

## Returning to Repair: Resolving Dilemmas of the Postcolonial Queer in Lawrence Scott's *Aelred's Sin*

Lee Easton and Kelly Hewson

To read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*: to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. (Sedgwick 24)

We initially began this project thinking about ways in which postcolonial discourse and queer theory might speak to each other and produce, perhaps, a kind of synergy.<sup>1</sup> We were intrigued by the work of luminaries in each critical field which pointed to the need to deal more concretely and critically with the role of affect. In an interview in *Race, Rhetoric and the Postcolonial*, Homi Bhabha asserts that “in our contemporary moment, the politics of difference, the politics of community, the politics of communities of interest have such a deep and strong affective charge that we now have to understand the part that emotions, affects, play in the construction of community politics” (34). Similarly, in her preface to *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, Eve Sedgwick contends queer theory must shift from exclusively paranoid ways of knowing/reading to an emphasis on affective ways of knowing/reading. She urges a move *beyond* preoccupations with oppression and regulation to examine how affect enables repair: to recognize that many queers have been remarkably successful in (re)constructing painful experiences into objects capable of providing sustenance in the face of oppression. Taken together, these commentaries invite an exploration of possible ways of understanding the operations of affect in postcolonial and queer reading strategies.

Initially our conversations centred on the similarities between Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Lawrence Scott's novel, *Aelred's Sin*. We also considered including Shyam Selvadurai's much-analyzed *Funny Boy* and Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* to develop our conceptual frames. However, while we had not envisioned a single-text focus, *Aelred's Sin* alone proved especially generative as we continued our explorations of affect and Sedgwick's notions of paranoid and reparative readings. Through our collaboration, we found Scott's text enabled us, from our respective theoretical positions, to assess how postcolonial and queer readings intersect with and contest one another in unexpected ways. Our focus, then, is not so much on achieving a reading of a particular, provocative text—in this case Scott's *Aelred's Sin*—but rather how the mutual interrogation of postcolonial and queer assumptions can produce both paranoid *and* reparative readings.

When we re-read the book and met to talk about it, our responses were rich and wide-ranging, but tellingly, they were convergent on a particular textual moment, a moment we initially characterized as an awkward bit of scaffolding, the least integrated bit in the text. The moment in question is Scott's description of a painting in the monastery his protagonist enters, featuring a black boy "looking up plaintively" (78) like the dog which is sitting beside him, at the face of an imposing, sumptuously dressed white man.<sup>2</sup>

The more we talked, however, the more we began to realize that the description of the picture, far from being an unwarranted "extra," is in fact central to understanding the problematics we want to investigate. While being open to the possibility that our moment of textual queer-ness is an effect of our whiteness—that is to say that this same moment might mean differently for those who identify as racially non-white<sup>3</sup>—we want to propose that our response to the picture might also be symptomatic of the challenging space Scott's novel creates—an overlapping, conflictual space where the queer and the postcolonial intersect. Our response is also symptomatic, we contend, of the tension that exists between paranoid and reparative readings.

This novel begins with Robert de la Borde re-tracing the steps of his dead gay brother's life. His brother, Jean-Marc, leaves his West Indian

home twenty years earlier to enter a English monastery, where he takes on the name of a ninth-century monk, Aelred of Rievaulx.<sup>4</sup> Robert is undertaking the task of reconstructing J.M.'s life from "part objects": letters, memories, anecdotes, journals and interviews, and his going back is a product of a present longing—"brother trying to find a brother"—which will reshape the past. In undertaking this project, Robert is making a move from what object-relations psychoanalyst Melanie Klein calls the depressive position—"where the loved object is reassembled though one's own resources" (Sedgwick 8)—towards the target of a reparative reading of J.M.'s life story. In other (psychoanalytic) words, he is taking an absence, his brother, and converting it into a loss, which he then hopes to repair. Robert's re-remembering suggests to us Sedgwick's proposition that queer theory should emphasize how the depressive position enables one to reassemble an object "*not necessarily like any pre-existing whole*" (8). Once that object is repaired "the more satisfying object is available both to be identified with and to offer one nourishment and comfort in turn" (Sedgwick 8). Robert, by analogy, reminds himself that his method is to "write [his brother's life story] to understand it," to "eat" J.M.'s words (147). Words are food; and Robert is "eating" them for nourishment, but further than that, for *affect*—to feel, to see, to understand his brother. An act of loving communion, writing allows Robert to consume J.M.'s words and make them his own. Both brothers are on linked reparative projects—but with a difference. As Robert puts it:

