Sexual Exiles or Citizens of the World?  
The Homerotics of Travel

Ruth Vanita*

This article examines the literary representation, in fiction, non-fiction and poetry, of various types of travel and border-crossings by homosexually inclined people, particularly from Europe to Asia and northern to southern Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the U.S. to South America and Europe in the mid-twentieth century, and Asia to Europe and the U.S. from the later twentieth century onwards. Placing these journeys in the context of age-old global circulations of ideas regarding sexuality, I raise questions regarding the mixed motivations and experiences of sexual exiles and adventurers who travel either literally or figuratively, creating new hybrid identities and literary genres as they go. Reading both well-known and little-known texts composed in Europe, America and India, I look at the legal, literary and spiritual ramifications of such transnational movements and migrations, and also at travel as a symbol suggestive of many diverse and contradictory experiences, such as escape from oppression, sexual exploration, international connections and the search for a remade self.

I. INTRODUCTION

If there is some truth to the adage that there are two basic plots – person leaves home and stranger comes to town – it is even truer that stories about same-sex desire are so often involve selves changed through travel. Protagonists move from the rural to the urban, occasionally from the urban back to the rural and often from one country to another, in search of more congenial clothes and of the hidden self.

When people travel, so do ideas. Ideas about same-sex desire have circulated between cultures throughout recorded history and cross-fertilised one another. Opposition to homosexuality often takes the form

* Professor, Liberal Studies Programme, University of Montana, USA <ruth.vanita@umontana.edu>. This article has been reproduced with permission from Cambridge University Press. The original source of the article is: Ruth Vanita, The Homerotics of Travel: People, Genre, Ideas, in The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing 99-115 (Hugh Stevens ed., 2011) © Cambridge University Press 2011.

1. Especially when writing about the past and about people or texts (past or present) that do not define themselves as queer, I use the term 'same-sex' which is descriptive.

2. For example, by erecting statues of his dead lover Antinous across the empire, Roman Emperor Hadrian publicly idealised male-male love in regions unused to such idealisation. Another example is the translation of the fourth-century Kama Sutra, including its chapter on male-male sex, by nineteenth-century Europeans like Richard Burton.
of blaming other cultures for importing it into one’s own supposedly pristine society. As John Boswell points out, this tendency is evident in classical antiquity as well as in medieval Europe; it is much more pernicious and widespread today.  

The current wave of globalisation which has had many precursors throughout history brings a new twist to the debate. LGBT movements in developing countries are frequently seen by queer theorists as manifestations of neo-imperialism, wherein ‘third world’ queer people mindlessly imitate ‘first world’ identities, like ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’ and ‘homosexual’. This is the left-wing counterpart of the right-wing claim that homosexuality is an import from the ‘West’. What is often lost sight of is that no idea is uniquely or entirely the property of one country or culture. Ideas about same-sex sexuality, like other ideas, have always circulated between cultures. Sexual identity categories are not the product of a hermetically sealed or homogenous ‘West’. Indeed many cultures that are today largely hostile to same-sex desire (for instance, parts of north India, Iran) were, a few centuries ago, much more accepting and even celebratory of that desire, as compared to European countries that have undergone a change in the opposite direction. Cultures and societies go through cycles of change and often the change is inspired by imported ideas. If some LGBT Indians today are inspired by changes in the West, many nineteenth-century European and U.S. homosexuals were inspired by the homoeroticism of Persian and Urdu ghazals as well as by the Kamasutra. An exaggerated focus on the colonial moment can obscure the fact that a much longer pre-colonial past shapes the present of societies like those of India and Iran.

In response to post-colonial queer theorists’ attacks on identity categories like lesbian and gay, some third-world AIDS activists have picked up U.S. health workers’ terms, such as MSM (Men-who-have-Sex-with-Men) as more politically correct and have also re-invented local terms which they claim are more accurate than terms like ‘homosexual’.

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4. In English, the primary meaning of the term ‘queer’ is ‘strange, curious, odd’. The adoption of the term by some to describe themselves does not change this primary meaning. In my view, same-sex desire and cross-gender identification are not any stranger than cross-sex desire or same-gender identification. All of these have co-existed in history.
5. For detailed analyses of this debate, see my essay Ruth Vanita, A Rose by Any Other Name: The Sexuality Terminology Debates in Gandhi’s Tiger and Setu’s Smile: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Culture 60–69 (2005).
8. Edward Carpenter, Oscar Wilde, ‘Michael Field’ are some of these writers.
Interestingly, they often apply a word in a local language or a regional identity from one region to the entire country.\textsuperscript{9} These efforts to separate national from international identities arise from the unstated assumption that identities can be fixed and cultures can be or have been sealed off from one another.

However, attempts to pin down cultural difference are doomed from the start. More fruitful in my view are attempts to explore interconnections and circulations. Most scholars would agree that great literature always has depicted identities as multiple, fluid and hybrid. Despite this agreement, the anxious desire to reify identities repeatedly resurfaces. Nationalism, arguably the dominant religion of the twentieth century, provides fertile soil for this anxiety.

But fear cannot stop border-crossings—physical, virtual or imaginative. When people cross borders, their identities change. The borders may be between nations, religious communities or linguistic groups. Today, even the most brutal dictatorships find it hard to prevent their citizens from crossing borders over the internet.

