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## The Upper-Class Bisexual Top as Romantic Hero: (Pre)dominant in the Social Structure and in the Bedroom

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Published online: October 2012

<http://www.jprstudies.org>

**Abstract:** I discuss variations in the cultural understanding of male sexuality, particularly the form of dominant male bisexuality personified by the heroes of my two Regency novels. Looking at human sexuality from the anthropological and historical perspectives, I see a "vertical divide," in which sexuality is categorized by a person's preferred role, inserter or receiver ("top" or "bottom"), being replaced by a "horizontal divide," based on the gender of a person's partners (the modern idea of sexual orientation). With their wealth, social status and sexual dominance, my upper-class bisexual heroes more closely resemble traditional (heterosexual) romance heroes than members of a sexual minority (LGBT), and their emotional evolution differs from that of their old-school counterparts only in number, as their relationships with both male and female partners are equalized through love.

**About the Author:** Ann Herendeen is the author of two Harper Paperbacks: *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander* (2008) and *Pride/Prejudice* (2010), a finalist for the 2011 Lambda Literary Award, Bisexual Fiction category. Her short story, "A Charming Ménage," appeared in the fourth Gay City anthology: *At Second Glance* (2011). An e-book series of sword-and-sorcery/women's fiction, "Lady Amalie's memoirs," consists of two novellas and four novels so far. Ann is a graduate of Princeton University, where she majored in English, and a lifelong resident of Brooklyn.

**Keywords:** male bisexuality, Regency romance, dominance, submission, human sexuality, homosexuality, social structure, Jane Austen, Georgette Heyer

As an illustration of the attractions of wealth and high social status in a marriage partner, it's hard to surpass Elizabeth Bennet's reply in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to her sister Jane's question as to how long she has loved Mr. Darcy: "I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley" (353; vol. 3, ch. 17). While the remark is presented as a typical jest from the wittiest of Austen heroines ("Another

entreaty that she would be serious, however, produced the desired effect”), some readers can’t help seeing a grain of truth in this supposedly humorous answer. We recall Elizabeth’s thoughts during her visit to Mr. Darcy’s beautiful grounds, “that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!” (note the exclamation point) and her “lucky recollection” that her “uncle and aunt would have been lost to [her]” which “saved her from something like regret” (235-236; vol. 3, ch. 1).

In my second novel, *Pride/Prejudice*, I develop Austen’s link between status and attraction, teasing out its sexual undertones. On his wedding night, Fitz(william) Darcy is momentarily deflated, literally and figuratively, upon learning that Elizabeth has seen him, naked and aroused, in the company of an equally naked and aroused Charles Bingley. Elizabeth attempts to joke her new husband into confidence and potency: “Although Charles is a very well-formed man, appropriate for a respectable four or five thousand a year, your far more magnificent appearance confirmed my every idea of the grandeur of a large estate, a house in town, and a clear ten thousand pounds” (Herendeen, *P/P* 318). This is the place in my book where the deliberate correlation of wealth, power and sexuality is stated most clearly, and as Elizabeth cheerfully admits, crudely. But the combination of high economic, social and sexual status as desirable ingredients in the romantic hero underlies all my fiction, and is an obvious theme in my two published novels: *P/P*; and *Phyllida and the Brotherhood of Philander*. That the romantic hero in each of these books is not simply a wealthy, upper-class man, but also a bisexual top, as dominant in the bedroom as he is in the social structure, is the twist on the Austen model that I wish to explore in this essay.

The connection these novels imply between the heroes’ social status and their dominant bisexuality seems to have struck some readers as not only confusing but contradictory. Consider, for example, the way that Meredith S. Faust began her presentation on my work at the 2011 PCA/ACA conference: “Many [ . . . ] old school romances depict sexuality according to strict patriarchal hegemonic heteronormative structures: masculinity rules. [ . . . ] Therefore, when I picked up Ann Herendeen’s *Phyllida* . . . a female / male / male polyamorous love story, I expected to see [ . . . ] characters whose understanding of relationships and preferences in relationships was evolved. [ . . . ] I was [ . . . ] astonished by the patriarchal and rigid heteronormative structures in place” (1). Faust seems to have assumed that a romance novel featuring bisexuality and polyamory would necessarily contest “old school” constructions of masculinity and sexuality, and I can understand why, given how the genre itself has “evolved” in recent years. Over the past three decades, after all, as first feminism and then “gay” liberation (now more inclusively seen as LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) brought into question the nature of “masculinity” and “femininity” and the very concepts of “men” and “women,” the popular romance novel has undergone profound changes. Contemporary romance novels—those written recently, including those set in the past—reflect readers’ increasingly diverse outlooks and advanced ideas of sex roles and relationship dynamics. Alpha males are more likely to be vampires or shape-shifters than human beings, and gender roles are constantly being reevaluated and renegotiated in romance subgenres like BDSM, m/m and paranormal. Members of minority groups such as African-Americans, gay men and lesbians and, occasionally, people with disabilities are the heroes and heroines of love stories from which they were not so long ago excluded. The idea of a romance hero who is wealthy,

upper-class, and sexually dominant seems at odds with a presumably “progressive” decision to cast this hero as a bisexual. To Faust, at least, it seemed positively retrograde.

Set during the English Regency (1811-1820), near the end of the Georgian era, my novels take place at a time when traditional ideas of social class were only beginning to be questioned. As I wrote them, I imagined heroes who embody late Augustan-age, [\[1\]](#) robust masculinity: men at the top of their society who enjoy every material advantage and who expect to control their partners. The characters of my heroes, Fitz in *P/P* and Andrew Carrington in *Phyllida*, are determined primarily by their social and economic class. Both are wealthy, even by the standards of their rarefied stratum of society; both are nephews of earls; and both are, I imagined, “tops,” men who prefer the dominant position in sexual activity. As their creator, I was making a deliberate connection between their social class and their sexuality—one which, as I hope to show, has some basis in actual history, however refracted through a novelist’s eyes.

What, though, of their bisexuality, their status as outsiders in a harsh, punitive, heteronormative society? At a time when same-sex love between men was a capital offense, how could these men also be at the top of their world?

To address these questions within the limited space of this article, I will have to survey changes in attitudes toward male human sexuality over time and place in a necessarily cursory fashion, concentrating on eighteenth-century England. I will be interpreting these changes from the point of view of a *novelist*, especially in their relation to the fiction that has directly influenced my own writing; I hope that this perspective will help me escape, at least in part, the solipsism of any author’s analyzing her own work, yielding me something to offer an academic forum on a popular genre of fiction. My intent is not to refute Faust (or any other scholar kind enough to discuss my work) but rather to contribute the viewpoint of both a writer and a longtime reader of the romance genre to the evolving scholarly conversation about it, and not just in the cases of *P/P* and *Phyllida*.

