from the second century A.D. Hadrian is the eponymous protagonist of Marguerite Yourcenar's acclaimed novel *Memoirs of Hadrian* (1954)² In his letter to his successor Marcus Aurelius, Hadrian, feeling his death approaching, recounts a visit to his physician:

*Today I went to see my physician Hermogenes, who has just returned to the Villa from a rather long journey in Asia. No food could be taken before the examination, so we had made the appointment for the early morning. I took off my cloak and tunic and lay down on a coach. I spare you details which would be as disagreeable to you as to me, the description of the body of a man who is growing old, and is about to die of a dropsical heart. Let us say only that I coughed, inhaled, and held my breath according to Hermogenes' directions. [...] The professional eye saw in me only a mass of humors, a sorry mixture of blood and lymph. (Marguerite Yourcenar, *Memoirs of Hadrian*, 15.)*

The literary works considered here focus on men who have loved another man and lost him. Nostalgia and longing are hidden under the unaffected style of both texts. That is why the works make such a strong impact on the reader. The present essay explores some parallel features between Annie Proulx's short story "Brokeback Mountain" (BbM)

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and Marguerite Yourcenar's *Memoirs of Hadrian* (*Memoirs*). The essay addresses three themes, central to Proulx and Yourcenar's texts: the representation of masculine corporeality or embodied masculinity³, the concept of textual female masculinity⁴, and the intertwined literary traditions of elegy and nostalgic discourse, which are so central to the depiction of same sex love and passion in both texts. Consequently, the essay examines some features that link Proulx and Yourcenar's texts to various traditions of representing male-male love.

Annie Proulx (b. 1935) is an American author. After living 30 years in Vermont, she now lives in Wyoming. Most of her writing concerns the harsh living in rural communities such as Vermont, Newfoundland, Texas, and Wyoming. The poor, remote areas of the American hinterland provide her scenery. In fact, she knows personally the states of Wyoming and Nebraska, made infamous by the murders of Matthew Shepard and Brandon Teena, and studied by Moisés Kaufman in *The Laramie Project* (2000/2002). Until the worldwide success of her second novel *The Shipping News* (1993), Proulx made a career as a journalist. In "Getting Movied", her recent essay, Proulx identifies herself as "a student of history and a writer of fiction" (Proulx 2005, 129), a description which applies rather nicely to the French author Marguerite Yourcenar (1903-1987), too. Yourcenar is best known for her philosophical novels, which usually take place in the distant past. Characteristically, the protagonists in her fiction are homosexual men, or men who love and desire other men. In 1980, Yourcenar became a celebrity for being the first

woman ever to be elected to the French Academy. She lived in the United States since 1939 with her long-time partner and trusted translator Grace Frick (1903-1979).

At first, it might seem an odd move to argue for the role of *Memoirs of Hadrian*, a novel in the classicistic, elevated French prose style, as a subtext of "Brokeback Mountain", the story of two wanna-be-cowboys, told in sparse, rugged style. The context, which Ennis and Jack desperately want to belong to, is the Great Western Myth (Proulx 2005, 130). Discussing the literary predecessors of Proulx's short story, Larry McMurtry links "the long-frustrated love" of Ennis and Jack to a certain genre of masterpieces of American literature. He names some famous portraits of lonely, doomed young men such as *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *Miss Lonelyhearts*. (McMurtry 2005, 140.) The linkage of "Brokeback Mountain" to the American literary tradition is definitely strong but I suggest a further step by linking Proulx's modern classic to Yourcenar's highly classicist depiction of love between men – a characteristically European masterpiece although written by an expatriate author on the American soil.

Drawing a parallel between Proulx and Yourcenar's pieces of prose suggests new ways to approach some of the characteristics of the texts. A recurrent interest in the masculine experience, and very often in the masculine protagonists, is a notable feature in both authors' fiction. In drawing a parallel between two female authors, manifestly at home with the 'masculine experience' and with expressing it subtly and perspicaciously, I seek to address the multilayered structure of "Brokeback Mountain". Focusing on the

dialogue between the Proulxian and Yourcenarian texts makes it possible to interpret the themes and narration of Proulx's short story in relation to masculinity in men, in women, and in fiction.

The aching bodies of white men

In their Introduction to *Constructing Masculinity* (1995), the editors make it clear that masculinity is not to be understood as a monolithic structure, but as a sum of many different cultural, emotional, and intellectual variables. They delineate the intersections forming various masculinities as follows:

Because masculinity belongs to no one gender, race, sexuality, or intellectual discipline, it is important to represent multivalent ways of thinking about the conditions, sensibility, and psychological, economic, legal, and medical imperatives that enforce it (Berger, Wallis & Watson 1995, 6).

The contributors of *Revealing Male Bodies* (2003) on the other hand address the specific topic of male corporeality from mainly phenomenological and psychoanalytic points of view. They investigate the areas of embodiment and socialization that seem to converge in the concept of maleness notwithstanding differences in age, race, and sexuality.⁵ In the 1990s, masculinity studies faced the challenge of identifying masculinity outside male bodies. Since then, masculinity is no longer understood as being identical with biological and social manhood, but as a set of culturally constructed ways of identifying, acting, gesturing, expressing emotions, and performing oneself.

