

# literatur für leser:innen

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Gegenwartsautor:innen

Herausgegeben von Brigitte Prutti

Mit Beiträgen von Karin Bauer,  
Simone Pflieger, Julia K. Gruber, Olivia Albiero  
und Heidi Schlipphacke



PETER LANG

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## Lesbian Camp and the Queer Archive: Angela Steidele's *Rosenstengel: Ein Manuskript aus dem Umfeld Ludwigs II.* (2015)

### Abstract

Angela Steidele's 2015 epistolary novel *Rosenstengel: Ein Manuskript aus dem Umfeld Ludwigs II* presents a queer archive via partially fictional letters from and about Ludwig II and the cross-dressing lesbian Catharina Margaretha Linck, who lived more than 100 years before the Bavarian king. Steidele's novel highlights the marriage of materiality and fantasy within the queer archive, engaging a mode of Camp aesthetics that always points to the gap between the material/real and fantasy. What is more, it is lesbian Camp, an undertheorized concept, that shapes and structures Steidele's novel, even those portions concerned with the homosexually-inclined King Ludwig. The unrepresentability of lesbian desire surfaces in the novel as textual gaps that connote both a joke and loss, underscoring the affective complexity of the queer archive.

The queer archive is a trove of discarded materials and fantasy. If every archive represents a collection of documents that opens up as many questions about the past as it answers, then the queer archive is characterized by additional knowledge gaps. What particular language or code might have signified queer desire in the documents collected? What was said clearly, and what was of necessity repressed, hidden, or even destroyed in the processes of communication, documentation, and collection? Fantasy seeps into the gaps of the queer archive, as we imagine the fulfillment of love barely hinted at in order to recover queer histories that may or may not have existed in the forms we imagine. Angela Steidele's 2015 epistolary novel *Rosenstengel: Ein Manuskript aus dem Umfeld Ludwigs II.* presents just such a queer archive via partially fictional letters from and about Ludwig II and the cross-dressing lesbian Catharina Margaretha Linck (aka Anastasius Rosenstengel), who lived more than 100 years before the Bavarian king. Steidele's novel highlights the marriage of materiality and fantasy within the queer archive, engaging a mode of Camp aesthetics that always points to the gap between the material/real and fantasy. Indeed, it is a lesbian mode of Camp, characterized by textual gaps and misreadings that connote desire, the joke and loss, that shapes and structures Steidele's novel, even those portions concerned with the homosexually-inclined King Ludwig. Ludwig's passion for his brother Otto's doctor, Franz Carl Müller, is sparked by and modeled on Linck/Rosenstengel's love life; in this sense, the queer archive represented within Steidele's novel stages the fantasy of establishing an aesthetics of lesbian Camp that could shape our historical, political, and aesthetic imagination.

### The Queer Archive: Truth and Lies

Anne Cvetkovich writes that queer archives are „a practice of fantasy made material. [...] they are composed of material practices that challenge traditional conceptions of history and understand the quest for history as a psychic need rather than a science.“<sup>1</sup>

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1 Anne Cvetkovich: *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC 2003, pg. 268.

She notes that much of this work is done by volunteers whose passion contributes to the idiosyncratic quality of queer archives, „so often collected according to sentiment and emotion.“<sup>2</sup> Cvetkovich's take on the queer archive points to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the archive itself in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Derrida calls into question the metaphoric function of the archive as the container of the unconscious, for if traumatic memory cannot be traced to its source, then what are the objects in the archive?<sup>3</sup> By highlighting the fantasy of the archivist within the process of creating the archive, Cvetkovich opens up a space for the collaborative and deeply sentimental nature of the specifically queer archive.

Steidele's epistolary novel relishes in the queer emotional attachments and slippery truths it presents. One of the many characters in the novel who represent a hybrid of historical fact and fantasy is Bernhard von Gudden, a psychiatrist in charge of an asylum in Munich. He writes of Bettina von Arnim's *Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde* (1835), a book of which his wife is particularly fond: „[...] ich blätterte erst unwillig darin, doch dann las ich diese undurchschaubare Mischung aus historischem Bericht und wüster Phantasie als Arzt höchst fasziniert durch.“<sup>4</sup> Gudden is particularly fascinated by the „Lügen“ in Arnim's collection which he categorizes as a „Pseudologia phantastica.“<sup>5</sup> We are invited to think of Steidele's novel along these lines, as an opaque mixture of historical document, found objects, and „pseudologica phantastica.“