Perhaps the most invigorating border crossing is that between past and present. Despite continuities, any culture’s past is radically different from its present. Lesbian and gay writers often travel into the past in search of ancestors. Indeed, it is impossible to truly explore a culture without considering its past. In Same-Sex Love in India, Saleem Kidwai and I began such an exploration. The present essay looks at European and U.S. travel (both real and imaginary), and also glances at present-day Indian travel or immigration to the West.

II. NORTH TO SOUTH: IN SEARCH OF PASSION AND BEAUTY

Tourism and travel in Europe and the U.S. became more widespread in the nineteenth century than ever before. Walter Pater was a pioneer of the narrative that intertwines explorations of cultural difference and of homoeroticism. ‘Winckelmann’, the last essay in Pater’s enormously influential little book The Renaissance (1873) outlines what would become a familiar pattern: a man journeying from northern to southern Europe in search of freedom, male beauty and the intensities of love. Southern Europe, most notably Italy and Spain, were precursors of later homoerotic travel to Africa and Asia.

\textsuperscript{9} For example, in India, the word ‘kothi’. See Lawrence Cohen, The Kothi Wars: AIDS Cosmopolitanism and the Morality of Classification, in Sex In Development: Science, Sexuality and Morality in Global Perspective 269-303 (Virgaine Adams and Stacy Leigh Pigg, eds., 2006).
Pater conceives of the European Renaissance as steeped in the homoerotic traditions of the medieval and classical pasts. He celebrates the northern transmission of those traditions by Hellenist scholar Winckelmann, who, Pater argues, influenced Goethe's transformation of modern literature through Romanticism. Pater depicts Winckelmann as travelling physically to Rome but imaginatively to Greece in search of pagan beauty which he characterised as archetypally male. Pater judiciously quotes Winckelmann's letters in a way that links his intense, often anguished, love for men with his quest for "some unexpressed pulsation of sensuous life" in "the buried fire of ancient art."  

Many writers including Thomas Mann, E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf would pick up and play with this pattern of a journey from North to South. Today, 'North' and 'South' often refer to Western Europe and North America versus Asia, Africa and South America. But up to the early twentieth century, these terms more commonly referred to the supposedly sharp divide between northern and southern Europe.

Northerners went south in search of the sun. The brilliant skies of southern Europe, closer to Africa and Asia, beckoned them from the chilly industrialism of Puritan England and Germany to literally and metaphorically hot and fertile vineyards. Southern France, Spain, Italy and Greece all participated in this mystique. Greece, indeed, was part of both Europe and what was then termed 'Asia Minor', serving as a bridge between past and present as well as between continents.

For northern Europeans, Venice, where Shakespeare's Antonio (in *The Merchant of Venice*) longs to die for his Bassanio, Byron's "isles of Greece/Where burning Sappho loved and sung," Rome, where Wilde passionately commemorated the tomb of Keats, "fair as Sebastian," patron saint of Victorian homosexuals, and Florence, where Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett fled from her father's chilly Victorian house, all comprised Keats' "warm south/Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene." Here had flourished the glories of pagan poetry and art, and here were to be found the pleasures of free and passionate love. Often, this love was between members of the same sex.

Wilde's works are saturated in this imaginative continuum. Almost every poem, short story and essay involves forays into other cultures. His

comedies, though set in England, are galvanised by ‘Bunburying’ people who journey between town and countryside or return home from long sojourns abroad. Dorian Gray’s life is changed by a book about a young Parisian and it seems fitting that Wilde ended his life in Paris and was buried there.

Nor was this kind of imaginative travel confined to men. Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, who wrote under the joint pen-name ‘Michael Field’ and belonged to Wilde’s circle, recomposed the north to south journey in a Sapphic key. They travelled extensively through Europe, and their poems display an eclectic pursuit of female beauty and love, transposed from southern Europe to England’s green and pleasant land. The seduction poem, “An Invitation,” places the lover’s room in an imagined ‘south’:

Come and sing, my room is south,
Come with thy sun-governed mouth,
Thou wilt never suffer drouth,
Long as dwelling
In my chamber of the south.
.... There’s a lavender settee,
Cushioned for my love and me,
Ah, what secrets there will be
For love-telling,
When her head leans on my knee.14

Later in the century, Henry James, who emigrated from the U.S. to England, shared a passion for Italy with writer and art critic J.A. Symonds. In 1895, sending Symonds a copy of his essay on Venice, James wrote: “It seemed to me that the victims of a common passion should sometimes exchange each other.” 15 Both men were homosexually inclined.

