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Eros and Anteros: Queer Mutuality in Milton’s *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*

DAVID L. ORVIS

In central London, at the heart of Piccadilly Circus, stands the Shaftesbury Monument Memorial Fountain, a structure commemorating the philanthropic work of Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury. Atop this monument and cast in aluminum is the statue of a scantily clad youth accoutered with wings and a bow (fig. 1). Although passers-by routinely identify this statue as Eros, the sculptor Alfred Gilbert claims it is Anteros, Eros’s brother, since he, “as opposed to Eros or Cupid, the frivolous tyrant,” represents “reflective and mature love.” Eros, in other words, embodies carnal lust, Anteros a benevolent mutuality transcendent of erotic love. This distinction is lost upon the vast majority of the statue’s visitors—a consequence, no doubt, of Eros’s prominence among the erotes. Nevertheless, the ease with which one can confuse two figures who purportedly represent two very different kinds of love bespeaks a confusion inherent in the figures themselves and the conceptual differences they supposedly signify. As we shall see, this confusion has a long, complex history, one that stretches back thousands of years before the Shaftesbury Memorial’s unveiling. The controversy Anteros tends to engender is nearly as ancient, so perhaps Gilbert half-expected the mixed reactions to his sculpture. While he insisted that the memorial portrays a mature, spiritual love, this explanation did little to assuage critics who thought it in poor taste to immortalize Shaftesbury’s philanthropy with a nearly naked youth modeled after Angelo Colarossi, the sculptor’s then-fifteen-year-old assistant. In this instance, embodiment appears to have undermined, indeed militated against, a (strictly) Neoplatonic representation of love. Or to put it in literary terms, the tenor could not efface the vehicle, which in any case continues to be misrecognized as Eros, the youthful incarnation of (homo)erotic love.2
Dating back to antiquity, the tradition of Eros and Anteros is conflicted at least in part because it has been subject to the vagaries of diachronic change and synchronic variance. Yet, even the earliest depictions of the erotes seem vexed, as if conflict is bound up in the very notion of Anteros. Whereas in some classical works Anteros is Eros’s companion and patron of requited love, in others he is Eros’s nemesis and avenger of spurned love. In some texts he is born of heteroerotic love, while in many others he is the product of homoerotic love. And while sometimes Anteros emerges from love requited, at other times he is manifest in love scorned. This cacophony of origins and significations derives from Anteros’s name, which taken from the ancient Greek Ἀντερως can mean anything from “different love,” to “opposite love,” to “against love” – all of which suggest the possibility of mutuality as well as antagonism. For example, does “against love” mean “love pressed against love?” Or does it signify “love pitted against love?” In the first interpretation, Anteros and his brother Eros constitute a mythic same-sex couple; in the second, they are bitter enemies locked in an eternal struggle. The cohabitation of love returned and love scorned presents problems of interpretation that during the Renaissance were compounded by two trends: first, humanist scholars often confused and conflated Anteros not only with Eros, but also with Amor Lethaeus, the dissolver of love (fig. 2); and second, the rise to prominence of Neoplatonism encouraged revisionist readings of the homoerotic tale of Eros and Anteros as exemplifying a spiritual mutuality that transcends carnal desire. Thus, one is never quite sure which of the erotes is being presented. Rather like Michel Foucault’s famous description of sodomy, the literature on Eros and Anteros is “utterly confused.”

Figure 1: Anteros, from the Shaftesbury Monument Memorial Fountain. Photograph by David L. Orvis.

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One might be surprised, therefore, to find Eros and Anteros among the allusions John Milton includes in his *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643) to figure the mutual love and desire that should precede matrimony. Yet, as Will Stockton discusses in his introduction to this special issue, Milton’s conceptualizations of companionship (whether hetero or homo) are not, as some critics would have it, consistent. One of the aims of the present essay is to demonstrate that this inconsistency is evident even within his divorce tracts, and hence, too, that Milton continued to wrestle with the concept of matrimonial love even as he tried to make the case for divorce. In *Tetrachordon* (1645), for instance, Milton dismisses Augustine’s pronouncement that male friends, rather than mixed-sex spouses, constitute the ideal union:

_Austin_ contests that manly friendships in all other regards had bin a more becomming solace for _Adam_, then to spend so many secret years in an empty world with one woman. But our Writers deservedly reject this crabbed opinion; and defend that there is a peculiar comfort in the married state besides the genial bed, which no other society affords.⁵

In this passage, Milton elevates companionate marriage above masculine friendship, that affective bond so many Renaissance humanists heralded as
superior to heterosocial relations. Pointing to this and other examples from his polemics and poems, critics have identified Milton’s participation in a discernible epistemic shift in the so-called sexual norm: when homonormative friendship was superseded by heteronormative marriage. According to Gregory Chaplin, “The marital ideal that Milton articulates in his divorce tracts ... develops out of the Platonic inspired friendship that he shared with Charles Diodati. Milton’s theory of marriage thus represents the fusion of two discourses: Christian marriage, as modified by reformed theologians and humanist scholars, and Renaissance friendship – the practice of classical friendship revived by humanist educators and the dissemination of classical texts.” Likewise, Thomas Luxon argues that Milton seeks “to redefine marriage using terms and principles of classical friendship, and then to promote this newly dignified version of marriage as the originary human relation and, therefore, the bedrock of social and political culture in Protestant Christendom.” Milton’s project, then, was to appropriate the rhetoric of masculine friendship for companionate marriage.

