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「除非你知曉」：辨識安德烈·艾席蒙

《以你的名字呼喚我》中的雙性戀認同

“Unless You Know It”: Reading Bisexually
in André Aciman’s *Call Me by Your Name*

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“UNLESS YOU KNOW IT”: READING BISEXUALLY
IN ANDRÉ ACIMAN’S *CALL ME BY YOUR NAME*

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To those who are in their quest for self-knowledge



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國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士班

碩士論文提要

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論文提要內容：

安德烈·艾席蒙 (André Aciman) 的小說《以你的名字呼喚我》(*Call Me by Your Name*)，近年因改編為同名影視作品而知名。由於故事本身更為彰顯同性浪漫取向，掩蓋了兩位男主角各自與異性發展的浪漫關係，進而使得他們雙性戀之性認同 (sexual identity) 被讀者忽略。現今關於非異性戀性認同的理解，主要仍以同性戀認同為主，因此大眾對於雙性戀者的認知，往往停留在他們的單性浪漫關係，即化約為異性戀的或同性戀的性取向，卻忽略人的浪漫關係與性取向不必然一致，如同主角艾里歐 (Elio) 所遭遇的。在本篇論文中，我首先點出雙性戀 (bisexuality) 作為多元性取向之一環，並提出一種辨識雙性戀認同 (reading bisexually) 的閱讀方式，重新解讀《以你的名字呼喚我》，企圖檢視該作品主角們對多於一種性別的可能浪漫傾向，賦予讀者全面的雙性戀認同觀點；其中，我以酷兒時間性 (queer temporalities) 的概念強調特定時空對於雙性戀者性認同形成過程中的重要性。

關鍵詞：《以你的名字呼喚我》、性認同、艾里歐、雙性戀、辨識雙性戀認同、

酷兒時間性

Abstract

More often than not, research on bisexuality has been lumped into discussions of heterosexuality and homosexuality, with bisexual behaviors and identities being taken as lesbian or gay ones. Prior analyses of André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name* likewise focus on the gay relationship between the protagonists and thus bestow gay identities on them. Yet both characters also develop relationships with women, and their bisexuality is ignored. Such a perspective of reading characters' sexualities as either heterosexual or homosexual is rather exclusive. I argue that a subject's sexual identity and relationships do not necessarily align with each other. In this thesis, I first pinpoint the use of bisexuality as a sexual orientation and propose a strategy of reading bisexually, which examines characters' possible sexualities when they experience attractions to people of more than one gender. I focus mainly on an analysis of Elio's bisexuality, and use the concept of queer temporalities to emphasize that time and space play significant roles in the formation of bisexuality.

Keywords: reading bisexually, *Call Me by Your Name*, sexual identity, Elio, bisexuality, queer temporalities

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Chapter One

Introduction

Is insincerity such a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities.

—Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 137

What readers talk about when they talk about literary romance novels is habitually the development of a relationship between two people in love, and the couple are conceivably heterosexual, gay, or lesbian. Through the lens of a queer reading, readers may grasp that human sexuality does not easily fall into heterosexuality and homosexuality because “queer theory defines individual sexuality as a fluid, fragmented, dynamic collectivity of possible sexuality” (Tyson 335). Despite that awareness, readers find it intuitive to identify one’s sexual orientation through one’s relationship or the object choice in relation to the subject. However, this kind of recognition is hardly conducive to understanding bisexual orientation and bisexuality as a sexual identity because “bisexuals have commonly occupied gay, lesbian or straight spaces and assign meaning to their desire in spaces that rarely reflect their named identity” (Hemmings, “Bisexual Theoretical” 20). Hemmings’ observation responds to Kaiser’s review of *Call Me by Your Name*: “Love That Knows No Boundaries,” in which Kaiser describes Elio’s feeling as “homoerotic” and the two male protagonists embody the argument that “‘gay’ describes an act rather than a person” (n. pag.). This view leaves open the question of the proper term to describe the characters’ identity and relationship. In this thesis, I analyze Elio’s sexuality and other male characters’ notion of sexual attraction in André Aciman’s *Call Me by Your Name* from a bisexual perspective. By reading the text bisexually, I also examine how bisexuality further affects the existing concept of binary sexual desire and romantic relationships.

DEFINING BISEXUALITY

Since the early 1990s, there have been works on bisexuality from a wide range of disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. However, literary studies that can bring forth a robust cross-disciplinary approach to bisexuality have not appeared. Such a lack explains the trend of scholars being inclined to read bisexuality in literary texts by rereading what is previously read from a heterosexual or gay/lesbian perspective (Knopf 144). In the bibliography regarding bisexuality she draws up, the bisexual activist and scholar Robyn Ochs finds that “[b]isexuals whose lives are celibate, monogamous, and/or without conflict or triangulation are rarely read as bisexual by the outside viewer, but rather are seen by others as either straight or gay” (218-19). Monosexual reading reflects the tendency to regard sexual behavior and partners’ biological sex as the primary indicator of sexual orientation. That is to say that if a male character having a relationship with a girl also happens to have sex with men, he is likely to be considered gay, and vice versa. Therefore, the common bisexual rereading makes a general argument that “Reading bisexually means not assuming an either/or conclusion” (Knopf 158). The intention of validating bisexuality fades away when it develops into deconstructing the binary assumption of sexuality with queer theory.

A common bisexual reading of literary works resonates with Fox’s research on bisexual identity, which contends that bisexual subjects “need to acknowledge and validate both the homosexual and the heterosexual components of their identities, regardless of the degree to which either or both of these are actualized in sexual behavior or relationships” (75). The scholars looking for bisexual identity may first empower the characters to claim their bisexuality by adding the heterosexual or homosexual supplement to what is less discussed in the earlier interpretation. During the validating process, their common goal is to raise the awareness of bisexual invisibility while arguing that its erasure stems from the binary system of understanding sexuality. At its very essence, this reading is quite

contradictory, if not null. First of all, those who adopt this bisexual reading are reluctant to take bisexuality as a sexual orientation because in their opinion, this gesture does little to deconstruct ways of viewing sexuality. Secondly, the characters may even not know the possibility of claiming bisexuality to describe their sexuality. The historiography of bisexuality with its multiple meanings and references easily makes those who attempt to theorize it inconsistent. Some theorists of bisexuality who view bisexuality as sexual desire take bisexuality as an instrument to subvert heteronormativity (Däumer 92) or to question the structure of sexual identity (Hemmings, “Bisexual” 17). Their approaches mainly focus on what bisexuality can do vis-à-vis other types of sexuality instead of what bisexuality is. On the one hand it is practical to consolidate bisexual theory in academia; on the other hand, the theory would scarcely be developed without establishing a reliable framework for comprehensive information. When scholars review the development of sexuality studies over the last few decades, they find out that the discussion of bisexuality tends to be “broader critiques of gay and lesbian identity politics” (Monro et al. 672) and “often positioned as a cultural practice — a ‘lifestyle choice’ — rather than a sexual ‘orientation’ that falls under the rubric of structural analyses of discrimination” (675). Such research supports my concern that without a plausible definition, bisexuality will remain unappreciated by the potential readership and on the periphery not only of sexuality studies but also of public recognition.

In addition to sexuality, the use of binary categorization is a human tendency, and without them people would simply create pairs of words that are less ill-disposed such as normative and nonnormative. What readers can do is to think and read “both/and” as well as “more than one.” Therefore, before proposing a revised bisexual reading in the next chapter, I first provide a definition of bisexuality and regard bisexuality as a sexual orientation so that the characters who can be identified with it possess bisexual identity and simultaneously

occupy their own space. Moreover, such a definition can also be a source of information for readers when they encounter characters' potential bisexuality or other sexual possibilities.

It would be helpful to first discuss the terminology I am going to use regarding sexuality. Most explanations of terms are from Tony Adams's *Narrating the Closet*, in which individual experience is taken as the starting point to investigate sexual identity. Sex, gender, and sexuality are interrelated. The term "sex" refers to the biological indicator for categorizing persons as females and males (Adams 30). The term "gender" tends to be considered from social and cultural perspectives, and thus it refers to "the enactment of criteria for classifying persons as male or female, man or woman, masculine or feminine" (31). I use the term "sexuality" in a broad sense when I analyze the characters of the novel, including the meanings of sexual orientation, sexual attraction, and sexual identity, referring to "one person's sex and the person's attraction to another person's sex" (31). More often than not, the categories of sex and gender overlap when adopted to describe one's sexuality, but the intricacy between the two is not the main focus here. The term "fluid/fluidity" has become trendy in descriptions of the unpredictable nature of sexuality. The bisexual activist Eisner explains that the term bisexual can "denote a specific identity as well as a multiple-identity umbrella term," and "fluid" is on the spectrum to be defined as "attraction that changes or might change over time (toward people of various genders)" (28-29). In her masterpiece on women's sexual fluidity, Diamond explains that "fluidity can be thought of as an additional component of a [person's] sexuality" and "changes of [fluidity] are unexpected" (*Sexual Fluidity* 10-11). In other words, sexual orientation is a consistent pattern, whereas fluidity depends on contexts and occasional events. Diamond further argues that "though the concept of fluidity overlaps with the phenomenon of bisexuality (since fluidity, by definition, makes nonexclusive attractions possible), they are not the same things" (43). Social science literature has not made such a clear distinction between sexual orientation and fluidity

because of the complexity of these concepts. Claiming sexual fluidity allows people to stand in an open position regarding their sexual desire even though they have not met the objects of their desires.

Identity labels may sometimes be reductive to an individual's subjectivity, but they can be functional for understanding. People take different labels such as sexual identities across different contexts. It is significant for them to recognize a label without discrimination. Gender and sexuality are socially and culturally constructed norms, and therefore they have to be revised and expanded when there are people who do not fit in or are unaware of the existing categories. The bisexual orientation is considered sexually fluid because one is conventionally considered heterosexual, and he or she may later explore same-sex attraction and identify oneself as gay or lesbian owing to the prevailing idea of fitting in one sexuality in a monosexual culture. "It is not until later, finding both the heterosexual and gay/lesbian labels unsatisfactory, that many people are able to recognize the nuances of their attractions and desires and come to realize sexual identity is not limited to heterosexual or gay/lesbian" (Swan 51). From Swan's observation of the possible process of recognizing bisexual identity, It easy obvious that sexual fluidity gives a bisexual individual the capacity to respond nonexclusively to the different objects of sexual desire. A clear definition may help bisexual people to identify themselves without confusion and those who are monosexual to acknowledge bisexuality and non-monosexualities. Swan delineates the definition of bisexuality as comprising identity, attraction, and behavior :

Bisexuality is a collective term for a sexual orientation that encompasses a continuum of relational possibilities including, [*sic*] sexual behaviors and/or feelings toward, emotional attachment to, and/or desires or fantasies for, both men and women. These attractions do not have to be acted on or equal in either their magnitude or in the ratio of men and women to whom they are targeted. (55)

The term “continuum” in Swan’s definition of bisexuality signifies time and the ongoing involvement in cross-sex relationships during the course of a life. It specifies the unique life experience of a bisexual individual and a possible sexual identity for characters.

INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT

Instead of the previous strategy of rereading by looking for bisexuality in classic gay or lesbian novels, it may be more meaningful to establish new research on contemporary novels. André Aciman’s reflective and dense writing depicts the subtle nuance of emotions and responds to how one loves and lives through identity exploration. His debut novel *Call Me by Your Name* is an extension of his other nonfiction works pertinent to time, place, love, and loss: the memoir *Out of Egypt*, the essay collection *False Papers: Essays on Exile and Memory*, and the edited anthology *The Proust Projects*. As a Jew born in Alexandria, Egypt, and raised by biracial parents, Aciman speaks multiple languages and has stayed in many countries since the family was expelled from Egypt in the 1950s. His related experience enables him to depict minority identities well. The intense feeling of loss and the endeavor to retrieve selfhood from the past strike Aciman ceaselessly. In his essay “In Search of Blue,” Aciman traces his love for the sea in different life stages to the question, “*What do you do with so much blue once you’ve seen it? What is it if not the desire to prod some kind of admission from those we cannot have and wish we hadn’t met or gotten to love and are condemned to crave?*” (28; emphasis in original). The concept of irreversibility weighs so heavily on Aciman’s mind that he never stops thinking about what was lost. “My love of the sea is in part a result of having lost Alexandria, not necessarily something I experienced in Alexandria. I love it precisely because it was lost” (“In Search” 28-29). That void invigorates Aciman to return to his memory, where nothing is gone; in the novel, he makes Elio, the protagonist, his proxy to fathom the impact of desires on personal transformation and

interpersonal relationships. The spirit of inquiry visits Elio regularly to provoke a similar sentiment: what do you do and how do you go on once you have experienced the most profound desire that you try to clench in your fist but must release your hold on? Although Aciman avoids labeling sexuality to emphasize the nature of human desire and intimacy in the novel, I find this idea would be best addressed from a bisexual perspective.

Aciman adopts a nonsequential narrative style to tell a coming-of-age story lasting more than twenty years starting in the late 1980s; when Elio looks back on his development of love for Oliver, he also finds his feelings for Marzia and recognizes his bisexuality. The process of looking for bisexuality in retrospection is prominent. In *Find Me*, the sequel to *Call Me by Your Name*, being asked about having someone special, Elio refers to his relationships with Marzia and Oliver, respectively: “We were friends, then we were lovers, then she split. But we stayed friends” (139). “My lover helped me cast [taboos] off. He was my first” (141). Elio’s bisexuality is clear. On the face of the story, it is an amorous reminiscence of the relationship between two men, but to take Elio’s sexuality as sheer homosexuality is to jump to a conclusion about his sexuality and/or identity. To avoid such a jump, I focus on Elio as bisexual subject in *Call Me by Your Name* exploring his relationships with men and women and what is at stake by claiming bisexuality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although this thesis is focalized around the central protagonists in the novel, I include some discussion and analyses of its film adaptation in the literature review to show that the exclusive perspective on sexuality is quite common. Most critics and reviewers of the novel and its film adaptation may disagree with my argument of Elio’s bisexuality since most of them pay attention only to the gay relationship instead of to both of Elio’s relationships, which suggest his bisexuality. Roden analyzes the novel from a theological perspective, but

at the same time he registers, though he does not pursue, Elio's bisexuality. His "Queer Jewish Memory" treats the novel as a piece of art in relation to the memorial and looks at how Jewish identity played out in the novel. Most reviewers note the Jewish identity shared between Elio and Oliver, but only a few mention that Jewishness is also a suppressed identity for Elio. Engaging his feeling with Jewish history, Elio describes an intimacy taken away would be like "*galut*, the Hebrew word for exile and dispersal" (Aciman 49). Roden argues that the story is told as "Elio's interior narrative: it is his Jewish and homoerotic closet" (201). He also adopts Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium* to highlight Elio's and Oliver's homosexual desire: "'Love' is the name for our pursuit of wholeness, for our desire to be complete" (Plato 841). Despite the lauded same-sex relationship, it does not represent Elio's sexual identity. Roden acknowledges Elio's bisexuality by pointing out that Elio "is torn between love of women (like bisexual Oliver), having wooed and made love to a local girl, and the Platonic soul's pursuit of its carnal whole," but he does not look deeper at Elio's love of women (204).