III. SELF-REALISATION ABROAD

At the start of the twentieth century, two consummate literary tellings of this story of self-realisation through discovery of one’s homosexuality in a foreign land were André Gide’s The Immoralist (1902) and Thomas

Mann’s *Death in Venice* (1912). While Gide’s novel explores the consequences of abandoning morality in favour of unbridled hedonism, Mann’s is more narrowly focused on same-sex desire. Throughout his tale of a celebrated middle-aged German author’s passion for a beautiful Polish boy named Tadzio, Mann emphasises the foreignness of the setting in that “most improbable of cities,” Venice. The difference between modern Venice and Munich is emblematised in both natural and cultural forces, the naked sun god who draws attention away from the intellect to the senses, the oppressive sirocco blowing across from Africa, and the maze of bridges and alleys where the protagonist, Gustav von Aschenbach, loses himself. Equally important is Italy’s cultural ancestor, Greece, where Socrates taught his beloved Phaedrus and where the reigning deities included Eros, Eos, “ravisher of youth,” Apollo who loved Hyacinthus, and Dionysus, whose revels haunt Aschenbach’s dreams.

Far from resisting a passion he knows is “absurd,” Aschenbach embraces his emerging identity. Formerly a rigid moralist, he now delights in anything that seems to undermine “the bourgeois structure.” He wears make-up and hair dye, becoming like the grotesque old dandy he had despised on his voyage to Venice. All this is possible only because:

> He was alone, he was a foreigner, he was sunk deep in this belated bliss of his – all which enabled him to pass unblushing through experiences well-nigh unbelievable.

The locals deliberately hide from foreign tourists the cholera epidemic raging in the city. When an Englishman reveals the secret to Aschenbach, he neither enlightens Tadzio’s family nor leaves Venice. Recalling the foreigner in Munich who had aroused in him “a lust for strange countries and fresh sights,” he rejects the option of returning home to a life of reason.

His death just before Tadzio leaves Venice can be read as punishment for his love but can also be read as the crowning glory of his life. He has nothing to live for since he knows that the loving contemplation

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16. **Anthony Heilbut**, *Thomas Mann: Eros and Literature* (1997) (Anthony Heilbut analyses Mann’s diaries, which were unsealed in 1975 and establish his homosexual inclinations).
18. *Id.* at 55.
19. *Id.* at 59.
20. *Id.* at 61.
21. *Id.* at 63.
22. *Id.* at 74.
of beauty is the supreme felicity of existence. In Pater’s words, in the
concluding lines of his essay on Winckelmann:

And what does the spirit need in the face of modern life? The sense
of freedom [...] Who, if he saw through all, would fret against the
chain of circumstance which endows one at the end with those great
experiences?23

IV. INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Since Aschenbach cannot confide in anyone, his identity remains
unchanged in the eyes of the world. In contrast, Radclyffe Hall’s The
Well of Loneliness (1928) traces its protagonist Stephen Gordon’s progress
from isolation on her family estate in the English countryside to joining
an international gay community in Paris. Paying tribute to the expatriate
homosexual community on the Left Bank, the novel maps another
pattern that grows increasingly important in the construction of lesbian
and gay identities through the twentieth century — leaving one’s own
country in order to find community abroad.24

The need for gay communion impels Stephen to leave England. Her
friend, the gay playwright Jonathan Brockett, insists that she go to Paris
because she is atrophying in London.25 Compelled to concur with his
diagnosis, Stephen terms it a “queer revelation.”26 This term is echoed
later when she finds happiness with Mary Llewellyn in Paris and life
becomes “a new revelation.”27

Hall uses the categories “invert” and “abnormal,”28 regardless of
people’s nationality or race. Stephen’s sense of identity as a homosexual
gradually emerges once she leaves her much-loved country. Unsure
at first whether she feels “outraged or relieved” that Brockett and his
friends in Paris recognise her as one of themselves, she withdraws and
immerses herself in work.

After World War I, she gains not only a partner but also increased
confidence in her new identity. She and Mary attract little attention on
the streets where female couples stroll among male-female couples while

23. PATER supra note 10 at 148-49.
were several precursors of this expatriate gay-lesbian community, for example, the circle
around Harriet Hosmer and Charlotte Cushman in mid-nineteenth-century Rome).
25. TERRY CASTLE, NOEL COWARD AND RADCLYFFE HALL: KINDRED SPIRITS (1996) (suggesting that
Brockett may be modeled on Coward).
27. Id. at 327.
28. Id. at 242.
in the air is “the inconsequent feeling that belongs to the night life of most great cities, above all to the careless night life of Paris.” Later, Stephen seeks out gay night life. She and Mary frequent bars where women can dance together; they also host and attend gay parties and musical soirees.

Hall paints an invaluable portrait from the perspective of an insider of this international gay community’s cultural diversity. Stephen’s sympathies are broadened as she learns about other cultures. She and Mary befriend a lesbian couple from the Scottish Highlands and socialise with U.S. lesbian expatriates. With Wanda, a Polish Catholic, Stephen visits the church of the Sacre Coeur. Adolphe Blanc, a “gentle and learned Jew,” tells her of her duty to write about the injustice gay people suffer; she will act on his words at the book’s conclusion. She also hears two African-American heterosexual men sing spirituals and feels a kinship with them.

Although Hall refers to the gay community, especially the drug addicts and alcoholics in it, as a “miserable army,” she depicts its members as mutually supportive and generous. At home in the English countryside, Stephen thinks she is the only one of her kind, but in Paris she turns to “her own kind,” and realises that she is one of millions throughout the world. Hall depicts this in the book’s last pages as a turning point in the incipient gay movement for justice. Such a movement can grow only when borders are crossed.