Without denying the importance of friendship in Milton’s ruminations about marriage, I submit that the paradigm put forward by Chaplin, Luxon, and others has had a potentially totalizing effect on Milton criticism. That is, the scholarly emphasis on friendship and marriage – as opposed to a wider range of hetero- and homoerotic relations that defy and exceed these dominant paradigms – has established a false binary. Thus, whereas Chaplin claims that Milton’s deployment of Eros and Anteros in Doctrine “depict[s] the marital bond because his friendship with Diodati serves as the basis of the marital ideal he develops,” I propose that the myth about the erotes posits a dynamic that resists any easy categorization. Examining the version of Eros and Anteros we find in Doctrine in the context of the rich tradition from which it emerged, I aim to show that Milton puts into discourse a concept of mutual love separated out from preexisting social structures. I want to argue that Milton exploits the slew of contradictions and controversies attached to the story of Eros and Anteros in order to articulate a hitherto ineffable mutual love – what I am calling “queer mutuality.” Not only is this mutuality distinct from institutions such as friendship and marriage; it is also put in the service of exposing the tyranny of those institutions. That Milton would offer a critique of marriage in a chapter that in fact focuses on matrimonial love might seem paradoxical. As I hope to demonstrate, however, this paradox enables the polemict to distinguish sharply between institutions of friendship and marriage on the one hand and the mutualities they often disallow on the other. In so doing, Milton opens up a conceptual gulf wherein the radical queer potential of his argument might be realized. For even if he could not have anticipated the sexual politics of the modern era, the primacy Milton affords mutual love irrespective of cultural expectations appears strikingly similar to queer critiques of marriage and the neoliberal state.

The argument of Book One, Chapter 6 in Doctrine rehearses, at the same time that it interrogates, the terms and conditions of marriage that most concern Milton: “God regards Love and Peace in the family more than a compulsive performance of marriage, which is more broke by a grievous continuance than by a needful divorce.” In this argument, Milton throws into relief crucial differences
between marriage, which often requires “compulsive performance” and “grievous continuance,” and reciprocal love founded upon “Love and Peace.” In the chapter itself, Milton develops this distinction, explaining that marriage and love are not synonymous; on the contrary, in many cases they oppose one another: “this is a deep and serious verity, showing us that love in marriage cannot live nor subsist unless it be mutual; and where love cannot be, there can be left of wedlock nothing but the empty husk of an outside matrimony, as undelightful and unpleasing to God as any other kind of hypocrisy” (711). In fulminating against the “hypocrisy” that confers marital status upon individuals who do not love one another, Milton acknowledges that mutual love differs fundamentally from, and therefore exists independently of, the state of matrimony. Moreover, Milton insists upon the primacy of “love in marriage,” without which “wedlock [is] nothing but the empty husk.” In other words, what concerns Milton most here is not the integrity of the married state, but rather the threat marriage poses to love’s “subsistence.”

