

## Abstract

Posthumously appointed the “English Sappho” by her contemporaries after her tragically early death, Katherine Philips was only the first in a line of several women poets (including Anne Killigrew, Anne Finch, and Elizabeth Singer Rowe) living in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries who wrote passionate verses describing other women—what, today, we might identify as lesbian poetry. Decades later, Charlotte Charke penned an autobiography detailing her life, including a time during which she assumed the name “Charles Brown” and lived with a woman she called “Mrs. Brown.”

At the same time, public discourse was constructing a sort of spectre of the “tribade,” as lesbians were termed at the time. As outlined in both pseudo-medical pamphlets speculating on lesbian bodies and short stories detailing lesbians who wore men’s clothing in order to marry women, this dangerous and lascivious tribade would teach other woman how to pleasure themselves and that sex could be pleasure-driven, thereby upsetting heteropatriarchy and solidifying women’s sexual autonomy. How did lesbian writers articulate their feelings against a wider perception of them as monstrous and predatory? How did they code these feelings into their writings in order to avoid public shame, while at the same time, reaching women who were like them? In my project, I draw patterns from the evident discourses in order to answer these questions. Using both poetry and prose works by lesbians as well as fiction and anatomical texts written by outsiders, I work to understand how lesbians were responding in writing to an exaggerated social caricature.

**“I’ve all the world in thee”:**

**Lesbian Poetics and Discourses of Sexuality in the Long Eighteenth Century**

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## Introduction: Defining Lesbians in the Eighteenth Century

In her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, Jodie Medd asks, “who hasn’t had a problem with lesbian definitions?”<sup>1</sup> Today, the word “lesbian” describes women<sup>2</sup> who love women and encompasses all associated behaviors including dating, romance, and sex. In the long eighteenth century (1660-1730), however, as well as the decades that followed, descriptive terms for lesbians were wholly based on sex in both its definitions: speculated genital formation and sexual activity. Throughout this work, I refer to women who loved<sup>3</sup> women (and who had sex with women) as lesbians following the theoretical framework of lesbian historiography posited by Valerie Traub.<sup>4</sup> According to this approach, “there exist certain recurrent and explanatory metalogics that accord to the history of lesbianism over a vast temporal expanse a sense of consistency and, at times, uncanny familiarity”—in other words, in studying sources both by and concerning lesbians, patterns can be discovered, and these patterns are traceable and identifiable across centuries.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, these metalogics “draw their specific content from perennial axes of social definition,” which makes attention to discourse outside of lesbian communities as equally important as the study of lesbian creation, particularly in eras before the modern construction of identity politics.<sup>6</sup> As such, I argue that lesbian writing, in the long eighteenth century in particular, was resistant to discourses being constructed through speculation on lesbian bodies rather than lesbian experiences. To resist these discourses, lesbian

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<sup>1</sup> Jodie Medd, “Lesbian Literature: An Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>2</sup> In this instance, I mean to use a modern understanding of women—anyone who identifies as a woman. My usage of the term in relation to the eighteenth century differs slightly, which I will explain in a later footnote.

<sup>3</sup> Here, I define “love” as intense closeness, passion, and deep emotional intimacy.

<sup>4</sup> Valerie Traub, “The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography,” in *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 84.

<sup>5</sup> Traub, “The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography,” 84.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

poets constructed elaborate and coded metaphors within their poetry that positioned their desires beyond the body and expressed them through double-writing. The writer of one prose narrative, Charlotte Charke, also uses double-writing. Double-writing is a tactic in which a queer writer writes their work in one way that reads as acceptable to a heterosexual audience. This surface-level intention distracts the heterosexual audience, allowing the writer to simultaneously code queer themes, tropes, and experiences into their work.

In this introduction, I wish to establish an understanding of the discourses of the era to give a sense of lesbian poetry's intense and creative resistance to masculine discourse. In establishing this poetic "scene" as part of a wider discourse-resistant trend, I attune my analysis to Traub's third component of lesbian historiography, "cycles of salience," which she defines as "forms of intelligibility whose meanings recur, intermittently and with a difference, across time."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, both the various forms of lesbian creative production as well as works written about them are infused with these "forms of intelligibility" that reach across history, and manifest as the discursive and literary patterns I identify in my research. I define "discourse" here as the way lesbians were generally spoken about, portrayed, and understood in wider society, and these discourses were, of course, driven by male control of the medical and legal fields. I differentiate these texts from the literary, though there is certainly overlap. As we study this enigmatic archive, it behooves us to focus the discourses around queer women against which some of them were reacting in writing, rather than relying solely on empirical evidence. In inspecting the various terms nonconsensually applied to lesbians, it is important to acknowledge a lack of sexual self-definition. These women likely would not have referred to themselves with any kind of sexual identification, and many were married to men. It is imperative that we read these women's works fairly, in a way that honors how they felt about, and construed of,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 85.

themselves. It is equally important to acknowledge, however, that almost every term referring to lesbians at this time was related to biological sex and the speculated capabilities of the lesbian body.

From the late-seventeenth century to the eighteenth century's close, lesbians were most commonly labelled as tribades,<sup>8</sup> fricatrices,<sup>9</sup> confricatrices,<sup>10</sup> subigatrices,<sup>11</sup> tommies,<sup>12</sup> and sapphists.<sup>13</sup> "Tribade" contains a Greek verb meaning "to rub"; "fricatrice" is the Latin equivalent of "tribade" and contains the root "fric" as in "friction"; "confricatrice" is the same with the prefix "con" added to mean "rubbing *against*"; and "sapphist" refers to the poet Sappho, who is consistently mentioned in medical texts discussing the clitoris as a "tribade." The term "tribade" has its origins in classical Greek texts, but also appeared in Roman satire "denot[ing] a woman who engages in sexual acts with another woman."<sup>14</sup> Medical and legal texts are the bases for all of these terms. Texts like these often speculate how two individuals, both without a penis, could have sex. As evidenced by these terms, the public imagining of lesbian sex originates in classical Greek and Roman texts and focuses on the clitoris, speculating that through its stimulation in various ways, pleasurable friction could be generated. Because lesbianism at the time was discursively physicalized and grounded in the body, lesbians who did not want to be publicly lambasted had to choose different methods to express their sexuality-related feelings,

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<sup>8</sup> This term appears the most frequently in works discussing women having sex with other women. Just a handful of these include: Anonymous, "A Supplement to the Onania," in *The Literature of Lesbianism*, ed. Terry Castle (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 246; Georges Arnaud de Ronsil, *A Dissertation on Hermaphrodites. [Electronic Resource]*: (ECCO, 1750), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, "A Supplement to the Onania," 246.

<sup>10</sup> James Parsons, "The Nature of Hermaphrodites," in *Secret Sexualities: A Sourcebook of 17th and 18th Century Writing*, ed. Ian McCormick (London, UK: Routledge, 1997), 38.

<sup>11</sup> Anonymous, "A Supplement to Onania," 246.

<sup>12</sup> Jack Cavendish, *A Sapphick Epistle, from Jack Cavendish to the Honourable and most beautiful Mrs. D\*\*\*\**, Eighteenth Century Collections Online (accessed April 12, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi, *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (Later Mrs. Piozzi), 1776-1809*, ed. Katherine C. Balderston (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1951), quoted in Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women* (London, UK: Bello, 1993), 164.

<sup>14</sup> Terry Castle, *The Literature of Lesbianism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003). 131.

particularly poets and writers. Therefore, in the majority of lesbian poetry from the era, the body does not emerge as a site of identifying and describing intimacy.

Women's bodies<sup>15</sup>, at this time, constituted an especially patriarchal terrain, with a wide array of dubiously scientific, legal, and gossip texts being published and circulated, constructing what Traub calls a "multiplicity of discourses."<sup>16</sup> These texts, especially those including anatomical mappings, were rapidly growing in popularity in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This growth took place after what Thomas Laqueur refers to as the "'rediscovery' of the clitoris" in the sixteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Medical texts were primarily written by men, and focused on anatomy (such as *The Ladies' Dispensatory or Every Woman her Own Physician* and *The Ladies' Physical Directory* for women specifically as well as Robert James's *Medicinal Dictionary*)<sup>18</sup>, midwifery (such as Jane Sharp's *The Midwives Book*<sup>19</sup> and Nicholas Culpeper's *A Director for Midwives*)<sup>20</sup>, masturbation (such as the pamphlet *Onania* and its *Supplement* published in subsequent editions)<sup>21</sup>, and conjugal relations (such as Nicholas Venette's *Conjugal Love, or the Pleasures of the Marriage Bed*<sup>22</sup>), and these were central to constructing a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century medical discourse around women's bodies and their sexual and reproductive capabilities. Quite a few of these texts uniquely pathologize the clitoris, and with it, the implications of non-normative female sexuality (for example, the idea of the "tribade," a woman with an enlarged clitoris who used it to have sex with other women).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> I use this terminology to denote the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century understanding of sex—that is, someone born with a vulva is assigned female at birth—and with the recognition that this has not historically always been true. There have always been women with varying sexual anatomies, but I use "women's bodies" here in the way individuals at the time understood it, which was to denote someone assigned female at birth.

<sup>16</sup> Valerie Traub, "The Psychomorphology of the Clitoris," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2, no. 1-2 (1995): 158

<sup>17</sup> Traub, "The Psychomorphology of the Clitoris," 158.

<sup>18</sup> Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women* (London, UK: Bello, 1993), 57.

<sup>19</sup> Traub, "The Psychomorphology of the Clitoris," 167.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

<sup>21</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 46.

<sup>22</sup> Traub, "The Psychomorphology of the Clitoris," 173.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* 170.



Coupled with a medical and sexual discourse constructed almost entirely by men, this lesbian-clitoris association meant women had little space to understand their own bodies, and women's bodies were often idealized to serve two essential functions: reproduction, and sexual pleasure for a man. Writings about the clitoris nearly always mentioned female homosexuality (though this term was not yet extant), and the clitoris quickly grew to become associated with lesbianism.

With a backdrop of the overwritten physicality of lesbianism, a lack of self-identification with sexual orientation and Traub's "cycles of salience," how do I define "lesbian" throughout my argument? In my definition for this particular research endeavor, within works both by and about lesbians, I include the following: physical sexual activity (which only appears in works written *about* them); an express desire for women, sexual or not, which seems to surpass the admiration and closeness of friendship; detailed descriptions of women and their bodies; extensive compliments and praise; mutual care and affection. This definition absolutely includes the realm of "affectionate" or "romantic" friendship because, at the time, this specific type of passionate friendship may not have been defined, recognized, or even understood as lesbian, but it falls under what Adrienne Rich classifies as the "lesbian continuum"—a continuum of relationships between women in which both women desire each other's company over that of others, and their relationships are exceptionally passionate, regardless of whether sex plays a role.<sup>24</sup> While sexual activity/desire does not have to be central to lesbianism, it is definitely something I am looking for when reading through these archives and bodies of work, though it does not appear in all of them. In fact, none of the works written *by* lesbians place sexual scenes at the forefront, and all eroticism is shrouded in metaphor. The only works with explicit descriptions are those written by men with the intention to titillate.

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<sup>24</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5, no.4 (1980): 648-49.

My research focuses on texts originating in the “long eighteenth century” (1660-1730) as well as the several decades that follow. I choose this timeframe because the discourse, particularly with regard to terminology, remains relatively consistent and similar, whereas in the later eighteenth century, new terms emerge that deviate from being descriptors of sexual activity. The discursive patterns that solidified during the earlier eighteenth century influenced the construction and etymology of later terms like “sapphist,” which did not appear until the late eighteenth century. These early- to mid-eighteenth century discursive patterns set the overall tone for the wider public understanding of lesbians in England at the time. In texts concerning people termed “hermaphrodites,” the word “tribade” is often used in the description of what several of these authors, including James Parsons, Giles Jacob, and Georges Arnaud de Ronsil in their similarly-titled “hermaphrodite” treatises, call “female hermaphrodites.” That is, women whose sexual development was otherwise classified as “normal,” but who had a larger-than-average clitoris. According to Parsons in *A Mechanical and Critical Enquiry into the Nature of Hermaphrodites*, these women are separate from other “hermaphrodites,” and instead should be called “macroclitoridae.”<sup>25</sup> Parsons also helpfully gives a general definition of the term as he understands it:

There are many authors who have given histories of women that have been detected in the abuse of such large Clitorides, calling them Tribades, Confricatrices, and the like...These Tribades were no more than women with clitorides larger than ordinary. Such of them as are so may be capable, perhaps of that action from whence the name arose.<sup>26</sup>

Here, we see that “tribade” is the first term used and the only one given intense focus, while “confricatrice,” though confirmed in this text as an accepted auxiliary term for lesbians, is given less attention. Tribades, for Parsons, are merely women with large clitorises who are sometimes

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<sup>25</sup> James Parsons, “The Nature of Hermaphrodites,” in *Secret Sexualities: A Sourcebook of 17th and 18th Century Writing*, ed. Ian McCormick (London, UK: Routledge, 1997), 38

<sup>26</sup> Parsons, “The Nature of Hermaphrodites,” 37.

capable of what he calls “that action from whence the name arose,” meaning both pleasurable friction as well as penetrating another woman. The term “tribade” was not invented in the eighteenth century, and is a Greek word originating in classical Roman texts—*A Supplement to the Onania*’s author claims that it was coined by Plautus.<sup>27</sup> The word was frequently printed in Greek letters in eighteenth-century publications,<sup>28</sup> demonstrating its connections to Sappho, who is often referenced in medical texts as the original tribade since it was speculated that she had a large clitoris. Consequently, “tribade” appears frequently in texts mentioning the clitoris, which include texts ranging in subject from sexual oddities (mainly people with intersex conditions, including various similarly-titled pamphlets purporting to reveal new discoveries on “hermaphrodites”) to sexual advice to midwifery to anti-masturbation treatises. Many of these texts plagiarize and quote each other, sometimes verbatim. One of the earliest mentions of a tribade appears in *The Midwives Book*, published by Jane Sharp in 1671, the only work concerning the clitoris published by a woman. In it, directly after her mention of the clitoris, she provides a brief discussion of female “hermaphrodites” which, according to this source as well as many others focusing on “hermaphrodites,” were not actually intersex, but were only perceived as having an enlarged clitoris. The enlargement of the clitoris is fundamental to the discursive construction of the lesbian in the long eighteenth century, which Emma Donoghue calls the “spectre of the tribade.”<sup>29</sup> The tribade was a woman with a large clitoris who used this enlargement to her advantage and pleased other women with it, both by frictive motion and penetration, if it was large enough. Because of their more phallic genitalia, these women were often expected to be more masculine, and some dressed in men’s clothing in order to trick

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<sup>27</sup> Anonymous, “A Supplement to the Onania,” 246.

<sup>28</sup> One example of this is Georges Arnaud de Ronsil’s *A Dissertation on Hermaphrodites*, where the word “tribade” appears in Greek letters on the facsimile. Georges Arnaud de Ronsil, *A Dissertation on Hermaphrodites*. [Electronic Resource]: (ECCO, 1750).

<sup>29</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 85.

unsuspecting virgins into marrying them, according to the male writers of these texts. The tribade was a deceptive, cunning, corrupting force who, it is important to add, was almost certainly corrupted herself in childhood or adolescence by another tribade.

The lesbian and the clitoris are, as Valerie Traub writes, “sisters in shame: each is the disturbing sign (and sign of disturbance) that implies the existence of the other.”<sup>30</sup> In practically every single medical text at the time that discusses the clitoris, the tribade is its epithet. Jane Sharp, in *The Midwives Book*, writes that “some lewd women have endeavored to use [the clitoris] as men do [their penises],” introducing the speculation that women could use their clitoris to penetrate each other if it was large enough.<sup>31</sup> The fact that this statement accompanies a mere mention of the clitoris in a midwifery book demonstrates how, even before the start of the eighteenth century, the clitoris was intensely pathologized due to its single function as a pleasure-producing organ. Since it was not integral to reproductive sex, it was feared as a mechanism of upsetting patriarchy and heterosexuality. If women could pleasure themselves and each other without the presence of a man, the fear was that women might usurp the position of men in society—while there were no laws explicitly criminalizing lesbianism or lesbian sex at the time, several “female husbands” of the era, who were seen as women attempting to replace men, were charged with “fraud.”<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, speculations on the clitoris’s capabilities were often published explicitly for the purpose of making the organ and its associated activities seem monstrous. Otherings of the

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<sup>30</sup> Traub, “The Psychomorphology of the Clitoris,” 154.

<sup>31</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 40.

<sup>32</sup> Donoghue provides several examples of female husband cases in both legal records and personal accounts. One man, Anthony à Wood wrote about one case in 1694 where a female husband was convicted and sentenced to whipping and hard labor, and had her love letters to her wife read in court in order to embarrass her. A 1720 prison list gives the name of a woman, Sarah Ketson, who tried to marry a woman while dressed as a man. Donoghue also provides a marriage record from Cheshire that shows two different female couples getting married in a “Fleet-wedding,” or a casual courthouse wedding with no comments from the officiant. Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 72-73.

clitoris usually took one of two forms. The first form is generally commensurate with what Thomas Laqueur refers to as the “one-sex model,” or the Galenic model. Within this model, “the vagina is imagined as an interior penis,” and with added heat (an inherently masculine addition, since women were thought to be very cold), the vagina and clitoris could prolapse.<sup>33</sup> It was entirely possible, within this model, for women’s genitals to take on any number of different formations in between the cold, inverted penis and the warmer external one. Of course, any such changes were considered highly unusual and inherently unnatural for women, since they were thought to stem from the addition of masculine heat. This classification of certain bodies as unnatural despite their fulfillment of expected changes creates a sort of gender binary within the one-sex model, though the one-sex model is certainly not absolute—I use it comparatively, as it aligns with both conceptions of the tribade body. The addition of heat meant the presence of sexual desire, which was also a masculinized trait and its appearance in women, in this model, was usually indicative of some kind of sexual sin, usually masturbation, lesbian sex (tribade sexuality), or both. Examples of this model appear in the anonymous 1725 pamphlet *A Supplement to the Onania*, where a woman’s letter to the editor describes her clitoris as having grown “as long or longer than [her] thumb” as a result of what the editor terms “abuse” of the part.<sup>34</sup> Through this “abuse” of her clitoris, its shape spontaneously changed as a form of punishment. This comprises the first model of the clitoris’s connection to lesbianism: as a result of sexually deviant behavior, especially clitoral “abuse” with another woman, the clitoris could grow, in turn making the woman being punished more prone to the behavior in the first place. Texts in which bodies spontaneously change directly as a result of behavior are more common in the earlier eighteenth century, and Laqueur argues that

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Bodies and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 4.

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous, “A Supplement to the Onania,” 244.

The old model, in which men and women were arrayed according to their degree of metaphysical perfection, their vital heat, along an axis whose telos was male, gave way by the late eighteenth century to a new model of radical dimorphism, of biological divergence.<sup>35</sup>

However, scholars have reexamined these claims about the eighteenth century's supposed position as a transitional period between the one- and two-sex models. Using the research of Anthony Fletcher and Mary Fissel, who posit the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the transitional period, Karen Harvey argues that "the stress on bodily differences existed much earlier than Laqueur allows."<sup>36</sup> This critique certainly accounts, then, for the fact that works depicting lesbians *born* with an enlarged clitoris, thus making them inherently prone to lesbianism, appear concurrently with those from the earlier depictions of spontaneous change. Additionally, a plethora of medical texts published in the eighteenth century contain similar stories of women born with a large clitoris, giving them a greater propensity to lesbian behavior. One such example is the 1750 *Dissertation on Hermaphrodites* by George Arnaud de Ronsil. He explains each type of "hermaphrodite" genitalia, classifying them as either perfect or imperfect. A "perfect hermaphrodite" is someone who displays both binary sexes perfectly, whereas an "imperfect hermaphrodite" has some other kind of formation. One type of "imperfect hermaphrodite" was the woman whose clitoris was enlarged, with no change in any other sex characteristics besides her increased masculinity due to the more phallic shape of her genitalia.

The second form is commensurate with Laqueur's two-sex model, in which bodies are immutable from birth, and refuses the idea that genitals could change as an effect of illicit sex. Rather, it was thought that tribades were just born with a larger clitoris, which caused a greater propensity for lesbianism. In the same way that the sudden addition of masculine vital heat to the

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<sup>35</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 5-6.

<sup>36</sup> Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 79.

sexed-female body could cause the genitals to become more phallic, the congenitally-large clitoris, comprising the second “cause” form, also gendered women with this supposed formation as more masculine. The increase in libido itself, thought to accompany the large clitoris, was coded masculine, *especially* sexual desire for women. De Ronsil writes that women with these bodies were able to

enjoy coition without the perfect consummation of the venereal act. The Greeks called these women tribades, whence comes, I imagine, the old French word *ribaude*, which signifies a lewd woman; such was the famous Sappho.<sup>37</sup>

So, then, were women pathologized in such a way really intersex? The other types of intersexuality speculated upon in works like these, it is likely, were. However, for women specifically assumed to have an enlarged clitoris, either as a cause or effect of tribadism, it is possible that this was merely a way of making lesbian bodies seem grotesque and othered as a deterrent, especially the “effect” model, in which the clitoris could grow punitively. Donoghue argues that medical accounts of women who had sex with women that reported a larger-than-average clitoris were often exaggerated.<sup>38</sup> This exaggeration came from a combination of factors, including: a skewed scale of a “normal” clitoris size within which it was mistakenly thought to be much smaller; the persistent desire to pathologize and other sexually-deviant women; stories (as written in various kinds of texts and passed through the community) becoming more hyperbolic as they were passed along, published and republished, like a long game of telephone; and “the reporter’s capacity for sheer invention.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, a pattern can be drawn from works pathologizing women with large clitorises as tribades or “hermaphrodites” with these same characteristics—that the discursive construction of the tribade

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<sup>37</sup> Georges Arnaud de Ronsil, *A Dissertation on Hermaphrodites*. [Electronic Resource]: (ECCO, 1750).

<sup>38</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 31.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

was bound up in the need to make lesbianism seem grotesque, and both the cause and effect of bodily suffering and social ostracism.

On top of pseudo-medical misinformation monopolizing the public discourse around lesbians, aristocratic women (which many of the prominent poets of the time were) were consistent victims of pamphlet gossip, which often made accusations about their sexual behaviors. While the body of lesbian writing from this era is strong, particularly from several women poets,<sup>40</sup> to be a high-profile woman at the mercy of pamphlet gossip was difficult. Therefore, lesbian literary production, already so estranged from the medicalized and pathologized female body, was pushed even further away from making direct, declarative statements that might be considered “empirical.” One example of the scathing criticism that some high-profile women received in the early eighteenth century is the political satire *Secret Memoirs and Manners of Several Persons of Quality, of both Sexes, from the New Atalantis* published by another woman writer, Delarivier Manley. The 1709 text contains various short stories, including one entitled “The Ladies of the New Cabal.” This particular account focuses on a society of women not unlike poet Katherine Philips’s Society of Friendship she created several decades before, though this one was likely satirizing various women associated with the court of Queen Anne, including Sarah Churchill and the playwright Catherine Trotter.<sup>41</sup> “The Ladies of the New Cabal” satirically identifies an intense, close relationship between two women and describes it as “two beautiful ladies joined in an excess of amity.”<sup>42</sup> It also recounts the story of a member of the Cabal, Zara, and her rivalry with the husband of her lover, Daphne, the Cabal’s new initiate. Zara “introduced [Daphne] to the Cabal, but with infinite anxiety suffered that any

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<sup>40</sup> Most notably Katherine Philips, Anne Killigrew, Anne Finch, and Elizabeth Singer Rowe, among others.

<sup>41</sup> Terry Castle, *The Literature of Lesbianism*, 191.

<sup>42</sup> Delarivier Manley, “The Ladies of the New Cabal,” in *The Literature of Lesbianism*, ed. Terry Castle (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 198.



lover should dare to engage where she had fixed her heart”<sup>43</sup>—in other words, Zara was exceptionally jealous that Daphne joined the society despite still having male lovers, which Manley acknowledges she was “forced” to do.<sup>44</sup> While these details certainly legitimize lesbianism by comparing several of the women’s behaviors to those of male lovers, they also advance the satire. The overall tone of the piece is derisive, and is intended to tarnish the reputations of successful, high-profile women. For a lesbian poet who feared exposure through this sort of text, especially one in which it was obvious to whom the satire referred, she would need to be far less explicit in her poetry, making use of various tactics in order to code rather than directly declare her feelings. It was certainly a combination of the male-constructed medical discourses and the contemptful gossip pamphlets that forced lesbian poets in this era to feel that their experiences were best expressed through abstractly coded works situated in the pastoral mode whose social critiques only become visible upon closer looking.

In this thesis, I argue that because physicality is so aggressively overemphasized, the body essentially became stolen from lesbians who wished to write about their experiences candidly. Therefore, the literary production of women concerned with their reputations—poets in the court of Mary of Modena, for example—largely shied away from writing even a fraction as explicitly as men did. And yet, the literary, against all odds, became a comfortable place of self-expression for these women. I also argue that women writing between the years 1660 and 1755 whose works I interpret as “lesbian” shared several literary and poetic tactics in order to express their feelings within their work without being publicly lambasted as tribades, and without using the dominating, overwritten discourses of the medicalized body. However, there were certainly exceptions: playwright and novelist Aphra Behn wrote a poem entitled “To the

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<sup>43</sup> Delarivier Manley, “The Ladies of the New Cabal,” 198.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 199.

Fair Clarinda, Who Made Love to Me, Imagin'd More than Woman,"<sup>45</sup> which I believe critiques the casting of lesbians as hermaphrodites, but is much more sexually explicit, and something that other lesbian poets attempted to distance themselves from.<sup>46</sup> In my first chapter, I focus on the poet Katherine Philips, whose figuration of the connections between women eschews the body completely. As a result of both the details of her own life, such as her marriage to a much older man and isolated life in Wales, as well as the burgeoning public discourse, Philips's poetry expresses a disillusionment with and disassociation from the body. In her work, she critiques this embellished physicality by situating her erotics metaphysically, introducing the soul, rather than the body, as the site of love and affection. Within her poetry, she creates a separate space I call a soul-connection realm that is thematically represented by her usage of the escapist, pastoral mode which I refer to as a "lesbian separatist pastoral," since it is resistant to heterosexuality and exists as a space in which women's desire for each other can be realized. Because Philips constructs a space so intentionally influenced by her disillusionment with the masculine corporeality of desire, I also argue that she had an understanding of compulsory heterosexuality, and this, in turn, guides her figuration of resisting both heterosexuality and bodily erotics.

In my second chapter, I focus on three poets, writing through the legacy of Philips, who also resist the overemphasized physicality of lesbianism within discourses on sexuality and gender. The first, Anne Killigrew, examines the struggles of being able to know oneself and one's desires within a heteropatriarchal discursive framework. In her poem "On the Soft and Gentle Motions of Eudora," she explores, through metaphor, the ideas of epistemological and ontological un/availability. Epistemological un/availability considers how a woman might be

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<sup>45</sup> Aphra Behn, "To the Fair Clarinda, Who Made Love to Me, Imagin'd More than Woman," in *The Literature of Lesbianism*, ed. Terry Castle (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 173.

