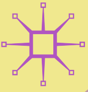

Same-Sex Desire and the Environment in Norwegian Literature, 1908–1979

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i Åsmund Sveens forfattarskap. As mentioned, some of the material on Alf Martin Jæger's novels has been printed in the chapter "Secundum naturam: Landlege miljø og kjærleik mellom menn i Alf Martin Jægers romanar" in the anthology *Skeiv lokalhistorie* (Oslo: Nasjonalbiblioteket 2022). Finally, parts of the text on Tarjei Vesaas's novels in Chapter 4 have been printed in Norwegian in the article "Å bli som ein kar: Patriarkat, erotikk og homososialitet hjå Vesaas og Sveen" in Nora Simonhjell and Benedikt Jager (eds.) *Norsk litterær årbok* (Oslo: Samlaget 2018). I am grateful to the editors and publishers for the opportunity to explore these texts and am very happy to present these readings to a non-Norwegian-speaking audience.

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About the Author

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CHAPTER 1

Sexualities and Environments in the Norwegian Twentieth Century

Queering Nature, Greening Sexuality

This book grows out of a curiosity regarding how and why conceptions of the environment seem to play an important part in literary depictions of same-sex desire. I hypothesize that the dichotomy between urban and pastoral environments in Norwegian twentieth-century literature provides a means of constructing, representing, and interpreting the experience of same-sex love and its effects on a cultural as well as an individual level. A guiding assumption is that while Norwegian narrative fiction on love and desire between people of the same sex has points in common with a Western "canon" on gay and lesbian themes, it also differs from it. Many aspects of same-sex desire in Norwegian gay and lesbian literature should be interpreted with reference to Norwegian environments—and conceptions thereof. The works under scrutiny in the following chapters thus provide unique case studies for an ecologically aware kind of queer theoretical literary study.

One of the central goals of this book is bridging the gap between the "de-naturalizing" project of gender and queer theory on the one hand, and, on the other, the centering of the nonhuman environment in ecocriticism. While Greg Garrard (2012, 5) proposes a wide definition of the subject of ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship of the human

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and the nonhuman throughout human cultural history … entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself," a problem with ecocriticism for queer theory has been the former's often uncritical assumption of the existence of an acultural "nature." Conversely, as Robert Azzarello explains, ecocritical scholars have lambasted the poststructuralist idea of nature as socially constructed, finding social constructionism "indicative of a greater human hubris that they identify as the cause of the environmental crisis in the first place" (Azzarello 2012, 9). However, he goes on to identify a potential for cooperation between these seemingly contradictory viewpoints by referring to Eve K. Sedgwick's now famous distinction between "paranoid" and "reparative" readings (cf. Sedgwick 2003). Since there is no safe haven for lesbian and gay identities as either "natural" or "cultural," a queer environmentality which cherishes "the overdetermination of sexual desire" is necessary (Azzarello 2012, 18–9). Such an approach does not mean that we have to do away with a critique of the heterosexist ideologies we perceive in cultural texts. What it *does* mean, is acknowledging that literary artworks are filled with disparate ideological elements so that what might look heterosexist can, if we ask the right questions of the text, open for alternative ways to acknowledge nonheteronormative sexualities.

In a similar vein, Nicole Seymour proposes to analyze the oppression of human and nonhuman life as interconnected. Thus, echoing earlier efforts in ecofeminism (cf. Chapter 2), she calls for historicizing the concept of "nature." Simply rejecting it as an oppressive term, Seymour notes, begs the question of what it can mean and how it can be understood otherwise (2013, 4). Instead of discarding concepts like "nature," "the nonhuman," "the environment," and "the future," then, she encourages environmentally conscious scholars of queer theory to highlight affirmative conceptions. For example, the prevalent dehumanization of queers in homophobic discourse might not necessarily be considered "wrong in and of itself—because the nonhuman is not worthless—but dehumanization *as a justification for violence would* be. After all, environmental exploitation is often justified by the nonhuman status of 'nature'" (ibid., 12). The parallel oppression of nonhuman and non-heteronormative life forms can allow for critical exploration of where the border between human and nonhuman is conceived to go, and which values are assigned to either side of the border.

