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Beyond the Censor and the Closet: Re-framing Eisenstein's Memoirs as Queer Life Writing

The voluminous, albeit fragmented, memoiristic writings of Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein are often cited in biographical works on the director to document historical events and his attitude toward those events, or to enhance our understanding of his theoretical writings on cinematography—the memoirs do indeed contain important theoretical passages on filmmaking and the creative mind. The memoirs, however, have yet to be analysed as queer life writing, despite the author's self-conscious thematization of sex and sexuality and of their place in life writing, which takes place throughout the memoirs, and Eisenstein's profound playfulness on these topics, which demands interpretive readings. This article represents the first attempt at a systematic interpretation of the memoirs as queer life writing and, together with recent studies of Eisenstein's homoerotic drawings, of the homoerotic imagery in his films, and of his interest in 'those who love strangely', aims to contribute to our understanding of Eisenstein's distinctly queer performance of his sexuality. To that end, the article analyses Eisenstein's life writing through the theoretical lens of camp, as defined by Susan Sontag in her seminal essay 'Notes on Camp' (1966), and further elaborated by queer linguists, such as Keith Harvey (2002), who focus on the double-voicedness and citationality of camp talk.

> 'And… did you know the most effective way of hiding something is to put it on display'. (Eisenstein 1995: 453)[1]

While for much of the Cold War, Soviet and Western biographers diverged in their interpretations of Eisenstein's life and work, they expressed surprising unanimity in their assessment of his life writings. Critics and scholars on both sides of the Iron Curtain characterized them as highly opaque and offering little definitive evidence of the director's 'true' nature. As the Soviet film critic Nina Zorskaia wrote: 'Even though we had hoped these autobiographical notes would reveal the

[1] All citations to the memoir are taken from the English translation, *Beyond the Stars* (Eisenstein 1995), referred to in the paper as BTS. Due to the fragmentary nature of Eisenstein's memoiristic writing and the fact that the fragments were written at different times, I will refer to BTS in the plural, as Eisenstein's memoirs.

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truth about the author [...] the varying expressions of the author, articles, notes, certain pages of the diary now published, unfortunately even now cannot serve as irrefutable evidence of the true intentions and views of their author' (quoted in Marshall 1983b: xvii). Scholars writing in the West drew similar conclusions. Herbert Marshall, one of Eisenstein's English biographers and the translator of the first collection of Eisenstein's life writing published under the title *Immoral Memoirs: An Autobiography* (1983), remarks in the introduction to that volume:

> When I consider his personality, however, I have to say he always seemed like a Russian *matriushka* [*sic*]—the famous carved wooden doll, hiding within it another doll, hiding another doll, and so ad infinitum. Outside he was a Soviet Russian; inside, according to some, he was a Christian. According to others, he was a Jew; to yet others, a homosexual; to a few, a cynical critic ... and what else? It was difficult to know what he was fundamentally. *He never expressed it verbally* [italics – B. J. B.]. Still, there was one medium through which he expressed his innermost feelings—his drawings and caricatures (Marshall 1983a: vii).

Little changed with the fall of the Soviet Union. For example, in the introduction to the 1997 two-volume Russian edition of Eisenstein's memoirs, the editor and Eisenstein scholar Naum Kleiman resorts to the elliptical language of the Soviet era when suggesting that Eisenstein did not and could not have discussed his true (sexual?) nature in the memoirs: 'The reader will not find much here about that which today we would like to know about Eisenstein himself. He could not then write about a lot—due to the conditions of the time. About certain things he didn't want to write, assuming, following Pushkin, that a celebrity, like any other person, has the right to a private life, not subject to disrespectful public discussion' (Kleiman 1997: 16).[2]
Oksana Bulgakowa expresses something similar in the opening of her German-language biography of the director: 'Was Eisenstein homosexual? A Stalinist? A conformist? A dissident? He left no clear answers for his biographers. The answer lies

[2] All translations from Kleiman's introduction are my own.

somewhere *between the line of his diaries and letters* [italics – B. J. B.], in his drafts to scripts, films, drawings, projects, and scientific research' (Bulgakowa 2001: xi). Against the backdrop of such statements, which construe Eisenstein's life writing as a site of repression and concealment – a product of the censor or the closet – this article proposes an alternative hermeneutic lens through which to understand them, that of camp performativity.[3]

Eisenstein's Sexuality and Cold War Polarities

American writer and editor Joseph Freeman recounts a phone conversation he overheard between Eisenstein and the critic Sergei Tret'iakov, during which Eisenstein declared: 'Had it not been for Leonardo, Marx, Freud, Lenin and the movies, I would in all probability have been another Oscar Wilde' (Seton 1978: 119). For most of the Cold War, the two sides treated Eisenstein's inspirations separately: the Soviets focusing largely on Marx and western biographers largely on Freud. The Freudian frame allowed for Eisenstein's homosexuality to be mentioned (Seton 1952; Fernandez 1975; Marshall 1983a, 1983b), although typically in the terms suggested by Eisenstein himself in regard to Freud's

[3] In the past, the absence of a straightforward 'confession' or eyewitness testimony provided a pretext for historians to ignore the sexual life of queer cultural figures – arguing that they were refraining from overreading or reading into the historical data – a position that was buoyed by the general belief that such a perspective was irrelevant and/or would unduly sully the reputation of these great individuals and offend contemporary readers. Such scholarly reticence not only circumscribed the range of available interpretations that could be applied to their life writing but also affected the publication and editing of relevant historical material, as was the case with queer philosopher Ludwig Wittengenstein's notebooks from the first half of World War I, which were, until quite recently, heavily abridged. This created a vicious circle, or a conspiracy of silence, in which the need for overwhelming evidence led to the suppression of various pieces of circumstantial evidence. In the case of Wittgenstein's notebooks, the right side (recto), containing his philosophical writings, has been widely available in German and in English translation since the early sixties, while the pages on the left side (verso), which concerned his private life, including his sexual proclivities, and were written in a code, were published in German only in 1991, under the title *Secret Diaries* [*Geheine Tagebücher*], and translated into English only in 2022. Moreover, Marjorie Perloff, the editor of the English edition, rejects the notion that the encoding of the verso pages was the major impediment to their publication as, 'the cipher that Wittgenstein employed was both basic and known to his siblings, who used it as children (z is a, y is b, etc.)' (Perloff 2022: 9n).

psychobiography of Leonardo da Vinci as repressed. (That being said, Dominique Fernandez was the only Cold War biographer to make Eisenstein's sexuality a central feature of his biography.) The repressive hypothesis in this case aligned neatly with the broader western narrative of the creative individual stifled by the oppressive politics of the Stalinist state, as is evident in Marshall's 1983 volume *Masters of the Soviet Cinema: Crippled Creative Biographies* (Marshall 1983a) and more recently in Andy McSmith's 2015 *Fear and the Muse Kept Watch* (McSmith 2015).

