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17th Century British Literature
Term Paper

Balance Achieved: Homo-Neutrality in the Poems of Katherine Philips

One of the principal objectives of modern literary scholarship is the contextualization of primary texts with aspirations of divulging authorial meaning and significance within the relevant contextual framework. Such aspirations can be perceived amongst the burgeoning erudition of feminine and lesbian/queer academia beguiled by the prevaricated poetry of seventeenth-century interregnum poet, Katherine Philips. Most contemporary scholarship has consensually typified the poetry of Katherine Philips as being inherently homoerotic– specifically, the homoeroticism attributed to female-female sexual desires. Arlene Stiebel, in her article "Subversive Sexuality: Masking the Erotic in Poems by Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn," suggests that lesbian homoeroticism is ubiquitous throughout the collected poetry of Katherine Philips: "How can contemporary critics continue to overlook, if not deny outright, the lesbian content of poems so clearly erotically charged with the love of women for women?"[1] Although Stiebel is correct in recognizing the irrefutable erotic language within Philips' poetry, it is possible that the charged colloquial conventions that characterize Philips' works are not exclusively equitable with the authorial intent and prescribed meaning contended by scholars who isolate a distinct female homoerotic initiative within the texts of Katherine Philips. In other words, Philips' erotic language does not necessarily betray evidence that the homoerotic insinuations are exclusively pertinent to Philips' personal acuity regarding female desire and sexuality.

[1] Arlene Stiebel, "Subversive Sexuality: Masking the Erotic in Poems by Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn,"*Renaissance Discourses of Desire.* ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth. (Columbia: University of Michigan Press, 1993): 225.

By approaching Philip's poems from a linguistically deconstructive perspective, I hope to provide sufficient evidence demonstrating that despite the erotic language of Katherine Philips' collected works the poems themselves cannot be singularly typified as being intrinsically illustrative of female same-sex desire.

The purpose of this explication is not to debase current scholarship that has characterized Philips' poetry as being wholly symptomatic of female homoerotic desire. The epistemological implications Valerie Traub identifies in her extensive book, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, acknowledge that female same-sex desires "were culturally practiced and represented in a variety of ways" and are indicative of what she refers to as "a *renaissance* of representations of female homoerotic desire"[2]; therefore, it would be erroneous to contend that a female homoerotic reading of Philips' poetry is not sufficiently constitutive of a valid interpretation of the prevalent erotic language. Rather, I propose an additional interpretation of the erotic conventions exploited by Katherine Philips under the premise that it is justifiably possible to construe the erotic and homoerotic language of Philips' poetry as being "homo-neutral." Philips' linguistic patterns suggest a unique balance and gender neutrality that is effectively achieved through the deliberate juxtaposition of contrasting engendered subjects and idiomatic imagery. Consequently, the gender neutrality and general equilibrium manifested throughout her collective works reveal that the homoerotic suggestions are neither exclusively "lesbian" nor "straight," but rather, the subversive erotic language reveals an impartial heterosexual depiction of balance that consciously appealed to seventeenth century societal expectations of erotic behaviors and the restricted engendered capacity such behaviors were attributed. This is not to say that the balance itself is characterized as being inherently

[2] Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 6-7.

heterosexual, but the methods in which Philips' poetry delegates the proposed gender neutrality is reflective of what seventeenth century society perceived as being erotically typical. I will return to this distinction later when discussing specific examples of juxtaposition and how Philips contrasts engendered subjects and images to achieve erotic balance and gender neutrality.

The alternate interpretation I have proposed will attempt to reconcile the homo-neutrality of Katherine Philips' *amicitia* poetry within three collaborative expanses: the separation of presumed authorial intend from homoerotic poetic discourse, the hetero origins of "The Society of Friendship," and the subversive linguistics of Philips' erotic language.

Fallacy Exposed

Contemporary scholars who endorse a lesbian affirmative interpretation of Katherine Philips' poetic works often circumscribe authorial intent to biographical speculation regarding Philips' alleged relationships with women such as Lucasia and Rosania, the principal objects of her coterie correspondences. Although such practices have become conventional within the field of literary criticism, assumptions regarding authorial intent are often subjected to what William .K Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley identified as the intentional fallacy. According to Wimsatt and Beardsley, the intentional fallacy fundamentally asserts that the author cannot be recreated within the text; therefore, any delineated meaning deduced from an author's poetic works are exclusively determined by the reader's subjective experiences upon interacting with the objective text. Any extraneous details relative to the author's life and behaviors are consequently limited by the textual evidence.[3] The deconstructive reasoning articulated throughout this explication can be predominately attributed to Wimsatt and Beardsley's axiomatic assertion which argues, "If the poet succeeded in doing it [the poet's intent], then the poem itself shows what he was trying

[3] William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review* 54, No. 3 (Jul-September, 1946): 468-470.

to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem – for evidence that did not become effective in the poem."[4]

The recreation of Philips' authorial intent has largely been conducted by means of a Sapphic discourse that struggles to appropriate homoerotic identity within an era that had not yet conventionalized terminology that could suitably define same-sex desire and intercourse – specifically those desires ascribed to women who modern scholars regard as perpetuating a transgression of sexual and gender archetypes within seventeenth century England. In an effort to validate Philips' homoerotic sentiments, secondary sources are explored and collaborated with biographical references extrapolating Philips' female relationships and erotic content of her verses as sufficient evidence demonstrating her lesbian homoerotic affixations toward Lucasia (Anne Owen) and Rosania (Mary Aubrey). However, as Paula Loscocco stresses in her article "Inventing the English Sappho: Katherine Philips's Donnean Poetry," "regarding her [Philips] poetry as autobiographical code, readers reduce it to its alleged political or sexual content and respond to it with perplexing ideological passion."[5] The reduction Loscocco deliberates does not necessarily denounce the cogency of the secondary sources themselves but rather the methods in which scholars exploit extraneous details in conjunction with "modern systems of intelligibility" in order to situate Philips' erotic language within a marginalized lesbian affirmative context.[6] Limiting Philips' homoerotic language and its supposed connotations to what is demarcated from secondary sources consequently discourages a poem's potential of being interpreted as anything but a subversive expression of Philips' female desire.

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[4] Ibid 469

[5] Paula Loscocco, "Inventing the English Sappho: Katherine Philips's Donnean Poetry." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*102, no. 1 (Jan., 2003): 60.

[6] Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 26.

Valerie Traub observes that depictions of female same-sex desire in the Renaissance and seventeenth century "depend heavily on classical antecedents for their modes of comprehension."[7] The extent to which a classical discourse affects contemporary epistemological understandings of Philips' poetry can be discerned in the methodical, yet generalized, parallels that accordingly situate Philips within the homoerotic tradition of Sappho, "the originary embodiment of same-sex female desire."[8] Harriette Andreadis' book, *Sappho in Early Modern England*, investigates the influence of Sappho on sixteenth and seventeenth female writers and its subsequent relevance in allocating sexual identities to women such as Katherine Philips, whose writings were received as a contravention of the preconceived expectations governing the parameters of sexual propriety within early modern society. As Andreadis observes, "despite the ambiguities of her sexual reputation, Sappho became the one figure associated with female poetic excellence; she was the sole ancient model to which contemporary women writers might compare themselves and to who they might be compared."[9]

The Sapphic myth and its subsequent influence on seventeenth century female writers is derived from Ovid's account of Sappho and Phaon recorded in the *Heroides.* Ancient literary traditions such as Athenian comedies exemplify Sappho as the epitomic woman whose explicit sexual desires toward other women transgressed societal boundaries regulating tolerable erotic proclivities; however, Ovid's rendition of Sappho is characterized by her rejection of previous female lovers in pursuit of the ferryman, Phaon. Ovid concludes his reconfiguration of the Sappho myth with Sappho lamenting both the absence of her female cohorts and the "unrequited

[7] Ibid 8
[8] Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001): 27.
[9] Ibid 38

passion for the much younger Phaon" and consequently commits suicide.[10] Sappho's suicide, according to Andreadis, is the consequence of being "seduced away both from her art and from her female companions by a self-destructive heterosexual obsession."[11] Such assimilations subliminally effect how Sappho and other ancient literary traditions are attributed to Katherine Philips's poetic discourse on female friendship. Andreadis' attempt to rationalize Sappho's suicide as a consequence of heterosexual attraction despite past sexual endeavors with other women invariably promotes a negative perception of any heterosexual eroticism that may collaborate in conjunction with Philips' homoerotic conventions. In 1749, an anonymously published tract, *Satan's Harvest Home,* further restricts the Sappho-Philips typology by depicting Sappho within an exclusive lesbian context.