The norms and representation of masculinity are produced discursively and socially in specific historical situations. Furthermore, masculinity is as thoroughly discursive and “inauthentic” a category as femininity. Instead of one kind of masculinity, we are aware of various masculinities among which a few are dominant or hegemonic. Other masculinities, consequently, are seen to deviate from the norm of white, straight and able-bodied masculinity. As Judith Halberstam states, the boundaries of normative masculinity are often more clearly recognized when – instead of the middle-class white men – masculine characteristics are displayed by other kinds of persons, such as the non-white, the elderly, or women (Halberstam 1998, 1-2).

The two quotations in the beginning focus on the bodily aspects of masculinity. The theme of embodied masculinity even opens both of the works, Proulx's short story and Yourcenar's novel. For Proulx and Yourcenar, being a man always includes embodiment⁶. Their protagonists are presented as corporeal beings who emit sweat, semen, and even tears. Embodiment enables sensual knowledge and enjoyment, but embodiment also marks the ineluctable limits of our existence (Thomas 1996, 11-18, 27-29; Zuern 2003). In addition to vulnerability and mortality, embodiment means living in a certain time and place (see further Tuana et al. 2003). For Hadrian, the historical context is Hellenistic Rome, Greece, and Asia Minor in the second century. As the Emperor, he was working hard to maintain peace and prosperity in the vast Empire. It was the time when Hellenistic pagan gods and the culture of ancient Greeks still ruled over the emerging Christianity, as Yourcenar (2000, 269, 282-283) puts it.⁷

For Proulx's protagonists, Ennis and Jack, however, the specific time and place mean rural, vehemently homophobic Wyoming in the early sixties and in the next two decades that follow.⁸ While herding sheep in 1963, Jack and Ennis meet. They fall in once-in-a-lifetime love. In "Getting Movied", Proulx, in the role of a self-reflective essayist, recounts vividly the moment when the idea of the Wyomingite male-male love story came alive in front of her eyes. In 1997, in a bar, she had noticed an older ranch hand, maybe in his late sixties. The man would soon inspire the characters of "Brokeback Mountain":

Although spruced up for Friday night his clothes were a little ragged, boots stained and worn. I had seen him around, working cows, helping with sheep, taking orders from a ranch manager. He was thin and lean, muscular in a stringy kind of way. He leaned against the back wall and his eyes were fastened not on the dozens of handsome and flashing women in the room but on the young cowboys playing pool. Maybe he was following the game, maybe he knew the players, maybe one was his son or nephew, but there was something in his expression, a kind of bitter longing, that made me wonder if he was country gay. (Proulx 2005, 129-130.)

The barely hidden need, desire, and bitter longing link the anonymous ranch hand to the men depicted by Proulx and Yourcenar. As the opening quotations indicate, corporeality and thus inevitable vulnerability of the bodies are highlighted by focusing on the needs and functions of any human body. Peculiarly, the texts call into question the notion of phallic masculinity. The narratives underli-

ne vulnerability of the human body, represented by aging, dying, and decaying male bodies. Hadrian and Ennis' bodies show marks of age and weariness. Their bodies need nourishment or need to abstain from it; their bodies itch and need touching and scratching. They cough out phlegm, they perspire, and they urinate. The same basic needs and bodily functions are shared by a poor ranch hand from Wyoming and the fictionalized Roman emperor. The manner in which the character bears his body and its limitations is an essential part of the character's masculinity. Moreover, the depicted male bodies are aging, aching, and ailing bodies. The two protagonists are getting old; their lost lovers, on the other hand, will stay forever young in dreams and memories.

The stoic aesthetics of writing

The motive of Stoicism connects Hadrian and Ennis' attitudes. Stylistically stoicism might also relate to *textual female masculinity* as a set of textual strategies, as will be elaborated further in the next chapter. Stoicism was the Hellenistic philosophical school preferred by the historical Hadrian as well as the fictionalized Hadrian of Yourcenar's novel. The name of the philosophical school, favoured also by Marcus Aurelius, has lived longer than the actual school. Today, Stoicism is related to the unswerving serenity with which both joy and suffering are met.

According to Stoically inclined Hadrian, the human body is "only a mass of humors, a sorry mixture of blood and lymph" (*Memoirs*, 15). Later in the novel, he presents

himself with a “body with swollen hands and livid nails, this sorry mass almost half-dissolved, this sack of ills, of desires and dreams, is hardly more solid or consistent than a shade” (*Memoirs*, 242). Yet he worships passionately perfect beauty, especially in the bodies of youths; stoically, equally calmly, he recognizes the signs of age and illness on his body. In both texts, as significant as the bodily aspect of masculinity is the narrator’s means of conveying it. The narrators avoid all sentimentality. The third person narrator of “Brokeback Mountain”, true to Ennis’ style and point of view, shares Hadrian’s calm perspicacity. The narrator, for example, describes the protagonists with peculiar mixture of bluntness and tenderness:

At first glance Jack seemed fair enough with his curly hair and quick laugh, but for a small man he carried some weight in the haunch and his smile disclosed buckteeth, not pronounced enough to let him eat popcorn out of the neck of a jug, but noticeable. He was infatuated with the rodeo life and fastened his belt with a minor bull-riding buckle, but his boots were worn to the quick, holed beyond repair and he was crazy to be somewhere, anywhere else than Lightning Flat.