Moreover, as Seymour underlines, much contemporary ecocriticism essentializes nature by positing it as "pristine, primal, or at least self-evident" (2013, 14). For those of us who come into ecocriticism from queer studies, this essentializing is quite glaring. Indeed, the relationship of many modern Westerners to the nonhuman environment strikes me as similar to our relationship to sex, as Michel Foucault eloquently described it. We talk about sexuality all the time while claiming to repress it (Foucault 2009, 16), and we talk longingly about nonhuman nature all the time while considering it something we have lost touch with or whose existence we have forgotten.

Thus, as Timothy Morton asserts, the contemporary nature-worshipper mourning the loss of a connection to nature "is like a depressed closeted gay man who insists he is straight" (2010, 95). Riffing on Judith Butler's account of melancholia, he argues that we experience this depressive state since we cannot mourn for the environment "because we are so deeply attached to it—we *are* it. Just as for Butler the 'truest gay male melancholic is the 'strictly straight man,' so the truest ecological human is a melancholy dualist" (Morton 2007, 186). Taking this analysis in a slightly different direction, I would argue that just as everyone can be considered "queer" in Butler's sense of never performing heterosexual gender perfectly, so the modern Western human might be considered a "queer" animal seeking to attain an impossible state of harmony with nature. Much like how the ideal of gender is constructed as out of reach by definition, nature, too, is constructed as something different from modern humans, something we by definition cannot attain. Straight-identified people in modernity have a troubled relationship to the category of "homosexual": it is, as George L. Mosse (1998) has shown, a necessary "counter-type" to normative conceptions of gender but also a generator of especially male homosexual panic (cf. Sedgwick 1985). This is mirrored in the attitude of nature-worshippers who feel the need to pledge allegiance to a nature paradoxically conceptualized as simultaneously unattainable and inescapable. Here, those positioned as non-heteronormative, and thus as unnatural, arguably have more freedom in defining what their relationship to the nonhuman can be, as we will see in several of the works to be studied.

While among the first to argue for a "a partnership between queer theory and ecological criticism" (2007, 186), Morton, I would argue, steps into the trap against which Seymour warns by arguing that "[p]utting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from

afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman" (ibid., 5). Calling for an "ecology without nature"—and, one wonders, also a feminism without woman?—Morton thus seems to assume that "nature" can only be politically oppressive and support a dualism which in the last analysis blocks true ecological thinking. However, just as feminists make efforts to conceptualize "Woman" in antipatriarchal ways, so queer environmentalists can historicize, diversify, and redefine the concept of "Nature." I propose that such a process should start with a brief genealogy. In a thorough study, Frédéric Ducarme and Denis Couvet map four current definitions of "nature" as defined in dictionaries of Western languages. A simplified version of their table looks like this:

	Definition	*Opposed concept*
1	The whole of material reality, independent of human activity and history	Culture, artifice, rational intention
2	The whole universe, including humans	Supernatural, unreal
3	The specific force at the core of life and change	Inertia, fixedness, entropy
4	The essence, inner quality and character, the whole of specific physical properties of an object, live or inert	Transmutation, denaturation

(based on Ducarme and Couvet 2020, 4)

Several contradictions appear. "Nature" can mean everything *except* humans (1), but also everything *including* humans (2). While the first two definitions define categories (although (2), being all-encompassing, does not work as a category in a strict sense), (3) and (4) are terms for characteristics *internal* to organisms and/or objects. Several of the authors whose works will be analyzed in the following play with what comes across as a fundamental dual concept of nature. On the one hand, nature is an external category with the power to exclude, and on the other, it is the label for characteristics or forces internal to the subject. It is also useful to note the contradiction between (3), a concept of nature as a force of dynamic change, and (4), in which it is simply a synonym for whatever is *unchanging* in an organism or in a dead object. While the three first definitions have roots in philosophical traditions,[1] (4) is more of an everyday use of the term. Instead of doing away with such a flexible concept, a queer ecocriticism should celebrate its potential for creating literary overdetermination, as the works in this study are examples of. To

do so would be to "queer" the concept of nature in much the same way as queer theorists have shown how "homosexual" is also a concept with several contradictory definitions.

