

“Freedom through this strange kind of love”: Impersonal be(com)ing and Barbara Adair’s *In Tangier We Killed the Blue Parrot*

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Abstract

Barbara Adair’s first novel *In Tangier We Killed the Blue Parrot*, published in South Africa in 2004, draws on the American writers Paul and Jane Bowles’s time in Tangier, Morocco, and fictionalizes their struggles to write as well as their efforts to love, not only each other but also their same-sex Moroccan lovers. In this article, I take seriously the notion of impersonal intimacy as articulated by Leo Bersani to explore the potentialities of realizing and sustaining an indeterminate in-between space of be(com)ing that *In Tangier* articulates. I further suggest in this article that the impersonal be(com)ing opened by *In Tangier* offers a response to the obsession with known and knowable categories of identification that Ashraf Jamal provocatively diagnosed over a decade ago as the predicament in South African cultural production and reception as well as his insistence on “rethink[ing] the human in South Africa and how, as a constitutive part of the process, [to] restore the capacity for love” (2005: 20).

Keywords

Barbara Adair, be(com)ing, impersonal intimacy, love, South African literature

I

Barbara Adair’s first novel *In Tangier We Killed the Blue Parrot*, published in South Africa in 2004, draws on the American writers Paul and Jane Bowles’s time in Tangier, Morocco, and fictionalizes their struggles to write as well as their efforts to love, not only each other but also their same-sex Moroccan lovers. Adair alternates a third-person

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narration focalized mostly through Belquassim, Paul's¹ lover, with italicized first-person monologic reflections from primarily Paul's and Jane's perspectives. Along with her only other novel to date, *End*, Adair's work is, in my view, distinct within the corpus of "South African" writing; and this strange out-of-placeness is perhaps best signalled in the omission of *In Tangier* from the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature's* annual bibliography which comprehensively documents publications of literature categorized under the national rubric "South Africa" (Warren, 2005). Cheryl Stobie indeed maintains that *In Tangier* is an "anomalous text, difficult to classify, but comprehensible *primarily* within a South African context" (2007: 266; my emphasis). She further argues that the novel, although set entirely elsewhere, ultimately "allows for productive and progressive reflection on the contemporary South African social landscape, as well as on South Africa's position within the continent of Africa" (2007: 267).

Stobie's symptomatic reading of *In Tangier* epitomizes the novel's reception in the scant critical consideration it has garnered. In her unpublished master's dissertation on *In Tangier* which was supervised by Stobie and is the only other academic engagement with the novel, Jean Rossmann initially offers a reflection on her claim that "the significance of Adair's text lies in its status as a South African novel and in the questions arising out of its place in the landscape of South African literatures" (2006: 5). She contends that "[i]n terms of a poststructuralist critique of the text, centrality should not be afforded to the author or her position as a South African, 'displaced' in Tangier as a tourist/traveller comparable with the expatriate Bowleses" (2006: 36). This gesture towards a reading of *In Tangier* which does not centre on revealing what the novel says about the South African condition is nevertheless co-opted into a teleological explanation of the nation, as Rossmann concludes that the novel "creates a space for dialogue between the present South African social text and the past text of the Bowleses' lives and fictions" (2006: 141). She insists, for instance, that "[i]t would seem that Adair's text mirrors a South African social reality; that is, the gap between constitutional guarantees and the actual experiences of women in contemporary South Africa" (2006: 144). Stobie similarly implies that *In Tangier* is most usefully read as an allegory of post-apartheid South Africa because it draws parallels between the contestations and reconfigurations of "intimate connections" and "ideologies and creative forms" (2007: 246) that take place in the interzone of mid-twentieth-century Tangier and contemporary post-apartheid South Africa.

This narrow symptomatic approach to *In Tangier* that adamantly resituates it within a "South African" framework is, I would argue, exactly the kind of interpretative move that Ashraf Jamal argues the "dull and prescriptive enterprise" (2010: 15) of literary criticism in South Africa would make. Over a decade ago, in *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa*, Jamal provocatively diagnosed that cultural production and reception in South Africa are still oppressively dogged by the divisive logic of cultural solidarity and difference established by apartheid. The South African cultural imaginary is, according to Jamal, stuck in rigid and inadequate categories of "nomination" (2005: 9) and identification, and freedom is in his view the transgression of both these closures of the past and the reactive nature of imaginative expression which persists today. What Jamal thus argues for is "a sphere of expression that accepts the unthinkable: that which has not heretofore been thought; that which in its nature resists thought; that which challenges the prohibition of the unnameable" (2005: 7). More specifically, Jamal is committed to

imagining a space beyond the obsession with known and knowable categories of identification, urging an engagement with the unthinkable indeterminacies of what it means to be human in contemporary South Africa. This must entail thinking through “an extra-moral and a-categorical realm, a realm that bursts and renders fluid all categories and [...] challenge[s] a hegemonic drive to categorize, divide, and rule” (2005: 145). According to Jamal, a “recovery” from the predicament of the overdetermination of identitarianism only “arises from a psychic and epistemic rupture, from a place within rupture called *love*: a place that is immune” (2005: 162; my emphasis).