Ennis, high-arched nose and narrow face, was scruffy and a little cave chested, balanced a small torso on long, caliper legs, possessed a muscular and supple body made for the horse and for fighting. His reflexes were uncommonly quick and he was farsighted enough to dislike reading anything except Hamley’s saddle catalogue. (BbM, 257-258.)

In “Getting Movied”, Annie Proulx describes both Jack and Ennis as country boys without prospects. They will represent any “ill-informed, confused, not-sure-of-what-

he-was-feeling youth growing up in homophobic rural Wyoming” (Proulx 2005, 130). They are young men “brought up to hard work and privation, both rough-mannered, rough-spoken, inured to the stoic life” (BbM, 256). Diana Ossana (2005, 146), too, brings up Ennis’ stoicism while reporting a discussion with Proulx about the character’s background, homophobic worldview, and inability to access his emotions. Stoicism as stylistic term refers to sparsity, equanimity, and the unaffected or unsentimental style, which many modern critics – often in an overtly or covertly essentialist manner – equal the “masculine” style of writing.⁹ The narrator’s last lines in “Brokeback Mountain” give an example of the Proulxian version of stoic style. The narrator describes Ennis’ lonely years after Jack’s death, and his feelings of guilt, remorse, and resignation:

There was some open space between what he knew and what he tried to believe, but nothing could be done about it, and if you can’t fix it you’ve got to stand it. (BbM, 285).

Above all, Ennis as well as Hadrian still dream of the past when they were touched by another man. Both Hadrian and the two Wyomingites are depicted in the historical and discursive contexts in which they live: male-to-male desire is not identified as ‘homosexuality’ or ‘gayness’ by the characters. Therefore, it would be highly anachronistic to call them gay men or homosexual men. Hadrian, again, interprets his love for Antinous and other youths through the category of paederastic love. By the standards of the Greeks of the classical period, paederasty – the sexual, emotional, and educational relationship between a mature man and a youth – was the noblest form of love.¹⁰ In

Yourcenar's novel, *Hadrian*, living in the much later Roman Hellenistic period, offers his version of Greek love. He equals his relationship to Antinous with the tradition of the classical paederasty and the archaic Homeric model of heroic comradeship.¹¹

According to Proulx, *Close Range*, the collection including "Brokeback Mountain" is "ostensibly concerned with Wyoming landscape and making a living in hard, isolated livestock-raising communities dominated by white masculine values, but also holding subliminal fantasies. [---] "Brokeback Mountain" was not connected to any one incident, but based on a coalescence of observations over many years, small things here and there." (Proulx 2005, 130.) As she insightfully explains the origin of his fictional Western lovers, "Brokeback" was constructed on the small but tight idea of a couple of home-grown country kids, opinions and self-knowledge shaped by the world around them, finding themselves in emotional waters of increasing depth" (Proulx 2005, 130). For Ennis and Jack, 'queer' is a familiar category; but it is a category to avoid at any cost. The emotions and desire they are overwhelmed by are experienced, literally, outside and without any words, names, and categories:

They never talked about the sex, let it happen, at first only in the tent at night, then in the full daylight with the hot sun striking down, and at evening in the fire glow, quick, rough, laughing and snorting, no lack of noises, but saying not a goddam word except once Ennis said, "I'm not no queer", and Jack jumped in with "Me neither. A one-shot thing. Nobody's business but ours." (BbM, 262.)

Four years later, when they discuss their shared desire in

the Motel Siesta they carefully avoid naming the desire, or the sexual acts. As Ennis puts it: "You know, I was sittin up here all that time tryin to figure out if I was -? I know I ain't. I mean here we both got wives and kids, right?" At the same time, he states emphatically that "doing it with women" was nothing like having sex with Jack. (BbM, 268.) In comparison with Ennis, incapacitated by his deep homophobia, Jack identifies as a man having sex between men and expresses time after time his willingness to share his life with Ennis. Eventually, Jack plans to experience something real with his Texas neighbour. The reader cannot be sure, whether he dies as a victim of a hate crime or an accident, whereas Ennis is sure that he is killed by the local homophobes. For Ennis' self-conception, it seems crucial that Jack is the only man he ever loves and desires, although he admits some kind of belonging to a minority group while confessing: "Shit. I been lookin at people on the street. This happen a other people? What the hell do they do?" (BbM, 271.) In Ennis' mind, nevertheless, their love is not necessarily a 'queer' thing – especially when, according to him, being queer equates with a death sentence. After Jack's death, love and desire are over for Ennis, too.

Textual female masculinity

Since the 1990s, masculinity has been considered as a cultural construction relevant not only to biological men. Judith Halberstam argued most compellingly that masculinity is not only a male thing and that all genders are discursive constructions having their own genealogies. In

Female Masculinity (1998), she set out to explore the genealogy of female masculinity – forms of masculinity performed by persons with female bodies. Masculinity is not only the social, cultural and political expression of being a man, but a set of cultural gestures, signs and meaning, Halberstam underscores. In her work, she has explored the history and representations of masculine women since the 1800th century. In a later essay, she shows that while seen admirable in men, masculinity in women has been considered highly avoidable – its negativity strengthened with linking it to ugliness and monstrosity (Halberstam 2002, 358).

