

Miss Man?

Languageing Gendered Bodies

Miss Man?

Languageing Gendered Bodies

Edited by

Giuseppe Balirano and Oriana Palusci

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Miss Man? Linguaging Gendered Bodies

Edited by Giuseppe Balirano and Oriana Palusci

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2018 by Giuseppe Balirano and Oriana Palusci
and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1096-4

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1096-8

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	vii
'Miss Man': Does the Gendered Body Matter?	
<i>Giuseppe Balirano and Oriana Palusci</i>	

PART I Reverberations of the Gendered Self

CHAPTER ONE.....	2
<i>The Female Husband: Masculinity and Femininity in Nineteenth-Century America</i>	
<i>Marco Venuti</i>	

CHAPTER TWO.....	19
"Language is being. We are the Words we Use": Wordplays, Encounters and Transformations in Ali Smith's <i>Girl Meets Boy</i>	
<i>Silvia Antosa</i>	

CHAPTER THREE.....	38
Portraying Males: From Muybridge to Hyperrealistic Art	
<i>Elena Tavani</i>	

PART II Mediating Maleness

CHAPTER FOUR.....	62
Men 2.0: Portraying Masculinity in Straight and Gay Dating Apps	
<i>Nicola Borrelli</i>	

CHAPTER FIVE.....	87
The Islamic State Male Warrior: Using Performativity to Reaffirm Hegemonic Masculinity	
<i>Margaret Rasulo</i>	

CHAPTER SIX.....	118
The Crisis of the Male Role through the Lens of the Brexit Campaign	
<i>Giusy Piatto</i>	

CHAPTER SEVEN	133
Perspectives of the Male Nude: Queerness and Masculinity in Derek Jarman's Films	
<i>Francesca Vigo and Stefania Rimini</i>	
 PART III Representing Transgender Identities	
CHAPTER EIGHT	156
From 'Berdache' to 'Two-Spirit': Naming Indigenous Women-Men in Canada	
<i>Anna Mongibello</i>	
CHAPTER NINE	168
Living as a Woman: The British Press on Trans Identities	
<i>Angela Zottola</i>	
CHAPTER TEN	190
Who Writes the Story Matters: Transgender Identity through the Lens of Citizen Journalism	
<i>Adriano Ferraresi</i>	
Notes on Contributors.....	215

INTRODUCTION

‘MISS MAN’: DOES THE GENDERED BODY MATTER?

GIUSEPPE BALIRANO AND ORIANA PALUSCI

This book draws together chapters that contain original interdisciplinary research and offer a range of critical perspectives on some linguistic and semiotic understandings of gender in the context of recent contrasting debates about gender non-conforming people, including different ways of ‘doing’ masculinity. It may seem surprising that the contributors to this volume are all from Italy, a country with a strong humanistic and philosophic tradition, but also a land of mind-boggling contradictions. It is, indeed, not widely acknowledged that Italy is the country where the first university record booklet for transgender students – which identifies the gender they choose – was issued, long before transgender people were granted legal recognition on official documents by the Government. Yet, the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* has recently reported a sad episode about a group of young students bullying a twelve-year-old schoolmate for being gay (Moreno 2017). Ivan, the boy who was repeatedly bullied and cyberbullied, wrote in a beautiful ‘liberating’ school-essay: “Sono diverso, non sbagliato” (‘I am different, not wrong’). Needless to say, Ivan lives in a country where being gay is still a difficult stigma, and where part of the Catholic Church is still convinced that policies of gender create ‘transhuman beings’ (Rodari 2015). Such contradictory practices result from the fact that, at the time of writing, much of the sensitive action, which was won by several liberation movements, is bearing the brunt of a Catholic and right-wing backlash against being ‘politically correct’, or simply human, when addressing gender non-conforming policies. The editors’ original idea was to directly contest the several constraints, stereotypes, and prejudices concerning gender nonconformity by sparking academic inquiry and (hopefully) social change through discussions relating to gender in linguistic, literary, artistic, and cultural contexts. It is

a large and challenging project, and it is one that our contributors have embraced, with somewhat mixed but remarkable results.

Part of the title for this volume, 'Miss Man', is borrowed from a fascinating film dialogue that takes place in a breakthrough representation of a transgender person in the US Oscar-winning movie *Dallas Buyers Club*, directed by Jean-Marc Vallée (2013). The unlikely collocational pattern in the phrase mainly suggests that there can be several categories of gendered embodiments which, particularly in media practices, are simultaneously construed and contested. The model of embodiment we espouse in this book derives from Judith Butler's theory of gender performance which is our fundamental departing stance and, more recently, a privileged observation point on gender variant bodies, particularly strong in transgender studies. The diverse constellation of chapters in this volume intends to help the reader to recognise the editors' main objective to affirm clearly that in order to grasp the connections between gender and language, it is fundamental to begin with the analysis of the way people embody understandings of gender and sexuality onto their own bodies. We posit that this may foster thinking on the way people use their language around the surrounding ideologies which shape gendered individuals (see also Borba and Ostermann 2018, 100).

The instability of the semantically-incoherent expression 'Miss Man', indeed, highlights the ways in which rigid or stereotyped notions of gender and sexuality continue to flourish in systems of knowledge, belief, and power relating to communities of queer, gender non-conforming and transgender people. It is no surprise that the emergence of such a contemporary gender variant trope may work to re-orientate questions of diverse or, rather, non-heteronormative sensibility, sexuality, and identity in both local and global contexts. Giving life to a 'Miss Man' is a performative act which reconceptualises the very notion of gender and its various intersections with sex, race, age, class, and nation as simultaneous processes of identity building within linguistic, cultural, institutional and social practices. Such a powerful, performative act works to compensate for the lack of attention towards fundamental intersections both in gender and linguistic studies. Since masculinity performances are still the unique possible and socially-acceptable pattern of social practices, often associated with the position of hegemonic men in any society's type of gender relations, gender-variant bodily differences are not immediately recognisable elements of gender representations. Thus, the phrase 'Miss Man' in this context questions the gendered body by introducing a queering linguistic reading of traditional normative gender practices. Seeking to overturn a naturalistic approach to the body as a biological

given, ‘Miss Man’ redefines non-binary gender representations as possible sociocultural phenomena, thus calling for radical social change. Consequently, the gendered body constitutes the primary site for the construction and performance of alternative forms of gender. In analysing the role of the body throughout history, Chris Shilling (2005, 8) aptly observes, “the body, it soon became clear, could be all things to all people”. This view demolishes the belief that the body is passively shaped by society while reinforcing the idea that it is always involved in social action as an active part of the personal and social experience. Hence, an army of Miss Men bodies can easily cause or, rather, be the agent of social change.

