



DePaul University  
Via Sapiientiae

---

College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences  
Theses and Dissertations

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

---

6-2010

## "Love of the purest kind": Heteronormative rigidity in the homoerotic fiction of Ann Herendeen

Meredith S. Faust

DePaul University, [FAUST.MEREDITH@GMAIL.COM](mailto:FAUST.MEREDITH@GMAIL.COM)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/etd>

---

### Recommended Citation

Faust, Meredith S., "'Love of the purest kind': Heteronormative rigidity in the homoerotic fiction of Ann Herendeen" (2010). *College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences Theses and Dissertations*. 41.  
<https://via.library.depaul.edu/etd/41>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at Via Sapiientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Via Sapiientiae. For more information, please contact [digitalservices@depaul.edu](mailto:digitalservices@depaul.edu).

# **“Love of the purest kind”: Heteronormative Rigidity in the Homoerotic Fiction of Ann Herendeen**

---

A Thesis  
Presented in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

**June 2010**

**By  
Meredith S. Faust**

Department of English  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
DePaul University  
Chicago, Illinois



In many popular novels, it has become commonplace to assume that the ending will be happy or at least satisfying even before one reads past the first chapter.<sup>1</sup> Yet many critics complain that because female-authored popular novels written for a female audience (almost exclusively) generally end happily with the confirmation of a heterosexual monogamous relationship or marriage that the novel lacks substance and restricts the limitations of happiness in the novel to the confines of hegemonic heteronormative standards. In fact, in Lisa Fletcher's recent book *Historical Romance Fiction*, she claims that popular romance novels "represent and use speech acts—and performatives in their broader sense—to produce and reproduce hegemonic ideas about romance, history and heterosexuality" (1). Thereby insisting that not only do speech acts, such as "I love you," generate heteronormative notions when they are used in the novel, but also that they promote these ideas through the reinforcement of the genre. Thus, the reader is left with no alternative to the heterosexual monogamous marriage authorized by the dominant patriarchal societal structure—even in a fictional world.

However, what these critics and Fletcher do not allow for are the sub-genres of the popular romance novel, including historical popular novels that include homosexual, bisexual, and ménage romances that attempt to thwart this type of hegemonic polarization and limitation of sexualities. Indeed, many authors of popular fiction have attempted to subvert the centuries of patriarchy, misogyny, and misrepresentation of relationships in novels by incorporating alternatives to the strict formula of popular novels, particularly popular romance novels, by including ménage couples, homosexual couples, bisexual couples, and self-sufficient characters

---

<sup>1</sup> Romance novels are at least one faction of popular novels, which by definition, must have a happy ending in order even to be considered a member of that genre. Readers expect there to be a happy ending, which is oftentimes why readers read that particular genre. Detective novels are similar, in that the case is always solved and the detective is always praised for his sleuthing, thereby ensuring a happy ending where the morally good triumph in a morally corrupt universe.

who seem to reject the forced hegemonic heterosexuality of happy endings. The recent emergence of the sub-genre of slash fiction in popular novels, which endorses homosexual, bisexual, and polyamorous love relationships and sexual practices largely reconfigures this dominant tradition by overtly rejecting heteronormative hegemony in favor of alternative yet equally fulfilling endings. Ann Herendeen is one author who openly engages with gender and queer studies in her works *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander* and *Pride / Prejudice* her retelling of the Jane Austen classic *Pride and Prejudice*. This thesis will explore how heteronormativity functions within Herendeen's novels specifically within the major couples of the texts and how their relationship affects the perceived subversiveness of the ménage couple ending. By looking specifically at both Phyllida and Andrew's and Fitz and Charles's roles within their relationships and their respective narratives we will determine whether heteronormative desires and structures are subverted, maintained, or reconfigured entirely creating multiple and complicated representations of sexuality.

### I. Discourse of Heteronormativity and Homosexuality in Literature

Before the consequences of heteronormative or non-heteronormative endings in popular novels can be examined, first heteronormativity and the components that make it up, particularly gender, sex, and desire, must be investigated. Judith Butler examines heteronormative hegemony as a structure or rather, as a construct, of patriarchy by focusing on gender and how gender, specifically the female gender, is "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (33). While Butler defines gender, and on a larger scale heteronormative hegemony with the aid of Michel Foucault, Laura Mulvey contends that the dominant structure of patriarchal society has placed certain values on females subjecting them to

what she calls “the male gaze”—an insistence that females are always being watched and regulated by men (2186), resulting in females performing for men whether they are aware of their performance or not. Therefore, both Butler and Mulvey suggest that patriarchy as a structure constructs minority structures from a fantasy model by controlling them through careful monitoring. While Butler and Mulvey stress the performativity of the female minority structures under the control of the patriarchal ideology, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Randolph Trumbach examine the male homosexual minority structure and homosociality as a necessary segment of heteronormative hegemonic society, specifically in the eighteenth-century.

While Butler, Mulvey, Trumbach, and Sedgwick are critical theorists of primarily highbrow literature, their critical theories on the rigidity of heteronormative discourse tends to ignore or rather naively apply to popular fiction as they ignore this genre of literature entirely. Therefore, more recent critics such as Carole Genz, Samantha Burley, and Fletcher’s arguments better incorporate not only the demand for a heteronormative happy ending and its consequences, but also they more readily expose further “gender trouble” (as Butler calls it) inherent in the overwhelmingly female authored and female read genre of popular romance novels. Whereas, many authors of these popular novels, such as Laura Kinsale, suggest that popular romance novels are not restricted by their heteronormativity suggesting the production of a rigid and confined structure, but that these novels are actually liberating for their readers. By combining the two areas of critical theory with popular novels, we will obtain a better understanding of heteronormativity as it functions within the popular novel, specifically within the slash fiction sub-genre of popular novels.

In Butler’s seminal work, *Gender Trouble*, she explores the concept of heteronormative hegemony by examining Foucault’s theory that power produces a structure and then reinforces it.

She identifies the power producer as the patriarchal tradition and its production as the idea of limited gender. Because patriarchy has created gender, it tends to polarize the restrictions of that creation, oftentimes establishing binaries: male/female, man/woman, masculine/feminine, and so on. The limits of these binaries are set by hegemonic culture and reinforced through the repetition of these structures. Therefore, the power differentiations are always already at work within the structure defining and restricting the binaries and the presumption of gender. In this way, a true binary is created, as one gender cannot exist without the other. Hence, without the masculine there can be no feminine. Butler contends that heterosexual desire as a component of heteronormative hegemony “requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term,” and it is this differentiation that internalizes the “coherence of sex, gender, and desire” projecting it onto the other non-dominant structures (22-23).

But what perplexes Butler is not the inescapability of gender’s constraints within its construction, or that the structure was constructed through the production of power and is enforced by the dominating power through its own further constructions, but that gender, as we know it, does not actually exist. Again referring to Foucault, Butler establishes that gender becomes the “disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body’s surface” (135). Thus, not only is gender constructed by heteronormative hegemonic patriarchal society, but it is constructed out of a fantasy for that very heteronormative display of gender, thereby concealing “the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts” where the gender construct does not express or reflect the significant corporeal dimensions of an actual gender—only its construction (135-136). Because this structure does not allow for alternatives to heterosexuality, the

“regulatory ideal is then exposed as a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe” (136). Butler explains that due to this fiction of the body, an “illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” is created (136). Therefore, the truth of gender is fabrication and fantasy “instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies” implying that genders are “neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth” (136).

If Butler asserts that “[g]enders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived,” but merely performed through and because of patriarchally enforced compulsory heterosexuality (141), then Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” functions as a miniature of that very patriarchal heteronormative hegemonic society structure in film. Mulvey asserts that “the fascination of film [for male viewers] is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded [sic] him” (2181). Thus, the structure of film functions as an exact replica of the structure of society, and the fascination the male viewer has with film is a direct result of the performed gender that has been prescribed as a feature of that gender’s assumed role.

If we look at Mulvey’s description of the Hollywood cinema and its “skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure” (2183-84), as a representative subset of patriarchy, then we see that males are not only voyeurs as they sit in their seat in the movie theatre, but that their participation in heteronormative hegemonic society is scopophilic as well. Thus, when Mulvey explains the spectatorship aspect to film with her term “male gaze,” which is a projection of the male’s vision/fantasy onto the female, who is then positioned according to what



most pleases him (2186), we realize that a part of the gender performance of femininity is an “exhibitionist role [where] women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (2186). Consequently, an aspect of the performance of the female gender is to react to the vision/fantasy of the male viewer directing the female gender’s behavior, resulting in a parody of the original fantasy, which is not based on an actual prototype gender or woman, but only on an improbability (this is not to say unachievable, but merely not already in existence).

