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Queer Elements in Renaissance English Poetry

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Abstract in Italian

L'omoerotismo e l'omosessualità hanno sempre fatto parte della concezione di sessualità umana, nonostante le diverse opinioni espresse in merito e i vari cambiamenti che hanno subito nel tempo. Introducendo innanzitutto la situazione storica, sociale e psicologica vissuta dagli omosessuali durante il Rinascimento inglese, influenzata dal discorso teologico, e come ha trovato nelle idee umaniste una via di fuga fondamentale per esprimere i loro sentimenti e desideri, la mia tesi si concentrerà nel discernere gli elementi omoerotici della poesia del Rinascimento inglese. Inoltre, spiegherò brevemente come lo studio e la definizione di omosessualità si sia tradotto nella prima scienza moderna, mostrando come già al tempo i medici avessero provato a darne una spiegazione, arrivando persino a formulare la prima ipotesi della condizione innata dell'omosessualità. Successivamente, mi occuperò nello specifico di due autori che hanno inserito molti elementi queer nelle loro opere letterarie: Richard Barnfield e William Shakespeare. Del primo, mi focalizzerò nel poema *The Affectionate Shepheard*, mentre, per quanto riguarda il secondo, ne esaminerò i sonetti. Il mio scopo principale è quello di dare spazio a una parte di letteratura che è stata ingiustamente accolta, analizzata e criticata per adattarsi ad un un'unica versione di mondo e ad un pensiero categorizzante e binario, proponendo quindi una rivalutazione critica di queste opere. Infine, vorrei mostrare come la rappresentazione dell'amore e dell'affetto tra persone dello stesso sesso abbia portato alla censura e all'errata interpretazione di svariati testi letterari e di come l'eteronormatività abbia prevalso nella critica letteraria e nella nostra cultura generale, arrivando a soffocare intere comunità di persone.

Introduction

In the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, because of religion, people's affective and sexual lives underwent a rigid and intrusive control; this strict influence was affected by the concept of morality and sense of decorum. Western culture suffered heavy censorship and manipulation, which contaminated every form of art and communication, proposing a prototypical romantic and sexual relationship in literature: the heterosexual one. Even though the Renaissance was a period of rediscovery and rebirth thanks to the recovery of ancient texts, both Greek and Latin, which made culture slightly emerge from romantic and sexual limited representations, literature had to make use of clever tricks and specific genres to talk about transgressive themes and topics. This partial freedom was permitted because Greek and Latin authors and philosophers – such as Homer, Plato, Socrates, Catullus, Horace, Virgil, Ovid, and Sappho – openly discussed sexuality, including different human sexual orientations and dynamics. So, they made a reopening of the discourse possible to new and diversified approaches. This is why the freest and most libertine environments were those of culture, from visual arts to literature and theatre, and it is possible to find, in the Renaissance, a bigger group of writers and artists who tried to discuss these particular and controversial themes.

Hence, I have chosen to pay attention to Renaissance poetry because of the sense of freedom it holds in relation to queer studies, as well as for its relevance in the history of art and literature. In this thesis I will argue that Renaissance English poetry does present many works which contain homoerotic elements and that these elements are shown through very precise and typical patterns of the homoerotic Classical tradition and social anxieties. Furthermore, this thesis argues that the univocal and heteronormative interpretations have imposed themselves and prevailed in the anthologies and literary criticism, influencing the public's general evaluations. The authors I am presenting, Richard Barnfield and William Shakespeare, will try to portray homosexuality with a positive attitude through a weak, forced, or negative participation of women and through the use of

Classic elements. My purpose is showing how these elements managed to be hidden and transcended through the poetic language, permitting their survival until our days. This happened with many Renaissance authors, from Edmund Spenser to Francis Bacon, from Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, to Richard Barnfield, from Christopher Marlowe to William Shakespeare.

My thesis is divided into three chapters: the first attempts to frame homosexuality within the historical, social, cultural, and scientific context of the Renaissance; whereas the second and the third chapters present queer elements in two works by two different authors of the time, Richard Barnfield's *The Affectionate Shepheard*, and William Shakespeare's sonnets.

In the first chapter I am going to introduce my topic, homosexuality, in the context of the English Renaissance. I start by describing how, since Late Middle Ages, homosexuality was conceived and interpreted by Christian religion, specifically in the Bible, in order to mould an idealistic and aesthetic society that could benefit the political and economical establishment. Next, I will show how sexuality became a taboo, and every form of non-reproductive sexual activity started to be considered non-acceptable, to be put into one single group of sinful and criminal behaviours. I will then highlight the confusion which surrounded the word 'sodomy', easily and indifferently compared to rape and bestiality. Furthermore, I will explain how homosexuality was also exploited as a form of propaganda during the Reformation Era by Protestants to counter their political and religious enemies, the Catholics – also called Papists – as the Church of England was separating from the Church of Rome. To create differences that could clearly separate the two factions, they played on social stereotypes and religious superstitions, such as the devil and the witches stories. Many poets, satirists, lawyers, and travellers tried to give an opinion about it, never detaching themselves from the predominant theological consideration of homosexuality. In the second paragraph, I will quickly go through the late Tudor dynasty, from Henry VIII to Elizabeth I, then moving to the first Stuart king, James I, an extremely important figure for the queer community. During their reigns, the theatre and the literary production of texts were the safest environments that

could let people freely and positively explore anti-conformist feelings and sexual desires. I will then present the sources that helped historians and sociologists study the phenomenon of homosexuality. Along with satires, legal documents are the main remaining proofs of homosexual activity. Analysing some examples, I will show how even court records fail at detaching from a discourse that makes use of the same contents and logic of the theological discourse, mixing homosexuality with political dissidents, anti-religious people, and citizens that did not have European origins. Subsequently, I will present the rural society of the Elizabethan and Jacobean reigns: boundless and isolated in the farthest and darkest corners of life, homosexuals used slavery silently and unconsciously as a means to discover one's sexual preference, as well as prostitution, showing how homosexuality was mainly trapped and influenced by relations of power and subordinations. As the Renaissance flourished, Humanism and classical texts helped to create a safe space of expression for queerness in the arts and literature, so this is why the educational system became, as a consequence, the first free road for investigating on one's sexuality: this is going to be the focus of my third subchapter. In a close analysis of the *Symposium*, I will shed light on its importance as a Classic texts when it comes to the plurality of love and sexual expressions. Nevertheless, these ideologies were equally victims of social hierarchies that see sexuality manifesting only in opposite elements, as a relationship had to be subject to dynamics of passive and active roles. This is why pederasty became the most unfair reality connected with homosexuality. Finally, in the last paragraph, I will explore how the scientific discourse of the early modern period, even if not very often considered and explored by critics, anticipated the conceptualization of homosexuality as an innate condition, which, contrarily, most people locate in the late 19th century.

In the second chapter, I would like to give voice and space to Richard Barnfield, a poet who, despite his beautiful poetry, was hastily deemed to belong to the 'minor' poets' circle, and was almost made disappear from the history of literature because of his themes; in fact, in his most famous work, the poem *The Affectionate Shepheard*, he chose to talk about the love for another

man, disguising his homosexual characters – Daphnis, a shepherd, and a young man named Ganymede, a Greek mythological figure – in one of the few examples of the classical tradition which represented and respected their condition: pastoral poetry. My intention is also to give importance and recognition to less studied poets in literature like him, giving them the right with respect to other poets which have already been extensively studied. Even though he was praised for his unique and suggestive style, he has remained neglected for a long time and still today his works are rarely anthologised. Shakespeare's authorship, attributed erroneously to many of Barnfield's works, explains and guarantees the quality of his poetry, contrary to those who see his almost disappearance as the consequence of his average poetry. My other purpose is to uncover different narratives that represent love in all its facets and dynamics. Furthermore, this chapter aims at giving Barnfield the real analysis and approach his poetry deserves. As all artists that wanted to deal with this subject, he had to protect himself through the imitation of a Latin work, in his case, Virgil's Second Eclogue. A close reading of *The Affectionate Shepherd* is what the second subchapter is going to deal with, considered one of the most exemplary work of literature for homoerotic contents. Comparing his works with Virgil's, Spenser's, Sidney's, and Marlowe's, I will show how pastoral poetry, a genre created for the first time in ancient Greece by Teocritus, with the *Idyllis*, became the means to convey same-sex desire. Over time, it became the only viable route for those who wanted to talk about these subjects. These, as Barnfield does in *The Affectionate Shepheard*, had also to insert other classical reference to make their work less autobiographical and their defence more plausible. In addition to using a Greek genre in his poem, Barnfield merges elements of Platonic love, establishing an age gap between the two main characters to explain activity and passivity in the relationship. Once Ganymede has refused the love for Daphnis, reducing his romantic feelings to a platonic friendship, the relationship becomes an elevated and mature bond in which the old and wise man, because of the pain of the refusal, tells the young man the right things to do in order to embody the moral ideals at the base of society and know his place and role in life.

The second author I have selected for this dissertation and that I am going to present in the third chapter is William Shakespeare. I chose this poet because, despite the overt studies conducted on his works, he has to be taken in consideration for his now renowned role as a queer poet and for the incredible innovations and diversities he brought to his works. After briefly tracing his biography, I will unveil the queer elements that compose the intricate plots of some of his most famous plays, from *As You Like It,* to *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, showing that Shakespeare's queer imagination does not limit to homoeroticism and belongs to plenty of his works, from his poetry to the plays. His sonnets have been unfairly judged by critics and have been forcibly subjected to a moralist and partial reception for many centuries in history, until new criticism, in 1980s, finally gave space to a long-deserving queer approach to his work. This is going to be the focus of my third paragraph, which aims at following the publication history of the sonnets and investigate the hindrances and censures they underwent for their contents. Again, as with Barnfield's poem, this shows the persevering, obsessive, and suffocating heterosexualization that have been subject to and shedding light to the fair and honest presentation they deserve. In the forth paragraph, while making a humble and modest study of the first twenty sonnets, I will show how, similarly to Barnfield, the pattern used to represent homosexuality is nearly the same, giving even more sense to the homoerotic stance and weakening its counterpart. I chose to analyse the first 20 sonnets for the thematic similarity in relation to *The Affectionate Shepheard* and for the cohesiveness of plot they present.

In conclusion, my dissertation aims at contributing to the process of revisionism to be operated on culture and literature when it comes to queer studies, recovering texts obscured by the censorship or texts that have been critically acclaimed but that have been unfairly criticized and analysed in the name of made-up conceptions of moralism and decorum. Moreover, I would like to spread notions on minor and less considered poets like Barnfield, and raise awareness on these topics that people still judge as new or recent, but which have just been imposed a forced silence

and adjustment. With my thesis, I hope to discuss and create a debate on a dominating ideology and on minority statuses that have been endlessly suppressed by cultural hegemony.

Chapter 1

Homosexuality in the English Renaissance: Religion, History, Society, and Science

1.1 The Weight of Religion

The first things that should be taken into consideration when we talk about homosexuality in relation to the 16th and 17th centuries are the importance of religion for the society of the time and its mechanism of obscurantism and condemnation applied to culture and lifestyles.[1]

With the end of the West Roman Empire and the birth of the Papal State and the reign of Charlemagne, the Holy Roman Empire, Christianity was officially imposed in the Old Continent as the only symbol of faith. In addition to giving spiritual purpose, it served also as a way to educate, control, and regulate its citizens after how pagan religions shaped their populations. The Christian religion was also a form of political power and, as a consequence, it was impossible to refuse to follow it. The Bible, becoming the first printed text in history in 1453, made its dogmas even more concrete and pressuring.[2]

Nevertheless, the problems with the Bible rely on the incorrectness and unreliability of the translations on many of the matters considered as 'sin': among these, homosexuality. In fact, the clergy could interpret the Scriptures freely and people were easily manipulable as society was mostly illiterate and the power of culture was in the hands of very few powerful institutions: among these, the Church.[3]

For example, the word 'homosexual' only appeared for the first time in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible published in 1952, but it was already used by the end of the 19th century in the medical world, even if with skepticism. However, the first two definitions associated with homosexuality appeared in the 1611 translation of the Bible, the new Authorized Version

1 Marie Helena Loughlin, ed., *Same-Sex Desire in Early Modern England, 1550-1735: An Anthology of Literary Texts and Contexts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), pp. 27-36.
2 Loughlin, *Same-Sex Desire*, pp. 27-36.
3 Kenneth Borris, 'Introduction', in *The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Kenneth Borris and George Rousseau (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 17-75 (17-22).

commissioned by James I for the Anglican Church, precisely in chapter six of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, part of the New Testament: a Greek word translated as 'effeminate', which inevitably contributed to connect homosexuals to a status of non-conformity and inferiority, and the Greek periphrasis translated as 'abusers of themselves with mankind'. This never helped those people to stop being miscalled, perpetuating the wrong ideas and stereotypes that favoured the invention of new degrading words in the English language that have been carried out to this day, such as 'ingle', 'inverted', 'sexual-invert', and 'molly', to indicate people who committed what were considered to be obscene sexual acts, and 'Ganymede', 'cinaedus', and 'catamite', which, even though generated in the classical context positively, started to be used negatively in the English culture to refer to homosexuals. For centuries, the most common word has been 'bugger', derived from a sect of heretics from Bulgaria who were thought to commit abominable practices, and 'sodomite', linked to the Sodom and Gomorrah episode in the Bible; even though the latter is not used anymore now, the verb 'to sodomize' still remains in the vocabulary to describe that specific sexual act.[4]

For centuries, people have believed that the Bible mentions homosexuals to condemn them. In the first book of the Old Testament, the Genesis, precisely in chapter nineteen, God is punishing the population of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for a terrible sin they committed and to do so, He destroys both cities (it is not known if by sending an earthquake, a fire or a plague). It was wrongly believed that these people were also being punished for being involved in same-sex intercourses, but in fact, God is punishing people who are having sexual intercourses with members of their family: in one of the families taken into account in this episode, the daughters of Lot get their father drunk and push him to have sexual intercourse; the daughters also get drunk, so none of them is fully aware of what they are doing. As a consequence, what is punished here is incest and rape. What made historians doubt this episode was that the heterosexual or homosexual matrix does not seem to be a problem here; as a matter of fact, to make another example, in Noah's family, his son Ham discovers his father's nudity, making this episode also a sexual one: 'And Ham, the father

[4] Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 13-14.

of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside'[5]. But, again, what is condemned here is incest, and people – to condemn all sexual intercourses who were not accepted and were considered 'immoral' – took the opportunity to interpret this episode as the repression of the 'sin' of homosexuality. Other references to homosexuality in the Bible are to be found in the third book of the Old Testament, the Leviticus; they have been interpreted derogatorily as well, completely decontextualizing the real meanings of the actions and words expressed.[6]

During the 16th and the 17th centuries, the concepts of debauchery and dissolution ended up condemning all sexual practices that were not heterosexual and that did not constrain sex within marriage, using it only as a form of reproduction; this included autoeroticism, adultery, 'sodomy', incest, and rape.[7]

'Sodomy' and rape were pretty much interchangeable words at the time and they both described sexual situations that had to be condemned.[8] In fact 'sodomy' was considered 'a general category of non-procreative acts'.[9] In *Institues* (1644), Edward Coke does not clearly distinguish 'sodomy' from 'buggery', bestiality, and rape. In his opinion, rape, as 'buggery', was considered a crime because and when it involved penetration.[10] For example, in sex with under-age girls, the latter were called 'sodomitess'. Moreover, in early modern England, brothels were called respectively 'Sodom' or 'Little Sodom' on the basis of the type of sex requested, as it is reported in the works of the statesman James Butler (1610-1688), the poet John Wilmot (1647-1680), and the poet John Dryden (1631-1700). At the time, one sexual practice that was not socially accepted could lead necessarily to another of the same kind or could mean the same thing.[11] The English poet John Donne in satire number 4 intervenes on this matter, saying:

> Who wastes in meat, in clothes, in horse, he notes,
> Who loves whores, who boys, and who goats.[12]

[5] My reference edition for the Bible is the *New King James Version* from the *Genesis*, v. 9,22.
[6] Loughlin, *Same-Sex Desire*, pp. 27-36.
[7] Alberto Mario Banti, *Le Questioni dell'Età Contemporanea* (Roma-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2010), pp. 124-151.
[8] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 14-19.
[9] Melissa E. Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2019), p. 61.
[10] Edward Coke, *The Third Part of Institutes of the Laws of England* (London: W. Clarke and Sons 1644), pp. 58-60.
[11] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 14-19.
[12] John Donne, 'Satires', *The Complete English Poems*, ed. by A. J. Smith (London: Penguin Classics, 2001), ll. 127-

The same happens in many other passages of his satires, where he generalizes on all kinds of sexual expressions and abominations, putting in the same group homosexuality and sex with beasts. John Marston (1576-1634), an English poet and playwright, does the same in the *Scourge of Villanie II* (1598), where a man left by his wife finds his comfort in the arms of a young boy and his goat; the poet Ben Jonson (1572-1637) in *Sir Voluptuous Beasts* (1616) also talks about 'Ganymede', the beautiful young mortal Zeus kidnaps and falls in love with in Greek mythology, and a goat, associating again homosexuality with bestiality. Furthermore, the English judge and politician Edward Coke (1552-1634) tries to find the causes that can lead to homosexuality. In his opinion, it is because of 'pride, excess of diet, idleness, and contempt of the poor'[13]. In the poet George Turberville's (1540-1597) opinion, 'drunkenness'[14]. So, same-sex attraction was considered a consequence of problematic, degenerative, and unstable behaviours.[15]

Religion plays again an important role in the condemnation of homosexuality when used as an instrument of propaganda for the historical and religious changes of the period. This happens when Protestants used the figure of the Papist as a way to refuse Catholicism during the Reformation Era (1517-1603) and, with it, 'sodomy'. This happened because Papists were considered the followers of the Antichrist, the servants of the King of Spain, people coming from abroad – so, strangers –, and also 'sodomites'. Around Papists the most curious stories were invented: they were thought to be villains, bringers of the plague, burners of towns, and instigators of the Civil War. As a consequence, being a 'sodomite' was something useful to be added to their propaganda. In their opinion, priests and monastic orders' celibacy and chastity – something that only belonged to Roman Church – would lead necessarily to homosexuality, as William Lithgow (1582-1645), a Scottish traveler and writer, claims. Ephraim Pagit (1575-1647), an English clergyman and heresiographer, argues that the Jesuits brought homosexuality to England from the colleges abroad, and, in his opinion, they were not only the enemies of true religion, but also the

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13 Coke, *The Third Part of the Institutes*, p. 59.

14 George Tuberville, *Tragic Tales* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Printing Company, 1837), p. 372.

15 Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 14-19.

enemies of the King of England. As a matter of fact, during the Tudor and the Stuart dynasty, these concepts were not distinguished. For Edward Coke, homosexuality was a treason against the King of Heaven, and all Kings, because the King himself represented God. It is not by chance that Christopher Marlowe was found guilty of heresy, treason, but also homosexuality, as it was reported by the Elizabethan agent Richard Baines (1568-1593).[16] Donne writes plenty of times against Papists in his satires, for example in satire number 2, where he associates churchmen with 'sodomites':

> Simony and sodomy in churchmen's lives,
> As these things do in him: by these he thrives.[17]

So, homosexuals usually found their place in religious assassinations, superstitions, and stereotyped propaganda, among the stories of werewolves, basilisks, and heretics, as well as sorcerers. The connection they have with sorcerers is drawn by a quite interesting story. It was believed that the witch had a sexual relationship with the Devil and that from them homosexuals were generated. In the poem, *The Moone-Calfe* (1627), the English poet Michael Drayton (1563-1631) represents two children deformed physically and morally, two figures with certain characteristics and vices that the author will use for his satiric intentions. These two children are two twins, a male and a female**.** While for the woman, her debauchery depended entirely and exclusively on her heterosexuality, as the mere fact that she could have sexual desires was depraving, for a man, debauchery was homosexuality. But, in this poem, the children are rejected also by the Devil. The explanations given by Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas in *The Life and Death of John Atherton* (1641) and Drayton in *The Moone-Calfe* about the Devil's refusal of his son's homosexuality are that his son's condition was unforeseen, he was something he could not decide, or have any claim or power on. The Devil was the enemy of God, while witches were the opposite of Saints; so, as God and Saints were the representation of heterosexual love, the witches' union with the Devil could only be the representation of a parody of the 'ideal' love. The Church

[16] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 19-20.
[17] John Donne, 'Satires', ll. 75-76.

understood and forced homosexuality around this parody.[18]

Homosexuality had then no place in the Kingdom of Hell, nor in the Kingdom of Heaven. The place it could hold was mythology, something that was handed down from the past like an old legend, but it could not be real, it could not be part of the regulated world created by God, nor of the one generated by the Devil. According to Thomas Browne (1605-1682), an English polymath and author, homosexuality was not God's creation. God created order, and this happens in nature and has to happen in society as well. In his opinion, that order is lost with homosexuality. Homosexuality was not part of the harmony and the balance created by God, and could not even find space in its counterpart, the creation of the Devil: it was part of nothing, it was part of debauchery and dissolution, it was part of confusion and disorder. People only had to sexually relate with their opposite to balance themselves and create, consequently, harmony and order. This idea was conceived because it was feared that the earth would go back to how it was before the Creation, to the Chaos it reigned before God created our planet: the earth was without form and there was void everywhere.[19] The chain of degrees that links together all creatures, which Thomas Browne defines as the 'Ladder and Scale of Creatures' in *Religio Medici* (1642), is contradictory and antidemocratic, as it refers to the fact that there must be a hierarchy in society, a superiority in certain human beings as there is in the natural and animal world when it comes to the submission to the male animal and the most aggressive and powerful species, because, in his opinion, a world like this expresses order and civilization.[20]

Consequently, this has to happen in relationships as well. This vision is to be seen in the figure of the man; therefore, a man cannot be with another man as he could not claim his power and 'manhood', while he could with a woman, as women were put in an inferior position. Moreover, showing affection to another man would be immoral and a symbol of disorder, as that is an action only to be shown to a woman, because only the woman was connected with sweetness, delicacy,

[18] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 21-23.
[19] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 23-26.
[20] Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici and Other Works*, ed. by L. C. Martin (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 29.

pureness, and affection. Similarly, a woman and another woman together would always miss something, something that would fill a void or make them feel important – masculinity – as femininity was connected with passivity and weakness. These considerations are discussed in the gender and queer studies made by the philosophers, sociologists, and historians George L. Mosse, Michel Foucault, Jeffrey Weeks, Eve Sedgwick, and Judith Butler since 1960 up to our days.[21] The majority of writers and authors that talked about homosexuals in the past kept pushing them down a vortex of no return, feeding so strongly a class of thought that would take centuries to be properly disputed.[22]

1.2 Homosexuality in the Reigns of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and James I (1603-1625)

The reign of Herny the VIII, the second sovereign of the Tudor dynasty, was known for his heavy laws on homosexuals, specifically, the famous Buggery Act of 1533, which made 'sodomy' – committed also between men and women, and by people with animals – officially criminalized by the State for the first time and punishable with death by hanging until 1861, when the Offences Against the Person Act was promulgated and the penalty was changed to life imprisonment. In 1885, the 'Labouchère Amendment' focused specifically on punishing homosexuality: the law reduced the sentence to two years of imprisonment with or without hard labor, but it was meant to punish every homosexual love manifestation, even though it did not specifically include 'sodomy'. As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, this was only a matter handled by the Church before, which had launched a massive campaign against homosexuals around 1200, making it a crime in all Europe by the end of 1300. This was established by the Jus commune, a Latin expression that means 'common law', used by European civil law jurists and courts as a point of reference for legal systems.[23]

In 1553, Mary the Catholic became Queen and, as she was a Catholic and during the

[21] Banti, *Le Questioni*, pp. 124-151.
[22] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 26-32.
[23] Giovanni Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'Altra Storia. L'Omosessualità dall'Antichità al Secondo Dopoguerra* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2015), pp. 360-371.

Reformation Era protestants were using the association made between Papists and 'sodomy' as a means to contrast the Roman Church, she revoked all her father's protestant laws, including the anti-'sodomy' laws.[24]

With Elizabeth I, things on the matter changed again, as in 1564 she restored the laws against 'sodomy' and they remained intact until 1861.[25] Nevertheless, she was intentionally a supporter of the homosexual subculture. In addition to being an alternative woman for the time, by not marrying and adopting 'masculine' clothes and behaviours, Elizabeth I was a great lover and supporter of the theatre, a form of entertainment that has always been a safe place for all kinds of sexual orientations and that has always pushed the boundaries of gender binarism and stereotypes. Having to do with art, the theatre is a place of exploration, restraint of social injustices, and fake and hypocritical moralities, giving space for the freedom of expression of every diversity and idea. The theatre is a place of disguise, of fitting in somebody else's shoes, of exchange of roles, of wearing make-up, and fancy and elaborated costumes, of breaking the rules. That theatre, specifically, was a all-male sector, because women were not allowed to act, giving homoeroticism a possibility to emerge; it was also a very diversified place, attended by all social groups and personalities, something that for the time was extremely revolutionary. Furthermore, being the favourite entertainment of the Court had its positive contributions: in fact, the Court was a place highly dedicated to painting, music, and poetry, a place filled with members of high society, intellectuals, artists, rich people, and nobles, the mostly blamed social class at the time for its extravagance, which was considered a form of debauchery and degeneration, for its fancy and colourful clothes, excessive make-up, and libertine lifestyles, usually associated with homosexuality and other sexual 'deviances'. In a society where there was not any freedom of speech, art became the means of expression of the impossibility, of the denouncing of social and political issues, of the rise of criticism on corruption and injustices. Many of the poets and dramatists of the time were

[24] Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'Altra Storia*, pp. 370-371.
[25] Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'Altra Storia*, pp. 360-371.

courtiers, as all writers, including Shakespeare and Marlowe and many other playwrights, as they had to wait for the Queen or the King's approval in other to put up a show. What changed with Elizabeth I was opening up the art circle to what was out of the Court, to a bigger and diversified audience, a more public sphere, that is why we can talk about the participation of different social classes and groups. This push was not only given by the Queen, but also by the particular social and historical situation of that time, characterized by the expansion of the markets, the flourishing of international trade, the increased size of cities and population, and the movement of people from the countryside to the city centrers, especially London: the culture and mentality broadened.[26]

The strict control of people's sexual life softened when James I, the first king of the Stuart dynasty, came to the throne. His homosexuality has always been generally well-known and tolerated thanks to his extremely privileged position. Scholars have found documentation and proof of it in his close correspondences with several men at his Court, which somehow survived, as most homosexuals would get rid of their letters: these men were Esmé Stewart, 1st Duke of Lennox; Robert Carr, 1st Earl of Somerset; and George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham. What made scholars confirm his homosexuality and his protection toward this community was also the decreased number of arrests for 'sodomy' during his reign when compared to others.[27] James I was also a great supporter of the theatre; consequently, London playhouses acquired more and more of a reputation for homosexuality, as the pamphleteer Philip Stubbs (1555-1610) claims in *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), saying that theatre would encourage 'sodomy', while the poet Michael Drayton denounces in *The Moone-Calfe* that theatres are the haunts of the 'sodomite'. The king's association with homosexuality was also evident with the significant change within the Court after James I's death and the new reign of King Charles I.[28]

Along with theatre, another positive connection with homosexuality can be made thanks to literature and the relational dynamics implied in written texts' compositions, which unintentionally

[26] Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature. The Sixteenth Century and The Early Seventeenth Century: B* (London: W.W. Norton, 2012), pp. 531-543.
[27] Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'Altra Storia*, pp. 360-371.
[28] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 54-57.

left homosexuality space for breathing. Both in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, homosociality was a widespread reality. Consequently, close male friendships were common and were considered even more important than heterosexual romances. This is one of the main differences between the old and the new views of gender and sexuality, influenced by Renaissance ideologies – Platonic love and the classical philosophy of friendship. A man could not create a strong friendship with a woman as a woman was considered intellectually inferior: furthermore, a male-female friendship was reckoned as a sign effeminacy and irrationality. Consequently, a bond with a woman could only mean a male subordination to 'need, appetite and self-interest'.[29] Contrarily to modern views, which see heterosexual marriage and family as the most fulfilling and healthy symbols of adulthood, male friendship was the central social model of early modern adult life, serving as a means for same-sex love appreciation and tacit tolerance. Male intimacy was then a preponderant part of early modern education and correspondences, as well as of the production and transmission of literary texts: bonds could be formed between lords and secretaries, kings and their favourites, friars in monasteries, tutors and secretaries, students, poets and dramatists, and their patrons. Contrarily to the modern understanding, which sees the solitary intellectual as the symbol of literary culture, male closeness and writing collaborations were the central cultural models to early modern writing compositions and editing. As is documented in many early modern printed drama, co-authored works were the norm for the play production of the time; a safe homoerotic space can be also seen in the dedications or commendatory verses at the beginning of manuscripts, in printers' and editors' prefaces, paving an alternative way for homosexual survival. Even if to a lesser degree, it is also possible to find signs of women's collaborations, emerged through communities of readers and writers, such as personal dedications, poems, and letters, challenging the early modern relationships and hierarchies. This does not exclude the formation of female friendships as a contrast to 'the naturalization of a heterosexual order based on male superiority'.[30] Both kinds of