To elucidate this originary mutual love, Milton provides his own adaptation of the myth of Eros and Anteros. In what might be an attempt to bridge the gap between love and marriage, Milton calls the story a “parable” of “matrimonial love” (711). However, the tale has nothing to say about the cultivation of love within the constraints of wedlock; it explores, rather, the discovery of mutual love and desire irrespective of any social institutions. Beginning at the end, we note that in Milton’s version, when Eros finally encounters his brother Anteros, their union is described as “the reflection of a coequal and homogeneal fire” (711). What kind of love is this, exactly? Though some artists did heterosexualize the myth, depicting Eros and Anteros as a mixed-sex couple (fig. 3), these renditions make up a relatively small portion of Renaissance interpretations. In general, Renaissance artists maintained the homoerotic dynamic of Eros and Anteros’s coupling, prompting one to wonder why Milton would choose it as the vehicle for expressing mutual love vis-à-vis marriage. Though one might think that the Neoplatonic reading of the tale appealed to Milton, in the discussion that follows I shall show that the images of tumescence and ejaculation he enlists in his version indicate a resistance to a narrowly allegorical interpretation. It will also become clear, however, that the mutuality Milton illustrates is not necessarily reducible to an erotic encounter. Drawing upon a range of sources that contest and contradict one another, Milton uses Eros and Anteros to articulate a dynamic that remains tantalizingly out of reach, intelligible more for what it isn’t—namely, friendship or marriage, or rather friendship or marriage as such—than what it is or could be. Or to put it another way, the wide spectrum of possibilities separated out from preexisting social arrangements, friendship and marriage among them, makes Milton’s parable of Eros and Anteros so obviously invested in a kind of queer mutuality.
In some respects, the tale we find in *Doctrine* is of a piece with Milton’s other works emphasizing the need for one to discern right from wrong, good from evil. Eros searches “all about” for his brother Anteros, along the way meeting “many false and feigning desires that wander singly up and down in his likeness” (711). Whose “likeness” the “false and feigning desires” inhabit remains unclear. They might be impersonating Anteros, since he is the one Eros has set out to find. But they might also be disguised as Eros, since Milton, following Themistius, claims that “Love, if he be not twin-born, yet hath a brother wondrous like him, called Anteros” (711).13 In any event, Eros finds himself in the by-now familiar Miltonic position, tasked with differentiating between true love and “false and feigning desires.” In fact, the quest is even more difficult than it first appears. If we accept that Milton knew of and drew upon multiple accounts of the myth, and indeed this is one of my premises, then in addition to finding his brother Anteros, Eros must also locate the correct form of him. Although many Renaissance works identify Anteros as the embodiment of mutual or reciprocal love, in Pausanias’s second-century *Description of Greece*, a text Milton would have known, Anteros represents something entirely different – what W.H.S. Jones translates as “love avenged”:

πρὸ δὲ της ἐσόδου της ἐς Αἰκαθημέαν ἐστὶ βωμὸς Ἑρωτως ἐχων ἐπίγραμμα ὡς Χάρμος Αθηναίων πρώτος Ἐρωτι ἁνάθει, τὸν ἐν πολεί βωμον καλομενον Ἀντερωτος
In this passage, Anteros represents not love returned but love spurned, a love that sends Timagoras and Meles to their deaths. As the avenging spirit of Timagoras, Anteros designs to punish those who scorn love even, perhaps especially, when the lover is a foreigner. I shall have more to say about the tragic trajectory of Pausanias’s version of the tale. For now, it should suffice to note that if Milton’s parable focuses on the eventual union of the erotes, then this union would entail Eros’s finding one instantiation of Anteros while avoiding the wrath of another. Thus, at the same time that he must discern between the “many false and feigning desires” that may appear as Eros and/or Anteros, Eros must also discern between Anteros as Love Returned and Anteros as Love Avenged.

The misrecognition of love and desire that mobilizes Milton’s tale is also of central importance to the earliest depiction of Anteros, which we find in Plato’s *Phaedrus.* Though editors of *Doctrine* regularly cite Plato as Milton’s chief source, the particulars of the passage in question cast serious doubt on critical interpretations that take masculine friendship as the salient model for Miltonic marriage.15 Appearing in *Phaedrus* as a concept rather than a cherub, anteros (ἀντέρωτα) names the physical desire felt between lover and beloved, erastes and eromenos. In the famous chariot allegory, Socrates explains that each lover is a charioteer, his chariot pulled by two horses:

<math>
\text{ὅταν ὁ οὐδὲν ὁ ἡμέρας ἀνὴρ τὸ ἐρωτικὸν ὄμην, πάλιν αἰσθήσεις}
\text{διαθέμεθα την ψυχήν, γαμαλίαμου το και πόθου καντρον}
</math>

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[Before the entrance to the Academy is an altar to Love, with an inscription that Charmus was the first Athenian to dedicate an altar to that god. The altar within the city called the altar of Anteros they say was dedicated by resident aliens, because the Athenian Meles, spurning the love of Timagoras, a resident alien, bade him ascend to the highest point of the rock and cast himself down. When Meles saw that Timagoras was dead, he suffered such pangs of remorse that he threw himself from the same rock and so died. From this time the resident aliens worshipped as Anteros the avenging spirit of Timagoras.]14
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Although Socrates warns against allowing the concupiscent horse to drive the chariot, his description of reciprocal love suggests that such consummation is not just desirable but often inevitable:

