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Uranian Poetry: the Homosocial and Homoerotic Paradox

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1. INTRODUCTION

For centuries, homosexuality has been swept under the carpet, portrayed as something shameful and unnatural. Such an injurious shame has always been supported and promoted by the heteronormative patriarchy. Patriarchal structures have traditionally been sheltered by religion and creationism where the binary male/female, Adam and Eve, is set in stone. The defiance of this binary, through their eyes, is corrupt, hell sent and sacrilegious; ergo, they were able to condemn it by appropriating the concept of sodomy¹ from Christian Theology, which nurtured a strong rejection towards same sex activities and criminalized them. Historically, homosexual bonds and practices have been outlawed and banned by most cultures and societies not only in legal ways, but also by means of social discriminatory acts. As historian Harry G. Cocks points out: “never before in the history of Britain have so many men been arrested, convicted, imprisoned and even executed for homosexual offences” (in Wilper 2010: 55).

The following dissertation aims at analysing the work of a group of male poets who were labelled as Uranian, and whose main literary productivity relied on poetry as the foremost vehicle to express, often in highly lyrical and sensual voices, their most intimate feelings on same-sex desire. Although we find examples of Uranian poetry in both the U.S. and the U.K from the end of the 19th century up to the first three decades of the 20th century, most of these poets were frequently connected to the U.K,² possibly influenced by the previous dissident literary works that challenged the orthodoxy of Victorian fiction, such as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Michael Field.

¹ According to Mark Jordan (1997: 9-29), the notion of “sodomy” can be traced back to the 11th century in the book *Liber Gomorrhianus*, by theologian Peter Damian. Later on, under the reign of Henry the VIII, “The Buggery Act (1533)” banned sodomy and was punished by death. (The British Library, www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-buggery-act-1533)

² In this sense, Kaylor points out that “although “Uranian” denotes this particular group of English paederastic writers, the flourishing of Boy-love poetry and prose during this period was a transnational phenomenon, as likely to appear in Paris as in Berlin, in New York City as in Prague, though the far-reaching influence of the British Empire during this period and the accompanying proliferation of its culture gave its writers a wider stage” (2010: xv).

Undoubtedly, these literary trends exerted an influence on what is known as Uranian poetry, an influence that later on was transmitted on to American poets like Bayard Taylor, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman. After briefly explaining the etymology of the term Uranian and the most representative Uranian poets, this dissertation will explore the dynamics between homosocial and homoerotic desire, their different semantic and ideological implications, so as to subsequently analyse a set of poems, selected not only on the grounds of relevance for my analysis, but also on their availability.³ The fact that they have been systematically neglected by the academia in most University syllabus on poetry is also a reason why I would like to address them in this work, since part of their literary value relies on a homoerotic and homosocial aesthetics that are worth exploring as other examples of the expression of homosexual love that has been forgotten and demonized.

The term “Uranian” was first conceived as a synonym of homosexual. Semantically, the homosexual is the descendant of the Uranian. The notion of homosexuality was first coined by psychologist Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-95) in the 1860’s, and “Ulrichs’ term for homosexuality, “‘Uranian’ or *urning*, passed into the language” (Annan 1990: 191). This term stems from classical Greek mythology. Uranus, father god of the sky, was castrated by his son Cronus in order to dethrone him. Consequently, from the castrated member the well-known Aphrodite, goddess of love, was born, as can be seen in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. In this vein, Michael Kaylor (2006) explains how Plato’s *Symposium*⁴ is the root for the name’s etymology. Intrinsically, we appreciate the connection between the Hellenistic culture that Uranians shared and

³ It is worth noting that the difficulty in finding full poems written by Uranian poets has been significantly striking, mainly due to the scarcity of poetic anthologies on Uranian poetry and their high cost.

⁴ “The concept presented in the *Symposium* is that the original human being came in three sexes: male, female and hermaphrodite. Halved by the gods, each human then sought his or her missing half. [...] the existence of the “third sex” in nature, or homosexuality as restoration of primal wholeness” (Fassler 1979: 239). Kaylor (2006) explains how in the *Symposium* there are two sisters, Aphrodite Urania, and Pandemos, the first one being more intelligent and spiritual in comparison with the latter.

Ulrichs' diagnosis. Ulrichs' depiction of the *Urning* was "employed to denote 'a female psyche in a male body'" (Kaylor 2006).

In the *Greek Mirror* (Mader 2005), we find that the first person to ever write about these Uranian group of poets was Walter Breen (J.Z. Eglinton) who called them "The Calamities: a Victorian Paidophilic Poetaster Clique" (Eglinton 1964: 375-405). He discusses the figures of Alfred E. Housman, John Addington Symonds, Edward C. Lefroy, Edwin E. Bradford, Lord Alfred Douglas, Richard Middleton and Edmund John. Furthermore, he keeps on exploring other authors, such as Timothy d'Arch Smith, in his ground-breaking book *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English 'Uranian' Poets from 1889 to 1930* written in 1970, where he uses the word Uranian between brackets as it was "a designation for homosexuals in general, originally coined by Karl Hein-Ulrichs, later being picked up by Marc Andre Raffalovich" (Mader 2005: 379). Despite the publication of this thorough collection, which extensively includes a great number of Uranian poets and their works, it is difficult to classify them as a unified and homogeneous group because we truly do not know how many members belonged to such entity and, it is also true that "there were other poets who should have been included but who slipped through the net" (Mader 2005: 380).⁵ Notoriously, their association to pederasty and pederast tendencies and themes is still what best defined them as a controversial source of writing and behaviour, obviously not in a positive way. They were denoted and crossed and, as I have said before, they were accused of sodomy and ephebophilia, a term used at the end of the nineteenth century to signal sexual interest in mid-to-late male adolescents.

Nonetheless, 19th century psychology, when explaining same-sex activities, followed a process of patronization clearly limiting the body to two genders, the male

⁵ Mader refers here to Timothy d'Arch Smith's book *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English 'Uranian' Poets from 1889 to 1930* (1970), which is considered a catalogue for the study of Uranian poetry.

and the female, who meaningfully coexisted with two kinds of personality in the human psyche, thus establishing heterosexuality as the only valid and respectful option. However, we can still find examples of support towards homosexuality or Uranianism, as defended by sexologist Havelock Ellis in his *Sexual Inversions* (1897), co-authored by John Addington Symonds, where they “followed in the style of Continental sexologists, describing homosexuality in both men and women, and demonstrating that it was but another manifestation of the sexual instinct: itself a natural process” (in Kaylor 2006: 20).