[29] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, p. 64.
[30] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, p. 67.

same-sex friendships helped building the triangulation of desire explored by many authors in English literature, such as Shakespeare, forming another part of the aesthetic features of the Renaissance.[31]

Nevertheless, it is difficult to have documentation and proof of homosexual activities during the Elizabethan and Jacobean Eras. All the intellectuals who were homosexual did either not talk about it or they did it subtly and vaguely, through Greek myths or by imitating great Greek and Latin works. On the contrary, those who did talk about it more openly and directly were people, such as clerks, jurists, lawyers, satirists, historians, travellers, theologians, and clergymen, who wanted to denigrate it and make fun of it – that was the only allowed way – so the few accounts of homosexuality that have made it through are for the most part negative.[32]

In particular, satirists were usually the only ones allowed to touch themes of obscenity, grossness, and debauchery in details. The censorship of the Church was heavy at the time and everything was subjected to revision, even what was published by those who could talk about it. In fact, in 1599, afraid that they were not completely condemning homosexuality, three ambiguous satirists' works were burned by the order of the Bishop of London: John Marston's *Scourage of Villanie* (1598), Everard Guilpin's (1574-1601) *Skialetheia* (1598), and Thomas Middleton's (1580-1627) *Micro-Cynicon* (1599). This turned out to be ineffective censorship, as they survived, and many others are gradually beginning to appear, making scholars realize even more how many might have found a similar destiny and how the repression was severe. These works represent a very common misconception of the time: homosexuality as a vice of the cities and the gentry. As a matter of fact, they often talk about London and they portray wealthy lifestyles, naming people with luxurious clothes and cosmetics, considered, as I said before, a form of dissipation of the time. But, as Alan Bray documents, thinking that homosexuality was a vice of the cities was wrong and unfounded, as during the Elizabethan and Jacobean Eras people moved frequently from the

[31] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 57-83.
[32] Bray, *Homosexuality*, p. 33.

countryside to the urban centres and vice versa, and it was untrue to say that London was less subject to traditional moral codes than the countryside, as most people lived in rural areas. Furthermore, the theatre was attended by all social groups and classes. Claiming otherwise, though, was for them a form of political antagonism, opposition to the Court and all its privileges, as it happened with the church of Rome. This caused the resentment of the gentry, who considered themselves as the 'natural' rulers. So, the homosexual, along with his association with the Papists, became a general antagonist figure to demolish the Renaissance Court. The Court was the representation of weakness, confusion, disorder, and dissolution: the figure of the homosexual could have not fitted better.[33]

When it comes to court records, they are historically inaccurate as not all the cases were recorded and only some parts of the notes survived. Moreover, the records are superficial: they do not give details about the figures involved, how they were involved, and the actions that led them to the compromising fact. This makes the homosexual phenomenon difficult to frame during the Renaissance. The records seem to be mainly just legal fiction as clerks were more concerned to write reports in the correct form than making a full record of the facts. The majority of the crimes reported were the means to condemn another form of inadequacy, not properly the homosexual's, forcing a connection between the two.[34]

As it is reported in the Order Book of the Western Assize, Domingo Cassedon Drago, a man coming from Spanish colonies and arrested for 'sodomy' in 1647, happened to be a black man, while John Wilson, the vicar of Arlington is Sussex, seemed to have problematic political views; this makes scholars think if perhaps, the crime of 'sodomy' could also serve as a way to marginalize those who belonged to a different ethnicity or were not part of the political establishment, being a threat for the elite and regulated society.[35] This is when non-reproductive and non-normative sexual activities started to be connected to racial discrimination and colonialism.[36] George Turberville, who

[33] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 33-37.
[34] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 38-40.
[35] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 40-42.
[36] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 90-94.

was also one of Elizabeth I's ambassadors, in *Tragic Tales* (1587) exposes the details of his journey to Moscow for political matters, concentrating specifically on the 'homosexual lifestyles' he encountered there[37]; he says that homosexuality is 'a product of a savage soil, where laws do bear no saw'[38], and he says again that 'it is a land where lust is law'[39]. The idea that a foreign land, in particular Africa and the orient, represented 'freedom', 'disorder', 'carnality', 'bestiality', and 'wildness' started during the Renaissance and kept to be pictured in many of the travel books, diaries, and journals published in the 18th and 19th centuries, during the peak of colonization. This historical phenomenon contributed to reinforce the idea that homosexuality was a 'sickness', an 'infection', and a 'vice' brought from abroad. Those lands were seen as more barbaric and uncivilized, and sexuality was lived more freely; therefore, same-sex love could not be part of the elevated, controlled, and civilized English society.[40]

For the reasons I will explore more extensively in the next subchapter, the humanist culture is to blame when it comes to the negative categorization of the homosexual: the word 'boy' was used in many trials for homosexuality to define a man that had committed same-sex activity. This word, in these cases, it had less to do with age but more with status and behaviours, showing how Classical ideologies had also entered the legal discourse, stereotyping the homosexual man and sexual dynamics: for example, in one 'sodomy' trial, the 'boy' involved in the love affair was, in truth, 29 years old. Consequently, 'boy' was also a way to wrongly associate homosexuality with pederasty and to ridicule male submission and passivity.[41]

In general, though, unless there was a bewildering experience, ordinary cases of homosexuality were not reported but usually ignored – probably on purpose –, as they would have ruined the image of the English society: this silence was not because of tolerance, but, because of a calculated misrecongnition. Unless it disrupted social or economic hierarchies, homosexuality had

37 Bray, *Homosexuality*, p. 25.
38 Tuberville, *Tragic Tales*, p. 388.
39 Tuberville, *Tragic Tales*, p. 389.
40 Banti, *Le Questioni*, pp. 100-123.
41 Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, p. 78.

to remain hidden, because it only had to be associated with something foreigner, which represented an uncivilized, barbarous, or Papist society. Talking too much about it would have given it too much importance, would have normalized this sexuality, when the only things it had to be associated with – as I will deal with it more specifically later – were sin, crime, disorder, debauchery, barbarism, abnormality, and monstrosity. Every homosexual had to be potentially a criminal, an heretic, or a monster. The manipulation of society conducted by powerful institutions became a psychological manipulation of each person's mind, preventing them from overcoming this hostility, fear, and hate; therefore, to explore their true self. If people managed to live or not their real sexuality more positively, despite the claustrophobic climate they were surrounded by, is something we will never know; the inherited accounts of homosexuality that scholars have from this historical period are definitely distorted from the social forms they might actually have taken. Therefore, it is impossible to have a truthful, certain and clear representation of it.[42]

During the 16th and 17th centuries, British society was extremely rural and people lived mainly in villages and hamlets. Only 5% of the population lived in big cities. Therefore, experiences of homosexuality in this period are recorded mainly within this characterization of society, and, because of this, local communities and households must be taken into consideration first. On the basis of the very recent data that historians could find in registers of births, marriages, and deaths, it was finally possible to have an accurate representation of British pre-industrial society. Contrary to what most people might reckon, the pre-industrial society household was composed of two generations living together, more generations were rare. The picture of the traditional family, composed of mother and father, children, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, was an image of emotional stability and order, which is used to some propagandistic extent now too, but it did not really represent British society. What was primarily different at the time was the authority: it was held by just one figure, usually, the man/father – the master of the house – to whom the woman/mother would be subordinated, as society was highly hierarchical and patriarchal.

[42] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 67-80.

Furthermore, servants were a substantial part of British society – they made up 13.4% out of one hundred communities taken into consideration – and their number was usually proportional to the number of children in a household; this means that children of poorer households were working for richer households and they were living in that households together until they both reached the average age of marriage.[43]

Consequently, the focus now shifts to their role as people who were not members of the family, were unmarried, but also workers: as the age of sexual maturity happened well before the average age of marriage, the constrained situation of the household would have encouraged and favoured their preferred sexual life after puberty. As a matter of fact, the power held by the master could also be sexual towards their servants, as well as between the sons of the master and their servants. The Justice of Peace reported many cases of overcoming the sexual restrictions on heterosexual relationships – usually between the master and a female servant – testified by the high numbers of premarital heterosexual intercourse and illegitimate children cases: that is when homosexuality enters the scene, as it was likely to raise less interest and pass unnoticed. The advantage of finding alternative sexual outlets that were not reproductive, the common practice of same-sex servants sleeping together, and the possibility and preferability of finding sexual partners within the households instead of looking for external relationships, also permitted homosexuality. The nobleman philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon and the nobleman and politician Mervyn Touchet are two examples of these dynamics. The former case was reported by the natural philosopher John Aubrey and the politician Sir Simonds D'Ewes in their autobiographies and correspondences, but also by a letter that his mother sent to his brother Anthony Bacon, where she explicitly complains about 'that bloody Percy (...) as a coach companion and bed companion'[44]; instead, the latter case is documented by the trail record of the Earl of Castlehaven, in which it is stated that Mervyn Touchet had sexual intercourses with his servants and had assisted one of his

[43] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 42-46.
[44] James Spedding, ed., *The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon, Vol.1* (London: Longman, 1861), p. 244.

favourites in the rape of his wife. Apart from these two famous people, homosexual activity between masters and servants was mainly accounted for by satirists, such as Richard Brathwaite (1588-1673), an English poet; in *Placentia* (1621), he calls them 'lustful catamites' and 'private parasites'[45].

As the households were hierarchical and patriarchal institutions, so was the educational system, which, as I said before, also involved and permitted various forms of institutionalized homosexuality. This happened mainly in universities between students – who were unmarried, were sharing rooms, and could live in an environment that let them explore their sexuality – and the teachers and the students, but it could also happen between the tutor incorporated into the households and the master's sons.[46] This has been complained by the unknown author of *The Times' Whistle* (1582), where he says 'I grieve at the vices which prevail at the university' or 'how many towardly young gentlemen (...) are with this infection poisoned by them whose best protection should keep them from all sin'[47]. Forms of institutionalized homosexuality also happened in grammar schools or village schools, where the famous cases of the headmasters of Eton, Nicholas Udall, and Great Tey in Essex, Mr Cooke, became the disturbing facts used to poison and feed even further the monstrous reputation of the homosexual 'creature'.[48]

Furthermore, homosexuality appears to be quite 'tolerated' in prostitution and it was clearly a widespread activity, as documented, in Elizabethan and Jacobean London. This is referenced many times in John Donne's *Satires*, such as satire number 1:[49]

> Why should'st though (that dost not only approve,
> But, in rank, itchy lust, desire and love
> The nakedness and bareness to enjoy
> Of thy plump, muddy whore or prostitute boy).[50]

In *Certain Satyres* (1598), John Marston exposes a form of prostitution that also happened within

45 Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 42-51.
46 Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, p. 78.
47 Richard Corbet, *The Times' Whistle: Or, a New Daunce of Seven Satires, and Other Poems* (London: Wentworth Press, 2016), p. 80.
48 Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 51-53.
49 Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 53-54.
50 John Donne, 'Satires', ll. 37-40.

the household and that sees one of the servants being secretly hired as a prostitute and having a relationship with the master.[51]

In the 17th century, molly houses started to appear, secret places where homosexuals could meet and engage in sexual activities; here, prostitution also happened. The Society for the Reformation of Manners was a religious organization that had the role of persecuting 'sodomites', prostitutes, and sabbath-breakers, and shutting down these kinds of places.[52]

Apart from the other forms it took in theatre and the virtual gathering space created through the production of literary texts, it sadly seems that homosexuality happened and was justified mainly within a form of power, whether economic or social. In such a restrictive environment, it was impossible for homosexuals to figure out who they were or who they might be. Queer people simply adapted themselves for the collective good and they thought that was the right thing to do.[53]

1.3 The English Renaissance and Homosexuality: Influences from Europe and the Relation with the Classics

The Renaissance was a historical and intellectual period characterized by a rebirth of literature and arts stimulated by the recovery of texts and artifacts from classical antiquity and the development of techniques and aesthetics based on classical models; it had its peak in Italy, especially in the sector of visual arts. English education was conducted by tutors and private teachers in wealthy families or grammar schools and was mostly characterized, on one side, by the study of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and, on the other side, by arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music, and, finally, by a general acquisition of literature, which, more appropriately, was literacy and culture knowledge, extended to Ancient Greece for more intellectually ambitious humanists. But, above all, the main subject remained Latin. This made people question the situation of the English language, which appeared to be very unstable and ephemeral when compared to the

[51] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 53-54.
[52] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 81-118.
[53] Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 53-54.

classical languages, strongly exalted; consequently, people started to be more aware and pride of the English national identity and culture, and to manifest a sense of belonging to the nation and its traditions. This phenomenon pushed many intellectuals to translate into English the major classic works of the time, such as Virgil's *Aeneid* (1490) by William Caxton, Homer's *Iliad* (1611) and *Odyssey* (1614) by George Chapman, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1657) by Arthur Golding, and Plato's *Symposium* (1795) by Floyer Sydenham. Even though they originated in pagan times and, because of this, were reconciled to the moral vision of Christianity, they were studied by many artists, allowing the spread of plenty of the homoerotic elements they contained.[54] If, on one side, we see the Bible as the first text being printed, on the other side, print's invention also favoured the circulation of Humanist ideologies and ancient views of same-sex relations that clashed with Christian moral orthodoxy, as it made every kind of information more accessible.[55]

So, as I mentioned, the recovery of the classical texts also meant a recovery of Greek ideas, visions, and conceptions of homosexuality, which became the means to express same-sex love in English Renaissance literature and art. Generally, Greeks' vision of homosexuality has always been positive – even if with its own peculiarities and exceptions – and it has been so fundamental for this subculture that, for all history until the 20th century, it has been the main form, reference, foothold, and defence to homosexual love in Western culture and life.[56] For example, in Greek religion and mythology, it is said that Zeus, Apollo, Hermes, Zephyr, Narcissus, and Achilles, as many other Greek God and Goddesses, and semi-Gods and semi-Goddesses, had numerous love affairs, with both males and females, though respecting the limits imposed. As a consequence, this was reflected in society as well: Greek men were free to enjoy sex with other males without a perceived loss of masculinity, power, or high social status as long as the older, wiser, or notable man took the dominant or penetrative role; therefore, pederasty was the most common male bond that could fit in these dynamics because the younger and unexperienced partner was not considered a fully

[54] Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 531-543.
[55] Borris, 'Introduction', pp. 17-22.
[56] Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'Altra Storia*, pp. 85-88.

developed man yet and could have 'feminine' traits, covering a passive role. Usually, the pederastic relationship was composed of an unmarried man in his twenties, called *erastes* or lover, and an adolescent boy in his mid-to-late teens, called *eromenos* or beloved. A lifelong male bond could also exist but the *eromenos* had to wait to be an *erastes* and respect the age gap. Same-aged adolescents could engage in a sexual and romantic relationship as well but there was always someone who courted and the other who had to be wooed. These limitations were set for the respect of the social and economic pyramid – which saw the rich adult man at the top – the active/passive roles, and the full virile age – which symbolized when a man could not be passive anymore. In general, Greek male partners founded a romantic bond that was seen as a part of the educational and formative experiences for adult life.[57]

The *Symposium* (385-370 BC) is a fundamental Classical work to look at when it comes to homosexuality because it is responsible for its association with pederasty during the Renaissance, but it also influenced – along with other philosophical works, such as *De Amicitia* by Cicero, and *Ethics* and *Politics* by Aristotle – homosexual relationships from this period forward.[58] The work represents a celebratory drinking party where a group of intellectuals have a conversation and expose their opinions about love. There are many times when the work deals with homosexuality. For example, Phaedrus**,** the Ancient Greek poet, mentions the sacrifice of Achilles for his lover Patroclus. Even though he knows about the adverse fate of his life given by his mother Thetis, he decides to kill Hector anyway to take revenge on his lover, but he will find death. In exposing their relationship, Phaedrus then makes a clarification, saying that Achilles was 'more beautiful than Patroclus', who 'was still beardless and much younger'[59], and so, he associates their bond to a pederastic, but noble and exemplary relationship.[60] One of the most significant opinions is shared by Pausanias**,** the man of the great war virtues, who talks about vulgar love and celestial love. Vulgar love is the love for the body, the attraction for the body, and to this section belongs the female-

[57] Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'Altra Storia*, pp. 36-63.
[58] Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'Altra Storia*, pp. 85-88.
[59] Plato, *The Symposium* (London: Penguin Classics, 1999), p. 12.
[60] Plato, *The Symposium*, pp. 9-12.

female love and the male-female love, while celestial love is the male-male love, the love that generates energy, intellectual things, government, and military deeds. Homosexual love was considered superior and put in a different group because it concerned men, because men had a privileged role in society and could have access to knowledge; consequently, it was a love that had other purposes, that had more important aims. Only men could love each other fully and beautifully: what primarily attracted a man to another man was virtue, courage, intelligence, temperance, and strength, because that was not granted to women, that was not something that could not belong to a woman.[61] Another interesting opinion is Aristophanes's**,** the comedian, who says that love comes from a lack of something and he presents the myth of the three genders, introducing for the first time a theme related to gender, besides sexual orientation. In the past human genders were three: masculine, feminine and androgynous. Men and women were round and they had two faces in one head, four arms, two genitals, and four legs, and were eternal. Zeus wanted to kill them because they were getting stronger and closer to the Olympus, wanting to become like Gods. But the other Gods told him that without humanity no one would venerate them anymore, so he decides to divide them in two: that is why human beings now have one head, two arms, one genital, and two legs. Throughout their life they will have to look for their missing part: the female will look for her other female part (lesbian love, Gaia, the earth), the androgynous for his opposite part (heterosexual love, the Moon, halfway between the sun and the earth), and the male will look for his other male part (homosexual love, the Sun, rational). He then adds that homosexuals are not shameless, as most people think, but, on the contrary, he says they are the most 'virile', 'masculine', and 'bravest' of all, as they are attracted to someone that has their same physiognomy and characteristics. In his opinion, this is evidenced by facts, as 'men like these are the only ones who, when they grow up, end up as politicians'[62]. He specifies that 'When they become men, they're sexually attracted to boys; they have no natural interest in getting married and having children, although they are forced to do

[61] Plato, *The Symposium*, pp. 13-20.
[62] Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 30.

this by social conventions'[63]. So again, homosexual love is considered superior because men had a more important role in society and is identified with pederasty because it was a love towards boys.[64] But the most efficient moment is when Socrate tells the myth of Eros. Agreeing with Aristophanes, love is a missing part of ourselves, the lack of beauty that we look for so desperately. In fact, Eros was born from an incomplete and contrasting love, Penia, which means poverty, and Poros, which means abundance. After the birth of Aphrodite, a banquet was given and all the Gods reunited to eat. After eating quite a lot, Poros went to sleep under a tree, tired. At the feast, in the meantime, arrives Penia, the woman of poverty, an ugly homeless with nothing with her; therefore, she decides to steal his love: they make love and she gets pregnant from richness and abundance. Eros is the son of a poor woman and the God of Abundance: a semi-god. This is needed to show that love is what connects the world of ideas and the world of things, as Plato will explain in his philosophy, because love moves, it is what pushes forward, to get things, to desire and to obtain things people do not have. Love is not rich, nor poor, Love is not old, nor young: it is in between. At this point, he explains the five degrees of beauty that correspond to the five degrees of love: the love for the body; the love for the soul; the love for the good laws, the good government; the love for the sky and the stars; and lastly, the love for the beauty itself, the idea of beauty, the Good. This is Platonic love, a love that has nothing to do with sex, carnality, procreation, and children: it is a love that only has to do with love. And here is where homosexuality finds its place for Plato.[65] In conclusion, in the *Symposium* the philosopher defines homosexual love as superior because it is a love for its own sake, but also because the man was considered superior to the woman, because he was the mark of an urbane and sophisticated person; as a consequence, homosexual love became the symbol of something that enhanced and enriched the person, that intellectually stimulated the other partner, and was needed for something major and important. The best bond that could represent this dynamic was formed by an adult man and a young man because both had something that the other

[63] Plato, *The Symposium*, p. 30.
[64] Plato, *The Symposium*, pp. 25-32.
[65] Plato, *The Symposium*, pp. 41-63.

needed: the adult had wisdom, while the young man had beauty. Heterosexual love was seen as the only form of reproduction, for the immortality of the species; someone could not be mentally stimulated in it because the woman had nothing to do with the academic sphere and so that kind of love, was inferior. And so was lesbianism.[66]

It is well documented how Romans were also leading a quite open sexual life between the sexes. Most Roman emperors had same-sex partners, but ordinary men could have male partners only if they were slaves, former slaves, prostitutes, entertainers, and young boys; unfortunately, man's war rape also happened. If they were free men there could be sexual intercourse but with no penetration. Many critics say that Romans talked about homosexuality only through and because of Greeks myths and it is only because of it that Ancient Rome society welcomed this sexual orientation that used to condemn before, but others say that homosexuality was already present in Roman history, only with a different representation and different practices, as expressed before. It is certain, though, that the elevated use of Greek art, literature, inscriptions, and archeological remains, such as erotic artifacts and architecture, as a model of expression, contributed to the diffusion of homoeroticism and homosexuality as a normal and partially accepted romantic and sexual orientation in the Roman Empires. Sexual attitudes and behaviours of Ancient Greece are incorporated into the Ancient Rome lifestyles, as well as in Latin forms of art. Many of the elements, such as characters and places, found in Latin poets' works that talked about homosexuality – such as Virgil's, Ovid's, Catullus', and Sappho's –, refer to homoerotic Greek myths and scenarios; these have consequently been transmitted to English art and literature during the Renaissance, as I will show more specifically in the next chapters.[67]

It is clearer, now, why art – painting, sculpture, music, theatre, and literature – was the primary way we can recognize – where it is possible – a positive representation of homosexuality during the Renaissance and how Greek myth and arts were the only positive available models

[66] Plato, *The Symposium*, pp. 64-80.
[67] Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'Altra Storia*, pp. 36-46/64-84/94-100.

homosexual artists and authors could have access to and could grab onto to convey it; in fact, in a close analysis of the autobiographies and literary and artistic works of many of those artists, Plato's idealization and spiritualization of pederasty – which resulted in the formulation of Platonic Love – was the majoritarian homosexual love manifestation presented. This led to the stereotypical association of homosexuality to boy love. Though is not categorical for everyone – and, at the time, it was common for many heterosexual relationships to present an age gap as well – it cannot pass unnoticed that this was the main form of homosexual love representation during the Renaissance and that more people managed to embrace their true sexual orientation in this period because of the importance of the Classics. Greek philosophers' elevation of homosexuality from a mere sexual and physical function to a noble form of love between intellectuals and thinkers, especially between the teacher/educator and the pupil/apprentice, contributed to making it a form of institutionalized romantic and spiritual relationship in the academic and educational environments, though opening a breach to its total condemnation. Artists were led to understand that this was how they were allowed to live their homoerotic experiences, this was the dynamic they had to fit their sexuality in, accepting it only when it was an intellectual and spiritual love, as it would have only been a form of perversion and debauchery in the other cases, leaving it totally defenceless and unjustified. This deformed conception of homosexuality deceived individuals, whereas Plato, in trying to elevate it by making it an intellectual attraction between an older man and a younger man, was himself a victim of sexual dynamics dictated by social gender roles; his definition remains a partial, confused, and unequal representation of homosexuality.[68]

The flourishing of these Classical ideologies in the academic environments merged with the rigid gender roles that men and women had to perform in English society; consequently, the homosexuals lived and experienced, involuntarily, a confused and complementary identity and sexuality. They were extremely influenced by social norms, forced to be inserted in two fixed roles, forced to find their expression in the opposite of their partner's; so, two men or women that engaged

[68] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 77-83.

in a sexual and romantic relationship usually found themselves in the usual opposite patterns that had to make one feel more 'manly' – therefore, 'superior' – than the other, as they had to take the role of the man, and one more 'effeminate' – therefore, 'inferior' – than the other, as they had to take the role of the woman; usually these patterns could be mapped onto the categories of active/passive, insertive/receptive, masculine/feminine, or man/boy.[69]

For example, these representations of homosexual love happened between Michelangelo and his younger lover, the nobleman Tommaso de' Cavalieri, to whom the artist had dedicated his poetry, as well as between Shakespeare and the 'fair youth', to whom the poet and playwright will also dedicate his sonnets fifty years later. Oscar Wilde used Plato's conception of homosexual love through his works, but, most importantly, in his famous speech during his trial for his 'sodomy' accusation; to defend his love for Bosie, he takes Michelangelo and Tommaso, Shakespeare and the fair youth, and David and Jonathan's relationships as examples for his arguments. In the eyes of the modern scholar, this partly seems like an excuse, an exception, a way to extinguish one's 'sin', and does not correspond to the complexity and extension of today's conception of homosexuality.[70]

1.4 The Positions of Science

While religious claims tend to be more attached to an irremovable position, science seems to go in a slightly different direction. The studies conducted by science on homosexuality were believed to be non-existent before the 19th century, while before, historians of sexuality seemed to have focused exclusively on theology and law, that is, on sins and crimes. On the contrary, even if less impactful, the first scientific approaches to this matter had already started in the 16th and 17th centuries, but others even claim that these ideas were first formulated by Greek and Roman medicine and astrology. The former sciences can already provide great knowledge of the social, cultural, and conceptual history of male and female same-sexual desire and relations. The

[69] Borris, 'Introduction', pp. 23-29.
[70] Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'Altra Storia*, pp. 201-225/360-371.

exploration of this occult and forgotten archive has only recently begun.[71]

The reason these disciplines were part of a minor standpoint and subject to a huge silencing and repression by the Church, especially during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation Eras, when the Inquisition was at its highest power, was not only for the scandal they represented, but also for the fear they would stimulate same-sexual desires. In fact, scientists who exposed themselves on this matter, as many other heretic contents, could have risked their professional status and reputation, but, above all, their life, causing them to fall into a professional self-censorship. Most of the early modern scientific studies on homosexuality were being conducted in Italy and, to a much lesser extent, in France, Spain, and England, as in Italy sexuality was being seen and lived in a much more relaxed and open-minded way, especially in the Mediterranean coast.[72]

Most of the scientific tractates and writings on homosexuality made during the Renaissance partly anticipate the 18th and 19th-century vision that considered same-sex attraction not as an 'unnatural perversion' depending on single acts, but as a constitutional sexual 'deviance', a 'pathological' impulse dictated by the functioning of the most intimate and internal human parts. The implications of early modern scientific disciplines ended up concluding that homosexuality was an innate condition and could be divided into various categories, according to their 'causes' and consequent manifestations; these categories were assigned by distinctive human constitutions or abnormal anatomies and physiologies, attributed to embryological, astral and complexional etiologies. For example, the anatomist André Du Laurens (1558-1609), started to study the human body and, above all, human genitals, and concluded that their size and forms could determine our sexual orientations: for example, the *virago* (a Latin word that refers to a woman with a virile body and attitude, such as exceptional strength), the *cinaedus* (a Latin word that refers to a man with a passive character and weaker appearance, also used by Romans as a derogatory offence) and the *tribade* (a Latin word that refers to a woman with a big clitoris) are figures that biologically and

[71] Borris, 'Introduction', pp. 23-29.
[72] Borris, 'Introduction', pp. 17-75.

physiologically do not correspond to the canonic body type of the male and the female human beings, and they explain the 'imbalance' humans might have and that could bring to a consequential different sexual attraction. He also examined male anuses in order to establish the degree of inclination to sodomitical pleasures. As a consequence, the homosexual was considered like a sick individual who had to be subject to surgical operations, if necessary, like the amputation of the female-looking genitals characterized by pseudophallus labial and clitoral hypertrophy, or psychological and therapeutical controls and treaties, like the prescription of diets, exercises, or drugs, in order to be cured and reunited with the 'natural' vision of things and social conception of reality. Doctors were giving couples advices on how not to conceive 'cinaedi' and 'viragos'. In his study made on *On Chronic Diseases*, written by the Greco-Roman physician Caelius Aurelianus, he opinions that a homosexual individual was generated because the parents' seeds did not merge correctly during the sexual act.[73]

To be more specific, the early modern science debate challenged the theological and legal discourse that was only referring to the act, not to a whole identity, as if the person's feelings were disconnected from the body. By doing so, it was like claiming that everyone could potentially commit a homosexual act, because it was something that was caused by external circumstances, particular factors or dynamics; in other words, something that someone was brought to do because of the situation they were in. There were not homosexuals, but only individuals who committed 'sodomitical' acts. What changed in science during the 18th century was the connection of homosexual behaviours and attitudes, as Michel Foucault says in *The History of Sexuality* (1976), to a whole individual identity, so to an innate condition that the individual alone had the volition and necessity to embody. This eventually led to today's vision of homosexuality. But apparently, this connection was partially already made in the 16th and 17th centuries, therefore anticipating at that time the modern sexual discourse.[74]

[73] Borris, 'Introduction', pp. 23-75.
[74] Borris, 'Introduction', pp. 23-29.

