

“What, then, was my new friend?”

Self-Censorship and Narrative Elements of Discursive
Limitations in Edward-Prime Stevenson’s *Imre:
A Memorandum*

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Abstract: Edward Prime-Stevenson’s novel, Imre: A Memorandum (1906), is a recollection of the unfolding relationship between a Hungarian soldier, Imre, and Oswald, an Englishman, whose first-person narration conveys the story through a unique perspective. The novelette functions as a piece of educational literature that aims to break away from the earlier stereotypes of homosexuality’s portrayal, especially of Wildean stereotypes, which, according to Prime-Stevenson, only fuel the negative connotations attached to same-sex desire. The advancement of the narrative is influenced by three main reasons: the book as a piece of educational literature, the restricted and strictly controlled speakable discourse on homosexuality, and Oswald’s experience told from his point of view. The aim of the paper is to argue that the speakability of homosexuality is only possible in a self-censored narrative frame, which pre-emptively decides the limits of the discourse that can be spoken. First, I present Judith Butler’s interpretation of the 1994 congressional statute that prohibited the self-declaration of homosexuality in the US military, in order to reflect upon the performative operation of implicit censorship. Then I explore how self-censorship functions in the dialogues between the protagonists, and argue that Prime-Stevenson’s novel uses narrative “blanks” as a means and ways of creating the discursive frame in which, and only in which the speakability of homosexuality becomes possible. Thereby, I aim to present that for the novel to fulfil its function as educational literature, and to provide a sympathetic reading of homosexual love, it is of crucial importance to maintain the narrative frame and, thus, the limits of the speakable discourse. For Prime-Stevenson, it was only through this perspective that same-sex desire seemed portrayable.

Edward Prime-Stevenson's novel, *Imre: A Memorandum* (1906), explores the precarious progression of the unfolding romance between two young men. Out of fear of the contemporaneous views on homosexuality, and scared of losing each other, they "wear the mask, day by day, until finally it is thrown away, first by one, then by the other" (Prime-Stevenson, *The Intersexes* 369–370). In *Imre: A Memorandum*, the masks worn by the narrator, Oswald, and the Hungarian soldier, Imre, function as discursive regulations, setting forth the carefully structured narrative frame that dictates the speakable limits of homosexuality. Published at the beginning of the twentieth century, under the pseudonym Xavier Mayne, the novel explores the possible discursive ways that allow the two men to speak about their controversial feelings and open up to each other.

The aim of this paper is to examine how the narrative mechanisms of the text create a very particular atmosphere, the so-called masks, which at first seem completely dominated by self-censorship—a censorship that can be observed in both the narrator's and Imre's discourse. It is heavily influenced by certain ideas about masculinity and their possible connections to the two men's understanding of homosexuality. I aim to argue that this narrative framing is essential for the novel to be able to function as an educational and representative literary work.

THE CONGRESSIONAL STATUTE OF 1994 AND THE PERFORMATIVITY OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE MILITARY

In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Judith Butler examines the performative potential of the contested meanings of homosexuality in the American military. The US Congress passed a statute in October of 1994 that prohibited the self-declaration of homosexuality in the military; otherwise known as DADT ("Don't Ask, Don't Tell"). Unexpectedly, the statute initiated a broad public discourse on the topic, and thus achieved the very goal it wanted to avoid. Butler states that the regulation, which declares *what* it does not want to be declared, thwarts its own goals in the form of performative self-contradiction: "The term 'homosexual' thus comes to describe a class of persons who are to remain prohibited from defining themselves; the term is to be attributed always from elsewhere. And this is, in some ways, the very definition of the homosexual that the military and the Congress provide" (Butler 105). With whom does the power of identifying someone as a homosexual lie then? This way, the definition of homosexuality, after

the passing of the mentioned statute, is left to others, and a homosexual is thus someone “who is denied the act of self-definition ... one whose self-denial is a prerequisite for military service” (Butler 105). The philosopher goes on to suggest that in this social and juridical milieu, the words “I am a homosexual” not only have descriptive functions, they also perform what they aim to describe. Consequently, these utterances not only construct the speaker as a homosexual, but they “constitute the speech as homosexual conduct” (107). It should be stated, however, that such performative power of these utterances can only be observed in this very specific, regulated context: “In this sense, the regulations conjure the spectre of a performative homosexual utterance—an utterance that does the deed—that it seeks to censor, engaging in a circularity of fabrication and censorship that will be specified as paranoid” (107). It remains unclear exactly what the referent of the word “homosexual” would be in the case of this congressional statute. The lack of being able to capture the meaning of what is prohibited creates the very possibility that Butler calls “radical democratic contestation,” which, in the future, might have the potential to pave the way for different (re)articulations. Interestingly enough, this regulation does not construct homosexuality as an act—by allowing a single utterance of “I am a homosexual” to be understood as conduct, the singularity of this event is imagined as a series of events, “and so [the regulation] imagines a certain force of homosexuality to drive one-time practitioner into a compulsive or regular repetition” (111). This way, the statute reinstates the presupposition that the communication of one’s homosexuality can somehow be equal to doing the act itself. According to Butler, there must be something rather disruptive in the self-defined homosexuality, since it is construed as if the very speaking of the word is already an offensive act, or rather, conduct. The author reminds us that Michel Foucault in his volumes on the history of sexuality argued that first there were homosexual “acts,” then, only later did homosexuality as a category of identity emerge. This statute imagines the doing of an act as already a category of identity, as something that is equal to doing the act. Butler, then, invoking Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* provides a psychoanalytic interpretation on how the idea of homosexuality that the regulation presupposes becomes a taboo, thereby shedding light on the discursive patterns of the statute’s text, which imagines homosexuality as something contagious, comparing the conduct to a virus-like, spreading idea: “Anyone who has violated a taboo becomes taboo himself because he possesses the dangerous quality of tempting others to follow his example: why should he be allowed to do what is forbidden

