

Antinous: Saint or Criminal?

Two Forgotten Danish Dramas

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Dette essay undersøger, hvordan den antikke fortælling om den romerske kejser Hadrians protegé Antinous og hans mystiske død i 130 e.v.t. blev genopdaget af det sene 1800-tals homoseksuelle kunstnere, og hvordan historien blev anvendt til at tematisere mandlig homoseksualitet. Skønt Antinous som figur i dag er næsten glemt, spillede han en stor rolle i perioden omkring den moderne homoseksualitets fødsel som både rollemodel og halvhemmelig kode. Mine analyseobjekter er to fuldkomne glemte danske dramaer fra hhv. 1899 og 1909, som på meget forskellig vis anvender fortællingen om Antinous til at tematisere homoseksualiteten som problem. Essayet søger således at levere et beskedent bidrag til det større projekt at konstruere en historie over tidlig dansk homolitteratur og -dramatik.

Keywords: Antinous, gay drama, Danish gay literature, heteronarrativity

“And then Antinous.”

Yes, do not touch him, dear Høg, *we* must certainly sympathize with him, as truly as my name is Bernhard Hoff. Who believes the myth – that is probably just pure nonsense ... No, I believe that image is the image of a poor child that must have been burdened with more than he could bear, an early sorrow, much too early experience, a big secret or who knows what. Anyway – his shoulders could not bear it and then he shut his mouth tightly for his screams and put the waters of the Nile and the Acheron between the world and himself. (Bang 2008, 272–3)¹

WHEN THE 23-YEAR-OLD Danish writer Herman Bang (1857–1912) in his first novel *Haabløse Slægter* from 1880 introduces his young queer protagonist William Høg to an even queerer, slightly older writer by the name of Bernhard Hoff (the inverse initials of Herman Bang),² the Antinous reference was a clearly readable signifier of male homosexuality, an easily decipherable hieroglyph of sexual hermeneutics. Today, however, this significance has been lost both on queer or non-queer audiences. Antinous no longer plays any part either as role model or as gay code.³ This article explores the surprising productivity of this particular myth in 19th century literature and looks into two almost simultaneous, now completely forgotten Danish dramas that interpret the Antinous figure in almost opposite ways. My readings are a small contribution to the larger process of unearthing or creating an early gay Danish literary history, pointing also to the need of producing a general Nordic history of gay and queer literature (Heede 2015b).

A Modern Antinous

Bernhard Hoff, of course, has the obligatory bust of Antinous⁴ (111–130 CE) in his extremely gay, heavily perfumed, and exotically cluttered and draped boudoir that the young William is invited or, perhaps, rather seduced into, a sort of homosexual Aladdin's cave (echoing the extravagant rooms of young Herman Bang himself). The scene is a mysterious, sensorily rich initiation to a sexuality, an identity, a life style, and a tragic, potentially lethal destiny. Hoff in his reinterpretation of the Antinous story implores his own name (“as truly as my name is Bernhard Hoff”), as if the two are somehow connected and, perhaps, interchangeable and might include William himself as well. In Hoff's speech act, Høg is drawn into the emphasized “*we*” that must sympathize with Antinous.

“Antinous” is Hoff's coded way of both coming out to William and of “outing” William himself, and indirectly, perhaps, of Bang to his reader.⁵ All three are tragically inscribed in a grand, almost unspeakable narrative under the icon of Antinous, their prime fellow sufferer, with whom they must all “sympathize.” The myth is construed as the first queer suicide in a tradition comprising almost two thousand years. Thus,



*Depictions of Antinous typically emphasized his masculinity.
Antinous as Dionysus, Roman Empire, 2nd c., CE, Inv. N° 1960, Ny Carlsberg
Glyptotek, Copenhagen. Photographer: Ole Haupt*

Antinous did not manage to take his secret with him to his grave – at least not if the secret was homosexuality.

Hoff and Bang's reappropriation of the Antinous narrative is exemplary for the way 19th century homosexuals projected their lives and destinies onto the tragic myth of the Greek youth, Roman emperor Hadrian's (76–138 CE) favorite. According to legend, the 18-year-old man was discovered by the ruler in Asia Minor (present day Turkey) in 128 and brought to his court, where he suffered the jealousy of Hadrian's estranged wife Sabina (83–136/7 CE). Their relationship was probably first and foremost a marriage of convenience. On a trip two years later to the province of Egypt, Antinous drowns under mysterious circumstances. Speculations include suicide, murder,⁶ human sacrifice, or a kind of *liebestod*, where the young man voluntarily kills himself in order to save or prolong his master's life; local myths believed that a gift to the Nile River would prolong the ailing ruler's life. After Antinous' death, Hadrian is devastated and initiates a cult around the deceased, consisting of cities, temples, coins, statues; even a star is named after him.

Hoff psychologizes and modernizes his fate as a masked coming-out story (“an early sorrow”; “a big secret”) and perhaps a seduction tale with potential child abuse (“much too early experience”) ending in the typical gay suicide. This is, clearly, also both his and William's personal story as they were both at an early age seduced by the same (!) monstrous, much older woman, a demonical Countess Hatzfeldt, with an uncanny appetite for 16-year-old boys. She is a strange creature who can obviously, also, be read as an allegory for the adult male homosexual predator preying on young boys to abuse and corrupt (Heede 2003, 63–77).