Freud was largely ignored by Soviet biographers, except to lambast the vulgar psychologizing of the director's life by their Western counterparts. As Soviet film critic Rostislav Iurenev insisted in his 1985 biography of Eisenstein: '[Eisenstein's interest in Freud] was only academic in nature and did not at all influence his daily life, his personality, or his worldview' (Iurenev 1985: 6). Elsewhere Iurenev turns the lens of vulgar psychologizing back onto Eisenstein's biographer, Mary Seton, suggesting that her interpretation of Eisenstein's sexuality was the result of unrealized romantic ambitions: 'There is no doubt that she was sincerely attracted to Eisenstein both as an artist and as a man. Her hopes for greater intimacy with him were probably unsuccessful. Perhaps this explains in part her nervous, biased description of Eisenstein's personality' (Iurenev 1985: 4–5). (Incidentally, Iurenev also rejected the notion that Eisenstein's paternal grandparents were Jewish (Iurenev 1985: 5), another theme that played an important role in Western psychological portraits of the director.) Soviet critics could compare Eisenstein with da Vinci as long as they foreclosed any hint of queerness, as in the following statement by Nina Zorskaia: 'Eisenstein, this Leonardo without his *Mona Lisa*, this Le Corbusier without his House of the Sun' (quoted in Marshall 1983a: 213), indexing the traditional view that da Vinci was in love with Mona Lisa.

The opening of archives in the years before and after the fall of the Soviet Union alongside the emergence of sexuality studies in the Western academy over the course of the 1990s – not to mention the unanticipated surfacing of Eisenstein's erotic drawings and their publication in 1999 (see Ackerman 2017) – have led to more open and nuanced treatments of the direc-

tor's sexuality.[4] That being said, they were rather slow in coming. The 1993 collected volume *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, edited by Richard Taylor and Derek Spring, ignores the director's sexuality entirely, while the volume *Eisenstein Rediscovered,* edited by Ian Christie and Richard Taylor and published in the same year, makes only two brief mentions. By the late 1990s, however, there had emerged an unprecedented willingness, at least outside of Russia, to interpret the historical record in favour of a queer reading of Eisenstein's sexuality (see Bergan 1999: 119; McSmith 2015: 160; Bershstein 2017) and of his oeuvre (see LaValley 2001; Bershstein 2010; Bershstein 2021; and Ackerman forthcoming).[5]

Among that new scholarship, one of the most detailed and systematic discussions of the director's sexuality to date is Evgenii Bershtein's 'Eisenstein's Letter to Magnus Hirschfeld: Text and Context' (Bershtein 2017). In this essay, Bershtein establishes both the director's deep and abiding interest, his 'intellectual obsession', to use Bershtein's phrase, in what Eisenstein himself referred to as 'people who love strangely' (Bershtein 2017: 77), as well as 'Eisenstein's tendency to see the connection between one's creative world and one's sexual character as a very direct one' (Bershtein 2017: 84). This and other recent works provide a convincing rationale for reading Eisenstein's memoirs as queer life writing, something Eisenstein himself cued his readers to do in a variety of ways, which I outline below.

Framing the Memoirs as Queer Life Writing

The place of sex and sexuality in an individual's life and in life writing is thematized from the very opening of Eisenstein's memoirs. The author does so, first, in the short preface titled 'About Myself', in which he rewrites the French novelist Stendhal's epitaph, 'I lived, I wrote, I loved' as 'I lived, I contemplated,

[4] As LaValley and Scherer (2001: 1) note, 'The atmosphere of glasnost also allowed an exploration of the way in which [Eisenstein's] films are infused with sexuality, politics, and religion—areas which had previously been largely avoided by Soviet commentators. Western scholars had also left these topics largely unexamined'.

[5] The outing of Eisenstein in western popular culture would culminate in the films *What Is This Film Called Love* (2012), by Mark Cousins, about Eisenstein's time in Mexico, and *Sergei / Sir Gay* (2017), by Mark Rappaport. The title of the latter film references the young Eisenstein's habit of signing his first name Sergei in English as Sir Gay.

I admired' not simply replacing 'loved' with 'admired', but also drawing attention to the replacement by including both Stendhal's original and Eisenstein's 'translation'. Then, in the 'Foreword' which immediately follows he invokes several works of 'sexual' life writing: Giacomo Casanova's diary, *Story of My Life* [Histoire de ma vie, written in the late eighteenth century, but first published in German in 1822]; Frank Harris's autobiography *My Life and Loves* (1922); and Marcel Proust's autobiographical cycle of novels *In Search of Lost Time* [À la recherche du temps perdu (1913-1927)]. He mentions Casanova's diary in order to reset reader's expectations for his own memoirs: 'This is not Casanova's diary, or the history of a Russian film director's amorous adventures' (Eisenstein 1995: 4). He then discusses Harris's autobiography, which was something of a *succès de scandale* due to its explicit descriptions of Harris's (heterosexual) encounters. Although he describes Harris's memoir in very negative terms – 'This highly unpleasant, caustic and importunate author set down his life and the catalogue of his affairs with the same distasteful candour and tactlessness that characterised his relations with most of his eminent contemporaries' (Eisenstein 1995: 4) – he later admits to reading three out of the four volumes of the autobiography (!) in a paragraph that highlights the perverse workings of censorship: it draws attention to that which it seeks to silence: 'I read three volumes of his autobiography in the USA – naturally, bought "under the counter" – in an unexpurgated edition, where, for convenience's sake, everything that the censor had cut from the usual edition was printed in a different typeface— – 'for the convenience of its readers'!" (Eisenstein 1995: 4). It should also be noted that Harris was the first biographer of Oscar Wilde, an artist with whom Eisenstein expressed some degree of identification.

A few paragraphs later, Eisenstein mentions Proust: 'I have never enjoyed Marcel Proust. And that has nothing to do with snobbery—deliberately ignoring the terribly fashionable interest in Proust' (Eisenstein 1995: 5). In situating his memoir between these two autobiographical works – rejecting the former for its overly explicit depiction of the author's sex life and the latter, perhaps, for its modesty (namely, Proust's practice of disguising homosexual relations by presenting men from his real life as women in his fiction; e.g., Albert becomes Albertine) – Ei-

senstein sets the stage for the kind of arch performance of his sexuality that both invites and confounds, or at least complicates, interpretation, a mode of writing alien both to the prudery of official Stalinist culture and to the binary logic of the closet.

This genre consciousness is evident throughout the memoirs in references to other 'sexual' biographies and autobiographical writings, such as Colette's writings (Eisenstein 1995: 237–38) and Herbert Gorman's biography of Alexander Dumas, *The Incredible Marquis* (1929). Like Harris's autobiography, Gorman's biography stood out for its lack of sexual reticence: 'With a frankness that is as Gallic as its subject, [Gorman] portrays the amoral life of Alexandre Dumas who conquered women as easily as he conquered the French stage and the French field of the novel' (from the dust jacket of the first edition). As Eisenstein notes, 'Mr. Gorman's biography wittily exonerates the Marquis [de Sade – B.J.B.], calling him the learned predecessor of Dr Freud, and explaining his novels as the only available form in the eighteenth century for disquisitions into case histories of psychoses and pathological portraits of a particular proclivity' (Eisenstein 1995: 519).