to others?” (qtd. in Butler 115). The congressional regulation, therefore, creates a discursive pattern, which binds together the “spreading” of homosexuality with the spreading of a certain virus, notably HIV.

The next chapter of Butler’s *Excitable Speech* continues to interrogate how speech act theories might help to understand the function of censorship exercised by the congressional regulation. Butler argues that censorship should be viewed as a means of creating speech, that is, it already pre-emptively dictates what speech can be spoken. If censorship is seen as creating the speech, then it is ahead of the creation of the text, not an *a posteriori* restriction of speech. That is why it is of crucial importance to distinguish between explicit and implicit censorship. The effectiveness of implicit censorship suggests that the power of the censor cannot be limited to overt political actions, censorship like this functions in a much more obscure way. Although the regulations instated by DADT could easily be put in the category of explicit censorship, they also seek to define the norm of military subjectification: in the case of the male military subject, the norms that define masculinity will be those that require the denial of homosexuality. However, the introduction of the regulation did not limit references to homosexuality in the military; on the contrary, a proliferation of such references was seen. Consequently, the mechanism of censorship plays an active role not only in the creation of the subject, but also in the delineation of the social parameters of the discourse that can be spoken: “According to this view, censorship is not merely restrictive and privative, that is, active in depriving subjects of the freedom to express themselves in certain ways, but also formative of subjects and the legitimate boundaries of speech” (Butler 132). As a result, these kinds of implicit potentials give censorship its source of power.

According to Butler, certain kinds of iterability have the potential to subvert cultural and political discourses. The subversion of the politics of different norms and systems of power lies in the potential of repetition done differently. By invoking the case of Rosa Parks, Butler displays exactly how reiterations done in specific ways have the power to change the dynamics of a cultural discourse. As outlined above, the possible reiterations that have subversive potential are always situated in social and political contexts, which dictate in advance what we are to understand by subversion and how it might happen. In other words, the political power of these reiterations is indirectly provided by that authority, state etc., who exercises the censorial power.

“WHAT, THEN, WAS MY NEW FRIEND?”

In the case of Prime-Stevenson’s novelette, the protagonists need to explore and communicate their feelings in such political circumstances that control the exact speakable limits on homosexuality. I will argue that differently done discursive reiterations in Prime-Stevenson’s novel have the potential to subvert (up to a point) the negative connotations Imre and Oswald and their societies attribute to homosexual love. These speech acts provide and organise the speakable discourse on homosexuality: by repeating the same kinds of discursive patterns a bit differently each time, the two protagonists slowly become able to subvert their own (sometimes intentional) self-censorship, thereby creating a space for their sexualities to be able to be spoken of. I aim to explore how the performative discursive patterns in which Oswald and Imre enclose themselves are “one of the influential rituals by which [their] subjects are formed and reformulated” (Butler 160).

NARRATIVE HIATUS AND THE UNFOLDING DISCOURSE ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Prime-Stevenson’s novel focuses on the (self-)censored discourse of the protagonists, who slowly and carefully put down their masks, and in the end reveal their secrets to each other, while still adhering to the limits and customs provided and regulated by the discourse that, according to them and their societies, can be spoken. Three main reasons can be observed as to why and how this discursive frame functions. Firstly, the discursive framing is closely tied to how Prime-Stevenson’s novel positions itself within the contemporaneous cultural context. In the Prefatory, Oswald addresses Xavier Mayne: “And as you have more than once urged me to write something concerning just that topic which is the mainspring of my pages I have asked myself whether, instead of some impersonal essay, I would not do best to give over to your editorial hand all that is here? as something for other men than for you and me only?” (Prime-Stevenson, *Imre* 3–4 [1906]). The most important purpose of this novelette explicitly appears in the cited passage, in which the author of this imaginary letter states that the manuscript presented here is for “other men” primarily. As Zsolt Bojti points out, “[t]he nature of *Imre* as a self-help and educational book is seen from the very beginning of the novelette” (“Narrating Eros and Agape” 23). In his paper, Bojti demonstrates that, for the author of *Imre*, it was of essential importance to provide the broader public with a different perspective on homosexual love, compared to what had been previously accessible in English literature. For this very reason, the narrative of the novelette turns away from the pre-existing

negative connotations of homosexuality in order to offer a new and more acceptable understanding of same-sex desire. Therefore, Prime-Stevenson's book is not only memorable for allowing homosexual characters a happy ending for the first time in an English literary text, but also because it displays an empathetic understanding of male-to-male desire in a cultural era, where homosexuality was strictly criminalised. In *Imre: A Memorandum*, the thoughts and acts of the protagonists are, for the most part, driven by intentional self-censorship, because this narrative key paves the way for a subversive understanding of homosexuality that is explored in the first person narration of Oswald and in the discourse of the Hungarian soldier.

