HOMOEROTIC MASCULINITIES: IDEALIZED MALE SEXUALITY IN

RENAISSANCE ART, POETRY, AND THEATER

THESIS

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by

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Dedicated to the two that have gone and the two that remain.

And To William

Na ten, kdo bere jsem ruku, a článek mi prostřednictvím temnostech

nejistoty a sláva potenciál. Zde je na průzkum a na století a z životních

patří, stále vděčně a láskou.

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INTRODUCTION

The fabric of the Renaissance is composed of a unique texture of social, political, and religious threads that directly influenced its society; these threads helped formulate individual identity, gender roles, sexuality, preferences, and fantasy. While some originate in previous eras, many are specific to the Renaissance, such as the influence of Italy over England, a collective social interest in antiquity, a self-conscious revival of the arts and sciences, and widespread exploration. Others not restricted to the era-- plague, religious turmoil, social unrest, and shifts in the monarchy-- are shared with other societies from centuries before. Taken together, these issues stimulated some to contemplate, question, and explore the social constructs that identified them and the social doctrines that bound them.

England and its social products particularly reflect this exploration and redevelopment. Like many other countries in Europe, England was ravaged by epidemics of illness; outbreaks of the Black Death, together with religious theory and emphasis on the "memento mori" made death a strong presence and mortality a common fixture. During the last half of the century, English peoples were suddenly ruled by female sovereigns, with Elizabeth particularly willing to take on an androgynous gender role in order to secure influence over

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her people and protect herself from rebellion. Social issues surrounding Elizabeth's gender and sexuality required attention because of her influential station above the English patriarchy, and her implicit suppression of both the traditional aristocracy and the patriarchy caused men to struggle fiercely for social authority-- an authority often linked to their status as men. Her monarchy symbolically questioned the presumed natural order and the incapability of women, throwing the era into social upheaval. Gender play was popularized in society and the courts, while male sexuality became questioned and the social constructs of "the masculine" explored. With the widespread interest of classical antiquity came the widespread European re-popularization of Socratic and Platonic theories surrounding homosocial societies, idealized masculinities, and "rational," perfected love, and these, together with religious dogma about the spiritual weakness of women, tended to suppress women and elevate men. The blurring of gender roles and regulations brought on by Elizabeth and social play created social anxiety due to these conflicting trends and sexualized fantasies. These social and psychological effects were widespread and heavily influenced a culture that produced prolific visual, literary, and theatrical arts.

This material offers insight into the era and its discourses surrounding gender, sexuality, and influence. Some literature, including William Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis* and his theatrical productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It,* along with visual art of the Renaissance, illustrates these roles and desires; they are significant cultural resources because, as social commodities, they relied on the interest, support,

and overall approval of a multitude of patrons. The success of Shakespeare's works suggests that the material portrayed delighted audience members or readers and illustrates that the subjects depicted in them were popular. The prevalence of sexuality in Shakespearean works is undeniable as in his plays often depict the sexual, erotic, homoerotic, homosocial, and sometimes hint at the homosexual; in all cases, however, importance is placed on the masculine that leads to the promotion and idealization of masculinity. The performance on stage is not unlike that of courtly appearance, but the theater also offers a realm that facilitates a play house borderland that requests and empowers the gaze, sexualizing the actors and soliciting the homoerotic. Many of these same issues are similarly depicted in the arts, including some works by Michelangelo and Caravaggio, who further explored the naturalism and idealism surrounding masculinity and borrowed from the ancients. In some cases, they also introduced eroticized meaning to the works. The evidence from Shakespeare's poem and play, together with Renaissance art, suggests that the Renaissance era offered a unique opportunity for gender play and social fantasy, both in the theater and in the courts. The literary and visual works of the era offered an opportunity for masculine desires particularly to be addressed, which I argue, responds to the sexual and gender anxieties specific to the Renaissance era.

The argument will be broken down into four main chapters; the first investigates the social and political atmosphere in the Renaissance while looking closely at England, the second explores Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis,* discusses some sexualized visual arts from different areas of Europe, and explores the homoerotic tendencies and gender issues in the

Shakespearean plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It.* These

works of literature, theater, and art display particular masculinities, often

idealized, which eroticize the masculine while symbolically devaluating the

feminine. It is possible that this interest in the masculine and the fantasy it

solicits were reactions to the desire to reestablish of masculine power in society

and reclaim social order and prevalence.

The arts act as historic documentation for the wants and needs of

English Renaissance society. Accordingly, those arts cannot be separated from

the social context that surrounds them; the Renaissance era is a complex web

that influenced much of the visual and literary arts. These contexts encouraged

exploration of the basic substance of identity, as people, particularly men,

began to explore what masculinity is and what it should be. The social

constructs that had been in place began to be questioned because of the

particular crisis the new Renaissance represented. Issues like gender roles and

responsibilities were only aggravated by the reevaluation of appropriate,

inappropriate, rational, irrational, earthly, heavenly, idealized, and everyday

sexuality, which quickly began to create anxiety because of uncertainty and

panic. One major source of gender-role confusion was the power and

prominence of the new head of England: Elizabeth. As a woman on the throne,

she created confusion and anxiety as to how to redistribute power or

significance to women in society and in how men should be situated in

response. Elizabeth becomes an important factor in the creation of a

homoerotic, masculine expression of Renaissance and English Renaissance art.

A single woman ruled over the patriarchy in all of their affairs, but men

continued to hold the power and importance in religion, other public offices, and at home. This equated to men being stripped of power in the courts and country but also allowing them to maintain other important powers throughout the country. This incongruity stimulated a struggle to reestablish masculinity's importance in the courts and society and in the hopes of slowly accumulating the authority once allotted to the nobility and aristocracy. As I will discuss further in the first chapter, the courts offered an opportunity to redirect some power to men, but required performativity, as described by Judith Butler, to succeed; this would later influence the gender-play in society and influence the ecstatic popularity of drama because performance and gender play were indispensable to it. Many aspects of social action and reaction, such as knightly activity and shame, became largely performative. The English Renaissance court offered an opportunity for nobility to re-attain the power and influence they once had through knightly and chivalric action. Tournaments went from being occasions for men to bravely face injury and death from losing, to being merely a theatrical act and having to fear only shameful defeat in front of courtly members of influence: including the Queen. Succeeding in society became directly linked to social performance, so when the presence of widespread death and plague outbreaks caused social outcry, many Renaissance peoples began to "desire and enjoy more" in their lifetime and often "escaped" from the uncertainty of life into the performativity of artistic distraction (McCoy 13).

In this light that many enjoyed playing with ideas of gender and fantasy in theater, literature, and art, while also exploring their own desires in the

midst of uncertainty surrounding the gender and sexuality in society. Antiquity

was also of great influence on the era, and this reiterates the importance placed

on masculinity rather than femininity. Classical Greek and Roman society

influenced art and culture of the period; the Renaissance was a "re-birth" of

realism and idealism in the human form and homosexual desires as acceptable,

and sometimes preferable. Antiquity along with powerful Italian influence

caused humanistic theory to spread into England, which supported exploration

into the masculine and promoted homosocial relationships, while

simultaneously elevating the masculine to the point of divinity. This encrypted

the reemphasis on man and the masculine was obvious often in the desire and

chase of man and the romanticized and idealized masculine body in art. All

points refer to the importance and desirability of the masculine-- oftentimes

through the stimulation of homoerotic fantasy and masculine entertainment.

Adonis's shame for example, directly relates to both courtly shame and

rational love theory through his profound personal shame and anger

surrounding Venus's empowered role and heterosexual conquest. This is

arguably representative of society's anxiety surrounding Elizabeth emasculating

the patriarchy and society's thoughts and fears surrounding gender and sexual

ambiguities. In contrast to the promoted masculine ideal, females were

depicted as vehicles to reach and fulfill the desires of men in society and the

arts, both allowing for gender play and the excitement of homosexual desires

and fantasies. Shakespeare plays with these issues through his own

representation of Venus and Adonis in his poem, and as we will see later with

other characters, on stage.

Venus and Adonis, discussed in Chapter 2, is based on mythological characters first created in antiquity. Venus has two personae: the innocent goddess of love and the shamed, earthly sensual vixen. Shakespeare not only chooses to represent Venus in her secondary form, but also allows her to be an empowered woman who disgusts the "rational" Adonis with her heterosexual love. She is so empowered, in fact, that her character exudes masculine qualities and emasculates Adonis, the hunter. Shakespeare most likely collected the idea for Venus from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, but alters her greatly for his purposes. Shakespeare's Venus is the aggressive chaser and Adonis is the shamed, inexperienced and unwilling chased. Throughout the poem, the heterosexual-ideal of Venus attempts to romance Adonis, who constantly refuses her advances and attention. The unusual shift in social and personal power in the emasculated Adonis is significant, as it is both a huge change for the "norm" and also, because of its extreme popularity at time of publication, it represents a discovered social fantasy. In this way that the poem is pastoral in nature, transpiring in a "pastoral borderland" of nature. This poem creates a powerful and desirable realization of literary fantasy both for the empowerment of women and for the gender play of men. Most significantly, the male fantasy is heightened by the desired Adonis. Even though the poem depicts Venus's heterosexual desires, its homoerotic desires reverberate; her chase and the longing intensify sexual importance from the viewpoint of male reader and longing projected on him creates a masculine, homosexual fantasy. Psychologically, the intense shame and anger portrayed by Adonis's character are not only those of a scared, unskilled virgin but rather, a person being

coerced and mocked for what he is not: a man desiring a woman. Shame in this case is projected on Adonis by Venus. Not only does she mock his virility and question his manhood, but in doing so she establishes a type of shame which is similar to her own in mythology. The mythological innocent Venus being was finally altered after she was "gazed on" while she bathed, turning her from pure to soiled. The gaze objectified and humiliated her, causing her first Eve-like shame. In the second chapter I explore all of these issues and relate them to what is happening in the visual arts of Italy and other parts of Europe.

The gaze is one crucial aspect of Renaissance arts, which links all art forms together. The power of gaze is most evident in the relationship of the audience to visual art; yet the gaze is present in the reader projecting desire onto the narrative, the viewer's gaze objectifying the masculine ideal or androgynous being in visual arts, and finally is central to the relationship of the audience to theater, which also objectifies the performance and actors. The audience has the power to project a desire onto anything, but some of Renaissance art helped to initiate such desires. In the cases of Michelangelo and Shakespeare, the artist understood society and desired to create works that facilitated sexual longing. Several works by Michelangelo and Bernini entice the viewer to project fantasies onto the work by emphasizing and romanticizing beautiful, idealized masculine bodies, while other pieces illustrate an ambiguity of gender through female subjects who look masculine and androgynous, sexless angels similar to those in painting of *Venus and Adonis* by Cornelis van Haarlem or Giorgio Ghisi. The powerful and chiseled male forms depicted

famously by Michelangelo represent another favored masculinity that were reminiscent of classical works which the Renaissance culture was so interested in. This masculine desire predominated in art of the era. Gender roles and representation are especially interesting in visual renderings of Venus and Adonis. In many cases throughout the Renaissance, the Venus is just as masculine, if not more masculine, than Adonis. In most of these representations, Adonis is portrayed as an unsure and uninterested youth, sometimes angry and embarrassed. This further illustrates that Adonis was unresponsive to the type of love which Venus signified. That her image is largely masculine in this era only reiterates the aggressive role which she took on in Shakespeare's poem. Adonis's refusal of Venus is not just the refusal of the masculine Venus but also of the female, and it represents him as an effeminate male only interested in the homosexual. Again, the heterosexual desire of Venus and her refusal, only exaggerate the homoerotic desire of the painting and poem. Art also represents the ambiguous gender of the some subjects. The social upheaval of gender superiority and role along with sexual tensions fostered representations of the angels as neither male nor female, but both; this odd blurring of gender is also apparent in Michelangelo's *Night* and *Dawn* sculptures from the Medici tombs, which hint at the lack of ideal and reverence associated with the feminine and suggests the lack of importance placed on femininity by the patrons and potentially society. Androgynous individuals or feminine males mix the feminine mixed with the masculine, but do not suggest that the feminine could be an ideal in its own right. Renaissance literature, theater, and art promoted masculine desire and fantasy

which allowed a temporary escape from the social anxieties about sexuality and desire. It, in turn, was a method of re-establishing some patriarchal control and power in an era of sexual uncertainty.

The final chapter is devoted to the theater experience and how it functioned in relation to the desires of male Elizabethan and Jacobeans. Just as depicted in Venus and Adonis and in the visual arts of various artists, gender play and homoerotic desire is illustrated in the Shakespearean theater and suggests larger issues of worth and identity were burdening the patriarchy. Even though Shakespeare often used characters and settings from centuries before, his culture's influence could not be erased from its creation. Issues of gender and homoerotic sexual tension are present through several aspects of production. There are numerous gender related issues, including men playing female characters; as no women were allowed on stage the prospective used was solely male. When women were represented on stage, a unique sexual interplay between what the actors were and were trying to be caused new tension between the audience and the stage; this often solicited exploration, objectification, escape, and fantasy of the audience surrounding issues of gender, sexuality, and desire. Men were acting and dressing feminine, but were still equipped to be men; thus, issues with the "hidden penis" soon arose (Breitenberg 72). Then, when paired with male characters on stage, personal relationships formed for the story became instances of interesting sexual play between two men. Such is the case in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the female character Helen, who pursues the uninterested Demetrious. Much like

Venus's desire of Adonis, Helen chasing and desiring Demetrious, although a presentation of heterosexual love, introduces a homoerotic desire; a man is chasing a man. Also much like Shakespeare's poem, the play takes place in a natural setting, and though not filled with shepherds, it acts also as a pastoral borderland due to the gender play (female empowerment) and homoerotic desire (homosexual extracted from projected heterosexual chase). The ambiguous nature and layering of meaning supported by pastoral poetry is likewise depicted in Shakespearean drama. A borderland is epitomized by the theater itself, a domain where gender play and sexual fantasies can operate largely unregulated. The plays usually portray heterosexual stories, yet the desires and imaginations of the audience allow gives them secondary meaning and significance and the all male cast make heterosexual encounters homosexual ones. Performances and female characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* are left largely ambiguous for this reason; to leave opportunity for multiple analysis and to satisfy the multiplicity of Renaissance desire. The multitude of desires arguably did point towards homoeroticism, but keeping works ambiguous protected authors, artists, and playwrights from social stigma or religious/lawful reprimand. These sexual tensions between both the audience to the stage and the players to one another and gender play of the portrayer and the portrayed collaborates to create homoerotic significance.

Because of the anxiety surrounding gender and sexuality, many Shakespearean works like *Venus and Adonis* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* offered also comic relief through satire and overt gender switches. They are sexually stimulating while still offering a release of tension and a temporary

escape from reality. Both the untiring pursuits of Venus for Adonis (a man rejecting aggressive female for masculine hunt), and the interplay between Helen and Hermina, who struggle in for the attentions of their male loves (men fighting over the affections of men), offer a comic relief through sexual/gender expression. Satire was used as a method to break down barriers and ease anxieties to allow for a more relaxed evaluation and, in some cases, the beginnings of fantasy and the homoerotic. As previously mentioned, the audience mainly had the power to create the homoerotic on stage, paper, and canvas and facilitated by the clever construction and planning of the creator. The gaze, specifically, is one of the most powerful bridges the viewer has on the art or play and allows for the communication of any desire or satire appropriate to the art.

CHAPTER I: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INFLUENCES ON MASCULINE GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND IDENTITY

In the Renaissance many European cultures flourished, but the Elizabethan period presented a unique set of social and political circumstances that brilliantly accommodated the exploration and fantasy of male gender roles and masculinity. These circumstances directly affected social constructs surrounding sexuality and drove a desperate male populous to explore mankind in an attempt to reestablish a crumbling patriarchy.

The era was heavily influenced, if not defined by, specific social and political factors. The plague, for example, ravaged the cities and country sides of Europe since the mid 14th century and lingered in small outbreaks until the early 18th century, with significant effects on the development of European cultures. Illness caused panic and social unrest; the plague killed thousands while others were forced to hibernate from social festivities and events, such as theaters in London. It was in one of these mandated hiatuses that William Shakespeare, along with

the rest of his acting company, was forced out of the theater and

presumably undertook the creation of his poem, *Venus and Adonis,* in

1593. The Black Death was considered a great social equalizer; though

some nobility deserted the cities for their country estates, many members

of the aristocracy were not spared by the illness and symbolized the

susceptibility of all echelons of society. In fact, Shakespeare had several

intimate encounters with the plague (Barroll 13-22). Due to the

frequency of death, the uncertainty of survival, and high mortality rates,

the "memento mori" was widespread throughout the Medieval and

Renaissance eras; death was as much the center of life as the

churchyard was the center of the town and heavily contributed to the

close relationship between the church and life (Stone 54). Although the

church's grip on society began to loosen, there remained an adamant

fear of shame, stigma, and damnation. England, although religious,

changed due to political currents, altered religious institutions with a

split between church and state, and attempts to develop and establish

alternatives to the Roman Catholic Church of England. The

overwhelming reminders of mortality along with the reexamination of life

caused people to also reassess the idea of mankind. Soon the

Renaissance, in particular the Elizabethan Renaissance, becomes

consumed with the humanism: that had been introduced and

encouraged by the Florentine, Lorenzo de Medici (Crompton 269).

The sovereignty of King Henry VIII had thrown the English people

into the midst of power struggle between their monarch and church.

When Elizabeth succeeded to the throne after Edward and Mary, her

subjects were still divided between those loyal to country and those loyal

their religion, as the relationship had never been mended. She worked

feverishly to consolidate religious institutions and doctrines in the hopes

of establishing a unified Church of England and hence offer some

stability to her people. These social anxieties are reflected in the *Thirty-*

Nine Articles (1563) that attempted to relieve stress and redirect devotion

to the church. These Articles later became *The Common Prayer Book*,

which was mass produced and promoted by parliament. Yet Elizabeth's

reign continued the reformation that had stimulated religious turmoil.

New forms of both Catholicism and Protestantism offered opportunities

for some religious freedom, but for many people this freedom represented

an additional source of stress as the once constant and inarguable force

of the Roman Catholic Church was wavering (Brown 19). The Church

of England had long been a formidable power, and sometimes it

conflicted with the desires of the ruling monarch; instead of working in

cohesion with the church, Elizabeth was like her father in his later life,

and railed against the church when she believed it directly conflicted

with her rule. This animosity to established Catholicism was present

during Elizabeth's reign when she refused to be second in power to the

church and disapproved of perceived outrages against the Protestant

movement. The power struggle became so fierce between religious

establishments and the throne that many people prepared to decide

between the pope's army and that of the Queen's (Wilson 128).

Eventually, Elizabeth's power acted as a check on outside powers like the

church, nobility, and the courts. Although she sometimes had to

compromise with Parliament, her desire for independence, personal along

with national, made her monarchy differ from other reigns (Brown 16).