In contrast, supported by Ulrich’s ideas, male homosexuality was once seen as effeminizing the male attributes. They saw it as a loss of power for men, a creation of the third sex that diminished men’s lives, thus castrating them like the father god of the sky. For instance, the figure of Oscar Wilde somehow became the archetypical example of the 19th century effeminate man. He was summoned to court for some allegations regarding his involvement with young male sex workers, leading him to be judged for sodomy. He defended himself using homoerotic elements of the Greek classics⁶ but “this declaration of his purity juxtaposed against less elegant allegations of vaseline and excrement-stained bedsheets, assignations with male prostitutes’ sodomy” (Reay 2009: 220). Obviously, Wilde was not the only man who used the company of young men. In “Writing the Modern Histories of Homosexual England” Reay (2009) states that there is evidence that the number of male prostitutes was similar to its female counterpart and that a “large number of the working class used sex to supplement other income” (221). In contrast, they were not exclusively meeting young men and we interestingly find that these relationships were not always an exchange of goods, as Havelock’s theories

⁶ As he put it: “spiritual affection that is pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art like those Shakespeare and Michelangelo... It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an elder and a younger man.” (In Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, 1962: 201)

suggested, but also that these individuals could just have been following their sexual instincts. In *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures of the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*, Matt Houlbrook (2005) reports examples of men who did not consider themselves homosexuals, and thought it was a phase that ceased after they got married to a woman, whilst others “continued their same-sex liaisons” (Reay 2009: 222-23). For some men it was not merely a phase but something deeper and intrinsic to their own identity as homosexuals. Although motivated by different reasons, what seems to be a common and distinctive feature in all their poetry is that Uranian poets found their source of inspiration in Greek mythology and Hellenic deeply rooted traditions. In his praised review entitled “Yearn for Youth in Uranian Poetry” (2012), Arnold Schwab attests to the relevance of Greek ideals of homoerotic desire where they praised the “beloved boy’s physical attractions” yet in some cases “the problem was that most young adolescents, [...] were too shy and immature emotionally to respond to the Grecian ideal” (Schwab 2012: 504).

By looking into their poems, we can trace back a great deal of Hellenistic motives and homosexual Greek themes (vid. Figure 1 in the Appendix) such as “male friends like Ulysses and Patroclus, Apollo and Hyacinthos, Poseidon and Pelops” (Fassler 1979: 238). Other significant examples are provided by William Cory’s *Ionica* or Edwin Emmanuel Bradford’s poem on “Aphrodite Pandemos” in his book *The Romance of Youth and Other Poems* (1910) amongst others. Accordingly, these 19th century homosexuals saw themselves reflected in the Greeks as a result of the better understanding of the classical world at that time. The mimicking of their ancestors was a way to fulfil their inner desires, creating a mirroring state where their existential angst and their ontological issues could be reflected in the past and, somehow, using a pattern of behaviour and implanting it in their lives could lead them to a spiritual catharsis.

The homosocial and homoerotic ideas found in these poems can be traced to the Hellenic love explained in Edward I. Prime-Stevenson's work *The Intersexes* (1908), where he differentiates between three kinds of love. The first and the second referring to more romantic and "platonic" elements of love, where we can still find passion and physicality, and the third one which is purely "boy-love" (Wilper et al. 2016). In the following pages I will attempt to analyse different works by some of these Uranian poets dichotomizing them into two categories: the homosocial kind and the homoerotic type, whilst trying to find a middle ground for the study of their beauty and depth.

2. "THY COMRADE HONOURS THEE"/ "TIS WHERE YOU ARE I FAIN WOULD BE": A HOMOSOCIAL APPROACH

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains homosociality as "bonds between persons of the same sex" (1985: 1) and as a neologism created by analogy with homosexual. Likewise, she formulates a continuum of the homosocial and the homosexual, where homosocial bonds are paired with desire and, consequently, tied to a strong fear and hatred towards homosexuality. In this context, the portrayal of homosocial bonds as male friendships considerably focuses on the social bonds hinged on mentorship, rivalry or companionship. Alienating homosociality from desire reinforces the previously mentioned patriarchal structures, as Sedgwick illustrates. Detaching male bonds from homosocial desire could become troublesome not only for the individuals partaking in these dynamics but also for society itself. Desire, affection and amiability were restrained from male bonds sustaining emotional numbness in the collective male minds and depriving them of male-to-male sensibility. Male friendships were inconceivably based on intimacy as sodomy was also forbidden and criminalized. Notwithstanding, we find a plethora of distinctive homosocial friendships in the 19th and 20th centuries, and

even earlier. For instance, in Elizabethan society subtle bonds between influential patrons and clients or suitors and friends at court were created as a natural process: “a concept so necessary to social life was far removed from the 'uncivil' image of the sodomite, yet there was still between them a surprising affinity, as in some respects they occupied a similar terrain” (Bray 1990: 4). As we can see, homosocial bonds were a key point to Elizabethan life in general, finding strong ties in most of the social spheres. As we are focusing on the artistic sphere and Uranian poetry, the homosocial bonds are motives which become a basic element to understand its depth. For instance, the expression of tenderness or vulnerability which was not, and still is not, expected to come out of a man, is portrayed all throughout these authors’ body of work as well as the rejoice found in comradeship.

In these poems, Hellenic love serves as one of my focal points for the study of both the homosocial and the homoerotic. In this very case, with the aid of Stevenson’s *The Intersexes*, the homosocial type would fall into the first group of said love, focusing on friendship and its spiritual connotations, restraining physicality. Nevertheless, the use of the second type of Hellenic love where there is an existence of a “similosexual” physical love is also relevant for my study.⁷ This type of love deals with spirituality, comparable to nowadays finding “the better half”. The poems I have chosen to comment on are two elegies and some love poems. It could come as a shock to find love poems here, but they are relevant for my analysis because of the evolution of homosocial bonds which possibly could become desire. Moreover, these love poems contribute to contrasting the stereotypical homosocial behaviour as well as enhancing their focus on heartbreak or the impossibility to fulfil that desire.