Medicine, physiognomy, and chiromancy interpreted bodily features as signs of an innate constitution or nature, while astrology concluded that stars could affect our human attitude, physical characteristics, and sexual preferences.[75]

When it comes to medicine, one of the most interesting analysis has been conducted on Avicenna, a Persian polymath known for his advanced studies that connected physical and psychological symptoms in order to treat patients. Its five-volume medical encyclopedia, *The Canon of Medicine*, was used as the standard medical textbook in Europe up to the 18th century. In Jacques Despars' (1380?-1458) commentary on Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine,* written in 1453 and published in 1498, it was argued that same-sex desire depends on the self-identification people make with the partner they have a sexual relationship with. The homosexual sees himself in other people's bodies. The process of arousal happens through a voyeuristic identification, that is imagining themselves in the other person, as it happens during self-erotism. Both for the French physician and Avicenna a homosexual is 'a discrete sexual type' whose sexual identity was 'defined by what the subject wants, by desire'[76]. Moreover, in Despars' opinion, homosexuality does not depend on bodily anomalies, such as deformity or complexion imbalance, nor on an act of 'perversity', but on a state of imaginative or psychic difference. Finally, he says that homosexuals are much more than a simplistic binary division, showing that their identity was not confined to a stereotypical one based on their sexual orientation and that reality was already desiring for more identity differences at the time.[77]

The Italian doctor Giulio Guastavini's (1560-1633) commentary on the Pseudo-Aristotelian work *Problemata*, explains why some men enjoy a passive role in sexual intercourses, giving three main reasons: anatomical deformity, that leads the semen to gather in the 'fundament', so that 'that part of the body desires friction'[78]; an 'unnatural' or 'effeminate' constitution, so that, although they

[75] Borris, 'Introduction', pp. 23-29.
[76] Derek Neal, 'Disorder of Body, Mind or Soul. Male Sexual Deviance in Jacques Despars's Commentary on Avicenna', in *The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Kenneth Borris and George Rousseau (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 77-96 (91).
[77] Neal, 'Disorder of Body, Mind or Soul.', pp. 77-96.
[78] Faith Wallis, 'Giulio Guastavini's Commentary on Pseudo-Aristotle's Account of Male Same-sexual Coitus,

are men, they desire to be passive like women; or, finally, if a young man has a sexual experience with another man at a very early stage, he will receipt it and that will be ingrained and imprinted in the person, making it become a habit. Same-sex intercourse will make him feel safer and more comfortable with himself, so he will never enjoy sex with another person biologically different from him.[79]

Paolo Zacchia's (1584-1659) wrote *Quaestiones Medico-Legales* in 1630. In this work, the Italian physician and philosopher analyses some cases of sodomy and rape; this work is interesting because it does not appear to be interested in the act itself but in condemning the real crime, so the rape, paying attention to the injuries presented.[80]

The Spanish doctor Juan Calvo's (1535-1599) treatise on syphilis published in 1580 is important to mention because it established that what was considered a divine punishment before was, in truth, something men would transmit to each other sexually, counting many cases among the Hispanics. Documents prove that same-sex sexual transmissions were the first cause for diseases among European sailors, and that were passed from America to Europe with colonization. Because of the complex social-historical period, though, Calvo could not propose a same-sex transmission, nor a transmission from native American men to European women, so he had to blame a non-sexual path, suggesting that the closeness shared by soldiers by sleeping together in the same rooms and beds would lead to those transmissions. Calvo's blame of a non-sexual mode of transmission still makes the scholars think about what he probably had to hide at the time: even with sex kept rigorously from view, the image of shared beds, bedclothes and breath alludes to a sort of intimacy between men.[81]

Problemata', in *The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Kenneth Borris and George Rousseau (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 97-119 (100).

79 Wallis, 'Giulio Guastavini's Commentary', pp. 97-119.

80 George Rousseau, 'Policing the Anus. Stuprum and Sodomy According to Paolo Zacchia's Forensic Medicine', in *The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Kenneth Borris and George Rousseau (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 120-141.

81 Cristian Berco, 'Syphilis and the Silencing of Sodomy in Jean Calvo's *Tratado del Morbo Gálico*', in *The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Kenneth Borris and George Rousseau (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 142-169.

The Italian physiognomer and sexologist Cocles, or Bartolommeo della Rocca (1467-1504), explains homosexuality through 'the intrinsic constitutions indicated also by other identifiable bodily signs'[82]. Particularly, he studies the figure of the 'cinaedi' and 'pedicators', the insertive and the receptive homosexuals respectively. He concludes that the 'pedicators', who should restrain themselves from their transgressive impulse in the name of the moral code and social identity roles, are also part of a 'deviant sexual species' with a distinctive 'constitutional morphology'.[83]

When it comes to astrology, it is important to mention the studies of the Italian mathematician and astrologer Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576), who believed that the Universe was responsible for every person's gender. He thought that the Sun and Mars were masculine because they are both hot and dry, while Venus and the Moon were feminine because they are moist and cold; these descriptions were used to declare that the planets and their positions at the time of birth of the person were decisive in defining the individual's gender identity. Astrological influences may lead to excessively 'masculine' men or excessively 'effeminate' women (which Cardano calls 'illegitimate') or to 'masculine' women and 'effeminate' men (which Cardano calls 'unnatural'). In Cardano's opinion, the insertive man or woman would be the 'illegitimate' man and the 'unnatural' woman and the receptive would be the 'unnatural' man.[84] A close look at Cardano's biography, whose life was filled with conflicted same-sex loves, reveals the pains and pleasures of masculine sociability. As a matter of fact, being a great passionate of music, he surrounded himself with male musicians, but he saw them and his inexplainable desires as an impediment to his activity, as it was usually associated with male youth and sensual pleasures. Love and desire for Cardano were forms of madness. This is a very interesting portrait of the homosexual sufferings of the time and the man's struggles in society. In conclusion, astrology confirmed that same-sex desire was an innate

[82] Kenneth Borris, 'Sodomizing Science. Cocles, Patricio Tricasso, and the Constitutional Morphologies of Renaissance Male Same-sex Lovers', in *The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Kenneth Borris and George Rousseau (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 195-235 (206).

[83] Borris, 'Sodomizing Science', pp. 195-235.

[84] H. Darrel Rutkin, 'Astrological Conditioning of Same-sexual Relations in Girolamo Cardano's Theoretical Treatises and Celebrity Genitures', in *The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Kenneth Borris and George Rousseau (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 258-280.

human condition, but it did not separate homosexuality from being also a form of moral depravity.[85]

On the basis of the observations presented, I will now analyse the works of Richard Barnfield and William Shakespeare, where it is possible to perceive elements of homoeroticism. Despite the suffocating climate they were created in, they courageously contributed to carving the arduous and tumultuous path of Queer literature.

[85] Guido Giglioni, '"Bolognan Boys are Beautiful, Tasteful and Mostly Fine Musicians." Cardano on Male Same-sex Love and Music', in *The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Kenneth Borris and George Rousseau (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 281-307.

Chapter 2

Richard Barnfield (1574-1620/26?)

> Fond Love is blinde, and so art thou (my Deare)
> For thou seest not my Love, and great desart;
> Blinde Love is fond, and so thou dost appeare;
> For fond, and blinde, thou greevst my greeving hart:
> Be thou fond-blinde, blinde-fond, or one, or all;
> Thou art my Love, and I must be thy thrall. (ll. 139-144)

2.1 Biography and Queer Works: A Poet Casually Obscured by Literature?

Before new studies appeared in 1990, Richard Barnfield's biography was incorrectly and inaccurately reconstructed. Scholars used to claim that, after the 1590s, he retired from his literary career, got married, and had children, living as a farmer until he died in 1627. But, after observing his family's record offices and church registers, it was possible to completely reconstruct his life, which appeared to be quite different from what it was thought to be.[86] As the literary scholar Andrew Worall has discovered, there is no evidence that he retired to country life and married; on the contrary, as soon his career started, it appeared not to be an easy one, and, because of it, the rest of his life was spent mainly in isolation, at the margin of society. Furthermore, the apparent year of his death, 1627, was not his, but someone else's who bore his same name, probably his father's. In addition to these false reports, there is also a very striking fact that caught the scholars' attention: Barnfield's will and other legal documents. They confirmed that his legacy would pass his younger brother, Robert Barnfield, depriving Richard of what he should have been legitimately assigned.[87]

These biographic discoveries have been extremely important for understanding Barnfield's personal life, subjectivity, and sexuality, which were inevitably connected to his poetry. Consequently, his works could be given a better interpretation. While some scholars were and are still convinced that his works simply adopted a diffused homoerotic literal convention – there is a strong classicist influence in his literary production as is shown in his frequent references to Greek

[86] Claude J. Summers, 'Foreword', in *The Affectionate Shepherd: Celebrating Richard Barnfield*, ed. by George Klawitter and Kenneth Borris (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2001), pp. 7-12.

[87] Andrew Worrall, 'Biographical Introduction: Barnfield's Feasts of "all Varietie"', in *The Affectionate Shepherd: Celebrating Richard Barnfield*, ed. by George Klawitter and Kenneth Borris (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2001), pp. 25-38.

myths and Latin works –, other critics and historians, like Andrew Worall, proved it to be a categorical refusal to heterosexual marriage and reproduction for a strong defence and embrace of his individuality and sexual preferences. For the first time in literature, Barnfield represented, thanks to classical views, a homosexual love that was totally detached from the condemnation of English culture, but that, on the contrary, appropriates of its natural beautiful connotations, such as freedom, romanticism, sweetness, vulnerability, and all the most positive human emotions related to love.[88]

Given these views on his persona and his ambiguous biography, new investigations were conducted concerning his family, lifestyle, and his acquaintances to try to give more proper answers. Richard Barnfield came from a relatively rich family: his parents' families were landowners and lawyers, so they came from high social classes, and the fact that he had not married yet or had a love interest that his father did not approve of, as well as having different sexual tastes, could not guarantee a succession of a new generation of Barnfields to his estate, something that we can imagine was extremely important to this kind of families. There is no other explanation for his father's decision of depraving Richard from his legitimate heritage other than having done something that would have put at risk the family line or reputation, or having crossed the boundaries of what was considered morally acceptable. His brother and his male heirs would have inherited the estate by default, although Robert was still underage and unmarried. To find other documentation and proofs to his sexual preferences, scholars have noticed dedications in his poetry to his male friends from college, who then he would also encounter in the Inns of Court, literary circles he probably used to attend given his father's membership to Barnard's Inn and Gray's Inn, and which can also be connected to homoerotic lifestyles.[89]

When it comes to his works, though, the discourse is a little more complex. The Scottish literary editor Alexander Grosart (1827-1999) and the English scholar and editor Edward Arber

[88] Summers, 'Foreword', pp. 7-12.
[89] Worrall, 'Biographical Introduction', pp. 25-38.

(1836-1912) deny any presence of homoeroticism in his poetry and reckon that what gave that idea, in truth, is just a product of an artificial style and content, a common classical imitation among poets not to be taken seriously.[90] Even Alan Bray claims, having also read the drafts of the original manuscripts, that Barnfield's works are merely pornographic poetry from a heterosexual point of view; he also cites Barnfield's preface of *Cynthia* (1595) – his third published work – in which the poet says that claiming he is depicting the love of a shepherd for a boy is a mistake, to which he would never excuse because he never intended to do that, insisting on the fact the only thing he is trying to do is imitating Virgil in the Second Eclogue of Alexis:[91]

> Some there were, that did interpret *The Affectionate Shepherd*, otherwise than (in truth) I meant, touching the subject thereof, to wit, the love of a Shepheard to a boy; a fault, the which I will not excuse, because I never made. Onely this, I will unshaddow my conceit: being nothing else, but an imitation of *Virgill*, in the second Eclogue of *Alexis*.[92]

Any presence of homoeroticism in Barnfield's works had to be obviously denied, but it is curious to observe that this exorcising process happened in the exact same way for Spenser, who also used similar words in his statements: E. K., the code name for Spenser's commentator in the paratextual material of *The Shepheardes Calender* – suspected to be Spenser or his intimate friend Gabriel Harvey – similarly says that the love of the shepherd for Colin in the first eclogue should not be read as a support of 'sodomy', but just as an imitation of Virgil's Second Eclogue. Then, he defines 'Hobbinol' as a 'fained country name, whereby, it being so commune and usuall, seemeth to be hidden the person of some his very speciall and most familiar freend'[93]. E. K. also claims that:

> In thys place seemeth to be more savour of disorderly love, which the learned call paederastice: but it is gathered besides this meaning. For who that hath red Plato his dialogue called Alcybiades, Xenophon and Maximus Tyrius of Socrates opinions, may easily perceive, that such love is muche to be alowed and liked of, specially so meant, as Socrates used it: who sayth, that in deede he loved Alcybiades extremely, yet not Alcybiades person, but hys soule, which is Alcybiades owne selfe. And so is paederastice much to be praeferred before gynerastice, that is the love whiche enflameth men with lust toward woman kind. But yet let no man thinke, that herein I stand with Lucian or hys devilish disciple Unico Arentino, in defence of execrable and horrible sinnes of forbidden and unlawfull fleshlinesse.[94]

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90 Kenneth Borris, 'Critical Introduction: Barnfield's Reception and Significance', in *The Affectionate Shepherd: Celebrating Richard Barnfield*, ed. by George Klawitter and Kenneth Borris (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2001), pp. 13-24 (13-15).

91 Bray, *Homosexuality*, pp. 60-61.

92 Richard Barnfield, 'Cynthia', *Poems of Richard Barnfield*, ed. by George Klawitter (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005), p. 90.

93 Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calendar* (London: Hugh Singleton, 1579), p. 17.

94 Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calendar*, p. 17.

With this statement, he refers to the *Symposium* and the definition of Platonic love, with which he identifies Colin's and Hobbinol's bond, considering Colin's passion for Rosalind inferior, of the 'gynerastice' type. In fact, he will give his gifts to Rosalind – as it is said in line 59 and 60 of the first Eclogue: 'Ah foolish *Hobbino*l, thy gyft bene vayne:/*Colin* them gives to *Rosalind* againe'[95]; this is exactly what Alcibiades has done with Socrates' gifts in the *Symposium*, used to appease Xantippe, and what Corydon wanted to do with the gifts meant for Alexis in Virgil's Second Eclogue: 'Thestylis keeps telling me she wants them,/And maybe I'll give them to her'[96]. E. K. makes sure the reader is aware of 'paederastice', the only form of homosexual love conceived and accepted at the time in literary representations, the only form of excuse that writers who wanted to engage with these topics could use in their defence, finding a source for it in Virgil's poetry. He defends this love in terms that cannot be related to Colin's circumstances with clarity; consequently, he denies any autobiographical reference by reading as Plato would have done: as a love between minds and not as the 'form' of homosexuality Lucian or Arentino would like.[97]

Without really disproving traditional homoeroticism in pastoral poetry, E. K. ends up promoting it unconsciously. After his confutation of 'paederastice', in 1588 the English poet and Barnfield's mentor Abraham Fraunce (1558-1592) publishes a translation of Virgil's Second Eclogue with a scheme of its structure and contents, followed by Barnfield's *The Affectionate Shepheard* in 1594. As the scholar Harry Morris documents, Fraunce must have influenced Barnfield's life and literary career extensively; moreover, Barnfield's direct study of Latin sources – as shown by his publications, all presenting Latin epigraphs – could have also given him the opportunity to find a way to secretly convey his desires. Putting all this together, his homoerotic intentions seem to outweigh his meagre attempt to bury them. His works show 'the most overt

[95] Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calendar*, ll. 59-60.
[96] Virgil, *The Eclogues of Virgil: A Translation*, ed. by David Ferry (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), ll. 53-54.
[97] Anna Lake Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser: "Great Collin" and the Art of Denial', in *The Affectionate Shepherd: Celebrating Richard Barnfield*, ed. by George Klawitter and Kenneth Borris (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2001), pp. 85-98 (92-97).

homosexual themes and motifs in English Renaissance literature'[98], which make his erotic commitments to men very clear, although precise biographical facts are difficult to find due to the lack of sources. The intensity and the details of male body descriptions, the frequency in which they appear, and the sincerity with whom they are presented, leave little doubt to his sexual attraction. An imitation? An 'imitation' that has gone a little bit too far to be just an 'imitation'.[99]

So, putting aside what Grosart and Arber said back in the 19th century, it is clear – and this might be a tragical misunderstanding and loss for the homosexual activist Alan Bray in the 1980s – that, Barnfield's clarification remains only a blatant justification to hide the obvious truth, and that 'beneath the apparently blithe self confidence of Barnfield's explanation lies deep-seated anxiety'[100].

Despite these ambiguous deductions, the homophobic interpretation of his early critics has been useful to determine the homoerotic stance of his poetry. In fact, many critics have made severe comments on his poetry, considering it bad because of the explicit homoerotic elements, in order to safeguard the moralistic literary canon from sexual depravity and corruption. For example, the negative comments made by the writer and theologian Clive S. Lewis (1898-1963) referred to a 'very bad verse', picturing him as a poet who 'is often a fool'[101], and so does the poet and critic Edmund Gosse (1849-1928) in 1885, who, despite the positive opinion on Barnfield's lyrical style, defines the male romantic bond in *The Affectionate Shepheard* (1594) 'a sentiment of friendship so exaggerated'[102]; in 1887 the critic and editor George Saintsbury (1845-1933) also declares that it is 'a mistake to suppose that anyone who disdains his country morality must be a good poet' and that 'As it Fell upon a Day' (1598) is a 'not very numerous example of perfect poetry written by a very imperfect poet'[103]. He then goes on to say that Barnfield's style 'does not find itself ill-matched with

98 Rictor Norton, 'Pastoral Homoeroticism and Barnfield, the Affectionate Shepherd', in *The Affectionate Shepherd: Celebrating Richard Barnfield*, ed. by George Klawitter and Kenneth Borris (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2001), pp. 117-129 (120).
99 Norton, 'Pastoral Homoeroticism and Barnfield', pp. 117-129.
100 Summers, 'Foreword', p. 11.
101 Clive S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 497.
102 Leslie Stephen, ed., *Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. III* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1985), p. 263.
103 George Saintsbury, ed., *A History of Elizabethan Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1920), pp. 117-118.

accurate drawing of nature' and that 'his very bad taste in *The Affectionate Shepherd* may be excused as a humanist crotchet of the time'[104]. In 1963, Harry Morris, sharing these views, still talks about 'perverted love'[105]. Judgments on the quality of Barnfield's poetry were always made in parallel with his homoerotic contents. Frank Kermode's (1919-2010) appraisal of Barnfield's poetic achievement as separated from his homoeroticism is a rare case. All the critics who wrote his biography or analysed his works kept following this line of thought until 1990, when finally criticism opened up to new evaluations. *The Norton Anthology* excluded Barnfield from the first edition in 1962 to the seventh edition in 1999, and the same was also done 'accidentally' with the most homoerotic Shakespeare's sonnets. *The Longman Anthology* finally gave recognition to this poet in its first edition in 1999 dedicating to him up to twenty-one pages: they included *The Affectionate Shepheard* in its integrity and the six sonnets to Ganymede in *Cynthia*, which were censored in the English anthologies and literature books for centuries. What was miraculously reprinted were only cut and clean versions of Barnfield's original works in extremely limited copies: his first and second major works for the first time in 1840, while his third work, *The Encominion of Lady Pecunia*, apparently lacking of homoerotic elements, 'already' in 1816. But, then, what was the real problem? Was he not good enough, not worthy of being given space, or, perhaps, only 'too gay'?[106]

Consequently, it is interesting to shift the focus on the reason why he was classified as a 'minor Elizabethan poet'. It is particularly interesting because, apart from the generally negative reception, many critics, such as C. S. Lewis himself, have associated him with Shakespeare, while at the same time have diminished him once they realized the strong homoeroticism of his poetry; for example, 'As It Fell Upon a Day' was falsely attributed to Shakespeare for a long time, but finally its real authorship was recognized in the 1870s. Many of other poems were incorporated in Shakespeare's collections only to permit their survivals. The educator Felix E. Schelling (1858-

[104] Saintsbury, *A History of Elizabethan Literature*, pp. 117-118.
[105] Harry Morris, *Richard Barnfield, Colin's Child* (Tallahassee: The Florida State University, 1963), pp. 42-105.
[106] Borris, 'Critical Introduction', pp. 13-24.

1945) commented that 'he deserved the confusion which long existed between some of his lyrics and Shakespeare's'[107]. Many other critics, such as Frank Kermode, have praised the quality of his lyrics for the unique and attractive combination of native and classical elements with the richness of his fantasy in pastoral settings. But, above all, it is quite interesting to expose Edward Arber and Edmund Gosse' opinions, as the former also classified him above 'any third-rate poet', while the latter underlined his 'great poetical qualities', his 'melody, picturesqueness, and limpid sweetness' of his lyrics.[108] Given these opinions, Kenneth Borris is definitely convinced that the obscurantist policy applied to Barnfield's figure was the result of an antipathy connected to the themes and contents of his poetics, not to the level of his style and technique. There have been attempts to misread on purpose these homoerotic elements for simple affection with no sexual intentions to try to save him from obscurity, but nothing else. In fact, Edward Arber betrayed himself by describing his works also as 'skillful poetry, *not* expressing any personal feelings'[109]; the same happens with the editor Arthur H. Bullen (1857-1920), who spoke of his 'unlaboured fluency and grace with *playful touches of extravagance*' or, again, he said that 'the choice of his subject was *not happy*'[110] – that is, of course, *not heterosexual* –. However, the claims made on his poetry and the related discontinuity of its reception – whether positive or negative – have prevented his total disappearance from literary history: this contrasting debate gave the possibility to Barnfield's texts to be wholly rediscovered after the mid-nineteenth century and let the readers decide, basing themselves on their personal perception of homoerotic desire, if to fully ignore it or give it a totally new and free interpretation.[111]

2.2. *The Affectionate Shepheard* (1594): Pastoral Genre and Homoeroticism

The Affectionate Shepheard is the poem with the most homoerotic elements of all of Barnfield's works. It is a complaint of the shepherd Daphnis for the love of Ganymede, a fair young

[107] Stephen, *Dictionary of National Biography*, p. 263.
[108] Stephen, *Dictionary of National Biography*, p. 263.
[109] Edward Arber, ed., *Richard Barnfield: Poems, 1594-1598* (Birmingham, English Scholar's Library, 1882), p. xxii.
[110] A.H. Bullen, ed., *Some Longer Elizabethan Poems* (Westminster: Constable, 1903), pp. xiv-xv.
[111] Borris, 'Critical Introduction', pp. 13-24.

man, who is loved by a woman, Queen Guendolen.[112] Ganymede is an emblematic character drawn from the Greek myth of Ganymede and Zeus, frequently used in the homoerotic discourse. In this myth, made famous by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the God Zeus kidnapped the beautiful mortal Ganymede to make him his cupbearer. Zeus falls in love with Ganymede and they become lovers.[113] Daphnis and Ganymede will also appear in six sonnets of Barnfield's second most famous work, *Cynthia*. With the end of Paganism, moralists turned Ganymede into a negative word for 'catamite', a boy used for sexual purposes, while, during the Renaissance, with Neoplatonism, it acquired a positive acceptation and meant a person with transcendent virtues or values.[114] Thanks to this myth, as well as Hyacinth's, Narcissus', Orpheus', Adonis', and many others, Ganymede's figure started to be used by poets and dramatists to secretly involve a homosexual affair and positively discuss homosexuality.[115]

The Affectionate Shepheard is a pastoral poem composed of 156 stanzas of 6 verses each, divided into three parts: *The Affectionate Shepheard*, consisting of 'The Teares of an affectionate Shepheard sicke for Love (or The Complaint of *Daphnis* for the Love of *Ganimede*)' and 'The Second Dayes Lamentation'; *The Shepherds Content*; plus one concluding sonnet. For this work, Barnfield is influenced by Virgil's *Eclogues*, also called Bucolics. They are ten in total and Barnfield drew on the second one, which is about the love of the shepherd Corydon for the beautiful boy Alexis, to tell his story. Other influences come from other pastoral Latin works, such as Theocritus's *Idylls* (the first example of pastoral poetry), various English Renaissance works, and the Song of Solomon, a biblical episode of the Old Testament.[116] In terms of English Renaissance works, Barnfield was probably influenced by Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) and Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593). Throughout the chapter, for the former, I will briefly take into consideration

[112] Leo Daugherty, 'The Question of Topical Allusion in Richard Barnfield's Pastoral Verse', in *The Affectionate Shepherd: Celebrating Richard Barnfield*, ed. by George Klawitter and Kenneth Borris (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2001), pp. 45- 61 (45).
[113] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, p. 78.
[114] Daugherty, 'The Question of Topical Allusion', p. 45.
[115] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 78-79.
[116] Daugherty, 'The Question of Topical Allusion', p. 45.

The Shepheardes Calender (1579) and *The Faerie Queene* (1590), for the latter, *Hero and Leander* (1598) and *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* (1599).[117]

Pastoral poetry, specifically, the pattern shepherd-young man, seems to be the 16th-century model of expression for homosexuality, following the tradition by which it was previously represented and consequently handed down: Greek and Latin pastoral works.[118] As we see in *The Shepheard Calender*, same-sex love representation emerges through the attraction of a shepherd towards a young man, whose love reciprocation is hindered by the interest for another woman. *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* does not specify the gender of the shepherd's lover, but given Marlowe's biography, the genre poetic tradition, and the evident imitation of Virgil's Second Eclogue, the ambiguity sides with homoeroticism. Even the epyllion (a short epic poem) *Hero and Leander* – a retelling of the myth of the lovers of the Hellespont first told by Ovid in the *Heroides* – uses again the Greek God Neptune and Ganymede's mythological figure as a disguise for homosexuality within the plot. Here, the God Neptune's makes a romantic confession to Leander, exchanging him for Ganymede, who was once his lover:[119]

> The lusty god embraced him, called him love,
> And swore he never should return to Jove.
> But when he knew it was not Ganymede,
> For under water he was almost dead,
> He heaved him up, and looking on his face,
> Beat down the bold waves with his triple mace,
> Which mounted up, intending to have kissed him,
> And fell in drops like tears because they missed him.[120]

Even though Neptune realizes he is not Ganymede, the God is still attracted by Leander and tells him a tale of seduction between a shepherd and a boy to make him understand that these feelings can happen and are legitimate:[121]

> Thereat smiled Neptune, and then told a tale,
> How that a shepherd, sitting in a vale,
> Played with a boy so faire and kind,
> As for his love, both earth and heaven pined;

[117] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', p. 85.
[118] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, p. 82.
[119] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 91-92.
[120] Christopher Marlowe, 'Hero and Leander', *The Complete Poems and Translations*, ed. by Stephen Orgel (London: Penguin, 2007), Sestiad II, ll. 167-174.
[121] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 91-92.

That of the cooling river durst not drink,
Lest water-nymphs should pull him from the brink.[122]

As I asserted in the previous chapter, Greek homosexuality and homoeroticism mainly meant 'boy love'. Though Daphnis and Ganymede, in *The Affectionate Shepheard*, do not represent the age gap that Platonic love refers to – they appear to be same-aged – a close analysis of their love dynamics brings to a very interesting allegoric interpretation: it is because of the refusal of Ganymede that Daphnis has suddenly become an old man, a metaphor needed to explain the desperation and frustration of his unrequited love. Daphnis passes from being a 'wooer full of youthful vitality to a disillusioned old man'[123]. The following lines in The Second Dayes perfectly links the surreal rapid aging of Daphnis to the unrequited love for the young Ganymede:[124]

This leare I learned of a bel-dame Trot,
(When I was yong and wylde as now thou art):
But her good counsell I regarded not;
I markt it with my eares, not with my hart.
But now I finde it too-too true (my Sonne),
When my Age-withered Spring is almost done.