V. PRIMEVAL PLACES

As even more Europeans and North Americans began to travel in the early twentieth century, they went further afield. More exotic locales appear in gay fiction. Stephen and Mary become lovers not in France but in Orotava on Tenerife, a Canary Island situated off the African coast. They stay in the oldest villa there which has walls adorned with old erotic frescoes, as well as “a veritable Eden of a garden.” In this brief idyll, they return to a more “natural” condition: “They no longer felt desolate, hungry outcasts.”

The lush vegetation is described as an objective correlative for their

29. Id. at 328.
30. Id. at 356.
31. Id. at 393.
32. Id. at 360.
33. Id. at 309.
34. Id. at 317.
35. Id. at 320.
love, which is termed “primitive”36 in the sense of ‘primeval’; it is part of. “Creation’s terrific urge to create.” Although the local culture is Spanish, they are described as coming together in “the African night.”37 The memory of “those African nights”38 sustains them after they return to Paris.

Hall adumbrates a cluster of ideas that is found at this time in many European and U.S. fictional representations of travel in Africa, Asia and South America. Such travel is represented as pleasurable, liberatory and conducive to the discovery of one’s self and one’s sexuality.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, many homosexual and bisexual writers undertook and wrote about such travels – Edward Carpenter in Sri Lanka and India, J. R. Ackerley, Christopher Isherwood and Allen Ginsberg in India, E. M. Forster in Egypt and India, Paul and Jane Bowles in Morocco, Hart Crane and Tennessee Williams in Mexico, Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil – the list could go on for several pages. For some, like Isherwood, these travels were part of a spiritual quest.

These travels were part of a larger, still continuing, historical pattern of gay people leaving home for sojourns in places where they feel freer precisely because they are foreigners there. Radclyffe Hall’s Barbara puts it succinctly when she pleads with her lover to leave their village in Scotland: “Jamie, let’s go away... they hate us. Let’s go where nobody knows us.”39

It is important to remember that travellers to Asia and Africa also travelled widely in Europe and America; therefore the crossings are not one-way but multi-directional. For instance, Isherwood travelled to Germany, and then moved to the U.S. with Auden (he depicts the isolation of a Britisher in the U.S. in *A Single Man*); Forster travelled in Italy and Greece; Bishop lived in Brazil for many years; many North Americans, including Natalie Clifford Barney, Romaine Brooks, Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas, H.D., and later Paul Cadmus, James Baldwin and Patricia Highsmith sojourned or settled in Europe. Rimbaud and Verlaine conducted their tempestuous affair, memorialised both in poetry and prose (“A Season in Hell”), partly in England and this preceded Rimbaud’s later travels in Asia and Africa.

The reverse movement from Asia and Africa to Europe and the

36. Id. at 317.
37. Id. at 311.
38. Id. at 327.
39. Id. at 359.
U.S., began later, and was concurrent with the ironic reversal of levels of tolerance between ‘East’ and ‘West’ in the late twentieth century.\textsuperscript{40} This movement is in full spate today. With the recent and honourable exceptions of South Africa and Nepal, which India will hopefully follow soon, most formerly colonised countries in South and South-East Asia and Africa have retained the anti-sodomy laws introduced by the European colonising powers. On the other hand, most European countries, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and recently the U.S. as well as some South American countries have abolished anti-sodomy laws and many have also introduced a range of civil rights for gay people. Consequently, a substantial number of Asian and African gay people seek amnesty in the U.S., Canada, and European countries on the grounds that they face persecution in their home countries.

VI. HUNTED AND EXILED

The twentieth century was the century of exiled refugees pouring from one country or continent into another. The Holocaust is the enduring image of such exile but it was preceded and succeeded by many waves of such unwilling boundary crossers. This century also saw an increasing number of writers hounded for their works and as gay writers became more visible, they suffered greatly in this respect. Wilde, who died as the century began, was the archetype of such suffering.

Ironically, the trial of \textit{The Well of Loneliness} enacted the persecution the novel documented, confirming its central thesis. Throughout the book, Hall uses images of hunted animals to symbolise the victimisation of defenceless homosexuals. English literature has a long and honourable history of critiquing the hunt by juxtaposing it with the oppression of women, children, prisoners, and other wretched of the earth. William Wordsworth’s “Hartleap Well” and Thomas Hardy’s \textit{Tess of the D’Urbervilles} are among the more famous examples. Radclyffe Hall was among the first writers to explicitly connect this image to the persecution of gay people.

Stephen is an avid hunter but one day after her father’s death, she suddenly identifies with the fox as a ‘solitary creature’ hunted by

\textsuperscript{40} For example, up to the eighteenth century, people were executed in many parts of Europe and the U.S. for same-sex acts; in England in the nineteenth century, men were pilloried, imprisoned and persecuted for ‘sodomy,’ which was termed an unspeakable crime, the sin not to be mentioned among Christians. In India, conversely, no one had ever been executed for same-sex relations and these were openly discussed and even celebrated in mainstream literature. See Ruth Vanita & Saleem Kidwai \textit{supra} note 7 for further discussion and examples.
“ruthless, implacable, untiring people,” and then experiences an almost mystical epiphany very close to Advaita Vedanta ideas, by this time well-known in England and America: “she perceived that all life is only one life, that all joy and all sorrow are indeed only one, that all death is only one dying.” Much later, the misery of a drug-addicted, young, gay man reminds her of the fox and her own thoughts about it: “It’s looking for God who made it.”