⁷ In this vein, Prime-Stevenson points out: “confessedly, or under a veil: including high idealism, intellectual companionship, completion to the friend’s existence, along with the physical passion for him and natural satisfaction. [...] It needs a ripened emotionality on both sides, a harmonious and balanced union.” (1975: 49)

The first poem I am going to deal with is by Roden Noel (1834-1894), entitled “To J.H.”, written in Brighton, October 1891. It belongs to the unpublished poems of his posthumous work *Collected Poems* (1902), and formally the poem has a structure of free verse and it contains four stanzas. Noel’s association to the Uranian group could be discarded as he was married to Miss Alice Broë in 1863 and had three children⁸. Some years after he got married, he suffered from a rheumatic fever which later would provoke the heart attack that took his life on the 26th of May of 1894 (Hickey 1895). Despite the little information we have about his life, we do have some remarks done by Rupert Croft-Cooke in *Feasting with Panthers: A New Consideration of Some Late Victorian Writers*, where he states that Noel did have associations with “service men and good-looking manual workers” (1968: 123). Noel did also influence J.A. Symonds to leave his forced heterosexual period, sometimes leaving Symonds “shocked and envious when he saw the uncomplicated way in which Noel would hire male lovers as men hired prostitutes” (Croft-Cooke 1968: 124).

“To J.H.” functions as an elegy dedicated to a comrade, and in the first stanza (l. 1-15), we understand they are not in the same social rank. He is mourning the loss of this unknown individual, as we only have his initials, ornamenting his character by burying with him the negative attributes and elevating him as “no famous man hath ended better” (l. 9). There is a clear connection between the one whom he is addressing to and the sea. We could maybe think he was a sailor as he was a “true child of ocean [...] who more than once plucked human lives from waves that would have whelmed in their tremendous play” (l. 11-15), interpreting them as a beautiful metaphor created from a memory shared by the addresser and the addressee (vid. Figure 2 in the Appendix). We also find in this first stanza a visual and soothing line: “whom wild

⁸ The youngest, Eric, did not surpass his father, and as a result from this tragic event Roden Noel wrote what would become one of his best-known poems “A little Child’s Monument” (1881).

wind and wave bronzed with much kissing” (l. 11-12), reinforcing again the connection to the sea but also giving us some information about the addressee’s physicality. In this first stanza it is clear that this individual formed part of the poetical voice’s life in yet another level surpassing friendship. The addressee is elevated in the poetic voice’s mind: “thy comrade honours thee” (l. 10), and here the term comrade becomes a term of endearment.

The second stanza (l. 16-26) is filled with mourning. We could say that in this stage of the poem the addresser is trying to understand the situation from a melancholic and grim point of view: “But life, alas! Proves often hard to bear” (l. 16). The addresser puts himself in a position of grief as “the horror of cold gloom, that unaware enshrouded” his poor heart (l. 21), adding another level of sorrow and showing great emotion for his lost comrade. Through the metaphor of the mariner (l. 23-24), it is understood that the addressee’s life was troubled, leading us to comprehend the possibility that his situation was unavoidable. Furthermore, with the personification of death, we fathom that it is the only reliever for the addressee’s situation: “For niggard Life had used thee hardly; death relieves from burdens unendurable” (l. 25).

The third stanza (l. 27-48) reminisces and recalls their shared past life and their encounters: “Still I seek a face well-loved, and listen for a well-remembered tone, upon the stairway, in my private chamber” (l. 34-36). With this implicit affirmation we can assure that their friendship surpassed homosocial male bonds, yet we do not know explicitly to what extent. The next lines depict the time they spent together close to the sea “climbing waves in bounding boats” (l. 38-39). Thereafter we have another beautiful image of him in contrast with the previous joyous image: “I roam heart-wounded in chill twilight by the shore” (l. 40-41), revealing his loneliness now after the addressee is gone. All the references to the sea could be traced and located to Donegal coast in the

northern part of Ireland, which also serves for inspiration for his cycle of sea-poems (Hickey 1895: 189). And, lastly, from this stanza we can appreciate a comparison between him and his addressee and other classic Greek comrades. Whilst he is roaming the shore, he pictures how Homer felt disconsolate, how “Achilles mourned Patroclus” and how “Alexander wept Hephaestion”⁹ (l. 42-48). It is interesting to see with these mirroring examples how explicitly their homosocial bonds could shift to dynamics that have to do more with desire. The fourth and last stanza (l. 49-54) is the shortest one in which the addresser finally farewells. Nevertheless, the addresser tells the addressee to stay by his side in the reverie state, as if their souls belong together and the only middle ground would be a state similar to limbo but dreamier. Although throughout the poem the addressee is called “friend”, “comrade” and “brother” and there is still a tremendous feeling of comradeship in their relationship, their bond is depicted as more than friendship.

The second poem was written by William Johnson (1823-1892), who later would become William Cory. “Heraclitus” belongs to his influential work *Ionica* published originally in 1857. He was a teacher in Eaton University until he was dismissed for exercising paederast pedagogies. By the same token, he had favourite pupils who would later refer to themselves as Uranians such as Archibald Philip Primrose or Laureate Robert Bridges, who later influenced Gerard Manley Hopkins. For said group Johnson and his *Ionica* would become a source of inspiration and a communal space for their diminished poetry (Kaylor 2006). Formally this poem is an eight-ette with full rhyme AABB CCDD. It is not an original poem because Johnson did a translation from Callimachus’ “Heraclitus” originally written in ancient Greece.

⁹ This is an explicit Hellenic reference of homosocial relationships which ties him closer to the Uranian group. The story of Achilles and Patroclus belongs to Homer’s *Iliad* and he also uses the example of Alexander the Great and his alleged lover Hephaestion. The debate about these duo’s relationship and whether it surpassed friendship into desire is still debated.

Therefore, again formally, it is categorized as a translation of an elegy. Prematurely, with a first glance at the poem, we could interpret it as an elegy written in honour of the classical hero Heraclitus, son of Zeus/Jupiter and Alcmena. Although this reinforces the appreciation that Uranians had for the classics, the truth is that Callimachus' poem was dedicated to his colleague Heraclitus, who was also a poet and a philosopher.¹⁰ As Blackwell has observed: "the poet thinks of his friend, the pleasure of the time they shared, [...] and the friend's memory preserved through his poetry" (2019: 320). This elegy overflows with longing, which becomes a bitter sentiment for the addresser who now reminisces his lost: "they brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed" (l. 2). Remarkably, both elegies have in common the attachment of the souls, the eternal belonging of friendship: "Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake; for death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take" (l. 7-8). This poem can be visited from many homosocial perspectives; we could see this as it originally was, a homosocial elegy dedicated to Callimachus' friend, or we could theorize that Johnson, by translating and adapting the poem, embodied the ancient text and dedicated it to someone, dead or alive, at that time.