<sup>46</sup> I believe Behn, unlike the other poets I discuss, was able to write more bawdily because of her already-established reputation as a playwright in the world of Restoration theatre. As a woman known for her raunchy comedies, a sexually-charged poem would likely not have been seen as out of the ordinary for her to write.

able to know that loving women is possible, while ontological un/availability figures how a woman might realize and fully “become” a lesbian, internally acknowledging one’s feelings. Killigrew explores the idea of the un/available through constructing metaphors that compare lesbianism to things barely accessible to the senses, which can only be discovered when actively sought out. The second poet, Anne Finch, employs a tactic I call “double-writing.” I explore two poems in particular that construct the text in such a way to be read as something publicly “safe” to write about and maintain reputation, while at the same time, showcasing queer experiences, whether intentionally or not. Finch structures her poem “Friendship between Ephelia and Ardelia” as a call for marriages that resemble female friendships, but at the same time, also explores the passionate, marriage-like relationship between the two women featured in the poem. The third poet, Elizabeth Singer Rowe, does the same thing in her poem “Love and Friendship: A Pastoral.” Rowe structures the poem as a dialogue between two shepherdesses, with each shepherdess speaking the same amount of lines. One discusses the man she loves, while the other discusses a woman. Structurally, the poem suggests an equivalence between heterosexuality and homosexuality, while the content of the poem actually positions homosexuality as superior.

In my third chapter, I examine three prose narratives alongside several medical treatises from the time in order to examine how these works were both reacting to and helping to construct the discursive spectre of the tribade. I argue that in her autobiography, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*, Charke employs double-writing in order to gain back the respect of the public after the end of her acting career while simultaneously showcasing her queer experiences in detail with the knowledge that others could read them and potentially understand some of their own experiences. In addition to this personal narrative, I also examine two works that were instrumental to the public understanding of a subcategory of the tribade, the

“female husband.” These texts were integral to the construction of the tribade because they highlight deception, which Charke works concertedly against. The term “female husband” came into public consciousness with Henry Fielding’s short story *The Female Husband*, which corroborates several patterns endemic to the spectre of the tribade: an obsession with lesbian etiology, and the emphasis on the tribade’s intentional sexual deception. Giovanni Bianchi displays the same patterns in his chronicle of a “female husband,” *The True History and Adventures of Catherine Vizzani*, but fails to embark on an etiological quest, garnering him criticism from his English translator. Both of these stories were highly influential to the public narrative of the deceptive lesbian, which Charke works exceptionally hard to avoid in her autobiography.

To summarize, with such a strongly-constructed public stereotype, it is certainly no surprise that lesbian literary production attempted to reject the body and expertly code these desires. In the early eighteenth century, male physicians and sensational writers alike worked exceptionally hard to construct a discursive spectre of the tribade, selling her as a corrupting influence who could deceive any innocent virgin. Whether her lesbianism came as a result of her own previous corruption or was caused by her abnormal body, the spuriously-constructed tribade was an established social figure. Being identified as a tribade could be disastrous for a high-profile woman’s reputation, leading to public gossip. As a result, lesbian literary production, both poetic and prosaic, was largely situated outside of the body. The body was not a site at which lesbian desires could be realized, understood, or carried out, and so, as I will argue, skillful coding and abstract poetics were two significant vehicles for lesbian writing in the long eighteenth century.

## Chapter 1

### The Soul-Connection-Realm of Katherine Philips: Metaphysical Erotics and the Lesbian Separatist Pastoral

Discourses and cultural narratives being constructed by women who, in the modern nomenclature of sexual identity, might be called “lesbians,” seem to concentrate in poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the majority of which is not compromised by inevitable speculation of realistic subjects. It appears, then, that the only way lesbians were able to express their romantic and erotic desires (under their own name) in this period was through poetry. In a way, they situate their sapphic desire in a sort of separate, intangible space. José Esteban Muñoz conceptualizes this metaphysical positioning of queerness as a means of “see[ing] and feel[ing] beyond the quagmire of the present.”<sup>47</sup> Though this is a modern theory, the construction of queer desire as a spatiotemporality is applicable to the creative processes, whether conscious or unconscious, that these women poets (Katherine Philips, in addition to Anne Killigrew, Anne Finch, and Elizabeth Singer Rowe) could employ. All of these poets make use of the pastoral mode, whether thematically, structurally, or both, in order to either construct it as a specifically experimental or lesbian-desire-centered space, conceptualize lesbian desire in a poetic realm with no burden of realism, or, as Philips specifically does, create a metaphysical realm, influenced by pastoral themes, into which she can project her soul, the locus of her desire. Philips’s work combines the pastoral mode, which romanticizes a simpler past, with ideas of queer futurity as is posited by Muñoz, and in this way, the pastoral becomes a space of queer escapism not inherently placed in the past, but somewhere extratemporal and always present. Heidi Laudien

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<sup>47</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

defines the pastoral as a literary space which “...blur[s] the boundaries between poet, subject and speaker, and allow[s] the poet the license to renounce poetic responsibility.”<sup>48</sup> These women appear to have chosen the pastoral as a poetic mode not just due to its popularity at the time, but because it could function as an exploratory space not burdened by the pain of real-life experience.

I begin this exploration of the construction of lesbian poetic discourses (by lesbians) with the poet Katherine Philips, whose work marks the beginning of a succession of women poets of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century writing romantically- and erotically-tinged poems that incorporate pastoral imagery and elements, with other women as the subject or muse. These poems, in my interpretation, extend beyond the level of (contemporary conceptions of platonic) friendship, and express romantic love, metaphysical connection, and erotic desire for women, desires which, in modern understandings of sexuality, might be read as lesbian. Philips’s understanding of “desire” is decidedly different from the way her poetic successors express it, who compare desire to, or juxtapose it with, heterosexuality. Philips, on the other hand, constructs her desire as something resistant to, totally outside of, and utterly separated from heterosexuality. She goes so far as to place desire on another level completely, in which it becomes a different kind of desire, not defined in the same terms as the heterosexual version. Because ideas such as marriage, desire, and love were so bound up in the violence of heteronormativity for Philips, her definitions and understandings transcend her tangible reality. This separatist conception of lesbian desire aligns, again, with Muñoz’s discussion of queer futurity. He explains that

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<sup>48</sup> Heidi Laudien, “Reading Desire in the Pastorals of Elizabeth Singer Rowe,” *Women’s Writing* 19, no. 4 (November 2012): 602–21.

Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is the thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing.<sup>49</sup>

Philips's poetry certainly suggests that there can, indeed, be something more than the restrictive hierarchy of marital and wifely obligations. The pastoral space she constructs in her work functions as a representation of a soul-realm within which her desire can flourish, and is a place where, instead of visibly and materially resisting heterosexuality, the concept of heterosexuality vanishes. When the soul suddenly exists in the soul-realm rather than the body, real connection between women can be made.

Philips, born in 1632, was married off at sixteen to a fifty-four-year-old politician. Her long-lasting reputation as the "chaste" and "matchless" Orinda (her pastoral nom de plume) was only solidified posthumously (with her poems not being published until after her death), because her poetry, at the time, was interpreted as decidedly non-erotic, depicting innocent romantic friendships. In general, I define romantic friendship using historian Lillian Faderman's description:

Thus they might kiss, fondle each other, sleep together, utter expressions of overwhelming love and promises of eternal faithfulness...opening their souls to each other and speaking a language that was in no way different from the language of heterosexual love.<sup>50</sup>

In other words, a relationship defined as a "romantic friendship" could be (and often was) much more than that, and had the potential to include components that blur the line between a friendship and a romantic and/or sexual relationship. With this definition, Faderman argues that though these women would do all of these things, they may not ever acknowledge their relationship as similar to heterosexually-defined romance. Faderman's classification of these acts

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<sup>49</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981), 16.

under the “language of heterosexual love” actively works against recognizing the lesbian potentiality of these relationships, however, defining them in opposition to heterosexuality and further entangling them in the heterosexual matrix. Instead of comparing acts like “sleep[ing] together” and “kiss[ing] [and] fond[ling] each other,” to similar acts performed by heterosexual couples, we must work to understand lesbian relationships under different terms. Whether the women in these relationships recognized these feelings as something akin to “lesbian” or not is irrelevant here—what matters is that these women were passionate with each other, whether romantically, sexually, or both, and their intimacies that supersede their relationships with men places them on what Adrienne Rich defines as the “lesbian continuum”:

a range—through each woman’s life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support.<sup>51</sup>

Rich’s argument here certainly encompasses the countless women throughout history whose close, passionate relationships with and communications to other women may have been (or appeared) chaste (that is, non-sexual), Katherine Philips included.

Even though she only shared her poetry with her circle, she repeatedly insisted on the innocence of the emotions she expressed, as did numerous scholars after her.<sup>52</sup> As the wife of a politician, she was concerned with her reputation, being exceptionally careful to maintain good standing in her level of society, as well as among her circle of friends. In the 1650s, she established her “Society of Friendship” to solidify creative and political bonds with her circle. The Society was primarily composed of Philips’s female friends, but there were a few male members.<sup>53</sup> She chose names inspired by pastoral poetry for each member, including Orinda

<sup>51</sup> Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs* 5, no. 4 (July 1, 1980): 631–60.

<sup>52</sup> Valerie Traub, “‘Friendship so Curst’: *Amor Impossibilis*, the Homoerotic Lament, and the Nature of Lesbian Desire,” in *The Noble Flame of Katherine Philips: A Poetics of Culture, Politics, and Friendship*, ed. David L. Orvis and Ryan Singh Paul (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2015), 261.

<sup>53</sup> Traub, “‘Friendship so Curst’: *Amor Impossibilis*, the Homoerotic Lament, and the Nature of Lesbian Desire,” 248.



(herself) and Lucasia (Anne Owen, a very close friend and subject of many of Philips's romantic poems), Ardelia, and Rosania (other female poetic subjects). All of the female subjects of her poems appear to be members of the Society of Friendship, and all are based on real individuals she was familiar with, as opposed to the nebulous reality of Anne Killigrew's pastoral female subject, "Eudora." Her closest friend, Anne Owen (Lucasia), whom she convinced her husband to allow her to visit in London under the guise of making money publishing<sup>54</sup> there due to financial difficulties, is her most frequent poetic subject.<sup>55</sup> After Owen's first husband died, Philips attempted to set her up with a friend, Charles Cotterell, so that she could continue visiting her. This matchmaking endeavor failed, and Owen married a different man and moved to Dublin, causing Philips to be able to see her much less frequently. This separation inspired several poems regarding Orinda and Lucasia parting ways. Philips died in 1664 at age 32 from smallpox, and it was not until the latter half of the 1660s that a friend collated her poetry to be published. From this point, she was upheld as a paragon of chastity and innocence, frequently being referred to as the "Matchless Orinda" or the "Chaste Orinda," because her romantic pastoral-inspired poems supposedly read as simplistic romantic verses inspired by courtly love poetry, exalting her innocent friendships and containing little to no erotic undertones, lewd humor, or bodily description. In the later seventeenth century, when the homoerotically-inclined work of playwright and poet Aphra Behn rose to popularity, she was often compared to the much more reserved, "chaste" Philips.

Interestingly, Philips, along with Anne Killigrew, one of her genre-successors, was referred to as the "English Sappho." In this period, literary speculation over Sappho's sexual

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<sup>54</sup> Though none of her poetry was published until after her death, Philips earned some money publishing English translations of French plays, most notably Pierre de Corneille's *La Mort du Pompée*. Elizabeth Susan Wahl, "Female Intimacy and the Question of 'Lesbian' Identity: Rereading the Female Friendship Poems of Katherine Philips," in *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 132.

<sup>55</sup> Wahl, "Female Intimacy and the Question of 'Lesbian' Identity," 142.

orientation was common.<sup>56</sup> As opposed to actual translations of Sappho's fragments, the circulation of poems *about* her guided this discourse, solidifying her as a cultural reference point for lesbian sexuality. Philips's posthumous appointment as the "English Sappho" may very well have been a reference to Sappho's rumoured sexuality. However, it is equally possible that the reference alluded to a successful and talented woman poet rather than speculation over the romantic intentions of her work. According to Elizabeth Susan Wahl, the 1670s and 1680s, after Philips's death, saw an influx of the importation of libertine literature from France, much of which detailed transgressive sexual activities such as adultery and homosexuality. This particular reference to Sappho is certainly not the *beginning* of discourses around lesbian sexuality for the Restoration period and eighteenth century, but an increasingly widespread sexual discussion in literature certainly brought queer sexualities more into the public discourse and cultural consciousness than ever before.<sup>57</sup>

In contrast to the much bawdier anonymous poem "Cloe to Artimesa" or sexually descriptive Aphra Behn, there are no descriptions of sexual encounters or explorations of bodily erotics in Philips's poetry. Instead, she posits the *soul*, rather than the body, as the site of love and attraction, connection, transcendence, and escape. Since the rediscovery of her poetry in the nineteenth century, literary critics have been using these very themes, especially in tandem with the idea of romantic friendship, to deny her queerness. Earlier critics often attempted to malign her sexuality, like the nineteenth-century critic Edmund Gosse, who mocks her behavior toward Anne Owen and characterizes her as a sort of suitor or predatory lesbian, making the relationship

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<sup>56</sup> The poet John Donne published "Sappho to Philaenis," an erotically-charged conversation between Sappho and a female love interest. In the early eighteenth century, Alexander Pope published a new translation of Ovid's "Sappho to Phaon," with the more explicit references to her "Lesbian Dames" in earlier translations being softened and heterosexualized for public consumption, though this intentional editing implies an awareness of her rumored sexuality.

<sup>57</sup> Wahl, "Female Intimacy and the Question of 'Lesbian' Identity," 140.

appear “physically grotesque”<sup>58</sup> and “belittling her desires.”<sup>59</sup> Other critics do the same—George Saintsbury, in the first modern published collection of her poetry, “attempts to negate any erotic reading of the poems” in his introduction.<sup>60</sup> Even more critics have attempted to eschew discussions of her sexuality by choosing to focus on other implications present in her work, such as her adoption of traditionally-male poetic themes (friendship, pastoralism).<sup>61</sup> However, more recently, the body of scholarship<sup>62</sup> on Katherine Philips has shifted to recognize her as a queer or lesbian writer, as evidenced by her inclusion in compendia of lesbian literature and her consistent appearance in texts discussing early-modern and eighteenth-century queer writers.

Despite early critical arguments that certain themes like friendship, pastoralism, or biographical details render her lesbianism impossible, I believe that these themes, as well as others in her work, are pertinent to what Valerie Traub calls a “lesbian-affirmative” reading, arguing that even when her poems are “not addressed to a female beloved,” they still read as lesbian “when viewed from the perspective of someone whose desires have been, in the prior literary tradition, defined as outside or against it.”<sup>63</sup> I argue that for Philips, the female body is unsalvageable as a site of sexual and romantic liberation due to its deep, male-constructed and -controlled ties to reproduction, heteronormativity, heterosexuality, and control of women, especially when this control is being asserted in medical, legal, and other public discourses. It is easy to infer that because Philips was married off so young to someone so much older than her, she was likely unhappy in her marriage, and it may have been sexually violent. But beyond just

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>62</sup> Particularly that done through what Valerie Traub calls “lesbian-affirmative” reading, including scholars like Traub herself, Harriette Andreadis, Caroline Gonda, Terry Castle (who includes Philips in her anthology *The Literature of Lesbianism*), just to name a few.

<sup>63</sup> Traub, “‘Friendship so Curst’: *Amor Impossibilis*, the Homoerotic Lament, and the Nature of Lesbian Desire,” 255.

speculations on her own personal feelings about sex (which do, of course, influence her work), it is essential to acknowledge the discursive positioning of women's bodies during the time in which Philips lived.

The view of the body in the late seventeenth century was still largely dominated by a humoral model, where a person's emotions had equal bearing on their physical health. Karen Harvey writes that, with the arrival of the eighteenth century, "the decline of the humoral body meant the passing of seeing the health of the body as grounded in a harmony, balance, and proportionality that paralleled the macrocosmos."<sup>64</sup> However, Philips died in the 1660s, so humoral pathologies were likely still dominant. Women's bodies, in particular, were exceptionally policed, especially in a time when, Laura Gowing argues, "[m]onarchies were perpetually troubled by the possibility of a line dying out with no heir" and the "fidelity and fertility of women" was a major concern.<sup>65</sup> Women's pleasure was also not a necessary focus of heterosexual sex, for the widespread belief was that conception could not occur without a woman's orgasm in addition to a man's.<sup>66</sup> In the seventeenth century, sex organs were commonly referred to in medical pamphlets as organs of "generation," part of a body system formed for reproduction and little else.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, if a woman needed to orgasm in order to facilitate reproduction, then female sexual pleasure was wholly geared toward conception, rather than for the purpose of pleasure itself. Sexual pleasure was irrevocably associated with heterosexual sex in the wider discourse, placing women's bodies and pleasures into a reproductive hierarchy where their ability to become pregnant was of utmost importance, and pleasure- and orgasm-focused sex seemed to be little more than a means to an end. Additionally, the age-old

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<sup>64</sup> Karen Harvey, "Epochs of Embodiment: Men, Women and the Material Body," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42, no. 4 (December 2019): 455.

<sup>65</sup> Laura Gowing, "Women's Bodies and the Making of Sex in Seventeenth-Century England," *Signs* 37, no. 4 (2012): 815.

<sup>66</sup> Laura Gowing, "Women's Bodies and the Making of Sex in Seventeenth-Century England," 816.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 817.

trope of the hysterical (at that time, literally), emotionally deceitful woman was incredibly pervasive when it came to women understanding their bodies—women’s “subjectivity...[and] their ability to know their bodies” was troubled by a heavy focus on “tangible evidence in infanticide and rape cases” in court.<sup>68</sup>

This misogynistic discursive structure was one to which Philips would have been no stranger. With the female (and, certainly, lesbian) body circumscribed in such a way, Philips’s disillusionment with her body is unsurprising. All of the connection, love, and closeness expressed in her poetry takes place in the realm of the soul, poetically represented in the pastoral mode, a kind of separate, escapist realm on its own. In doing so, she creates a meta-physical, rather than bodily, erotics completely outside of heterosexuality and reproductive hierarchy. Because the body is so fraught, it must be totally transcended, and as a result, the soul, for Philips, is the site of true emotion, love, connection, and, by extension, eroticism. Susan S. Lanser explains that “[t]he homoeroticism inscribed in writings of women like Katherine Philips reappropriates the body from its legal and social status as property by (re)positioning the self within one social relationship that is structurally outside male control.”<sup>69</sup> By repositioning the self, which Philips conceives as separate from the body, she constructs her pastoral, a space “structurally outside” the strictures of the court. Philips’s “reappropriation of the body” translates as a separation from it in her work, signified by expressed dissatisfaction and mechanization of the body through her body-as-watch metaphor in “To my Excellent Lucasia, on Our Friendship.”

I will also discuss whether, as the wife of a politician living a secluded life in Wales, Philips fit one of two models, which I have observed in the scholarship discussing both her work and the available details of her life. Was she closed off, unable to conceptualize her feelings due

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 821.

<sup>69</sup> Susan S. Lanser, “‘Bedfellowes in Royaltie’: Early/Modern Sapphic Representations,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 93-106.

to the lack of access to language, her political, motherly, and wifely obligations, and the time in which she lived? Or was she completely and fully aware of her feelings, understood them as more than (her temporally-situated understanding of) friendship, and wrote her poems very deliberately in the way she did in order to convey her desires, purposefully using the pastoral as a mode because it was such an exploratory space? I derive these two models from scholarly analyses of Katherine Philips published within the last thirty years. They include Harriette Andreadis, whose argument that Philips uses the pastoral to code her erotics I will expand by asserting that this pastoral is a “lesbian separatist” one,<sup>70</sup> and Elizabeth Wahl, who argues that Philips “dared to imagine a world of female intimacy that could survive the conventional divide between...a woman’s virginal status as a maid and her ‘heterosexual’ status as a wife and mother”<sup>71</sup> (from which I construct my argument that Philips had some sort of understanding of compulsory heterosexuality). These two models, of course, are certainly not the only options for understanding Philips’s point of view. Though these models serve to help construct and infer the way Philips infuses her poetry with lesbian desire, there is not necessarily a pure binary of either obliviousness and lack of access to the language she uses to describe herself, *or* full awareness of her feelings (perhaps an incipient recognition of lesbianism) in a more descriptive way. I argue that Philips fits more closely with the second model, but she is certainly not confined to it, especially where the idea of self-identification was not of paramount concern when it came to sexuality. Philips certainly knew how she felt, but was probably unable to write about it as descriptively as she may have liked—therefore, her poetry comes across as much more coded, metaphorical, and abstract. Rather than being terminologically trapped, she felt trapped in her

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<sup>70</sup> Harriette Andreadis, “Versions of Pastoral: Philips and Women’s Queer Spaces,” in *The Noble Flame of Katherine Philips: A Poetics of Culture, Politics, and Friendship*, ed. David L. Orvis and Ryan Singh Paul (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2015), 291.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Susan Wahl, “Female Intimacy and the Question of ‘Lesbian’ Identity,” 141.

body and her social circumscription. Both these models have been constructed through different interpretations of her work, mainly by the above writers as well as other scholars of queer history including Valerie Traub,<sup>72</sup> Caroline Gonda,<sup>73</sup> and Susan S. Lanser.<sup>74</sup>

There is no “physical” erotics or sex in Philips’s soul-connection pastoral, no “snake beneath the fragrant leaves” (à la Aphra Behn<sup>75</sup>), no softly-moving body of a woman she is observing (à la Anne Killigrew<sup>76</sup>)—everything takes place in the realm of the soul. When Philips and Lucasia are apart, they can still “touch” through their souls, and the soul is what “look[s] out...through the eyes”—the body is merely a vessel.<sup>77</sup> For her, the soul, because it is the site of love and connection, *is* the site of eroticism and desire, and is represented and described through pastoral thematics in her poetry. “To my Excellent Lucasia, on our Friendship” exemplifies the importance of the soul in her romantic connections. The poem weaves together three major components I have traced throughout Philips’s work, which help to construct the lesbian poetic narrative of the Restoration and early eighteenth century: non-bodily or metaphysical erotics; her understanding of a concept similar to the modern idea of “compulsory heterosexuality”;<sup>78</sup> and the poetic envisioning of her soul’s imaginary escape from that matrix, what I call a “lesbian separatist pastoral.”

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<sup>72</sup> Valerie Traub, “‘Friendship so Curst’: *Amor Impossibilis*, the Homoerotic Lament, and the Nature of Lesbian Desire,” in *The Noble Flame of Katherine Philips: A Poetics of Culture, Politics, and Friendship*, ed. David L. Orvis and Ryan Singh Paul (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2015), 243-265.

<sup>73</sup> See Caroline Gonda, “Writing Lesbian Desire in the Long Eighteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 107-121.

<sup>74</sup> See Susan S. Lanser, “‘Bedfellowes in Royaltie’: Early/Modern Sapphic Representations,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 93-106.

<sup>75</sup> Aphra Behn, “To the Fair Clarinda, Who Made Love to Me, Imagin’d More than Woman,” in *The Literature of Lesbianism*, ed. Terry Castle. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 173.

<sup>76</sup> Anne Killigrew, “On the Soft and Gentle Motions of Eudora,” in *The Literature of Lesbianism*, ed. Terry Castle. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 179-80.

<sup>77</sup> Katherine Philips, “A Dialogue of Absence ‘twixt Lucasia and Orinda. Set by Mr. Hen. Lawes,” *Luminarium*, November 12, 2006, <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/philips/dialogue.htm>

<sup>78</sup> This term was coined and first used by feminist theorist Adrienne Rich in her 1980 essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.”

In my analysis of “To my Excellent Lucasia, on our Friendship,” I will also incorporate other poems of hers that exemplify similar themes, as a great many of her poems focus on similar or overlapping subjects. She opens the poem by proclaiming that:

I did not live until this time,  
Crowned my felicity,  
When I could say without a crime,  
I am not thine, but thee.<sup>79</sup>

This line introduces the overarching image of the poem—Philips’s soul-connection to Anne Owen (Lucasia), and how Philips felt dead and soulless before she met her. In the second line, “this time,” more than any other time before it, is what “crown[s] [Philips’s] felicity,” and this period of intense closeness with Lucasia is the happiest moment of her life. The following line refers both to the past and the present, juxtaposing her previous feeling of emptiness with her current “felicity.” The word “could,” at first, signifies a retrospective element within the poem in which she compares her previous depression with the intense happiness she feels with Lucasia. However, the word also idealizes the relationship between her and Lucasia up until the point at which she situates this poem—this is not a new relationship, because phrases like “crowned my felicity” are in the past. It is unclear, though, why she chooses to idealize the beginning of this relationship, since it seems that her joy has continued into the present, because later lines such as “No...mirth/To mine compared can be” include the word “can” rather than “could”—this is now in the present.<sup>80</sup> She concludes the first stanza by expressing her conception of the soul, which guides the poem’s subsequent metaphysical underpinnings. Not only is Philips Lucasia’s friend/lover/confidant, she *is* Lucasia, and experiences such an intense closeness that she feels she is, indeed, part of her. This line functions as an explanation of Philips’s poetic construction of

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<sup>79</sup> Katherine Philips, “To my Excellent Lucasia, on our Friendship,” in *The Literature of Lesbianism*, ed. Terry Castle. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 160-161.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*



the soul as more than just a metonym for consciousness or personality. For her, emotion, love, connection, and by extension, erotics, live in the soul. The soul becomes not only a metaphysical concept, but a pastoral space all its own, where true love can transcend the body and reach its full romantic and erotic potential. Furthermore, Philips presents the idea of the soul as something dormant or dead (“I did not live until this time”) which can only be awakened by love and connection. The poem’s second stanza goes further into detail of the revivification of the soul by love:

This Carcass breath’d, and walkt, and slept,  
So that the World believ’d  
There was a Soul the Motions kept;  
But they were all deceiv’d.”<sup>81</sup>

In referring to herself as a “carcass,” Philips expresses just how lifeless, useless, and obsolete she felt in the time before she met Lucasia. Her body was, to her, without life, but performed functions associated with life, such as walking, breathing, and sleeping. She explains that her previous state was all a carefully calculated deception—she only did this to convince everyone that she had a soul, when, in reality, she felt utterly empty. Prior to her revival by Lucasia, she is suffering from a sort of internal death, going through the motions without feeling connected to much at all. Her life as a wife and mother feels incredibly isolating and causes her to associate her body with the functions others feel it is designed to fulfill: sex and reproduction. Her admission that “the World believ’d/There was a Soul the Motions kept” gives insight into her internal struggle. She is a woman essentially trapped in her situation, miserable, and very aware of how differently another woman makes her feel in comparison to her husband. She is only able to publicly make sense of these feelings in metaphorical poetry, expressing this pain through images of revivification, ontological death, and mechanization. This mechanization of the body

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

first appears in the description of her body as if it is dissociated from her mind: it “breath’d, and walkt, and slept,” performing the basic functions of life without any input from her soul. It seems, for Philips, that there are two different versions of “life”: first, the body’s basic functions that sustain physical life, and second, the fulfilling qualities of life that make it worth living, like love, mutual care, and connection with others. In other words, there is both a physical life and a metaphysical life, the latter being superior to the former.