I keep coming back to these two things, sorting out in my mind my brother's love for a man and his guilt about race. These are the two things that I have to sort out in myself. The first because it's to do with him, not me, the second because I grew up in the same world as him with the same history. (106)

Robert's project, however, is more involved than this initial description suggests. In the end, he "wants [his] brother back. [He] wants his forgiveness" (389). And while these hopes are impossible, he *is* able to reassemble J.M.'s life in way that is a comfort to him and which also provides Robert a basis for political action. J.M.'s quest likewise revolves around sexuality and race, but his story centres on overcoming

the damage inflicted on him by a homophobic society and awakening to the implications of “coming out” as a black man. His task is not only to wrestle with the problem of loving “that which he is supposed to fear,” but grappling with a longing to find a community where he can express his desire safely. His choice of the Catholic Church and its monastic community is determined, in part, by his belief in its potentiality as a transcendent space where markers of race, particularly, are irrelevant as well as its being a homosocial space where homosexual desire can exist. As our collaboration proceeded we began to see how a paranoid reading of J.M.’s story produced few surprises; for instance, the exposure of the church and its school as thoroughly implicated in colonialism and homophobia was hardly news. At the same time, though, in following Robert’s story of his brother, where we are positioned reparatively—encouraged, in other words, to re-assemble the paranoid story into a new whole—surprises did emerge: in the interconnected strands of what we call here the dilemmas of the postcolonial queer.

### **Dilemmas of the Postcolonial Queer, or, a story of Adam and Steve**

[T]he discourse of lesbian of lesbian/gay identity, with its rhetoric of Come Out! Be queer! Be happy! Pride!—puts Third World individuals practising non-heterosexual sexualities in a position of danger within a cultural and political context which may be incapable of conceiving of sexualities and sexual freedom along American and European models. (Cover 39)

We were intrigued by Scott’s choice to use the Church to situate these issues: the choice of setting is provocative, especially when we closely examine J.M.’s initial conflicts and the tensions surrounding identity and community they uncover. The term ‘community,’ of course, has been problematic in both gay/lesbian/queer theories and postcolonial discourses. Queer theory claims “an aggressive impulse of generalization” and a universalizing utopianism” (Warner xxvi), that is global in scope, a vision that has been criticized for, among other things, occluding the difficulties of class, ethnic and geographic location (7). As well, postcolonial concepts of “nation” have been scrutinized in terms of the

histories that imagined communities—nations—necessarily silence or omit (Loomba 202). These issues are taken up in both brothers' stories in *Aelred's Sin*.

We'll begin by exploring a narrative arc in the novel where J.M., now renamed Aelred, recalls when he and Ted, his childhood friend and eventual lover, were "playing one of their secret games" (119). He remembers that he and Ted were in "grapefruit trees below the estate house. They were climbing and picking fruit, peeling it with their fingers, pegging it, they called it, and sucking on the fruit so that the juice was sticky on their hands and faces, dribbling on their merino jerseys" (119). This moment, one of several that J.M. as Aelred is recalling, "just come back, kinds of coincidences they were" (119), is at once imagined as racially and class innocent. The sexual implications of the encounter are also downplayed. In this Edenic space, J.M. wants to resist the "temptation" of identity and the concomitant politics it creates. When Ted declares he is the blacker of the two and proffers his body to prove it, J. M. refuses to see: "I know what you are like. I've seen you. You don't have to show me. Don't show me"(120). Struggling to hold onto the innocence of his sexual encounters with Ted, J.M. subverts any formulation as a sexualized or racialized subject.

His denial of these projections of identities informs the young J.M.'s attraction to the Catholic Church and its school. In his thinking, the Church and school appear to offer a pre-lapsarian space where identity is nullified: "They were all in the same school in the racatang building next to the church of Notre-Dame de Grace.... They were all together: brown, black, white and Indian, all mixed together"(120). Not only are there no racial hierarchies, sexual tension seems totally absent. In several of his journal entries, J.M. writes in romantic terms about his boyhood crushes and early homosexual encounters which, while not officially sanctioned by the Church school, occur with surprising regularity. He writes in his journal:

There was the boy with whom I lay in the heat of siesta reading comics. We leant against each other.... We leant so close that our lips, at first dry and then wet, kissed and kissed and kissed. We spoke not a word of what it meant. (130–31)

In this seemingly idyllic locale, race, class, sexuality, indeed difference itself, appears subsumed “into the white clouds of [Dom Maurus’] monastic habit as they swirled in play in the school yard of the parish church of Notre-Dame de Grace” (121). For the young Jean-Marc, the Church and its school, perforce, are positioned as possible utopias where markers of identity might be eliminated, but at this point, he has not come to terms with the history of the Church’s complicity in the project of colonization, a history he fails to comprehend even when confronted with the picture in the monastery.