Perhaps the most consequential sexual biography in Eisenstein's memoirs, however, appears in the chapter titled 'Encounters with Books', where Eisenstein recounts his first 'chance' (fateful?) reading of Freud's biography of da Vinci, which interprets the artist's interest in scientific investigation and his inability to complete works of art as the effects of sublimating his homosexual desires. The importance of Freud's biography for Eisenstein lies, first of all, in authorizing the open treatment of sex and sexuality in biographies of this kind. As Freud writes in Chapter 1:

> If a biographical effort really endeavors to penetrate the understanding of the psychic life of its hero, it must not, as happens in most biographies through discretion or prudery, pass over in silence the sexual activity or the sex peculiarity of the one examined. What we know about it in Leonardo is very little but full of significance (Freud 2020: 8).

Also important is the notion that sublimation does not eliminate the targeted desire; rather, it disperses it: 'it is naturally distorted and not free, but forceful

enough to sexualize even thought itself and to accentuate the intellectual operations with the pleasure and fear of the actual sexual process' (Freud 2020: 17). Or, as Eisenstein puts it in his memoirs: 'Impressions lodged like splinters and emerged in unexpected shapes' (Eisenstein 1995: 548). Such sublimation can manifest itself in what might be referred to as unproductive neuroticism – e.g., da Vinci's chronic inability to complete works of art – as well as productive neuroticism, informing the symbolic world of the artist: 'A kindly nature has bestowed upon the artist the capacity to express in artistic productions his most secret psychic feelings hidden even to himself, which powerfully affect outsiders who are strangers to the artist without their being able to state whence this emotivity comes' (Freud 2020: 50).

Especially relevant to the genre of the memoir is Freud's claim in Chapter 2 that memory is a privileged site for the expression of sublimated desire: 'As a rule the memory remnants, which he himself does not understand, conceal invaluable evidences of the most important features of his psychic development' (Freud 2020: 24). And so, one could argue, instead of inuring the artist's work to unwanted interpretations of a sexual nature, by invoking Freud's theory of sublimation Eisenstein invites just such interpretations while also greatly complicating the act of interpretation. As Freud notes: 'When one considers what profound transformations an impression of an artist has to experience before it can add its contribution to the work of art, one is obliged to moderate considerably his expectation of demonstrating something definite. This is especially true in the case of Leonardo' (Freud 2020: 50). This is also true of Eisenstein, who continually invokes the notion of the sexual secret or riddle while eluding or confounding any definitive interpretation.

Here is Eisenstein's account of his first encounter with Freud's biography of da Vinci, playfully mystifying the workings of the subconscious:

> Books open up at the quotation I need. I used to check—and sometimes I needed nothing before and nothing after, in the whole book.
>
> Here are some syndromes in the pathology of the nervous system. The book opened itself up in my hands, at the very page which addressed the question of the technique of

> stage movements in Italian comedy…
> Sometimes a modest-looking booklet with a portrait of Leonardo on the cover (even in childhood I liked reading about him), with the German author's surname and Christian name that had been taken from the Nibelung as a little birdie told me, brings news of the unexpected discovery of a new field which I embark upon even without an expert guide. If I say the booklet, published by *Sovremennye problemy* [Contemporary Questions], concerns 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood' and is by Sigmund Freud, then the significance of the little birdie is exactly in keeping with the description of the kite inside—which Leonardo used to dream about.
> Amazing words for a description of a dream!
> Thus my introduction to psychoanalysis (Eisenstein 1995: 354).

The birdie referred to here appears in a dream had by da Vinci that Freud analyses as proof of the artist's latent homosexuality. In the dream, a kite, which Freud renders as vulture, visits the artist in the cradle: 'he opened my mouth with his tail and struck me a few times with his tail against my lips' (Freud 2020: 22). In translating 'this phantasy from its strange language into words that are universally understood' (Freud 2020: 23), Freud notes that tail, or *coda* in the Italian, is used as slang to refer to the male member. From this Freud concludes: 'The situation contained in the phantasy […] corresponds to the idea of fellatio, a sexual act in which the member is placed in the mouth of the other person. Strangely enough this phantasy is altogether of a passive character; it resembles certain dreams and phantasies of women and of passive homosexuals who play the feminine part in sexual relations' (Freud 2020: 25).

And while Eisenstein's ironic tone in the above passage raises some doubt as to his acceptance of Freud's theory, his identification with the Italian artist certainly invites the reader to test the theory out: 'And I related how we assigned to ourselves the roles of various titans of the Renaissance. Pudovkin got his teeth into Raphael. Dovzhenko was allotted Michelangelo. And I was Leonardo …' (Eisenstein 1995: 687). Elsewhere he would describe da Vinci as 'the creator

of the montage sequence' (quoted at Bergan 1999: 43), setting him up as his artistic father. In addition, he shares the Italian artist's fascination with knots, an image that was central to Eisenstein's conceptualization of the artistic process. as Eisenstein suggests at the very end of the autobiographical essay 'The Author and His Theme':

> There is in each of us something like those complex knots that Leonardo designed for the Milan Academy and that he drew on the ceilings.
> We encounter a phenomenon.
> And the plan of this knot seems to be laid over this phenomenon.
> The features of one coincide, or otherwise.
> They coincide partially.
> Here and there.
> They do not coincide.
> They clash with one another, striving for coincidence.
> Sometimes breaking the structure and the outlines of reality, in order to satisfy the contour of individual desire.
> Sometimes violating individualities in order to 'synchronise' with the demands of what they have clashed with.
> I cannot actually remember any examples of the latter from my own personal practice, but then I could give plenty of examples illustrating the former... (Eisenstein 1995: 794-95).

Elsewhere Eisenstein describes the 'various traits and features which I carried and still carry around with me' as a 'knot of complexes' (Eisenstein 1995: 418), and earlier describes himself as a 'knot that was unable to bind the family together and keep it from breaking up' (Eisenstein 1995: 99).
The statement quoted above, at the beginning of section two, could be considered another knot: 'Had it not been for Leonardo, Marx, Freud, Lenin and the movies, I would in all probability have been another Oscar Wilde' (Seton 1978: 119). The juxtaposition of Marx and Lenin to Freud, to say nothing of the juxtaposition of the Renaissance da Vinci to the modern art of movie making, clearly challenges any straightforward interpretation. While Eisenstein attempts to draw a parallel between Freud and Marx when explaining his statement to Freeman, noting, 'Freud discovered the laws of in-

dividual conduct as Marx discovered the laws of social development' (Seton 1978: 119), Marxism and *Freidizm*, or Freudianism, were at this time in Soviet culture seen as antithetical. Marxist economic models are developmental and teleological, while many psychiatric notions, such as Freud's so-called 'family romance', are posited as ahistorical, present throughout history and across cultures. Moreover, sex and sexuality, not to mention homosexuality, play a small, rather incidental role in Marxist thought, while they are central to psychoanalysis. All this lends a paradoxical note to Eisenstein's statement, suggesting that it be read less like a confession than like a Wildean aphorism—a manifestation of the very thing those influences supposedly worked to prevent.