Because metaphysical life, to her, is superior to the physical, she metaphorizes her (female) body as mechanical, mainly due to its entrapment in the violence of a heterosexual marriage with an extreme power imbalance. She writes:

For as a Watch by art is wound  
To motion, such was mine:  
But never had *Orinda* found  
A Soul till she found thine.”<sup>82</sup>

Not only her body, but her entire life before Lucasia has a mechanical nature: a repetition of the “motions,” which convince everyone around her that she is alive. This is the second time the word “motion” appears, and yet for her, the body’s motions are inconsequential, and pale in comparison to the workings and interactions of the soul. Her body becomes mechanized to the point where she feels she must be wound up like a watch in order to function properly. As a woman in this period of certain social stature, the expectation is that she serves one essential purpose: reproduction. In addition to the expectation of reproduction, she is also implicated in the institutions of marriage, heterosexuality, and motherly and wifely duties. These systems, particularly those of marriage and birth, are construed, theorist Elizabeth Freeman writes, as “effectively shaping the contours of a meaningful life” because they are recorded by the state “to

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

track and manage their denizens through an official timeline.”<sup>83</sup> In other words, certain life events or details are deemed important and worthy of recognition by the state in its continued enforcement of a hierarchical, heterosexual matrix<sup>84</sup> of marriage and reproduction. This practice of recording these events, but not others, such as “initiations” or “friendships,”<sup>85</sup> implies a wider hegemonic privileging of certain (normative) social practices over others, which in turn creates a mechanized, heteropatriarchal system in which those with non-normative desires, especially women, are forced to be part of a system that persecutes and pathologizes both these women and their desires. In this way, they are rendered practically invisible. As someone who was essentially forced into marriage very young to someone old enough to be her father, it is likely that Katherine Philips’s role as a wife was to maintain her husband’s social status, and produce children for him, thereby being pigeonholed into the heterosexual matrix, no doubt inspiring feelings of helplessness, despair, and a view of her body as only useful in certain (potentially violent) ways, hence this mechanized metaphor of the watch. Bound by her corporeal body, she is also bound by time, as the body has a limited amount of time alive. Therefore, the pastoral space of the soul, as a space oriented to queer futurity, is the only escape.

The misery and confinement she feels in her life before she meets Lucasia are especially striking in this poem, and her fervent desire to escape the body and find comfort on the metaphysical level indicates how women were forced or coerced into reproductive hierarchies and marriages like hers. I would argue, then, that Katherine Philips had some understanding of compulsory heterosexuality. Philips pursued both “Lucasia” and another poetic subject of hers, “Ardelia,” despite both women, as well as Philips herself, being married. Marriage was of no

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<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, “Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography,” *Social Text* 23, nos. 3-4 (2005): 58.

<sup>84</sup> I use this term to designate what Judith Butler defines as “that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized.” Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 208.

<sup>85</sup> Freeman, “Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography,” 58.

consequence for her because she knew that, in her own class, the majority of these marriages were not for love. Unsurprisingly, as Elizabeth Wahl argues, “[Philips] also espoused a set of social relations that imitated and yet implicitly questioned the authority and sanctity of marriage.”<sup>86</sup> Marriage, the heterosexual matrix, reproductive transaction, forced and expected wifely and motherly duties—and by extension, the body, due to its carnality and role in reproducing all of these institutions—were a place of confinement for her. The fact that neither her marriage nor those of the women she pursues are any obstacle to her shows just how indifferent she feels toward her own husband and the institution of marriage itself. True joy and mental liberation came only from the soul-connection she felt with other women. Since the body is not the site of intimacy or desire for her, Philips is essentially redefining, for herself, understandings of these concepts, because they are forced into a metaphysical space. Because the body is absent, the erotic contact comes from the inherent intertwinement of souls mingling and touching. This redefinition of lesbian erotic possibility applies to the women poets who succeed her, with much of their description of sapphic desire occurring in the intangible realm of the pastoral. It seems, then, for Philips as well as other “lesbian” poets of the period, desire and intimacy are not tied to physicality, but can be conducted completely through emotion and connection.

Philips questions (heterosexual) marriage itself, but doesn't quite reach the conclusion that the possibility of women living together in a marriage-like structure was possible, most likely because, to her, the institution of marriage was not a place of love. Love, for Philips, is a connection between souls. In order to transcend the nuclear family, heterosexual reproduction, governmental control under Cromwell, etc., the physical world must be transcended completely. Her recognition of the way she believes heterosexual marriage can destroy women's lives is

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<sup>86</sup> Wahl, “Female Intimacy and the Question of ‘Lesbian’ Identity,” 142.

especially clear in her poem “Orinda to Lucasia Parting, October 1661, at London.” This poem was written to Anne Owen, as the title states, when Owen moved to Dublin with her second husband. This moment was especially tragic, as Philips had tried and failed to convince Owen to marry a friend of hers so she could stay close. Philips’s sadness and heartbreak in this poem almost seem like a bookend to the relationship detailed in “To My Excellent Lucasia,” as Philips seems to allude directly to the line “My joy, my life, my rest”<sup>87</sup> in “Orinda to Lucasia Parting”: “I quit my Joy, my Hope, Life, and all but thee.”<sup>88</sup> Philips’s despair, worry, and evident understanding of how heterosexual marriage is disrupting and destroying a joyful and fulfilling relationship between her and Lucasia intensely culminates in the final line of the poem, where she proclaims that she “[has] more cause than e’er I had before,/To fear that I shall never see thee more”<sup>89</sup> Because Lucasia’s departure comes directly as a result of her marriage, Philips identifies it as the reason for her anxieties and sadness. It is marriage, above any other reason for traveling or moving, that gives Philips “more cause than e’er [she] had before” to fear that she and Lucasia will never physically see each other again. Her fears are just a small part of an evident disillusionment with the body and its constant and required presence—it is only within poetry, rather than within material reality, that the body can be left behind, and Philips’s frustration with this inescapable truth is what drives anxieties over Lucasia’s parting.

Katherine Philips’s disillusionment with her body is intense, and this disillusionment constitutes her understanding of a compulsory heterosexual matrix. But what exactly caused this stark association of the body with pain and confinement? In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, companionate marriage—that is, marrying for love and having a friendly relationship

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<sup>87</sup> Philips, “To My Excellent Lucasia, on our Friendship,” 160-161.

<sup>88</sup> Katherine Philips, “Orinda to Lucasia Parting, October 1661, at London,” *Luminarium*, November 12, 2006, <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/philips/lucasia3.htm>.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

with one's partner—was only beginning to take hold.<sup>90</sup> Philips was definitely not in a companionate marriage, as she did not choose her husband who was almost forty years older. Instead, the relationships she maintained with her female friends, particularly those who became her poetic subjects (Lucasia, Ardelia, etc.), were, based on her poetic expressions, intense and passionate. It is unknown whether the close relationship Philips had with Lucasia was a sexual one, and this speculation itself contends with Philips's own philosophy. However, Philips seems to argue, in her positioning of the soul as the locus of desire, that the structures of heterosexual marriage, reproduction, and gendered hierarchy need not be reproduced in relationships between women—only the complete renunciation of this hierarchy can allow for women to truly reach their full potential to love and mutually care for one another.

In a society where medical discourses constructed a reproductive hierarchy for women, the body could also be a site of violence. Philips's descriptions of the physical world as nothing compared to that of the soul, according to Traub, suggest "that the world of men is one of intrusion, intemperance, and conflict, both political and sexual."<sup>91</sup> This association of the body with pain, conflict, restriction, and violence appears again and again throughout Philips's oeuvre as she constructs a metaphysical poetic space into which she can project her non-normative desires.

The conflict between the metaphysical and physical, as well as the paradox of needing to transcend an inescapable body, feature in "A Dialogue of Absence 'twixt Lucasia and Orinda," a poem resembling a pastoral eclogue in structure:

*Luc.* And can we part?  
*Orin.* Our bodies must.  
*Luc.* But never we:

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<sup>90</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 325.

<sup>91</sup> Traub, "'Friendship so Curst': *Amor Impossibilis*, the Homoerotic Lament, and the Nature of Lesbian Desire," 265.

Our souls, without the help of Sense,  
By ways more noble and more free  
Can meet, and hold intelligence.<sup>92</sup>

This poem directly acknowledges the limits the body places on their relationship, as well as women's relationships with each other as a whole. The "we" here is rhetorically separated from the body by Lucasia's counter to Orinda: "Our bodies must./But never we." They, both as individuals and combined souls, do not have to part on the soul-level. Their bodies will part, but their souls will remain connected forever. Unfortunately, experiential soul connection without the soul's vessel, the body, also present is physically impossible—Orinda and Lucasia are not telepathic as much as they may have imagined and wished they could be. This poem evokes two earlier points. First, that Philips is writing herself and Lucasia as the soul through her use of the word "we." She separates the collective pronoun (both she and Lucasia) from "bodies." Their bodies must part, but they themselves never will. It is a complete separation of body and self, the self being contained in the soul. Second is the contradiction Philips runs up against in positioning the body and soul as separate entities, and making the soul a metonym for the body when it is impossible to achieve this split. The poem concludes with an acknowledgement that the only way souls can truly be together without being inhibited by the body is in death: the poem concludes with a chorus where both speakers explain that they "shall come where no rude hand shall sever,/And there we'll meet and part no more for ever."<sup>93</sup> This departure from Lucasia cuts away a piece of Orinda's hopes, since the desire to "part no more for ever" once they are in Heaven implies that she initially wanted to be with Lucasia forever in life as well. Philips consistently expresses the desire to escape or relinquish the constraints of her life as it is, and transcend the body completely. The body is the site of powerlessness, entrapment, and worth as

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<sup>92</sup> Katherine Philips, "A Dialogue of Absence 'twixt Lucasia and Orinda. Set by Mr. Hen. Lawes," *Luminarium*, November 12, 2006, <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/philips/dialogue.htm>

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

defined by reproductive capacity. Therefore, because the body is circumscribed in this way, Philips contends that true happiness, love, and connection can only be attained through recourse to the metaphysical—in other words, the body must be transcended, because the soul, not the body, is the site of emotion, romance, connection, and even love.

The soul itself, then, serves as a utopian space for Philips, what Muñoz describes as a “rejection of the here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.”<sup>94</sup> The soul itself represents this constant utopic potentiality, which complicates the idea of death in the poem. Perhaps her anticipation of seeing Lucasia again in death is not merely a Christian-tinged hope of meeting in heaven, but instead, the death occurring here is the death of her life as it was. A life circumscribed by motherhood, wifely expectations, and, of course, this forced parting from Lucasia was exactly the life this “death” would leave behind. Here, “death” is not a literal physical end of life, but instead, the leaving behind of heteronormative constraints in favor of the optimism of a queer future. In the same way that she posits relinquishing the body in favor of the soul, this “death” relinquishes a life incommensurate with her true desires. Here, Philips posits this queer utopic future as an impossible, and yet imaginable, place of lesbian ontology, introducing a paradox that her poetic successors would explore more fully.

What, then, were her true desires? Were they lesbian desires? Older interpretations of Philips’s work, like those of Saintsbury, for example, place her passionate, intensely emotional poems within the realm of chaste romantic friendship, effectively denying them a categorical spot in the lesbian archive until Adrienne Rich argued that romantic friendship exists on the lesbian continuum. “Romantic friendship” does not and should not automatically connote the opposite of lesbianism. Detaching romantic friendship from lesbianism perpetuates what Sylvia

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<sup>94</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.



Martin calls a “love/sex dichotomy” and an attempt to “excise the ‘genital’” from relationships between women.<sup>95</sup> Romantic friendship was not always independent of lesbianism, and privileging the supposed chastity of women’s romantic friendships over lesbianism due to lesbianism’s more sexual discursive implications does two things: it desexualizes what may have been both a sexual *and* romantic relationship by relegating it to romantic friendship (this terminology specifically being chosen to separate it from lesbianism), and it sexualizes lesbians, insisting that lesbian relationships must be empirically proven by record of an embodied sexual encounter. Therefore, the classification of Philips’s work as “romantic friendship” with all the implications of the term divorces it from queerness, and this classification aligns with her initial posthumous reputation as the “chaste” Orinda. Romantic friendship can and does carry a lesbian potentiality, especially when desire can be conceptualized “based on the lived experience of women instead of accommodating to or reacting against male constructions of desire that have been mapped onto female bodies.”<sup>96</sup> If it is not required, then, to “prove” markers of eroticism in Philips’s work in order to classify it as lesbian rather than romantic friendship, though the erotic is certainly present in her work, existing outside hegemonic, heteropatriarchal (and therefore bodily, in Philips’s eyes) prescriptions. The body’s only mention comes when Philips adversely constructs it as the one thing holding her back from truly being intertwined with Lucasia forever in “Orinda to Lucasia Parting.”

Because Katherine Philips situates the soul, rather than the body, as the site of love and desire, these soul-connections, these feelings of being entwined with another’s soul, and even of wanting to be *within* another’s soul, are inherently erotic. I define Philips’s eroticism as one divorced from the body, only acknowledging it as what holds her back from true connection. The

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<sup>95</sup> Sylvia Martin, “‘These Walls of Flesh’”: The Problem of the Body in the Romantic Friendship/Lesbianism Debate,” *Historical Reflections* 20, no. 2 (Sum 1994): 248.

<sup>96</sup> Martin, “‘These Walls of Flesh,’” 258.

desire that constitutes this particular brand of eroticism is expressed literarily, through tropes, figurative language, construction of poetic worlds, and imagery. The combining of souls produces a friction of these souls against one another, and this friction produces an erotic implication. The word “eroticism” is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “sexual excitement.” For Philips, this sexual excitement, whether its translation into the soul-realm is reflected corporeally or not, appears through the intertwinement between two souls. In my signification of friction as representative of eroticism, I allude to Karen Barad’s entanglements, which she argues “are enfoldings of spacetime-matterings,” and in this case, Philips’s figuration of her soul and the soul of the woman to whom she addresses her poem are the two beings in “iterative intra-action”—they are always already connected, regardless of the material proximity of their bodies.<sup>97</sup> In being made into being through this spacetime-mattering, these frictions can become real, as opposed to figurative.

Philips poetically characterizes herself as the soul because her body is far too entangled in the heterosexual matrix. In writing herself as the soul in her poetry, she contends that all her love is situated there, and in combining with the soul of another, there is a sort of erotic friction, a kind of sensuality that transcends itself. This creates a fascinating and complicated contradiction: though Philips works to leave the body behind and render it vestigial, it is always already present, and it does not allow for the transcendence she suggests—this can only happen in her poetry. The body blocks the soul from existing outside of it, because the soul is inextricably contained within. She wants to relinquish the body, and yet, is unable to do so. It is this very paradox encompassing a dichotomy of body and mind that makes Philips’s poetry erotic. Even though the soul-friction is what constitutes the erotic “contact” between Philips and

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<sup>97</sup> Karen Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 19, no. 2 (2011): 139.

Lucasia, the impossibility of totally cleaving the soul from the body causes the body to be immanently involved in these interactions.

Philips is able to eschew the reality of being unable to transcend the body, particularly in her poem “Friendship,” which opens with

Let the brutish World that know not Love,  
Continue heretics, and disapprove  
That noble flame; but the refinèd know  
‘Tis all the Heaven we have here below.<sup>98</sup>

Philips describes the world as “dull” and “brutish,” one which “know[s] not Love.” The “Love” she describes here is one of her two seeming definitions of love, this one indicating a closeness between her and her objects of affection. This love is specifically situated in the soul, not the body, because the soul is something that can transcend the body, which Philips sees as just another element of the “dull brutish World.” There are two worlds for Philips: the physical one, of which the body and all its negative associations are part, and the metaphysical one, a soul-connection-realm not unlike the world created by pastoral poetics. This pastoral soul-realm does not have any connection to Heaven, though, as evidenced in “A Dialogue of Absence,” it functions as an extension of the soul after death. Instead, it is a sort of “Heaven...here below,” and is still a component of life, placing Philips’s two experiential realms in a paradoxical relationship. Physical life and bodily experience are inferior to the pure love of the soul, but both of these remain confined to the mortal, terrestrial plane. Only one is able to extend into Heaven, but not until death—until then, it is bound to the body, since the body is its vessel.

Philips’s exploration of the metaphysical erotic appears again in “Friendship” as she discusses the poem’s subject:

Friendship, that Love’s elixir, that pure fire

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<sup>98</sup> Katherine Philips, “Friendship,” *Luminarium*, November 12, 2006, <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/philips/friendship.htm>

Which burns the clearer 'cause it burns the higher.  
 For Love, like earthly fires (which will decay  
 If the material fuel be away)  
 Is with offensive smoke accompanied.<sup>99</sup>

The erotic is mainly symbolized in the extended metaphor of “pure fire.” Fire, often a symbol of love and passion, is instead made to symbolize friendship here. Friendship is not only the elixir of love, it is a “pure fire” as opposed to an “earthly fire” with its “offensive smoke.” On the surface, Philips seems to be differentiating friendship from love completely, writing it a more superior type of relationship. While this is partially true, upon closer inspection, Philips writes friendship as a more superior type of Love, and yet, still something different. If fire is indeed the symbol of love, and love and friendship are merely two different versions of each other, since they are each a kind of fire—friendship a more “pure fire” and love an “earthly” and “offensive” one. The “earthly” and “material” elements are only mentioned in relation to love, which indicates that Philips, perhaps, had multiple definitions for love, or saw love as having many possibilities. This “earthly” love is love as tied to heterosexuality and reproductive sex, and yet, she references another type of love in her romantic verses to Lucasia—friendship-love. This friendship-love is constitutive of the soul-connection she describes, as it is a joining not just of bodies for reproductive purposes, but of souls. I use the term “friendship” not as a means of negating the romantic, but as a relationship descriptor, stipulating a connection between individuals that that includes sharing of emotions, mutual care for one another, which may or may not be additionally romantic—in other words, the “companionate” aspect of “companionate marriage.” Earlier in “Friendship,” Philips argues that

All Love is sacred, and the marriage-tie  
 Hath much of honour and divinity  
 But Lust, Design, or some unworthy ends

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

May mingle there, which are despis'd by Friends.<sup>100</sup>

Here, the purity of the “marriage-tie” is juxtaposed with “lust,” which is “despis'd by Friends.” Negatively-coded qualities like lust are impure, and therefore, have no place in friendship, the purest form of love. In this instance, the “love” to which she refers is specifically within (heterosexual) marriage, whereas friendship is both a different type of relationship as well as a type of love.

Friendship, then, encompasses material love rooted in the body, and becomes the more superior relationship, friendship, by incorporating soul-connection. If love (bodily, earthly) becomes friendship by adding soul-connection, then friendship is still a version of love rather than something completely separate. This division of the bodily and suprabodily correlates with Philips's disillusionment with the physical and her privileging of the soul as the true site of connection. If we read this extended metaphor of fire as a representation of desire and passion, then both love (heterosexual marriage) and friendship-love (intimate soul-bonding) have the capacity to be erotic, and since friendship as a form of love, “love's elixir,” is superior to earthly, bodily love, eroticism is possible and present on the metaphysical level. This characterization of friendship as an “elixir” of love is further proof that Philips considers friendship-love to be superior, and acts as such because friendship is exactly what purifies love. The body is connected to a sexually-grounded “love” that she views as impure and inferior, and a place where she is ultimately dissatisfied.

Philips's incorporation of the pastoral mode into her poetry comes as a direct result of her break from the body, as she figures its realm as her poetic representation of the soul-realm she constructs. The pastoral tradition originates in the classical-era writings of Virgil, Theocritus, and others. It was a popular poetic vehicle of the prominent poets of the seventeenth century—like

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

Sidney, Jonson, Marvell, Lanyer, and Milton—with whom Philips would have been contemporaries. Philips’s poetry incorporates many different characteristics of the pastoral, including “redress[ing] of separation, absence, or loss,”<sup>101</sup> elements of performance, a movement from grief to renewal<sup>102</sup>, and, most importantly, an idealized life in the countryside. Philips’s usage of the mode is different from the aforementioned poets, however, as she uses the pastoral itself as a place of escape, rather than just adhering to escape as a theme. It is within poetry rife with the pastoral staples of nature and rural simplicity that Philips’s conception of the soul-realm can be verbally represented. The metaphor of a simple country life acts as a poetic manifestation of the space of escape Philips wishes so desperately to inhabit, nowhere more clearly than her poem in the pastoral sub-genre of the country house poem, “A Country Life.” In accordance with her recurring themes of relinquishing hierarchy and the heterosexualized body, the poem offers an extended daydream of a life free of “tumult, discontent...thoughts of ruling and of gain...[and] courtship.”<sup>103</sup> Philips reiterates her distaste for the regimented heterosexual courtship and marriage structure with which she was familiar, declaring

Let some in courtship take delight,  
And to th’ Exchange resort;  
Then revel out a winter’s night,  
Not making love, but sport.<sup>104</sup>

Here, she openly disavows the structure of courtship and equates it with “th’ Exchange” (sex), which she sees as just that—an exchange. In addition to its sexual connotations, this “exchange” can also be read as marriage. In her essay “The Traffic in Women,” Gayle Rubin questions

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<sup>101</sup> Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 81.

<sup>102</sup> Harriette Andreadis, “Versions of Pastoral: Philips and Women’s Queer Spaces,” in *The Noble Flame of Katherine Philips: A Poetics of Culture, Politics, and Friendship*, ed. David L. Orvis and Ryan Singh Paul (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2015), 292-309.

<sup>103</sup> Katherine Philips, “A Country Life,” *Luminarium*, November 12, 2006, <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/philips/countrylife.htm>

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

“relationships by which a female becomes an oppressed woman,”<sup>105</sup> which include exactly what Philips seeks to critique in her use of the word “exchange”: those which implicate women into a mechanical, industrial, and reproductive hierarchy, and which demand female acquiescence into a structure of marriage and reproduction. In her own way, Philips had an awareness of what Rubin dubs the “exchange” or “traffic in women”—that is, understanding the “ultimate locus of women’s oppression” as rooted in the exchanges of women via marriage that constitute social relations.<sup>106</sup>

Interestingly, this poem, despite remaining thematically pastoral (due to her use of pastoral scenery), is much less abstract than her other works. Within this long daydream of an idealized country life, she embeds an exigent and very clear social commentary—though it can be argued that the romanticization of a rural existence free of vice is a social critique in itself. She presents sex and marriage here as exchanges, transactions, and something borne from the superficiality of heterosexual courtship—another indicator of some sort of understanding of compulsory heterosexuality. She refuses to call sex “making love,” but calls it “sport”<sup>107</sup> instead. This further underscores her characterization of it as an exchange. It is a game with rules, specific positions, intentional power imbalances, and is just one of many hierarchical structures Philips critiques in “A Country Life.” Later in the poem, she proclaims

And from this hermitage of mine,  
I banish all wild toys,  
And nothing that is not divine  
Shall dare to tempt my joys.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex,” in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). 34.

<sup>106</sup> Rubin, “The Traffic in Women,” 45.

<sup>107</sup> In addition to being a critique of heterosexual sex, the word “sport” might also be a reference to early-modern poetry and sonnets featuring predator-prey dynamics and detailing the hunt.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

Sex (both the act itself and sexuality as a whole), which she seems to view as immutably wrapped up in heterosexual structures, is one of these “wild toys.” Philips will take “nothing that is not divine” on this hypothetical retreat to the country, reintroducing her poetic construction of the metaphysical soul-connection-realm. Philips constructs her own vision and version of the pastoral mode by using its already-established escapist properties to construct a “pastoral of one’s own,” so to speak, allowing her to represent her soul-connection-realm within the it.

The critique of courtship structures found in “A Country Life” provides excellent insight into exactly how Philips is constructing her specific vision of the pastoral: instead of writing a poem or eclogue rife with themes of heterosexuality and a heteronormative marital conclusion, the pastoral is a place of escape not unlike her vision of the soul-realm. Harriette Andreadis argues that “the pastoral escape is defined largely by its negation of the values of a corrupt social world,”<sup>109</sup> which is exactly what Philips does in “A Country Life,” as well as more abstractly in much of her other work. Andreadis also contends that in Philips subtext, she employs the pastoral in her choice of pastoral names for her poetic subjects, as well as the places she situates her poetry, using the example of situating “A retir’d Friendship. To Ardelia” in a “bowre.”<sup>110</sup> I would argue that this pattern of Philips situating her poems in places of respite (a bower, a country house) extends to the poems that also have no clear location, such as “To my Excellent Lucasia.” In this poem, Philips situates herself directly *in* Lucasia’s soul, evidenced in multiple places, but it features most strongly in the penultimate stanza:

No bridegroom's nor crown-conqueror's mirth  
To mine compared can be;  
They have but pieces of this earth,

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<sup>109</sup> Harriette Andreadis, “Versions of Pastoral: Philips and Women’s Queer Spaces,” in *The Noble Flame of Katherine Philips: A Poetics of Culture, Politics, and Friendship*, ed. David L. Orvis and Ryan Singh Paul (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2015), 294.

<sup>110</sup> Andreadis, “Versions of Pastoral: Philips and Women’s Queer Spaces,” 294.



I've all the world in thee.<sup>111</sup>

The first line of this stanza presents two different hierarchies that Philips recognizes in her poetry—marriage and monarchy—which is interesting considering Philips's stance as a royalist, though her critique of marriage features much more strongly than the latter. She is happier than both a bridegroom in the presence of his wife and a new monarch reveling in the glory of his power. Philips critiques these hierarchies by deflating their importance, and heterosexual joys pale in comparison to the "mirth" Philips feels when she is with Lucasia. Philips needs nothing else—because she has "all the world" in Lucasia. Here, Philips is situating her soul directly in Lucasia's, and everything else can be relinquished. This act of combining souls creates the metaphysical, figurative space inside which true connection can be achieved has figural ties to the pastoral mode she invokes so often. The pastoral, too, focuses on the rejection of earthly vice in favor of connection in another sort of realm where (some of) the hierarchies of real life are of no consequence.<sup>112</sup>

Philips's repetition of her desire to relinquish hierarchy and vice, transcend the body, and exit the pain and powerlessness of her physical world completely display a lack of faith in the structures around her. She does not wish to work within the structures she critiques because the body is far too fraught with the potential violence of heterosexual marriage and forced reproduction. Her wish to completely transcend her body, her physical life, and the structures by which it is circumscribed is ideologically similar to a movement that emerged centuries after her death: lesbian separatism. Though anachronistic, the term denotes a specific cultural development in radical lesbian feminist communities in the late twentieth century in which some

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<sup>111</sup> Philips, "To my Excellent Lucasia, on our Friendship," 160-161.

<sup>112</sup> I include "some of" as an indicator of the gendered hierarchies still present in much of traditional pastoral. In the following chapter, I will discuss this more in-depth as I explore other poets who, like Katherine Philips, manipulate the pastoral in order to make it a place of safety for women *away* from these hierarchies traditionally found there.

lesbians felt that attempting to fit into, work within, or reform a system not built to include them was a futile endeavor. Instead, they believed that lesbians should break away from society, heterosexuality and heteronormativity, conventional marriage, and conformity to patriarchy completely and form their own communities in which they could thrive better than they ever could in a system in which they had to constantly fight for their basic human rights. A manifesto for the movement written in 1992 in the feminist magazine *Off Our Backs* defined its goals as such:

‘Lesbian Separatism’ is a principle of moving towards Lesbian, life-loving reality and implies separation from the pervasive domination of the global political and ecclesiastical union that is heteropatriarchy. That is, the worship of maleness, social relationships that support male power and the destruction of female energy and power.<sup>113</sup>

Of course, it is important to acknowledge the temporality of both this article and Philips’s literary similarities to it. Each is responding to phenomena endemic to the era, but both are informed by heteropatriarchal expectations for women, which both Philips and this manifesto’s author seek to critique. Therefore, I would define Philips’s use of the pastoral (and her metaphysical erotics in general) as “lesbian separatist” in nature because this modern descriptor seems to be analogous to what she hopes to achieve in her supra-physical space of soul connection between women.