However, Mulvey does not examine female film directors and their positioning of men or women. But as Mulvey’s male gaze functions within the masculine dominated world of film, and that world is subsumed by the reality of a masculine dominated world, it is safe to say that the female director of films still operates under the male gaze and therefore places her and displays the characters in her films for masculine approval. And while the audience of these films is not distinguished, most film patrons are from the developed western world, which operates under the overarching structure of patriarchy. Because of these limitations, female (and male, for that matter) characters are always placed and displayed exuding “*to-be-looked-at-ness*” for male approval.

While both Butler and Mulvey contend that the structure of heteronormative hegemonic patriarchal society is contingent on male domination of women, Sedgwick maintains in *Between Men* that within the very structure of heteronormative hegemony lays a homosociality that features homoeroticism at its core. In fact, Sedgwick asserts, “in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence” (25, emphasis Sedgwick’s). Even though

female homosocial bonds are similar to the male homosexual bonds in that both females and homosexual males are in a way minorities, because of patriarchy's desire for power the similarities between heterosexual females (and homosexual females for that matter) and homosexual males dissolves creating a further imbalance of "male vs. female power" (4-5). Sedgwick argues that "homophobia directed by men against men is misogynistic, and perhaps transhistorically so," defining misogyny as not only "oppressive of the so-called feminine in men, but that it is oppressive of women" as well (20). Even though heterosexuality is privileged in the heteronormative hegemonic structure, homosexual males are still granted a higher value than heterosexual women are. Hence, no matter the sexual practices of men, they still dominate the female gender, not inventing a new binary, but ignoring a rather large descriptive quality of their gender as a counter-heteronormative gender.

Therefore, when Sedgwick summarizes René Girard's concept of the erotic triangle—a device in fiction where a bond connects two (generally male) rivals perhaps more powerfully and passionately than the bond that links the rivals with the (generally female) object of desire where "the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love,' differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent" (21)—she reveals Girard's acknowledgement of homosociality without recognizing the inherent homoeroticism as Sedgwick does. As a result of the homosociality of this male dominated rival triangle, the beloved is marginalized as not a part of the seemingly secondary "love" story between the rivals. The erotic rivalry triangle, which seems to be contingent on the female and her choice, therefore, effectively discounts her completely, thrusting her into the margins, only highlighting her as an object. In this way, the female of the love triangle only functions as a commodity exchanged among the male rivals—an excuse to bolster the bonds of male homosociality (25-26).

In an attempt to explore the representations of homosociality in eighteenth-century England that Sedgwick discusses, Trumbach asserts that changes in the representations of masculine and feminine sexualities occur. He claims that women's status undergoes modification due to the emergence of the companionate marriage in place of the arranged marriage (254). The new intimacy that the companionate marriage gave to families caused an anxiety in men to declare their dominance over women by adopting new ways to separate and distance themselves from their families. And Trumbach asserts that in order to maintain their dominance, adult men were said to be the only gender capable of complete heterosexuality, thereby placing them as "fully human," securing the "dominance of one half of society over the other, of men over women" (259). As a result of the masculine overcompensation by patriarchy, the representation of women changes from inconsistent whores to the polar opposite saint-like image, because *naturally* women are "intended for the domestic joys of motherhood" and not for promiscuity or sexual adventurousness (256). And apparently by changing the way society represents and views women, the actual status of women will mimic the representation, causing a correspondence between the ideal female and the real female. This correspondence creates a further power imbalance between the male/female binary as now males are completely free to act in whatever manner they please, while females are restricted to the male enforced image of what it is to be female.

However, when women's status adjusts into a more positive yet limiting representation, men's status and relationship to women also transforms to incorporate sexual practices outside of marriage extending from "prostitution to adultery and rape, all of which were illegal in England and certainly immoral everywhere in Europe" (254). And immoral as it was, this behavior is nevertheless accepted when it portrays men as powerful. As men committed these immoral and

illegal acts they proved themselves as more powerful than women, as women were unable to commit the same acts without severe punishment and shame.

This power relationship is even true of homosexual relations between males, where the dominating male in power is seen as honorable and not immoral because he penetrates the submissive male, generally an adolescent boy “who existed in a transitional state between man and woman” (255). Therefore, because the adolescent male was not quite a man, he was more similar to a woman and socially acceptable to penetrate. But because adult men are already transformed into men and out of their state as adolescents resembling women’s status, society rejects sodomitical relations and labels sodomites as effeminate. “Adult men,” Trumbach posits, “were deemed effeminate only when they allowed themselves to be sexually penetrated, or when an overpowering sexual desire for women caused them to surrender control in the hands of women” (255). This image of an adult male who does not act in the way an adult male should act, but instead acts as a woman should by submitting and allowing anal penetration creates a friction in masculine representation. In order to combat this tension, these men were all understood as sodomites and were thus labeled as exhibiting “behavior of an effeminate minority” (255). And because effeminate men were thought to want to be women they must, therefore, must “hate actual women” providing that misogynistic effeminate sodomite image Sedgwick encountered previously (255). Paradoxically, the representations of the effeminate man, or the “Molly,” was as a misogynist and, at the same time, an impersonator of women—a man in feminine drag.

But what happens when these theories are applied to female-authored historical novels involving love triangles? Is the female still similarly discounted and thrust to the margins, or does the female authorship alter Sedgwick’s romantic rivalry theory concerning women? By

incorporating female-authored male/female/male erotic love triangles into her argument, Genz declares in “The More the Merrier? Transformations of the Love Triangle Across the Romance Genre,” that “the object of desire in romances remains the principal pole of affectivity and desiring activity,” thereby maintaining that the woman, as the object of desire, functions as the center of the triangle and is not marginalized as she is in Girard and Sedgwick’s subject-rival axis model of the erotic love triangle (4). For Genz, then, the female does not function merely as a means to link the bond between the two rivals, but as an “independently desiring subject whose desire propels most action and whose point of view governs reader identification” (8). Thus, the female of the male/female/male triangle structure drives the plot of the novel as well as demands attention to herself and her actions. She is no longer the object of desire as the triangle’s focus, but the one controlling the desire. This desirability is a function of her agency within the narrative, not an obligatory limitation forced upon her by patriarchal ideology.

While Genz asserts that in the male dominated erotic love triangle the female centerpiece does assert her agency, she admits that in the female/male/female structure of the rivalry love triangle, it is the male “whose determining gaze holds definitional power” (11). By pitting women against each other in this female-based triangulation, the man reasserts his power as choosing the best or the preferred woman is ultimately his decision. And like in Sedgwick’s male homosocial model of the erotic rival triangle, the women of the female dominated triangle also, according to Genz, assert their own homosocial “female-female bonds” (14).

But where Genz diverges from previous conceptions of the erotic triangle is in her assessment of the *ménage* love relationship—a recent development in romance fiction. Here she contends that it “functions as a committed and sexually exclusive structure that rivals dyadic coupledness in terms of romance and love” (19). The triangle is no longer a rivalry, but a

preferred organization of a threesome relationship prioritizing equality and liberation of self. In this ménage relationship, heterosexuality and homosexuality are no longer power-enforcing structures because no one in the triad concerns him or herself with defining sexuality in those restrictive, polarizing terms. They all love one another equally, and they all respect the boundaries within their triangulated relationship equally. It is also within this model, specifically the male/female/male ménage romance that the “depiction of male homosexuality elicits female pleasure” (22). Genz affirms that male homosexual erotic scenes provoke in female readers what lesbian eroticism provokes in male viewers. Essentially, she inverts Mulvey’s male gaze into a “female gaze” because “the male body becomes sexualized in the same ways the female body has been objectified for centuries” (22). For Genz, the erotic triangle and the ménage romance combined with female authorship is not limiting for females, but liberating for females. In fact, ménage romances subvert patriarchy instead of enforcing it.