My third example of homosocial bonds relates more clearly to homosocial desire and frustration. They were written by John Gambriel Nicholson (1866-1931), mentioned in both Kaylor's *Secreted Desires: The Major Uranians: Hopkins, Pater and Wilde* and Mader's "The Greek Mirror". He was also an English teacher and he was considered, like William Johnson, a teacher for the Uranians. The two poems I am going to comment on were included in his work *Love In Earnest* (1892).¹¹ I want to start with

¹⁰ In the poem there is a reference to Heraclitus as "my dear old Carian guest", clarifying that he is indeed the philosopher and not the Greek hero. Caria was an ancient region located in the south east of Turkey.

¹¹ The name Earnest was used both by John Gambriel Nicholson and Oscar Wilde. There is also a myth surrounding the name as it is said it was used as a code for gay (Kaylor 2006: 15). The same title can be found in Timothy d'Arch's *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English 'Uranian' Poets from 1889 to 1930* (1970).

“’Tis Where You Are” not only because it is the one which is most similar to the study of homosocial bonds but also because the homosocial/homosexual continuum is clearer. The poem’s main focus is on the desire to be with the addressee, to physically stand next to him. The principal motive for the frustration is physical space: “Between us rolls of sullen sea” (l. 2). The sea works as a dividing natural force, which could also point to the strong forces that do not let the friends come together. In contrast, with “Secret Love” the addresser suffers an obsession-like state, whilst the addressee doesn’t know about this. They maybe share some kind of bond, but it is obvious that the addresser’s feelings are strong, yet he finds himself in a state of dissatisfaction. Furthermore, it is not only the obstacles, whichever they are, that impede their relationship to flourish but also his own fear induced by those external forces. In both poems the homosocial bond shatters to develop into something more sincere and deep. In “’Tis Where You Are” it seems the bond is still conceived between the two partakers, yet there is a force which impedes the successful development of their relationship, whilst in “Secret Love” the possibility of achieving homosocial desire is unknown by the addresser but not by the addressee. His desire brings him to experience these strong feelings of sincerity, yet there still something that mutes him. His obsession is portrayed as a cycle, for he ends with the same words of hope that he uses in the beginning “did I but dare”.

To summarize, these four poems are all tied together by the homosocial theme. They also share a frustrated focalization caused by the homosocial/homosexual continuum. In the case of “Secret Love”, the poetic voice suffers in silence whilst the desire to fulfil his inner desires haunts his consciousness condemning him to an obsessive state. At the same time, in both elegies, the frustration is relieved through spirituality, and “’Tis Where you Are” subtly and most efficiently executes the continuum, implying the resilience of the bond and its belonging to the second type of

Hellenic love, although there is still a physical absence that thwarts the poetic voice. Interestingly, the genre of the elegy tends to be a plausible method in overcoming homophobic tendencies and the development of homosocial desire. Grieve provides a gateway to these poets, in particular for their upmost expression of sensibility. Society respects the mourning process in such a manner that we are able to communicate and better share our feelings, finding that the grievers are treated sympathetically and in a respectful manner, a rather special affinity from society. This great expression of feelings, even in literature, between men is not always possible. Nevertheless, this genre contributes to the expression of both homosocial bonds and homosocial desire, thus normalizing through poetry an unconceivable utter expression of homosocial male bonds. In elegies the secreted desires come out and, as we have seen in both examples, male authors are able to express, without judgement, not only their grieve but also reminisce and pay tribute to friends who were more than friends. Sedgwick's homosocial and homosexual continuum meets the absolute zenith when the expression of said homosocial desire is expressed through the genre of the elegy.

All these poems show a kind of relationship where men can be sincere with one another without fear, accepting vulnerability and the expression of emotions. Thereby, the conclusion to the homosocial type, as previously portrayed, could be understood as confined within blurred lines and limits that are not clear, as friendship develops and changes, shifting the dynamics and, even though still hiding desire, beautifully expressing male sensibility.

3. "LOVE, I ADORE THE CONTOURS OF THY SHAPE"/ "BABBLES OF DEEPEST MYSTERIES OF FATE": A HOMOEROTIC APPROACH

These authors' body of work is intrinsically imbued with the homoerotic motif, hence homoeroticism could be delineated as the erotic expression of male to male relations,

with all its connotations; for instance, the depiction of nuances which are related to sex, the higher expression of physicality or the metaphorical portrayal of the desired body. Examples of homoeroticism in mainstream literature, sculpture or art are usually concealed and many times implicitly displayed. Ergo, as happens with the expression of homosocial desire (Sedgwick 1985), it is also tied to a strong homophobia. Admittedly, homoeroticism is a term which could also be targeted from a misogynistic point of view, as it more than often solely portrays male to male relations. The etymology of the term most certainly could likewise be targeted from a female to female perspective, although it generally focuses on the former. In this dissertation, I focus on homoeroticism as the embodiment of male homosocial desire, its culmination now metamorphosing into homosexual/homoerotic desire,¹² the merging with Sedgwick's parallel continuum lines. This type of desire, although possibly still concealed, it undoubtedly climaxes into the expression of sincere feelings of passion and sexual attraction. Besides the problematics of its misogynistic usage, it notoriously goes hand in hand with the previously explained ephiphilia. In the Introduction to *Lad's Love: An Anthology of Uranian Poetry and Prose*, Michael Matthew Kaylor (2010) refers to the Uranian group as "a cluster of paederastic writers active in England from roughly 1858-1930" (xv). It is the trait that most commonly defines and unifies them as a group. These ephiphilic tendencies are present throughout the work of these authors and, most importantly at the time, they themselves labelled the group and imbued it with the boy-love implications as their source of sensual inspiration (Kaylor 2010). Certainly, boy-love was a well-used theme in their work, but as we have observed in the previous chapters it was not the only theme, yet they are most infamously related to it.

¹² As explained in Linda Dowling's *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (1997) John Addington Symonds, who struggled with his homosexuality, in one of his essays on Greek pederasty starts conceiving the term of "male erotic 'comradeship'" (12) where he hopes to bring it to a public sphere. With this Symonds himself crosses from homosocial desire to homosexual desire, thus blurring those limits of friendship.