Secondly, Oswald and Imre have no other choice but to navigate their dialogues according to the limitations of their cultural context. Prime-Stevenson's novel, while itself being a piece of educational literature, depicts how dangerous it was for someone to explicitly open up about their sexuality. The text also showcases to what extent homosexuality and the concepts of masculinity were inherently intertwined at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Finally, Oswald, the narrator of the text, starts writing this "memorandum and guide-book of Imre's emotional topography" (*Imre* 63) after all this has already happened; thus, the narrator knows in advance how their coming-out story would end. Therefore, every bit of the story is conveyed through Oswald's perspective, thereby raising the question, whether he could be seen as a reliable narrator. Nonetheless, the memorandum is as much his "emotional topography" as it is Imre's. Although the novelette portrays only Oswald's reflections, it becomes very clear from their dialogues that Imre goes through the same precarious path of coming to terms with his sexuality, as it is depicted in the narrator's own thoughts. These three elements combined construct the narrative framing of *Imre*: the book as a piece of educational literature, the restricted and strictly controlled speakable discourse on homosexuality, and Oswald's experience that propels the narrative.

The withholding of information in narrative fiction is a widely discussed topic of literary theories in the twentieth century. In her book, *A csend retorikája* (The Rhetorics of Silence), Edit Zsadányi gives a brief overview on the development of theories concerned with the narrative function of figures of omission. Zsadányi reminds us of Wolfgang Iser's claim which argues that not even as an experiment would it be possible to create a literary work without interruptions. The narrative hiatus that is thus formed has an integral part in the interpretation of any literary work (Zsadányi 13). According to Iser, it is in the nature of literary communication that

the “blanks” of a text could never have a singular interpretation, which may provide the information so far withheld. The indeterminacy of interpretation is a consequence of the communicative situation of literature—literature that is the very communication between the text and the reader (Iser 163–170). Reacting to Iser’s “blanks” (*Leerstelle*), Leona Toker argues for a more distinct category that she calls “narrative gaps.” The inevitable narrative gap only becomes a hiatus, if the reader, following their expectations, considers the omitted information to be relevant, in other words, if the reader considers the hiatus as information to be interpreted (Toker 5–6). In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth claims that several authors of the twentieth century restrain themselves from explicitly explaining their stories, thereby avoiding any kind of overt interpretation. Compared to writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these authors do not express their views through any voice in the text, thus letting their characters create their own stories (Booth 271–274).

This is not the case with Prime-Stevenson. Not only does he explicitly provide a voice for his own views on homosexuality through the narrator of the novel, but also the narrative hiatus—the most important discursive element organising the advancement of the protagonists’ dialogues—has a very distinct and clear way of operation in the novelette. The first sentence of the Prefatory is already an example of the *modus operandi* of the narrative gaps:¹ “In these pages I give you a chapter out of my life... an episode that at first seemed impossible to write even to you” (3). Zsadányi emphasises that “[a]n unfinished line marked with three dots may indicate not only that the thought can be continued, but also that the speaker has reached the limit of verbal expression” (Zsadányi 23).² In the novel, most of these blanks presuppose that some unspeakable information, something mostly related to homosexuality and its (un)speakability is being withheld. Or, it is also very common that the hiatus functions as a typographic tool after which something that shall not be uttered will indeed be uttered, of course, within the limits regulated by the social views on homosexuality and the related self-censorship of the protagonists.

Gerald Prince’s narratology distinguishes the un- or non-narratable from the un- or non-narrated as the occurrences of blanks in a literary text (28–31). Within the category of the unnarratable, Prince lists three possible occurrences. First, the narrator does not want to subvert or question the social orders; second, the narrator realises their own incapability of portraying something, this mostly being a rhetoric

1 In my analysis, I use the terms for figures of omissions interchangeably.

2 Passages from Zsadányi’s work are translations of my own.

incapability; and in the third instance, the narrator faces the problem of unspeakability. All three versions occur very often and they sometimes overlap in *Imre*. In the following pages, I turn to the interpretation of the different kinds of narrative blanks in the novel. Thereby, I examine how hiatus organises the discursive patterns, limits the speakability of the discourse, while at the same time creates the possibility for homosexuality to actually be speakable.