From this outset, I suggest distinguishing between three positions within critical discourses on the relationship between "nature" and "sexuality." The first may be identified in the long tradition of pastoral depictions of same-sex love (cf. Shuttleton 2000; Donoghue 1995). Often arguing implicitly against the idea of homosexuality as "unnatural," authors—including several of those to be studied here—have taken care to portray gay and lesbian characters as immersed in nature. This approach takes the positive connotations of "nature," as expressed in categories (2) and (3) above, at face value. Conversely, a second approach consists in rejecting the relevance of "nature" altogether, as an oppressive, cultural construction alongside normative ideas of gender and sexuality. As mentioned, this is the fundament of the nature-skeptical viewpoint common in the poststructuralist projects of queer theory and feminism. Addressing the limitations of this viewpoint, Kate Soper notes:

> if there are, indeed, no 'natural' needs, desires, instincts, etc., then it is difficult to see how these can be said to be subject to the 'repressions' or 'distortions' of existing norms, or to be more fully or truly realized within any other order of sexuality. […] Equally, of course, such anti-naturalism is at loggerheads with ecological realism and with any argument appealing to the nature we share in common with the rest of the animal world, or to our biological dependency upon the ecosystem. (1995, 130)

Hence the need for an affirmative approach to how "nature" and "sexuality" can be conceptualized otherwise, and how attention to the oppression of the nonhuman can benefit nonnormative human lives. Such a third type of approach, evidenced in the work of e.g., Azzarello and Seymour, would also have to "affirm" the two other positions—in the sense of seeking to understand how the pastoral and the nature-skeptical projects are aesthetically, politically, and theoretically efficient.

Seeking not only to ecologize queer theory but also to queer ecocriticism, the following chapters rest on a dynamic view of literature which I would label "ecological" in its own right. Not only do artistic representations change the state of what is politically visible, as Jacques Rancière might say (2007, 12); they are also dependent on, and in turn affect, the nonhuman world. I identify the project of this book with Catriona

Mortimer-Sandiland's and Bruce Erickson's definition of queer ecology as the critical analysis of how "ideas and practices of nature, including both bodies and landscapes, are located in particular productions of sexuality," and how "sex is, both historically and in the present, located in particular formations of nature" (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 4–5). A queer version of ecocriticism can make us become aware of a variety of ways of understanding and treating the world and its human and nonhuman inhabitants.

Narratives of Nation, Sexuality, and Environment

The revolutionary contribution of ecocriticism, in the famous definition by Cheryll Glotfelty, is taking "an earth-centered approach to literary studies" by studying "the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty 1996, XVIII). (One might add that contemporary ecocriticism has grown increasingly water-centered cf. Dobrin 2021.) Rejecting the cultural ecologist view that "culture must in the final analysis have its origin in natural processes,"[2] this book nevertheless insists on the importance of the Norwegian context, including its geo- and topography, alongside cultural texts. Both queer theory and ecocriticism are largely the work of scholars whose examples are drawn from British and American fiction. This also applies to scholars within the field of queer ecology. The centering of Anglophone culture in these fields means that there is a risk of applying culture-specific notions to contexts where these are less relevant—a kind of cultural appropriation by way of theory. If one believes in the tenet of the social constructionist paradigm championed by Foucault, the basis of most queer theoretical study, one should also be sensitive to how key terms and lines of argument are constructed within a specific cultural context: that of late twentieth-century American culture, which on many points differs vastly from Northern Europe.

Indeed, since a fundamental assumption of this study is that the nonhuman environment and conceptions thereof are considered to be carriers of meaning, I wish to highlight the need for attention to local and national contexts. Not only is Norwegian geo- and topography and natural and urban history different from that of the USA or the British Isles; conceptualizations of "Nature" are also culturally contingent. Furthermore, there is much talk of a Nordic exceptionalism, which encompasses gender equality and sexual minority rights as well as pioneering environmental policy (Hennig et al. 2018, 5–6).