This is partially illustrated by her avoidance of choosing another

country's royal bachelor to wed, which kept her power undivided and

neither aligned or alienated countries from England. With illness and

death looming, people strove for the stability a church represented, but

with the reformation underway, often problems with religious

establishments, like animosity between the Protestants and Catholics

and between Elizabeth and the Catholic Church, aggravated society's

need for support as it fragmented the church's façade as a unified, social

stabilizer. Changing conditions of religion and the prevalence of illness

made the Renaissance a uniquely mutating entity; this constant

revolution prompted the redefinition of people's identities and desires

(Hussey 22). Citizens of London would have been continuously exposed

to instability, and their anxieties and searches for satisfaction would

have resonated in cultural products; these specific social conditions like

Elizabeth's powerful and sometimes troublesome reign, Italian influence,

interest in antiquity, growing Humanism, courtly performativity and

gender play, exploration of mankind, and anxieties sexualities opened up

Renaissance society to the formation of culture.

After Queen Elizabeth I ascended to the throne, she immediately

worked to establish a cohesive relationship between church and state

and simultaneously began reestablishing central and unshared control

over her country. Though the English monarch maintained substantial

influence over many aspects of the English church and over the church

and nobility, nobles assimilated various social powers by the time of her

coronation. The aristocracy wielded these powers during the reign of

Elizabeth's father. King Henry VIII, for example, had allowed for some

aristocratic influence in his courts, while Elizabeth largely denied these

influences to members of court because of the threat they potentially

signified. Her reconsolidation of these powers was also symbolic of

feminine dominance and masculine subordination; she was a woman

taking authority away from men, seemingly causing a switch in normal

gender roles.

Elizabeth's gender alone did not distinguish her monarchy from

others. After all, Queen Mary had shared Elizabeth's gender but not her

success in creating an England fertile for exploration of social roles. For

some, a female monarch suggested a period vulnerable to threats from

foreign forces. Elizabeth recognized that for such countrymen her femininity symbolized an obstacle that she would have to overcome in order to rule effectively. She did not want simply to warm the throne for the next male heir but rather to rule her people well and bring new prosperity to England. Her position as a feminine sovereign was, of course, not the only factor leading to the production of the significant social changes of the Elizabethan era. Elizabeth's femininity did, however, produce potent cultural anxieties over gender and sexuality for the English people, particularly men, that induced significant social examination of constructs, ideals, desires, and identities.

Although culture flourished under Elizabeth, her male public struggled with her authority because of her gender. The social construct of gender is closely associated with the formulation of "self," with the result that the threats to gender constructs or sexuality that Elizabeth stimulated also caused uncertainty about identities. England had been typically governed by men, whose dominance extended from the King through his courts and into the houses of his male subjects. As sovereign, Elizabeth threatened the social order of gender and male dominance that had been in practice for so long, although ideals of masculine dominance, like the belief that subordination of men under a woman was unnatural, were immediately projected onto Queen Elizabeth I following her coronation. She recognized that society doubted her

capacity to rule, as suggested it in several of her speeches wherein she

separated her gender from her "manly heart and stomach" as in her

address at Tilbury. Her reign did little to distribute more rights to

women but greatly confused the gender structure and aggravated the

established gender roles (Brown 11). Many of these gender roles were

established by the church and reach back to the oldest chapters of the

bible. Society dictated that women were slaves to their weaker bodies, as

they were not equipped to act in a dominating context and suggested

that men were "naturally" able to rise by use of reason (Hadfield 202,

253). In the past, gender roles stemmed from religious principles, which

Jonathon Dollimore argues calls self-validating: "Beliefs, practices, and

institutions legitimate the dominant social order or status quo-- the

existing relations between domination and subordination" (49). In this

sense, the dominating masculine was validated because it was a

construct that had been in place for so long. In England, men's rule over

women in church, law, and home was "naturalized" due to precedence,

which did not require explanation. Once Elizabeth took the throne, her

dominating presence and prerogative clearly opposed these long

established power relations shared between men and women. Andrew

Hadfield contends that Christian doctrine presented a "natural order"

that was adopted by society and effectively situated men at the head of

all avenues of power and simultaneously placed women in passive gender

roles that were subordinate. Patriarchal control over a woman would shift among a father, husband, and brother. Merry Wiesner argues even marriage would not elevate a woman, as a man would not be choosing her femininity, but rather, he would be officially aligning himself with God (23).

Men would govern women in much the same way a King would rule his people, thus reiterating patriarchal control throughout the country (Wiesner 243). Following the coronation of Elizabeth I, the hierarchical gender system was shaken by her authority, and Elizabeth avoided subservience to a man by resisting matrimonial unions and thereby avoided the division or distribution of her influence (Dobson 2). Other women, including Elizabeth's half sister Mary, had sat upon the English throne, but it was during Elizabeth's reign that there was a culmination of factors that produced both the anxieties and artistic products of the period. Elizabeth symbolically effeminized the male gender by consolidating their authority to her own, and the masculine power structure struggled chaotically to redefine its subordinate relationship to a feminine monarch. Men had always been the predominant influence in England; Elizabeth superseding them frustrated this "naturalized order." Alice Shalvi suggests that in the second half of the 16th century some members of the patriarchy strove for influence and power in society and created a sensitive and complex

opposition that Queen Elizabeth had to react against until her death (1).
Phillip Kolin argues that sexuality in the Renaissance was constantly in a
state of investigation and reconfigurement (20).

Society was faced unstable gender constructs aggravated by Queen
Elizabeth I, but it also harbored anxiety about masculine relationships
and the homoerotic, often "mixing the vocabularies of friendship and
love" (Hammond 104). Men still had considerable power through the
offices of church and state, which acted as a potential rival to Elizabeth's
sovereignty. The relationship of the religiously proscribed roles of
"natural order" equated them with God-given rights, solidifying
distributions of power based on the oldest stories of the bible (Dollimore
250, 253). Women were to follow the word of God, and the church placed
them in subordinate positions. The masculine authorities and
aristocracy continuously lusted for more power, and that desire
sometimes manifested itself in erotic desire for Elizabeth (Stone 109).
Tensions related to gender and masculine desire became synonymous
with the era, and added to the gulf between genders (Borris 259).

Though Elizabeth's reign occasioned much of the social turmoil
surrounding masculine roles and identity, the roots of these anxieties
stretch back farther; these anxieties would have been closely associated
with masculinity in general and would have been present in the ancient
era as well as the Medieval era. During Elizabeth's reign, women were

not awarded new independence in the law, the courts, or through their social positions, but there grew an underlining anxiety in the relationship of women to power. According to Courtni Crump Wright, "The rise to power of Mary I and Elizabeth I provided the women with positive, aggressive, self-confident female role models who ruled Renaissance England with determination and, sometimes, an iron hand...however, the women of the Renaissance and the Elizabeth Age were not as yet modern women" (8). Elizabeth's independence, intellect, and integrity laid the ground-work for gender play due to cultural anxieties over her capacity to rule over men. Women were not given the opportunity to grow substantially in prominence or importance in society; instead, the masculine anxieties that arose in response to Elizabeth grew in intensity. David Herlihy argues that in the Elizabethan era "Something changed which altered women's sense of themselves" (Dash 252). Queen Elizabeth's reign signified a woman in charge not only of men, but of an entire nation. Men found themselves bowing to the orders of a woman, and many quickly learned that Elizabeth need not share official power with any other party, though she often consulted with close advisors. She established herself as a credible leader of men, and, in so doing, successfully fulfilled a man's role. Elizabeth believed in "royal absolutism" that required her subjects' blind following paired with undivided influence over all subjects-- an

absolutism that became fundamental to her campaigns for religious reform. Even though Elizabeth maintained authority by assuming a male role, it potentially caused some of her subjects who had to submit to her will were disgruntled or even outraged.

Carole Levine suggests that Elizabeth was aware that her people were accustomed to a strong patriarch and that she therefore attempted to separate her gender from her ability to rule; she hoped that this separation would make her gender more easily accepted (Levin 12). Elizabeth drew upon the Medieval concept of the "King's Two Bodies" and argued that as sovereign she had a "Body natural" separate from the "Body public," a tradition that allowed her to effectively disconnect her sex from her capacity to be an effective ruler (Greenblatt 167). In order to avoid direct and constant scrutiny over her gender, Elizabeth filled feminine and masculine gender roles by suggesting that she could be both. She was able to create interplay between her sex and her duty by operating as both the "powerful prince of authority and mother of a nation." She could be feared and respected as a man and idealized as a woman (Neely 8). This division allowed for the dismissal of her body from politically affiliated matters and possibly aided in her subsequent embodiment of the iconography of a divine entity (Greenblatt 18).

The sovereign's playing the roles both of a powerful male monarch and an attractive female suggested to other public figures that

performativity and sexual ambiguity offered an avenue for keeping and maintaining power. This public performance had been modeled by her father, King Henry VIII, who had "performed" his role as a capable, masculine king through displays of self-indulgence. He dressed extravagantly, dripping with exotic jewels, and carried himself pompously in pageants. In all matters, he exuded powerful kingliness and reveled in the theatrics of court, which became an important avenue for the nobility under his rule to imitate in order to accumulate wealth and influence (Greenblatt 28). The younger Henry reveled in wrestling, jousting, and hunting, where he was shown to be a capable man as well as capable king. Even the most basic and universal social act of "dressing up and showing off" constituted an opportunity for courtiers to portray themselves as the persons they wished to be. Courtly social performance began around the age of seven and continued throughout adult life, as courtiers portrayed Christian ideals and embodied cultural discourses, including gender roles (Finucci 235). Activities of escape through costume and reidentification with the courtly reality titillated the desires of men. Stephen Greenblatt suggests the play between costume and identity on the stage, for example, potentially reflected the play of court (59).

Similar to such courtly performativity and the use of extravagance to indicate success and power, Queen Elizabeth repeatedly explained her

devout loyalty to her people. Not only did she construct her social identity as being that of "two distinct bodies," but she also accrued authority by asserting a strong bond between herself and her subjects. When addressing her subjects, Elizabeth often proclaimed that no other ruler ever loved their people as much as she loved England, as iterated in her address of her troupes in Tilbury in 1588, and she used this persistent claim to justify her sovereignty and instill her worth into people's minds. This method of gaining respect and trust through the image of a loving female sovereign helped her overcome the obstacles posed by gender and encouraged support from a devout following; if she could entreat their respect and love, she could better protect herself against enemies (Greenblatt 168).

The blurring of gender roles and boundaries allowed the queen to construct feminine identity that was above definition and clear identification. Elizabeth railed against the belief that women were not endowed with the capacity or "facilities" to hold power over men (Greenblatt 18). The distortion of sexual boundaries and gender-role definitions, as represented by Elizabeth's role, resonates in various historical and artistic documents. Writing in 1661, Edward Leigh suggested that Elizabeth's merits had deserved the title of "honorary man": "She was 'a Prince above her sexe of a manly courage and high conceit' and 'besides her sexe, there was nothing woman-like or weak'"

(Dobson 79). Yet, Elizabeth's male/female dualality added to gender anxieties and sexual tension. Noting that Elizabeth constantly performed a complex mixture of male and female sexual identities to prove her ability to rule, Levine quotes an Elizabethan contemporary, Nicholas Heath, the Archbishop of York, who claimed that by "appointment of God she [is] our sovaraigne lord and ladie, our kinge and queen, our emperor and empresse" (1). According to Archbishop Heath, Elizabeth successfully represented remarkable qualities of both the masculine and feminine, in her roles "sovaraigne lord," "kinge," and "emperor." Elizabeth's ambiguous status arguably gave her more room to reestablish her role, but the vibrations of gender issues were felt throughout England. Gender and sexuality became more indefinable, much like Queen Elizabeth herself, who evaded clear delineation:

> Whether represented as Anne Boleyn's orphaned, bastardized, suffering daughter or as the implacable nemeses of Mary, Queen of Scots, whether depicted as learned stateswoman or frustrated lover, near-martyred heretical princess or triumphant warrior queen, Elizabeth somehow remains in enigmatic excess of all the stories and images which have sought to define her. (Dobson 2)

Elizabeth's play with gender created a new environment in England; one which questions constructs, tests gender boundaries, and explores sexuality. Alison Findley suggests that London became "a crossroads or

marker place in which traditional gender roles and even sexual

identities" could be "exchanged and interrogated." A foreign visitor to

Renaissance London remarked that "the women there have much more

liberty than perhaps in any other place; they also know well how to make

use of it" (Findlay 108). Some women saw Elizabeth as an inspirational

feminine power but the displaced masculine patriarchy found itself ruled

by Anne Boleyn's daughter. Regardless of her adamant proclamations

that she was the "England's Prince," many continued to be troubled that

she occupied the most important seat in the country while men from all

echelons of society bent to her will (Levine 2).

Some men, like Simon Forman, dealt with Elizabeth's example of

feminine supremacy by expressing masculine desires to dominate and

control her. These desires sometimes were manifest in their sexual

yearning for Elizabeth and wish to exert masculine control (Rubin 22).

Jeanne Addison Roberts argues that desire to dominate Elizabeth was s

method of retaining patriarchal power and establishing male self

definition (117). Making Elizabeth submissive would symbolically

dissolve her influence and empower the man dominating her. Just as

women were reconsidering the prospect of their gender, men were

exploring male gender and masculine sexuality in hopes of reestablishing

male power and dealing with sexual anxieties brought on by changing

social currents. Often power struggles were intertwined with sexual

prowess, which caused boundaries to be blurred. Louis Adrian Montrose

discusses a 1597 diary entry by Simon Forman, who recounted a dream

of the night before. He described having a personal audience with the

elderly and frail queen, during which they intimately discussed many

subjects. In the dream he protected her from several sexual suitors, but

then displayed his own desire for her: "I told her she should do me a

favour to let me wait on her, and she said I should. Then said I, 'I mean

to wait upon you and not under you, that I might make this belly a little

bigger to carry up this smock and coats out of the dirt'" (Montrose 65).

Forman's dream represents a desire to dominate the Queen's body,

thereby gaining control over it along with everything else under her

charge. Forman discloses his desire to make her his subordinate by

sexually "owning" her and impregnating her. The dream represents a

larger social anxiety over masculine gender issues and coincides with

other documents that express similar interests. As I will show in the

following chapters, some of William Shakespeare's poems and plays

suggest similar gender play and masculine fantasy in *Venus and Adonis*

and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which illustrate how these gender

issues spread across the English culture. Montrose argues that "Both

Forman's private dream-text and Shakespeare's public-play text embody

a culture-specific dialectic between personal and public images of gender

and power; both are characteristically Elizabethan cultural forms"

(Montrose 69). The exploration of these issues through social gender play and their reflection in the arts created the opportunity for men to redefine themselves by exploring the potentialities of gender. Male gender play allowed for "the transference of masculinity" from one representation to another, soliciting multiple expressions of masculinity. According to Elton, even some discrete homosocial relations were "generously accepted by England" (95).

Gender is considered by many, including Montrose, to be a highly performative social construct that portrays the chosen "self" of the individual. This theory is famously shared by Judith Butler, who goes on to suggest that gender is a culturally produced phenomenon with designated idealistic roles and encoded positions. Society had created gender models that individuals were to follow; but immense popularity of works of literature like Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis,* suggests that play with these roles was widespread and enjoyed. In this way, the formulation of identity allows for a "transference of masculinity" wherein those following gender models are in a state of constant performance. The only universality in personally and socially constructed "gender" is the relationship of sexual organs to their function (Butler 44). In most cases, the existence or absence of a sexual organ facilitates identification of the feminine or the masculine and isolates the gendered qualities expected in society. David Lee Miller suggests that the cultural

expectations projected on gender are profoundly contingent on its construction: "If gender is performativly-produced any cultural discourse may occasion its reproduction" (Finucci 232). To be gendered is to act the part given to you by society, but gender's performativity was often amplified to include play with those gendered parts. The Sixteenth century poet Samuel Daniel linked anxieties about masculine virility to the female monarch: "[diminished virility was] widely spread and further aggravated, under Elizabeth, by subordination to a female ruler" (McCoy 9).

Elizabeth's succession to the throne and her inarguable political success stimulated a crisis for masculinity that directly affected gender performance and desire. Elizabeth also avoided some feminine gender roles that England had long established, like marriage and submission. A collage of influences had created the social ideal of male superiority and suggested that men were better governors of the communal well-being of society-- that only they were capable of managing power. This cultural ideology justified society's power structure and often masculine behavior (Habib 4). Proper English women were to be pious, generous, selfless, and pleasurable to their husbands at all times: never scolding or chiding (Vives 111). The passive, weak ideal constructed by society was strongly influenced by Christian doctrine that argued woman was the "original temptress" and prone to sin, and, therefore, that strict moral

restrictions were considered necessary to achieve her salvation. Elizabeth exposed a rift in the masculine supremacy that worked with other aspects of Elizabethan society to encourage cultural exploration of masculine desire, gender, and sexuality.

Yet gender and sexual performativity also offered an avenue for men to regain some control. The men surrounding her in council, courts, and the public strove to situate themselves in relation to Elizabeth, but, while they identified the need to grant her respect and loyalty, many men desired to reestablish some of the power that they had formally held, which required them to elevate their masculine agency over her royal absolutism. Courtly displays like knightly ritual or masculine performance in courts or in tournaments were a popular solution for allocating social and political power by the honor and recognition they facilitated. The aristocracy was accustomed to sharing in royal power by creating positive personae for themselves. This action was mainly available through positions in court; therefore, they systematically and painstakingly cultivated courtly façades in the hopes of winning authority or royal favor. In reaction to Elizabeth's feminine authority, male nobility strove to revive influence by climbing in social rank, royal favor, and knightly honors through courtly display and performance. Men took much the same approach as their female sovereign and "self fashioned" themselves under new circumstances.

Jonathan Dollimore discusses Stephen Greenblatt's idea of "the role of human autonomy in the construction of identity" and suggests that "cultural institutions - family, religion, and State" heavily influenced the creation of the self and its performativity (47). The persona constructed for public or private spheres directly relates to the culture in which it was created. Both Dollimore and Greenblatt suggest that society influences the qualities that create an identity and the need or desire to perform gender or sexuality in a certain way. For Elizabethan men, using performativity in life provided an opportunity to reestablish one's masculinity and potentially gain influence or recollect what had been lost.

Through participation in courtly displays and ceremonial functions, nobility could portray characteristics that gained court approval, public praise, and royal favor, all in the hopes of "solidifying" influence. McCoy argues that for many Elizabethan male aristocrats, the idea of "chivalry" offered a renewed claim on their supremacy and allowed them to protect through chivalric parade and action their place and "rights" (14). Chivalric demonstrations were particularly profound insofar as they represented an idealized and virtuously knightly version of the individual. In the Renaissance, knighthood was earned in much the same way as during the Middle Ages; in both periods the gallant, knightly persona would have been associated with positive masculinity.