Philips’s construction of her own “lesbian separatist” pastoral, a poetic realm normally undercut by heteronormativity, seems to function as a space separate from, but still thematically informed by, the pastoralists by whom she was inspired. For her, women *are* the retreat and respite from her unfulfilling world. Her feelings of love, desire, loss, and despair strike as strongly as they do in heterosexual romantic poetry. Valerie Traub argues

Philips’s love poetry attempts to articulate a homoerotic subject through the fictions and temporalities of lyric expression, deploying the lyric voice to disrupt

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<sup>113</sup> “Lesbian Separatism,” *Off Our Backs* 22, no. 6, June 1, 1992, 17.

those relations between ideology, causality, and sequence that, in the drama and prose narrative, propel the plot teleologically toward a marital conclusion.<sup>114</sup>

In both her life and in the pastoral she was familiar with, nearly every story ends in heterosexual marriage<sup>115</sup>. As Traub argues, it is mainly the “drama and prose narrative[s]” that structure the plot toward and end in marriage, though pastorals often lament desire and end in heterosexual pairings. Because Philips wants to escape, she is creating a different kind of pastoral with differential goals in mind—a marriage conclusion is unnecessary, because her pastoral is intentionally built as a departure from this expectation. To construct her pastoral, Philips capitalizes on the typical characteristics of the mode, particularly fantasy scenes that exclude reality and upend hierarchy, but rejects the mode’s heterosexual plots and conclusions to create a space where the body, and by extension heterosexuality, disappears. Unlike her poetic successors, who abide much more closely to traditional pastoral imagery, Philips creates a space that can be read as a “room of her own.” Just because she makes use of the male-constructed pastoral space, this does not necessarily mean her own pastoral must remain heteronormative. She redesigns it to be a place of ontological separation, escape, and, in a way, a poetically-achievable manifestation of her soul-connection-realm.

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<sup>114</sup> Traub, “‘Friendship so Curst’: *Amor Impossibilis*, the Homoerotic Lament, and the Nature of Lesbian Desire,” 251.

<sup>115</sup> There are numerous examples, from antiquity to the eighteenth century, of stories employing corrective heterosexuality in order to achieve this desired ending. One example is Ovid’s story of Iphis and Ianthe, another is Margaret Cavendish’s 1688 play *The Convent of Pleasure*. Nearly the entire story is spent detailing a romantic and/or erotic relationships between two women, only to provide the easy fix of sex/gender-change toward the end, where one woman is either revealed to “actually” be a man (*Convent*) or is conveniently endowed by the gods (Iphis and Ianthe).

## Chapter 2

“Which none can see, though all find true”: Eighteenth-Century Lesbian

### Poetics after Katherine Philips

Fortunately, Katherine Philips’s death in 1664 did not mark the end of pastoral lesbian poetry. Though there were quite a few women who wrote on similar homoerotic themes in similar ways, I am choosing to focus on three who comparatively connect through their usage of lesbian thematics and patterns present in lesbian writing beyond poetry. Anne Killigrew, born shortly before Philips died, uses sensory-rich metaphors in her poem “On the Soft and Gentle Motions of Eudora” to demonstrate what she views as a struggle for lesbians to access information and emotions regarding their own feelings and desires. This idea of lesbian desire being both epistemologically and ontologically unavailable—that is, women being unable to recognize their true desires due to a lack of knowledge that has been intentionally kept from them—is consistent throughout the poetry of Anne Finch and Elizabeth Singer Rowe, contemporaries of Killigrew, as well. These three women also demonstrate patterns I consider to be thematic of lesbian poetics during the Restoration period. In the works of all three of the aforementioned poets, ideas of transcendence abound. And though what each one transcends differs slightly, they are all connected to an inner struggle with emotional articulation as well as an immanent social critique. Both Finch and Rowe use the definitions of words, and the intentional blurring, conflation, and criticism of these definitions, as poetic frameworks in which pastoral eclogues can be situated. In addition, other queer-coded tropes make appearances in the work of all three poets, including intimate connection, the creation of separate spaces, struggles and frustrations with compulsory heterosexuality and the proscriptions of heteropatriarchy, and

writing in reaction to the period's vitriolic public discourses on lesbians, to name just a few. Anne Killigrew digs deeper than Philips does in her poetic discussions of the ontological and epistemological un/availability of lesbianism to some women of the period. Anne Finch uses more conventional pastoral structures than Philips, like the eclogue, to place intimate connection between women into conversation, though less explicitly through the process of double-writing: the poem might read one way to a heterosexual audience and contains a discussion or critique that distracts this audience from the queer experiences being presented within the work. Elizabeth Singer Rowe also thematizes the eclogue as a space where queer feelings and experiences can be explored.

Like Katherine Philips before her, Anne Killigrew's poems also went unpublished until after her death, where they were introduced with a lengthy ode written by John Dryden which compares her to Sappho.<sup>116</sup> As I discuss in the previous chapter, these comparisons to Sappho do, of course, reference "female poetic achievement,"<sup>117</sup> but it is equally possible that they reference poetry detailing passionate female relationships. The three poems that conclude the posthumous volume of Killigrew's poetry especially align with this characterization, most notably the final work, "On the Soft and Gentle Motions of Eudora." I would characterize this poem as "lesbian" due to its eroticism described in the voice of one woman about another, but Killigrew takes a slightly different path in her descriptions than Philips. These descriptions take on a distinctly sensory (and, at the same time, silent) quality that comments upon the ontological unavailability of sapphic desire and experience. Unlike Philips, this intertwining with another cannot be achieved by arguing for a rejection of the body while simultaneously acknowledging its maddening ever-presence. While all of Philips's erotic encounters take place in a metaphysical

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<sup>116</sup> Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics 1550-1714* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 111.

<sup>117</sup> Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England*, 112.

realm she conceives where souls can connect, the erotic nature of Killigrew's speaker's encounter with Eudora is only metaphysical in that Eudora is being watched, rather than touched. In this way, Killigrew positions the representation of her desire in the motions of another person, rather than herself, and the poem becomes a representation of the ontological (or epistemological, or both) unavailability of lesbian desire for her. The affections and feelings, though perpetually there, are hidden, coded in language describing a sensoriality just beyond comprehension.

This battle of perceptible versus imperceptible sensory experience begins right at the poem's opening:

Divine Thalia strike the harmonious lute,  
But with a stroke so gentle as may suit  
The silent gliding of the hours.<sup>118</sup>

The inclusion of the lute here, according to Andreadis, is a figure of female sexuality derived from Elizabethan sonnets and courtly romance.<sup>119</sup> This invocation to the muse Thalia in the very first line infuses the poem with sexuality and immediately indicates how the speaker feels toward Eudora, and the presence of the lute, symbolizing female sexuality specifically, genders the speaker female. Killigrew's use of erotically-tinged words like "stroke" and "gliding" in the two lines that follow further underscore the sexual nature of this work. The first line is certainly the "loudest" in the poem, but the imagery of "striking the harmonious lute" gets cut short by proclaiming its "gentle[ness]." This sudden reduction in volume does not negate or obfuscate the initial sexuality of the poem's opening, but rather places it elsewhere, just out of reach. The "stroke" of the lute, now "so gentle as may suit/The silent gliding of the hours," becomes auditorily silenced. It is not, however, silenced metaphysically. The stroke is made "gentle" so as

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<sup>118</sup> Anne Killigrew, "On the Soft and Gentle Motions of Eudora," in *The Literature of Lesbianism*, ed. Terry Castle. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 179-80.

<sup>119</sup> Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England*, 123.

to fit into this place where the “gliding of the hours” is silent, and where overt sensory experiences are muted in favor of those which are visual and emotional. The sound remains present, but now “suit[s]” the silence, and the sound is no longer immediately available, even epistemologically unavailable to those unable to look past the silence and reach for it. This music Killigrew introduces offers itself here as a figure for lesbian attraction and desire, which is consistently silenced or intentionally made difficult to find—it is rendered epistemologically (being able to know and understand lesbianism) and ontologically (being able to be a lesbian) unavailable.

Killigrew further reiterates the *silence* that has fallen over the poem by listing soundless actions that the sudden gentle stroke of the lute is suited to:

Or yet the calmer growth of flowers;  
The ascending of the falling dew,  
Which none can see, though all find true.<sup>120</sup>

The striking imagery of the poem’s opening is nearly forgotten by this point as Killigrew evokes images of gentle silence like the “growth of flowers” and the “falling dew.” Each of these things, she notes, are impossible to see in real time, but acknowledged as universal phenomena. If she intends for these things to metaphorize lesbian desire, it is wholly cemented in these three lines. It is something that is epistemologically available, yet blocked by its lack of moving visual evidence before its end result. A flower’s growth can be viewed and tracked, of course, as can the condensation of dew, but this requires constant viewing for an extended period of time, and its final product is valued as most important. She places her acknowledgement of the epistemological availability of lesbianism to women in this place of secret sensoriality because, while the rest of the world hears only silence, those who know will be able to find it—a sort of

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<sup>120</sup> Killigrew, “On the Soft and Gentle Motions of Eudora,” 179-80.

wink-and-nudge, even a form of lesbian humor characterized by a secret acknowledgement of a shared, patient close looking. Her insistence on the universal acknowledgement of this symbol for lesbianism (or, for Killigrew, probably romantic friendship<sup>121</sup>) can also function as a critique of the persistent denial of its existence, its relegation to mere practice for marriage, and its devaluation by men. The only reason it becomes unavailable is its intentional denial in the discursive disruption of the “lesbian continuum”<sup>122</sup> where many kinds of relationships between women all have a lesbian potentiality, whether sexual or not, purely because they function as a subversion or rejection of compulsory heterosexuality. In disrupting the idea of the lesbian continuum, the wider discourse was able to neatly pathologize the lesbian into some whose sexuality was defined by a certain sexual depravity or bodily pathology, effectively making physicality, rather than the nature of a relationship, the defining trait of lesbianism.

The sensory character moves from aural to visual as the speaker begins to describe Eudora:

For thus alone,  
Can be shown,  
How downy, how smooth,  
Eudora doth move,  
How silken her actions appear.<sup>123</sup>

A moving image of Eudora is introduced here by removing sound yet again, and she is the very manifestation of the thing “which none can see, though all find true,” since Killigrew remarks that “thus alone/Can be shown,” referring to the previous line. Lesbian desire and erotics, initially presented as epistemologically and ontologically unavailable, are now represented in Eudora, a figure who moves without sound, very softly, and without any sharp or sudden

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<sup>121</sup> I choose Lillian Faderman’s definition of this term again, but do not use it to deny erotic or sexual desire and encounters between women. The word “friendship,” here, for me, does not correlate to the opposite (or lack) of romance or sexuality.

<sup>122</sup> I refer here to Rich’s definition of the term.

<sup>123</sup> Killigrew, “On the Soft and Gentle Motions of Eudora,” 179-80.



movement. It is unclear exactly what Eudora's "downy,...smooth" movements are—perhaps she is moving toward or around the speaker, or the speaker is watching her from afar, as there seems to be no contact between the two. Regardless of the nature of this encounter, Killigrew chooses words with similar connotations and evocations to underscore the warmth and softness she feels toward Eudora: "downy," "smooth," and "silken." These three descriptors construct the ethereal, touchless interaction between the speaker and Eudora, while simultaneously allowing for a kind of hapticality in the way that the speaker is in the physical presence of Eudora. This tone carries throughout the rest of the poem and serves as a reminder of the imaginative and fantastical quality of this vision of Eudora. These three words positively move the poem into a more ethereal, pastoral space, but Killigrew also provides a bit of negative juxtaposition as well in her use of the word "appear." Eudora's actions "appear" to be "silken," but "appear" carries a suggestive undertone. Her actions appear in such a way in this pastoral, poetic space Killigrew constructs, but this very verb acts as a recognition of reality outside of it. Eudora's actions are silken *within this space*, but this poem is not material life. This poetic space, like much of the realm of nymphs and swains constructed in the pastoral genre, is an imagined fantasy. Killigrew's constructed space is, like that of Philips, a projection of the body, but for Killigrew, there is no body/soul dichotomy. The speaker's body is not mentioned, only that of Eudora, but this functions in a similar way to Philips because it separates material reality from imagined poetic spaces in which lesbian desire can flourish and be explored. Though, within Killigrew's pastoral, there are still elements of physicality and touch, since Eudora's body is described and there is a corporeality present in the poem, whereas Philips's descriptions are purely in the language of the soul. The presence of intermittent vanishing and moving physicality in

Killigrew's work correlates to the un/availability of lesbian experience and desire she explores in the poem.

In Killigrew's poem, the speaker's body is completely absent, and there is no fight to escape it, no reason to relinquish it, and no despair over its inexorable nature. Instead, the poem is wholly focused on the movements of Eudora's body and how it makes the speaker feel. It is the feeling of watching, rather than the liberatory euphoria of leaving the body, that inspires this part of the poem. The visual description of the previous section transitions back to an aural one, and the constant slippage between sensory inputs denotes a sense of epistemological uncertainty when it comes to the availability of lesbian desire. As Killigrew continues, she circles back to her recognition of this lesbian struggle:

The air of her face,  
Of a gentler grace  
Than those that do stroke the ear.<sup>124</sup>

In these three lines, Killigrew again uses the absence of auditory input to place lesbian desire just out of reach, differing slightly from the silence of the poem's earlier lines. Instead of using silence as the representation for lesbian desire's epistemological unavailability, she places Eudora's beauty above the beauty of sound. Sound is present, yet Eudora (and lesbian desire, with Eudora as its representation) exists somewhere above it. If music (specifically the "harmonious lute") acts as a metonym for female sexuality, Eudora's positioning *above* it places her above sexuality. This does not negate the lesbian sensibility of this poem, however. Lillian Faderman describes "lesbian" relationships in a historical context as one

in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other. Sexual contact may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Killigrew, "On the Soft and Gentle Motions of Eudora," 179-80.

<sup>125</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1981), 17-18.

Requiring sexuality in order to empiricize a lesbian relationship is a production of male fantasy, Faderman argues, and ignores the possibility of intense romantic friendships that were indeed lesbian, but may have lacked a genital component.<sup>126</sup>

As Eudora's body moves, the speaker moves from a direct representation via sexual symbols to something above physical sensation altogether. The "strok[ing]" of the ear is not a literal touch, but the intangible touch of music that is only selectively present in this poem, something that must be carefully and attentively listened for, something that can really only be listened for if the listener already knows it to be occurring, but the experience (the actual act of listening) remains unavailable until this initial knowledge of the phenomenon (for example, the "calmer growth of flowers...that none can see, though all find true" is required). These are phenomena that no one can see, or that can only be seen when looked at very closely, as they are also soundless. If they produce a sound, it could only be experienced by actively listening for it—not like the music of a lute, which one would immediately hear. These silent sounds exist somewhere beyond music, just out of reach, above audible sound.

The description of Eudora's face is structured in the same way as this extended metaphor. It is not just her face which is "of a gentler grace," it is the "air of her face," something adjacent to or above her mere physical appearance. The word "air" also carries double meaning here beyond Eudora's disposition—an "air" is also a type of melody, and the word in this context has several documented usages in the late seventeenth century.<sup>127</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, earlier uses of this word in a musical context often suggested "lightness or liveliness" and was usually "accompanied by a lute."<sup>128</sup> This matches perfectly with the

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<sup>126</sup> Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 17.

<sup>127</sup> "air, n.10". *OED Online*. December 2020. Oxford University Press.

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/4366?rskey=6H5ARP&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 11, 2021).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

musicality Killigrew introduces in the poem's first line, commanding "Divine Thalia" to "strike the harmonious lute." Airs, as a type of music, generally have a "simple or unobtrusive accompaniment" and have a "pleasing progression of sounds...[or] otherwise satisfying the ear."<sup>129</sup> Killigrew, at first, seems to be comparing Eudora directly to music, but the lines that follow disrupt this assumption. Her face is "gentler" than "airs...that do stroke the ear," meaning that Eudora and the quality of her movement are, again, imagined to be somewhere above or outside of physically aural music. And yet, these imagined airs are still a form of music despite their lack of physical registration, signifying, again, the friction and slippage between material and immaterial, aural and visual, and physical and metaphysical that complicates the presence of the body and the availability of desire.

Having used the superlative "gentler" and the preposition "than," the speaker has now positioned Eudora and her movements above bodily understanding. They are still visual and comprehensible to the eye, but aurally, they cannot be detected—they are now outside of music's reach and unavailable except to those who know to listen. The poem ends with the following:

Her address so sweet,  
 So modestly meet,  
 That 'tis not the loud though tunable string,  
 Can show forth so soft, so noiseless a thing!  
 O this to express from thy hand must fall,  
 Then music's self, something more musical.<sup>130</sup>

The word "sweet" brings a sense of taste into the poem in addition to seeing and hearing. Though it is used in its adjectival sense, it still embodies the potent sensoriality Killigrew imbeds into her description of Eudora. In this section, Eudora's voice is mentioned for the first time, but we do not hear any dialogue or statement from her. What exactly she says to the poem's speaker is unknown, and based on the rest of the poem's coded commentary on epistemological

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, n.11.

<sup>130</sup> Killigrew, "On the Soft and Gentle Motions of Eudora," 179-80.

unavailability, the lack of vocal representation for Eudora functions in the same way the poem's earlier silences do. Her voice's qualities are available to the reader, but not the content of her presumed speech. In this way, Killigrew turns the epistemological unavailability described earlier on back to the reader, allowing them an understanding of this struggle. There is something here that passes between Eudora and the speaker in "her address so sweet," which is, again, compared to music as a means of placing her above it. In the lines that follow, the speaker reiterates Eudora's superiority in noting that "'tis not the loud though tunable string,/Can show forth so soft, so noiseless a thing." The lute itself and its audible music are not what produces the silence representing the impossibility of knowing—these are, in fact, a distraction, even an annoyance, as indicated by the word "loud." Since Killigrew distinguishes Eudora from that which is audible here, her construction as a representation of lesbian desire and its unavailability is clearest at this moment in the poem.

The poem's concluding couplet shifts the address back to the muse Thalia, who struck the lute at the beginning. Killigrew toys with the lute's sexual energy as being both representative of how she feels toward Eudora as well as something she exists outside of. She both utilizes and rejects traditional symbols, particularly music in her request to Thalia to create a sound only audible to those who already know it to be occurring. In other words, sound, ever-present and inaudible, represents that which is just out of epistemological or ontological reach, but available to those who know to look for it or imagine it—in other words, an acknowledgement of different stages in the struggle of existing as a lesbian. Because this final set of lines is no longer addressing Eudora, it returns to the recognition of the lute as a traditional symbol rather than transcending it in favor of supra-sensory encounter. Killigrew expresses her own poetic dilemma, as she figures how "this to express": the poem focuses on this ethereal (and yet tactile) encounter

that balances the available and the unavailable, the sensory and the unfeeling, both interwoven with female sexuality's social connections to heterosexuality. As I mention in my previous chapter, female sexuality was intensely pathologized and the myth that a woman's orgasm was necessary for conception was pervasive—therefore, discursively, women's pleasure (during heterosexual sex) only mattered where reproduction was concerned.<sup>131</sup> As Philips does, Killigrew expresses frustration over the circumscription of the female body. Sexuality, here grounded in the body because the strike of the lute is called upon to inspire the speaker's description of Eudora, falls into the background until Killigrew reinserts it, writing that Thalia's "hand must fall" from creating the "stroke so gentle as may suit/The silent gliding of the hours" in order to create "something more musical." Sexuality is called forth from its background position as the speaker grapples with her own feelings on sexuality, its implications, and how this encounter with Eudora—though ethereal and positioned somewhere outside of material experience—manifests lesbian erotics. Perhaps the speaker's fixation on Eudora is more difficult to separate from carnal, bodily sexuality than she originally thought, and this poem's conclusion functions as a questioning of her own feelings. After spending time reifying the un/availability of lesbian desire within a poetically-constructed space, the poem ponders its connections to physical life. The aporia between the physical and the metaphysical (and by association, the body and the soul) come to represent the internal struggles of being able to articulate, understand, and express these emotions in a world where women are tightly circumscribed by compulsory heterosexuality.

Anne Finch probes these struggles as well, with particular attention to their identification and direct naming. She writes her discussion and exploration of these themes into poems that, on the surface, appear to have one reading geared toward heterosexual readers, and one to queer

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<sup>131</sup> Laura Gowing, "Women's Bodies and the Making of Sex in Seventeenth-Century England," *Signs* 37, no. 4 (2012): 816.

readers, the queer reading only realizable by those who know to look for it—a coded double-writing that appears in Killigrew’s work as her commentary on epistemological and ontological un/availability, as well as in the poems of Elizabeth Singer Rowe, who infuses her poetry with two simultaneous conversations, one structural and one diegetic.

Two of Finch’s poems in particular, “Friendship between Ephelia and Ardelia” and “A Pastoral Dialogue Between Two Shepherdesses,” explore and question the conflicting definitions of friendship and love, and specifically use the world of the pastoral as a place for both experimentation and contemplation of these definitions. While Katherine Philips struggles to untangle body and soul in her fight to split them, and Anne Killigrew similarly contends with the heterosexual implications of traditional figurative language, Anne Finch uses her short dialogue between Ephelia and Ardelia to trouble the definitions of friendship and love, specifically that which takes place between women, by using their meanings as vehicles through which lesbian experience can be reified in the pastoral.

Finch opens the poem with Ephelia’s question to her Ardelia:

EPHELIA: What Friendship is, Ardelia, show.

ARDELIA: ‘Tis to love as I love you.<sup>132</sup>

What is immediately striking about Ephelia’s request is that she asks Ardelia to *show*, rather than tell “what friendship is.” This makes Ephelia’s question more complex than just asking for a definition or even for an example because she wants Ardelia to show her rather than tell her, almost as if she expects a certain response. Ardelia purely telling her would not be nearly as descriptive as a response as Ephelia hopes to receive. Ardelia’s initial response, “‘Tis to love as I love you,” begins as a mere telling, but concludes with the specific example of her love for

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<sup>132</sup> Anne Finch, “Friendship Between Ephelia and Ardelia,” in *The Literature of Lesbianism*, ed. Terry Castle (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 218.

Ephelia. Ardelia “shows” her by presenting their own relationship not just as one example, but as friendship’s exemplar. She uses the word “love” to describe their friendship, solidifying this poem’s intentional conflation and combination of not just friendship and love, but friendship *as* love. In order to make sense of Finch’s deliberate choice of the word “love” to describe friendship, it is important to consider their definitions at the time. As I have previously discussed, companionate marriage was still less common. Therefore, “friendship” and “love” were often descriptors reserved for relationships between those of the same gender, and before the eighteenth century, “friendship” merely meant those with whom one has some sort of affiliation, with its first usage in its modern context not appearing until the 1740s.<sup>133</sup> Of course, regardless of terminology, relationships of this nature between women still occurred and, according to Lillian Faderman, “flourished...in the seventeenth century.”<sup>134</sup> Initially, then, it appears that Finch might just be choosing these terms to describe the relationship because they are all she verbally has access to. Marriage at the time, especially her social class as a countess, was rarely a result of an already-existing friendship, though marriage vows appearing in the 1662 *Anglican Book of Common Prayer* did instruct the couple to love each other.<sup>135</sup> Therefore, it is evident that the word “love” was used to describe heterosexual relationships, care for one another, and honoring one’s partner. Finch’s deliberate choice of these terms, then, goes beyond just the language of the day and works to specify a relationship that is not only unique to women, but is not dissimilar from what the word “love” describes.

Ardelia’s immediate description of love *as* friendship does not negate the lesbian potentiality of this relationship. The relationship is not being compared to a heterosexual one in this opening exchange, but instead is being clearly delineated as one unique to women. This

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<sup>133</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 97.

<sup>134</sup> Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 68.

<sup>135</sup> “The Book of Common Prayer (1662) [The Book of Common Prayer].” *Oxford Essential Quotations*, 2018.



approach that almost moves toward female separatism, however, is broken when Ephelia demands a more comparative approach:

EPHELIA: This account, so short (though kind),  
Suits not my enquiring mind.  
Therefore farther now repeat:  
What is Friendship when complete?<sup>136</sup>

She is clearly unsatisfied with Ardelia's mere description of their relationship in particular, and wants something more all-encompassing. She then asks what friendship is "when complete"—but what is a complete friendship? Is it the logical progression of an intense, passionate friendship (i.e., it becomes romantic)? Is it the end of a friendship due to the responsibilities of a heterosexual marriage? Is it an evolution of a friendship into a romantic or sexual relationship? Is this poem, then, an argument for companionate marriage as reflected through two women's comparison of their own friendship to a heterosexual marriage? I argue that Finch, with this questioning of "complete friendship," intentionally offers multiple readings of friendship, love, and marriage as a means of coding and recognizing lesbianism, albeit in a more subterranean manner. Ardelia's examples of complete friendship do mimic the details of a heterosexual marriage. She argues that "friendship when complete" is to

ARDELIA: 'Tis to share all joy and grief;  
'Tis to lend all due relief  
From the tongue, the heart, the hand;  
'Tis to mortgage house and land;  
For a friend be sold a slave;  
'Tis to die upon a grave,  
If a friend therein do lie.<sup>137</sup>

This list of qualities sounds similar to the traditional Christian marriage vow, which appears in the *Book of Common Prayer* Finch herself would have used at her wedding.<sup>138</sup> What aligns most

<sup>136</sup> Finch, "Friendship Between Ephelia and Ardelia," 218.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>"The Book of Common Prayer (1662) [The Book of Common Prayer]." *Oxford Essential Quotations*, 2018.

strongly with the marriage vows (specifically the command to “love and honor”<sup>139</sup>) at the time is the sharing of “joy and grief...to lend all due relief.” This “due relief” is lent from “the tongue, the heart, [and] the hand,” which is demonstrative of the intense closeness Ardelia is attempting to portray. These examples reiterate that this poem is a comparison of the characteristics of a marriage (share joy and grief, lend due relief, mortgage one’s house), particularly a companionate one (through the usage of the word “friend”) to the friendship that Ardelia and Ephelia share. However, just because romance and friendship were not always attributed to marriage (seen as a uniquely heterosexual phenomenon) does not negate the homoeroticism evident in Ardelia’s declarations of love. She is also comparing how she feels to how one would feel in a companionate marriage, so it is possible she does feel something for Ephelia. Whether she does or not, this poem still depicts a passionate female friendship that Adrienne Rich would position on the “lesbian continuum,” which she describes as

a range—through each woman’s life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support.<sup>140</sup>

It is not just the marriage comparison that codes Finch’s exploration of romantic friendship as lesbian, but the fact that romantic friendship is described to be as close as a marriage, if not much closer, especially in Finch’s time. Furthermore, the idea of two women getting married was not completely unthinkable. A phenomenon known as “Fleet marriages”—those performed somewhere other than a church by clergymen in desperate need of money—had arisen during the Restoration period. Only a few years before this poem’s publication, several records of women attempting to marry each other in this way exist, with their acceptance or rejection being entirely

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs* 5, no.4 (1980): 648-49.

at the discretion of the officiant.<sup>141</sup> Women marrying each other was only done in a manner usually associated, in public discourse, with “fortune-hunters...eloping with heiresses...then deserting them.”<sup>142</sup> In other words, it could be assumed to be for financial gain, whether it or not this was the case.