There is a strong case to be made that queer-friendliness and respect for the nonhuman environment are strongly linked, if not in all aspects of Realpolitik, at least in the identities and cultural imaginaries of the Nordic countries. As Nina Witoszek succinctly (and sarcastically) describes Norwegian national identity:

> At the beginning of the twenty-first century, an achieved utopia of the European Left seems to have emerged in the North. It embodies equality, freedom, welfare, and justice, and it combines these blessings with immense affluence. Its wealth goes beyond the oil, gas, and hydro-power that give it one of the highest GDPs in the world; it includes a rich tradition of peaceful, reform-oriented development, emancipatory politics, a generous welfare system, and an identity based on partnership with nature […] In the eyes of the outside world, it has become the epitome of good governance, environmental concern, and enlightened altruism. It is symbolically and politically linked to 'positive development', as evinced by Arne Næss' Deep Ecology, the Brundtland Commission's idea of 'sustainable development', and massive aid projects in developing countries. (Witoszek 2011, 7)

Indeed, it would seem that a respect for the surrounding nonhuman world is fundamental to the altruism which ensures an equitable distribution of wealth, legal protection of women and minorities, and equal opportunities for happiness—at home and abroad. (After all, the concept of "sustainable development" was popularized by a UN commission led by Gro Harlem Brundtland, the first female prime minister of the Scandinavian countries.) This national identity narrative has historical roots and is clearly in need of nuance. Hence, the rest of this introduction critically inquires the most salient aspects of conceptualizations of "sexuality" and "nature" in Western and Norwegian twentieth-century culture.

The categories of "sexuality" and "nature" both grow in visibility and importance due to the development of instrumental rationality from the seventeenth century onwards. If "nature," in the words of Andrea Wulf (2015), was "invented" by scientists such as Alexander von Humboldt at the turn of the eighteenth century, the homosexual, in Foucault's oft-quoted phrase, was "born" in 1869 (Foucault 2009, 59). As Sigrid Weigel argues, Humboldt and other Enlightenment scientists built on a new concept of nature, in which Woman was seen as a symbol of a janus-faced

nature: both harmonious and demonic, and possible to objectify in scientific study and aesthetic contemplation (Weigel 1990, 127–8). Ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant explains how the image of nature as female was key in legitimizing the exploitation of natural resources starting with the scientific revolution (Merchant 1990, 189, cf. chapter 2). Furthermore, William Cronon has shown how a dualist conception of "wilderness" vs. "civilization" came about in the nineteenth century through the merging of Romantic ideas of the sublime together with the Rousseauian idea that "the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to simpler, more primitive living" (Cronon 1996, 76). Echoing Merchant, Cronon also notes how the individual who transcends the frontier and draws strength from wilderness is most often thought of as masculine (ibid., 78, cf. Chapter 3). The nature/culture divide, then, is shot through with gender.

This dualism, along with the scientific impulse to categorize the world in order to exploit its resources better, is at the heart of the bio-political thinking that shapes the nascent category of the "homosexual" in late nineteenth-century medicine. In Foucault's view, modern states are characterized by shifting their emphasis of power from protecting the life of the head of state to protecting and fostering the life of its citizens in order for the nation to prosper. State power takes the form of an "anatomopolitics" of the human body and of a "bio-politics" of the population as such (Foucault 2009, 183). Bio-politics entails mapping and exploring the means of procreation, and thus sex is "put into discourse" (ibid., 33–4). Coinciding with the development of the anthropocentric—as well as androcentric and masculinist—modern natural sciences, this discursivation of sex likely exacerbated the age-old association between same-sex desire and the "unnatural." In the law of king Christian V, in vigor in Norway from 1687 until 1889, anal intercourse, involving different-sex as well as same-sex couples, was termed "intercourse against nature" [Omgængelse, som er imod Naturen] (Halsos 2007, 92). This echoes how, as Emma Donoghue has shown in a study going back to the second half of the seventeenth century, the "unnatural" is a common trope in all conceptualizations of same-sex desire (Donoghue 1995, 6). However, when "the homosexual" emerges as a type of human, we are not just dealing with "unnatural acts," but with a whole class of people deemed "unnatural."