The Antinous bust – and the myths related to it – is a coded way for Hoff to communicate the dangers and futures for the likes of himself and William. Antinous' “weak” shoulders connect him to Høg's and Hoff's notoriously weak, degenerate spines (Hoff in a grand gesture has to “cheer” his “up” with cologne!). Bang, here, clearly offers a different view on the figure of the Greek youth who is typically depicted as a strong, healthy, sound, virile, and hunting-loving youth. In Hoff's narrative, the Greek son of nature (many versions depict him as a shepherd)

is instead interpreted as a neurasthenic, suicidal weakling, much like William himself, and as the first young homosexual in history to fulfill his tragic, secret destiny.

A “Homosexual” Antinous

Both in the English and the German-speaking world of the second half of the 19th century Antinous was deployed almost as a synonym for homosexuality similarly to how the names of Oscar Wilde and Herman Bang would function in the 20th century, thus, replacing Greek and Roman mythology as the main reference to male homosexuality. Sarah Waters (1995) suggests that while the figure of Ganymede was the most popular icon for male homoeroticism in the Renaissance and Early Modernity, the myth of Antinous is iconic to Victorian England and Wilhelmine Germany, the latter being the birthplace of modern homosexuality (Beachy 2014).⁷

Where Renaissance culture modeled same-sex male desire as a meeting between a mature man and a young, effeminate boy, the Antinous myth was a readily available depiction for relationships between an adult man and a masculine youth, representing the erotic dreams of late Victorian homosexuals. The late 19th century saw a renewed version of the Antinous cult played out in a number of fields and media: art, poetry, art and cultural history, prose and, not least, drama. Many homosexual (and some heterosexual) artists and intellectuals published on, and reworked, the motif. Unlike Ganymede, Antinous is typically not depicted as a frail, young, effeminate child, or *putto*, but as a beautiful, strong, masculine young man. Herman Bang’s retelling is not typical for his time.⁸

The history of the posthumous Antinous cult is perhaps even more interesting than the original story. Hadrian was a renowned grecophile and his paederastic love for Antinous was in the Roman times clearly associated with a Greek past.⁹ The fact that Antinous was Greek would have eased his association with this older time and culture. It facilitated his “Hellenization.” Therefore, when Hadrian celebrated his “Greek” love, this would also include a yearning for a lost past that was consid-

ered superior by some of his contemporaries. Nostalgia was from the very beginning at the core of the Antinous cult.

When 19th century homosexual artists celebrate Antinous reiterating Hadrian's celebration, they are in some ways doubly nostalgic, yearning for the Ancient Greece via Hadrian's Roman yearning for love *à la grecque*, embodied in the deceased youth who was worshipped in a "classical" style, already anachronistic in Hadrian's own time. The Victorian longing replicates Hadrian's longing for the beautiful dead youngster, but also for another time and place. Ancient Greece becomes a specter of very mixed projections: a time where beauty reigned, a place in history where male same-sex attraction was revered, and a culture that idealized men's love of boys, at least as a spiritual concept (Foucault 1984; Halperin 1990). As Waters (1995) points out, Antinous remains strangely frozen in time as the *puer aeternus* by Hadrian's commemoration.¹⁰

A Dead Antinous

There is one feature in the Antinous myth that, in an uncanny way, makes it particularly attractive to, and productive for, artists, writers, and intellectuals at the time of the birth of the modern homosexual: the young man's mysterious and endlessly suggestive death. Antinous' fame, while alive, was limited to his two years at the Roman court, but his afterlife and myth, his posthumous legend by far exceeds the role he may (or may not) have played at Hadrian's court. The twenty years of his life is by far surpassed by the almost 2,000 years of his afterlife.

From its very beginning, in the second half of the 19th century, the modern identity of the homosexual had the element of death at its core, typically in the form of suicide. Antinous whose life is completely overshadowed by his tragic death, a death that is impossible to dissociate from homosexuality, is thus the perfect role model, tragic and sentimental, wide open to different and varied retellings and phantasies. The corpse of Antinous has functioned as a screen for very different projections and interpretations, an almost blank page for homoerotic and homophobic narratives and elegies.

All early depictions of modern homosexuality, at some level and to a smaller or larger (mostly the latter!) degree, encompass death,¹¹ and this is one important reason for the immense popularity and revival of the Antinous myth. If the modern homosexual has death inscribed in his¹² destiny and character, the mysterious drowned Greek is, again, a role model that permits, and even more invites and encourages, imaginary identifications by which cultural taboos can be negotiated. Instead of Ganymede, who is only transported to Mount Olympus by Zeus in the guise of an eagle, Antinous' afterlife and identity are tied to his, as it seems, endlessly suggestive death. Crudely speaking, contrary to Ganymede, Antinous' masterpiece and claim to fame was not only his unfailing beauty but his perfect death, which ensured his mythological resurrection in the 19th century gay imagination and imagery.