While the female author frame influences Genz’s theories toward liberating the female reader, for Burley, this frame problematizes the apparently inherent homoeroticism of the male/female/male love triangle by forming a new triangle: female author/female protagonist/female reader. Burley asserts in “What’s a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Book Like This?: Homoerotic Reading and Popular Romance,” that the all-female-triangle model seemingly outs the homoeroticism Sedgwick and Genz declare is secondary and often repressed by pushing the male protagonist to the margins instead. However, Burley asserts, the female readers of popular romance fiction unknowingly participate in homoeroticism, resulting, once again, in its suppression. Thus, readers read “against the heteronormative grain reveal[ing] a homoerotic counternarrative in which romance reading is a sexual-textual practice” (137). In this way, readers are not engaging in the restrictive heteronormative structure of the novel

prescribes, but instead engaging in a repressed feature of the novel due to its authorship and readership. Furthermore, Burley asserts that involved in this sexual-textual practice is the reader's identification with the female protagonist where the reader sees herself as both the protagonist and desiring what the protagonist has. She states, "Readers can revel in her seduction *and* be seduced by her" (142, emphasis Burley's). Although Burley concedes that "every popular romance eventually ends in a celebration of heterosexual union" (146), she questions the definition of this heterosexuality, and thereby the heteronormative hegemonic structure it proclaims to be protecting.

Kinsale further problematizes Burley's homoerotic argument in "The Androgynous Reader: Point of View in the Romance," as Kinsale insists that if the reader is objectively involved in the heroine's actions, then the reader is not actually experiencing the homoerotics the text features. While Kinsale does not discuss the homoeroticism as a function a predominantly female authored, female read genre, she does offer additional insight into female reader identification. She claims that to assume the female reader identifies exclusively with the female protagonist is shortsighted, for the female reader "*is* the hero, and also is the heroine-as-object-of-the-hero's-interest (the placeholder heroine)" (32, emphasis Kinsale's). Therefore, the female reader simultaneously identifies with the hero as an assertive and aggressive person recognizing these characteristics in herself *and* as the object of his pursuit in the female protagonist, enjoying both being pursued and doing the pursuing. If this is the case, then seemingly Kinsale's theory aligns with Burley's theory of romance novels as veiled homoerotica or even doubled narcissism. After all, if the female reader is the hero when he flirts with or engages in sexual practices with the placeholder heroine, then in effect, the female reader indulges in a simulated psychological self-gratification, whether she finds this scenario physically arousing or not.

Yet, the reasoning behind Kinsale's theory suggests that female readers frequently identify with the male protagonist because the female reader sexually admires him. She states, "a large part of it feels like a simple, erotic, and free-hearted female joy in the very existence of desirable maleness. Hey, women *like* men" (37, emphasis Kinsale's). If this is true, then why is the female reader psychologically (and possibly, physically) engaging in self-love? While Kinsale does not address this issue, as Burley attempts to, she does attempt to explain the female reader's preference towards hero-identification. Kinsale believes that female readers identify with the male protagonist because as she engages in this hero-identification, "a woman can become what she takes joy in, can realize the maleness in herself, can experience the sensation of living inside a body suffused with masculine power and grace . . . [i]n short, she can *be* a man" (37). Although Kinsale views this desire to embody masculinity as liberating to female readers, and qualifies that the man the female reader can be is just a masculine aspect of her own personality and not a function of Freud's penis envy, this notion nevertheless emphasizes the power-produced structure of the regulatory binary system of patriarchy.

As previously mentioned, in Fletcher's more recent work of scholarship, she examines the extent to which speech acts are performative and how these specific speech acts promote heteronormative hegemonic structures. To Fletcher, an assortment of repeated speech acts characteristic of romance fiction, particularly the speech act of saying "I love you" both propels the novel into heterosexual restraints both confining it to heteronormativity while not being able to function without its compulsory speech act. She states, "It is impossible to imagine a romance fiction which does not depend on the force of these three little words . . . for the progress of its plot and the development of its characters" (1). Because the speech act "I love you" is necessary for the plot and progress of the popular romance novels, Fletcher contends that there is no



romance novel that does not prescribe heteronormative practices. Even though, she acknowledges the “impulse to conform to hegemonic structures as [the romance genre] subverts them” (5), Fletcher continues to assert that any subversion or attempted subversion on the behalf of the genre is quickly dismissed due to the compulsory heterosexuality the performative speech acts imply. In the vein of Foucault and Butler, Fletcher argues that not only are genders largely performed for the hegemonic structure of power, but that even the words uttered from these genders are performed. In this way, each time it is said, the speaker knows exactly what is expected of him (or her) and what those words mean to the receiver of them. Thus, each time “I love you” is uttered by a male to a female it is a cliché because it has been said before, while at the same time representing the first time this specific man has declared his love for this specific woman, rendering the speech act as derivative and original simultaneously. And because “I love you” is most frequently said first by the male, it reinforces his dominance in the relationship as the one allowing himself to be committed to the female and demanding that she likewise commit herself to him.

However, what Fletcher’s argument does not cover is the idea that there are now novels, even historical novels, in which the male protagonist does not say, “I love you” first, or to a woman. Her short-sightedness at not including slash fiction leaves the question open as to how heteronormativity functions within slash fiction and ménage fiction. If a man performs the very same speech act for another man, does that change the very construct for which “I love you” is intended? Does “I love you” still mark possession of the other person if heteronormativity is not implied? By applying the architecture of Fletcher’s historically performed heteronormative enforcing speech act “I love you” in conjunction with the classic theories of Butler, Mulvey, Sedgwick, and Trumbach and the more contemporary theories of Genz, Burley, and Kinsale to

the novels of Herendeen, the implied heteronormativity will either be exposed or a new non-heteronormative structure will be revealed.

## II. Performing heterosexuality in *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander*

In the late eighteenth-century, when erotic novels were first said to be written and published in English,<sup>2</sup> they were, according to Trumbach, “produced for and often, written by gentlemen” as a product of what he calls “the religion of libertinism” (253-254). Trumbach contends that libertinism rejects the normative Christian tradition by claiming sexual desire as inherent and beneficial to humanity. But within the limits of this sexual gratification of libertinism lies a new meaning of sexuality, sexual exploration, and sexual relations attached to males that encompasses not only monogamous heterosexual relationships, but also relationships outside of monogamy, including polygamy and counter-heteronormative relationships such as homosexual relationships, to use contemporary terminology. Though Trumbach examines the history of homosexuality and homosociality surrounding libertinism in Enlightenment England, he finds that although alternatives to heteronormative sexuality existed, the dominant and normative sexuality was heterosexual, as a result of patriarchy’s influence. Because of this Trumbach does not draw any direct conclusions as to the author reader relationship embedded in the larger framework of erotic novels written by men for men starring females.

In the nearly 260 years since the publication of Cleland’s novel—an erotic book written by a man for men, as contemporary fiction is written by women for women, as a general rule—the question of author reader relationship as a faction of homosociality has emerged.<sup>3</sup> Recently,

---

<sup>2</sup> Trumbach credits John Cleland as writing the first unambiguous English book of pornography, *Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, originally published in the *General Advertiser* on November 21, 1748 in “Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism in Enlightenment England” p. 253.

<sup>3</sup> In the many years that have followed the publication of *Fanny Hill*, an abundance of homosexual or queer erotic novels have been published. The reference to Cleland’s novel as the pioneering queer erotica text appears to

the scholarly consensus is that Cleland's original novel is a homosexual text disguised as a heterosexual text,<sup>4</sup> albeit one that finally condemns the very homosexual practices it seems to invite by ending conservatively<sup>5</sup> with a monogamous heterosexual marriage between the prostitute protagonist and her deflowerer. Can the same be said of contemporary popular novels incorporating elements of erotica and written by women for women? Ann Herendeen's *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander* raises exactly that question as the novel seemingly promotes alternatives to heteronormative hegemonic happy endings with the inclusion of ménage marriages, thus subverting conservative heterosexual monogamous relationships, as Genz suggests in her study. However, Herendeen's attempt at completely subverting the restrictive gender portrayals with the inclusion of ménage couples does not entirely fail due to her ultimately restrictive gender portrayals<sup>6</sup> that enforce the power of the patriarchal heteronormative hegemonic tradition, but instead complicates the relationships by offering alternatives while imposing heteronormativity.

*Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander* is set near the start of the nineteenth-century:

a time when, according to Trumbach, the culture of marriage had already begun to shift from

---

illustrate à la Pamela Regis the relevance of popular romance novels, specifically those involving graphic erotic scenes as predating the recent emergence of homosexual fiction and slash fiction.

<sup>4</sup> See Edelman or McFarlane

<sup>5</sup> David Weed states in "Fitting Fanny: Cleland's *Memoirs* and the Politics of Male Pleasure," that "*Memoirs* constantly inscribes a range of sexual practices only to thwart them in favor of vaginal intercourse between men and women" (11). This suggests that sex acts outside of heterosexual intercourse—Emily's 'domino', Fanny's sailor, female masturbation, lesbianism, and the sodomites—were "incomplete and misdirected, dead ends and wrong turns on the sexual highway" and not actually condoned within the limits of the novel (11).