Before turning to the analysis of censorship in the text, one more remark must be made. On the one hand, according to the Prefatory, Oswald gives the imagined Xavier Mayne (the pseudonym under which Prime-Stevenson published the novlette) the manuscript for revision. In this fictional framing, therefore, it is possible to entertain the idea that Mayne might have actually changed some parts of the text, since Oswald explicitly asked him to do so. Furthermore, it is stated on the title page that the text was “edited” by Mayne. On the other hand, the narrator emphasises in the same passage that “[he] may say to [Mayne] here that the dialogue is kept, word for word, faithfully as it passed” (*Imre* 4). Hence, it is of vital importance to examine by whom and how censorship is exercised in the progression of the dialogues. The typographical outlook of the novel, the various usage of certain figures of omission, this way, could not only be attributed to Prime-Stevenson’s educational aim that correlates mostly with Imre’s or Oswald’s censorial performative acts, but regarding certain parts of the text, one might as well argue that it was Mayne who edited the manuscript according to his best interests. This is further supported by Oswald’s request, since he explicitly states that due to his aim of conveying everything truthfully, the manuscript could have turned out to be too long. Hence the request, asking Mayne to “use” his editorial hand, where he feels it is needed. Thus, censorship in this sense could also be attributed to the imagined editor, Xavier Mayne. At the same time, it must be emphasised that the main feature of the operation of implicit censorship lies in the blurring of censorial power. In other words, implicit censorship functions in a way that the agent of a censorial act could hardly be named. As we have seen in Butler’s argumentation, implicit censorship pre-emptively regulates speech, even deciding in advance how the exact censorial act may function. Thereby, regarding a few instances I will aim to present whose (self-)censorship organises the limits of the discourse, because in these cases, locating the censorial act also organises the interpretation of the text; I will do so, however, by bearing in mind the obscure workings of implicit censorship.

In the first chapter of *Imre*, soon after meeting each other, the Hungarian soldier mentions a friend of his, namely Karvaly, a very good-looking person who meant a great deal to him. It is during the telling of this story that significant amount of narrative blanks start structuring the protagonist's speech: “Means much? Ah, ah, so very much! I dare say you think it odd... but I have never had anything... never... work upon me so! ...” (24).³ After having finished his portrayal of Karvaly, Imre turns to Oswald, saying: “I never talked this way with any one—at least never till now. I am an idiot! I beg your pardon” (25). This self-reflexive utterance is a tell-tale sign of the speakable limits of their discourse. On the one hand, the soldier is unsure, whether he shared way too much information with his new friend, on the other hand, he could as well reflect upon his hesitation that the text typographically conveys with the use of blanks. Talking about his friend's physique, Imre performs one of the first self-censorial acts. He does not let himself explicitly address why the physical appearance of Karvaly matters to him in any way. At the same time, however, this censored discursive element opens the possibility for Oswald to start thinking about Imre's intentions: “‘I beg to compliment you on your enthusiasm for your friend. Plainly one of the “real ones” indeed,’ I said. For I was not a little stirred by this frank evidence of a trait that sometimes brings to its possessor about as much melancholy as it does happiness” (24).

In the novelette, the concepts of masculinity are significantly intertwined with the ideas about friendship between two males. As James Patrick Wilper argues, the novel “along with the author's *The Intersexes*, is forthright in its rejection of the Wildean stereotype and attempts to wrestle interest in literature and the fine arts away from effeminacy” (139). Prime-Stevenson clearly entertained the idea that the only way he could shift the literary and cultural discourse on homosexuality from contemporaneous negative perspectives was by shedding light on a radically different picture of gay men. Both his protagonists posit themselves as men who are not at all “effeminate” or “weak”—they showcase none of the features attributed to Wilde's characters. Moreover, both Imre and Oswald appreciate homosexual males with distinctively “manly” features, and they also despise the ones who are by any means “feminine.” In the second chapter, one of the key points of Oswald's monologue is the part where he describes the kind of gay men he disdains: “To think of them shamed me; those types of man-loving-men who, by thousands, live

3 In the 1906 edition, figures of omission are sometimes marked with multiple periods. In my paper, I standardised these to three periods.

incapable of any noble ideals or lives.” He continues: “The effeminate artists, the sugary and fiberless musicians! The Lady Nancyish, rich young men of higher or lower society twaddling aesthetic sophistries, stinking with perfume like cocottes!” (116). Bojti states that Prime-Stevenson found himself in a conflicted situation: on the one hand, sexual science was problematic and not at all available to a general readership; on the other hand, literature related to Oscar Wilde and his circle only fuelled the criminalisation of same-sex desire, at least according to Prime-Stevenson (*Wilde, Stenbock, Prime-Stevenson* 142–144).⁴ While in the cited passage Oswald definitely distances himself from the concepts that evoke Wilde’s literature, and while it displays Prime-Stevenson’s aim with his book, this discursive pattern is also a tool for developing the discursive frames, which give the protagonists a chance to engage in topics related to homosexuality, of course, in a highly self-censored way. By constructing this hyper-masculinity and relating it to the speakable friendship between men, a narrative situation is constructed that drives the plot. Oswald and Imre continuously return to this topic during their conversations. It is also notable that this censored discursive frame remains in their dialogues even after both of them open up about their sexualities. Therefore, Butler’s analysis on censorship helps to better approach the way censorship functions here: by limiting the speakable discourse, exactly those parts of the speech accumulate and proliferate that should have not been spoken. Simultaneously, these reiterations will provide agency to the protagonists by the end of the novelette to communicate their desires; however, the narrative frame remains mostly intact, hardly subverting the concepts of masculinity and censorship.