Although Jamal does not quite articulate what he means by “love”, I think that his call to reflect carefully on the relationship between self and other² offers a point of entry to the larger critical stakes of my consideration of Adair’s preoccupation with intimacy and relationality in *In Tangier*. Rossmann indeed brings to the fore these concerns, suggesting that “the relationship between self and Other as represented by Adair reveals a quest for the impossible annihilation of difference or alterity” (2006: 49). She further maintains that *In Tangier* offers, especially through Paul, “a utopian vision, challenging the limits and boundaries of love/intimacy and suggesting new possibilities beyond the limits of the known” (2006: 49). Nevertheless, even though Rossmann acknowledges that “Adair’s text is a palimpsest that allows, through its postmodern technique, a space for the expression of new modes of intimacies” (2006: 4), she believes that “[w]hilst raising contemporary issues surrounding sexual freedom, the ethics and aesthetics of sadomasochistic counterpleasures, and creating space for alternative patterns of intimacy, Adair’s vision [...] is limited” (2006: 147). My sense is that Rossmann’s interpretation of intimacy and relationality in *In Tangier* does not sufficiently account for Adair’s careful, reserved vision, which recognizes the dangers of the desire to “annihilate” difference but is also sceptical of the possibility of bringing the self and the other into a relation of equality. What Adair seems to be attentive to is the nuanced spaces that sex and physical touch, as well as radical acts of writing in the feminine libidinal economy (what Hélène Cixous calls *écriture féminine*), may open for a consideration of difference — especially sexual and racial difference — and the potential for what I will call impersonal be(com)ing.

II

In *Intimacies*, his dialogue with Adam Phillips, Leo Bersani articulates an ethics based not on recognition but on an embracing of indeterminacies, which he calls impersonal narcissism or impersonal intimacy. What is necessary, according to Bersani, is “a profound shift in registers of intimacy: from our heterosexual culture’s reserving the highest relational value for the couple to a communal model of impersonal intimacy” (Bersani and Phillips, 2008: 42). Intimacy in Bersani’s articulation is not concerned with individual egos and the differences that underlie our personalities, but becomes about the reciprocal love of the selfsame in the other, the mutual recognition of the “singularities” and virtual potentialities that people share and can cultivate together. Bersani proposes that we emulate a model of relationality in which “each partner demands of the other [...] that he reflect the lover’s type of being, his universal singularity (and not his psychological

particularities, his personal difference), by recognizing and cultivating that singularity as his own most pervasive, most pressing potentiality” (2008: 86).

Even though Bersani realizes that this universalizing attempt to erase boundaries may be problematic, he emphasizes nonetheless that

[i]f we were able to relate to others according to this model of impersonal narcissism, what is different about others (their psychological individuality) could be thought of as merely the envelope of the more profound (if less fully realized, or completed) part of themselves which is our sameness. Naturally, each subject’s type of being is not reflected in everyone else. But the experience of belonging to a family of singularity without national, ethnic, racial, or gendered borders might make us sensitive to the ontological status of difference itself as what I called the nonthreatening supplement of sameness. (2008: 86)

That is to say, what is ultimately politically transformational and productive about impersonal intimacy is that it is a kind of relationality not based on mastery or absolute knowledge of the other, but on a non-domineering reckoning with difference. However idealistic impersonal intimacy may seem, it offers a productive shift in paradigm for working with our inherent unsettling nonsovereignty, and the possibility of interacting empathetically with the other; being, as Phillips puts it, “attuned [...] to what each is becoming in the presence of the other” (2008: 113).