Two Danish Versions

It is well known that a number of European names celebrated Antinous, including German homophile advocate Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825–1895),¹³ John Addington Symonds (1840–1893), Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935), and Marguerite Yourcenar (1903–1987).¹⁴ The Swedish writer Viktor Rydberg (1828–1895) contributed with an essay on Antinous in 1875/6, translated into English in 1879, *Roman Days*, and a poem in his first volume of poetry, *Dikter* from 1882,¹⁵ and Norwegian art historian Lorentz Dietrichson (1834–1917) in 1884 published a monograph on the Greek youth: *Antinoos: Eine kunstarhologische Untersuchung*. Dietrichson explicitly works to remove Antinous from the homosexual tradition.¹⁶

It is, however, completely unknown that no less than two Danish playwrights, Konrad Simonsen (1876–1945) and Palle Rosenkrantz (1867–1941), almost at the same time produced two, very different Antinous plays, both with explicit homosexual themes.¹⁷ In 1899, the 23-year-old Simonsen published his first book, *Hadrian: Dramatisk Digtning i fire Akter samt et Forspil* [*Hadrian: Drama in Four Acts and a Prelude*], an impressive achievement in classical verse.¹⁸ It seems to have gotten no reception and left no trace in Danish literary history, a

fact that is also connected to the very marginal role the writer played despite his originality, productivity, and talent.¹⁹ Nevertheless, *Hadrian* is probably the first homosexual drama in Denmark and in many ways a pioneering text. The first Danish novels, dealing with modern male homosexuality did not occur until the first decade of the 20th century, Christian Houmark's *Det Syndens Barn* (1907), Aage von Kohl's *Hjertevirtuosen* (1908), and Herman Bang's *Mikaël* (1904) (Heede 2015a). Of course, one could argue that, with the use of the motif of Antinous as one of its central clues, Bang's first novel, *Haabløse Slægter* from 1880, discreetly is about nothing but homosexuality (Heede 2003).

Simonsen was probably aware of the tabooed character of his theme. He introduces the text by quoting the famous playwright Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791–1860): “Everything in poetry depends on the treatment.”²⁰ By “treating” male homosexuality in the frame of a historical drama in an outmoded, anachronistic form deploying rhyme and metric (though in a somewhat “homemade,” amateur way), Simonsen could smuggle in forbidden content in classical form. The elevated, romantic style and the beauty of the old-fashioned diction and highly stylized verse camouflaged the outrageousness of his subject.

Palle Rosenkrantz' drama, *Antinous: En moderne Tragedie i fire Akter* [*Antinous: A Modern Tragedy in Four Acts*], is also, today, forgotten, and yet the play was both produced on stage and well received.²¹ Today, Rosenkrantz is mainly remembered as the first writer to introduce the modern crime novel in Denmark in 1904 and a crime fiction prize is named after him. The writer, who was both productive and successful, was sympathetic to homosexuals (Nielsen 2000), but his drama is in no way the elegiac homage to homoerotic spirituality that Simonsen's enigmatic, metaphysical, and high-strung text explores. In fact, the two dramas could hardly be more different.

Rosenkrantz' plot is entertaining, realistic, and suspense laden and is in a way a staged crime novel, whereas Simonsen's classicist play is historical, melodramatic, and very far from any attempt at crowd pleasing. In fact, it is a vastly ambitious, daring, gay rewriting of the Passion of Christ, replacing Jesus (!) with Antinous. Its enormous ambitions,

ornate style, and high-strung emotionality, together with its flawed attempts at mastering classical verse, rhyme, and rhythm, would probably classify it, today, as a divine piece of camp, perhaps a queer kind of soap opera.

Nevertheless, I will argue that both dramas can be read²² within the same heteronarrative and heteronormative logic. My reading will focus on the role of death in the two plays and on the connections between dying and the realization of gay sexuality. Although very different, both plays mercilessly associate active homosexuality with death despite the fact that neither condemns homosexuality while, moreover, showing compassion for, if not identifying with, the homosexual protagonist, whose suffering is clearly and intensely depicted. Both the historical and the modern “Hadrian” are fundamentally sympathetic characters and, first and foremost, victims of dangerous desires that they heroically try to master.

A Criminal Antinous

Despite its genre definition as a “modern tragedy,” *Antinous* is a captivating, easily accessible play and a daring commentary on a tabooed subject: an older man’s infatuation with a beautiful young man who abuses him for financial gains. Published a few years after one of Denmark’s most extensive debates on male homosexuality, the sensationalized scandals in 1906 and 1907 that, amongst other things, forced Herman Bang into exile in Berlin for two years (von Rosen 1993, 719–60), the play can be read as a fairly enlightened and progressive comment on contemporary social issues. The argument is clearly one of understanding and tolerance for the suffering homosexual man – within certain limits and on certain conditions.

Eberhard Vittinghof is neither villain nor monster, but a dignified bachelor assessor who is dangerously ignorant about the true character of his desires. He is respected and liked, and his judge superior understands that he is an asexual man devoted to his true passion, the collection of antique Roman coins from the Early Christian eras, including, of course, those depicting Antinous. In the first scene, Vittinghof

describes the statue of Antinous in the Vatican, which he implores his boss to visit on the judge's forthcoming journey to Italy.²³ Vittinghof's eroticized homage to the marble sculpture mixes femininity and masculinity: "His chest is strongly rounded, yet virginal childish, his hips are slender and delightful is his waist, his loins are voluptuous as a woman's, yet firm and strong as a man's." (Rosenkrantz 1909, 4)²⁴ This is clearly not a boyish Ganymede.