> *Sappho,* as she was one of the wittiest Women that ever the world did bred, so she thought with Reason, it would be expected she should make some Additions to a *Science* in which Womankind had been so successful: What does she do then? Not content with our Sex, begins *Amours* with her own, and teaches the Female World A new Sort of Sin, call'd the *Flats,* that was follow'd not only in *Lucian's* Time, but is Practis'd frequently in *Turkey*, as well as at *Twickenham* at this day.[12]

Although similarities in style and linguistic conventions often persuade modern scholars to equate Philips' authorial intent to the questionable same- sex eroticism perpetuated by Sappho, admirers and acquaintances of Philips, such as Abraham Cowley, resisted such associations even in the seventeenth century:

> They talk of *Sappho*, but, alas! the shame

[10] Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001): 28
[11] Ibid 29
[12] *Satan's Harvest Home* (London: 1749) 18.

Ill manners soil the lustre of her fame.

Orinda's inward Vertue is so bright

That, like a Lantern's fair enclosed light,

It through the Paper shines where she doth write.[13]

Although comparative analyses of Sappho and Philips' linguistic conventions are beneficial in interpreting the same-sex female eroticism prevalent within Philips' friendship poetry, exclusively typifying Philips as a Sapphic-woman who indubitably experienced similar same-sex desires discourages the relevance of the subversive erotic conventions Philips consistently employed to propagate gender neutrality and balance.

Supplementing the Sapphic model of comparison are additional secondary sources that attempt to rationalize the homoeroticism of Philips' poetry within a strict lesbian-affirmative interpretation. In her book, *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment*, Elizabeth Wahl situates Philips within a "historical proximity to an influx of homoerotic and pornographic materials from France following the restoration of Charles II." The access Philips may have had to female same-sex erotica has consequently "led some scholars to use evidence of burgeoning interest in tribadism and erotic depictions of female-female desire to surmise that a widespread cultural consciousness of lesbianism had already arisen earlier in the century."[14] Although an examination of erotic literature in the seventeenth century is critical in defining the historical and social context in which Philips authored her poetry on female friendship, scholars unconsciously violate the intentional fallacy whenever they utilize these extraneous biographical and literary sources to equivocate assumptions claiming Philips' works reveal a "woman whose emotional focus was primarily on other women and whose passionate

[13] Ibid 38

[14] Elizabeth Wahl, *Invisible Relations* (Standford: Standford University Press, 1999.): 140

involvement with them guided much of her life and inspired her most esteemed poems."[15] The intentional fallacy dictates an objective approach to literary criticism; therefore, despite the possibility of Philips being inspired by ancient and contemporary depictions of female homoeroticism, it is erroneous to assume that the authorial intent of her poetry was to specifically recapitulate the sexual desires she experienced toward other women – the subversive function of her homoerotic language constitutes a more complex destabilization of gender and sexuality. However, the influx of seventeenth century female homoerotic materials has dominated critical assessments of Philips' poetry and has accordingly perpetuated a "late-twentieth-century lesbian aesthetic"[16] which Traub confesses is "an exceptionally compressed and admittedly inadequate rubric for a wide, and sometimes conflicting, range of afflictive and erotic desires, practices, and affiliations, which have taken different historical forms and accrued varied historical meanings." Although Traub implements a relatively moderate lesbian-affirmative perception of Philips' poetic works, she too struggles with avoiding a modern intellectual conception of lesbianism when deliberating female authors whose writings explored the nature of same-sex desire and friendship in the early modern period. Traub acknowledges, "to use the term lesbian when discussing early modern texts is prematurely to unify concepts that only began to come into contact, jostle, and intersect late in the period"; however, she consistently employs the term lesbian as a "representational image, a rhetorical figure, a discursive effect"[17] to explicate the homoeroticism apparent in Philips' verses addressed to female acquaintances within the Society of Friendship. When addressing the function of Philips'

[15] Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001): 57.
[16] Ibid 57
[17] Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 15.

homoerotic subjectivity, Traub attempts to evade circumstantial assumptions by proposing a "wedge between Philips as author and 'Philips' as lyric voice and persona." Quoting Joel Fineman, Traub asserts that such a distinction is necessary when contemplating the subversive correlations existing between Philips' erotic conventions, literary subjectivity, and the pertinent historical context in which she wrote: "the literary formation of the self occurs in the slippage between self-presence and representation; it is only through such slippages that the voicing of the lyric subject are interpretable as expressing a deeply interiorized desire."[18] Contrary to Traub's attempts to isolate autobiographical assumptions from poetic representation, the rhetorical strategy she adopts to cogitate the homoerotic content of Philips' collected works involuntarily constitutes a violation of the intentional fallacy. For Traub's model to function correctly, a predetermined lyrical subject and notion of desire must be established prior to poetic inquiry. The "slippages" in Philips' lyric voice insinuate that all instances of homoeroticism, specifically the homoerotic conventions attributed to the Renaissance male *amicitia* tradition, are inherently symptomatic of a single interiorized desire that is idiosyncratically separate from the physical and emotional desires of Katherine Philips as author. Otherwise, if a lyrical subject is not determined prior to inquiry, then there would be no way of distinguishing the "slippages" in Philips' lyrical voice. Consequently, the symbiotic functionality allocated by Traub's proposed rhetorical stratagem diminishes the significance and self-sufficiency of both male and female homoerotic conventions which can additionally be construed as functioning independently of one another; therefore, interpretations that observe simultaneous representations of male and female homoeroticism throughout Philips' coterie poetry are equally feasible.

Balance Defined

[18] Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 12.

Prior to evaluating the utility of feminine and masculine homoerotic conventions throughout Philips' collected works, it is prudent to first discern how Philips' perceived balance as a conceptual union of two prevalent opposites. The recurrent patterns of Katherine Philips' linguistically dichotic conventions are integral to the prevalent balance characterizing her collected works; furthermore, the poetic balance Philips achieved is additionally indicative of gender neutrality that objects to claims by Stiebel and others who emphasize a dominant discourse of erotic desire circumscribed to the female gender alone. Philip's acknowledges her perception of balance in the following selection from the poem "L'accord du bien"[19]:

1

Order, by which all things were made,
And this great world's foundation laid,
Is nothing else but Harmony,
Where different parts are brought t'agree.

2

As Empires are still best maintain'd
Those ways which first their greatness gain'd
So is this Universal frame
What made and keeps it is the same

3

Thus all things unto peace do tend;
Even discords have it for their end.
The cause why Elements do fight,
Is but their instinct to Unite.

Balance, or harmony, according to Philips, is the ultimate result of the compulsory unification of at least two contradicting "Elements." Moreover, Philips alleges that these

[19] Katherine Philips, *The Matchless Orinda,* ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990): 169, lines 1-12.

