

Analysis of sexuality in literature essay sample

[Life](#), [Love](#)



Language has always been the thread to string together the vast tapestry of humanity and its experiences. Language is the single most important tool that connects one individual to another, allowing people to break beyond the barriers of silence and isolation into a world of communication and interaction. French philosopher George Bataille defines this sensation of eroticism in the following terms: “ We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity.” These factors are considerably more pervasive in same-sex eroticism, the very nature of which forces many into isolation. This yearning for connection is witnessed throughout a variety of the texts in this class. Most specifically, this yearning is present indicated in Walt Whitman’s foliage related metaphor in the “ Calamus” poems, Audre Lorde’s experience with lesbians as written in her autobiography “ Zami: A New Spelling of My Name”, Essex Hemphill’s loneliness in his poem “ Under Certain Circumstances”, Housman’s unrequited love in Tom Stoppard’s play “ The Invention of Love, and Leslie Feinberg’s resemblance to the character Jess in s/he’s novel “ Stone Butch Blues”.

Walt Whitman understands the importance of language in expressing the deepest of emotions. Like most men, Whitman finds trouble describing his emotions through spoken words. He uses an elaborate metaphor comparing himself and his emotions to the leaves of trees. This metaphor serves as a theme that ties two specific poems together, “ I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing” and “ Here the Frailest Leaves of Me”. The subject of the first poem is an oak tree, which Whitman observes stands alone and apart from other trees. He notes that while the tree lives alone, “ without a friend or lover

near” whereas “ I know very well I could not.” Whitman concedes that he could not live without the connection of a friend or lover, indicating the intrinsic discontinuity he feels. Whitman saves a piece of the oak, which “ makes me think of manly love”. The reader assumes that this is directly related to the “ friend or lover” that is so necessary to Whitman’s existence. This poem demonstrates Whitman’s need for connection, specifically one homoerotic in nature.

Though this second poem is very short, it provides strong insight into Whitman’s perspective on his own thoughts and emotions. His reference to “ leaves” acts as a double-entendre; in one word Whitman compares the fragile leaves of trees to the fragility of the thoughts that he writes down. In essence, this poem is both figurative and literal: these leaves, these thoughts that he has written down are “ my strongest lasting”, and “ they expose me more than all my other poems.” It is clear that Whitman is exposing his humility and his earnestness in writing these poems that “ shade and hide my thoughts.” This poem serves to further enforce and validate the necessity of that homoerotic “ manly love” that Whitman references in the previous poem. It is clear in these two poems that Whitman yearns for a homoerotic connection, one that is necessary for him to exist happily.

Audre Lorde is another author who utilizes literature to connect with others and fill the discontinuity that plagues her. In her novel “ Zami: A New Spelling of My Name”, Lorde describes her relationship with Muriel and her lesbian friends. While she finds comfort in connecting with them as lesbians,

she feels at all times aloneness due to her difference in race. Within her close group of friends, and even among her wider acquaintances, Lorde finds comfort and solace. She describes needing a place to go, and for her that place was often the bars where she met her friends. However, the group's inability to discuss "that difference [that] was was real and important" (204) was due to the conflict between "individuality [that] was precious to each one of us"(205) and the need to retain the uniformity of the group as a collection of lesbians, unified by that one similarity.

Lorde is plagued, particularly during her relationship with Muriel, by this "one way in which I would always be separate, and it was going to be my own secret" (204). Lorde feels unable to even acknowledge her race, making it impossible to ever openly discuss the pain and suffering she experiences as a result of it, even with her lover Muriel. Lorde, at the end of the book, discusses importance of sisterhood to African women. It is Lorde's belief that every woman with whom you interact gives you something, and at the same time takes something from you. It can be asserted that Lorde is writing this novel to give something of herself to all the African lesbian women who share her strife as a victim of racism and homosexual discrimination. Her struggle to alleviate her internal discontinuity precipitated into her autobiography, so as to relate her yearning to others through literature.

Essex Hemphill, in the same vain as Whitman, illustrates his longing to connect with another man. In his poem "Under Certain Circumstances", Hemphill is "lonely for past kisses", indicating a longing for a connection that he once had. The significance of these past kisses is enforced when, in

the same stanza, Hemphill fears “ to die sleeping with soldiers I don’t love.” Those “ past kisses”, which must refer to past loving relationships, thus must be held deeply in his heart. It is unaddressed in this poem what put these relationships in the past, but Hemphill states “ love is a dangerous word”. Taking this poem in the context of Hemphill’s life will reveal that African American homosexuals were often strongly discriminated against, even in their own homosexual community. Hemphill’s disconnect with his lover from earlier in life and his fear of attempting to find love again is clearly the inspiration of this poem. Poetry serves as his outlet to express that emotion to reconnect.

Alfred Housman, the main character in Tom Stoppard’s play “ The Invention of Love”, uses poetry to express his unrequited feelings towards his heterosexual friend Jackson. Housman recites the following poem after he reveals to Jackson that he has been “ sweet” on him.

He would not stay for me; and who can wonder?
He would not stay for me to stand and gaze.
I shook his hand and tore my heart in sunder
And went with half my life about my ways.

This poem very clearly illustrates that Jackson is the connection for which Housman yearns. Now that his true feelings have been revealed, Housman intends on parting with Jackson, and “ went with half my life about my ways.” Though he yearns for Jackson and to have the friendship and brotherly love that connected them, Housman must accept that Jackson cannot return those sentiments. The isolation Housman experiences as a

homosexual is emphasized in Jackson's comment that Housman will "meet the right girl and we'll all three be chuckling over this". Jackson does not seem to understand the nature of Housman's love; one that he has dedicated half his life to and must now part ways with. It is only through poetry, the written expression of his emotions, can Housman find a way to push forward in his life.

Leslie Feinberg's novel "Stone Butch Blues" provides striking insight into Feinberg's own growth and development into an adult butch. Much of Jess's suffering and hardships as a homosexual is parallel to Feinberg's difficult life. He writes this novel to emphasize his own feelings of happiness, discontent, and yearning. In the novel Jess has a dream where she encounters several butches. As she awakens she excitedly explains to Theresa how she "felt like I belonged with them" (143). Here Jess clearly displays her feeling of isolation from society, which can only be mended if she was in the presence of butches. She exemplifies her yearn to become more manly and explains that she was happy in her dream because she "had a beard and my chest was flat." Her dream allowed her to realize her desire to be a butch and finally be able to connect with others like her. All her life, Jess did not want to feel different, but in her dream she "liked it" and enjoyed the company of "other people who are different" like her. In essence, Feinberg's novel showed how Jess yearned to connect with individuals that shared the same sexual desires as her so she could eliminate her discontinued feelings.

Eroticism as defined by Bataille holds undeniable truth in the case of same-sex love. This yearning for connection in the face of impassable isolation is a

common theme throughout the novels of this course. More specifically, the implications of homoeroticism are seen in Walt Whitman's foliage related metaphor in the "Calamus" poems, Audre Lorde's experience with lesbians as written in her autobiography "Zami: A New Spelling of My Name", Essex Hemphill's loneliness in his poem "Under Certain Circumstances", Housman's unrequited love in Tom Stoppard's play "The Invention of Love", and Leslie Feinberg's resemblance to the character Jess in s/he's novel "Stone Butch Blues".