Scott’s numerous references to their whiteness underscore that the Church and its school are anything but undifferentiated and homogeneous. As Aelred’s backward glances indicate, race, class and sexuality *are* constants in his life. First, he is marked as a young child as French Creole. Next, his black friends point out his apparent duality around class and race: “one minute you nice, nice, the next you with others on your high horse” (92). And little wonder. His parents—especially his mother—constantly peg the social position of Ted’s family versus the families of J.M.’s black friends. These persistent reminders of class and race, as earlier noted, lead J.M. to question his sexual and emotional attraction to those he is supposed to fear. Moreover, when Jean Marc and Ted are outed as lovers, the Church and its school, formerly innocuous zones for boyhood sexual play, out themselves as homophobic, lethal, in fact, to anything named homosexual. Of course, Ted’s transgression is the greater because Ted, a school captain and a dorm head boy, was “everyone’s hero” (126), a ‘normal’ young boy who was presumed straight. According to Robert, “if it was said about J.M. alone it would peter out, last for a day or two. Linked with the name of Ted, that was dynamite!” (127). The moment J.M. and Ted are labelled “bullers,” they become marked; their identity is fixed and Scott details the harassment, the on-going assaults and the ostracized life to which J. M. and Ted are subjected upon discovery of their clandestine love. The culmination of the communal violence exercised on them is a gang rape, told in two different versions: one version is from Robert’s perspective, overheard in the toilet, as the “braggers” boast about their achievement of fucking the “bullers.” The other version is from J. M.’s journal, “embellished” as

Robert says, through poetry, but demonstrating, nonetheless, the utter brutality of the rape.

Several points might be made here. First, in his book, *Masculine Migration: Reading the Post-Colonial Male in New Canadian Narratives*, Daniel Coleman, remarking on the novels' *Funny Boy* and *Spirits in the Dark*, observes "the young protagonist's growing recognition and acceptance of his own homosexuality displaces his gender, race, class, ethnicity and even nationality in ways that question the prior claims of each of these categories of identification (167). Certainly, Scott's novel supports this assertion in some respects. Once J.M. is named "a buller," he is fixed. Robert too experiences the spill over when he is identified as the "buller's" brother. (A frequent target of verbal and physical abuse from certain boys in the school, Robert in turn mimics the rampant homophobic actions unleashed on his brother and Ted). There is a difference, though, between Scott's novel and the other two, and it is a crucial one: J.M. and Ted do not *choose* a homosexual subject position; it is coercively branded onto/into them, supplanting all other subject positions. A critical distinction is being made in Scott's novel, then, between coming out into a community (however difficult that process may be) and being outed into a community visibly hostile to one's existence.

Second, for those who do not belong, the utopian impulse is an attractive option, offering the hope of imagining communities where difference might exist without harming the marginalized people. Heather Smyth states that both Shani Mootoo and Dionne Brand "use utopianism to explore what it might mean to imagine a space for lesbians and gay men in the Caribbean" (156). Scott's character is similarly attracted to what appears to be a utopian space, and he imagines it, like Brand, to be elsewhere. In this case, though, it is not Canada but the European Catholic Church. This is an understandable move since in the 1960s, when J.M. leaves Les Deux Isles, there is not yet a tangible Queer Nation with which to identify. The white Church presents itself as a place, an imagined community, as Benedict Anderson reminds us, that originally transcended language and national boundaries, where J.M. might safely exist and where his desire for men can be displaced into an idealized community of labouring male bodies. Looking at "those

pictures in those foreign books on monasticism” becomes “a kind of pornography”: his desire becomes “his spirituality, an erotic mysticism” (313). One can see the appeal for J.M. since the Church appears to offer a possible model for community, united by a common affective desire, while seeming to acknowledge difference in sameness.<sup>5</sup>

As with the white school of his childhood, however, J.M. finds an apparent flexibility illusory. Initially, the monastery offers J.M. a way to “[straiten]” his desire (134). Paradoxically, though, he moves to a transnational space, which he assumes will allow entry to a body without a nation, only to discover that what is allowed is a mind *without* a body. Similarly, J.M. joins the monastic community of Ashton Park, in part, to escape the bonds of racial identification, but there is no chance of that. As soon as a body marked by a darker shade than pale walks in the door, the politics of race are activated: Benedict, a senior brother, is entranced by the new novice’s “golden” limbs and Edward, another young novice, is attracted to his “darkness” (252). Ultimately, then, the Church is unable to accommodate either J.M.’s sexual desire or his racial history, in which he comes to see it, is so deeply complicit.