This perception illuminates the dark underside of Paris’s international community or of gay exiles and refugees anywhere. Their border crossings and assumption of international identities are not chosen but forced and they suffer irreparable losses as Stephen suffers the loss of her ancestral home.

VII. “I HAVE NO COUNTRY”?

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of artists and writers across the world, who were supporters of colonised countries’ struggles for national independence, developed an aspiration towards internationalism. In India, Tagore critiqued narrow nationalism, and Suryakanta Tripathi ‘Nirala’, arguably the greatest twentieth-century Hindi-language poet, described ‘ekdeshiya’ (uni-national) writing as “inherently narrow.” He claimed that interaction between literary traditions caused them to shine “like the many beautiful colours of the rainbow in the rays of one sun.”

In England, members of the Bloomsbury group of writers and artists, most of whom were homosexual or bisexual, forcefully enunciated an internationalist position. Virginia Woolf, for example, claimed: “As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.”

Such utopian yearnings were haunted by the spectres of colonialism and imperialism. Forster was to famously remark in 1939: “If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.” But his last novel, A Passage

\[\text{notes:} 41. \text{Hall, supra note 26 at 123.}
42. \text{Id. at 125.}
43. \text{Id. at 394.}
44. \text{Rabindranath Tagore, Nationalism (1917); Sahitya ki Samtal Bhumih, Nirala Rachanavali, 156 (Nandkishor Naval ed., 1983) (1926).}
45. \text{Nawin Sahitya aur Prachin Vichar, Nirala Rachanavali, 441 (Nandkishor Naval ed., 1983) (1929).}
46. \text{Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas 103 (1966) (1938).}
47. \text{See Leela Gandhi, supra note 6.}
48. \text{E.M. Forster, What I Believe, in Two Cheers for Democracy 68 (1951) (1938).}\]
to India (1924), which emblematises this aspiration in the homoerotic friendship of the Englishman Fielding and the Indian Aziz, concludes with the two men’s separation. They want to be friends but larger forces obtrude.

Although both Fielding and Aziz marry women, their relationship is the thread running through the book and evolves as its thematic centre. Their separation indicates how hard it is for what Forster termed “Love, the Beloved Republic” to survive the tensions created by imperialism. Forster dedicated Passage to Ross Masood, the Indian he loved unrequitedly for years.

This was a time when ideas about homosexual identity were being exported from one country to another. While this created connections, it also spawned fears, many of which are alive today.

VIII. IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

In north India, male homoerotic subcultures had flourished in pre-colonial cities and been celebrated by major poets.\(^{49}\) But in the late nineteenth century, British-educated nationalists, both on the Right and on the Left, who had internalised Victorian homophobia, claimed that homosexuality was imported into India by ‘Westerners,’ either Europeans or West Asian Muslims. This myth still thrives in India today. Ironically, it was in fact not homosexuality but homophobia in its modern form that was imported into India via British education and law.\(^{50}\)

The first public debate in north India around homosexuality and its representation in literature was also a debate about ‘West’ versus ‘East’. It was sparked off in 1927 by the publication of a collection of short stories on male homosexuality entitled Chocolate.\(^{51}\) The author, a firebrand nationalist, Pandey Bechan Sharma, with the pen-name ‘Ugra’ (Extreme), claimed that despite the anti-sodomy law introduced by the British in 1860, homosexuality was widespread in all strata of Indian society and that his stories were written to expose and denounce it. However, his opponents claimed that the stories titillated readers with depictions of beautiful boys and lovers’ encounters, and were therefore obscene. Ugra, who never married, was suspected of homosexuality, and there is evidence that male homosexuals were delighted by the book’s publication. The first edition sold out in a week.

\(^{49}\) See Vanita and Kidwai, supra note 7 at 125-42, 183-90 & 197-205.

\(^{50}\) Id. at 220-233.

\(^{51}\) See Ruth Vanita, Introduction to Pandey Bechan Sharma Ugra, Chocolate and other Writings on Male-Male Desire (Ruth Vanita trans., 2006) (for a more detailed account and analysis of the controversy and a translation of the text).\)
Ugra depicts groups of sophisticated young men, both Hindu and Muslim, who enjoy the pleasures of the city and most of whom acknowledge the attractions of other males. “Chocolate,” the title of the collection and of one of the stories, is a term they use both for their desires and for the objects of those desires. While suggesting that male-male desire is a Western import; this term also normalises that desire by indicating that Western tastes are an ineradicable part of modern Indian identity. One of the most widely available consumer items in India, chocolate is so indigenised as to have become a Hindi word but is nevertheless non-Indian in origin. The term works against Ugra’s narratorial denunciations of homosexuality.