<sup>6</sup> This essay deals primarily with the main love couple of Phyllida and Andrew and how their genders function within the narrative. Having said that there are many different representations of gender throughout the novel. The three most prominent genders in the novel are the sexually adventurous heterosexual female (Phyllida, Mrs. Lewis, Lady Fanshawe, Nan), the exclusively homosexual male (Rhys Powyl, Harry, George Witherspoon, Monkton), bisexual males (Andrew, Matthew, David Pierce, Kit, Philip Turner/PhilippeTournière), and the exclusively heterosexual male (Dick Carrington). However, there is at least one female homosexual character, Gladys Powyl identifies as a sapphite, while Agatha Gatling mixes gender norms because she prefers to dress in men's clothing. Although these counter patriarchal consenting representations of gender do exist in the novel, the novel does not authorize them because Gladys leaves the narrative almost as quickly as she enters it, while David Pierce, Agatha's brother's lover, impregnates and marries Agatha confirming conservative heteronormativity. While this section does not explore the gender of the homosexual male, the following section on *Pride/Prejudice* will.

traditional arranged marriages where the woman was a commodity men used in the bartering of wealth distribution and family posterity in favor of love marriages. Phyllida seems to favor the emerging trend for romantic love versus familial obligation because her initial reaction to the idea of an arranged marriage—even the progressive marriage Andrew proposes—is to scoff at it: “No thank you, Mama I have no objection to men of that sort, but I would rather remain a spinster than be tied for life to a man who doesn’t really want me” (14). Phyllida’s exertion of agency seems to reflect gender role subversion: she is opinionated, steadfast, and frank—not submissive as traditional representations of femininity illustrate. However, after her mother makes it clear to Phyllida that marrying Andrew is not a decision she is in charge of (“You listen to me. For once, you will do as I say and as I think best” (14)), Phyllida relinquishes her power and submits to her mother’s demand.

Because Phyllida’s submission to familiar authority is to a matriarch rather than a patriarch (her father died years prior), she is required to do as her mother instructs, which is not merely to accept Andrew’s offer, but to “receive him, wearing your best gown, and with your hair curled . . . and when he’s finished you will curtsy and say, ‘Yes, thank you kindly, sir’” (15). Phyllida is given a role to enact. She is not acting of her own will, but from her mother’s instruction of a learned ideal. To be precise, Mrs. Lewis instructs Phyllida to exhibit herself in a way that is desirable to Andrew. She instructs her to exhibit the “*to-be-looked-at-ness*” Mulvey contends is crucial to the male-female exchange. Mrs. Lewis tells Phyllida that she will dress and look a certain way as well as behave a certain way—all in order to please Andrew.

Although it may seem counterproductive to try to woo Andrew with her beauty and compliance because he is a self-pronounced sodomite (“I am most definitely a sodomite” (31)), the parameters of the marital contract he proposes involve the production of an heir, specifically

a male heir, in order to fulfill the monetary and independence promises offered as incentive to her for tolerating his sodomitical infidelities. Therefore, when Andrew requests that she sit on his lap, Phyllida does not shy away from the offer, but instead understands that if she is going to marry him, she should know “whether they could share intimacy comfortably,” and thus, she walks over to him lifting “her skirts just enough not to wrinkle them by sitting, and settle[s] herself on his thighs,” asking, “Now . . . what happens next?” (28). The coquettish behavior Phyllida exhibits is not characteristic of her previous behavior with men. She has refused two suitors already. This behavior is a representation of what she believes women seeking a husband should demonstrate. She tries to suppress her “fear and excitement from showing too obviously in her voice” because she does not believe that a frightened or eager female is desirable to men, especially sodomites (28). Instead, she attempts to conduct herself to correspond with the hegemonic vision/fantasy of female behavior. In short, she performs her sexuality, as Butler would say, to match an ideal that does not exist. And as far as Phyllida knows, Andrew’s ideal vision/fantasy for the mother of his heir is that she should be sexually adventurous.

In the first exclusively heterosexual vaginal penetration scene in the novel, which occurs after their marriage, Phyllida’s performance of gender identity becomes even more pronounced. After having received instructions from her mother yet again as to how to behave and look (“there are ways to put a man in the mood” (39), and “her mother had trimmed [Phyllida’s pubic hair] with the sewing scissors after her bath” (40)), Phyllida awaits Andrew naked in the bridal bed. As she does so she “arrang[es] herself to what she hoped was the best advantage . . . She turned halfway on her side. . . . her breasts askew from the leaning position, her hips making a large S-curve. Not bad, she decided. Almost artistic” (41). Phyllida literally acts out instructions from her mother that are directly related to Mulvey’s claim in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative

Cinema” where “[t]he determining male gaze projects its phantasy [sic] on to the female figure which is styled accordingly” (2186). Mrs. Lewis has interpreted the masculine fantasy to include mood enhancers and cropped pubic hair and has instructed Phyllida to portray both of these images. And while it is Phyllida who positions her body herself—not Andrew, not her mother—she does so with Andrew’s gaze in mind. She acts according to the presumed hegemonic heterosexual masculine fantasy, not as anticipating the exact male fantasy of her recent husband whose sexual fantasies run against the heteronormative grain.

Not surprisingly, Andrew does not react to Phyllida’s arrangement, but instead performs his own gender as masculine heterosexual roles dictate and tells Phyllida that she, as an aesthetic image, pleases him, however his words sound “polite” and “perfunctory” demonstrating his anxiety to conform to heteronormative hegemonic standards (41). This anxiety, or rather his obstinate refusal to perform the appropriate actions of the heterosexual male gender<sup>7</sup> confines his vision/fantasy to excluding any member of the opposite gender as a result of his identification as a sodomite. However, what this scene reveals as Phyllida begins to display symptoms of fear and anxiety upon viewing his naked phallus, is that Andrew’s vision/fantasy is not of a provocatively displayed female (or even male for that matter), but of a misogynistic and sadistic

---

<sup>7</sup> Or more precisely, of performing hegemonically authorized heterosexuality privately, as Andrew proudly identifies as a homosexual, if the term existed, when he states, “I am most definitely a sodomite” (31). Although he has experimented with many women “an upstairs maid when he was fourteen” and many prostitutes from “London’s most luxurious brothels” only to discover that “it was not for him” (44). If it were socially acceptable to proclaim his sexuality he would most readily do so, but because of England’s homophobic atmosphere, according to both Sedgwick and Trumbach, a type of “homosexual panic” emerges where heterosexual men begin to feel threatened by the possibility of their homosocial relationships being perceived as homosexual revealing a “a structural residue of terrorist potential, of *blackmailability*, of Western maleness through the leverage of homophobia” (89 emphasis Sedgwick). Thus, the structure of patriarchal society refuses to permit Andrew to advertise his status in public, and he therefore clings to his identity within the private sphere creating a perverse anxiety against heteronormative sexuality, and, to use the modern term, bisexuality. Because hegemonic society condemns his status as sodomite, he revels in it; the authorization of heterosexual relationships by hegemonic society repulses Andrew so that he spurns any heterosexual desire.

representation of the women as inferior to men<sup>8</sup> and thus, afraid of their dominating power—physically representing this. Immediately after Phyllida views his penis, which is “long and lean as every other part of him—and soft, hanging limp over his balls,” she “almost crie[s] with despair” (42). Of course, Phyllida cries because she is worried that Andrew lacks the ability to consummate the marriage and she *really* wants to consummate the marriage: “but she wanted to know the feel of him, the taste of him, that thick hardness inside her that she had felt with her hand through the leather of his riding breeches” (42). Phyllida’s tears of despair result from her inability to perform her gender correctly. She needs to meet Andrew’s vision/fantasy in order to complete, what Butler calls the “*stylized repetition of acts*” that are intrinsic to the representation of the heterosexual female gender (140, emphasis Butler’s).