Steidele begins her book with an editor's preface in which she describes the accidental discovery of the documents contained within the novel, which she claims to have simply transcribed (RS, pg. 6). The letters are purported to be the contents of files deposited in an archive by Dr. Franz Carl Müller, a physician who attended to Ludwig II. during his last days. Just like the editor of Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774), Steidele claims to be merely the curator and transcriber who presents these documents to the reader. Indeed, she notes twice in the book the material object of Müller's „Besucherkarte“ that falls out of the files: „Dr. Müller, München,“ once in the preface (RS, pg. 5) and once in the „Kurzbiographien“ section at the end of the novel where Steidele provides clues to the historical accuracy and lack thereof of the letters collected and the people they characterize. In her biographical description of Müller, she points to Müller's role as a doctor to Ludwig's brother Otto, assistant to Gudden, and his presence in the last days of Ludwig's life. The historical Müller likewise researched and wrote about historical queer identities, including the cross-dressing Catharina Margarethe Linck. Within Steidele's novel, Müller is Ludwig's lover and in the process of collecting the letters surrounding Linck/Rosenstengel's story. The biographical notes on Müller at the end of *Rosenstengel*, however, make no mention of Müller's role as Ludwig's lover. Indeed, the biographical notes provide no „closure“ about the distinction between historical truth and fantasy within Steidele's novel. Yet

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2 Ibid., pg. 269.

3 Jacques Derrida: *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago 1995.

4 Angela Steidele: *Rosenstengel: Ein Manuskript aus dem Umfeld Ludwig II.* Berlin 2015, pg. 43. Hereafter cited as RS and referenced in the text.

5 Ibid. Steidele has explored the queer nature of Arnim's works in: *„Als wenn Du mein Geliebter wärest“: Liebe und Begehren zwischen Frauen in der deutschsprachigen Literatur 1750-1850.* Stuttgart 2003. See, in particular, pp. 247-98.

Steidele mentions here once again Müller's „Besucherkarte“ that is contained with his research documents: „Sein Besucherkarte (‘Dr. Müller, München’) liegt noch bei“ (RS, pg. 267). Why? The seemingly marginal card, that which is normally discarded in the process of history, is saved and even revered for its tactile materiality, for its ability to denote the queer potential of the real in a transtemporal manner.

Steidele's novel is, like Arnim's works, filled with „Lügen.“ Two parallel discussions between men from diverse time periods focus on the question of the representation of history. The first of these discussions takes place in the correspondence between the Halle early Enlightenment theologian August Hermann Francke and his rival Christian Thomasius. Francke's critique of „Lügen“ is mirrored in his critique of the novel form; in a letter dated August 20, 1713, to Thomasius, whom he had called in an earlier letter a „Lügengeist“ (RS, pg. 60), Francke asserts that narratives in novels are „gegen die Regeln der Wahrscheinlichkeit“ (RS, pg. 168). Thomasius, in contrast, is willing to entertain the idea that a degree of fantasy might characterize art works: art should, he writes on July 7, 1713 „der Wahrscheinlichkeit ziemlich nahe kommen“ (RS, pg. 168). Here, art gestures toward a possible verisimilitude, approaching mimesis without becoming it. Similarly, in the letters written more than 150 years later between Ludwig II. and Müller, the two argue about the representation of history with a specific reference to the letters surrounding Linck/Rosenstengel's life in the early eighteenth century. Ludwig articulates a simplistic notion of historical representation along the lines put forth by Francke: „Geschichte ist die Darstellung des Geschehenen“ (RS, pg. 68), citing the historian Otto Ranke's dictum that history must represent „wie es eigentlich gewesen ist“ (RS, pg. 75, emphasis in original). Here we have a flat notion of history that itself recalls anachronistically Walter Benjamin's critique of precisely these lines by Ranke in his „Über den Begriff der Geschichte.“<sup>6</sup> Precisely by citing Ranke, Ludwig's position is ironized; the joke is on him. Müller, in contrast, insists that it is neither possible to write without „Lücken“ (RS, pg. 73) nor to satisfactorily answer the question of whether historical narrative is „gefunden oder erfunden“ (RS, pg. 74, emphasis in original). This is precisely the point when, in transcribing letters he finds in Halberstadt detailing the Linck/Rosenstengel case, Müller accidentally intersperses quotes from diverse letters. He decides to explore a space *between* „gefunden oder erfunden“ in which he creates new pastiche letters out of original quotes that are taken out of their context in order to represent history in a manner that is „charakteristisch“ (RS, pg. 247), indeed, perhaps more characteristic of the period than the original letters themselves are. These, of course, are the letters we read in Steidele's novel.