Homographesis or Linguistic Inversion: From *Pars pro toto* to *Pars pro parte*

Lee Edelman (Edelman 1993) theorized the phenomenon of homonymy as homographesis. His premise was that, if, as Saussure argued, natural languages are built on arbitrary differences among signifiers rather than on an essential relationship of sameness between the signifier and the signified, then homonymy exerts a troubling effect. It conceals difference under the guise of sameness, by analogy with the homosexual's ability to pass, that is, to conceal their homosexual difference under the guise of sameness. In this way, homographesis queers linguistic (and social) semiosis, resulting in an indeterminacy of meaning. An interest in the phenomenon of homographesis is evident throughout Eisenstein's memoir in his fascination with word play and with the capacity of symbols to support multiple interpretations, often connected arbitrarily by colour, graphics, or phonetics. That space of non-equivalence and interpretative abundance, the gap between reality and representation, between somatics and semantics, gives free rein to desire and the irrational.[6]

The associative, almost stream of consciousness writing that is dominant in the memoir challenges the logic of metonymy put forward in the classic formulation *pars pro toto*, in which a

[6] Eisenstein's linking of bisexuality (which was essentially his term for queerness) with wordplay, as well as 'ecstatic creativity', is discussed by Bershtein (Bershtein 2017: 84). He made an attempt to discuss this in his correspondence with Dr Magnus Hirschfeld, a leading German sexologist and an ardent proponent of the depathologization and decriminalization of homosexuality.

part stands in for the whole and which Eisenstein used to explain the technique of montage. According to the latter, the *toto* would refer to the overall theme (see Eisenstein 1995: 771). In political terms, the subservience of the parts to the whole guarantees the primacy of the ideological interpretation. In Eisenstein's memoir, however, parts are quite often associated with other parts, through graphic or phonetic rather than semantic resemblance, producing 'random' chains of signifiers that do not resolve into anything greater, enacting what Jacques Derrida would later describe with his concept of *différance* as the endless deferral of meaning in language. Consider Eisenstein's description of a striptease he witnessed while in the US: 'A bow-tie, a ribbon, the last shred of decency. The auditorium is in uproar, shouting, raving. But beneath the bow-tie—is a bow-tie. Beneath the ribbon, a ribbon. Beneath the pearl. … The spectacle vanishes into darkness' (Eisenstein 1995: 450).

This is a semiotic world built on non-equivalence, where linguistic substitutions (the same) produce difference.[7] Perhaps the most extreme manifestation of this occurs in plays on words based solely on phonic or graphic resemblance, as elaborated in the following passage:

> The high priest of bars like 'Le Chat Noir' and '[Au] Lapin Agile'.
> This second Montmartre bar was a play on words, in honour of the artist who painted the sign: *l'a peint A. Gill.*
> Just think of Hugo's 'Le pot aux roses' [French: The Pot of Roses], which became *le poteau rose* [French: the rose thorn]; or his '*Tu ora*' [Latin: 'You pray'] which became *trou aux rats* [French: 'rat-hole'], which was where Esmeralda found sanctuary when she fell into the hands of the mad old woman.
> Or again, that Catholic and reactionary, King Charles X—*le pieux monarch* [French: 'the pious monarch'] whom Travies turned into *le pieu monarch* [French: 'the block-head monarch'] (Eisenstein 1995: 625).

[7] For more on Eisenstein's views on linguistics and literary theory, which shaped the semiotic universe of his life writing, see Yampolsky 1993 and Iampolski 2017.

This idea of difference lurking behind sameness is expanded to include even repetition, which produces new interpretations: 'All the rules governing refrains dictate that there must be a new light cast on the subsequent repetition—it must be interpreted differently' (Eisenstein 1995: 769). He develops this notion further in relation to the image of the mirror in decadent art, in which the reflection takes on a life of its own, as in Hanns Heinz Ewers and Paul Wegener's art film *Student of Prague* [Der Student von Prag, 1913] and in Oscar Wilde's prose poem 'The Disciple' (1894). He notes elsewhere that Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for Wilde's *Salome* may be subjected to a completely different interpretation – as parody – upon reading of 'the hatred the two felt for one another' (Eisenstein 1995: 530).

Such associations, generated by the materiality or corporeality of words, played a prominent role in avantgarde literary movements of the early twentieth century, which celebrated the autonomous life of words once liberated from their subservience to semantic content or meaning. The Russian avantgarde poets Aleksei Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlebnikov expressed this in their concept of 'the word as such'. Connecting language with the somatic realm through sight and sound was seen as a way to escape the rational realm of verbal semantics to gain access to the irrational or pre-rational, described by the Russian Futurists as *zaum*, or beyond reason.[8] In fact, Eisenstein openly acknowledges his intellectual and artistic debt to the Futurists and, specifically, to their approach to language, in a short chapter titled 'Names':

> Somewhere, a very long time ago, Chukovsky very wittily defended the Futurists.
>
> He found the same abstract charm in their euphonious nonsense as we find in Longfellow's enumeration of Indian tribes. For us they too are utterly devoid of any sense and their charm lies *solely* [italics – B.J.B.] in the rhythm and phonetic features (in Hiawatha: 'Came Comanches…' etc).
>
> Sometimes, when I start remembering things, I lapse into an *utterly abstract* [italics – B.J.B.]

[8] The literary use of such associations reached its apotheosis, one could say, in James Joyce's masterpiece, the novel *Ulysses,* for which Eisenstein expressed enormous admiration in the memoir.

> chain of names and surnames (Eisenstein 1995: 119).

Such seemingly random associations – the memoir is also filled with 'chance' encounters – become central to Eisenstein's approach to writing his memoir, and to his artistic method in general, as he explains in the chapter 'Three Letters about Colour': 'Another motive prompted me from behind the scenes, which was to give myself a free rein and "throw out" on to the page the whole gamut of associations which spill out uncontrollably at the least provocation and sometimes apropos nothing at all' (Eisenstein 1995: 647). Some of these 'random' associations are quite frivolous, even absurdist, as when he connects Valerian Dovgalevskii, Plenipotentiary Representative of the Soviet Union in France, the English writer Rudyard Kipling, and the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche through their distinctive moustaches (Eisenstein 1995: 198), or Marx, Tolstoi, and the Austrian politician Engelbert Dollfuss through their height (Eisenstein 1995: 569).