All attempts to avoid markers of identity are thwarted: Ted introduces the snake of identity into the garden; the school is shown to be hypocritically homophobic; even the pre-capitalist, pre-print feudal monastery cannot accommodate postmodern identity politics. Identity cannot be denied; to do so carries consequences. But not all of these consequences are, as Sedgwick notes, necessarily negative. If we shift away from exclusively “paranoid readings” of texts and focus also on reparative readings, we are to open to the discovery that some surprises, however “terrible,” can potentially be “good” (Sedgwick 24).

### **A Postcolonial Story: The Boy in the Picture**

The history of the black Atlantic ... continually crisscrossed by the movement of black people—not only as commodities—but engaged in various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship, is a means to re-examine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory. (Gilroy 193)



To illustrate how some surprises are good, we return to the picture that we initially thought peripheral to the novel. In fact, it is central: it is the nexus where the problematic space of the postcolonial/queer is produced, and is the conduit through which Aelred comes to a racial and ethnic consciousness. Terry Goldie identifies one of the problems arising from the intersection of postcolonial discourse and queer theory as a tendency to “queer” race into a reading that is implicitly Afro-American (21). Just as queer theory has been criticized for its tendency to project a North American image of queerness globally, Goldie points to a similar problem when queer theory approaches the postcolonial. The portrait is interesting in light of Goldie’s comment because the history/geography it embeds is that of Paul Gilroy’s “Black Atlantic.” Set in the heart of the English monastery, the picture is viewed by a West Indian French Creole, who, because of his class, has been able to leave *Les Deux Isles* to venture to a metropolitan centre. In the foreground is a white Duke, and off to the side are a black boy and black dog. We understand the picture and its viewer as encapsulating the “triangular trade,” thus opening up a strand of the postcolonial narrative Goldie and Cover have identified as over/underwritten in queer and postcolonial discourses. Further, Scott’s invocation of Gilroy’s Black Atlantic perspective signifies the desire to “transcend structures of nation-state and constraints of ethnicity and national particularity”—with this novel adding sexuality to the mix—hence complicating the notion of a stable identity rather than conflating it with a universalizing and globalizing sign of queer or black. The “hemispheric order” narrativized in the picture is captured psychically as well: as Aelred dusts the picture, he remembers his black friends in the Caribbean and the stories his black nurse, Toinette, told him about Mungo, the enslaved child from Africa, memories that, via transference, deeply affect him. What connects Aelred’s memories to theirs is not so much a “shared racial essence” but what Gilroy calls “shared histories and geographic movements” (Loomba 214). The shared histories and movements that emerge from the picture, and are triggered in Aelred, all comprise strands of a postcolonial narrative among whose tropes include those of racial difference, violence, cruelty, displacement, and subjugation.

Most dramatic, however, is the moment Aelred sees himself merging into the picture: “Then he saw his own face reflected in the glass of the portrait. His face superimposed upon that of the boy whose face shone from beneath, so that the black face seemed to be his own” (78–79). Aelred’s striking identificatory act operates on several levels. First, Jordan, the name he gives to the boy in the picture, is, as Aelred attests, “blacker than any he [Aelred] knew” including Ted, who, if you will recall, told the then J.M. “I’m blacker than you” (119). This moment is, we suggest, what Chantal Mouffe calls “crystallization,” where the subject moves into an identification, in this case with Jordan, whom Aelred imagines telling stories to his white mistress, Miss Amy, about his experiences of enslavement (184). This narrative mirrors Aelred’s recounting of his life and its attendant horrors to his “guardian angel,” Benedict, and ultimately, Robert telling us his brother’s story (136).