The historical/fantastical pastiche that Steidele creates in *Rosenstengel* is not simply a deconstruction of the possibility of historical verisimilitude; it is likewise imbued with a queer mode of humor and longing. Daniel Fulda points out that Steidele makes frequent use of obvious anachronisms in the novel that reveal the ways in which the present is always implicated in historical accounts. The anachronisms that are plain for all to see include Kant quotations before Kant, Nietzsche before Nietzsche, poetry by Goethe and Klopstock quoted before they were written, and the imagined name of

6 Walter Benjamin: Über den Begriff der Geschichte. In: Walter Benjamin: *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften* I. Frankfurt/M. 1977, pp. 251-262, here pg. 253.

„Gille de Leuze“ for a stocking maker for whom Rosenstengel works.<sup>7</sup> Fulda argues that Steidele likewise engages in a mode of „verbessernde Geschichtsdarstellung,“ imagining that history offers something to contemporary subjects that may never have been there.<sup>8</sup> He notes that, though the historical Linck/Rosenstengel could be seen as a trans man, Steidele resists this understanding of the figure in both the novel and in her biography of Linck/Rosenstengel, instead deeming Linck/Rosenstengel a lesbian.<sup>9</sup> This, Fulda seems to suggest, is a product of Steidele’s lesbian longing. And, indeed, the queer archive is the storage place for such longing. Steidele queers temporality in a manner consistent with the queer archive, positing desires via unlikely intertexts in a manner that is often funny and sometimes melancholic, an affect so frequently tied to queer loss. Heather Love has pointed to melancholy as the affect in accord with the pain associated with the impossible love of queer desire, in particular in historical contexts that openly banned them.<sup>10</sup> Elisabeth of Austria, whose partially fictionalized letters appear in the novel and who is herself a melancholic and queer figure, visits Sappho’s grave on Corfu (RS, pg. 239). Müller makes a pilgrimage to Halberstadt in his research for the Linck/Rosenstengel book and writes in passing of the house of Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim, a figure associated with a past homoerotic cult of male-male friendship, linking his relationship to Ludwig metonymically with the Gleim circle.<sup>11</sup> Linck/Rosenstengel’s lover, Susanna Mühlhahn, imprisoned in Halberstadt in 1714 for her „sodomous“ relationship with Linck/Rosenstengel, sings the song of Faust’s Gretchen: „Meine Ruh’ ist hin / Mein Hertz ist schwer / Ich finde sie nimmer und nimmermehr“ (RS, pg. 291). In channeling the pain felt by the literary Gretchen almost a hundred years later, Mühlhahn embodies a lesbian performance of „das Ewig-Weibliche.“

The mode of anachronism does not project a fantasy of a better queer history into the past but rather invests the early Enlightenment with a queer form of melancholia, a loss that will never be assuaged. Linck/Rosenstengel’s execution is rewritten by Steidele as a drowning and moved back six years from 1721 to 1715.<sup>12</sup> Rather than being executed with the sword, as was the historical Linck/Rosenstengel’s fate, the novel’s Linck/Rosenstengel is drowned. The pastor who presides over Linck/Rosenstengel’s drowning in the novel points to the feminizing punishment that drowning implies: „Darmit der Linckin im Tode endlich die Erkenntnüß zu Theil werde, daß sie ein Weib, soll ihr die Ehrenstraffe des Schwertes vorenthalten, und sie vielmehr in einen Sack eingenäht im Wasser ersäufft werden“ (RS, pg. 335). In this sense, Steidele’s fiction

7 Daniel Fulda: *Liebe geht durch alle Zeiten? Historische und poetologisch-selbstreflexive Anachronismen im romanhaften Geschichtserzählen von Sexualität und Geschlechterrollen*. In: *Romanhaftes Erzählen von Geschichte: Vergewaltigte Vergangenheiten im beginnenden 21. Jahrhundert*. Eds. Daniel Fulda/Stephan Jaeger. Berlin, Boston 2019, pp. 81-110. See Fulda’s list of anachronisms, pp. 100-101.