Other associations, however, are used to more clearly parodic ends, as in the chapter titled 'The Christmas Tree', where he appears to mock the vulgar social determinism of some Soviet critics by drawing a connection between the paper chains on a Christmas tree and the chains used on doors to keep intruders out, noting that 'Burglars are heartily disliked in middle-class families. And this dislike is instilled in the children at a very early age' (Eisenstein 1995: 59). Later in the chapter, he mentions that on that Christmas he received François Mignet's *History of the French Revolution* [Histoire de la revolution française, 1824], a book that seems in 'complete dissonance' with the festive holiday setting. At this point he returns to the image of the chain, but now uses it metaphorically to question the very social determinism he had used it to illustrate above: 'Why this complete dissonance? It would be no easy task to reconstruct the entire chain, to say what planted in my curly head the desire to have precisely that book as a Christmas present' (Eisenstein 1995: 59). (Incidentally, Mignet was considered something of a determinist, presenting the Revolution as inevitable.) We see a similar associative train of thought from the literal to the figurative in 'The Twelve Apostles': 'The actual "flight" of steps led to the planning of the scene, and its upward flight set

my direction off on a new flight of fancy' (Eisenstein 1995: 173), suggesting this movement from the literal to the figurative and back again to be a key characteristic of creative thought or of 'a law characteristic of inventiveness as a whole' (Eisenstein 1995: 762).

In his memoiristic writings, Eisenstein insists, moreover, on the impossibility of ultimately 'untangling the knot of associations' (Eisenstein 1995: 743) and putting an end to these chains by reducing the associations to a single logical interpretation: 'Zabaglione defies linguistic analysis' (Eisenstein 1995: 45). In fact, he refers to the 'logic' connecting the various elements in an associative chain as 'magic' (Eisenstein 1995: 661) and 'very frequently irrational' (Eisenstein 1995: 409), noting too that the intuition driving those associations 'is not wholly reliable' (Eisenstein 1995: 328). This is especially true in the sexual realm, as Eisenstein elaborates in relation to the phenomenon of Don Juanism, where he questions the popular interpretation of the syndrome as 'unsuccessful attempts to find the one woman who is inaccessible' (Eisenstein 1995: 719):

> The chains of associations which enable one suddenly to substitute one being for another, purely on the strength of the similarity of a microscopic feature, or on the basis of a fleeting community to replace someone with somebody else – even sometimes to change to people around because of a barely noticeable trait – are complete mysteries (Eisenstein 1995: 719).

There is no ideal woman who will finally concentrate Don Juan's libido.

As with Don Juanism, many of the associative chains in Eisenstein's memoir appear to be driven by (latent?) sexual desire. Consider the short paragraph that follows Eisenstein's description of his first encounter with Freud's biography of da Vinci: 'As regards my sorties through the fantastic jungles of psychoanalysis, which (the sorties) were imbued with the powerful spirit of the original "lebeda" (as I disrespectfully alluded to the sacred impulse of libido) I shall write of them later' (Eisenstein 1995: 354–55). Eisenstein's substitution of *lebeda*, or saltbushes, for libido, may appear to be based on a chance phonic resemblance, but it may also express an association of libido with the male member, as the

Russian word *lebed'* refers to another birdie, a swan. Indeed, the popular motif of Leda and the swan in Renaissance art, including a well-known painting by da Vinci, has made the association of the long-necked bird with the male member a commonplace. Given the agglutinative capacity of symbols, however, Eisenstein's word play may also serve as a reference to Ivan Lebedev, a Russian athlete and circus performer, whose image circulated widely in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Russia (fig. 1). In the memoirs Eisenstein describes Lebedev, who was referred to as Uncle Vanya, as 'the legendary wrestling referee, and hero of my (and many others'!) childhood' (Eisenstein 1995: 669). In addition, Lebedev was the editor of men's fitness magazines, such as *Hercules* (fig. 2), which featured images of scantily clad male athletes. Eisenstein refers to the mythological Hercules several times in the memoirs, once in reference to the Austrian director Josef von Sternberg's 'predilection for well-built males [which] brought Sternberg some compensation. In Berlin, he even stayed at the Hercules Hotel, across the Hercules Bridge, opposite the Hercules Fountain with its huge grey statue of Hercules. …' (Eisenstein 1995: 326), and elsewhere in referencing the myth of Hercules wrestling the Hydra (Eisenstein 1995: 613), an image that was often featured on the cover of Lebedev's fitness magazine (fig. 3) and that Eisenstein associates with the ancient Greek notion of sexual attraction as the search for one's other half, allegorized by Rabelais as the 'beast with two backs' (Eisenstein 1995: 485).

One might be accused of overreading Eisenstein's playful substitution of *lebeda* for *libido*, but doesn't his campy reference to the libido as 'sacred' encourage the reader to find something profane in *lebeda*? Indeed, the idea that such 'chance' linguistic associations could mean absolutely nothing is undercut when Eisenstein references psychanalyst Isidor Sadger's work on the sexual origins of word formations (Eisenstein 1995: 355, 599), suggesting a potential libidinal motivation behind any use of language.

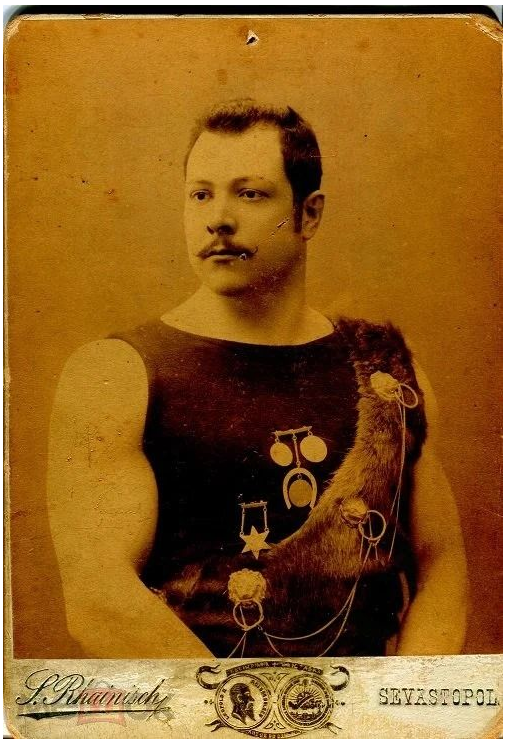

Figure I. Photograph of Ivan Lebedev.

Figure 2. Cover of a 1913 issue of Lebedev's journal *Gerkules*.

Figure 3. Image of Hercules wrestling the Hydra.