Plato's *Symposium* truly reminisces at the core of their work, either as a source of inspiration or as an argumentative device. As Naomi Wood explains (2002), "paederastia or 'Greek Love' was embraced as an ideal of 'spiritual procreancy' superior to merely carnal heterosexual breeding" (158). In the original text, Dowling (1997) contemplated the poem "To a Sicilian Boy", which I will later comment on, as to depict, with the aid of the *Symposium*, the spiritual reasons why the authors worshiped boy-love. Furthermore, Wood describes how the 19th century was a time when the idea of childhood was brought to light and highly capitalized. The public was platonically enamoured, romanticizing the figure of the child leading to the "Golden Age of Children's Literature" (2002: 159).¹³ With these ideas I aim to stress the possible origins of these authors' "Greek Love" connecting it to spirituality, ancient Greek culture and tutor-pupil dynamics. Here we can see another mirroring experience, connected to the one explained in the Introduction, where the authors saw themselves in their younger lovers/friends. When I think about this mirroring episode, I cannot help but theorize it from a queer point of view, using Freud's "Oedipus Complex", where the transgenerational relations lead to a mirroring state between the young partaker and the older partaker; a potential source of knowledge and wisdom for the younger one and a metaphorical fountain of youth for the older one. As I have stated, this is only a theory to better depict their relations and to rationalize their behaviours. For the analysis of the following poems I will resort to Sedgwick's continuum, as it is still relevant for my study and it makes sense when comparing it to the homosocial, no matter how the nuances may change, and the same dynamics of the continuum may merge. Besides, I am using the last two types of Prime-Stevenson's Hellenic Love; the former, to bridge

¹³ Wood recalls how this epoch "was already infatuated with the idea of childhood. Inheritors of Wordsworthian Romantic tradition that privileged childhood over adulthood and innocence over experience, fin-de-siècle authors produced a newly sensual Romantic child through books directed towards children [...] Authors remembering their own childhoods or admiring the beautiful children around them" (2002: 159).

both parts, that is, the homosocial and the homoerotic, and the latter, as previously explained belonging strictly to boy-love.

The first poem I would like to analyse was written by John Gambriel Nicholson and, as I hope to demonstrate, it bridges the continuum between the homosocial and the homoerotic approach. “Hopeless Love” belongs to the same collection as the other poems *Love in Earnest* (1892). Formally, it is a sonnet with two stanzas, a rhyme scheme ABBA ABBA CDDCCD and made of decasyllabic lines. Whilst drawing comparisons with his other poems, I find that they are easy poems to read and of a compelling nature. The themes are also similar, as it seems to be a pattern for these poems to follow a kind of frustrated and heartbroken aesthetic, thus foregrounding a politics of heartbreak that are a constant theme in these Uranian poems. The poetic voice again is a prisoner of his feelings, only being able to express them through poetry. The addressee again does not know, or seems to be oblivious, of the addresser’s feelings. This situation accentuates the addresser’s obsession and, as he states when there is some physicality, “hopes are born, and all my soul is stirred” (l. 8). His own love here is explained by means of spirituality and the continuum merges for the addresser. Here the homosocial dynamics are undeniably shifted, giving birth to even sincerer feelings; passion at its finest. Nevertheless, the last stanza portrays the peak of what I have called earlier the politics of heartbreak: since love is not fulfilled in any shape or form the only possible denouement conceived by the poetic voice is heartbreak, “my greatest fault is loving you too well” (l. 14).

The second poem I will comment on was written by Wilfred Edward Salter Owen (1893-1918), entitled “Ballad of the Morose Afternoon” and published in his posthumous anthology *The Complete Poems and Fragments* (1983). Owen was of Welsh ascend and lived a short live dying in war field just a week before the war ended.

Although he is best known for his First World War trench poems, we find that most of his poems were published posthumously and with them some interesting facts about his life were exposed: “above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The poetry is in the Pity” (Owen 1983: 535). James S. Campbell (1997) uses this quote to express Owen’s passivity and the misogyny instilled in it, as women were the ones who had no choice but to be passive subjects. Furthermore, he goes on to comment that Owen and Siegfried Sassoon¹⁴ “eventually discredit femininity as a moral force” (824) and, by doing so, they embodied that femininity in their masculine bodies appropriating that passivity into their poetry. The poem under analysis is unedited, and as most of the other works in this collection, hieroglyphic-like. Since most of his poems were published posthumously, we find drafts and unfinished papers. Originally, this poem is a translation from Laurent Tailhade’s “Ballade élégiaque pour le morose après-midi” (Owen 1983: 436), first published in *Poemes Élégiaques* (1907). The poem does not follow any kind of formal pattern. Furthermore, I think the first part was intended to be the literal translation (l. 1-20), whilst chaos is what best describes the following lines (l. 21-43). He tries to write about his teenage lover Vivian Rampton¹⁵ (l. 34), almost lamenting his growth from boy to man (l. 35-36). Interestingly we have a crucial line crossed “Be better if I had not ~~touch~~ ~~ed my hand~~ ~~and~~” (l. 39) left unfinished, followed by the last lines (l. 40-43) where he almost laments having looked at him. This shows us how chaotic his sexuality was and how little he did know about it. The continuum here wants to be merged subconsciously yet the consciousness decides to deny and cross it, hence the homoeroticism in this poem is implicit and interpreted with the context.

¹⁴ Siegfried Sassoon was Wilfred Owen’s mentor and by reading James S. Campbell’s text (1997) we come to think that they could have had some kind of homosocial bond, an idea that fits into Sedgwick’s continuum.

¹⁵ Jon Stallworthy in *Wilfred Owen* stated that “this would seem to indicate an adolescent infatuation for another boy, but when and for whom it is not possible to say” and was “written most probably some time after he had left Dunsden” (2013: 73). Similarly, Dominic Hibberd identifies the boy and confirms they were “friends” for at least a year from early 1912 to February 1913, while acting as lay assistant to the vicar of Dunsden in Berkshire. Owen was 19 and Rampton was 13 (Hibberd, 1986).