Other online or published book reviews agree that the novel is about the process of identity formation, and at its core is sexual awakening, longing, and obsession. The acknowledgment of bisexuality, however, is mostly absent. Although the novel seems to present a harm-free environment to allow one to be whom one wants to be, there are still taboos and moral codes that the two protagonists have to overcome before and after they consummate their desire, such as the conservative milieu in the 1980s and the seven-year age gap between the two (Kaiser; Simon 1918). Hence, in exploring Elio's sexuality, readers should consider various perspectives of his identities. The formation of Elio's sexual identity involves Oliver and Marzia, but only three reviews mention the existence of the female character involved. Some reviewers avoid labels of sexuality and draw attention to personal longing and desire from a universal viewpoint (Campbell; Reyn; J. Freeman). However, these

intense feelings are not merely portrayed as romantic love in the novel. The relationships among Aciman's protagonists reflect the human desires' intricacies and the difficulties of actualizing the subject's sexuality.

D'Erasmus, after pointing out the ungraspable essence of desire depicted in the novel, indicates that "[t]he younger Elio has apparently been more or less heterosexual until Oliver arrives, but in fewer than 15 pages he's already in a state he calls the 'swoon'" (n. pag.). She omits Elio's adaptation to his sexual identity except for frenetic lust. Despite the lack of references to bisexuality, Winslow regards the novel as a "coming-into-homosexual-awareness" and argues that reading it just as a gay romance would be "a compromising view" because Elio has already expressed his desire to be with men and women (n. pag.). Combrinck-Graham examines the novel from the standpoint of a psychologist. Similar to Winslow, Combrinck-Graham's claim that "*Call Me by Your Name* is not about homosexuality, though the lovers are men," indicates Elio's ambivalent sexual orientation (1611). She considers the book "a refreshing reminder of the nonpathological love obsession and search for identity that can make adolescence a time to be relished" and a celebration of the adolescent experiences initiating identity formation (1611). Yet, she fails to provide a specific identity that Elio develops into. Upchurch also speaks highly of Aciman's work, seeing it as "a great love story, whether you're gay or straight" (n. pag.). There is a telling ambiguity in Elio's sexuality that deserves personal and cultural intelligibility throughout these reviews. Bisexuality is a proper interpretation of Elio's ambiguous sexual identity.

In respect of the characters' sexuality, Tóibín uses the term "fluid" to describe "[t]he ambiguity [that] belongs to an older world" (14). Unlike other reviewers who moderately reckon Elio's sexuality as more or less heterosexual or almost gay but not absolutely gay, Tóibín considers the characters' fluid traits deliberately played with in novel as "a sweet alternative to [homosexual] rigidities" (14). As an openly gay writer, Tóibín enunciates his

sexual politics and identity politics by finding the novel “unsatisfactory to readers who will surely want Elio and Oliver to be either one thing or another” (14). The characters’ unspecified sexual identities in the novel challenge habitual approaches assuming a dual sexuality, and Tóibín’s interpretation suggests the need for an intelligible identity on the part of possible readers. The heterosexual and gay/lesbian readings might be limited, if not problematic, when the characters’ sexual identity is arguably not either of them. The reviewers’ comments make Elio’s sexuality ambiguous, while the narrator endeavors to figure it out. Those equivocal remarks inspire me to propose a bisexual reading for the ambiguity of the protagonists’ sexual identity.

Reviews of the film adaptation also lack a discussion of potential bisexual identity. In responding to the hit of the movie version of the novel in 2017, Aciman reveals his ideology of sexuality through his characters when asked about the impact of his love story on the contemporary recognition of sexuality: “They are fluid in their sexuality, and this ambivalence says more about how we think about sex today. . . . Most of us don’t know who we are sexually” (qtd. in Harman n. pag.). The discussion of sexual ambivalence may enlarge the space for different identities, but a starting point for analyzing non-monosexual identities such as bisexuality is missing. Galupo stresses that “sexual orientation encompasses attraction, behavior, and identity, although it has been consistently noted that the three are not congruent” (62). Only a few readers and viewers consider all three indicators of sexuality in their analysis of literature or film because not every sexual attraction follows up on desire. They tend to look at the most apparent marks, such as the portrayal of a sex scene or a preferred relationship over another. Therefore, subtle demonstrations of the sexual ambiguity and fluidity, where the most contradictory feelings and emotions are entwined, are ignored.

Galt and Schoonover question the film adaptation’s inauthentic presentation of gayness. They point out that the film has been accused of not being gay enough because of

the absence of explicit sex scenes between the two men (70). I argue that the movie is “not gay enough” precisely because it aims to show the fluid sexuality and bisexuality at its, and the novel’s, core. Some reviews from mainstream media like *The Guardian* position the characters as gay. For example, Peter Bradshaw subtitles his review “Gorgeous Gay Love Story Seduces and Overwhelms” and observes that “Both Elio and Oliver are to have romantic associations with local young women, but it is more than clear where this is heading” (n. pag.). It suggests that bisexuality is just a phase for the two men. Benjamin Lee considers the movie “tender, erotic, awkward, poignant and unarguably, unavoidably, unmistakably *gay*” (n. pag.). A tweet on Twitter infuriates Lee because it praises the movie as “a romance overwhelming in its intensity” with a film still of Elio and Marzia. Lee argues that such a post is deliberately misleading since the relationship that Elio and Marzia have is “an understandably doomed sexual relationship,” (n. pag.) but as a matter of fact, the relationship between Elio and Oliver does not last to the end of the movie, either. I share Lee’s concern that “studios are still trying to straight-wash gay films,” and yet at the same time, it is also thought-provoking to see that Lee demands visible queerness while he invalidates Elio’s opposite-sex relationship because Elio has to be gay instead of bisexual. Much as the book reviews do, these film reviews reveal the paucity of common recognition for bisexuality.

THESIS STRUCTURE

From the literature review above, some issues need to be addressed and are expected to be answered in this thesis: What are the possible reasons that make bisexuality a passing topic in discussion? How to read bisexually? What vulnerabilities may a bisexual subject encounter in consummating his or her sexuality? The bisexuality discussed in this thesis mainly focuses on male bisexuality because of the primary text I examine. Female bisexuality encounters

different identity issues in a different context, so I avoid sweeping generalizations. The thesis is composed of five chapters. The introduction raises awareness of bisexuality, gives a synopsis of the novel, and examines related reviews of the story. It pays particular attention to the need for a competent bisexual definition and bisexual reading. In chapter two, with a refined history and review of studies of bisexuality, I propose a strategy to read the novel from a bisexual perspective. By reading bisexually, I examine characters' sexuality when they experience attractions to people of more than one gender, attempting to discuss possible sexuality other than heterosexuality and homosexuality. Chapter three takes up the application of the bisexual reading strategy in Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name*. It presents the awakening of Elio's bisexuality by investigating his opposite-sex and same-sex relationships. Chapter four looks at how by exposing the potential bisexuality, discussions of romantic love and sexual desire would be less exclusive than those that assume a sexual binary. In sum, reading *Call Me by Your Name* from a bisexual perspective, readers can understand the formation of bisexual identity, learn about bisexual experiences, and have a representative literary novel for future gender and sexuality studies.

Chapter Two

A Bisexual Perspective

What we reach for and what ultimately touches us is the radiance we've projected on things, not the things themselves—the envelope, not the letter, the wrapping, not the gift.

—André Aciman, "Intimacy," p. 33.

Despite the increasing number of works addressing bisexuality in gender, sexuality, and queer studies since the 1990s, bisexual studies (as well as transgender studies) are still struggling to occupy their place within the related fields. There are several instances reflecting this situation. For example, in Lois Tyson's *Critical Theory Today*, there is no section about bisexuality under the heading of "Lesbian, gay, and queer criticism." Some introductory textbooks about LGBT and queer studies also provide limited discussion about bisexuality. In *Handbook of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, the only chapter that directly addresses to bisexuality is entitled "The Bisexual Menace: Or, Will the Real Bisexual Please Stand Up?". It opens up with multiple questions about what bisexuality is and leaves unclear answers to them (Esterberg 13). Besides, there is only three-page discussion about bisexuality and its erasure in the queer community in *Finding Out: An Introduction to LGBT Studies* (Gibson et al.). What causes bisexuality to become invisible or be lumped into lesbian and gay studies is its varied meanings and definitions, reflecting the predicament of theorization.

This chapter proposes a revised strategy of reading bisexually to locate potential bisexual subjectivity. In so doing, I trace the history of bisexuality in the United States and Western Europe from the late nineteenth century to the present, and examine how it negotiates its juxtaposition with heterosexuality, homosexuality, and monosexuality. After that, I review theories regarding bisexuality and the application of them in other literary

works. I conclude with a revised strategy of reading bisexually and my reading of Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name* as a bisexual text.

A HISTORY OF BISEXUALITY

Even though bisexual theory to date relies on psychology, sexology, and identity politics, it was biology researchers who first utilized the term and influenced the follow-through formation of meaning in other fields. In biology, "bisexuality" means "the state or condition of having both male and female characteristics; the state or condition of having both male and female reproductive organs, hermaphroditism" ("Bisexuality"). This biological notion prevailed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when psychologists and sexologists then characterized bisexuality: one's sexuality could spontaneously be predicted through one's sexual organs. At that point in time, heterosexuality was the only sexual paradigm, and any other form of sexuality was pathologized and psychologized as a mental illness instead of deviance. Homosexuality became the main representative of the non-hetero sexualities. For instance, in the 1860s, the German gay activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs proposed his "third sex" theory of homosexuality (uranism): he hypothesized that people are inherently hermaphrodites as embryos with homogenous sex organs, and the ultimate split results in (heterosexual) men, (heterosexual) women, and a (homosexual) third sex. Those who were in the "third sex" category were considered "sexual inverts," indicating female souls confined in the male bodies and vice versa (qtd. in Bowes-Catton and Hayfield 43). In the mid-1890s, the Austrian psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing adopted the notion of the hermaphroditic state of a fetus, terming the condition of those who were emotionally or behaviorally engaged with both sexes as psychosexual hermaphroditism, "a condition in which an individual experiences the psychological equivalent of physical possession of both male and female sex organs" (qtd. in Elia et al. 3). He interpreted bisexuality as a throwback

to a regressive state that preceded the biologically and sexually perceptible form. Other scholars like the British sexologist Havelock Ellis and the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud initially agreed with the theory of psychosexual hermaphroditism in their early stage of research and understood bisexuality as inversion (qtd. in Elia et al. 3). From Ulrichs' theory to the designation of inversion, the study of bisexuality in the nineteenth century was conducted based on the binary system that enclosed male and female as well as masculinity and femininity, by which "human sexuality could still be imagined according to a heterosexual model" (Garber 239). Suppositions that effeminate gay men were female souls enclosed in male bodies, or that bisexuals were those whose masculine parts fall for women and feminine parts long for men reflected the focus on biological sex and the lack of thorough recognition of an individual's identity.

In the early twentieth century, the discussion of bisexuality shifted from the biological to the psychological. Along with categories of heterosexual and homosexual, Ellis abandoned Krafft-Ebing's term and took "bisexual" as an elementary category of sexuality, and he also found it difficult to designate one's sexual desire through simple classification (qtd. in Storr 15-16). Freud's view of bisexuality was a continuation of psychological hermaphroditism. Unlike the previous theory, Freud's attended to the mental characteristics of bisexual individuals. Freud referred bisexual nature to the combination of masculinity and femininity, and supposed that one's heterosexuality and homosexuality would be shaped through social and psychological development (144). Bisexuality was regarded as overdue sexuality rather than a sexual identity with a stable continuum. Freud's thought of being originally bisexual is a popular but misunderstood viewpoint. Storr points out that "much of Freud's influence on popular understandings of sexuality actually derives from misconceptions and misrepresentations of Freud rather than from Freud's own idea" (29). For instance, although Freud was more interested in examining masculinity and femininity instead of sexual desires,

his follower Wilhelm Stekel deliberately took Freud's hypothesis of bisexuality as the primary state of sexuality (qtd. in Storr 28). Stekel argued that if bisexuality was innate, monosexuality as heterosexuality and homosexuality was in effect the repressed, problematic state (28). Had Stekel's argument received enough attention, the recognition of bisexuality would have changed in a new binary framework of monosexuality and bisexuality/plurisexuality. However, bisexuality was not the main issue to be solved. Goob summarizes the view that bisexuality in the early twentieth century was an explanation for the "puzzle of homosexuality, whereas manifest bisexuality was either not discussed, was mentioned in passing, or was attributed to homosexuality" (10). The early understandings of bisexuality revealed its inextricable connection with heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Such an inextricability was still well preserved in Alfred Kinsey's research on sexual behaviors in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, arguably the initial emergence of sexual fluidity. Bisexuality was previously analyzed in biological, sexological, and psychoanalytic texts until Kinsey and his colleagues, departing from the biomedically-oriented research, developed the "Kinsey Scale." The scale ranged from 0 to 6 in two polarized extremes from being extremely heterosexual to being extremely homosexual regarding physical contacts and psychologic reactions (Kinsey 638-41). Kinsey threw doubt on the binary model of human sexuality theorized by the early sexologists—that composed of heterosexual and homosexual as two rigid categories—because there was a large intermediate group. The term bisexual (behavior) is not on the scale, and hence the correlation between sexual desire and sexual objects makes the idea of bisexuality "everywhere yet nowhere" (Elia et al. 4). The limited categories failed to capture the nuance and fluidity of sexual behaviors and attractions. However, Kinsey found it difficult to apply the term bisexual because "the term as it has been used has never been strictly delimited" (656). Although bisexuality was assumed to be a biological term rather than an orientation in his research, Kinsey argued that the word

bisexual should be taken as a sexual description just like *heterosexual* and *homosexual* (657). Kinsey's work also helped distinguish the concepts of bisexuality and intersexuality, thus enabling subsequent researchers to legitimize bisexuality as a sexual orientation. MacDowall observes from the early studies that "[t]here has been an uneasiness with the fact that bisexuality defies the neat categories of *heterosexuality* and *homosexuality*; it blurs the lines and is 'messy' for society" (13; emphasis in original). In Kinsey's research, bisexuality was not recognized as a solid or mature sexual orientation but, along with its subversive characteristics, a challenge to the widespread belief in dichotomous sexuality.