Still, Andrew does not know that Phyllida’s tears come from a cyclical gender performance anxiety, which implicates the completion of her part of the marital contract rendering her incapable of completing her familial duty due to his lack of erection. Instead, Andrew believes she is afraid of him, or more specifically afraid of the power of his penis. He tries to comfort her: “you mustn’t be afraid . . . You know I must hurt you a little tonight, but I will be as gentle as I can” (42). Andrew does not expect Phyllida to behave as “a scared little nun,” when she views him, but as the “bold wench who had sat on his lap and grabbed him” at their first introduction (43). Thus, when he is confronted with a weeping and frightened woman whose “lush, ripe body” exhibits a “whorish clipped patch of hair at her crotch,” Andrew realizes

---

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the representation of males’ interest and attraction to women’s presumed fear of penis possession is a contemporary, prominent, and expected counterpart to heterosexual arousal. In Cleland’s *Fanny Hill*, for example, this attraction is illustrated as almost all of Fanny’s suitors become more aroused by her fear and pain, or her feigned fear and pain, of the largeness of their penises in reference to penetrating her vagina. The satirized rape scene with Mr. Norbert is the best instance of this sadistic behavior. Moreover because Andrew “must have smutty books . . . Erotica” according to his brother, Dick, it is likely that Andrew owns Cleland’s work, or similar work, in which women’s pain as a pleasure provoker for men is illustrated didactically for the scopophilic male reader (105). Thus, when Andrew presumes Phyllida’s tears result from the size of his penis, it is a form of penis praise he has learned through erotic novels.

his power over Phyllida and becomes aroused “in a couple of seconds, when only a minute ago he had been feeling the dread of having to perform on demand, suspecting the whole idea had been a huge and humiliating mistake” (43). His immediate erection is not because of her voluptuous body, or as a result of his performed heterosexuality, but rather as a result of the homosocial culture that produces the domination complex Trumbach suggests. Andrew, ordinarily a member of minority society as a sodomite, suddenly feels the power that comes with being a heterosexual man having a woman afraid of him. He interprets Phyllida’s response as a reflection of the fear he believes a man’s penis poses for a female virgin—the ultimate power of the penis is, of course, the evocation of fright and terror—and becomes aroused not by the sight of her body, but at the thought of his body part scaring her, thus increasing his dominance over her.

Moreover, Andrew’s actions do not suggest the gentleness he promises Phyllida, but instead an aggression: “He tightened his arms”; “His lips closed over hers”; and “His tongue snaked in” (43). What is more, all of these things happen without his cognitive control. He squeezes her to him “inadvertently,” he kisses her “automatically,” his skin “react[s] with a strange, primitive feeling of lust” when he touches her breasts finally culminating in his uncontrollable erection (43). These actions happen to Andrew involuntarily suggesting that he is not acting out his heterosexuality, but rather his biology. His body is attracted to Phyllida’s even if his mind is not. As Herendeen describes the scene, Andrew’s performed identification with being a sodomite is now displaced by his true or natural sexuality, which turns out to align quite comfortably with heteronormative standards. Not only is he aroused at the idea of provoking fear in Phyllida, but he is also unintentionally aroused by her biologically.



As soon as Phyllida senses Andrew's ithyphallic posture, her tears immediately dry as she realizes that she will be able to complete her duty to her family by consummating the marriage. However, she has "her mother's good sense, at least, not to confess the truth" of her tears, suspecting Andrew's excitement may have been caused by his new role as forceful heterosexual lover (43). And although Andrew is relieved to know that Phyllida will not cry anymore "for fear at sight of my beef bayonet," he does not expect the virginal Phyllida to "[stretch] out, arching her spine and spreading her legs" to greet his advances (43). Indeed, because "[t]he transition into sexual invitation was so sudden," he finds himself questioning the validity of her tears and her virginity, determining both to be authentic because he "felt for himself the violence of her convulsions" (44).<sup>9</sup>

Once again he rationalizes that he would "rather a willing, even an eager bride than a terrified, crying victim" and should "go through with it" tonight, waiting to determine her true virginal status as secondary to marriage consummation (44). This rationalization does not signify that he is a mature and evolved man more interested in mutual affection and participation, or that he does not subscribe to the feminine fear of the phallus resulting in a masked penis praise, but rather that his emerging heterosexuality directly stems from his perception of Phyllida's fear of him, and he cannot reasonably and lucidly acknowledge that he enjoys seeing his wife as his victim. He knows that he likes the image—that it pleases him—but he cannot recognize its pleasure cognitively. In order to cast aside his power hungry heterosexual feelings, he must remind himself that having heterosexual intercourse with his wife is mandatory for

---

<sup>9</sup> This preoccupation with fear and legitimate maidenheads mirrors Cleland's prototype erotic novel as Fanny's first experience with heterosexual vaginal penetration by a penis results in "so much complaining" on her part, which further entices her lover (77). Again this occurs in the feigned maidenhead scene with Mr. Norbert where Fanny acts "all the niceties, apprehensions, and terrors supposable for a girl perfectly innocent to feel at so great a novelty as a naked man in bed with her for the first time" (170).

acquiring an heir (“The arrangement was all spelled out. He could get her pregnant easily enough” (45)). And because this heterosexual sexual intercourse is obligatory, Andrew cannot consent to enjoying it or, for that matter, allowing Phyllida any pleasure: “he wasn’t with a mistress who might expect some attention to her sexual gratification. He was with his wife . . . If he gave her little pleasure the feeling would be mutual” (44-45).

Yet, Andrew surprises himself. As he tries to pretend that he wants Phyllida—or, rather, that he wants to have heterosexual vaginal intercourse with her—he discovers that he actually *does* want it, that “it was his desire” (46). And when Phyllida moans in “pain, not pleasure,” he attempts to suppress his need for her “tight little opening” (46). But ultimately Andrew cannot, as he “los[es] control, thrusting into her to the hilt” after exiting to give Phyllida a moment to situate herself, he plunges “back in, repeat[ing] the motion, over and over, increasing the rhythm, pounding her mercilessly, her cries only spurring him to greater force” until he finally finishes “in a frenzy of rapid, deep thrusts that left him spent and panting” (46). This scene not only focuses on Andrew and his perspective, but also it communicates his fundamental heterosexuality. He cannot resist “the heat, the wetness, the tightness, her moans and sighs” (46) and has to let his biological nature take over. Just as his biology took over earlier in the scene, it has done so once again. Each time Andrew tries to take himself out of the pleasure of heterosexual intercourse through rationalization, he is unsuccessful. His intention to perform his heterosexuality reveals that his earlier homosexuality (or sodomitical identification) was itself a performance, however unconscious or unrecognized.

The insistence of heterosexual behavior as the norm at least for men as members of the privileged sex that Butler presents exists clearly within Andrew’s character. Even though he identifies as a sodomite, and therefore a minority according to Sedgwick, he is not actually a

member of the effeminate minority. He may enjoy having sex with men, but this pleasure is only a fraction of the pleasure he experiences because of his status as a properly masculine male, which makes him a member of the hegemonic majority. As a dominating man, Andrew can possess either men or women and obtain pleasure because he is exercising his power. The pleasure comes from his source of power, not from a distinction between genders or sexual practice.

Phyllida, meanwhile, feels used after Andrew's performance. When she begins to encourage Andrew's advances, she hopes that Andrew will respond to the vision/fantasy she presents him with according to her own vision/fantasy of how males should act during the sex act. In an interesting subversion of gender norms, Phyllida engages in a sort of inverted male gaze—a female gaze of sorts.<sup>10</sup> When Andrew approaches Phyllida's meticulously positioned body for his aesthetic enjoyment, instead of fetishizing Phyllida by focusing on certain body parts, segmenting them from her person and thus dehumanizing her to a commodity, Phyllida does this to Andrew instead. She “couldn't help . . . devouring him with her eyes” taking mental stock of all his body parts (41). His “sinewy and graceful” body occupy her thoughts as she “just look[s] and dream[s]” while staring at him (42). It is, however, at this point that she awakens from her fantasy as she realizes that his penis is not erect—that she cannot fulfill her familiar and marital duty. It does not take her long to bounce back from this, as we've seen, as a result of Andrew's dominating erection and manner. However, when Andrew speaks to her about stopping her tears from fear of viewing his “beef bayonet,” Phyllida feels “herself growing wet between her thighs just from the sound” of his voice (43). She expects him to “[m]ake love to”

---

<sup>10</sup> This gaze is not the same as Genz's because Phyllida has yet to witness and enjoy male on male sexual practices. Later in the novel she does spy Andrew and his lover in the midst of a tryst and she does fully realize Genz's female gaze.

her as she has requested of him (43), and anticipates that “something really wonderful was going to happen,” only to realize that once again her fantasy has been overthrown as he “simply fuck[s] her” (47). Phyllida takes several progressive stances in the scene, both by inverting the male gaze into a female gaze and by acknowledging that her fantasy has not been fulfilled, even though her duty has been. However, instead of punishing Andrew for his thoughtless behavior, as a progressive heroine might, Phyllida retreats, deciding that she is, on the whole, “a very lucky woman” and that she will “thank him” in the morning for this inconsiderate sexual experience (47). After one heterosexual vaginal penetration experience, Phyllida transforms from strong and independent into submissive and complaisant. She completes the gender role performance by becoming the perfect vision/fantasy.