Thus emerges a set of binary, hierarchical opposites, exemplified in the following table borrowed and adapted from Greta Gaard (2004, 23) and Azzarello (2012, 20):

Man	Woman
Culture	Nature
Heterosexual	Homosexual
Reason	Emotion
Rationality	Animality
Mind	Body
Activity	Passivity
Health	Illness
Strength	Weakness
Spirit	Matter
Transcendence	Immanence
Civilized	Primitive
Subject	Object
Self	Other

As Azzarello remarks, such a system of dichotomies relies on stable terms on each side (Azzarello 2012, 21). As we have seen, however, "nature" is thought of as feminine and passive, but at the same time a sublime, powerful wilderness for masculine exploration. Likewise, Gaard has highlighted the paradoxical view of queer sexualities as simultaneously against *nature* and against *civilization*, noting that this is precisely the sort of paradoxes that queer theorists are interested in (Gaard 2004, 26).[3] Predating Morton's call for joining the forces of queer theory and ecocriticism, Gaard suggests that a queer ecofeminism would look for vertical associations between terms in either column: "… we can examine the ways queers are feminized, animalized, eroticized, and naturalized in a culture that devalues women, animals, nature, and sexuality. … Finally, we can explore how nature is feminized, eroticized, even queered" (Gaard 2004, 26). This approach entails acknowledging how the nonhuman physical world and the concepts we use to make sense of it are changing, unstable, and dynamic. All definitions of "nature" can be scientifically, intellectually, and politically useful, Ducarme and Couvet state, referring to Claude Lévi-Strauss' observation that even scientists work with a historically contingent conception of human–nonhuman interplay (2020, 5). Awareness of the variety of such conceptions, they stress, is key in developing culture-sensitive, philosophically sound, and rhetorically appealing conservation policies (ibid., 6). This claim supports a key point for many scholars

in the environmental humanities, including Seymour, Gaard, Morton, and Azzarello: the critical work we do can play a vital role in the transition to an ecological society.

The Urban and the Pastoral

The ultimate queer environment seems to be the city. As David Shuttleton described the state of the historiography at the turn of the millennium:

> Historians of sexuality are largely in agreement that a modern Western homosexual identity emerged as a metropolitan phenomenon enabled by the particular conditions of social mobility generated by capitalist industrialization and imperialism [...]. By the close of the nineteenth century, conservative and reformist sexologists alike equated neurotic sexual perversion with the febrile life of the city. (Shuttleton 2000, 127)

The association between homosexuality and the urban environment thus rests partly on pseudo-medical prejudice, partly on sociological facts. Indeed, Henning Bech forcefully claims that the male homosexual form of existence was an "*answer*" to the modern conditions of life:

> [...] the city, the collapse of norms, the absence of safe and secure communities and identities, the struggle of the sexes, the images and the stagings, the institutions of art, the theory and practice of liberal democracy, the external surveillance of the police and the internal analysing of science [...]. (Bech 1997, 154)

Taking this at face value, one might wonder how homosexual identities—at least among males—would be possible in a low-urbanized, wilderness-worshipping country like Norway. Indeed, Dag Heede has made the polemical claim that a Norwegian gay literary history is incomplete without the influence of Copenhagen (Heede 2015, 164). It is true that the Danish capital, which also served as the capital of the Dano-Norwegian union from 1537 until 1814, has had a special attraction for Norwegian gays and lesbians. Larger than Oslo, Copenhagen is also a bridge to the European continent and holds a place even in the contemporary Norwegian imaginary as a place of freedom and carefree leisure.[4] However, there is no reason to disregard the actual metropolitan qualities of Norway's capital and arguably single big city. Named *Christiania* until

1897, then *Kristiania* until being rebaptized with its medieval name in 1925, Oslo witnessed an enormous growth in the late nineteenth century, when its annual population growth surpassed that of most European cities. The growth rate reached a staggering 9% in 1898, encompassing more than 32% of the total share of urban inhabitants in Norway (Helle et al. 2006, 336). And although its net population number was unimpressive, passing just 250,000 in the inter-war years, the important fact is its composition and variety. The growth of Christiania/Kristiania, from less than 9,000 inhabitants in 1801 to more than 200,000 in 1900, implies a remarkable demographic and thus sociocultural evolution over the course of a century. The city turned into a "capital of movement," with thousands of people moving in and thousands out every year (Helle et al. 2006, 349). This means that during the nineteenth century, the city turned increasingly diverse: people from rural backgrounds moved in to seek education and employment in a capital offering rich opportunities for cross-cultural encounters and anonymity. This ambivalent attraction of the capital is evident in several of the works to be studied.