Behold my gray head, full of silver haires,
My wrinckled skin, deepe furrowes in my face:
Cares bring Old-Age, Old-Age increaseth cares;
My Time is come, and I have run my Race:
Winter hath snow'd upon my hoarie head,
And with my Winter all my joyes are dead.[125]

Consequently, homoerotic Greek literature concentrates on and celebrates late adolescent male beauty because it represented the peak of male attractiveness and body flourishing, considered the perfection of human beauty. This also happened because the age range in which young men were allowed to form homoerotic bonds with older men was between puberty and the appearance of the first beard: a very short, and, for this reason, precious phase worth to be praised and exalted. This is why we usually find an older man, a shepherd, praising the physical beauty and feeling attraction towards a younger man, conventionally called 'Ganymede'. In this pastoral idyll,

[122] Marlowe, 'Hero and Leander', Sestiad II, ll. 193-198.
[123] Julie W. Yen, '"If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy": Rereading Homoerotic Desire in Barnfield's Ganymede Poems', in *The Affectionate Shepherd: Celebrating Richard Barnfield*, ed. by George Klawitter and Kenneth Borris (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2001), pp. 129-148 (131).
[124] Daugherty, 'The Question of Topical Allusion', pp. 50-52.
[125] Richard Barnfield, 'The Affectionate Shepheard', *Poems of Richard Barnfield*, ed. by George Klawitter (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005), ll. 409-420.

harmonic, delightful, and natural scenarios contribute to creating an atmosphere of spirituality, enchantment, and wonder for their beautiful and natural love. But, the boy will soon lose his beauty as the shepherd will lose his boy. A metaphor to say that youth and beauty disappear quickly and represent a very brief moment of our life that has to be lived, guarded, and remembered, and so, love.[126]

The Hellenic male beauty ideal becomes, then, another defensive shield through which conveying homoerotic appreciation. However, male descriptions in Greek and Latin works are never too explicit, only generic. There are no descriptions of boys' body features or of the physical charms that produce these effects on the older lover. What is preferably described and given much attention is nature, to indicate the naturalness of the love they share, or to create analogies between its brief freshness and luxuriance, shown through the passing of seasons, with the brevity that characterizes the explosion of human beauty and youth. This was part of Classical decorum. So, unlike Theocritus' *Idylls*, Virgil's *Eclogues*, and even Ovid's descriptions of Hyacinthus, Narcissus, and Ganymede in the *Metamorphoses* (8 CE), descriptions of handsome young men in Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593), and Drayton's *David and Goliah* (1630), as well as Barnfield *The Affectionate Shepheard* and *Cynthia*, become sensual and peculiar in their details. This is what changed with the English Renaissance and the revisitation of the Classic works.[127] In these texts is also possible to perceive the convergence of the pederastic and pedagogic platonic ideals, as the presence of adult figures have the role of teaching, persuading, and advising the younger boy, making him discover the things he is capable to do in order to be a perfectly virile and skillful man.[128]

The main available text that Renaissance writers could have had as a model for these specific descriptions of male beauty and sensuality was the biblical episode of the Song of Solomon

[126] Daugherty, 'The Question of Topical Allusion', pp. 50-52.
[127] Raymond-Jean Frontain, '"An Affectionate Shepheard Sicke for Love": Barnfield's Homoerotic Appropriation of the Song of Solomon', in *The Affectionate Shepherd: Celebrating Richard Barnfield*, ed. by George Klawitter and Kenneth Borris (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2001), pp. 99-114 (99-105).
[128] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, p. 78.

– an erotic poem about the love and sexual longing of two lovers –, which was so ambiguous in its possible interpretation of homoerotic desire that made the Christian Standard Bible, the 2017 English translation of the Bible, introduce the dichotomy 'man' and 'woman' as a final clarification for it. In fact, in many passages of this episode, the Bible fails to specify the pronouns of who is speaking to whom, leaving the readers to openly interpret the dialogues on the basis of their preferences. In the first translation of the Song of Solomon, the female and the male voices shift in the narration without warning, giving more freedom to personal interpretation and imagination of the characters, and more flexibility to settled gender roles. Moreover, the power given to the female character is outstanding, as she does not only passively wait for her man to arrive, but, at the same time, her desire for him is exposed with no filter, in an aggressive and anxious search for his lover: she is the protagonist of her feelings, both spiritual and erotic, she is given a primary voice in the relationship, she can also be the one to decide and take action. Similarly, in *The Affectionate Shepheard*, gender roles are first asserted, then ignored and mixed up, softening all categorical gender distinctions: Ganymede takes both the conventional sexual roles of a man and a woman. The precise description of the maiden's beloved in the Song of Solomon became an important example 'for the lyrical celebration of a sexuality that is free and boundless as the nature itself'[129], perfectly leaving freedom to applications and incorporations of homosexual dynamics, further explored by writers like Barnfield.[130]

So, while Virgil and Spencer represent a more chaste, pure, and unadulterated passion, Marlowe and Barnfield's pastoral dramas are erotic, free from sexual boundaries, lush, honest, and real, creating metaphors that connect the natural world to a more natural and primitive sexuality. Ganymede is described not only for his personality and the things he does and that fascinate Daphnis, but also and especially for his body. The love is not simply spiritual, but also carnal, and Barnfield seems to find joy, literary freedom, and excitement in this new nuance given to English

[129] Frontain, "'An Affectionate Shepheard Sicke for Love'", p. 103.
[130] Frontain, "'An Affectionate Shepheard Sicke for Love'", pp. 99-105.

poetry – to be found in Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* as well –. The opening stanzas immediately focus on Ganymede's physical appearance, with no shame, no fear, or hesitation. It is beautiful because it is free, wild, and outright. The love is represented by Ganymede's figure, it is the praise and the exaltation for him, his beauty, and his youth[131]:

> Scarce had the morning Starre hid from the light
> Heavens crimson Canopie with stars bespangled,
> But I began to rue th' unhappy sight
> Of that faire Boy that had my hart intangled;
> Cursing the Time, the Place, the sense, the sin;
> I came, I saw, I viewd, I slipped in.
>
> If it be sinne to love a sweet-fac'd Boy,
> (Whose amber locks trust up in golden tramels
> Dangle adowne his lovely cheekes with joy,
> When pearle and flowers his faire haire enamels)
> If it be sinne to love a lovely Lad,
> Oh then sinne I, for whom my soule is sad.
>
> His Ivory-white and Alablaster skin
> Is staind throughout with rare Vermillion red,
> Whose twinckling starrie lights doe never blin
> To shine on lovely *Venus* (Beauties bed:)
> But as the Lillie and the blushing Rose,
> So white and red on him in order growes. (ll. 1-18)

In these passages, Ganymede is described as a delicate boy, the glorious male hero of the Hellenic ideal, pointed out by standard features like 'that faire Boy' (l. 4), 'sweet-fac'd Boy' (l. 7), and 'lovely Lad' (l. 11), with 'lovely cheekes' (l. 9), on which 'amber locks' (l. 8), curled up in 'golden tramels' (l. 8), dangle down; other details make up his immense beauty, such as his 'faire haire' (l. 10), enamelled with 'pearle and flowers' (l. 10), not to forget about his 'ivory-white and alablaster skin' (l. 13), stained with 'rare vermillion red' (l. 14). As it is anticipated with 'I came, I saw, I viewd, I slipped in' (l. 6) in the sixth line of the first stanza – 'slipped in' can be a sexual innuendo of the eroticism implied in the seventeenth stanza, indicating metaphorically that he slipped into his sins or into a precise part of his anatomy –, the sexual exploration of its body reaches all senses in line 95:[132]

> 'O would to God (so I might have my fee)
> My lips were honey and thy mouth a Bee.' (ll. 95-96)

[131] Frontain, '"An Affectionate Shepheard Sicke for Love"', pp. 105-110.
[132] Frontain, '"An Affectionate Shepheard Sicke for Love"', pp. 105-110.

Here, it is understood that the shepherd does not only want to see him, but also smell him, touch him, and taste him – 'fee' is an Elizabethan sexual pun for 'fellatio'. The honey metaphor was frequently used in Greco-Roman literature and in the Petrarchan imaginary: the lips are the honey, usually associated with the female partner, that attracts the bee, usually associated with the male partner. But it later became the most used homoerotic metaphor, to be found in Virgil's *Georgics* (29 BCE), Strato's *Muse of Boyhood*, and Proust's 'Bee and Orchid', a chapter of *Cities of the Plain* (1921), for the representation of fellatio, because it was discovered that bees procreate with their mouths. This can be seen in line 96 of the first part, where it is supposed that Daphnis is taking the 'feminine' role and Ganymede the 'masculine' one. In the following stanza, Barnfield presents atypical sexual dynamics, engaging in a reversal of sexual roles, that is an exchange of active and passive roles between partners:[133]

> Then shouldst thou sucke my sweete and my faire flower,
> That now is ripe and full of honey-berries;
> Then would I leade thee to my pleasant Bower,
> Fild full of Grapes, of Mulberries, and Cherries:
> Then shouldst thou be my Waspe or else my Bee,
> I would thy hive, and thou my honey bee. (ll. 97-102)

The same-sex passion is very evident in its metaphors and associations, especially in line 97, where the verb 'sucke' and the name 'flower' indicate that Ganymede is invited – 'shouldst' – to accomplish a specific sexual practice addressed to a man; at the same time in line 101, Ganymede is asked – recalling the conditional 'shouldst' used in the first line of the stanza – to be his 'Waspe' or his 'Bee', alluding to the masculine action of penetration and to an active role, while Daphnis, being his 'hive', would take the passive role. It is not clear if 'honey bee' in line 102 refers to a passive or an active role: if we consider the final word 'bee' as a verb and not as a noun, both Daphnis and Ganymede could take the 'feminine' sexual role, as the expression is associated with Ganymede. So, the presence of two men engaging in sexual intercourse is evident, as Barnfield highlights a gender switch, where both can penetrate and be penetrated. Even if there is always a necessity to associate one partner with the 'feminine' role and the other with the 'masculine' one, the fact that they can

[133] Frontain, '"An Affectionate Shepheard Sicke for Love"', pp. 105-110.

both take the same role is very progressive. This is not just a representation of a homosexual relationship, but a modern representation of it, where the sexual roles are reversible, and lose their traditional meanings and their stereotypical univocal associations. Honey passes from being saliva in line 96 ('My lips were honey') to semen in line 98 ('honey-berries'). In line 99, the 'pleasent Bower' is used to indicate both his secluded and safe space for lovemaking, recalling the welcoming place the shepherd invites his boy into in Marlowe's *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*, but also Daphnis' own body, totally offered to Ganymede for his own sexual satisfaction, naming 'Grapes' (l. 100), 'Mulberries' (l. 100), and 'Cherries' (l. 100) as elements of his body, given to the beautiful young man to enjoy as gifts the nature gives to humanity to consummate and feed itself.[134] Another erotic situation is replicated in the twenty-sixth stanza of the first part, where 'Coyne' refers to the mercantile metaphor for sperm:[135]

> but like the honey Bees
> Thou suckst the flowre till all the sweet be gone;
> And lov'st mee, for my Coyne till I have none. (ll. 62-64)

In the Renaissance, the sexual and the economic spheres were usually associated together and money was by default, a masculine possession. In fact, the man represented economic power, as well as sexual. So, as 'coin' is a synonym for 'money', while 'till I have none' (l. 64) means a waste of it that could have cost Daphnis to 'conquer' Ganymede's love, this metaphorically leads to 'a waste of semen', expanded in 'a waste of shame', for 'misspending' his semen in homosexual activities. As a consequence, this explains the sexual but also economic metaphor used in line 95, where the word 'fee', a synonymous for reward, is used as a sexual pun for fellatio: Daphnis has spent a lot of money for his efforts in getting Ganymede's attention and he would like to have something back. This sexual and economic metaphoric association is used in Shakespeare's sonnets as well, as I will deal with it in the next chapter.[136] Throughout the poem, many other homoerotic

[134] Frontain, "'An Affectionate Shepheard Sicke for Love'", pp. 105-110.
[135] Mario DiGangi, "'My Plentie Makes Me Poore': Linguistic and Erotic Failure in 'The Affectionate Shepheard'", in *The Affectionate Shepherd: Celebrating Richard Barnfield*, ed. by George Klawitter and Kenneth Borris (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2001), pp. 149-173 (149-160).
[136] DiGangi, "'My Plentie Makes Me Poore'", pp. 149-160.

references for sexual intercourse are presented: for example, 'stones' in 'When Hunts-men of her pretious Stones bereave her/(Which with her teeth sh'had bitten off before)' (ll. 255-256) for testicle; 'purses' in 'Making thicke purses, thin; fat bodies, leane' (l. 263) for scrotum; 'Robbin-red-brest' in 'A Robbin-red-brest shall thy Minstrell bee,/Chirping thee sweet, and pleasant Melodie.' (ll. 41-42) and 'Pype' in 'To *Pans* owne Pype Ile helpe my lovely Lad' (l. 143) for penis; and, finally, the metaphoric allusions in the stanzas dedicated to Cupid in the first part.[137]

Part of the homoerotic power Barnfield depicts is drawn on *Hero and Leander*, which follows the same sensual taste as *The Affectionate Shepheard*: the poem presents Leander in long, rich, and detailed descriptions – there are entire stanzas dedicated to him – as *The Affectionate Shepheard* does with Ganymede. Fully reflecting the Renaissance ideal and constant play with homoeroticism, the poem cannot hide Marlowe's attraction for male beauty, youth, and body. On the contrary, this does not happen in *The Shepheardes Calender*, where Hobbinol is mainly left in a corner, nor in the epic poem *The Faerie Queene*: no poem gives this much attention to a man as *Hero and Leander* does, and this has been really inspiring for the writing of *The Affectionate Shepheard*. In *Hero and Leander*, the focus, the attention, and the exaltation of the male body are inescapable. This characteristic is silent but the most powerful proof, symbol, and positive argument for capturing the depiction of homoeroticism in literature.[138]

Ganymede's ambiguous gender identity is a real challenge for the complex reality of the English Renaissance. His character's unconventional representation reflects Belphoebe's in *The Faerie Queene* in a particularly accurate way. In fact, while Spencer's Belphoebe is a virgin huntress who spends her time in the woods to avoid the numerous men who chase her and fall in love with her, Ganymede is often depicted as a delicate, gracious, and emotional figure, that lets himself being admired by other's people eyes, casually assuming 'feminine' connotations. In particular, Ganymede's descriptions match Belphoebe's description when the knight Braggadochio

[137] Norton, 'Pastoral Homoeroticism and Barnfield', p. 124.
[138] Frontain, '"An Affectionate Shepheard Sicke for Love"', pp. 102-103.

and his squire Trompart's encounter the beautiful and valorous huntress in the Second Book of the epic poem: they get enraptured by her singular beauty and physical appearance. In *The Affectionate Shepheard* Ganymede's cheeks, red flushed because of love, are so described in several passages:[139]

> But as the Lillie and the blushing Rose,
> So white and red on him in order growes. (ll. 17-18)
>
> Cooling those Cheeks, that being cool'd waxe red,
> Like Lillyes in a bed of roses shed. (ll. 101-102)

In these lines, the descriptions of the roses and the lilies ('Lillie' and 'Rose' in line 17 and 'Lillyes' and 'roses' in line 102) represent respectively the white and the red, the coolness and the warmth of the cheeks for emotional intensity, with the rhetorical figure of a chiasmus. The character of the shy and virgin Belphoebe, who represents the private and caste Queen Elizabeth – in fact, the poem was a gift from Spenser to the Queen –, is similarly described, by paying particular attention to her cheeks to convey vulnerability and emotion:[140]

> Through goodly mixture of complexions dew;
> In her cheekes the vermeil red did shew,
> Like roses in a bed of lillies shed.[141]

Belphoebe is an ambiguous figure because is it not certainly conventional in her representation: in fact, she is not representative of a 'clear femininity', at least not in the way it was conceived at the time. Her original femininity often parallels Ganymede's unique masculinity and vice versa, merging the two words and depriving them of their original meanings. Masculinity can be femininity and femininity can be masculinity: there is not a fixed and universal rule. Moreover, she is described as an androgynous figure: an adolescent huntress with a flat chest, resembling a Greek young ephebe – a Greek word for a male adolescent – with undeveloped muscle mass. Also, her clothes and behaviours seem agender: her skirt is hiked up and she wears arrows on her back. On the other hand, Ganymede's rosy cheeks are a conventional characteristic usually used to describe feminine sweetness and vulnerability. Without associating the rapid shift of emotions with a 'female

[139] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 88-89.
[140] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 88-8.
[141] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queen,* ed. by Thomas P. Roche (London: Penguin, 1979), Book II, Canto III, Stanza 22.

thing', his character is charged with resistance, subjectiveness, and suggestiveness. Spencer's huntress is bold, romantically and sexually untouched, so less subject to a change of emotions, and a solitary person, just like biographers' depiction of Queen Elizabeth. Both Belphoebe and Ganymede are figures that rely on completely different social costumes from the ones they 'should' align to.[142]

It is not the first time a merging of male and female stereotypical associations happens –there are plenty of them in Shakespeare's theatrical works –: Philip Sidney does the same in *Astrophil and Stella* (1591). As it was inconceivable for the time to portray a female character that had an adulterous sexual life, in the cycle of the 108 sonnets, the male character, Astrophil, embodies the libertine role. As we read in the last sonnet, Astrophil betrays his lover Stella, leaving her for other unspecified women. In the poet's real life, though, it is Penelope Devereux who leaves Sidney, not Sidney the one who betrays his lover; in fact, Robert Rich, a noble and rich man, becomes her husband instead of Sidney, as he was considered to be a more proper suitor than him. So, it is the woman, Penelope, who represents the libertine role of Astrophil, while the man, Sidney, identifies himself with the loyal role of Stella. This explain why it is to Penelope Rich that Barnfield dedicates *The Affectionate Shepheard*. Not so by chance, as she was considered one of the most intriguing figures of the 16th century: the scandal generated by her twenty-year love affair with Sir Charles Blount, conducted under her husband's eyes, gave her a transgressive and powerful role as a woman in the society of the time.[143]

As I have previously mentioned, fitting within Barnfield's personal taste and imagination, *The Affectionate Shepheard* is built around situations already used in past Greek texts, using Greek Gods or figures of Greek mythology as shield characters to justify homosexual love. This is seen in many other situation throughout the poem. For example, in several moments throughout *The Affectionate Shepheard*, Barnfield alludes to a classical 'locus amenus' to evoke a secret place where

[142] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 88-89.
[143] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 97-98.

Daphnis and Ganymede can hide and live happily, being together and making love to each other, as it is shown in the seventeenth stanza:[144]

> Then shouldst thou sucke my sweete and my faire flower,
> That now is ripe and full of honey-berries;
> Then would I leade thee to my pleasant Bower,
> Fild full of Grapes, of Mulberries, and Cherries:
> Then shouldst thou be my Waspe or else my Bee,
> I would thy hive, and thou my honey, bee. (ll. 97-102)

As previously mentioned, in line 99, the 'pleasant Bower' is used to indicate his secluded and safe space for lovemaking. But even more similarity is drawn in the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth stanzas, where Daphnis invites Ganymede to 'come and dwell' with him at 'home':[145]

> If thou wilt come and dwell with me at home,
> My sheepcote shall be strowed with new greene rushes:
> Weele haunt the trembling prickets as they rome
> About the fields, along the hauthorne bushes;
> I have a pie-bald curre to hunt the hare,
> So we will live with daintie forrest fare.
>
> Nay more than this, I have a Garden plot,
> Wherein there wants nor hearbs, nor roots, nor flowers;
> (Flowers to smell, roots to eate, hearbs for the pot,)
> And dainty Shelters when the Welkin lowers:
> Sweet-smelling Beds of Lillies and Roses,
> Which Rosemary blanks and Lavender incloses. (ll. 157-168)

His 'home' (l. 157) is their comfort zone, a place surrounded by nature, where they can hunt the 'trembling prickets' (l. 159) in the 'fields' (l. 160), along the 'hauthorne bushes' (l. 160), and the 'hare' (l. 161) with a 'pie-bald curre' (l. 161); then, they will exchange love and affection, inside his comfortable and cozy house equipped with a 'Garden plot' (l. 163), 'dainty Shelters' (l. 166), and 'Sweet-smelling Beds of Lillies and Roses' (l. 167) covered with 'Rosemary blanks' (l. 168), which remind to the idea of intimacy. A similar situation is depicted in the forty-fourth stanza:

> If thou wilt love me, thou shalt be my boy,
> My sweet delight, the comfort of my minde,
> My love, my dove, my sollace, and my joy; (ll. 25-27)

In these lines, 'sollace' (l. 27) reminds to the idea of home, leisure, and relax. However, some words strike our attention more than others, as they perfectly manage to describe homosexuality as a metaphor for 'home': in fact, 'comfort of my mind' and 'dove' connect to the ideas of safety, peace,

[144] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 91-92.
[145] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 91-92.

and purity, to love as a sheltered and an untouchable place made just for them, where only they can go and live because only they will be able to fully understand it. It is Marlowe's *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* that Barnfield refers to for setting of these stanzas, especially the twenty-eight and the twenty-nine, using the same layout of words and substituting the landscapes and natural elements cited in Marlowe's short poem. They both display the love between a shepherd and an attractive young boy, in which the young man is invited to the shepherd's secret places to live with him and surrender to their love:

> Come live with me and be my love,
> And we will all the pleasures prove,
> That Valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
> Woods, or steepy mountain yields.
>
> And we will sit upon the Rocks,
> Seeing the Shepherds feed their flocks,
> By shallow Rivers to whose falls
> Melodious birds sing Madrigals.
>
> And I will make thee beds of Roses
> And a thousand fragrant posies,
> A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
> Embroidered all with leaves of Myrtle;[146]

The 'kirtle', in line 11, is a big scarf used around the shoulders and torso both by men and women, which Barnfield will recall in the fifty-fifth stanza of The Second Dayes: 'A silken Girdle, and a drawn-worke Band' (l. 93), where Daphnis is listing a part of the gifts for Ganymede. Both pastoral works get their inspiration from Virgil's Second Eclogue*,* as they have been written depicting the same kinds of situations and requests Corydon asks his Alexis:[147]

> O come and live with me in the conutryside,
> Among the humble farms. Together we
> Will hunt the deer, and tend the little goats,
> Compelling them along with willow wands.[148]

In line 34, 'come and live with me' and 'the countryside' are used by both Marlowe and Barnfield in their works as a starting point for their natural and magical representations.[149]

In the first part of *The Affectionate Shepheard*, Daphnis is mentioning all the things he

[146] Marlowe, 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love', in Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Poems and Translations*, ed. by Stephen Orgel (London: Penguin, 2007), ll. 1-12.
[147] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 91-92.
[148] Virgil, *The Eclogues of Virgil*, ll. 34-37.
[149] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 91-92.

would like to give his lover to adorn his young and beautiful body; with the intention of seducing him, the shepherd tempts him with precious gifts, reflecting the identical gesture that Socrate makes in the *Symposium*; but, as Alcibiades, Ganymede will refuse them:[150]

> I would put amber Bracelets on thy wrests,
> Crownets of Pearle about thy naked Armes:
> And when thou sitst at swilling *Bacchus* feasts (ll. 103-105)

Plenty of episodes like this one continue in The Second Dayes, where Daphnis, in a fit of rage and desperation, is trying to make him feel the weight of his refusal, listing all the things he would have, all the things Daphnis would do and offer him, if only he stayed with him and loved him back:[151]

> Clusters of crimson Grapes Ile pull thee down;
> And with Vine-leaves make thee a lovely Crowne. (ll. 65-66)
>
> Or wilt thou drinke a cup of new-made Wine
> Froathing at top, mixt with a dish of Creame;
> And Straw-berries, or Bil-berries in their prime,
> Bath'd in a melting Sugar-Candie streame:
> Bunnell and Perry I have for thee (alone)
> When Vynes are dead, and all the Grapes are gone. (ll. 67-72)
>
> Against my Birth-day thou shalt be my guest:
> Weele have Greene-cheeses and fine Silly-bubs;
> And thou shalt be the chiefe of all my feast.
> And I will give thee two fine pretie Cubs,
> With two Young Whelps, to make thee sport withall,
> A golden Racket, and a Tennis-ball. (ll. 85-90)
>
> A guilded Nutmeg, and a race of Ginger,
> A silken Girdle, and a drawn-worke Band,
> Cuffs for thy wrists, a gold Ring for thy finger,
> And sweet rose-water for thy Lilly-white hand,
> A Purse of silke, bespangd with spots of gold,
> As brave a one as ere thou didst behold. (ll. 91-96)
>
> A paire of Knives, a greene Hat and a Feather,
> New Gloves to put upon thy milk-white hand,
> Ile give thee, for to keep thee from the weather,
> With Phœnix feathers shall thy Face be fand, (ll. 97-100)

This is something we also see happening in Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender*. Despite its main representation of the love between the young Colin Clout and Rosalind, the January Eclogue presents the figure of an older shepherd Hobbinol – the code nickname for Spencer's friend, Gabriel Harvey – whose love is rejected by the young man, and so are his gifts:[152]

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[150] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 93-97.
[151] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 93-97.
[152] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 93-97.

> It is not *Hobbinol*, wherefore I plaine,
> Albee my love he seeke with dayly suit:
> His clownish gifts and curtsies I disdaine,
> His kiddes, his cracknelles, and his early fruit.
> Ah foolish *Hobbinol*, thy gyft bene vayne:
> *Colin* them gives to *Rosalind* againe.[153]

Both works parallel the same situation in Virgil's Second Eclogue, where the young Alexis denies the love of the shepherd Corydon by rejecting his gifts:[154]

> Perhaps you do not know, Alexis, who
> It is you scorn: how many cows I have,
> With all the milk they yield, summer and winter;
> A thousand lambs, my lambs, pasture upon
> These hills around; [155]
>
> Corydon, you're a yokel! What makes you think
> Alexis would care in the least about what you offer?[156]

Furthermore, both *The Shepheardes Calender* and Virgil's Second Eclogue replicate the same action in the *Symposium* in which the refused gifts are given to a woman, with the exception that, in Virgil's work, it is the scorned man the one who has the intention to give the gifts to a female 'adversary'. It is not clear if, in *The Affectionate Shepheard*, Daphnis nor Ganymede express the will to give the gifts to someone else.

On the basis of the presented observations, the love triangle scenario seems to be a literary feature used in plenty of homoerotic works, not only pastoral; this narrative choice is also featured in Shakespeare's sonnets – as I will show it in the next chapter –. All the works cited present a lady, not properly as a celebrated lover, but more as if she was like the 'screen lady' presented by Dante in the *Convivio*, a woman that serves as a cover-up for the same-sex love, a replacement for the real lover that could not be freely loved; it could also be used as a cure for the pain and sufferances caused by their impossible love, and a 'fixing' of something that could not be said or displayed in literature. There is no real meaning, nor intention behind it: it is just a fallback for the character involved and a form of self-censorship for the author. This gives a new total reading and perspective to the character of Queen Guendolen, who becomes part of the love triangle needed for

[153] Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calendar*, ll. 55-60.
[154] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 93-97.
[155] Virgil, *The Eclogues of Virgil*, ll. 22-24.
[156] Virgil, *The Eclogues of Virgil*, ll. 69-70.

giving *The Affectionate Shepheard* homoerotic space. In fact, Barnfield also names distractedly the shepherd's love for a certain 'Eliza' in *Cynthia*, – like he had to, for the sake of the law and the censure:[157]

> With great griefe that did abound,
> (Cares and griefe the heart confound)
> In whose heart (thus riv'd in three)
> ELIZA written I might see:
> In Caracters of crimson blood,
> (Whose meaning well I understood.)
> Which, for my heart might not behold,
> I hyed me home my sheep to folde. (ll. 89-96)

And so, Rosalind in *The Sheapheardes Calender* could have a similar role in the storyline: she is just a character used to cover up the deceptive and 'irrelevant' presence of the shepherd in the January eclogue. *Hero and Leander*'s love triangle is peculiar: like in *The Shepheardes Calender*, the main love story 'has to' be between a man and a woman, but the romantic intentions of Neptune towards Leander are clear and evident, causing no calculated escape nor normative conclusion for homophobic criticism to suggest:[158]

> The god put Helle's bracelet on his arm,
> And swore the sea should never do him harm.
> He clapt his plump cheeks, with his tresses played,
> And smiling wantonly, his love bewrayed.
> He watched his arms, and as they opened wide,
> At every stroke, betwixt them would he slide,
> And steal a kiss, and then run out and dance,
> And as he turned, cast many a lustful glance,
> And threw him gaudy toys to please his eye,
> And dive into the water, and there pry
> Upon his breast, his thighs, and every limb,
> And up again, and close beside him swim.
> And talk of love: Leander made reply,
> "You are deceived, I am no woman, I."[159]

Leander takes down his advances, but, as it also happens in many of Shakespeare's plays, only when this encounter happens and the homoerotic fantasy is created, his love with Hero shines, making the homosocial interaction the means and the driving force for the heterosexual relationship to succeed. Heterosexuality becomes the facade used to appease society, but it is apparent that this plot choice is constraining the expression of Marlowe's true intentions and will. Even in Virgil's Second

[157] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 92-93.
[158] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 92-93.
[159] Marlowe, 'Hero and Leander', Sestiad II, ll. 179-192.