In the 1950s and the 1960s, there were affirmative gay and lesbian psychological approaches that contributed to the depathologization of homosexuality. It was heartening to see the more positive conceptualization of homosexuality, but at the same time, the sexual binary was firmly established in defiance of Kinsey's acknowledgment of fluid sexuality. Sexual attraction to both males and females continued to be dismissed by many researchers as a psychological disturbance. Sex research tended to lump bisexuality into homosexuality as a transitory phase. Bisexual-affirmative research, based in psychology, empirical sociology, and identity politics, arose in the late 1970s in response to the cultural repudiation of bisexuality. The related studies of viewing bisexuality as a sexual orientation started making progress to acknowledge this perspective. For example, Blumstein's studies of bisexuality in men and women again questioned the sexual dichotomy by examining bisexual behavior among those who self-identified as heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual.

By the 1980s, the critiques of dichotomous categorizations of sexuality went on, and so did the search for bisexuality as a distinctive identity along with increased bisexual activism. American researcher Fritz Klein emphasized the complex and fluid nature of sexuality in his influential work, *The Bisexual Option*, in 1978. He further developed the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG) by extending the narrow focus of the Kinsey Scale on

sexual behavior, also drawing attention to attractions, fantasies, preferences, self-identification, and lifestyle, as well as changes over time (Klein et al. 38). KSOG was interview-based research showing that many of Klein's participants were ignorant of bisexuality as an identity (15). This observation demonstrated the lack of a clear definition of bisexuality because by then the public was ambivalent about bisexuality. Theorists agreeing with Klein's research model critiqued the fixed dichotomous models by underscoring the complex and fluid nature of sexuality. Notwithstanding the endeavor of validating bisexuality, the HIV/AIDS crisis from the 1980s onward overwhelmed the awareness of male bisexuality and questioned its very existence.

Thanks to the growing feminist movements for gender equality in the 1990s, research on bisexuality has received much more critical attention than in previous periods and it also reflected the tensions within queer communities. The majority of scholars came to concentrate on female bisexuality, but they overlooked the development of male bisexuality as well as the reassessment of masculinity. There were varied publications from activists and academics in interdisciplinary of social sciences, humanities, and geography. Many edited anthologies addressed personal histories and political perspectives. Hemmings notices that from the early 1990s, there were prevalent publications about "the relationship between feminism and bisexuality" or "the historical and first-person experiences of bisexual women" (*Bisexual Spaces* 17). Scholars of feminism then took a deconstructive standpoint to analyze bisexuality because of the apparent binary structures, such as men and women, heterosexuality and homosexuality, etc. The intervention of feminism distinguished the study of female bisexuality from male bisexuality and made it the main narrative of bisexual research. In addition to the feminist influence, the lack of a discussion of male bisexuality discussion may stem from the loss of bisexual male activists during the AIDS epidemic and the restrictiveness of traditional masculinity (Steinman 39). Hence, while female bisexuality

is discussed with sexual fluidity (Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity* 11), male bisexuality still confronts medicalization, sexualization, and denial because it threatens a decisive and stable masculinity (Eisner 201). As a whole, bisexual desires, experiences, and subjectivities become specific and uninhibited. However, fears of cross-border mobility and prejudice against fluid sexuality come thick and fast from not only from other members of queer communities; for instance, lesbian and gay people may think that bisexuality is a position of “fence sitting” for being indecisive or opportunistic (Pramaggiore 3). The unfriendliness is also from straight people with attitudes of denial. They may think that bisexual individuals are experimenting same-sex relationships or afraid of accepting their homosexual orientation. The above-mentioned situation leads further to bisexual erasure or invisibility.

The growth of bisexual research since 2000 has engendered intersectionality and interdisciplinarity. *The Journal of Bisexuality* has produced qualitative research on the development of bisexual identity and bisexual discourse analysis. Besides, there has been a growing scientific understanding of the links between sexual minorities, mental health, and racialized identities based on quantitative and lab-based psychological research. Bowes-Catton and Hayfield urge researchers to go beyond the organized bisexual community and “seek out new ways of engaging with the concerns and agendas of people outside them” (54). Despite various discussions, several issues raised in the 1990s remain unsolved, such as the imbalance between the bisexuality of different genders. Tyler Curry shares his concern for male bisexuality in the LGBTQ-interest magazine *The Advocate*, pointing out that male bisexual individuals are elusive because they are living in an environment that casts doubt on the legitimacy and authenticity of personal identity. The historical perspective on bisexuality reflects its transformation through biological, pathological, psychological, and sociological contexts. When it comes to identity politics in the current social and interpersonal context,

discussions about fluidity, continua, and self-interpretation of bisexuality are insufficient, as my review of related theories below will show.

THEORIES OF BISEXUALITY

From the historical background of bisexuality I trace above, it can be observed that the term bisexuality has been carrying a plethora of meanings. The range of divergent definitions leads, at least in part, to the inadequacy of theories of bisexuality. In this section, bisexual theory explicitly forms the focal point of the methodology. I review some discursive strategies that have been used by queer, feminist, and bisexual theorists to present the difficulties of their formation. I also shed light on the use of related theories in textual and literary analyses.

Discussions of identity-based politics have become fluid and malleable because of queer theory since the 1990s. However, Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell notice that “in its attempt at theorizing nonheterosexual identity, queer theory has unfortunately come to theorize only homosexual identity” (298). Experiences of lesbians and gays initially help bisexuals to identify themselves with non-normativity. The long-time dependence on lesbian and gay discourses later makes it difficult to see bisexuals. For instance, before bisexual subjectivity becomes visible, male bisexual individuals may express their life history and experiences via gay discourses. It is not until bisexuals find that lesbian and gay discourses cannot adequately convey their situation that they are eager to find their own voices: as Steinman points out, “the gay community’s advancement of gay and lesbian interpretations of non-heterosexual attractions and actions may function to restrict bisexual self-interpretations” (24). Therefore, several scholars have been attentive to enlarging the capacity of queer theory. Steven Angelides, who is dedicated to historicizing bisexuality, points out that bisexuality is likely to be found in past or in future because the current discussion of it is

situated in the binary system. By “in past,” he means an innate sexuality from Freud’s and Stekel’s theory, which will develop in heterosexuality or homosexuality. By “in future,” he means an ideal sexuality held up by the gay liberation movement in the 1970s, which represents optional sexualities instead of obligatory heterosexuality. He argues that “the elision of bisexuality from the present tense has been one of the primary discursive strategies employed in an effort to avoid a collapse of sexual boundaries—a *crisis of sexual identity*” (*History* 17; emphasis in original). The crisis indicates that both heterosexuals and homosexuals share a similar way of being identified—the partner’s sex/gender—and bisexuals undermine this form of identification. The predicament of bisexuality in queer theory is owing to the binary logic “[d]ominated by the field of gay and lesbian history . . . [and] the assumption that bisexuality is merely a by-product or after-effect of the hetero/homosexual opposition” (Angelides, “Historicizing” 128). However, building up another binary system between monosexuals and plurisexuals cannot help bisexuals out of this structural maze. People need a new way to discuss sexuality and negotiate bisexual subjectivity by its inextricable encounter with the binary system. In the matter of practical influence, Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell propose that “theories of bisexuality and queer theory will mutually inflect one another, ultimately forcing a reconceptualization of categories of sexual difference that extend far beyond our current notions of them” (313). With the involvement of bisexuality, queer theory needs to reconfigure its mode so that it can encompass other sexual possibilities.

Clare Hemmings provides a careful review of recent bisexual theorizing to demonstrate the progress of bisexual epistemologies in her prominent work, *Bisexual Spaces*, although she concentrates on “the increased interest in bisexuality as not only, or nor even, a sexual identity, but as an ontological or epistemological location from which to critically survey the current field of queer and feminist studies” (21). She outlines a few tactics that

have been frequently used to analyze bisexuality: The first one is to create a new binary system between bisexuals and monosexuals. This strategy ignores the differences between lesbians, gay men, and heterosexuals by putting them in the same category. It aims at revising social cognition of not just taking a partner's sex or gender as the only factor to conjecture one's sexual orientation. The second method is to postulate that bisexuality is a sexual identity with credibility and authenticity, and its significance needs to be redeemed from history because it is related to sexuality everywhere, but is everywhere repressed (qtd. in Hemmings 30). This argument makes the inclusion of bisexuality in discussing a sexual orientation too loose to be analyzed and offers no basis to designate bisexuality. It erases the nuanced variation of desires because those who do not strictly stick to one gender/sex are considered bisexual. The third technique is to shift, as many recent scholars do, "from a focus on bisexual identity to one of bisexual epistemology" and to focus on "how bisexuality generates or is given meaning in particular contexts" (31). On top of that, Hemmings distinguishes three primary approaches from this technique—one is to situate "bisexuality as outside conventional categories of sexuality and gender," another is to position "it as critically inside those same categories," and the last is to emphasize "the importance of bisexuality in the discursive formation of 'other' identities" (31). Hemmings criticizes these approaches for metaphorizing bisexuality because were people looking at bisexual subjectivity through the heteronormative perspective, people might not properly understand it. However, instead of providing a new perspective to recognize bisexual identity, she looks at identifiable bisexual subjects and communities to reinforce bisexual epistemologies.

Reading from a bisexual perspective can be a way to increase bisexual visibility, but it needs extra attention to read through the lens of bisexuality because "bisexuality occupies a space that is delineated by normative assumptions of heterosexual, monosexual, and cisgender experience" (Galupo 71). The conventional goal of reading bisexually is to

challenge the binary categorization. Knopf finds it ironic and difficult to do so because the term bisexuality signifies the idea of two: “bisexuality reifies the same gesture it undoes” (144). The published bisexual readings aim mostly at reclaiming bisexuality from gay (rarely) or lesbian (mainly) sexuality and reflecting the lack of bisexual subjectivity.

Both Kaloski and Knopf apply a bisexual reading to the protagonists in novels that were publicly read as addressing lesbian identity. They are of the same opinion that a bisexual reading would not necessarily contradict the lesbian interpretation. However, Kaloski argues that “a bisexual reading, unlike a lesbian reading, can *never* be a complete reading, and it/she will experience the ambivalences produced by the (lesbian) attempt at a wholesome text” (98; emphasis in original). Such ambivalence is akin to what I have noticed in the reviewers’ opinions about Elio’s sexual identity, which lies between homosexuality and heterosexuality. It is disheartening to see her putting what I consider to be the formation of bisexual subjectivity in a footnote: “a reading which speaks to a bisexual sense of self is one that tolerates not-knowing, flux, postponement and transition, and is aware of, but continually attempts to mediate between, multiple subject positions and the multiple relationships between them” (98n29). While Kaloski urges bisexual visibility, even risking it being lumped in with lesbianism, Knopf argues that “Reading bisexually means not assuming an either/or conclusion at the end of [the] text . . . to read and reread beyond dualistic hierarchies of binary desire” (158). It is futile to overturn the previous lesbian reading when both lesbian and bisexual perspectives are forming queer subjects. However, Knopf claims that “there needs to be room to think about different kinds of ‘queer’ subjectivities in as many contexts as possible” (143). In her rereading of *Two Serious Ladies* by Jane Bowles, Knopf reads under the scope of the sexual binary and emphasizes the bisexual character’s ability to “pass between and within both heterosexual and lesbian communities” (144). In this case, the discussion of bisexuality is based on established same-sex relationships with heterosexual

elements. Rereading lesbian/homosexual novels from a bisexual perspective between homosexuality and heterosexuality demonstrates bisexuality's fluid sexuality and extends the study of queer subjectivities. However, this strategy risks bisexual subjects of becoming invisible by the act of passing, which potentially indicates bisexuality as an option instead of a need.

Male bisexuality is in want of consideration and examination. Several researchers have revealed its erasure and invisibility caused by gender differences and the binary frameworks. When Denton attempts to redeem Oscar Wilde as a proto-bisexual character and reread his *Picture of Dorian Gray* as a bisexual work, he finds that bisexuality is hard to recognize at the end of the nineteenth century in Britain because a deviation from "normal" heterosexuality would easily be assigned as homosexuality, regardless of its complexity. Denton argues that the nature of sexual binary has continued to exist since then, which causes "[t]he problem inherent on dualistic perspectives" and "an inability to recognize or embrace any existing dimensionality" (480). Although Denton challenges the notion of a dichotomous system, he observes that bisexuality is noticeable because of the binary construction, and it is simultaneously rendered invisible by the same structure. As with Knopf's observation of female bisexuality in the lesbian community, Denton reveals that male bisexuality tends to be read as gay performance. Bisexuality is imperceptible in the domain of binary sexuality, so the attempt to reclaim bisexuality by rereading gay/lesbian novels is hardly successful. The rereading process not only indicates the limit of the binary system for more sexual possibilities, but also shows the need for a reading strategy for bisexual subjectivity.

Joseph Ronan's analysis attempts to maneuver the stereotype of bisexuality into subversive narrativity, as the term "queer" becomes a reading strategy to destabilize normativity. Without a consensus of what bisexual identity is or a ready definition, this approach risks endorsing the stereotypes instead of rightfully representing bisexuality. To

explore “bisexual textuality (or bitextuality),” Ronan takes the stereotype from the psychological perspective that bisexuality is immature and “repurposes ‘bisexuality as immature’ as ‘textual immaturity’” (87). Ronan subscribes to Eisner’s epistemological methodology: “these stereotypes should not be taken literally at all, but rather read as metaphors about the subversive potential of bisexuality” (Eisner 43). However, Ronan ignores Eisner’s endeavor to provide definitions of bisexuality and explanation of stereotypes beforehand. Thus, the metaphor he proposes lacks the shared meanings and associations between his target texts. In other words, Ronan accepts the stereotype of immaturity as the definition of bisexuality and finally falls into contradiction. The analogy he draws between textual immaturity on “adolescence as a particular discursive position” and bisexuality (88) has already shown his misunderstanding in the first place that sexuality is a choice, even though the scholarly references he makes tell him the opposite (Eisner 41; *Bi Academic Intervention* 208). For Ronan, maturity means being able to choose “according to a particular monosexist logic” (97), but this perspective invalidates the bisexual subjectivity by rendering it a passing phase. Although Ronan hypothesizes that the stereotype of bisexuality can be a way to challenge monosexism, little headway has been made in acknowledging bisexuality as a sexual orientation.