While the city has traditionally been thought of as a male space and a hotbed of gay male identity, female writers have played a central part in constructing and transmitting the urban experience (Selboe 2003, 194–5). Mapping the feminized cityscapes of Norwegian realist authors, Janke Klok highlights the tradition starting with Enlightenment philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau and David Hume, through the Norwegian nineteenth-century feminist author Camilla Collett all the way to the contemporary Dutch author Geert Mak, in which women's opportunity to use the city as a public space is thought to indicate modernity, progress, and civilization (Klok 2011, 28–9). This ideological strand, of course, assumes that such elements are positive factors in the feminist emancipation project, conflating feminism and urbanism as modern endeavors.

The urban landscape, so central to feminists and queer theorists, has been largely absent from ecocriticism, with Michael Bennett and David Teague's *The Nature of Cities* (1999) constituting a rare exception. However, their book is solely knowledgeable of North-American literature and urban life. Highlighting the city as environment, then, in itself seems a way of queering ecocriticism. In contrast, one could make the case that queer theorists have been more eager to integrate "green" perspectives in their field. Already in 2005, Jack Halberstam (2005) deftly coined

the term "metronormativity" to describe how the trope of urban liberation paradoxically constitutes a set of limiting norms and expectations. In other words, this trope ignores the potential for queer life in other contexts, impoverishing our understanding of queer history and experience. Since the late 1990s, scholars in queer history and culture have nuanced the image of the countryside as sexually repressive and urban environments as liberating. This approach grows out of studies by sociologists and social geographers in the 1990s, such as Kath Weston (1998), and Gordon B. Ingram, Anne-Marie Boutthillette, and Yolanda Retter (eds., 1997), all uncovering opportunities for queer lives in rural environments. More literary oriented scholarship, too, such as the work by Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson (2010) and Lucas Crawford (2017), or anthologies like *De-Centring Sexualities* (Phillips et al. 2000), *Queer Ecologies* (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010), and *Queering the Countryside* (Johnson et al. 2016) have explored counternarratives to the dominant itinerary of breaking free from the village to seek erotic and affective bonds in big cities.

In fact, alternative histories to the metronormative ones are not isolated counterexamples but robust traditions in their own right. While modern gay male identity has been associated with the city, Donoghue argues that "[p]astoral poetry—set in idealised landscapes—provides some of the most uninhibited poems of female passion" (1995, 116). In a Scandinavian context, Eva Borgström has highlighted how hiking, together with sports and physical culture, was a part of the feminist emancipation project in the first half of the twentieth century (Borgström 2016, 106). Non-urban spaces have offered opportunities to participate in physical exertion traditionally reserved for men. One of Borgström's examples is Swedish author Agnes von Krusenstjerna's classic five-volume lesbian novel series *Fröknerna von Pahlen* [*The Misses von Pahlen*, 1930–35] which relies heavily on primitivist tropes of reconnecting with nature through sexuality (Borgström 2016, 179). Hence, misogynist and feminist discourses alike have drawn on the conceptualization of women as more "natural," whether understood as uncontrollable and chaotic, or as harmonious and a life-giving antidote to urban decadence.

For women, it might seem, urban as well as pastoral space constitute a potential flight from the oppression of the domestic sphere. As I discuss in the following chapters, however, there is a relative paucity of pastoral spaces in literature on desire among women in Norway compared to its Scandinavian neighbors. This might be due to the relatively small grade

of urbanization in Norway, which means that non-urban environments are less available as locations of escape. (If pastoral landscapes constitute your everyday, they are less likely to represent an alternative.) In literature on male same-sex relations, however, there is a much stronger tendency to seek pastoral spaces. I speculate that this is because as men have not traditionally been confined to the domestic sphere, authors have been able to distinguish more clearly between the symbolic import of spaces conceived as different. This parallels how male homosexuality in itself has been culturally produced as more visible and more clearly defined than female homosexuality, a point to which I return in the next section.