[So he is in love, but he knows not with whom; he does not understand his own condition and cannot explain it; like one who has caught a disease of the eyes from another, he can give no reason for it; he sees himself in his lover as in a mirror, but is not conscious of the fact. And in the lover’s presence, like him he ceases from his pain, and in his absence, like him he is filled with yearning such as he inspires, and love’s image, requited love, dwells within him; but he calls it, and believes it to be, not love, but friendship. Like the lover, though less strongly, he desires to see his friend, to touch him, kiss him, and lie down by him; and naturally these things are soon brought about.]17
In this depiction, anteros signifies a reciprocal or requited love expressed through physical intimacy. Although the critical tendency has been to identify this love as amity, as in Chaplin’s reading of Milton’s use of *Phaedrus*, Socrates insists, following Harold Fowler’s translation, that the lover “calls it, and believes it to be, not love, but friendship.” This distinction is crucial: not only does Socrates, and through him Plato, distinguish between love (ἔρως) and friendship (φιλία); he also declares that mutual love is often misrecognized as friendship. More simply put, anteros feels like friendship, when in fact it is something else. This something else, moreover, involves a physical consummation that, propelled by the concupiscent horse, remains distinct from, but not incompatible with, the spiritual love Socrates celebrates as divine madness.

During the Renaissance, at least two interpretations of this consummation became prominent: some humanists sought to de-eroticize the myth, repackaging it as an allegory for choosing spiritual love over carnal love, while others either eschewed this prudish reading altogether or reproduced it so as to lay bare its pretentiousness. If the Shaftesbury Memorial represents a more recent attempt at the former interpretation, Andrea Alciati’s *Emblemata* includes a considerably more influential example, one Milton certainly knew. In Emblem CX (“Ἀντέρως, id est, Amor virtutis”), Alciati presents Anteros as “love of virtue”:

Die ubi sunt incurvi arcus? ubi tela Cupido?
   Mollia queis iuvenum figere corda soles.
Fax ubi tristis? ubi pennae? tres unde corollas
   Fert manus? unde aliam temporae cincta gerunt?
Haud mihi vulgari est hospes cum Cypride quicquam,
   Ulla voluptatis nos neque forma tulit.
Sed puris hominum succendo mentibus ignes
   Disciplinae, animos astraque ad alta traho.
Quatuor ecque ipsa texo virtute corollas:
   Quarum, quae Sophiae est, tempora prima tegit.

[“Tell me, where are your arching bows, where your arrows, Cupid, the shafts which you use to pierce the tender hearts of the young? Where is your hurtful torch, where your wings? Why does your hand hold three garlands? Why do your temples wear a fourth? - Stranger, I have nothing to do with common Venus, nor did any pleasurable shape bring me forth. I light the fires of learning in the pure minds of men and draw their thoughts to the stars on high. I weave four garlands out of virtue’s self and the chief of these, the garland of Wisdom, wreathes my temples.”]^{18}

The image for this emblem (fig. 4) show Anteros (or is it Eros?) holding a palm, a reference to yet another version of the myth from antiquity. In a different section of his *Description of Greece*, Pausanias observes,
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As Guy de Tervarent has shown, this depiction of Eros and Anteros as competing over a palm was common in Renaissance art. For Neoplatonists such as Alciati, the struggle between Eros and Anteros amounts to a struggle between physical love and spiritual love. That the brothers wrestling for the palm often look identical to one another (figs. 2 and 5) underscores the difficulty of the struggle; they are evenly matched, and more often than not Renaissance artists illustrate not a decisive victory but an ongoing struggle. The twinning of Eros and Anteros also raises questions about the supposed differences between the two kinds of love they embody. Indeed, how do we know Eros from Anteros? And how do we move away, finally, from the eroticized images through which erotic and spiritual love are conveyed?

Once again, we find the tenor unable to efface the vehicle. To illustrate the dilemma, one might glance at the text of Emblem CXI from Alciati’s Emblemata:

Aligerum, aligeroque inimicum pinxit Amori,
Arcu arcum, atque ignes igne domans Nemesis.
Ut quae alius fecit, patiatur: at hic puer olim
Intrepidus gestans tela, miser lacrimat.
Ter spuit inque sinus imos: res mira, crematur
Ignis ignis, furias odit Amoris Amor.

[Nemesis has fashioned a form with wings, a foe to Love with his wings, subduing bow with bow and flames with flame, so that Love may suffer what he has done to others. But this boy, once so bold when he was carrying his arrows, now weeps in misery and has spat three times low on his breast. A wondrous thing - fire is being burned with fire, Love is loathing the frenzies of Love.]
On its face, this emblem records Anteros’s triumph over Eros, but in the scene Alciati narrates Eros has his carnal desires turned against him, implying that Anteros vanquishes his brother only by outmatching him in the arena of erotic prowess. Here the twinning of Eros and Anteros confounds the very qualities Alciati is at such pains to differentiate.