Ugra’s homosexual characters are proud of their hybridity. They defend their desires by expounding a hedonist philosophy, derived both from ancient Greek and medieval Indian thought: “Truth must be respected wherever it is. Beauty alone is truth. So whether the beauty is a woman’s or a man’s, I am a slave of love.” They also claim an illustrious ancestry, with hybrid sources, Eastern and Western, Hindu and Muslim. In the title story, a homosexually inclined character quotes the renowned Urdu poet Mir Taqi Mir’s homoerotic love poetry but also looks to the West for inspiration. The censorious narrator reports: “[H]e told me on the basis of an English book that even Socrates was guilty of this offence. He said that Shakespeare too was a slave of some beautiful friend of his. He spoke of Mr Oscar Wilde as well.”

Ugra uses a range of terms for homosexuality and these too are drawn from different cultures. Among them are older indigenous words like sarvabhogi (taking pleasure in or consuming everything) and rangnimijaz (of colourful temperament); popular pejorative terms like laundebaaz (boy fancier), and poetic words in local dialect like paatalpanthi (followers of the path of paatal, a rose or trumpet flower).

Ugra’s writings were widely attacked by Hindi litterateurs. One reason was that he dared depict homosexuality as a heady mix of different cultural traditions from West and East.

IX. ANXIETY AND TRANSFORMATION

Suniti Namjoshi is the first openly lesbian Indian writer; she moved from India to Canada and then to England. From its inception, her work

52. Id. at 49.
53. Id. at 39.
54. Id. at 64; For rangnimijaz as a term for homoerotic inclination, see Vanita and Kidwai, supra note 7 at 218.
draws on Indian as well as European literary traditions to engage with post-colonial and diasporic anxieties about Western identities. A number of her animal figures from the blue donkey and the one-eyed monkey to the tiger and the dragon suggest the fear and hostility that prevail between heterosexual and homosexual, East and West, men and women. While acknowledging these conflicts as real, she also deconstructs identities to reveal convergences across national and other boundaries.

The Conversations of Cow, a fantasy novel, is her most sophisticated exegesis of the question of identity. The protagonist, Suniti, and the object of her pursuit, the eponymous Cow, constantly metamorphose yet remain recognisable. The cow is Goddess, woman and animal; this is normal in an Indian context where one may be reborn as an animal. Many Gods have an animal vehicle, some Gods take an animal form and most animals are worshipped but it appears outrageous in a Western context. While Suniti, with her Western education, is agitated by identities that fluctuate, the cow is equally comfortable as an Indian lesbian and a white heterosexual man.

Namjoshi draws on Hindu philosophy to undo everyday categories. In Hindu thought, Kama is one of the four aims of human life and represents the third stage before the final one of *moksha* or liberation. One interpretation of this is that when all desires are fulfilled and one has nothing left to desire, one reaches liberation. Namjoshi’s cow resonates with a number of Hindu narratives recalling both the mythological cornucopian cow Surabhi who produces an endless stream of milk and Kamadhenu, the cow who fulfills all desires. *Kama* means desire and *dhenu* means cow. Bhadravati, the lesbian cow, both fulfills Suniti’s desires and also liberates her from prejudices and unreal categories. Evoking the Hindu idea that all living beings are manifestations of the divine, the cow becomes a symbol for dissolving cultural differences, like those of gender, race, nationality and sexuality.

When Suniti is perplexed by the cow’s rapid transformations, the cow reassures her: “It’s all right... identity is fluid. Haven’t you heard of transmigration?” pointing to ancient Indian versions of apparently

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55. For an analysis of the homoerotic implications of these animals, see Ruth Vanita, *Dogs, Phoenixes and Other Beasts: Nonhuman Creatures in Homoerotic Texts*, in *Sappho and the Virgin Mary, Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination* 214-41 (1996).


57. For a more extended analysis of this text, see Ruth Vanita, “I’m an Excellent Animal”: Cows at Play in the Writings of Bahinabai, Rutkan Advani, Suniti Namjoshi and Others, in *Gandhi’s Tiger and Sita’s Smile* 290-310 (2005).

new Western ideas. When Suniti is not persuaded, the cow expresses a desire that many people who are categorised as deviant may have experienced: "All I ever wanted... was to be an ordinary animal." \(^{59}\)

In the closing peroration, Namjoshi draws on another Indian devotional practice, that of invoking a God by hundreds of names. She uses this linguistic strategy to displace gender and cultural difference, much as Monique Wittig and Jeannette Winterson use the first person pronoun. The protagonist invokes the cow as all who have appeared in the narrative, including Westerners and Indians, living and imagined beings, humans and non-humans, men and women, straight and gay, concluding, "O Cow, who manifests herself in a thousand shapes and a thousand wishes." \(^{60}\)

Namjoshi thus returns us by many routes to a modern version of the Bhagavad Gita's claim that a wise person sees the one in the many and the many in the one. The novel concludes with the return of the cow, which makes Suniti "feel so very, so extraordinarily happy." \(^{61}\) She decides that she likes Cow in all her incarnations, and finds even her heterosexual white male persona "wholly engaging." \(^{62}\)

X. SWEET DUALITIES\(^{63}\)

Crossing boundaries involves meetings, encounters and sometimes dualities. A love relationship is one kind of duality and as international relationships become increasingly common, identities are transformed at the most visceral levels. As Edmund White remarks: "a love affair between foreigners is always as much the mutual seduction of two cultures as a meeting between two people." \(^{64}\)

In The Married Man, White's most extended examination of such a mutual seduction, U.S. protagonist, Austin, falls in love with a Frenchman, Julien, and part of the attraction is that the relationship represents "a total immersion into France." As in Henry James's novels, this has mixed results for Austin's identity. Julien has a French disdain for sexual identities which shakes Austin's sense of himself as a gay man; he becomes distanced from his gay friends, and from the U.S., which increasingly appears like a foreign country to him.