In *Masculinities without Men* (2004), Jean Bobby Noble examines the representations of female masculinity in literature, focusing on the characters instead of the stylistic features of the text. She takes her cue from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's statement that "sometimes masculinity has nothing to do with men".¹² In 2004, Michael Davidson applied the concept of female masculinity to a more textual approach to literature. In *Guys Like Us*, Davidson studies masculinity in Cold War literature examining mainly male poets of the era. However, he applies the concept of female masculinity to the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop and Sylvia Plath. According to Davidson, female masculinity in their poetry is informed by textual strategies, which enable to depict homosocial bonding between women. In Davidson's study, female masculinity is understood as a means to denaturalize the forced linkage between femaleness, femininity, and heterosexuality. (Davidson 2004, 170-171, 179-195.)

The following reading examines the textual and stylistic features of the text – the textual strategies that are construed as "masculine" regardless of the author's gender. Here, textual female masculinity is offered as a concept for dealing with the inevitably gendered aspects of any text as well as writing and reading. Thus, textual female masculinity refers not only to a presence of masculine characters and experiences in the fiction of female authors, but also to characteristics that in our culture are linked to the masculine style or bearing. In my mind, textual female masculinity should not be reduced to the author's self-identification; instead the notions of the text's masculine (or feminine for that matter) features are construed in the interpretative processes between readers and the text. Reading is a gendering act informed by various means to recognize discursive formations such as style, power, gender, and sexuality and attribute them to "gender". The concept of textual masculinity makes visible the various interrelations between gender, textuality, and sexuality present in all textual activity.

For example, the absence of characteristics deemed feminine in the text of a female author is often interpreted as a notably masculine style. Thus, Yourcenar's style is a topic invariably discussed as *controlled*, *lofty*, and *universal*, in order to signal the "masculinity" of her style. According to Joan Acocella "it comes as no surprise that nearly every essay on Yourcenar speaks of her work as 'marmoreal' or 'lapidary' [---] this together with her highly controlled prose, encouraged reviewers to say – as they would say throughout her life – that she wrote like a man. As one critic

put it, he could not find in her work 'those often charming weaknesses [---] by which one identifies a feminine pen. The hand does not yield, it does not caress the paper, it is clasped by an iron gauntlet.'" (Acocella 2005.) In 1985, Mavis Gallant analyzes in length Yourcenar's characteristic style; according to her, its "calm and dispassionate approach never changes". She goes on:

*In an age of slops, she writes the firm, accurate, expressive French that used to be expected in work taken seriously. Critics speak of language carved, etched, chiselled, engraved: simply, a plain and elegant style, the reflection of a strong and original literary intellect. She is a master of her native tongue and an *honnête homme* of French letters. (Gallant 1985.)*

The characteristically sparse prose style of Proulx has been commented on, too. Her work contains more humour than Yourcenar's – although very dark. Nevertheless, their fictions share the sense of "carved or chiselled firmness" and stern structure. Moreover, they do not shy away from grim and violent stories.¹³ In "Getting Movied", Annie Proulx herself characterizes her writing in "Brokeback Mountain" as "tight, compressed style that needs air and loosening to unfold into art" (Proulx 2005, 134). Larry McMurtry (2005, 140) captures the essentials of Proulx's textual female masculinity while describing the style of "Brokeback Mountain": "Now Annie Proulx has written it, in spare, wire-fence prose that is congruent with the landscape itself, and with the struggling, bruised speech still to be heard today across the north plains". Diana Ossana (2005, 146), in her essay "Climbing Brokeback Mountain", describes Proulx's prose as "tight, precise, spare,

evocative, unsentimental and yet incredibly moving".

Both Yourcenar and Proulx seem exceptionally at home while writing about men's experience and very often from the masculine point of view. However, textual female masculinity goes beyond masculine protagonists or narrators. In the work of Proulx and Yourcenar, it is a structural and textual principle that pervades their fiction. The analogical characteristics between Proulx's short story and Yourcenar's novel remain not only in the realm of themes and stylistics, but they share rather surprising common structural features, too. The relationship between the two fictional texts and their later paratexts in the form of the authorial commentaries provides an example. Yourcenar's *Memoirs of Hadrian* contains a famous appendix "Reflections on the Composition of *Memoirs of Hadrian*"¹⁴, dedicated to G.F. – Grace Frick, Yourcenar's partner for forty years. In the "Reflections", Yourcenar recounts the creative process during the two decades that preceded the actual writing of *Memoirs of Hadrian*. In this paratext, she renders the story of her novel's background in its complexity. In a passage of "Reflections", she describes her method of writing:

*One foot in scholarship, the other in magic arts, or more accurately and without metaphor, absorption in that *sympathetic magic* which operates when one transports oneself, in thought, into another's body and soul (Memoirs, 275).*

Throughout her career, Yourcenar was known for her intense feelings towards her protagonists. She often maintained that the characters were very real to her; she could even refer to them as her brothers. More than once the charac-

ters seemed to her even more real than people in reality.¹⁵ In the similar vein, Proulx tells us about her unusual relationship to her fictional Wyomingites:

These characters did something that, as a writer, I had never experienced before – they began to get very damn real. Usually I deal in obedient characters who do what they are told, but Jack and Ennis soon seemed more vivid than many of the flesh-and-blood people around me and there emerged an antiphonal back-and-forth relationship between writer and character. I've heard other writers mention this experience but it was the first time for me. (Proulx 2005, 131.)