Although the novel does a very good job at keeping up the tension between the protagonists, constantly maintaining the discursive frame, the narrator’s point of view occasionally steps out of these limits, and applies his later acquired knowledge to the textual Oswald, that is the narrator, who at that point of time could not have been in the possession of information he communicates. In these cases, he attributes reflections to his past self from the point of view when writing this memorandum, which, according to the fictional frame, happened after he had experienced all this. “Such an hour or so... for the evening was drawing on when we parted... was a kindly

4 As Bojti reminds us elsewhere: “let us think of pleasure-driven opium addict Dorian Gray, whose relationships are of no spiritual depth, or of the erotic novel attributed to Wilde and his coterie, *Teleny* which presents the purely sexual and emotionally toxic relationship of the narrator and the title character” (“Narrating Eros and Agape” 22).

prophecy as to the future of the intimacy, the trust, the decreed progression toward them, even through our—reserves” (28). Or, at another point, as he talks about Imre’s eyes: “It seems to me that now, as I write, I meet their look. I lay down my pen for an instant as my own eyes suddenly blur” (44). These parts of the novelette complicate the position of the narrator. Prime-Stevenson builds a narrative frame, which, by repeatedly reinforcing the speakable limits of the discourse, displays the (self)-censorial operation of the speech thematising homosexuality. It is also arguable that these parts of the novelette undermine the aim of the text by stepping out of the discursive frames so precisely built. However, the narrator who—so to speak—has the ability to occasionally step out of his own limited speech, must always return to and stay within the censored point of view, whenever talking with Imre, and also in most cases, when he communicates his own feelings and thoughts regarding the unfolding relationship. Consequently, by sometimes leaving the limits of the narrative framing and hence the censored discourse, Oswald—whether knowingly or indirectly—strictly reinforces the very limits of the speakable discourse, thereby emphasising the power and inescapability of implicit censorship. Considering the fictional framing of the novel, Oswald’s breaks from his own narrative voice and point of view might be parts of the memorandum that went through the imaginative editorial hand of Mayne. The novel remains very alert about these instances, and they only seem to aim at further establishing the speakable limits.

A very distinct feature of the usage of narrative hiatus can be observed in the “infectious” operation of blanks. As outlined above, Imre behaves rather hesitantly when he approaches the topic of his old friend, Karvaly. Later on, when Oswald recollects Imre’s behaviour, he notes that “[s]ince the afternoon on which we had met, Imre referred so little to Karvaly... he seemed so indifferent to his absence, all at once... indeed he appeared to be shunning the topic... that I avoided it completely” (55). It seems to be the case that Oswald re-enacts what Imre had done previously, notably he repeats the pattern of speech organised by the narrative hiatus. Censorship seems to be operating in the same way when Oswald opens up to his old-time friend about his sexuality, and he reacts to the narrator’s confession in the following manner: “I took you for my friend because I believed you to be a... man. You chose me for your friend because you believed me... stay, I will not say *that!* ... because you wished me to be... a something else, a something more or less like to yourself, whatever you *are!* I loathe you! ...” (141). According to Butler, the text of the analysed congressional statute imagines the operation

of homosexuality in a way that the act of self-definition functions as a “discursive carrier for this displacement and ‘transmissability.’ The sign uttered in the service of a prohibition carries that prohibition and becomes speakable only in the service of that prohibition” (115). The naming of homosexuality, therefore, cannot merely be understood as a sign of desire, rather it is the very means by which desire is enacted by the sign—thus it acquires a “carrier” function that connects homosexuality to contagion. “The self-descriptive utterance of ‘homosexuality’ becomes the very act of dangerous communication which, participating in a contemporary reevaluation of that sacred scene, infects its listener” (“Contagious Word” 116). This is exactly how the forbidden utterance of homosexuality functions in Prime-Stevenson’s novelette. In his 2022 essay, Bojti explores how a “susceptible” reader could interpret the exposition of *Imre* rather differently than the “average” reader. By analysing Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* and *Teleny* and other contemporaneous literary works, he argues that there are certain signs in the novelette that pave the way for a subversive reading related to homosexuality; consequently, Bojti proposes that the novel offers a double narrative similar to other pieces of homosexual literature at the time (“Hungarian Nervous Music” 27ff.). This reading, as he points out, differs significantly from the Wildean stereotypes in order to shed light on a different, much less eroticised understanding of same-sex desire. While Bojti explores censorship in relation to the Hicklin Standard, thereby highlighting a possible, restrictedly accessible subversive way of reading homosexuality, the censored narrative framing examined in this paper could also be viewed as a tool with subversive potentials. In this sense, subversion lies in the operation of (self)-censorship that the text conveys with the proliferating usage of narrative blanks, since it is the means and ways for Prime-Stevenson to provide an alternative perspective on same-sex desire. The “contagious” operation of the self-proclaiming utterance of homosexuality may only be approached and communicated in such a discourse of which the limits are very clearly reinstated by the utterance’s infectious effect. The typographically inscribed way of homosexuality’s speakability that is passed through its very utterance keeps the discourse within the limits of its censored speakability. Prime-Stevenson’s double narrative gives its protagonists the happy ending so far not seen in English-speaking literature thematising homosexuality; however, the subversive potential of the text is kept and may only function within the borders of implicitly censored same-sex desire.