Vittinghof's head is at the very outset described as that of a Roman emperor, thus establishing him as the Hadrian character of the tragedy. The economical Rosenkrantz wastes no time either introducing "Antinous," a beautiful young orphaned boy by the prosaic name of Carl Georg, who appears in court when his foster brother Johan is involved in a petty crime.

Vittinghof invites the beau to live with him and the two enjoy a chaste relationship over two years during which time the older man tries to convey his love of culture and gardening to the youngster. But it turns out that Carl Georg is a lazy good-for-nothing who refuses to give up his relationship with his girlfriend, Louise, seemingly a seamstress, but in reality a singer of questionable reputation. When Johan seduces Carl into stealing from his benefactor, Vittinghof becomes increasingly desperate as he learns more and more about his protégé's criminal leanings and his secret meetings with Louise, from whom the assessor has banned contact.

The drama intensifies as the down-to-earth and matter-of-fact Louise reveals the true character of Vittinghof's relationship to Carl Georg, feelings that he has never "acted" upon. Louise describes her boyfriend's position in the older man's life as perverse: "To go through one's whole life as a toy for an oddball." (70)²⁵ This degrading unveiling of the truth puts Vittinghof in a crisis and the point of no return is established when he admits to the true nature of his feelings: "[...] – it is true – I love this boy – as a man loves a woman." (75)²⁶ From now on the plot is headed for disaster.

Carl Georg is arrested for theft, but is allowed to escape. At night, he revisits his former home but the tormented and desperate Vittinghof

is now prepared and armed with a gun. His childhood friend and first love, Otto Braun, who is also a scientist and who, thus, represents an enlightened and expert view on homosexuality, intervenes as Vittinghof himself is unable to kill the young man he loves. Braun shoots the youngster in the last dramatic act in which the murder is quickly covered up as a suicide. The youngster dies in Vittinghof's arms, and the old man declares: "Antinous is no more." (78)²⁷ The tragic truth is of course that Antinous *never* existed – anywhere but in Vittinghof's imagination.

A Coarse Antinous

Unlike the famous gay text of the time, Herman Bang's *Mikaël*,²⁸ which deals with a similar plot (an altruistic old man in love with an ungrateful, handsome young man in love with a woman), it is not Vittinghof who must die in the end, but Bang's long suffering protagonist, the genius painter Zoret. Tormented by various forms of thefts and betrayals by the young, handsome, greedy, and lazy Mikaël, Zoret dies alone while Rosenkrantz delivers a more modern view on homosexuality, punishing instead the young rogue while also expressing some understanding for Carl Georg's frustrations with his situation: "Do you think I am neuter." (Rosenkrantz 1909, 30)²⁹

Vittinghof's "survival" in the plot and his "salvation" by the actions of his friend can be explained by his "innocence": the fact that his homosexuality is naïve and ignorant, posing no physical danger to young men. However, once the unspeakable is spoken, someone needs to die. Vittinghof is depicted more as a child than a predator, in some ways resembling a Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875), rather than a Herman Bang. Rosenkrantz' "murder" of Carl Georg is clearly a comment on the criminal male prostitutes who tormented homosexual men with blackmail,³⁰ and the play also criticizes the press for wanting to scandalize Vittinghof: "But as I said something has come out about Carl Georg, and people have wanted to create a sensation about it in a dime magazine." (49)³¹

Antinous depicts homosexuality as a tragic fate whose bearers command compassion and perhaps respect, at least as long as they do not

act on their desires. The villains are criminal youths and sensationalist journalists who take advantage of unfortunate human beings. For once, it is not the homosexual who dies but his usurper. Interestingly, the 34-year-old heterosexual Rosenkrantz depicted homosexuality in a more positive way than the ten years older homosexual Herman Bang, whose “winner-takes-it-all”-plot leaves the old lover to die alone while the younger heterosexuals have sex.

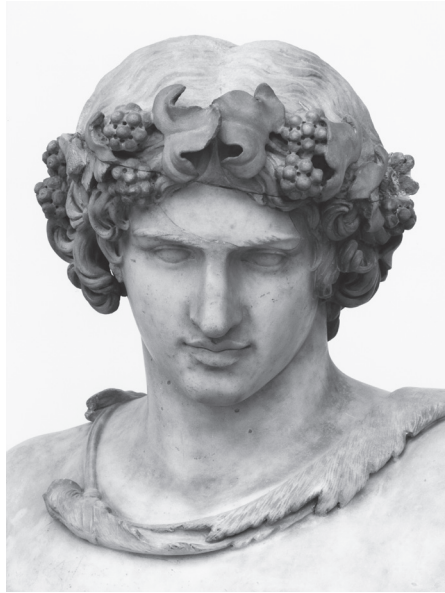
Carl, it is important to note, is neither homosexual, nor “Antinous.” Vittinghof’s mad infatuation with him is a symptom of the older man’s general desublimation, which is also affecting his passionate work on the Roman coins. One might see this as a homosocial, perhaps homoerotic project between the widowed Doctor Braun and the childhood friend with whom he has reconnected later in life. Braun immediately detects that there is something seriously wrong with Vittinghof when his contributions become increasingly flawed. The friend can no longer distinguish between true and false: “You have become unsystematic, incoherent, you commit simple errors, in the 35th volume that you mailed me, you treat coarse imitations as coins from the age of Septimius Severus.” (Rosenkrantz 1909, 33)³²