“Getting Movied” relates to “Brokeback Mountain” as Yourcenar’s “Reflections” relate to the novel. While Proulx describes the strange reality of Jack and Ennis in her mind during the creative process, her essay bears a strong resemblance to Yourcenar’s philosophical reflections. In the same manner as Yourcenar’s “Reflections”, Proulx’s essay studies the efforts of finding the right tones for the ruggedly elegiac story of the two cowboys in love.

Both Yourcenar and Proulx’s text pay homage to the long tradition of pastoral elegy. In fact, both texts deal with the elegiac mode and tradition. In antiquity, elegy referred to any love poem written on a metre called an elegiac distichon. Significantly, the elegiac distichon was the favoured metre of the paederastic poems praising male-male love in ancient Greece (Dover 1989, 50). Since the 1700th century elegy has referred to a poem of mourning, or a reflection on the death of a lost friend or lover. In English and American literature, the traditional pastoral elegy transformed to the ‘friendship’ elegy in which a male poet

praised the beauty and virtue of a dead male ‘friend’; for the writers the elegiac metre was a means to communicate same-sex intimacy in their own time. (Woods 1999, 108-110, 116-121.)

Throughout its history, elegy has remained a distinctively gay literary genre, as Gregory Woods (1999, 123) concludes. The elegiac mode, the tragic loss, and nostalgia form a complex of themes that Yourcenar and Proulx’s texts probe, but their texts evoke the long elegiac tradition, too. In fact, Jack and Ennis herding sheep on Brokeback Mountain form an earthy rewriting of the classical representation of the tragic love between two male shepherds – Virgil’s second Eclogue in *Bucolica*. In the poem, significant to later representations of homosexual love, Corydon loves unrequitedly Alexis, the other young shepherd.¹⁶ The bucolic outdoors is the modern context of the Wyomingite lovers, too. Ennis and Jack’s days and weeks together are spent in the Western countryside, on its meadows and mountains; later, the fishing trips provide an excuse for time spent together. In “Brokeback Mountain” the Midwestern landscape echoes Theocritus’ Sicily and Virgil’s Arcadia. Pastoral details surface even in Ennis and Jack’s last trip, which ends with Ennis’ jealousy and Jack’s resentment. On the first day, however, the idyll is as perfect as ever.

The tea-colored river ran fast with snowmelt, a scarf of bubbles at every high rock, pools and setback streaming. The ochre-branched willows swayed stiffly, pollened catkins like yellow thumbprints. The horses drank and Jack dismounted, scooped icy water up in his hand, crystalline drops falling from his fingers, his mouth and

chin glistening with wet. – “Get beaver fever doin that”, said Ennis (BbM, 275.)

Memoirs of Hadrian, on the other hand, is abundant with representations of pastoral idyll. Hadrian describes his first vision of Antinous:

A little apart from the others a young boy was listening to those difficult strophes, half attentive, half in dream; I thought at once of some shepherd, deep in the woods, vaguely aware of a strange bird’s cry. He had brought neither tablet nor style. Seated on the edge of the water’s basin he trailed a hand idly over the fair, placid surface. (Memoirs, 135.)

Hadrian recurrently depicts Antinous in a close relationship with nature. For him the youth is “a beautiful animal”; he even equals him to “a slender greyhound”. Throughout the novel, Antinous is connected with water symbolism bearing connotation not only to his death by drowning, but also to femininity associated with water element. (See Andersson 1989; Hekanaho 2006b.) Hadrian confesses that as a lover and master of Antinous, he almost believed himself a god; the years spent with Antinous were the apex of his life. Proulx’s short story echoes the experience in the bucolic setting. The days up on Brokeback give Jack and Ennis a feeling of total freedom and happiness.

There were only the two of them on the mountain flying in the euphoric, bitter air, looking down on the hawk’s back and the crawling lights of vehicles on the plain below, suspended above ordinary affairs and distant from tame ranch dogs barking in the dark hours (BbM, 262).

Nostalgia: gut cramps

The omnipresent feeling of loss and melancholy connects Hadrian and Ennis’ stories. For them, past happiness is personified by the lost lover. Their stories make visible the nostalgic and temporal nature of the classical Western narrative of passion as a love which must be a lost love in order to be perfected. In *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (1998), Jonathan Dollimore delineates the classical linkage of desire and death characteristic to our Western culture. The classical myth of passionate love demands that it entails the seed of its own destruction. The tragic powers that inevitably form a part of the discourse of passion consist of fears of temporality, loss, change, and decline. Therefore, the knowledge of love’s limited duration guarantees its intensity. (Dollimore 1998, xiii.) Love which has lost the desired object cannot become stale but instead it is elevated to a timeless mythical sphere.