Scott’s mirroring strategy—with narrative moments inverting or reflecting one another—makes us read issues racial also as issues sexual. For instance, just as the black body in the picture is, as Aelred is horrified to recognize, collared and contained, the boundary-lessness of blackness firmly under the white man’s control, so too the Church (and, as Joe, a gay friend of J.M.’s points out, the State) firmly attempts to control the gay body through its varied rituals and surveillance techniques. The key to control of the gay body is policing the line between the homosocial and the homosexual, which, as the novel shows, must be carefully and constantly guarded. “Always in threes, never in twos” is the mantra of the monks (136). Eventually, Aelred and Edward, the white blonde novice, disrupt the regulations of desire by being two, not three and by making more than brotherly love, the details of which Scott makes explicit, a point to which we later return.

Aelred’s moment of identification with Jordan is central because Scott appears to be deploying the gay convention of “coming out” to examine the process of Aelred’s racialization and growing awareness of other allegiances, challenging a postcolonial assumption that homosexuality is a specifically white problem (Goldie 220). Indeed from the moment described here, Aelred’s path is outward—out of the monastery, out of a racialized space where things are either black or white, and into a more fluid sense of identity.

The postcolonial stories generated by the picture and Aelred's stories/memories of sexual difference continue the inflection of race and sexuality. In a moment of dizzying inversion and doubling, Aelred becomes aware that while he looks at Jordan's picture, Benedict is observing him, clearly entranced by the glimpse of his naked calf. In this case, unlike the previous instance in the Caribbean, it is not simply Aelred's desires which are disruptive although they certainly do disrupt; rather, it is Benedict and Edward's fascination with, and their desire for, what they see as Aelred's black body which is disrupting the "imaginary community" of Ashton Park. Scott's achievement therefore is twofold: he racializes the queer body and (homo)sexualizes the black body.<sup>6</sup>

Our gradual recognition becomes that both Jordan and J.M. meet the same fate: sodomy, Jordan because he is an enslaved African; J.M. and Ted because they are homosexualized. In the first instance, the enslavement of Jordan, predicated on a colonialist assumption of white supremacy, obviously arrests his control of anything: the 'master' sodomizes Jordan to exert his brutal, ill-gotten power. In the second instance, the gang rape of J.M. and Ted functions to maintain a secure heterosexual masculinity and draw the line between the school's acceptable homosociality and the boys' unacceptable homosexuality. In both cases what we see is how a dominant construction of male heterosexuality and whiteness link the already-abject black body (because enslaved) and the abject homosexual body (the gender traitor) through sodomy and consequent feminization. Gender becomes the link between the postcolonial black body and the homosexual body.

Much of what we have discussed to this point exemplifies what we take Sedgwick to mean by "paranoid" reading. "Have we said anything we don't already know?" she might ask. Possibly—probably—not. So now, we move to examine the potentialities of reparative reading.

Aelred's coming out as a gay and black man is the beginning of his project around race. In identifying with Jordan, Aelred is propelled into action, which begins with his excavation into outlawed and silenced histories. One of these is the history of the plantation economy and its effects, the most notorious being the erasure of the African presence in the Caribbean and despite its prominence in the monastery, within the

Church. This precipitates another crystallising moment where Aelred recognises the similarities between Malgretoute, his ‘estate home’ and Ashton Park, the estate pre-monastery, both of which have been predicated on the repressed premise—until Aelred views the picture—of race. What unintentionally emerges from this point on is Aelred’s growing awareness that he, too, is part of the postcolonial story, one he makes his own through his imagining of Jordan’s story. This imagining brings us to the reparative moment that Sedgwick identifies as critical to refashioning sustaining narratives: Aelred constructs Jordan’s story as source of sustenance just as Robert reconstructs J.M.’s life story as way to understand his brother. Taken together the two stories repeat and re-cite the lost and silenced histories of the African presence in the Caribbean and the gay presence in the postcolonial.

When Aelred leaves the monastery and renames himself J.M., he undergoes analysis, an endeavour which ultimately proves unfulfilling. We read this “failure” of analysis—as it is typically practiced, a paranoid process of stripping away—as confirmation of reparative reading’s focus on the “additive and accretive” (Sedgwick 28) as a source from which to draw sustenance and plenitude.<sup>7</sup> Those official discourses which sanction (silence) particular narratives are not, Scott seems to suggest, useful in the process of reconstruction and repair. Similarly, Aelred and Edward’s decision to leave the monastery is not to be read as negative. In fact, their leaving can be understood as a point of departure for repair. Aelred’s leaving certainly enables him to understand Aelred of Rievaulx’s sin. For in his namesake he sees a person who could not imagine a way to tie together the threads of sexual desire, identity, community and affect.