The lesbian primitivism identified by Borgström forms part of a larger tendency in the early 1900s to employ an imagery of nature that would portray erotic desire between women as natural, instead of "against nature." I have argued (2017) that a similar trope is at play in the Danish lesbian novel *Et Vildskud* [*An Offshoot*], published by "Agnete Holk"[5] in 1940. The title of this novel reappears in Gudmund Vindland's *Villskudd* (1979, cf. Chapter 5). Whether we are dealing with an instance of direct influence, or an example of a rhetorical trope circulating in diverse texts seeking to give an affirmative view of same-sex desire, is uncertain. Whatever the case, the metaphor forces the reader to question what is actually natural: like an offshoot, the lesbian and the gay man are part of nature and biological reality, although in important ways different from the majority—characterized by a "wildness" at odds with civilizational norms. Referring to Richard Terdiman's 1985 study of symbolic resistance, I choose to call the use of such tropes "counter-discursive." Terdiman coins this term to denote the "discursive systems by which writers and artists sought to project an alternative, liberating *newness*" in subversive opposition to established discourses (1985, 13). Yet as he further remarks, such oppositional discourses run into "the problem of sustaining the crucial claim of 'difference' against reinfection by the constituted *sameness*, the apparent stability and inertia, of the dominant" (ibid., 13–4). In other words, a protest against hegemonic ideology, e.g., in literary works of art, always implies the discourse one opposes. Heteronormativity remains as a specter in any antihomophobic counter-discourse.

This also applies to the strongest alternative current to metronormativity in gay male aesthetics, what Shuttleton dubs the tradition of the "gay pastoral." Quoting Rictor Norton's assertion that "if any particular genre can be called a homosexual genre, the evidence would point most

convincingly to the pastoral tradition" (2000, 125), Shuttleton argues for the need to historicize this genre:

> The reduction of the queerness of pastoral to a timeless abstraction is to succumb to the escapist pull of pastoral's own dominant rhetoric, which seeks to evade time, history and material political realities through a retreat into a phantasmic ideal space which is pre-cultural, if not pre-social, and often, by implication, superior and preferable. (Shuttleton 2000, 126)

In other words, the pastoral is not an unambiguous, universal idyll removed from a repressive society. It is a historical trope bringing to light, among other things, the complex entanglements between humans and the nonhuman environment. Shuttleton notes how pastoral tropes have been used in what we might call a counter-discursive way, by presenting male same-sex desire as "natural." However, this act of appropriating the idea that "natural" equals "morally good" can serve politically problematic ends. For instance, André Gide's *Corydon*, "overturns established notions of 'the Natural' to support a highly elitist notion of homosexual superiority and institutionalized pederastia; it is also grossly misogynist" (Shuttleton 2000, 131). This illustrates how attention to the rhetoric of environment makes different conceptualizations of same-sex sexuality visible.

As these examples of different uses of urban and pastoral landscapes show, we are not dealing with a stable connection between certain sexualities, gender categories, and spaces. Rather, these elements are produced in dynamic and often contradictory interplay in Western modernity. In the readings of the following chapters, I use the urban/pastoral dichotomy as heuristic tool in order to explore this interplay. These categories denote what are usually thought of as human-made and natural (nonhuman) landscapes, while calling attention to how literary imaginings endow these landscapes with meaning in dynamic interplay with material reality and societal discourses. As Raymond Williams has shown in his seminal *The Country and the City*, this dichotomy saturates Western culture: every generation seems to long back to an unspoilt, authentic rural life as a positively charged alternative to a decadent or unhospitable contemporary civilization. In a larger perspective, however, the question is: "what kinds of experience do the [received] ideas [of country and city] appear to interpret, and why do certain forms occur or recur at this period or that?" (Williams 1985, 290). Identifying the figure of thought thus provides

merely the first step of an inquiry into how the urban/pastoral dichotomy interprets the experience of same-sex attraction.