In addition to these men's fitness magazines, the illustrations in detective novels, which are built 'always and invariably [on] a double reading of the evidence' (Eisenstein 1995: 601), provided another rich source of homoerotic imagery for children of Eisenstein's generation. As Eisenstein notes, illustrations in Pinkerton detective novels often featured 'streams of sweat and torn shirts' (Eisenstein 1995: 401). It is therefore notable that Eisenstein attributes his first wet dream to a Nick Carter detective story (Eisenstein 1995: 542). In a later chapter, his interest in the 'inversion of opposites' extends to cross-dressing balls and bisexuality 'when it enters clearly

the area of ecstasy', as in the 'cast of mind of a saint' (Eisenstein 1995: 699). For Eisenstein, the state of ecstasy brings together mystical and sexual experience or allows for the substitution of the sexual for the religious and vice versa. We see a similar inversion or conflation of religion and sexuality in the figure of St Sebastian, whom Eisenstein mentions several times in the memoirs, and in his repeated juxtaposition of nuns and whores: 'But nobody should be shocked by so close an association between the holiest of maidens and women of easy virtue' (Eisenstein 1995: 211). As he notes elsewhere: 'It is worth taking the "fanaticism" out of religion: it can later be separated from the original object of worship, and be "displaced" to other passions …' (Eisenstein 1995: 73). It is interesting in this regard to consider a play on words deployed by Eisenstein as a retort to someone raising questions about his sexual orientation. Accused by Leonid Utesov of being a 'sexual mystic' [*polovoi mistik*], Eisenstein responds that it is better than being a 'shtetl waiter' [*mistichkovyi polovoi*], i.e., a waiter in a shtetl tavern, referencing Utesov's Jewish Odesa background (1995: 511). Based on the double meaning of the Russian word *polovoi* – the adjectival form of the noun *pol*, which can mean either 'floor' or 'biological sex', also functions as a substantivized adjective to mean 'waiter' – Eisenstein's pun offers an absurd diversion, a linguistic performance, in place of an admission or denial.

Eisenstein's often parodic exploration of potentially endless chains of meaning, connected by irrational phonic, graphic, or even visual resemblances, goes beyond the notion that one meaning can be substituted for another. Rather, it comes closer to the distinction made by Susan Sontag in her discussion of camp:

> The camp sensibility is one that is alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken. But this is not the familiar split-level construction of a literal meaning, on the one hand, and a symbolic meaning, on the other. It is the difference, rather, between the thing as meaning something, anything, and the thing as pure artifice (Sontag 1966: 283).

The promise of some definitive meaning dissolves in the wild performativity and artifice of Eisenstein's word play. The link

between the signifier and the signified is like the bridge over the Rio Grande River, 'that did not so much link the two banks—Mexico and America—together, as hold them apart' (Eisenstein 1995: 231).

Camp Talk, or The Art of Artifice

Artifice, or rather, the celebration of artifice, is perhaps the defining feature of a camp sensibility: 'its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration' (Sontag 1966: 277). As Susan Sontag elaborates in point number one of her 58-point essay 'Notes on "Camp"', 'Camp is a certain mode of aestheticization. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon' (Sontag 1966: 279), and later, in point 38: 'Camp is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world. It incarnates a victory of "style" over "content," "aesthetics" over "morality", of irony over tragedy' (Sontag 1966: 289).[9] One of the most pronounced elements of camp in Eisenstein's memoirs is the primacy of aesthetics over 'reality', although aesthetics here should not be understood as high art or as high art alone. Throughout the memoir, Eisenstein discusses works of elite and popular art and literature side by side, with equal sympathy and appreciation. In fact, it is that juxtaposition of high and low, of the sacred and profane, that constitutes an important aspect of Eisenstein's camp sensibility. And so, the opposition might be more generally expressed as one between the natural and the unnatural, as expressed in the opening lines of the chapter 'Encounters with Books', where Eisenstein replaces living creatures, symbols of the natural world, with books, which he anthropomorphizes:

> Birds fly to some saints: Francis of Assissi [*sic*].
> Beasts run to some legendary figures: Orpheus.
> Pigeons cluster around the old men of St. Mark's Square in Venice.
> A lion followed Androcles wherever he went.
> Books cluster around me.

[9] Sontag mentions Eisenstein in the essay, asserting that his films do not quite meet the standard of camp; she was, however, unable to consider the memoirs, which appeared in English translation only in 1995, nor the erotic drawings, which were published only in 1999. LaValley (2001: 58), on the other hand, uses the adjective 'camp' and 'campy' to describe the character of Vladimir in Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible* [*Ivan groznyi*, 1944].

> They fly to me, run to me, cling to me.
> So long have I loved them: large and small, fat and slender, rare editions and cheap paperbacks, they cry out through their dustcovers, or are perhaps sunk in contemplations in a solid, leather skin, as if wearing soft slippers (Eisenstein 1995: 350).

He then describes himself as 'a latter-day St Sebastian, pierced by arrows flying from shelves' (Eisenstein 1995: 352).

Time and again Eisenstein describes moments in his life when he encountered the world through the lens of art or literature. In fact, he claims to have encountered sex first through books, specifically, through the rather risqué books he found hidden in the St Petersburg apartment of his mother, whom he describes as 'oversexed' (Eisenstein 1995: 425). Those books included the novels *Juliette* [Histoire de Juliette ou Les prospérités du vice, 1797] by the Marquis de Sade, *The Torture Garden* [Le Jardin des supplices, 1899], by Octave Mirbeau, and an illustrated edition of the novella *Venus in Furs* [Venus im Pelz, 1870], by Leopold de Sacher-Masoch. He also mentions having created an image of Mexico from books long before he visited the country (Eisenstein 1995: 11). This idea of life mediated by art is elaborated on a more theoretical level where he eschews any distinction between biographies and autobiographies per se and autobiographical fiction. In this way, Eisenstein frames his memoirs not as an unmediated and sincere outpouring of thoughts and memories, but as an aesthetic object, a self-consciously fashioned work of life writing that must find its place among other such works, that is, among the established conventions of the genre. For example, in the chapter 'A Christmas Tree', described above, he attempts to explain the innocent curly-headed boy's desire for Mignet's bloody *History of the French Revolution* by referencing literary influences, ending with an invocation of biographical conventions: 'Probably my reading Dumas, *Ange Pitou*, and *Joseph Balsamo* of course had long since enthralled this "impressionable little boy", to use a cliché from biographers' (Eisenstein 1995: 60). Indeed, many of the experiences recounted in the memoir are mediated by a discussion of linguistic norms ('The word "citadel" is now not so fashionable'), stylistic conventions ('For some reason, I converse with God in the

French style: He and I were on *vous* terms'), or by works of art or literature ('A jet of water four storeys high pumped out of the ground. It looked like a picture of a geyser in a geography book') (Eisenstein 1995: 94, 73, 84). The memoirs are thick with literary and artistic references, and even the most mundane objects are filtered through literary or artistic representation, as in the opening of the chapter 'Dvinski': 'On the subject of beds. World literature has two superlative pronouncements to make on this matter' (Eisenstein 1995: 138). In fact, many of the chapters are dedicated not to events from Eisenstein's life, but to encounters with works of art and literature, as in the chapters 'The Works of Daguerre', 'Museums at Night', 'Pages from Literature', 'Encounters with Books', 'Bookshops', 'Books on the Road', 'The History of the Close-up', '*Monsieur, madame et bébé*', and 'To the Illustrious Memory of the Marquis', the last chapter referring to the Marquis de Sade. It is in 'The History of the Close-up', however, that he overtly establishes the primacy of art over life and does so in a distinctly camp fashion. He opens the chapter with a description of a white lilac branch that 'spilled through the window into my bedroom' (Eisenstein 1995: 461). Calling it 'the first of my memories of childhood associations', he then reveals that the lilac branch was not 'real':

> So it was that my consciousness awoke beneath a spray of lilac.
> Then it began nodding off again, for very many years at a time, beneath that same branch.
> Only the branch was not real but drawn; half painted and half embroidered in silk and gold thread.
> And it was on a Japanese folding screen.
> I used to doze off looking at this branch (Eisenstein 1995: 461).