Eclogue, Corydon expresses the necessity to find rebound women to make jealous and take revenge on the insensitive and unsoulful Alexis, such as 'Thestylis' in line 12 and 53, and 'Iollas' in line 71, but they just seem to be there to use, hide, discard, and deprive the 'love that dear not speak its name'.[160]

As Anne Lake Prescott perfectly sums up, 'The former's Arcadia constantly flirts with homoeroticism in its play with gender disguise and confusion', becoming a protection for same-sex love representation.[161] Naming Eliza is not the only time and method that Barnfield uses to constrain a female character into the narrative. In fact, in the fifty-second stanza of The Second Dayes, the attempt to fit the homosexual relationship to a heterosexual one gets almost repetitive and obsessive:

> Her shalt thou have, and all I have beside,
> If thou wilt be my Boy, or els my Bride. (ll. 77-78)

Here, as it happens in many other lines, such as in line 17 and 18, where it is possible to have a comparison with the figure of Belphoebe, or in line 16, 'To shine on lovely Venus (Beauties bed:)' (l. 16), where Ganymede is associated with the Goddess Venus, the character of Ganymede is 'feminized' and made an object of his own desire. But, unexpectedly, four stanzas later, Daphnis rejects any kind of femininity in his beloved, playing again with gender roles:[162]

> These two examples by the way I show,
> To prove th' indecencie of men's long haire: (ll. 133-134)

On the contrary, in so many other lines, it is Daphnis the one assuming 'feminine' connotations. For this reason, even though *The Affectionate Shepheard* depicts homoerotic love exuberantly, Daphnis's character gets through a transformation and an ambivalence that has puzzled critics, who investigated with eager curiosity and interest on the choice of showing a character that is so contradictory and incoherent, constantly divided by 'assertion and denial, desire and prohibition, fertility and sterility'[163], frequently giving a sense of a heterosexual relationship representation.

[160] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 92-93.
[161] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', p. 93.
[162] Yen, '"If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy"', pp. 130-148; DiGangi, '"My Plentie Makes Me Poore"', pp. 149-173.
[163] DiGangi, '"My Plentie Makes Me Poore"', p. 159.

Moreover, while the shepherd in the first part complains about unrequited love, at the end of The Second Dayes he advises Ganymede to get married, a dynamic that we will also see in Shakespeare's sonnets. This attitude change, the love triangle, and the confusion in the gender roles' depiction have been interpreted as a giving up to a love that is unfeasible, that has no future, not only because the other person does not correspond him, but also because it is a homosexual love; so the readers perceive a background of deep and latent anxiety since the first lines because of this realization.[164] According to Valerie Traub, desire in homosexual love was always accompanied by anxiety because this kind of love was founded on a lack. The lack was caused by the social and political implications of homosexuality in early modern England, that inevitably aroused feelings of despair, such as fear and danger, deformity and inadequacy.[165] The choice of giving up their love and pushing Ganymede to get married is a way to sublimate physical desire and give an elevate sense and ending to the poem – a conventional content choice of the poetry of the time –, but also as a way to realize the dramatic reality of their condition and to involuntary condemn the shepherd's homoerotic desire, indulging society and its moralism, even though Daphnis knows very well what he wants. Daphnis' transformation is an interpretation key for the homoerotic representation during the Renaissance: silence, oppression, and adequacy. Daphnis has become a serious and dotty person that has transcended his physical and basic necessities, providing not only a way to elevate his poetry, but also a means to silence criticism from insinuations on homoeroticism. Daphnis' love is so strong and real that he is willing to have a relationship with Ganymede on any terms, permitting an exchange of roles in his erotic fantasies at the beginning, and renouncing and sacrificing his love for a woman at the end: an unattainable desire for him but complete for his beloved. His love has reached its fulfillment in seeing him happy, becoming old and mature enough to be able to know when it is time to let it go. Their relationship becomes a wise friendship and Daphins the mentor that suggests his beloved the right thing to do, filling the virtuosic 'perfect' image with whom

[164] Yen, "“If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy”", pp. 130-148; DiGangi, "“My Plentie Makes Me Poore”", pp. 149-173.

[165] Valerie Traub, *Desire and anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 7.

society has decided to trap all relationships, filling the Greek pederastic and pedagogic role of the intellectual who teaches young scholars how to be responsible adults, in the name of the Platonic love ideal. The homoerotic desire undergoes a transformation dictated by social pressure, as always 'corrected' and forced into spiritual love or platonic friendship. Homosexuality will always have to renounce his happy ending and lack of something, without finding its balanced and righteous fulfillment.[166]

Therefore, one of the biggest theme of queer literature is the pain of homoerotic desire for its impossible realization in everyday life and society. *The Affectionate Shepheard* is full of references in this regard. In line 5 of the first stanza, he is 'Cursing the Time, the Place, the sense' (l. 5), but also 'the sin' (l. 5), a concept that the theological discourse related to homosexual love at the time. In fact, 'sin' is a recurring word throughout the whole poem. Moreover, the negative word 'Cursing' (l. 5) juxtaposes the positivity of 'I came, I saw, I viewd, I slipped in' (l. 6), in an endless and tiring fight between the joy and the vitality, and the pain and the weakness of homosexual love. Line 7 of the second stanza says 'If it be sinne to love a sweet-fac'd Boy' (l. 7), involving 'sin' also in the second stanza. Again, in line 11 and 12 Daphnis laments:[167]

> If it be sinne to love a lovely Lad;
> Oh then sinne I, for whom my soule is sad. (ll. 11-12)

Still emphasizing the concept of sin, the theme of sadness, just an allusion before, is also brought to the surface. This is another preponderant element connected to homoerotic love. In the first stanza, in line 3 and 4, Daphnis refers to 'that faire Boy' as 'th'unhappy sight' (ll. 3-4). The last lines of the first part conclude the first section of the poem by saying:[168]

> But if that thou disdainst my loving ever;
> Oh happie I, if I had loved never. (ll. 233-234)

These lines expose the catastrophic sadness and conflictuality implicated with his falling in love: there is no escape to this feeling, because it is real and natural in the human being, but not its

[166] Yen, "'If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy'", pp. 130-148; DiGangi, "'My Plentie Makes Me Poore'", pp. 149-173.
[167] Yen, "'If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy'", pp. 130-148.
[168] Yen, "'If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy'", pp. 130-148.

condemnation, that he cannot escape either in his historical period. Other contrasts, doubts, and insecurities in Daphnis' mind about his homoerotic passion appear silently and undisturbed in a conflicting discourse during the sixteenth and seventeenth stanzas of the first part. In the sixteenth stanza his plea for pity is intrinsic of anxious and anguish tones: he immediately shows us the insecurities of homosexual love by saying:[169]

> Oh would to God he would but pitty mee,
> That love him more than any mortall wight; (ll. 91-92)

Consequently, he exposes a dreamy scenario and hopeful wishes, hinting at a love that will not be corresponded:[170]

> Then he and I with love would soone agree,
> That now cannot abide his Sutors sight. (ll. 93-94)

On the other hand, in the seventeenth stanza, he juxtaposes expressions of overt eroticism, fusing the opposing feelings that form their love. It is common to find close stanzas that deal with completely different and contrasting feelings. Again, in the thirty-seventh stanza, Daphnis seems sure of the sincerity and the depth of his love: on one hand, 'She that lov'd thee for thy Beauties sake,/ when Age drawes on, thy love will soone forsake' (ll. 215-216), while, on the other hand, 'I that lov'd thee for thy gifts divine' (l. 217), but, in truth, Daphnis' romantic confession betrays a deep anxiety. Its perception will reach its highest point in line 220, when his mouth slips words of bitterness for something he will never have: here, not only hostility and contempt are displayed, but also disgust and hate, connoting Ganymede's eyes of negative emotions through the words 'behold me' and 'baning':[171]

> Will still admire (with joy) those lovely eine,
> That now behold me with their beauties baning: (ll. 219-220)

In fact, even though Daphnis will still admire them with joy, never stop loving him, Ganymede's eyes are banning Daphnis' sight from him, preventing him from looking at him, spoiling his love with refusal and denial. There could not be a more precise depiction of the drama surrounding the

[169] Yen, "'If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy'", pp. 130-148.
[170] Yen, "'If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy'", pp. 130-148.
[171] Yen, "'If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy'", pp. 130-148.

homoerotic passions.[172]

The Affectionate Shepheard and *The Shepheardes Calender* presents a similarity on this theme, associating winter with the idea of getting old and dying, with the shutdown of all happy things, like love. This can be seen in The Second Dayes of *The Affectionate Shepherd*, where Daphnis says: 'When my Age-withered Spring is almost done.' (l. 414), or 'Winter hath snow'd upon my hoarie head,/And with my Winter all my joyes are dead.' (ll. 418-419), whereas in the December Eclogue of *The Shephearded Calender* we read 'My spring is spent...My head besprent with hoary frost I fynd'[173]. These lines refer to the months as the cycle of life; winter and December, in addition to representing life ending by the presence of cold weather, the scarce nature, and the gray environments, also represent the decay and the aging of the human being, using the frosty hair as a metaphor for grey hair. Indeed, in *The Shepheardes Calender* each month of the calendar represents a stage of human life, while, in *The Affectionate Shepherd*, this concept is briefly explained in the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth stanzas. In this case, specifically, human life perishes not only because of the passing of time, but also because its fragility is exposed to unsatisfied desires and feelings, associating accelerated aging with the pain of unrequited love – especially homosexual – and the consequent necessity of dying.[174] In opposition to the concept of wintertime, springtime is associated with the positivity of emotions and love, as well as sexual awakening and revival, in parallel with the flourishing of nature and flowers. At the beginning of the thirty-eighth stanza, Daphnis, in a wishful thought, mentions May as the month when he will finally be allowed to embrace the young man he is in love with:[175]

> But that I lov'd thee for thy gifts divine,
> In the December of thy Beauties waning,
> Will still admire (with joy) those lovely eine,
> That now behold me with their beauties baning:
> Though Januarie will never come againe,
> Yet Aprill yeres will come in showers of raine.
>
> When will my May come, that I may embrace thee?

[172] Yen, '"If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy"', pp. 130-148.
[173] Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calendar*, ll. 128-129.
[174] Prescott, 'Barnfield's Spenser', pp. 87-88.
[175] Frontain, '"An Affectionate Shepheard Sicke for Love"', pp. 105-110.

When will the hower be of my soules joying?
Why dost thou seeke in mirth still to disgrace mee?
Whose mirth's my health, whose griefe's my harts annoying:
Thy bane my bale, thy blisse my blessednes,
Thy ill my hell, thy weale my welfare is. (ll. 217-228)

At the beginning of The Second Dayes as well, we can read lines that perfectly describe the feelings of dissatisfaction and despair connected to homosexuality, using the seasons as metaphors for the steps that brought him to the realization and acknowledgment of his refusal, to his lonely and lacking state as a lover, and the impotence in doing anything to improve his situation:[176]

My Harvest's come, and yet I reapt no corne:
My love is great, and yet I am forlorne. (ll. 11-12)

The concept of saving his beloved from the difficulties and the deceptions that damn their love, because love is stronger and knows it can always resist senseless hate, is perfectly expressed in the eighteenth stanza of the first part, where Daphnis is reassuring Ganymede of his love's protection. In particular, 'save thee from all harmes' strongly ascribes to their condition:

My lips with charmes should save thee from all harmes:
And when in sleepe thou tookst thy chiefest Pleasure,
Mine eyes should gaze upon thine eye-lids Teasure. (ll. 106-108)

Other related themes can be observed in the other two lines: 'sleep' is mentioned as the keeper of 'thy chiefest Pleasure', explaining that the good moments, the mundanity, and the passion of their love are like a dream: silent, dark, secret, and unattainable. The metaphor of 'thine eye-lids' as 'Treasure' connects it to the semantic words of 'gold' or 'jewel', referring to the preciousness and rarity of their love. Looking at him is a precious and rare moment, like receiving a gift: because of this, it is given great value when it happens.

So, Daphnis gives Ganymede the possibility to find 'real', 'healthy', and 'happy' love in a heterosexual context. But Daphnis is never afraid to show his homoerotic feelings and attraction towards him; this demonstrates that the shepherd is very well aware of his sexual orientation. Jealousy is shown for the time in the forth stanza, where he introduces his young boy's mutual and reciprocated love with Queen Guendolen:[177]

[176] Yen, "'If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy'", pp. 130-148.
[177] Yen, "'If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy'", pp. 130-148.

Her he embrac'd, of her was beloved,
With plaints he proved, and with teares he moved. (ll. 23-24)

With enormous pain in his heart for this rejection, he tries to bring her down and humiliate her, naming two other past lovers in her life, the young dead man that she mourns and an old man that is her suitor, and painting Ganymede as a simple substitute, a rebound. He then defines her as unable to love and cold-hearted, considering 'Her hart more hard than Adamant or steel,' (l. 65) in addition to being unreliable and mutable, considering 'Her hart more changeable than Fortunes wheele' (l. 66), contrasting her with Ganymede's personality, 'Whose sugred love is full of sweete delight' (l. 85), and defining Queen Guendolen's love as 'Base Love still staind with foule indignitie.' (l. 90). Praising him to leave her, he still talks negatively about her, considering her a materialistic and superficial person. He knows she is the 'faire' relationship, but his love is truer and stronger:[178]

Leave *Guendolen* (sweet hart) though she be faire
Yet is she light; not light in vertue shining:
But light in her behaviour, to impaire
Her honour in her Chastities declining;
Trust not her tears, for they can wantonnize,
When teares in pearle are trickling from eyes. (ll. 157-162)

In the thirty-fifth stanza, he compares his love with hers, making his look superior and nobler:[179]

Compare the love of faire Queene *Guendolin*
With mine, and thou shalt see how she doth love thee:
I love thee for thy qualities divine,
But She doth love another Swaine above thee:
I Love thee for thy gifts, She for hir pleasure;
I for thy Vertue, She for Beauties treasure. (ll. 205-210)

Consequently, there is too much individuality and subjectiveness in Daphnis' story to be just an imitation of Virgil's Second Eclogue and for Barnfield not to be aware of what he was doing; in a close analysis and confront with other stories, he ends up sharing the same doubts and insecurities of a 'guilt-ridden 1950s homosexual'[180], showing how oppressive was the environment he was living in. The imitation's excuse becomes weak when he connects with the traditional poetic themes of lovesickness and the concept of 'being slave of love', typical of courtly love. This is expressed in The Second Dayes in the line: 'Thou art my love, and I must be thy thrall!' (l. 144), making

[178] Yen, '"If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy"', pp. 130-148.
[179] Yen, '"If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy"', pp. 130-148.
[180] Norton, 'Pastoral Homoeroticism and Barnfield', p. 122.

Barnfield almost create an hybrid and mixed genre. Daphnis is the protagonist of a story of unrequited love, as the majority of poetries was written about in that period, and Daphnis is the emblematic representation of it, turning the work into a real, authentic, and autobiographical testimony – probably personal, as Barnfield in the prefatory material anticipates that he openly identifies with Daphnis. This is why Daphnis cannot simply be the passive and meager imitation of a homoerotic pastoral story, but, on the contrary, a character who gets filled with actual and concrete feelings of lovesickness from a man towards another man – Ganymede – becoming an active subject who gets out of a pre-made and set box. Daphnis deepens with stubborn precision all the feelings that characterize their love – and homosexual love precisely – displaying all the risky consequences that this love could cause him, willing to take full responsibility of his actions; this is underlined since the very beginning of the poem, by the subject pronoun 'I' in line 12:[181]

> If it be sinne to love a lovely Lad;
> Oh then sinne I, for whom my soule is sad. (ll. 11-12)

The plausibility of his story is shown many times throughout the poem: for example, in the abundance of gifts that Barnfield's Daphnis offers Ganymede, which is far more superior than Theocritus's, Virgil's, or Spencer's shepherds, and also in his character's emotional descriptions and psychological developments, which are far more detailed and intentional than theirs. Moreover, The Second Dayes is extremely precise at developing the exact same steps of the process that lovers would take to get their confidence, dignity, and ambition back after a refusal, by first being sad and angry over their lost love, lamenting their actions, and then by finding the strength to get over them, burying his feelings in careless forgetfulness. It is possible to perceive all the tiredness, weakness, cynicism, and the sense of defeat and adaptation, caused by Ganymede's unrequited love, especially towards the end.[182]

At the beginning of the second part, Daphnis tells him how mean, cruel, and selfish he is for having deprived and denied his love, showing all the rage he is feeling for what he did, almost

[181] Yen, "'If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy'", pp. 130-148.
[182] Yen, "'If It Be Sinne to Love a Sweet-fac'd Boy'", pp. 130-148.

taking a revenge on him; at the same time, he plays notes of victimhood and maudlin pity for underlying Ganymede's insensitiveness and incapacity to understand what he is going through after his discard, but also, for intentionally showing that he still loves him: while the young man has love, Daphnis is left with nothing. With the intention of making him suffer as Ganymede made him suffer, he tells him with anger and sarcasm to think about it again, in stanza 44:

> And thou, love-scorning Boy, cruell, unkinde;
> Oh, let me once againe intreat some pittie:
> May be thou wilt relent thy marble minde,
> And lend thine eares unto my dolefull Dittie:
> Oh, pittie him, that pittie craves so sweetly;
> Or else thou shalt be never named meekly. (ll. 20-25)

Nevertheless, it is clear Daphnis still has feelings for him and it is hard for the shepherd not to show devotion and great generosity towards his beloved, as it happens in the stanzas dedicated to the gifts meant for Ganymede, from stanza 45 to 57. Daphnis wants to make sure that Ganymede knows all the things he would miss without him, what he could have if he was his lover; the shepherd wants to make him feel the weight of his refusal with the hope the young man might have some mercy for him and he might understand the pain he has caused him, bearing the consequences of his choices until he might regret them, or at least feel sorry for them. But, in exposing the desperation and the contrasting feelings generated by unrequited love – he is angry at him but, at the same time, he seems like he is still courting him, by listing all his gifts – Daphnis also shows the exhaustion caused by this dramatic and difficult love, dreaming about sweet moments of affection with him, dreaming about an imaginary world where they can finally be together:

> Yet if thou wilt but show me one kinde looke,
> (A small reward for my so great affection)
> Ile grave thy name in Beauties golden Booke,
> And shrowd thee under *Hellicons* protection;
> Making the muses chaunt thy lovely prayse:
> (For they delight in Shepheards lowly layes.) (ll. 31-36)

> Why doo thy Corall lips disdaine to kisse,
> And sucke that Sweete, which manie have desired?
> That Baulme my Bane, that meanes would mend my misse:
> Oh let me then with thy sweete Lips b'inspired;
> When thy Lips touch my Lips, my Lips will turne
> To Corall too, and being cold yce will burne. (ll. 113-118)

Since the fifty-eighth stanza until the end of the Second Dayes, Daphnis educates him, like

an old man would do with a younger man, until he gets married and knows his role and position in life, in order to become an exemplary and responsible adult, as Shakespeare does in the sonnets when it comes to his relationship with the fair youth. One of the last stanzas perfectly sums up all these intentions:[183]

> Restraine thy steps from too much libertie,
> Fullfil not th'envious mans malitious minde;
> Embrace thy Wife, live not in lecherie;
> Content thyself with what Fates have assignde:
> Be rul'd Reason, Warning dangers save;
> True Age is reverend worship to thy grave. (ll. 397-402)

The similarity with Shakespeare is also evident in the lines where he talks about Ganymede's beauty, which the shepherd invokes and celebrates to highlight its importance and to pass it down to the future generations: 'Oh lend thine yvorie for-head for Loves Booke,/Thine eyes for candles to behold the same;' (ll. 145-146), or again 'Sell thy sweet breath to'th'daintie Musk-ball-makers;' (l. 151). And finally he says: 'Let others of thy beauty be pertakers;' (l. 153), but he does not forget to mention that 'Els none but Daphnis will so well esteeme it', showing the strength and the bravery of his love above others, which at times seems to surpass Shakespeare's. Telling him how to become a 'real' Renaissance gentleman, he shows his beloved the basic notions of Humanism, making their bond fit in the Platonic love ideal: he does so by naming great valorous Greek men and Gods as examples to imitate or from whom receive help for these tasks. In the eighty-third stanza, Daphnis names Narcissus, as Shakespeare does in the sonnets, who has always been on the most representative mythological figures for homosexuality, and he identifies with him:[184]

> Be not so much of thine owne Image doating:
> So faire Narcissus lost his love and life.
> (Beauty is often with itselfe at strife). (ll. 262-264)

In the subtitles to *The Affectionate Shepheard*, the words 'Tears', 'sicke for Love', 'Complaint', and 'Lamentation' anticipate the disorder of articulating homosexual desire in the poem, because of the partiality and unfairness connected with it and the impossibility to escape the situation. Same-sex love knows it has to be able to bear the other face of the medal, that with love

[183] DiGangi, "'My Plentie Makes Me Poore'", pp. 149-160.
[184] DiGangi, "'My Plentie Makes Me Poore'", pp. 149-173.

might come disdain, that with sweetness and joy might also come disgust and refuse. Consequently, *The Affectionate Shepherd* presents a failure of linguistic terms for the erotic discourse of same-sex love. This happens because the linguistic and social disorder are intertwined: though Daphnis is crying real and big tears for a person that he has courted with the richest words and the most expensive gifts, for a love that it is the strongest and greatest of all, he is left with nothing, he is left impoverished and abandoned, as he says in line 12 of the Second Dayes: 'My love is great, and yet I am forlorne'. 'Plenty' and 'poor' are the most used words by Narcissus, who, in the *Metamorphoses,* cries because 'he has been wooing himself all along'[185], saying that his image makes him poor, and so symbolising that the love for another man is like the love for is own image. It is, for Narcissus, a love that does not bring him to any direction; it is like a love only for himself, a selfish and narcissist love that does not give him anything. These words are also borrowed by Barnfield, who, in line 340, laments: 'Their want with welth, the poore with plentie feed'. Similarly, Daphnis has fallen in love with an image drawn by his own words, Ganymede, a person that does not exist in reality because he has left him with nothing if not only refuse, denial, sufferance, shame, and regret. He is only an illusory young man that cannot provide him anything if not only an illusory love, making Daphnis pursuit a delusive and an unavailable love, like an inexistent water in an endless desert. A love that cannot ignite itself because it is extinguished. A love that does not exist because it cannot exist. A language that cannot speak because the love cannot love.[186]

From Theocritus's *Idylls* to Virgil's *Eclogues*, from Virgil's *Georgics* to Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, from Spencer's *The Shepheardes Calender* to Marlowe's *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* and *Hero and Leander,* from Barnfield's *The Affectionate Shepheard* to Marcel Proust's *Cities of the Plain*, from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855) to A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), and from Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) to Richard Amory's *Song of the Loon* (1966), the pastoral genre became the means to depict new natural settings and express homosexual

[185] DiGangi, "'My Plentie Makes Me Poore'", p. 166.
[186] DiGangi, "'My Plentie Makes Me Poore'", pp. 149-173.

love and homoeroticism through worldwide literature. Same-sex love became an integral part to pastoral genre. Authors managed to talk about their sexual preferences, knowing that they could use the pastoral genre and their Classical predecessors as a form of excuse for an imitation. In the next chapter, I will show how Shakespeare managed to express his homoerotic desire through his works, focusing specifically on the sonnets, and I will present their similarities and differences with *The Affectionate Shepheard*.

Chapter 3

William Shakespeare

> When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see;
> For all the day they view things unrespected,
> But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,
> And darkly bright, are bright in dark directed.
>
> (Sonnet 43, ll. 1-4)

3.1 Shakespeare's Biography: A Free Bisexual Soul

Shakespeare's sexuality and private life have constantly been object of much speculation. Considering his biography and his works, when compared to other contemporary writers and the Renaissance vision and habits on male relations, studies have concluded that Shakespeare could belong to the Queer circle.

Shakespeare grew up in a context that permitted a prolific development of his language, lexicon, and imagery, thanks to a historical period, Queen Elizabeth's reign, that promoted arts and theatre, and encouraged an early approach to literature. He received a Classical education; he attended Stratford-upon-Avon's Grammar School, where the main taught subject was Latin – there were not any classes on English literature, history, chemistry, biology, or physics – and where he developed his passion for playacting. In fact, to have a better and full learning of Latin, the school required kids to read old Latin plays out loud in class and even organized plays that they would perform regularly: being schools only accessible to boys, there were moments when students had to portray the main characters of a play in love, sharing kisses. Moreover, many of the chosen classic plays contained sexually explicit contents, like *Terence and Plautus* by Seneca.[187]

So, Shakespeare plunged into the theatre world at a very early stage; this was also favoured by theatre troupes' visits to his town, and festivals, and folk parades that were held in neighbouring towns, constantly exposing him to playacting. Luckily, moralists and religious reformers had not had time yet to discipline these events according to their taste, so they freely talked about virtues

[187] Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in The World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York, W. W. Norton, 2016), pp. 23-53.

and vices and dealt with uncomfortable moral themes.[188]

Shakespeare was indeed very close to his father. In addition to following the theatre troupe his father administrated and assisting its shows, young Shakespeare would travel with him to rural markets, where his father would buy wool and leather, to then sell them illegally. He was also a glove maker and he would finance loans for his clients. His position as a respectable gentleman did not last very long, as he would soon start to get fines and debts, making him slowly disappear from the public eye; in fact, being a Catholic, he did not attend church services – people who did not were fined – and, at a certain point, his illegal activities were discovered. After being involved in his father's business, Shakespeare would work as a schoolmaster for Catholic wealthy families in Lancashire: in a period where Catholics were persecuted and had to profess their belief in silence, he showed himself as a controversial figure from the very beginning.[189]

His troubled stay in Lancashire and his family's Catholic views are probably the reasons that could have made him marry so early, at only 18 years old, with Anne Hathaway, a woman of 26 years of age. Anne represented a new fresh start, new ideas, and new social costumes: having lost her father the previous year, she was a free woman who could make her own decisions and have control over her own life, even sexual. Not a rare thing to look at for Shakespeare, who seemed to have been attracted mainly by unconventional and rebellious women. Plus, her family was Protestant. When they expressed their desire to marry, Shakespeare's lover was already pregnant, another reason why they might have wanted to formalize their bond. However, after only three years of marriage, Shakespeare had already moved to London to pursue his acting and playwriting career, leaving his wife and three kids behind. His plays reflect many times both positive and negative opinions about marriage, which is what made scholars suspect the truthfulness of their marriage. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), Shakespeare highlights his reluctance to premarital sex, rejecting children as a pretext for marriage. In many other plays, such as *A*

[188] Greenblatt, *Will in The World*, pp. 23-53.
[189] Greenblatt, *Will in The World*, pp. 54-117.