In *The Ethics of Opting Out*, which attempts to consolidate recent articulations of the social and the antisocial in queer thinking, Mari Ruti argues that it is perhaps time to take up the impersonal seriously and differently. For Ruti, an ethical paradigm “that merely (benevolently) tolerates the other as a symbolic or imaginary entity is not strong enough, for it balks in the face of difference that feels too radically different” (2017: 206). In other words, relationality based on empathic identification ultimately fails because, in Ruti’s view, “whenever our symbolic and imaginary supports collapse, the other risks becoming overly proximate in its grotesque jouissance, thereby effectively neutralizing our capacity to empathize with its vulnerability” (2017: 206). To this end, she articulates a reinvigoration of Lacanian ethics which “look[s] for ways to transcend the hostility that arises when the other ceases to make (symbolic and imaginary) sense” (2017: 211). Bersani’s project is, according to Ruti, an example thereof in its “ask[ing] us to relate to the utter singularity of the other as an entity who, like us, is fanatically driven to the traumatic groove of its drive destiny” (2017: 207). In this article, then, I want to follow Bersani and Ruti in taking impersonal intimacy seriously as a concept to explore Adair’s *In Tangier*. I will attend to the implications of such a reading in relation to Jamal’s articulations of the predicaments of cultural production and reception in South Africa, and his insistence on “rethink[ing] the human in South Africa and how, as a constitutive part of the process, restore the capacity for love” (2005: 20).

III

It is well known that Paul and Jane Bowles had an unconventional, and what may perhaps be called queer, relationship: even though they were married, they had sexual relationships with people of their own sex (Meyers, 2011: 171). Millicent Dillon also

mentions in *A Little Original Sin*, her biography of Jane Bowles, that the Bowleses often discussed their affairs and “their ideal of a marriage, and agreed that no marriage was any good unless the partners were free” (1988: 43). Paul’s male Moroccan lover Belquassim in *In Tangier* is based on the minor character of the same name in Paul Bowles’s novel *The Sheltering Sky*, whereas Cherifa, Jane’s female Moroccan lover, is drawn from Jane Bowles’s lover of the same name, whom Jeffrey Meyers describes, perhaps too prejudicially, as “[a]n illiterate savage who spoke only the local Moghrebi dialect and laughed uproariously at her own jokes, [...] [and] was notorious for her black magic and insatiable greed, her love of alcohol and wild rages” (2011: 178).

Throughout *In Tangier*, the nature of love is a constant preoccupation for the three central characters, Paul, Jane, and Belquassim, and they try in their own ways to make sense of the burden of negotiating some sense of self which does not violently subsume the difference of the other. Jane’s reflection on her relationship with Paul is pivotal in this regard. She says that:

I love Paul. I will love him forever. But he says he has never loved anyone. How can I love someone who does not love me back? He always says “You are not I. So you love and I will not.” He has colonised me, or have I allowed this colonisation, as some say of the Moroccans? They allowed it to happen, as they knew that they would gain much from the French. They wanted it. They were lesser than their masters were. Am I lesser than Paul? Is he my master? (Adair, 2004: 25)³

Confronted with Paul’s seemingly aloof resistance to intersubjectivity, Jane wonders whether any interaction between people, whether it be between people of different genders or of different races, necessarily sets up a conditional and hierarchical relationship of oppression. What Jane thus calls into question is whether love is always a force of subjugation, whether the self always ends up trying to obliterate difference in its interactions with the other. Nonetheless, Jane also expresses some unease at the realization that people in fact seem to be complicit in their desire to maintain categories of difference, and her yoking of gender and colonial injustices is indicative of an implicit acknowledgement of as well as an attempt to mitigate her own involvement in the categorical “colonisation” of others.

This paradoxical entanglement with difference is reiterated in Paul’s response to Jane, “You are not I. So you love and I will not”. Here, Adair has Paul reference the title of Paul Bowles’s puzzling short story “You Are Not I”, collected in *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories*, in which a young woman who escapes a mental institution ends up at her sister’s house only for her to be forcefully taken back to the institution. As the young woman is manhandled back into her room at the institution, she observes that “no one realized that she was not I” (2006: 218), that she has somehow swapped places (mentally?) with her sister and it is the latter who is now confined in the institution. Dillon maintains in *You Are Not I*, her biography of Paul Bowles, that “You Are Not I” is “crucial, central” (1998: 239) to Bowles’s oeuvre and argues that “the essence of the story” is the “idea of the interpenetration of beings to the point of exchange of identity, the idea of the dissolution of borders between beings” (1998: 241). I think, rather, that Bowles’s short story demonstrates that the encounter with difference is always a conflictual one,

for even though the young woman “ke[pt] insisting inside [her]self” and “willed” (2006: 214) a disintegration of the boundaries between herself and her sister, the curious use of subject pronouns in the title asserts that such intersubjective relations are impossible. Indeed, “You Are Not I” suggests that interactions between people are always a violent negotiation of scripted categories of identification — such as between those inside and those outside (the mental institution), between those who abide by social expectations and those who live by their personal convictions — and that a total identification with the other, which is a complete erasure of difference, threatens the subject itself with annihilation. What Jane’s reflection on love thus indicates is her commitment to intimate, intersubjective encounters with other people despite the burden of sustaining an identity which admits otherness without eradicating difference.