He then goes on to describe the image on the screen in luxurious detail. In doing so, he not only reveals his first impression of nature to be artifice—'Nothing in nature can be campy' (Sontag 1966: 3) or, as Wilde put it in 'The Decay of Lying', 'The more we study Art, the less we care for Nature' (Sontag 1966: 3)—he also displays a camp affinity for decorative art, 'emphasizing texture, sensuous surface and style at the expense of content' (Sontag 1966: 280). But Eisenstein then short-circuits any lofty aesthetic pretensions by noting that the screen was damaged when

someone put a chair through it, and so it was taken away. This act of deflation distinguishes Eisenstein's camp from what Sontag describes as 'naïve, or pure camp', which is characterized by an essential seriousness that fails (Sontag 1966: 285). Eisenstein manages to 'dethrone the serious' in this case not from within but from the side, in orchestrating the *mise-en-scène*.

Not surprisingly, his camp take on art as artifice is especially evident in his comments on museums, where the perception of works of art (already mediated representations of 'reality' or 'real' experience) is itself mediated. First, because we have often seen reproductions of great works in books or on postcards before we see the 'real' thing, and, second, because museum guides mediate the experience in such a way as to leave the museum visitor 'blind': 'These unattractive ladies with dried-out hearts and flat, jumper-covered chests ensure that the visitor's perception of the picture is not spontaneous but spoilt by tedious analysis and dull-witted conclusions' (Eisenstein 1995: 307). Elsewhere, he offers a humorous comparison of art galleries to whorehouses (Eisenstein 1995: 365).

Camp Talk, or the Queer Art of Citation

Sociolinguist Keith Harvey elaborates on the relationship between camp and citation, to which Sontag alludes in the statement 'Camp sees everything in quotation marks' (Sontag 1966: 281). While describing citationality as 'a general take on linguistic semiosis' that encompasses 'the very notion of an act of enunciation—and treats *this* ironically' (Harvey 2002: 1147), Harvey goes on to argue that 'a particular type of allusiveness and manipulation of "quotation"' is deployed in camp 'to bind queer interlocutors' (Harvey 2002: 1149). That binding, Sontag argues, is achieved through 'flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation; gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders' (Sontag 1966: 283). In Harvey's terms, insiders can discern a statement as a quotation, while outsiders interpret the statements straight, so to speak, without quotation marks. Harvey goes on to distinguish three types of camp citationality, all three of which can be found in Eisenstein's memoirs. They involve citations of (a) the medium, (b) cultural artefacts, and (c) femininity.

In regard to citations that draw attention to the medium itself, word play has been discussed at length above, but one could add Eisenstein's discussion of etymology, tautology, palindromes, pronunciation, and handwriting styles, his liberal use of foreign words and slang, as well as quotation marks, and his interest in intersemiotic translation. It should also be noted that Eisenstein digresses on the topic of quotations itself, acknowledging his fascination with them as a distinct form of communication:

> Quotations differ. A dogmatist may use a quotation from an authority as a shield, for him to hide his ignorance or well-being behind. Quotations may be lifeless compilations. I see quotations as outrunners on either side of a galloping shafthorse. Sometimes they go too far, but they help one's imagination bowl along two distinct paths, supported by the parallel race. [...] I have quotations. Not enough of them. I would like to make a montage of the fragments discovered by others, but for a different purpose—mine! (Eisenstein 1995: 353-54).

Regarding citations of cultural artefacts, Eisenstein makes repeated references to what by mid-century belonged to a gay subcultural canon of literary and artistic artefacts and cultural figures. For example: '... And even my meeting with Victor Basch did have something aesthetically exciting about it, such as one might experience on meeting Mary Stuart's executioner, or the heroine of Shakespeare's sonnets, or the spy whose reports denounced Christopher Marlowe' (Eisenstein 1995: 222). The use of 'aesthetically' is clearly ironic—what aesthetic value could there be in meeting Mary Stuart's executioner or Marlowe's accuser? Moreover, Oscar Wilde had suggested in 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.' that the heroine of Shakespeare's sonnets was in fact a hero, the actor Willy Hughes, something of which Eisenstein as an admirer of Wilde was very likely aware, while the English playwright Christopher Marlowe was accused by Richard Baines of being an 'Atheist' with too much love for 'Tobacco & Boies [boys]'. These queer subtexts, which Eisenstein indexes with the campy phrase aesthetic excitement, demonstrate how camp 'incarnates a victory of "style" over "content," "aesthetics" over "morality", of irony

over tragedy' (Sontag 1966: 289), as does his association of divorce and suicide as 'modish' (Eisenstein 1995: 99).

Later, in the same chapter, Eisenstein mentions a scandalous event in a French theatre during a performance of Jean Cocteau's monodrama *The Human Voice* [La Voix humaine, 1930], which involves an actress onstage having a phone conversation with someone offstage. At one point, Cocteau's avowed enemy, the Surrealist poet Paul Éluard shouted out to the actress: 'Who are you talking to? Monsieur Desbordes?' Eisenstein describes this as a two-pronged insult, again campily combining the sacred and the profane: 'First, insulting the tradition of the sacred walls of France's leading theatre. And second, a direct attack on the author—a hint at his all-too-well known proclivities; in this case his name was linked with a young Monsieur Desbordes, a rising novelist' (Eisenstein 1995: 247). Jean Desbordes was Cocteau's lover, a fact that neither did much to conceal: they lived together in the mid-1920s, Cocteau provided the preface to Desbordes's poetic essay *I Adore* [J'adore, 1928] which was a kind of love letter to Cocteau, and Desbordes was the subject of numerous drawings by the artist. And so, Éluard's insult may have been directed at Cocteau's homosexuality or at the openness with which Cocteau and Desbordes carried on their relationship.

The memoirs also contain more encrypted references to works of art and literature that had become canonical in the modern gay subcultures of western Europe and the Americas. In the visual realm, he references the sexually suggestive, often androgynous illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley and in particular his illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, and homoerotic works of Renaissance art, such as *The Rape of Ganymede*, *Prometheus and the Eagle*, and *St Sebastian* (Eisenstein 1995: 310, 583, 352). The latter two, Eisenstein notes, were subjects of consistent interest: 'St Sebastian often crops up in drawing I do almost automatically'; 'Prometheus and the Eagle always returns to my pen' (1995: 532, 583).