Midsummers Night's Dream (1600) – as I will explore later in the chapter – he stages forced marriages between the main characters, making another interesting connection with his private life and marriage. In *Much Ado About Nothing* (1600), he shows pessimist views about love and marriage, portraying the main couple, Beatrice and Benedick, easily falling in love and marrying, then also quickly falling out of love. In this comedy, this is the only couple who seems to be partially happy while it lasts, while the other couples in his other plays are always mismatched, or ill-fated, that is their love meets obstacles and ends in tragedy. What is more striking, though, about the whole marriage affair, is that Shakespeare did not include Anne in his will, defining her as his 'second best bed', and that they were not buried together. In Sonnet 145, he talks about one of his past lovers, who critics have identified with his wife Anne, saying that she had a fundamental role for that period of his life, as she saved him; in lines 13 and 14, he reports: '"I hate" from "hate" always she threw, And saved my life, saying "not you".'[190]. This has made scholars think that he might not have had a happy marriage and there probably was a particular situation that might have induced it or forced it. On the other hand, Shakespeare's sonnets and his other poems, show that he probably experienced happy and intentional love, both homosexual and heterosexual, but only outside marriage.[191]

Shakespeare's biographer Greenblatt has found two other reasons, outside his unhappy marriage, for his leaving Stratford: political problems and an attractive job offer. In fact, in town, he apparently came into conflict with Sir Thomas Lucy, who was a Catholic persecutor. Given the arrest and consequent death of his close relatives John Somerville and Edward Arden for having Catholic beliefs, he probably did not want to risk his life either. The opportunity to join the theatre troupe called the Queen's Men, who were searching for a new actor, came at the best time.[192]

His move to London with the Queen's Men has to be dated around the late 1580s. At the time London was a dangerous, frightening, and rapidly changing city. The grey and urban

[190] My reference edition for Shakespeare's Sonnets is William Shakespeare*, Shakespeare's Sonnets,* ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 1997), Sonnet 145, ll. 13-14.
[191] Greenblatt, *Will in The World*, pp. 118-148.
[192] Greenblatt, *Will in The World*, pp. 149-174.

architecture became the preferred setting of his plays, in addition to representing a libertine and transgressive lifestyle. With the drastic political and religious change that England was undergoing at the time, Shakespeare had to learn how to be secretive and private, always disguising himself in somebody else's shoes: this explains the lack of sources in his biography for this period of life. The suburbs of the city were the vital centre for entertainment and for people who were looking for a more free and libertine lifestyle. There were brothels, but also physical punishments and public executions of criminals and heretics: an endless stage of brutality and inhumanity. In this setting, theaters found their place as well, which were slowly starting to emerge in the crucial, controversial, and problematic period that Britain faced across the 16th and 17th centuries.[193]

Shakespeare started to work as a playwright and actor in theatres and he came in contact with the University Wits, an all-male social circle composed of flamboyant poets and playwrights that were known for having reckless, libertine, and even criminal behaviours. Here, he met Christopher Marlowe, with whom he had a very close relationship and collaborated for certain plays, such as *Henry VI*'s trilogy, and from whom he drew his inspiration for his first plays – Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1589) present many similarities. However, Shakespeare never joined this circle and never adopted their snobbish and extreme attitudes, remaining an outsider. Many of the criticisms he received from this poetic circle, specifically from his great rival, the dramatist Robert Greene, were used against them in his plays.[194] By 1594 he was already working with one of the most successful troupes in London, the Lord Chamberlain's Men.[195] Along with the Lord Admiral's Men, these were the two main companies who survived and dominated London in that difficult time.[196]

In fact, from James I's accession in March 1603 to September 1604 and from July 1606 to December 1610, Shakespeare faced some unstable periods for his literary production: apart from theater enemies, such as puritan preachers and hostile magistrates, that constantly attacked this

[193] Greenblatt, *Will in The World*, pp. 175-198.
[194] Greenblatt, *Will in The World*, pp. 199-225.
[195] Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Anthology*, p. 1166.
[196] Greenblatt, *Will in The World*, pp. 256-287.

institution for its presumed immorality and danger, terrible plague outbreaks shook London periodically across the decades, forcing theatres to close if not only for short periods of partial activity; Shakespeare had then to find different ways to receive his outcome. That is why his sonnets and poems were produced in these years of his life. His encounters with the aristocrats, possible inspirers of the sonnets, Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, and William Herbert, Third Earl of Pembroke, have to be located around this period.[197]

Contrary to what most queer studies focus on when it comes to the debate on Shakespeare's sexuality, the constrained environment in which people lived at the time, which considered every sexual practice that was not reproductive as deviant or perverted, determined a broader representation of 'abnormalities' belonging to one single category, making different sexual expressions opaque but, at the same time, more fluid. Consequently, Shakespeare's transgressive and progressive creative world is not limited only to homoeroticism. While reading and studying Shakespeare's works, it is possible to draw a picture of the society of the time and understand many of its sexual dynamics, practices, and fantasies that could happen. Judging from the degree of precision in law cases, people were very aware of them but knew how to hide them and express them through puns, word plays, or Classical references.[198]

The environment that translated queerness more positively into reality from literature was the theatre, which, being an all-male institution, made male actors take women's roles, arousing and facilitating the discoveries of homoerotic feelings and identifications. The single-sex composition of London playhouses constrained boys to perform women's roles, fuelling once again the Renaissance and Neoplatonic homosexual association with pederasty, but creating a safe world where the audience was so immersed that tacitly accepted conventions that could let men explore with makeup, dresses, and gestures socially defined as 'feminine', and to play with gender roles and gender stereotypes.[199]

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[197] Greenblatt, *Will in The World*, pp. 226-255.
[198] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, p. 95.
[199] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 57-98.

3.2 Shakespeare's Queer Plays

Many of Shakespeare's plays aim at depicting same-sex eroticism or queer heterosexuality, and this is shown through cross-dressing and friendship, as well as through religion, interracial attraction and sex, and the thin relation between desire and marriage.[200]

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613), William Shakespeare and John Fletcher present a male same-sex bond so intense that seems to affirm the superiority of homoerotic relationship to heterosexual dynamics of courtship and marriages. In the tragicomedy, Arcite declares that he and Palamon are 'an endless mine to one another:/We are one another's wife, ever begetting/New births of love' (2.2.79-81)[201], where 'begetting' can refer to friendship, love, but also sex.[202] Analysing the words Shakespeare uses as sexual puns, Jeffrey Masten explains that the word 'conversation' had a more complex and broader use of meanings in early modern England, and could mean 'talking', but also 'having sexual contact', and it was used as a substituter of 'sexual intercourse', which entered the English vocabulary only around the 18th century. Their bond borders on eroticism when in act 2 they are conversing in prison and Arcite says: 'We are Young/and yet desire the waies of honour,/That liberty and common Conversation/The poyson of pure spirits; might like women/Wooe us to wander from.' (2.2.73-76)[203] Shakespeare also explores deep male friendships in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1598) between Proteus and Valentine.[204] In the second act, Valentine talks about himself and his past with Proteus when they were kids, using the verb 'converse' both literally and figuratively in relation to their bond: 'I knew him as myself, for from our infancy/We have conversed and spent our ours together'(2.4.54-55).[205] Even when he talks about the woman he is in love with, he does not stop to show sweet affection for his close 'friend', like he does some

[200] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 57-98.
[201] My reference edition for Shakespeare's works is Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus, and Gabriel Egan, eds., *The New Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 3294.
[202] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 63-66.
[203] Jeffrey Masten, *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language, and Affect in Shakespeare's Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 83-105.
[204] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 63-66.
[205] Masten, *Queer Philologies*, pp. 83-105.

lines later, when he says: 'Forgive me that I do not dream on thee' (2.4.164).[206]

As I previously mentioned, 'Ganymede' was an early modern slang term used to refer to a homosexual man, both positively and negatively. As in the love triangles explored in the previous chapter, *As You Like It* (1599) and *Twelfth Night* (1602) both represent similar situations. In fact, although they both end with heterosexual marriage, this is achieved through male and female homoerotic encounters: in *As You Like It*, Rosalind dresses up as the young and handsome Ganymede to test Orlando's love for her, but at the same time she is wooed by both Orlando and the shepherdess Phoebe while being a man.[207] In *Twelfth Night*, Viola transforms herself into a young man, Cesario: Orsino's instantaneous decision to marry 'him' as soon 'he' changes 'his' clothes and returns to be Viola is another amazing representation of homosexuality.[208] Viola is not named with her character's name 'Viola' until line 235 of Act 5, leaving her unnamed until almost the end of the play; up to this scene, she is simply called 'lady' or 'madam', making the terms of address not immediately clear. Shakespeare's intention to insert pederasty and boy desire in this play is very evident, for example when Cesario is constantly called 'boy', as it occurs in Scene 4 of Act 2: 'Come, hither boy' (2.4.199), or 'Hath it not, boy?' (2.4.24); similarly, he is also called 'good youth' (1.4.15) or 'Dear lad' (1.4.29) to evidence the fact that he is much younger than Orsino. Even though Orsino waits until Cesario gets back being Viola in order to marry 'him', he excuses the attraction he knows he is feeling, making sure people know he is a boy, and so he could somehow fulfill a role of passivity.[209] Going back to who she was, the order has not been overturned, it was just an accepted theatrical plot twist: once she resumes her 'proper' appearances, restoring the established and approved sexual position, they can get married, but Orsino gets married to a virtual stranger, just for the sake of his social image. The person he met and knew was actually someone else. Shakespeare's extraordinary foresight and narrative ability show with simplicity and naturalness that a person can fall in love beyond gender assignation, sending a message that overcomes social boundaries and

[206] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 63-66.
[207] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, p. 79.
[208] Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 1187-1189.
[209] Masten, *Queer Philologies*, pp. 109-110.

moral injustices.[210]

A Midsummer Night's Dream is an example of women's desire for same-sex intimacy and physical contact. Women's erotic relations can be observed through the characters of the Queen of the Amazons, Hippolyta, and the Queen of the Fairies, Titania. The latter recalls memories she shared with her Indian votaress, connecting tribadism to non-European women;[211] Mario DiGangi analyses Titania's behaviour as dominant towards her Indian votaress, who 'fulfills the roles of a fertile wife, religious devotee, exotic pet, and domestic servant'[212]. This can also be seen in the characters of Hermia and Helena, who explore the language and the characteristics of a classical male friendship, even displaying a ritual kinship.[213] They happen to say things like: 'The sisters' vows' (5.200), 'We, Hermia, like two artificial gods/Have we our needles created both one flower,/Both one sampler, sitting on one cushion' (5.204-206), 'So, with two seeming bodies, but one heart' (5.213), defying their love 'ancient love' (5.216). These rituals used to happen in the institutions of sworn brotherhood – in operation until the 17th century – which took place to declare and sign an oath between two men who wanted to formally and publicly forge a kinship that 'could be as indisputable as that formed by marriage'[214], as Alan Bray documents. Kathryn Schwarz describes Hermia and Helena's relationship as a strong erotic presence, shown through female separatism – a feminist theory that sees the defeat of patriarchy only through a clear separation from men. In this comedy, the attention posed on female friendships highlights something missing in male relationships. Moreover, the relevance of same-sex bonds makes heterosexuality look like an awkward third wheel.[215] Even if these representations are obvious signs of female homoeroticism, they cannot be seen as a total imitation of heterosexuality, but more as a set of bonds that expand

[210] Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Anthology*, pp. 1187-1189.
[211] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 67-72.
[212] Mario DiGangi, *Sexual Types: Embodiment, Agency, and Dramatic Character from Shakespeare to Shirley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 84.
[213] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 67-72.
[214] Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 112.
[215] Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 219-221.

our understanding of queerness.[216] At the end of *The Winter's Tale* (1611), it is shown that Paulina and Hermione have lived together for sixteen years, representing 'a legitimate expression of same-sex allegiance, restorative witchcraft, and monarchical service'[217]. Strong same-sex friendships are also explored in *As You Like It*, between Rosalind, Celia, and Phoebe, and Viola and Olivia in *Twelfth Night*.[218]

The Comedy of Errors (1594), *Othello* (1604), *The Merchant of Venice* and the already mentioned *The Winter's Tale* and *Much Ado About Nothing* seem to explore another part of queerness through the deconstruction of the heterosexual couple and family ideals, proposing a more expanded idea of relationships and communitarian ideal of intimacy. In fact, adultery, along with autoeroticism and 'sodomy', was considered a sexual expression that had to be condemned. In these plays, Shakespeare depicts the possible life that Catholicism made available for those who did not want to get married, by presenting the communal life in convents as a possible alternative to intimacy and close relational forms outside heterosexual couples and marriages. The same happens in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1594), where Kate's intention to live a celibate life is brutally treated as something that has to be abandoned. *A Midsummers Night's Dream*, which begins with the marriage between The Queen of the Amazons and the Duke of Athens, Theseus, underlines the fact that it is a forced marriage that goes against Hippolyta's will. *The Two Noble Kinsman* also concludes with the anticipation of another forced marriage: that of Hippolyta's sister, Emilia; in both plays, female virginity, conceived in Catholic terms, is treated as a 'sexual deviance', something that is forced and goes against natural inclinations. In *Henry VI, Part 1* (1592) the progressive character of Joan of Arc is created speculating all men's forms of decadence and debauchery that are considered a threat to the nation of early modern England: she is denied her virginity, she is accused of being a diabolic figure, and she is considered a foreigner. But even more interesting is Isabella's pure and moralist character in *Measure for Measure* (1604), whose sexuality

[216] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 67-72.
[217] DiGangi, *Sexual Types*, p. 87.
[218] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 67-72.

is always submitted to someone else's decisions and will. In this tragicomedy, the novice is asked to have sexual intercourse with Angelo – the new governor of the city, thought to be a chaste and exemplary figure – in exchange to free her brother who got his lover Giulietta pregnant before marriage and has been sentenced to death as a consequence for it. But instead, Isabella sends Mariana, Angelo's lover, not to give up her virginity. During the play, Isabella's lines 'Th'impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,/And strip myself to death as to a bed/That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield/My body up to shame' (2.4.101-4) evoke the Catholic practice of public flagellation in convents, which Protestant polemists considered voyeuristic and sadomasochistic.[219] Many other passages in *Measure for Measure* assume sadomasochistic and pornographic dimensions: Carolyn Brown has evaluated this element of the play, the representation of Isabella's characters, and her disguised seductive language, as a way to ignite her true intentions and nature, making her assume a hypocrite and irresolute role, in addition to considering her sexuality repressed.[220] At the end of the play, Mariana is forced to marry Angelo to save him from the death penalty he has been condemned for, after the accusation that Mariana and the novice have filed against him, and Isabella has to endure the same destiny from the Duke, having to renounce her desire to become a nun. On the contrary, considering a historical moment where sexual pleasure was not interiorised as a legitimate part of the human experience, James M. Bromley sees 'Isabella's body's surface as a space for resistance through unabashed pleasure in the face of a state seeking to make political use of its subjects' erotic lives'[221]. In expressing her voluntary refusal to heteronormativity in order to embrace asexuality, the scholar sees her perception of it as a possible queer interpretation.[222]

3.3 Shakespeare's Sonnets: Publication History, Contents, and Criticism

Analysing Shakespeare's sonnets is not only interesting for their quality, but above all for the

[219] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 72-77.
[220] Carolyn E. Brown, '"Measure for Measure": Isabella's Beating Fantasies', The Johns Hopkins University Press, (1986), pp. 67-80.
[221] James M. Bromley, *Intimacy and Sexuality in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 140.
[222] Sanchez, *Shakespeare and Queer Theory*, pp. 72-77.

innovation of themes and style they present. The publication of Shakespeare's sonnets was not immediate and easy, but frequently hindered and manipulated. This could happen because of the scarce data available for his biography, the censorship, and the strict control over culture. In fact, Shakespeare's authorship was frequently questioned.[223]

According to scholars until the first half of the 20th century, the 1609 Quarto of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* was published clandestinely. It was even claimed that the Quarto was suppressed after its publication. It is thought that this rumour stemmed from a general feeling of anxiety caused by a 1885 reinforcement of the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, the 'Labouchère Amendment' – which expanded the crime to any homosexual activity between consenting adults males, making it an act of public offence and gross indecency – and Oscar Wilde's trial in 1895. Scholars had to divert the attention from Wilde's association between the fair youth and Shakespeare's numerous male friendships within the homosocial environment he found himself in, at theatre, as it was reported by his documentation that I will further explore: the greatest English poet could not be possibly involved with homosexuality.[224]

As with Barnfield, even in Shakespeare's case it was claimed that his poetry perfectly fit the boundaries of literary tradition and reflected common classic conventional features: as the biographer and critic Sidney Lee said, without any evidence, 'Hundreds of sonneteers had celebrated, in the language of love, the charms of young men.'[225] Hard to believe, as hundreds of sonneteers have surely not talked about a love for a young man that keeps them awake at night, as Shakespeare writes in lines 13 and 14 of Sonnet 27: 'Lo, thus by day my limbs, by night my mind,/For thee, and for myself, no quiet find.' (ll. 13-14), and keeps writing in Sonnet 28. Lee further claims that Thomas Thorpe – Shakespeare's publisher – had criminally appropriated the text and published it on his own, without Shakespeare's approval. Shakespeare, who by 1594 had

[223] Katherine Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', in William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets,* ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 1997), pp. 29-34.
[224] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 29-34.
[225] Sidney Lee, 'General Characteristics', in William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. by Sidney Lee (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), p. 10.

completed most of the sonnets, had nothing in common with the person he was in 1609; so, they were considered to be a mistaken product of a reckless youth and not a deep and intentional product of his maturity. These claims have been accepted without any challenge. However, they do not exclude the intentions behind the sonnets' content, which still remain strongly homoerotic, and do not explain why he should have been fascinated by a young man in his first years of marriage rather than his later years of theatrical success during the period spent in London.[226]

Contrary to the beliefs that were spread about its publication, Shakespeare's Sonnets, with every probability, were published by Shakespeare himself, as it happened with many other Elizabethan poets, such as Michael Drayton and Samuel Daniel. Furthermore, given the attention to certain details, such as italic script in words that do not fall into the italic words category, it is unlikely that the poet was unlinked from the publication his work. Lee's suggestion that Shakespeare did not know how to italicize words is unconvincing, given his profession, his unique style, and his education at Stratford's Grammar School.[227]

The heterosexualization of the sonnets is also evident in the continuous changes, edits, and rearrangements of the following reprints. For example, John Benson's edition, published in 1640, contains about thirty poems from other writers, with the intent of misleading his readers and suggesting that the addressee is exclusively a woman. Other edits are made to the pronoun 'he', often changed to 'she', or to the words 'sweet boy', changed to ' sweet love', in Sonnet 108, or to the title change 'Vpon the receit of a Table Book' to which was added 'from his Mistris', in Sonnet 122, to force the heterosexual and conventional matrix. Sonnet 126, entitled 'O thou my lovely Boy...' was omitted from the collection, while the number 20 was given the title 'The Exchange'. In the introduction to this collection, the attempt to guide the readers and to influence their thoughts is evident. The 1711 Bernard Lintott edition was determined to heterosexualize the collection as well: the sonnets were described as 'One Hundred and Fifty Sonnets, *all* of them in Praise of his Mistress',

[226] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 29-34.
[227] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 34-41.

while *A Lover's Complaint* was retitled as '*A Lover's Complaint of his Angry Mistress*'. It is clear that this kind of writing was not so common and conventional, and these methods served only to reassure the book-buyers of their contents, but it was evident to anyone that the uncensored original version of 1609 had acquired a reputation for being ambiguous and cloudy, and the lover addressee was not always specified. If Shakespeare was undoubtedly heterosexual, why making his works ambiguous from this point of view? Why not specifying the gender? The need for secrecy is clear.[228]

When it comes to Shakespeare's sonnets, a comparison with his predecessors is needed; for example, Sidney's collection of poems *Astrophil and Stella*, but also Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, a fundamental work for all the Renaissance English poets, are to be taken in consideration. Along with other English imitators of these works, such as Thomas Lodge, Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel, William Barnes, and John Fletcher, both of them have written on the basis of the Italian sonnet form and present a clear female addressee: Sidney's Stella and Petrarch's Laura. Contrarily to what Sidney Lee said, only another Elizabethan collection of sonnets is addressed to a young man and this is Richard Barnfield's sequence of twenty sonnets to Ganymede in *Cynthia*, breaking with two hundred years of Petrarchan imitation, and poets were surely very aware of this transgressive choice.[229]

The 'dark lady' is the protagonist of only six sonnets of the twenty-eight sonnet cycle which corresponds to the third part of the collection – from Sonnet 127 to Sonnet 154 – and brutally clashes with 'Petrarchanism'. For example, in Sonnet 130, Shakespeare does not explore the common subject of the unattainable love for a chaste and candid lady, but he praises a dark woman coming from a low class who does not certainly represent the conventional characteristics of a 'proper' lady of the time: she is not young, nor beautiful, nor intelligent, nor chaste, but, on the contrary, she is clumsy, she does not walk straight, and her breath is bad. In this way, on the one hand, Shakespeare depicts a totally different woman, who is real and authentic, challenging all the

[228] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 41-45.
[229] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 45-47.

stereotypes and conventions of a univocal and idealized representation, but, on the other side, he exploits the woman's representation to bring her down in order to compare her with the young man and elevate him, being sexist and misogynist. The woman is not celebrated, but, on the contrary, is often denigrated and ridiculed. While Sidney's Stella is encouraged to read Astrophil's sonnets, being recognized a right to her education, and to receive pleasure from it, being given an active role in her sexuality, Shakespeare's 'dark lady' is pictured as rather stupid, who cannot even understand that she is being made fun of and used for his sexual pleasure, to then brag about her with his friends – this is also present in *Astrophil and Stella* but in a more positive way. Instead, the fair youth is described in a completely different way. The young man is not simply being compared to the woman as if it was a comparison between genders and so, once again, to claim men's superiority over women, but he is being compared to the woman specifically as a better lover, and this is the crucial passage that needs to be understood. In fact, 'he is anatomized as physiologically, as well as morally, superior to the female love-objects'[230], while other poets have been 'stirred by a painted beauty' (l. 2), as it is said in Sonnet 21.[231]

On the other hand, Sonnets 1 to 126 – which form the first and second part – are all dedicated to the celebration of a young man, who might well be his love interest. The main difference between Shakespeare's love object and his predecessors' is, as I said, the gender: he is not a woman but a man; furthermore, he is a 'friend', so, someone he knows, not a distant and idealized person; and finally, the lover is not the means to reach religious transcendence, but a means to push idolatrous boundaries, without substituting lover-worship with Christian-worship, but using him as the means to push the limits and constrictions of religion, and exposing blasphemous and flamboyant ideologies.[232] This can be witnessed in Sonnet 105, where he says: 'Let not my love be called idolatry' (l. 1), or in Sonnet 129, where he talks about the compulsive force of lust. Moreover, in Sonnet 5, as I will explain in detail in the next subchapter, he defines human procreation as

[230] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', p. 49.
[231] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 47-49.
[232] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 49-50.

'distillation' (l. 9).[233]

The interpretations of Shakespeare's love object's choice can essentially be divided into two currents: the first one belongs to a post-Romantic view and sees Shakespeare writing the sonnets with these addressees because his life was upset by an unhappy affair with Mary Fitton, Queen Elizabeth I's maid of honour; so, to fit the sonnets to the courtly love tradition, the 'dark lady' takes the role of the 'femme fatale'. The second and most powerful vision sees the 'dark lady' as a 'suggestio falsi', so as a figure used to deviate the focus from the subject matter. As I explained in the previous chapter, homoeroticism needed the love triangle scenario in order to survive: for the way the thoughts are put out – there was more freedom in heterosexual expression – and for the heteronormativity implied in society, the 'dark lady' section strongly implies that the predominant focus of the sonnets is heterosexual, even if she is dedicated only twenty-eight sonnets. As Shakespeare has always been an idealized figure, serious, and diligent, the audience would have found a double adultery uncomfortable, but not as much as homosexuality, which was, among other things, a criminalized activity at the time; so even if one hundred twenty-six sonnets are devoted to a man's celebration, this can be easily forgotten if the attention is consequently directed to a woman for lesser lines. The same discourse can be made in relation to the love triangle created in the first part of the sonnets with the unknown woman the fair youth is suggested to procreate with.[234]

The focus on the 'rival poet' from Sonnet 78 to Sonnet 86 has also been the subject of endless speculation, and this speculation gets even bigger when connected to the third dedication of the paratextual material of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, a mysterious 'Mr. W.H.', offering a biographical association for the fair youth's identification. Another attempt to heterosexualize the sonnets comes in this case as well, when the journalist Barbara Everett in an article published in 1986, titled 'Mrs. Shakespeare', identifies the young man with a powerful and attractive masculine woman, his wife Anna Hathaway, the master-mistress of the poet's passion.[235] Scholars have finally suggested that the

[233] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', p. 70.
[234] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 50-51.
[235] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', p. 52.

fair youth whom Shakespeare talks about in the sonnets is either Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, a bachelor who refused to accept marriage proposal, or, most probably, William Herbert, Third Earl of Pembroke, who was also receiving pressure from his family to get married.[236] Greenblatt reckons that, for the different tones and style used, the first part of the sonnets was inspired by Henry Wriothesley, while the second by William Herbert.[237]

For the most part, the reception of Shakespeare's Sonnets has been negative or showed an obvious attempt for heterosexualization in order to cancel the initial and general embarrassment that was generated. On the contrary, when women started to enter the literary studies system, their criticism has been more positive and this not only finalized the homoerotic thrust on the sonnets, but also showed men's uncomfortableness with homosexuality and the reason for the sonnets' censorship. The silence with which the work was greeted was surprising, considered the poet's fame in 1609. There is nothing else but discomfort, disappointment, and shock that can explain this reception.[238]

His contemporaries and early 17th-century poets, like John Donne or John Milton, do not seem to have read the sonnets or enjoyed the reading, judging by the lack of opinions on the matter.[239] The poet George Herbert invokes God in criticizing the sonnets for the lack of traditionalism and spirituality, showing himself embittered by the turn poetry took with Shakespeare.[240] Even students at Oxford and Cambridge do not seem to have said anything about the sonnets. The only one who seems to have shown appreciation is Sir John Sucking, who has surprisingly liked the unconventionality and gender depiction that Shakespeare brought to his work, without depraving sexual ambivalence but, on the contrary, incorporating it in his play *Brennoralt* (1640). But this play did not receive particular fame. When Benson's 1640 edition was published, the 1609 Quarto almost disappeared and Benson's was the only edition that was taken into

[236] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 53-69.
[237] Greenblatt, *Will in The World*, pp. 226-255.
[238] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 69-85.
[239] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 69-70.
[240] George Herbert, *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. by F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 206.

consideration for centuries. Anthologists like Joshua Poole and Edward Phillips kept modifying the sonnets, changing them in order to please the audience and its morality. For example, they put together various final couplets from the fair youth's section forming a poem with the title 'A Persuasive Letter to his Mistress'. This definitely contributed to lowering the interest and appreciation in Shakespeare's sonnets over the 18th century, spreading opinions of distaste.[241]

However, 19th-century authors' criticism opened up to new evaluations. For example, William Wordsworth's comments on the sonnets have always been very ambivalent: he first said that they have 'many fine lines and passages' and that they are positively 'warm with passion', but he also found them filled with 'sameness, tediousness, quaintness, and elaborate obscurity',[242] worthy of a 'scanty plot of ground'; instead, in another situation, he implored critics to give the work a second chance because Shakespeare put a lot of dedication into writing them.[243] Samuel Coleridge went back to the old roots, showing himself always uncomfortable in relation to the sonnets, never giving a clear opinion and always avoiding them, preferring the discussion of the poems.[244] In 1803, he writes that, if someone really wants to understand the sonnets, they 'must read the chapter in Potter's *Antiquities* on the Greek lovers', mentioning Theban and Philip as example for acceptable Platonic love, but keeping away the 'most calumnious fancies' who 'had suspected their love of desires against nature'[245]. He further claims that 'This pure love Shakespeare appears to have felt', does not show even a partial 'allusion to that very worst of all possible vices'[246]. Contradicting Wordsworth, he sees 'no elaborate obscurity and very little quaintness'[247]. On the other hand, near the end of his life, he seems to have been less hostile to the work, but he always exonerated Shakespeare from this 'kind' of love, defining the sonnets as something that could be written by someone in love and in

241 Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 69-85.
242 William Wordsworth, 'Critical Comment', in *Shakespeare: The Sonnets. A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Peter Jones (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 41-42.
243 Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 75-76.
244 Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', p. 76.
245 Samuel T. Coleridge, 'Critical Comment', in *Shakespeare: The Sonnets. A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Peter Jones (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 41-42.
246 Coleridge, 'Critical Comment', pp. 41-42.
247 Coleridge, 'Critical Comment', pp. 41-42.

love with a woman only, and excusing Sonnet 20 but without really explaining why: 'there is one sonnet which, from its incongruity, I take to be a purposed blind'.[248] In 1817, John Keats intervenes on the work, saying that he 'found so many beauties in the sonnets – they seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally – in the intensity of working out conceits'. And again, 'He has left nothing to say about nothing or anything: ... He overwhelms a genuine Love of Poesy'[249]. A similar approach comes from Percy Shelley, who praises Shakespeare's poetic images for their simplicity, 'and yet animated with what intense poetry and passion'; but he also seems to remain on the surface, afraid to say too much: a surprising fact, considering his biography.[250] The scholar Benjamin Jowett thinks that the content choice of Shakespeare's sonnets could be a consequence of his position towards Classicism and, in particular, Hellenism.[251]