Nostalgia is yet another concept which helps to understand the bitter longing expressed in Ennis and Hadrian’s stories. Both works render a story of a great passion turning to suspicion and disappointment – before its elevation through the death of the beloved. Pining for the lost happiness is also central in nostalgia, which in modern speech is a concept related to melancholy. Bryan S. Turner, for example, characterizes nostalgic discourse as seeing history in terms of decline and loss of a past “golden era”, and as a series of tragic losses. Thus nostalgic discourse and longing are related to temporality and loss. (Turner 1987, 147, 150-151.) At first, when the medical concept of nostalgia was coined in 1688, it referred to a pining for homeland – then

a typical ailment of the European mercenaries fighting far from their native land. Nostalgia is a neologism, originally coined by joining the Greek word for homecoming (*nostos*) and another Greek word denoting pain and grief (*algos*). As Linda Hutcheon (1998) notes, nostalgia was a pining for a homeland, and the pining manifested itself in the form of physical symptoms. Nostalgia belonged to a tradition, known already in antiquity, which stressed the bodily aspect of grief and melancholy. During the next two centuries, nostalgia lost its relevance as a medical concept and its linkage to a certain place. Nostalgia began to denote a mentality or a state of mind and was considered one form of melancholy. Since the 1800th century, nostalgia has been construed more temporally than spatially, as a longing for a lost past instead of a place.¹⁷ Thus the myth of a lost golden era is so crucial to nostalgic discourse.

In the third book of *Memoirs of Hadrian*, the myth of the golden era is central. The third book, which centers on the story of Antinous and the relation between him and Hadrian, is even called *Saeculum aureum*, the Golden Era. The chapter recounting the paederastic love story forms the apex of the novel. In Proulx's short story, Ennis finds the same timeless happiness from the memory of Brokeback Mountain in 1963. The once-mounted Mountain where they tended the flock gains importance as the symbol of a lost era. In the beginning of the short story, the narrator recounts Ennis' morning in his trailer after Jack's visit in dream:

[He] lets a panel of the dream slide forward. 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 (BbM, 255).

Longing as a physical pain is present throughout the two texts: losing the beloved, and yearning after him, are experienced as an intense physical pain. Hadrian describes poetically his agony after Antinous' death:

In prisoners' camp on the banks of Danube I had once seen wretches continually beating their heads against a wall with a wild motion, both mad and tender, endlessly repeating the same name. In the underground chambers of the Colosseum I had been shown lions pining away because the dog with which their keepers had accustomed them to live had been taken away. I tried to collect my thoughts: Antinous was dead. (Memoirs, 171.)

Ennis and Jack's story consists of parting after parting and long periods of separation. Their first separation takes place when it is getting cold in August, and they have to leave Brokeback Mountain. "As they descended the slope Ennis felt he was in a slow-motion, but headlong, irreversible fall", as the narrator illustrates Ennis' realization of the approaching pain of loss (BbM, 263). Ennis' reaction to losing Jack after finishing the herding job is violent and utterly physical; in his body, he feels the emotions he is not able to name or express.

"Right", said Jack, and they shook hands, hit each other on the shoulder, then there was forty feet of distance between them and nothing to do but drive away in opposite directions. Within a mile Ennis felt like someone was pulling his guts out hand over hand a yard at a time. He stopped at the side of the road, and in the whirling new snow, tried to puke but nothing came up. He felt about

as bad as he ever had and it took a long time for the feeling to wear off. (BbM, 263-264.)

Ennis' visceral reaction to the first parting from Jack gains even more importance, when in the Motel Siesta, he tells Jack for the first time of the painful separation and his "gut cramps", and that it took him about a year to figure out the reason to the reaction (BbM, 268-269). It is not only Ennis's and Hadrian's corporeality that Proulx and Yourcenar focus on; their lost loved ones – Jack and Antinous – are also remembered as highly corporeal beings.

The historical Hadrian is (in)famous for his passion for Hellenistic culture and for his young beloved Antinous who, in his twenties, mysteriously drowned in the Nile around 130.¹⁸ In the novel, Hadrian describes his efforts to keep Antinous' memory alive:

I would tell myself bitterly that this remembrance would founder with me; that young being so carefully embalmed in the depths of my memory seemed obliged thus to perish for a second time. That fear, though justifiable, has been in part allayed; I have compensated for this premature death as well as I could; an image, a reflection, some feeble echo will survive for at least a few centuries. Little more can be done in matters of immortality. (Memoirs, 240.)

Hadrian even proclaims him a Hellenistic god with his own cult. Hadrian has Antinous ritualistically embalmed by Egyptian priests in order to give the youth the everlasting life promised in the Egyptian religion. In Egypt, Hadrian founds the holy city of Antinopolis, too.¹⁹ In addition to this, he orders an enormous amount of busts and statues in marble or bronze representing Antinous. While

ordering one statue after another, he tries to give a body to the memory of the boy, since he identifies Antinous with his beautiful, young body. In the novel, the ailing body of ageing Hadrian is contrasted with the representations of eternally youthful Antinous. Hadrian tries to immortalize Antinous, obsessively commissioning busts and statues representing the beautiful youth. Hadrian realizes the despair of his efforts, while he admits:

I had cast a spell over stones which, in their turn, had spellbound me; nevermore should I escape from their cold and silence; henceforth closer to me than the warmth and voices of the living; it was with resentment that I gazed upon that dangerous countenance and its elusive smile. Still, a few hours later, once more abed, I would decide to order another statue from Papias of Aphrodisias. --- The best likenesses among them have accompanied me everywhere; it no longer matters to me whether they are good works of art or not. (Memoirs, 194.)