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“Homosexual behaviour is common among social animals, and is mainly expressed within the context of a bisexual sexual orientation,” Aldo Poiani declares in the abstract to his 2010 work on animal homosexuality. Poiani’s statement, something that would have seemed radical not so long ago, is now almost mainstream; it takes for granted a distinction between sexual acts (behavior) and an individual’s identity, his or her “sexual orientation.” Poiani goes further, applying the concept of sexual orientation to other animals besides human beings and, most radical of all, acknowledging “bisexual” as an orientation, one still not entirely accepted even within the LGBT community. [\[2\]](#)

If most animal “homosexuality” can be interpreted as behavior that occurs in the context of a bisexual orientation, it can also be said that, as far as we can tell from the sketchy historical record, most human “bisexuality” has occurred in contexts where modern ideas of “orientation” only awkwardly apply. From classical to early modern times, for example, sexuality was defined or categorized by what I call a “vertical” divide, based on a person’s role in the sexual act itself and in relationships, both sexual and social: a conceptual framework that spanned Greco-Roman antiquity, Christian Europe, and much of the Islamic world (Andrews and Kalpakli 11-15), and is also quite common elsewhere (Werner 330). The important distinction was who inserted or penetrated (the “top”) and

who received or was penetrated (the “bottom”). In vaginal heterosexual sex, the man is the inserter, the woman the receiver. Inserter/penetrator and receiver/penetrated defined the concepts of masculine and feminine, and the inserter/receiver distinction was applied to same-sex male relationships as well, influencing a society’s acceptance or rejection of the individual participants and of their place in the social structure.

This inserter/receiver understanding of gender identity and sex roles can take two forms (Werner 330-331). In one, the “gender-stratified society,” cisgender males (men who exhibit the appearance and behavior their society considers masculine) (“Cisgender”) are distinguished from “pathics,” men who engage in sex exclusively with other men and prefer the receiver role. Only the pathics are considered to be homosexual, and there is often a specific word in the language for them. Pathics may dress as women and perform women’s jobs, and in some societies they may marry a cisgender man as his second or third “wife.” The cisgender men who have sex with pathics are not considered to be homosexual and are not recognized as a separate group from men who do not engage in sex with pathics.

In the second type, the “age-stratified” society, boys or youths take the receiver role with older men, either in a monogamous relationship with a “mentor,” or in a “catamite” system in which the boys are available as sexual objects to older and socially powerful men. When the boys reach an age at which they are considered to be (young) men, they switch over to the inserter role with younger boys/men. In some age-stratified societies, the period of same-sex relationships is a distinct phase for all males between early adolescence and heterosexual marriage; in others, access to youths is a permanent privilege of masculine adulthood.

Many societies contain elements of both gender and age stratification, but among these various societies there are two constants: the view of cisgender males as “masculine,” whether or not they engage in homosexual behavior with pathics or boys; and the relegation of adult men who choose the receiver role to a separate category, pathics, distinguishable by their “effeminate” dress and behavior. Reinforcing the view of the receiver as taking the “feminine” role, K. J. Dover compares the acceptable behavior for a youth courted by an older man in ancient Greece to that of a proper Victorian lady (90). The modest youth, like the nineteenth-century woman, does not desire or seek out sexual intercourse for its own sake, but yields to an honorable proposal from a good man whom he admires. It is the adult masculine role to pursue and to take the top position in sex; it is the feminine or youthful role to submit to the bottom position, but only out of love for a worthy suitor.

Both age- and gender-stratified societies, then, might be said to be “heteronormative,” in the sense that even when a degree of same-sex male sexual behavior is accepted or encouraged, it occurs within a cultural context that feminizes the man or boy in the receiver role. In the gender-stratified society, the pathic is female-identified by appearance and behavior. In the age-stratified society, it is boys who are too young to show secondary sex characteristics that are acceptable objects of adult male attraction. Stratification, social hierarchy, is the crucial conceptual framework involved, *not* what we might think of now as “sexual orientation.” In fact, in both kinds of stratified society, adult men married to women might engage in sex with pathics or boys as their society allows, without their activity being labeled “bisexual” and without their identity as (heterosexual) men being questioned, as long as they do so in the active, penetrating role.

It is important to note that I am talking now only about socially-approved behavior. The fact that in ancient Athens adult men were not supposed to engage in the receptive role in same-sex relationships tells us very little about men's actual sexual behavior. The disapproval of adult males' taking the receiver role applied only to citizens (Dover 31-34). Working-class men, foreigners, and especially slaves were by definition on the bottom of this vertical divide, expected or required, for reasons of poverty or disenfranchisement, to engage in the receptive role with wealthy higher-ranking men.

By the time we come to early modern England, acceptable behavior no longer includes any same-sex activity. But the vertical distinction between masculine inserter/top and feminized receiver/bottom is still in place. Up until the middle of the seventeenth century, invisible homosexual relationships could exist within a hierarchical society that contained, along with the usual age and gender stratifications, a third one—social class—also present in ancient Greece. Master with servant or apprentice, schoolmaster with pupil, and gentry and noblemen with “boys” of all sorts, the Ganymedes and linkboys of Lord Rochester's Restoration-era contests with his mistress, “When each the well-looking linkboy strove t' enjoy, / And the best kiss was the deciding lot, / Whether the boy fucked you, or I the boy” (lines 38-40): all these couplings allowed the older or higher-ranking man to engage in the active sexual role while retaining his masculine identity, and we know from both public and private texts (diaries, letters, etc.) that such couplings were far from uncommon (Andrews and Kalpakli 125-129).

At the end of the seventeenth century, for complicated and much-debated reasons involving urbanization and the concentration in cities of young unmarried men, as well as the desire to persecute Roman Catholic institutions, male same-sex activity came to the attention of the legal and religious authorities. The sporadic single prosecutions of the 150 years following the passage of the Buggery Act of 1533 gave way to cycles of raids and hangings that both Bray (92) and Norton (*Mother* 16-18) relate to the development of a subculture of “molly houses” and the men (“mollies”) who frequented them. Since the law made no distinction between inserter and receiver, all men accused of “sodomy” were equally guilty, equally “unnatural,” and equally “gay,” and the old, vertical model of sexuality began to seem obsolete. Inserter/receiver or masculine/feminine no longer made sense as ways of describing or thinking about same-sex male relationships, and some Western European societies moved toward a third way of classifying sexual identity, the “egalitarian system.”

In an “egalitarian system,” as opposed to a stratified one, *all* men who engage in same-sex activity, whether inserter or receiver, cisgender or pathic, are considered to be homosexual (Werner 331). Under this new way of thinking, sexuality is defined, not by a vertical division, top and bottom, but by what we might call a *horizontal* division between “male” and “female” based on a person's (perceived) gender and the gender of his or her partner. This horizontal division is similar to, and perhaps the first step toward, the modern concept of sexual orientation or identity. In an egalitarian system, men who are consistently attracted to other men and choose men for their partners are classified as homosexual in orientation; men who consistently choose women are considered heterosexual.