Language and gender are closely linked, and this is one of the most persistent topics in linguistics. We believe that a thriving approach to gender and its many intersections – with multiple other dimensions of identity, including racial ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and age – which further complicate thinking about sexual orientation as a homogenous category, needs to relate to a system of social relations involving language and power. Power can be an extremely dangerous political and social activity, especially when it works at linguistically downplaying minority groups. Language has the power to constantly strengthen and re-interpret the social, cultural and legal exclusion of less represented minority groups of our societies. It is a privileged instrument in the shaping of diversity through negative stereotypes. *Ad hoc* biased images construed through linguistic and semiotic exercises of power tend to depict transgender, gender variant, and gender non-conforming people within negative representations relating mainly to illness, monstrosity, and death. Both power and gender are linguistically embedded in social practices since they derive their meanings from the human activities they refer to. The non-binary categorisation of gender practices, and the new possibilities opened by scientific advances and changing attitudes throughout the twentieth century, have proven a significant challenge to all European languages, which had not previously been seriously demanded to accommodate areas between the two established genders. Therefore, how people who do not conform to the male/female dichotomy are addressed and how new labels are increasingly imposing themselves onto ‘undefinable’ (trans) (bi) (a) (cis) gendered bodies are part of the complex issues raised in this volume. Man-woman, woman-man, female-man, male-woman (see Palusci 2013) and, more recently, cisgender, transgender, agender, are only a few of the new lexical choices which open up a universe of diverse naming strategies. Consequently, a new interest in the use of inclusive, or even gender-neutral language, which means

avoiding to *misgender* people, becomes a powerful political, linguistic practice which forces languages to amplify their binary gender lenses in order to encompass non-binary gendered people. Gender non-conforming people have often been translators, interpreters, and multilinguals, yet, their cultural invisibility is witnessed by the fact that only a limited number of books about transgender people and their communities have been translated from language to language. An example is Leslie Feinberg's book, *Transgender Warriors*, first published in 1997, regrettably unaddressed to a wider audience due to the lack of translation into other languages. Therefore, the very notion of a transgender community of speakers, a relatively new social category, demands immediate intellectual, political, social and linguistic investigation. Who can really define what gender variant means? How are gender variant individuals construed and/or how do they construe themselves through language and in discourse? What does it take 'to be a man' outside the patriarchy system?

The chapters in this volume explore some of the 'Miss Man' tropes as they apply either to same-sex related desires, identities, and practices of gender transformation and cross-dressing, or to other dimensions of gender non-normative experiences such as weak and often socially-unacceptable representations of manliness. These studies address language use over a range of diamesic, diastratic and diatopic contexts where the discursive practices discussed are diverse, including the language associated with gay websites, homophobic discourse, coming out stories, policies that limit transgender subjects' access to resources. This wide-ranging collection mainly attempts to demonstrate that language matters in the everyday experience of gender diversity beyond the traditional gender/sex binarism by modelling some of the approaches that are now being explored in linguistic and gender studies (see Baker and Balirano 2018). By focusing on the social function of language, all the authors in the volume aim to investigate the thorny relationship between gender and language in gender variant communities of practice, or in communities where the very concept of gender is seen to involve men, women, and any other human category shifting between the rigid binary classification. Several challenges to understanding gender have too often indulged in the idea of sex roles by treating men and women as simple categories. The book presents original contributions on theoretical reflections from linguistics, literature, philosophy and media studies scholars, as well as from academics in neighbouring disciplines, with an interest in the language of gender variant people connected with the themes identified and produced in English speaking countries.

The editors have organised this collection of papers in three separate and self-contained parts, each one with its own scopes but all connected to the very same idea of treating ‘other’ representations of gender as a powerful instrument to enhance diversity and inclusion.

The first section, ‘Reverberations of the Gendered Self’, includes three chapters which deal with meaningful representations of gender and non-heteronormative gender in literature (Marco Venuti and Silvia Antosa) and visual arts (Elena Tavani).

The second section, ‘Mediating Maleness’, includes four chapters which tackle gender from a male perspective encompassing different ways of doing masculinities across a spectrum which goes from weak to hegemonic representation of manliness. Interdisciplinary in its methodological apparatus, it investigates gay apps (Nicola Borrelli), hegemonic masculinities, performativity and politics (Margaret Rasulo and Giusy Piatto), and the transfiguration of the male body in films (Stefania Rimini/Francesca Vigo).

Finally, the third section, ‘Representing Transgender Identities’, explores the other-representation of transgender individuals in different contexts and through multifarious methodologies, starting from a diachronic investigation of two-spirit individuals in Canada (Anna Mongibello) and moving to the representation of transgender people in contemporary media discourse (Angela Zottola and Adriano Ferraresi).

We do hope that this foray into underexplored human wilderness may help understand the cogent necessity of immediate agency that such topics unbelievably still require today by reminding us that the gendered body always matters.

*The Editors,
Giuseppe Balirano and Oriana Palusci*

References

- Baker, Paul and Giuseppe Balirano (eds). 2018. *Queering Masculinities in Language and Culture*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Borba, Rodrigo and Ana Cristina Ostermann. 2018. “Do Bodies Matter? Travestis’ Embodiment of (Trans)Gender Identity through the Manipulation of the Brazilian Portuguese Grammatical Gender System”. In *Queering Language, Gender and Sexuality*, edited by Tommaso M. Milani, 89–102. Sheffield: Equinox.
- Feinberg, Leslie. 1997. *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*. Boston (MA): Beacon Press.