The third poem was written by Theodore William Graf Wratislaw (1871-1933), entitled “To a Sicilian Boy” and found in his collection of poems *Caprices: Poems by Theodore Wratislaw* (1893). Wratislaw was a poet and a civil servant, educated in Rugby School from 1885 to 1888. Some of his poems were dedicated to figures like Oscar Wilde or Lord Alfred Douglas and he was married three times. In contrast with this heterosexual history, we find his infamous poem “To a Sicilian Boy”. It could be described as one of the archetypes of boy-love and Uranian poetry. Formally the poem is a sonnet, composed by two stanzas, with rhyme scheme ABBA ABBA CCDEED and decasyllabic lines. This is explicitly a homoerotic poem because of the confessed adoration towards the physicality of the lover, “I adore the contours of thy shape, thine exquisite breasts” (l. 1-2), the highly expressed feelings of passion through the metaphor of the fire (l. 4) juxtaposed with the following metaphors of the sea (l. 5-7). Here the continuum merges creating a passionate dynamic (l. 9-11) and the figure of the boy is worshiped as the supplier of pleasure. There are some interesting lines: “oblivion the past, [...] and the dull ennui of a woman’s kiss” (l. 13-14)¹⁶ where, together with line 2, the boy is given female attributes like “breasts”. This idea was branded by Kaylor as “the paederastic response to the ‘female body’” (2006: 65), where they confessedly preferred the boy’s body but still gave it female attributes, thus creating a power dynamic.

The last poem is entitled “Boyhood” and it belongs to Edwin E. Bradford’s *The Romance of Youth and Other Poems* (1910). Reverend Edwin E. Bradford (1860-1944) was an “undergraduate at Exeter College in Oxford”, he was “ordained an Anglican priest at St. Albans in 1885” and later he was made “vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Nordelph, near Downham Market, Norfolk, where he remained until his death” (Kaylor

¹⁶ As Dowling states, “Wratislaw’s proud indifference to a “woman’s kiss” is meant to announce nothing other than his allegiance to the “heavenly” or Uranian Eros [...] here is that higher principle of masculine desire [...] the discourse of noble and ennobling male love” (1997: 29).

2010: 78). We find that he was a prolific Uranian poet who “published twelve books of poetry on the same controversial topic over a period of better than 20 years” (Mader 2005: 389) with a variety of themes from Greek culture to spirituality. Formally, “Boyhood” is a sonnet composed by one stanza, rhyme scheme ABAB CDCD EFEF GG and decasyllabic lines. Expressly, the poetic voice is a worshiper of the idea of Boyhood “as a part of Nature’s whole” (l. 2), “telling of her joy, her hope, her love” (l. 3-4), “not warped by prejudice nor cramped by creed” (l. 7). By idolizing the ideas of purity and innocence that youth possesses, it draws comparisons with Christianity sitting “boyhood” on “Nature’s throne” (l. 11), thus resembling God’s heavenly throne. This is not an explicitly homoerotic text per se, and the continuum here cannot be openly observed, as it does not contain the typical erotic themes and motifs we are accustomed to observe. However, the highly idealized boyhood portrays a spiritual ecstasy, similar to the ones depicted in Christianity, triggered by youth itself or the thorough experience of/with it, thus romanticizing the idea of boyhood, elevating boy-love to a higher level and portraying it as something to be worshiped and divine (vid. Figure 3 in the Appendix).

To find these poems’ common thread is not as easy as it was in the homosocial part. Not only because of the problematics that I have explained in the Introduction to this part but also because of their disparity. It is true that I have grouped them under the homoerotic theme, and yet, they all vary when approaching the common theme. In general, this thread could be the higher expression of homoerotic feelings. In other words, each poem’s poetic voice devotes the figure of the lover through poetry, either by doing it implicitly or explicitly. For instance, “To a Sicilian Boy” and “Boyhood” follow similar homoerotic aesthetics in worshiping the idea of the boy, even as a spiritual experience. Furthermore, in this part they are the best examples of boy-love in

my study of the Uranians. As I wanted to show a greater picture of the group, in my modest catalogue, there are not many examples of epebophilia. Accordingly, “The Ballad of the Morose Afternoon” again follows an epebophilic pattern; yet it is implicit and we only know about it because of the context. The homoeroticism of the poem itself lies beneath the surface, the trial and error shown with the crossing of the lines and the conflicting nature of the poet’s sexuality. And finally, “Hopeless Love”, softly shows a side of homoeroticism where the slightest touch can trigger a plethora of feelings and, even though they are not shared by both partakers, they are enough to create new sentiments of passion in the poetic voice. The amalgamation of Sedgwick’s homosocial and homosexual lines culminate into these poems, hence expressing homosexual desire in different manners, doing it in a higher language and portraying 19th and 20th century homosexuality or, in the case of the boy-love problematics, these poets’ inner desires towards the youth, explained as repressed feelings of sexual freedom through a mirroring experience. This is best grasped when seeing the boys as effeminate and giving them female attributes, thus projecting in these boys a life they were not able to live and a new opportunity through them to freely explore their sexuality and gender expression.

4. CONCLUSION

As shown in my dissertation, Uranian poetry showcases a massive variety of themes, ranging from leitmotifs based on the boy-love aesthetic to homosexual ones dealing with heartbreak, frustration, love, desire, lust or spirituality, just to name a few. Hellenism as well as the use of Greek culture was an essential foundation for these authors’ literature. From the allusions of Greek mythology and its heroes to the practice of Plato’s *Symposium*, they treated them both as a source of inspiration and a refuge.

This Greek refuge was a metaphorical place where they could reflect and project their inner desires, therefore embodying them in their poetry. Certainly, the term Uranian is still imbued with the “Greek Love” motifs but, taking into account the extensiveness of the group, branding their poetry as “paedophile-like” would be creating a generalization, although most of these authors labelled themselves as such. Whilst they are problematic, and we cannot deny the examples of paedophilia in their writings, they portrayed homosexual love in times when homosexuality was criminalized and had no visibility in culture and literature. The object of my dichotomization, between homosociality and homoeroticism, has been to show how blurred the lines are when it comes to the poetic expression of feelings. These eight poems depict different kinds of male-to-male aesthetics, all of them underlined by Sedgwick’s continuum. Namely, the expression of feelings is depicted in such a manner that when the friendship, which is portrayed as homosociality, evolves into something farther, it becomes similar, poetically and intrinsically, to the explicit expressions of homoeroticism.

As I have stated earlier in my dissertation, the controversy of their themes does not only fall into the boy-love category but also in their misogynistic undertones. The group is solely formed by male writers, and the groups which were created, at Universities were mainly male based. Undoubtedly, the themes are also male centred and both homosociality and homoeroticism, then and nowadays, are conceptually correlated with gay male relations. It seems as if the expression of female-to-female relations have no place under the Uranian terrain.