Ennis' experience is much earthier. While Ennis visits Jack's parents, he suddenly remembers a story from Jack's childhood. In the story, Jack realizes the anatomical difference between his circumcised willy and his father's uncircumcised penis.

Jack was dick-clipped and the old man was not; it bothered the son who had discovered the anatomical disconformity during a hard scene. He had been about three or four, he said, always late getting to the toilet, struggling with buttons, the seat, the height of the thing and often as not left the surroundings sprinkled down. (BbM, 282.)

Jack makes a mess sending his father to rage. He knocks

the boy down whipping him with his belt. The lesson culminates with the enraged father urinating on Jack. As an adult, Jack concludes the story by his first realization of being different as a male: “[w]hile he was hosing me down I seen he had some extra material that I was missin. 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.” (BbM, 282.)

The embodied secret

Ennis and Hadrian, respectively, try to give a body to a memory, while they seek to keep their dead lovers forever present by cherishing the memory of their desirable bodies. As the narrator puts it in “Brokeback Mountain”, after having dreamt of Jack, Ennis “would wake sometimes in grief, sometimes with the old sense of joy and release; the pillow sometimes wet, sometimes the sheets” (BbM, 285). Nevertheless, the bodies of their loved ones are unattainable to the two lovers. The lost lovers represent, fundamentally, our inability to know another or to probe the thoughts of a loved one. In *Memoirs of Hadrian*, Antinous stays silent and impenetrably enigmatic. The reader is able only to know Hadrian’s speculation; the thoughts and emotions of the dead youth remain secret. More than anything, the youth is a mirror onto which Hadrian reflects his ideal of a perfect relationship between two lovers. Antinous has no voice, nor a subject position in Hadrian’s narration. Antinous’ death remains a mystery, too. The reader will not know, whether he drowns accidentally, commits suicide, or is even murdered. (See further He-

kanaho 2004; 2006b.)

The narration of “Brokeback Mountain” is focalized through Ennis. Consequently, everything we know of Jack is tinged by Ennis’ feelings. We are offered but one short passage from Jack’s point of view. In his experience, tenderness and bitterness are inseparably intertwined (BbM, 278-279). In the same manner as Antinous, Jack eventually becomes an embodiment of a secret. Just as Antinous’ death, Jack’s death remains enigmatic. We have reason to construe his death as a hate crime but at the same time, we must acknowledge the experiences of destructive homophobia that have permanently scarred Ennis. In the end, we meet more riddles than certainties. In Ennis’ experience, Jack becomes an embodiment of closeted gayness. He literally grubs about Jack’s closet in his family home finding the two shirts that become part of his personal shrine in the trailer. Only memory of scent is left for him to cherish.

He pressed his face in into the fabric and breathed in slowly through his mouth and nose, hoping for the faintest smoke and mountain sage and salty sweet stink of Jack but there was no real scent, only the memory of it, the imagined power of Brokeback Mountain of which nothing was left but what he held in his hands (BbM, 283)

In the trailer, Ennis has built a shrine for the memory of Jack and “the imagined power of Brokeback Mountain” (BbM, 238). Their shirts from the “golden days” form the centre of the shrine. Ennis finds the shirts, worn by the men on Brokeback, from Jack’s closet where, we are told, they are hanging, Ennis’ shirt inside Jack’s shirt – “the

pair like two skins, one inside the other, two in one” (BbM, 283). The other central item on Ennis’ personal shrine is a postcard of his lost Arcadia of Brokeback Mountain (BbM, 283). The narrator depicts him pinning the card up with the brass-headed tack in each corner.

When it came – thirty cents – he pinned it up in his trailer, brass-headed tack in each corner. Below it he drove a nail and on the nail he hung the wire hanger and the two old shirts suspended from it. He stepped back and looked at the ensemble through a few stinging tears. (BbM, 284.)

In fact, Ennis’ modest cult of Jack Twist does not differ much from Hadrian’s ritualistic necromantic activities into which he succumbs while yearning for Antinous:

I have listened for the night’s faintest sounds. I have used the unctions of oil and essence of roses which attract the shades; I have set out the bowl of milk, the handful of salt, the drop of blood, supports of their former existence. I have lain down on the marble pavement of the small sanctuary. (Memoirs, 241.)

In Ennis’ dreams, scenes of pastoral happiness and erotic arousal are constantly darkened by the memory of a tire iron which represents all his traumas, fears, and homophobic anxiety since his childhood. His austere shrine with the postcard of thirty cents and two shirts on a wire hanger serves, indeed, the same purpose as Hadrian’s magnanimous acts and his insatiable need to immortalize Antinous’ beauty in marble and bronze sculpture. As it happens, the mighty Roman emperor and a poor ranch hand from Wyoming have more than just a few things in common.