- Moreno, Gustavo. 2017 (June 4). “‘Sono Diverso, non Sbagliato’ E il Tema Mette a Tacere i Bulli”. *La Repubblica*. Available online at <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2017/06/04/s-ono-diverso-non-sbagliato-e-il-tema-mette-a-tacere-i-bulli12.html> (Last accessed: February 28, 2018).
- Palusci, Oriana. 2013. “Translating Dolls”. In *Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice in Translation and Gender Studies*, edited by Eleonora Federici and Vanessa Leonardi, 15–31. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Rodari, Paolo. 2015 (March 24). “‘Il Gender Crea Esseri Transumani’, Bufera su Bagnasco”. *La Repubblica*. Available online at <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2015/03/24/il-gender-crea-esseri-transumani-bufera-su-bagnasco18.html> (Last accessed: February 28, 2018).
- Shilling, Chris. 2005. “Introduction”. In *The Body in Culture, Technology and Society*, 1–23. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE.

PART I

REVERBERATIONS OF THE GENDERED SELF

CHAPTER ONE

THE FEMALE HUSBAND: MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

MARCO VENUTI

1. Introduction

On March 21, 2015, the Italian online newspaper *Il Post* published an article entitled “Storia di una coppia lesbica a inizio Ottocento” (“The story of a lesbian couple in early 1800”), which introduced the story of a lesbian couple who lived in the small town of Weybridge, Vermont, in the early nineteenth century.¹ The article is the Italian translation of an article published by *The Washington Post* on the previous day: “The improbable, 200-year-old story of one of America’s first same-sex ‘marriages’” (Kaplan 2015). Intrigued by the story of Charity Bryant and Sylvia Drake, I kept reading more on the subject and found out that Rachel Hope Cleves, associate professor of history at the University of Victoria (Canada) had written a book about the lives of the two women in 2014 and a research article on the history of same-sex marriages in America in 2015.

In order to introduce Charity and Sylvia’s story, as well as my research hypothesis, it is useful to start with the account of their relationship given by one of Charity’s nephews. In his *Letters of a Traveller*, William Cullen Bryant provides an interesting account of the lives of Charity and Sylvia as it sets up the central themes of my analysis (Bryant 1850, 136-137):

I passed a few days in the valley of one of those streams of northern Vermont [...]. If I were permitted to draw aside the veil of private life, I

¹ The two women met in 1807 when Charity travelled to Weybridge, where she had planned to stay just a few months, to visit a friend. On July 3, they rented a room where they moved together. This date was celebrated as the beginning of their union for the forty-four years of their relationship (Cleves 2014, x).

would briefly give you the singular, and to me most interesting history of two maiden ladies who dwell in this valley. I would tell you how, in their youthful days, they took each other as companions for life, and how this union, no less sacred to them than the tie of marriage, has subsisted, in uninterrupted harmony, for forty years, during which they have shared each other's occupations and pleasures and works of charity while in health, and watched over each other tenderly in sickness; for sickness has made long and frequent visits to their dwelling.

I could tell you how they slept on the same pillow and had a common purse, and adopted each other's relations, and how one of them, more enterprising and spirited in her temper than the other, might be said to represent the male head of the family, and took upon herself their transactions with the world without, until at length her health failed, and she was tended by her gentle companion, as a fond wife attends her invalid husband. [...] I would speak of the friendly attentions which their neighbors, people of kind hearts and simple manners, seem to take pleasure in bestowing upon them, but I have already said more than I fear they will forgive me for, if this should ever meet their eyes, and I must leave the subject.

The account is fascinating because it frames the relationship between the *two maiden ladies* under three main themes. The first one is the explicit comparison to a more traditional and socially recognised form of marriage, a *union, no less sacred to them than the tie of marriage* that finds a further recognition in its long-lasting nature, for the two women lived together in *uninterrupted harmony, for forty years*. The second issue is strictly related to the social recognition of 'marriage'. William Cullen Bryant refers to the way people living in the small community of Weybridge accepted the relationship, describing the *friendly attentions which their neighbors, people of kind hearts and simple manners, seem to take pleasure in bestowing upon them*. The third, and probably more relevant, issue is the way Charity and Sylvia are described in the way they act within society and between themselves. Charity is described as being *more enterprising and spirited in her temper* and acting as *the male head of the family*, as she was the one who *took upon herself their transactions with the world without*. On the other hand, Sylvia is presented as the *gentle companion* and *the fond wife* attending *her invalid husband*. The narrator introduces Charity and Sylvia with attributes that are typically associated to masculinity and femininity respectively, an association that seems to help the acceptance of their community, by virtue of the socially recognisable roles they enacted. The three issues are related to the way queer theory considers sex, gender and sexuality as social constructs that have developed a "unique relationship" (Sauntson 2008, 274) and, more

specifically, they draw our attention to the fact that “some of the ties are socially (re)produced as ‘normal’ and ‘desirable’ [...] while others are devalued as ‘deviant’ and ‘unwanted’” (Milani 2014, 262).

I decided to explore the issue further looking at how the relationship between the two women had been construed in the works by Rachel Hope Cleves, in the way readers reacted to the story, looking at reviews of the works by the historian, and looking at the way same-sex marriage/relationships are talked about in contemporary texts.²

Before introducing the corpora I used for my investigation of male and female roles in same-sex relationships in Section 3, I will provide a brief outline of relevant research on masculinity and femininity as social constructs and on queer theory. I will then use a corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach (Baker 2006, 2014; Partington 2008, 2009) to the identification and analysis of language patterns used to construe gender identities in the three corpora.

2. Masculinity and femininity: gender roles, relationships, and society

Defining gender and gender roles is not a simple task since gender has been extensively described and discussed in various fields of studies and from various perspectives. The roles ascribed to the different genders are somehow socially recognised and typically depicted in a hierarchy. Gender, as it is widely known, is opposed to sex; it does not exist by itself, it is performative as Butler (1990) maintains and it is constructed by means of interactions. Its performative nature implies an ‘audience’ capable of interpreting the ‘performance’. It is a dialogic action, which includes at least two people. However, gender is hardly defined on the basis of individuals’ beliefs; it is rather constructed socially since its recognition is linked to previously existing and shared knowledge.