Ardelia’s next characteristic of friendship, “to mortgage house and land,” is also something associated with marriage, and is an interesting inclusion. In England, women were not permitted to own or mortgage property until the late nineteenth century. Does this line, then, allude to a heterosexual marriage in which the man would be able to own property? If so, it is only done as a comparative measure or even an exemplar of what exactly she means by “friendship when complete.” Friendship when complete, perhaps in Ardelia’s understanding, is marriage—a relationship which is (and should be) companionate and romantic, but also includes practical things like mortgaging one’s house.

The marriage vow-like character of Ardelia’s response continues in her final comparison that “‘Tis to die upon a grave,/If a friend therein do lie,” which parallels the final promise in a vow. This final line bookends the section’s opener about “joy and grief”—if friendship is, indeed, sharing “all joy and grief,” then grieving the death of a friend is included in this. The concept of grief bookending Ardelia’s response here solidifies her argument that friendship is not only “mortgag[ing] house and land,” but to share a wide range of complex emotions with one another. This form of intense emotional intimacy was, at the time, highly visible in relationships between women, and therefore, these marriage comparisons argue for a romantic friendship’s similarity to marriage. Despite the character of marriages at the time being varied and friendship and love not always being the sole reason for it, this poem’s consistent comparisons of romantic

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<sup>141</sup> Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women* (Oxford: Bello, 1993), 73-74.

<sup>142</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 73.

friendship to marriage produces an interesting set of conclusions: that this poem, in its comparison of friendship to marriage, functions as an argument in favor of companionate marriage; that Ephelia and Ardelia have romantic feelings for one another; and that it privileges romantic friendship as being just as valuable as marriage in a time that romantic friendships between women were often seen as an adolescent phenomenon. It intentionally blurs the line between friendship and marriage, insists that friendship should be an integral component of marriage, compares her friendship with Ephelia *to* a marriage, and intentionally lists off clichés that fit with her use of the word “love” in “‘tis to love, as I love you.” It connects love to both friendship and marriage, and approximates the two. It also indicates that her feelings toward Ephelia are extremely passionate, and fit into the definitions of romantic friendship and the lesbian continuum given by Lillian Faderman and Adrienne Rich respectively. Here, Finch is displaying a practice I refer to as “double writing,” which appears to be a common thread among lesbian writers across this time period. By “double writing,” I mean to describe the practice by which a poem or piece of writing, on one level, gives the impression of having one intention, where in reality, there are two or more auxiliary aims. For example, Finch’s questioning and complicating of the definitions of love and friendship function as a more coded critique of heterosexuality, while another possible reading of this poem remains its potentiality to be a call for marriages to resemble friendships—or even for queer marriages, which serve to complicate the heterosexually-constructed institution.

Finch presents ambiguity as to which relationship she might be talking about. Are these details characteristics of Ephelia and Ardelia’s own relationship, or those of a companionate married couple in general? Ephelia’s response confirms that these are more general conditions:

EPHELIA: This indeed, though carried high;  
This, though more than e’er was done

Underneath the rolling sun,  
 This has all been said before.  
 Can Ardelia say no more?<sup>143</sup>

Therefore, the list of things Ardelia provides is not necessarily what she feels toward Ephelia, since Ephelia requested something “farther,” and explained that Ardelia’s personalized “‘Tis to love as I love you” “suit[ed] not [her] enquiring mind.” During Ardelia’s long list, Ephelia appears to have changed her mind, and is now requesting a more interesting definition of friendship as evidenced by her complaint that the items on the list have “all been said before” and “this, though than e’er was done/Underneath the rolling sun.” Her emotional detachment from the vicissitudes of life in search of something only inches out of reach displays the same themes of epistemological and ontological un/availability that Anne Killigrew weaves into her poetry. And Finch, though her poem constructs a specific relationship between two people as opposed to an ambiguous one in which it is unclear that the two characters are communication, nevertheless troubles the definitions of love and friendship as well as what constitutes them in order to question compulsory heterosexuality and the institution of marriage, though she fails to call for its abolishment in the way Philips does.

Despite Faderman’s persistent argument that the vast majority of pre-twentieth-century lesbian relationships were what she calls “non-genital,” obviously not all lesbians<sup>144</sup> at the time ignored their feelings of sexual arousal and desire. Emma Donoghue provides a few examples of women in “romantic friendships” whose sexual activities with these friends was speculated upon by outsiders, particularly the sculptor Anne Damer in writings by Horace Walpole and Hester Thrale.<sup>145</sup> All this to say that if Finch’s comparisons of romantic friendship to marriage are as

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<sup>143</sup> Finch, “Friendship Between Ephelia and Ardelia,” 218.

<sup>144</sup> I use this term for clarity to mean all women in “romantic friendships” who experienced genuine romantic and sexual attraction to their friend.

<sup>145</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 162-63.

comprehensive as Ardelia describes, sexuality may well have been acknowledged in this lesbian poetic circle. Sexuality is certainly acknowledged in Katherine Philips's metaphysical erotics and in Anne Killigrew's intentional representation of its epistemological un/availability, so perhaps this codes lesbian erotics into Finch's work just as the earlier and later poets do. By "coding," I mean the intentional hiding of messages, symbols, details, and poetic meanings within a literary work that can only be teased out through more critical reading. These are the foundations of the tactic of "double writing" that Anne Finch, as well Killigrew, Rowe, and other writers, use. By making the poem seem like a commentary on one thing (in "Ephelia and Ardelia it is companionate marriage) while imbedding the poem's secondary commentary on the rigidly heterosexual relationships within it, Finch creates a poem that can be read in two different ways depending on the reader similar to Anne Killigrew's wink-and-nudge to the queer reader.

Ephelia's reply demonstrates a sudden switch in her desire for wider examples as she characterizes Ardelia's long list as a series of generalizations. Ephelia asks, "Can Ardelia say no more?" indicating her anxiety over Ardelia's response and her eagerness to hear her reply. This need but inability to know offers a similar commentary on epistemological and ontological unavailability encoded in Anne Killigrew's poetry. It is confirmed by Ardelia's response, which concludes the poem:

ARDELIA: Words indeed no more can show:  
*But 'tis to love, as I love you.*<sup>146</sup>

Ardelia's inability to find the words to explain how she feels beyond her repetition of "'Tis to love, as I love you" demonstrates a frustration and even a despair with regard to understanding her own feelings, the language for which may not be epistemologically available to her. She knows she loves Ephelia, but this love is indescribable. It is almost as if she *wants* to answer

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<sup>146</sup> Finch, "Friendship Between Ephelia and Ardelia," 218.

Ephelia and confirm she shares her feelings, but the poem ends before any of this can occur. This moment of silent recognition is only visible if looked for, like in Killigrew, which further solidifies the shared theme of the epistemological unavailability of lesbian desire. It is coded in for those who know to look for it and who recognize it, and for the rest, it is merely a commentary on companionate marriage. There may be something else both speakers want out of the relationship, like a sexual encounter, but cannot articulate or describe this desire, but as in Killigrew, articulation and understanding of the desire is positioned just out of reach, and Finch cuts the poem off before any further epistemological exploration can occur. Here, both the desire itself as well as its epistemology are unavailable to both the reader and the speakers, if we presume that the end of the poem marks the end of the conversation. This instance is not the only time that Anne Finch cuts off a potential exploration of lesbian sexuality.

The same sort of premature termination before her suggestions become too radical is equally evident in “A Pastoral Dialogue Between Two Shepherdesses.” In it, she uses the experimental nature of the pastoral to create a uniquely female space, but only as a means of *delaying* the heterosexual conclusion rather than rejecting it altogether. The first nymph, Silvia, is the more exploratory one, inviting Dorinda to forsake the swains if only for a moment and join her:

SILVIA. Pretty nymph! within this shade,  
 Whilst the flocks to rest are laid,  
 Whilst the world dissolves in heat,  
 Take this cool and flowery seat,  
 And with pleasing talk awhile  
 Let us two this time beguile.<sup>147</sup>

Here, Finch creates a female space within the already-separate pastoral one. The mention of the “flocks” alludes to what the swains are doing while these two nymphs sit in a glen some distance

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<sup>147</sup> Anne Finch, “A Pastoral Dialogue Between Two Shepherdesses,” in *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 9.

away, which induces a quasi-separation between the female space Silvia is inviting Dorinda (the second nymph) to create with her and the rest of the world. They are not completely severed from it, but instead attempt to create a space where their desires and emotions can be experimented with and expressed, a place separate in location and expectation. This space is not, however, “separate” in the same way Philips’s is, since it is only temporary. This impermanence is exemplified in the final line of the above excerpt, “Let us this time beguile,” as well as the poem’s conclusion when Dorinda ultimately leaves Silvia by herself. The poem ends by reaching the inevitable heterosexual conclusion, implying that the experimental homoerotic space within the pastoral is only temporary, whereas its normative heterosexual conclusion is capable of lasting forever. In this way, heterosexuality is presented as being *delayed*, but not completely escapable in the way that Philips posits. At the time, lesbian sexuality was sometimes viewed as an “adolescent bond that marriage must properly if painfully disrupt.”<sup>148</sup> Because marriage was expected to disrupt this phenomenon, there were some who even viewed it as a “legitimate adolescent passion,” which could be predictably curtailed by a man.<sup>149</sup> Perhaps, then, the poem critiques the trivialization of these relationships, though it similarly runs out of proverbial steam by the end as its lesbian potentiality is cut short before any inevitable further speculation can occur.

The construction of the shared space itself is not what brings the lesbian potentiality to this poem, but rather its placement away from men and their physical absence from it. The fact that, with men absent, these women are “sharing a rich inner life,...bonding against male tyranny, [and] giving and receiving...practical and political support” adds a lesbian element of intimate

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<sup>148</sup> Wahl, “Female Intimacy and the Question of ‘Lesbian’ Identity,” 135.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 161.



connection.<sup>150</sup> The absence of men is upheld as something positive as Silvia continues to beckon Dorinda:

Though thou here no shepherd see,  
To incline his humble knee,  
Or with melancholy lays  
Sing thy dangerous beauty's praise.<sup>151</sup>

In this stanza, Finch provides a more detailed description of the space Silvia is inviting Dorinda to create with her as well as present her motive for creating it in the first place. She reassures her that the constant presence of men is unnecessary, and instructs her to ignore the suitors who “sing [her] dangerous beauty's praise.” In doing so, she casts all shepherds as having the same behavior toward women, making the process of courtship look repetitive and boring, as well as depressing with “melancholy lays.” To describe Dorinda's beauty as dangerous might indicate that Silvia sees her as irresistible—Silvia understands why swain after swain would be courting her. It is interesting that Finch critiques excessive courting behaviors seemingly present in her conception of the pastoral when the pastoral itself is often used as a place of escape from the rigidity of court politics.

In Dorinda's response, she parallels Silvia's initial opening address:

DORINDA. Nymph! with thee I here would stay,  
But have heard that, on this day,  
Near those beeches, scarce in view,  
All the swains some mirth pursue,  
To whose meeting now I haste.  
Solitude does life but waste.<sup>152</sup>

Whereas as Silvia acknowledges Dorinda's beauty (“pretty nymph”), Dorinda does not do so. She explains that normally she would stay with her, but she must hasten to the swains who wish to court her. It seems as if there is some sort of imperative Dorinda imagines that drives her

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<sup>150</sup> Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” 649.

<sup>151</sup> Finch, “A Pastoral Dialogue Between Two Shepherdesses,” 10.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

toward feeling guilt over staying with Silvia, and she even admits that the meeting of the swains is pure hearsay. While she *does* explain her reasoning for leaving, she does not explain her declaration that “solitude does life but waste.” Equally present in Finch’s “Shepherdesses” is the idea of loving oneself through another person. In this space she constructs, the absence of men inherently causes a form of solitude—or Dorinda just sees it this way. It is probable that Finch gives Dorinda this line because Dorinda seems to represent the more traditional pastoral, fulfilling the expectations of women that so often accompany it. Silvia, on the other hand, represents a more experimental pastoral, and, indeed, functions as the catalyst for experimentation within the space. Without Silvia’s initial suggestion, this discussion would not even be occurring.

Dorinda is also not entirely certain of what she must hasten to at all, and reveals that she has only “heard” it. In order to maintain the hierarchy that exists within her world, Dorinda is willing to pursue news she is not sure of rather than stay with Silvia in a safe and comfortable place. We might note that the swains “pursue” the “mirth,” not the nymphs. Dorinda does not see this communion with Silvia as a pursuit of mirth, but a waste of life and time. Again, Dorinda’s presence functions as a staple of the pastoral, engaging in all of its traditional hierarchical implications while Silvia exists as a questioning presence. However, Dorinda is not completely averse to staying with Silvia, since she informs her that she “I here would stay, but . . .” It is as if Dorinda secretly wants to stay, that she would prefer the “solitude” of only being with women, but is unable to reach this conclusion because she cannot picture her life without men. Silvia, on the other hand, does not view their male-free space as solitude, and would prefer that Dorinda stay with her. Silvia’s feeling of togetherness with another woman, rather than solitude, may function as a critique of the heterosexual underpinnings of the traditional pastoral. Unlike

Philips, she does not create her own imagining of the pastoral, but rather uses it without changing many of its crucial details. Finch's more traditional interpretation of the pastoral is certainly evident in her "dealing with, not avoiding or retreating from, present situations and occasions."<sup>153</sup> In other words, Finch's pastoral does not become as "lesbian separatist" as that of Philips, and returns to heterosexuality at the end when Dorinda leaves. Dorinda's leaving exemplifies the "dealing with" rather than the "avoidance" of the real-world issue of compulsory heterosexuality that Finch acknowledges and inherently critiques, but does not go as far as Philips in calling for its rejection altogether.

Dorinda's conception of an all-female space as solitude reflects the theme of epistemological and ontological unavailability again because Dorinda's true desires seem to lie just out of reach. While Dorinda herself is representative of pastoral staples (which paradoxically parallel real-world hierarchies), Silvia is representative of the potentiality of this space itself, as well as its experimental nature. Therefore, it is not impossible for the pastoral to be so manipulated that its heterosexual conclusion is foregone altogether—Finch just chooses not to. One reason she may have chosen not to stray too far from the mode is her class status and image as a woman writer. With a small group of women writing at the time, she would have been careful not to align herself with writers who wrote about sapphic relationships in a much more bawdy and sexualized way, such as Aphra Behn.<sup>154</sup> Harriette Andreadis notes that

Finch's introduction to the 1713 edition of her poems picks up her concern with Behn's too 'loose' writings and makes very clear the nature of her agenda with respect to a female erotics and her calculated intention to emulate the apparent reserve of Philips in sexual matters.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 92.

<sup>154</sup> Particularly in her poem "To the Fair Clarinda, Who Made Love to Me, Imagin'd More than Woman."

<sup>155</sup> Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 126.

Her denial of a male-free ending, then, results not from a commitment to preserving heterosexuality, but to align with a politics of sexual respectability and preserve her image as a woman writer.

For the poet Elizabeth Singer Rowe, however, heterosexuality and homosexuality are not in contention with each other, but heterosexuality is still delayed. In her 1696 pastoral eclogue between two women of a similar nature, “Love and Friendship: A Pastoral,” she, like Finch, does not construct this space as wholly separate, but rather one allowing for many kinds of desire. She does, however, go farther than Finch by placing the two ideas of “love” and “friendship” as equals, with parallel stanzas consisting of the same amount of lines for each woman, one representing love, and the other friendship. In equating them in this way, she creates a conversation between heterosexuality and homosexuality, which exists in a space that inherently allows for that kind of speculation.

The poem begins with both nymphs, here called Sylvia and Amaryllis, making their “am’rous secrets” known.<sup>156</sup> Amaryllis, the nymph who expresses interest in the swains, is not as epistemologically trapped as Dorinda in the previous poem. She proclaims:

Let us, beneath these spreading trees, recite  
 What from our hearts our muses may indite.  
 Nor need we, in this close retirement, fear,  
 Least any swain our am’rous secrets hear.<sup>157</sup>

She understands the need for the exclusively female space and even upholds it as something sacred, a place where no woman need fear the interruption of heterosexuality. This is drastically different from Finch’s “Shepherdesses,” which is more of an actual conversation and less of an equal consideration of ideals. This initial invitation by Amaryllis is inviting Sylvia to express her

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<sup>156</sup> Elizabeth Singer Rowe, “Love and Friendship: A Pastoral,” in *The Literature of Lesbianism*, ed. Terry Castle (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 185.

<sup>157</sup> Rowe, “Love and Friendship, A Pastoral,” 185.

desire for whomever interests her, with no intervention by a man or heterosexual imperative. Interestingly, despite the expressed safety and openness of the space, their desires are still considered “secrets.” This space, though removed from men, does not exist in complete isolation. Heterosexuality exists in the heteronormative world, but inside this particular space, these concepts are presented as equivalent and normal.

Sylvia is the first to reveal her love interest:

SYLVIA: To ev'ry shepherd I would mine proclaim;  
 Since fair *Aminta* is my softest theme:  
 A stranger to the loose delights of love,  
 My thoughts the nobler warmth of friendship prove;  
 And while its pure and sacred fire I sing,  
 Chaste goddess of the groves, thy succour bring.<sup>158</sup>

For Sylvia, there is no secret, and she would willingly tell every shepherd she sees that she is not interested in them, but rather a woman. As the first place in the poem where love is juxtaposed with friendship, the word “love” is reserved for a heterosexual relationship while the word “friendship” is reserved for relationships between women. Unlike Finch’s terminological consideration in “Ephelia to Ardelia,” love and friendship do not overlap in this poem. Each stanza alternates between a discussion of one or the other, and one nymph stands for one or the other. But, as we have seen, the word “friendship” does not automatically negate the very real possibility of romantic love. And despite this contrast, these two things are equivocated in the poem’s parallel line structure, rather than one being shown to triumph at the end.

Despite this equivocation, Sylvia herself argues that friendship is a “nobler warmth” and that love is made up of “loose delights.” The use of “nobler warmth” and “pure and sacred fire” are very similar to Katherine Philips’s “noble flame” and “pure fire,” and Philips may have inspired these metaphors. The comparison of love as being “loose” in contrast to the “nobler

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

warmth of friendship” recalls Philips’s poetics, especially her poem “A Country Life.” Friendship, for her, is more noble and more pure than “love” because the way she feels for Aminta resembles how a woman might feel for a man, since she (and the poet) conceptualize these feelings as friendship due to love’s strong ties to heterosexuality and marriage. Close relationships between women are consistently privileged in this poetic scene because they allow for more intimacy, relatability, and similarity. They are also more pure because, from the outside, they are seen as inherently chaste (in most cases). Romantic friendship, generally, read as quite pure, but there were plenty of texts discussing sex between women who became what society deemed far too close.<sup>159</sup> “Love” and “friendship,” of course, were not irreconcilable, and it was not impossible to imagine that a woman might feel “love” rather than “friendship” toward another.

Finally, Sylvia calls on the goddess Artemis, the “chaste goddess of the groves,” who was never partnered with a man and remained a virgin within a group of women, for assistance. She believes that Artemis, associated with women living independently of men, is the one who will assist her in expressing her love and admiration for Aminta. Words associated with heat are mentioned twice in this stanza, with the “nobler warmth” as well as the fire metaphor. Diegetically, it seems as though Sylvia attempts to prove the superiority of friendship with the superlative “nobler” and with her choice to refer to love as “loose delights,” but the overarching structure of the poem, including the title (“Love and Friendship”), places the two things side by side. Rowe herself is structurally equivocating the two, but Sylvia’s argument here shines through as a privileging of (romantic) “friendship” over (heterosexual) “love.” What reads as an

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<sup>159</sup> One prominent example is the artist Anne Damer, an artist in the latter half of the Eighteenth Century who, though living many decades after Elizabeth Rowe, was not the first woman to have her public reputation defamed by accusations that she was a sapphist. Damer was accused of lesbianism in the diaries of Hester Thrale as well as in a satirical pamphlet called *The Whig Club*. I will further discuss the public perceptions and criticisms of women rumored to be lesbians in my next chapter on this subject. Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women* (Oxford: Bello, 1993), 164.

initial presentation of two types of relationships actually seems to function as a way of covering what Rowe is truly coding here—that “friendship” truly is superior. This tactic resembles the double writing Anne Finch uses in “Friendship Between Ephelia and Ardelia.” While Rowe’s structural parallelism frames the poem as a conversation between two equal things, Sylvia’s character encodes the true critique of heterosexuality and privileging of passionate relationships between women.

Amaryllis’s response also invokes a deity, this time the “propitious god of love,” presumably Eros. Amaryllis’s call to Eros contrasts with Sylvia’s invocation of Artemis, but it also begs the questions of why Sylvia does not invoke Philotes, the goddess of friendship and affection. Instead, she chooses a goddess known for remaining in a group of women, which reiterates her need for a safe, exclusively female space. Eros is described by Amaryllis twice as “propitious,” while Artemis is “chaste,” complicating the implications of their presences further. Eros is inherently propitious toward Amaryllis, and will assist her in courting one of the swains she lists in her response—this is a feeling she can act on if she chooses. Sylvia, on the other hand, cannot, and her interactions with Aminta, even if they are emotionally identical to those of Amaryllis with her swains, her intentions are categorized as “chaste” because it does not involve men. Amaryllis’s long list of swains, each described with similar characteristics, is juxtaposed with Sylvia’s fixation on Aminta. While Amaryllis is content to choose Alexis, Conon, or Phoebus, (though she seems to prefer Alexis above the other two), Sylvia is only interested in Aminta, and while Amaryllis provides similar and short descriptions of the three swains, Sylvia gives a much more detailed account of Aminta:

Beauteous *Aminta* is as early light,  
 Breaking the melancholy shades of night.  
 When she is near, all anxious trouble flies:  
 And our reviving hearts confess her eyes.

Young love, and blooming joy, and gay desires,  
In ev'ry breast the beauteous nymph inspires.<sup>160</sup>

Because Aminta's description takes up an entire stanza whereas Amaryllis's description of Alexis contains auxiliary choices, Amaryllis's stanza may function as a coded critique of the frivolity of heterosexual social prescriptions. Amaryllis's description of Alexis contains a few metaphysical comparisons, like those to light and air, but she mainly focuses on his activities, such a "danc[ing] on the flow'ry green" with "such an air, and such a graceful mien."<sup>161</sup> She even declares Conon to be a better singer than he is, again focusing on what he physically does, and also comparing his abilities to those of another. Sylvia, however, mentions no other nymph in whom she is interested. All descriptions of Aminta are either metaphysical, comparative, or both. Aminta also appears to be a comforting presence, since "when she is near, all anxious trouble flies." The closest parallel to this description in Amaryllis's declaration is that "each virgin sighs" when Alexis is near, but there is no mention of how Amaryllis herself feels; it is all explained through a removed, observational lens with descriptions of what other people do around Alexis, rather than herself. Sylvia's description of Aminta is similar with its collective nature, but it is based wholly on how she feels. She does attempt to avoid this by generalizing, proclaiming that "*our* reviving hearts confess her eyes" and that "in *ev'ry* breast the beauteous nymph inspires" love and desire (my italics). Sylvia, unlike Amaryllis, shifts away from examples of Aminta's behavior and continues with nature metaphors, finishing with the assertion that nature itself cannot inspire pleasure unless Aminta, an integral part of it, is near. There is no such equivalent in Amaryllis's previous stanza, and the emotions expressed by Sylvia come across much stronger than those expressed by Amaryllis. Sylvia even chooses the word "love" over "friendship" in this stanza, saying that Aminta inspires "young love" rather than friendship.

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<sup>160</sup> Rowe, "Love and Friendship: A Pastoral," 185.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.



Though Sylvia and Amaryllis represent friendship and love respectively, they are not irrevocably tied to either. Amaryllis acknowledges the value of friendship and a uniquely female space by being the one to invite Sylvia to share her “am’rous secrets,” but nevertheless only expresses desire for men. Sylvia, though extolling friendship in her first remark, uses the word love to describe it, and universalizes this love by collectivizing her desire toward Aminta. The poem’s title and parallel structure, at first glance, indicate a clear-cut equivocation of the two, which goes much farther than Finch. There is still a heterosexual conclusion, but only for Amaryllis, and this conclusion is completely incidental. Whereas in Finch’s “Shepherdesses,” Silvia is left alone while Dorinda forsakes her for the swains, Amaryllis merely expresses her desire to be with Alexis at some point in the future, but not immediately. Here, too, heterosexuality is delayed, as in Finch, but not in the same way. In Finch’s pastoral, heterosexuality is postponed by Silvia. Here, it is delayed by Amaryllis’s willingness to both create and stay in the safe space she has constructed in tandem with Sylvia, and Amaryllis becomes less of a representation of strict heterosexuality and more one of sexual fluidity. Amaryllis’s partnering with the swains is delayed, and the poem carries no overtone of heterosexual imperative; rather, Rowe presents heterosexuality as one option equal to Sylvia’s sapphic love, and heterosexuality is not discursively privileged. Sylvia, in calling friendship “nobler,” places her lesbian desire over Amaryllis’s heterosexuality. Whereas Katherine Philips constructs a lesbian pastoral utopia wherein men (as well as bodies) are completely absent, Rowe builds one where no form of love is positioned as superior to another. Rowe’s parallel structuring of her stanzas equivocates heterosexuality and homosexuality, but her actual characters feel differently, particularly Sylvia through her use of the comparative “nobler.”

Rowe's pastoral eclogue is markedly different from that of Finch, particularly because there is no argument or disagreement present. In Finch, Silvia is begging Dorinda to stay with her rather than go to the men, and in Rowe, Amaryllis has no time-bound need to go to them. She daydreams about them just as Sylvia does with Aminta, and they do not even really seem to be having a direct conversation, but rather are sharing their parallel ideas one after the other. In Sylvia's final stanza, she takes on the supra-sensory metaphors present in Killigrew's poetry:

SYLVIA: On flow'ry banks, by ev'ry murm'ring stream,  
*Aminta* is my muse's softest theme:  
 'Tis she that does my artful notes refine,  
 And with her name my noblest verse shall shine.<sup>162</sup>

Like Eudora in Killigrew's poem, Aminta can only be sung about when a muse is called upon, and she is the "muse's softest theme." The figure of Aminta, then, functions in a similar way to Killigrew's coding of epistemologically unavailable lesbian desire—Aminta is the "softest theme," perhaps available only to those who listen (and who know to listen). Despite Aminta's verse being the "softest," she is also what makes Sylvia's own music all the clearer, and with Aminta, Sylvia's "noblest verse shall shine." The use of the word "noble" in a superlative form, especially following its comparative "nobler," is no accident, and codes Sylvia's love for Aminta as somewhere above Amaryllis's for Alexis, despite Amaryllis's final stanza being extremely similar to this one. Differently from Eudora's positioning, Aminta *is* music. This further represents the epistemological and ontological un/availability introduced by Killigrew by turning Aminta, a person, into the music that must be intentionally listened for, and only if one knows to listen for it. The quiet sounds present in Killigrew also return with the "murm'ring stream," the description of the muse's theme as "soft," further solidifying the distinct poetic

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

pattern among Killigrew, Finch, and Rowe, whose poetics all acknowledge the struggles of lesbianism being ontologically and epistemologically unavailable to some women.