This is an exact description of Vittinghof’s relationship to Carl Georg who is no “Antinous,” but rather nothing but a “coarse imitation.” Braun’s reproach can thus be read as a general criticism of the modern homosexual projection of perverse desire onto antiquity. Vittinghof is so blinded by his undiagnosed desire that he believes trash to be divine beauty just as his passion for Roman coins is an outlet for his repressed homosexuality. Nevertheless, there is little hope for recovery, as the mourning lover never stops calling the boy “Antinous” even when embracing his corpse.

A Saintly Antinous

Why was I not created like all others?³³

(Simonsen 1898, 82)



Simonsen's strategy, politics, and aesthetics are very different. In fact, one might suspect *Hadrian* to be the very kind of drama, Vittinghof would write, had he possessed Simonsen's command of classical verse, rhyme and rhythm. The drama takes place in Jerusalem, Egypt, and Italy, beginning in 130 CE just before the Jewish uprising led by rebel leader Simon Bar-Kokhēba ["The star son"]. The mysterious Bar-Kokhēba functions as a kind of prophet and messenger both at the beginning and at the end of the text, thereby delivering a metaphysical frame for the plot.

In the prelude, he challenges the Roman emperor, who is at first welcomed in Palestine as a god, claiming that he is not Jehovah, but in the end, he admits that the deceased Antinous was the true, divine prophet. Throughout the play, theological themes and discussions are played out and in the end the deceased Antinous emerges as the true Christ-like savior, who offers his life so that Hadrian can live. Antinous is depicted as martyr, saint, and god. Thus, Simonsen's text offers nothing short of a seemingly blasphemous new, New Testament centered on the elevation of sublimated queer desire.

Like *Mikaël* and *Antinous*, *Hadrian* focuses on the triangular drama between an older man, a woman, and a young man: Antinous is caught as both the object of Sabina's jealousy and Hadrian's desires. He himself expresses no worldly appetites; he is melancholy, selfless, and tormented by the emotions of others that he is unable to reciprocate. Sabina accuses him wrongly of manipulating her husband with selfish goals and she plots in vain to have him leave the court or tries to marry him off to her lady in waiting, the poetess Julia Balbilla (72–130 CE). Balbilla also loves Antinous but is able to sublimate her emotions into art, thus, perhaps miming, in a metapoetic way, Konradsen's own artistic endeavor.³⁴ Sabina's final feat is to suggest discreetly to Antinous that he sacrifices himself to save Hadrian.

The first scene finds a made up, bejeweled, and youthfully dressed Hadrian preparing a secret rendezvous with his friend in a palace filled with music and flowers. He is interrupted, though, by his angry wife who scorns his looks: "with woman's glow on white, made up cheeks"; "Old man in young boy's attire." (Simonsen 1898, 37, 40).³⁵ It is clear that Hadrian's love for Antinous feminizes the emperor who was more manly in his chaste asexuality. Sabina blames the youth explicitly for this change:

Whose has sneaked his life in here,
bent to feminine desire your mind,
so manly power you lost? (Simonsen 1898, 38)³⁶

Hadrian himself changes sex symbolically while advocating for his right to love against prejudice and condemnation:

Let them cry it out for all the world,
let them find sordid what is pure:
I have the right to love like a woman. (42)³⁷

When Antinous finally arrives, Hadrian tries to seduce him but their rendezvous is suddenly interrupted by the Jewish mob and the court's return to the scene.

A Virginal Antinous

Antinous is aware of the emperor's emotions but tries to convert them into nobler goals. For the longest time he is successful as Hadrian finally finds a measure of peace by sublimating his love for Antinous into matters of politics and government:

I loved you for so long, I love no more,
My love for country and people has won;
far above all pain of passion and joy of passion I see
a love refined to thoughts and ideas –
today all of my diseased mind is dispelled. (80)³⁸

But a dangerous desublimation threatens their relationship as Hadrian is unable to master his feelings: one evening he meets Antinous on the banks of the Nile and begs for kisses and embraces: “come, embrace me in the night till the break of day.” (99)³⁹ This request terrifies the young man. Hadrian's desire is depicted as a threatening erect phallic shadow:

Flee, flee! Since I am frightened by the words of your hot craving
that grow large as the shadow in the evening sun;
for the first time I feel like the weak one. (100)⁴⁰

Antinous, finally, seems to surrender unhappily to the joyous Hadrian's desires, which all through the text are described in pathological terms as diseased, sick, and forbidden, both by himself and others:

You begged and you asked me with eye and with lip
for love which is diseased and deadly to your health,
and I have grown tired and give in. (101)⁴¹

The melancholy youth himself is clearly not “homosexual” and to him expressions of physical desire and Hadrian's physical advances are connected to the Biblical fall:

You crave more than my soul can give,
I cannot love in another way;
and if I could, I would drive
my noble mind from its paradise. (98)⁴²

In the end, the tortured and suffering Hadrian does not have his way with the pure, noble, virginal and terrified Antinous as the youth escapes in the night just before his final monologue, his swan song:

from when I twisted away from his kiss
and his burning hand on my forehead. (105)⁴³

He sails out on the Nile where he drowns himself, never to be found. His noble fate resonates with that of a Victorian virgin who would rather give up her life than her “honor” while Hadrian’s attempts at physical enforcement of his passionate love is associated to both sacrilege⁴⁴ and murder. The emperor’s lack of control over his desires is what drives the young man to his death.