Brave, self-less, heroic feats would be performed in the name of king, country, or an ideal system. Many Englishmen of the Renaissance were willing to participate in battles, as they offered the most direct opportunity for knighthood. Knighthood would not only offer the recipient prestige but also the possibility of the ruling sovereign's high regard resulting in increased power.

Tournaments were a well-liked and powerful courtly performance scheduled frequently in the Renaissance. Aim, riding expertise, and luck were indispensable in both being victorious and remaining unhurt in these games, which remained fashionable for centuries: reaching the 16th century. Tournaments substituted for combat in battle and provided opportunities to rise in reputation and class through honors accumulated. Originally, the goal for jousting competitions was to knock the opponent from his horse; many men were seriously hurt. McCoy suggests that games shifted from their Medieval origins; for years the games were particularly dangerous, and often the injuries proved fatal (21-24). Even King Henry VIII suffered from an old, painful, jousting injury for years prior to his death in 1541. Though these tournaments were public performances meant to display masculine prowess, people soon found that the games could render honor and shame without being so dangerous. Though the tournament's purpose was to display the individual's strength and capability, the games altered to become a less

hazardous means to prove knightly worth. Tournaments became more like shows, and weapons became more like props; costumes were convincing but perhaps not durable for actual jousting, and the rules were expanded to include restrictions to prevent injury were included in the rules (McCoy 4). McCoy calls such a tournament play between desired courtly chivalry and frustrated aggressive masculinity, and that, in all cases, the Queen controlled rewards of knighthood and honor. Therefore, even in the midst of the winner's acclaim, men, along with their performances, remained subject to the approval of a female sovereign. Yet the males' struggle with gender throughout Renaissance society caused the reign of Elizabeth I to produce a "spectacular revival of chivalric practices and ideals" intertwined with sexual anxiety (McCoy 1-14). Though the games were no longer as dangerous as their Medieval counterparts, the competitors still achieved honor or shame depending on the outcome of the match, and, due to their centrality in court, games became central to the struggle for masculinity.

Stephanie Trig contends that notions of courtly shame or honor directly related to ideas of masculine virility that originate in the court of King Edward III and his Order of the Garter. Shame, she argues, was mainly performative and signified one of many everyday performances (Trig 68). History records Edward's courts as being particularly linked to shame due to a legend surrounding an incident in court. One evening,

when the court was brimming with festivity, a young woman lost her garter belt while dancing. In the Medieval era the garter signified chastity and modesty and was highly guarded as the mark of a virtuous, proper lady. It took no time for the soiled garter to be noticed immediately by male observers, and the objectified and humiliated woman became a spectacle before them. According to the legend, as the men berated her, King Edward approached the woman and deflected both attention and shame from her by picking up the lost garter and sliding it onto his own leg. No man would laugh at the male sovereign, and the shame that had forced the girl into a submissive role successfully was transferred to the scorned nobles. In this legend, shame is not only negative but associated with the feminine submissiveness that stirred reactions from men. Consequences of being shamed might cause a loss of one's social position which could effeminize men by taking away their influence (Trigg 70-75). Being shamed in a courtly context could therefore alter one's social circles, restrict courtly attendance and access, make some actions or clothes not acceptable, and cause a man to renegotiate a new, subordinate persona in society; losers would have to work twice as hard to redeem themselves after being shamed in court.

Order solidified the courts as a performative zone as the actions encompassed within it dictated the identity bestowed on individuals and

opened opportunities for, as Clifford Geertz suggests, an opportunity for "deep play" (quoted in McCoy 24). Kenneth Burke surmises that such discourses of performance and reward derived from the need to "mediate conflicting interests of the ruling class"; the contestants desire both to be devoted to Queen Elizabeth and to dominate her (quoted in McCoy 4). In this way, the violence of the tournaments, expressed an "open and direct interpersonal and intergroup aggression" due to the anxieties of influence and gender in the court and kingdom. According to McCoy many believed that such ceremonies reestablished claim on masculine supremacy and a masculine ideal (14).

Though this type of public performativity divided from action on the battlefield, it survived as a courtly function. Performativity resonates throughout Renaissance culture in its arts and life, and it holds a relationship to fantasy. It was not necessary for the courtly audiences to believe that two knights jousting were in serious danger in order for the riders to receive glory. The performative nature of courtly display did not rely heavily on reality but instead were based on the desire for power. As with performance in courts, fantasy served to overcome unstable social conditions; fantasy became a means for exploration and escape from society. Tournaments and other social charades altered the social reality of the participants though fantasy. Not only could participation in ceremonies permit escape from lower social positions, but it also

permitted an escape from a world of social and religious volatility. There seems to have been a universal need for individuals to deal with issues in their culture and represent themselves in that culture as they wished to be seen. Anthony Ester contends: "The entire chivalric revival is seen as a nostalgic anchorism and escapist fantasy of a decadent ruling class," which Elizabeth allowed as long as it did not "eclipse" her own (McCoy 15). Fantasy spread beyond the desire to regain courtly and social influence to the arts and affected other aspects of life and desire. Many took the opportunity to explore ideas of the masculine in the period's flourishing literary and visual arts. Artistic invention offered an appealing environment for escape through exploration of masculinity and desire. McCoy describes this escape as sometimes allowing helpful reevaluation: "Shakespeare's stage, like Spenser's Fairy Land, sustained a kind of utopian displacement, its distance from the pleasures of immediate controversy allowing a more detached perspective on its social situation" (6).

The search for, and envelopment in, these escapes often allowed for new expressions and experimentations with gender roles, so play with "identity" allowed the opportunity for redefinition of individuality and inclinations. The changing social conditions allowed passions to run "high and unchecked" (Brown 15). Art, literature, and theater represented desires in an eroticism directed especially at male patrons,

readers, or viewers. Because men retained influence, they especially desired to reestablish themselves and their influence, leading to gender play and the exploration of masculine sexuality, leading to interest in the masculine expressed itself through homoerotic desire in the arts (Robertson 8). As I will show in later chapters, Shakespearean plays and poems, along with various visual arts like those discussed in later chapters, serve as a time capsule for the articulation of masculine desire when there was "movement in all the activities of man; people were constantly learning more, attempting more, enjoying more" (McCoy 13).

English culture also sought to re-stimulate the greatness of the ancients. Humanists and artists studied ancient Greece and Rome, translated ancient writings, and attempted to duplicate aspects of these bygone cultures. They attributed to the classical era perfection that was absent from later cultures, founded in part upon classical concern with the human body. The natural male form, for example, was represented by idealized representations of the male nude that evoked powerful desires. According to Marsilio Ficino, ancient aesthetics were linked to passionate same-sex love and friendship in an era when masculine love was valorized: "Love between males [seemed] 'the best of all forms of divine possession'" (Borris 251-252). The homoerotic undergirded art, literature, and theater, and it allowed a male escape and gender play that spread due to social and political conditions (Brown 15).

Many Renaissance writers embraced the idea of Socratic love, for example. It describes a powerful masculine love and comradeship that inspired many to idealize intimacy between men, much like that ascribed to brotherhood (Hammond 7). Such relationships could be socially accepted and even encouraged. Male/male relationships were felt to have a heroic grandeur. Women, in contrast, were seen as imperfect or incomplete versions of men, and, because men were judged to be close to divine human perfection, women were thought to be the opposite: the "incapable other" as suggested by religion (Roberts 55). Karoline Szatek, among others, argues that this prejudice was established due to ignorance of and anxiety about the female body. Female sexual organs, unlike their male counterparts, are held within the body. Intrinsically mysterious, they caused femininity also to become inherently mysterious, ambiguous, and therefore threatening (Szatec 243-252). These ambiguities in female sexuality resonate in female gender roles; society and religion stationed women in roles submissive to men to alleviate anxieties about the mysterious female sex (Roberts 28). Due to their sexual differences, women could not achieve the relationships the ancients attributed to men. In practice, masculine, Socratic love often became a "possible code, synonym, disguise, or perceived endorsement for... fully sexual love." The closeness and idealized intimacy between heroic men often led to the expressions of sexual passion. According to

Kenneth Borris, Marsilo Ficino believed that [Socratic love] not only infused male homosociality in general with strong potential for romantic passion and heady idealization, and became widely appropriated from investing heteroeroticism with such significance, but also became an alternate identity for male same-sex sexual desires and practices, contrary to Christian notions of sodomy's debasement. (Borris 257)

The love between men, physical as well as brotherly, represented stages leading to perfect union. According to Sixteenth century philosophy "the soul's progress toward perfection was from sensual love through rational to divine love" (Pearson 261). Therefore a masculine relationship could be a heroic and beautiful expression of power and wisdom that thorough Socratic idealization, reestablished struggling masculinity.

By the time of Elizabeth's coronation, society was already rediscovering masculinity through "homosocial" relationships. Paul Hammond cites Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's idea of the "homosocial" as stemming from the ancient Greeks, who "introduced intense social bonds between men which are strongly affective, supportive, and competitive" (Hammond 9). Social interest swarmed around ancient ideals of honorable masculine relationships and introduced "Socratic Love" and the related "Platonic Love" to popular culture. Hammond observes that ideals surrounding male friendships derived from "Greco-Roman myth"

and often warranted "passionate expression" (7). A close male bond signified an alliance of heroic brotherhood and sometimes facilitated homosexual relationships. Masculine desire in the social or sexual sphere, soon expanded into a cross-cultural fascination with beauty in humanity and later into a fascination with mankind (Pearson 239).

Any form of masculine relationships was considered more valuable than heterosexual ones, even heterosexual intimacy. Love between men projected desire onto the masculine gender and helped to reestablish authority by equating men to unmatchable value, and it was a means situating them above their female sovereign as well.

Idealization of the masculine is evident in some visual arts of the era, wherein male relationships and desires were intensified by their identification as divine and solidified the masculine power structure through exploration of masculine desire. For example, Michelangelo shared this Socratic belief and, arguing that the love of a woman to a man was common while the love shared between two men was rational and divine (Pearson 261-262). As I will show in a subsequent chapter, his painstaking studies of the male body and idealized renditions of the erotic form seem to reiterate the Socratic theories so popular in the era. In England, the arts flourished during the reign of Elizabeth, who encouraged the arts through hoer patronage (Brown 20). Ivor Brown argues that everything in the Shakespearean theater goes back to

Renaissance issues "closely relevant to the Courts of Queen Elizabeth I" (11).

Homosexual love, like other forms of sexual expression, includes the necessity for one member to be femininely possessed, dominated, and penetrated by the other. Sexual embrace requires an invasion of one person, and symbolically this act includes a discourse of sexual power. A primary and secondary partner, with one having to succumb to the other, is necessary for the encounter to be successful. Irene Dash contends that sex in the Renaissance was seen as pointless if it did not solidify the influential position of one person over another, and she suggests men would not have responded favorably to accepting a secondary role in sex with a woman. As noted above, there was no place for women in either Socratic love or rational love. Sexual ambivalence is suggested in Shakespeare's poem, *Venus and Adonis*, after Adonis refuses Venus's aggressive sexual advances (Kolin 21). Shakespeare's Venus is portrayed as exhibiting masculine sexuality in, opposition to her popular consensual feminine role. Neely argues that male sexuality defines gender roles, just as female sexuality does. Men were expected to be dominant with women and only share power with other men, mirroring the sexual relations of heterosexual and homosexual encounters; elevated sexual love would be shared between two men of equal intellect and class though one would have to be dominated by the

other, while earthly, common love between a man and woman would require him to "rule" her. Again, however, Elizabeth's reign caused a rift in gender constructs. Kenneth Borris cites Bruce R. Smith, who describes Elizabethan England as a "closed all-male society" that kept women from infiltrating the heroic male relationships and the power those relationships established: "Structures of power in early modern England fostered the homosexual potentiality in male bonding, yet society gave official sanction only to matrimony. Likewise with structures of ideology" (258). Religious and political ideology condoned male relationships and heterosexual marriage while officially disapproving of sodomy. Actual cases of sodomy making their way to court were rare; many instances of homosexuality or homoeroticism likely went unpunished and were overlooked. In fact, many male members of society advocated homosocial relationships. Desirable male relationships intrinsically devalued women; desiring women would have worked against this reestablished masculine dominance by advancing femininity. While women were necessary for procreation and represented the only opportunity for marital union, desiring marriage rather than resigning oneself to it would degrade men. Therefore, women were defined by their relationship to masculine desire, which did nothing to value heterosexual relationships or femininity. Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin argue that Renaissance men could display their

superiority to women by rejecting them sexually; the temptation they symbolized was seen as a common, earthly relationship, greatly removed from the "rational" and perfected love two men could share. Howard and Rackin contend that "A man's desire for a woman, now coded as a mark of masculinity, then constituted a double degradation, the enslavement of a man's higher reason by his base bodily appetites and the subjection of the superior sex to the inferior one" (194). Powerful and prolific masculine relationships could only be possible if both individuals were equal, and women were secure in their subordinate position (Borris 259). The presumption of natural feminine inferiority made it impossible for women to be an equal heterosexual counterpart and produced their constant rejection from honorable relationships with men. Therefore, sexual ideology helped to alleviate male frustrations by rejecting women and desiring men.

There were substantial differences between the sensual, empty love offered by the subordinate sex and the "reasonable," honorable relationship shared between men: "According to the sixteenth-century love philosophy of Italy, the soul's progress toward perfection was from sensual love through rational, to divine love" (Pearson 261). Sensual love could stimulate the loins, but rational love could titillate body and soul. The distinction between the effeminizing love for a woman and the perfected love for men was argued by the artist Michelangelo, as Pearson

notes: "To Michaelangelo, love of woman was more or less common, but love of man for man was rational and therefore close to the divine, [and] he believed that a beautiful youth would naturally inspire the best love" (261-262). For years Italian culture had influenced the English people, which became more profound during the reign of King Henry VIII. Soon English men were "Italianized" as they developed interest in masculine relationships and integrated Socratic Love into English society (Pearson 230-236). Borris contends that Socratic Love

> not only infused male homosociality in general with strong potential for romantic passion and heady idealization, and became widely appropriated for investigating heteroeroticism with such significance, but also became an alternate identity for male same-sex desires and practices, contrary to Christian notions of sodomy's debasement. (257)

Socratic philosophy was central to the idealization of masculine relationships because it heroicized male bonding and romanticized masculine qualities. Although Socratic homosocial relationships of antiquity were embraced by Elizabethan and Jacobean society, laws prevented overt displays of homosexual deviance and sodomy. Much of society equated sodomy with wickedness based on religious doctrine, even though individuals could be legally reprimanded for sexual offenses (Hammond 9).

Renaissance sexuality was influenced by a complex mixture of ideals that both supported intimate male relationships in society and applied a strict Christian morality that demanded sexual prudence. The lack of evidence recording sexual transgression could possibly be the result of discrepancies in documents, but likely it reiterates society's distinction between sodomy and the homosocial (Hadfield 255). But the intimate relationships endorsed by ancient philosophy justified by intellectual merit remained somewhat protected from religious judgment: "'Socratic Love' between males quickly became in various ways possible codes, symbolism, discourses, or perceived endorsement for their fully sensual love," and it undermined "homogenital relations as social taboos" (Borris 257). Yet the homoerotic and even the homosexual could be easily concealed. "Sodomy" would have had negative connotations, but blatant references or allusions to sodomy would have been avoided in society or the arts. It is likely that most uses of Socratic love philosophy along with the homoeroticism suggest it facilitated the advancement of a collective cultural masculinity and fantastical escape for those consumed with gender and sexual anxieties (Pearson 257).

Renaissance literature and art act as cultural documentation of the importance placed on passionate longing and titillating desire, rather than the overtly homosexual. Similar to Socratic Love and city records, the arts offer no abundance of evidence to suggest widespread promotion

of homogenital transgressions but often privilege homosocial relationships as a pure, passionate release. The passionate "brotherly love" articulated in Socratic Love was believed to be divine, somewhat removed from early pleasures, but Smith contends that "the spiritual was synonymous to the sexual in homosocial bonds" as the noble entanglement of their hearts and bodies would be a noble experience (quoted in Borris 256). Socrates himself directly referred to the spirituality of male bonds: "Love between males is 'the best of all forms of divine possession.'" Though the use of "possession" suggests a sexual connotation, Socratic love was usually related to righteous, divine, and perfected experiences (Borris 256).

As noted previously, overt displays of homosexuality were condemned, but very few cases were ever taken to court. The passionate and experimenting Renaissance culture was still governed, at least in part, by the morality of the Medieval church (Saslow 39). Yet the fantasy for gender play transferred easily to the stage, paper, and canvas. The arts offered an opportunity for the expression of "divine masculine love" (Pearson 262). In them, the desire to reanimate displaced masculine supremacy effectively separated with gender and sexuality from popular interest and mainly focused on the masculine, with the recognition that this interest and exploration of the masculine in Renaissance art, literature, and theater performances had to please the patriarchy (1-10).

As I will show in the next chapter, Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis* and some visual art, including Michelangelo's *Study for Adam,* promote masculine superiority and the perfected homosocial relationships through the "Beauteous Youth," ancient love philosophy, and eroticized the male body. This evidence reiterates the struggle of masculine influence in the Elizabethan era and a changing world.

CHAPTER II: MALE SEXUALITY EXPRESSED IN THE VISUAL ARTS AND POETRY

Interest in passion and desire reverberated from Renaissance Italy to England, a point criticized by Roger Ascham in *The Scholemaster* (1570), who noted the effects of Italianate culture on "English youths" (Pearson 236-7). William Keach notes that English literary critism was powerfully influenced by Italy's visual arts; in early Shakespearean criticism, character portrayals were often described as "Titianesque" or "Rubenesque" (55), and many suggest "types" of masculinities like the androgynous Ganymede, the effeminate boyish male, the heroic warrior, and the knightly gentlemen. Both Michelangelo's art and Shakespeare's writing suggest the homoerotic, if not the homosexual. Abigail Solomon-Godeau contends that the development of multiple masculinities could result from "cultural distress," anxiety and frustrations like those evident in Renaissance England (35).

Many Renaissance portrayals of men in literary and visual arts were inspired by ancient works, and often those portrayed the ideal masculine form that made Greek and Roman art famous, positioning

masculinities in a way that idealized them and equated them with the good, heroic, and godly. Antiquity influenced the idealized masculine construct used in the Renaissance and by doing so simultaneously created ideals for the physical manifestations of the masculine. At the high point of antiquity, particularly in its sculpture, there was natural idealized bodily expression in art, presenting a realistic human body that also illustrated the perfected and ideal.

The physical ideal was so celebrated that Renaissance artists worked to imitate the perfection of ancient works. They analyzed the few original Greek sculptures and Roman copies that survived. Artists like Leonardo de Vinci and Michelangelo completed painstaking studies to understand the human anatomy and physiology of the beautiful male body. Of course, artists in both eras were also interested in the idealized female body, but more prevalent were illustrations of masculine perfection, and because both eras were governed by a patriarchy, the predominance of the masculine promoted that patriarchy. According to James Saslow, ancient art communicated social attitudes, articulating likes, dislikes, and ideals (18). Renaissance art expressed similar preferences as is evident in paintings, sculptures, and sketches of male nudes that similarly emphasize a muscular, realistic, and graceful masculinity. This ideal visually expresses the Socratic belief of "perfected love," which easily becomes eroticized by viewers.