The literary references that allude to an emerging queer literary canon include Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Marcel Proust. In regard to Whitman, Eisenstein references his work nursing wounded soldiers during the American Civil War, mentioning the fact that Whitman would often kiss the soldiers 'on the lips': 'The kindly, grizzled poet Walt Whitman

used to visit the wounded and dying. He would bring them comfort and tobacco. Kiss them on the lips. Sometimes more than once' (Eisenstein 1995: 319). He ends the passage by stating that he did not do the same when nursing Russian soldiers during the Civil War: 'I did not kiss anyone on the lips' (Eisenstein 1995: 319). He mentions Whitman's nursing of soldiers again in the chapter on daguerreotypes: 'These [soldiers] have been so ruthlessly and touchingly described in the pages of notes and diaries of the "great, grizzled poet", Whitman, who eased the last moments for several dozens of them in Washington hospitals…' (Eisenstein 1995: 296). Note the use of ellipses, which appear elsewhere in the memoirs to imply a sexual referent (see the passage on the chastity belt quoted below). It is also interesting that one of the only other references to kissing in the memoirs is gender neutral and specifically mentions lips: 'When I kiss a pair of lips, new, unfamiliar, for the first time, I am already thinking of how the farewell kiss will rest upon them' (Eisenstein 1955: 7), thus associating himself with Whitman or, at least, not foreclosing such an association. Moreover, such use of metonymy (in this case, having lips refer to a person) to avoid gender designations was a central feature of queer Russian poetry and perfected in the work of Aleksei Apukhtin, a poet of the late nineteenth century, often referred to as the Russian Wilde (see Baer 2017).

In regard to Melville, who is mentioned several times in the memoirs, Eisenstein references arguably the most libidinously charged homoerotic passage from *Moby Dick,* but does so elliptically: 'As Herman Melville puts it so well in *Moby Dick*… for I believe that much of a man's character will be found betokened in his backbone. I would rather feel your spine than your skull, whoever you are…" (from the chapter about the actual extraction of spermaceti from a whale's head)' (Eisenstein 1995: 504). This chapter, 'A Squeeze of the Hand' is described by Marc Démont (Démont 2018: 163) as 'particularly queer'. The shortened form of spermaceti, sperm, is used eight times in a passage where Ishmael 'discovers "an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling" for his male companions and sailors while together they squeeze lumps of sperm' (Démont 2018: 163–64, citing Melville 2002: 323). Regarding Proust, Eisenstein describes Vicomte Étienne de Baumont as Monsieur Charlus,

Proust's famous homosexual dandy (Eisenstein 1995: 229).

Harvey's third category deals with parodic citations of femininity, which occur at various moments in Eisenstein's memoirs, both in describing figures who appear themselves to be camp and in Eisenstein's own camp performance. Two notable examples of the former involve the actress Yvette Guilbert and the socialite Madame de Mandrot. About the former, Eisenstein writes: 'Madame was in despair. She had a cold. But for that, she would have sung her entire repertoire for me. [...] My visit, if not a matinée recital, was undoubtedly dramatic. An auburn wig. Self-important. Inordinately expressive. Exaggerated tread. Everything was trumpeted in a declamatory style ill-suited to conversation. *Après midi*—a continuous performance' (Eisenstein 1995: 261). About Madame de Mandrot: 'The *"belle chatelaine"*, as we always called her, was not at all indifferent to the Soviet delegation. As she said her farewells, she told us tragically: "Ah, Bolsheviks! Bolsheviks—you are the only true gentlemen!"' (Eisenstein 1995: 340).

Of course, it is difficult to neatly separate Eisenstein's own camp performance from his descriptions of these camp figures as their campiness bleeds into his writing through *style indirect libre*. In any case, Eisenstein's more autonomous citations of femininity are evident in a number of stylistic mannerisms. First, we see it in his extravagant or exaggerated expressions of emotion, which are typically addressed to authors, artists, or works of art, never to women: 'I was to worship him all my life'; 'And *Dieu sait* I adored her repertoire'; '[my] mad attraction for Lawrence' ; and 'a sixteenth-century engraving I had fallen in love with' (Eisenstein 1995: 263, 261, 360, 439). Second, it is evident in a comic or mock prudery in relation to sexual matters, indexed by such French expressions as '*un peu risqué*' or '*bouche bée*', and by coy sexual references, such as referring to de Sade's *Justine* as an 'unorthodox breviary' or a whorehouse as a 'den of iniquity' (Eisenstein 1995: 495, 360, 517, 379). We see it too in the following elliptical descriptions of a chastity belt, a codpiece and a death erection, respectively: 'This idiosyncratic saddle, an iron "wait for me", assured the ladies' inviolability while their lords spent long years on the arid sands of the Holy Land, on military expeditions... Mischievous tales from the past tell of duplicate keys...'; 'Everyone knows that in those days knights donned each iron

legging separately. Between them was another separate, small (though not always) steel shield, which stuck impudently out from under the steel opening, in the lower position of the knight's abdomen'; 'Villa, who ordered the prisoners to be hanged naked so that he and his soldiers could be entertained by the sight of their last physiological reactions, peculiar to hanged men' (Eisenstein 1995: 308, 315, 420).

Note the double use of ellipses in his description of the chastity belt, used in the first instance to suggest that the knights may have strayed while wifeless in the Holy Land, and in the second instance, to suggest that the wives may have found ways to circumvent the contraption.

Finally, Harvey notes that another particular way to index femininity in camp discourse is through a nuanced appreciation of colour, or rather, shades of colour, citing the following example from Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991):

> BELIZE [. . .] Oh cheer up, Louis. Look at that heavy sky out there. . .
> LOUIS Purple.
> BELIZE Purple? Boy, what kind of homosexual are you, anyway? That's not purple, Mary, that colour up there is (*Very grand.)* mauve (quoted in Harvey 2002: 1152).

While Eisenstein discusses colour throughout the memoirs as a basis for associative chains, there is one particularly camp use of colour that appears somewhat incongruently at the end of a lightly homoerotic description of men in chains on the cover of a Nick Carter detective novel:

> It showed an underground part full of various implements of torture. Collars were chained to the walls.
> Each collar gripped tightly the neck of a young man who was stripped to the waist.
> They all had well-groomed hair with a parting.
> And their one item of clothing—their trousers—were perfectly creased.
> The cover was pale lilac (Eisenstein 1995: 536).

Conclusion

Reading Eisenstein's diary as an elaborate work of camp offers an alternative to the reductive hermeneutic lenses of either the state censor or the closet. Eisenstein himself offers glimpses of that alternative throughout the memoirs, as in the following

passage, which he cites from Stuart Gilbert's biography of James Joyce in regard to some draft pages of *Ulysses* sent by mail to a friend:

> So curious is the language of this episode that, when it was sent by the author from Switzerland to England during the Great War, the Censor held it up, suspecting that it was written in some secret code. Two English writers (it is said) examined the work, and came to the conclusion that it was not 'code' but literature of some unknown kind (quoted in Eisenstein 1995: 665).

Eisenstein's camp sensibility, I would argue, undermines a reading of the memoir as merely 'coded'—the effect of the censor or the closet—encouraging us to see it instead as a literature of some unknown kind: a work of queer life writing that melds decadent writing and avant-garde experimentation, high and low cultural references, and campy asides next to serious theoretical reflections, ultimately queering the distinction between living and life writing and endlessly deferring any ultimate confessional truth.

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