"different parts" are possessed of an instinctive inclination to "Unite" and resolve unto a natural state of equilibrium. The model of balance Philips articulates in "L'accord du bien" fundamentally resembles a dialectical discourse in which she juxtaposes two dichotic notions, a thesis and antithesis, to perpetuate a synthesized conception of balance delineated by the "rhetoric of friendship that Philips uses to describe an egalitarian relationship of mutual sympathy and a mystic transformation of two selves into one soul."[20]

The platonic mingling of two souls is paramount to Philips' idyllic configuration of balance which can be observed by the "transportation of two hearts into one body" and the subsequent "union–or marriage–of souls between friends."[21]The image of unified souls can be discerned as a complex metaphysical vehicle in which the gender of the apparent homoerotic language is neutralized by Philips' linguistically dichotomous patterns and conventions. The unusual conventions Philips' delegates to the union of two souls suggest an exploitation of societal and introspective sensitivities toward same-sex love and friendships in order to perpetuate a perception of balance that contends with the gender binary institutionalized in early modern England. Loscocco ascertains that Philips developed a "noncomparative discourse appropriated to the union that is, given the gendering of Renaissance rhetoric, explicitly identified with female eroticism"[22]; however, the egalitarian structure of two unified souls reveals an inherent balance that is neither feminine nor masculine but rather an ambiguously defined eroticism that transcends the limitations imposed by a gender binary methodology. The

[20] Elizabeth Wahl, *Invisible Relations* (Standford: Standford University Press, 1999.): 147.
[21] Refer to Harriette Andreadis' "Re-configuring Early Modern Friendship: Katherine Philips and Homoerotic Desire." 525. Here, Andreadis quotes the anonymous M.B. (1596) and an anonymous work translated by Thomas Breme (1584) to illustrate the quintessential bonds between the fused identities characterizing "true friendships."
[22] Paula Loscocco, "Inventing the English Sappho: Katherine Philips's Donnean Poetry." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*102, no. 1 (Jan., 2003): 62.

following selection from "A Friend"[23] offers insight into Philips' assessment of female same sex friendships and the balanced attributed to the natural function of twin souls:

1

Love, nature's plot, this great Creation's soule,
The being and the Harmony of things,
Doth still preserve and propagate the whole,
From whence man's happiness and safety spring:
The early'st, whitest, blessed'st times did draw
From her alone their Universall Law.

2

Friendship is abstract of this noble flame,
'Tis love refin'd and purg'd from all its drosse,
The next to Angells Love, if not the same,
Stronger than passion is, though not so grosse:
It antedates a glad Eternity,
And is a heaven in Epitomy.

3

Nobler then kindred or then mariage band,
Because more free; wedlock felicity
If self doth only by this Union stand,
And turns to friendship or to misery.
Force or design matches to passe may bring,
But Friendship doth from love and honour spring.

4

If no soules no sexes have, for men 't' exclude
Woman from friendship's vast capacity,
Is a design injurious and rude,
Onley maintain'd by partiall tyranny.

[23] Katherine Philips, *The Matchless Orinda,* ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990). 165-166, Lines 1-24.

Love is allow'd to us, and Innocence,
And noblest friendships doe proceed from thence.

As David Robinson argues in his book *Closeted Writing and Lesbian and Gay Literature Classical, Early Modern, Eighteenth Century,* "Philips herself emphasizes the essential sameness and equality of the sexes: the essence of a person is the soul, which is neither male nor female, but human."[24] The neutrality of the soul's gender constitutes a crucial example of poetic language that according to Wahl, "aspires to transcend the body."[25] When considering the soul as an amorphous entity separated from the body, the gender binary model often exploited for comparative analysis loses its absolute validity; without a definite somatic identity it becomes fundamentally impossible to engender the object of the soul's desire; "If no soules no sexes have, for men 't' exclude/ Woman from friendship's vast capacity,/ Is a design injurious and rude." According to Philips, "Harmony" is attributed to "the great Creation's soule" which is the ultimate source of all men's contentment and efficacious accomplishments. Philips additionally suggests that the "great Creation's soule" is the source from which the domain of men derive "their Universall Law." Despite Philips' claims that souls are genderless, the balance Philips illustrates in *A Friend,* can be defined within a pseudo-cause-and-effect relationship; a feminine perception of love and friendship are construed as being the idyllic model and consequential cause for the propagation of men's particular actions in love and friendship – the result is an equivalence dictated by the "possibilities for a female friendship equal in depth and fullness to the idealized soul-friendships of men."[26] Furthermore, "the ventriloquized male voice and verbal

[24] David Robinson, *Closeted Writing and Lesbian and Gay Literature Classical, Early Modern, Eighteenth Century* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006): 24.
[25] Elizabeth Wahl, *Invisible Relations* (Standford: Standford University Press, 1999.): 147.
[26] Andreadis Harriette, "Re-Configuring Early Modern Friendship: Katherine Philips and Homoerotic Desire." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 46,* no. 3 (Summer, 2006): 534.

cross-dressing"[27] evident in *A Friend*, are symptomatic of the balanced erotic linguistic system manifested throughout Philip's collected works.[28] This equality and balance which characterizes the platonic union of souls is further accentuated in "Friendship in Embleme, or the Seal. To my Dearest Lucasia."[29]

4

They flame, 'tis true, and severall ways,

But still those flames doe so much raise,

That while to either they incline

They yet are noble and divine.

The image of the flame, according to Traub, acknowledges "the presence of erotic heat, admitting that their hearts are aflame and that these flames move in 'several ways'[30]; the flames are 'noble and divine' regardless of the ways in which 'they incline.' Many of Philips' poems that embrace friendship or the union between two souls as the primary subject incorporated similar images that allude to equivalence and balance which is neither exclusively applicable to the predominant female or male homoeroticism.

If balance is the ultimate product in the synthesis of at least two disparate elements, then one may question how the homoeroticism manifested throughout Philips' collected works is indicative of a gender neutrality and equilibrium. By definition, the prefix "homo" functions adjectivally to describe an inherent sameness between at least two compared objects whether they be a person, place, thing, or ideological concept. It may therefore seem that Philips'

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[27] Ibid 526.

[28] *Refer to the section entitled* "Reactionary Balance: Philips' Preciosite Tradition and Donnean Male Conventions" located in this explication for further elucidation

[29] Katherine Philips, The Matchless Orinda, ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990). 106-107, Lines 13-16.

[30] Valerie Traub, "Friendship So Curst*."* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 22.

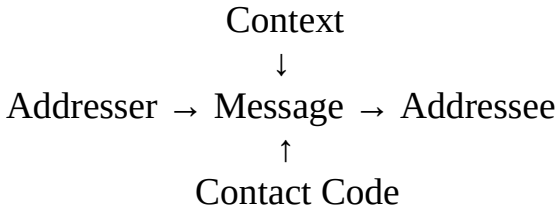
homoerotic language and conventions are incapable of demonstrating balance as a result of the inherent sameness implied by the terminology; however, limiting the function of Philips' homoerotic linguistics to what is implied by terminological meaning befits a disrupting instance of twentieth century semantics and intelligibility attributed to homoerotic content in early modern written works.

When considering how Philips' homoerotics are indicative of gender neutrality and balance, the historical context clarifying seventeenth century sensitivities toward same-sex desire and relationships is of particular interest. In the introduction to her book, Traub contemplates early-modern England's reactions toward what a modern intelligibility would identify as gay or lesbian erotic relationships. According to Traub, "female eroticism prior to the enlightenment has seemed silent and invisible. Impossible."[31] Central to Traub's assessment of Renaissance biases that accordingly dismiss female same-sex relations as impossible is the play *Gallathea* by John Lyly; specifically, the discourse prompted by Cupid's scheme to confound Diana's virgin nymphs: "I will make their pains my pastimes, and so confound their loves in their own sex that they shall dote in their desires, delight in their affections, and practice only impossibilities."[32] The Renaissance's blatant dismissal of female same-sex desire as impossible suggests that despite the inherent sameness of the relevant genders the action of participating in homoerotic relations constitutes a disparate union between two same-sex constituents. Because seventeenth society considered female same-sex love and desire an inexorable impossibility the homoerotic conventions employed by Philips are situated in opposition to one another irrespective of the fundamental sameness implied by the terminological classification. Consideration of early modern society's established sentiments regarding female same-sex desire may be interpreted

[31] Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 3.
[32] Ibid 327. *See,* John Lyly, *Gallathea.* Act II Scene II, lines 6-9.

without violating the intentional fallacy because the relevant context delineated from such observations do not impose or assume Philips' authorial intent; therefore, the male and female homoerotic conventions apparent in Philips' poetry can be interpreted as the dichotic elements necessary to promulgate Philips' perception of gender neutrality and balance.

To further elucidate the balance perpetuated by Philips' male and female homoerotic conventions, Roman Jakobson provides supplementary evidence as to how poetic linguistics function toward balance and equivalence: "The selection is produced on the basis of equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymy and antonymy, while the combination, the build-up of sequence, is based on contiguity. *The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.* Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive devise of the sequence."[33] Consider the following diagram illustrating the modes by which Philips promotes the equivalence of both male and female homoerotic language and conventions.