As previously discussed, Socratic relationships presumed that two males of equal merit and morality shared a rational, "divine" relationship that could facilitate sexual relationships. The loving relationship of Alexander the Great and Hephaestion is recorded as epitomizing such a deep, passionate friendship, although their possible sexual intimacy cannot be proven. Their relationship symbolizes the ambiguity of sexuality in a homosocial atmosphere, in that it presents an opportunity for sexuality but does not require it (Crompton 76-78). Winfried Schleiner suggests that, while the existence of "homosexuality" can be questioned in accounts of Renaissance homosocial relationships, the "homoerotic" cannot (605). Idealized masculinity combined with the promotion of homosocial relationships created an opportunity to explore and investigate the masculine in the visual arts. The gaze upon a perfected and idealized male form, like that of the "Beauteous Youth," could sexualize or *eroticize* the work along with the male form illustrated in it. A "perfected erotic" emerged in art and literature. Art, literature, and theater, which I will later discuss, idealized and promoted masculinities in support of patriarchy; the widespread appeal suggests that the arts pleased patrons and may have shaped their likes, dislikes, and desires.

Raymond Williams suggests that "we cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice, in such a way as to make

them subject to quite special and distinct laws"; that is, the arts cannot be separated from the cultures which made them (44). They are a part of the major social discourses and issues and should not to be separated from the struggles of an anxious patriarchy or the questioning of masculine gender and sexuality. Particularly powerful examples of art and literature that have the capacity to represent the eroticism of their culture include William Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis* and works of art by Michelangelo, Sandra Botticelli, Caravaggio, Giorgio Ghisi, Simon Vouet, and Luca Cambiaso. Such artistic products offer valuable insight into the past in that they were protected from stigmas or severe censorship due to the growing artistic license, appreciation of the imagination, and protected self-expression (Dollimore 47). Artists of the Renaissance who represent the erotic and in some cases the homoerotic largely center in Italy; Charles R. Forker argues that Italy was very influential over England, but the full blown humanism that was prevalent in Italy and supported by ancient philosophy and Socratic theory did not fully spread to the English visual arts until decades after theaters had begun expressing such homoeroticism on the English stage (3-4). Many of Shakespeare's plays, for example, like *Venus and Adonis*, comment on topics such as masculine desire and fantasy (Hadfield 16). Lu Emily Pearson suggests that a particular practice, the rational friendship discussed in the preceding chapter "no doubt stimulated

Shakespeare in his composition not only of the sonnets, but also of the poems *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*" (263). Pearson argues that both Michelangelo's sonnets and his art present titillating portrayals of the "Beauteous Youth," similar to Shakespeare's poem, *Venus and Adonis* and his sonnets that suggest the homosexual (259).

Venus and Adonis marks a particularly powerful portrayal of confused gender and sexuality. First published in 1593, the poem appeared in some sixteen editions in forty-seven years. Readers seem to have been interested and entertained by Adonis's refusal of erotic overtones and by Venus's complaints, such as the following: "Art thou obdurate, flinty, hard as steel?/ Nay more than flint, for stone at rain relenteth;/ Art thou a woman's son and canst not feel,/ What 'tis to love, how want of love tormenteth?" (Wilson 126; *Venus* Lines 199-202). The gender reversal of the sexually dominant, yet rejected Venus, and the inexperienced and sexualized Adonis created new constructions of the interplay between gender and sexualities, perhaps linked to the masculinity performed by Queen Elizabeth discussed in Chapter 1 (Kolin 28). William Keach contends that the appeal of the poem resides in the comical excess of Venus's passion and the intriguing role reversal it illustrates. There was no literary precedent for such feminine alterations to the "traditional Elizabethan conception of [the masculine] Adonis," and these Shakespearean changes titillated audiences who also explored and

redefined sexuality and masculine gender (Keach 55-61). Though the story was told by Ovid in the *Metamorphosis,* this particular gender play is specific to Shakespeare's version. Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* offer outlets for gender play and sexual fantasy, with the main focus is on Adonis and what he represents specifically for masculinity, sexuality, gender, and fantasy. Venus is needed primarily for the reaction she stimulates from him (Maguin 22, 8). Adonis's male body and beauty are the central points of desire, and they suggest homoerotic undertones due to his refusal of the goddess's advances. His refusal of the female ideal is also a rejection of heterosexual partners. Adonis is presented as delicate, pure, and righteous, preferring death to succumbing to a heterosexual relationship. His attractiveness to and refusal of Venus, together with its Socratic idealization of the masculine and the homoerotic challenged male readers' conventional masculinities. In turn Venus's worth, together with the appeal of the feminine, is crippled by his rejection of her (Prince 2). The reversals in Shakespeare's poem create ambiguities that give "power, burden, and mystery to readers" (Keach 53).

Andrew Hadfield describes the poem as an "erotic short epic." It depicts two mythological characters in nature: the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility and a youthful, handsome male hunter (103). Venus, the goddess of love, is lusting after the adolescent hunter, Adonis, and she makes him her sexual conquest; Adonis, however, is

uninterested and appalled by her advances. She idealizes his looks and
legend and lusts after his body. Her many attempts are frustrated:
coaxing, chiding, manipulating, and insulting offers no progress for her.
He finally escapes her to hunt and is killed by a boar. In a sense, he
chooses to die rather than reciprocate Venus's heterosexual love. Don
Cameron Allen notes that hunting becomes an interesting focal point of
the poem in that, as Adonis wants to hunt the boar and Venus wants to
hunt him, and in that hunting was considered a masculine sport. In
turn, Venus offers a prospect of sexual pleasure to Adonis: "A summer's
day will seem an hour but short,/ Being wasted in such time-beguiling
sport" (Lines 23-24). Venus sexually yearns for the youthful Adonis and
tries profusely and unsuccessfully to seduce him, begging and scorning
him, only to find him resolved to deny her. Coppelia Kahn observes that
Adonis is only angered and ashamed by her attention: "Souring his
cheeks, [he] cries, 'Fie, no more of love!/ The sun doth burn my face, I
must remove" (Lines 185-186). She not only appropriates masculine-
style sexual aggression but also effeminizes him. The objectified and
pursued Adonis assumes a submissive role: "The tender spring upon thy
tempting lip/ Shows thee unripe; yet mayst thou well be tasted./ Make
use of time, let not advantage slip;/ Beauty within itself should not be
wasted./ Fair flowers that are not gather'd in their prime/ Rot, and
consume themselves in little time" (Lines 127-132). Her blazon of his

beauty feminizes him, and encourages male readers to assume a sexualized point of view towards him: "'Thrice fairer than myself' thus she began,/ 'The field's chief flower, sweet above compare;/ Stain to all nymphs, more lovely than a man,/ More white and red than doves or roses are" (Lines 7-10). Venus's appreciation of the masculine represents an upset of "the normal polarities of gender," which interestingly mimics Queen Elizabeth's confused, double-sexed gender (Keach 56, Maguin 164).

At a key moment, when the goddess Venus literally takes possession of the youth, the poem uses "red" to represent both Venus's masculine passion and Adonis's emasculated shame: "Over one arm the lusty courser's rein,/ Under her other was the tender boy,/ Who blush'd and pouted in a dull disdain,/ With leaden appetite, unapt to toy:/ She red and hot as coals of glowing fire,/ He red for shame, but frosty in desire" (Lines 31-36). He is shamed by the projection of her sexual desire upon him, and takes the opportunity to avoid her common love; his rejection of the heterosexual leaves a chance for homoerotic fantasy. His shame embodies that which haunted male readers. Richard Levine argues that other symbolism likewise feminizes Adonis. He is a pure, fair, fertile flower about to be "plucked" by Venus (quoted in Elton 95, Line 4). In feverish pursuit of a man, Venus abandons desirable feminine qualities, such as sexual distraction: "'Fondling,' she saith,

'since I have hemm'd thee here/ Within the circuit of this ivory pale,/ I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer:/ Feed where thou wilt, on mountain or in dale;/ Graze on my lips, and if those hills be dry,/ Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie" (Lines 229-234). Alan Sinfield has observed that a dominant personality takes a dominant role during heterosexual or homosexual intercourse (170). Though Venus is anatomically incapable of penetrating Adonis, she approaches the situation with a masculine mindset. She is not pious, reserved, submissive, or chaste as she articulates her desires and tries to facilitate them.

The negativity toward Venus's sexual libido stems, in part, from interpretations of the Bible, wherein a sexualized Eve seems naturally condemnable and susceptible to sin during the original temptation and "the fall of man." Coppelia Kahn argues that *Venus and Adonis* is "a mythological reenactment of man's fall to sin," although Adonis remains untainted (Kolin 142). In the poem Venus's sensual longing and overt displays of dominating desire, are "sinful," in contrast to Adonis's disdain of sexuality and preference for love. According to Pearson, the poem represents a struggle between earthly temptation and noble, masculine love:

> In *Venus and Adonis*, he [Shakespeare] used the sonnet theme of
> the contest between sensual love and reasonable love, elaborating

the whole struggle with all the gorgeous descriptions one might expect from his Renaissance age. He showed Venus, trying all the sweet snares of the flesh, in her effort to win the youth, but Adonis, who loved hunting and the manly sports of wholesome living, "laughed love to scorn." (line 4, 283)

In addition to representing gender reversal, Shakespeare's description of Venus represents her as a woman craving sexual intimacy despite being a mythical goddess of heterosexual, earthly love (Kolin 181-189). Her heterosexual allure does not help in her conquest of Adonis. Regardless of her reputation as desirable characters, Adonis refuses her advances, and, more importantly, what she represents: heterosexual love. Adonis seems slightly amused by rejecting Venus and her earthly, carnal love and only promises to give her a kiss as a trick: "Upon this promise did he raise his chin,/ Like a dive-dapper peering through a wave,/ Who being look'd on, ducks as quickly in:/ So offers he to give what she did crave,/ But when her lips were ready for his pay,/ He winks, and turns his lips another way" (Lines 85-90). Adonis's rejection of Venus implies the homoerotic; even as that rejection angers and frustrates Venus, who seems jealous of the masculine relationship he symbolically chooses (Keach 79). A frustrated Venus contends: "Fie, lifeless picture, cold and senseless stone,/ Well-painted idol, image dull and dead,/ Statue contenting but the eye alone,/ Thing like a man, but of no woman bred!/

Thou art no man, though of a man's complexion,/ For men will kiss even by their own direction" (Lines 211-216). Keach discusses that Venus's anger results from Adonis's refusal to be dominated and controlled in the sexual game (15). Paul Hammond suggests that some sense of the homoerotic emerges during heterosexual encounters in the poem. He contends that the importance of Adonis's beautiful body shifts "an ostensible narrative of heterosexual desire into a series of discontinuous opportunities for homoerotic pleasure" (7).

Adonis is idealized, but the masculinity he portrays is not that of the heroic, warrior character. Abigail Solomon-Godeau distinguishes two masculine ideals; the first is heroic, mature, virile and dominating while the second is youthful, submissive, sensual, graceful, and passive. The second ideal, though overlapping with the feminine, is often the type of masculinity represented in the arts: Caravaggio's boyishly sexual Bacchus replaced the great heroic masculine figures of Michelangelo (Fernandez 144). The poem's focus on Adonis causes him to become the object of worth; his character and body become sexualized for both Venus and the male reader who is invited to share Adonis's perspective in passages like the following: when Venus has leapt onto Adonis, in the hopes of erotically enticing him: "Panting he lies and breatheth in her face./ She feedeth on the stream as on a prey,/ And calls it heavenly moisture, air of grace" (Lines 62-64).

Hammond argues that Shakespeare here and in other works presents the "Beauteous Youth," while Pearson explains Shakespeare used masculine play and eroticization to entice readers by the "high poetic value of suggestion" (Hammond 85, Pearson 258). Shakespeare's Adonis is very young, "inexperienced," and "unplucked," while simultaneously being depicted as having a strong male physique and noble brow. He quintessentially represents the "Beauteous Youth," or a youthful, beardless adolescent who is usually pretty, girlish, and appears submissive (Kolin 149). His idealized body contributes to the poem's eroticized tendency, even as it is the focus of Venus's uncontrollable obsession. According to Hammond, the poem "analyzes various kinds of possession and dispossession" through its concern with virginity, love, beauty, youth, and death (84). Venus desires to take ownership over his virginity and symbolically the self of Adonis: a youth worthy to "pluck." The blurring of gender roles along with the homoerotic charge of the poem illustrates Keach's argument that the poem was designed to "titillate social appetite" (121). As we have seen, the homosocial is based directly on classical philosophy of masculine relations and rational love; succumbing to a lesser being is not rational, but irrational, which is precisely what Venus's desire represents. Kolin argues that the poem was not written to promote heterosexual lust, but rather to advocate a divine homosocial alternative to Venus (141).

Socratic idealizations of male homosociality contribute to the ideal male youth represented by Adonis, yet the intellectual ideal merged with representations of the ideal, perfected body, as is evident in Venus's fantasy of Adonis, used to encourage Adonis's response: "Over my altars hath he hung his lance,/ His batter'd shield, his uncontrolled crest;/ And for my sake hath learn'd to sport and dance,/ To toy, to wanton, dally, smile and jest,/ Scorning his churlish drum and ensign red,/ Making my arms his field, his tent my bed" (Lines 103-108).

The non-martial Adonis not only represents a masculine ideal body, but his position as an adolescent male eroticizes him and recalls the homosexual relationships between young men (*epheboi*) and elders (*erastae*) in ancient Greece (Prince 3-62). The poem refers to his youthfulness as turning "crimson," being "unripe," "fresh spring," and as being "an un-plucked flower," (Prince 1-13). Yet this ephebe-like Adonis is paired not with the masculine *erastes* but the hyper-sexualized Venus. The eroticized Adonis and the masculinized Venus are both defined by how they situate themselves in relation to heterosexuality: "Venus is shown as the destructive agent of sensual love; Adonis, as reason in love" (Pearson 285), with a resulting tendency to wish to protect the ideal masculine love and its homosociality. Effeminate masculinity becomes positive and desire, while heterosexuality is linked to threatening power. Venus is the "destructive agent," and, on this point, the portrayal of

Venus in the poem is not unlike that of the boar. Venus's unruly

passion for Adonis and the boar's passion to live both oppose Adonis's

youth and representation of rational love (302). Adonis is shamed by

Venus's aggressive sexual pursuits as she attempts to dominate him,

these producing his resentment of her sensuality and therefore to his

masculinity (Trig 66). This masculine shame echoes that in the

Elizabethan court, which worked to reassert masculine power.

Douglas Bush refers to Shakespeare's poem as a "pseudo classic"

in form (cited in Keach 15), with a love dilemma and setting reminiscent

of the pastoral genre (Kolin 4). Moreover, its mythological characters are

occupied with the sexualized hunt found in Ovidian myth, and it laments

the hunter's death in a lush countryside that recalls the pastoral.

Venus's grief over the loss of Adonis is similar to that expressed in Bion's

"The Lament of Adonis" (Edmonds 387-395). Yet Shakespeare's *Venus*

and Adonis, with Adonis's passionately negative reaction to Venus's

aggressively masculine appetite, produces homosexual sympathies that

distinguish it from classical predecessors.

The tension between traditional gender relations and the

innovative construction of Shakespeare's poem allows for ambiguity

about sexual preferences. Karoline Szatek suggests that the pastoral

develops "borderlands," which "veil" sexual ideologies that can only be

expressed through the distancing of a classical atmosphere (345-359).

Ancient Greek genres also brought to the surface homosocial friendships, creating a borderland that could accommodate gender play and heterosexual refusal, as is the case of Adonis for Venus. As in ancient pastoral, the poem's borderland expresses fantasies deemed socially unsavory; the unique atmosphere opens the way to sexual desire. The pastoral borderland in which *Venus and Adonis* is set helps establish the idealized masculine relationships that lead to the homoerotic. Paul Hammond argues writers of the Renaissance era "pleasured in teasing their readers with homoerotic possibilities" and allowed an outlet for sexual fantasy that reestablished male supremacy (6). Myth and the pastoral produced a "veil" that allowed readers to enjoy the pleasure of the text.

Shakespeare creates a multi-dimensional poem that is not soley preoccupied with the homoerotic. It includes a sexualized Adonis desirable by both men and women, the androgynous Ganymede familiar in visual arts of the period. This alludes to another sexual ideal depicted in some visual arts of the period. Bruce Smith argues that

> In their androgyny, figures like Leander, Adonis, and Hermaphroditus embody, quite literally, the ambiguities of sexual desire in the English Renaissance culture and the ambivalences of homosexual desire in particular. They represent not an exclusive sexual taste, but an inclusive one. To use the categories of our

own day, these poems are bisexual fantasies. The temporary

freedom they grant to sexual desire allows it to flow out in all

directions, toward all the sexual objects that beckon in the

romantic landscape. (Kolin 21)

Such mythic figures permit a "cultured fantasy" because of their relation

to divine love, in contrast to sexual art that panders to "lowly" desire

(Chedgzby 135-136). This elite masculine ideal has more social value

due to its surface than in its substance; Anna Bryson suggests this

interest in exterior qualities reiterates the era's interest in the

performative. These preferences place importance on the façade of

sexuality, rather than on what it truly is (quoted in Gent 137).

Veiled homosocial ideals and the privileging of the perfected

masculine of the "Beauteous Youth" create a re-sexualized masculinity

and a new discourse of masculine culture expressed in many art forms.

According to Laurie Shannon, the era was saturated with the

"homonormative." The monarchy, private and social patriarchies, gender

constructions and roles, and laws all promoted masculine domination

while forcing women into a subordinate role (187-189). All things,

including the arts, are designed to support the patriarchy, against

perceived and feared feminine threats.

Of course, Shakespeare's poem was not the only representation of

Venus and Adonis. While more conventional representations of the pair

privileged a heterosexual liaison some, like Shakespeare, represented a masculine Venus and an effeminate Adonis. In artworks, as in Shakespeare's form, gender play added a distinct sexual charge to the narrative, one that promoted the homoerotic.