The final act takes place eight years later in Hadrian’s villa in Baiae near Naples. We find both Hadrian and Sabina aged and unhappy and in bitter quarrels over the death of Antinous. Sabina especially is guilt ridden and feels responsible for encouraging the young man’s suicide although Julia tries to soothe her. Suddenly Bar-Kokhēba, now seemingly mad, enters like a prophet and announces the return of the deceased Antinous as a star in the sky. He, thus, reiterates the familiar trope of the madman, who, perhaps inadvertently, tells the truth.

Sabina realizes that she wronged Antinous when accusing him of selfish scheming and that she is guilty of killing a god. She commits suicide⁴⁵ while the jubilant Hadrian adores the immortal picture of Antinous in the sky as he dies in ecstasy in the arms of his stepson. The mysterious Bar-Kokhēba, thus, functions as the play’s *deus ex machina* by ensuring a happy end and a metaphysical solution to the deadlock that the mortals have gotten themselves into. In the next world emperor Hadrian can join his beloved Antinous.

A Buried Antinous?

Strange and secretive figure, who the caprices of an emperor would depict sometimes as Bacchus to make the silent suffering dance, sometimes as Death with its lowered torch. You speak not yet the will of your master demanded that you had to carry your sorrow and your secret through all countries to be stared at by tourists' eyes. That was *your* destiny, you who wished for nothing but to be forgotten. That is why you mourn.

(Herman Bang 1883)⁴⁶

In this fundamentally misogynist drama, Sabina's suicide adds to the happy end with Hadrian dying in one young man's arms while worshipping another.⁴⁷ There is a clear causality between Hadrian's direct attempts at sexual "embrace" of the young man and his ensuing death by suicide. Thus, both Antinous dramas, one modern, realist, the other historical, archaic and in verse can be read as versions of a similar heteronarrative logic: homosexual desire can be tolerated as long as it is not acted upon, and as long as it does not involve physical "corruption" of minors.

Antinous and Hadrian must both die, as the emperor is unable to control his physical urges. The suicide of Sabina is an added, but strictly unnecessary bonus. Vittinghof barely survives because of his naivety and chasteness while Carl must be killed since he preys on a vulnerable victim.

While it is unlikely that Rosenkrantz knew Simonsen's play, it is difficult not to read *Antinous* as a critique of Simonsen's and other homosexual artists' strategy of employing the Antinous myth and antiquity in general as a disguise for the elevation and covert celebration of homoerotic love. Rosenkrantz' play is a practical and matter-of-fact commentary on a contemporary problem in Danish society – homosexual men and their vulnerability to prostitution, blackmail, and media scandal. Simonsen's text, on the other hand, employs antiquity in both content and form to treat forbidden love and to exalt sublimated male same-sex desire. Simonsen's drama is a coded homage to the love of a grown man

for a youngster, a love that is described as ennobling and that is in the end given metaphysical, Christ-like redemptive qualities, establishing, perhaps, the foundations of a queer spirituality. Rosenkrantz' play, of course, has no such investment in spiritual homoerotics, presenting this rather as a potentially dangerous phenomenon, whose innocents carriers should be pitied rather than persecuted and taken advantage of. In fact, the engagement in antiquity is presented as a risky endeavor that can mask illusions and misgivings about the true nature of the worshippers' desire.

In both Simonsen's and Rosenkrantz' text, any attempts at physical contact between the older and the younger man can take place only right before or after death. Hadrian's kiss and Vittinghof's embrace are both directed at a corpse or at someone soon to be one. Here, the physical aspects of homosexuality announce a motif that is crucial to understanding Danish and probably Western literary history in general, namely, that for overdetermined cultural reasons, the representations of these aspects invariably involve death and dying. No one, it seemed to Victorian homosexuals, embodies and illustrates this artistic and cultural configuration better than Antinous. Therefore, we should, perhaps, today not mourn his disappearance from queer cultural memory but, following Herman Bang's advice, finally, let Antinous rest in peace in his watery grave.