Ultimately, throughout my work I have noticed that we meet the epitome of expressing homosexual desire with the use of elegies. Roden Noel cried for J.H., William Cory embodied the loss of Heraclitus and Wilfred Owen translated a “ballade élégiaque” to express his tumultuous feelings towards his teenage love, as if it were an

elegy to his own sexuality. The genre helped express these authors' subversive and hidden desires in a manner that society would respect and not condemn, as "the elegy proved the perfect format with which to mask oneself, a mask which could be changed frequently and without contradiction" (Barrett 2010: 76). These metaphorical masks, whether more similar to either the homosocial or homoerotic aesthetics, provided shelter from the hostile environment in which these authors lived in and gave them a means to be able to express their queerness in a sacred space. The forenamed hostility towards homosexuality treated it as "the other" and targeted it as easy to ridicule, as they did to Oscar Wilde in his judgment. That oppression was overcome thanks to the genre of the elegy. Besides, the secreted desires portrayed in these poems beautifully reflect the different layers of desire, vulnerability and the fulfilment of their desire through poetry which, in all fairness, is the most vulnerable expression of feelings and sensibility.

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APPENDIX:

“TO J.H.” (Noel Roden)

R.I.P.

1. COMRADE, my comrade, they are calling
names
2. Of epoch-making men about the town
3. Who died but now; and these are nought to
me,
4. Who mourn my brother, lowly, poor, un-
5. known,
6. Dead with them in thy manhood's flower;
thee Death
7. Took using all thy strength to wrest a friend
8. From his cold clutch; but he would take
you both.
9. No famous man hath ended better ; God
10. Approveth, and thy comrade honours thee,
11. True child of ocean, whom wild wind and
wave
12. Bronzed with much kissing, claiming for
their own;
13. Convivial, improvident, free-handed,
14. Who more than once plucked human lives
from waves
15. That would have whelmed in their tre-
mendous play

16. But life, alas! Proves often hard to bear
17. For such as you, one warfare grim and long
18. With famine, daily want of those who lean
19. On you for daily needs, your children, wives;
20. And so, may be, the horror of cold gloom,
21. That unaware enshrouded my poor heart,
22. To thee was but the long-delayed, blithe sail,
23. Scarce hoped for, dawning on the mariner
24. Who thirsts and hungers on a sullen sea:
25. For niggard Life had used thee hardly; Death
26. Relieves from burdens unendurable.

27. But, ah! my friend, I may not see thee more,
28. Nor hear, nor feel! whom now in this my
dwelling

29. The very rooms with appurtenances,
 30. Inanimate and trivial, recall;
 31. The frame well-knit, well mounded, the deft
 hand.
 32. That so disposed them even now; yon beach
 33. That strews my garden speaks of thee
 34. Who brought it; still I seek a face well-loved,
 35. And listen for a well-remembered tone
 36. Upon the stairway, in my private chamber;
 37. Ah! who will do thine office for me now?
 38. Nay, we may never more climb waves to-
 gether
 39. In bounding boats, nor ply the limber oar
 40. Among those bounding billows: but I roam
 41. Heart-wounded in chill twilight by the shore,
 42. Like him of old of whom blind Homer
 sang,
 43. How, reft of one he loved, disconsolate,
 44. He went in silence by the sounding sea:
 45. I hear that rhythmic breathing of the sea
 46. And evermore the surge repeats thy name.
 47. Even so Achilles mourned his friend
 Patroclus.
 48. So Alexander wept Hephaestion.
49. O may thy soul repose in peace, my friend,
 50. Nor any troubled dream disturb thy rest;
 51. But from a maze of tranquil reverie
 52. May one remembrance, light as a rose-
 petal,
 53. Float to my world and wandering to me
 54. Here by my side assume the form beloved!

Brighton, *October* 1891

Retrieved from *Collected Poems* (1902) pages 487-488

“Heraclitus” (William Cory)

1. They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead,
2. They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed.
3. I wept as I remembered how often you and I
4. Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky.

5. And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,
6. A handful of grey ashes, long, long ago at rest,
7. Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake;
8. For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.

Retrieved from *Ionica* (1877) page 7.

“Secret Love” (John Gambril Nicholson)

1. Did I but dare this silence break,
2. And at thy feet confession make,
3. My faithful heart would cast away
4. The bitter-sweet of mute delay,
5. And cease with its hidden wound to ache.

6. Fain would I tell how, for thy sake,
7. I from Love’s Dreamland fear to awake,
8. And still Love’s willing prisoner stay,
9. Did I but dare!

10. Perchance thou wouldst compassion take,
11. And lighter fetters o’er me shake;
12. I might come forth from twilight gray
13. To noontide glow of Summer day, --
14. Might sail with thee Love’s sunlit Lake,
15. Did I but dare!

Retrieved from *Love in Earnest* (1892) page 92

“’Tis Where you are” (John Gambril Nicholson)

1. ’Tis where you are I fain would be;
2. Between us rolls a sullen sea,
3. But love, though you are far away,
4. I bridge in dreams by night and day
5. The gulf that serves you from me.

6. ’Tis not where Southern winds blow free
7. O’er sunny wave and flower and tree
8. That happiness with me will stay, --
9. ’Tis where you are!

10. Dull skies are yours, a barren lea,
11. A wintry clime whence song-birds flee;
12. Still to be there I long and pray,
13. My heart abides not in this bay,
14. This fairyland of might and glee, --
15. 'Tis where you are!

Retrieved from *Love in Earnest* (1892) page 93

“Hopeless Love” (John Gambriel Nicholson)

1. Mainly I strive to show by deed and word
2. How great my love for you, how deep and strong;
3. Daily you hear my heart's one passionate song,
4. And still pass on as though you had not heard;
5. Your slightest smile, your gentlest glance and gird
6. My suppliant life with joy that lingers long, --
7. You touch my hand, and straight a gladsome throng
8. Of hopes are born, and all my soul is stirred.

9. But ah, you do not understand nor see,
10. And when my looks of my devotion tell
11. You deem it but some pitiful wayward spell ;
12. Love comes not my interpreter to be,
13. And in your eyes, because you love not me,
14. My greatest fault is loving you too well !