In focusing so heavily on parallel structure, being careful to equivocate each stanza almost line for line, Rowe is able to shift the reader's attention to how two different types of relationships that are really not so different at all, expertly double-writing in the same way Finch does by placing details and signals within the poem in places and in ways only for those who know and understand them. Heterosexuality and homosexuality, described here as love and friendship respectively, are equivocated through their equal presence in nature. However, Rowe's use of the superlative for the word "noble" establishes a coded, almost secret privileging of lesbian desire over the frivolities of heterosexuality. Instead of Finch's intentional imitation of a chaste female friendship even as it suggests something more, Rowe more openly proposes the experimental and women-safe nature of the pastoral. Rowe's poem does not have to have a definite heterosexual closure, but it can be a place where the "confessional qualities" are permitted to flourish and be visible.<sup>163</sup>

All of these women poets writing in the pastoral, including Katherine Philips, long for a uniquely female space away from men where women's desires, including those for each other, can be realized. It is no coincidence that all of these women encode their desire in similar ways specifically through the pastoral mode. Heidi Laudien writes that

by the eighteenth century, the pastoral ultimately was associated with women writers, who became increasingly responsible for its production and who made credible contributions to the form that differ from those of their male contemporaries.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Heidi Laudien, "Reading Desire in the Pastorals of Elizabeth Singer Rowe," *Women's Writing* 19, no. 4 (November 2012): 602.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 603.

Additionally, it was the pastoral mode and its “flexibility...[that] provided an entry point to writing” for women. This mode’s inherent flexibility allows for such experimentation as seen in Anne Killigrew, Anne Finch, and Elizabeth Singer Rowe. The internal conflict present in all three include those between body and mind, reality and unreality, physical and metaphysical. These constitute a characteristics pattern among these lesbian poets. The struggle occurs diegetically or in a coded manner and, therefore, may have been something these women struggled with in their own lives. They were also not likely to have been able to articulate their desires outside of a medium where fictionality is permissible, particularly the pastoral mode. The fact that these poets chose to explore these feelings, albeit hidden beneath many layers, is demonstrative of a strong lesbian circle connected through poetic technique. Drawing from both personal experience as well as abstract ideas of lesbian sexuality and its ontological and epistemological un/availability, these works constitute not just expressions of love and passion for other women, but the emotional and philosophical struggles of imagining these relationships in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

### Chapter 3

#### “Transactions not fit to be mention’d”: Charlotte Charke, Female Husbands, and the Eighteenth-Century Lesbian Body

Charlotte Charke, daughter of playwright and actor Colley Cibber, wrote one of the only first-person narratives detailing the experiences of a “female husband” in the eighteenth century. The vast majority of other accounts were written by others, usually men, who spoke of female husbands with a tone of abhorrence. With the knowledge that these narratives and pathologizations existed and were instrumental to the discourse around lesbians, I argue that Charke employs the same tactics as Anne Finch and Elizabeth Singer Rowe do in their poetry—that is, constructing a double-written narrative with the simultaneous distraction for the heterosexual audience paired with intentionally excessive detail in scenes that showcase queer experience. To further this, beyond just framing her experiences with heavy disclaimers, Charke also performs a queer self-mythologization, referencing her own “oddness” throughout the memoir as a means of trivializing her own experiences for the heterosexual audience. *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*, as a personal narrative, provides an extremely detail-oriented view of her life—from her “follies”<sup>165</sup> of cross-dressing as a child to her acting career in breeches (men’s) roles to her various other odd jobs after she was forced out of the theatre due to the 1737 Stage Licensing Act. It also details a period of her life where she took the name “Charles Brown,” moved to the English countryside with her partner only known as “Mrs. Brown,” and became a pastry chef. In the time that she worked as an actress, as well as after, she was a relatively well-known figure in London’s theatre scene partially through her relationship

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<sup>165</sup> Charlotte Charke, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* (1755; repr. n.p.: Moonglow Books), 15.

with her father, well-known actor and playwright Colley Cibber, though she did develop a reputation in her own right.

Charke employs the tactic of double-writing largely in response to narratives of female husbands written by men which served to pathologize and vilify these people, and I examine two of these alongside Charke's work. As a work both in conversation with and in response to condemnatory female husband narratives, Charke makes a substantial effort to avoid fitting into the "spectre of the tribade" trope that Henry Fielding's *The Female Husband* and Giovanni Bianchi's *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani* serve to reiterate and uphold. I argue that these works are both emblematic of multiple aspects of the spectre of the tribade—Fielding's tone is condemnatory, and he works to structure his narrative as a moralizing deterrent for female sexual deviance as includes multiple scenes that serve as "explanations" for the behavior of Mary Hamilton. Bianchi, while maintaining the same censorious tone as Fielding, goes on much less of an etiological quest when detailing the life of Catharine Vizzani. However, a description of Vizzani's postmortem examination is appended to her story, which serves to further circulate the exaggerated medical discourses regarding the tribade and clitoris. What both these narratives have in common is the theme of deception, integral to the figure of the tribade. What made "female husbands" especially deceptive was the transgression of their gender performance: in the view of these writers, these individuals wore men's clothing in an attempt to convince innocent women that they were men, marry them, and sexually defile them. In her own narrative, Charke tirelessly reiterates her embarrassment and shame about the time she spent as a female husband, intentionally deflecting any suspicions of deception.

Throughout Charke's life, as she details in her memoir, her relationship with her father became strained, and she claims to be writing and publishing the book in order to gain back his

respect through repentance.<sup>166</sup> Throughout the work as a whole, she frequently assures readers that she has reflected on the acts she recounts, and expresses embarrassment over anyone knowing about them at all. These almost obsessive reassurances evoke the question of why Charke would recount these memories in such excruciating detail to begin with. Near the end of her life when her *Narrative* was published, she was nearly destitute and in desperate need of money. Knowing how popular scandalous stories were in her time, she likely penned her memoir with the hope that it would become a bestseller due to its content, particularly the instances where she dresses in men's clothing and has relationships with women. There are two that stand out: in the first, a young heiress pursues Charke, and Charke must regretfully deny her to prevent any deception. In the second, Charke lives domestically with a woman she calls "Mrs. Brown," with whom there is no such guilt or worry over deception, implying that Mrs. Brown knew Charke was a woman. Here, a tension between internal and external recognition is visible. It is possible that the heiress knew Charke was a woman, but Charke bends the truth to make herself seem more worthy of exoneration, constructing a moral quandary for herself to solve. Charke does not explain away every single event that reads as queer in order to *truly* repent, but rather, these moments become showcases of her experiences that other queer women may relate to, and she tinges it with a tone of false embarrassment. Perhaps, then, her confessional tone is a ruse, and she, like the lesbian poets writing decades before her, writes to two different audiences. To do so, she utilizes specific literary details, such as her excessively penitent apologies that the average heterosexual reader might take at face value. Her second audience is queer readers, who might be searching for someone like them. She does not speak directly to them, but the inclusion of certain moments in her life (in great detail) are there so that others like her may read and understand them—unlike nearly every narrative of a "female husband" at the time, Charke never

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<sup>166</sup> Charke, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*, 7.

invokes a disclaimer or a warning to not do as she did. At the beginning of her memoir, she vows to “satisfy a curiosity which has long subsisted in the minds of many,” which displays exactly this sort of encoded double-writing. On one level, she plays on the public’s need for gossip and information, as well as the popularity of sensational, exaggerated accounts; on another, she rhetorically calls upon those who are interested in her exploits not because they merely find them strange, entertaining, or a subject for discussion, but because they might find their experiences or desires represented in Charke’s writing.

Charke seems to have a rudimentary understanding of compulsory heterosexuality, though only in retrospect, unlike Philips, whose poetry expresses her despair and confinement. Charke recounts her first meeting with her husband and their subsequent marriage, which she claims

put a Period to the Fertility of my mischievous Genius; and, upon being soon after acquainted with Mr. *Charke*, who was pleased to say soft Things, and flatter me into a Belief of his being an humble Admirer, I, as foolish young Girls are apt to be too credulous, believed his Passion the Result of real Love, which indeed was only Interest. His Affairs being in a very desperate Condition, he thought it no bad Scheme to endeavor at being Mr. *Cibber*’s Son-in-Law.<sup>167</sup>

Her marriage, in her eyes, marks the end of the “fertility of [her] mischievous genius,” a forced conclusion to her childhood follies, and a way of straightening her out—in addition to her childhood cross-dressing, she also enjoyed hunting which, as she grew into adolescence, became more taboo. The use of the word “genius” as a self-descriptor here is interesting with regard to Charke’s queerness. Andrew Elfenbein writes that the idea of genius “took on the mantle of mixed fear and admiration that has historically characterized homosexuals since the eighteenth century” and that it has been “a privileged repository for all the behaviors exiled from

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 29.



respectable society.”<sup>168</sup> In other words, the concept of “genius,” or the being of remarkable or superior intelligence or creativity, is an othering and resistant characteristic—an inherently queer moniker. Elfenbein continues that “[h]omosexuality is not intrinsically creative, but the situations in which many homosexuals have found themselves have offered all the disadvantages required by successful genius.”<sup>169</sup> Thematically, the experiences match up. It is possible that Charke chooses the word “genius” intentionally as a rhetorical substitute for her queerness and its manifestations during her childhood, and the fact that this genius was of the “mischievous” kind imparts a tone of illicitness. Consequently, this “genius” is curtailed by her marriage.

Charke also describes herself as a “foolish young girl” who was “too credulous,” implicitly arguing that many men might intentionally be duping women into flirtation and even marriage to take advantage of parental wealth—after all, Mr. Charke “thought it no bad scheme to endeavor as being Mr. Cibber’s son-in-law.” Though she reproachfully attributes her gullibility to the nature of being a young woman, she essentially places her husband at fault for marrying her because of her father, and universalizes her experience, using no personal pronouns when referring to “foolish young girls,” placing her own life alongside those of many other women pushed into and made miserable by loveless marriages. This criticism of heterosexual marriage and recognition of how it harms women constitutes Charke’s understanding of its compulsory nature not unlike Philips’s commentary on it through poetic conceptions of relinquishing the body. She then explains that she did develop a “fondness” for her husband despite her father trying to break off the engagement.<sup>170</sup> However, she quickly doubles back, revealing that

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<sup>168</sup> Andrew Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 7.

<sup>169</sup> Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 7-8.

<sup>170</sup> Charke, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*, 30.

I had, indeed, too often very shocking Confirmations of my Suspicions, which made me at last grow quite indifferent; nor can I avoid confessing, that Indifference was strongly attended with Contempt.<sup>171</sup>

Charke's experience with heterosexual marriage, it seems, was marred by an inattentive husband whose affections, she reveals, could not even be won back through the birth of their daughter.

Charke's choice of the word "indifferent" here is telling. She feels absolutely nothing toward her husband except contempt, for reasons that are nebulous at best, which gives deeper insight into the queerness of her narrative. When they first meet, Charke mentions that her husband is more interested in being Colley Cibber's son-in-law than being Charlotte's husband, and this resentment seems to grow until his inattentiveness, which fails to be solved by the birth of their child, becomes utter indifference and contempt. This moment, however, is not the beginning of her indifference—when recounting their first meeting, she mentions that the marriage put an end to the "fertility of [her] mischievous genius."

This commentary on marriage is one of several. Much later on in the narrative, her daughter also gets married, and Charke's feelings on the subject seem to remain unchanged. She echoes her earlier sentiment by also referring to her daughter as a "foolish girl," and going even further as to remark that her daughter "enslaved herself for Life."<sup>172</sup> This remark comes nearly at the end of the memoir, so it seems that throughout her years of acting as a female husband to Mrs. Brown, her outlook on heterosexual marriage soured even more so than when her own ended. Does this consistency of belief connote an experience of a heterosexual-appearing (to the public) relationship becoming a type of forced heterosexuality? No. Jack Halberstam argues that female masculinities are not imitations of maleness, but are socially viewed as "the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing."<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 140-141.

<sup>173</sup> Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1998), 1.

Therefore, a relationship between two women in which one is, using modern terminology, “butch” and the other “femme” does not imitate or appropriate heterosexuality since neither partner is a man. The type of female masculinity displayed by a butch woman is only legible as masculine, Halberstam argues, because it only becomes “legible as masculinity” when it leaves the male body.<sup>174</sup> Charke’s disaffection toward heterosexual marriage seems, then, to just be a belief she maintained after a disappointing, essentially coerced, and loveless marriage that likely confirmed for her a lack of attraction to men.

It is exactly this distaste for men and heterosexuality in general that acts as a genre-defining trait for the female husband narrative, despite Charke’s being quite different from those written by heterosexual men. There are quite a few elements, however—like the audibly expressed distaste for a heterosexual life—that appear across nearly every narrative of a female husband from the era. In those written by men, however, the female distaste for heterosexuality is made comical, perhaps even an early version of the trope of the man-hating lesbian, and is often coupled with etiological quests for early signifiers of queerness that could be identified and pathologized.

The first of these common narrative elements is the intent to deceive innocent women. *The Female Husband*, published in 1746 by novelist Henry Fielding, tells the story of Mary Hamilton, a woman who, like Charlotte Charke, presented in men’s clothing in public and chose a male name. Fielding provides several different anecdotes from Hamilton’s life before she was caught, each of which portray her as if she were an actor playing a part in order to deceive a seemingly oblivious woman into marrying her. Fielding chooses to make Hamilton’s prime motive the desire to carry out “monstrous and unnatural desires,”<sup>175</sup> especially since each of the

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<sup>174</sup> Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 2.

<sup>175</sup> Henry Fielding, *The Female Husband*, facsimile (London, ca. 1746; fac. Eighteenth Century Collections Online, 2020), 23. Citations refer to the 1746 edition.

marriages depicted fail. In one instance, Hamilton impersonates a doctor and succeeds in marrying an unsuspecting young woman who “had not the least suspicion of the legality of her marriage, or that she had not got a husband for life” because “the Doctor so well acted his part.”<sup>176</sup> This anecdote is only one of several different instances Fielding presents in which Hamilton successfully convinces a woman that she is a man, and the woman, unsuspectingly, marries her. In the above case, it is implied Hamilton and her wife<sup>177</sup> allegedly have sex without the wife realizing, but it is important to remember that this is Fielding’s fictionalization—the wife’s obliviousness is likely his attempt to avoid the terrifying reality of two women having sex without a man and enjoying it, as opposed to one predatory individual duping an innocent virgin.

The ability to dupe innocent women sexually seems to be the most egregious offense to Fielding, who repeatedly uses vitriolic language to refer to Hamilton’s exploits, including “abominable and unnatural,”<sup>178</sup> “violent,”<sup>179</sup> “wicked,” “criminal,” and “not fit to be mention’d.”<sup>180</sup> He also makes use of the ever-present trope of the predatory lesbian<sup>181</sup>, remarking that “this Girl became an easy conquest to the doctor,” who had “taken such advantage of her ignorance and innocence, and to ruin her in such a manner,” as the wife herself puts it.<sup>182</sup> For

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<sup>176</sup> Fielding, *The Female Husband*, 13.

<sup>177</sup> Many view Hamilton’s story as that of a trans man, and I do not wish to devalue or negate that reading with my argument. Rather, I choose to include *The Female Husband* in a discussion of lesbian discourses because it was socially viewed in this way. The gender transgression, within the discourse, was symptomatic of the wider view of lesbians, in no small part due to the sexual essentialism of the period. Therefore, as an exploration focusing on discourses and their effects on lesbian literature, I focus on *The Female Husband*’s discursive implications.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> The trope of the predatory lesbian is not new, and many examples can be found in the eighteenth century. A certain type of female character present in several popular novels of the eighteenth century is the swashbuckling single woman who attempts to corrupt the female heroine and distract her from her heterosexual interest. Examples include Harriet Byron of Samuel Richardson’s *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* and Harriet Freke of Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*. Caroline Gonda, “Writing Lesbian Desire in the Long Eighteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 115.

<sup>182</sup> Fielding, *The Female Husband*, 13-14.

Fielding, it is not necessarily the cross-dressing that constitutes Mary's "wicked crime," but rather the cruel act of deception itself. The act of deception, because it involves the defiling of innocent women, was criminal because of its connections to lesbian sex. It is important to note, however, that lesbian sex itself was not criminalized in England at the time, so Mary Hamilton, as well as other women who were caught in a similar way, were not charged with sodomy, as some lesbians in France were.<sup>183</sup> The criminal charge most often levied against female husbands (who were arrested) was fraud or vagrancy, Mary Hamilton's being the latter.<sup>184</sup> Therefore, it is probable that Charke feared deception the most because it was the deception, the "fraud," that was a punishable crime, and already struggling with debt, likely did not want any more crimes associated with her.<sup>185</sup>

Fielding's tale is, in no small part, a catalyst of the exaggerated "female husband" genre. In fact, Jen Manion argues that Fielding is responsible for popularizing the term, though its first recorded use is in a 1682 broadside entitled "The Male and Female Husband." This detailed the life of a "hermaphrodite" and the phrase "female husband" here denotes a person initially assigned female at birth whose sexual development and resulting impregnation of a woman forced her to be reassigned as male.<sup>186</sup> Its usage by Fielding as a descriptor of a woman whose genitals are never described (only the fact that she used a dildo, indicating that there was no speculation by Fielding on the size of her clitoris or its ability to be used in the same way, at least in writing) shifts the meaning of "female husband" from a woman who was forced to become a "husband" to a woman who chose to do so through dressing in men's clothing *for the explicit*

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<sup>183</sup> Elizabeth Susan Wahl, "The Tribade, the Hermaphrodite, and Other 'Lesbian' Figures in Medical and Legal Discourse," in *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 18.

<sup>184</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 68.

<sup>185</sup> Jones DeRitter, "'Not the Person she conceived me': The Public Identities of Charlotte Charke," *Genders* no. 19 (March 22 1994): 70.

<sup>186</sup> Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 29.

*purpose of marrying and having sex with women.* Because of these details, as well as because of the story's success, Henry Fielding is responsible for the term's introduction into discourse. At the time of *The Female Husband's* publishing in 1746, Fielding was already an established and popular playwright driven to novel-writing due to the same Stage Licensing Act of 1737 that drove Charlotte Charke to poverty.<sup>187</sup> It was Fielding's established popularity that caused *The Female Husband* to sell quite well, as well as its low price of six pence, making it "accessible to nearly all but the poorest of London's inhabitants."<sup>188</sup> The construction of the female husband coupled with the "spectre of the tribade" solidified the discursive caricature of lesbians as deceptive.

Lesbian sex itself was not (legally) considered a sexual crime like sodomy because, in the eyes of the legal system influenced by the public discourse, no real phallic penetration was involved, and therefore, it was not sex, since sex was, at the time, largely defined by heterosexual penetration (though with exceptions, of course). Socially, however, as Fielding comments, lesbian sex was certainly considered immoral and on par with forms of "self-pollution"<sup>189</sup> like masturbation. The philosophy behind this, Emma Donoghue writes, probably stemmed from "men's fear of being usurped by uppity women, but it can also be taken as a euphemism for lesbian seduction."<sup>190</sup> The word fraud when connected with lesbian sexuality, of course, reiterates one view of it as a sexually inferior, adolescent practice for marriage, what Terry Castle calls "at best a warm-up to heterosexual sex—a necessary but ultimately temporary phase."<sup>191</sup>

*The Female Husband*, in addition to being the narrative stereotype that Charke attempts to distance herself from, is evocative of the larger discourse around lesbian sexuality at the time.

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<sup>187</sup> Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History*, 30.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>189</sup> Referring to the title of an anti-masturbation treatise called *Onania, or the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution*

<sup>190</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 68.

<sup>191</sup> Terry Castle, *The Literature of Lesbianism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 287.

Many texts (but not all) make it clear that, in most cases, lesbianism was something acquired through seduction or corruption and could be prevented with enough moral guidance. Fielding adheres to this structure in *The Female Husband*, arguing in his opening passage that “once our carnal appetites are let loose, without those prudent and secure guides, there is no excess and disorder which they are not liable to commit.”<sup>192</sup> Fielding claims that Hamilton told him herself (the story, he alleges in its subtitle, is “taken from her own mouth”):

Nor did she in her younger years discover the least proneness to any kind of vice, much less give cause of suspicion that she would one day disgrace her sex by the most abominable and unnatural pollutions.<sup>193</sup>

This single statement provides a great deal of information on how sexual behaviors considered deviant were viewed at the time. Fielding’s etiological quest attempts to trace the origins of Hamilton’s strange behavior and satisfyingly provides an origin point in the character of Anne Johnson, before whom “no irregular passion ever had any place in [Mary’s] mind, till she was first seduced.”<sup>194</sup> By denying Hamilton’s “proneness to any kind of vice” in her childhood, Fielding provides another clue into the era’s etiological obsessions with deviant sexuality. Michel Foucault argues that, in the eighteenth century, sexuality was becoming more heavily scrutinized, and there was a visible “setting apart of the ‘unnatural’ as a specific dimension in the field of sexuality.”<sup>195</sup> This “setting apart” was particularly popular in the realm of medical texts that focused on reproductive anatomy, marriage, and masturbation, all of which Foucault sees, in combination with tightening governmental and religious strictures, as comprising a “medico-sexual regime.”<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Fielding, *The Female Husband*, 1.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 39.

<sup>196</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 42.

The influences of this burgeoning regime are visible in *The Female Husband*, particularly in Fielding's usage of the word "pollution." The word is found in the 1708 pamphlet *Onania, or the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution*. The original work was published in nineteen editions over several decades of the eighteenth century, and in 1725, a follow-up text called *A Supplement to the Onania* was included in all subsequent publications.<sup>197</sup> One particular anecdote within the collection is a letter of dubious authenticity detailing a sexual relationship between the apparent author, a teenage girl, and her chambermaid. The much older chambermaid shows the younger girl how to masturbate, and they proceed to perform these acts on each other as well as on themselves. Here, as in *The Female Husband*, the trope of a more experienced lesbian seducing an innocent young woman materializes. In addition to the language of "pollution" and "self-pollution," words like "abuse" and "self-abuse" often appear in works describing lesbian sex. In his commentary upon the young woman's letter, the author of *Onania* explains that this woman suffers from "excessive Lust and abuse of the Parts," and that this act caused her clitoris to grow "longer than [her] Thumb."<sup>198</sup> The word "abuse" implies that there is a "use" that is correct, but for the clitoris, texts like these nearly always make any usage of it seem wrong. Throughout both anatomical texts and female husband stories, the size and appearance of the clitoris is seen as an indicator of lesbian sexual behavior, and constructed as an inherently lesbian-associated organ, and almost every time the clitoris is mentioned, so is Sappho.

There are two general models of the clitoris's cultural association with lesbianism that appear most frequently in works like the *Supplement to the Onania*, other female husband tales like *The True History and Adventures of Catherine Vizzani*, and the repetitive, essentially plagiarized proliferation of "hermaphrodite" studies (*The Nature of Hermaphrodites*, A

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<sup>197</sup> Castle, *The Literature of Lesbianism*, 243.

<sup>198</sup> Anonymous, "A Supplement to the Onania" in *The Literature of Lesbianism*, ed. Terry Castle (New York: Columbia University Press 2003), 244.



*Dissertation on Hermaphrodites*, and *A Treatise of Hermaphrodites* to name just a few).<sup>199</sup>

Occasionally, both models appear together, as in the *Supplement*. The author constitutes the first model, explaining that women who abuse their clitorises (either via masturbation, lesbian sex, or both) “have this propension” wherein their clitoris “extends itself...[and] erects and falls...in proportion to the venereal Desire or Inclination of the Woman.”<sup>200</sup> However, if the woman “regulate[s] the inordinate and enraged Venereal Desire...the Parts [restore] to their pristine, natural State and Condition.”<sup>201</sup> The body’s ability to change in response to lesbian sex as a form of punishment comprises the first model, and this model also corresponds with Thomas Laqueur’s “one-sex” model. In this model,

women were essentially men in whom a lack of vital heat—of perfection—had resulted in the retention, inside, of structure that in the male are visible without.<sup>202</sup>

Because internal genitalia were thought to be a mere inversion of the external with each structure having a homolog in the other sex, it was plausible that a woman’s vagina or clitoris could prolapse with the addition of masculine “vital heat.” And, with the dissipation of this heat, a normal genital appearance could be returned to with the dissipation of this heat. The reason that lesbian sex specifically was the cause of this heat-related genital change was because sexual desire, brought on by bodily heat—if we follow the Galenic, one-sex model—was considered a male, masculine-coded trait thought to be weaker in women since women lacked that “vital heat.” If women felt sexual desire, especially toward other women, then they could usurp a sexual position that was societally reserved for men. A woman with strong sexual desire would

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<sup>199</sup> *A Supplement to the Onania* also contains a “hermaphrodite study,” as does Nathaniel Wanley’s *Wonders of the Little World* (1678), and other works speculate on large clitorises without using the word hermaphrodite, including countless medical texts spanning an entire century, from Jane Sharp’s *The Midwives’ Book* (1671) to Samuel Tissot’s *Onanism* (1766). Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women* (London: Bello, 1993), 39-59.

<sup>200</sup> Anonymous, “A Supplement to the Onania,” 245.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 4.

do anything to satisfy it—the presence of this desire made her more masculine, and the masculinity of her desire expressed itself by causing her clitoris to appear and behave more like a penis. The *Supplement* mentions the entanglement of desire and anatomy, where the woman writing claims that her enlarged clitoris would cause her to be “almost continually wet.”<sup>203</sup> The repercussion of genital morphing also functioned as a sort of punishment, as some texts associate certain bodily discomforts with it. For example, in *Supplement to the Onania*, the young woman claims she also suffered from “a great pain in [her] Back, and [her] Belly is swell’d.” In the clitoris’s first model, its growth is an effect of its (ab)use, and once the clitoris has grown, these women are “accounted Hermaphrodites...they have been able to perform the Actions of Men with other Women.”<sup>204</sup> Nearly every characteristic of the tribade had its roots in masculine-classified behavior: sexual desire, specifically for other women and satisfied through masturbation, sex acts that were thought to mimic heterosexual sex (i.e., penetration with a large clitoris or dildo, though the hypothesis of the large clitoris is the consequence and resulting cause for the repeated behavior), and dressing as a man in order to deceive and seduce women. It is for this reason that I agree with Emma Donoghue’s assessment that a woman deemed a “hermaphrodite” purely through lesbian behavior (or the perception of it) does not mean that she is (in modern terminology) intersex, or that her genitals do not conform to a constructed binary. The only way that outsiders were able to conceptualize sex between women was if one woman possessed something biologically analogous to a penis, and their only imagining of this seems to be a clitoris large enough to function as one.