Throughout the novel heteronormative sexual practices are encouraged, and in fact, preferred over every other form of sexual activity.<sup>11</sup> For even though Andrew marries both Phyllida and Matthew, it is his marriage to Phyllida that is sanctioned publicly, and his sexual intercourse with Phyllida that reaps the greatest reward—children, heirs to his lineage. Thus, although Herendeen attempts to subvert the heteronormative hegemonic structure surrounding the happy ending with her ménage romance the ending conforms to hegemonic patriarchal society.

### III. Performing Homosexuality in *Pride / Prejudice*

---

<sup>11</sup> Although the course of the novel helps both Phyllida and Andrew come to terms with their own respective sexualities, the logistics behind their first sexual encounter do not change. After Andrew once more forces himself sexually upon Phyllida, she tries to take a stand by locking him out of her bedroom and refusing to visit him in his, her strength is once more undermined when she is actually threatened with rape outside of their marital union, which forces her to realize that Andrew had not actually raped her to begin with. Moreover, even though Andrew continues to practice his sodomitical sexuality with several other men before eventually forming an attachment to Matthew (whom he marries at the end of the novel), the first time he has intercourse with his male lover, he imagines Phyllida: “He watched with greedy desire as the narrow blue eyes opened wide at the sudden fullness, reminding him of something he couldn’t quite place. *Soft brown eyes, not blue, fearful but willing—God!—Phyllida on their wedding night.* The memory only increased his excitement” (308).

As we have seen with *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander*, gender is largely performed based on previous conceptions of how that gender should behave. Even though certain characters perform their genders, there is always an underlying structure of hegemonic heteronormativity at work; therefore, even in cases where a character prefers to perform a homosexual identity a normative performance of heterosexual masculinity nevertheless presents itself in sexual encounters, whether they feature same sex or opposite sex partners. In Herendeen's latest novel *Pride / Prejudice*, the characters are based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*; however, Herendeen has slashed the novel to create a homoerotic reading of Austen's work. Thus, Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley (both known by their first names, Fitz—shortened from Fitzwilliam—and Charles, respectively) are the main couple, while Darcy and Bingley's relationships with their own Bennet sister takes a back seat. Moreover, the conflict between Darcy and Wickham is further complicated as a result of the previous sexual relationships between not only Wickham and Miss Georgianna Darcy (a relationship present in the original novel) but also Wickham and Fitz. Because Austen has already written the growing adoration between the socially sanctioned heteronormative couples in her work, Herendeen emphasizes the homosexual relationships she perceives as inherently homoerotic in Austen's original text. However, in Herendeen's version, the Fitz and Charles relationship mimics Austen's prototypical relationship of Darcy and Elizabeth where Charles promotes Fitz's gradual change—not Elizabeth. Yet, it is Charles who quickly dismisses the homosexuality of his character and his relationship with Fitz in favor of a heterosexual relationship with Jane, while Fitz clings onto his homosexual relationship with Charles and is only drawn to Elizabeth through Austen's plot.

Just as Trumbach contends that sodomitical practices between two men, though immoral and illegal, were honorable when the adult male is presented as overpowering the weaker adolescent boy or effeminate adult male, Fitz consistently overpowers his sexual partners. Although the power structure of his relationship with Wickham may have been grossly exaggerated by Wickham,<sup>12</sup> generally, because of Fitz's upper-class status, he is not only the man granted the power in the relationship, but also he penetrates his partners instead of receiving penetration, thereby establishing Fitz as more powerful.

In order to reinforce his status as alpha male in relationships, Fitz continuously refers to his partners as ganymedes<sup>13</sup>—Charles is consistently described as a boy.<sup>14</sup> In an effort to condemn Charles to an effeminate status and penetrable lover, Fitz uses his age to infantilize Charles and rectify their relationship as somewhat socially acceptable. After all, as Trumbach points out, the socially sanctioned adolescent male sodomitical penetration shift occurs only 100 years prior to the practices Fitz engages in. Thus, the emergence of the modern stigma associated with homosexuals is relatively new to Fitz and Charles's society.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Fitz finds Charles's journey "to becoming a man" somewhat "difficult to accept" suggesting that Fitz has trouble accepting that soon he will have to come to terms with Charles as an adult man—a harder obstacle to overpower (5).

---

<sup>12</sup> In addition to the embellishments Wickham describes in Austen's text, he further confides to Elizabeth that Fitz coerced Wickham into an unsavory and nonconsensual sodomitical relationship, where he had to participate as a result of his steward status. Fitz, however, later reveals to Elizabeth that this is not the case. Wickham persuaded Fitz into the relationship only to later use their relationship to elicit money and generosity, such as covering up many sexual scandals, from Fitz. Even the grand gesture Darcy makes in *Pride and Prejudice* to force Wickham into marrying Lydia is now an exchange of money and sexual practices in *Pride / Prejudice*.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, when Fitz first becomes attracted to Elizabeth he believes "she had a boyish figure" only to later assess that she is "[v]ery feminine, not like a boy at all" (136).

<sup>14</sup> References to age appear throughout the novel, generally referring to comparisons of Charles as a boy or a man. A few examples of this can be found on pages 5, 9, 21, 90, 224, and 336.

<sup>15</sup> What is more, Fitz constantly justifies his love for men by citing ancient civilizations and their different definitions of love and relationships, declaring that if traditionally it was acceptable for men to have sexual and even love relationships together, then it should likewise be mainstream and conventional for his society to practice these same counter-heteronormative practices, making them normative. See, for example, pp. 255-262.

Because Charles is progressing into adulthood, his interest in sodomy wanes. As Fitz observes, Charles is “no longer the untried youth of our first acquaintance” (5). Instead, Charles feels that the two of them have grown “too old for this” (9), grown too old for the continuance of their homosexual relationship. Here, he is not only demonstrating a reflection heteronormative society’s interest in suppressing sodomy, but also in his own interest of outgrowing his status as an adolescent boy and receiver of anal sex. And as he does not want to be distinguished as an effeminate man, he refuses to continue their relationship into his adulthood.

Moreover, the classification of their relationship as “a youthful love” earlier by Fitz marks their sexual practices as practiced only by young men until they grow up into heterosexual love (9). And while socially sanctioned and legal marriages are the ultimate goal for “a single man in possession of a good fortune,”<sup>16</sup> in order to guarantee safety from the emerging homophobia Sedgwick explores, Fitz does not want to acknowledge that he will have to relinquish his affair with Charles (1). Charles feels that they are now too old to continue their sexual relationship as it will no longer be acceptable even by non-mainstream society shedding his homosexual gender and revealing his heterosexuality. This maturation suggests that his previous homosexual gender is performed or, at the very least, demanded of adolescent males when faced with homosexual male sexual encounters with adult men of higher social and financial status than themselves.

The exploitation of adolescent males by adult men is emphasized in the case of George Wickham. In addition to the wrongs Wickham claims Darcy has committed in regards to his finances and career, Wickham also claims that Fitz skillfully coerced Wickham into submitting to him at the age of thirteen—“the age of consent is thirteen”(57)—in order to avoid any future

---

<sup>16</sup> Here, Herendeen opens her novel similarly to Austen’s famous introduction; however, instead of the narrator expressing this idea it comes in dialogue form from Fitz.

slander. Wickham explains the restrictions and confines regarding age the members of sodomitical relationships acknowledge as no longer permissible without recognizing the anal penetration of another adult man and his inability to partake in the knowing effeminization of himself to Elizabeth stating, “I made it quite clear that I would no longer submit to his unnatural demands. That was when he threw me out, with no living as had been promised, no position, and no income” (56). Wickham’s portrayal of Fitz as exploiting his ganymede status, is, of course, discovered to be inaccurate as soon as Fitz tells his side of the story; however, as Wickham illustrates his dark past with Fitz for Elizabeth, he declares that if he were to accuse Fitz of this crime, Fitz “would not tell it that way . . . On his side, it would be I who had proposed our sinful activity, or who had acquiesced and was now turning to extortion” (57). And while Darcy’s stance aligns with the one Wickham presents as false, Wickham’s deceptive story promotes a heightened sense of homophobia against adult male sodomizers as manipulative and exploitive. As a result of this sentiment, the homosexuality largely presented is coerced sexuality, and therefore performed exclusively for the sodomite who coerces the other male into anal penetration. The exploitative relationship insinuated by Wickham is consequently a reinforcer of heteronormative sexual activity as sodomy is again displayed as undesirable and negative.