Confused gender appears in Cornelis van Haarlem's (1562-1638) *Venus and Adonis* (1614). A barebacked Venus reaches towards a timid, adolescent Adonis who appears smaller and more feminine than the female figure; she turns towards him and seems to envelope him, thus dominating him. Only a few visual clues help to identify the figures; Adonis holds a staff with a hunting dog nearby, while the goddess Venus has an intricate hairstyle and is dressed in jewels. Physically Venus has little to suggest her femininity, except for the profile of an almost non-existent breast mainly shielded from view by her physique and reclining posture. Her back is broad and muscular while his, clothed, appears significantly smaller and less masculine as he "shrinks" to her dominant figure. Her face lacks the delicate features and her bulky neck the grace presumably appropriate for of the goddess of love, while Adonis has the soft, supple face of an adolescent who slightly blushes at the forward advances of Venus as illustrated by van Haarlem; in this case especially, a dominating Venus. His reaction to her appears to be much like that of Shakespeare's character, as evident in his body language; even though Adonis has not yet been angered by her conquest of him, his blushing

suggests that he is already embarrassed. He curls his wrist around the neck of the dog and pulls it protectively, closer to his torso. His arm divides his personal space from that of Venus, simultaneously separating his body and libido in favor of the alternative: the hunt and masculine superiority achieved through sexual rejection. He looks at her unconvinced, resisting, innocent; very much portraying the "unplucked" adolescent of the poem, while she, also in the same fashion as Shakespeare's poem, turns her body towards him and pulls him closer. Adonis's hand also seems to be pulling himself and the dog backwards, resisting Venus's advances. The painting suggests a power play between the wills of the two characters, with tension between sexual domination and submission.

In van Haarlem's painting, portrayal of the feminine male and masculine female seem distinct from one another, though still signifying ambiguous genders. Another artwork that blurs gender is Giorgio Ghisi's (1520-1582) *Venus and Adonis* (c. 1570). In this work, the minute detail of Venus's braided hair contrasts with his loose hair. He wears boots and holds a hunting spear and is surrounded by his hunting dogs, while small cherubs, or *putti*, lingers around Venus; the hunting equipment and accessories suggest masculine hunting, while the angel is associated with Venus's mythology. She is very muscular, much like Haarlem's Venus, and attempts to embrace him while he bewilderingly turns his

head and eyes to resist her kiss and heterosexual intimacy. Caravaggio

famously painted men made effeminate by posture, composure, and

mannerisms. Such is portrayed in the work, *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* (c

1593), by the soft curves of the boy's body and tender, sensual look he

gives the viewer. In the case of *Boy with a Basket of Fruit*, the youth's

shoulder, upper chest, neck, and collarbone are exposed, objectifying

and sexualizing the boy as an effeminate adolescent. Donald Posner

suggests that Caravaggio's males "solicit" the viewer both through that of

the gaze of the character to the viewer and through the viewer to the

work's young man. This sexualizes the figure and eroticizes the work

(112). Posner observes that the works act as social documentation

because the "androgynous characters" reiterate the "artist's intended

aesthetic statement" and reflect the desire of the culture. Caravaggio

(1571-1610) and Michelangelo (1475-1564) specifically reflected Italian

desires and expression and were unique for their ability to use "urgently

seductive images of sacred and profane love" as is seen in "the gloriously

three-dimensional David, the perfect boy-man in all his charm, delicacy,

strength, innocence, and amorous possibility" (Forker 4). The figures

sexualized as effeminate men clearly mean to "tempt the spectator" due

to their positions (112-114). In the instance of the *Boy with a Basket of*

Fruit, the sexualized solicitation is evident to Posner: the youth's "tousled

hair and warm, important gaze can hardly be meant to advertize

vegetables" (114). Caravaggio sexualizes males in other paintings, like the cupid figure in *Amor Vincit Omnia* (1602-1603), wherein the figure props up one knee and draws attention to his hairless, youthful genitalia as he looks coyly at the viewer and positions himself, and his sexuality, above and before the symbolic objects included in the background. Such erotic expression was not rare for him; Caravaggio was so well known for his sexualized works and notorious for stirring the homoerotic that even some of his religious commissions were argued to be "indecent." The series *St. John the Baptist,* much like Bernini's (1598-1680) *the Ecstasy of St. Theresa* (1647-1652), were, by some, considered examples of fetishism and soft pornography (Webb 94).

Other illustrations of Venus and Adonis take gender play further by becoming even more ambiguous, to the point of being undecipherable and androgynous. Regarded as the androgynous ideal, Ganymede was borrowed from ancient mythology and soon became "one of the prime embodiments of its theories of divine love" (Saslow 22). Seymour Howard describes the figure of Ganymede or the similarly androgonous character, Bacchus, as a "seductive androgynous pubescent beauty" that would have appealed to ancient interests shared by Renaissance society and pleasing to powerful Florentines like the Medici (87). The ideal of the hermaphrodite is even normalized to represent an idealized androgyny in the illustrated utopia, *The Land of Hermaphrodites* from *Livre des*

merveilles (Early 15th Century) by Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516). This work depicts men with breasts and women with penises in a harmonious and Eden-like atmosphere (Smith 40). Ganymede represents a "beardless youth" that is both masculine, innocently child-like, and often feminine with a fleshy, supple body. A beard symbolized authority, established masculinity, social status, and age, so oftentimes visual or literary descriptions of men would have paid special attention to whether the masculine character, or in some rare cases female characters, should or should not be illustrated with a beard. The beard was linked to masculinity and then equated to the patriarchy, which was equated to "natural order" and divine humanism (Johnston 2). One could not "perform" as a man without "appearing" as a man; therefore, a beard effectively makes it impossible for women to secure a role in masculine society. Mark Albert Johnston discusses this and goes on to suggest that the beard "naturalized the distinction" between what was masculine and feminine, despite some gender play and struggle (1). A male illustrated without a beard may imply a less prolific masculinity than that of a bearded man; the beardless are thereby subordinated to dominant males. A beardless boy could be seen as naïve and young or even as feminine. Winfried Schleiner suggests that such beardless men could be considered "girlish" and "beautiful" in *Amadis de Gaule* (608). Similar symbolic meaning is suggested by Shakespeare's youthful and

"rational" Adonis as well as the mystic, young and eroticized Ganymede. In some cases Ganymede's androgyny revives symbolic power, as in the boy's mythological elevation to heaven by Zeus. Zeus takes on the form of an eagle to abduct Ganymede and fulfill his desires. Ganymede's being swept up by the God of Gods illustrates his powerful appeal and equates androgynous sexuality and the hermaphrodite to highest divinity. Even though many characters were seduced or raped by Zeus, the visual portrayal of the androgynous Ganymede in transit to heaven is highly symbolic (Hart 1-64).

In some cases, Ganymede is depicted physically as a hermaphrodite, and therefore pleasurable to male viewers who desire various masculinities not associated with heterosexual love. Ganymede-type figures appear in several art works: *Venus and Adonis* (16th century) by Luca Cambiaso (1527-1585) and in *Venus and Adonis* (1642) by Simon Vouet (1590-1649). Both of these works portray asexual figures, as depicted by the Venus in Vouet's work, shown as masculine with a pronounced pectoral muscle instead of a well-defined breast and by the angel-faced Adonis in Cambiaso's painting, where the male and female figures seem almost completely interchangeable and indistinguishable. All four of these characters are sexless, and all point to their relationship to the masculine; whether being a feminine man or a masculine woman,

they all *are* or *masquerade* as male and reiterate the performative

qualities of the masculine gender (Godeau 34-35).

The feminine is not always erased through androgyny, but central

interest in the masculine is a recurring theme. This beautiful, perfected

masculinity was desirable for various reasons, including the eroticized

gaze of the viewer. As evident in Venus's desire of Adonis in

Shakespeare's poem, the gaze has the power to objectify and symbolically

demean, elevate, and dominate the subject. Laura Mulvey suggests that

the spectator can cause a performance to become sexualized by the

objectifying gaze and can create a spectacle out of the performer, a

sexualized exhibition of both the action and the body of the performer

(Mulvey 34-35). In this context, the performer can be on stage, on

canvas, or in a literary text. This sexualizing gaze has the potential of

being demeaning and shaming through unwanted attention and fantasy.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau argues that a man's body becomes feminized by

the objectification of the gaze. Femininity is transferred from the female

character, who would normally be the recipient of "the gaze," onto the

male, who then becomes an object of "erotic contemplation" (18). The

gaze could be enacted by a group of men who objectify a female servant,

Venus in her sexual desire of a homosocial Adonis, or elders who

eroticize a young man. In some instances, the youthful adolescent was

admiringly desired by older members of the patriarchy, as a "Beauteous Youth."

Christopher Fulton argues masculine interest in the male youth was due, at least in Florence, to the association of the well-bred adolescent boy with a glorious future and a secure transition of the patriarchy to a new generation (31-33). Since antiquity, visual artwork depicts older men having sex with adolescents: most often representing the elder as the dominant sexual partner with a submissive youth. Catherine Johns argues that love between men, including love between older men and male adolescents, was not only popular but widespread. This social discourse is so popular that it is even referenced by Ovid in his "Book X" of *Metamorphosis* as "the love of boys" (Crompton 95). From antiquity to the Renaissance this "domination" allowed for elders to maintain control over youths. Christopher Fulton argues that artwork containing interaction between boys and men on any intimate level is "an instrument in the enforcement and reproduction of patriarchal authority" (31). Boys were naturally important to society because of their position as inheritors of the country; male guardians worked feverishly on the enculturation of their hearts and minds. This education projected importance onto the male youths and because of the "hope" a new generation brought intensified their idealization. Together with their youthful, undaunted, unsuppressed strength and sexualized ambition

the courageous dream-boy represented (Fulton 32), a beardless male upon whom elder men could project their ambitions, dreams, prerogatives, and desires. Desires or fantasies in poems, plays, or art are "divorced enough from everyday life," so that the viewer or audience may explore feelings more freely, while immunizing them from associations with sodomy or sin (Schleiner 606).

Some Greek pottery acted as "love tokens" commissioned by men for boys to convince them to be lovers or to communicate a love or appreciation for their partner (Johns 98-115). In these classical works, one often sees a sexual encounter between a bearded adult or *erastes* and a young man or *eromenos* (Mahon 49-50). The red-figure cup by the "Brygos Painter" represents the classical relationship between boys and men, with the boy nestled between the thighs of his elder, who is bending down to fondle him. The boy pushes his torso towards his lover and runs his fingers through his hair. In this context, the boy becomes the erotic object and entertainment of the elder, who is visibly excited. Both individuals, especially the boy, seem pleased with the encounter. His body language illustrates the positive, ancient example of "divine, heroic love" and normal social discourse of the ancients (Johns 98-99). This image is repeated in many examples of artwork from antiquity, as in a black-figure vase from the late 6th century. In this image, the boy's body seems slightly less completely receptive to the attention of the bearded

elder, but the boy does open his body towards the man and allows himself to be touched. He is smiling and speaking to the elder, who looks at him but seems less interested in conversation and more interested in fornication (Johns 115). These images and desires are partially due to older members of the patriarchy feeling anxiety about handing over power and authority to their younger counterparts. There exists the chance that the elders fear they will be betrayed if they lack the homosocial support they desire. Sexually dominating the male adolescent or "Beauteous Youth" allows an older man to exude power over the youth and personal masculine power and virility (Fulton 32-33). Catherine Johns argues that such love between men, including that between older men and male adolescents, was widespread in ancient culture. This social discourse is so popular that it is even referenced by Ovid in his "Book X" of *Metamorphosis* as "the love of boys" (Crompton 95). From antiquity to the Renaissance this "domination" allowed elders to maintain control over youths. Christopher Fulton argues that artwork containing interaction between boys and men on any intimate level is "an instrument in the enforcement and reproduction of patriarchal authority" (31).

Michelangelo Buonarroti's art illustrates a prolific number of male nudes in sketches and sculptures that epitomize the "Beauteous Youth" and ideal love. Idealized, rational love was often equated with divine,

perfected love and with a dominant masculinity, as previously discussed.

Alyce Mahon suggests that Michelangelo strove to depict masculine

figures who embodied desirable inner qualities like grace, culture, depth,

and a good soul (17-19). Mahon links art to the homosocial through its

idealization of the *outer* and *inner* qualities of men. Giorgio Vasari, a

contemporary or Michelangelo, wrote that Michelangelo's talent was

considered divine and that as an adolescent he was hailed as a prodigy

due to his ability to render the human form, especially that of men . His

artistic style created a sensation due to his meticulous knowledge of

anatomy and his ability to make "poetry for the eyes" (Vasari 256-257).

This idea of "visual poetry" includes the gaze of the viewer and is a

reminder that the relationship between the "audience" and the art object

is based on the gaze of the viewer. Pearson argues that Michelangelo's

artistic choices often involved play with proportions and muscle

physiology, as he attempted to illustrate "perfect masculine beauty" and,

therefore, a masculine ideal (Pearson 256-257). Deviations from pure

naturalism are evident in the proportions of *David* and *The Pieta* where

absolute realism was sacrificed for aesthetics and idealized bodies. His

art was so admired by viewers that statues such as *David* and *the Pieta*

were sometimes worshiped, with some believing they had not been

chiseled but rather were created in a miraculous fashion. Vasari writes

that *David* was considered to surpass the talent and grace of ancient

Greek sculptures and that Michelangelo's renderings were so revolutionary their beauty sometimes terrified admirers (424-428).

At the center of his art and his artistic philosophy is the idealized "Beauteous Youth." Desire for the "Beauteous Youth" sexualizes a work as it ostensibly promotes rational love, as seen in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. As noted above, Kenneth Borris argues that many Renaissance artists replace overtly homosexual imagery with eroticized masculine beauty; thereby justifying fantasy, explorative sexuality and embracing masculinity (257). Just as in society, the homosocial and homoerotic did not necessarily equate with the homosexual. However, Rudolf Wittkower argues that Michelangelo, along with Caravaggio, did what he could to intensify the emotion of the work through sexuality, simultaneously promoting the masculine body along with masculine rationality (Fernandez 118). Michelangelo's *The Dying Slave,* for example, portrays a standing male figure caught at the border between life and death; his body is agonizingly twisting upward, illustrating an ecstatic release from the pain of death and the austerity of life. Seymour Howard argues that the figure in the *Dying Slave* is "ecstatically surrendering" to the death that is apparently creeping upon him, while also seeming to "surrender" to the gaze of the viewer and the fantasy they and society project onto him (99). Sawday argues that this "agonizing ecstasy" is titillating because of its similarity to Christian illustrations of

the passion as seen in Bernini's scandalous sculpture, *St. Teresa in Ecstasy* (Gent 122). Michelangelo's slave is a youth, beardless and baby-faced but with the physique of a man, which unites separate masculinities in one sculpture. His body is sculpted to display his muscular physique, and through "Contrapposto" his rigid body is made sensual; his contours are softened and his body is feminized. His delicate face, which sits under a mop of curls, does not suggest agony but rather a sensual liberation symbolizing his transition from the earthly to the divine: much like the Platonic link between sensual love and rational love. Vasari suggests that in his study sketches for paintings, Michelangelo often practiced on wax moldings before he began sculpting in stone to perfect the physique, working "continuously without letting anyone see it" (426-427). With this method, he introduced a level of craftsmanship and execution that yielded very polished products. This method seemed to allow the ideal to "unveil" itself slowly through the stone as it emerged.

Botticelli's painting *Venus and Mars* also depicts a masculine form in highly passionate representation much like the sexually ecstatic slave in Michelangelo's sculpture. In this work, Venus and Mars recline, facing each other. A feminine Venus is lavishly clothed and in a state of mild relaxation. Mars, however, appears much more interesting in that he is mainly nude save for a thin drapery covering his genitalia and in

that he appears exhausted and seems to still be teetering on the peak of sexual release and euphoria. As the two figures lounge in an ideal, natural setting there is the suggestion that the characters are just intimate, but because Mars is displayed in such a sensual manner Venus is mainly ignored. The focus of the work becomes his body, how he reclines, the gentle contours of his muscles, and how his neck, arms and legs seem to become limp from some unseen exertion. His palms lie open and allow his fingers to unfold outward while his legs simultaneously push away from his body, effectively stretching him into a collective, blissful posture. Arguably the most important aspect of Mars and his eroticized masculinity is the expression on his face, whose glowing skin, closed eyes and open mouth, and head thrown back in ecstasy causes his body and character to be sexualized. All lines direct the eye to this point on the canvas, which happens to be the most highly sexualized aspect in the composition. His face gives the main suggestion of the sensual in the work and helps to eroticize his figure. The gaze is important to the eroticism of this painting, as the natural reaction of the eye with line helps to add importance to his face and therefore his representation of the eroticized masculinity. His hair is tussled and his head thrown backward, becoming heavy with bodily exhaustion, and completes the clean line that draws the eye from Venus's face, down through her body, and up through his own, halting at his eroticized face.

The eroticization of the masculine is a quality that continuously surfaces in regards to Michelangelo's male figures. His *Three Labours of Hercules* for instance, eroticizes masculinity and even suggests the homoerotic through two portrayed males. The sketch portrays two figures that appear to be in combat, with Hercules in the dominating position and the other in a subordinate position underneath him. Hercules's nude body swings fluidly toward his opponent, which causes weight to go onto his front leg and his torso to twist, exposing rippling muscles and powerful masculine strength. Hercules's body seems a perfect specimen of masculine beauty, as suggested even in the profile of his face, and Michelangelo is able to exhaust that beauty to suggest potency, endurance, and heroism through this graceful contest and grand gesture. James Saslow argues that Michelangelo understood the ideal of the classical male as a "symbol of strong male/male affinity," which promotes masculine bonding, rational love, and an eroticized masculinity (32). Vasari had described Michelangelo's construction of male figures: "Michelangelo wanted to attain a marvelous combination of various parts of the body and, most particularly, to give it both the slenderness of the young male figure and the fleshiness and roundness of the female" (424). In *the Three Labours of Hercules*, both the male bodies interact to create homosexual tension. The man contorts his body underneath Hercules and raises a leg upward, while Hercules towers

over him. The opponent's leg seems to be nestled between Hercules's thighs and forced upward towards the groin, which both puts Hercules in a vulnerable position and allows him gain control over the movement of his opponent. The opponent's fingers stretch out and run against the inner thigh of Hercules and are positioned so as to pull Hercules down towards him rather than away from him. The action of pulling Hercules's leg and groin towards makes the tumble of the two men almost a sexual encounter instead of a battle of strength. The touch of the opponent not only sexualizes the sketch but also Hercules, as alternative masculinities establish the work's homoerotic significance. Overall, the beautiful, eroticized forms recall both Shakespeare's poem and *The Dying Slave*. Such representations of heroic masculinities in art seem to have been created especially for the enjoyment and fantasy of male viewers, and the discourse between the viewer and the art charges it with homoerotic desire and links it to erotic fantasy. According to Kenneth Borris,

> The Renaissance is definitively characterized in part by a new cultural impetus toward male homoerotism inspired by the recovery of dissemination of the Platonic dialogues on love, and reflected...in the marvelous representations of masculine physical beauty in the visual arts of the time. (251)

The inter-relationships among various Renaissance portrayals of the "Beauteous Youth" emphasize this development of the homoerotic.