As a matter of fact, gender is still viewed in terms of binarism, which is also supported by the roles society assigns to people. Roles in society are gendered because they develop according to the expectations societies have of individuals in relation to their sex, which happens to define their gender too. Roles are, thus, gendered and they stem from the interaction

² The relevance of the works by Rachel Hope Cleves and of their reception to the issue of same-sex marriage in general is due to the fact that data were collected at a time when the topic of same-sex marriage was frequently debated in the media in the months leading to the US Supreme court ruling on the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case (June 26, 2015).

between people and society (Blackstone 2003). Gender roles are a social construction and may change according to the values each society ascribes to the different genders. Gender roles have been long studied within several different disciplines, each of which has provided a specific perspective to investigate the issue: the ecological perspective suggests that the environment and the community influence them; the biological perspective supports the existence of a natural affinity between one's own gender and some activities, even though there is no reference to a possible hierarchy; the sociological perspective comes much closer to our scope of study, as it corroborates the assertion that gender roles are not natural but learned, somehow taught/imposed by society nor are they related to biological features.

Strongly linked to the sociological approach is the feminist one, which maintains that since gender roles are learned and profoundly influenced by social norms of behaviour, they can change and be changed in time, and they can also display how power is shared between the two sexes in a given society. Gender roles often originate from the gender stereotypes a society supports, or, better, from those oversimplified beliefs frequently connected with a specific sex. Unfortunately, gender stereotypes are very influential and affect people's beliefs, which at the same time are fed by gender roles in a dialogic relation. The two are strongly intertwined. As for gender stereotypes, referring to Deaux and Lewis (1984), Brannon suggests four components "to differentiate male from female – traits, behaviors, physical characteristics, and occupations" (Brannon 2010, 54). These components can be variously combined, usually in relation to what society suggests and people perceive as single possible combinations. As a consequence, changing social perspective is of utmost importance to revise people's gender perception. Historical and social development contribute to change gender roles too. In western societies, for example, as it is widely known, the Industrial revolution significantly changed people's lives creating new needs and habits and destroying others. With reference to gender roles, it caused a great change in creating new roles: men started to work outside the house and women remained at home on their own, they both acquired new roles (Brannon 2004), they performed new roles, and these roles became gender specific.

Gender roles are always constructed in opposition to each other; something is either man's specific or woman's. Roles are thus gendered in so far as they are either feminine or masculine. It goes without saying that the description of something as 'traditionally feminine' and 'traditionally masculine' is strictly related to what a society supports. Institutions are gendered as well (Kimmel 2000), and they enhance traditional and deviant

values; they also “express a logic, a dynamic, that reproduces gender relations between women and men and the gender order of hierarchy and power” (Kimmel 2000, 95).

Traditional roles are far too known to be recalled here, especially the feminine ones, tightly tied to the image of women as weak, subordinate and the like. As for masculinity, it has undergone a significant change lately, even though men are still supposed to be “stoic, aggressive, dependable, and not feminine” (Brannon 2010, 50). Masculinity is often perceived as homogeneous, but in fact, it is not. The traditional view of masculinity leaves aside all those who do not conform to that view, marginalising them as well as it happens with other non-conforming minorities.

A further layer in the analysis of gender roles in general, and of masculinity in particular, comes from Milani’s suggestion that in order to queer epistemological normality it is crucial to map “more carefully the ways in which women – irrespective of sexual orientation – as well as transgendered and intersex individuals also do masculinities in their daily lives” (Milani 2014, 274).

Moving on from gender roles to relationships, we need to refer to Baker’s analysis of the terms *bachelor* and *husband* (2008, 203–215). The analysis highlights how the use of the two lexical items becomes problematic when they threaten the institution of marriage. More importantly, the analysis suggests a constant process of normalisation of marriage: monogamous, heterosexual marriage is something a man should desire and aspire to in order to accomplish the masculine role assigned by society. Baker (2008, 216), therefore, identifies that a

[...] key role of queer theory is to move the debate on sexuality beyond the focus of gay and lesbian identities by taking into account the ways in which all forms of desire and all social practices connected to sexuality and gender are influenced by powerful, normalising discourses.

It is from the assumption that queering masculinities also entails looking at agents other than just male participants that I start my analysis of the (hi)story of Charity and Sylvia in order to highlight the importance of gender roles in same-sex relationships.

3. Data and methodology

In order to carry out my investigation, I collected three distinct and yet interrelated corpora.³ The first one, which will be referred to as *Cleves*, comprises only two texts, i.e. the two works by historian R. H. Cleves: the book on Charity and Sylvia and the journal article on same-sex marriage. This corpus will be used to investigate the representation of the two women in the original sources and in the interpretation given by R. H. Cleves.

The second closely related corpus consists of reviews on the book published on journals, newspapers, and blogs; it will therefore be referred to as *Reviews*. It contains 54 texts, 23 written by readers mainly on blogs, 3 published on academic journals and the remaining 27 published on different newspapers and magazines. Even if the texts in the corpus are varied in terms of authorship, readership and style, they all reflect the opinion of readers; it proved a useful corpus to investigate the way contemporary readers perceived the story and decided to frame it in their opinions.

The third corpus has been collected to test whether the findings coming from the analysis of the first two corpora could be corroborated in texts dealing with a similar issue, a relationship between two women, that would not be dependent on or stemming from a focus on 19th century America. To this purpose, I compiled a corpus using WebBootCat (Baroni *et al.* 2006). The WebBootCat tool embedded in Sketch Engine allows the researcher to create corpora from ‘seeds’, automatically downloading pages from the web. The seeds I used to compile the *WebSameSex* corpus were identified with a keyword analysis that compared *Cleves* and *Reviews* to *EnTenTen*, a very big reference corpus. The keywords identified were then manually checked and all those referring to the specific context and lives of Charity and Sylvia were discarded, e.g. references to specific places, Weybridge, people and historical references. In the end, nearly twenty seeds⁴ were used to create the *WebSameSex* corpus, which comprises one hundred texts, which proved a useful point of reference to

³ In addition to the three collected corpora, I also used one general reference corpus, *EnTenTen* (Jakubicek *et al.* 2013) as a neutral baseline, being unrelated to the topic of the three corpora under scrutiny.