I don't mean to suggest that the older conceptual model vanished away entirely. Indeed, the older, stratified system and the emerging egalitarian one sometimes converged as they grappled with male (homo)sexuality. Under the old system, the “unnatural” man

was the one who, as an adult, chose the bottom position. He was considered to be feminized, or partaking of both male and female identities (two-spirit, etc.). In the transitional eighteenth century, sexual subcultures, perhaps celebrating their freedom from the constrictions of earlier gender roles, were often characterized by effeminate behavior, cross-dressing, and the use of female nicknames by men whose occupations are conventionally masculine (butcher, bargeman, blacksmith, coal merchant, etc.), reinforcing this notion of sexual duality, androgyny, or even metaphoric hermaphroditism (Norton 93).<sup>[3]</sup> By the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, theorists like Havelock Ellis and Richard von Krafft-Ebing were debating whether the newly-defined group called “homosexuals” constitutes a “third sex,” and the idea that male homosexuals are “feminine” men while lesbians are “masculine” women became entrenched in the popular imagination (Norton, “Critique”), from which it has never entirely vanished. My fictional character Sylvester Monkton, a proud and outspoken man of exclusive homosexual orientation, expresses his (and my) exasperation with this enduring idea: “The world is so ignorant of these things, [that] they confuse buggery with incapability and a sodomite with a hermaphrodite” (Herendeen, *P/P* 214).<sup>[4]</sup>

As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has observed, this three-sex conceptual model necessarily created new suspect, boundary-crossing categories. What, for example, was one to do with that problematic figure, the “straight-acting and -appearing gay male” (Sedgwick, *Closet* 46)? And what, I would add, of the male bisexual? As an adjective, “bisexual” originally signified a pathic, “two-spirited,” androgynous, hermaphroditic quality: “having both sexes in the same individual” (“Bisexual”), precisely the confusion lamented by my Monkton. The older idea of a man who is attracted to members of both sexes, but is in no way “feminized” by that attraction—who is, quite the contrary, the ultimate in dominant masculinity precisely because of it—seems to me to have slipped out of learned discourse about the sexes with the arrival of the three-sex model. In a curious twist of history, however, it has lingered within popular culture, preserving the older, stratified model of sexuality even as the broader culture has embraced the egalitarian model.<sup>[5]</sup>

This version of the bisexual man—the one who is the inserter, the top, with “anything that moves”—shows up in both progressive and deeply conservative aspects of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Western culture. As recently as 2002, for example, the deliberately humorous title of a national publication for bisexuals was “Anything That Moves.” Less happily, Mark Simpson quotes the advice that openly bisexual author Colin MacInnes (Thirkell) received from his father—“What you must do, son, is become a fucker and not [ . . . ] a fucked” (69)—and notes that such admonitions help explain “why ‘bisexual’ is not an identity taken on by the vast majority of men who are bisexual in behaviour: they regard themselves as straight men who happen to have sex with other men” (209). From the few reputable studies that have been conducted, there does appear to be a small but genuine subset of men that enjoys dominating both male and female partners (Werner 335-336; Dixon 397). In a gender-stratified society—a society in which, as Faust said in her conference paper, “masculinity rules”—such men would find a comfortable home at the top of the economic and political hierarchy, since what we now think of as bisexuality is, in such contexts, an established, if often covert form of male dominance. Recall my earlier point about gender-stratified societies: they generally are, as we would now say, “heteronormative,” but they define adult masculinity in terms of male

dominance, and not in terms of the sex of one's partner. In such societies, the "straight man who happens to have sex with other men" is not an outlaw or outlier, but something like a cultural ideal, at least if he has the money and power to be "a fucker" and not "a fucked."

The aristocratic bisexual heroes of my Regency novels are precisely these sorts of men, unabashed tops (in every sense of the word) in a society still stratified by class and gender. No wonder Faust was all astonishment! In the egalitarian system, bisexuality has been reclassified from a mode of male dominance to an oppressed minority's sexual orientation, so that just like people of different ethnicity or racial heritage and people with disabilities, the bisexual male is someone whose rights are being trampled on by "The Man." My heroes have gone from *being* The Man to being Born This Way. And as the transition from gender- or age-stratified to egalitarian society can be seen as "evolution," an upward progression from discrimination against an outcast group to acceptance, progressive readers might mistakenly expect to find "evolved" modern men in my novels instead of men who (rather shockingly, I gather) recall the traditional romance heroes of the old-school, heteronormative romance. It is to those old-school heroes, my literary models, that I want to turn next.

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The modern popular romance novel, if we follow Pamela Regis in beginning with Richardson's *Pamela*, and progressing to Austen and Georgette Heyer, has been necessarily situated within its own heteronormative society. Its heroines are disenfranchised, inevitably by gender, and often additionally by poverty or inferior social status; its theme is the heroine's elevation, through romantic love and marriage, to a situation more appropriate to her nature, defined as intelligent, spirited and virtuous—a natural aristocrat. In such works as *Pride and Prejudice* and most of Heyer's historical romances, the agency of this elevation is a man with the requisite status and wealth to accomplish it. Only a Mr. Darcy or a Duke of Avon—an alpha male—can afford to marry purely for love, to choose a young woman of superior character without regard to her (lack of) fortune, land, or aristocratic connections.

The setting for my two novels, the England of 1811-1813, is a society in transition. A new, wealthy middle class is making inroads on the aristocracy's monopoly of power, but rank and title still establish a man's place in the hierarchy; the gay subculture exists, but for most people sexuality is still divided the old-fashioned, vertical way. In novels by Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson, wealthy and powerful men, including titled aristocrats, landed gentry, and merchant princes, reflect the privileges of rank in their sexual practices. Richardson's dedicated seducer-rapists, Fielding's cheerful libertines, Defoe's entrepreneurs, those dark lords of commerce—all enjoy the hunt, the chase and the conquest.<sup>[6]</sup> Sedgwick's interpretation of English literature at this time, however, teases out how transitions in class and in sexuality appear in the subtexts of some authors of the time, including the "feminization of the aristocracy" in the eighteenth century (*Men* 93, ch. 4) and evidence of "homosexual panic" in some male authors' Gothic novels (*Men* ch. 5).<sup>[7]</sup>

As for the fiction of Jane Austen, I would argue that Austen's place in the literary continuum is decidedly with the heterosexual and "masculine" first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>[8]</sup> Her only response to the Gothic is parody (*Northanger Abbey*), and the authors she admires, whether men (Richardson, Samuel Johnson) or women (Maria Edgeworth,

Frances Burney), wrote in the realistic tradition. From her position on the lower rungs of the gentry, Austen sets her works within her own milieu; influenced by her female contemporaries Edgeworth and Burney, she created a new kind of hero, appealing to women readers tired of being conquered. Empathetic and respectful, Austen's heroes are gentleman, not noblemen, and each accepts his female partner as an equal from the beginning. With one exception: that darkest of Austen heroes, Mr. Darcy. It's no coincidence that he's the most aristocratic and by far the wealthiest.