The most relevant and honest opinion was given by Oscar Wilde, and is clear from his letters, from 'The Portrait of Master W.H.', from his philosophy of thought, widely based on Classic ideologies, and from his testimonies at his trials. In a letter to a student, Louis Wilkinson, dated 20th March 1899, he states his opinion on Shakespeare's homoerotic feelings towards the attractive young man, protagonist and inspirer of his sonnets:[252]

> My dear Boy... So you love Shakespeare's Sonnets: I have loved them, as one should love all things, not wisely but too well. In an old *Blackwood* – of I fancy 1889 – you will find a story of mine called 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.', in which I have expressed a new theory about the wonderful lad whom Shakespeare so deeply loved. I think it was the boy who acted in his plays.[253]

Similarly in 1899, the homosexual author Samuel Butler also found shelter behind the homoerotic ideologies of Greek culture and pederasty, saying that:[254]

> The marvel, however, is this, that whereas the love of Achilles for Patroclus depicted by the Greek poet is purely English, absolutely without taint or alloy of any kind, the love of the English poet for Mr W. H. was, though only for a short time, more Greek than English. I cannot explain this...[255]

From this statement Samuel Butler only radiates confusion and doubt. He defines the relationship

[248] Coleridge, 'Critical Comment', p. 45.
[249] John Keats, 'Critical Comment', p. 46.
[250] Percy B. Shelley, 'Critical Comment', p. 46.
[251] Alfred Tennyson, *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. by Christopher Ricks (Harlow: Longmans, 1969), p. 860.
[252] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 69-85.
[253] Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis, eds., *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Fourth Estate Limited, 2000), p. 1133.
[254] Samuel Butler, 'Critical Comment', pp. 51-52.
[255] Samuel Butler, 'Critical Comment', pp. 51-52.

between Achilles and Patroclus of the 'English type', so, for the conception of the time, he talks about their homosexuality involving 'sodomy' or, however, sexual attachment. On the other hand, he classifies Shakespeare and Mr W. H. possible relationship of the 'Greek type', so as Plato conceived it. Between two men of that society, love had to be elevated, removing any sign of 'criminal' activity.[256]

Consequently, all critics confirmed a love and passional thrust in the sonnets, in all three sections. But they had to confront themselves with a 'big problem': the presence of a man. So, as soon that is realized, passion takes a step back, leaving space for reused excuses of Platonic love. As with Barnfield, suspicions and insinuations on the homoeroticisms in his works have always been evident, but had to be hid, manipulated, and heterosexualized, causing unfair and false criticism. If Shakespeare was having these feelings towards a man, in past critics' opinion this could only be a form of Platonic love, drawing on Greek works and Greek lovers to find answers on what they could not explain.[257]

Even the homosexual poet W. H. Auden, afraid of a possible takedown of the imminent decriminalization of homosexual acts between consenting adults – it happened in 1967 – never publicly celebrated nor endorsed the homoeroticism of Shakespeare's sonnets, saying that it was not the right time yet. Finally, the first positive study of the homoeroticism in Shakespeare's sonnets appeared in 1985, with the American Scholar Joseph Pequigney's publication of *Such Is My Love*.[258]

3.3 *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1609): The Homoerotic Sonnets

Shakespeare's Sonnets are essentially divided into three parts: the first part goes from Sonnet 1 to Sonnet 17 and celebrates a young man, also called the fair youth; in particular, it celebrates the beauty and the youth of this man, but also the love for him, pushing him to get married to a woman, procreate, and perpetuate his image. The second part goes from Sonnet 18 to Sonnet 126 and still

[256] Samuel Butler, 'Critical Comment', pp. 51-52.
[257] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 69-85.
[258] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 69-85.

celebrates the young man's beauty and youth, but, in particular, it focuses on Time and Love as ideals, how the former and the latter are connected to each other. Time is considered as a definer of our life passing away as we get old, so Shakespeare proposes a way to defeat Time: using poetry, specifically, the sonnets, which can show people eternity in the present; the sonnets will make people immortal by making the soul immortal, and Love, which should be developed individually, thanks to the beloved person but also for a more communal value and interest, is what constitutes and animates the sonnets. The purpose is then to save the young man from the destructive power of time that characterized the first part: the sonnets will make his ravishing beauty and fragile youth immortal first by pushing him to get married, as occurs in the first section, and, consequently by making him immortal thanks to the power of poetry. The third part goes from Sonnet 126 to Sonnet 154 and sees the 'dark lady' as the protagonist of an unconventional and transgressive representation of woman and sexuality.[259] I am now going to present the sonnets which I have selected for the analysis of my dissertation: the first part, including also Sonnets 18, 19, and 20 of the second one.

Sonnets 1-17 present changing, contrasting, and complementary attitudes towards the fair youth: Shakespeare starts with a general and disinterested appreciation for the youth's look, later shifting to an almost intrusive interest in his sexuality. However, he shows affection, love, and respect for the young man, representing the typical characteristics of romantic love. This succession of the sonnets and the order in which they deal with certain themes, reflect the Classic ideals, embodying the Hellenic beauty canon and educational approach – which we saw in *The Affectionate Shepherd* as well – of an older and wiser man guiding a younger and handsome man to be an honourable and respectable adult in society. The sonnets document the young man's interest, as well as his social status, giving voice to Shakespeare's ethical and political outlook.[260]

The sonnets are transgressive from any point of view, not just for the representation of homoerotic love or the presence of the 'dark lady', but also for the way they start: the lack of the

[259] Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Anthology*, p. 1170.
[260] Joseph Pequigney, *Such Is My Love: A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 7.

usual introductory features, and the failure to imitate any of Shakespeare's predecessors or contemporary Renaissance poets completely breaks with the tradition. Sonnet 1 does not make any reference to a woman or to a Muse – this does not happen until Sonnet 21 – but, instead, it does not have a clear addressee, looking disorienting and confusing.[261] Starting from Sonnet 1, in the first sonnets Shakespeare recreates the same situation that happens in the Genesis, when God commanded His creatures to increase and multiply, simulating an educational intent:

> From fairest creatures we desire increase,
> That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
> But as the riper should by time decease
> His tender heir might bear his memory:
> But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
> Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,
> Making a famine where abundance lies,
> Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.
> Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament,
> And only herald to the gaudy spring,
> Within thine own bud buriest thy content,
> And, tender churl, mak'st waste in niggarding.
> Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
> To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee. (Sonnet 1)

However, Shakespeare proposes it in an aestheticised form, as we read in the first line, desiring for an Eden where 'beauty's rose' (l. 2), the beauty of the young boy – so of his future generations as well –, predominates. But this intention is under attack, as the young man refuses to accomplish this request, showing himself hostile to 'increase' (l. 1).[262] The beauty of the man and his pressing suggestion to procreate work hand in hand with the abundance of the aesthetic investment made on the sonnet: in fact, it represents an enormous quantity of good values and images, such as increase, ripening, expansion, beauty, sweetness, freshness, ornament, springtime, the rose, fair creatures, bright eyes, light, shown in juxtaposition with negative concepts – maybe a way to contrast heterosexual and homosexual love – such as dying (l. 2), decease (l. 3), memory (l. 4), contraction (l. 5), self-consumption ((l. 6), famine (l. 7), waste (l. 12). So, this sonnet seems to reproach itself of the same 'waste of niggarding' (l. 12) addressed to the young man, but it also functions as a 'self-replicating increase' for the other sonnets and the fair youth.[263] As it is common in Shakespeare's

[261] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 7.
[262] Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 46.
[263] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 47-48.

works, there is not a very clear representation of genders, even though the readers know the speaker and the spoken-to of the sonnets: the borders of Shakespeare's character identities are left intentionally blurred. Nevertheless, there are a few words that can hint at a male representation: the possessive adjective 'his' in line 2, and the expression 'within thine own bud' in line 11, that is a promising young man, 'buriest thy content', which formally means happiness. However, it could also maliciously refer to his seed, as in the previous line 'the gaudy spring' (l. 10) alludes to something generative. In general, the tone in this sonnet – and of the whole first part – leans on morality and severeness, typical of an older person teaching something to a younger person, who, in Sonnets 2 and 3 are evidently confirmed to be two men. 'Beauty' in line 2 and 'memory' in line 4 anticipate the recurring themes of this part, Beauty and Time, but, unlike in the second part, Time here is seen as a destructive element. Beauty is not conceived as a helpless element, but, being personified in the boy, as something that could defeat Time and could survive, if only he wanted to procreate and pass his beauty on to someone else. The young man's beauty takes also the form of a rose, made evident by the possessive form 'beauty's rose' (l. 2), by 'the world's fresh ornament' (l. 9), and by 'And only [floral] herald to the gaudy spring' (l. 10). These are surprising comparisons, as the rose has always been a well-established symbol for women.[264]

The lavish praise of a young person's beauty is definitely a Petrarchan topos and the only sign of the poetic tradition that we can find in this sonnet, in addition to the over-used 'bright eyes' in line 5: the rest of the description follows an unconventional masculine lode. The praise of this man is intermixed with blame for refusing sexual relations with an unspecified woman. Contrarily to other collections of sonnets, such as *Astrophil and Stella*, the male protagonists have always strived for sexual engagement with their woman, aiming not at simple reproduction but mainly at their personal gratification. The woman's praise for her beauty was needed as a way to arouse sexual desire, while her chastity was a sign of patience and love's virtuosity. But, here, his beauty and youth are not seen as a means for the other partner's sexual arousal, nor for creating any

[264] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 9.

virtuosity in their bond, but, on the contrary, as a fault, an impediment for not being able to procreate. And this leads to one single question: why?[265]

The theme of procreating is dealt with in all the first seventeen sonnets, but in Sonnet 1 it is treated differently, as a universal theme; in fact, it regards all the 'fairest creatures' and 'we' (l. 1), referring to everyone who is subject to grow and decay. But this inclusiveness is restricted only to the beautiful boy in line 5, which starts with 'But thou', using the man's beauty as the only reason for this constant persuasion for procreation. In fact, it is only from the 'fairest creature' Shakespeare wants people to seek progeny.[266] It is possible to perceive a comparison with the myth of Narcissus, who, after denying the love of Echo, ends up falling in love with his image on a lake; this has been interpreted also as a way to convey same-sex love and desire. As Narcissus, the young man Shakespeare praises is blamed for squandering and accumulating useless things ('waste in niggarding' in line 12) and for self-absorption ('self-substantial fuel' in line 6). However, it is already visible that the speaker is fond of the man who he is talking about, showing a bond that is real, imperfect, and contrasting: as in many other lines throughout the collection, in line 8 we read 'thy sweet self', or, in line 12, 'tender churl', where adjectives that betray Shakespeare's mandatory censorious attitude are being used.[267]

Sonnet 2 and Sonnet 3 have the intent to explore the reasons why the youth should procreate, never naming love once, but using procreation only as a form of interest, need, obligation, because his condition probably pushes him to find love and sexual happiness somewhere else;[268] while in Sonnet 2 he is reminded of aging, in Sonnet 3 he is reminded of death, as it is evident by the key words of each couplet (in Sonnet 2, line 13 'old', and in Sonnet 3, line 14 'Die' and 'dies'):[269]

> When forty Winters shall besiege thy brow,
> And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,

[265] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 8.
[266] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 10.
[267] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 8.
[268] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 11.
[269] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 19.

Thy youth's proud livery so gazed on now,
Will be a tattered weed of small worth held:
Then being asked where all thy beauty lies,
Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,
To say within thine own deep-sunken eyes,
Were an all-eating shame, and thriftless praise.
How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use
If thou couldst answer, “This fair child of mine
Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse”,
Proving his beauty by succession thine:
This were to be new made when thou art old,
And see thy blood warm when thou feel’st it cold. (Sonnet 2)

In Sonnet 2, aging is also shown through metaphors of winter – 'winter' (l. 1) – war – 'trenches' (l. 2), used as a metaphor for wrinkles – and commerce – 'worth' (l. 4), used as a metaphor for saying that his youth will be a 'weed of small worth' (l. 4), that is a treasure of no value if he does not have kids and passes it to them, contrasting it with his current 'proud livery' (l. 3). Winter as a symbol for seasonal destruction is something that also Barnfield used in *The Affectionate Shepheard*. Shakespeare divides the sonnets into two main parts: the first, from line 1 to line 6, makes a prophecy and asks questions; the second, from line 7 to line 14, gives answers and judgments. The arguments used to induce him to 'breed', are based on prudence and moral obligation. For example, from line 5 to line 12, Shakespeare puts emphasis on personal interest, starting from social stigma and impressions, as old people are not well seen in society if they do not have children, so they have to procreate if they want to avoid 'an all-eating shame' (l. 8). Children are then seen as something to have to receive 'thriftless praise' (l. 8) and to 'make' one's 'old excuse' (l. 11).[270] Therefore Shakespeare concentrates on loneliness, as children can be a source of happiness, consolation, and company for older people, rather than being alone. But here, sons and daughters are not needed for consolation as a form of affection or help in case of need, but as a way to see each own strength, vitality, and beauty in another human being, so for a mere, superficial, materialistic need.[271] To abstain from procreation is a form of egoism and narcissism, recalling one of the topics of Sonnet 1.[272]

Look in thy glass, and tell the face thou viewest

[270] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 53-56.
[271] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 11.
[272] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 53-56.

Now is the time that face should form another,
Whose fresh repair if now thou not renewest
Thou dost beguile the world, unbless some mother.
For where is she so faire whose uneared womb
Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?
Or who is he so fond will be the tomb,
Of his self-love to stop posterity?
Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
Calls back the lovely April of her prime:
So thou through windows of thine age shalt see,
Despite of wrinkles, this thy golden time.
But if thou live remembered not to be,
Die single, and thine image dies with thee. (Sonnet 3)

In Sonnet 3, dying also catches the reader's attention through the words 'tomb' in line 7.[273] Once reminded to procreate in line 2 ('Now is the time that face should form another), the fair youth is imagined as married (as in Sonnet 9) and he is the defined as the fine object of many marriageable girls (as in Sonnet 16). Through lines 5 and 6, serving as a way for being glorified from a male point of view, the author never spends time on praising the woman and saying these things about her, but always focusing his attention on him.[274] The image of the 'mirror' and of the myth of Narcissus are cited again in line 1, 'look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest', and in line 9, 'Thou art thy mother's glass', hinting at same-sex love as reasons for his non-procreative choice.[275] The suggestion that his father is dead in line 13, giving an important biographical allusion to Henry Wriothesley – his father died when he was young as well –[276], is the reason why, in lines 4, 9, and 10 the youth's mother is taken into consideration to show that his beauty has been passed from generation to generation.[277]

The persuasion for procreation is never dissociated from the praise of the man's beauty and from his persona, hiding what Shakespeare's real intention might have been: showing appreciation and sexual attraction for the fair youth. Shakespeare's sexual interest is extremely evident in Sonnet 11, Sonnet 16, and then Sonnet 20, where the homoerotic attraction strongly clashes with heterosexual love and procreation. In Sonnet 11, Nature plays an important role and She is used to

[273] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 58-60.
[274] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 19.
[275] Greenblatt, *Will in The World*, pp. 230-231.
[276] Greenblatt, *Will in The World*, p. 228.
[277] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 58-60.

say that procreation is needed to give equilibrium:[278]

> As fast as thou shalt wane, so fast thou grow'st
> In one of thine, from that which thou departest;
> And that fresh blood which youngly thou bestow'st
> Thou mayst call thine, when thou from youth convertest;
> Herein lives wisdom, beauty and increase;
> Without this, folly, age and could decay.
> If all were minded so, the times should cease,
> And threescore year would make the world away:
> Let those whom nature hath not made for store,
> Harsh, featureless, and rude, barrenly perish;
> Look whom she best endowed, she gave the more,
> Which bounteous gift thou shouldst in bounty cherish:
> She carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby
> Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die. (Sonnet 11)

As it is explained in line 5, in a world where human beings know their role and multiply, it 'lives wisdom, beauty, and increase' (l. 5), whereas 'without this, folly, age, and cold decay' (l. 6) would be created, making 'the times [...] cease' (l. 7) and 'the world 'away' (l. 8). As is shown in line 13, Nature 'carved' him.[279] In this inorganic metaphor, which suggests the fair youth has to print himself in order to form copies of his images – so the figure of speech is made reproductive – he creates an 'inanimate' situation that could be needed for his homoeroticism to find escapism: his procreation is shown through the writing of poetry, art, and their creative power; so through the poet's ability, not through biological reproduction. This contrasts the rest of the sonnet: line 3, 'fresh blood', which the young man should pass to his descendants, and line 9, which declares 'Let those whom Nature hath not made for store', suggest that those who decide not to reproduce are not only irresponsible, but also 'unnatural'. In fact, in line 9, 'store' means procreate and could hint to homosexual men – or people who do not want to procreate in general – who are 'harsh, featureless, and rude' (l. 10) and should 'barrenly perish' (l. 10).[280] The word in line 11 'the more' in line 12 and 'bounteous gift' are synonymous for male genitalia, managing to evoke parts of his body indirectly and his curious interest in them; they are used to indicate their role in the reproductive system.[281]

In Sonnet 16, the speaker identifies himself as a poet for the first time and tries to find a

[278] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 13-15.
[279] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 13-15.
[280] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, p. 91.
[281] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 13-15.

way to make his beauty and youth immortal without using reproduction as a vehicle for it:[282]

> But wherefore do not you a mightier way
> Make war upon this bloody tyrant time,
> And fortify your self in your decay
> With means more blessed then my barren rime?
> Now stand you on the top of happy hours,
> And many maiden gardens, yet unset,
> With virtuous wish would bear your living flowers,
> Much liker then your painted counterfeit:
> So should the lines of life that life repair,
> Which this, time's pencil or my pupil pen,
> Neither in inward worth nor outward fair,
> Can make you live your self in eyes of men:
> To give away yourself keeps your self still,
> And you must live drawn by your own sweet skill. (Sonnet 16)

Shakespeare realizes that the young man's biological representation is superior to the artist's pencil or the writer's pen artifact representation. In fact, he says: 'And fortify yourself in your decay/With means more blessed than my barren rhyme?' (ll. 3-4), in which 'means more blessed', refer to his power in the heterosexual intercourse, and 'barren rhyme' to his poetry.[283] In line 10, the 'pencil' and 'pen' are associated with male genitalia; the sexual innuendo continues in the final couplet, where 'to give away yourself' (l. 13) implies seminally, and 'sweet skill' (l. 14) refers to sexual ability. His 'living flowers' (l. 7), that is his sperm, has the power to generate a kid that would be more similar and accurate to his beauty than his empty lines: in fact, only 'the lines of life' (l. 9), that is children, have the possibility to hand down his image in a more realistic and substantial way. Emblematic is though line 12, which says that if he had a child with that woman, his beauty will live 'in eyes of men', putting the attention on men's attraction for him.[284] Nevertheless, interesting is the use of the verb 'draw' (l. 14) in relation to his procreative activity, as it refers to the artistic ability to replicate an image, and could perfectly ascribe to the word 'skill'.[285]

In Sonnet 20, he manages to hide a man's body and personality behind a woman's ones:[286]

> A woman's face with nature's own hand painted
> Haste thou the master mistress of my passion;
> A woman's gentle hart but not acquainted
> With shifting change as is false women's fashion;

[282] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 114-115.
[283] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 114-115.
[284] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 13-15.
[285] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 114-115.
[286] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 13-15.

An eye more bright then theirs, less false in rolling,
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
A man in hue all Hews in his controlling,
Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth;
And for a woman wert thou first created,
Till nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated,
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing:
But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,
Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure. (Sonnet 20)

Nature, as in Sonnet 11, plays again an important role: in line 10, it is said that 'she wrought' him and 'fell a-doting' on him. Moreover, Nature endowed him with the power of procreation: 'she pricked thee', as it is said in line 13.[287] In Sonnet 20, the young man is praised for having female physiognomy, a woman's face, without being a woman, that is having female body parts and being subjected to instability and easy alteration of emotions. In fact, in lines 3 and 4, he is described as having 'A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted/With shifting change, as is false women's fashion'; at the same time, he has 'an eye more bright than theirs' (l. 5), but they are 'less false in rolling' (l. 5), that is that they do not have a mean look. His eyes are 'gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;' (l. 6), that is turning precious the object they put their eyes on. By comparing him with women, Shakespeare does not seem to challenge stereotypes associated with women's personality, especially with their temperament – contrary to what Sidney does with Stella – but, instead, he makes use of them in order to lift his man up. It is not the only time Shakespeare seems obsessed with references to the menstrual cycle and women's connected lunacy: in fact, the number of sonnets which are conventionally grouped as 'the dark lady sonnets', twenty-eight, corresponds to the lunar month or menstrual cycle of a woman.[288] In lines 7 and 8 he says that the 'master mistress of his passion' (l. 2) is 'a man' (l. 7), 'Which steals men's eyes and woman's souls amazeth': the fair youth attracts both sexes. He even proposes a double same-sex attraction, the poet's and Nature's, as he is attracted to the young man of the master-mistress and She is attracted to the woman of the master-mistress; in fact, Nature first created the young man as a woman, but then, in between conceiving the creature mentally and generating the flesh, She changed her mind, modelling a

[287] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 13-15.
[288] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 47-49.

mixed figure: 'And for a woman wert thou first created,/Till nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting' (ll. 9-10). In this sonnet, the poet seems angry and frustrated 'at women for not being the young man' and 'at the young man for not being a sexually available woman'[289], serving as a perfect conflicting situation to convey homoerotic feelings; to please the society of the time, his love is not consummated physically, but remains Platonic, as it is said in line 14: 'Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure'. He imagines and manages to express his love for his man always in relation to a woman; in fact, he had to write that he was first thought as a woman, who Nature had 'pricked' (l. 13), so had added her a penis – to avoid a representation of lesbian love. By doing so, 'by addition me of thee defeated' (l. 11), She also separated him from the poet.[290] The most homoerotic expression is to be found in line 12, where 'By adding one thing to my purpose nothing' refers to the impossibility and inutility of homosexual love, because it cannot exist in society and cannot produce anything, if not 'useless' love.[291] His attraction and his infatuation for the fair youth are evident but cannot be expressed nor lived through the 'body', but only through the 'eye', as if its sexuality was castrated, or maimed: it is there but cannot find a way to emerge, if not only imaging the young man in a woman's face but with his body and personality.[292]

It is not the first time we see a homosexual character not being able to find a precise and clear representation in literature: it is a person who is always half and half, half a woman and half a man, half a human and half something else, something that makes it different – emblematic is the character of the mermaid in *The Little Mermaid* (1837) by Hans Christian Andersen for its similar allusions; constantly intermixed with a part of somebody else, the homosexual character is never being able to come out freely, but he always has to pretend to be someone else or to disguise as somebody else. Their sexuality is trapped in a form of expression that is not theirs, finding their outcome only by involving a woman. This happens in all the 1-17 sonnets, as well as in Sonnet 144, when Shakespeare imbeds his love in a love triangle, as if the woman has to be there to balance a

[289] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, p. 129.
[290] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 128-129.
[291] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 13-15.
[292] Vendler. *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 14-17.

situation that he cannot explain, that he has interiorised as insufficient, defective, and unhealthy.

Unlike in *Twelfth Night* and *Venus and Adonis*, the theme of procreation does not fall into the category of courtship and this has raised much speculation about the bond between the author and the young man.[293] While, on one hand, he might be psychologically manipulated and abused by challenging his feelings of fear and aversion to marriage and sexual intercourse with a woman, on the other hand, mixing the praise of his beauty with the indications of the procreational purposes and advantages, the misuse of masturbation, and the negativity of celibacy (which I will explain in detail later) does not make their relationship fall into the Renaissance friendship category. Shakespeare's reiterated habit of connecting the fair youth to sex has been a problem for many critics to give a definite answer to their relationship.[294]

The sexual attraction towards the young man flows into the sexual imagery in Sonnets 3, 5, 6, and 16, where he images him engaging in sexual intercourse with the unnamed woman, representing the triangulation of desire. Sexual intercourse is hinted at in lines 5 and 6 of Sonnet 3, where he says: 'For where is she so fair whose uneared womb/Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?', using the seeding-cultivation-harvesting metaphor, frequently used in Shakespeare's imagery. The same metaphor appears in lines 9 and 10 of Sonnet 5, where Shakespeare writes: 'Then were not summer's distillation left,/A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,' where 'liquid prisoner' (l. 10) refers to male semen and 'walls of glass' (l. 10) indicate the uterus. In Sonnet 6, the young man is the flower – associating once again a man with the symbol of the flower – who should 'be distilled' (l. 2) with semen, 'make sweet some vial' (l. 3), that is inseminating some womb, and 'treasure thou some place/with beauty's treasure' (ll. 3-4). In these lines, 'some place' (l. 3) refers to a womb again, while 'treasure' (l. 4) has two meanings: as a verb, 'enrich', in the sense of inseminate; as a noun, 'semen'. In Sonnet 16, he imagines sexual intercourse between him and the unnamed woman. Here, 'many maiden gardens,' (l. 6) refer to female genitalia and uterus, while 'bear your

[293] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 20.
[294] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 19.

living flowers' (l. 7) refers to his children and implicitly to his sperm.[295]

As it occurs in *The Affectionate Shepherd*, Shakespeare's sonnets also present a correspondence between financial and sexual references. This happens in Sonnets 2, 6, and 9: Sonnet 2 connects the economic and sexual spheres with the word 'treasure' in line 6, while Sonnet 6 with 'Beauty's treasure' in line 4, which appears to be the key expression to this association. But so are 'forbidden usury' (l. 5) and 'pay the willing loan' (l. 6), expressions which describe financial investment, but, at the same time, also sexual enjoyment. Besides referring to moneylending, 'usury' properly refers to sexual intercourse. The verb 'spend' (l. 9) in Sonnet 9 has the same function.[296]

Sonnet 4 is built around the same concept, but it also introduces another theme, using for benefitting procreation and contrasting the young man's refusal for it, through masturbation:[297]

> Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend
> Upon thyself thy beauties legacy?
> Nature's bequest gives nothing but doth lend,
> And being frank, she lends to those are free:
> Then, beauteous niggard, why dost thou abuse,
> The bounteous largesse given thee to give?
> Profitless usurer, why dost thou use
> So great a sum of sum, yet canst not live?
> For having traffic with thyself alone,
> Thou of thyself thy sweet self dost deceive;
> Then how, when nature calls thee to be gone,
> What acceptable audit canst thou leave?
> Thy unused beauty must be tombed with thee,
> Which used, lives th'executor to be. (Sonnet 4)

Here, Shakespeare is reproaching the young man for misusing something that Nature has 'bounteous largesse' (l. 6) of, as She is very generous, but She 'lends' (l. 3) Her 'bequest' (l. 3) to people expecting them to be equally generous. Again, we find themes like narcissism, avidity, and selfishness. Instead of imagining sexual intercourse with someone else, this sonnet focuses specifically on masturbation, which Shakespeare disapproves of to encouraging instead a shared sexual experience with a woman. The young man is first defined 'Unthrifty loveliness' in line 1, referencing again someone who takes care too much of himself by accumulating useless things for his personal need: in this case, he prefers to 'spend' – a way to name seminal discharge – time for

[295] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 14-15.
[296] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 14-15.
[297] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 15.

his own sexual satisfaction in private and his 'beauty's legacy' on himself. In line 5 he is then defined 'beauteous niggard', and in line 6 'profitless usurer', as someone who wears oneself out with masturbation, recalling the idea in Sonnet 2, 'beauty's use' (l. 9), of making use of the pleasure of one self's body without producing and giving nothing in return to society. In line 9, the expression 'For having traffic with thyself alone' finally explicitly exposes the meaning of the sonnet: 'traffic' is sexual commerce, so it connects the economic and the sexual spheres. But, as it is said in line 11, 'when nature calls', every man has to fulfill their role in society, and if the young man's beauty is used, it will live 'th'executor to be' (l. 14), that is his child will be his executor, so he will manifest the father's beauty in the future. Otherwise, the 'unused beauty' (l. 13), will be 'tomb[ed] with thee' (l. 13), will be buried with him and disappear. Shakespeare is so sorry for wasting such a marvelous face and body – caring so much about his private sexual life – that he is willing to overcome their sexual bond that does not produce anything and that he tried so hard to cover up, if the young man is aware of the fact that he also has to marry and fulfill the related duties, like the poet did.[298]