The collaborative function of Philips engendered homoerotic conventions can be observed in how the verbal communication between the addresser and the addressee is conveyed when dictated by a specified context and preferred method of delivering the desired poetic message. The majority of Philips' friendship poems are addressed to female participants within the Society of Friendship and can therefore be construed as the subject and object of Philips' ostensive female homoeroticism. The female homoerotic linguistics adopted by Philips preserve the subsequent modes of communication necessary to maintain the poetic dialogue between the

[33] Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1960): 7.

female addresser and addressee. Operating in conjunction with the effeminized conduits of communication between Philips and her intimate associates is the "axis of combination," which determines the conventions and methods of effective communicative contact between the addresser and addressee. Writing within a hetero-societal context, Philips' exploitation of traditional male *amicitia* conventions institutes the contact code enabling the communication between the addresser and addressee to function efficiently. Functioning co-dependently of one another, the intersection between communication and methodical conventions divulges the general meaning of the communicative exchange. When this model is applied to Philips' friendship poetry, the intercepted meaning delineated from the cooperative interactions between the two axes is deliberately ambiguous. Although female homoerotic language regulates the verbal communication between Philips and her coterie correspondences, the equally significant homoerotic male conventions destabilize the assumed meaning of the poetic discourse; the result is a heterogeneous perception of balance that is neither exclusively symptomatic of female nor male same-sex desire. The inherent consequence of subversively juxtaposing male and female homoerotic language and conventions is the perpetuation of a perceptible balance that is characterized by its suggested heterosexuality. To recapitulate, female and male homoerotic conventions are equivalently employed by Philips to encourage a gender neutral discourse that effectually challenges the same-sex sensitivities attributed to early modern England in the seventeenth century and is therefore emulative of the balance and harmony she aspired to promote.

Reactionary Balance: Philips' *Preciosite* Tradition and Donnean Male Conventions

As the principal mode of communicative contact between Orinda and her female addressees, the traditional male *amicitia* conventions employed by Philips function in

coordination with the more recognizable patterns that encourage an exclusive lesbian-affirmative interpretation of Philip's coterie poems. Most contemporary critics endeavor to stabilize the abstruse gender dynamics of Philips' poetry by absolving the functional independence of the male conventions in order to subsume the apparent homoeroticism under a blanket analysis promoting Philips' assumed authorial dispositions toward female friendship and desire.

It is largely uncontested that the passionate language and stylistic conventions Philips' extorts when addressing the various members of her "Society of Friendship," are immutably reminiscent of the "ancient, enduring forms and rituals of male friendship"[34]; however, because the male linguistic conventions are purposefully ambiguous and generate a disparity between the addresser and addressee, scholars are more prone to interpreting the homoerotic content as an appropriation of " the cavalier conventions of platonic heterosexual love, with their originally platonic and male homoerotic feeling, and to use those conventions and that discourse to describe her [Philips] relations with women."[35] Arlene Stiebel argues that the homoerotic male conventions function as a figurative mask designed to preserve her reputation as an exemplar of female heterosexuality within a society that "was so restricted by patriarchal coercion that true sexual preferences may often have been obscured or invisible, requiring conformity to a social norm in which even the acknowledgement of a sexual preference for a women was a radical act."[36] The rhetorical mask, according to Stiebel, effectively demonstrates a figurative eroticism existing between Philips and her female subjects–"a clever reworking of the spiritualized

[34] Harriette Andreadis, "Re-Configuring Early Modern Friendship: Katherine Philips and Homoerotic Desire." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 46,* no. 3 (Summer, 2006): 526.

[35] Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001): 57.

[36] Arlene Stiebel, "Subversive Sexuality: Masking the Erotic in Poems by Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn." *Renaissance Discourses of Desire.* ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Michigan Press, 1993): 224.

romance tradition combined with idealized classical friendship to de-emphasize the sexual reality inherent in the concrete, physical terminology of the poem."[37] Although the male *amicitia* conventions do function as the contact code between Philips and her female coterie, Stiebel and others who claim that the poetic forms Philips incorporated into her poetry fulfill "important personal needs"[38] come precariously close to violating the intentional fallacy. By implying that the masculine conventions were subjugated by Philips' suspected sexual desires for other women, scholars naïvely undermine the interpretive potential of the equally significant homoerotic male conventions. Although Stiebel's assertion that Philips exploited *amicitia* conventions "to proclaim to all who would read their poems that the desire of a woman for a woman lover falls well within acceptable literary norms"[39] may prove valid within an external biographical context, I argue that Philips' utilization of heterosexual male conventions and discourse is perhaps more indicative of a pragmatic resolve determined to successfully promote equivalence and balance irrespective of gender identity and sexual sensitivities.

It is convenient for the purposes of this exposition that the origin of the "Society of Friendship" exemplifies balance as a reaction against the indoctrinated biases of the Renaissance that epitomized male-male friendships whilst concurrently denying all notions suggesting women were capable of forming legitimate same-sex friendships equal to the homoerotic bonds typified by early modern representations of male camaraderie. As Patrick Thomas elucidates in his introduction to *The Matchless Orinda*, much of Katherine Philips' poetry was "primarily addressed to and intended for circulation among a select group of friends in West Wales and

[37] Ibid 228.
[38] Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England*. 58.
[39] Arlene Stiebel, "Subversive Sexuality." 226.

London."[40] The established conventions characterizing Philips' literary coterie are reminiscent of the French preciosite tradition introduced to England by Queen Henrietta Marie, spouse of the disposed King Charles I of England. To delineate the predominant values governing Philips' coterie, Thomas quotes a letter composed by James Howell in 1634 entitled *Epistolae Ho-elianae*.

> The court affords little news at present, but there is a Love call'd Platonick Love, which much sways there of late; it is a love abstracted from all corporeal gross impressions and sensual appetite, but consists in Contemplations and ideas of the Mind, not in any carnal fruition. This Love sets the Wits of the Town on work; and they say there will be a Mask shortly of it, whereof her Majesty and her Maids of Honor will be part.[41]

According to Howell, the platonic love emulated by the Society of Friendship is indicative of an intense discourse distinguished by the astute wit and gregarious contemplations practiced by the coterie's affiliates. Howell adamantly asserts that the relatively enigmatic concept of feminine platonic love is "abstracted from all corporeal impressions and sensual appetite" and "carnal fruition." Thomas offers additional insight into the topical subjects of Philips' coterie correspondences: "She wrote elegies on the deaths of her Welsh neighbors/ epitaphs for her London connections/ lamented the unsuccessful courtships of her friends/ and celebrated the weddings of her relatives."[42] The communicative interactions and poetic subject materials observed by Thomas and Howell within Philips' Society of Friendship are indisputably

[40] Katherine Philips, *The Matchless Orinda,* ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990). 12.
[41] Katherine Philips, *The Matchless Orinda,* ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990). 7.
[42] Ibid 12.

reminiscent of the pastoral, platonic, and courtly love conventions often attributed to the archetypal Renaissance traditions venerating male same-sex friendships.

The pseudonyms Philips assigned herself and her correspondences reflect the pastoral rituals implemented by the Society of Friendship and function, according to Patrick Thomas, as a means of "avoiding unwanted attention from the censors as well as protests from those of the poet's subjects who might feel their privacy breached in a manner unbefitting the gentry."[43] Pastoral elements are also discernable in Philips retreat poems including *A Countrey life* and *Invitation to the Countrey*. When considering the apparent pastoralism in the poetry of Katherine Philips, the "Society of Friendship", comprised primarily of Philips' cherished female friends, is in many ways indicative of the French 'cabinets' that offered women "a kind of deliberate retreat from the restrictions of more public spaces, a place where they could speak, write, and dress as the pleased and where they might receive their female intimates."[44] Within this context, it is probable that Philips' "Society of Friendship" constituted a deliberate facsimile of the Renaissance tradition that dignified male-male friendships as the sublime epitome of appropriate societal relationships. As a reaction against early modern subjectivities regulating the socially acceptable forms of amities, Philips' effeminate coterie demonstrates an occasion in which two dichotic elements facilitate aspirations of balance and equality.