Paul’s refusal of this burden, on the other hand, is reasserted when he declares that “I never want a place or a person to appropriate me. I will never take sides again, I do not have this right” (99). For him, interacting with others entails choosing identitarian modes of being, and he does not wish to do this as it means forcibly appropriating and being appropriated by difference, which inevitably involves a loss of selfhood. He thus cautions that “once you reveal everything to another you fall under his power. If I ever told you one important thing this is it — don’t reveal yourself completely to another” (147). Paul seems to propose apathetic loneliness as the ethical alternative. He remarks that “[b]lack solitariness is in my head. And to love. . . do I even know what it means?” (22), and further argues that

I am not sure that I want to agree with what he [Jean-Paul Sartre] said later in his writings. He tried to say that our salvation is with each other as this is the only way we are free to experience and so to be. I am not sure that we cannot save ourselves alone, that is if we think that we need to be saved. I am not sure that the solidarity of others is a perspective I concur with. [...] I think that human beings are confined to a life of solitariness, which is why I like it in this city [Tangier]. Here I have no illusions about my solitariness, I am outside the social milieu, I am outside of that which is familiar. So my solitariness is reinforced. (59)

Paul suggests here that loneliness entails a moving away from everything that one is accustomed to, and significantly, what is also intimated is that in doing so, one shifts from a static being toward a mobile becoming.

Indeed, Paul endorses the social isolation that Tangier affords him as he finds it productive. He claims that

I love the silence out here. It teaches me something about solitude, about reintegration. [...] Sometimes it is difficult not to try to keep hold of the man that I know, the American in me, but I think I have let it take its course. I do not remain who I am. It’s not loneliness that I feel [...]. I hear nothing but my own breathing, and I feel nothing but the blood moving through my veins and up into my brain allowing me to think. After this feeling I can only feel me. Just me, the inside of me. The inside of silence. The inside of nothing. (41)

It is paradoxically this distancing from others that allows Paul to feel a “reintegration”, a sense of subjective and social coherence, which opens up the productive potential inherent in his seemingly nihilistic negativity. He asserts that “I do not have feelings. I am able

to stand outside the circle, never moving inside. In this way I can capture the feelings of others. I survive by words” (20). Put differently, this reintegrating loneliness is what allows Paul to open up a space for writing, a space in which he can try to both empathetically engage with and “survive” — that is, not be destroyed by — difference. In this regard, he maintains that “[his] writing is based on nothing — that nothingness that creates existence” (20), as it is in and through writing that he feels he is able to arrive non-violently and constructively at the other. Indeed, Belquassim remarks that Paul loves the stories that he told him and from these stories Paul “would fashion his own tales, tales of intrigue and passion. *One world enjoined with another*” (7; my emphasis).

Nonetheless, Paul also points to the limits of writing as a space for an unconditional interaction with the other. He observes that

[i]n writing, unlike music, I have to think of the people in the story, I have to think of where my characters are and how they will respond to what they are doing. I control them. I don’t judge them. What have I got to do with my characters? Nothing, they decide what to do although I write about it. But I leave myself out of their lives, I do not impose myself on their lives. I therefore cannot judge them. But I do control them. (53)

This authority over the other which Paul feels he has in writing suggests that for him, writing does not quite exemplify a space for impersonal intimacy, as he is unable to completely suspend the need to fully know or control the other. Paul thus brings to the fore what Lauren Berlant finds “wishful and willful” about the notion of impersonal intimacy (2009: 269). Berlant maintains that “we have all been affected by ideas and by people, but attachments multiply affects without forcing detachment from prior positionings, especially if we see attachments mainly as aggressive and tightly binding” (2009: 269). This implies that it is not as easy as Bersani suggests for the ego to let go of the narcissistic need to subsume the threatening difference of the other, in order to recognize the other’s singularity and similar potentiality for becoming. I would argue that Adair recognizes this difficulty, and tries in *In Tangier* to think through the implications of not being able to relate to the other along the model of impersonal intimacy.