⁴ The full list of seeds includes: *affections*, “*female husband*”, *friendships*, “*gentle companion*”, *husbands*, “*impossible marriage*”, *intimacies*, *lesbian*, “*lesbian history*”, *lesbianism*, *manless*, *mannish*, *marriages*, *masculinity*, “*same sex marriage*”, “*same-sex marriage*”, “*same-sex union*”, *sexuality*, *unmarried*. Words in inverted commas were used as clusters rather than as individual words.

extend previous findings. Table 3.1 summarises the size of the four corpora used for the present study.

	<i>Cleves</i>	<i>Reviews</i>	<i>WebSameSex</i>	<i>EnTenTen</i>
texts	2	54	100	22,000,000
words	112,673	30,372	568,757	11,000,000,000,000

Table 3.1. Corpora description in terms of texts and words

Starting from these premises, I set out to investigate the following research questions: (a) How is Charity and Sylvia's relationship presented in *Cleves* and in *Reviews*?; (b) What are the roles, if any, assigned to them in *Cleves* and in *Reviews*?; (c) What are the linguistic resources used in attributing them their roles?; (d) Are the same linguistic choices salient in the *WebSameSex* corpus?

4. Corpus-assisted analysis

The first step was the identification in the word lists of *Cleves* and *Reviews* and in the keyword lists, previously computed in the selection of 'seeds', of words that could be used in the two corpora to refer to the two women and their relationship, as well as to marriage and other forms of same-sex relationships in general. A close reading of samples of concordance lines leads to the identification of the lexical set included in Table 4.1.

<i>Cleves</i>			<i>Reviews</i>		
word	freq.	pMw	word	freq.	pMw
marriage	439	3251	marriage	190	5367
relationship	172	1274	relationship	137	3870
friendship	138	1022	friendship	23	650
couple	81	600	couple	94	2655
husband	179	1326	husband	42	1186
wife	130	963	wife	46	1299
partner	16	118	partner	7	198
companion	38	281	companion	16	452
lover	66	489	lover	6	170

Table 4.1. List of words referring to relationships and roles in relationships.

The frequency of occurrences is expressed both in raw frequency and in per million words normalised frequency, in order to make the comparison between the two corpora possible, given the different size of the two corpora. All identified lexical items are more frequent in *Reviews* than in *Charity*, but for the terms ‘friendship’ and ‘lover’. This may suggest that the focus of readers is the relationship between the two women, the book by Cleves also focuses on the lives of Charity and Sylvia before their encounter, and that they explicitly describe their relationships in terms of a marriage. This is evident also if we look at the collocates, computed with Sketch Engine’s log-dice (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014), for terms referring to relationships: ‘marriage’, ‘relationship’, ‘friendship’, and ‘couple’. Collocates⁵ of ‘marriage’ in *Cleves* include *same-sex*, *impossible*, *traditional*, *legal*, and *spiritual*, suggesting that same-sex marriage is present along with a focus on other forms of marriage, or other values associated to it. Collocates in *Reviews* include *same-sex*, *legal*, *gay*, *unofficial*, *first*. Readers, in their reviews, focus on the relationship highlighting that this is the story of the first legal marriage. Collocates of ‘relationship’ in the two corpora share more similarities.⁶ This may be linked to the fact that ‘relationship’ is in itself a less ideologically valued term, compared to marriage, and its use in *Cleves* is similar to the way reviews use it. Collocates of ‘couple’ in *Cleves* are *married*, *female*, and *same-sex*, in *Reviews* they are *married*, *lesbian*, *same-sex*, and *queer*.

The analysis of ‘marriage’, ‘relationship’, and ‘couple’, and their collocates, seems to suggest a more explicit reference to homosexuality in the language of the reviews and, conversely, a tendency in *Cleves* to focus on more balanced lexical choices. This tendency is confirmed by the use of ‘friendship’ in *Cleves*, the only term referring to relationships, which is more frequent in *Cleves* compared to *Reviews*. This is partly related to the phrase “romantic/passionate friendship”, that is, the phrase that in the specific historical context would be used to describe a homosexual relationship.

Moving on to the analysis of relational nouns, we can easily identify ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ as the terms that are by and large the most used nouns; ‘husband’ is slightly more frequent in *Cleves* and ‘wife’ is more present in *Reviews*. The other terms, ‘partner’, ‘companion’ and ‘lover’ display slightly different distributions in the two corpora, even if their usage is not remarkably different, as shown in the following examples:

⁵ Collocates are listed according to the score of the log-dice.

⁶ Collocates of ‘Relationship’ in *Cleves* include *romantic*, *sexual*, *physical*, *passionate*, and *same-sex*; those in *Reviews* are *same-sex*, *sexual*, *physical*, *romantic*.

- (1) Charity was the husband and Sylvia the wife. But as Cleves points out, their relationship rested on equality more than traditional husband and wife unions. (*Reviews*)
- (2) From the July day in 1807 that Sylvia came to live with Charity until the October day in 1851 that death divided them, Charity headed the women's household in their own eyes, as well as in the eyes of their family, their friends, and their community. William Cullen Bryant likened Charity to a 'husband,' and Sylvia to her 'fond wife.' (Cleves 2014, 132)

While reading concordance lines, I noticed a recurrent pattern which was repeatedly used in both *Cleves* and *Reviews* to present Charity and Sylvia's relationship "as a marriage" and the two women "as husband and wife". The following examples are merely indicative of a much more widespread use of the pattern:

- (3) His words offer the plainest statement that Charity and Sylvia's relationship was viewed **as a marriage** (Cleves 2014, xi; emphasis added).
- (4) Many people described the women **as companions**, echoing Sylvia. Minister Jonathan Hovey addressed the women as 'Miss Charity Bryant & her beloved Companion' (Cleves 2014, 139; emphasis added).

Therefore, I decided to investigate the distribution of the pattern, exploiting the possibility offered by Sketch Engine to query the corpora using patterns of part of speech tags rather than individual words.