As previously noted, seventeenth century society vehemently undermined the authenticity of female same-sex friendships as being inferior to the male *amicitia* tradition. The classical authoritative source concerning masculine friendship and its erotic connotations is Michel de Montaigne's essay entitled *De I'amitie:*

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[43] Ibid 8. Here, Thomas provides a list of the various pastoral sobriquets (pastoral personae) that Philips assigned to various participants of her coterie. The names and respective pseudonyms include 'Antenor', 'Charistus' (John Owen), 'Silvander' (Sir Edward Dering), 'Philaster' (John Jeffreys), 'Palaemon' (Francis Finch), and 'Polycrite'(Lady Mary Cavendish).

[44] Elizabeth Wahl, *Invisible Relations* (Standford: Standford University Press, 1999.): 139.

> As soon as it [love] enters the boundaries of friendship, that is to say harmony of wills, it grows faint and languid. Enjoyment destroys it, as having a fleshy end, subject to satiety. Friendship, on the contrary, is enjoyed according as it is desired; it is bred, nourished, and increased only in enjoyment, since it is spiritual, and the soul grows refined by practice. During the reign of this perfect friendship those fleeting affections once found a place in me, not to speak of my friend, who confesses only too many of them in these verses. Thus these two passions within me came to be known to one other, but to be compared, never; the first keeping its course in proud and lofty flight, and disdainfully watching the other make its way far, far beneath it.[45]

Here, Montaigne's lamenting for "a mad craving for something that escapes us" [46] is comparable to the emotional discourse Philips articulates when absent from the female objects of her presumed desires:

> **3**
> What angry star then governs me
> That I must feele a double smart?
> Pris'ner to fate as well as thee;
> Kept from thy face, link'd to thy heart?
> Because my love all Love excells,
> Must my griefs have no parallels?[47]

Despite Montaigne's usage of hetero-platonic conventions, the erotic language signifying his intimate desires is equally as subversive as Philips' ambiguous platonic discourse of female friendship: "Despite Montaigne's own effort to delineate between the passion of men for woman and the love of men for men, the salient differences seems to be less the gender of the beloved

[45] Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (Standford: Standford University Press, 1958): 137.
[46] Valerie Traub, "Friendship so Curst." (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 14.
[47] Katherine Philips, *The Matchless Orinda*, ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990). *See pg.141*; "To Mrs. M.A. upon absence*."* (Set by Mr. Henry Law's), Lines 13-18.

object than the relative state of ease experienced by the desiring subject."[48] Although the platonic male conventions of unobtainable desire shared by Montaigne and Philips function identically, Montaigne maintains a prejudiced assessment of women accusing them of being incapable of managing prosperous friendships with other women:

> Besides, to the tell the truth, the ordinary capacity of women is inadequate for that communion and fellowship which is the nurse of this sacred bond; nor does their soul seem firm enough to endure the strain of so tight and durable a knot. And indeed, but for that, is such a relationship, free and voluntary, could be built up, in which not only would the souls have this complete enjoyment, but the bodies would also share in the alliance, so that the entire man would be engaged, it is certain that the resulting friendship would be fuller and more complete. But this sex in no instance has succeeded in attaining it, and by the common agreement of the ancient schools is excluded from it.[49]

Here again, the hetero-platonic conventions employed by Montaigne reveal an innate homoerotic desire provoked by the intimate male relationships advocated by the *amicitia* tradition; however, when compared to the platonic conventions exploited by Philips, the object of Montaigne's homoerotic language is specifically engendered male and can therefore be effectively limited to interpretations confirming Montaigne's same-sex proclivities. Although the subjects of Philips' platonic verses were primarily women, the subsequent homoerotic language implied by her adoption of Montaigne's classical *amicitia* discourse is considerably more subversive and ambiguous. Despite Andreadis' accurate claim that "the discourse used by Philips is both male and heterosexual,"[50] the poetic recipient of Philips' homoerotic desire is noticeably genderless. Rather, the male and female homoerotic sentiments expressed throughout her collected works are

[48] Traub 14.
[49] Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (Standford: Standford University Press, 1958): 138.
[50] Andreadis Harriette, "The Sapphic-Platonics of Katherine Philips, 1632-1644." *Signs* 15, no. 1 (Autumn, 1989): 41.

juxtaposed in opposition to one another. The resultant balance can be characterized as being "infused with the passionate intensity and rhetoric of heterosexual love as it was understood by seventeenth-century male poets."[51] By subsuming the homoerotic conventions into a heterosexual perception of balance, Philips effectively exemplifies the equivalency of male and female homoerotic sentiments as they collaborate in opposition toward a gender-neutral depiction of same-sex Love and its respective influence on the idyllic platonic relationship.

The successful progression and general function of Philips' heterosexual balance is further disseminated throughout her collected works by way of incorporating the masculine poetic theme of seduction as depicted by sixteenth and seventeenth-century literary representations of courtly love between a man and woman. Andreadis and other prominent scholars of Philips' poetic verses propose that "the major influence on her [Philips] friendship poems may not have been the cavaliers or *prèciositè* but John Donne and the metaphysical conceit, for the intensity of her friendship feelings is expressed through echoes of Donne's early seduction poems."[52] When considering Philips' elicitation of courtly love and Donnean metaphysical conventions, Andreadis observes, "Except that these poems are addressed to a woman, they could have been written by a man to his (female) lover."[53] The influence of Donne's heterosexual seductive poetics on Philips' platonic-love verses is evident by how the synthesized balance functions as a reoccurring metaphysical conceit throughout her collected works. By adopting the Donnean model of heterosexual love and desire, Philips was permitted access to its intrinsic "platonism, its implicit eroticism, and its impassioned argument via conceits" in order to divulge "the emotions she sought to chart and for which she sought a

[51] Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England.* 58.
[52] Andreadis Harriette, "The Sapphic-Platonics of Katherine Philips, 1632-1644." *Signs* 15, no. 1 (Autumn, 1989): 39.
[53] Ibid 41.

vehicle."[54] The metaphysical similarities between Donne and Philips' poetic discourses are most apparent in the hyperbolic images and conceits the poets engage to demonstrate the intensity of friendships experienced between two "agreeing soules." In the poem, "A Valediction:Forbidden Mourning," Donne incorporates the metaphysical conceit of "twin compasses" that guide and govern the symbiotic movement of two souls:

> But we by a love so much refined,
> That our selves know not what it is,
> Inter-assured of the mind,
> Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.
>
> Our two souls therefore, which are one,
> Though I must go, endure not yet
> A breach, but an expansion,
> Like gold to airy thinness beat.
>
> If they be two, they are two so
> As stiff twin compasses are two;
> Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth, if the other do.
>
> And though it in the center sit,
> Yet when the other far doth roam,
> It leans and hearkens after it,
> And grows erect, as that comes home.
>
> Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
> Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
> Thy firmness makes my circle just,

[54] Ibid 42-43.

And makes me end where I begun.[55]

Mimicking the metaphysical imagery of two synchronized souls, Philips assumes Donne's metaphorical conceit of the compass in the poem "Friendship in Emblem, or the Seale, to my Dearest Lucasia" to elucidate the fused identity characterizing her intimate friendship with Anne Owen.

6

The compasses that stand above
Express this great immortall Love;
For friends, like them, can prove this true,
They are, and yet they are not, two.

7

And in their posture is express'd
Friendship's exalted interest:
Each follows where the other Leanes,
And what each does, the other meanes.

8

And as when one foot does stand fast,
And t'other circles each to cast,
The steddy part does regulate
And make the wanderer's motions straight.

9

So friends are onley Two in this,
T'reclaime each other when they misse:
For whose're will grossely fall,
Can never be a friend at all.[56]

[55] John Donne, "A Valediction: Forbidden Mourning." Lines 17-36.
[56] Katherine Philips, *The Matchless Orinda*, ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990). See pg.107; "Friendship in Emblem, or the Seale, to my dearest Lucasia." Lines 21-36.