In an article analyzing James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* and *Another Country*, Beemyn supports Baldwin’s belief that “in our era of constant movement, of surfing and shifting subjectivity, Baldwin reminds us that our position is never fixed, and that we try to do so at the cost of being fixated on ourselves” (58). Despite Beemyn’s intention to address bisexuality in Baldwin’s works, he is not interested in merely rereading, arguing that “simply reinterpreting them as ‘bisexual novels’ would scarcely be more appropriate, for none of the characters explicitly identifies as bisexual” (58). Instead, Beemyn concentrates on Baldwin’s endorsement of sexual and gender fluidity in terms of bisexual and androgynous

behaviors. As I have traced in the history of bisexuality above, the term initially referred to a physical trait or psychological perplexity instead of a sexual orientation, but now there are more appropriate and precise terms such as “intersex” and “transsexual” to describe such physical characteristics. Baldwin appropriates the idea of an androgynous body to advocate the harmony between human beings: “But we are all androgynous, . . . because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are part of each other” (qtd. in Beemyn 57). Baldwin’s idiosyncratic androgyny deals with the fluidity of gender, sexual, and racial identity. Beemyn’s employment of bisexuality here can be seen as the metaphorical force of fusion. However, without a clear delineation, much as Hemmings throws doubts on broadly incorporating bisexual meaning, it turns into vagueness. Beemyn concentrates on the fluid elements of bisexuality, and he argues that such fluidity between races, classes, genders, and sexualities in Baldwin’s novels results in a “breaking down of rigid identity categories and the recognition of individual complexity” (65). An ideal goal made in the article is to “see ourselves and each other beyond simplistic categories and narrow, isolated identities,” and yet Beemyn does not explicitly show how the narrow identity categories restrict people to a greater or lesser degree (70). His failure might rather reveal the insufficiency of current categories. Repudiating the use of labels or categories before modifying or expanding their capacity is rather arbitrary.

Adding bisexuality to existing sexual categories helps readers further explore more sexual possibilities. Renouncing categories may create inconsistency in discussion. When Fairington scrutinizes the bisexuality in Kinsey’s sex research, she asserts that there are many reasons for people not to self-identify as bisexual, so “it might make sense to drop the identity categories altogether and go back to Kinsey’s purely behavioral approach whereby research subjects are asked about their activities and fantasies but not about the labels they

use” (268). Fairyington ignores the very fact that, as indicated previously, bisexuality was not regarded as a sexual orientation as Kinsey developed this model: “The term bisexual has been used in biology for structures or individuals or aggregates of individuals that include the anatomy or functions of both sexes” (Kinsey 657). Beemyn also supports Fairyington’s viewpoint by arguing that “researchers need to ask about sexual attraction and behavior, rather than how people label their sexuality” (qtd. in Fairyington 268). Beemyn seems to ignore the fact that, unlike other sexual orientation labels such as lesbian, gay, and straight, the label of bisexual receives relatively little or only stereotypical public acknowledgment. Perhaps scholars who agree with this notion tend to regard labels as inaccurate or restrictive. It is rather unconvincing to discard labels because, at a fundamental level, labels can also be descriptive and informative for people who want to know about this community and those who want to ascertain their own sexuality.

This brief review of bisexual theories reveals some significant problems, one of which is the formation of identity before being recognized. Calhoun points out that “Self-knowledge—always a construction no matter how much it feels like a discovery—is never altogether separable from claims to be known in specific ways by others” (10). Lacking self-knowledge of bisexuality, bisexuals use the binary concept of sexuality and the binary identification of gender to express themselves. Intuitive though it appears, a way of telling one’s sexuality that depends on the gender of one’s partner is not suitable for everyone. If gay and lesbian identities continue to be viewed as the only alternatives to straightness, the importance of a person’s same-sex attraction and sexual experiences may be lessened or dismissed. Such a perspective may ensure that people of fluid sexuality continue to be ignored. The review also shows that people’s understandings of sexuality are varied and probably change through time. Therefore, it is worth noting that a bisexual reading would not necessarily contradict the gay or lesbian interpretation of texts. A bisexual reading may

provide another perspective for readers to examine characters' self-knowledge, and it may challenge readers' identification of sexuality.

READING BISEXUALLY

In her research on distinguishing romantic love and sexual desires, Diamond points out that “the association between same-gender sexual and affectional feelings is that they are somehow related yet somehow distinct” (“Sexual Orientation” 187). As a sexual orientation, bisexuality presents these intricacies by showing both the unpredictable process of a person forming a romantic attachment with another and the recognition of such a desire. For bisexual individuals and those who identify their sexuality other than as part of the binary system, it is not about choosing to be with men or women; instead, it is a question of finding a way to think about who they are. Accordingly, it is necessary to have a way of reading, looking, and making bisexual subjectivity visible.

A bisexual reading strategy entails particular themes of texts. It is ideal for texts whose characters have the following traits: sexual behaviors and/or feelings toward, emotional attachment to, and/or desires or fantasies for, both men and women or people of different genders. My goal of this thesis is not to make a list of all possible aspects of bisexual people because they depend on personal life experience. For example, there may be bisexual subjects who engage only in relationships with those of the opposite sex but also have intense feelings for those of the same sex; and there may be those who think that bisexuality is merely a temporal phase for them. I am not attentive to its typology. Instead, I am intrigued by the reasons they choose or give up such an identity in certain milieux; or more exactly, to capture a character's state of mind. Some texts may overlap with gay or lesbian texts. Reading those texts from a bisexual perspective may allow readers to examine whether bisexuality is considered as a potential sexual orientation for characters in the first

place. If so, readers can analyze how characters negotiate their bisexuality along with the presence of heterosexuality and homosexuality. If not, there are questions for readers to ponder on: Do characters strictly abide by the notion of sexual dichotomy? Would claiming bisexuality be helpful for characters to challenge the status quo? What is at stake if characters are bisexual?

Most sources about bisexuality in sociological studies, such as Swan and Habibi's *Bisexuality*, Hall and Pramaggiore's *RePresenting Bisexualities*, Bi Academic Intervention's *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire*, Angelides's *A History of Bisexuality*, and Storr's selection of critical texts on bisexuality, for example, demonstrate binegativity, measurement of sexuality, mental health, and the label's value at an interpersonal level. According to these sources, looking at action, agency, and idiosyncrasies of potentially bisexual individuals is meaningful. Such an effort also resonates with Young's suggestion of reading bisexually: "Any theoretical work on sexuality in general would be greatly enhanced by an examination not only of what bisexuality means for bisexuals, but of how it functions in larger discourses around sexuality as well" (70). Given that literary works have been instrumental in shaping and reshaping readers' ideas of the world by depicting characters in detail, this suggestion urges readers not only to search for unity, coherency, and harmony among characters' actions, desires, and identities, but also to rethink the contemporary perception of sexuality. A bisexual perspective foregrounds a personal tendency instead of social stereotypes.

Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name* is a suitable text to read bisexually. Aciman does not specifically label any kind of sexuality on characters; instead, he encourages readers to put themselves in characters' shoes and to experience their feelings. I focus on an analysis of Elio's bisexuality because as a first-person narrator, he provides a detailed illustration of his mind regarding sexuality. I also look at Oliver's potential bisexuality and how he deals with

it. Moreover, there are scenes that provide rich metaphors of fluid sexuality. To read *Call Me by Your Name* from a bisexual perspective, in the next chapter I first analyze Elio's sexual attraction and behavior toward characters of different genders, revealing the intricate manifestation of subjectivity and the negotiation between self-perception and communal cognition. Readers may observe that although Elio is aware of his sexual desire for men and women, he encounters problems expressing it. In the chapter after that, I will examine how same-sex and opposite-sex relationships pose different risks or new possibilities for a bisexual subject by borrowing the concept of queer temporalities.

The recognition of bisexuality in *Call Me by Your Name* may extend the understanding of sexuality, which is about not just behavioral patterns but sophisticatedly expressing personal wants and desires, and comprehensively reflecting the development of characters in a certain context rather than answering statistical questions. The inventive potency of literature can fill the gap between theories and reality, for "literary training and focus on language may hold out the greatest promise for new interdisciplinary discussions since it is at level of language, of metaphor, and of rhetoric that new connections across fields can begin to be imagined" (Martin 371).

Chapter Three

Awakening of Bisexual Identity

An unapparent connection is stronger (or: better) than one which is obvious.

—Heraclitus, Fragment 54

This chapter analyzes *Call Me by Your Name* from a bisexual perspective to scrutinize Elio's sexual identity. Despite the attention given to the same-sex relationship between Elio and Oliver, I argue that Aciman's novel is a bisexual man's coming-of-age story, and it deserves a more broad-ranging discussion than simply treating the protagonist as gay because of its distinctive same-sex relationship. Elio narrates his passionate affair with Oliver in retrospection, and through Oliver, Elio finds that his sexuality is not limited to women. Therefore, I focus on the process of how Elio confronts his same-sex attraction while having an opposite-sex relationship with Marzia.

Most people tend to take the gender of one's lover, rather than personal experience or self-knowledge, as the criterion for identifying one's sexual orientation. However, this kind of reading makes it difficult for bisexual individuals to substantiate their sexual identity if they do not get involved with a man and a woman simultaneously. I would like to note that I discuss bisexuality in this novel as a sexual orientation that one can identify with, rather than as a form of relationship, because when it comes to the invisibility of bisexual identity, some scholars have argued that, "Expectations of monogamy, and monosexism, also reinforce the expectation that human relationships themselves can only be defined as either straight or gay" (McLean 85). This argument shows why readers should not use only relationships to define a person's sexual identity. It suggests that it is problematic for bisexual individuals to claim such a sexual identity if they are in a monogamous relationship, but on the other hand, straight or gay people can also have nonmonogamous relationships. Besides, gay or lesbian

individuals may also choose to establish opposite-sex relationships because of social pressure. In other words, relationships reveals one's sexual identity only to a limited extent. I am not saying that the partner's gender is not important, but readers should first look at how subjects recognize their sentiments about the objects of their desire so that they would discover other possible sexualities. An ideal sexual identity should reflect a person's sexual orientation while not conflicting with a person's sexual relationship(s).

Given the social background in the mid-1980s, when homosexuality had just been depathologized and the AIDS pandemic had started, Elio undergoes quite different experiences to form his bisexual identity from his relationships with Marzia and Oliver. As a sexual orientation, bisexuality “encompasses a continuum of relational possibilities including, sexual behaviors and/or feelings towards, emotional attachment to, and/or desires or fantasies for, both men and women. These attractions do not have to be acted on or equal in either their magnitude or in the ratio . . .” (Swan 55). Such a continuum can be observed through a coming-of-age narrative in the novel, which “not only narrate[s] the character formation of their hero but also discuss[es] their concept of [formation] in an implicit or explicit way” (Engel 267). Those profound moments of the formation of selfhood foreground the protagonist's life experience. Meanwhile, in *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed argues that the term “orientation” indicates a spatial formation because it is related to subjects, objects, and the world. “Sexuality would not be seen as determined only by object choice, but as involving differences in one's very relation to the world—that is, in how one ‘faces’ the world or is directed toward it” (68). I divide the discussion of Elio's sexual identity into three sections. The first addresses Elio's idiosyncrasy, which reflects not only on his sexuality but also on his way of thinking and using language. The second analyzes Elio's awakening of bisexuality through his forming attachments with Marzia and Oliver. The concluding section elucidates Elio's self-recognition of his relationships with Marzia and Oliver so far.

ELIO'S IDIOSYNCRASY

The elaborate description of Elio's infatuation with Oliver convinces many readers that the book is a gay romance and hence the narrator is gay, but the story is about a bisexual man falling in love with another man. Regarding his sexuality in retrospect, seventeen-year-old Elio reveals that "no one my age had ever wanted to be both man and woman—with men and women. I had wanted other men my age before and had slept with women" (25). This information shows that Elio has interest in both men and women, but those experiences have not been the same. Elio has fantasized about men but he may have no idea how to express his affection. On the other hand, despite having sexual behaviors with women, Elio may not have close relations with women to share emotional intimacy. While forming his bisexuality through Marzia and Oliver, Elio also learns that relationships may take a turn that one cannot anticipate but can only react to.

In response to heterosexuality and heteronormativity, Judith Halberstam takes those who develop queer temporalities—a timeline or moments in life not scripted as heteronormativity like marriage, reproduction, rearing children—as realizing other modes of being and a "way of life"; by this term she means that such a form of self-description "has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space" (1-2). Such a self-description reflects personal ideology and history. Music is Elio's unspoken language to convey the state of mind that he considers "a token of something very beautiful in me that would take no genius to figure out and that urged me to throw in an extended cadenza" (Aciman 13). Enjoying transcribing music on distinct instruments from piano to guitar, Elio shows his agency for diverse expressions by mixing different musicians' ways of playing to speak for him. For example, when Oliver asks Elio to play again Bach's piece that he had played on guitar, Elio deliberately plays it on the piano, first in Busoni's manner and then in Liszt's. Until Oliver was irritated, Elio played it in his own way while thinking: "I

was sending it to him as a little gift because it was really for him” (13). Elio’s attitude toward music and its interpretation shows that for him there is no certain way to express oneself, and hence he writes at the end of his diary dedicated to Oliver that, “We are not written for one instrument alone; I am not, neither are you” (13). The way Elio performs the same piece of music on varied instruments and in various manners can be read as a metaphor that suggests that he does not confine his affection and sexuality to a specific gender of people.