Masturbation themes are also recurrent in Sonnet 6, where with 'beauty's treasure ere it be self-killed' (l. 4), the poet implies the young man's preference for non-copulatory sexual activities. Sonnet 9, in line 2, uses the verb 'consumst thyself' to perfectly describe the idea of giving oneself sexual pleasure; 'in single life' (l. 2) is a simple way to refer to an unmarried, bachelor life. This theory finds support in line 11, where this lifestyle is defined as 'beauty's waste': in fact, it is called a waste, a consumption of one's own beauty because in the Renaissance it was believed that autoeroticism would erode beauty and youth, and shorten life. Moreover, this concept is underlined in line 14 ('That on himself such murd'rous shame commits'): 'murd'rous shame' were considered to be abstinence or autoeroticism. Lines 13 and 14, the 'murd'rous shame' that he 'commits' on himself does not 'bosom' love towards others. His lack of love involves four categories of people: in lines 1 and 2, 'a widow' is first introduced, then, in lines 4 and 5, 'the world', that is everyone, all human beings. These ideas are further developed in Sonnet 10, which mentions 'many' (l. 3) who love him,

[298] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 15.

and, finally, 'for love of me' (l. 13), that is the speaker himself.[299] All the reproaches on self-abuse end with Sonnet 9.[300]

In fact, Sonnet 10 is a key one for the change of themes and approaches:[301]

> For shame deny that thou bear'st love to any,
> Who for thyself art so unprovident;
> Grant, if thou wilt, thou art beloved of many,
> But that thou none lov'st is most evident:
> For though art so possessed with murd'rous hate
> That 'gainst thyself thou stick'st not to conspire,
> Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate
> Which to repair should be thy chief desire:
> O change thy thought, that I may change my mind;
> Shall hate be fairer lodged than gentle love?
> Be as thy presence is, gracious and kind;
> Or to thyself at least kind-hearted prove,
> Make thee another self for love of me,
> That beauty still may live in thine or thee. (Sonnet 10)

For the first time, the speaker takes a step forward, identifying himself and using the first-person singular in the narration; this happens in line 9 with 'I' and in line 13 with 'me', contrasting the previous sonnets which are presented with a general voice whose subject is 'we'.[302] The subject 'I' makes the reader aware of who is speaking, Shakespeare, who becomes more present in the sonnets from this moment forward: the sentence 'O change thy thought, that I may change my mind' (l. 9) seems to betray Shakespeare, ordering the fair youth to stop showing resistance so he might dedicate himself to that woman; in other words, to change his mind, so he may change his, his opinion on him. But, at the same time, this sentence could unveil that the poet is giving this order so he might stop feeling love and desire for him; underlying all the fatigue and the difficulty of this task, Shakespeare hopes that, if the young man goes with the woman, he might forget about him.[303] Consequently, in this sonnet, love becomes the main character – the word is repeated three times as a simple noun in lines 4, 10, and 13; once as a verb in line 1; and once as a derived noun in line 3. Intimacy between the speaker and the spoken-to takes a big step forward. As it is specified in line 3,

[299] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 16.
[300] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 18-19.
[301] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 88-89.
[302] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 88-89.
[303] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 16.

the fair youth becomes the 'beloved', adding to the themes of beauty and youth the one of love.[304] In fact, this sonnet detaches itself from the reproaching tones used previously, no longer accusing the young man of narcissism and selfishness, and denying and contradicting what he claimed in Sonnet 9: 'No love towards others in that bosom sits' (l. 13). This implies that the boy has never reserved love and attention for others, but he could not only love himself because, as lines 5 and 6 of Sonnet 10 prove, the hate for himself could have led him to self-murder: 'For thou art so possessed with murd'rous hate,/That 'gainst thy self thou stick'st not to conspire' (ll. 5-6).[305] Shakespeare keeps praising his lover, as is seen in line 11: 'Be as thy presence is, gracious and kind'. He shows admiration and advocation for him again: not physically, as he has done before, but to qualities related to his manners.[306] In fact, this sonnet marks the beginning of a more sophisticated fiction, attentive in glorifying the lover through his deeds: hence, focusing more on the beloved only, and less on him and the unknown woman he should have reproduced himself with- This representation observes again the poet and the young man's relationship, which paradoxically seems closer and more intimate.[307] In the following line, 'Or to thyself at least kind-hearted prove' (l. 12), Shakespeare looks for a reaction from the young man, giving for granted his good heart, knowing that he is capable of good things, and could be for even more; so the author is hoping for a wider act of generosity.[308] Though the 'love' in line 13 is not conceived as erotic, but more as charitable, in a humanitarian sense, the sentence 'Make thee another self for love of me' may also unveil the secret romantic bond they share. If he did not love anyone in line 13 of Sonnet 9, here he contradicts himself by saying 'for love of me' in the same line as the following one, insinuating something that no one should know and cannot help but admit.[309]

As noticed, Shakespeare presents contradictions in certain sonnets: for example, instead of naming masturbation as the block for a generative, useful life, he seems to hint also at celibacy as a

[304] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 17.
[305] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 88-89.
[306] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 17.
[307] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 88-89.
[308] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 17.
[309] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 16.

cause for it; therefore he condemns it. This happens in Sonnet 10, lines 7 and 8, where 'Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate/Which to repair should be thy chief desire' stands for the young man's body ruined by his decision of shunning sex. This could be repaired by reproduction; in lines 9 and 10 of Sonnet 13, 'Who lets so fair a house fall to decay,/Which husbandry in honour might uphold...?', 'house' is another synonym for his body and 'fall to decay' hints at abstinence, chastity. But this could be resolved if he becomes a husband because, according to the latter line, marriage brings honour – interesting point for his biography, as he does not connects marriage to love, but to a social power. The question from line 9 to line 12 is answered in the last couplet, which again pushes the young man to become a father: 'O none but unthrifts, dear my love you know:/You had a father; let your son say so.' (ll. 13-14), never forgetting to hint at the bond that might hide behind this social and moral obligation: for this, Shakespeare calls him 'dear my love'.[310]

While in Sonnet 11, Shakespeare becomes the interpreter of Nature's will, in Sonnet 12 he resumes the first person narration of Sonnet 10, highlighted by the pronoun 'I' in line 1, 3, 5, and 9. Sonnet 13 restores the affectionate tone previously used, calling the fair youth with words like 'dear my love' in line 13. In Sonnet 14, the pronoun 'I' appears seven times.[311] It seems that, from Sonnet 10, there is a change in attitudes and the poet is slowly falling in love with the young beauty.[312]

A part for the similarities in the syntax and the disposition of themes between Sonnet 12 and Sonnet 15 – the word 'when' at the beginning of the first two quatrains, the word 'then' at the beginning of the third, the word 'and' at the beginning of the couplet, the theme of the universality of temporal decay in the first two octaves, and the argument of the problem's solution of the friend's decay – with Sonnet 15 the dramatic effect of the previous sonnets is lost:[313]

> When I consider everything that grows
> Holds in perfection but a little moment;
> That this huge stage presenteth naught but shows
> Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;
> When I perceive that men as plants increase,
> Cheered and checked even by the self-same sky,

[310] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, p. 17.
[311] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 21-23.
[312] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 20-21.
[313] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 23-26.

Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
And were their brave state out of memory:
Then the conceit of this inconstant stay,
Sets you, most rich in youth, before my sight,
Where wastful time debateth with decay
To change your day of youth to sullied night:
And all in war with Time for love of you
As he takes from you, I ingraft you new. (Sonnet 15)

Making a philosophical analysis of the passing of Time and the brevity and the transience of life, Shakespeares compares human beauty to 'everything that grows' (l. 1), or is alive, which 'holds in perfection but a little moment' (l. 2); 'stars' are named in line 10 of Sonnet 14 and are used again in Sonnet 15 to say that they have an influence on beauty. Human beings are connected to the natural world, to 'plants' (l. 5) specifically, and, like them, their 'brave state' (l. 8) is canceled from their life. Every time he thinks about this, the poet is reminded of the fair youth, as is clear from lines 9 and 10: 'Then the conceit of this inconstant stay,/Sets you, most rich in youth, before my sight' (ll. 9-10).[314] While in Sonnet 12, as well as in 13 and 14, there is still a necessity to remind the youth of procreating with the woman, in Sonnet 15 she disappears; on the contrary, it is the speaker the one taking this role. This is shown through the use of two words: while in Sonnet 12 the couplet includes the word 'breed' in line 14, Sonnet 15 uses the word 'engraft' in line 14. 'Engraft' is a botanical word that describes the practice of renewing old trees by inserting a sprout or a scion of one into another, consequently simulating an artificial practice. Moreover, 'breed' is used in the literal sense, while 'engraft' in a figurative sense. The person who will 'engraft' the young man is the poet, 'I', in line 14, and he will do it, 'for love of you', as he says in line 13. If the woman was the means to fight decay before, now it is the poet who will help him, taking the role of his beauty's perpetrator through his poetry, through the 'rhyme', as he says in line 4 of Sonnet 16: 'With means more blessed than my barren rhyme?'. Despite 'breeding' having strong importance in Sonnet 16 – the artist's 'pencil' and the writer's 'pen' occupy one line in comparison to the rest – Shakespeare manages to insert the ambiguous word 'draw' in line 14: poetry wins in these last sonnets, becoming the main theme of Sonnet 17, 18, and 19, becoming the means to propagate the boy's beauty and

[314] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 108-112.

youth. Sexual reproduction is a strong theme in the first ten sonnets, but he slowly starts to disappear in the following ten. It is still presents in some of them, showing that Shakespeare is fighting a hard battle, but it totally disappears at the end of the cycle.[315]

In Sonnet 17, the poet's form of reproduction has to face a problem, the inadequacy of his poetry's creativity to express it:[316]

> Who will believe my verse in time to come,
> If it were filled with your most high deserts?
> Though yet, heaven knows, it is but as a tomb,
> Which hides your life, and shows not half your parts:
> If I could write the beauty of your eyes,
> And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
> The age to come would say, 'This poet lies;
> Such heavenly touches ne'er touched earthly faces.'
> So should my papers (yellowed with their age)
> Be scorned, like old men of less truth than tongue,
> And your true rights be termed a poet's rage,
> And stretched metre of an antique song;
> But were some child of yours alive that time,
> You should live twice: in it, and in my rhyme. (Sonnet 17)

The poet thinks he is not skillful enough to describe with words the young man's beauty, as if it was too great to do it. In fact, in line 5 we read 'If I could write the beauty of your eyes' and in line 6 'And in fresh numbers number all your grace'.[317] But, for the first time, he predicts the future on paper: he shows that his written words are able to become a testimony for the young man's beauty and youth, and not only through his thoughts, but through his eyes as well. In fact, in line 9, he sees his 'papers (yellowed with their age)'. With this sentence, it seems like he has given up on believing that biological reproduction is the only way to hand down one's own image, having confidence in another way out, showing that there can be many possibilities to different situations. Line 1 and line 9 both predict the future with 'in time to come' (l. 1) and 'papers (yellowed with their age)' (l. 9), dividing the sonnet into two parts. Shakespeare follows a sort of escalation through the lines, constructing 'a series of steps ascending to the future'[318] until line 8, to be found in lines 2, 5, and 6, and then those needed to descend from line 9 to 14. Lines 7 and 8 show that the poet has managed

[315] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 23-26.
[316] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 23-26.
[317] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 23-26.
[318] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, p. 117.

to do so, as '"The poet lies' (l. 7) establishes the perpetuation of the verses with the present tense. The use of the past tense in the following line, with the word 'touched' (l. 8), establishes that the young man's beauty and youth are irrevocable and cannot come back anymore.[319] However, natural perpetuation is always reminded, 'But were some child of yours alive at the time,' (l. 13), and the couplet seems to cooperate with poetic perpetuation: 'You should live twice – in it and in my rhyme' (l. 14). In lines 13 and 14, Shakespeare seems to cover the unknown woman's function, only in another way. He seems like he is fighting with his own desire for him and the social and moral role he knows his beloved has to accomplish: he proposes his skill, poetry, and his love for him as substitutes for heterosexual sex and procreation.[320]

Sonnet 18 is not only the most famous one of the collection, but it is also very particular for the revolutionary role it acquires in this first part:[321]

> Shall I compare thee to a Summers day?
> Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
> Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
> And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
> Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
> And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
> And every fair from fair sometime declines,
> By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed:
> But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
> Nor loose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
> Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
> When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
> So long as men can breath or eyes can see,
> So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. (Sonnet 18)

This sonnet stands out from others because, since the question in line 1, 'Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day?', the idea of a conversation is evident; in fact, it looks like a spoken text, not written. As we are going toward the end of the cycle, the readers are aware that the question is needed for a preparation for what will be a written testament of the young man's beauty, youth, and personality in the next section, of his existence. With this sonnet, Shakespeare wants to make sure, to ask, to evaluate if his lover is adequate for this. As it is explained in the first and second quatrains, he is more 'lovely' (l. 2) and 'more temperate' (l. 2) than a summer day, even though May flowers cannot

[319] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 117-118.
[320] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 23-26.
[321] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 47-49.

resist those 'rough winds' (l. 3). In particular, he is being described as having a 'more temperate' beauty than women, because he does not menstruate, so his beauty is not subject to natural changes, as it was believed at the time; so, here, there is a first explanation on why the poet prefers the young man to women and even to the 'dark lady'.[322] Summer has its negative sides: it is always too brief and the sun raises the temperature too much, burning his gold skin and ruining his beauty. But, as Shakespeares is used to do in his sonnets, he contrasts what he says in the first half with what he says in the second half of the sonnet, using a 'But' at the beginning of the third quatrain: in fact, even though the Nature is imperfect and everyone is destined to decay, the fair youth is different, he will resist all of the natural and casual changes.[323] As it is explained in the third quatrain, his summer will not be interrupted, it will not make him lose his beauty, and death will not have the glory to steal his life, because he will contrast Time with his eternity. In the last couplet, Shakespeare will say how: as long people 'can breathe' (l. 13), that is alive – but also can speak, giving another oral sense to the sonnet – and are able to read, this sonnet will live and will give his young man life. In this way, this sonnet can be played out loud as a score or acted vocally by future readers.[324] In this way, he established that art can function as a perpetuator of the human species.[325]

Like Sonnet 5, Sonnet 19 does not address to the fair youth directly:[326]

> Devouring time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
> And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;
> Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,
> And burn the long-lived Phoenix in her blood;
> Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleet's st,
> And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed time,
> To the wide world and all her fading sweets:
> But I forbid thee one most heinous crime,
> O carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
> Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen;
> Him in thy course untainted do allow
> For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.
> Yet do thy worst, old Time, despite thy wrong,
> My love shall in my verse ever live young. (Sonnet 19)

Nevertheless, this could not have been necessary as Sonnet 5 seems joint to Sonnet 6 and Sonnet 19

[322] Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', pp. 47-49.
[323] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 120-122.
[324] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 26-27.
[325] Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, pp. 120-122.
[326] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 27-28.

seems to recover one important theme of Sonnet 15. In line 13 of Sonnet 15, Shakespeare writes: 'And all in war with time for love of you'; in fact, Sonnet 19 represents a battle against Time, more specifically, as it is said in line 1, against the 'Devouring time'. With the purpose of keeping his lover's body and look intact, he will start a war against Time. Shakespeare tells Time what to do until line 7 with a series of imperatives, but he forbids It from committing a crime. Calling his young man 'my love' (l. 9), he commands Time not to mark the hours of time on the youth's forehead, drawing lines on it like a pen does. He begs It to leave him intact in order to be a model for future men's beauty. Shakespeare employs again another sweet, caring, and devoted way to call his young man: 'My love' (l. 14), reminding us again that he will remain young thanks to his verse. Bold and fierce commands in the first part leave space to the more concessive, milder, and imploring tones of the second part of the sonnet: from being 'Devouring' in line 1, Time becomes 'swift-footed' in line 6 and 'old' in line 13: Time is old, while his lover is young and alive.[327]

With this sonnet, Shakespeare reaches a sort of compromise: he realizes the truth, that is his poetry cannot prevent the youth from decaying – in fact, he describes pen's Time as 'antique', making poetry aware of the inescapability of aging – but verses can save his youth as an aesthetic object. The war with Time has ended: Shakespeare knows his place and his limits, as well as the limits of poetry, and reconciling both things, he will do everything he can to make his handsome man survive. Even though the idea of reproduction is reminded in Sonnet 16, everything that happens before Sonnet 15 disappears: the boy and his immortality become the main subjects of the following sonnets until number 126. Shakespeare's poetry will turn into something more important than the immortality reached through biological reproduction with an unnamed woman that he does not care about. The reason for this becomes clear and is repeatedly stated: the speaker's love for him.[328]

In conclusion, it seems that Shakespeare's Sonnets 1-9 cannot clarify, nor explicate, a love

[327] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 27-28.
[328] Pequigney, *Such Is My Love*, pp. 27-28.

bond between the author and the fair youth, despite the affectionate adjectives used in certain lines to portray him and him being his only and exclusive interest. As I said before for *The Affectionate Shepherd*, the love triangle could be just a protective shield for a silent and cunning homoerotic appreciation; in fact, it is his beloved's physical beauty the means to push him to 'breed', while the woman, whose name we never learn and of whom we never read a description, is first used and then discarded in the name of a moralistic intent. At the beginning, the situation presented is static and mechanic, and the relation between the author and the addressee is ambiguous and unsettled. But this relational choice is not completely vague: it is needed as groundwork for the further thematic developments in the other sonnets, which seem to uncover a more intimate relationship. So love, shyly anticipated in Sonnet 9, is not fully presented until Sonnet 10, where it slowly emerges until Sonnet 14; from Sonnet 15 to Sonnet 19, the loving poet blatantly aims to immortalize his beloved, even making his attraction towards the 'master mistress of his passion' in Sonnet 20 undoubtedly sexually explicit. His romantic intentions are inescapable and undeniable in Sonnet 18, which formally begins the second section. In suggesting sexual reproduction in the first part of the section, Shakespeare seems to stage and repeat a scenario that society needs to automatically embody: marrying, having a family and kids. But Shakespeare proves it is not like this for everyone and he has found a solution: his poetry and him.

Conclusion

With this thesis, I came to many conclusions on queer works and studies in relation to the English Renaissance. Firstly, I have managed to understand how sexuality, specifically, homosexuality was perceived and lived at the time from a social and psychological point of view. Furthermore, I have discovered how and why their condition of minority was originated. Even though the majoritarian discourse was negative, many writers of the time were homosexual or managed to talk about homosexuality, showing themselves willing to positively portray these themes, and giving their works a queer approach and a possible homoerotic reading. Since the Middle Ages, as well as during the Renaissance, sexual desire had not been interiorised as a healthy, legitimate, and beautiful part of human experiences, and – above all – as a private, personal, and conscious choice – but as an experience that had to be monopolized and controlled by the State in order to serve it with the only means of the perpetuation of the species. Consequently, this was interiorised by homosexual writers, who showed relationships with women, and, as a consequence, human reproduction, almost as an obsessive necessity, without being able to see their love as complete and separated from conventional costumes and habits. Moreover, because of the hierarchical society which produced social supremacies and discriminations based on gender, religion, ethnicity, and classes and economic positions, homosexuality was associated to everything and everyone that was considered inferior: femininity, citizens of colonised countries, people having a different ethnicity, atheists, people belonging to low classes, and criminals. Even Greek and Latin societies were subject to dynamics of importance and superiority, but homosexuality was semi-tolerated, as long as the relationship fitted opposite roles and dynamics such as richness and poverty, activity and passivity, old age and young age, as a rich, wise, and white man could not take a passive role in a relationship: Greek pederasty formulated by Greek philosophers as a defence of homosexuality reflected those social roles and, being the only form of foothold for same-sex love in the future, was taken as an example for many homosexuals who were trying to understand their

sexuality and identity. Nevertheless, the importance that works like *Symposium* constitute to normalize and accept different sexual orientations from the normative one is outstanding; the same judgment can be reserved for others as *De Amicitia*, which helped to lighten the cumbersome masculine role of the male sex, based on strength, rigidity, and boldness, and give to male bonds a more romantic, sweet, and tender connotation; the frequent dedications to men in the paratextual materials of published texts and the diffuse homosociality in the literary environments are strong examples of this, showing a more flexible type of closeness, not afraid of being considered a sign of 'effeminacy', passivity, and subordination.

Secondly, I have acknowledged how homosexuality was expressed through literature, in particular, poetry. Life and literature have been forced within a single narrative form that was encouraging marriage and reproduction; this is to be seen in both *The Affectionate Shepheard* and Shakespeare's sonnets, which struggle to find a way out through the tight and obscure passages of Renaissance life. The infiltration of a woman in the narrative is categorical and manages to shift the attention from the subject matter, even when the homoerotic stance is stronger and more evident. The heterosexual preference always managed to suffocate the queer narrative even if evidently constrained into the narrative or out of place, permitting scholars to propose and impose the heterosexual matrix. Consequently, love triangles are presented in most homoerotic works during the Renaissance and forward, with few exceptions, to balance a situation that would crumble on its own, as, on the one side, the homosexual relationship was made believed insufficient to stand alone - so dramatically exposing a condition of irreversibility - and, on the other, had to please the forced censorship - so compulsorily forging a situation as a protection. In all these cases the works are exposing a claustrophobic social trap that they cannot escape from, never finding true happiness.

Shakespeare presents a woman that his beautiful young man does not care about, does not want, but has to procreate with, more for social necessity and moralism than for love. In fact, love between them is never depicted and the woman is always used in the first part of the sonnet

sequence to get the poet and the fair youth closer, creating a homoerotic bond that was not something common in the Renaissance, even for those who claim that calling someone 'my love' was part of the romantic idea of friendship and of the homosociality that constituted the period. This is hard to believe, judging from the details that describe their bond, the sexual tension created by Shakespeare with the constant descriptions of the young man's body, as well as his almost intrusive and impertinent interest in his sexual life, from hinting at his masturbation moments to imagining him having sexual intercourse with the unnamed woman. These situations, interpreted as friendship, would sound a little forced and could be thought of as masks he needs and uses to let out his real interests and his passion towards the boy. Similarly, Barnfield shows a character, Ganymede, who is not interested and has not fallen in love with anyone – it is Queen Guendolen that loves him and wants to steal him from Daphnis; in this way, Shakespeare presents a weak female 'adversary', whose love, when compared to Daphnis', is frivolous. Moreover, he always concentrates the narration on himself and his lover, never really focusing the attention on her, never describing their love in detail, with positivity, or interest. Even when Daphnis compares his love to hers, he does not subtract himself from showing that his love is stronger, greater, and superior, explaining why. Even if he knows the consequence that their homoerotic attachment could cause for a society like that, he is not shy nor afraid to show his feelings, giving Queen Guendolen a name and a slightly more relevant presence with respect to the unnamed woman of the fair youth, but always making her assume a border role. Daphnis' details of their imaginary sexual intercourse, when compared to Shakespeare's, are more real and precise, giving more verisimilitude to their homoerotic bond; while Shakespeare, in the first twenty sonnets, does not include himself in his beloved's sexual experiences, Barnfield's Daphnis describes erotic moments they share together.

In addition to love triangles and the use of heterosexual relationships for the simplistic purpose of reproduction, Classic references seem to fuel the homoerotic stance even more. These references are: first, Barnfield's choice of the characters – Ganymede, the protagonist of a

homosexual love story in Greek mythology, and a shepherd, who marks the pastoral scenario, used several times for homoerotic stories in Greek and Latin works such as Theocritus's *Idylls*, Virgil's *Eclogues*, and *Aeneid*; secondly, Shakespeare's sexual interest for a man that is considerably younger than him, as well as Barnfield's, who, at the end of the poem, says that, because of Ganymede's unrequited love, his aging accelerated; and, finally, Barnfield's and Shakespeare's representation of a Platonic relationship, which – even though assumes erotic connotations at times – passes as a clean and pure bond full of intellectual and spiritual intentions.

What comes out from a global look at all homoerotic poetry is that they all try to picture an age gap between the characters and both authors forced to make it look like a pederastic relationship; in addition to the age gap, they share an intellectual and wise bond between man, and this is shown through both Spenser's and Barnfield's prefatory materials. Even though is not present in Shakespeare's preface, it is clear that he is older than the man he is talking to. They both identify with the speaker: Barnfield identifies himself with Daphnis, and Shakespeare identifies himself in the sonnets with the poet and the pronoun 'I'. They both show sufferance and desperation for a love that they cannot have and that has to accomplish heterosexual duties, but, while Ganymede does not correspond to Daphnis, the fair youth's disposition seems to hint at a bond between the two. Another difference between Shakespeare's work and Barnfield's is that the Platonic bond is revolutionary, as it undergoes an escalation. Shakespeare ends up substituting the girl in the heterosexual relationship, guaranteeing the youth offspring and the immortality of his soul and beauty through his poetry. Barnfield's platonic bond stops earlier, simply adapting at a teaching role and leaving the boy so he can lose himself in Queen Guendolen's arms, thus adapting to a traditional view. With Shakespeare, the Platonic relationship is perceivable immediately, since the very first sonnet, but it ends up disappearing after a while, leaving mainly space for their love; with Barnfield, the Platonic relationship gets in the scene later in the poem, in the second part, when their love has been consummated and Ganymede's refusal has made Daphnis resign. Other Classical

elements used in homoerotic English Renaissance poetry are references to gods and goddesses of the Pagan religion. Greek mythology has been handed down by Latin poets who have retold these stories and permitted their survivals, expanding the narrative, which unfortunately narrowed with chivalric poems and courtly love poetry of the Middle Ages in respect of these themes. Many Greek myths talked about homoerotic love affairs between gods, or gods and mortals, or semi-gods and mortals, and they have been used by authors who wanted to touch these themes to add more homoerotic representative elements to their works. In fact, both works refer to Greek myths and figures, such as Narcissus, used many times as a form of identification for homosexual stories or affairs and to create another defensive shield behind which they could secretly and harmlessly expose their preferred topics.

Barnfield's biography is too short and fragmentary to be sure of his homosexual orientation, but even the facts presented are sufficient to suggest a non-normative sexual condition that might explain his isolation from society and his estrangement from his family and his legacy. Even if, on the one side, making some of his works belonging to Shakespeare was unfair, on the other, it permitted their survival and confirmed that his poetry was by no means poor, but, on the contrary, was neglected for his content choice. His language precision is compelling: he explains homosexual feelings with such concreteness, likelihood, honesty, and actuality that seems to be representing a modern scenario. I also look positively and with admiration at his courage in portraying explicit situations, daring and revolutionary. Personally, I extensively identify with what Daphnis says, seeing myself in many of those lines, showing how modern, real, and authentic these feelings are. Barnfield proved that there is little difference from past to present, showing a side of today's perception of the homosexual condition still experienced by many people, and confirming that this kind of feelings could hardly be associated with heterosexual love. Despite the auto-censorship he had to apply to his work, the author of *The Affectionate Shepheard* made the readers and critics think that he could have partially understood and been aware of his condition, at least embracing

semi-positively his sexual desires without condemning them, considering how difficult acceptance was even for a homosexual person in the 19th or 20th century. But the main problems start with social conflicts: in fact, it is possible to perceive the homosexual characters' struggle to try to make fit their condition into society's chains and their bond in a romantic relationship that they thought was the only kind of representation, the Greek pederasty. Daphnis' feelings have to be cut in half, demolished, and deprived of their romantic and sexual connotations, only left with a mere feeling of respectful and courteous friendship. Their bond has to be inserted in the old/young dynamic, in which one can claim his superiority and activity, keeping a possible autobiographical reading or personal reference away from Barnfield's persona.

Even Shakespeare's biography is unable to tell with clarity if he had been involved in one or more homosexual affairs. Nevertheless, his works unveil a quite interesting comfortability in talking about queer topics: in particular, the sonnets are masterful at showing the difficulty, the contrasts, and the conflictuality of homosexual love, presenting a scenario so modern and close to our days that it is almost shocking. Highlighting how universal these feelings are, able to transcend space and time, it is hard not to consider that Shakespeare might have personally felt this way and he probably knew exactly what he was talking about and permitting identification and a relatability for many queer people, myself included. The different layers and motives of the plot are perfectly embedded to fit his homoerotic feelings for the young man and the heterosexual default plot he had to insert. Despite this narrative choice, he manages to give sense to a work that, without this queer analysis point of view, would look like an unfinished painting.

In conclusion, both works manage to show the transhistorical difficulties and conflictualities of homosexual loves in their struggle to emerge in such a suffocating reality, having to remain silent and accepting reluctant conditions, and the desperate attempts to hide the poets' feelings behind reused excuses and mechanisms that could protect them. Among these, we find an uncomfortable and forced participation of women, the representation of love triangles, and the use of classicism,

which emerges through Platonic love, naming Greek pederasty as the only homoerotic bonds that could find a form of survival in the English Renaissance society, and using Greek and Latin works or genres as excuse for imitation, which, on the contrary, in many cases assumed a very personal, detailed, and revolutionary aspect when compared to the weak originals.

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