So far, little attention has been paid to the distinction between the author, Prime-Stevenson, and the fictional editor, Xavier Mayne. It is of course hardly possible to outline the distinction perfectly, since in this fictional framing most of the censorship present in the novel could be attributed to both the author and the imagined editor. However, the infectious nature of censorship is clearly one of the most important tools of the author in portraying the sexuality that cannot be spoken of. As I have shown, the censorship exercised by either Imre or Oswald has the ability to “communicate” with the other’s censorial act. We can observe that the proliferation of censorship occurs exactly because of this: one starts limiting his own speech and then the other continues it, censoring himself. This is clearly a discursive pattern used by Prime-Stevenson to portray the contagious nature of self-censorship. Exactly because of this, it becomes very interesting to entertain the idea that it was Mayne himself who actually allowed censorship to function in a way which, in the end, gains a somewhat subversive power. For Prime-Stevenson definitely has his own limitations and by giving the text to the “editorial hand”, one more layer of censorial power is realised in the fictional framing, which might actually have the chance to go against the decisions of the author himself, and allow the discursive limitations to start functioning against themselves, thereby slowly opening the way to the speakability of homosexuality. If Prime-Stevenson’s method of infectious censorship were not interrupted throughout the novel, then the speakability of homosexuality might never have been realised. Here, however, it must be stated once more that it is not possible to name the exact occurrence of these interruptions, thanks to the functioning of implicit censorship, following Butler’s argumentation. Nevertheless, we can definitely state that Prime-Stevenson’s fictional framing needed Mayne to disrupt the contagiousness of implicit censorship. The complexity of *Imre* lies in the creation of this extra editorial layer as well.

One of the key parts in the text is right after the letter that Oswald receives, which urges him to travel home for approximately a year, and he even has to entertain the idea of not returning. The two protagonists have a final *rendez-vous* before Oswald’s planned departure. At this point, the narrator, quite affected by Imre’s seemingly emotionless behaviour, starts talking about the War-School. “Imre, Imre! Instead be a... man! A man in this, as in all else. You trifle with your certainty of a career. Be a man in this matter?” (94).⁵ Then Imre comes up with

5 I use the 1906 edition of *Imre* because the Gifford-edition (2003) treats narrative blanks rather arbitrarily, sometimes using dashes instead of the three (or more) periods and also changes the original

a rather unexpected response: “Be a man? In this, as in *all*? God! how I wish I could be so” (94). Whereas at the beginning of their friendship, the intertwining concepts of masculinity and self-censorship served as a discursive pattern that allowed the two men to conceal their unspeakable feelings and sexuality, here Imre with the slightly different reiteration of these ideas *uses* self-censorship as a means and ways of portraying his true feelings. This precisely built narrative framing of friendship between men provides the basis for the protagonists to put their feelings to words. “I have found, as thou hast found, ‘the friendship which is love, the love which is friendship.’ Come then, O friend! O brother, to our rest! Thy heart on mine, thy soul with mine! For us two it surely is... Rest!” (205).

I argue that the recurring emphasis on the “friendship which is love, the love, which is friendship” is of vital importance to the broader narrative structure of the literary text. By locating their final discourse to the aforementioned ideas of friendship and censorship, the true potential of this discursive and narrative framing comes to light. With this narrative structure, which is inseparable from self-censorship, Prime-Stevenson creates a speakable language that allows same-sex desire to be openly addressed at the beginning of the twentieth century. This is why it is crucial for the narration to remain embedded in the precisely built discursive structure even at the point, when both Oswald and Imre confess their love. By reiterating this discourse continuously, and only by doing so, can the two protagonists open up to each other. Here, we can see that the connotations of same-sex desire not only closely evoke concepts of masculinity, but friendship as an idea is also a focal point in setting forth the speakable limits of the discourse. In the first two chapters of the novelette, Oswald’s narration and the protagonists’ dialogues, when reflecting upon what kind of relation there is between them, must remain within the possible friendship which society allows. After the limits of the regulated speech has been firmly established, the different reiterations of the discourse start to question this carefully built order by stepping out of the allowed limits of friendship between

punctuation. The editor states that “[s]pelling and punctuation have been modernised and obvious textual errors have been corrected” (30). I firmly believe that Prime-Stevenson’s usage of narrative hiatus is one of the key narrative elements of the text, which organise the discourse between Oswald and Imre. Gifford’s changes of typographic tools fail to realise the main goal of the text that is finding the limits of a speakable discourse on homosexuality, in which one can open up and avoid any possible harm. The punctuation and the meaning of the blanks used by Prime-Stevenson are, therefore, of vital importance. Here, for example, Gifford removes the figure of omission, despite the important fact that, by suggesting Imre’s hesitation, it subverts the rigid concepts of masculinity.

two men. That is why Imre, at one point, warns Oswald that their relation must adhere to the idea their society allows: “The world thinks—as it thinks—now. And the world, our to-day’s world, must decide for us all! Friendship now—now—must stay as the *man* of our day understands it, Oswald” (104).

In the following passages, I will turn to examine the removal of the masks (i.e. the confessions), which pave the way for the reformulated speakability of homosexuality. For now, we should state that this recontestation will remain within the discursive framing, and thus, love between two men will only be approachable through the idea of friendship that is allowed.

How do their masks, their shared hidden secret, then, enter the discourse and reformulate their subjectivities? After the speakable limits of homosexuality have been carefully built, Oswald, with a performative speech-act, raises the question:

I should find myself turning aside from the path of straightest truth which I would hold-to in these pages, if I did not find *that* question written down early and frankly here, with the rest. It *must* be written; or be this record broken now and here!