How an individual uses language potentially informs their sexuality. In an article examining the intersection of sexual and linguistic fluidity from individual experience, Lyn Wright argues that “Language, gender, and sexuality are closely intertwined, and language ideologies, alignments and identities influence and are influenced by sexualities” (178). She draws on fictional characters from novels, considering that the genre provides situational contexts for the characters to practice their languages and sexualities “in ways that research reports in the social sciences rarely do” (197). Most importantly, she suggests that people can shape flexible and shifting identities through the practices of sexual and linguistic fluidity because fluidity, associated with mobility, runs across borders of culture, history, and politics (179). One scene in the novel showing linguistic fluidity takes place in Rome when Elio and Oliver encounter a street performer playing Dante who would mumble a passage of a canto from *Inferno* in Italian if tourists kept tossing coins. Elio finds that no one but him recognizes the touching citation of the Fifteenth Canto, where Dante meets his teacher Brunetto Latini, who is in hell because of sodomy. Brunetto is a sympathetic character who reminds readers of whether homosexual acts or relationships are still considered against the natural order. Following the passage from the *Inferno*, the performer deliberately recites a Roman drinking song after two American tourists toss him just a few tiny coins and makes the locals burst out laughing. Oliver is bewildered because he cannot tell the difference between the two Italian citations. Elio explains the context to readers and Oliver by saying that “unless you know it,

it's not funny" (175). On the surface, the scene seems to show that without knowing the language, one cannot figure out the intertextual links in a context. Still, despite knowing a language, one may not understand the content as readily as Elio recognizes the specific passage of the *Inferno*. I regard Elio's words "unless you know it" as a suggestion of knowing sexuality, especially the difference between bisexuality and homosexuality, which both contain same-sex desire but need explanations to distinguish them.

Although Lyn Wright's research bestows mobility to multilingual individuals, I argue that such capacity depends on the act of practicing, which demands courage when it comes to emotion and sexuality. In the novel, Elio is multilingual, but he tends to avoid speaking out about what he really feels when he talks to Marzia and Oliver. Elio buys himself and Marzia two copies of poetry entitled *Se l'amore* [*If Love*]. After receiving the poetry, Marzia wants to understand Elio's gesture by asking why he bought her this particular book. Despite knowing the intention of Marzia's question, Elio answers in their mother tongue, "*Perché mi andava, because I felt like it*" (114). His response vexes Marzia, and Marzia's irritation makes Elio aware of his passive attitude: "Perhaps I didn't want to believe what she was implying for fear of having to answer for my behavior" (115). A similar situation happens when he is with Oliver. Elio maneuvers his fluidity to manifest the interplay of language and sexuality. Elio accidentally reveals his hidden emotions after the two men translate Leopardi's poems :

. . . all the while delving deeper into Leopardi's world, we were also finding occasional side alleys where our natural sense of humor and our love for clowning were given free play. We translated the passage into English, then from English to ancient Greek, then back to gobbledeglish to gobbledygitalian. Leopardi's closing lines of 'To the Moon' were so warped that it brought bursts of laughter as we kept repeating the nonsense lines in Italian—when suddenly there was a moment of silence, and when I looked up at him he was staring at me . . . (Aciman 158-59)

Perhaps the multiple languages and attempts to translate the last few lines of Leopardi's "To the Moon" reminds Elio that his feeling for Oliver will be memorable: "Oh in youth, when hope has a long road ahead/ and the way of memory is short,/ how sweet it is remembering what happened,/ though it was sad, and though the pain endures!" (113). Garofalo discusses the importance of the moon to Leopardi by seeing that, "The moon becomes the understanding of his vicissitudes, the one to whom he can open his heart without possible ridicule" (356). After they are together, Oliver mentions that he knows Elio's secret affection by seeing Elio blush when they look at each other during a brief silence. From Elio's expression, readers can learn that he is too timid to speak his mind and that his words and actions may contradict each other.

Swan has made additional relevant remarks on the definition of bisexuality: "These attractions do not have to be acted on or equal in either their magnitude or in the ratio of men and women to whom they are targeted" (55). This is a significant yet easily overlooked point. Even though readers know Oliver is Elio's idea of love, this conclusion comes from Elio's experience of interacting with both Marzia and Oliver. In other words, Elio loves Oliver more than Marzia, but it does not indicate that what Elio and Marzia share is invalid. In the previous chapter regarding bisexual history, readers can observe that bisexual temporalities are often mistakenly or deliberately ascribed to heterosexual or homosexual temporalities because of the binary or dichotomy perspective. A traditional bisexual reading looks at the subject's interaction with objects of different genders individually, instead of the subject's awareness of bisexuality as an undivided whole. The bisexual perspective I propose is to notice, in addition to sexual behavior and desire, the experience of "being" bisexual. Even though Elio has feelings for both men and women, his sexuality entails relational changes over his interactions with different objects. Elio's recognition of sexuality shows a transformative change from a teenager exploding with hormones to a man who knows whom

he loves. The development of Elio's subjectivity meets his awakening of bisexuality interwoven with his profound feelings for Marzia and Oliver.

The only scene where the three characters get together shows their interrelated development. After playing tennis doubles, Oliver reaches out and gently squeezes Elio's shoulder; he later claims that the gesture is a "sign" of affection he gives to Elio, but the way Elio reacts makes Oliver feel like he was a molester (160). Elio, on the other hand, first convinces himself that delicate touch is "in imitation of a friendly hug-message," but he abruptly frees himself from Oliver because he feels panicked by something akin to "what startles virgins on being touched for the first time by the person they desire" (15-16). Regardless of the hidden tenderness, the mistaken signals put both men in an embarrassing situation because they do not even know what the other man is thinking. Therefore, from Marzia's perspective, it seems that the boy she likes maybe hurt and she cares about his pain:

"Here, let me make it better." He was testing me and proceeded to massage my shoulder. "Relax," he said in front of the others. "But I am relaxing." "You're as stiff as this bench. Feel this," he said to Marzia, one of the girls closest to us. "It's all knots." I felt her hands on my back. "Here," he ordered, pressing her flattened palm hard against my back. "Feel it? He should relax more," he said. "You should relax more," she repeated. (Aciman 16)

Those knotted muscles and knots of sexual confusion tangled within Elio's body while Marzia and Oliver are willing to ease them. Perhaps Marzia has already picked up the perceptible affinities between Elio and Oliver among those knots, but it does not bother her to be protective of Elio because she also has feelings for him as the story unfolds. This scene also reveals that Elio tends to remain passive until Oliver and Marzia take action. In the process of exploring his sexuality, Elio learns and improves himself through his two objects.

He thinks about Marzia when he is with Oliver, and vice versa. Although I analyze Elio's two relationships independently, I will also show how they interact with each other.

ELIO AND MARZIA

The narrative based on Elio's memory of Oliver leaves the impression that Marzia is a substitute for Oliver or simply a passing infatuation. Yet, the interaction between Elio and Marzia deserves a more detailed discussion due to its impact on Elio's self-knowledge and sexual identity. A few scenes in the novel show that their interactions carry their own weight. Elio and Marzia dance past midnight and decide to have a late-night swim together. Honest and insightful, Marzia sees through Elio's passivity to his emotions, asking him whether his being with her is simply because Oliver is with the other girl. Elio tries to avoid such an inquiry about his sexuality by "feigning a puzzled look" (50). After their swim, Elio takes the initiative to kiss Marzia. The mutual attraction makes the two kiss each other heartily and agree to meet at the same spot the following night. Even though Marzia asks Elio not to tell anyone about that night, Elio shows off to his father and Oliver as if in a game between men by saying, "We almost did it" (50). The two grown-ups encourage Elio to try again later. Oliver asks Elio the question that happens to be the chapter title of the novel: "If not later, when?" (51). The term "later" in this context suggests the time one needs to find the courage and the will to reach out again. The scene also shows that at the time Elio almost has sex with Marzia, he does not even dare to recognize his feeling for Oliver. It is the reciprocal affection shared with Marzia and her straightforwardness that urge Elio to face his same-sex desire.

After Elio plucks up the courage to tell Oliver his feelings and the two men have their first kiss, Elio becomes vexed and frustrated when Oliver gives no more attention to him. Those emotions remind him of Marzia: "It never crossed my mind that I too was a traitor, that somewhere on a beach near her home a girl had waited for me tonight, as she waited every

night now, and that I, like Oliver, hadn't given her a second thought" (96). Elio starts guessing and presuming what Oliver's attitude represents until he decides to ignore Oliver. Elio's father asks him to ask Marzia out unless he is avoiding her. "Not avoiding—but she seemed full of complications . . . Even being with her would challenge me in one way or another. I didn't want to be challenged" (111-12). Elio is no less complicated because he is not good at dealing with the emotions caused by others but craves attention from people he likes. Despite the complaint, Elio enjoys their date in a bookstore.

Marzia, like Elio, is afraid of getting hurt by someone who has not made up his mind yet, but what makes her different is that she is willing to talk about her feelings and clear the air. The bookstore scene shows that dissatisfied with his young age, Elio is eager to have more life experience instead of enjoying what he has. When Marzia is still rereading the poem the two read together, Elio cannot wait to turn the next page and give advice to the couple near them looking for good Italian novels in translation. Elio buys the poetry about love and gives it to Marzia after he kisses her behind the ear. It is Marzia's turn to figure out what Elio's intentions are. While Marzia is angry at Elio's evasion of her question about their relationship, Elio thinks to himself: "Perhaps I'd been ignoring every one of her signals on purpose: to draw her out. This the shy and ineffectual call strategy . . . Had Oliver been doing the same thing with me?" (115). Their conversations then turn into those between two loving people trying to align their feelings. Marzia shares her thought that people who like to read tend to hide who they are, and explains why. "People who hide don't always like who they are" (115). She is suggesting that Elio, who is devoted to reading, may not be truthful. After Marzia confesses that she sometimes hides as well, Elio suddenly becomes brave enough to ask Marzia whether she also hides from him. The question is a turning point for Elio because he has been reading people and situations based on his own imagination. When reality does not align with his imagination, he becomes discouraged. Marzia answers with her own

concern: “No, not from you. Or maybe, yes, a bit . . . Not that you mean to hurt anyone, but because you’re always changing your mind, always slipping, so no one knows where to find you. You scare me” (116). Marzia points out Elio’s characteristics that no others ever do, and her candor fascinates Elio.

Marzia shows Elio that passion and vulnerability coexist if one recognizes and follows desire. After they get to know each other further, the two become intimate. During those erotic moments, Elio even pictures their lives together. While Elio is mentally scanning through the location where they may have sex, Marzia utters words with audacity and tenderness, which make Elio feel perplexed for a second: “*Sei duro, duro*, you’re so hard . . . *Ma tu mi vuoi veramente bene*, do you really care for me?” (117). Marzia’s unabashed affection again reminds Elio of his tenuous connection with Oliver. Not to lose his desire for Oliver inexplicably, Elio decides to leave a note to him and composes it while kissing Marzia passionately: “*Can’t stand the silence. I need to talk to you*” (117). Although Elio may have doubts about his same-sex desire, it does not bother him to forge a romantic opposite-sex relationship. Besides, it is through Marzia that Elio earnestly speaks out his desire for men and women.

ELIO AND OLIVER

Despite the awareness of his same-sex desire, Elio takes a long time to confess his true feelings for men, at least to Oliver. The narrative mixes adult Elio’s love for Oliver in memory, which has lasted for two decades, and young Elio’s exploration of his feelings towards Oliver.

Jewishness and Queerness. Their shared Jewishness first forges the connection between Elio and Oliver. Oliver’s open attitude towards his Jewishness makes Elio come to embrace his

same-sex desires. Aciman does not stress Jewish history in Europe or whether Elio's family has been oppressed. Still, he endows this identity with a vicarious and "repressed shame" and intimacy for the protagonist (19). The same-sex desire is implicitly associated with the Jewish identity in the novel. As Roden analyzes the novel from a religious perspective, being Jewish in a Catholic country equates, in a social sense, to being queer in a heteronormative world (201). Pavel, Oliver's predecessor, is an anti-Semite who unconsciously offends Elio's family because they are "Jews of discretion," as Elio's mother claims (228). They do not celebrate this identity nor forget it. Elio fantasizes about Oliver when he first looks at Oliver's applicant photo before meeting him. Oliver's face, hair, and shirt are imprinted in Elio's mind, reminding Elio that he himself replaced desire with fear on that sixteen-year-old afternoon because of his secret sexuality (228). Elio expects that Oliver would be someone who can share his same-sex desire as well as his Judaism at the same time. Seeing Oliver fine with being Jewish—wearing the Star of David necklace and talking about it—helps Elio himself overcome the insecurity of accepting a significant part of his identity.

Out of discretion, Elio uses Jewishness to subtly express his strong feelings for Oliver when he is not ready to touch on the hidden same-sex desire. Just when Elio is taunted by Chiara, the girl from the neighborhood who also adores Oliver, for being "a well-behaved boy," Oliver comes to his rescue and replies that Elio's reading Paul Celan is a rebellious act (48). Paul Celan, a Jewish poet whom both men adore, is as proxy to enact Elio's emotions. Elio addresses their inextricable connection in this interior monologue:

Me Jewish, Celan Jewish, Oliver Jewish—we were in half ghetto, half oasis, in an otherwise cruel and unflinching world where fuddling around strangers suddenly stops, where we misread no one and no one misjudges us, where one person simply knows the other and knows him so thoroughly that to be taken away such intimacy is *galut*, the Hebrew word for exile and dispersal. (49)

Elio's inner voice speaks out the historical and religious root within the Jewish community and his self-identification. Elio further adopts Celan's words to convey his profound emotions and complicated state of mind. When both men avoid talking about their feelings for each other after their first kiss, Elio inscribes a line from Celan and a few words on the endsheet of a novel he gives to Oliver: *Zwischen Immer und Nie [between always and never], for you in silence, somewhere in Italy in the mid-eighties* (105). Elio wants Oliver to remember that the silence tells a lot in a desperate attempt to remind them of ignoring their sentiments. Elio exercises their spiritual but imaginary connection to convey the idea that sharing each other's bodies is for a return to a kind of union:

This is like coming home . . . like coming home to a place where everyone is like you, where people know, they just know—coming home as when everything falls into place and you suddenly realize that for seventeen years all you'd been doing was fiddling with the wrong combination. Which was when I decided to convey without budging, without moving a single muscle in my body, that I'd be willing to yield if you pushed, that I'd already yielded, was yours, all yours, . . . (Aciman 15)

Jewishness has a long history that both men can learn to cope with it from their parents or the community, but same-sex desire is rarely a blood-wise connection or a topic to discuss with others. In his *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, John Boswell notes the similarities and differences between Judaism and homosexuality:

[T]he fate of Jews and gay people has been almost identical throughout European history, from early Christian hostility to extermination in concentration camps. The same laws which oppressed Jews oppressed gay people; . . . the same periods of European history which could not make room for Jewish distinctiveness reacted violently against sexual nonconformity; . . . But there are significant differences, . . . Judaism, for example, is consciously passed from parents to children, and it has been

able to transmit, along with its ethical precepts . . . Moreover, it has been able to offer its adherents at least the solace of solidarity in the face of oppression . . . Gay people are for the most part not born into gay families. They suffer oppression individually and alone, without benefit of advice or frequently even emotional support from relatives or friends . . . (15-16)

Elio experiences the same struggle to confront same-sex sexuality, seeing himself insulated from his family, relatives, friends:

There was no one to speak to. Whom could I tell? Mafalda? She'd leave the house. My aunt? She'd probably tell everyone. Marzia, Chiara, my friends? They'd desert me in a second. My cousins when they came? Never. My father held the most liberal views—but on this? Who else? Write to one of my teachers? See a doctor? Say I needed a shrink? Tell Oliver? Tell Oliver. There is no one else to tell, Oliver, so I'm afraid it's going to have to be you . . . (61)

Here Elio again experiences the same feeling of having “no one” to talk to or share with as he expresses his attraction to men and women. Elio's anxiety reflects the similar path that gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals may undertake. Against such anxiety, the novel suggests that bisexual individuals' opposite-sex relationships may calm their worried minds when they want to follow their same-sex desire. After all, Elio finds the courage from the relationship with Marzia to tell Oliver about his feelings.