When comparing "Valediction: A Forbidden Mourning" and "Friendship in Emblem," the compass conceit functions similarly to represent the duality of the idyllic platonic soul that is neither one nor two but a partnership in which the subjects naturally complement one another "t'reclaime each other when they misse." The logical progression of Philips' argument for female friendship, "with its platonism, its implicit eroticism, and its impassioned argument via conceits,"[57] is symptomatic of the same conventions exploited by Donne in "Valediction: A Forbidden Morning"; The hetero-platonic conventions, and equally apparent erotic language, conveyed in "Valediction" and "Friendship in Emblem" exemplify the masculine poetic tradition of constructing images and language to profligately express the desires of "an importunate male suitor/lover."[58] By adopting Donne's metaphysical language of love and platonic friendship, Philips is able to consolidate the various homoerotic stratums into a socially acceptable heterosexual configuration that subsequently satisfies her perception of balance in which the sex of the prescribed object has "fled the world."[59]

Comparative evaluations of the metaphysical conventions shared by Donne and Philips reveal that the hetero-platonic language has the inherent potential of destabilizing or redirecting the homoeroticism often associated with the *amicitia* tradition; however, the dichotic linguistics employed by Philips are habitually more subversive than Donne's seductive lyrics. The extent of Philips' subversive discourse can be observed when compared to the explicit eroticism of Donne's poem, "Sappho to Philaenis."

> Thy body is a natural paradise,
> In whose self, unmanured, all pleasures lies,
> Nor needs perfection; why shouldst thou then

[57] Andreadis Harriette, "The Sapphic-Platonics of Katherine Philips, 1632-1644." *Signs* 15, no. 1 (Autumn, 1989): 42.
[58] Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England*. 58.
[59] Katherine Philips, *The Matchless Orinda*, ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990). See pg.235; "To Pastora being with her Friend." Lines 1-8.

Admit the tillage of a harsh rough man?
Men leave behind them that which their sin shows,
And are as thieves traced, which rob when it snows.
But of our dalliance no more signs there are,
Than fishes leave in streams, or birds in the air.
And between us all sweetness may be had;
All, all that Nature yields, or Art can aid.
My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two,
But so, as thine from one another do;
And, oh, no more; the likeness being such,
Why should they not alike in all parts touch?
Hand to strange hand, lip to lip none denies;
Why should they breast to breast, or thighs to thighs?[60]

The erotic language discernable in "Sappho to Philaenis" forsakes the subversive conventions of masculine platonic conventions and instead, accentuates the apparent homoeroticism by substantiating the desire through images that attempt to capture tangible instances of same-sex carnal relations: "Why should they not alike in all parts touch? / Hand to strange hand, lip to lip none denies / why should they breast to breast, or thighs to thighs?" Additionally, Donne maintains the conceit establishing the addresser and addressee as two separate yet fused souls: "My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two / But so, as thine from one another do"; however, the exposed erotic language is more indicative of corporeal desire as opposed to the spiritual amalgamations associated with the masculine platonic tradition. "To my Lucasia, in defense of declared friendship," one of Philips most erotically charged poems, the heterosexual perception of balance is maintained despite the overt homoerotic language.

Nay to what end did we once barter Minds,
Only to know and to neglect the claim?
Or (like some Wantons) our Pride pleasure finds *15*

[60] John Donne, *Seventeenth Century British Poetry (1603-1660),* "Sappho to Philaenis." *See pg. 51-52* Lines 35-50.

To throw away the thing at which we aim.

If this be all our Friendship does design,
We covet not enjoyment then, but power:
To our Opinion we our Bliss confine,
And love to have, but not to smell, the flower.

Ah! then let Misers bury thus their Gold,
Who though they starve, no farthing will produce:
But we lov'd to enjoy and to behold,
And sure we cannot spend our stock by use.

Think not 'tis needless to repeat desires;
The fervent Turtles alwaies court and bill,
And yet their spotless passion never tires,
But does increase by repetition still.

Although we know we love, yet while our Soul
Is thus imprison'd by the Flesh we wear,
There's no way left that bondage to controul,
But to convey transactions through the Ear.

Nay, though we read our passions in the Eye,
It will oblige and please to tell them too:
Such joys as these by motion multiply,
Were't but to find that our Souls told us true.[61]

Because the erotic language of "To my Lucasia, in defense of declared friendship" is specifically addressed to Lucasia, modern scholarship is prone to draw conclusions implying the language Philips extorts is revealing of her uncouth desire to transcend her platonic relationship with Lucasia for a more physical consummation of their love. Unlike "Sappho to Philaenis," Philips deliberately avoids language that may expose any transgressions on her part of what was considered socially apposite for "a lady of good birth and reputation."[62] In lines 19-20 Philips self-restricts hers and Lucasia's "bliss" to that which is spiritually active but not physically enjoyed: "And love to have, but not to smell, the flower." In line 30, Philips further distinguishes

[61] Katherine Philips, *The Matchless Orinda*, ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990). See pg.153-156; "To my Lucasia, in defense of declared friendship."
[62] Wahl, *Invisible Relations.* 143.

the nature of their relationship by asserting their souls are "imprison'd by the Flesh we wear." Taking into consideration Loscocco's claim that "the 'unitary' or specular discourse starts as Donnean conceit, but emerges as an afigural way of using language in which words do not refer to but reflect or embody their own meaning,"[63] the erotic relationship Philips illustrates in "To my Lucasia, in defense of declared friendship" is conducive with her assertion that souls are genderless entities. If the erotic language reflects its own meaning, then the two souls involved are ambiguously represented and can therefore be susceptible to multiple interpretations that attempt to comprehend the function of conflicting female and male homoerotic language and conventions. Rather than strictly adhering to the Donnean metaphysical model, Philips manipulates the metaphysical conceit to "produce a poetic language that aspires to transcend the body even as the physicality of its tropes undermines that longing."[64] The heterosexual representation of balance promoted by Philips not only functions as a subversive strategy but also constitutes the primary conceit perpetuating the conception of gender neutrality and its relevance to love within the context of intimate friendships.

I: Syntactical Phrases

Until now, I have attempted to identify the various hierarchies of balance that are represented by Philips' Society of Friendship and masculine conventions in order to validate the functional significance of male homoeroticism when juxtaposed to the more exclusive lesbian-affirmative interpretations attributed to Philips and her female coterie. The following sections will analyze specific instances in which Philips exploited the masculine conventions explicated above to facilitate the heterosexual balance characterizing her same-sex discourse. The linguistic analysis of Philips' poetry can primarily be conducted within three philological tiers which I will

[63] Loscocco, *Inventing the English Sappho*. 66.
[64] Wahl, *Invisible Relations*. 143.

refer to as: syntactical phrases (individual poetic lines), accommodating phrases (a singular poem), and anthological conventions (the collected works). Roman Jakobson articulates, "Poetics deals with problems of verbal structure, just as the analysis of painting is concerned with pictorial structure"[65]; therefore, despite the erotic language and contextualized homoerotic assumptions attributed to Philips' and her poetry, the specific structures and patterns of the erotically charged images must be considered when conducting speculative discourses that attempt to discern the function of homoerotic language discernable in Philips' coterie poetry.

As I have elucidated above, Philips perceived balance as the inevitable consequence of two incongruent concepts being forced into a cohesive amalgamation. Although the contending language is often destabilizing and purposefully ambiguous, the dichotic linguistics, distinguishable by their "conventional oxymoronic terminology" that subsequently "permeates the verse–light versus dark, day versus night, presence and absence, life and death,"[66] exemplify Philips' perception of synthesized balance. The dichotic structure expediting linguistic opposition and subsequent balance is most recognizable when the opposing elements are juxtaposed to one another in a single syntactical phrase. Consider the following selection from "The World":

> Wee falsely think it due unto our friends,
> That we should grieve for their too early ends:
> He that surveys the world with serious eys,
> And stripps Her from her grosse and weak disguise,
> Shall find 'tis injury to mourn their fate;
> He only dy's untimely who dy's Late.
> For if 'twere told to children in the womb,

[65] Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1960): 1.
[66] Arlene Stiebel, *Subversive Sexuality.* 228.