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59. Id. at 32.
60. Id. at 122.
61. Id. at 124.
62. Id. at 125.
63. Borrowed from Gillian Hanscombe & Suniti Namjoshi, And There's You And Me, My Sweet Duality, 24 (3) WOMEN'S STUD. INT'L FORUM 401-08 (2001).
64. EDMUND WHITE, THE MARRIED MAN 65 (2000).
The limitations of identity politics become evident when Austin is accused of political incorrectness at the U.S. university where he teaches. U.S. liberal tolerance of homosexuality is scathingly revealed as shallow and xenophobic; Austin’s colleagues do not warm to Julien and him because they are not “the sort of dotty, aging gay couple an academic community likes.” As Julien’s health declines, they travel to Venice and Morocco; here, White pays tribute to Gide, Mann, and Bowles, and perhaps to James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*, one of the earliest novels about a transatlantic relationship.

A kind of relationship less often examined is that between expatriates from two different countries who settle down together in a third. Such was the relationship between North American Natalie Barney and Englishwoman Renee Vivien, both of whom settled in France and later between short story writer Katherine Mansfield and Ida Baker. Mansfield came from New Zealand and Baker from Burma to a finishing school in London, where both later relocated. Though Mansfield had earlier had an intense affair with Maata, a Maori classmate, her unfinished manuscript, ‘Maata’ records her life-long partnership with Baker whom she termed her ‘wife’ and who co-existed, not always happily, with Mansfield’s husband, the literary critic Middleton Murry.65

More recently, Namjoshi and her partner Gillian Hanscombe explore their relationship in a poetic dialogue, *Flesh and Paper*, which touches on their life as expatriates from two former colonies (India and Australia), who lived in Canada and England.

XI. TRAVELLING GENRES: THE CASE OF THE GHAZAL

Another way cultural identities mingle is when genres are translated and rewritten in cultures other than their native ones. Marilyn Hacker’s ‘villanelles’ and Adrienne Rich’s *ghazals* come to mind. The *ghazal* is a particularly interesting case because of its conventions in its native languages, Persian and Urdu, where lover and beloved always take the masculine grammatical gender. This is so even when a woman is the addressee. The convention lends itself especially well to male-male relationships and renders unnecessary the kind of subterfuge that poets in English resorted to for centuries, using the ‘I-you’ format to avoid revealing the beloved’s gender.66

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From the late nineteenth century onwards, Indian nationalist critics launched campaigns to purify literature in several Indian languages. The ghazal came in the line of fire; Urdu critics denounced it as decadent. Fortunately, it proved resilient and still flourishes but the homoeroticism endemic to the genre was purged or disguised and the male-male convention was gradually replaced by a male-female convention. Twentieth-century Urdu poets, like Josh Malihabadi and Firaq Gorakhpuri, widely known to be homosexual, wrote in the male-female mode. From the late nineteenth century onwards, Rekht, a sub-genre of early nineteenth-century Urdu poetry, which contained explicit descriptions of female-female relationships, was suppressed in India as obscene.

The recuperation of same-sex conventions in the English-language ghazal is, therefore, an example of how cross-cultural travellings shift the identities not only of individuals but even of genres. If the encounter with British colonialism heterosexualised the ghazal, the encounter with Western gay identities enables a recuperation of same-sex desire.

Where Agha Shahid Ali draws on his own identity as a Kashmiri Muslim to write in the ghazal form (interestingly, English allows him to disguise the homoerotic content by avoiding third-person pronouns), Adrienne Rich, a U.S. half-Jewish lesbian, wrote ghazals that are explicit about female-female amours.

XII. CITIZENS OF THE WORLD OR SEXUAL EXILES?

Today many writers, especially from the developed world, emigrate, move freely across borders, live in more than one country, and obtain dual or triple citizenships. Their quest may be for foreignness itself, for the special creative urge triggered by exposure to different cultures and histories.

LGBT tourism from Asian and African countries, especially from India, does take place but it is not as widespread or as easy. Many LGBT people are forced into exile, fleeing either outright persecution or more subtle forms of discrimination. This type of migration from India has been figured as a type of sexual exile both by Sunil Gupta and by Sukirat Anand. While most Indian immigrants to the West of whatever class are driven largely by the desire to improve their economic status, LGBT

67. See Vanita & Kidwai, supra note 7 (especially Introduction to Modern Materials).
68. Id. at 412-422.
69. See Ruth Varta, Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West 246-80 (2005).
migrants from India are often driven by the desire to lead a more open life and find a larger community or a partner.