Same-sex Desire. In addition to Jewishness, the other connection lies in adult Elio's hindsight that Oliver and he share the resemblances in many characteristics, especially their intuition and sexuality. Elio diligently looks for terms as a smokescreen to conceal his affection, but his romantic feeling unfolds as he repeatedly fantasizes about Oliver. The affinities between them draw Elio to Oliver “with a compulsion that [overrides] desire or friendship or the

allurement of a common religion,” and his thoughts of Oliver transform with intimacy as long as they have conversation and interaction (22). The compulsion may refer to Elio’s surprise at finally meeting someone just like him for the first time: “What never crossed my mind was that someone else who lived under our roof . . . that someone else in my immediate world might like what I liked, want what I wanted, be who I was” (25). On top of that, Elio explicitly talks about their resemblance in sexuality despite the age difference: “no one my age had ever wanted to be both man and woman—with men and women. I had wanted other men my age before and had slept with women” (25). Even though Elio’s self-revelation indicates the potential acknowledgment of bisexuality, his sexual identity is still theoretical because Elio has no experience of creating an affectional bond for other men. Elio does not tackle his same-sex desire, either in mind or in reality, until he meets Oliver.

Due to his lack of same-sex experience or knowledge about it, Elio first comprehends his same-sex attraction through his imagination and experience with the opposite sex. Elio’s statement of “being both man and woman—with men and women” can be understood as his desire to love a man like a woman and love a woman like a man. Elio compares himself with Chiara when she and Oliver have intimate interaction: “Sometimes it was Chiara who had to be eliminated. I knew what she was up to. At my age, her body was more than ready for him. More than mine?” (42). Elio’s jealousy is not just about physical maturity but his insecurity of probing into uncertain feelings. “What I didn’t realize was that wanting to test desire is nothing more than a ruse to get what we want without admitting that we want it” (43). Such desire alludes to his bisexual inclination: “I dreaded losing him to her. Dreaded losing her to him too. Yet thinking of them together did not dismay me. It made me hard, even though I didn’t know if what aroused me was her naked body lying in the sun, his next to hers, or both of theirs together” (43). The desire that Elio projects on Oliver engenders his self-image as a woman. “It never bothered me to think of him between a girl’s legs as she lay facing him, his

broad, tanned, glistening shoulders moving up and down as I'd imagined him that afternoon when I too had wrapped my legs around his pillow" (67). Even after the two men kiss each other for the first time, Elio still imagines himself as a woman while visualizing the sexual contact with Oliver: "I'd make sure to turn him on as he pinned me down while I wrapped my legs around him like a woman" (87). Heteronormativity affects Elio's presumptive understanding of sexual behavior; his lust for Oliver is still based on the imagination of one man and one woman instead of two men. Imagining himself as a woman in his fantasy may also imply the untold impact of the AIDS epidemic and Elio's inherent conflict about having sex with men as well. The paradox of physical and emotional desire for men will disturb Elio again when he is about to have sex with Oliver (127).

Elio has sensed and experienced different degrees of same-sex attraction prior to Oliver, but he only admits and recalls those episodes after becoming emotionally and physically intimate with Oliver. Oliver's presence is evocative of Elio's past and latent homoerotic experiences. Elio's first same-sex arousal is at the age of fourteen when he encounters an errand boy who shows interest in him, but all Elio could do is cast back "a troubled look." Elio turns down the boy and other boys after him because of uncertainty, shyness, and passiveness while remembering the event with rue: "I could have—easily—I didn't" (176). Despite all probability, Elio wants Oliver to know that he is the first man Elio has ever pursued. Oliver also elicits Elio's belated awareness of affection from other men. The uncanny feeling of stares between men strikes Elio once again when he sees Oliver holding the postcard from Maynard, the previous summer guest. The front of the postcard is the picture of Monet's *berm*, a rendezvous that Elio regards as his secret spot and where he first speaks out his feelings to Oliver. The back of the card inscribed—*Think of me someday*—reminds Elio of the latent lust that Maynard attempted to express when Elio was fifteen. Elio remembers the scene when Maynard came to his room, staring at him while Elio

was wearing only a bathing suit. However, Maynard's silence causes "an awkward moment" (221). With the benefit of hindsight, Elio makes no pretense of his inexperience by saying that, "But I wouldn't have said no" if Maynard takes the initiative (221). The desire expressed through stares and silence is unfulfilled and even unconscious for Elio at the time. Elio's experience with the errand boy and Maynard also shows that sometimes people do not grasp their sexuality if they are still in doubt. Moreover, some attractions only come to be realized with exposure over time. Elio does not fully recognize his same-sex sexuality until he speaks out his affection to and has physical intimacy with Oliver, shifting his position from the object of others' desire to the subject who pursues his own desire.

Confession and Silence. Aciman attempts to reflect the difficulties of exposing intimacy by repeatedly making his characters lapse into silence and then break it. When discussing silence in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault tackles oppression and the discourse of power-relations with the argument that, "There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed. . ." (27). Moreover, breaking free from oppression is not just about "who" and "how" but also "where" and "when." Time and space are meaningful frameworks for one's sexual identity and its revelation. Overwhelmed by the imagination of sexual intimacy with Oliver, Elio decides to confront Oliver with his feelings so that he can be sure of himself. Same-sex desire unfolds in the synthesis of confession and silence between the two men. Elio takes three times to finally express his feelings to Oliver, and those three spaces where Elio attempts to confess play a psychological role in revealing the relations between self and others.

Elio first uses a story to conceal his feelings while prying on Oliver's thoughts in the residential garden. The garden, generally regarded as a liminal space between the inside and

the outside, also bridges the connection between the private and the public (Alexander 868). The location suggests Elio's tendency to show his interiority. The story he tells refers to *Heptaméron*: a knight falls in love with a princess but has no idea whether he should express his love or not. "Tell me, [my Lady], is it better to speak or to die?" "I would always advise my friends to speak," she replied quickly, "because there are very few words that can't be remedied, but once you've lost your life, there's no way of getting it back" (Navarre 2257). What constrains the knight from expressing his affection is owing to his social status, and therefore the expression may sabotage their current relationship. As Roden argues, "Literature shapes their unconsummated union"; the literary references and anecdotes become a means of expression for Elio and Oliver (203). Although the knight does confess in the story nevertheless, Elio tells Oliver that the knight fudges. Elio evades the real question and his unreserved admiration despite his wish for Oliver to encourage him to speak up. On the other hand, although Oliver senses Elio's ulterior motive, he agrees with the knight's compromising attitude. Roden doesn't see the silence as "the Wildean love that dare not speak its name" but the slogan "Silence = Death" from the social activism of the AIDS crisis that embodies "the closet of 'gay disease'" (203). Roden's association between silence and death here implies that same-sex desire is inevitably doomed because of the disease. However, the "Silence = Death" slogan tended to ask people to raise their awareness and speak up about their status. The mutual silence between Elio and Oliver is rather like a performance of being closeted as described in Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, in which she argues that such a silence is "not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in the relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (3). Hence, the shared silence can be seen as a strategy for the two men to tell their feelings without the act of mentioning while the silence carries different meanings for

them: for Elio, it is about how to tell his affection to Oliver; for Oliver, it is about how to conceal his feeling from Elio.

After listening to the story, Oliver sits “silently a moment” and then asks Elio to go downtown with him (69). They leave the domestic realm for a public space to continue the unfinished topic. Although his second attempt to confess is silenced by Oliver in a public square, Elio discovers a side of Oliver he had never seen before. The scene moves to the piazzetta overlooking the sea, where Oliver probes Elio’s feelings by asking him whether he knows the story about Percy and Mary Shelley. Elio briefly retells the dramatic episode “*Corcordium*, heart of hearts,” when Mary Shelley kept her husband’s heart before his body was cremated on the shore (71). Following the story, Oliver wonders how Elio seems to know everything. Elio seizes the chance to speak his unspoken affection for the first time, saying “If you only knew how little I know about the things that really matter. . . . Because there is no one else I can say it to but you” (72). However, aware of Elio’s intention to confess, Oliver promptly breaks off their conversation and leaves to find his translator to avoid responding to Elio. While waiting for Oliver, Elio looks at the war memorial centered in the square, entertaining the idea of how their conversation is going to be remembered by others. That monument in the open space signifies Elio’s determination to let his feelings be recognized. After Oliver returns, Elio notices that he is dodging the subject, but Elio does not want to pretend that nothing had happened between them:

“I wish I hadn’t spoken,” I finally said.

I knew as soon as I’d said it that I’d broken the exiguous spell between us.

“I’m going to pretend you never did.”

Well, that was an approach I’d never expected from a man who was so okay with the world. I’d never heard such a sentence used in our house.

“Does this mean we’re on speaking terms—but not really?”

He thought about it.

“Look, we can’t talk about such things. We really can’t.” (Aciman 75)

Departing from his previous strategy of using a story, Elio speaks for himself this time to break the silence. Sedgwick argues that “the fact that silence is rendered as pointed and performative as speech, in relations around the closet, depends on and highlights more broadly the fact that ignorance is as potent and as multiple a thing there as is knowledge” (4). Oliver’s deliberate ignorance of the ongoing same-sex sexuality provokes an emotional response from Elio. Elio finds that his agony, shame, and secrecy stemming from his lust for Oliver is gone because now Oliver is cognizant of his feeling. This is also the first time the two men address their potential affection explicitly. Despite Oliver’s unwillingness to discuss what they have brought to light, Elio ventures to confess one more time.

Elio’s third confession confirms his same-sex sexuality through physical interaction with Oliver. Elio brings Oliver to his secret spot with its temporality and individual space for the two men to reveal their desires without disruption. The spot where Monet came to paint is covered by olive trees and palm trees near the edge of the cliff, “not a sign of civilization anywhere, no home, no jetty, no fishing boats” (76). As on the previous two occasions, Oliver keeps giving Elio the runaround about Elio’s vague confession and is unwilling to discuss same-sex attraction. While the two men stare at each other, the silence they share teems with their sexual desires and tensions. Despite his own saying that “I have to hold back,” Oliver cannot help but flirt with Elio and finally kisses him as a kind of test (79-81). After their first kiss, Elio gives Oliver a more violent kiss, containing Elio’s own doubts about his sexuality and their relationship. Elio realizes how much he enjoys this serene sense of intimacy with Oliver. However, Oliver seems to simply want their relationship to stop at the kiss by exercising self-censorship:

[Oliver:] “We can’t do this—I know myself. So far we’ve behaved. We’ve been good. Neither of us has done anything to feel ashamed of. Let’s keep it that way. I want to be good.”

[Elio:] “Don’t be. I don’t care. Who is to know?” (Aciman 82)

Despite the consensus of their feeling, the two men’s attitudes toward same-sex sexuality are quite different from each other. From Elio’s confession, it is easy to observe how he overcomes uncertainty and fear and finally dares to express himself. Oliver’s silence and self-restraint show how much he considers the ramifications of revealing his feelings.

CONCLUSION

From Elio’s guarded exploration of his sexuality with Marzia and Oliver, readers may observe that it is not easy for bisexual subjects to confront the part of less-explored sexuality. Elio’s awakening of bisexuality reflects the subtle nuances of his identity and the different ratio of feelings that a bisexual subject may have with men and women. The first and most crucial step for Elio is to consciously perceive and recognize his attractions to more than one gender so that he can further ponder on his connection with others instead of keeping himself away from others.

Chapter Four

Exposure of Bisexuality

I investigate myself (or: I made enquiry of myself).

—Heraclitus, Fragment 101

In *Find Me*, the sequel to *Call Me by Your Name*, adult Elio talks about his family and his fluid sexuality: “I was a quiet child and by the time I was eighteen or so it was clear that my inclinations ran in all ways. I said nothing at first, but I am forever grateful that my father made it easy for us to speak about matters most parents are reluctant to even hint at” (176). It takes time for Elio to show his certitude about his own sexuality because when he was a teenaged boy, he was not so sure about his feelings for men and women; of them, his feelings for men were hard to talk about with others. Aciman consciously avoids adopting labels to describe the desire fluctuating between the characters in *Call Me by Your Name*, but there is already a given societal norm that reminds readers that sexuality is a correlational synthesis composed of personal, communal, and social traits. In *Love Between Men in English Literature*, Hammond points out that there are varied forms of affection between men and not all of them are exclusively homosexual. He believes that strategies are needed to “resist both the negative stereotypes of homosexual love, and the predominance in literature of the language of heterosexual experience” (3). Reading bisexually provides a nonexclusive way for readers to ponder on nonheterosexual sexuality as a component of identity. In the exposure of bisexuality, it takes time to reveal the nuances between romantic love and sexual desire, which can be accomplished by avoiding falling into binary assumptions. This chapter first discusses the differences between monosexual and bisexual perspectives on reading sexuality in *Call Me by Your Name*. It also examines bisexual subjects’ recognition of their sexuality intersected with queer temporalities.