Writing a century after Austen, in a world transformed by extraordinary gains in women's social and legal status, Georgette Heyer likewise consistently rejects the sentimental and the Gothic, preferring Austen's humor and common sense. Building on Austen's transformation of the romance hero, but never losing sight of Mr. Darcy, Heyer glamorizes and, dare I say, romanticizes the upper-class man. Her heroes are paragons: educated and intelligent, fashionable and well-dressed, athletic and financially responsible—sound minds in exceptionally fine bodies. And however much they love the heroine, their expectations for marriage are traditionally masculine. The Heyer hero will be on top after marriage as before, and his only "feminization" is an appreciation for the woman who is his proper mate: not his equal, but his complement.

My two Regency novels are deliberate homages to Austen (*P/P*) and Heyer (*Phyllida*), and their respective heroes, Fitz Darcy and Andrew Carrington, are written to be as un-evolved as their literary predecessors. Andrew was imagined as the direct descendent of the domineering, alpha-male heroes of Georgette Heyer's romance novels,<sup>[9]</sup> while Fitz was simply my reading of Austen's most-desired hero, Fitzwilliam Darcy. Of course, my reading took place through a very particular set of historical and erotic lenses. Given the correlation of social class and sexuality in Mr. Darcy, how could I *not* see him as potentially (OK, to me, *obviously*) a bisexual dominant? As for Heyer's aristocratic heroes, many could easily be interpreted as bisexual tops with little or no change in their personality.

To me as both reader and author, the character of the traditional romance hero, from *Pamela* onward, already corresponds almost perfectly with what history and anthropology tell us about dominant male bisexuality in stratified sexual cultures. Like these old-school heroes, my particular type of "bisexual" hero dominates his partners, male and female, just as he dominates his society with his ten thousand pounds a year and his great estate, his control of electors and clergymen's livings—because the top is his rightful place in the world. He is "to the manner born," a phrase from a time when aristocratic behavior ("breeding") was thought to be transmitted, generation through generation, to those born into the top of society. For such a man, bisexuality of the "anything that moves" variety is a natural fit, reflecting the persona of the man who is born to power and accepts his role as leader. In the dichotomy of modern terminology, it is *who he is*, expressed naturally and happily, by *what he does*. To me, the hero's bisexuality enhances his masculinity, making him even more desirable to me as participant/heroine in the love story I am writing. His ability to top other men, and women, is proof, in my view, of his extraordinary virility.

This version of masculinity does not have to be cruel or selfish; it can be loving and generous, as it is, eventually, with both my heroes. *Eventually*—because the plot of the old school romance novel, from Richardson to Austen to the present, is mostly the story of an upper-class (and therefore, to Austen, morally suspect<sup>[10]</sup>) hero who is "properly



humbled” by love, and I wanted to use this plot as well. Just as the hero in heterosexual romances often begins with a negative outlook on women, love, and marriage (leaving him sexually predatory, rejecting love, and uninterested in monogamy), my bisexual heroes have been damaged by past loves, here inflicted not by women but by other men. Just as the hero in heterosexual romances is “humbled” by love for the heroine, emerging as an ideal husband only after an enforced metamorphosis from the pupa of a rather prickly caterpillar, my alpha-male bisexual heroes must evolve toward an emotional equality with *two* partners, male and female, making two parallel and simultaneous transformations. And, as in heterosexual romances, the transformed heroes must retain a degree of masculine pride, even dominance, the quality that made them so appealing (to me) in the first place.

In *Phyllida*, envisioned as an old-school romance of the highest order, I approached this challenge through a version of that oldest of old-school plots, the marriage of convenience. As we meet Andrew Carrington at the start of the novel, he is a man of large fortune who—after some heterosexual experimentation in his teens—thinks of himself simply as a “sodomite,” acting on his desires without apology or regret. Reconciled to the new egalitarian system which has made him an outsider, he is hopeful that his wealth and social status will allow him to live as he pleases (Herendeen, *Phyllida* 4, 31); to be on the safe side, however, and to do his family duty, he arranges to marry Phyllida Lewis, an impoverished young lady<sup>[11]</sup> who writes Gothic romances. Phyllida accepts his offer, agreeing to ignore his sexual orientation in return for access to his wealth and social position, but also in return for *his* willingness to ignore her continuing work as an author, so long as she continues to publish anonymously. As she finds herself falling in love with her “sodomite husband” and aroused rather than disgusted by his same-sex activity, Phyllida must reexamine her earlier, innocent ideas on physical and emotional love between men and women, as well as her fulfillment in the kind of marriage that society sees as mercenary, even if approved (67-68, 145-147). Andrew, meanwhile, must come to terms with the fact that he is aroused by and, in time, quite in love with his wife, even as he also pairs off, sexually and emotionally, with his male partner, Matthew Thornby, the tall, blond, muscular, financially comfortable son of a tradesman.<sup>[12]</sup>

Abrasive as he may be to modern sensibilities, Andrew is not envisioned as a morally challenged aristocrat but simply as sexually dominant. He’s cocky, not corrupt. His favorite form of sexual encounter is a sort of verbal / sexual sparring, filled with drawled insults and sneering orders, but he reserves “playing the game” (85, 168) for encounters with equals: men like Matthew, and certainly not women. How to “properly humble” such a hero? First, I unsettle Andrew by having Phyllida be less than pleased by what to him seemed a more than adequate performance on their wedding night (49-52), so that he’s forced to turn to his straight younger brother (oh, the humiliation!) for advice on how to satisfy her sexually. Next, he is emotionally wounded—that old trope —by the ending of a long-distance relationship with a young officer serving overseas: a turn that is quickly followed by a Big Misunderstanding that leaves poor Andrew convinced, quite erroneously, that he has not just failed to please his wife, but struck her in anger. Aghast, abashed, he finds himself impotent at the thought that he has abused his power. In a final twist, near the center of the book I have Andrew read Austen’s anonymously published *Sense and Sensibility*, believing his wife to be the author. He admires her talent, but is downright terrified at the thought of being married to such a brilliant writer. “She could eviscerate

him with a chosen phrase, demolish him with a sentence. His manhood would never withstand that cold scrutiny" (448).

Andrew's lowest point occurs when his emotional distress over the problems with his wife affects his sexual performance with Matthew (368-372). The aspect of his sexuality about which he has been most confident, his relationships with other men, has been undermined, but it's the *woman* who has unmanned him. While Matthew, an ideal partner, is properly encouraging and sympathetic, Andrew's return to healthy masculine sexuality requires the reparation of his relationship with Phyllida. Their rapprochement begins when Phyllida no longer perceives Andrew as a threat but as a wounded hero in need of healing. Instead of demanding that Phyllida submit to him in fulfillment of her wifely duty, Andrew requests that she share his bed, and only when she is ready (265). And it is here, in his flaccid state, that Andrew experiences his first genuinely egalitarian sexual moments. Unable to engage in intercourse, Andrew takes the "submissive"[\[13\]](#) role in oral sex, bringing Phyllida to full, screaming orgasm and giving Andrew the sense of accomplishment that has been lacking in their earlier "vertical" encounters. Not only does he acquire a new respect for women's powerful sexuality, but he reaps an immediate reward for his submission, as Phyllida reciprocates and brings him to his own first climax since his loss of confidence.