The beauty of youthful, beardless men and the desire of older, bearded men are also evident in two of Michelangelo's other sketches: *Studies of Haman* and *Study for Adam*. As has been previously suggested, the homoerotic does not necessarily suggest the homosexual. The sketches Michelangelo created "established allegorical vocabulary of Neoplatonic humanism, simultaneously communicating the artist's intense individual emotions and locate these feelings within a broader system of values that interlinks love passion, beauty, ecstasy, and experience of the divine" (Saslow 18). In *Studies for Haman* it is not necessary for two men or any two figures to interact in order to stimulate the work's sexualizing homoeroticizing force. The sketch represents the type of the elegant body-- a masculine body whose torso twists and muscles flex in the act of leaping. Similar to works discussed above, featured in the sketch is a detailed rendering of an idealized male figure in an interesting pose, allowing Michelangelo to study movement and the body. Abigail Solomon-Godeau suggests that in such cases even the artist's studio could take on a homoerotic charge, and the artist's exposure to such masculine beauty, even if artistically idealized, would have an even greater impact on the eroticization of the artwork (56). It reiterates the profound idealized masculinity of the era, but it seemingly alludes to the difference between homoerotic and homosexual. By not including the genitalia in this study, the drawing disassociates the

sexual organs from the masculine body. The focus of the sketch highlights the male body and promotes the rational male relationship, but does not go so far as to include the sexual organs in the idealized portrayal. The ideal depiction of the masculine form may not have benefited at all from a naturalistic representation of genitalia in motion. If the body as a whole is eroticized, then the male sexual organs are not central to representing the masculine ideal, the "Beauteous Youth," or to creating homoerotic artwork. If the male body may be idealized and erotized without genitalia, the latter would not seem necessary to Michelangelo's image of masculinity. This possibility would in turn suggest that the era did not equate the homoerotic with the homosexual, confirming Borris's view, and that Michelangelo, was mainly interested in was masculine beauty and did not endorse sodomy.

Perhaps the best example of a "Beauteous Youth" who stimulates the homoerotic, but not necessarily the homosexual is Michelangelo's *Study of Adam*. This fresco represents a powerful example of Michelangelo's interest in understanding anatomy and experimenting with different bodily positions in his artistic drafts. One of the artist's major accomplishments and longest artistic commitments was the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which strained his body and permanently damaged his eyesight, yet prematurely abandoned the project due to the Pope's impatience (Vasari 442-443). Michelangelo preferred sculpting to

painting but took the opportunity to play with many difficult figural

positions that illustrate the "Beauteous Youth"; his love of sculpture may

have influenced his style of rendering of masculine bodies in two

dimensions, as he seems to "sculpt" them rather than "draw" them. One

of the most important representations of idealized masculinity is the

scene, *The Creation of Adam,* which is central to the religious narration

and one of the most widely reproduced portions of the project. The *Study*

of Adam portrays a masculine figure with a strong physique and

definition that exudes virility and power through its idealized body and

glorified masculinity. The fluidity in the contours of Adam's body

reiterates the flowing lines used to create his position and detail, which

harmonizes the sketch's style. The nude Adam is lying on his side,

propped on one bent arm, with legs spread, displaying his body to the

viewer along with a vulnerable and heroic sexuality in the painting and

in the Bible. The endorsement of the homosocial achieved in this

idealized illustration is emphasized by Adam's relationship to the figure

of God. In the painting, his figure physically meets the divine, just as his

idealized body symbolically promotes divine attachment. The masculine

torso is illustrated in Michelangelo's stylized approach, but the figure's

appealing arrangement of the legs and arms makes the *Study of Adam*

particularly powerful, emphasizing the image's closeness to divinity.

Vasari states that Adam's extremities were designed to portray "the

height of beauty and perfection" as they bend, extend, and unveil, and he goes on to suggest that its "beauty, pose, and contours" seem too divine to have come from Michelangelo's hand (438-445). Not only does Vasari see the fresco as miraculous, but he also admires the intensity of emotion and subject matter, expressing a near reverence similar to that for *Pieta* or *David*. Adam's beautiful form is tinged with sexuality causing the figure to represent rational, perfected love and stimulate homoerotic desire. The way his legs and arms thrust out his torso and groin draw attention to his genitalia, but again the lines created by the construction of Adam's pose create a triangular motif that loops the eyes outward on the peripheral extremities and then inwards to the trunk and penis. In the context of this powerful and grandiose visual manifestation of the classic and Renaissance ideal of masculinity, the treatment of the genitals becomes symbolically idealized as virile, potent, and valuable. The positioning of the body bows the chest outward, making Adam appear broad and muscular, which further idealize his masculine body. Vulnerable points on the body are left exposed both to the narrative in the painting and to the gaze of the viewer. His collarbone, innermost thighs, and the soft underside of his deltoid and upper arm are all pushed away from the body and simultaneously from the self-protection it would offer. As in *The Dying Slave*, Michelangelo's masculine compositions portray "the effects of the soul's passions and joys," and his

sketches mix artistic and sexual "fantasies" to "satisfy" admirers; the admirers' gaze eroticizes the beautiful, heroic body (Vasari 461). Michelangelo's art participated in a Renaissance reexamination of sexuality generally and masculinity in particular. In the complex ambiguity surrounding sexuality in the Renaissance, it was impossible for desire, both sexual and Platonic, to be separated completely from the homoeroticized "Beauteous Youth" as the admirable forms would have inspired many forms of longing. Clearly, the homoerotic and even the homosexual could be easily veiled in the homosocial atmosphere that the Renaissance accommodated with its promotion of male supremacy, evident in Shakespeare's poem and the visual arts.

This complex sexuality spread across cultures exemplifies the enormity of the masculine struggle and the endless meanings derivable from it. Italian culture continued to influence England for centuries and helped to endorse ideals and desires of the English. The "Beauteous Youth" portrayed by Michelangelo and William Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis* represents two distinct cultural products that share the goal of romanticizing valorous masculine relations and simultaneously idealizing the masculine and dismissing heterosexual desire.

Michelangelo represented the importance and favorability of the masculine through two female sculptures in a different way than in his

other works. Like Venus and Adonis illustrations discussed earlier, confused gender constructs and portrayals of gender play could also act as powerful commentary on the masculine and, hence, the patriarchy. Several of the female figures Michelangelo sculpted for Medici tombs, including *Dawn* from the tomb of Lorenzo de Medici and *Night* from the tomb of Giuliano de' Medici, are rendered in a masculine way; even the breasts seem to be stuck onto a male body as an afterthought. The breasts represent a distinct and easily identifiable feminine attribute, and when perky and supple suggest a positive sexuality and cause heterosexual desire. The breasts of the sculptures are created oddly and vastly separated and seem to act as representation for a breast rather than portraying a naturalistic and believable chest. Dominique Fernandez suggests that these two female figures are void of sexual desirability and symbolically allocate that desire to another recipient (124). It is unlikely that this is due to anatomical ignorance: Howard suggests that Michelangelo mainly studied male bodies and contends that Michelangelo would not have been familiar with female breasts and anatomy (97). Johathan Sawday refers to the Renaissance era as the "Anatomical Renissance" and suggests that desire to learn about the human body a popular branch of Humanism (Gent 111). Due to the widespread interest in medicine and science and its clear effects on the arts, it seems unlikely that Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni

would have been unaware of the curvature of a woman's breast or the softness of her body. The presentation of *Dawn* and *Night* is more likely deliberate and suggests an intentional statement relating to the masculine, as almost everything else was in the period. Even though he continuously investigated and illustrated the masculine ideal, these two figures are clearly not perfected female forms. The breasts could represent a patriarchy's discontent with femininity, as the unnatural modeling of *Dawn* and *Night* could be due to the "repressed lust, fear, and rage" of society, which "exalted the male body" (Howard 100-101, Fernandez 126). Both figures were decorating the tomb of major supporters of the patriarchy and facilitators of homosocial society, and the patrons may not have desired the symbolism or meaning surrounding a female ideal but may have been much more interested in the masculine. Struggles between the power structure of a society like the masculine against another, lesser influence like femininity, represents not only a struggle between genders, but more specifically, it represents a battle for power and influence: just as the aristocracy struggles in court (Solomon-Godeau 45). Art ran solely off of commission and patronage; therefore the works almost always reflect the specific desires and specifications of the patron. It was an expensive article for individuals to collect, so often solely the elite and the church could afford commissions; hence, their tastes established the popular taste of the

time (Solomon-Godeau 30). In effect, the breasts of the sculptures are like extraneous afterthoughts added to masculine body; it is possible that these pieces represent sexualities similar to Ganymede. "Hermaphroditic beauty or completeness, a melding of male and female attributes" is discussed by Howard in relation to Michelangelo's androgynous and "imperfect" female sculptures *Night* and *Dawn* (96). The nature of these feminine portrayals does not encourage female sexuality or desirability, but seems to signify women as the unattractive "other" in society. These female sculptures are situated among male statues, and they seem simply to commend masculinity by dismissing the importance of femininity, which was considered ambiguous and unspoken of. The lack of correct female anatomy in the Medici tombs reiterates the idea that the feminine was not the ideal of society or the arts. Similarly, it was not necessary to focus on Venus in *Venus and Adonis*; her purpose was to stimulate a reaction from Adonis, thus eroticizing him and creating an interesting embodiment of social desires in his character. In the case of the tombs however, perhaps the interest of the Michelangelo and the Medici patrons was not on female beauty but on masculine beauty and its social signifiers, while also presenting the feminine as imperfect and unnecessary. Similarly, there are instances where sexuality and gender is blurred or reversed in popular Renaissance portrayals of angels with ambiguous sexualities and in role

reversals between genders. Shakespeare's Venus plays with these gender roles and exudes masculine qualities in her pursuits of Adonis, which William Keach suggests Shakespeare used to "cause disorder in the sexual sphere" and therefore to create interest among readers (59). A similar Venus is represented by Giovanni Battista Paggi in his 1581 painting, *Venus and Cupid.* Though her body is illustrated in a softer and fleshier way than Michelangelo's idealized men, she nevertheless does not exude femininity. She seems almost androgynous; only the slight contour of her breast suggests that the figure is female. Her figure becomes much less important than the context surrounding her masculine design; her broad back and thick arms seem more to resemble the body of a male than that of the goddess of love, which further suggests that it was not she or her body that was desirable.

Such artistic and literary portrayals promoted Renaissance masculinity by drawing on social constructs of desirable male gender roles, in the attempt to establish a reformed powerful masculinity. In England, Elizabeth's role as a two-bodied, two-sexed monarch aggravated an already anxious society, which was desperate to reestablish the threatened patriarchy. *Venus and Adonis* and Michelangelo's sketches and sculptures represent positive masculinities that reiterate old Socratic and Platonic love philosophy, idealizing male relationships and concurrently eroticizing the perfected male form. Though these examples

are highly erotic, societies from the era differentiated between the homosexual and the homoerotic; therefore these visual manifestations of fantasy and desire do not necessarily suggest social or artistic promotion of sodomy. They did, however, implement suggestive representations of the "Beauteous Youth" to romanticize masculinity for its strength, honor, stability, and dependability and strive to resurrect masculine dominance and situate the Renaissance as an era that explored sexuality and stimulated fantasy.

CHAPTER III: THE FANTASTICAL ARENA OF THE ENGLISH THEATER AND ITS EROTICIZATION OF MAN

As I have argued in Chapter 2, *Venus and Adonis* depicts some cultural ideals through Adonis's effeminate qualities, the seeming promotion of rational love, and the suggestion of the homoerotic. Shakespeare's theater also reflected the culture that made it. The theater space and its plays responded to cultural ideals, anxieties, and desires, including the homoerotic charge discussed above in regards to poetry and visual art. The theater provided a social common ground that enticed and enhanced homoerotic fantasy, encouraged gender play, and further idealized masculinities. According to Louis B. Wright: "Elizabethan drama flourished too luxuriantly to be restricted to any class, and in the sixteenth century the dramatic taste of the aristocrat was so nearly like that of the commoner that innumerable plays did duty both at court and in the public playhouses" (608). The Elizabethan theater was a place production that existed to intrigue and entertain and it relied heavily, almost solely, on the ongoing patronage of a large,

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diverse audience. The popularity of the Elizabethan theater suggests that patrons appreciated the entertainment.

Working among innovative and seasoned actors and play-writes, Shakespeare created some of the most profoundly sexual and telling plays of the time. His productions entertained the masses and stimulated amusement and, more importantly, he understood Elizabethan society. He employed ambiguity strategically to please an array of audience members and, in many plays, created an atmosphere that promoted exploration of desire. As in his poem *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare seems in some of his plays to investigate humanity, and, more specifically, masculinities.

Unlike other artistic media, theatrical performance offers an experience as the object of fantasy. However, similar to the visual arts is the importance it places on the spectators and their gaze. The spectacle of the stage and the gaze of the audience work together to enhance erotic play. The theater offered a retreat into fantastical domains that transcended time and space. In the English Renaissance particularly, the theater offered an escape from urban and cultural turmoil. Elizabethan London was dynamic due to plague, riots, political turmoil, religious unrest, and secular change like gender and sexuality under Elizabeth's sovereignty.

Of course not everyone attended plays for the same reasons or with the same results, but performances often spoke to gender issues and sexuality, presenting masculine ideals and gender play. The Beauteous Youth and the eroticization of masculinity were not confined to poetry and the visual arts; performance on stage similarly captured sensual displays that could solicit the homoerotic. According to Charles R. Forker, "It can hardly be denied that Renaissance drama, at least in its English manifestation, constitutes a body of plays as highly charged with eroticism and as profoundly concerned with questions of sexuality as any in history" (1). The English theater dramatically grew in popularity during the Renaissance because of its accessibility to the public but also due to its patronage by Queen Elizabeth and members of the nobility. In the public theaters, all echelons of society were represented, though not many playgoers were members of the aristocracy or even the gentry. Theaters were scattered around the periphery of London, and were a constant source of entertainment. Individuals could pay to stand among the masses surrounding the stage or sit among those more elite, so almost all Englishmen could afford theatrical entertainment.

According to Russ McDonald, "In the 1590's several outdoor playhouses, what we tend to call public theaters, were operating around London. The outdoor playhouses were designed as theaters and located outside the City walls because they were thus beyond the reach of the

London authorities" (46). While the "rights" of artistic expression deflected some opposition and scrutiny of playhouses and performances, they were susceptible to public condemnation.

As theater became fashionable, different types of playhouses private as well as public appeared in and around London. Though people from different tiers of the social stratosphere went to any of the many theater houses functioning in Shakespeare's England, some did attract one social group specifically. Louis B. Wright suggests that the Blackfriars or Globe theaters would have been suited for fashionable urban playgoers while others like Chapel Royal received many members of the gentry. The Cockpit in Drury Lane was more popular among the "lesser citizenry" (608-610). As a whole, theater in London outweighed opposition from Puritans, the Anglican Church, or conservative political officials. Situating the public theaters outside the periphery of the city not only helped to protect it from the reprimand of London clergy and officials, but it also made the playhouse a destination that was slightly adventurous. Shakespeare played an important role in the establishment of several theaters including the famed Globe Theater, and his acting company became so celebrated that, in 1603, it became the King's Men, the official acting troupe of King James I after the death of Queen Elizabeth I (Brown 20, McDonald 52). Like other creative spaces, the theater could present political subject matter or imply cultural

statements. Theater wielded power because of its fashionable reputation and popularity. Often too, it unlocked and fulfilled sensual fantasies. Unlike other social powers, the theater was an establishment created and patronized by common people. In this way, the theater held a special, intimate relationship with "the people" as it seemingly spoke to their wants, needs, and, in some instances, spoke social truths.

The Bishop's Ban of 1599, which censored play-texts and theatrical performances, acknowledged, influenced, and illustrated the threat of playhouses to clerical authority (Boose 185). The public playhouses were open-air facilities, only partially covered; hence it was not practical for companies to invest in an extensive array of elaborate props. Costumes were notoriously elaborate and richly constructed, as they were often gifts or inherited articles from gentry as aristocratic patrons. The Puritans cited the rich dress as evidence of the theater's wickedness. They objected to the corrupting nature of the theater, partially because of the sumptuous costumes accumulated by troupes and theaters through donations and patronage. William Prynne's *Histriomastix*, published later in 1633, reads, "Those plays which are usually acted frequently in over-costly effeminate, strange, meretricious, lust-exciting apparel, are questionlesse unseemely, yea unlawfull unto Christians" (McDonald 43). The Puritans and others might have been less threatened by theatrical productions had they not represented a

social influence independent from and largely uncontrolled by appointed officials. Shakespeare's performances were ambiguous when representing social, political, and cultural views for many reasons; much like his poem *Venus and Adonis*, performances with points of ambiguity promoted multiple interpretations that potentially could titillate the audience but could also protect dangerous views from criticism. Because of theater's ambiguous relationship to reality, plays were difficult to incriminate; in a sense, it would be like demonizing a dream. In the realm of the theater masculine fantasies would be protected due to the audience's position as spectators rather than persons in the midst of daily life. By extension the theater became a place with great potential for escapism and fantasy, and it offered alternatives to reality. The plays that I will discuss below, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*, invite sexual fantasies related to ambiguous gender. The stage presented newly sexualized representations, and reflected cultural and authorial influences, including those related to gender and sexuality, particularly masculinity (Roberts 197).

More than just a setting, the theater provided an atmosphere where performances became more powerful and the desire surrounding the actors intensified. Some considered actors to be lowly social creatures, but for those suspending disbelief in the theatrical realm, they were transformed from their tainted statue to heroic, powerful, desirable,

or comical characters. Kathleen M. Lea suggests that the stage plays relied on imagination and "the inward eye" that gave the audience "Places, Times, and Persons" in which, they were asked blindly to believe and see played on stage (132). Some actors on stage are themselves made to be an audience to other performers on stage. Audiences could affect the mood or tone of a scene and influence the audience's interpretation.

Passion is prolific in the context of the theater space. The desiring gaze of the viewing audience at least subconsciously evaluates and sometimes sexualizes performers. Scenes eliciting excitement, anticipation, uncertainty, and euphoria would undoubtedly contribute to their mind frame and help produce the "suspension of disbelief" that allowed the experience to be successful. Michael D. Bristol suggests the theater invited the audience to use imagination and potentially uncover hidden desires (Bristol 28). The theater was a fantasy land that was authentic enough to engage imagination and invest emotion in. The sensual context of the drama paired with the discourse of Renaissance theatrical production could encourage sexual desire.

The fantasy brought on by imagination became synonymous with performances and facilitated a homoerotic atmosphere because of the desire that was projected onto the actors who portrayed masculine ideals. Forker argues that the stage was the "chief artistic medium for

projecting images of sexual desire" and that it allowed audiences to come
to terms with their own "attitudes and feelings" surrounding eroticism
(3).