### Return to Repair: Tying Together the Threads

*The two photographs arrived today... I've propped them up on the desk on the veranda where I do the estate work.*

*J.M. and Edward. (445)*

This returns us to the framing story of Robert and the conflicts we identified at the outset, but it is return with a difference. In this section we focus on another photo Scott describes in the text, this one of the

former novice, Aelred, now J.M., and his lover Edward, which Robert has placed prominently on his desk at Malgretoute (which aptly translates as “despite everything”). What we have here is a symbolic return and commingling of J.M., Robert, Edward, the estate, and the suppressed histories the estate represents. This reintegration of the queer brother into the family represents a utopian gesture of a day yet to come. Interestingly the photos move from England to the estate in the West Indies, retracing one leg of the triangle and Krishna, the estate’s Indian supervisor, delivers them to Robert. This single moment recaptures the hybrid nature of the Caribbean and re-presents the image of the school—but this time with an awareness of differences and an acceptance of them. As result of his excavations of J.M.’s life and his own hagiographic (re)writing of that life, Robert has reintegrated his lost object, but not exactly as it was. Instead, he imaginatively reworks that life which, as Scott emphasizes through various gaps and dead ends in J.M.’s story, is only partial, as it must be. As we remarked earlier, this re-fashioning provides Robert with sustenance just as Jordan’s story nourishes Aelred in Ashton Park.

But more than this. Through re-writing J.M.’s life, Robert imagines himself in J.M.’s position—almost becoming his brother, which forces Robert to challenge the limits of his heterosexual imagination. This challenge is acute, particularly in terms of accepting the “dirty bits” (353) about J.M. and Edward. As Joe, J.M.’s friend who provides an on-going gay political commentary of Robert’s progress, states: “You need to read those bits of the journal that are explicit about the sex he had with Edward or what he did with Benedict” (353). Robert’s need to understand his brother compels him to record not just the details of J.M.’s sexual encounters with Edward, but also the details of the rape back home. Like the portrait in the monastery, these elements are not gratuitous, but central to Robert’s quest to find forgiveness for his own homophobic actions. His longing to seek forgiveness for his complicity in the crimes committed against his brother enables him to move *beyond* the imaginative limits his history has hitherto constructed for him.

Just as the portrait enables J.M. to open himself to a new identity as a product of displaced identities, so too does Robert’s imagining open

him to new possibilities of being. Contemplating J.M.'s life, Robert eventually finds himself wondering: "Would I have kissed Benedict on the mouth? Funny how I keep considering this now. Like when I'm with Joe sometimes. We touch . . . . Then I wonder. I mean, I could do some of these things" (416). Realizing the fluidity of his own desires represents the culmination of Robert's journey, a journey he began with a minimal awareness of himself as a subject within a "fully gendered, sexualized, and racialized world" (Morrison 12). The outcome is that his sexuality—indeed his identity, which was rigidly contained, is now open, on a continuum, fluid.

Because Robert's relationship to his brother is transformed through his visit to the English monastery and other sites of J.M.'s life, so is his relationship to the Caribbean. He has "eaten" his brother's words and now shares his brother's perspective; hence, Robert too becomes a subject of the brother's "shared histories and movements." In having Robert share this Atlantic perspective, Scott resists appealing to universal notions of queer or race; rather he decentres both by insisting on the specificity of geographic location and the importance of sexuality. But, as with Selvadurai, Scott writes from "within the postcolonial," reintroducing the black Atlantic and sexuality into "the chain of equivalencies" that Mouffe argues comprise identity.

Lest we become too sentimental here, let us be clear that a bleaker one offsets this reparative moment. Robert writes that J.M.'s ashes were sprinkled where he sprinkled Edward's: in the cemetery with the African heads. Note that this recommending of J.M., Edward, Jordan, the monastery and the community it represents is achieved only in death, and death by a disease whose symptoms allow us to name it, though Scott does not. A paranoid reading perhaps, but its power reminds us that repair comes at a price.