For Adair, this failure precipitates colonization, and Bersani indeed remarks that “the imperialist project of invading and appropriating foreign territories” is “an ego-project, a defensive move (or a pre-emptively offensive move) against the world’s threatening difference from the self” (Bersani and Phillips, 2008: 66). Regarding “the division of the country [Morocco] between the French and the Spanish, and the creation of the International Zone [in Tangier]”, Paul observes that “because we think that we are god we have divided the land too” (83), pointing to the ego-narcissism that is the European imperial project. Furthermore, on witnessing firsthand a Moroccan rebel rioting against and being shot by a French guard, Paul says to Belquassim:

No, I want to hear these sounds. This is the sound of people who want to be free, free from the French who won’t let them walk on their stinking bourgeois boulevards without being sneered at. And they think that if they are free of the French, if the Boulevard Pasteur is called the Avenue Mohammed V, they will be free from hunger and from nihilism. They won’t you know, but it doesn’t matter, what matters is their movement, their need to destroy those that they

perceive are the cause of this wanton poverty and squalor. We are all its cause. We all want to destroy. (96)

As I suggested earlier, and as Paul reiterates here, colonization seems to fundamentally be about an overcommitment to sustaining particular categories of identity, such that it becomes impossible to admit otherness without violently eradicating difference. What Paul proposes though, is that *everyone* is implicated in this antagonistic politics of subjective identification, and he thus also implies that what is necessary is a rethinking of relationality without aggression. The incident in which Belquassim is attacked with a knife by a Moroccan man for being a “sell-out whore” (80) — that is, for his perceived obsequiousness to Paul — also speaks to this hostility towards the other that results from ego identities. The native assailant reflects that

[t]hey take our country. They take our culture. They take our women. And now they take our boys. They take what it is to be a man from this country and they leave only sickly women behind. The cutting, I did it because violence makes me a man. I cannot drive them out but I can be a man. A man who can make blood flow. A man who is not a woman. They cannot take me. They cannot make me a woman. I must stay a man, stay a man because then I can do violence. (89)

This unwavering zeal for known and knowable categories of identification compels the destruction of the other, foreclosing any openness to difference. Cherifa’s comment on the disappearance of Paul’s “beautiful blue parrot” (57), which Paul and Belquassim believe she had killed with magic, is significant in this regard. In her saying that “I do not know what happened to the bird, [...] but that bird was not a Moroccan bird. You brought it from somewhere else. It did not belong here in this Moroccan house” (58), she enforces scripted categories of (non)belonging.

For Jane, this colonization of the other, this brutal imposition of identificatory categories in one’s attempts to know and to relate to the other, is inadvertent. She remarks that “[n]o one who thinks, I believe, can ever rationalise colonialism in any form. It is only the faceless patriot who believes in the right of conquest and subjugation. [...] Perhaps we all do it without recognising what it is. Am I colonising Cherifa, or is she colonising me?” (24). As indicated here in her uncertainty, what Jane is preoccupied with throughout *In Tangier* is the “nonsovereignty” of the self — which Berlant and Lee Edelman clarify in *Sex, or the Unbearable* is “the psychoanalytic notion of the subject’s constitutive division that keeps us, as subjects, from fully knowing or being in control of ourselves and that prompts our misrecognition of our own motives and desires” (2014: viii) — and the implications of this nonsovereignty for one’s endeavours to relate to others. For Berlant and Edelman, sex is a site which “holds out the prospect of discovering new ways of being and of being in the world”, “[b]ut it also raises the possibility of confronting our limit in ourselves or in another, of being inundated psychically or emotionally” (2014: vii). It seems to me that Adair explores in *In Tangier* the kinds of spaces that physical touch and sexual intercourse offer for thinking anew about relationality and intimacy, for the self to suspend its fixation with frameworks of knowing to begin moving towards the other.

Jane observes in her reflection on her relationship with Paul that, even though she cannot logically explain her desire to relate to him, she feels a strong affective connection when they touch each other: “I gave [my soul] to him, and even if he remains an enigma, love is not rational. [...] When we touch each other, it is passion mixed with my emotions and his lack of emotion that I love most of all. It is the way he touches me, touches my skin. Skin on skin. And we don’t have sex any more” (25). These remarks of Jane’s intimate the intense association that is a radical encounter with the other beyond categories of difference. In this way, Jane’s comment on the ineffectuality of words and her desire to “feel” — “what are words anyway? To me they mean nothing as long as I have my feelings, both the good and the bad ones. I do not need to describe them. I just want to feel” (26) — can perhaps be interpreted literally: to “feel”, that is, to touch, realizes forms of continuous exchange which are also an openness to the other.