This is not very different from the way France functioned vis-à-vis England and the U.S. in the first half of the twentieth century. Despite or perhaps because of its literary climate where many openly homosexual writers refuse to identify as 'gay' or attend gay literary conferences, it retained the promise of a relatively liberatory sexual ethos.\textsuperscript{71} Marilyn Hacker's sonnet sequence \textit{Love, Death and the Changing of the Seasons} records a relationship lived out in Manhattan and Paris.\textsuperscript{72} Continuing the trajectory of such writers as James Baldwin, Edmund White's protagonists in \textit{The Married Man}, a novel based on the author's life, find France more congenial than the U.S., and U.S. writer David Sedaris too recounts his experiences with his partner in France.\textsuperscript{73}

Greece, whose past contributed so centrally to shaping modern gay identity, also retained its allure into the twentieth century. For two decades James Merrill and his partner David Jackson spent part of each year in Greece and Merrill's poetry, which, like Forster's fiction, develops a poetics of place, often evokes Greek life and Greek men. Merrill and Forster also had in common an admiration of Greek homosexual poet C.V. Gavafy whom Forster brought to the English-speaking world's attention and three of whose poems Merrill later translated.\textsuperscript{74}

A forerunner of today's globe-trotting gay writers was the peripatetic Ronald Firbank who often wrote a novel set in a real or imaginary foreign land while himself living in another foreign land; he travelled around Spain, Italy, the Middle East and North Africa; Venice was one of his favourite cities.\textsuperscript{75} European and U.S. gay writers today, because of their privileged position, are increasingly able to identify with more than one nationality. However, writers of Asian, African or Latin American origin, whether straight or gay, who live in the 'West' often tend to write only or largely about their countries of origin or about ethnic diasporas. This may be partly because writers as well as academics of non-Western origin tend to get much more attention in the West if they write about the non-Western world about which they are supposed to have insider knowledge and about which Western readers know little.

Vikram Seth is an exception; he writes not only with the ease but with the loving knowledge of an insider about China, England and the United States as well as India. As \textit{A Suitable Boy} demonstrates, not least

\textsuperscript{73} David Sedaris, \textit{Me Talk Pretty One Day} (2001).
\textsuperscript{74} C.P. Cavafy, \textit{Three Poems} (James Merrill trans., 1987).
by its wide popularity among readers in India, he is one of the foremost imaginative chroniclers of modern Indian life. But his masterpiece, The Golden Gate, which Gore Vidal, in his backjacket blurb for the book called “the great California novel,” nowhere suggests his Indianness and predictably came in for some criticism on this score. Its portrait of a gay relationship between a bisexual older man and a tormented, young, gay Catholic reveals how certain feelings cross times, places and sexual orientations, for example, when one man must stretch out in the darkness to his roommate, making the first move and thus risking rejection.

Seth’s lyric poems excel in working out variations on the theme of unrequited or semi-requited love, the age-old, even central, preoccupation of European as well as Indian lyric poetry. In his first collection, Mappings (1981), Seth playfully wonders how his bisexuality fits into identity categories: “In the strict ranks/of Gay and Straight/what is my status?/Stray? or Great?” Mappings features explicit love poems about men (“Guest,” “Even Such”) and women (“Time-Zones”), rendering somewhat futile the years of media speculation about his sexuality that followed. The media imagined that he first came out on a radio talk-show in the late 1990s or later when his mother mentioned his bisexuality in her autobiography, or still later when he was the lead signatory to an open letter calling on the Indian government to repeal the anti-sodomy law instituted by the British which still remains on the books. His ‘coming out’ has had to be repeated again and again, as is perhaps the inherent nature of coming out, necessitated by the powerful heterosexist assumption that everyone is heterosexual unless proved otherwise.

From the start, Seth favoured the time-honoured ‘I-you’ form in his lyric love poems, most of which avoid gendering the beloved. One reason this form has been so popular throughout history is that it allows anyone regardless of gender to identify with both lover and beloved and also allows the poet to get to the heart of the matter by exploring universal rather than gendered emotion.

In his introduction to his Collected Poems, first published by Penguin India in 1995, Seth suggests that an author’s national identity is ultimately irrelevant to writing: “I see myself as Indian... But ...

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The wish to write about anything is such a rare and mysterious feeling that it is pointless to pre-empt or constrain it by notions of subject or geography or genre.\textsuperscript{79}

The next generation of writers, born and bred in the internet patch, often bypasses the question altogether. The protagonist of \textit{Kari}, a graphic novel published in India in 2008 by Amruta Patil, lives in Bombay and is in love with a vanished non-Indian called Ruth.\textsuperscript{80} Going by her appearance and preoccupations, Kari could as well live in New York or London, as many readers of the book do. Elements of Indian life (the house cleaner, for instance) appear without being marked as exotic in any way as do the many signs of international identity. No sexual identity terms are used but Kari’s butch baby dyke ways are quite evident, visually and in words.

As the world shrinks, gay people are indeed everywhere, both in life and literature, popping up in the most remote places and unlikely settings. This frenzied travelling, however, should not obscure that journeying for which it is a metaphor, and which, fittingly, travel-shy poets like Emily Dickinson and Mary Oliver have best evoked. As Oliver writes:

\begin{quote}
One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice –

But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do –
determined to save
the only life you could save.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{79} Seth, supra note 77, at xv.
\textsuperscript{80} Amruta Patil, Kari (2008).