Figure 4: Emblem CX, from Andrea Alciati, Emblemata cum commentariis Claudii Minois I.C. Francisci Sanctii Brocensis, & notis Laurentii Pignarii Patavini . . . Opera et vigilii Ioannis Accesserunt in fine Federici Morelli Professoris Regij (Padua, 1621), 457.
If Alciati allies himself with the Neoplatonists, Milton, in rejecting a
narrowly allegorical view of Eros and Anteros, gravitates more towards Plato and
the dialogue on love as divine madness in *Phaedrus*. So, too, does Ben Jonson,
whom Merritt Hughes cites as a contemporary source for Milton’s representation
of the erotes. Before attending to the homoerotics of the excerpt from *Doctrine*,
then, I would like to turn briefly to one of Jonson’s masques that appears to have
been formative for Milton. Performed at Bolsover Castle in 1634 and printed in
1641, *Love’s Welcome* was likely Jonson’s final court masque. Staged in honor of
King Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria, the masque begins with the chorus’s
pondering the nature of love:

Chor. If LOVE be call’d a lifting of the Sense,
To knowledge of that pure intelligence,
Wherein the Soule hath rest, and residence;

1 Tenor When were the Senses in such order plac’d?
2 Tenor The Sight, the Hearing, Smelling, Touching,
Taste,
All at one banquet?
Base ‘Would it ever last?24

Though the meditation begins with the Neoclassically informed idea that love must
transcend “Sense, / To knowledge of that pure intelligence,” the individual voices
that make up the chorus go on to undermine such a view by conceiving of love as
a sensual banquet. The masque’s stage directions indicate that an actual banquet is
then set before the king and queen, but not before the chorus concludes, “And
hence, / At every real banquet to the Sense, / Welcome, true Welcome fill the Complements” (808). Although the interactive aspect of the performance is de rigueur for Stuart masques, this particular gesture conscripts into a polyamorous feast of love not just the sovereign and his queen but everyone in attendance.

One might suspect that this initial feast belongs to the Jonsonian antimasque, the place where chaos and discord are simulated. However, Eros and Anteros’s introduction into the masque’s interrogation of love suggests that Neoplatonic ascent is finally not possible. Nor is it desirable. Jonson’s skepticism is evident in the stage directions that describe the first entrance of Eros and Anteros:

And the King, and Queene, having a second Banquet set downe before them from the Cloudes by two Loves; One, as the Kings, with a bough of Palme (in his hand) cleft a little at the top, the other as the Queenes; differenced by their Garlands only: His of White, and Red Roses; the other of Lilly’s inter-weav’d, Gold, Silver, Purple, &c. They were both arm’d, and wing’d: with Bowes and Quivers, Cassocks, Breeches, Buskins, Gloves, and Perukes alike. They stood silent awhile, wondring at one another, till at last the lesser of them began to speake. (810)

Here, as elsewhere, Eros and Anteros remain virtually indistinguishable, the only marker of difference the color of their garlands. In fact, they look so similar that their entrance is punctuated by an awkward silence as they “wond[er] at one another.” At this moment, Jonson affords spectators the ability to see the embodiment of Eros and Anteros as a process that culminates in their becoming aware of one another’s existence. As usual, the erotes wrestle over the palm, but whereas Renaissance artists tend to depict the struggle rather than the outcome, and whereas Neoplatonists tend to insist that of course Anteros wins, Jonson’s stage directions indicate that “Anteros snatch’d at the Palme, but Eros divided it” (811). In addition to giving Eros rather than Anteros agency in this situation, Jonson allows that Eros might make the rational decision to split the palm between the two brothers. Indeed, if either of the brothers is to be labeled irrational, it is the overzealous and uncompromising Anteros seen “snatch[ing] at the Palme.” As for the act itself, Eros’s dividing the palm exemplifies a palpable shift away from Neoplatonism and back toward Plato. As in Socrates’ chariot allegory in Phaedrus, erotic love and spiritual love are not found to be mutually exclusive – or at least not inherently so. Although Jonson’s revision of the palm incident might seem minor, it can be read as a rebuke of the unrealistic, even undesirable views of Neoplatonists who, like Anteros and Alciati, think Eros has no claim to the palm in the first place.25

The palm’s division might serve as a diplomatic resolution to the argument between cherubs, but Eros and Anteros at peace are no less disruptive to the masque’s representation of love, since any admission of carnality between the brothers activates and brings to the fore the latent homoeroticism of this
dynamic. Indeed, moments later the reconciled erotes return to expound on mutual love, an exchange that will get them booted from the performance:

Eros
We ha’ cleft the bough,
And struck a tallie of our loves, too, now.

Anteros
I call to mind the wisdome of our Mother,
Venus, who would have Cupid have a Brother-

Eros
To looke upon, and thrive. Mee seems I grew
Three inches higher sin’ I met with you.

Anteros
It was the Counsell, that the Oracle gave
Your Nurses, the glad Graces, sent to crave
Themis advice. You doe not know (quoth shee)
The nature of this Infant. Love may be
Brought forth thus little, live, a-while, alone;
But ne’re will prosper, if he have not one
Sent after him to play with.