Nonetheless, Jane’s relationship with Cherifa foregrounds the destabilizing emotional “inundations”, the overwhelming anxieties and frustrations, that also accompany sex and physical touch’s unsettling resistance to the fixity of identificatory categories. Jane observes that “lust is harsh. It knows no boundaries or rationality. Cherifa impales me. [...] When she touches me it is as if she is putting a knife through my body, I can’t move. [...] Those long fingers over my nipples, squeezing them, fondling them. Watching my pleasure. Obsession, obsessive. It’s a feeling that so attracts me, but at the same time it repulses me” (50). This *jouissance*, this painful pleasure that results from erotic touch, undoes the subject by making clear the limits of knowability — by “break[ing] down the fantasy of sovereignty”, as Edelman (Berlant and Edelman, 2014: 71) puts it — in the self’s struggles to relate empathetically to the other. Indeed, Jane further comments that

[w]hen she [Cherifa] touches me, and whispers to me, my body seems to have a life of its own. It just moves and responds and it refuses to be influenced by what I say in my head. [...] There are no rules in this game of passion. And Paul, when Paul touches me, and when I touch him, my head and my hands move together. But when I touch Cherifa my hands move on their own, they have no guide. It’s a kind of love I feel for her. But what is love really? I can’t compare what I feel for her to what I feel for Paul, but can’t they both be called love? Or, is love something that is reserved only for others? Something that I can never know? (51)

This persistent apprehension that Jane expresses about the nature of these encounters with difference signals the committed yet also perturbing openness to thinking transformatively about relationality that sex and physical touch offer. As Berlant and Edelman argue, “[r]eimagining forms of relation entails imagining new genres of experience” (2014: ix). Jane’s uncertainty about “love” demonstrates her attempts to experiment with new, impersonal modes of intimacy, despite what Berlant and Edelman would call the unbearable negativity of sex.

Paul, on the other hand, seems to imply that sex in fact cannot, as Berlant puts it, “induce a loosening of the subject that puts fear, pleasure, awkwardness, and above all experimentality in a scene that forces its participants to disturb what it has meant to be a person and to ‘have’ a world” (Berlant and Edelman, 2014: 117). He claims that “I don’t much care for sex, which is why I do not often get involved with it” (23), and when he does engage in sexual intercourse, sex seems to be an act of appropriation. For instance,

after one particular sexual encounter with Belquassim, “Paul leaned across him and with his forefinger traced his own name with Belquassim’s semen across the flat brown stomach. Belquassim could feel the letters ‘P-A-U-L’” (29). This is clearly a symbolic act of claiming sovereignty, demonstrating Paul’s unwillingness to be unsettled and move beyond himself. Indeed, Dillon notes that “[i]n Paul [Bowles]’s own fiction, whenever the sexual act appears, it is almost invariably played out as a drama of one person overcoming another, of one person dominating and the other submitting” (1998: 218).

Nonetheless, Paul asserts that he “want[s] to make a case for love” (133). “I believe that if you are in love there is never any guarantee that you will ever be loved back”, he declares. “Love is only valuable if it is instinctive, rather than rational [...] I don’t need to be loved back by anyone. I love her more than I have loved anyone. But my love is selfless, because, in a sense, if I am in love with my own reflection, it’s a reflection that I see in her. And in this I stand alone. It’s possible then that I am the cruel one” (133). This is perhaps the clearest articulation in *In Tangier* of Bersani’s notion of impersonal intimacy, the mode of relationality in which “the self the subject sees reflected in the other is not the unique personality central to modern notions of individualism” (Bersani and Phillips, 2008: 85). For Bersani, then, it is imperative that the self collapses the differentiating, and thus violent, categories of identification which not only structure the ego’s desire for assurance of its own existence but also one’s interactions with others. He goes on to clarify that the “fundamental premise of impersonal narcissism is that to love the other’s potential self is a form of self-love, a recognition that the partners in this intimacy already share a certain type of being (a sharing acknowledged by love)” (2008: 124). Paul’s recognition that encounters with the other are only constructive if they are “instinctual”, and more significantly, “selfless”, thus speaks to this. This impersonal intimacy that Paul and Jane share is acknowledged by Belquassim. Observing Jane and Paul together in the hospital when Jane falls ill, Belquassim “leaned against the wall and watched them in their intimacy. He had never been so close to something like this before and he felt awed. Whatever it was, he felt its intensity rush over him, clouding his thoughts as he battled to comprehend it. Why her, he thought, why her?” (158). It is also reiterated by Jane, who claims that “[t]hat *incomprehensible closeness* that we have, it is not a logical closeness, but it is one that I do not question. That is how I love [Paul]” (89; my emphasis).