Over time, as the two become comfortable with each other, Andrew's recovery to dominant masculinity will be complete, but within an egalitarian, consensual context, without the earlier overtones of coercion. In their first encounters, despite the spark between them, Andrew's unconscious reliance on "the game" confused and frightened Phyllida. Her involuntary response to Andrew's dominant manner unnerved her, and she worried that there may be no clear line between consensual sex and rape (67-68). Once Andrew discovers that Phyllida responds to the teasing words of the game as well as any man, and once Phyllida recognizes the game as Andrew's peculiar but enjoyable sexual style and has gained the experience to participate in it as an equal, their lovemaking can become egalitarian regardless of who is on top in any particular act. Andrew signals their impending reconciliation by calling his wife a "slut" who is "hungry for cock" and threatening to strip off her inappropriate attire, to which Phyllida responds by calling him a "foulmouthed beast," a "brute" and a "fiend." As Andrew explains to the shocked bystanders, "Mrs. Carrington was merely expressing her love in our own subtle idiom" (419-420).

Andrew's necessary sexual evolution occurs almost entirely with his wife, as his feelings of pride and later on, love, require him to learn the differences in women's anatomy and responses. He can experiment with a beginner's level of nonthreatening equality, such as mutual oral gratification, and when Phyllida later tops him in bed it's at Andrew's invitation, following a spectacularly successful demonstration of the old, dominant method. With his male partner there are no such difficulties. Matthew's submissive desires are a perfect complement to Andrew's dominant ones; their only problems are caused by plot devices related directly or indirectly to Andrew's troubles with Phyllida. By the end of the story, Phyllida and Andrew are evolving into genuine versatility, while Andrew continues to enjoy the dominant role with Matthew. With both partners, Andrew adds words of love to his repertory while engaged in some form of dominant sexual activity (484,498-499), although the almost identical verbal role-playing ("slut" and "brute") will continue indefinitely.

Outside the bedroom, Andrew's social evolution is accomplished through clashes with both partners. Although Phyllida and Matthew may enjoy the submissive role in the bedroom, neither is submissive in character, and their strong wills challenge Andrew's authority as a gentleman of leisure and wealthy provider. Matthew continues to work at his father's business, while Phyllida insists on pursuing her career as author, writing it into the marriage contract. Both partners engage in the kind of teasing banter with Andrew that is the opposite of the obedience he expects from a wife or the deference of a working-class man. More seriously, they unintentionally (at first) and without malice deceive Andrew, for reasons of necessity and expedience (Phyllida) or simply because it's so easy (Matthew). Phyllida doesn't correct Andrew's mistaken ideas about her writing, finding it preferable to his discovering its true Gothic (and semi-autobiographical) nature, but also enjoying the secret pleasure it gives her, a form of emotional and financial independence. In a similar fashion, she lets Andrew continue to believe he struck her, despite the cost to their marital happiness, convinced that her silence is protecting Andrew from the threats of a blackmailer.

It's only with Matthew's seemingly lighthearted deceptions that Andrew confronts all the deepest conflicts of wealth and social class. Andrew perceives Matthew as his inferior in wealth as well as socially, and Matthew deliberately encourages Andrew's misconceptions, lapsing into Yorkshire-inflected speech on occasion and complaining about the expensive lodgings at the Brotherhood. As it turns out, Matthew's "tradesman" father is an obscenely wealthy cotton baron, the personification of the social upheaval wrought by the Industrial Revolution on the English nobility's inherited wealth and titles, leaving Matthew more than a match for Andrew in size, in strength, and in wealth. He can buy and sell Andrew if not "ten times over," "at least once or twice," and is the beneficiary of a similar education (Harrow to Andrew's Eton) (489, 528). What's worst, from Andrew's point of view, is that Matthew is not ashamed of his inferior background. He works by choice, not out of necessity, despite having enough ready capital to buy a landed estate, and he deliberately provokes Andrew's displays of upper-class hauteur, as when Andrew covers his hurt at Matthew's seeming abandonment by correcting his expression of going "up" to the country, instead of "down" (454).

But Andrew's evolution toward equality with his male partner is relatively easy. As the men's climactic confrontation shows, their fistfight turned into lovemaking (chap. 27), it is the logical outcome of all of Andrew's—and his world's—conflicted desires. Andrew has discovered the truth of his lover's vast fortune, earned through despised "trade" rather than inherited, as Andrew's is, and the reality of Matthew's gentlemanly education. "The Yorkshireman is heavier, but Carrington's got style," one of the upper-class spectators remarks (493), and as the fight progresses, Andrew's style triumphs over Matthew's brawn. For Andrew, there's a thrill to be had in topping someone who outmatches him in size, in strength, and in wealth. In the Heyer model, upper-class style (manners, "breeding") has value beyond its "weight;" the rising middle classes emulate their social superiors because they want to join their ranks, not displace them, and the aristocratic bisexual top may dominate the heavier middle-class or working man—but only with his acquiescence.

Once I moved from writing an original work to interpreting Austen's famous novel, I felt as if I was entering a darker, harsher universe. My original creation, *Phyllida*, and its male protagonists, Andrew and Matthew, were shaped in part by the worldview of Georgette Heyer and her relatively benign assessment of upper-class masculine dominance.

Austen, by contrast, takes a more jaundiced view of the aristocracy, male and female, and its assumption of privilege.<sup>[14]</sup> The conflicts of wealth and social class are explicit in Austen's novel, leading me to focus on bringing out the implicit bisexuality in mine. Austen's Fitzwilliam Darcy is an aloof, arrogant, and disdainful man at the beginning of her novel, and his "humbling" by Elizabeth Bennet is not only an argument in favor of equalizing male-female relationships but a representation of the superiority of middle-class manners and morals. Elizabeth rejects Mr. Darcy's first proposal because he has not behaved in a "gentleman-like manner" (Austen 188; vol. 2, ch. 11), and from the beginning of the novel it is his friend, Mr. Bingley, whose father made his fortune in trade, who is described as "gentlemanlike" (12; vol. 1, ch. 3).