Notes

1. I wish to thank the two referees and convey my heartfelt thanks to Harri Kalha. Anne Aurasmaa and the editors I thank for their patience!
2. The French original *Mémoires d’Hadrien* was published in 1951.
3. For the further discussion, see Thomas 1996; 2002; Tuana et al. 2003.
4. Discussing the topic of textual female masculinity, the essay does not seek to delineate any sort of *écriture masculine* or a notion of masculine style. Texts have no gender. Instead of “masculine style”, the essay focuses on the ways in which the cited commentators have constructed the “masculinity” of Yourcenar and Proulx’s texts. Certain textual features are hardly more masculine than other but the question remains, why the presence or absence of certain features are so often referred as masculinity or masculine style. Another question is how the readers construct their notions of a text’s masculinity or queerness in relation to the known biographical facts of the authors. Instead of ideas of essentialist masculine style, I emphasize the strategic use of textual female masculinity as a concept.
5. In her seminal essays, Susan Bordo (2000; 2003) examines the ever-tightening norms of aesthetics and desirability, which form masculine bodies as well as feminine ones. The norms of commercial masculine aesthetics manifest themselves in the casting and filming of *Brokeback Mountain*, too. Instead of “scruffy and a little cave chested” Ennis, or bucktoothed Jack with “his boots worn to the quick, holed beyond repair”, the viewers are presented manly Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal with delicate features and eyes that outshine Audrey Hepburn. We will see “gay cowboys” but we certainly won’t see them poorly clad and wearing boots full of holes.
6. On the theme of body and corporeality in feminist studies, see e.g. Gatens 1996; Grosz 1994; 1995; Grosz & Probyn 1995; Young 2005. On masculinity studies and feminist theory, see Gardiner 2002.
7. The citation comes from Yourcenar’s “Reflections on the composition of *Memoirs of Hadrian*” which forms an integral part of the

whole of Yourcenar's novel, as I show elsewhere (see Hekanaho 2006a; 2006b).

8. "I am something of a geographic determinist, believing that regional landscapes, climate, and topography dictate local cultural traditions and kinds of work, and thereby the events on which my stories are built. Landscape is central to this rural fiction", Proulx (2005, 129) writes in her recent essay "Getting Movied".

9. On mainly feminist critique of Yourcenar's "masculine" style, see Hekanaho 2006b.

10. Paederasty, or Greek love flourished especially in Athens during the classical period 500-300 B.C. but Greek love was known and practiced later too on Hellenistic and Roman period. Plato's *Symposium*, for example, praises the paederastic love as the noblest form of a loving relationship. See David M. Halperin: *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, 1990, 20-21, 30-38, 75-87, 99-104, 142-147; Craig A. Williams: *Roman Homosexuality*, 1999, 62-95. See also David M. Halperin: *How to do the History of Homosexuality*, 2002.

11. See Halperin, 1990, 86-87.

12. On Sedgwick's statement, see Berger, Wallis and Watson 1995, 7. On Noble's book, see "Now you're a man" by Marc A. Ouellette, in *Canadian Literature*, No. 186, Fall 2005, 171-172.

13. Interestingly, Bill Cameron, a British e-blogger, writes on Proulx's "riveting style" and "a brutal clarity and way of discussing matters, specially those affecting men (hetero- and homosexual, both) which I find particularly startling coming from the pen of a woman...". He describes Proulx's writing as "completely straightforward and seem-

ingly very authentic". Bill's Comment Page, Friday, May 26, 2006, "Annie Proulx, Brokeback Mountain and other stories".

14. The French original *Cahier de notes de Mémoires d'Hadrien* (1952, 1958).

15. See Marguerite Yourcenar and Matthieu Galey: *With Open Eyes*, 1984, and Patrick de Rosbo: *Entretiens radiophoniques avec Marguerite Yourcenar*, 1972.

16. André Gide shocked France by his Socratic dialogues defending male homosexuality in *Corydon* (1911, 1920, 1924). In *Corydon*, Gide represents also a young man called Alexis. He commits suicide due to his closeted homosexuality. In 1929, Marguerite Yourcenar published her debut novel named *Alexis*. The novel recounts a coming out story of a young homosexual aristocrat. Jack and Ennis certainly belong to the queer family of same-sex bucolic lovers.

17. See further Linda Hutcheon: "Irony and Nostalgia", 1998, and Svetlana Boym: "The Future of Nostalgia", 2001.

18. See Royston Lambert: *Beloved and God*, 1997, where Lambert examines the historical sources concerning Hadrian and his lover Antinous. See also Sarah Waters: "'The Most Famous Fairy in History'", 1995, on the pre-modern and modern representations of Antinous in the homosexual culture since 1900th century. On the queer readings of *Mémoires d'Hadrien*, see Hekanaho 2004; 2006a; 2006b.

19. In the short story, Proulx gives a relatively big role to Ennis' failed efforts to bury Jack's ashes on Brokeback and his sorrow knowing that Jack would "be buried in a family plot on the grieving plain" (see BbM, 280-284).

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