I then looked for instances of the pattern of the preposition 'as' followed by nouns (either in the singular or plural form) which may or may not have an article in between (as [a|an|the] NN.*) in the *Cleves* and *Review* corpora and in *EnTenTen* as a reference corpus.⁷

As the graph in Figure 4.1 clearly highlights, the pattern occurs significantly more frequently in *Cleves* than in the extremely big reference corpus. Given the topic, the focus and the sources of the publications by the historian Rachel Hope Cleves, this trend could be expected. Dealing with relationships and gender roles in same-sex relationships it is very

⁷ The exact query string used is:

[word="as"][word="a|an|the"]{0,1}[]{0,2}[tag="NN.*"]. It retrieves a sequence of 'as' followed by an article, or nothing, followed by a noun; the sequence may or may not include a premodifier of the noun.

likely that the author makes use of linguistic patterns to highlight them. What is more surprising is that the overall normalised frequency of the pattern is extremely frequent in *Reviews* not only in comparison to *EnTenTen* but also to *Cleves*.⁸ This may suggest that readers writing reviews have focused their attention and interest on the (re)presentation of the relationship between the two women.

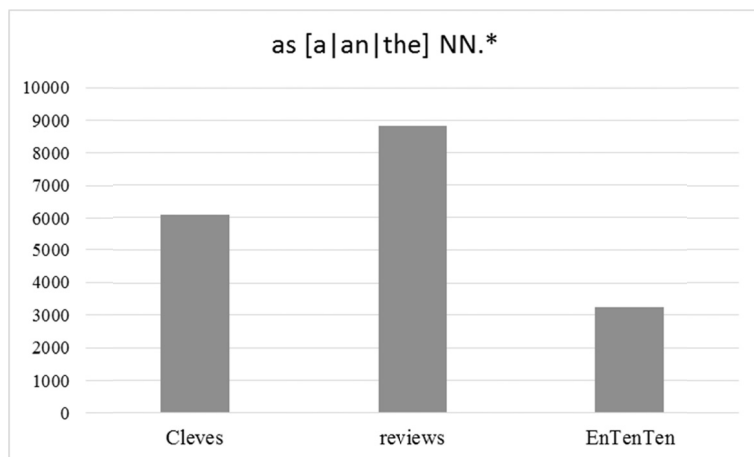


Figure 4.1. Distribution of per million word frequency of all the phrases matching the query string as “[a|an|the] NN.*”.⁹

Even if the graph highlights a clear trend in the distribution of the pattern, it does not show the actual realisations of the pattern, which are not necessarily relevant to the topic under investigation. In order to narrow down data to relevant patterns and, more specifically, to analyse in what ways they are used to describe same-sex relationships, I manually read the list of all the patterns, choosing only relevant ones. In order to carry out the selection, manual reading of concordances was necessary. As a result, Table 4.2 lists all the phrases that realise the query pattern that deal with relationships, and that occur at least twice in *Cleves* and *Reviews*. Together with raw frequencies, Table 4.2 also lists normalised frequencies, which

⁸ Variation in terms of frequency is statistically significant for all the comparisons with a log likelihood value that is higher than 25.

⁹ The pattern matched 686 occurrences (6,088 per million words) in *Cleves*, 268 (8,824 per million words) in *Reviews* and 133,996 occurrences (3,791 per million words) in the reference corpus *EnTenTen*.

are necessary for the comparison between the two corpora, bearing in mind that the size of the *Reviews* corpus is one-fourth of *Cleves*.

The first thing that the table shows is that the total number of normalised frequencies in *Reviews* is nearly three times higher than that in *Cleves*, a difference which is bigger than the one highlighted in Figure 4.1. This is a first confirmation that reviewers focused a lot on the issue of the relationship and on linguistic devices to frame it according to recognisable concepts. The other thing that emerges is that there is greater variability in *Cleves*; there are 34 clusters that realise the pattern as opposed to the 16 ones in *Reviews*. This difference may suggest once more that the attention of the authors in *Reviews* is centred around fewer and more easily recognisable schemes, *as a married couple*, *as a marriage*, *as [a|the][fond]wife*. On the other hand, we notice that there are numerous patterns in *Cleves* that introduce the relationship in less direct ways, using euphemisms and even metaphors: *as a common synonym* (for spouse|husband|wife), *as friends*, *as her help-meet*, *as a lover*, *as a metaphor* (for spouse), and so on. This trend confirms what had been analysed in the lexical analysis at the beginning of the paragraph: a more explicit reference to homosexuality in *Reviews* and, conversely, a tendency in *Cleves* to focus on more balanced lexical choices. The only exception is the frequent use of the phrase *as guiding lights* (of the religious community). This is an interesting choice also because the phrase, taken from the book synopsis, has been used in five different reviews, thus showing to what extent contemporary readers highlight the acceptance of the relationship by the local Weybridge community in a time when religious themes are frequently used against the notion of same-sex marriage in 21st century America.

<i>Cleves</i>			<i>Reviews</i>		
word	Freq.	pMw	word	Freq.	pMw
as a man	10	88.8	as a married couple	17	559.7
as a wife	6	53.3	as a marriage	8	263.4
as husband	5	44.4	as companions for life	8	263.4
as wives	5	44.4	as a couple	7	230.5
as a common synonym	4	35.5	as guiding lights	7	230.5
as a marriage	4	35.5	as a fond wife	4	131.7
as a member	4	35.5	as husband and wife	4	131.7
as a female husband	3	26.6	as head	4	131.7
as a husband	3	26.6	as the wife	3	98.8

<i>Cleves</i>			<i>Reviews</i>		
word	Freq.	pMw	word	Freq.	pMw
as a married couple	3	26.6	as a household	2	65.9
as a single woman	3	26.6	as an open secret	2	65.9
as a woman	3	26.6	as men	2	65.9
as companions	3	26.6	as spouses	2	65.9
as friends	3	26.6	as the husband	2	65.9
as head	3	26.6	as their anniversary	2	65.9
as her help-meet	3	26.6	as a lesbian couple	2	65.9
as lovers	3	26.6			
as man and wife	3	26.6			
as marriages	3	26.6			
as spouses	3	26.6			
as sisters	2	17.8			
as a euphemism	2	17.8			
as a fond wife	2	17.8			
as a friend	2	17.8			
as a gift	2	17.8			
as a lover	2	17.8			
as a metaphor	2	17.8			
as a union	2	17.8			
as a young woman	2	17.8			
as Charity's constant companion	2	17.8			
as family	2	17.8			
as marriage	2	17.8			
as partners	2	17.8			
as single women	2	17.8			
Total	75	931.9	Total	76	2,502.3

Table 4.2. List phrases matching the query string as “[a|an|the] NN.*” with a raw frequency higher than 2.

Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3 introduce a new term of comparison, i.e. the *WebSameSex* corpus. The patterns chosen for the comparison include only those patterns that had been previously identified for the inclusion of phrases in Table 4.2. Obviously, it is not possible to make sure the target figures refer only to relevant uses of the identified phrases but it should constitute a closer estimate to the distribution of relevant examples compared to the figures in Figure 4.1. As can be seen, for all the patterns, the normalised frequency is higher in *Reviews*. Usually, normalised

frequencies in *WebSameSex* tend to be higher than in *EnTenTen*, even if differences are not always statistically significant. Given the size of the *WebSameSex* corpus and of the reference corpus *EnTenTen*, it is not possible to carry out a more detailed analysis and comparison. Nevertheless, we could say that there is a general trend in the topic-specific corpus to use patterns that introduce relationships and roles in relationships. This seems to be the case also when texts have been collected more generally on same-sex relationships, and without any direct connection to the story of Charity and Sylvia, whose presentation in the works by Cleves may have triggered a specific interest and focus on our contemporary readers and reviewers.

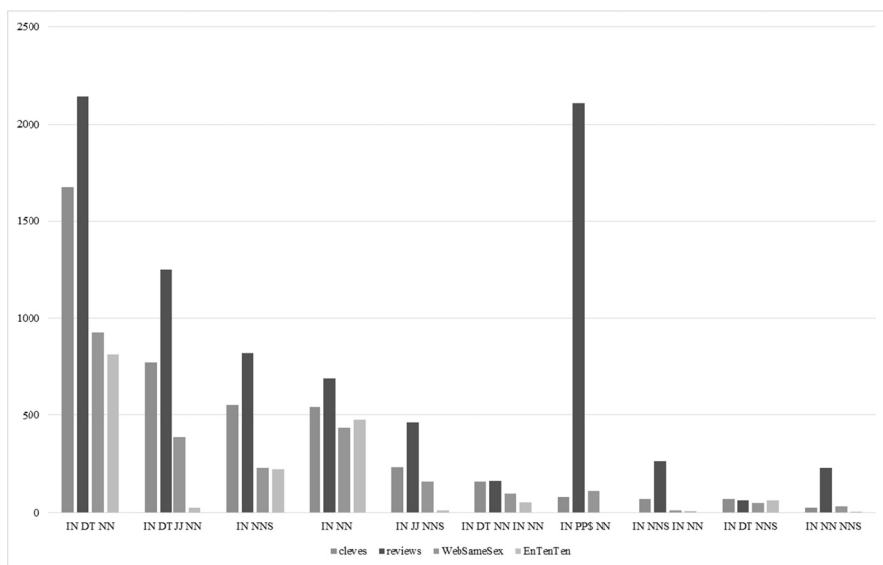


Figure 4.2. Distribution of per million word frequency of specific patterns in *Cleves*, *Reviews*, *WebSameSex* and *EnTenTen*.

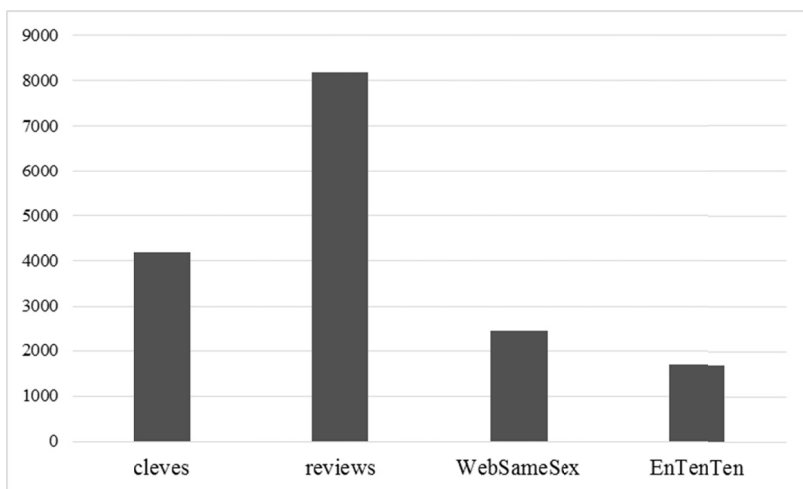


Figure 4.3. Distribution of per million word frequency of specific patterns in *Cleves*, *Reviews*, *WebSameSex* and *EnTenTen*.

5. Discussion and concluding remarks

Starting from the (hi)story of Charity and Sylvia we have focused our analysis on the restricted discourse domain of same-sex relationships, ranging from the topic specific works by Rachel Hope Cleves and their reception in readers' reviews, to a wider and more heterogeneous collection of contemporary texts on the general issue of homosexual relationships. Our focus has helped us to identify and analyse specific lexico-grammatical features and linguistic patterns used to describe and comment on gender roles in same-sex relationships. The analysis has highlighted some similarities but also relevant differences in the *Reviews* and *Cleves* corpora.

As discussed in the previous paragraph, both corpora show a great interest in gender roles, and a marked emphasis in depicting the two women in terms of masculine and feminine traits. The description of the couple given by William Cullen Bryant and introduced at the beginning of the chapter remains symptomatic of the way in which both the historical works and their reviewers describe Charity and Sylvia's relationship. Nonetheless, the widening of lexical choices in *Reviews*, especially in terms of collocational patterns, displays an opening of attitudes expressed towards the identification of gender roles in same-sex relationships. The wider range of lexical items identified to describe relationships and gender

roles points towards a less binary mind frame, i.e. a queering, a problematizing frame that includes a more varied gender representation in the way reviewers talk about the Charity and Sylvia's story and more generally about homosexual relationships.