Eros
Such another
As you are, Anteros, our loving brother.

Anteros
Who would be, always, planted in your eye;
For Love, by Love, increaseth mutually.

Eros
Wee, either, looking on each other, thrive;

Anteros
Shoot up, grow galliard –

Eros
Yes, and more alive!

Anteros
When one’s away, it seemes we both are lesse.

Eros
I was a Dwarf, an Urchin, I confesse,
Till you were present. (811-812)

Throughout the dialogue, Eros and Anteros express mutual love through the image of tumescence.26 As they begin to experience reciprocal love, Eros becomes aroused, declaring that he “grew / Three inches higher sin’ [he] met with” Anteros. For his part, Anteros encourages his brother to grow even bigger – to “Shoot up, grow galliard.” Here reciprocal love acts as an aphrodisiac, enhancing erotic desire. As the flirtation continues, the dialogue becomes stichomythic, enacting the rhythms of intercourse. In the unlikely event that some onlookers have missed the bawdiness of the encounter, Philalethes enters to prevent the erotes from carrying things too far: “No more of your Poetrie (prettie Cupids) lest presuming on your little wits, you prophanne the intention of your service” (812). Philalethes does not clarify whether homoerotic acts in themselves or their performance before the king and queen threaten to “prophane the intention” of Eros and Anteros. Either way, the exchange makes explicit that the mutuality embodied in Jonson’s Eros and Anteros is not the transcendent love of the Neoplatonists.

In the masque’s final monologue, Philalethes attempts to reconcile the love exemplified in Eros and Anteros with the strictures of marriage, but the result suggests a fundamental disconnection between the two. That is, while mutual love and marriage are not necessarily diametrically opposed, they are not synonymous.
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either. After scolding the erotes, Philalethes calls the court a “School-Divinitie of Love” and informs them, “Here you shall read Hymen, having lighted two Torches, either of which enflame mutually, but waste not. One Love by the others aspect increasing, and both in right lines aspiring” (813). Though Philalethes endeavors to bend the erotes’ desires toward marriage, the language of tumescence returns in his forecasting that the boys will “increase” and “inspire.” What is more, the need for a “School-Divinitie of Love” where the erotes will be taught how to abide marital obligations implies that while mutual love is natural, matrimonial love is cultural.  

Although Eros and Anteros, no less than Adam and Eve, are, as Jonson’s dialogue shows, companions fashioned for one another, the erotes radically oppose, even as they resemble, Biblically sanctioned matrimonial love.

The similarities between Milton’s and Jonson’s representations of Eros and Anteros indicate that the authors had comparable views on the kind of love the erotes signify. Like Jonson, Milton rejects a purely allegorical reading of the story. Also like Jonson, Milton invokes tumescence to illustrate Eros’s discovering Anteros:

[S]traight his arrows lose their golden heads and shed their purple feathers, his silken braids untwine and slip their knots, and that original and fiery virtue given him by fate all on a sudden goes out, and leave him undeified and despoiled of all his force; till finding Anteros at last, he kindles and repairs the almost faded ammunition of his deity by the reflection of a coequal and homogeneal fire. (711)

Desperate to cast off the “many false and feigning desires that wander singly up and down in his likeness” and find his brother Anteros, Eros grows flaccid. The arrows representing his phallic power “lose their golden heads and shed their purple feathers,” while the “silken braids” that evidence his potency “untwine.” Upon finding Anteros, he “kindles and repairs the almost faded ammunition,” regaining his phallic “force.” As in Jonson’s masque, the coupling of Eros and Anteros evinces a consummated homoerotic love that an allegorical reading cannot finally contain. On this point, it bears notice that Milton, following Jonson, does not award Anteros victory over Eros. On the contrary, Eros and Anteros merge in “a coequal and homogeneal fire.” This union may recall the Biblical account of the married couple’s becoming “one flesh,” but for Milton the “coequal and homogeneal fire” of mutual love precedes marriage. Hence, while Jane Kingsley-Smith has argued that by the close of the seventeenth century, Cupid, especially as he is portrayed in masques, suffers from a “dematerialization of eros,” thereby “losing[] power and agency,” in Jonson’s and Milton’s renderings, the erotes’ phallic abilities are enhanced rather than depleted. Moreover, the erotes’ coming together in “a coequal and homogeneal fire” points to a relationship that exists apart from, perhaps even in contradistinction to, dominant cultural institutions. Founded upon sameness, the bond of Eros and Anteros exhibits a homogeneity that seems closer to the angelic relations Stephen Guy-Bray examines in his essay for this special issue than the
Eros and Anteros