As a result of the stigma attached to two adult males engaging in sexual practices together illustrated through both Charles and Wickham’s respective relationships with Fitz, Charles comes to the conclusion that he should begin to find a wife leaving his sodomitical ways behind him, and with those ways his sexual relationship with Fitz more generally. After meeting Jane Bennet, he quickly reinstates their sexual encounters, but the resumption of their sexual activity is not an authorization of homosexuality or counter-heteronormativity; rather, the novel presents it as a substitute for an impossible heterosexual rendezvous. In fact, Charles explains to



Fitz that restoration of their relationship is due solely because of his infatuation with Jane: “I hope you don’t take it the wrong way that . . . this resumption of my—our—love is because of her” (19). While this may appear to be a rejection of Charles’s urge to conform to heteronormative sexuality, in reality, it is the opposite as Charles only permits Fitz to enact sexual practices with him because he needs an outlet for his sexual frustration. Indeed, in the course of their conversation, Fitz asks, “In other words, you allow me to do with you what you’d rather be doing with her, if the rules of society allowed it?” to which Charles responds, “I wouldn’t put it so crudely, but yes” (19). Even though Charles continues to engage sexually with Fitz, he only does so because he imagines that he is not with Fitz, but that he is actually with Jane. Correspondingly, the homoeroticism of Fitz and Charles’s relationship is removed as Charles is not actively engaging in his homosexuality, but only performing homosexually as a means of acting on his heterosexual lust. In fact, “just from the presence of Miss Bennet under the same roof,” Charles’s erection “keeps growing and growing” until it is “leaping and drooling in a state of near release, all without any help from Fitz” (21). This tumescence is only a production of heterosexual desire. Even as Fitz is grateful for Charles’s permission to partake in the gratification of his sexual needs, Fitz admits that he too is thinking of a Bennet girl instead of his immediate male partner: “I confess that the sister has had a similar effect on me” (19). Herendeen’s insistence that both men are actually fantasizing about women instead of each other (or even other men) further underscores the novel’s heteronormativity.

The insinuation of heterosexual preferences into this homosexual episode suggests that heterosexuality lurks in Fitz’s subconscious. Even as Fitz and Charles enact their heterosexuality through homosexual intercourse, Fitz reverts to his male homosexual desire in an effort to reject his emerging heterosexuality. In the midst of their sex act, Fitz requests to look at Charles’s

face, suggesting that he has forgotten all about Elizabeth, thereby fully reinstating his feelings for Charles. Charles, meanwhile, still imagining Jane does not want to come to terms with the reality of his having sex with Fitz and replies that he will submit to Fitz's request but that Fitz "can't make [him] like it," continuing, "no one can make someone like something he detests" (22). Charles's obstinate refusal to look Fitz in the face demonstrates that although Fitz may have genuine homosexual feelings for Charles, it is Charles who now refuses to participate in the homosexual culture to which Fitz has previously subjected him. Charles prefers heterosexual intercourse, but he settles for homosexual penetration in order to fulfill his sexual needs. Thus, for Charles, heteronormative hegemonic sexual practices are privileged; whereas, for Fitz, heterosexuality only begins to emerge.

While Charles finds homosexual practices shameful, preferring to suppress his past and embrace his future by participating in socially sanctioned heterosexuality, Fitz does not. Contrastingly, Fitz prefers his homosexuality and is ashamed of his emerging heterosexuality.<sup>17</sup> When he inadvertently finds himself "in danger of being mesmerized" by the "full, shapely breasts" of Lydia Swain, a former lover of his, he practically runs for the door and into Charles's arms (89). As Fitz finds himself disgusted with his inclination towards women, he determines that he must take it upon himself to reform his sexual desires to those he prefers. Therefore, as "furtive as a twelve-year-old boy" Fitz begins "a gentle but purposeful massage of Charles's bum-hole," which he has easy access to due to Charles's sleeping position and his shirt being conveniently removed up to his waist, in order for Fitz to insert himself unbeknownst to Charles (90). Fitz's determination to suppress his heterosexuality results in his essentially raping his best

---

<sup>17</sup> Fitz has had heterosexual experiences previous to his interest in Elizabeth. When he was at university, he fornicated with Caroline Finchley and Lydia Waring (a high-class prostitute, later married to Mr. Swain) both recurring characters from *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander*, before being introduced to the Brotherhood of Philander where he can freely and exclusively love men.

friend, and one with whom he has claimed to experience “[l]ove of the purest kind” (2). Thus, once again homosexuality is not portrayed admirably as Fitz’s heterophobia results in the violent, “massive[,] and forceful explosion” of ejaculatory fluid into Charles’s anus against his wishes, rendering him incapable of anything but a slight whimper and compliance (90). This rejection of heterosexuality does not further enforce the idea of multiple interpretations of sexuality and gender as the novel ostensibly appears to propose. Quite the contrary: due to the violence and the non-consensual nature of the of the penetration, the counter-heteronormative culture seems to be portrayed as sadistic and arguably even misogynistic, since violence to effeminate men, according to Sedgwick, is an instance of misogyny.<sup>18</sup> Thus, instead of idolizing Mr. Darcy as the perfect mate, as the reader does in Austen’s novel, the reader of Herendeen’s novel grows disgusted with Fitz’s behavior, becoming more and more sympathetic towards Bingley.

Even though Bingley does submit to Fitz’s advances in the end of the scene—not enjoying the sexual experience, but not refusing him access—any contention that his submission signals homosexual consent, rather than heteronormative hegemony is quickly diminished. An example of this reduction occurs when Charles, fully aware of the violence of Fitz’s thrusts resulting from some heterosexual problem, repeatedly mentions members of the opposite sex: “I take it the ladies were unreceptive,” “I don’t appreciate being treated like your neglected wife,” and “And you wonder why the ladies aren’t accommodating” (90-91). The repetition and reference to the opposite gender immediately after Fitz’s over-compensational forced confirmation of his identification as a lover of men suggests that not only is heterosexuality

---

<sup>18</sup> This idea of misogyny as a result of effeminacy in men is likewise reflected in *Fanny Hill* as Fanny comments that homosexual men are “stripped of all the manly virtues of their own sex and filled up with only the very worst vices and follies of ours . . . their monstrous inconsistency of loathing and condemning women, and all at the same time aping their manners, airs, lisp, skuttle, and, in general, their little modes of affectation, which becomes them least better than they do these unsexed male misses” (196).

unavoidable, but its compulsoriness must be reinforced continually, even through an ostensibly homosexual act.

Although both men eventually marry heterosexually, they do still occasionally engage in sodomy together. However, each time that they engage in sodomy Charles “think[s] of *her* all the while” (282, emphasis Herendeen’s). At the end of the novel, Charles continues to practice sodomy with Fitz, but only when Jane is physically unable to have vaginal intercourse with him due to soreness after giving birth to one of their many children. Additionally, after the double wedding takes place, any homoerotic sex scene no longer includes graphic descriptions of their sex act. Once hegemonic society sanctions the heterosexual marriages, the novel likewise sanctions only those sexual encounters. A “new ideal” is not created to include the homosexual relationship;<sup>19</sup> instead, its sexuality is thrust from the pages into the margins, just as the previous sapphic scenes<sup>20</sup> were (366). Counter-heteronormative sexual practices and love are not endorsed as they would seem to be, but instead they are confronted and suppressed. Apparently, heterosexual marriage is the ultimate determiner of an adult male.

#### IV. The Inverted Male Gaze

Although heteronormativity is reinforced throughout both novels, especially during sexual encounters between men, when the protagonist happens upon two men engaging in sodomy, when one of the men is her love object, she is not repulsed,<sup>21</sup> but rather aroused by the

---

<sup>19</sup> Although this ideal is discussed later in the novel in reference to the different homosexual marriages that previously took place in *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander*, Andrew and Matthew’s marriage is mentioned explicitly, Fitz and Charles never propose this to each other and never engage in any form of polyamorous marriage. Perhaps this is because it is not an erotic love triangle as there are four people and only three couples.