Retrieved from *Love in Earnest* (1892) page 4

“Ballad of the Morose Afternoon” (Wilfred Owen)

1. I would flee (blaze) under the virginal branches
2. Where burn (scorch) the clear noons of the spring.
3. God-Phoebus! Sun! When thou dost stream/gush/pour
4. Into the boughs ~~heav~~ weighed down (made) heavy with perfumes
5. I would flee far from the cursed temples
6. Far from the common crown, filthy and mad!
7. Lo! To finish the chaste morning.
8. April showeth her young flanks to the woods
9. Ye, however as on the marriage-eves
10. Deck with ~~some~~ a few flowers my ~~white-hair~~ bleached hair(s) (moon-white hair).
11. The archlutes and the violincello.

12. And the hautboys/oboes with/of the muffled tone (sound)
13. Mysterious, tell the names of tho/ese (fair ones)
14. Who brought me the roses of former times.
15. Blue souvenirs (remembrances) of the distant paradises,
16. ~~Garnish~~ (Adorn) the end of my day.
17. Let my temples be a crowned by you
18. And ~~into~~ the concord (accord/harmony) of the nonchalant ~~rimes~~ (heedless rhythms)
19. To lead me to the Isles of the Blest
20. Deck my white hair with a few young flowers

21. We two had known each other ~~two short years~~ (while)
 22. ~~And when I went my way and he went his~~
 23. In which he ~~went~~ underwent the secret Change
 24. The sad (from) ~~of~~ boy to man
-

25. We knew each other ~~while till~~ while ~~two~~ a years outran,
 26. The while (~~In which~~) he underwent (~~the great~~) **the that secret change crucial crucial**
 27. The ~~grand and~~ Inalterable change from boy to man.
 28. ~~And I myself felt more metamorphoses~~
 29. ~~Than I dare think of now, But to strange~~
 - a. ~~But I was strange~~
 30. ~~And many of~~ And many of my thoughts were given to him
 31. ~~The day I went~~ And many of his hours were given to me.
 32. **And metamorphoses more and strange**
 33. **Have worked**
-

34. **We two were friends while two short years outran**
 35. **The while he underwent the crucial change**
 36. **The inalterable change, from boy to man.**
 37. **And metamorphoses** not less strange
 38. ~~Created and annihilated, turn by turn~~
-

39. Be better if I had not ~~touch'd my hand and~~ or would it after all
40. ~~Be better if I~~ Known my voice nor for me
41. Or heard my heart? And would it ~~after all~~
42. Be better if I had not seen his face?
43. never to have ~~seen~~
 - i. to have looked on him?

Retrieved from *The Complete poems and fragments* (1983) pages 435-437

“To a Sicilian Boy” (Theodore Wratislaw)

1. Love, I adore the contours of thy shape,
 2. Thine exquisite breasts and arms adorable;
 3. The wonders of thy heavenly throat compel
 4. Such fire of love as even my dreams escape:
 5. I love thee as the sea-foam loves the cape,
 6. Or as the shore the sea's enchanting spell:
 7. In sweets the blossoms of thy mouth excel
 8. The tenderest bloom of peach or purple grape.
-
9. I love thee, sweet! Kiss me, again, again!
 10. Thy kisses soothe me as tired earth the rain;
 11. Between thine arms I find mine only bliss:
 12. Ah let me in thy bosom still enjoy
 13. Oblivion of the past, divinest boy,
 14. And the dull ennui of a woman's kiss!

Retrieved from *Caprices: Poems by Theodore Wratislaw* (1893) page 31

“Boyhood” (Edwin E. Bradford)

1. Boyhood I worship rather than the boy ;
2. And boyhood but as part of Nature's whole,
3. Her fairest blossom, telling of her joy
4. Her hope her love ; the tongue whereby her soul,
5. Imprisoned in the brute, still hardly freed,
6. Not wholly dumb nor quite articulate,
7. Not warped by prejudice nor cramped by creed,
8. Babbles of deepest mysteries of fate.
9. And if awhile I worship one alone,
10. That one to me is Nature, and a vision,
11. Though blurred, of Him Who sits upon her throne,
12. And sheds His glory on the fields Elysian.
13. But boy, as boy, is not so inly dear
14. A man, my fellow-worshipper and peer.

Retrieved from *The Romance of Youth and Other Poems* (1910) page 12

LIST OF FIGURES



Figure 1. Nicolas-Rene Jollain. *The Death of Hyacinth*, 1769.



Figure 2. Henry Scott Tuke. *The Critics*, 1927.

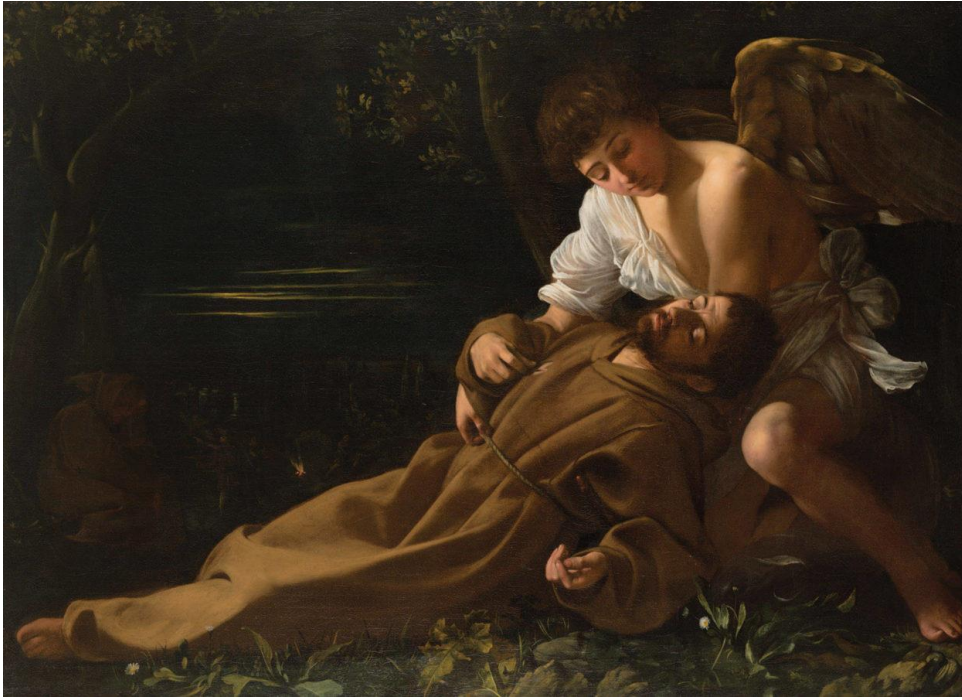


Figure 3. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. *Ecstasy of Saint Francis*, 1594–1595.