Was Imre von N... what is called among psychiaters of our day, an homosexual? (66)

Soon after wondering about Imre’s sexuality, Oswald re-enacts the limits, and states that it is surely out of question to put his friend in such a situation in which Imre would be faced with the unspeakable question: “But there! I had *no* right! Even if I... But there! I swore to myself that I had *no* wish!” (69). Then Imre tells the story of his colleague, whose “scandal” made him give up his charge. “You know” says Imre, “how specially sensitive... indeed implacable... the Service is on *that* topic. Anything but a hint of *it!* There mustn’t be a suspicion, a breath! One is simply ruined” (70–71). With the use of italics, the text emphasises the unspeakability of homosexuality implying that the mere utterance of the word is dangerous in itself. Here, it is important to highlight that it is Imre himself who thinks of the utterance as unspeakable. Of course, it is still Oswald who highlights this part of Imre’s speech. Nonetheless, by attributing it to the Hungarian soldier, it becomes very clear that the ideas and concepts organising censorship and the narrative framing function this way also because Imre (and of course Oswald) integrate the speakable limits to their subjectivities. Hence, the position from where they speak does not provide the possibility

to immediately move beyond the ideas controlled by their society; they have to alter the speakable limits of the discourse by reiterating it differently so that homosexuality can afford to be mentioned.

Continuing the conversation, Imre asks Oswald, whether he has ever happened to meet “with... that sort a man... *person*... yourself... in your own circle of friends?” (72). The concepts of extreme masculinity keep influencing their discourse, these ideas repeatedly reinstate the limits of speech. Here, Imre formulates his question by first referring to a homosexual man, who then is referred to as a “person,” thereby keeping the order of the discourse’s limits organised by their concept of masculinity. Reacting to this situation, Oswald breaks the promise he made to himself and tries to move beyond the boundaries: “Now *you* are just the very individual I should suspect! ... yes, yes, I am surprised!” (75). As the dialogue progresses toward the unspeakable, the narrative gaps get longer and longer, and Prime-Stevenson expresses the advancement with more periods as blanks. Imre, quickly realising the overstepping of the restrictions, replies: “Do you observe anything particularly womanish—abnormal—about me, if you please?” (75). Finally, Oswald’s joke eases the tension of the situation, realising that he went too far: “you seem to forget what you yourself said to Captain Molton this afternoon... in the billiard-room... about the menage-cooks... don’t you remember?” (76). He concludes that Imre is surely not a homosexual. During this dialogue, the pair crosses the Chain Bridge, which connects Buda and Pest, and Oswald entertains the idea that this place definitely possesses some peculiar ability, since it made them overstep the carefully built-up limits.

Margaret S. Breen argues that the bridge provides the space for the protagonists to talk about their sexualities: “Much as the bridge demarcates the space between Buda and Pest, the two men traversing it explore their relation to each other. ... Thus, the bridge offers an intermediate space for Imre and Oswald’s initial shared claim to a discourse (though as of yet not an identity) of sexual intermediacy” (Breen 7).⁶ However, as I outlined above, this “intermediate space,” as Breen puts it, does not allow the dialogue to actually move beyond the restricted discourse, contrarywise: the limits are re-enacted. Breen mentions their “initial shared claim

6 Margaret S. Breen explores the intertwined relation of the contested terms used to describe same-sex desire and the role of translation in the novel. In my analysis, I do not turn to the question of the various definitions used to describe homosexuality at the turn of the century; however, it must be stated that the unclear and inconsequential usage of terms further complicates the speakability of the discourse. For a comprehensive overview on this topic, see Bojti’s *Wilde, Stenbock, Prime-Stevenson* (126–173).

to a discourse” that at the time of the bridge scene has not yet turned into an identity. Two remarks must be made here. Firstly, I do not support the idea that speaks of a “shared claim.” Imre and Oswald (and distantly Prime-Stevenson and Mayne) do not find themselves in a situation where they have the “agency” to decide on a discourse they want to claim to themselves, upon which an identity could be formed. The implicit censorship pre-emptively sets forth what discourse and how it can be spoken. Hence, the discourse *precedes* any possible claim. Secondly, following the previous remark, I agree with Breen that an identity cannot be formed upon this discourse, but it is not because at this point the protagonists have not removed their masks. This discourse *prevents* the formation of any stable identity, since it constantly reinforces the speakable limits; thus, Oswald and Imre have to repeatedly come face to face with these regulations. That their speech remains embedded in this discourse even after opening up about their sexualities—as seen in the intact concepts of masculinity, and to an extent, friendship—proves exactly the obscure operation of implicit censorship. There is no “homosexual” identity to be built upon this discourse, since it *forbids* that exactly.

