

## **A Foray into the Camp and Ecological Liberation in Contemporary Queer Conversion Therapy Literature**

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This summer, while we all were confined to set spaces and isolated in camp-like ways due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I explored queer peoples' experiences in conversion therapy camp literature. I used four primary texts. Two of the texts, *How to Survive a Summer* by Nick White and *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* by Emily Danforth, are novels, while the other two works are memoirs, *Boy Erased* by Garrard Conley and *The Inheritance of Shame* by Peter Gajdics. By close reading these works through the theoretical and philosophical lenses of biopolitical theory and, specifically, camp theory (Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt), and queer ecotheory (Catriona Sandilands, Timothy Morton, Greta Gaard), I acquired an understanding of this unique version of a camp, its impacts on queer lives, and what is revealed by an ecological understanding of these spaces and people.

While each book presented a specific take on conversion therapy camp, all four works are useful for gaining a holistic understanding of contemporary literature around this topic. Each of my chosen primary texts showcases queer lives in close proximity to 'Nature' and their interactions with this construct. *How to Survive a Summer* and *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* are set in conventional American summer camp settings while *Boy Erased* and *The Inheritance of Shame* give a more nuanced example of what a conversion therapy camp can be. I looked at this nuance and the ways in which we categorize camps and if our definitions and understandings of camps need to expand. Beyond this, I researched how, as a contemporary culture, we perceive and understand 'Nature' and whether this understanding of what we tell ourselves is 'Nature' is limiting. I found both to be true—their colloquial definitions (boundaries) to be restricting, even in academia.

Professor Hilary Thompson of the English department mentored me as I read and applied difficult texts, such as those written by Deleuze and Guattari. Through her guidance, I was able to fully appreciate the theoretical concepts such as rhizomes and use this knowledge to look at how identities and things are connected and change. We mapped out an ecological understanding of experience and identity and reviewed how such a lens can help us understand how the natural world and queer worlds work in tandem, intersecting and growing through the same plateaus. Essentially, we explored how queer liberation in conversion therapy camp literature, both physically and of the mind, is tied to ecological liberation.

Beyond the writing I did this summer, my research will continue to be of use to my Honors Project for my senior year at Bowdoin. I will continue to study and write about contemporary conversion therapy literature and use the texts I spent time with over the summer as the foundation for this work. My outline for this project involves four chapters, one for each of my primary texts, an introduction, and a conclusion. The goal for this research is not only to be one of the first bridges between queer ecological theory and camp theory but also to use queer ecological theory to expand how one might understand the camp. Through my research, I will not only contemplate camp theory within physical borders, as is a common use, but also theorize the camp in metaphysical and mental spaces but through a queer ecological perspective. This research will create a case for camp liberation through queer ecological understandings by using close reading from my four primary texts.

**Faculty Mentor: Hilary Thompson**

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