Bisexuality is able to redeem from the retrospective rewriting of past experiences because to recognize one's bisexual identity, the subject may need to go through "a continuum of relational possibilities" (Swan 55). Such a continuum refers not only to possible objects of different genders but also the time a bisexual subject needs. That is to say that bisexual subjects may initially see themselves as heterosexuals or homosexuals with fluid sexuality and later self-identify as bisexual after they become sure of themselves. The process of recognition shows the potential risks posed by same-sex and opposite-sex relationships for a bisexual subject, such as monosexual and heteronormative presumptions. Despite intense passion, Elio's recognition reflects his doubts and confusion about sexuality between men: Elio is aware of his attraction to men and women, but he dates only girls until he meets Oliver. The difficulty for Elio is not just to confess to someone of the same gender because he also needs to adapt to another realm of sexuality. Not until Elio dispels his misgivings about sexual feelings and behaviors for men and women does he find himself more romantically attached to Oliver than to Marzia. In hindsight, as a bisexual subject, Elio's sexual desire for Marzia (women) is not in conflict with his profound affection with Oliver (men).

Monosexuals and bisexuals may hold different views on sexual desire, romantic love, and identity when the former is more exclusive and the latter is nonexclusive. For monosexual subjects, their objects of love are either homosexual or heterosexual, and their sexual orientations denote their sexuality solely through the gender of their objects of attraction, so the romantic love they perceive in a sexual relationship likely comes in degrees instead of among a range of other possibilities. Reading Elio from a monosexual perspective or through the lens of the homosexual/heterosexual binary would fall into comparison and negate Elio's heterosexual experience when it is not as momentous as his homosexual

relationship. Such negation may further create discrimination and a stigma against fluid sexuality and reinforce the sexual dichotomy.

Although many results show that bisexual men have sexual desire for both men and women, heterosexual people still consider that “a man who engaged in sexual behaviors with more than one gender was perceived to be more homosexual and less heterosexual than a woman who engaged in the identical behaviors,” and that gay and lesbian people assume that “bisexual men are actually gay and just have not come out yet” (Flanders 129). Flanders argues that these viewpoints may stem from the different obligations and social norms embedded with gender roles, where they intersect with the concept of masculinity (132). In their article regarding male psychology and intimate relationships, Smiler and Heasley find that males’ close relationships mostly occur when there are opportunities for bonding, such as the military, religious settings, and sport teams, where emotional expressions and spiritual support are appreciated (576). Despite men’s capacity for “emotional intimacy” in close same-sex friendships or potential romantic relationships, “they often lack a context within which such relationships might form” (Smiler and Heasley 576). It is possible that the early psychological hypothesis about nonheterosexual sexuality still affects people’s imagination of sexuality. There are many tendentious statements that are expressed in heterosexual language: homosexual men are female souls trapped in male bodies; or there were two souls in a bisexual subject and the male soul is looking for female objects, and vice versa. Therefore, lots of research and theories pertaining to sexuality are exclusively gendered in binary concepts: man and women, male and female, masculinity and femininity.

The juxtaposition of monosexual and bisexual perspectives is not to deny the differences between homosexuality and heterosexuality or to equate their social status to each other, but rather to reveal their respective effect of reading. Monosexuals can apply binary concepts to discuss sexual orientation assuredly because the aforementioned categories are

related to each other, especially when a subject can only embody one trait at a time. A heterosexual subject's possible objects are of the opposite gender and a homosexual subject's possible objects are of the same gender. If one must look at bisexuality from a monosexual perspective, a bisexual subject will only be recognized when the subject can simultaneously embody male and female traits, as in what is known as intersex people, and the object is the same. After all, no human subject can spontaneously and reversibly switch between being a man and being a woman. Discussion of sexual identity based on an exclusive binary concept comes at the expense of voices from bisexual subjects or others of plural sexualities on the sexual landscape. Since bisexual subjects are attracted to more than one gender, they would have an inclusive inclination for multiple desires while also having as exclusive a view on a certain object of love as anyone who wants to form a romantic relationship.

BISEXUALITY AND QUEER TEMPORALITIES

Theory of queer temporalities may help readers understand Elio's agitated and contradictory state of mind about his same-sex sexuality. This concept has become an important topic within queer theory for both its literal and theorized meanings. Queer theorists argue that there are schedules, calendars, and uses of time that "seem natural to those whom they privilege" and "internalize the given cultural tempos and timelines" (E. Freeman 160-61). For example, a heteronormative individual is expected to get married and have children, but nonheterosexual people may find themselves misfits in these situations in the first place. Therefore, those who adopt queer timelines have their own timetables or simply live in every moment by refusing or creating the imagination of the future. Halberstam finds temporality significant to queer subjects because they exist "in [a certain] place at [a certain] time," and they are "engaged in activities that probably seem pointless to people stranded in hetero temporalities" (qtd. in Dinshaw et al. 181-82). Queer temporality posits a corresponding

concept to the social script, “a mode of implantation through which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts” (E. Freeman 160). “Somatic facts” refer to physical changes or reactions through time such as puberty, orgasm, illness, and death. Nonheterosexual people would have different temporal experience, and those temporalities can also be shared with surrounding people. In *Call Me by Your Name*, queer temporalities describe the structure of time by mixing adult Elio’s memory and young Elio’s presence, mainly comprised of Elio’s exploration of bisexuality and connections with his friends, lovers, and family.

Reading Elio Bisexually. Elio does not fully recognize his bisexuality until he relinquishes control over monosexual choice of heterosexuality or homosexuality. Through developing his relationships with Oliver and Marzia, Elio notices that his bisexuality is allowed him to have opposite-sex and same-sex feelings at the same time without contradicting each other. Although Elio reveals his interests in men and women early in the novel, the process of establishing his own bisexuality is rather challenging. Elio looks at his sexual desire from a predominantly monosexual perspective and sidesteps his bisexual romantic feelings because he abides by hidden social norm: a non-heterosexual feeling or relationship is homosexual. Hence, the main obstacle that Elio needs to overcome before living his bisexuality is to deal with same-sex intimacy physically and emotionally.

Despite his fluid sexual desire, Elio seems to be stuck in a dilemma of being heterosexual or being homosexual until he has sufficient experience with men. Given that Marzia is not the first woman that Elio dates and has sexual intimacy, Elio may not encounter a revolutionary sense of feeling with her like what Oliver brings to him. Some of Elio’s thoughts regarding same-sex sexuality have changed after he creates a deeper connection with Oliver and approaches to bisexuality. Not deemed as a social norm, the secretive same-sex affection makes the relationship between Elio and Oliver distinctive. Unfamiliar with sex

and relationships between men, Elio first would picture himself as a woman while imagining having sex with Oliver (87). However, after having sex with Oliver, Elio no longer regards himself as a woman and even uses terms that refer to sexual preferences within the queer community: “I had never done this for anyone else in my life, and yet here I was, making certain that not a speck of the shell fell into his egg. . . . Just because he’d let me be his top last night” (157). Besides, Oliver is Elio’s first same-sex lover, so everything that occurs in their relationship might carry unusual meanings. Fluid nature allows a bisexual subject to move from one sexuality to another. Recalling their best moments together, Elio describes the state of being emotionally androgynous when he is with Oliver: “. . . and next to me my man-woman whose man-woman I was” (161). Such mobility is hardly present in reality when identifications of sexuality are socially and monosexually distinguished.

Elio also shows his prejudice against homosexuality because of his angst of desiring Oliver. Picturing what the life of two men together would be like and persuading himself to have sex with Oliver are the means of Elio’s resistance to the dominant hetero timelines. Aciman depicts Elio’s frivolous attitude and curiosity about homosexuality when a gay couple visit Elio’s parents. He jokes about wearing a purple shirt and the couple’s flamboyant outfit. It shows that the lack of gay representation in Elio’s life makes Elio presume he would also be comical by claiming his same-sex desire. During his waiting time for Oliver, Elio finds himself “shadowed by the thought” of having more in common with the gay couple than his parents or anyone else in his world (123). Despite his sexual desire for men, Elio is not positive about having a relationship with men. Many emotions teem within Elio’s mind, and he imagines all kinds of possible situations: Oliver may stand him up or finally show up but reject him. While he thinks about losing his virginity to a man, Elio hears the voice of his deceased grandfather saying, “*Don’t try, don’t try this, Elio*” (127). Roden argues that the lovemaking between men is an ethical problem and “the threat to patriarchal futurity” (204).

However, Elio's sexual drive convinces him of the opposite: "But I loved the fear—if fear it really was—and this they didn't know, my ancestors. It was the underside of fear I loved, . . . I loved the boldness that was pushing me forward; it aroused me, because it was born of arousal itself" (127). Despite the potential risk, Elio transforms the unknown fear of same-sex desire into an incentive for him to figure it out. By rejecting the idea of futurity, Elio is in immediate proximity to bisexuality in queer temporalities.

Heteronormative and queer timelines do not necessarily overlapped, and those who try to pass through both simultaneously may feel displaced. Although Elio always has a strong sexual desire for both men and women, he experiences self-doubt, shame, and repulsion after having sex with Oliver. Aciman illustrates a sex scene with Elio's thought on what is happening: "Now this. I was on the cusp of something, but I also wanted it to last forever, because I knew there'd be no coming back from this" (133). What is on the cusp is not just a sex act, but a choice that would make Elio depart from the social norm and everything he used to be. Elio feels pain, discomfort, a dream come true, and a sense of coming home with Oliver. Their carnal union is articulated by Oliver saying "Call me by your name and I'll call you by mine," an expression of a depth of intimacy that Elio "never shared with anyone in [his] life before, or since" (134). However, despite his intense affection with Oliver, Elio feels "self-loathing and remorse" the next morning and hopes Marzia would be there to save him from "a whirlpool of anxiety" and help him "rebuild" himself (135). His first sexual experience with a man has reshaped Elio, and also reflects the fact that a bisexual subject may initially encounter different degrees of feelings toward men and women. From Elio's response to his own doing, Elio may be considered a heterosexual man with fluid sexual desire for men and women at that moment of self-doubt: "Would I always experience such solitary guilt in the wake of our intoxicating moments together? Why didn't I experience the same thing with Marzia? Was this nature's way of reminding me that I would rather be

with her?” (150). Against the risky same-sex relationship and the unknown, unstable development with Oliver, Elio relies heavily on his sexual attraction for women to dispel his sexual desire for men. Elio finds his bisexual attraction discordant.

Elio does not have much to consider when he is with Marzia. For example, when the couple are about to have sex, Marzia asks Elio, “Do you really care for me?” while Elio is thinking about where the best location to have sex would be: “my mind was racing ahead to the berm. Should I propose it? . . . I knew we’d run into other lovers around there. Otherwise there was the beach. I’d used the spot before. Everyone did. I might propose my room, no one at home would have known or for that matter cared” (117). Elio’s thought shows the social tolerance for relationships between men and women. Those places are less private, or people know the purpose of going there as a couple. Elio enjoys a brief feeling of triumph in the sense that he hardly feels desire toward Oliver because he now loves the smell of Marzia on his hand and loves “the all-woman in every woman” (118). By focusing on Marzia, Elio does not have to care about his unfulfilled sexuality for Oliver even though he knows that desires for women and men are not interchangeable. He treats his lovemaking with both genders as acquired skills: “It never occurred to me to hide from Oliver what I was doing with Marzia. Bakers and butchers don’t compete, I thought” (151). By temporarily denying his deeper affection, Elio ensures that his bisexual identity stays at the behavioral level. Ironically, questioning bisexual men’s sexual arousal toward men and women is a common way to deny male bisexuality. Flanders finds it strange in the first place to see that bisexuality can only be defined by patterns of physical sexual arousal (130). Related research has been conducted to ascertain bisexual men’s attraction to both sexes (Jabbour et al.). Focusing on bisexual subjects’ sexual arousal originates also from a monosexual perspective because it expects bisexual subjects to stand on the side of either homosexual or heterosexual by rejecting the

fact that people may have feelings for more than one gender but not necessarily in equivalent amounts. Besides, the ascendant interest in homosexuality also suppresses other possibilities.

Fortunately, Elio's concerns about same-sex relationships soon pass. He starts indulging himself with his bisexual fantasies when he is about to masturbate with a ripe peach: "If Oliver walked in on me now, I'd let him suck me as he had this morning. If Marzia came, I'd let her help me finish the job. The peach was soft and firm, and when I finally succeeded in tearing it apart with my cock, I saw that its reddened core reminded me not just of an anus but of a vagina" (146). The maturity of the fruit and Elio requires time. The ripe peach is a metaphor for Elio's recognition of his bisexuality. Similar to the third stanza of Lee's "From Blossom," the peach also discloses many layers of meanings related to time:

O, to take what we love inside,
to carry within us an orchard, to eat
not only the skin, but the shade,
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold
the fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into
the round jubilation of peach. (21)

Elio tries to keep emotional distance from Marzia and Oliver because he relies heavily on his perception of their response. He is afraid they will see through his pretense of indifference. However, both Marzia and Oliver push Elio to encounter his emotions. There comes a time when Elio stops complying not just with sexual desire but with feelings and even the possible development of romantic relationships: "It was the first time I kissed him with feeling, not just desire" (154). It is a turning point for Elio to think about what he likes to do with Marzia and Oliver rather than their genders and sexuality. After their physical intimacy, nothing changes significantly between Marzia and Elio. They do what they do as usual: dating in the piazzetta, going to the movies, visiting bookstores. This sense of a pattern

of daily life is amicable. However, the affection between Elio and Oliver becomes more intense as the summer draws to an end. Elio feels they do not have enough time to be together: “‘We wasted so many days—so many weeks.’ ‘Wasted?’ I don’t know. Perhaps we just needed time to figure out if this is what we wanted’” (155). The time Elio considers wasted proves to be unforgettable in his life. Besides, it takes time for them to make sure of their bisexuality when neither of them has established a close relationship with another man.

Reading Oliver Bisexually. Oliver, another bisexual character who also experiences his queer temporalities when he is with Elio, can also be seen as a role model in a heteronormative timeline. Everything readers know about Oliver is from Elio’s point of view, and hence, his own thoughts on bisexuality are insufficient. He is young and promising, about to publish his first book and teach in college. Initially, his relationship with Elio is more like competitors of masculinity and intelligence. When he stays at Elio’s house, he dates girls from the neighborhood and makes Elio feel jealous. It is possible that the seven-year age gap between Elio and him makes Oliver stave Elio off several times. Oliver also hides his same-sex desire and refuses to confront it. After he kisses Elio for the first time, he immediately exercises prudence: “We can’t do this—I know myself. So far we’ve behaved. We’ve been good. . . . I want to be good” (82). Although Oliver attempts to hold back his feelings for Elio, he finally reveals them. Oliver has sexual experience with other men before meeting Elio and knows what changes it would bring to a man, so he carefully keeps his distance from Elio. Yet, they still consummate their desires and their first sex does not turn out to be as fervently anticipated for a moment.