To what a stage of mischief they must come
Could they foresee with how much toile and sweat
Men court that Guilded nothing, being Great;
What paines they take not to be what they seem,
Rating their blisse by others false esteem,
And sacrificing their content, to be
Guilty of grave and serious Vanity;
How each condition hath its proper Thorns,
And what one man admires, another Scorns;
How frequently their happiness they misse,
And so farre from agreeing what it is,
That the same Person we can hardly find,
Who is an houre together in a mind;
Sure they would beg a period of their breath,
And what we call their birth would count their Death.
Mankind is mad; for none can live alone
Because their joys stand by comparison:
And yet they quarrell at Society,
And strive to kill they know not whom, nor why,
We all live by mistake, delight in Dreames,
Lost to ourselves, and dwelling in extreames;
Rejecting what we have, though ne're so good,
And prizing what we never understood.
compar'd to our boystrous inconstancy
Tempests are calme, and discords harmony.
Hence we reverse the world, and yet do find
The God that made can hardly please our mind.
We live by chance, and slip into Events;
Have all of Beasts except their Innocence.
The soule, which no man's pow'r can reach, a thing
That makes each women Man, each man a King.

Doth so much loose, and from its height so fall,
That some content to have no Soule at all.[67]

Here, Philips contemplates the soul's birth into a world characterized by its "mischief" and discordant harmony. Although not implicitly involved with female friendship, "The World" maintains Philips discourse of hetero-platonic soul union and gender neutrality by juxtaposing masculine and feminine gendered pronouns that coincide with the androgynous nature of love and its object. Traub asserts that the engendered pronouns apparent in Philips' poetic conventions are indicative of a specific rhetorical device used to subvert certain societal discriminations which are "negotiated in those masculine discourses of *amicitia* which Philips so deliberately regenders."[68] Traub and other scholars render Philips pronoun conventions as an extension of the male *amicitia* tradition that effectively allowed her to express her "love with a number of women" within a strict heterosexual societal context; however, as Jakobson reiterates, "Sometimes we hear that poetics in contradistinction to linguistics, is concerned with evaluation. This separation of the two fields from each other is based on a current but erroneous interpretation of the contrast between the structure of poetry and other types of verbal structure: the latter are said to be opposed by their 'causal' designless nature to the 'noncasual' purposeful character of poetic language."[69] The juxtaposition of contrasting engendered pronouns in "The World" are essential to the verbal structure of individual syntactical phrases are therefore imbued with their own, albeit ambiguous, meaning within the context of poetic evaluation. The contrasting masculine and feminine pronouns in lines 3-4 establishes the subject as "He that surveys the world with serious eys" and juxtaposes it in collaboration with the object identified as "Her from her grosse and weak disguise." The two engendered pronouns function

[67] Katherine Philips, *The Matchless Orinda*, ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990). See pg.182-185; "The World."
[68] Valerie Traub, "Friendship so Curst" 13.
[69] Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1960): 2.

independently within the syntactical phrase to perpetuate the later claim "The soule, which no man's pow'r can reach, a thing that makes each women Man, each man a King." Philips reinforces the autonomy of the soul as being a cohesive union illustrating the "hermaphroditic perfection of the beloved who incorporates the best qualities of both sexes."[70]

According to Andreadis, the pronoun "he" and its various forms demonstrate "the speaking persona's assumption of an active–that is, male–subject position in relation to the female friend she [Philips] courts, and so acknowledges the unspoken erotic desires that drive the poem itself."[71] It is viable to assume that Philips' consistent use of male pronouns are symptomatic of the masculine platonicism exploited throughout most of her collected works; however, it is equally possible to interpret the juxtaposed verbal patterns as constituting evidence of Philips' proposed gender neutrality and balance despite the female addressees identified in many of her poems. Consider once again the poem "L'accord du bien":

23

Yet whilest we hug our own mistake,
We censures, but not Judgements, make;
And thence it is we cannot see
Obedience stand with liberty

24

Providence still keeps even state;
But he can best command his Fate,
Whose art, by adding his own voice,
Makes his Necessity his choice.

25

Rightly to rule one's self must be
The hardest, largest monarchy:

[70] Arlene Stiebel, *Subversive Sexuality.* 226.
[71] Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England.* 63.

Whose passions are his masters grown,
Will be a Captive in a Throne.

26

He most the inward freedom gains,
Who Just submissions entertains:
For while in that his Reason Sways,
It is himself that he obeys.

27

But onely in Eternity
We can these beauteous Unions see:
For heaven it self and Glory is
For one harmonious constant blisse.

Stanza 23 opens with an ambivalent subject identified as "we" but is soon replaced with a dominant "he" in stanzas 24-26. Although Philips adopts a masculine persona with its inferred male platonicism and homoerotic implications, the gender remains ambiguously defined by the absence of the additional constituents that are reintroduced in stanza 27 as the neutral "we." Therefore, the "beauteous Unions" and "one harmonious constant blisse" can be interpreted as referents for the soul which is intrinsically devoid of gender and sexual identity. In this regard, the specified gender of the pronouns are not necessarily exclusively indicative of Philips' female same-sex desires; the masculine and feminine identities of the poetic subject and object are susceptible to various evaluative assessments of love and harmonious union.

II-III: Accommodating Phrases and Anthological Conventions

The metaphysical conceits employed by Philips engage dichotic conventions such as changing pronouns to facilitate gender neutrality and its associated relevance to same-sex relationships throughout many of the linguistic structures distinguishable in Philips poetic verses. When considering the conventions exploited in individual poems and their relationship to the

collected works as a whole, Jackobson's claim that "linguistic are concerned not only with changes but also with continuous, enduring, static factors,"[72] coincides with the consistency in which Philips utilized the conventions available to her to subvert societal biases and establish what she considered to be the ideal platonic friendship liberated from potentially limiting sexual and gender identities. In the poem "To the truly noble, and obleiging Mrs. Anne Owen, on my first Approaches," the language entertained throughout is reminiscent of the masculine and Donnean conventions narrating the successful seductive conquest of a male suitor to his female lover.

> Madame,
> As in a triumph conquerors admit
> Their meanest captives to attend on it,
> Who, though unworthy, have the power confest,
> And Justify'd the yielding of the rest:
> So when the busy world (in hope t'excuse
> Their own surprize) your conquests doe peruse,
> And find my name, they will apt to say
> Your charmes were blinded, or else thrown away.
> There is no honour got in gaining me,
> Who am a prize worth not your Victory.
> But this will cleare you, that 'tis general
> The worst applaud what is admir'd by all.
> But I have plots in't: for the way to be
> Secure of fame to all posterity,
> Is to obtain the honour I pursue,
> To tell the world I was subdu'd by you.[73]

[72] Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1960): 3.
[73] Katherine Philips, *The Matchless Orinda*, ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990). See pg.102-103; "To the truly noble, and obleiging Mrs. Anne Owen (on my first approaches)."

Despite the obvious communicative contact between Philips and Anne Owen, the contact mode interrupts the assumed female homoeroticism by integrating traditional hetero-masculine language that could just as easily be read as if from a man writing to his female lover or from a man to his male friend. The language Philips extorts is erotically charged with masculine images that depict the relationship between Philips and Owen as a conquest in which the "honour," and "prize not worth your Victory" are evidence of Philips being "subdu'd by you [Owen]." Wahl argues that "the rhetoric of paradox that Philips derives from the amorous poems of Donne serve her purposes especially well as she seeks to conceal her transgression of social boundaries by adopting the position of a humble suppliant. Her assumption of the role of the masculine lover and beloved in this instance can more easily be coded as 'platonic' than a conventional male-female dyad."[74] Because "To the truly noble, and obleiging Mrs. Anne Owen, on my first Approaches" can easily be interpreted as a platonic expression of love, the apparent homoeroticism can be interpreted as either male or female as a result of the dichotic relationship between the subject and object of the communicative exchange and the contending linguistic patterns that make the communication possible. This distinction can more readily be observed when compared to the anonymous Philo-Philippa, "lover of Philips", who is credited with authoring "To the Excellent Orinda," one of the introductory poems to the 1667 edition of Philips' collected works.