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NOTES

1. “Og saa Antinous.”
Ja, rør mig ikke ved ham, kære Høg, ham maa vi skam ha'e Sympati for, saa sandt jeg hedder Bernhard Hoff. Pokker tro paa Sagnet – det er vel kun dumt Vaas ... Nej, jeg tror, det Billede kun er Billedet af et stakkels Barn, man maa have givet mere at bære paa, end han kunde, en tidlig Sorg, altfor tidlig Erfaring, en stor Hemmelighed eller hvad ved jeg. Nok er det – hans Skuldre kunde ikke bære det og saa lukkede han Munden fast sammen om sine Skrig og lagde Nilens og Akérons Vande imellem Verden og sig --. All translations are mine (DH).
2. Contemporary reviewers criticized Bang for reproducing himself in the novel as *both* William Høg and Bernhard Hoff. Later Bang would sometimes use Bernhard Hoff as a pseudonym in his journalism.
3. There are, however, efforts to revive the Antinous cult as an explicitly gay religion or spirituality: “Temple of Antinous: The Gay God,” <http://www.antinopolis.org/index.htm>: “Our Religion is Devoted to the Restoration of the Ancient Roman Cult of Antinous the Gay God. Veneration of Antinous is open to all.”
4. Antinous busts were sold to gay audiences all over Western Europe in Victorian times, Sarah Waters (1995, 195) states, in her excellent survey on the Antinous motif in German and English homosexual literature at the last turn of the century. This essay seeks to supplement her findings with Danish material.
5. Wilhelm von Rosen (1993, 634) in *Månens Kulør* [*The Color of the Moon*] discusses this scene and interpretations of it as Herman Bang's “silent confession” of his homosexuality.
6. One speculation is that the emperor grew tired of the youth as he developed into a grown man.
7. “Antinous attracted the attention of such a range of commentators at this time precisely because his story – like Ganymede's in the Renaissance – seemed so compatible with contemporary homosexual paradigms.” (Waters 1995, 229)
8. Neither was Thomas Mann's famous pederast model in his 1912 novella, “Der Tod in Venedig,” where the object of the aging Aschenbach's last desire is the frail, Ganymede-like character of Tadzio, a young boy of astonishing beauty. This text is one of the clearest examples of how homosexuality and death are connected. Although Aschenbach never makes direct advances to the boy, his expression of unspeakable emotion has disastrous effects. At the very moment that “The love that dare not speak its name” is actually “pronounced,” when Aschenbach expresses the forbidden: “Ich liebe dich” [I love you], cholera breaks out in Venice (Mann 1984, 48). The disease ends up killing Aschenbach while he reaches out for Tadzio at the beach.
9. It is here telling that many of Waters (1995, 203) 19th century examples anachronistically include Antinous, although clearly a Roman figure, in the pantheon of

Classical Greek mythology – next to beautiful male figures like Hyacinth, Adonis, Ganymede, and Narcissus.

10. “Antinous remained in the role the emperor had, perhaps, engineered for him: that of the beautiful *eromenos* frozen at the moment of adolescent perfection, his decline into maturity permanently deferred. [...] Hadrian’s desire for Antinous, in other words, provided the nineteenth-century Greek Lover not just with historical precedent but with a model for his own retrospective yearning.” (Waters 1995, 203)
11. I explore this theme in Danish and Norwegian literature in Heede (2017).
12. The first depictions of lesbians, too, have death and suicide at the core. For examples of lesbian applications of the Antinous myth, see Waters (1995).
13. In 1865 Ulrichs published a poetic epos “Antinous” in six parts in *Ara spei*. In his versions the youth’s death is caused by evil nymphs in the Nile that steal the handsome boy (Ulrichs 1998, 110–6).
14. Waters (1995) supplies a more comprehensive list.
15. Rydberg’s poem “Antinous” from 1882 is quoted in Borg (1908, 82).
16. In 1908, Norwegian writer Olaus Breda (1866–1924) published the novel *Antinoos* under the pseudonym Otto Borg. In this, the young hero Bernt Listow sacrifices his life for his older mentor and friend who remains unnamed, “he” [han]. The older man is portrayed as a lonely, altruistic bachelor. The Russian writer Mikhael Kuzmin (1872–1936) published several poems about Antinous whose name he used as his nickname. A circle of homosexual writers and artists in Moscow in the 1920s gathered under the name “Antinor,” the Russian version of Antinous.
17. Rosenkranz’ drama was not published until 1909, but the text states: “Written in the Spring of 1901, revised 1903, and produced on the free Stage February 1909” [Skrevet i Foraaret 1901, gennemset 1903, opført paa den fri Scene Februar 1909]. I have no information indicating that Simonsen’s *Hadrian* was ever performed on stage.
18. Simonsen obtained a doctoral degree in comparative literature from the University of Copenhagen in 1909.
19. Historian Morten Thing (1984–1985) has written a useful introduction to the eccentric literary, philosophical, and political figure. Simonsen was in various phases of his life a communist, a catholic, and a mystic. He was also one of the few known homosexuals of his time.
20. Alt i Poesien kommer an paa Behandlingen.
21. Ken Nielsen’s (2000) pioneering thesis presents documentation and produces a full reading of the drama. His claim that *Antinous* is the earliest Danish homosexual drama is contradicted by the finding of Simonsen’s text, which is not treated in his work.
22. I, being no theater scholar, read the dramas first and foremost as literary texts.
23. The statue in the Vatican Museum actually depicts Bacchus. It is contested that the motive is Hadrian’s youth.