union of husband and wife. Thus, the originary “coequal and homogeneous fire” of the erotes remains distinct from the “matrimonial love” Milton mentions at the beginning of Book One, Chapter 6 in *Doctrine*. Although the one should, in Milton’s view, lead to the other, the need for divorce implies that often such is not the case. But if mutual love does not equal marriage, neither does it fall under the rubric of amicitia. As the excerpt from *Phaedrus* reminds us, Anteros stands for a unrequited love of one man for another. That Pausanias notes the desire for and potentially incompatible with matrimony and matrimonial love, one might consider the tragic events that underlie a number of classical stories delineating Anteros’s origins. In the passage from Pausanias’s *Description of Greece* I quoted earlier, Anteros personifies Love Avenged. This version comes into existence when the Athenian Meles spurns the love of a resident alien named Timagoras. Upon seeing Timagoras’s corpse, Meles felt such insurmountable remorse that, in the words of Jones’s translation, “he threw himself from the same rock and so died.” According to this version of the story, Love Avenged emerges from the unrequited love of one man for another. That Pausanias notes the different nationalities of Meles and Timagoras suggests that xenophobia rather than homophobia is the motivating factor for the rejection, but here, as in other versions of the tale, one could read this incident as one of misrecognition, one that proves fatal. Only after Timagoras has done as his would-be lover has ordered does Meles realize the egregious mistake he has made. And so, in an act that reflects his acknowledgment of and atonement for the error he has committed, Meles joins in his lover in death.

One of Pausanias’s contemporaries, Aelian, traces a different etiology of Anteros in *On the Characteristics of Animals*. Although Anteros is manifest in the required love of Poseiden and Nerites, a same-sex relationship that is also intergenerational, it, too, ends in tragedy:

ο̟ δε̟ άλλος̟ λόγος̟ ἐφασθηναι̟ βο̟ Νηρτο̟ Ποσειδων̟ α̟ α̟ τνερην̟ δε̟ του̟ Ποσειδων̟ και̟ του̟ γε̟ υμνωμ̟ ονο̟ Αντερωσο̟ εντευθην̟ τη̟ γε̟ νεσο̟ υπαρξ̟ ξαθαι̟ συνικτρικ̟ οι̟ τα̟ τε̟ άλλα̟ το̟ ε̟ χα̟ θη̟ το̟ υ̟ ρω̟ με̟ νον̟ άν̟ ω̟ και̟ με̟ ν̟ και̟ κν̟ του̟ ε̟ λα̟ χ̟ νο̟ νον̟ το̟ κα̟ τ̟ ω̟ ν̟ χ̟ μα̟ τ̟ το̟ ά̟ ῦ̟ μα̟ τ̟ με̟ ν̟ κη̟ η̟ τ̟ λ̟ ω̟ λ̟ και̟ το̟ υ̟ τ̟ δε̟ λ̟ ρ̟ ρ̟ ν̟ και̟ προ̟ σεται̟ και̟ το̟ τρ̟ πονω̟ και̟ α̟ να̟ περι̟ ε̟ μα̟ ν̟ και̟ περι̟ σ̟ κεται̟ το̟ ά̟ ῦ̟ μα̟ και̟
Queer Milton

All is well until Apollo, in the form of the Sun, transforms Nerites into a spiral shell. At first Aelian proposes that Apollo metamorphoses the boy on account of his quickness, but it soon becomes clear that this explanation is merely a pretense:

τὸν δὲ Ἡλίον νεμεσθάι τῇ τάχει τοῦ παιδὸς ὁ μύθος λέγει, καὶ άμεσα οὗτος σαφῶς ὑπολείπει τὸν κοχλίον τοῦ νυν, οὐκ οὖν ἐπιτείν ὁποθεν ἄρχομαι: οὔτε γὰρ ὁ μύθος λέγει, εἶ δὲ τι χρῆ συμβεβληθῆ ὑπέρ τῶν ἀτέκμαρτων, λέγοντι ἵνα ἀντιρήν Ποσείδων καὶ Ἡλίος, καὶ γίγνεται μὲν ἦσος ὁ Ηλίος ὡς ἐν θαλάσσῃ ἁρμομένες, ἐμφάνετο δὲ κατὰ οὖς ἐν τοῖς κόκτειν ἀριθμεῖσθαι, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἄστροις ἀρχησθαι.

[But the story relates that the Sun resented the boy’s power of speed and transformed his body into the spiral shell as it now is: the cause of his anger I cannot tell, neither does the fable mention it. But if one may guess where there is nothing to go by, Poseidon and the Sun might be said to be rivals. And it may be that the Sun was vexed at the boy travelling about the sea and wished that he should travel among the constellations instead of being counted among sea-monsters.]
Eros and Anteros

Though Aelian locates the origin of Anteros in Poseidon and Nerites’ love for one another, the tragedy that befalls the intergenerational same-sex couple suggests that this love is elegiac, consigned to the past. In this instance, Anteros comes closest to occupying that paradoxical position where he inhabits both Love Returned and Love Avenged, since the requited love Poseidon and Nerites share is destroyed by a god jealous of their relationship.