> Shall it be our reproach, that we are weak,
> And cannot fight, nor as the School-men speak?
> Even men themselves are neither strong nor wise,
> If Limbs and Parts they do not exercise,
> Train'd up to arms, we Amazons have been,
> And Spartan Virgins strong as Spartan Men:

[74] Elizabeth Wahl, *Invisible Relations* (Standford: Standford University Press, 1999.): 148.

Breed Women but as Men, and they are these;
Whilst Sybarit Men are Women by their ease.
Why should not brave Semiramis break a Lance,
And why should not soft Ninyas curle and dance?
Ovid in vain Bodies with change did vex,
Changing her form of life, Iphis chang'd Sex.
Nature to Females freely doth impart
That, which the Males usurp, a stout, bold heart.
Thus Hunters female Beasts fear to assail:
And female Hawks more mettal'd than the male:
Men ought not then Courage and Wit ingross,
Whilst the Fox lives, the Lyon, or the Horse.
Much less ought men both to themselves confine,
Whilst Women, such as you, Orinda, shine.
That noble friendship brought thee to our Coast,
We thank Lucasia, and thy courage boast.
Death in each Wave could not Orinda fright,
Fearless she acts that friendship she did write:
Which manly Vertue to their Sex confin'd

Although Philo-Philippa develops similar conventions to subvert transgressions of societal sexual expectations, the language and images she extorts are characterized by an implicit sexual eroticism akin to Donne's "Sappho to Philaenis." As David Robinson suggests, "Philo-Philippa is more daring, at least to her approving allusion to a story about clearly *sexual* love between females. She implicitly condones Iphis's lesbianism."[75] In this selection, Philo-Philippa questions "Why should not brave Semiramis break a Lance/And why should not soft Ninyas curle and dance?" Furthermore, Philo-Philippa condemns Iphis' inevitable sex change in Ovid's story from the *Metamorphosis,* "Iphis and Ianthe": "Ovid in vain Bodies with change did vex /

[75] David Robinson, *Closeted Writing and Lesbian and Gay Literature.* 24.

Changing her form of life, Iphis chang'd Sex. / Nature to Females freely doth impart." Here, Philo-Philippa resists the gender change Iphis undergoes by implying it goes against the nature of women to freely choose the object of their erotic desires; a lover should not be forced into changing one's sex to satisfy the heterocentric ideologies of society.

Contrary to the popularity of Philo-Philippa's "To the Excellent Orinda" when conducting evaluative assessments of Philips' assumed lesbian sentiments, Robinson is correct in warning readers "Since we don't' know Philo-Philippa's identity, biographical information is irrelevant to reading 'To the Excellent Orinda" as coded lesbian writing. It is even possible she wasn't really a woman, a possibility Philips herself registered."[76] Regardless of the subversive attributes of Philo-Philippa's verses, the poetic language is distinctively addressed to a female object and the erotic images are therefore subsequently less complex and more revealing of exclusive female same-sex desires as opposed to Philips' synthesized balance that equally entertains both male and female homoerotic possibilities.

Before I conclude, I would like to consider one final poem from Philips' collected works that defines, and subsequently demonstrates, gender neutrality and balance as the product of two dichotic linguistic elements forcefully combined. "On controversies in Religion" is one of several poetic examples in which Philips maintains the consistent use of her balanced conventions. Considering Philips' earlier poetic declaration to Lucasia that "There's a religion in our Love,"[77] "On controversies in Religion" can possibly be read as a figurative discourse detailing the platonic love inspired by their friendship.

> So he advantage takes of nature's Light,
> And raises that to a bare useless height;

[76] David Robinson, *Closeted Writing and Lesbian and Gay Literature.* 26.
[77] Katherine Philips, *The Matchless Orinda*, ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990). See pg 90-91, "Friendship's Mysteries, to my Lucasia (set by Mr. H. Lawes)."

Or while we seek for truth, he in the quest
Mixes a passion, or an interest,
To us loose it; that, I know not how,
'Tis not our Pactise, but our Quarrell now.
And as i'th' Moone's Eclipse some Pagans thought
Their barb'rous clamours her deliverance wrought[78]

Lines 13-20 demonstrate an instance in which Philips deliberately juxtaposes two contrasting engendered images to propagate a mutual collaboration functioning toward balance and neutrality. Line 13 commences with "So he advantage takes of nature's Light." The anonymous 'he's' interaction with "nature's Light" is reflective of seventeenth century's heterosexual understanding of love shared between a man and woman and is therefore the primary conceit reinforcing Philips' perception of a heterosexual representation of balance. Following in the language conventions of the metaphysical poets, Philips too engenders "Nature" as the quintessence motherly figure and maintains that gender distinction throughout her collected works; therefore, the interactions between the masculine "he" and the feminine "Nature" can be construed as representing the heterosexual expectations of early modern society. However, the gender dynamics are consequently destabilized by the manifestation of two distinct contending homoeroticisms. Lines 15-16 reveal that the masculine 'he' is on an ambivalent "quest" and has since "mixed a passion, or an interest." When considering the male *amicitia* traditional and its suggestions of male camaraderie, lines 15-16 could be interpreted as an expression of the male homoeroticism implied the Renaissance model for intimate male friendships; the precise "passion" or "interest" is rendered ambiguous. Another engendered image that is consistently maintained is the moon, which Philips identifies as female: "And as i'th' Moone's Eclipse some

[78] Katherine Philips, *The Matchless Orinda*, ed. Patrick Thomas (Essex: Stump Cross Books and Patrick Thomas, 1990). See pg.130-132; "On Controversies in Religion."

Pagans thought / Their barb'rous clamours her deliverance wrought." Semantically, the "Moone's Eclipse" and "Pagans thought" may be typographically associated with "nature's Light." In this context, the feminine engenderment of the two images may be interpreted as the second contending homoeroticism ascribed to female same-sex interactions. The concluding five lines of "On Controversies in Religion" further resolves the linguistic balance.

> Like mists before the Sun will from it fly;
> And then thy soule, one shining Sphaere, at length,
> Fill'd with true love wisdom and purged strength,
> Beholds her highest good with open face,
> And like him all the world she can embrace.

Here, Philips not only counterbalances the image of the "Moone's eclipse" with the masculine engendered "Sun" but also rearticulates the multiple stratums of hetero and homoeroticism by linguistically relating the "Sun" to "nature's light"; the image can then be interpreted as an interaction between the anonymous "he" and the "Sun," or as the traditional male-female dyad in which "nature" and the "Sun" fulfill the feminine and masculine roles respectively. The final line recapitulates the perceived heterosexual balance by juxtaposing the two images to reflect the socially recognizable male-female relationship: "And like him all the world she can embrace." Other engendered images, such as fortune/fate and destiny, sacred and divine, honour and joy, are similarly juxtaposed throughout Philips' collected works to facilitate the heterosexual representation of balance as the fundamental metaphysical conceit operating toward gender neutrality.

Although the erotic language and conventions apparent in the poetry of Katherine Philips are highly suggestive of female same-sex desire, the implicit male homoeroticism associated with the male *amicitia* tradition is equally significant in enabling the subversive gender dynamics characterizing her discourse on same-sex friendships. Therefore, it is erroneous to assume that

the functional independence of the masculine conventions exploited by Philips are exclusively restricted to a single interpretative evaluation of her poetry as being indicative of intense lesbian-like relationships with her female correspondences in the Society of Friendship. Rather, the collaborative stratums of homoeroticism can be equally identified as being both masculine and feminine simultaneously. In this regard, the coordinating male and female homoerotic conventions and linguistic patterns are structured in opposition to one another to synthesize a heterosexual conception of balance that is subsequently rendered genderless by the platonic nature of two souls intertwined. Therefore, despite the interpretative validity of modern scholars who suggest the masculine conventions masked Philips' transgression of societal boundaries and satisfied her aspirations of equating female same-sex friendships to the esteemed male-male *amicitia,* it is likewise plausible that the neutralized homoeroticism is suggestive of an ulterior motive of equating all same-sex friendships, platonic and carnal, with the heterosexual sensitivities of early modern society.

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