### **Towards Producing Paranoid/ Reparative Readers**

Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope . . . is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organise the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. (Sedgwick 24–5)

Some critics might suggest that Scott's focus on a decentred subjectivity could mean a loss of collectivity and political action (Goldie 21). However, we contend that *Aelred's Sin* suggests otherwise. Robert's placement of the picture on his office desk cannot be dismissed as simply a symbolic Utopian gesture, especially in the contexts of a homophobic, postcolonial space. Placing his brother and his lover's picture on the desk, while potentially heteronormative, is not about tolerance but about Robert's "in-your-face" acceptance of their love in all its dimensions—physical, emotional and political. Similarly, J.M.'s life after the monastery also speaks to the way that this awareness of identity, motivated through imaginative reparative stories, becomes his locus of political action. He becomes a roving academic who not only writes papers on the Black Atlantic and its shared cultural experiences but also lives the Atlantic space.

Our point then is that Scott's novel seems to indicate that affective needs (those of forgiveness, commemoration and repair) can be the basis for constructing communities when we conceptualize identity as shared memories, histories, movements, albeit differently shared. Robert's journey in *Aelred's Sin* suggests to us that when we approach community-making from a reparative perspective, possibilities emerge that can lead to new imagined communities. Scott, drawing on Gilroy, offers one such possibility. He imagines a community not based on nation, but a community, nevertheless, which has space for differences, sexual, racial and otherwise, an attachment to which is fuelled by affect—by emotions differently felt and memories differently shared.

We want to end this discussion thinking about what we as college professors primarily do: teach those in the process of forming entrepreneurial, executive, and paraprofessional identities. On one hand, we want our students to practice disobedience as readers—to refuse or question the text and its intentions. This, in our thinking, is the hallmark of the paranoid reader whose focus is on policing power and a need to understand the way oppression works. Such reading practices are crucial and we do not want to lose them. But, returning to Sedgwick, we also want our students to know other ways of reading. One such practice is to be "good listeners" the way that Miss Amy, the white mistress Aelred imag-

ines outside the picture, is for Jordan, Benedict is for Aelred, and we are positioned for Robert. Good listeners are affected and affective in their responses to texts. Focusing on paranoid and reparative readings can fuse the disobedient energies of the paranoid reader to the depressive need to repair and create different structures that reassemble the whole, but with a difference. This fusion creates compassionate readers who are at once able to see the need for political action, but are also opened to their own complicity with the political and social conditions that enable homophobia and racism to exist. This complicity means that students can no longer be “pure” entrepreneurs or “pure” journalists: if they have been good listeners they have become something different. Here lies the possibility of a community, mobilized by common goals, that has moved beyond identity politics. We know we cannot expect our students to “eat” the words as Robert does, but it is an ideal towards which to strive.

## Notes

- 1 Drs. Lee Easton and Kelly Hewson presented a version of this paper at the CACLALS (Canadian Association of Commonwealth Language and Literature Studies) meeting, COSH, University of Alberta, May 2000.
- 2 The painting inspiring Scott's fictional picture is John Riley's *Charles Seymour, 6th Duke of Somerset*, 1690. The crucial difference is that Scott's fictionalizing of the painting has the black boy's neck collared, stressing that he is a slave not a servant. For a reproduction of the painting, see Dabydeen 27.
- 3 Daniel Coleman's musings on Shoshana Feldman's position on reading seem salient on this point. Drawing on Feldman's psychoanalytic theories of reading, Coleman writes, "In other words, when we read, signification results when our unconscious attaches its knowledge for the first time to the text. There, in the text, we 'see' our unconscious knowledge for the first time, misrecognize it as the text's meaning; whereas in reality, the text has caused us, been occasion for us, to perform our own knowledge or desire" (21).
- 4 Born Jean-Marc de la Borde in the Antilles, he takes the name Aelred in the monastery. Pre- and post-monastery, he assumes the initials J.M. Our shifting namings throughout the paper reflect Scott's protagonist's shifts.
- 5 We mean here that the Catholic Church despite its monolithic appearances does, in fact, have some measure of difference within its structures.
- 6 In another example of doubling and inversion, J.M.'s black lover in the Caribbean, Ted, becomes refigured as Edward, the "alabaster white" lover in the monastery. Whilst black Ted may be attracted to J.M.'s Creole whiteness, white Edward is definitely enamoured of J.M.'s "exotic" blackness. J.M.'s ardent love-



making with Edward may be read as J.M.'s attempt to repair and rework his rejection of a sexual and racial identity outlined earlier in the paper.

- 7 We are not lost here on either the irony or the origins of the term 'reparative' and its links to therapy practised on homosexuals, the repair aimed at in such practice being the overcoming/sublimation of one's troublesome sexual orientation.

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