Aelian’s story is also notable for its juxtaposing reciprocal love, which is homoerotic and tragic, with marriage, which is heteroerotic and procreative. Or to borrow Lee Edelman’s popular phrase, we could say that Aelian’s tale suggests that the love Anteros symbolizes has “no future.” Indeed, Poseidon and Apollo, the gods vying over Nerites, are veteran pederasts: in addition to loving Nerites, Poseidon loves Pelops (and Ganymede, according to Marlowe’s Hero and Leander); Apollo, meanwhile, also loves Hyacinthus. These instances of mutual love are also short-lived: Pelops goes on to marry, have children, and found royal dynasties of Greece, while Hyacinthus is killed by a wayward discuss and subsequently metamorphosed into a flower. According to Aelian, then, mutual love is not only homoerotic and intergenerational but also elegiac, destined to end either in marriage or in death.

One could argue that the tragic trajectories of Pausanias and Aelian help explain the gap Milton opens up between mutual love and marriage in Doctrine, but I want to resist the temptation to oversimplify the matter and add this text to the massive heap of works associating homoerotic desire with death. Returning Eros and Anteros to their immediate Miltonic context, we are reminded that the polemicist is employing the allusion to make a point about the disconnection between mutual love and marriage. And as Milton makes clear throughout his divorce tracts, mutual love is not the problem. In the final sentence of the chapter that features Eros and Anteros, Milton concludes,

And it is a less breach of wedlock to part with wise and quiet consent betimes, than still to soil and profane that mystery of joy and union with a polluting sadness and perpetual distemper: for it is not the outward continuing of marriage that keeps whole that covenant, but whosoever does most according to peace and love, whether in marriage or in divorce, he it is that breaks marriage least; it being so often written, that “Love only is the fulfilling of every commandment.” (712)

As one of his contemporaries was quick to point out, Milton’s quotation of Romans contains a subtle yet potentially radical modification: whereas Paul writes, “Love is the fulfilling of every Commandment,” Milton declares, “Love only is the fulfilling of every commandment.” Milton’s insistence that “Love only” matters in “keep[ing] whole that covenant” subordinates marriage to the sustaining love I have been calling “queer mutuality.” Appealing to the tragic elements of Anteros in order to suggest the disastrous effects matrimony has had on this mutual love – indeed, on all “coequal and homogeneous fire[s],” in all their permutations –
Milton transforms the love of Anteros into the divine’s imperative for humanity. Sometimes divorce is the only way to keep God’s commandments.

How exactly divorce might sustain this queer love (one would presume it signals its end) is one question Milton’s argument raises but does not answer. Nevertheless, in the process of bemoaning marriage’s tyranny over those compelled to wed, Milton acknowledges the possibility for what we might call a queer emancipatory politics of love. Of course, the queer politics I perceive in one chapter of one divorce tract do not make Milton a forebear of modern queer movements critical of marriage as a heteronormative, patriarchal institution. Nor do they reflect Milton’s clear and final say on matters of love and marriage. As I have shown, Milton’s “say” is unclear even in this one divorce tract, to say nothing of his other works. Because I am not convinced, as some critics are, that it is possible to show “how Milton works,” or indeed that Milton works – at least when “works” amounts to an achievement of argumentative clarity and internal consistency – I view the confused deployment of Eros and Anteros in Doctrine as a glimpse into Milton’s queer potential for theorizing and politicizing forms of love that do not consolidate into those supported by already existing, normalizing institutions. This potential may not make Milton our contemporary, but it does bring into focus a Milton who takes aim at the same monolithic institutions that preoccupy much queer criticism today.

Notes


6. On masculine friendship and Renaissance homonormativity, see Laurie Shannon, Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002). On challenges to this version of friendship, see Thomas MacFaul, Male
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7. On the problems with ascribing normative status to any early modern institution, see Karma Lochrie, Heterosexualities: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn’t (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).


17. Ibid., 255d-255e.


23. Hughes, Complete Poems and Major prose, 711. Hughes mentions a poem titled Eros and Anteros, but I have not been able to locate any work bearing this title. I have, however, found at least four works by Jonson that include Eros and Anteros: Challenge at Tilt, Cynthia’s Revels, Love Restored, and Love’s Welcome at Bolsover.


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27. For an incisive reading of homoerotic love as preceding and less a cultural construct than heteroerotic love and marriage, see Stephen Guy-Bray, “Shakespeare and the Invention of the Heterosexual,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 16 (October 2007): 12.1-28


32. Ibid.