Oliver’s reaction to Elio’s vibes reflects how people engaged in same-sex relationships may take a skeptical attitude with fear. Unlike Marzia when she asks Elio whether he cares about her, Oliver knows it takes more than care to make their sexuality

work. Nonheterosexual relationship would risk a person's social status in the 1980s, as it still does nowadays. When Elio approaches Oliver and touches him lovingly without saying much about his feelings, Oliver has to confirm they have come to a consensus: "You sure you want this? . . . We haven't talked" (131). Oliver is dismayed by Elio's agitation and uneasiness. Elio observes a side of Oliver he has never seen before: "For the first time in my life I watched him balk, prey to self-doubt" (136). Elio simply tries to adapt himself to the discomfort from anal sex and ponders over whether it is worth enduring the pain despite his infatuation for Oliver. Not knowing what causes the sudden indifference between them, Oliver is frightened at the thought of Elio's passive attitude by asking, "Are you going to hold last night against me?" (140). Oliver shows his vulnerability to Elio and hopes Elio will understand that he is not simply looking for fun. The two men soon become intimate again when Oliver straightforwardly talks about his emotions: "Do you understand how glad I am we slept together? . . . For you, however you think of it, it's still fun and games, which it should be. For me it's something else which I haven't figured out, and the fact I can't scare me" (143-44). What Oliver has not figured out is not clear here, but the common experience the two men have is self-doubt and a sense of shame toward their same-sex sexuality. Although both Elio and Oliver show their attraction to men and women, they also share the fear that their selfhood is threatened by the act of same-sex sexuality.

The restless summer weeks can be seen as a break for Oliver from his heteronormative timeline. Despite their intimacy, Oliver does not tell Elio about having a girlfriend back in America until he is getting married. Oliver's reluctance of disclosing his same-sex desire may stem from his idea of family. Oliver thinks Elio is lucky to have a father who is open-minded because his would send him to a correctional facility (227). Elio's father acknowledges the special friendship between Oliver and Elio by addressing the friendship between Montaigne and Etienne de la Boétie: "Parce que c'était lui, parce que c'était moi

[Because it was him, because it was me]" (223). Oliver possibly never thought that he would ever have a chance to build up a deep connection with a man, so he did not cling to it. That summer is as queer temporality for Oliver to indulge himself and embrace his bisexuality with Elio. The two men exchange and cherish those unspoken signals: lust and desire, guilt and shame.

Shared Queer Temporalities. The three-day trip in Rome before Oliver leaves for America is Elio and Oliver's shared queer temporalities, in which they feel released and "in the same spirit of avoidance" (187). Besides, the party they join for a poetry reading is meaningful for Elio as well: "Every glance that crossed my own came like a compliment, or like an asking and a promise that simply lingered in midair between me and the world around me" (183). The poet is the author of *Se l'amore*, whom he and Marzia had met before. He shares the poem entitled "The San Clemente Syndrome," referring to a stratified site that has at least four layers of history underneath it. The structure of many layers is multidimensional: "like the subconscious, like love, like memory, like time itself, like every single one of us, the church is built on the ruins of subsequent restorations . . ." (192). The poem resonates with Elio's thought about sexuality early in the novel: "*We are not written for one instrument alone*" (13). A sexual subject can have more than one sexuality. The poem also reminds Elio of his relationships with Oliver and Marzia. Oliver is like the top layer of Elio's sexuality, which makes him wonder: "Whom else would I ever be able to call by my name? There would be others, of course, and others after others, but calling them by my name in a moment of passion would feel like a derived thrill, an affectation" (187). It is also the defining moment for him to leave Marzia and see her as the layer beneath Oliver: "I remembered Marzia . . . How far, how different. How thoroughly unreal she'd become" (187). The

relationship between Marzia and Elio becomes part of Elio's history, continuing to shape his identity.

The poet's story in Bangkok was the original inspiration for "The San Clemente Syndrome," which is about his encounter with an androgynous person and his potential bisexual desire. The story attempts to break the stereotype of genders and how people take genders of their objects of affection to recognize their sexuality. The androgynous person challenges the poet's identification of his attraction by asking: "Do you want me man or woman?" (196). Not knowing how to answer, the poet said: "I want you as both, or as in between" (196). The whole scene seems to be Aciman's play of his idea pertaining to the theme: "Most of us don't know who we are sexually" (qtd. in Harman n. pag.). The poet's speech on the San Clemente Syndrome ends with a salutation in Italian, which toys with grammatical gender categories in linguistics: "'*Evviva il sindromo di San Clemente* [Long live the San Clemente Syndrome].' . . . '*Sindromo* [Syndrome] is not masculine, it's feminine, *la sindrome*.'" (196). People ponder on their own experience related to the San Clemente Syndrome after the talk. For Oliver, he thinks the poem "is to help us see double"; for Elio, he reflects on the movement of time: ". . . one thing leading to the next, to the next, to something totally unforeseen, . . ." (197).

The above queer temporalities are not just shared with those in the party. When Elio is back from Rome, Elio still feels insecure talking about his relationship with Oliver to others. Elio's father bridges the gap between heteronormative and queer temporalities by imparting how time and body affect one's identity from his experience, without explicitly discussing the romantic relationship between Elio and Oliver:

I may have come close, but I never had what you had. Something always held me back or stood in the way. How you live your life is your business. But remember, our hearts and our bodies are given to us only once. Most of us can't help but live as

though we've got two lives to live, one is the mockup, the other the finished version, and then there are all those versions in between. But there's only one, and before you know it, your heart is worn out, and, as for your body, there comes a point when no one looks at it, much less wants to come near it. Right now there's sorrow. I don't envy the pain. But I envy you the pain. (225)

The scene implies the intersection between heterosexual and queer timelines. By saying that he envies the pain Elio has, Elio's father indicates that such pain is not scripted to a heterosexual timeline. However, I argue that Elio's father is framing a new form of futurity for his son: a life that an elder man and father could not live again, which is to feel different kinds of emotions while young. Elio's father's speech also reflects the fact that no matter what is scripted to timelines, getting old and feeling weary are inevitable, so people should live as who they are instead of making a pretense for others.

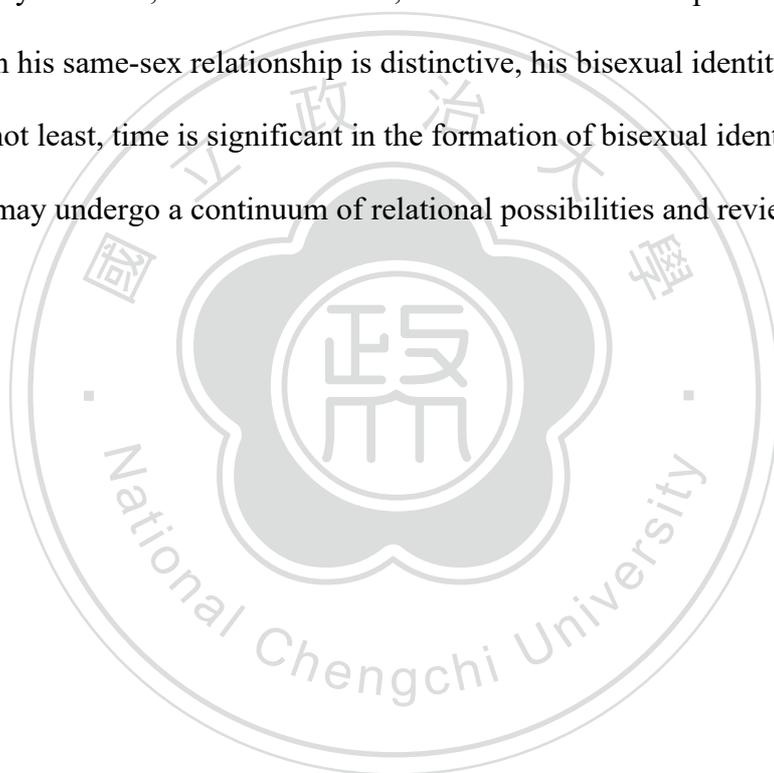
Personal Queer Temporalities. Queer temporalities mean differently to bisexual subjects like Elio and Oliver because they have opportunities to adopt a timeline similar to heteronormativity. Halberstam argues that, "Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to the logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction and death" (2). Elio takes Oliver as a marker of time on his timeline. Elio imagines what the other Elio would be like if he did not meet Oliver in that summer, but then he thinks that there will always be an Oliver who makes a change in him: ". . . would either of us understand why the other became who he is, would either be surprised to learn that each of us had in fact run into an Oliver of one sort or another, man or woman, and that we were very possibly, regardless of who came to stay with us that summer?" (229). Elio feels fortunate to have met Oliver in his young adulthood because

Oliver has let him know what he wants in life: “If I were to punctuate my life with the people whose bed I shared, and if these could be divided in two categories—those before and those after Oliver—then the greatest gift life could bestow on me was to move the divider forward in time” (230). Although there are many successors to Oliver, Elio has only have short-lived relationships with them because Oliver is irreplaceable. The whole story can be seen as Elio’s way of keeping his queer temporalities with Oliver.

Despite his affection for Elio, Oliver is married and has two kids. Elio pays Oliver a surprise visit after fifteen years but their reunion is not remarkable as their previous time together. “He was suddenly distant, as if stricken by the fear that we had met in a place he didn’t care to remember” (232). It is possible that Oliver has affairs with men secretly, so he is still cautious about bringing his same-sex inclination to light. Elio declines Oliver’s invitation to visit his family because he is not ready to accept the new Oliver. “The very possibility of meeting his family suddenly alarmed me—too real, too sudden, too in-my-face, not rehearsed enough. . . . Or was it that I was jealous of his family, of the life he’d made for himself, of the things I never shared and couldn’t possibly have known about?” (233-34). The two men discuss their affair, and their past feels uncanny, for they both want to relive that period of time. Moreover, they feel like they are still living their past history while their lives keep moving on, just like the notion of the San Clemente Syndrome. Both of them describe their lives as “a coma” or “a parallel life” because they are not with each other (240). Their circumstance is also consonant with Michelle Wright’s recapitulation of queer temporalities: “the self always being selves in moments of acute consciousness, alive and aware through interactions composed of a multitemporal moment rather than a linear narrative” (301). In Elio and Oliver’s case, once a bisexual subject is in a relationship with an object of a certain gender, the possible sexuality with the other gender may be put into a coma or run parallel despite being lively.

CONCLUSION

The exposure of Elio's and Oliver's bisexuality reveals a few perspectives that people would use to describe sexuality—binary, monosexual, and bisexual. Reading bisexually allows readers to observe the nuances between sexual desire, sexual behavior, and romantic love. The fact that Elio and Oliver are so different is proof of how much individuality sexuality can contain. In them, two seemingly contradictory sides of manhood come together. Most importantly, a subject's sexual identity and relationships do not necessarily align with each other. That is to say that Elio, as a bisexual man, establishes relationships with men and women. Although his same-sex relationship is distinctive, his bisexual identity cannot be erased. Last but not least, time is significant in the formation of bisexual identity because a bisexual subject may undergo a continuum of relational possibilities and review self-identity in retrospection.



Chapter Five

Conclusion

Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an *attitude*, and *orientation of character* which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not toward one ‘object’ of love.

—Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, p. 43

Furthering research on bisexuality within LGBTQ+ studies is important because as a sexual orientation, bisexuality is generally misunderstood and partially appropriated by its homosexual or heterosexual behavior. However, a sexual identity is more than what a person does; it also reflects a person’s self-knowledge and the interaction with others. Often, bisexuality cannot be addressed properly because of its varied meanings, leading to ambivalent discussions between genders and sexual orientations. With a clear definition, bisexuality can distinguish itself from a merger of heterosexuality and/or homosexuality. First and foremost, building up a romantic relationship with a man or a woman does not make a bisexual subject gay, lesbian, or straight. People consider a bisexual person as heterosexual or homosexual mainly because people tend to take a person’s object of affection in relationships as an indicator of his or her sexual identity.

The above-mentioned misunderstanding is quite common in reading literary novels. Aciman’s *Call Me by Your Name* is a typical recent example. In this novel, the protagonists, Elio and Oliver, are regarded as gay because of the love between them. Yet this perspective ignores Elio’s romantic relationship with Marzia as well as Oliver’s marriage afterwards. Therefore, I propose a revised reading strategy—reading bisexually—to locate characters’ bisexuality and reveal the paradoxical confrontation between bisexuality and homosexuality. Such a method of reading is appropriate to apply when characters experience different

degrees of affection or behavior toward people of more than one gender. It also looks at time and space for bisexual subjects to confront their own identity and negotiate it with others. Traditional readings of bisexual novels focus on characters' less-discussed relationship, emphasize the inadequacy of sexual dichotomy, and even tend to get rid of all kinds of sexual labels. Unlike those readings, my method, with the premise of clear definitions, stresses the importance of a bisexual category as a way of knowing, and I also draw attention to bisexual subjects' recognition of their attractions to other objects of desire and how those attractions further reflect their subjectivity. Reading Elio and Oliver carefully from a bisexual perspective reveals the nuances between love and desire for men and women.

By reading Elio bisexually, readers can not only understand a bisexual person's interaction with different genders but also adopt a nonexclusive perspective regarding sexuality. When heterosexual or homosexual people have relationships with others, people tend to examine personality traits of objects of affection and the degree of love they are showing because all potential objects are expected to be opposite-sex or same-sex. However, such connections are nonexclusive: in Elio's case, although his relationship with Oliver is more profound than his with Marzia, this does not mean that his attractions to women should be forsaken.

This research can be a stepping stone to further research on masculinity, manhood, forms of relationship, etc. The application of reading bisexually to more literary fiction may continue to challenge dichotomous thinking, and bring comparison and refinement within queer studies. Finally, I do hope this thesis can approach Fromm's idea of love: "love is exclusively an act of will and commitment, and that therefore fundamentally it does not matter who the two persons are" (52).

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