24. Hans Bryst runder sig stærkt og dog tillige Jomfruspædt, hans Hofter er smalle og smækker hans Midie, hans Lemmer er yppige som en Kvindes, men dog faste og stærke som en Mands.
25. At gaa sit hele Liv som Legetøj for en Særling.
26. [...] – det er sandt – jeg elsker denne Dreng – som en Mand elsker en Kvinde.
27. Antinous er ikke mere.
28. The novel was published in 1904, but rewritten with Sven Lange as a drama in 1910. It was never performed, presumably because of Bang's death in 1912.
29. Tror Du da, jeg er Intetkøn.
30. Herman Bang calls young male blackmailers a wide spread "curse" in his 1909 essay *Gedanken zum Sexualitätsproblem* (1922). Einar Christiansen (1861–1939) in his well-received three-act drama, *Thronfølger* [*Successor to the Throne*] from 1913 does not distinguish between villain and victim in this way. He kills them both off! Crown prince Eugen has had a sexual relationship with one of his footman, who now blackmails him. In a rage, Eugen kills him and shortly after commits suicide. Harmony is restored when his popular brother, Prins Allan – who is a doctor and thus understands his brother's tragedy – marries Eugen's estranged wife and ascends to the throne. In the play, the doctor is not only the hero and savior, but also the expert on homosexuality. Most homosexuals at this point in history regarded medicine as not only a help, but also their best hope for salvation, if not cure.
31. Men som sagt, der er sivet noget ud om Carl Georg, og man har villet lave Sensation af det i Skillingsblad.
32. Du er bleven usystematisk, springende, du begaar ligefremme Fejl, i 35te Hæfte, som du sendte mig, behandler du nogle plumpe Efterligninger som Mønter fra Septimii Severi Tid.
33. Hvorfor var jeg ej skabt som alle andre?
34. The poetess is also the only one of the main *dramatis personae* to survive the plot as neither mad nor dead.
35. med Kvindeglød paa hvide, sminkede Kinder/ Olding i Ynglingeklæder.
36. Hvem har sneget sit Liv herind,/ bøjet til kvindeligt Lyst dit Sind,/ saa mandelig Kraft Du misted? My prosaic translation does not do justice to Simonsen's rhyme, rhythm, and meter.
37. Lad dem raabe det mod alle Vinde,/ lad dem smudsigt synes, hvad er rent:/ jeg har ret at elske som en Kvinde. Vittinghof's declaration of his love for Carl Georg interestingly did not involve any sex change on the part of the subject (but possibly the object), when admitting that he loves the boy as a man loves a woman.
38. Jeg elsked Dig saa længe, jeg elsker ikke mer,/ Min Kærlighed til Land og Folk har sejret;/ højt over Elskovslidelse og Elskovsfryd jeg se/ en Kærlighed forædlet til Tanker og Ide'r –/ i Dag er alt mit syge Sind bortvejret.

39. kom, favn mig i Natten til Morgenens Gry.
40. Fly, fly! thi jeg ræddes ved din hede Attraas Ord/ der vokser sig som Skyggen i Aftensolen stor;/ jeg føler mig for første Gang den svage.
41. Du tigged og Du spurgte mig med Øje og med Læbe/ om Elskov, som er sygelig og vil din Sundhed dræbe,/ og jeg er bleven træt og giver tabt.
42. Du fordrer mer, end min Sjæl kan give,/ jeg kan ej elske paa anden Vis;/ og hvis jeg kunde, jeg vilde drive/ mit Adelsind af sit Paradis.
43. fra jeg snoede mig bort fra hans Kys/ og hans brændende Haand paa min Pande.
44. His crime takes on almost Shakespearean dimensions when, according to Antinous, the whole world mourns the shameful misdeed: “And the ground that we thread upon,/ it blushes in its womb,/ and the evening dew that floods here/ is the tears, it sheds.” (Simonsen 1898, 103) [Og Jorden, som vi træder,/ den rødmer i sit Moderskød,/ og Aftenduggen her, som flød,/ er Taarerne, den græder.]
45. This is dramatic or poetic license as all sources date her death to at least a year before Hadrian’s. Balbilla died in 130 and Bar-Kokheba in 135 CE.
46. Besynderlige og hemmelighedsfulde Skikkelse, hvem en Kejsers Lune snart fremstillede som Bacchus for at lade den tavse Kummer danse, snart som Døden med sin sænkede Fakkell. Du taler ikke, men Din Herskers Vilje vilde, at Du skulde slæbe Din Sorg og Din Hemmelighed gjennem alle Lande for at beglos af Turisters Øjne. Det var *Din* Skæbne, som intet ønskede uden at blive glemt. Derfor sørger Du. Bang wrote an unsigned newspaper article about Antinous when visiting the Antikensammlung Berlin in 1883. The museum houses a number of statues depicting the Greek youth.
47. Both *Haabløse Slægter* and *Mikaël* also vilify and demonize female characters, especially the two countesses Hatzfelt and Zamikoff. The latter “steals” Zoret’s protégé from him and stops Mikaël from visiting his older benefactor on his deathbed. In contrast, Louise in *Antinous* is depicted as a simple, sympathetic, straightforward, and honest girl who has frank conversations with Doctor Braun. Her love for Carl Georg is real although she, unlike Vittinghof, harbors no illusions about his flawed character. In Rosenkrantz’ drama, misogyny is not employed to deflect homophobia, and Vittinghoff’s attempts are in vain: “You have your free will – but this woman is a harlot, and the love of the harlot degrades the man.” (Rosenkrantz 1909, 54) [Du har din frie Villie – men denne Kvinde er en Skøge, og Skøgens Kærlighed trækker Manden ned.]