The second model is a “cause” model, where the clitoris’s size is immutable from birth. Women born with an enlarged clitoris were classified as “hermaphrodites,” whether they were

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<sup>203</sup> Anonymous, “A Supplement to the Onania,” 245.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

actually intersex<sup>205</sup> or not. And while people with intersex conditions have always existed, it is possible that expectations of the clitoris—including racialized ones in which women from warmer climates were thought to have a stronger “inclination to venerary”—influenced what doctors viewed as normal.<sup>206</sup> The “cause” model is commensurate with Laqueur’s “two-sex” model, which he describes as “of radical dimorphism, of biological divergence. An anatomy and physiology of incommensurability replaced a metaphysics of hierarchy in the representation of woman in relation to man” that radically altered how sex and genitals were described.<sup>207</sup> In this discursive model, heat was no longer a governing principle of anatomy, and therefore the body became far less malleable, genital conformations included. Within this model, the clitoris would not grow to extreme lengths due to masturbatin or lesbian sex, because it had a fixed position and immutable size from birth. Of course, there is no discrete point of historical changeover between these two models, but narratives of the “hermaphrodite study” sort tend to lean toward one model or the other. The “cause” model of the clitoris’s cultural associations posits that when a woman is born with an enlarged clitoris, she has a higher propensity for lesbian sexuality due to the phallic nature of her clitoris. The *Supplement to the Onania*’s author, like several others, voices his support for genital mutilation as a remedy for any form of excessive use of the clitoris which, in either model, would correlate to its abnormal size, but also quickly reminds the audience that these are practices found in exotic placesm so it is difficult to figure out whether he actively supports them, or just makes a comparative observation.

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<sup>205</sup> I differentiate this term in this position from “hermaphrodite” because “hermaphrodite” has historically been used a both an outmoded descriptor and pejorative term for intersex individuals. By intersex, I mean its modern definition as someone whose sex characteristics, whether internal or external, do not align with a binarical sex model. Many of the “hermaphrodite” pamphlets do describe various different “types,” many of which seem like descriptions of actual intersex people, but the specific use of the term alongside “tribade” and other terms for lesbians very rarely denotes intersexuality.

<sup>206</sup> Giles Jacob, “A Treatise on Hermaphrodites,” in *Secret Sexualities: A Sourcebook of 17th and 18th Century Writing*, ed. Ian McCormick (London, UK: Routledge, 1997), 19.

<sup>207</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 6.

Among all the discussion of “abuse” of the clitoris, its universal purpose as a site of sexual pleasure unrelated to sexual orientation is hardly articulated, and lesbianism is almost always mentioned, usually with reference to Sappho. Its functions are described, but it is consistently associated with tribades: In her 1671 *Midwives’ Book*, Jane Sharp claims that some women use their clitoris “as men do [their penises]”<sup>208</sup>; In a 1682 medical textbook, physician Thomas Gibson adheres to the “effect” model by claiming that those of some women have grown so large they can “accompany with other Women like unto Men, and such are called *Fricatrices*”<sup>209</sup>; Nicolas Venette, in *The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d* (1707), mentions “the Lesbian Sappho” in his description of the clitoris<sup>210</sup>; Robert James’s description of the clitoris in his 1745 *Medicinal Dictionary* provides a familiar account of a woman who dressed in men’s clothing to trick women into sex.<sup>211</sup> Based on these examples, as well as countless others, it is easy to see how the clitoris itself functioned as a cultural metonym for both lesbian sexuality and women’s sexual independence in general. Valerie Traub names the clitoris and lesbianism as “sisters in shame: each is the disturbing sign (and sign of disturbance) that implies the existence of the other.”<sup>212</sup> The medico-sexual regime’s obsession with the clitoris and its dangerous connection to lesbianism are the result of the wider heteropatriarchal desire to prevent non-phallic sex without the presence of a man as well as women’s sexual independence in general. Based on these social fears and reified by these pathologizing and etiologizing texts, as Traub writes, the clitoris and lesbianism became “joined through the imperative of repression, the clitoris and the lesbian together signify woman’s erotic potential for a pleasure outside of

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<sup>208</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 40.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>212</sup> Valerie Traub, “The Psychomorphology of the Clitoris,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, no. 1-2 (1995): 154.

masculine control.”<sup>213</sup> The clitoris was seen as the one part women had that differentiated them from simply being inverted men, and it certainly upset the one-sex model, since the penis’s homolog was the vagina, not the clitoris. Because the clitoris was an outlier in the anatomical compatibility of the heterosexual reproductive transaction, it had to be regulated. If women could pleasure themselves and each other without the need of a man, then men would no longer be able to control them sexually. So, naturally, male anatomists and doctors kept more detailed knowledge about the clitoris and its function in academic Latin, and little was vernacularized at first, most likely with the assumption of a low female literacy rate. However, it is possible that more women could read than one might expect, and throughout the early modern era into the eighteenth century, women’s literacy certainly did increase.<sup>214</sup> There was a growing consciousness of female homosexuality despite the attempted discursive control partly due to this vernacularization, particularly that of texts mentioning tribades (and, by association, Sappho) and fascination with genital variation, hence the proliferation of pseudoscientific studies of those purported to have intersex bodies (“hermaphrodites”).

The idea that women could relinquish the need for men altogether was clearly threatening to those hoping to control the discourse, and in doing so, control women’s sexuality. Pamphlets detailing illicit sexual activity or gender transgression (or both) often carried a disclaimer from the author, though these are flimsy at best in their conviction and function more as a form of obvious risk management in a story intentionally designed to titillate the reader with excessive, often hyperbolic detail. For example, in his 1718 *Treatise of Hermaphrodites*, Giles Jacob makes it clear he is “persuaded there will not be one sinfle [sic] hermaphrodite the more in the world,

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<sup>213</sup> Traub, “The Psychomorphology of the Clitoris,” 154.

<sup>214</sup> Eleanor Hubbard, “Reading, Writing, and Initialing: Female Literacy in Early Modern London,” *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 3 (2015): 555.

on account of the publishing of this treatise.”<sup>215</sup> The treatise, of course, proceeds to describe (in significant detail) two women “mutually [employing] their hands with each other” in significant detail.<sup>216</sup> A servant, Nicolini, voyeuristically watches the women through a hole in the wall and notices that one of them has “something hang[ing] down from her body of reddish color...which was very unusual.”<sup>217</sup> This short description is bookended with long-winded descriptions of every move the women make in their sexual encounter, with only a short discussion about what Jacob refers to as one of the women’s “female member.”<sup>218</sup> Even *The Female Husband*, despite how it differentiates itself from the various titillating accounts of the day by providing no direct sexual details with all references to sex heavily couched in euphemism and moralizing language, contains a cautionary note at the very end. He expresses his hope that

this example will be sufficient enough to deter all others from the commissions of any such foul and unnatural crimes: for which, if they should escape the shame and ruin which they so well deserve in this world, they will be most certain of meeting with their full punishment in the next: for unnatural affections are equally vicious and equally detestable in both sexes.<sup>219</sup>

After spending significant time detailing the experiences of their lesbian subject, both these authors proceed to excoriate those about whom they write. These disclaimers almost appear comical when juxtaposed against the texts they accompany, particularly those with excruciating sexual detail, like that of Giles Jacob. The question of why these writers, who are so insistent upon deterring these “foul and unnatural crimes,” produce such exhaustive stories so comprehensive that a woman reading it may realize her own feelings and completely ignore the cautionary quip, is quite pressing. *Supplement to the Onania* deters as well, and its great popularity was certainly not due to its character as an anti-masturbation treatise, but instead as a

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<sup>215</sup> Jacob, “A Treatise of Hermaphrodites,” 18.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Fielding, *The Female Husband*, 23.

compendium of titillating anecdotes. Condemnations of lesbian sexuality that were especially pornographic (i.e., *A Treatise of Hermaphrodites*, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*) were certainly produced more for male titillation than for cautionary purposes, but the cautionary elements are still present and strong. There was no risk when men read these pamphlets, since men would not be having (or be inspired to have) lesbian sex. In the hands of women, on the other hand, these publications could be dangerous.

Charlotte Charke chooses to shroud her experiences within a confessional framework, knowing that the mere descriptions of these experiences, whether they are presented with caution and condemnation or not, could awaken a secret desire in some women. For men, these pamphlets were entertainment; for queer women, they were life-changing. Foucault argues that it was impossible for sexuality, especially queer sexuality, to be successfully suppressed through discourse and condemnation. By the eighteenth century, sex was being transformed into discourse and had become a “‘police’ matter,” medicalized, and absorbed by the state with its newfound focus on population and childbirth.<sup>220</sup> But this obsessional prevention counterproductively displays a preoccupation with sex rather than a repression. Using French boarding schools of the eighteenth century as an example, Foucault examines the details of their architecture meant to curb masturbation and homosexual behavior. The very fact that they were constructed in this way in the first place indicates a fixation on sexuality, and through attempts to make sexuality illicit and unavailable, they actively proved their obsession with it—the larger and more attentive the repression, the more people are thinking about sex. Historical evidence of the attempts to prevent queer sexuality, especially lesbianism, confirms its existence and proves that, far from people being unaware that queerness even existed, there was knowledge of its existence. All this to say that the many attempts to deter women from lesbianism ultimately

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<sup>220</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 24-25.

failed, and instead, acted as a means of information-spreading. And Charke's work, while providing no sexual details, still functioned in this way purely through her presentation of her experiences, regardless of her repentant tone.

The addition of disclaimers to intentionally scandalizing works characterizes these publications, which give insight into the discourses around lesbianism at the time. The exaggeration and ridiculousness in these stories is intentional, and they carry a fictionality no matter what percentage of the story is true, whether or not it is based on real events. For example, Emma Donoghue writes, "one scrupulous critic estimates that [*The Female Husband*] is 13 percent fact."<sup>221</sup> The sensationalism lies not in bodily description within these stories, but in the emotions and drama, the minute details no doubt filled in after the fact, and their voyeuristic character of these stories. Sensational medical texts presented ridiculous claims as fact and, because of this, were instrumental in solidifying the discursive caricature of the tribade. Based on the fact that quite a few publications present the clitoris's capacity to grow as truth, we can infer that tales we might now consider ridiculous were not necessarily seen as such at the time. Therefore, it is possible that these ideas about the clitoris, whether it could grow on its own due to lesbian activity or cause it through its enlargement, were commonly understood as fact. The fictionalization of these individuals, whether female husbands, supposed tribades, or both, makes them much less threatening. Perhaps these writers believed that by relegating the experiences of these people to fiction (thereby making them inherently exaggerated) in combination with a heavy disclaimer, it could be enough of a deterrent that the excessive detail could be rationalized. And while these obvious exaggerations of the clitoris were very real within discourse and often sworn to be factual, their relegation to fiction along with the actual fictionalized accounts worked to invalidate the non-normative sexuality of the tribade. The fictionalized caricatures of these

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<sup>221</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 83.



male-authored stories render lesbians less threatening through making them seem ridiculous, greedy, deceptive, and sexual oddities worthy of mutilation, a life of misery and death.

Ultimately, however, these male writers failed to do so: following Foucault's repressive hypothesis,<sup>222</sup> these attempted vilifications only served to make lesbians all the more visible and real. Charke pointedly differentiates herself from these stereotypes and fictional specters to differentiate herself from in her own narrative—she was a female husband, but not one of *those* female husbands, and *certainly* not a lascivious tribade, as those female husbands are wont to do. The part of her story where she did live domestically as a female husband with another woman is not written as a triumphant deception, as in *The Female Husband*; rather, it seems that Mrs. Brown knew Charke is a woman, and she deliberately includes the moment earlier on where she feels immense guilt over nearly deceiving an heiress who fell in love with her. The dramatic quality of earlier events disappears when it comes to Mrs. Brown. To be sure, she is a relatively minor character in the narrative, but Charke never accounts for her disappearance as the memoir finishes, and this relationship does not offer the same drama and comedy as the heiress affair.

Fictionality, though an easy tool for male discursive control, becomes more complicated with works that purport to be true stories. For example, the full title of *The Female Husband* as printed on the facsimile is “The Female Husband: or, the Surprising History of Mrs. Mary, Alias Mr. George Hamilton, Who was convicted of having married a Young woman of Wells and lived with her as her Husband. Taken from Her own Mouth since her Confinement.” The story, of course, was definitely not “taken from [Mary’s] own Mouth.” Many of the pamphlets on hermaphrodites, as well as the *Supplement to the Onania*, attest to some degree of authenticity, whether or not they are actually authentic. The idea of a fictionality inherent in stories that claim to be true is not unique to pamphlets promulgating sexual discourses—this was a highly popular

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<sup>222</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 22-23.

trend in the eighteenth-century novel as well, and Catherine Gallagher argues that “[t]he majority of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century credible prose narratives—including those we now call fictions—were meant to be read either as factual accounts or as allegorical reflections on contemporary people and events.”<sup>223</sup> This remains true, Gallagher writes, up until around Daniel Defoe’s insistence that Robinson Crusoe was a real man in 1720, and over the next twenty years, a shift took place, evidenced by Henry Fielding’s 1742 claim that his characters were not representative of real individuals.<sup>224</sup> These characters, however, were those in his novels. Mary Hamilton, whose story is not novelized, but still fictionalized in a short story, was not a character he invented (though it can be argued that Fielding did not invent *all* the characters in his novels—*Joseph Andrews* is essentially a work derivative of Richardson’s *Pamela*). Fielding’s insistence on the veracity of Hamilton’s story, then, indicates that he did not intend for it to be structured like a novel, or even read as one, but rather as a moralizing cautionary tale that could be used to deter women from such behavior (but, in reality, likely did quite the opposite), which, due to both its scandalous nature and cheap pricing, would (and did) sell quite well. Despite the fact that *The Female Husband* is not a novel, it certainly contains many characteristics of those of the day, like “gullibility” and “innocence deceived,” which serve to fictionalize the story.<sup>225</sup> It is no surprise that the specter of the tribade could be so easily constructed and widespread in social culture. The tribade’s exaggeration has its source in its core tropes, such as taking advantage of gullible women and deceiving them, whether through dress, the body, or both. Charke, highly attuned to these exaggerations, resists the fictionality of the female husband by

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<sup>223</sup> Catherine Gallagher, “The Rise of Fictionality,” in *The Novel: Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 339.

<sup>224</sup> Gallagher, “The Rise of Fictionality,” 344.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

both claiming her experiences are factual as well as choosing which moments she claims to be embarrassed about.

However, despite all the vitriol, works that served to vilify lesbians often had a similar characteristic of double-writing to Charlotte Charke, though theirs was unintentional, whereas Charke could have done this on purpose. Emma Donoghue writes that, when relegated to literature, Mary Hamilton “became a memorable ‘fictive’ character and taught several thousand readers that a woman could fall in love with women and satisfy them sexually and emotionally, even if she had to find a rather roundabout way of doing it.”<sup>226</sup> I would argue that Charke, too, does this, though in a much more subtle and encoded manner, because she writes about herself rather than telling another individual’s story. Therefore, these scrupulous (though partially disingenuous) attempts by both Charke and male writers to moralize through cautionary statements and condemnatory rhetoric served to make women actively work to avoid being publicly lambasted. However, as with Charke’s narrative, despite the differing motives in publication, works such as Fielding’s still present the technique of double-writing—a woman may see her experiences or desires represented, even if exaggerated or negatively portrayed. These portrayals almost appear to be a primordial form of the “bury your gays” trope seen in contemporary media, where queer experiences are represented (well or not), and then the queer character is killed as punishment for their sexual deviance. The portrayal of queer characters as evil, deceptive, and deserving of death in electronic media has its origins in the film codes of the early twentieth century that barred films and television from positively portraying homosexuality, but evil gays being punished, of course, reaches far before the Hayes Code. The eighteenth-century discursive landscape worked to construct another version of the trope of deceptive queers through these medical treatises and vilifying short stories.

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<sup>226</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 83.

Even as she is working amid this discourse, Charke works exceptionally hard to avoid the stereotype of the deceptive tribade constructed by the medico-sexual regime. She includes a short anecdote in her narrative where she “endeavour[ed] to keep up to the well-bred Gentleman,” but still became “the unhappy Object of Love in a young Lady.”<sup>227</sup> Interestingly, she does not attempt to hide her desire for this woman, revealing her “Disappointment on both Sides; the Lady of the Husband, and I of the Money; which would have been thought an excellent Remedy for Ills.”<sup>228</sup> She openly admits that such a marriage would be financially beneficial to her, which acknowledges other female husbands who have done the same.

As part of her larger intent to avoid this caricature, Charke doubles back in her description of the heiress saga by pathologizing both herself and the heiress by making sure to clarify that the heiress is “placing her Affection on an improper Object.”<sup>229</sup> Charke’s use of the word “object” twice pathologizes herself and the heiress. This sudden inclusion of pathologizing terminology is indicative of Charke’s knowledge of both fictionalized stories and medical texts regarding women like her, which she makes clear in her avoidance of tropes assigned to fictionalized female husbands and tribades that she wants to avoid aligning with. Her style of double writing persists here—she details these experiences with the knowledge that the general public may compare her anecdotes to those which appear in stories like *The Female Husband*, so she intentionally attempts to distance herself from the seemingly purposeful deception present there; at the same time, there are certain details included in this moment that indicate a coded presentation of experience to her simultaneous second audience, especially her implicit recognition of not only her own desire, but the heiress’s desire as well, even if by judging these as “improper.” By including this moment in which she acknowledges her desire for the heiress,

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<sup>227</sup> Charlotte Charke, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* (1755; repr. n.p.: Moonglow Books), 59.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 60.

Charke is inherently validating these feelings. She does not cast them aside, but instead feels guilty that the girl's affections were placed on an "improper Object," and does not want to be the type of female husband who deceives other women. She does not hide her feelings, but rather writes them in such a way as to align them with her moralizing, penitent appeal to her first audience. It seems, however, that Charke's worry about the public perception of the relationship and the potential for discovery drive her to break off the engagement rather than being the "improper Object" of affection.

Charke does not encode her critiques in the same way Philips or her successors do; rather, she attempts to showcase her experiences with the hope that they will carry some sort of relatability to women like her, and that her actions may also serve as a cautionary example for those, like her, whose reputations precede them. I define this "relatability" as an identification with the experiences, coded critiques, and themes Charke includes in her narrative—the idea that another lesbian, "female husband" or not, might read Charke's story and identify with her inner feelings and experiences. In addition to identification with experiences, queer readers might also take direction from the mistakes Charke claims to have made so as not to be discovered and avoid becoming a sort of social pariah. And while the idea of sexual self-identification as we understand it today would not have been available to Charke, the mutual understanding of experiences certainly operates as one form of it, even if less verbally explicit.

Charke's narrative style is confined by a limitation that followed lesbian writers at the time—the inability to accurately tell one's own story without having to exaggerate and fictionalize, or remove or change elements that might be deemed too scandalous. Those outside the community constructing lesbianism's public perceptions through literature, like Fielding, for example, had the privilege to provide many sensational details, whether true or untrue, in his

account of Hamilton, and be as blatant about her lesbianism as possible because, while he could be called immoral for publishing such a work, there would be no chance of being called a tribade. And Fielding, unlike the writers of more descriptive, explicit works, injects his narrative with moralized disclaimers throughout. Charke does not have the opportunity to be detailed, and must make her past actions seem like mistakes, especially in her apparent act of repentance and in proving she has relinquished these old ways. Her choice to structure her narrative as a confession, tailor it to wider reading public who might find her queer experiences comical and ridiculous rather than serious or euphoric, and saturate every “embarrassing” moment with effusions of regret allows her to avoid further social rejection by the public as well as successfully double-write her narrative. Because of this, outsiders were able to tell lesbian stories with more details than lesbians themselves could, and in structuring and marketing her narrative as penitent, she furthers her double-writing technique by creating a plausible reasoning for publishing impressively detailed experiences that could serve as a distraction for the heterosexual reader while, at the same time, using this detail to connect to other queers.

I turn now to a third “female husband” narrative which, unlike Fielding’s almost prudish account, contains a detailed medical text along with a fictionalized story of a real individual, *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani*, written originally in Italian by Giovanni Bianchi in 1751. The narrative combines the sensational adventures of a Mary Hamilton-esque figure with the dubiously scientific analysis present in hermaphrodite narratives. Catharine Vizzani was an Italian woman who, like Charlotte Charke and Mary Hamilton, took on a male persona and had relationships with other women. The 1755 version of this text published in England contains an English translation of the story itself, Bianchi’s medical notes from dissecting Vizzani after her death, and then a short commentary by Cleland where he criticizes

Bianchi for being too sympathetic toward Vizzani and for failing to set out on an etiological quest, instead characterizing her sexuality as innate rather than a result of corruption. Vizzani's story, like Charke's, makes sexuality seem innate rather than a result of corruption as *The Female Husband* and *Supplement to the Onania* do. Vizzani's story, however, also contains notes from her dissection and surprise over the normal size of her clitoris, but she fits neither the "cause" nor "effect" model of the lesbian/clitoris connection: she is neither corrupted early in life nor born with a naturally higher propensity for lesbianism, and her sexuality appears to be naturally-occurring rather than carrying an identifiable and preventable cause that the narrative can advertise. This silent acknowledgement of the innateness of sexual orientation differs strongly from nearly every other narrative and treatise concerning lesbian bodies in that the etiological inquiry only happens after death, rather than being speculated on by the author during her life. Despite its defining differences, *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani* still discursively adheres to its portrayal of the spectre of the tribade (minus the corruption) in its expressed expectation of an enlarged clitoris as the postmortem examination is conducted, only to find that it is normal-sized, and on the smaller side to boot.

To introduce this story and ensure the reader that his detailed description of these behaviors does not indicate his approval of them, Bianchi claims that "Wantonness of Fancy, and the Depravity of Nature, are at as great a height as ever."<sup>230</sup> This assertion immediately makes Bianchi's narrative stand out against those written in England—quite a few of the hermaphrodite or tribade narratives discuss women from exoticized places like Egypt and the Mediterranean, Turkey, and even Italy and France. Several, including one from De Busbecq as early as the sixteenth century, use the Ottoman sultan's seraglio as an example of exotic homosociality that is always already homoerotic. These female-only spaces become inherently homoerotic because, as

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<sup>230</sup> Giovanni Bianchi, *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani*, [electronic resource] (ECCO, 1755).

Eve Sedgwick writes, the idea of the homosocial (describing social bonds) and the idea of the homosexual (describing romantic or sexual bonds) “need not be pointedly dichotomized” for women since female homosociality “can intelligibly dominate the entire continuum.”<sup>231</sup> By “continuum,” she means the continuum between “women-loving-women” and “women promoting the interests of women,” a model similar to Adrienne Rich’s “lesbian continuum,” which posits that intense, passionate relationships between women, whether sexual or not, can fall under the category of lesbianism, and that what she calls “genital sexuality” need not be required nor occluded in this analysis. The anecdote of the seraglio contains heavy implications of sex and its repression—De Busbecq mentions that unsliced phallic foods are not permitted and that the women are under constant surveillance.<sup>232</sup> In the eighteenth century, Turkish women’s spaces are mentioned again in Mary Wortley Montagu’s letters from her travels to Adrianople.<sup>233</sup> In *A Treatise of Hermaphrodites*, all the accounts Jacob provides come from countries other than England. To open his first anecdote, he claims that “the hotter the climate, the stronger the inclination to venery,” suggesting that women’s bodies become more masculine in presentation with the addition of heat, and therefore, women living in hotter climates would be born with an enlarged clitoris as opposed to it spontaneously growing as punishment for lesbian sex.<sup>234</sup> One of the only women who wrote (publicly) about lesbians in this way was Jane Sharp, whose 1671 *The Midwives Book* was in its fourth edition by 1725. She makes a brief mention of tribades in her discussion of the clitoris, claiming that ““some women have endeavoured to use it as men do theirs.””<sup>235</sup> In this description, she also claims that these women do not exist in England,

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<sup>231</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1985)

<sup>232</sup> Traub, “The Psychomorphology of the Clitoris,” 162-63.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>234</sup> Jacob, “A Treatise on Hermaphrodites,” 19.

<sup>235</sup> Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book* (London, 1671), quoted in Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women* (London: Bello, 1993), 40.



inherently othering, exoticizing, and racializing the phenomenon as well as “resurrec[ting] the colonialist imperative.”<sup>236</sup> The idea that tribades specifically, due to their enlarged clitoris and its resulting sexual implications, did not exist in England was, of course, false, and stories like *The Female Husband* prove this, though in a more realistic way: Mary Hamilton’s genitals are never speculated upon, and the way she and her various partners have sex is never described (though it is heavily implied when she is arrested and “something of too vile, wicked, and scandalous a nature, [is] found in the Doctor’s trunk,” most likely a dildo<sup>237</sup>). Hamilton is never referred to as a hermaphrodite either, but this more discreet telling of the story seems to be Fielding’s own preference, especially as someone who already had a strong literary and theatrical reputation—and even his own polite version of events seems to be too much for him at some points. Giovanni Bianchi also does not describe any detailed sexual encounters in his telling of Catharine Vizzani’s story, but his postmortem description does include extensive detail on her body and genitals and compares her to stories he knows about tribades, so the idea of the tribade as a “specter” certainly did guide the discourse around lesbians, including (and quite strongly, too boot) those who wished to write about their genital conformations. Texts of this sort, like Jane Sharp’s *Midwives Book* and Nicholas Venette’s *The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d*, which were geared toward heterosexual marriage and reproduction, still give mention to tribades in descriptions of the clitoris. Venette’s pamphlet, of course, mentions Sappho directly alongside, writing that “this part, lascivious Women, often abuse. The Lesbian Sappho would never have acquired such indifferent Reputation, if this part of hers had been less.”<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Traub, “The Psychomorphology of the Clitoris,” 173.

<sup>237</sup> Fielding, *The Female Husband*, 21.

<sup>238</sup> Nicolas Venette, *The Mysteries of Conjugal Love Reveal’d* [Electronic Resource] (ECCO [publisher not identified], 1707), 15.

Bianchi's introduction of Vizzani continues by describing her as "so far from being inferior to *Sappho*, of any of the *Lesbian Nymphs*, in an Attachment for those of her own sex, has greatly surpassed them in Fatigues, Dangers, and Distress, which terminated in a violent death."<sup>239</sup> As in so many other mentions of female husbands and tribades, Sappho as the original lesbian appears. This time, it is comparing Vizzani's eventual fate ("terminated in a violent death) as well as that of Sappho in Ovid's poem "Sappho to Phaon,"<sup>240</sup> whose plot was commonly accepted as what truly happened to Sappho, which ends with her suicide after Phaon rejects her—death becomes the ultimate punishment for homosexuality. Bianchi provides some details that help to explain Vizzani's sexuality and manner of dress, like the fact that she was always "reserved and shy towards young Men, but would be continually romping with her own Sex, and some she caressed with all the Eagerness and Transport of a Male Lover,"<sup>241</sup> but this is the extent of his etiology. These instances serve as examples of her sexuality early on rather than a search for a single moment (or series of moments) which could be identified as her corrupting influence.

This obsession with a cause for lesbianism was an obsession with a cure, and the obsession, as evidenced by cautionary notes, indicates a very real fear that women could be corrupted by merely reading about lesbian encounters. The obsession also displays a prevailing understanding at the time—that illicit sexual behaviors came as a result of being corrupted in some way, either by reading inappropriate material or by being exposed to it directly (with the exception of Vizzani's story, which does not attempt to trace a fixed point or several points in her early life at which she may have been corrupted, but rather examines her body's possible

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<sup>239</sup> Bianchi, *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani*, 2.