Austen's novels have become classics both of popular romance and of English literature, to an extent almost unimaginable a century ago. Perhaps it's their iconic status that colors our perceptions of their characters. While I deliberately wrote Andrew Carrington to be as arrogant and overbearing as the most self-assured of Heyer's heroes—and readers have read him that way—I've been astonished at reactions to my Fitz, with some readers apparently remembering Mr. Darcy as having been flawless from the beginning. As Faust says: "Thus, instead of idolizing Mr. Darcy as the perfect mate, as the reader does in Austen's novel, the reader of Herendeen's novel grows disgusted with Fitz's behavior" (MA thesis 32). But the Mr. Darcy presented at the start of Austen's *P&P* strikes me as a most un-evolved hero indeed, hardly someone to idolize. That, to me, is the theme of Austen's story, and of so many romance novels that followed: that an ideal husband is made, not born; that he is the product of hard work—and hard knocks—the heroine's initial rejection leading to his desire to improve.

In fact, the only major difference between my bisexual heroes and their heterosexual counterparts is one of number, not kind. I saw my Fitz as a bisexual hero with a bad attitude, engaged in two relationships, with Charles Bingley and Elizabeth Bennet, which require him to evolve emotionally if he wants to retain (Charles) or gain (Elizabeth) his partner's love. Fitz's treatment of his lover, Charles, in the first half of *P/P* is overbearing and domineering, just as Mr. Darcy's treatment of his friend Mr. Bingley is verbally condescending and bullying in Austen's novel. He's not an "evolved" personality in either book, and the sexual and romantic relationship between the men in my *P/P* is not equal. It's not intended to be a model of an ideal same-sex male romance, but the starting point for a story of a dominant male's transformation from an unlikable but sexually compelling "player" into a husband or lover who wins his partners' love through courtship, by treating them not merely as conquests, but as worthy of the respect that inspires love.

The story of my *P/P* follows Austen's novel, bringing out what I see as an implied bisexuality in Fitz (Mr. Darcy's) character, as shown in his two same-sex relationships: with Charles Bingley; and with his foster brother, the seductive and manipulative George Wickham. Austen's novel gives us several instances of Mr. Darcy's affectionate but seemingly contemptuous style of conversation with his friend Mr. Bingley,<sup>[15]</sup> which Elizabeth in *P/P* recognizes as similar to that of "the clever husband with the simple wife" (Herendeen *P/P* 30-31), saying that "Mr. Darcy could not be more jealous of a new bride than he is of [ . . . ] Mr. Bingley" (26). Similarly, the exploitative and deceptive nature of the relationship between Mr. Darcy and Wickham strikes me as one that can easily accommodate a physical sexual manifestation, and I wrote explicit scenes with both men in which Fitz displays his dominant bisexual masculinity.

Where Andrew Carrington's dominance was an exultant, happy expression of his sexuality, Fitz's dominance has darker roots, related to Austen's view of Mr. Darcy as having been "encouraged [by my parents . . . ] to be selfish and overbearing [ . . . ] to think meanly of all the rest of the world [ . . . ] of their sense of worth compared with my own" (Austen 349; vol. 3, ch. 16). Building on this self-description in Austen's novel, I imagined my Fitz as expressing this unpleasant side of his nature in his private sexual activity, although here I felt that there were mitigating factors. Fitz has been deeply scarred by his first love for Wickham, who seduced Fitz with submissive "favors" and led him on to make declarations of love, only to reveal, with the cruelest words, that his motives were mercenary and practical. "Love you? Are you really that stupid, Darcy?" (Herendeen, *P/P* 192) Where Andrew's wounds, the result of a reciprocated love affair reaching a natural if unwelcome ending, were easily healed, Fitz's wounds are permanent and disfiguring. Wickham's practiced duplicity has left Fitz suspicious of love and looking for a partner who is innocent and naïve—one whose love is genuine, or whom he can easily influence, if not control.

Partly as a result, for Fitz the allure of domination is more difficult to overcome. While Andrew's partner, Matthew, is submissive only in the bedroom, Charles Bingley is submissive in all aspects of his character. At the start of the novel, Charles is beginning to assert his independence, questioning the ideal of man/boy love underlying his relationship with Fitz, and beginning to think that "it might be very nice to have a wife" (Herendeen, *P/P* 6). But ultimately he enjoys being "taken care of" by Fitz, as Elizabeth remarks scornfully to Colonel Fitzwilliam (Austen 180; vol. 2, ch. 10). The challenge for Fitz with Charles is to continue to play the roles he enjoys: sexual top, protector, and mentor, while accepting Charles as his equal in spirit. Just as in a democratic society everyone is supposed to be equal before the law regardless of ability or income, so Fitz must not let his own areas of genuine superiority—wealth, intellect, pedigree, size and strength—undermine the equality and reciprocity necessary to sustain a relationship of love. Contrasting their uncomplicated love with the inescapable realities of heterosexual relationships, Fitz tells Charles, "We share the purest form of love, one that can exist solely between men—disinterested love whose only object is its own fulfillment, that looks for no advantage of money or condition" (Herendeen, *P/P* 226).

Where Andrew's two partners are similar, Fitz's male and female partners are opposites. Unlike Charles, Elizabeth is most certainly not submissive, and I could not imagine her exuberantly active nature melting away into passivity in the bedroom. On their wedding night, Fitz takes the dominant position at first, as he is the experienced lover. Elizabeth, overcome by the pleasures of lovemaking, utters the essential words, "I love you," as a form of submission (Herendeen, *P/P* 324). But by the next morning, after three or four sexual encounters, Elizabeth has developed the skill to top Fitz by winning a sexual wrestling match, and I imagined Fitz's astonished delight at being topped by someone he loves: "Never had surrender felt so like victory" (334). To underscore the significance of this reversal of positions, I show Fitz imagining himself as a racehorse with Elizabeth as the jockey whipping him to the finish line, and it is he who now "submits" by saying the words of love. Later in their marriage, Elizabeth dominates Fitz emotionally as well as physically, topping him on a chair in the breakfast room, forcing him, through his uncontrollable arousal, to perform despite his voiced fear that "Someone might come in" (350).

In the marriage of Fitz and Elizabeth I see a joyful combat between two dominant personalities; their only solution is to take turns. Fitz and Elizabeth will remain sexual tops, enjoying an equal, unwinnable contest, their more erudite conversational sexual intercourse an exalted version of Andrew and Phyllida's coarser "game." In fact, I saw Fitz's relationship with Charles as similar in many ways to a conventional marriage, domestic and comfortable, the two men naturally fitting their respective roles of "husband" and "wife," while Fitz's connection with Elizabeth has the allure of forbidden passion, more like an ongoing extramarital affair that neither partner can give up because it's so exciting—and transgressive.

For the two men, Fitz and Charles, it is only after they have entered into heterosexual marriages that they can resume their sexual relationship on new terms—an agreed-upon, negotiated dominance. Where Fitz has been humbled by his love for his exceptional wife and mellowed by winning her affection, Charles has matured, his character strengthened by marriage to his perfect female complement, the equally sweet and submissive Jane. "You have grown into marriage," Fitz tells Charles. "From a youth to a man. I admit to liking it very well" (360-361). Only now can the two former lovers approach each other with something resembling equality, and in their first reunion after their respective marriages Charles "surprises" Fitz by taking the initiative in their lovemaking. But evolution cannot entirely transform fundamental nature, and these two men will always be perfectly matched as opposites, as they are similar to their wives. When Fitz expresses the desire to make love "as they were used to," with Fitz on top, Charles replies, "I shall always want that" (365-366). Where upper-class male dominance wins the day with a timely left hook in *Phyllida*, in my version of Austen's world, the dominant aristocrat stoops to conquer, adopting some of the qualities of his middle-class partner and meeting him halfway.