Theater spotlights and elevates the masculine by idealizing male
characters, actors, sexualities, discourses, and narratives. The absence
of female actors is fundamental to the theatrical endorsement of the
masculine in that young boys and feminine males had many
opportunities to cross dress and perform female roles. In the public
theaters boys usually played female roles, although in some rare
instances men played elderly female characters (McDonald 43). This
eroticization of boyhood is reminiscent of the homosexual relationships of
antiquity often depicted on vases, although not as explicit. The theater's
disguised genders of boys and men reveal that performative acts were
accepted by society and the courts (Findlay 104-115). Jean E. Howard
finds evidence of cross dressing occurring on London's streets and in the
lives of its citizens (93). Inside the theater, effects of cross dressing upon
the actors and audience were magnified in that cross dressed performers
appeared on a stage, a spectacle for the entire audience. In turn, the
spectacle of the cross dresser became susceptible to the audience's gaze
and eroticized by it. Actors dressed as the men who were captured in the
objectifying gaze of the audience could represent traditional masculine
ideals, in contrast to effeminate males who played female characters. Yet

masculinities were not simply pigeon-holed in "types." Mary Beth Rose states that many Shakespearean heroes offer unique masculinities; for example, Macbeth is depicted as an attractive noble, Othello as a powerful but self-destructive general, and Coriolanus as a self-involved warrior. For Rose, even Elizabeth played the role of the masculine hero through speeches that presented her as the strong, masculinized sovereign of England (25). In the theater the multitude of masculinities offered a tantalizing selection to audience members, some of whom were themselves "hidden" under the guise of manhood as womanhood. Bristol refers to Oscar Wilde, who suggests that "the ambiguities of the sexes" portrayed on stage placed "one more demand upon the imaginative capacities of the spectators," as they explored gender possibilities (cited in Bristol 28). Bristol goes onto contend that the Elizabethan theater's embrace of gender exploration suggests that feminine men and masculine men were acceptable, if not desirable to, the audience, and, potentially, to society (Bristol 22-28). Society shaped the audience, actor, and playwright's understanding of the constructs that define them. Regarding the construct of masculinity, Holly Devor writes that: "People's identity as males or females, men or women, are partially based on their understanding of the meanings given to sexuality in their sociocultural context...masculinity likewise is partially defined by heterosexuality"-- what it is and what it is not (89).

As in the cases of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and the visual arts, the gaze is central to the eroticization of characters on stage and the development of the dramatic atmosphere. The gaze was constantly at work inside the theater, to sometimes being focused on the stage and sometimes objectifying others in the audience. Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell argue that incorporating the audience in an erotic way as active participants of the gaze "further intensified fantasy" especially in the case of male spectators (Comensoli 15). Although the number of women in the audience was small, they could become the object of fantasies of the largely male audience, and those embodying particular feminine ideal qualities, could be eroticized. Jean E. Howard contends that the anxiety that writers like Stephen Gosson felt about the presence of female audience members reflected larger issues in society; females entering the realm of male homosociality threatened the fabric of the theatrical space (Howard 92). As at the royal court and in Renaissance culture at large, the female represented a hazard to masculinity and its authority. This is illustrated particularly well by the turmoil brought on by the coronation of Queen Elizabeth I. The women of society found themselves situated within a largely male, homosocial England. Maureen Quilligan suggests that women learned to be obedient and recognize the necessity for male fantasy to be satisfied; they had to understand the stage was manipulated for the "visual pleasure of male

auditors" (Quilligan 209). Female portrayals on stage and reactions to

femininity in the audience reflected Elizabethan society (C. Wright 9).

Regarding the staging of the masculine, Jeanne Addison Roberts

argues that the theater space promoted "male vision and male discourse"

(15). Even with women present, male audience members along with male

performers could be objects of desire. According to James M. Saslow,

desire wasn't shared between men and women, but rather the kind of

desire normally associated with femininity was transferred from the

objectified feminine to the masculine. Male characters could be

eroticized, youthful adolescents playing women could be the object of

lustful fantasies, and the plays that emphasized the homoerotic could

produce homoerotic desire (41). The men on stage, who portrayed

characters through gender play, could launch desire, the gaze, and

finally elicit the homoerotic. As illustrated through the visual arts, the

gaze powerfully sexualizes an object because of its capacity to objectify.

This objectification can promote desire, but similarly, desire can also

facilitate the objectification of the character. The theater became a space

that exposed varied masculinities that interacted reciprocally with the

audience. Therefore, the masculine became a powerful object of desire to

the gaze of the audience members, especially given that the majority of

audience members were males, gazing upon a cast entirely comprised of

men.

The truly feminine, therefore, was separated from the gaze of the Elizabethan audience due to the absence of women from the stage and their rare attendance in the audience. The theater therefore served the interests of the Elizabethan patriarchy. Abigail Solomon-Godeau argues that

> [The] patriarchy, which can be generally characterized as a type of social organization in which greater power accrues to men, thus fostering forms of male domination and female subordination, produces in turn ideologies of gender that are reciprocally and relationally defined but always within a hierarchical structure in which greater power is possessed by men. (19)

By participating in the orchestration of femininity as that which is "other" than the masculine ideal, the Elizabethan theater underlined the "natural inferiority" of women found also in Socratic love, homosociality, and the idealization of masculinity (Comensoli 24). This inferiority is based on Medieval beliefs surrounding the natural capabilities of men and the natural incapability of women. Vern L. Bullough suggests a fetus was correct until it is born; if after birth it was identified as female then it was considered "faulty" and "defective." Therefore, the inferiority of women was influenced by older arguments of "anatomy and physiology" and the "one sex" theory of gender creation (34-35).

Moreover, traditionally accepted versions of the masculine would be accepted, cherished, and idolized on the stage, while "defective males of nature" (i.e. women) were marginalized by society and the patriarchy. Masculine portrayals like Shakespeare's warriors Hector and Ulysses *Troilus and Cressida,* for instance, embodied the dominant, heroic male so idealized since antiquity. These warrior masculinities, however, also include a multitude of different male-types: some, such as Patroclus, being more or less effeminate or masculine than others. Shakespeare's Adonis represents one popularized "type" of masculinity whose close relation to the feminine caused it to become associated with the homosexual. According to Saslow, "by extension, effeminacy became closely associated with homosexually," a transference that can apply to both feminine males in art and adolescents on stage, who, while disguised as women, would have still been associated with the submissive boy underneath (78-82). The youthful boys in Greek art, and the young man in some of Shakespeare's sonnets, like *Sonnet 29,* suggest an ongoing tradition of older men loving young men (Jardine 117). Just as in arts and poetry, the "Beardless Youth" on stage was a potent sexualized ideal whose beauty could be perceived to exceed that of women and girls, just as Shakespeare's Venus identified the youthful Adonis as "thrice fairer than I." Soft spoken, gentle, submissive, hopeful, and pure, these submissive, feminized boys represent a desired object

available to be "conquered" and simultaneously made available to the male audience (Howard 112). As sexualized objects on stage, as Ganymede-like or female characters, the boys represented themselves as powerful, tantalizing objects of the spectator's gaze. Not only would antiquity have set precursors for the eroticization of boys, but because they were portraying women who normally were the objectified and dominated individuals in society, the boys represented a replacement of women in sex (Howard 99). Therefore, boys replaced the absent women on stage physically and symbolically.

The boy actors could believably portray women, but at least at times the audience would know and remember the underlying male sexuality of the female characters. Their feminine portrayals would have been identifiable but not ridiculous; this base believability would have aided the "suspension of disbelief" (Buccola 169). Masquerading as a woman on stage required that the boys imitate "a set of learned social codes and mannerisms," with the result that the boys performed constructs of female gender, just as they would perform respectable masculine constructs outside the theater (Jardine 131). The audience's gaze would have been objectified onto the female performance, and the feminine construct would then be transferred to the boy players (Elton 95). Winfried Schleiner suggests that boys dressed in women's clothing would have complicated the actor's sexuality, and Saslow concludes that

"by extension, effeminacy becomes closely associated with homosexuality," therefore an effeminate man could be suspected being a passive sexual partner (Elton 82, Saslow 82). His penis is hidden or covered; it is missing from the sexuality he is performing, but the knowledge of its existence directly underneath the surface creates a "fetish," and the hidden sexuality becomes highly eroticized (Schleiner 607).

The audience's search for the hidden penis represents another instance in the theater space where the masculine is important and the feminine is excluded from interest. Of course, women are never given a possibility to become the desired object as none were allowed on stage, just as they were rarely given influence in society. Were it possible, the presences of a woman on stage, would have altered the relationship of the gaze to the homoerotic. "Gender panic" --the anxious reaction of gender play and exploration in society or in the arts--could have been stimulated, by the disrupted and disjunctive theater space by the presence of a woman on stage (38-58). According to Mark Breitenberg, "A theater in which women were actually present on stage might well have discouraged the exploration" that stimulated masculine fantasy within largely homosocial atmosphere (157). Females in the audience or on stage, would have had a new purpose rather than being erotic; like Venus, they too would have become a vehicle to masculine desire

through gendering on stage and the spectacle before the audience. In the existing theaters, the portrayal of a woman was not seen only as a woman but also signified as the "other" and, the portrayal of an evaluated based on her relationship to the masculine. Shakespeare's female characters would not have been understood as merely feminine, but would have reminded the audience of the boy actor's "hidden penis" underneath and its erotic charge given to the narrative. Findlay argues that "While male portrayals are emasculated, female characters often assume a masculine persona in the execution of their tasks" (72). The effects of women on drama caused boundaries of gender differentiation to blur and reiterated the ambiguity surrounding gender in the era. Likewise, heroic masculine representations could be objectified by the spectators in the audience, as was similarly depicted by artists of the era; both heroic and effeminate masculinities could have homoerotic desire projected on them by the audience. The objectification of one male by another could present a sexually dominant and submissive partner, so actors in the theater were automatically situated as submissive to the dominating, desiring audience. In the case of the English Renaissance stage, only the masculine was promoted: women, as with Venus in *Venus and Adonis*, were just a stimulant that heightened the homoerotic.

Not only the female character stimulated male titillation; as discussed in regards to the conquest of Venus for Adonis, the portrayed

heterosexual romance on stage could also imply homosexual love, as men were romancing men. Yoshiko Kawachi argues that "it seems to me that Shakespeare described the homosexual love through heterosexual love" and that heterosexual relationship, like the female character, becomes a method for amplifying the homoerotic (111-112). The gender play of actors "hiding penises" and chasing men was therefore capable of soliciting the homoerotic through on-stage heterosexual romances.

The theater was an environment of altered realities, which accommodated play between genders and sexualities easily. This ambiguity helped to alleviate some tensions and provided escape; this play with actuality allowed many readers and audience members the means to "escape" from society and into fantasy. Similar to the Shakespeare's poem this escape into drama is one that, as Schleiner argues, is completely "divorced from everyday life" and from the social issues plaguing the minds of people of the English Renaissance (606).

Opposite to the illness, political unrest, conflict, and social anxiety that burdened members of society were the theater's borderland qualities of ambiguity, play, and exploration that promoted enjoyment, and fantasy within its walls. The theater's fantastical qualities could to accommodate many desires and cultural discourses, mainly the masculine ones, which Dash argues allows Shakespearean plays to become vehicles of desire (247). This promotion of desire did not

necessarily cross over into female desire, however; in all theatrical portrayals, the male voice, male hand, male insight, and male desire causes the plays to elevate, idealize, and eroticize the masculine. They desire catered to the supported patriarchy.

While Shakespeare's intentions cannot be definitively known, it is probable that he understood the currents in society surrounding gender and sexuality and used his plays to reflect these current issues and desires. He knew the importance of supplying what the masses demanded. Brown argues that actors on the Shakespearean stage represented the "age and body of the time," and reiterates that what was portrayed on stage and in the written plays' text, cannot be separated from the issues in society (10-11). The relationship of the homoerotic and the stage is particularly prolific, and its expression is directly connected with this era (Forker 1). Spalding contends that Shakespeare's drama reflected this desire to explore the "true nature" of men (1).

The Elizabethan theater is not unlike the "pastoral" borderland described by Karoline Szatek with its multiple layers of context and interlaced erotic meaning; she uses the term to describe the potentiality for the homoerotic and homosexual in pastoral poetry (Szatek 243-252). A borderland is an atmosphere that promotes fantasy and hidden content behind the guise of some more obvious subject matter.

Identifying the Elizabethan theater as a borderland emphasizes the multidimensional nature of the performance but also, the sometimes concealed and yet valorized male/male sexual desire. Like imagination and fantasy, desire was a part of the audience's play-going experience; the audience was invited to participate in the realization of theatrically performed erotic desires (Brown 128-144). The gender play of male actors portraying men or women, could titillate a male audience. The borderland of the theater allowed homoerotic desire to become visible.

Particularly powerful were scenes representing an erotic exchange between a male and a female, or the pursuit of one character by another. Kawachi asserts that plays like Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, contain "male wooing between male players and male actors on stage," with the result being homoerotic or homosexual desire (115-116). By extension, this suggests eroticism in the interaction between actors on stage as well as in the relationship between audience members to the actors on stage. Stephen Greenblatt argues that the construction of the theater as a homoerotic zone was not accidental: "Shakespeare discovered the erotic power of the stage" understanding its potential popularity and the social influence of theatrical reflections on society. These were capitalized on, and the desires and anxieties of masculine society were explored and fantasized about (127).

In some instances, the drama produced homoerotic tensions between the gazing audience and eroticized actors. Specifically homosocial or homoerotic elements of a play could allude to the homosexual as in the portrayals of Achilles and Patroclus in *Troilus and Cresida*. In Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, the two male characters York and Suffolk share an intimate relationship. Howard and Rackin state that: "In *Henry V* the old association between homoerotic desire and martial valor is exemplified in their deaths on the battlefield at Agincourt," extending *Henry IV,* scene VI, "York turned 'and over Suffolk's neck threw his wounded arm, and kiss'd his lips, and so espous'd to death, with blood he seal'd a testament of noble-ending love'" (195). This relationship presents an intimate and passionate bond between two men, which that suggests a Socratic partnership and eroticism. The interaction between York and Suffolk symbolizes the valorous and perfected, yet sexualized, love as a type of Renaissance masculine ideal. *Henry IV, Part II,* also depicts a man, Hotspur, who asserts his masculinity by refusing his wife's attentions. Howard and Rackin contend that "Hotspur" affirms his masculinity, in fact, by banishing his wife from his bed" and that "Hotspur" affirms his masculinity, in fact by banishing his wife from his bed" (194). For Hotspur and his wife, the perfected love shared between two equal partners is reduced due to a heterosexual temptation that could

subordinate the male to a "lesser" being. Charles Forker references

contemporary "gay-lesbian criticism" when discussing the dispensability

of women in the era. Shakespeare seems to represent such views

through characters who, like Hotspur, enhance a heroic masculinity.

Forker notes that while early modern laws, church, and society

"demonized" sodomy, it embraced homosocial relationships and often

idealized same sex attractions. Although it was common for male adults

share beds, the situation offered a similar opportunity for suggestions of

the homoerotic or homosexual. Forker notes that a hypocritical

preferences for the homoerotic is evident in James I's attentions to "male

favorites" (2). In homosocial or homoeroticized relationships,

homosexuality does not necessarily follow, yet they tend to idealize the

masculine and promote the patriarchy. Joseph Cady contends that

during the Renaissance the "distinctly" homoerotic and homosexual were

so encrypted that they may have produced homosexual subcultures

(888).

Comedy and playfulness were central to Shakespeare's poem,

Venus and Adonis, as the "serious" love plight and gender play shared by

the two characters is comical. Through this tone, the reader is

comfortably invited to explore and enjoy the poem's many different layers

and sexual meanings. Similarly, the comedies on stage facilitate the

same euphoric escape from harsh, Renaissance realities more effectively

than more serious works because the emotions stimulated by heavy drama make it more difficult for the audience to *escape* into anything. In two of Shakespeare's comedic, lighthearted plays, *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and *As You Like It*, gender play is emphasized and offers an emergent homosexuality by soliciting the homoerotic through the gaze and through pastoral settings. The gender play of the stage together with the playfully suggestive text and transference of objectification onto men make the two plays particularly titillating examples of homoeroticized drama.

Both plays use the mystical forest as the setting. For example, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* uses the forest as the setting in much of the play. Within it magical things take place: not only is the fairy world is introduced, but also spells are used to alter affections between courting couples. Helen is infatuated with Demetrious who is interested in Hermia. Hermia, however, loves Lysander and all of these love interests are upset when Puck confuses Oberon's instructions. Eventually, both Lysander and Demetrious passionately desire each of the girls through due to, which seemingly makes the plot more confused and their relationships upset. The play is filled with scenes of the heterosexual chase, much like that illustrated in Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis*. In some instances male characters are desired by female characters, while in others, the male characters desire the females.

When the women are lustful and make conquests out of Lysander and

Demetrious, they situate themselves as the temporary dominant force:

greatly resembling Shakespeare's Venus and reiterating gender play.

This gender play maneuvers men and women back and forth between the

positions of dominator and dominated, is the main point of *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream (Sinfield 79). Not only is their gender play between some

actors and their roles as female characters, but also Hermia, Helena,

Demetrius, and Lysander's characters exchange the roles of the chased,

chaser, loved, and abandoned. Yet all characters are performed by

males, so all conquests are distinctively homoerotic; the male is chasing

the male, which heightens the homoerotic tension and fantasy due to the

desire of the masculine (Montrose 69). For example, Demetrius lusts

after the beautiful Hermia and therefore portrays a heroic, male

character chasing an effeminate, cross dressed adolescent male who

plays a woman. The suspension of disbelief needed for the success of the

theater would not have completely eroded the audience's understanding

of the gender play taking place on stage or of the "hidden penis"

underneath the feminine garb. After Lysander is bewitched, he

mistakenly falls out of love with Hermia and in love with Helena, causing

Hermia to transform from being desired by both Lysander and Demetrius

to being dispensed by both, in favor of Helena (York 37-38). The

confusion reaches an erotic climax when Hermia threatens Helena to win

back Lysander's love: "How low am I, thou painted maypole?/ Speak! How low am I? I am not yet so low/ But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes" (York 38). Here, two effeminate male actors playing women are prepared to battle on stage for the affection of Lysander, the heroic male character. It is because of the "hidden penis" and homosexual chase concealed by heterosexual narrative that this shift of love and infatuation from one male youth to another becomes eroticized. Throughout this play, there is a distinct embrace of the homoerotic subtext within the playful and ambiguous text. Hermia and Helena as costumed boys chasing after the affections of dominant male lovers together with comical and confused roles and attractions, situates the male at all points of desire and fantasy.