As I have indicated, Adair seems to propose throughout *In Tangier* that physical touch and sexual intercourse as well as the act of writing may open up spaces which realize the “incomprehensible closeness” that is an expression of impersonal intimacy, though she is evidently also hesitant about the potential of the self to hold off the colonization of the other. That is, she is sceptical of whether the self can suspend the need to know the other in order to begin moving towards the in-between where otherness is admitted without the erasure of difference. Paul reiterates this view when he observes: “How can we redeem ourselves? Through a community with other men as some have already put forward? Maybe we can even be lucid about this indifference. There is no prophylaxis, no solution. All I can do is write what I see and let other people be the judge of it” (98). Paul cynically implies that people have never quite been able to relate to one another without violence, as we have not been able to treat difference indifferently and impersonally, and even though he acknowledges that he does not have a “solution” to this, he suggests

that writing is the only way he can make sense of social encounters. Indeed, Belquassim mentions that “Paul needed his words. His stories were like pictures created by hashish, they painted him into an unknown world of raw emotion that he had never recognised or known existed. Only his characters knew of this emotion, but even they were unable to recognise it” (10). It is significant that it is Belquassim, a character from Paul Bowles’s novel *The Sheltering Sky*, who asserts that there is a “[f]reedom through this strange kind of love” (68): writing liberates people from conventional modes of being and knowing and offers a space for what Berlant calls an “experimentality in worlding” (Berlant and Edelman, 2014: 100), a dynamic space where intimacy and relationality can be thought differently.

Ultimately, then, Adair seems to suggest through *In Tangier* that the location of love is in the space of the in-between, that space where two people *begin to move* — but not arrive at, as that would entail an erasure of difference — beyond the self towards the other. It is in this space that I also locate this sense of be(com)ing: what I draw attention to in my parenthetical formulation is the relationship fostered by the textual between a coming towards the other and a sexual coming. Sarah Dillon astutely observes that it is the literary which holds together the “disparate examples” Bersani uses in *Intimacies* to develop his notion of impersonal intimacy (2015: 60). Following Dillon, I would argue that Adair regards writing and literature as also “not just necessary to impersonal intimacy: literature is *the* medium of impersonal intimacy” (2015: 60; emphasis in original). That is to say, in challenging rigidly conventional understandings of corporeality, identity, and relationality, and in, as Berlant would put it, “displacing sex from its normative function as the mechanism of emotional cohesion that sustains aggressive heteronormativity” (Berlant and Edelman, 2014: 13), Adair situates *In Tangier* in what Cixous would call *écriture féminine*. In other words, a writing in the feminine libidinal economy which recuperates the unsettling, emancipatory potentialities of *jouissance* and which “give[s] passage to this further-than-myself in myself” (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 56). Even though Adair suggests through *In Tangier* that the self and the other cannot quite relate equally and non-oppressively, it is exactly this movement beyond the self towards equality — that is, the movement towards what Phillips understands in *Intimacies* as “the longed for and feared experience of exchange, of intimacy, of desire indifferent to personal identity” (Bersani and Phillips, 2008: 113) — that opens up the space for impersonal be(com)ing.

Reading Adair’s writerly text *In Tangier*, then, becomes, in a reformulation of Edelman’s observation, a kind of unbearable encounter that breaks down the structuring fantasy of reading subjects as they are compelled by the text to reconsider their relation to others and their concept of who they are (Berlant and Edelman, 2014: 108). Indeed, Dillon maintains that “[l]iterature enables an impersonal intimacy between reader and characters, between reader and author and, perhaps most importantly, between co-readers” (2015: 60); Marlene van Niekerk’s passing observation in her appraisal of *In Tangier*, published somewhat oddly as the last page of the book, that it “is a reading experience that *lingers in the mind*” (2004: n.p.; my emphasis), indexes my articulation of impersonal be(com)ing. It is thus also in this way that we can make sense of the title of the novel, *In Tangier We Killed the Blue Parrot*. The first-person plural “we” recognizes that even though everyone is implicated in this project of colonization, this desire to work

through the incoherencies that trouble the fixity of identity and to comprehensively know the other, we can all become more aware of each other's potential becoming after reading the novel. In this way we may also effect an impersonal mode of relationality which, to use Cixous's eloquent exposition, is "a renunciation of the demands of a self that wants to exert power over the other, a renunciation that would accept, without giving in, so good-heartedly, to deliver itself, to open up, to give rise to the other while respecting them" (2008: 26).