In the view of Terry Gifford, one may speak of three kinds of pastoral: the poetic form associated with Theocritus and his followers up until the late Renaissance; celebratory descriptions of the country in opposition to the city; a pejorative term for a simplified romanticization of country life (Gifford 1999, 1–2). It is the second sense that will occupy us here, what Lawrence Buell terms "pastoralism," defining it as writing "that celebrates the ethos of nature/rurality over against the ethos of the town or city" (quoted ibid., 4). Gifford underlines how writers use the pastoral for critique as well as escape. On the one hand, it can subvert value hierarchies, e.g., by turning on its head the superiority of townspeople versus the inferiority of simple rural folk (ibid., 23). On the other hand, it can represent "a retreat from politics into an apparently aesthetic landscape that is devoid of conflict and tension" (ibid., 11). This retreat can be both spatial and temporal.

Frederick Garber defines the pastoral with reference to Schiller's distinction between naïve and sentimental poetry, highlighting Schiller's placement of pastoral in the latter category (1988, 437). The pastoral, then, is a genre characterized by "gaps of all sorts, lacunae that are uncrossable under all present conditions. The [sentimental] state has a topography of deep impediments and all sorts of attendant frustrations, spaces unfilled and unfulfilled" (ibid.). Garber's choice of spatial metaphors for describing the pastoral provides a suggestive way of thinking about its potential for representing the state of identifying as same-sex attracted in the twentieth century. Several of the texts under scrutiny in the following chapters depict a longing for another state, a place where same-sex love is possible.

Often, however, as in the work of Tarjei Vesaas (Chapter 4), this is also linked to a conception of childhood. Here, the pastoral also describes a temporal state of non-urban dwelling that feels irretrievably lost. Indeed, as Williams argues, the pastoral is often an image of innocence, a paradisiac location before sin and ambition entered the world (Williams 1985, 23–4, 46–7). Or as Cronon similarly states:

> In virtually all of its manifestations, wilderness represents a flight from history. Seen as the original garden, it is a place outside of time, from which human beings had to be ejected before the fallen world of history could properly begin. Seen as the frontier, it is a savage world at the dawn

> of civilization, whose transformation represents the very beginning of the national historical epic. Seen as the bold landscape of frontier heroism, it is the place of youth and childhood, into which men escape by abandoning their pasts and entering a world of freedom where the constraints of civilization fade into memory. Seen as the sacred sublime, it is the home of a God who transcends history by standing as the One who remains untouched and unchanged by time's arrow. (1996, 79)

As the pastoral implies a flight from some degree of civilization or cultural agglomeration, it needs an idea of the urban as its counter-image. In his thorough analysis of the construction of cities in modernism, Robert Alter regards the urban as characterized by a fundamental ambivalence. Often, it is marked by the "triple A" of "angst, alienation, and anomie," due to the general failure to make the exponentially growing cities attractive dwellings (Alter 2005, 103–4). However, there is also a parallel, affirmative current, celebrating the possibilities and "the sheer teeming variety of city life" (ibid., 104). Alter also discusses what he calls an "urban pastoral," exemplified in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Here, the pastoral is not an alternative to the urban space, but the urban space conceived of as providing harmony and joy as the cityscape is interwoven with memories of rural life through Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique (Alter 2005, 105). I highlight this as an illustration of how the pastoral as literary construction is not dependent on a real "unspoilt nature," but is rather a trope of sensibility: certain places generate or open the way for certain feelings, to be described in a certain kind of language.

Environment as Cultural Building Block

The urban pastoral in the Norwegian novels to be studied here is something quite different from that of Woolf. She depicts a true European metropolis, whose streets and energetic life has some of the same effects as the traditional pastoral. To illustrate the difference between Woolf's London and the steadily growing Kristiania/Oslo of the Norwegian twentieth century, one might look to Sigrid Undset's novel *Vaaren* [*The Spring*, 1914]. Here, the main character Torkild moves with his mother and younger sister from the Norwegian countryside to the capital. For the young boy, the city street with its apartment blocks is a place of both wonder and fear: