

## BUT IS IT GAY? KISSING, FRIENDSHIP, AND 'PRE-HOMOSEXUAL' DISCOURSES IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Germany was something of a 'developing country' culturally, and the same goes for its sexual culture, or so it seems. There was no urban centre of the size and vitality of London or Paris, and certainly not the kind of fully developed homosexual subculture that existed in London. Nevertheless, scholars have begun to uncover much more sexual heterodoxy than previously expected, especially as a subject of literature. Anyone who had really been interested might have noticed long ago that the major works of erotic literature in the eighteenth century included crucial homoerotic moments, and sometimes much more than moments: the most important of these are Christoph Martin Wieland's *Comische Erzählungen* of 1765, one of which was the tale 'Juno und Ganymed', omitted in later editions; Wilhelm Heinse's notorious novel *Ardinghello*, not to mention his translation of Petronius's *Satyricon* with a preface in which Heinse defended homosexuality; Goethe's *Römische Elegien*, one of the central works of Weimar Classicism; and Friedrich Schlegel's novel *Lucinde*, the major document of sexual liberation in the Romantic generation. To be sure, these works generally portray 'Greek love' as contrary to nature, and valorize heterosexuality; homosexuality is often treated only as a stepping-stone in the hero's development to heterosexual safety. However, the canonical authors obviously felt compelled to include male–male desire among the varieties of sexuality, even if they ultimately adopted a traditional Christian stance towards it.

This literature has not remained undiscovered by queer studies; in fact, it has become a favoured period for the examination of homoerotic culture in Germany.<sup>1</sup> I wish to argue, however, that scholars of this period have read too much queerness into male–male relationships of this time, or at least the wrong kind of queerness. While nominally taking into account the pre-nineteenth-century discourses on male–male relationships, they habitually ignore them when it comes to the analysis of particular cases. And I do not exclude my own work from this critique.<sup>2</sup> In this period and particularly in the heyday of *Empfindsamkeit*, it is exceptionally difficult to identify homoerotic characteristics. And certainly, I maintain, a new orthodoxy has grown up by finding homoerotic traces almost at will, by viewing what was fundamentally an age alien to us through our decidedly modern sexual eyes.

A book that made a considerable splash in the eighteenth century, but was

<sup>1</sup> See in particular Paul Derks, *Die Schande der heiligen Päderastie: Homosexualität und Öffentlichkeit in der deutschen Literatur 1750–1850* (Berlin: rosa Winkel, 1990); *Outing Goethe and his Age*, ed. by Alice A. Kuzniar (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Robert Tobin, *Warm Brothers: Queer Theory and the Age of Goethe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); and Susan E. Gustafson, *Men Desiring Men: The Poetry of Same-Sex Identity and Desire in German Classicism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> See W. Daniel Wilson, 'Amazon, Agitator, Allegory: Political and Gender Cross(-Dress)ing in Goethe's *Egmont*', in *Outing Goethe and his Age*, ed. by Kuzniar, pp. 125–46, 258–64. I would today have some reservations about the analysis of the relationship between Egmont and Ferdinand.

then more or less forgotten only to be rediscovered by scholars working in queer studies, is Johann Wilhelm Gleim's intensive, two-year correspondence with Johann Georg Jacobi, his junior by twenty-one years, which the two writers published in 1768.<sup>3</sup> Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller christens the collection 'die erste dezidiert homoerotische Briefsammlung dieser Art',<sup>4</sup> and Heinrich Mohr calls the letters 'erotische Dichtungen'.<sup>5</sup> Simon Richter, in his important article on 'Gender, Epistolary Culture, and the Public Sphere', is at first rather more careful. He rightly refuses to call Gleim and Jacobi 'homosexual', but then goes on to describe the signifiers often applied to this circle, and notes their affinity to 'the homosexual style known as camp', suggesting: 'Perhaps Gleim and his circle of friends were more in control of their behavior than previously thought.'<sup>6</sup> By the end of the article Richter has become less cautious:

The cultural practice of the *Gleimkreis* [. . .] recalls a public sphere where public and private, masculine and feminine were gaily flaunted and transgressed, a form of pre-closet *Öffentlichkeit*, the likes of which would not be seen again until, fleetingly, in Weimar Berlin and more persistently and effectively in the aftermath of Stonewall. (p. 121)

Most readers will come away from this article thinking that there is something gay about the Gleim–Jacobi correspondence—especially since Richter suggests that 'the eighteenth-century German conception of friendship was essentially homosocial and often virtually homoerotic' (p. 112). And in another piece Richter is rather less nice in his distinctions: he speaks flatly of 'Gleim's homoerotic *Empfindsamkeit*'.<sup>7</sup>

In fairness to these scholars, a piece of evidence in their favour should be mentioned. In 1774 Gleim wrote to Wieland to defend the young writer Heinse. Heinse had written erotic, almost pornographic verse and had sent it to the admired Wieland. When Wieland complained to Gleim about the breach of decorum in these poems, Gleim defended the young writer by saying that Wieland himself had written a story—'Juno und Ganymed'—that was the first to introduce German men to 'Greek love' and gave them the idea of keeping their own Ganymedes.<sup>8</sup> The notion of men with young sodomitic partners in

<sup>3</sup> A 'Herausgeber' claims to have published the letters without authorization, but this is a fiction, as letters of the two writers show; see Beat Hanselmann, *Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim und seine Freundschaften oder Der Weg nach Arkadien* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 105. The popularity of the correspondence is indicated by a second edition in 1778 and an edition by the infamous Viennese pirate publisher Trattner in 1780. Klotz (see below at n. 31) predicts in his review: 'Ich zweifle nicht, daß in kurzer Zeit diese Briefe in den Händen aller Leute von Geschmack seyn werden' (p. 21).

<sup>4</sup> Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, *Mann für Mann: Biographisches Lexikon zur Geschichte von Freundschaft und mannlicher Sexualität im deutschen Sprachraum* (Hamburg: Männerschwarm-Skript, 1998), p. 391.

<sup>5</sup> Heinrich Mohr, 'Freundschaftliche Briefe — Literatur oder Privatsache? Der Streit um Wilhelm Gleims Nachlaß', *Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts*, 1973, 14–75 (p. 32 n.).

<sup>6</sup> Simon Richter, 'The Ins and Outs of Intimacy: Gender, Epistolary Culture, and the Public Sphere', *German Quarterly*, 69 (1996), 111–24 (p. 117). Further references to this article appear in brackets in the text.

<sup>7</sup> Simon Richter, 'Winckelmann's Progeny: Homosocial Networking in the Eighteenth Century', in *Outing Goethe and his Age*, ed. by Kuzniar, pp. 33–46 (p. 35). Gustafson echoes Richter in describing Gleim's 'epistolary expressions of male–male desire' (p. 44).

<sup>8</sup> 'Sollt' ihn [=Wieland], wegen seines Jupiter und Ganymedes nicht irgend ein unberufener

provincial German towns of the eighteenth century seems almost inconceivable; there is no evidence for it other than this letter. And yet Gleim's statement does not seem to be mere bluff. If it is not bluff, then we have to admit that Gleim did seem to know about homosexual culture in Germany, such as it may have existed particularly in Berlin. But matters become more difficult when we notice that he reports having *defended* Wieland against the charge of encouraging sodomy, so that he does seem to view the accusation of sodomy as a reproach.

Gleim's correspondence with Jacobi is even more complex. Richter does not really analyse the letters, but it is easy to see where he, Hergemöller, Tobin, and others get the impression of homoeroticism. The passages that really tip the scales for modern readers are those where the two men write about kissing each other—by one count, the volume contains 13,242 kisses (though of course they are often expended in multiples of a thousand).<sup>9</sup> For example, Jacobi writes: 'Wie glücklich war ich damals, als mich der liebenswürdige Gleim durch Küsse weckte, und meine ersten Empfindungen diejenigen waren, die ich aus seinen Gedichten schöpfte!', and then he breaks into verse.<sup>10</sup> Or consider the elaborate fantasy in which Gleim imagines being kissed by Jacobi's spirit ('Genius') at the same spot under apple trees where earlier they had, in fact, kissed:

Nach Ihrer Abreise, mein liebster Freund, war ich heute zum ersten mahle wieder in meinem Garten. Pomona winkte mich zu dem Baume mit den kleinen rothen Aepfeln, unter welchem wir uns küsseten. Ich kont' ihrem Winke nicht folgen, es war mir zu traurig hinzugehen, und meinen lieben Jacobi nicht zu finden. [. . .] Auf einmal stand ich unter dem Baume mit den rothen Aepfeln, und da, mein lieber Freund, da gab ein Geist mir einen Kuß; der Genius meines Jacobi war es, oder er selbst. Er küßte völlig so wie mein Jacobi küßt. So, wie seine Verse von allen andern Versen, so unterscheid ich seine Küsse von allen andern Küssen. Es war eilf Minuten auf dreye: dachten Sie da an mich, mein lieber Freund, so war es gewiß Ihr Geist, der mich küßte. Uebermorgen um eilf Minuten auf dreye steh ich wieder unter dem Baume mit den rothen Aepfeln, wenn Sie etwa nur auf dieser Stelle mich küssen wollen. (*Briefe*, p. 54)

And of course Jacobi plays along, writing that he sends kisses to Gleim at the appointed hour.

One problem with viewing such passages as homoerotic is that cultures of kissing are not universal or timeless. Their specific parameters in the eighteenth century seem more like soundings from a non-Western culture. Around 1750, a contemporary wrote:

Selbst zärtliche Freunde können nicht unterlassen, einander häufig zu küssen; und wir setzen in unserer Gesellschaft einen großen Werth auf unsere freundschaftlichen Küsse. Wir machen uns auch kein Bedenken darauf, den schönern Theil unserer Gesellschaft zu

Richter des Schönen den Vorwurf gemacht haben, gegen den ich meinen Wieland zu Braunschweig einst vertheidigte, diesen, daß aus seinem Munde die deutsche Jugend zuerst von griechischer Liebe gehört, und bald darauf sich Ganymede gehalten hätte?' (Gleim to Wieland, 2 January 1774, in Wieland, *Briefwechsel*, ed. by Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin [by Hans Werner Seiffert]; [then] Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR; [then] Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften [by Siegfried Scheibe] (Berlin: Akademie, 1963–), v: *Briefe der Weimarer Zeit* (21. September 1772–31. Dezember 1777), ed by Hans Werner Seiffert (1983), p. 221).

<sup>9</sup> Hanselmann, p. 13; she also counts 260,022 embraces.

<sup>10</sup> *Briefe von den Herren Gleim und Jacobi* (Berlin, 1768), p. 7. Further references to this edition will appear in the text.

küssen, und uns oft dazu ungezwungene Gelegenheiten zu verschaffen. Wir verlachen die stoische Strenge derjenigen Moralisten, welche solche Küsse verdammen, weil wir wissen, daß man küssen kann ohne unzüchtige Empfindungen.<sup>11</sup>

The phrase 'zärtliche Freunde' refers to men, who are seamlessly treated together with women as natural objects of kisses, and it further refers to the fashion of *Empfindsamkeit* (usually translated as 'sensibility' or 'sentimentalism'), the early phase of which, around 1750, was most centrally associated with the concept *Zärtlichkeit*.<sup>12</sup> The term 'friendly kiss' ('freundschaftlicher Kuß') is, I would suggest, a *terminus technicus*. It is defined in the long article on kissing in Zedler's *Universal-Lexikon* as follows: 'Osculum amicitiae, ein Freundschafts-Kuß, ist, wenn zwey gute Freunde aus sonderlicher Gewogenheit und recht hertzlichem Vertrauen einer des andern Lippen berühren.'<sup>13</sup> Here, too, there is no suggestion that we are talking about a man and a woman—quite the contrary, hetero-kissing is dealt with separately in the article. Nor is this merely a polite kiss of greeting, if it is motivated by 'special affection and a very heartfelt confidence' ('sonderlicher Gewogenheit und recht hertzlichem Vertrauen'); polite kisses ('Küsse der Höflichkeit') are treated under a separate heading. It is interesting to note that the author of this article specifically states that a woman who is kissed by a man other than her husband is not necessarily to be considered promiscuous (i.e. as 'eine Hure oder [. . .] eine leichtfertige und liederliche Vettel'). This is because promiscuous kisses—one of dozens of kinds of kiss described in this article—are clearly distinguished from friendly ones.<sup>14</sup> It seems clear, then, that for both these authors there is nothing unusual about a kiss of this *friendly* type, whether between men, between women, or between man and woman. The very learned kissologist Heinrich Kornmann writes in 1610:

das Hertz kan er ihm nicht übergeben, vielweniger die Seele; daher legt er seinen Mund an seines Freundes Mund, damit daselbst die Seele, deren man nur iene in zwey Leibern vertrauter Freunde zu seyn meynet, gleichsam auf die Gränzen des territorii der Freunde komme, und einer dem andern die gebührende Schuldigkeit zollen möge, inmassen solches an keinem andern und bequemern Orte geschehen kan.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Georg Friedrich Meyer, in the weekly *Der Gesellige* (1749), quoted by Theodor Verweyen, 'Emanzipation der Sinnlichkeit im Rokoko? Zur ästhetik-theoretischen Grundlegung und funktionsgeschichtlichen Rechtfertigung der deutschen Anacreontik', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, n.s. 25 (1975), 276–306 (p. 302).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Gerhard Sauder, *Empfindsamkeit*, 3 vols [vol. II unpublished] (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1974–80), I: *Voraussetzungen und Elemente*, pp. 193–210.

<sup>13</sup> 'Osculum' (and related articles), in *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon Aller Wissenschaften und Künste, Welche bishero durch menschlichen Verstand und Witz erfunden und verbessert worden* [. . .], 64 vols (Leipzig und Halle: Verlegts Johann Heinrich Zedler, 1732–1750), xxv (1740), cols 2089–94 (col. 2092).

<sup>14</sup> 'Osculum fatuum [. . .] ein närrischer Kuß, ein unverschämter Kuß, ein unzüchtiger Kuß, ein geiler Kuß, ein verschwenderischer Kuß, ein verhurter Kuß, ein unanständiger Kuß, ein unflätiger Kuß, ein schändlicher Kuß, ein wollüstiger Kuß, ist, welchen entweder recht thörigt verliebte sich unter einander aus lauter Wollust und Geilheit geben, oder wodurch erst eines das andere zu verbotener und unzüchtiger Liebe zu verleiten trachtet' ('Osculum', cols 2092–93).

<sup>15</sup> Quoted by Johann Friedrich Heckel [Hekelius], *Historisch-philologische Untersuchung von den mancherley Arten und Absichten der Küsse/ vormahls in Lateinischer Sprache beschrieben von dem gelehrten Polyhistoro, Herrn Jo. Frid. Hekelio; anietzo aber wegen der Curiosité ins Teutsche übersetzt und hin und wieder vermehret durch Gotthilff Wernern* (Chemnitz: bey Conrad Stösseln



FIG. 1. Anonymous illustration for an entry by Johann August Klien in the album of L. R. Wilisch, Dresden, 29 December 1790. On private loan to and reproduced by kind permission of Gleimhaus, Halberstadt

The illustration may be viewed in colour and in greater detail in the online version of *MLR* at [www.mhra.org.uk](http://www.mhra.org.uk)

All this heavy philosophizing about kissing is predicated on the masculine form 'Freund', with no apparent suggestion of impropriety.

Thus, it seems that it was perfectly acceptable in the eighteenth century (and earlier) for two men to kiss in more than just a polite way, to show their affection (see Figure 1). This can be shown quite strikingly in a 1782 text which purported to describe a flourishing homosexual subculture in Berlin. In this book, the unsuspecting visitor to Berlin enters a gathering of nine men and two women. As he flirts with the women, he looks around:

Ich bemerkte von Zeit, daß sich die Männerchen mit der wärmsten Zärtlichkeit halseten, küßten, die Hände drückten, und einander Süßigkeit vorschwatzen, als immer ein Stutzer der Dame hätte sagen können.

Ich hielt all diese Auftritte für bloßen freundschaftlichen Ton, für wahre männliche Sympathie der Seelenstimmung. Und von der Seite betrachtet, bewunderte ich die kleine Zahl herzinniger Freunde.

Aber wie erstaunte ich nicht, da ich hinter diese freundschaftlichen Misterien kam!<sup>16</sup>

und Sohn, 1727), pp. xi–xii. The title refers to: *Linea amoris, sive, Commentarius in versiculum gl. visus, colloquium, convictus, oscula, factum in l. 23 ff. ad l. Iuliam. de adulteris* [. . .] *Henrici Kornmanni* (Frankfurt a.M., 1610).

<sup>16</sup> [Johann Friedel], *Briefe über die Galanterien von Berlin, auf einer Reise gesammelt von einem österreichischen Offizier* ([n.p.: n. pub.], 1782), p. 147. Derks (pp. 103–05) doubts the authenticity of this report—with weak arguments, in my opinion. In addition to the evidence that he gives regarding a homosexual subculture in Berlin, one could cite the following contemporary statement: 'Die meisten großen Städte sind zugleich die Freystätte der scheuslichsten, oft sodomi-

It turns out, of course, to be a group of homosexuals. The interesting part for a modern reader is the narrator's surprise at finding out that these men who were kissing each other are homosexual (and that he knows what homosexuality is becomes apparent in the rest of the chapter, where he lays out its whole genealogy in antiquity and modernity). The narrator is confident at first that their kissing is merely a display of 'friendship, true male sympathy of kindred souls' without erotic overtones. Regardless of whether the account is authentic, it obviously reflects a contemporary understanding of male–male kissing. A decade later, an author in Wieland's *Der neue Teutsche Merkur* explains in detail (and critiques) a culture of friendly kissing that had become so common as to be meaningless:

Ich treffe einen Mann dessen Bekantschaft— nicht Freundschaft! ich zufällig an einem dritten Orte machte, oder mit dem ich als Gelehrter oder Kaufmann in Briefwechsel stand, das wohl auf nichts weniger als auf eigentliche Freundschaft Bezug hatte: es muß, so will es hier die Mode, geküßt und umarmt werden. Ich lerne einen weitläuftigen Anverwandten kennen, der vielleicht, nach seinem moralischen Charakter, meiner Seele auf immer fremd bleiben wird: es muß geküßt und umarmt werden. Ich komme zu einem so genannten Traktamente, oder muß selbst den Wirth machen, und aus Höflichkeit und um allerley Verhältnisse willen manche Personen mit einladen, die wohl meine Tischgenossen, nur nicht meine Freunde seyn können; und — ja, hier wiederhole ich den vorhin nicht zu stark gesetzten Ausdruck, daß der Mißbrauch mit Freundschafts-Kuß und Umarmung *bis zum Unsinn* übertrieben werde.<sup>17</sup>

This author is inveighing against blurring the line between the kiss of true friendship and a kiss of politeness, since he seems to reject the latter entirely: it is not consistent with 'dem männlich teutschen Charakter' (p. 295), but rather is a manifestation of 'der vollherzigen Modemenschen' (p. 296). Strikingly, he does not claim that men should not kiss, but only that kissing and embracing should be reserved for 'die stärkste symbolische Freundschaftsversicherung', and advocates that 'der teutsche Mann verachte den faselnden Modekuß' (p. 297)—but should not reject male kissing *tout court*. In short, kissing among men was widespread and not (yet) an indication of homosexuality; according to this author, it was an attribute of true German manliness. After all, in the 1772 edition of Just Friedrich Wilhelm Zachariä's mock-epic *Der Renommist*, over-masculine students greet each other with kisses, with no hint of homoeroticism: 'Es drückt sich Mund auf Mund, es rasselt Bart an Bart . . .'<sup>18</sup> In fact, if kissing was reserved for true friends rather than casual acquaintances, its emotional value increased and thus it could more easily be confused with an

tischer Sünden' (Karl Müller, *Mittel wider den Kindermord: Eine Beantwortung der Mannheimer Preisaufrage* (Halle, bey Johann Christian Hendel, 1781), p. 5).

<sup>17</sup> [Hermann Christoph Gottfried Demme,] 'Ueber den Mißbrauch des Freundschafts-Kusses, und der Umarmungen: Eine Rede im Cirkel seiner Freunde gehalten von T. Stille', *Der neue Teutsche Merkur*, 11 (November 1790), 289–301 (p. 292). The identification of the author as the Gymnasium teacher, church official, and writer H. C. G. Demme (1760–1822) is made by Thomas C. Starnes, *'Der teutsche Merkur': Ein Repertorium* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1994), p. 237.

<sup>18</sup> Canto I. 191: *Bremer Beiträge: Zweiter Teil*, ed. by Franz Muncker, Deutsche National-Litteratur, 44 (Berlin and Stuttgart: W. Spemann, n.d.), p. 268. I am indebted to Ritchie Robertson for pointing out this passage to me. The first edition of the work (1744), which is considerably shorter, does not contain it.

expression of sexual desire; but this possibility does not even seem to occur to such writers.

There are three factors that account for the kind of modern misunderstanding which necessarily views such shows of affection as homoerotic: first, pre-homosexual discourses of male–male relations; second, the cult of friendship in *Empfindsamkeit*; and third, the literary rococo. The first of these factors has been deftly described by the theorist (and historian of ancient Greek homosexuality) David M. Halperin. Referring to the period before the modern discourse on homosexuality, he describes four ‘pre-homosexual models of male sexual and gender deviance’: ‘(1) effeminacy, (2) pederasty or ‘active’ sodomy, (3) friendship or male love, and (4) passivity or inversion’;<sup>19</sup> a further, fifth category is the modern concept of homosexuality. To sum up Halperin’s complex theorizing (pp. 104–37) very crassly: effeminacy is the ‘soft’ male personality, who was traditionally identified not with desire for men but with excessive desire for women at the expense of the true ‘male’ pursuit of war; pederasty or active sodomy is the sexual penetration of a male who is subordinate ‘in terms of age, social class, gender style, and/or sexual role’, but who is not expected to enjoy the act and is in any case not a partner in a relationship of equals; passivity or ‘inversion’ is the ‘reversal of masculine gender identity, a wholesale surrender of masculinity in favor of femininity’; and homosexuality is (at least in theory) a loving relationship of equals and thus always involves both partners, whereas the other discourses only necessarily involve one. The category that is of most interest in our context is ‘friendship or male love’. Like the other four pre-homosexual discourses, it must be conceptually distinguished from homosexuality. That is, it may of course be present in homosexual relationships, but it is not necessarily indicative of homosexuality, especially before the modern discourse of homosexuality arose in the nineteenth century. Halperin acknowledges the difficulty of understanding this distinction, since ‘The language used to convey such passionate male unions often appears to modern sensibilities suspiciously overheated, if not downright erotic’ (p. 119). He then quotes a passage from Montaigne which, in its description of the two souls merging, is strikingly like the one by Kornmann given above:

If you press me to tell why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed, except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I [. . .] it is I know not what [. . .] which, having seized my whole will, led it to plunge and lose itself in his; which, having seized his whole will, led it to plunge and lose itself in mine, with equal hunger, equal rivalry. (p. 119)

As Halperin points out:

It is difficult for us moderns—with our heavily psychologistic model of the human personality, our notion of unconscious drives, our tendency to associate desire with sexuality, and our heightened sensitivity to anything that might seem to contravene the strict protocols of heterosexual masculinity—it is difficult for us to avoid reading into such passionate expressions of male love a suggestion of ‘homoeroticism’ at the very least, if not of ‘latent homosexuality’ [. . .] (p. 120)

<sup>19</sup> David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 109. Further references to this book appear in the text.

Naturally, such male–male love and friendship could serve as a cover for erotic passion, or a means of ennobling it (Halperin, p. 120), but it could also exist without it. And that, I would suggest, is what we have in the case of Gleim and Jacobi, absent any evidence to the contrary.

Non-erotic male kissing was apparently even more widespread as a simple display of affection in the later phase of *Empfindsamkeit* with its cult of friendship, which is the second stumbling-block to a modern understanding of such effusions. Harking back to the ethos of male–male friendship in antiquity, writers of the mid-eighteenth century developed a widespread elite culture of friendship that has been interpreted in a wealth of critical literature: as a product of religious Pietism, as response to social destabilization in the wake of individualization of the Enlightenment, as retreat from the unsatisfying public sphere into the private enclave of inwardness and feeling, and as middle-class social ethos.<sup>20</sup> Fundamental to this phenomenon is the conviction that (Platonic) friendship is superior to erotic love.

A typical passage from the Gleim–Jacobi correspondence will illustrate the issues of sexuality and friendship in the letters. Jacobi writes to Gleim, who lived in Halberstadt:

Zehn Küsse geb' ich Ihnen dafür, mein liebster, daß Sie den Halberstädtischen Nymphen meine Grüße sagten. Noch immer seh' ich sie mit den Karten spielen, die ein kleiner Amor mischte, oder kleine Netze stricken, um sie auf dem schönen Busen aufzustellen, und Amoretten darin zu fangen. Im voraus schon freuten sich die losen Knaben über ihre Gefangenschaft, und wünschten die Freyheit nicht wieder.<sup>21</sup>

The passage is typical in at least two respects: Jacobi expresses his affection for Gleim and sends multiple kisses; and he shows keen interest in women, in a setting that truly is heterosexually erotic. These heterosexual passages—which are not mentioned by any of the critics who interpret the work as homoerotic—run through the entire correspondence; one of the major themes is that the university town of Halle, where Jacobi lives, has none of the charming 'girls' whom he knows from visiting Gleim in Halberstadt. The coexistence of heterosexual innuendo with male–male affection and kisses is jarring for a modern sensibility, which might see here at most bisexual tendencies. For almost all observers in the eighteenth century, particularly those familiar with the discourses of sensibility, the coexistence was peaceful and not indicative of homosexuality.

The passage, with its little gods of love ensnared in a beautiful bosom, reminds us very clearly of the third discourse at work here, exemplified by the reminiscences from Alexander Pope's masterly verse satire *The Rape of the Lock*. In the later phase of *Empfindsamkeit*, this highly artificial literary trend entered a very productive synthesis with the perhaps even more artificial literary rococo. And the rococo deployed with consummate skill the formal device of

<sup>20</sup> See the summary of some of the main research trends by Eckhardt Meyer-Krentler, 'Freundschaft im 18. Jahrhundert: Zur Einführung in die Forschungsdiskussion', in *Frauenfreundschaft—Männerfreundschaft: Literarische Diskurse im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Wolfram Mauser and Barbara Becker-Cantarino (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991), pp. 1–22, and, especially as relating to Gleim: Pott, pp. 7–9; on Gleim and friendship see also Hanselmann.

<sup>21</sup> Jacobi to Gleim, 23 January 1768, *Briefe*, pp. 245–46.



wit that has been described exhaustively by Paul Böckmann.<sup>22</sup> One of the major strategies of ‘wit’ is the unexpected combination of the incongruous. I think that Gleim and Jacobi consciously aimed at displaying their *Witz* by the—for moderns—jarring parallelization of their affection for each other with heterosexual love. Thus, Gleim writes of a possible Jacobi poem singing the beauties of a woman’s bosom, includes his own poem on a woman’s beautiful hand, and then closes the letter with the sign-off: ‘Ich umarme Sie, wie Sie das zärtlichste Mädchen’ (*Briefe*, p. 254). Thus, the canonical contrast between male–male *friendship* and male–female *love* is wittily undermined by the surprising parallel to male–female love, a metonymic move in which Gleim’s embrace of Jacobi is passed on from Jacobi to his ‘girl’. What would seem to modern observers an obvious hint at homosexuality—the comparison of the male–male relationship with an erotic male–female one—can easily be explained as a display of literary virtuosity, as self-conscious *Witz*.

This flavour of a literary game, the literariness of the letters, and the artifice in this sort of literature are more than obvious—they are thematized in the letters themselves: ‘[...] die wahren Empfindungen nicht, sondern die angenommenen machen den Dichter!’, Gleim writes to Jacobi (*Briefe*, p. 249). Or, as Gleim wrote famously in an earlier collection of his poetry: ‘Schliesset niemals aus den Schriften der Dichter auf die Sitten derselben. Ihr werdet euch betriegen; denn sie schreiben nur, ihren Witz zu zeigen, und sollten sie auch dadurch ihre Tugend in Verdacht setzen.’<sup>23</sup> There could be no clearer distancing of the conceits of style from any biographical assumptions. The Gleim–Jacobi missives are self-conscious *literature*.<sup>24</sup> They are one of the first examples in Germany of the highly constructed epistolary *genre mêlé*, in which verse and prose alternate. Most conspicuously, they combine the culture of feeling in sensibility with the culture of wit from the rococo. The fact that Gleim and Jacobi actually did write such letters to each other only highlights the discursive nature of their relationship. The parallel that they often draw between their friendship and male–female love is a witty display of the incongruous.

This is not to say that Gleim and Jacobi’s contemporaries all appreciated this highly artificial literary game, or the male–male cult of friendship (Halperin (p. 118) points out that such relationships usually obtained only in the social elite). One of the most prominent of those who seemed not to understand was the untutored poet Anna Louisa Karsch, who herself had earlier fallen victim to Gleim’s literary artifice when she took his epistolary professions of love too seriously and fell in love with him. Several years later, after this misun-

<sup>22</sup> Paul Böckmann, *Formgeschichte der deutschen Dichtung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1949; repr. Darmstadt, 1973).

<sup>23</sup> Gleim, preface to volume II of *Versuch in Scherzhaften Liedern*, in: *Versuch in Scherzhaften Liedern und Lieder. Nach den Erstaufgaben von 1744/45 und 1749 mit den Körteschen Fassungen im Anhang kritisch herausgegeben von Alfred Anger* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1964), p. 71.

<sup>24</sup> For an analysis of the letters as literature using game theory, see Hanselmann. By comparison of two printed letters with the manuscript original, Hanselmann points out that the letters are relatively authentic (pp. 98–105). However, Gleim and Jacobi did delete lengthy passages that were too ‘realitätsnah’ (p. 104), so that it is precisely in the limitation of the printed correspondence to themes around their friendship, women, poetry, and love that we can see the self-conscious creation of a literary work. Hanselmann rightly expresses the ‘suspicion’ that the letters were written with an eye to publication (p. 104; cf. p. 106).

derstanding had been ironed out, another arose when she read the published letters between Gleim and Jacobi. Her reaction was deeply insulting to Gleim and led to a lasting breach in their friendship. Her first response to the letters reads as follows:

endlich erhielt ich [. . .] die beyden Denkmähler<sup>25</sup> einer Liebe die seit dem Unttergange des griechischen und römischen Glanzes nicht mehr gebräuchlich gewesen ist, diese Liebe Bestehet in einer genauen Geisterverein[g]ung, aber es werden zu viel Küße dabey außgetheilt, als daß Sie der Verläumdung, den Argwohn, und dem Spötter entgegen könnte, ich Begreiffe die möglichkeit der Sache, ich weis es daß man auff diese Art lieben kann, doch je mehr ich diß weiß, je mehr ist es mir empfindlich daß Sie ehedem meine eben so platonische, reine und vielleicht aufrichtigerre Liebe zum Gelächter machten, und warum muß es aniezt Herr Jacobi der ganzen Welt erzählen?<sup>26</sup>

Richter marshals this passage as evidence of the 'homoeroticism' of the letters, and he is followed by Robert Tobin, who writes: 'Despite running against the grain of contemporary orthodox criticism, a queer reading can actually be true to history, for in fact the discourse of friendship between members of the same sex frequently provoked concern even during its own heyday' (p. 37). Aside from the problematic identification of the older interpretative paradigm as the 'orthodox' one, Tobin's claim, based as it is only on Karsch's letter, represents a selective reading of the 'reception' of the book, both by Karsch and by others. For Karsch actually refers to the suspicions of other readers, not her own, so that the letter is at least ambiguous in this respect. For his part, Gleim in his response denied the possible accusation:

Von meiner platonischen liebe zu ihnen, Madame, haben sie tausend Beweise. Zu dieser zwischen Personen Beyderley Geschlechtes gehören Küße nicht. Mit keinem Gedancken habe ich Freundschaft und Tugend beleidiget./ Die mir schänlich Beschuldigte Verspottung, und das Gelächter meiner Nichte, deßen Sie, nicht ohne bosheit, erwähnen hat die Wirklichkeit schlechterdings allein in einer schwartzen Argwöhnischen Abscheulichen Seele!<sup>27</sup>

The implication of this passage is that kisses between men and women are sexual because they ruin the platonic relationship, whereas between men they are not because the relationship remains platonic—a point that makes sense only when referring to heterosexual men. Especially telling is Gleim's appalled denial of the suggestion that the kisses signify a homosexual relationship. Jacobi, too, is horrified at the accusation and calls sodomy a monster at which nature recoils.<sup>28</sup> Thus, both authors firmly reject the insinuation that their letters are homoerotic—and yet their denials seem to count for nothing in the eyes of many modern critics.

<sup>25</sup> Karsch is referring to *Briefe von Herrn Johann Georg Jacobi*, which appeared in the same year and with the same publisher as the *Briefe der Herren Gleim und Jacobi*, and is referred to there because it contains letters to Gleim to which he responds in *Briefe der Herren* [. . .].

<sup>26</sup> Berlin, 18 July 1768, 'Mein Bruder in Apoll': *Briefwechsel zwischen Anna Louisa Karsch und Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim*, ed. by Regina Nörtemann, 2 vols (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1996), I, 312.

<sup>27</sup> Gleim to Karsch, 23 July 1768, Nörtemann, I, 316.

<sup>28</sup> 'Eine Zärtlichkeit, deren Küsse die Unschuld zählte, durch den schändlichsten Argwohn brandmarken zu wollen? In den ruhigen Gebüschchen, wo wir den weisesten Amor mit falschen Nymphen spielen sahen, ein Ungeheuer zu vermuthen, vor welchem die Natur sich entsetzet?' (Jacobi to Karsch, 6 September 1768, Nörtemann, I, 492).

Perhaps more tellingly, the two major known reviewers of the Gleim–Jacobi correspondence, unlike Karsch, do not even mention the many kisses and hugs, much less anything homoerotic. The only thing coming close is the beginning of a review in his *Deutsche Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften* by Christian Adolph Klotz,<sup>29</sup> a colleague and associate of Jacobi in Halle:

Ueberall findet man eine aufrichtige Liebe, welche sich auf eine wechselseitige Hochachtung gründet: die Verfasser entdecken einander alles, was in ihrer Seele vorgeht: sie theilen sich die angenehmsten Gedanken und die reizendsten Bilder mit, die ihnen ihre Einbildungskraft vorstellt. [. . .] Beide Verfasser unterhalten sich grösstentheils von den Kriegen und Siegen des kleinen Gottes, dessen Macht in allen Sprachen und in allen Zeitaltern besungen worden.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, Klotz is not afraid to point to the ‘love’ between the correspondents, and even mentions Amor as a metaphor for eroticism. He goes so far as to say that the book is ‘ein Denkmal, dem *Eros* und *Anteros* errichtet’.<sup>31</sup> But the ‘wars and victories’ of Amor to which Klotz refers are purely heterosexual, so it is difficult to see how his description refers to homoeroticism.<sup>32</sup> Klotz closes by saying that the letters represent ‘[. . .] die Wollust zweier zärtlichen Seelen, und sie werden das Vergnügen aller Leser seyn, deren Herz sanfter und freudiger Empfindungen fähig ist’ (p. 22). The word ‘Wollust’ still had its non-sexual connotation, and Klotz marshals the signifiers of *Empfindsamkeit* in this description (‘Herz’, ‘Empfindungen’, and especially ‘zärtlich’, which was a code word for the entire earlier phase of *Empfindsamkeit*). But the only other criticism that he expresses is that the letters betray a certain artifice born of overuse of sentimental vocabulary. ‘Die warme, ein wenig enthusiastische Sprache der Freundschaft ist empfindlichen Seelen weder Fremde, noch unnatürlich’, writes E. E. Buschmann in Nicolai’s *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*,<sup>33</sup> thus firmly establishing Gleim’s and Jacobi’s language within the sentimental discourse and its reference to elite readership (‘enthusiastisch’ and ‘empfindlich’—in the meaning ‘empfindsam’—are yet more signifiers of sentimentalism). His use of the word ‘warm’ could theoretically be taken as a hint at ‘Greek love’,<sup>34</sup> and Buschmann then launches his critique that seems to be heading in the same direction: ‘Sollen wir aber gestehen, daß manche

<sup>29</sup> On Klotz’s authorship of the anonymous review, see Hanselmann, p. 108.

<sup>30</sup> [Christian Adolph Klotz,] review of *Briefe von Herrn Johann Georg Jacobi* and *Briefe von den Herren Gleim und Jacobi*, in *Deutsche Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften*, ed. by Christian Adolph Klotz, 2.5 (1768), 1–22 (p. 1); an extract with some alterations is published in Wilhelm Körte, *Johann Wilhelm Ludewig Gleims Leben: Aus seinen Briefen und Schriften* (Halberstadt: Bureau für Literatur und Kunst, 1811), pp. 506–08.

<sup>31</sup> Klotz, p. 1. Anteros, the brother of Eros, was the god of fulfilled love and was sometimes associated with the feelings of a boy towards the dominant man in a pederastic relationship, but not necessarily so.

<sup>32</sup> As Hanselmann suggests, saying that with this phrase the letters are ‘in [der] Nähe antiker griechischer Gepflogenheiten’ and that it ‘[. . .] in der Liebe der Freunde einen Aspekt mehr sieht, als nur eine wie auch immer geartete seelische Verbundenheit, in der es die Seele allein mit dem Herzen zu tun hat’ (p. 108). However, Klotz’s passage clearly refers not to Gleim and Jacobi’s friendship, but to the heterosexual love omnipresent in the correspondence.

<sup>33</sup> [E. E. Buschmann,] review of *Briefe von Herrn* [sic] *Gleim und Jacobi* and *Briefe von Herrn Johann George* [sic] *Jacobi*, in *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, 10.1 (1769), 189–94 (p. 193).

<sup>34</sup> On the genealogy of the German ‘warm’ (especially ‘warm brother’) as a signifier for ‘homosexual’, see Derks, pp. 90–95.

Ausdrücke dieser Herren eine ganz widrige Wirkung auf uns gemacht haben?' (p. 193). But if we expect this rhetorical question to be heading for a critique of 'sodomitic' moments in the text, we will be disappointed; he explains the 'widrige Wirkung' as something quite different: 'Wir glauben *zuweilen* nicht zwey für einander brennende Herzen, sondern zwey kaltblutige Leute zu hören, die sich heiser geschryen [*sic*], und sich in frostigen Hyperbeln und leeren Ausrufungen erschöpfen' (p. 193)—and then he quotes a passage in which Gleim sends Jacobi ten thousand kisses, a passage that strikes *modern* readers as clearly queer, but which strikes him as simply affected. So it is the *artifice* that this contemporary saw in the letters, not any homoeroticism. In fact, both reviewers are clearly bored, expressing the classic anti-rococo critique of endless repetition of motifs: 'Besonders langweilig sind auch die Wiederholungen der nämlichen Ideen, der nämlichen Scherze', writes Buschmann, exasperated with these 'einschläfernde Spielwerke', but he also summarizes his impatience by pointing to the heterosexual element of the letters:

[. . .] haben denn zwey witzige Köpfe sich in beynahe zwey Jahren von nichts als von, ihrer heißen Liebe, von schönen Busen, von Mädgen, von Amorn, von fürtreflichen Briefgen, Liedgen u. dergl. geschrieben [?]. (p. 194)

Klotz, too, criticizes 'eine gewisse Monotonie' (p. 22). Both reviewers thus unmask the correspondence—at least the published part—for what it was: an elaborate, decidedly literary game, and a tiresome one at that.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, these two reviewers find nothing 'unnatürlich', as one of them explicitly says, in Gleim's and Jacobi's correspondence—and if there is one practically universal descriptor of 'Greek love' in this period, it is 'unnatural'. Rather, they situate the correspondence firmly within the parameters of the sentimental discourse that still dominated the literary world at this time, as well as in the obvious realm of rococo poetry ('Scherze' was a favourite signifier for this movement). However, there was of course a new paradigm arising at just about this time, which rejected both rococo and sentimental artificiality: the *Sturm und Drang*. And it is among the representatives of this new fashion that we find the attacks on Gleim's and Jacobi's supposed homoerotic proclivities. The initial attack comes in the first letter of Johann Gottfried Herder to his fiancée Caroline Flachsland in May 1771. Herder warns her against the abuse of sentimental circles by the likes of Franz Michael Leuchsenring, and, referring to Jacobi, says that such sentimentalists want to go out into the world on 'empfindsame Abenteuer' and want 'hundert Mädchen und Knabenmännchen u[nd] lieben Leutchen die Hände drücken'.<sup>36</sup> I take 'Knabenmännchen' to be an obvious cut at supposed pederasts. However, only a few months before his vitriol against the published letters set in, Herder had written with enthusiasm

<sup>35</sup> Two further responses to the book are discussed by Hanselmann: a short and inconsequential Hamburg review, and Johann Jacob Bodmer's pamphlet *Von den Grazien des Kleinen* (1769), which was part of the ageing Bodmer's bitter attack on rococo (it ends with a swipe at *Musarion* by Wieland, who had freed himself from Bodmer's influence) and of limited value in the present context (see Hanselmann, pp. 110–12).

<sup>36</sup> 1 May 1771: Johann Gottfried Herder, *Briefe: Gesamtausgabe 1763–1803*, ed. by Karl-Heinz Hahn, Wilhelm Dobbek, and Günter Arnold (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau 1977–), II (1984), 17.

about them,<sup>37</sup> thus unwittingly revealing the arbitrariness (and artificiality) not only of this sentimental fashion, but also of its opposite, the *Sturm und Drang* masculinist attack. Often quoted is a 1771 letter by Herder in which he calls Gleim's letters 'Halberstädtische Liebesbriefchen'. However, this passage may not be as homophobic as it seems; Herder specifically goes on to say that the purpose of Gleim's and Jacobi's love letters is 'die Herzen der Weiblein [zu] haschen'.<sup>38</sup> Herder's attack was trumped by a second one, this time a published one, by Goethe, in his parody with the wicked title *Götter, Helden und Wieland* (written in 1773). Here he refers obliquely to Wieland as 'Ganimeds Hofmeister'.<sup>39</sup> This is an allusion to Wieland's aforementioned rococo story 'Juno und Ganymed', which, according to Gleim, supposedly provoked a flowering of sodomitic culture in Germany. But the insult also encompasses Jacobi; when Wieland appears in the play, he says, as in a dream-state: 'Lassen Sie uns mein lieber Jakobi', and one of the figures comments: 'Man sieht doch mit was für Leuten er umgeht' (MA 1/1, 683). Goethe also parodied the Gleim–Jacobi correspondence in the poem 'Flieh, Täubchen, flieh!' (with the line 'Warm ist die Brust, | Keusch seine Lust') and in a farce he later destroyed, called *Das Unglück der Jacobis*.<sup>40</sup> No wonder that Goethe wrote in his autobiography that the correspondence had given rise 'zu mancherlei Scherzen'.<sup>41</sup>

The contemporary depictions of the Gleim–Jacobi correspondence as homoerotic—and they hardly comprise a 'public scandal'<sup>42</sup>—thus came from two directions. Karsch felt personally hurt and jealous of Jacobi. Thus, she saw the sentimental discourse in which the authors situate their letters through a very coloured lens, and drew the easy association of their relationship to classical homoeroticism (but supposedly voiced the imagined accusation by others)—an association based on her inability to understand the literary discourse at work. The second came from those who knew and had even practised the sentimental discourse (see Goethe's earlier letters to Behrisch!) but who now rejected it in

<sup>37</sup> To Gleim, October 1768, Herder, I (1984), 107; however, in a letter to his fiancée of 30 August 1770, Herder wrote disparagingly of 'die überschwemmtzärtlichen und ecklen Briefe Gleims und Jacobis' (Herder, I, 199). This latter judgement clearly falls in the later phase of the *Sturm und Drang* masculinist attack.

<sup>38</sup> To J. H. Merck, October 1771, Herder, II, 79; cf. IX, 116.

<sup>39</sup> Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens: Münchner Ausgabe*, ed. by Karl Richter and others, 21 vols in 33 pts (Munich: Hanser, 1985–99) [abbreviated in the following as 'MA'], 1/1, 683.

<sup>40</sup> MA, 1/1, 225–27, 864–65. More recently, Karl Eibl has relativized the interpretation of this poem as referring only to Gleim and Jacobi: Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke: Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, ed. by Dieter Borchmeyer and others, 40 vols in 45 pts (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–99), 1/1 (1987), 900–01.

<sup>41</sup> 'Jene Briefe und Gedichte, worin Gleim und Georg Jacobi sich öffentlich an einander erfreuten, hatten uns zu mancherlei Scherzen Gelegenheit gegeben [. . .]' (MA, xvi, 661). See also the attacks on Jacobi in reviews in the *Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen* by Goethe and his allies (MA 1/2, 343, 403).

<sup>42</sup> '[. . .] einen Freundes-Briefwechsel, [. . .] der ob seiner süßlichen "Liebes"-Spielerei nachgerade einen öffentlichen Skandal hervorrief' (Wilfried Barner, 'Gelehrte Freundschaft im 18. Jahrhundert: Zu ihren traditionellen Voraussetzungen', in *Frauenfreundschaft—Männerfreundschaft* (see above, n. 20), pp. 23–45 (p. 24)). It is also unclear why Barner claims (p. 31) that the references to Gleim and Jacobi visiting Berlin in Mendelssohn's letter to Lessing of 29 November 1770 and in Lessing's answer of 9 January 1771 refer to the correspondence between the two men. See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*, XI/2: *Briefe von und an Lessing 1770–1776*, ed. by Helmuth Kiesel and others (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1988), 100, 144.

a gesture of polemic that was a function of the culture wars that were being waged in the late 1760s and early 1770s. The *Sturm und Drang*, I would argue, can be seen as a pronounced attempt by younger writers—remember that it was the first youth movement in German literature—to establish their dominance against a movement that they increasingly associated with femininity or, at least, with a lack of virility. To a certain extent, this reaction can be seen as a revolt against the perceived threat by female authors (such as Sophie von La Roche) to the dominance of men in the literary market. It can also be interpreted as an attack on supposedly effeminate French (aristocratic) culture. Whatever the reason, the authors of the *Sturm und Drang*, obviously enough, cultivated an over-the-top masculinity that found a ready-made enemy in supposedly emasculated poets such as Gleim and Jacobi. The charge of pederasty or 'Greek love' was only part of this attack, and it was not an obvious or logical one to all contemporaries. As we saw, *neither* effeminacy *nor* male–male love and friendship have *necessarily* been associated with homosexuality, though they can be. A contemporary charge of sodomitic affection cannot in itself stand as evidence that Gleim and Jacobi's kisses made their missives homoerotic, let alone that they were practitioners of 'Greek love'.

It is perhaps not unimportant to look at how the men themselves viewed homosexuality. Gleim's apparent naivety in such things is most apparent in his correspondence with a true homosexual, the famous Swiss historian Johannes von Müller.<sup>43</sup> For Müller drops some very heavy hints, but Gleim never picks up on them. Of course, Gleim uses the typical language of *Empfindsamkeit* to describe his affection for Müller in terms that sound like the familiar homoerotic discourse:

Allen meinen Freunden, mein lieber Müller, sah' ichs gleich beym ersten Male an den Augen an, daß sie meine Freunde werden würden; keinem so im ersten Augenblicke, wie meinem Müller. Ja, mein Lieber, Sie sind mein!<sup>44</sup>

But that is as racy as it gets on Gleim's part; he merely repeats the same topoi that we know from his correspondence with Jacobi. Müller himself, however, gives broad hints, even figuring Gleim 'in Jacobi's freundschaftswarmen Schooße',<sup>45</sup> and thus apparently in agreement with Goethe and Herder on the homoerotic nature of the relationship. In this 'strong' interpretation, he is clearly trying to push Gleim in his own direction, and Gleim does not react to this apparent suggestion of his own homosexuality. In a couple of letters Müller is more insistent; he writes of the known homosexual Winckelmann:

J'aime beaucoup la mémoire de *Winckelmann*; quand je dis 'beaucoup' cela signifie: *extrêmement*; j'aime Winckelmann non seulement comme écrivain, mais aussi comme

<sup>43</sup> On Müller, see Derks, pp. 295–369; Gert Mattenklott, 'Eine Episode gleichgeschlechtlicher Liebe: Johannes von Müller und Friedrich von Hartenberg', in *A propos d'amour: les discours amoureux et le discours sur l'amour de Werther à Effi Briest*, Cahiers d'études germaniques, 45 (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 2003), pp. 89–100; 'In kleinen Staaten ersterben große Gedanken aus Mangel großer Leidenschaften': *Begegnungen mit Johannes von Müller*, ed. by Stefan Howald (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> Halberstadt, 13 September 1771, *Briefe zwischen Gleim, Wilhelm Heinse und Johann von Müller: Aus Gleims litterarischem Nachlasse*, ed. by Wilhelm Körte, 2 vols (Zurich: Heinrich Geßner, 1806), 1, 39–40.

<sup>45</sup> 'Bessinge bey Genf', 10 July 1774, Körte, *Briefe*, 1, 181.

homme. S'il avoit vécu, nous aurions été amis. Il y a des points sur lesquels nous aurions sympathisé. [. . .]. Quand on lit ce que Winkelmann a dit de la beauté, il semble quelquefois qu'il ne sait ce qu'il dit, mais je vois ce qu'il sentoit. C'étoit un homme heureux; je me rapelle d'avoir lu une lettre manuscrite, dans laquelle il parle de l'emploi de son tems: il consacroit une demi-heure par jour à méditer sur le bonheur, qu'il avoit d'exister à Rome. [. . .] on le voit tout entier dans ses lettres; il ne cache rien; c'est ce qui me le fait aimer.<sup>46</sup>

Gleim, of course, knew Winckelmann's letters—in fact, Müller is here responding to remarks by Gleim on those letters, in which the older writer had little positive to say about them:

[Ich] wandle mitten im Winter zwischen den Werken der Kunst, die entgegen stehen denen, die den großen Winkelmann um's Leben brachten. Denn hätte Winkelmann an den Schönheiten des Apoll im Belvedere, des Torso, der Niobe, nicht seine Seele verzärtelt, so wären ihm die Tyroler Gebirge nicht abscheulich, die spitzen Dächer Deutschlands nicht belachenswürdig erschienen; so hätte er seinen Freund Cavaceppi nicht verlassen, wäre nicht nach Rom allein zurückgekehrt, und wäre nicht ermordet. Ich lese seine Briefe; las in dieser Nacht den ganzen zweyten Theil. Unwürdig des großen Mannes ist dieses Denkmal seines Herzens, macht keine Ehre der Walterschen Buchhandlung zu Dresden, die so viel durch seinen Geist gewonnen hat.<sup>47</sup>

This is a fairly clear condemnation of Winckelmann's homosexuality as it was evident in his letters. Gleim was obviously able to distinguish cleanly between his own effusions of love for Jacobi or Müller on the one hand, and Winckelmann's sexual desire for men on the other, and to abhor the latter. It is tempting today to view him as naive—in fact, he might not even have suspected that Müller practised 'Greek love'—or as misguided, or as in deep denial or repression, but I think we have instead to take him on his own terms and understand the power of the literary conventions of the time, as well as the limitations of our modern understanding of gay.

I am not suggesting that none of the eighteenth-century writers whom scholars have described as overtly or latently homosexual should be assigned instead

<sup>46</sup> Berlin, 30 December 1780, Gleim, *Briefe*, II, 117–18. A no less obvious hint was contained in Müller's account of his private audience with Frederick the Great: 'Je ne pus d'abord saisir sa physiognomie; mais bientôt dans le cours de la conversation, je ne sais à propos de quoi, le roi leva sa tête, et je vis non seulement le plus beau vieillard, mais le premier grand homme, marqué pour l'être par la Nature, qui traça ses traits. O Frédéric, Frédéric, qu'ils ont pénétré bien avant dans mon ame! je ne les oublierai jamais, dussé-je vivre mille ans et ne te revoir jamais. Vites-vous chez personne des traits plus fins, des yeux plus vifs, un air plus doux? [. . .] Je su[is] inconsolable de n'être pas—son valet de chambre, place que je préférerois à celle de premier ministre d'un autre prince. Je ne puis encore penser à Frédéric, sans que les larmes me viennent aux yeux. Le lendemain matin, la première chose que je fis, fut de m'épancher dans le sein du marquis de Lucchesini; j'eus le bonheur de le trouver pénétré des mêmes sentimens' (to Gleim, Berlin, 14 February 1781, *Briefe*, II, 159–60).

<sup>47</sup> Halberstadt, 25 December 1780, Körte, *Briefe*, II, 110–11. Gleim was reading volume II of *Winckelmanns Briefe an seine Freunde* [. . .] mit einigen Zusätzen und litterarischen Anmerkungen hrsg. von Karl Wilhelm Dassdorf, 2 vols (Dresden: In der Walterschen Hofbuchhandlung, 1777–80). Gleim goes on to say: 'Mich freut es, daß ich die Briefe noch habe, die der Graf von Schlabendorff mir zur Herausgabe geschenkt hat', and Körte remarks in a footnote: 'Diese Briefe Winkelmanns an den nachmaligen Grafen von Schlabendorf, die ich vor allem so gern dem berühmten Herausgeber von "*Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert*" [=Goethe!] zur Einverleibung in sein vortreffliches Buch dankbar zugesandt hätte, wenn ich nicht zu spat von diesem herrlichen Vorhaben unterrichtet worden wäre, werden nun in meiner zunächst herauszugebenden Briefsammlung mit abgedruckt werden' (p. 111).

to heterosexual 'normalcy'. I would have liked to develop a series of firm criteria for identifying homoerotic elements in texts from the eighteenth century, but I have been so far unable to do so. Susanne Kord suggests implicitly a whole series of such criteria as they appear in the correspondence between Luise Gottsched née Kulmus and Dorothea von Runckel. These criteria are cogent as applied to that relationship, a truly 'authentic' bond that was not a bit literary, but they can hardly apply to the literary game that Gleim and Jacobi play. For example, Kord points to explicit parallels drawn by these women between their same-sex relationship and an opposite-sex relationship such as marriage.<sup>48</sup> As we have seen, Gleim and Jacobi, too, stylize their friendship in parallel to that between a man (usually Jacobi himself) and a woman, but for them the analogy functions as an elaborate display of *Witz*—and is embedded in generous discussion of desirable 'girls'. One possible criterion for assuming homoeroticism might be the secrecy with which same-sex desire is broached—the closet, as it were. An example might be a little-known letter of Goethe's servant Philip Seidel, describing his relationship to Goethe:

O daß ich meine Seele aushauchen könnte in Liebe zu diesem Manne und würdig wäre dem Gott zu danken, der mir so viele Seeligkeit bei ihm zu kosten giebt.

Wir haben das ganze Verhältniß wie Mann und Frau gegeneinander. So lieb ich ihn, so er mich, so dien ich ihm, so viel Oberherrschaft äußert er über mich.

Aber warum vertrau ich dem Papier, was mein heiliges liebes Geheimniß ist. [. . .]<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the suggestion of secrecy can point strongly to an interpretation of the relationship as homoerotic (or at least sodomitic), and in this case the parallel to a heteroerotic relationship could thus be read as pointing in the same direction. Other criteria are imaginable. For now, I would suggest only two: that (1) the same-sex kisses are explicitly figured as sexual, or are in a sexualized setting; and (2) they fall on parts of the body other than the face. Thus, the following climactic scene from Duke August of Saxe-Gotha's novel *Ein Jahr in Arkadien* (1805) contains both of these criteria and is self-consciously homoerotic:

Alexis [. . .] war seinem neuen Liebling nachgefolgt. Komm, sagte er, mit ihm die Fingerspitzen zärtlich verschränkend und die Lippen ihm auf die weissen Schultern drückend, komm, treues, frommes Gemüth. Einmal führtest du mich durch Irrwege und Dunkel; itzt stütze dich auf meinen Arm, ich will dich führen. Stumm folgte der Überselige seinem Beschützer nach.<sup>50</sup>

Not coincidentally, this passage was written precisely in the years (around 1805) that Paul Derks has established as the locus of a sea change in attitudes towards homosexuality, which was increasingly viewed through a hostile, nationalist lens, but one result of this hostility is a significant step towards a modern understanding of the phenomenon.

<sup>48</sup> Susanne Kord, 'Eternal Love or Sentimental Discourse? Gender Dissonance and Women's Passionate "Friendships"', in *Outing Goethe and his Age*, ed. by Kuzniar, pp. 228–49, 270–73 (p. 239).

<sup>49</sup> Quoted by Walter Schleich, *Goethes Diener* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau, 1965), p. 33, who dismisses it as a 'literarischer Versuch'. See also Rainer J. Kaus, *Der Fall Goethe, ein deutscher Fall: Eine psychoanalytische Studie* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1994), p. 77; Tobin, p. 96.

<sup>50</sup> [August Herzog von Sachsen-Gotha,] *Ein Jahr in Arkadien* (1805), ed. by Paul Derks (Berlin: rosa Winkel, 1985), pp. 83–84.



In a larger sense, what I am arguing for is differentiation, rather than assuming homoeroticism just from the fact, say, of two men kissing. This means taking seriously the otherness of earlier historical *periods*, no less so than we take seriously other *cultures* than our own. Robert Tobin writes: ‘Throughout the eighteenth century members of the same sex were able to say and write things to each other under the rubric of ‘sentimental friendship’ that sound incredibly queer today’ (p. 36)—but precisely the modifier ‘today’ ought to set off alarm bells, rather than allowing Tobin then to interpret such passages entirely from a modern, ‘queer’ perspective. In this sense, then, ‘queerness’ is something quite familiar to us moderns and thus a deceptively easy category, whereas the sentimental discourse is alien and in its own way very queer indeed, but no less real.<sup>51</sup> Halperin recounts quite frankly the impression of most classicists that ‘the ancient Greeks were quite weird, by our standards, when it comes to sex’ (p. 2). He describes having come to the realization that it is not the Greeks who were weird about sex but rather we moderns, with the ‘prominence of heterosexuality and homosexuality as central, organizing categories of thought, behavior, and erotic subjectivity. The rise to dominance of those categories represents a relatively recent and culturally specific development’ (p. 3). I would like to underscore Halperin’s conviction that there is ‘an intrinsic value in the historian’s daily struggle to work against her or his own intuitions, to counter them with a hard-won apprehension of irreducible historical difference’ (p. 15). German sentimentalist and rococo culture of the eighteenth century, then, is perhaps no less strange to us than Greek pederasty, as is the sentimental cult of male–male friendship in particular. We should seek to learn from these differences in much the same way as we seek to learn from the differences between our Anglo-Saxon cultures and those of German-speaking countries today (rather than minimizing those differences when we teach). We cannot understand the other by attempting to make it too familiar.

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<sup>51</sup> Kord’s general critique of the use of the term ‘sentimental discourse’ to dismiss homoerotic connotations is valid, I would argue, in the cases of female desire that she presents, but not is not applicable to all such relationships—certainly not to the friendship between Gleim and Jacobi. She defines ‘sentimental discourse’ as ‘the assumption that even where men and women openly declare their love, they do not mean it unless they are speaking to a member of the opposite sex. The sentimental discourse rests on no basis but the assumption of universal heterosexuality on the part of the reader: since it is impossible to *prove* sexual activity or desire between these “friends”, none is presupposed or suspected’ (p. 231). I would argue that the notion of ‘sentimental discourse’ rests on extensive research into a mode of thinking and feeling that represented one of the chief obsessions of the eighteenth century. Nor does one have to posit ‘universal heterosexuality on the part of the reader’ in order to ask that real evidence be produced to establish the homoeroticism in particular texts, and to suggest that not everything that may seem homoerotic today, after the invention of ‘homosexuality’ around 1870, also seemed such in the eighteenth century. It should be pointed out that Kord’s work, from which scholarship has profited enormously, must be seen as pioneering research on female same-sex desire, where it retains its validity and importance.