IV

Although Jamal, as I pointed out earlier, does not quite articulate what "love" signifies for him, he stresses that a realization of the potential of love is inextricably linked to the attainment of freedom and the prospect of engaging differently with South Africa, beyond a pathological obsession with overdetermined, binaristic enunciations of difference which foreclose any positive engagement with the "heterogeneous complexity of life" (2005: 37) in the country. He asserts that "for the imagination to liberate itself, for freedom to become realizable, thought must resist closure *in the name of love*" (2005: 24; emphasis in original). In a later article, "Learning to Squander: Making Meaningful Connections in the Infinite Text of World Culture", Jamal hints at his ideal iteration of relationality when he maintains that

[f]reed from an identitarian hysteria, perhaps there could begin to be a reconfiguration of a more harlequinesque or syncretic subjectivity, founded not on a utopian embrace of otherness, or a mutinous relation to a preconceived or preordained selfhood, but, rather, upon a keenly wakeful grasp of the absurdity of both positions. In short: there is no *a priori* selfhood from which one diverges and no aspirational alterity which can be wholly absorbed. The trick, then, is to recognise the ruse of self and other, a dialectic which, while highly efficacious, is nonetheless a chimera or nonsensical illusion. (2011: 32; emphasis in original)

It is clear that love for Jamal is a space beyond the obsession with known and knowable categories of identification where the self and the other are able to relate impersonally. What I have demonstrated in my close reading of Adair's *In Tangier* is the ways in which the novel enables us to think through the possibilities of realizing and sustaining such a space of be(com)ing, in which the self and the other are able to renounce categorical certainties in order to attempt to approach each other. I have argued that even though Adair is keenly aware of the vexing contradictions and the eventual chimerical absurdity inherent in any attempt to make sense of the encounter between the self and the other, it is the potentialities opened by the effort to begin to come toward one another — despite the risk of abjection in not knowing what will happen — that matters. I have further suggested that an attentiveness to Adair's conception of intimacy and relationality, that does not read it as *necessarily* addressing the national context and its (dis)contents, holds out such a space of be(com)ing, in which the reader is working and being worked, in which a ceaseless and non-domineering exchange between the reader–self and the other may take place, opening up transformative, world-making potentialities.

Moreover, in the preface of *In Tangier* dated 1993, that supposedly sets up the novel's South African context, Adair claims: "[n]ow for the first time, with the announcement of the release of political prisoners and the unbanning of the African National Congress, we can travel. Is it for this reason that I welcome political change in my country or can I muster other reasons for my hopefulness?" (2004: n.p.). As my close reading of *In Tangier* has suggested, I believe that the "other reason" for Adair's hopefulness for political change lies in what I have understood as her gesture towards the indeterminate heterogeneity at the heart of South Africa and the impossible explanation thereof. This then precipitates, in Jamal's terms, a "traduce[ment of] the hegemonic values of the time [...] in a non-reactionary and non-antagonistic manner, the better to elide the constraints of the time and invoke an other and untimely moment which not only rethinks the human, but does so *in the name of love*" (2013: 58; emphasis in original). This rethinking of the human in the name of love that I read through Adair's novel is expressed in the possibilities for "travel", which I understand in a more figurative sense, that she hints at in her preface. It is our making the effort to wend our way, with a ceaselessly mobile and fluid be(com)ing, that opens a space for this hopefulness for impersonal intimacy as a "properly political concept", to borrow Berlant's formulation (2011), of love in South Africa. Indeed, it is through this "strange kind of love" (Adair, 2004: 68) that we may attain freedom.

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Notes

1. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the literary figures in full as "Paul Bowles" and "Jane Bowles", or by their surname "the Bowleses", whereas I will refer to Adair's representations of them as "Paul" and "Jane".
2. Here I am following Leo Bersani's understanding of love as "an exemplary concept in all philosophical speculation about the possibility of connectedness between the subject and the world" (Bersani and Phillips, 2008: 75).
3. All subsequent references are to this (2004) edition of Adair's *In Tangier We Killed the Blue Parrot* and will be given parenthetically in the text.

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