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## EVIL AND COMPLICATED QUEERS THROUGH HISTORY

### Lee Mandelo

*Bad Gays: A Homosexual History*

Huw Lemmey and Ben Miller

New York: Verso, 2022. 368 pp.

In *Bad Gays: A Homosexual History*, Huw Lemmey and Ben Miller investigate “the evolution and failure of white male homosexuality” as both an “identity and a political project” (5), by telling the (his)stories of fourteen bad gays from Hellenistic emperor Hadrian to Far Right Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn. Drawing materials in part from their long-running podcast, Lemmey and Miller engage in a process of recontextualization as opposed to one of queer hagiography, or even of recovery to fill the historical record. By orienting their stories around the creation of the “homosexual” as a contingent identity, Lemmey and Miller productively reframe these queer figures as both products of and participants in the continuous project of Western empire. Rather than telling stories of queer history, *Bad Gays* tells stories of queers *in* history—sometimes for the better, but as one anticipates from the title, mostly for the worse.

Primarily aimed toward a general audience, *Bad Gays* explores its themes “not through scholarly argument, but [instead] through storytelling” (6)—producing

a cohesive, collective argument from interconnected, individual vignettes. However, the authors cleverly and smoothly integrate scholarship from Michel Foucault, Ann Stoler, C. Riley Snorton, Jasbir Puar, Silvia Federici, Jules Gill-Peterson, and more throughout. Their citational practice, which leans on paraphrasing and endnotes, allows uninterrupted narrative flow for the casual reader (or, introductory-course student) without eliding necessary references. Chapters are arranged in rough chronological order and center largely on Europeans whose historical roles otherwise appear settled, such as Frederick the Great, Roger Casement, and Lawrence of Arabia. Within the second half of the text, the authors also explore figures from the “empire whose refusal to acknowledge itself as such is a central part of its myth: the United States” (188), including Margaret Mead, J. Edgar Hoover, and Roy Cohn. Additionally, tracing links between gay hypermasculinity and right-wing nationalism, the authors include the story of Yukio Mishima.

While the book is delightfully catty, occasionally salacious, and eminently readable, the homosexual histories gathered within nevertheless arise from and radiate a deep political frustration. The failures of homosexuality Lemmey and Miller explore are failures of solidarity, failures to enact broader queer liberation in favor of rights-based assimilation into the “burning house” of the hegemonic order (5). In the introduction, the authors draw three general trends from the stories: “separation from and fear of gender non-conformity, . . . appropriation of the bodies and sexualities of racialized people and denial of those people’s full humanity, . . . [and an] incessant focus on the bourgeois project of ‘sexuality’ itself” (5). Suggesting that our understandings of queer history should derive as much from the wealthy, conservative “embodiment of evil twink energy” Lord Alfred Douglas (“Bosie”) as they do from his lover Oscar Wilde, *Bad Gays* asks why contemporary queers choose to remember some ancestors and forget others—as well as what the (classed, raced, gendered, colonial) politics of that forgetting are.

*Bad Gays*’ main strength therefore lies in its weaving-through of approachable, grounded critiques of colonialism, Western empire, and capitalism, as well as anthropology and sexology. Through the use of queer(ing) recontextualizations, Lemmey and Miller demonstrate how “symbolic events [often stand in] for the culmination of long-developing historical processes and the beginning of new cycles” (39). The text deftly communicates scholarly approaches to historical time and cultural critique, for example in its tracteries of how the development of capitalism helped craft the circumstances for both the discovery of the “homosexual” and the rapid expansion of colonialism. Relatedly, *Bad Gays* also aims to complicate “the idea of an unchanging thread of homosexuality that passes through history” (38),

buoyed along by Western cultural progress toward tolerance—a goal to which ending on the gay, Islamophobic, anti-immigrant Fortuyn lends itself.

However, the cohesion of the text's final third is looser. While the trajectories Lemmey and Miller follow post-1945 align with preceding critiques of masculinist fascism, white supremacy, and class-based exploitation, the leaps from Cohn, to Mishima, to Ronnie Kray, to Fortuyn occur rather abruptly. Though I acknowledge the limitations of trade print format, *Bad Gays'* ending arguments could have struck a more forceful note with the inclusion of perhaps three or four additional narratives. Further contextualization for the HIV/AIDS crisis, marriage and military service as “gay rights” campaigns, or the rise of neoliberalism—as opposed to compressing those critiques together—might have provided a smoother landing for the text as a whole.

Overall, though, Lemmey and Miller have constructed a solid critical text for a general audience—which also affords them opportunities for directness in their political anger and their queer humor. Of Roger Casement, the authors state, his acts of resistance “puts the lie to the idea that imperialist racism went unopposed in its day, a lie that serves to whitewash the reputation of racists like the politician and mining baron Cecil Rhodes” (123). These unflinching assessments aren't limited to colonialism; the chapter on architect Philip Johnson practically vibrates with loathing for his fascist classism. And of course, the second pleasure of *Bad Gays* is Lemmey and Miller's raucous sense of humor. In the discussion of James VI's system of patronage, for instance, they write: “There is power in being the king who sits upon the throne, but sometimes there is more power in being the throne on whom the king sits” (70). Or, consider an aside from the chapter on the gay Nazis of Weimar Berlin, which critiques erotic attachments to fascist masculinity: “(Remember that when writing your Grindr profile!)” (151).

*Bad Gays: A Homosexual History* ultimately concludes on a call for us, fractious queer community(s), to engage *being together* toward a queer futurity—arguing that only solidarity and alliance make liberation possible. Using the preceding stories “full of racism and exclusion” (304) as contrary examples, the text instead espouses queerness as theorized by scholars like Roderick Ferguson and writers like Larry Mitchell. By emphasizing an understanding of “how people have made and been made by history, how and why they have failed, and why we might succeed” (308), Lemmey and Miller demonstrate the potential of *Bad Gays* to offer an engaging set of stories for a broader readership—stories that provide a nuanced understanding of the past that remains with us, as well as lessons for “the revolutions of the queer future” (309).

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## THE CARE PRAXIS WITHIN

### Beans Velocci

*Trans Care*

Hil Malatino

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I wanted *Trans Care* to be longer. The book is what I believe reviewers typically mean when they refer to a “slim volume,” coming in at—in the edition kindly sent to me by *GLQ*—seventy-nine pages, bibliography included. As a historian, I found this jarring. As a trans person refreshing Twitter to see what fresh hell is being unleashed in state legislatures today, I felt a deep sense of relief and perhaps, if you will, of being cared for. It was a feeling I wanted more of, even amid my gratitude for not having to claw my way through a four-hundred-pager while dealing with (\*gestures broadly\*) all of this. I dwell on this not for the sake of saying *this is a short book* but to emphasize how effectively Hil Malatino has woven form and function: reading *Trans Care* feels like an act of receiving trans care, in that it is both a balm and a reminder of the vast amount of work we still collectively need to do.

The main takeaway is this: trans care is what trans people do to make room for each other to live in a world where the institutional and familial forms of care that are supposed to sustain us often don't. Also, trans care is difficult, exhausting, real labor that is compensated only insofar as we all, in some way or another, rely on it for survival. There is no utopic or romanticized vision of care, here. “None of these struggles,” Malatino writes, referring to examples like demanding lines on official paperwork for chosen names, suing health insurance companies for coverage, and pushing for the use of digital systems that allow gender changes, “are