Chapter 2, “Masks and—a Face,” mainly focuses on Oswald’s coming to terms with his sexuality. The previous roughly hundred pages have all led up to this point, when Oswald finally opens up and tells the long story of his past endeavours. Here, as the self-proclaiming utterance of homosexuality happens, we see the contestation of the conflicting connotations of same-sex desire. It is the very reiteration Butler speaks of that questions social orders and opens the possibility for a more empathetic understanding of homosexuality. However, the speech act happens within a society that strictly controls the way male-to-male love can(not) be addressed. Oswald again seeks the legitimacy of homosexuality by emphasising that a homosexual is “super-male, so utterly unreceptive of what is not manly, so aloof from any feminine essences, that we cannot tolerate woman at all as a sexual factor! Are we not the extreme of the male?” (114). In this sense, the narrative framing remains still intact: Prime-Stevenson’s educational goals seemed to be only successful this way, that is without questioning the concepts of masculinity his protagonists keep reaffirming. Imre’s reaction and hesitation, whether he should open up too, is again marked by the proliferation of narrative blanks: “If I could... my God! if I only could! ... say to thee what I cannot. Perhaps... some time... Forgive me, but thou breakest my heart! ...” (151–152).

In the last chapter, Imre has to leave for a while to fulfil his duties. Interestingly, the soldier, who previously referred to himself as a terrible writer, someone who likes to keep his writing very short, starts sending Oswald very lengthy letters. In just two days, the narrator gets three billets from him, but, keeping Imre's request in mind, he answers laconically. Oswald asserts: "Clearly, Imre in camp was not Imre in Szent-Istvánhely!" (160). Then the narrator spots a stroke in the letters, which seems to be erased. He remarks: "Was it like Imre to be sentimental, for an instant, in a letter?" (161). Oswald finds himself surprised at the tone of his friend's letters, he does not understand the inconsistency and especially does not seem to come to terms with a sentimental behaviour—a behaviour that both of them earlier portrayed as womanly and not suited for men like these two.

Later, Imre comes back to the city and finally decides to tell Oswald what he has been withholding so far: he also removes his mask. Interestingly enough, however, the narrator cuts his story short: "I shall not detail all of Imre's tale. There was little in it for the matter of that, which could be set forth here as outwardly dramatic" (183–184). Oswald finds himself in a situation once more, where it becomes hard for him to understand why Imre delayed his confession. He confronts the soldier: "Imre, I do not yet see why you have not trusted me sooner. There have been at least two moments in our friendship when you could have done so" (194). In a discourse that is pre-emptively organised and restricted by implicit (self-)censorship, one cannot clearly identify the operation of that discourse. Both Oswald and Imre try to be the ones to decide upon the censorial power they want (because they need) to exercise. But, as it is seen in the cited passages, there is no "sudden" escape from the limits of speech. And although there are instances when they are able to reflect on the regulations, not once is it possible to fully break away from the speakability provided by the discursive frame they must navigate their conversations in. The masks are thrown away in the end, but the limits of the speech remain: no stable identity is formed on the grounds of the censored discourse. "For—oh, Oswald, Oswald! I am just as art thou... I am just as art thou! (180). Removing the masks is only the first step in altering the speakable discourse.

CONCLUSION

Among scholars, Edward-Prime Stevenson's *Imre: A Memorandum* is not celebrated for its literary genius, rather it might earn its place in the canon because of its

historical significance. As a contemporaneous review from Marc-André Raffalovich states: “[*Imre*] is above all a document more than literature. It is deplorably written but it is lived” (187). In my opinion, this book earns its value from its portrayal of a strictly controlled discourse that is very precisely built as narrative framing, and pre-emptively organises how homosexuality can be addressed, and is made up of multiple layers. In the novelette, there is no escaping from the restrictions of speech. “The world thinks—as it thinks—now. And the world, our to-day’s world, must decide for us all! Friendship now—now—must stay as the *man* of our day understands it, Oswald” (104). The limits remain there constantly; both Oswald and Imre must deal with the precariousness of their own identities and social values when trying to break away from the speakable discourse. Their hesitations and careful behaviour are textually reflected in the various forms of narrative blanks.

The aim of this paper was to present why the specific type of narrative pattern that determines the slowly developing relationship between Oswald and Imre is of crucial importance for the portrayal of homosexual desire. Edward Prime-Stevenson’s goal—to provide the broader public with a different account of love between men—was seemingly only possible in this particular way. The performative self-censorship and its close relation to the concepts of masculinity and friendship create a narrative structure that paves the way for a speakable discourse on homosexual love, perhaps thanks to the editorial hand of Mayne, while at the same time constantly alerting the protagonists of its own unspeakability. By portraying this conflicted and contradictory operation of a censored discourse, Prime-Stevenson created an atmosphere where the current social norms could be questioned. As Butler puts it: “The appropriation of such norms to oppose their historically sedimented effect constitutes the insurrectionary moment of that history, the moment that founds a future through a break with that past” (159). The discourse that legitimises homosexuality between Oswald and Imre is inherently bound with concepts of masculinity that, in the end, could not be subverted. This confirms Butler’s suggestion that the performative power of differently done reiterations are in an obscure way provided by the very power that aims to regulate what it does not want to happen. Only within such circumstances, only by in some way adhering to the current social order can censored ideas be challenged. And Edward Prime-Stevenson does this exact thing; he offers a sympathetic reading of homosexuality in a certain way that, according to him, can operate as an educational piece of literature. This, in itself, is already an insurrectionary moment of history.

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“WHAT, THEN, WAS MY NEW FRIEND?”

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