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In writing my masculine, bisexual heroes, I had to make some concession to the realities of their time. My heroes are anomalies under the old systems governing male sexuality, cisgender men who desire, not boys or "pathics," but other cisgender men, and each must come to terms with the changing definition of sexual identity and orientation. And in some ways they are already moving toward the future, as embodied by the men they desire: other cisgender men, neither pathics nor effeminate, who choose the bottom position in sex.

In our modern understanding of "gentle doms" and "pushy bottoms," the man who plays the top role in bed is often motivated by the desire to please his partner rather than to control him, and the man in the submissive role as often as not directs the action ("Pushy bottom"). Both Andrew and Fitz perform oral sex on their wives as a matter of course, and although consistently dominant with their male partners during anal intercourse, willingly and eagerly take the "submissive" role in oral sex at times. When Andrew meets Matthew, his first clear statement of intent "involves your cock in my mouth and my cock in your arse" (Herendeen, *Phyllida* 298), and as soon as the two men are in bed, he makes good on his promise (306-307). Fitz, like Andrew, takes on the "submissive" role in oral sex as a way of both controlling and gratifying his partner. By pleasuring Charles orally, Fitz allows him

to climax first, while also preparing him for the receptive role in the anal sex that will be Fitz's "reward" (Herendeen, *P/P* 21-23).

For Andrew, already psychologically adapted to the new social order, and accepting himself as a "sodomite," it's the unexpected passion for a woman that most disturbs him. On his wedding night, after worrying that he will have to perform on demand, he's astonished to find himself "[holding] back with difficulty. He liked this, wanted this" (Herendeen, *Phyllida* 46). His early hope that Phyllida will become pregnant immediately and "he might never have to do it again" (51) soon turns to frustrated desire when Phyllida, displeased by his performance, locks him out of her room, and the transition from dominant "homosexual" to dominant "bisexual" is ultimately a natural one for him.

Fitz, the more introspective—and bisexual—of the two, labors toward self-acceptance. In two extended flashbacks, readers see him struggling to reconcile his position as a dominant bisexual man with the new egalitarian system that is being established, even at the top of the social and economic hierarchy he inhabits (Herendeen, *P/P* 191-200, 255-262). Fitz belongs to the same "gentlemen's club" of the earlier novel, but resists identifying as a sodomite or molly. His university education, with its exposure to the ideas of ancient Greece and Rome, has given him a different perspective. "Not all love between men is sodomy, any more than all love between a man and a woman is fornication," Fitz says (103), to the scorn of Monkton and the others.

My two stories are novels—fiction—that take place during a time of significant changes in both the literary and sexual traditions that still resonate today. I wanted my heroes not only to be transformed by their relationships with women, but to confront the Gothic, which Sedgwick sees as "feminizing" the literary and cultural aesthetic of the time—the fictional counterpart to the physical details of the men's sexual evolution. In *Phyllida*, a work that plays on the divide between "higher" literary fiction like Austen's novels and "low" popular romances, the influence of the Gothic is empowering. Although steadfastly scorning Gothic novels as "sensational trash, only a step up from obscenity" (326), and admiring Austen's work as superior, Andrew admits that marriage to a writer like Austen would be uncomfortable (see above). Later, while reading Phyllida's real work, a Gothic novel with an improbable but arousing m/m/f plot, Andrew realizes that the author of this novel is the perfect match for him, combining "the best of mind and carnality in a mixture that [he] had thought [ . . . ] could only be found in men" (449). The encounter with the feminized, homosexual Gothic has unexpectedly reinforced his dominant bisexuality.

In *P/P*, the friendship between Fitz and Charles is a perfect example of what Sedgwick calls "homosexual panic," a man's fear that he is "under the compulsion of another male" (*Men* 91). There is also a direct reference to Gothic romances when Charles, entering Fitz's darkened bedroom, compares it to a scene from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, while Fitz replies that he "hoped to be spared talk of ladies' novels in my own home" (Herendeen, *P/P* 223). But just as Austen rejected the supernatural Gothic in favor of sympathetic realism, so *P/P* must come down on the side of the "higher" literary genres. Fitz and Charles eventually reach a more equal relationship based on mutual agreement rather than the dominance and submission of Gothic control—while Fitz is introduced to the pleasure of realistic "ladies' novels" by his wife (347-349).

Sedgwick's idea of the feminization of the aristocracy in the eighteenth century seems to be a way of describing the upper-class adoption of a middle-class or bourgeois concept of the family. In discussing my two romance novels, with their conventionally

masculine heroes and the most unconventional families they create, I have also been talking about social class. In the old class- and gender-stratified world, one that did not have a concept of bisexuality or sexual orientation, these men were indistinguishable from other cisgender males. Now, with the new vertical division of sexuality, these upper-class heroes are “humbled” by love.

That the “submissive” male partners in both books are the sons of tradesmen is an outgrowth of my (and Austen’s, and perhaps Sedgwick’s) view of the social hierarchy. In *Phyllida*, the direction of accommodation is “upward,” as Matthew, benefitting from his father’s wealth and the education and opportunities it affords, adopts the manners of the upper classes and moves effortlessly (or so it seems) into the landed aristocracy. By the end of the novel, it is his estate, purchased from its impoverished owners, that becomes the de facto country home of Mr. and Mrs. Carrington and site of the infamous “molly weddings” that close this comic novel. In *P/P*, Charles Bingley’s personality and background are Austen’s creation, a personification of middle-class virtue to contrast with the inherently amoral aristocracy (in Austen’s view) from which Fitz must be reclaimed. Like Matthew, Charles is introduced at the beginning of Austen’s novel as in the market for an estate, but his status as gentleman is already established by his superior manners. It is Mr. Darcy, and my Fitz, who must improve themselves by moving “downward,” adapting their domineering upper-class behavior to fit the modern, egalitarian world being shaped by the middle classes. There’s hope for Fitz, as his father was a commoner, however wealthy, and the redeeming force is love: for Elizabeth—and, I would argue, for Charles—in both novels, mine and Austen’s. “Perhaps we can create a new ideal,” Charles says (Herendeen, *P/P* 366).