<sup>20</sup> In the few references to lesbian sexuality involving Elizabeth and her friend Charlotte Lucas no part of the sex act appears in the text. There are only allusions to their sapphic relations, but no graphic scenes describing the action. Instead, the text leads up to the sapphic sex and then shifts points of view away from the scene, only to return to Elizabeth with a slight reference to her “‘green gown,’ the inevitable result of lying on damp grass” (47).

<sup>21</sup> This inverted male gaze is not unique to Herendeen’s work, in fact in *Fanny Hill* Fanny happens upon two men practicing sodomy and although she actively watches them until she unintentionally interrupts them by creating a

scene. For instance, when Elizabeth encounters Fitz and Charles, “both naked,” she wants “to run away but was paralyzed with something that was not exactly fear. Her thighs felt sticky, as if viscous liquid was leaking out of her, although it was not that time of the month” (39). Her initial reaction when she views the two males together is one of fear, however as she continues to examine the situation, instead of becoming outraged at their embrace, she becomes aroused.

However, Elizabeth’s arousal is not provoked by her paralysis, but by the image she sees. Mulvey contends that in cinema the male director works his camera over the female body segmenting it and thereby dehumanizing her oftentimes in slow-motion for the pleasure of the voyeuristic male viewer. Here, Herendeen is the director of the gaze and she places Elizabeth in control of examining not one, but two male bodies for the pleasure of her voyeuristic female viewer. As the men “moved slowly” into Elizabeth’s eye line, mimicking the camera’s scanning view of women’s bodies, she observes:

[Darcy’s] skin was white and smooth, with muscles well defined by the shadows from the flickering light. He had very little hair, or perhaps, as he was fair, it did not show. Mr. Bingley was slender and dark, sinewy and lithe, with a downy coat of hair on this chest and shaggy legs like a hound’s. (39)

Although Genz calls observations like Elizabeth’s “[t]he active, sexualizing female gaze”—a gaze that objectifies men and their bodies the way that the female body has been sexualized by males for centuries—whatever “positions of authority and desire” this opens for the female reader within the world of the text, in reality, it is not actually a female gaze. Instead, this gaze is more of an inverted male gaze as it only functions as a female gaze within the specific scenes in

---

loud noise, she later expresses disgust at viewing the sodomitical actions. She calls her observations “so criminal a scene” and “with rage and indignation” she attempts to alert the entire house in order to catch and persecute them (195).

the novel that feature male homosexuality erotically for female pleasure. Once these scenes finish, patriarchy is restored throughout the novel and indeed, as the hegemonic structure outside the novel as well.

Even though the homoerotics of this scene provide an outlet for Elizabeth's experience in homosexuality and counter-heteronormative sexual practices, heteronormativity is not subverted in this scene, but reinforced. Not only is Elizabeth becoming aroused by a man's body, but she is aroused at the sight of two men's bodies. She is not aroused by them together, but at the overwhelming array of masculine features she sees. She enjoys both Darcy and Bingley together not because they represent what Genz asserts "'girl-on-girl' eroticism is for men (a self-gratifying, voyeuristic experience that is controlled by the gendered gaze of the onlooker and all the more pleasurable because it involves participants 'other-than-me'" (22)),<sup>22</sup> but because it involves seeing for the first time "[t]hat part of Mr. Darcy that Elizabeth had never seen on any man" and seeing it twice (40). Elizabeth does not care that the men are embracing and caressing each other. She is not aroused by their sexual acts together, but she is aroused because she has finally found two of the "instruments" her trysts with Charlotte Lucas were lacking. She has seen a penis and it has "lived up and more to the descriptions that Elizabeth had been certain were but exaggerations designed to frighten maidens into chastity. So thick, and that *color!*" (40, emphasis Herendeen's). Elizabeth does not focus on the actions of the men, but on their bodies. After all, it is the images of the two male bodies that arouse her to the point where her body produces lubricant, and it is the full frontal vision of Mr. Darcy's penis that makes her gasp.

---

<sup>22</sup> Similar to this scene, after Lydia observes Wickham and Darcy together she declares that it "was a rare treat to watch" (272). But because Lydia is disdained throughout both *Pride / Prejudice* and *Pride and Prejudice* her opinion approved of within the confines of the novel and even outside of it. Moreover, immediately after Lydia announces her interest in her soon to be husband's sodomitical practices, Wickham likens her to a prostitute or madam: "She leered and winked at him, like Mrs. Younge with a prospective customer" (272). This condemnation by Wickham of Lydia solidifies the irrelevance of her preference for enjoying male homoerotic sexual practices and further enforces the heteronormative agenda of the novel.

Moreover, when Elizabeth envisions Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham together, the image “would never do” and she quickly “open[s] her eyes and tried to find her place in the conversation” (57). Try as she might she cannot fantasize about Darcy and Wickham because she does not desire to see two men together sexually. Instead, she would rather take the place of one of the men. She wants the experience herself—not to live voyeuristically through the control of her gaze. Therefore, even though the reader is scopophilically engaging with the text, she sees that the protagonist does not enjoy the male-on-male action and would prefer to participate in heterosexual vaginal penetration. As a result, the heteronormative structures are endorsed both for Elizabeth and for the reader.

Because heteronormative sexual practices are reinforced throughout the slash fiction of Ann Herendeen in both *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander* and *Pride / Prejudice*, her attempt to counter Fletcher’s argument about heteronormativity in popular romance novels fails. Instead what Herendeen’s novels illustrate is that the confines of heteronormative hegemonic society are as difficult to escape in literature written by women for women as they were for John Cleland when he wrote what many consider a coded homosexual novel for men in the eighteenth-century. Thus, the happy endings these novels propose are not as liberating as their characterization as a member of the slash fiction genre would suppose, because of the way that heteronormative hegemony ends up reinscribed even within the sexual encounters of non-heteronormative relationships. And while Herendeen does ostensibly offer that all genders are free to love whomever within her novels, the framework of female author writing for female reader reading about male homoerotica does not demonstrate alternatives to heteronormative

sexual practices as she frequently includes phallic imagery<sup>23</sup> in the novels even when sex acts are not functioning within the novel.

---

<sup>23</sup> For example in *Pride / Prejudice* when Fitz observes Charles's attachment to Jane he employs language suggestive of the phallus when no sexually arousing scene follows: "Fitz didn't attempt to argue his friend out of what could only *be hardened* into obstinacy by opposition", and "This occasion *arouse unexpectedly*" (13, emphasis mine). While the language ostensibly deals with the occasion of Charles and Jane's love, the undertones suggest a fully erect penis. And in *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander* when Andrew and the brotherhood discuss his recent decision to marry heterosexually, Andrew "*stood up*" revealing "[h]is *height* was suddenly *noticeable, threatening*, even in the high-ceilinged first-floor parlor" (11, emphasis mine). While this language suggests the physical height or tallness of Andrew's body, the subtext suggests the largeness of his male reproductive organ. Although some might argue that this language is inserted to peak the arousal of the reader, heteronormative sexuality is clearly privileged through phallic imagery for a female reader, thus reinforcing, once again, the true heteronormative hegemonic agenda of the novels.



## Works Cited

- Burley, Stephanie. "What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Book Like This?: Homoerotic Reading and Popular Romance." *Doubled Plots: Romance and History*. Eds. Susan Strehle and Mary Paniccia Carden. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2003. 127-146. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Cleland, John. *Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. London: Penguin Books, 1985. Print.
- Edelman, Lee. *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Fletcher, Lisa. *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. Print.
- Genz, Carole. "The More the Merrier? Transformations of the Love Triangle Across the Romance Genre." Unpublished Article, 2010. Print.
- Herendeen, Ann. *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander*. New York: Harper, 2008. Print.
- , *Pride / Prejudice*. New York: Harper, 2010. Print.
- Kinsale, Laura. "The Androgynous Reader: Point of View in the Romance." *Romance Writers on the Appeal Dangerous Men & Adventurous Women of the Romance*. Ed. Jayne Ann Krentz. Philadelphia: U of Penn P, 1992. 31-44. Print.
- McFarlane, Cameron. *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire, 1660-1750*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997. Print.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and*

*Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 2181-2192. Print.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*.

New York: Columbia UP, 1985. Print.

Trumbach, Randolph. "Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism in Enlightenment England." *The*

*Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800*. Ed.

Lynn Hunt. New York: Zone Books, 1993. 253-282. Print.

Weed, David. "Fitting Fanny: Cleland's *Memoirs* and the Politics of Male Pleasure." *Novel: A*

*Forum on Fiction* 31.1 (1997): 7-20. Print.