<sup>240</sup> In 1712, a new version of Ovid's *Epistles* was published, which included his poem "Sappho to Phaon," translated by Alexander Pope. Pope's translation was the most popular in the eighteenth century, but was certainly not the first to vernacularize (and, of course, intentionally obfuscate the queerness in) Sappho's "story" for the public.

<sup>241</sup> Bianchi, *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani*, 3.

proclivities postmortem). The lesbian story in *Supplement to the Onania* even contains both, where the young woman is corrupted by her chambermaid as well as having read too much “Martial, Juvenal, Ovid &c...Books, Rochester, and Plays.”<sup>242</sup> Mary Hamilton is seduced by her first partner, a more experienced lesbian.

Charlotte Charke, however, also uses childhood indicators to make clear the cause of her behavior, and for her, like Vizzani, the desire to wear men’s clothing and be with women came naturally. Charke, too, moves away from etiology and toward a self-naturalization, at least for her cross-dressing, which is surprising considering her focus on self-pathologization in many of her scenes that code as queer. While Charke so deeply feared being seen as a deceptive, corrupting influence herself, Bianchi alleges that Vizzani’s initial relationships with women were relatively innocent, with the deception not beginning until much later. Fielding’s story, too, traces a relatively “normal” childhood for Mary Hamilton until she is corrupted by Anne. Even in a narrative where innateness reigns, like Vizzani’s, lesbianism is still ultimately a deceptive subject position. These juxtapositions of innocent relationships against predatory, corrupting ones in these fictions defines exactly what a chaste romantic friendship versus a sexual relationship looked like between women, indicating that there was certainly a line between close friendship and a romantic or sexual relationship, and an easily visible one at that. With a wider knowledge of what read publicly as queer, women were likely able to tailor their images and outward appearances of their lesbian relationships to maintain a veneer of chaste friendship. This accords with Emma Donoghue’s assertion that

For each wife who turned her female husband over to the police as a fraud...there may have been some who never knew the difference in the dark, some who found out and were not discontented, and others who knew from the beginning and preferred it that way.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Anonymous, “A Supplement to the Onania,” 245.

<sup>243</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 70.

As an adolescent, Vizzani courted a girl her age “under Pretence of learning Embroidery; and, not satisfied with these Interviews by Day, scarce a Night passed, but she appeared in Man’s Cloaths [sic], under her Charmer’s Window.” Unlike Fielding’s clear insistence that every woman Mary Hamilton had a relationship with did not know she was a woman, it is clear that Vizzani’s “charmer” knew she was female, based on the very activity she uses as a pretense to get to know the girl, which a man would not have been likely to do. A bit of deception appears here in the word “pretense,” implying she had ulterior motives, but the deception here is in motive, not through dress. Bianchi also notes that “she appeared in Man’s Cloaths” for her nightly visit, indicating this was not yet something she did in day-to-day life yet. And Margaret, the girl Vizzani courts, obviously knew Vizzani was female, so she is not deceived. The deceptions that resemble those of Mary Hamilton come later on in the story, and Bianchi’s descriptions of Vizzani’s early life seem to indicate a slight understanding of sexuality as something natural and unchangeable, rather than a result of corruption and incorrect upbringing. There appears no argument that Vizzani wore men’s clothing to deceive women, since she meets the first girl she courts in embroidery class, implying that this was more a preference than a means of deception. Of course, Bianchi is able to make these claims about Vizzani without being called a tribade himself.

Vizzani’s story diverges from other female husband and lesbian narratives in a myriad of ways, and even though it contains several mainstay details, it provides a slightly more sensitive portrayal of a female husband than that of Fielding, though it still takes a condemnatory tone in quite a few places. In her later teenage years, Vizzani finds a job as a servant, and passes as male for nearly her entire tenure until some suspicion arises. The more Fielding-like condemnatory language saturated with moral panic returns rather quickly once Bianchi begins to describe

Vizzani's various relationships, referring to her as "so barefaced and insatiable in her Amours."<sup>244</sup> However, before Bianchi can give much more detail to the description of her activities with the wenches where she worked, Cleland inserts his own commentary on Bianchi's choice to include this information:

The Doctor enters into a nauseous Detail of her Impostures, which is the more inexcusable, they not being essential to the main Scope of the Narrative. These, if agreeable to the *Italian Goût*, would shock the Delicacy of our Nation.<sup>245</sup>

It is interesting that John Cleland considers a description of this to be "nauseous" and "not...essential to the main Scope of the Narrative." If the narrative is meant to detail Catharine Vizzani's various escapades while dressed as a man, it is curious why Cleland would argue for its censorship. The rhetoric of othering and exotifying lesbians returns, with Cleland claiming that its very mention would "shock the Delicacy of our Nation." Bianchi's own view of Vizzani is not, however, so sympathetic as to be accepting. When she is wounded, Bianchi expresses his belief that "she drew it upon herself by the Licentiousness of her Amours," and calls her desires "unnatural." And, because women in these types of stories are never allowed to get away with their "crimes" (though this is to be expected from stories that were publicly known and probably portrayed negatively in newspapers and pamphlets), Vizzani is killed as she runs away with the village minister's niece, after their chaise breaks down and servants catch up with them. Cleland's translation of one part of this narrative's title is "killed for an Amour with a young Lady," but this is not how Vizzani actually dies. The title gives the impression that she was discovered and executed specifically for her sexual and gender transgressions, but her death is one of happenstance. It is also on her deathbed that she reveals that she is a woman to the minister's niece, Maria, whose reaction is not described, but who keeps with Vizzani's final

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<sup>244</sup> Bianchi, *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani*, 8.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

request to have a virgin burial. As she lays dying from an infected bullet wound, Bianchi chooses to reveal what he believes is the real reason behind Vizzani's choice to reveal herself to Maria.

Because the bullet wound is in her thigh, Vizzani was forced to remove her

leathern Contrivance, of a cylindrical [sic] Figure, which was fastened below the Abdomen, and had been the chief Instrument of her detestable Imposture...and laid it under her Pillow; and now, brought to a Sense of the Heinousness of her Courses, she disclosed her Secret to the charitable Maria de Colomba.<sup>246</sup>

Bianchi, it seems, imagines that Vizzani had some sort of revelation or retrospective embarrassment on her deathbed, and for this reason, requested that her womanhood be revealed to all through a virgin burial. In reality, it is more than likely that Vizzani knew that her womanhood would probably be discovered after her death anyway.

This narrative, like *The Female Husband*, further emphasizes the inferiority of her sexuality by deliberately mentioning a dildo. In both these narratives, it is mentioned as proof of her sexual encounters with women, since there were few other ways sex between women could be conceived of, particularly when one woman was thought to be impersonating a man, therefore deceiving them. The revelation of Vizzani's dildo as one of the mechanisms with which she (was thought to have) deceived women is interesting given Bianchi's later commentary on Vizzani's clitoris. As evidenced by the earlier medical texts, the primary way these physicians were able to conceive of two women having sex was if the clitoris of one was large enough to penetrate the other, since the hegemonic understanding of sex was that it was definitionally heterosexual and therefore penetrative. Bianchi's implicit conclusions about Vizzani's sexual behavior, including both her use of a dildo to (in his view) dupe women as well as his shock that her clitoris was normal-sized, are evocative of conflicting understandings of lesbian sex via what modern terminology would deem a bioessentialist view of gender and sex. The only possible reason these

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 35.

doctors could propose as to why a woman would use a dildo (on another woman, that is, and not just on herself) would be to play the role of a man, and what reason would a woman want to do this other than to convince her sexual partner she was a man? This confusion over Vizzani's potential reasons for using a dildo for sex is rooted in discursive constructions of lesbian sex as strictly clitoral, and therefore incommensurable with a phallic instrument. And for the doctors examining Catharine Vizzani, the possibility for considering both of these types of sex as lesbian instead of just one does not seem to be available.

It is only after Vizzani's death that *The True History and Adventures of Catharine Vizzani* becomes a medical text, and Bianchi's tone changes drastically from that of condemnation and deterrence to that of wonder, bewilderment, and fascination. He is able to tell she is a virgin from her "fine found Hymen"<sup>247</sup> that is "without the least Laceration."<sup>248</sup> His tone of abhorrence returns briefly when he comments on one public perception of her as "nothing less than a Saint, having preserved her Chastity inviolate"<sup>249</sup> while he knows her true nature: "her making Love, and with uncommon Protervity, to Women...were flagrant Instances of a libidinous Disposition; Proceedings incompatible with any virtuous Principle, or so much as Decency."<sup>250</sup> Her "true virginity" is not commendable because she was not fully virginal in Bianchi's eyes. This moment troubles the idea of virginity, and also seems to momentarily consider lesbian sex as sex. Although, this consideration may also be due to the fact that she took the virginities of other women, since the hymen is the physical evidence for this, considering she used a dildo. And in the end, her pathologization all comes back to her status as a woman in the heterosexual reproductive structure—even in death, the only thing that matters, and is outwardly displayed on

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 41.

her corpse, is her virginity. Her death, to Bianchi (and to his readers, he hopes, considering he intends this to be a condemnatory and cautionary piece), is a punishment for her behavior, and the significance of her “true virginity” is a means of deliberately forcing her back into the heteropatriarchal hierarchy she tried so desperately to escape.

What connects Vizzani’s narrative the most strongly to the medico-sexual texts of the day is the commentary on her clitoris Bianchi makes during her autopsy. He writes:

The Clitoris of this young Woman was not pendulous, nor of any extraordinary Size...and as is said, to be that of all those Females, who, among the Greeks, were called Tribades, or who followed the Practices of Sappho; on the contrary, her’s was no far from any unusual Magnitude, that it was not to be ranked among the middle-sized but the smaller.<sup>251</sup>

The fact that an enlarged clitoris was sure to be the final clue in uncovering a lesbian indicates that discourses circulated in medical texts, including pseudomedical hermaphrodite studies, guided the already-growing public consciousness of lesbians at the time. The fact that women purported to be lesbians were so often confirmed to have an enlarged clitoris is evidence of confirmation bias rather than an actual phenomenon, but it was normally the other way around—either the woman’s already-enlarged clitoris gave her a propensity to lesbianism, or the clitoris was found first, and then lesbianism confirmed. The discursive pattern of viewing the clitoris as an inherently lesbian body part was developed in medical and pseudomedical texts that circulated among both physicians and the public, which sometimes copied each other almost verbatim. Donoghue argues that the prevalence of these exaggerated stories reveal a lot about the “social fears of female sexuality,” which tie back to the reasons for male discursive control by refusing to vernacularize texts mentioning the clitoris for quite some time.<sup>252</sup> These embellished narratives influenced each other and created an expectation of a large clitoris purely through

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 43-44.

<sup>252</sup> Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 31.



hearsay and anecdotes printed so many times over in different iterations that their original contexts became unrecognizable. Another reason Donoghue gives for the seemingly incessant phenomenon of one type of woman's clitoris almost always confirming a physician's assumptions is misconceptions of the size of a normal clitoris.<sup>253</sup> These misconceptions appear in *Catharine Vizzani*, where Bianchi and several other physicians are astonished that Vizzani's clitoris is smaller than average rather than enlarged like that of a tribade. She most likely had a normal-sized clitoris, but Bianchi was so shocked at her "normal" body that he may have perceived it to be smaller than what he considered to be average. This small observation is just one example of how beliefs with little basis in fact infected the societal discourse around lesbianism.

With these discourses permeating all manner of literary genres, from short stories to medical treatises to pornography (particularly *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*), they were practically inescapable. As she wrote her memoir, Charke was certainly aware of the discursive implications of her past actions as well as the resulting social consequences. Though her repentant tone only comprises one layer of Charke's literary intention, it is the one she hopes will sway the public in her favor. This concern for her reputation is evident in her many remarks throughout the memoir, frequently expressing regret for actions she took in the past. Her penitent tone, signified when she refers to herself as her "father's repentant child,"<sup>254</sup> displays, on the surface, her anxieties about the public's scrutiny and assumptions about her. For example, her name appears in a long list of individuals chronicled in *The dramatic history of Master Edward, Miss Ann, Mrs. Llwhuddwhydd, and others*, where the author writes that

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 11.

Charlotte Charke used to pride herself, that her company, her ladies at least, were all vestals.... This daughter of Colley Cibber, the late Poet Laureate, was a lady of surprising singularity; but the oddities of the human mind are unaccountable.<sup>255</sup>

The word “vestal” in this context most likely means “virgin,” and as evidenced by the examples of the public perceptions of virginity, virginity only held weight when it came to heterosexual sex. Stevens mentions that Charke’s “ladies” were virgins, but not Charke, obviously since she has a child—but the fact that she attracted the sort of women who might join a group of virgins is undeniable, and the author feels it important enough to include in a brief description of her. Its inclusion is implicitly queer-coding, as groups of unmarried women found themselves the subjects of several narratives in the eighteenth century.<sup>256</sup> He also mentions Colley Cibber, whose own reputation plays a large role in Charke’s own fame. Much of the general public knowledge of Charke can be attributed to her father’s fame, though Charke’s own reputation as a breeches actress was significant enough, evidently, to label her a “woman of surprising singularity.” However, what stands out most in this short comment on Charke is the use of the word “oddity.” In noting that the “oddities of the human mind are unaccountable,” he implies that there is something different or strange about her, and Charke was well aware of this public perception of her. The use of the word “oddity” to describe Charke is intentional. The word “queer,” having been reclaimed by those with non-normative sexualities and genders within recent history, was weaponized against LGBTQ individuals in the first place due to its original meaning of “strange” or “odd.” But what exactly is “odd” about Charke’s mind? What makes her a “woman of surprising singularity” besides her theatrical reputation? This short description of her may

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<sup>255</sup> George Alexander Stevens, *The Dramatic History of Master Edward, Miss Ann, Mrs. Llwhuddwhydd, and Others. The Extraordinaries of These Times. Collected from Zaphaniel's Original Papers. Illustrated* (London: British Library, 1743), 134-35.

<sup>256</sup> These include works like Sarah Scott’s *Millennium Hall*, a description of a commune of unmarried women, Delarivier Manley’s “Ladies of the New Cabal,” a derisive description of a society of queer women, and Margaret Cavendish’s play *The Convent of Pleasure*.

function as an indicator of how the greater public viewed Charke and corroborates her own perceptions—if not as explicitly queer, then as strange or different in a queer (using both its definitions simultaneously here) way. Charke’s oddness and “singularity” came both from her theatrical reputation as a breeches actress as well as Stevens’s claim that she used to pride herself on only associating with women. Combined with her self-mythologization and her earlier mention of her “genius,” it becomes clear that “oddity” certainly codes as queer in this declaration. Elfenbein writes that “[e]ighteenth-century treatises often associated this daring and wildness with androgyny and with unsuitability for traditional domestic arrangements,” the “daring and wildness” being that which is associated with unprecedented, unconventional literary production.<sup>257</sup> Charke’s self-mythologization as a “genius” may be connected to the wider uses of “genius” at the time, which correlated with someone attempting to prove their distinctiveness in a sea of university-educated, wealthy, nepotism-benefiting writers, and in order to do so, they had to “demonstrate [this] daring and wildness.”<sup>258</sup> Charke, of course, was not one of these—when she published her memoir, she was much older with a much more established reputation, as well as her connections to her famous father. But her use of this word retrospectively rather than to describe herself at the present time of writing, especially with her remark that her marriage ended it, indicates that her “genius” was something that was inhibited by heterosexuality and, therefore, an *odd* kind of genius.

Stevens is not the only person to use the word “oddity” when describing Charlotte Charke. Charke, in fact, refers to herself in this way several times in an early scene in her *Narrative*. She proclaims her belief that “when they know my History, if Oddity can plead any Right to Surprize and Astonishment, I may positively claim a Title to be shewn among the

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<sup>257</sup> Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius*, 13.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

Wonders of Ages past, and those to come.”<sup>259</sup> In other words, she considers herself an oddity, is unsurprised when others do so, and understands that her experiences and deeds characterize her as such. Directly after this, she also vows not to conceal anything from her readers so as not to

deprive [them] of that pleasing Satisfaction, or conceal any Error, which I now rather sigh to reflect on; but formerly, thro’ too much Vacancy of Thought, might be idle enough to justify than condemn.<sup>260</sup>

Here, she gives reasoning as to why she provides such detail, especially in experiences that would certainly categorize her, in the eyes of many, as an “oddity.” She understands that there is a “pleasing Satisfaction” in knowing intimate details, especially in scenes with a degree of illicitness, and remarks that in the past, she would have justified her behavior, but sees fit to condemn it now. This entire justification carries two meanings: the first, that she is aware of her public reputation and therefore is writing what she knows will be entertaining and desired by her general audience, and the second, that those like her might read her story and take direction and pleasure from it. Because of her repentant tone, we can infer that the writing to those like her functions more as a cautionary measure, instructing these individuals so that they know what *not* to do when leading such a life. Furthermore, the idea that the satisfaction of knowing is “pleasing” also acknowledges those who might identify with these particular experiences—this is not “supposed” to exist, and yet, she renders it visible and available in her writing.

Charke furthers her double-writing self-mythologizing, citing her “genius” and “oddness” in several different instances. She repeatedly emphasizes this “oddness” throughout the memoir, particularly at the beginning. She explains that her education “might have been sufficient for a Son instead of a Daughter,” and that she was taught to read and write in both English and French quite early.<sup>261</sup> This statement alone, however, does not seem to be enough for Charke to convince

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<sup>259</sup> Charke, *A Narrative of the Life of Charlotte Charke*, 10.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

readers of her strangeness from an early age—she was not only educated like a boy, but she was also decidedly unfeminine, having been “never made much acquainted with the necessary Utensil which forms the housewifely Part of a young Lady’s Education, call’d a Needle.”<sup>262</sup> This initial example of her childhood gender transgression seamlessly transitions to a scene whose place in her narrative is, like her earlier vow to satisfy the reader, written toward two audiences simultaneously. These moments Charke provides are similar to the ones Bianchi gives in his description of Catharine Vizzani’s childhood, and the ones Fielding desperately searches for in Mary Hamilton’s life. Because Charke includes these in a similar narrative, it is evident that she surely had some familiarity with how a female husband narrative was typically structured, and therefore attempts her own self-etiology to placate her heterosexual readers and maintain her apologetic tone.

She begins her first self-etiology by reminding readers that she “[has promised] to conceal nothing that might raise a Laugh,” and refers to the incident as a “Specimin [sic] of [her] former Madness.”<sup>263</sup> The apologetic, self-deprecating, and self-pathologizing tone she takes sets up her primary audience (the general reading public) to expect a highly ridiculous scene, which she certainly provides through her further usage of self-othering language as she recounts a moment in her childhood where she put on her father’s clothes:

...and little Dimity Coat; which I artfully contrived to pin up, as well as I could, to supply the Want of a Pair of Breeches...and an enormous bushy Tie-wig of my Father’s, which entirely enclos’d my Head and body, with the Knots of the Ties thumping my little Heels as I marched along...with the Weight of a monstrous Belt and a large Silver-hilted Sword...But, behold, the *Oddity* of my Appearance soon assembled a Croud [sic] about me...and *walked myself into a Fever*, in the *happy Thought* of being taken for the ‘Squire.<sup>264</sup> (my italics)

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 12-13.

The language Charke chooses in this moment is comical, and even works to make this moment seem endearing, especially the description of being covered by her father's wig, the "monstrous belt," and the large sword that she "could scarce drag along."<sup>265</sup> The "Drollery of [her] Figure,"<sup>266</sup> as she terms it, is emphasized through the description of the clothes as "enormous," "monstrous," and "large." This visibility is further underscored by her use, again, of the word "oddity." The "oddity of [her] appearance" is not only made clear through the ill-fitting outfit, but specifically because it is a man's outfit—it is doubtless that a girl wearing her mother's clothes, for example, would draw attention as well, but in a different way. The "odd" quality of her appearance is due to her dressing in men's clothing, but because she is a toddler, she is not reprimanded in any way. She is, however, full of "Shame and Disgrace" when she must be "forc'd into [her] proper Habiliments," which quietly makes clear in what clothing she feels the most comfortable.<sup>267</sup> This scene reads in two ways, both commensurate with Charke's style of double writing. On one level, it is a comical recounting of a moment from her childhood which reads as an origin point for both her history of cross-dressing as well as her acting ability and love of performance.

Like Fielding attempts with Mary Hamilton, this scene satisfies the public's desire for distinct etiologies of queerness, which are confirmed in each work, with each writer, including Charke, pinpointing (or attempting to pinpoint) childhood moments that foreshadowed queerness. Why include these? For Fielding and Bianchi, it was a vital piece of their etiological explorations. If moments in childhood where queerness visibly instantiates are identified, then they can be easily pathologized and controlled. Charke pathologizes herself, making her anecdotes both comical scenes as well as etiological speculations. Charke's second intention for the anecdote is strongest when she describes how she feels while wearing these clothes, walking

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

herself “into a Fever, in the happy Thought of being taken for the ‘Squire,’” and this moment of euphoria and seemingly unconscious acknowledgement is cleverly encoded here directly alongside a story she claims to include to make people laugh, and that she even refers to as her “former madness.” This pattern of subtly-coded queer acknowledgements resembles the tactics of some earlier lesbian poets. Anne Finch, as I have argued in my second chapter, seems to make her short treatise on friendship, “Friendship Between Ephelia and Ardelia,” both a commentary on and a call for more companionate marriages, but it simultaneously reads as a declaration of romantic love and a marriage vow between two women, and never mentions husbands at all. Here, we see a concrete pattern among lesbian writers where they encode their desires and critiques in plain sight in works that appear to have a different motive, but with the knowledge that those who know and understand will recognize it.

The revelation of Charke’s indifference toward her husband, among other items, is a subtle yet intentional clue. Her lack of attraction to men in general is only detectable by her second audience. She acknowledges her own queerness in some places, like repeatedly describing herself as an “oddity.” However, there is both an appeal to the general public, whom she knows will read her work, and a secret entreaty to other lesbians by intentional self-deprecating trivialization of her own queer experiences to simultaneously appease the public and present them as extant and epistemologically available. And though Charke’s narrative is quite different than the poetry of Philips, Killigrew, Finch, and Rowe, the lesbian thematics remain the same: commentary on compulsory heterosexuality, ontological and epistemological un/availability, double writing, and encoded critique. However, Charke uses the additional queer theme of self-mythologization through describing her “genius” and her “oddness.”

## Conclusions: Lesbian Etiology and Those Who Resisted It

There are four main patterns that connect nearly all the texts that construct the discourse around the eighteenth-century lesbian writers I have discussed in this study. The foundational detail for all these patterns is the obsessive speculation on the size of the clitoris and its bearings on women's sexuality, particularly its connections to lesbianism. In the majority of medical texts, it fits one of two models: in the cause model, one is born with an enlarged clitoris, which *causes* lesbian behavior, and in the effect model, the clitoris grows as a form of punishment for lesbianism, in turn pushing a woman toward more lesbian sex. The idea of the enlarged clitoris originates with beliefs about the poet Sappho and her own activities, and thus, she becomes associated with the clitoris in these texts, cited as the first “tribade” or “tommy.”

Within narratives, which sometimes overlapped with medical texts (especially in *The True History and Adventures of Catherine Vizzani*), the third and fourth patterns appear. In the third pattern, lesbians often don men's clothing and take the role of “female husbands,” tricking innocent virgins into marrying them. In the fourth pattern, a catalyst must always be found, and it is almost always corruption by an older, more experienced lesbian. There is one notable exception to this: in *The True History and Adventures of Catherine Vizzani*, the original Italian author Giovanni Bianchi—while still, of course, condemning the behavior—makes no great effort to find a single moment or repeated pattern in Vizzani's childhood that explains her presentation and sexuality in adolescence and adulthood. In its English publication, the translator, John Cleland, chastises Bianchi for not dedicating himself more strongly to excavating a cause for Vizzani's behavior. The only time Bianchi touches on a cause is his postmortem dissection of Vizzani is when he expresses his surprise over the normal size of her clitoris. And



yet, unlike narratives such as *The Female Husband* and even Charlotte Charke's own personal narrative, in which she certainly attempts to self-pathologize, Bianchi's account of Vizzani's life contains no initial scene of corruption, as in *The Female Husband*, nor does it display a series of events foreshadowing future behavior, as in *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke*. Nevertheless, *Catharine Vizzani* still represents the equation of large clitorises and lesbianism, and is therefore indicative, as are the rest of the medical texts and pamphlets I examine as well as similar publications, of an intense discursive focus on a lesbian etiology. That is, an obsessional search for the cause of lesbianism, as well as other deviant sexualities, so that they could be easily identified and curtailed in childhood.

The discursive spectre of the tribade has its foundations in the public obsession with lesbian etiology, and is constructed by and through exaggerated, vitriolic texts written by men. The body is the single focus, and many of the eighteenth-century terms for "lesbian," particularly those that appear more frequently in the earlier half of the century, stem from various Latin words for "rub" or "friction."

Because the publicly- and medically-constructed idea of lesbians was so rooted in the body, it would have been far easier, for a lesbian wishing to maintain her reputation, to avoid writing about the body altogether. Furthermore, with women's bodies being so implicated in heterosexual, reproductive hierarchy, it is easy to understand why disillusionment with the body and the usage of escapist modes feature heavily in lesbian poetry from the era. Katherine Philips's work actively critiques compulsory heterosexuality and reproduction by creating a poetic space for the soul to disconnect from the body altogether, specifically using her own version of the pastoral—a pastoral of one's own, perhaps—as a representation of this soul-connection realm. Three of her poetic successors, Anne Killigrew, Anne Finch, and

Elizabeth Singer Rowe, employed similar tactics when shifting their pastorals away from the body. Anne Killigrew explores the internal struggles of lesbians, particularly those for whom knowledge about lesbian possibilities and potentialities is not fully available. Her poem “On the Soft and Gentle Motions of Eudora” uses intricate metaphors, especially those related to music and sensory experience, and places them just out of reach as a means of representing the epistemological and ontological un/availability of lesbianism and lesbian desire. Anne Finch and Elizabeth Singer Rowe both use a tactic I call “double-writing.” Within this framework, the poem can appear to concern or argue for one thing, which serves as a distraction to the heterosexual audience, while simultaneously containing experiences, descriptions, or thematics that speak to a queer audience. For example, Rowe structures her eclogue “Love and Friendship: A Pastoral” as a parallel discussion, with each nymph (one representing heterosexuality and one representing homosexuality) speaking in the same number of lines. On the surface, this appears to place heterosexuality and homosexuality as equal options and in conversation with one another (which was, of course, radical enough in itself). However, within the poem, Sylvia, representing homosexuality, argues that her relationship with another nymph, Aminta, is far better than that of Amaryllis, who represents heterosexuality. And Charlotte Charke, too, double-writes in her narrative, at once claiming to be repentant and showcasing queer experiences in detail.

It is clear that there was a traceable resistance to male-dominated medical, legal, and public discourses of women-loving women within lesbian poetry in the eighteenth century, which is especially visible when examining these poems and poets against the backdrop of the spectre of the tribade, as well as medicalizing and pathologizing discourses. For Philips, Killigrew, Finch, and Rowe, and even for Charke, reaching other lesbians was possible and

achievable when done creatively. The constrained, overwritten body could, indeed, be made obsolete, and a new space inside which lesbians could truly, revolutionarily touch could be more than imagined—it could be realized through the power of writing.

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