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In both novels, I portray a form of male bisexuality that, invisible from the outside, coexisted with the rigid heteronormativity, class system, and economic structure of their historical setting. Bisexuality of this kind was not, in itself, revolutionary, even if it might seem, to modern eyes, subversive, and I underscored the socially “natural” state of this bisexuality in my portrayals of both sets of men. Just as both Andrew and Fitz are dominant bisexual men by nature, so their male partners, Matthew and Charles, are sexual bottoms; when they submit to the hero, it’s out of love, and because bottoming is their preferred position in bed. In the outside world, however things are changing in the social and economic structure, these cisgender but submissive men are still on top by virtue of their sex and masculine demeanor. It’s the *women* who will want to equalize their marriages, and in both novels the heroes are ultimately “humbled,” not by their male partners, but by their wives.

That was my both my problem *and* my solution as a writer: to retain the reality of eighteenth-century male dominance, while at the same time “feminizing” it by allowing the heroines (and readers) to be aware of, even share in the men’s bisexual activity. Phyllida and Elizabeth are “modern” heroines; unashamed of their sexuality, attracted to their husbands physically as well as emotionally, and actively enjoying the fulfillment of their marital duties. Indeed, I take my heroines’ liberation from old-school sexual submissiveness several steps further, imagining them, rather than disgusted by their husbands’ same-sex activities, instead reveling in the vicarious arousal they provide.



But there's more at stake than arousal, important as that is for women's empowerment in marriage. According to Sedgwick, male homosocial desire is an expression of the patriarchy's "traffic in women." What may look like homoerotic attraction is just another form of male dominance, with women as commodities to be acquired and exchanged. Similarly, the traditional view of the married bisexual man is that he is "deceiving" his wife by engaging in same-sex activity or "cheating" on her with his male partner. In my contemporary reinterpretation of this very old situation I hoped to free my characters, male and female, from the "traffic in women," and the means of this liberation is a rejection of the passive, depressing, wifely "acceptance" or "tolerance" of her husband's sexual activities, in favor of a more active and positive response.

For these liberated wives and bisexual husbands, marriage is no longer something to endure for the sake of wealth and social position, or respectability. Released from the demeaning business of subterfuge, the men can pursue their male partners for no ulterior motive, only love, while their wives discover in their husbands' male partners a comrade: a kindred soul, not a rival. As Phyllida says to Matthew, dismissing Andrew's suggestion of "brother-in-law" as an "artificial relationship": "You are one of the family. Not exactly a husband, but far more than a friend" (Herendeen, *Phyllida* 530-531). Elizabeth Darcy, inspired by her sister Jane's belief that "A truly happy marriage ought not destroy a longstanding [male] friendship," reexamines her own understanding of love (Herendeen, *P/P* 402-403). By the end of both novels, the heroines' original ambivalence, nurtured by joyful and happy marriage, has blossomed into endorsement and encouragement of their husbands' bisexuality. Phyllida acts as the "groomsman" at her husband's marriage to Matthew (Herendeen, *Phyllida* 521), and Elizabeth allots a room to her husband and Charles for use during "inclement weather" (Herendeen, *P/P* 403).

Within the shell of a very old social order, a new one is beginning to emerge: playful, polyamorous, lit up by what Pam Rosenthal has called "the revealed spectacle of male homosocial desire" (7). It's an order centered, still, on the concept of marriage, but a marriage grounded in honesty and equality, chosen freely by all partners. That was a radical idea in Austen's time, and it remains one, as appealing to my heroines and heroes—and, I hope, my readers—as the beautiful grounds of Pemberley.

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[1] While *Pride and Prejudice* was published in 1813, its earliest version, "First Impressions," was written 1796-1797, and its sensibility seems more 18<sup>th</sup>-century than Regency. Georgette Heyer's Regency novels, especially those set in the early years, like *Regency Buck*, show a society in transition from the old century to the new, as reflected in dress, in speech and particularly in morals.

[2] For example, see Shiri Eisner's "Monosexual Privilege Checklist" that begins, "Society assures me that my sexual identity is real and that people like me exist."

[3] As the exemplary quotations that define the old slang term "maphrodite" reveal, this corrupt form of "hermaphrodite" was long used as a synonym for "homosexual" ("Morphodite").

[4] This remark occurs in the context of the "ignorant world" betting *against* the possibility of newlywed and former "confirmed bachelor" Andrew Carrington's

impregnating his bride. Suspicions of a penchant for “buggery” have been conflated with incapability, even for this most masculine-appearing man.

[5] Werner calls the gender-stratified society the “most common” in the ethnographic record (330), with only 30 modern societies having the egalitarian system. He also cites a 1995 study that found a number of societies in the process of changing over from gender-stratified to egalitarian (331).

[6] Bray (106) cites Ian Watts’s 1957 work *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* in his discussion of the cultural change from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. While we no longer restrict our discussion of the early English novel to these three male authors, I feel that their works are an accurate representation of the heterosexual orthodoxy of the time.

[7] The statement appears in a discussion of Gothic fiction and is related to Laurence Stone’s belief that the molly houses were “gentlemen’s clubs,” which Bray disputed and Norton’s work (not yet published when *Men* was written) entirely exploded, showing that the molly culture was a working- and middle-class phenomenon.

[8] I consider Austen’s writing sympathetic to women but “masculine” in style and mood: harsh, satirical and witty (while of course not believing that these qualities belong only to one gender).

[9] Influences for Andrew are many: Julian Audley, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Worth, in *Regency Buck*; Justin Alastair, Duke of Avon, in *These Old Shades* (aka Tracy Belmanoir, Duke of Andover, in *The Black Moth*); Sir Richard Wyndham in *The Corinthian*, etc., along with the way this version of the romance hero was distilled through romance novels of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

[10] For an example of the ultimate amoral aristocratic Austen antihero, see the unpublished novella “Lady Susan,” in which the eponymous protagonist, the daughter of a nobleman, breaks every rule of female sexual behavior and wins through to an ending which, if not exactly happy, is certainly successful in terms of wealth and respectability.

[11] I mean “lady” here in the period sense of the word: it meant, at the very lowest, middle class status, and usually implied gentry. Phyllida’s family is poor by middle-class standards, as was Austen during most of her adult life, but as a gentleman’s daughter she is an eligible match for Andrew.

[12] Hugo Darracott, the hero of Heyer’s *An Unknown Ajax*, was the direct inspiration for Matthew. The idea of a large, tall, blond, muscular Yorkshireman, the epitome of masculine stereotypes, as a sexual bottom struck me as hilarious and very appealing.

[13] I use the term “submissive” for the person performing oral sex and “dominant” for the one receiving it. Although the person performing oral sex is usually more “active,” the performance is commonly perceived as submissive and the dominant partner may not reciprocate.

[14] Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Darcy’s aunt, is even more disagreeable than her nephew. The aristocratic minor characters in other novels are usually buffoons or villains or both at once. Some examples: Sir Walter Eliot, the heroine’s vain father in *Persuasion*; Willoughby, seducer of innocents, in *Sense and Sensibility*; and coldhearted General Tilney and his rakish elder son, Frederick, in *Northanger Abbey*.

[15] For example, when Mr. Darcy accuses Mr. Bingley of “the indirect boast ... being proud of your defects” (47-49; vol. 1, ch. 10).

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