Shakespeare's *As You Like It* shares with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a focus on the homoerotic through the heterosexual confusion. The character Rosalind represents a character whose heterosexual love solicits the homoerotic. Her intense love for the courageous Orlando in itself can suggest homoeroticism; however, this is intensified once she enters the Forest of Arden, which acts as the "pastoral forest," and disguises herself (Howard 118). The female character, Rosalind is played by a male actor, she is costumed in men's clothes and through her, argues Gayle Rubin, the heteroerotic is shifted to the homoerotic (quoted in Howard 73). Most importantly, when she is asked to identify herself,

she assumes the name "Ganymede," which we have seen was an androgynous ideal borrowed from antiquity; Rosalind tells Celia "I'll have no worse name that Jove's own page;/And therefore look you call me Ganymede" (1.3.125-127). It is interesting that she, or Shakespeare, should pick that name in particular, as its mention establishes the ambiguous and suggests to the homosexual. Choosing the name of a androgynous ideal is in itself enough to elicit a borderland" homoerotic charge but where it is placed in the pastoral, borderland setting, the ambiguity of Ganymede is heightened. Salsow argues that a female character who choose a male, homosexual ideal would have denounced the feminine in favor of the masculine, which has the same effect as figuring heterosexual love to promote masculinity and sometimes homoeroticism (83). Gregory W. Bredbeck discusses a dictionary, *Glossographia*, from 1670 by Thomas Blount in reference to the description of the character Ganymede: "the name of a Trojan Boy, whom Jupiter [Zeus] so loved (say the poets) as he took him up to Heaven, and made him his Cup-bearer. Hence any Boy, loved for carnal abuse, or hired to be used contrary to Nature to commit the detestable sin of Sodomy, is called *Ganymede*, or ingle" (17).

The name Ganymede relates Rosalind's complex character to the homoerotic, simultaneously attaching new meaning to her love for Orlando (Howard 120). Rosalind as Ganymede is symbolic as well as

literal and is also reminiscent of the "Beauteous Youth"; according to Orlando, Rosalind makes a very beautiful, well spoken, and delicate Ganymede. Ganymede is so delicate, in fact, that *he* makes a believable *she*; and one that is idealized by Orlando and sexualized by the audience. Once Rosalind has began to perform the pseudo masculinity of Ganymede, the relationship between Ganymede and Orlando becomes one that is homoerotic in nature. Although Rosalind is in the guise of Ganymede, a boy actor is still under the Rosalind's character, so when Ganymede begins to woo Orlando, it suggests the homoerotic. Orlando reciprocates the homoerotic relationship as he pretends the pretty Ganymede is his beloved Rosalind, and performs as her beloved. Even before Rosalind allows Ganymede to perform to Orlando as a woman, Orlando interacts with Ganymede in a homosocial or homoerotic manner. Orlando continuously refers lovingly to Ganymede further stimulating the homoerotic discourse. Orlando questions him, "Where dwell you, pretty youth?" and praises him, "Your accent is something finer than you could purchase in so removed a dwelling" (3:2:352, 3:2:359-360). James Salsow argues that Rosalind's relationship to gender becomes both confused and charged with sexual tension. Before she assumes her new identity as Ganymede, she is outwardly feminine and inwardly male but afterwards is outwardly male and inwardly female. At one point, the boy actor portrays the female Rosalind. Later

he takes on the persona of Ganymede who pretends to be Rosalind. This is for the benefit of both parties; Rosalind is hoping to be closer to Orlando while concealed and she also wants to help Orlando express himself, as if Rosalind were there, instead of Ganymede. Therefore, there are two cases portrayed on stage, aside from the boy actor playing a woman, when Rosalind performs the role of Ganymede and when Ganymede performs as Rosalind. In both cases, the masculine assumes a central position by being either wearing a female's clothes or being a female pretending to take on an androgynous homoerotic ideal (77-83).

Upon entering the forest, Rosalind discusses with her friend Celia whether she should become a man once inside the Forest of Arden: "Because that I am more than common tall,/ That I did suit me all points like a man? A gallant curtle-axe upon my thigh,/ A boar-spear in my hand; and- in my heart/ Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will-" (1:3:116-121). Rosalind suggests that manhood, like the femininity that male actors must embody, is nothing but a performance and can be mimicked. If Rosalind can wear her costume in a certain way and hold herself in a tall, gallant way, she could potentially pass as a believable man. Therefore, gender is a performative construct. This performative quality is reiterated once Rosalind is overcome with despair and hopelessness at being separated from Orlando and realizes that her actions might seem effeminate: "I could find it in my heart to disgrace my

man's apparel and to cry like a woman; but I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat" (2:4:4-8). Celia responds to Rosalind's sadness on a later occasion by suggesting that tears would be incorrectly performing masculinity: "Do, I prithee; but yet have the grace to consider that tears do not become a man" (2:4:2-3). This advice from Celia likewise suggests that gender is a constructed façade, which can be as believable as an actor can perform. This performance wavered in some instances throughout the play. At one point, Celia argues that "You [Rosalind] have simply misused our sex in your love-prate," and she argues that her male/female representation confused and misrepresented the potential of femininity (4:1:206-207). Later, after hearing that Orlando has been injured by a lion, Ganymede swoons, and Oliver contends to him: "Be of good cheer, youth: you a man! you lack a man's heart" (4:3:165-166). This is quintessentially the essence of the Ganymede figure; often this homosexual ideal has the body of a fair boy and the delicate heart of a woman, which reiterates submissive sexual qualities, as referenced by Gregory W. Bredbeck (17). The gender play by Rosalind in *As You Like It* is helpful in "fulfilling emotional happiness" rather than "threatening" it, therefore the gender play of actors to characters and characters altering gender has a positive impact on the narrative (16).

Once Rosalind's character of Ganymede begins to perform as Rosalind in order to achieve the intimacy with Orlando, Orlando's reciprocation of Ganymede's attentiveness to fulfill his needs centralizes homosexuality rather than a heterosexual chase. Ganymede instructs Orlando to pretend he is Rosalind and to love him the way he would love her; Ganymede contends, "Nay, you must call me Rosalind" (3:2:454-455). Ganymede states that he can "cure" Orlando of his love for the absent Rosalind by allowing Ganymede to assume the role of Rosalind to Orlando, as Rosalind explains to Celia: "He was to imagine me his love, his mistress; and I set him every day to woo me: at which time would I, being but a moonish youth, grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles, for every passion something and for no passion truly anything, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this colour" (3:2:428-435).

For the span of the play wherein Ganymede and Orlando are "courting" one another, Orlando pretends to marry, love whole-heartedly, and kiss the feminine Ganymede. Given the loving and sexualized manner that the two characters interact with one another, it is easy to discount that they are "pretending" to love at all. It seems that the two are portraying a homoerotic love dialogue, until Orlando is forced to leave Ganymede: "For these two hours, Rosalind, I will leave thee. I must

attend the Duke at dinner; by two o'clock I will be with thee again"
(4:1:180-181, 4:1:184-185). The positive influence gender play has on
the plot hints to the popularity and harmlessness gender play has in
everyday life. Not only does Ganymede stir the homoerotic in interplay
with Orlando, but in the fashion of "Ganymede" figures, he can be
attractive to both male and female admirers. As in art and
Shakespeare's Venus, androgynous figures such as these can titillate
both sexualities. However, because these events took place on stage, the
male acting and the audience's objectifying gaze put a unique spin on the
heterosexual relationship. This is illustrated by Phebe, who is infatuated
with the fair Ganymede and who again depicts a heterosexual conquest
that seemingly promotes the homosexual. Ganymede attempts to deflect
her attraction, yet Phebe remains steadfast in her love: "I pray you, do
not fall in love with me,/ For I am falser than vows made in wine:/
Besides, I like you not" (3:5:72-74). After Rosalind exits, Phebe idealizes
Ganymede and simultaneously eroticizes him

> Tis but a peevish boy; yet he talks well;
>
> But what care I for words? yet words do well
>
> When he that speaks them pleases those that hear.
>
> It is a pretty youth: not very pretty:
>
> But, sure, he's proud, and yet his pride becomes him:
>
> He'll make a proper man: the best thing in him

Is his complexion; and faster than his tongue

Did make offence his eye did heal it up.

He is not very tall; yet for his years he's tall:

His leg is but so so; and yet 'tis well:

There was a pretty redness in his lip,

A little riper and more lusty red

Than that mix'd in his cheek; 'twas just the difference

Betwixt the constant red and mingled damask." (3:5:110-124)

Her romantization of Ganymede, even through his femininity, eroticizes

him and her attraction to him suggests the homoerotic; the titillating and

complex gender play boils down to a boy actor playing Phebe wooing the

boy actor playing Rosalind. Arguably, every female character portrayed

on stage could be seen as a Ganymede-like entity, both feminine and

male, but centered around the desires and interests of men, mankind,

and the patriarchy. Inside the forest, Rosalind's character begins further

gender play: a boy dressed up as a woman dressed up as a man. This is

comical but points to significant desires and anxieties of society, and the

overt gender play would have been titillating to male society by hinting to

the possibilities of eroticism and gender portrayal.

Ruben emphasizes the centrality of the patriarchal influence and

prevalence in all aspects of society and social product is who suggests

that Shakespeare seems to be interested in "Male characters, male

themes, male fantasies" rather than femininity as anything other than a vehicle (Burrow 113). The popularity of his plays reflect the intense desire of society to become "lost" in the theater arena and escape their anxious culture. Forker suggests that the theater was "a communal agency for enjoying, flaunting, reproving, or even thoughtfully exploring the sexual side of human nature" and through that exploration have an opportunity for the audience to fantasize and explore (7). In plays the forest borderland, much like that described by Szatek, seems central in facilitating the magic of love, as in *A Midsummer's Nights Dream* and the homoerotic androgyny of *As You Like It*. The forest, like the theater, is a domain of fantasy and possibilities. Jeanne Roberts suggests that forests often are portrayed as "mysterious, magical, and ambiguous" and allow "exploration, play, and interpretation." In many instances, the forest is directly linked to the feminine and therefore suggests female ambiguity in culture (24-25). At base theatrical expression is much like that of the visual arts and poetry, is gender and sexuality in the changing world of the Renaissance. Forker suggests that sexuality goes hand in hand with the human condition because of its direct link to emotions and the basic instincts of the human species (10). Sexuality, homosexual or heterosexual, is engrained in the individual and in the English and Italian Renaissance, and it is sometimes dictated, promoted, or deemed necessary. Shakespeare's plays were able to unlock fantasies

and confuse gender constructs to create a fantastical realm of escape and excitement that was notorious, even in the Renaissance, for being erotic, seducing, and soliciting to the audience and often to represent social and political issues directly related to Renaissance England (Callaghan 146-151).

CONCLUSION

Masculinity was so idealized and centralized in Renaissance society that it infiltrated the artistic products they produced; yet literature, visual arts, and theater reflect the deep running sense of anxiety and fear about challenges to that masculinity. Masculine anxiety affected the emotions of society and their collective expression in the arts. Some parts of Elizabethan society were consumed by the humanist "rebirth" of ancient ideals like Socratic love and by Medieval ideals of heroic masculinity that mixed with an eroticized, perfected idea of manhood. In varied masculinities, men were generally situated in a dominant position relative to women, and this statues was strengthened by the traditional gender roles assigned by religion and Elizabethan culture.

The patriarchy had long stood as the apex of all cultural circuits of authority, although it was threatened by the social force of Queen Elizabeth I's coronation and successful reign. She was a female figure who projected herself as a capable leader by appropriating an androgynous gender. Elizabeth had the body of a woman but argued she had the mind, heart, and stomach of a man. She contended that she could rule and love her people better than any male sovereign could.

She not only represented a female capable of ruling over men, but she simultaneously reconsolidated the power formally allotted to the courts and nobility. Because she believed in an absolute monarchy, she wanted no power to approach her own. Because she had confiscated the authority that men wrought, Renaissance masculinities were reconstructed to reestablish identity and power.

Elizabeth's authority also challenged the constructs of gender that had long been established by society, through the androgynous role she assumed. She modeled gender play for others, from the throne to the court and from the court to the streets and then on to artistic representations. Shakespeare's poem, *Venus and Adonis*, likewise portrays eroticized gender play wherein gender roles shift to create both comic relief and lustful titillation through the portrayals and interactions of the characters. The masculine gender was often highly idealized as the strong, heroic, noble male promoted in the males forms drawn by Michelangelo. Other innovative representations of the masculine were like the androgynous Ganymede or the effeminate male portrayed by Caravaggio or Shakespeare's Adonis. Masculinity was multiplied in the Renaissance, as it is a collaborative construct of various eras and cultures.

Humanism, borrowing models from antiquity, not only idealized but promoted the masculine as rational, beautiful, superior, and divine.

Masculinity seemed God-like and capable of forming strong, dynamic, heroic relationships with other men. The homosocial was not as available to women, and it tended to separate the sexes, one being promoted above the other. This promotion of mankind and the beautiful, desirous male promoted a masculine world to the point that even a heterosexual love or discourse could be portrayed in art; it tended to emphasize masculine homoeroticism. In the gender play so popular in the era, women lusted after men, with their desire projected onto the male ideal form.

Manhood was central on the stage as well. The stage was an arena for masculinity because of its ability to separate the sexes. Though gender could be androgynously presented on stage, women were the "other" group in the theater as in society. The playwrights, most patrons, and all actors were male. Here, especially, heterosexual encounters were particularly stimulating due to the homoerotic qualities of males chasing males, the eroticized gaze of actor to audience, and the male/male interaction due to all characters being disguised males. Shakespeare sometimes portrays socially idealized masculinity, and he at other times promotes sexual fantasy through ambiguous character portrayals and plots that allow the audience/readers/patrons to project their desires and fantasies onto the work. Such projections, in part, result from his play-texts, but they are also due to the theater because of

its qualities as a fantastical borderland. This arena allowed for an escape from the anxieties and realities, and it presented the opportunity to explore issues of gender and sexuality resonant in an anxious society.

What makes all these varied idealizations of the masculinity so significant is the consistent promotion of the masculine over the feminine. Mankind was distinguished from femininity by power, money, station, anatomy, and law in such a way that femininity was effectively disconnected from anything besides the acknowledgment of being the "defective male." Men were in turn elevated beyond even the earthly realm of rituals at court to become equated with the divine. Their differentiation may have begun as "natural" differences shared between the dominant and "frailer" sex, but it later grew to set the feminine against a multilayered and complex masculinity. Multifaceted masculinity could be represented as a Ganymede-type androgyne, a muscular, heroic warrior, a gallant and noble knight, a decorated king, or a delicate male youth. The multiplicity of the masculinities suggests not that a particular male type was desired and thereby promoted, but rather that maleness was of central importance. Whether the figure was to inspire social climbing, increase courtly power, escape from the confines of strict gender constructs, titillate viewers by suggesting sexual subordination, promote brotherly or intimate male relationships or arousal based on gallantry, heroism, and grace, the artist's illustration or

performance was directed to the male eye and heart. Masculinity's struggle to situate itself in response to the dominating force of Queen Elizabeth I influenced the lives of English people, and it produced exploration and questioning in the cultural, artistic products. These cultural products should not be separated from the social discourse that influenced its creation as it gives insight into meaning and context of the art and its creators. Even the personal acts of individuals such as the gaze or performativity, though sometimes enacted subconsciously, responded to profound cultural influences.

APPENDIX: FIGURES

Figure 1
*Posthumous statue of Marcus
Claudius Marcellus*

Figure 2
*Castor and Pollux or Corydon and
Alexis*

Figure 3
Bacchus

Figure 4
Study of Adam, Sistine Chapel

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Figure 5
Venus and Adonis

Figure 6
Venus and Adonis
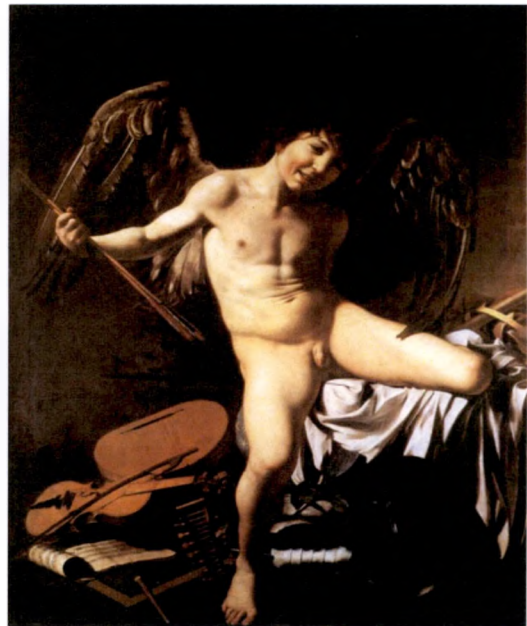

Figure 7
Boy with a Basket of Fruit

Figure 8
Amor Vincit Omnia

Figure 9
St. John the Baptist

Figure 10
*The Land of the Hermaphrodites, from
a Livre des Merveilles*

Figure 11
Venus and Adonis

Figure 12
Venus and Adonis
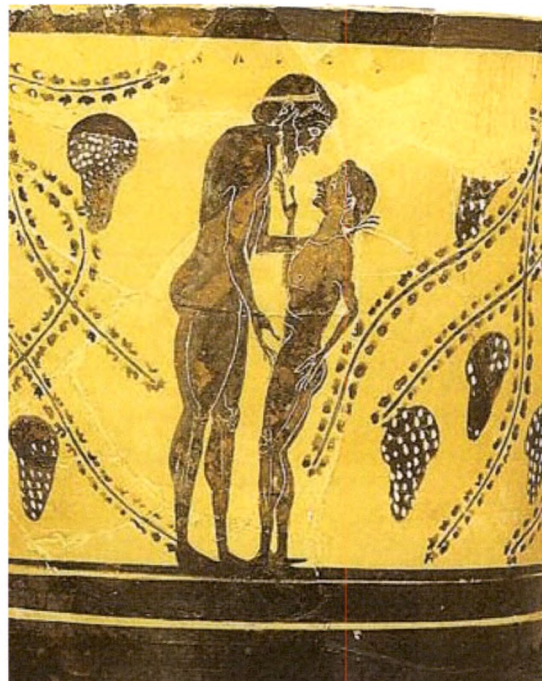
Figure 13
St. John the Baptist

Figure 14
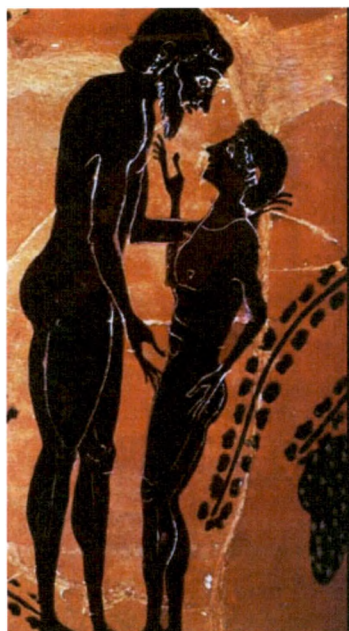*A scene of a man titillating
young boy*

Figure 15
*A man and a boy on
a black figure vase*

Figure 16
Kissing Competition

Figure 17
The Dying Slave

Figure 18
Venus and Mars

Figure 19
Three Labours of Hercules

Figure 20
Study for Haman

Figure 21
Dawn

Figure 22
Night

Figure 23
Thetis with Two Tritons

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