Both corpora also share the widespread use of the grammar pattern “as [a|an|the] NN.*”, which is frequently used to describe the two women, their relationship, and their role in the relationship comparing them to some easily recognisable frame. The presence of this pattern in both corpora is relevant inasmuch as it functions as a cognitive frame to conceive of relations and gender roles, particularly so in a restricted discourse domain. Its frequent use is important also because, compared to lexis, grammar patterns are a more stable feature of language, a feature that is less prone to development or changes. Its use, therefore, highlights a disposition to construe a discourse of same-sex relationships in comparison to more traditional roles. Looking at the specific realisations of the grammatical pattern, we can see how it is more frequently used in the *Reviews* corpus to refer to relationships (the three phrases *as a married couple*, *as a marriage*, *as a couple* account for nearly half of all the occurrences of the pattern), and in a less biased way. In *Cleves*, on the other hand, there is a predominant trend in using the pattern to introduce the binary opposition between *man/husband* on the one hand and *wife* on the other. Even in the stability of the grammatical pattern, *Reviews* presents a development in the way same-sex relationships are talked about, a trend that reflects and reinforces the findings of the collocational analysis.

The introduction of the *WebSameSex* corpus as a further point of reference helps us to place the trends so far identified in a wider perspective. The use of the grammar pattern is still more frequent than in *EnTenTen*, showing a persistence of a frame through which homosexual relationships are compared to other concepts. The decrease in relative frequencies also proves that, moving away from the story of Charity and Sylvia, the need for a comparison is less urgent.

This last recognition may lead us to some, more general, remarks on the use of *masculinity* and *femininity* in the story of the two women and in the way the public has perceived it. We could say that a ‘hegemonic’ representation of their relationship, which takes place through the acquisition of recognisable masculine and feminine traits, is the means that grants them visibility within their 18th century society. Charity and Silvia perform socially accepted/acceptable gender roles.

Gender performance empowered the two women also through economic stability, which entails social recognition and acceptance, a trait,

economic stability, which is equally present in the account by Cleves¹⁰ and in the reviews.¹¹ Economic stability also entailed social recognition, realised through the acceptance of their neighbours and their active participation in the life of the community: “They contributed their time and money to cleaning and furnishing the meetinghouse. They counseled the deacons, participated in church governance, and acted as spiritual guardians to the town’s youth” (Cleves 2014, 158).

Both through the words of the historian and the reviews by her readers Charity and Sylvia emerge as active, conscious, and deliberate actors in establishing themselves as a couple. They are not complying to social conventions *per se*; they are queering them through the accomplishment of socio-economic stability and the performance of recognisable social roles as a vehicle to self-representation, socially recognised visibility, and ultimately existence.

References

- Baker, Paul. 2006. *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*. London: Continuum.
- . 2008. *Sexed Texts: Language, Gender and Sexuality*. London: Equinox.
- . 2014. *Using Corpora to Analyze Gender*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Baroni, Marco, Adam Kilgariff, Jan Pomikálek, and Pavel Rychlý. 2006 “WebBootCat: A Web Tool for Instant Corpora”. In *Proceeding of 12th EuraLex Conference*, edited by Elisa Corino, Carla Marello and Cristina Onesti, 123–132. Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso.
- Blackstone, Amy. 2003. “Gender Roles and Society”. In *Human Ecology: An Encyclopedia of Children, Families, Communities, and Environments*, edited by Julia R. Miller, Richard M. Lerner, and Lawrence B. Schiamberg, 335–338. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Brannon, Linda. 2010. *Gender: Psychological Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Bryant, William Cullen. 1850. *Letters of a Traveller; or, Notes of Things Seen in Europe and America*. New York: George P. Putnam. Available online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11013/11013-h/11013-h.htm> (Last accessed: February 28, 2018).

¹⁰ “The stability of Charity and Sylvia’s business amid the time’s economic uncertainty helps explain why the women were in such demand as employers” (Cleves 2014, 171).

¹¹ “Of equal importance is the ability of the women to make their own way in the world, not reliant upon any relative for their subsistence. [...] they prospered by their hard work and their devotion to each other” (*Reviews*).

- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Cleves, Rachel Hope. 2014. *Charity and Sylvia. A Same-Sex Marriage in Early America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2015. “‘What, Another Female Husband?’: The Prehistory of Same-Sex Marriage in America”. *Journal of American History* 101, no. 4: 1055–1081.
- Deaux, Kay, and Laurie L. Lewis. 1984. “The Structure of Gender Stereotypes: Interrelationships among Components and Gender Label”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 46: 991–1004.
- Jakubiček, Miloš, Adam Kilgariff, Vojtěch Kovář, Pavel Rychlý, and Vít Suchomel. 2013. “The TenTen Corpus family”. Paper presented at 7th International Corpus Linguistics Conference, Lancaster, July 23–26.
- Kaplan, Sarah. 2015. “The Improbable, 200-Year-Old Story of One of America’s First Same-Sex ‘Marriages’”. *The Washington Post*, March 20.
- Kilgariff, Adam, Vít Baisa, Jan Bušta, Miloš Jakubiček, Vojtěch Kovář, Jan Michelfeit, Pavel Rychlý, and Vít Suchomel. 2014. “The Sketch Engine: Ten Years on”. *Lexicography* 1, no. 1: 1–30.
- Kimmel, Michael S. 2000. *The Gendered Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Milani, Tommaso. 2014. “Queering Masculinities”. In *The Handbook of Language, Gender and Sexuality*, edited by Susan Ehrlich, Miriam Meyerhoff, and Janet Holmes, 260–278. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Partington, Alan. 2008. “The Armchair and the Machine: Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies”. In *Corpora for University Language Teachers*, edited by Carol Taylor Torsello, Katherine Ackerley and Erik Castello, 189–213. Bern: Peter Lang.
- . 2009. “Evaluating Evaluation and some Concluding Reflections on CADS”. In *Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies on the Iraq Conflict*, edited by John Morley and Paul Bayley, 261–304. London: Routledge.
- Sauntson, Helen. 2008. “The Contributions of Queer Theory to Gender and Language Research”. In *Gender and Language Research Methodologies*, edited by Kate Harrington, Lia Litosseliti, Helen Sauntson and Jane Sunderland, 271–282. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.