8 *Ibid.*, pg. 107.

9 *Ibid.*, pg. 95. See Angela Steidele: *In Mannskleidern: Das verwegene Leben der Catharina Margaretha Linck alias Anastasius Lagrantinus Rosenstengel, hingerichtet 1721*. Frankfurt/M. 2021.

10 Heather Love: *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge, MA 2007. See also Heidi Schlipphacke: *Melancholy Empress: Queering Empire in Ernst Marischka’s Sissi Films*. In: *Screen* 51/2010, No. 3, pp. 232-55.

11 See Robert Tobin: *Warm Brothers: Queer Theory and the Age of Goethe*. Philadelphia 2000. See especially pp. 35-39. See also Rosa von Praunheim’s film *Männerfreundschaften*. Berlin 2018.

12 See Steidele’s biographical sketch of Catharina Margaretha Linck in which she indicates the correct historical dates: *Rosenstengel*, pg. 364. See also Steidele, *In Mannskleidern*: the date of execution is already indicated in this biographical narrative in the book’s title.

is crueler than history. Linck/Rosenstengel is not only murdered but also humiliated and tortured in the novel. Despite being enclosed in a sack filled with iron before being thrown into the river, Linck/Rosenstengel does not sink, so the executioners poke her with sharp tools until she bleeds and the sack descends into the water. In Dorothea Rosina Pott's description of the event in her letter to Francke's zealous pietist wife, Anna Magdalena Francke, she writes that Linck/Rosenstengel speaks a pastiche of religious discourse just prior to her death, proclaiming that „keine Zeit mehr seyn soll“ (RS, pg. 339). Pott's letter ends with a description of the dissonant organ tones emerging from the nearby cloister that sound as if „die Musick, ja die Zeit selbst stehengeblieben“ (RS, pg. 339).<sup>13</sup> Here, the imagined death of Linck/Rosenstengel is more gruesome than the historical one, and Pott's experience of it is transtemporal and timeless, a caesura recalling again both Benjamin's anti-teleological „Dialektik im Stillstand“ and the inability to move forward that structures melancholia.<sup>14</sup>

## Lesbian Camp

Camp aesthetics play with the notion that history is not teleological; indeed, Camp is often seen as an irrational attachment to the discarded and unwanted detritus of history, an attempt to bring to life that which is seen as dead. We might think of Elizabeth Freeman's use of the term „temporal drag“ along these lines, as „retrogression, delay and the pull of the past upon the present,“<sup>15</sup> in particular in light of the narrative of the cross-dressing Linck/Rosenstengel with her „lederne Wurst“ (RS, pg. 289).<sup>16</sup> The cover of *Rosenstengel* already invites a Camp reading of the novel: a popping bright pink with copper lettering, featuring a comic book-like image of Linck (Rosenstengel), modeled after a rendering of the historical figure. The comic book aesthetics are continued on the back cover that features a similar comic book drawing of King Ludwig above a blurb about the book written in comic book cursive. Letters in the novel are playfully color-coded to reflect different time periods (dark brown for the present; a lighter brown for the Linck/Rosenstengel period from 1711-15, and blue for the Müller/Ludwig period from 1884-86). It is clear we are dealing with an exaggerated and self-conscious representation, and the comic book aesthetics highlight this Camp aesthetic.<sup>17</sup> Here we are reminded of Susan Sontag's point that Camp is „not only in the eye of the beholder.“<sup>18</sup> Camp is characterized by incongruities – for

**13** Fulda interprets this moment as an anachronistic reference to John Cage's musical piece, *As slow as possible* that began in 2013 in Halberstadt and should take 639 years to fully play. See Fulda: *Liebe geht durch alle Zeiten?*, pg. 100.

**14** Cvetkovich: *An Archive of Feelings* connects from the outset the lesbian archive with trauma. See, in particular, Chapter 1: „The Everyday Life of Queer Trauma,“ pp. 15-49.

**15** Elizabeth Freeman: *Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations*. In: *New Literary History* 31/2000, pg. 728.

**16** As Christopher Nealon puts it, Camp aesthetics produce the „polemic affection for what is obsolete, misguided or trivial.“ Christopher Nealon: *Camp Messianism, or, the Hopes of Poetry in Late-Late Capitalism*. In: *American Literature* 76/2004, No. 3, pp. 579-601, here pg. 581.

**17** See Moe Meyer's queer etymology of Camp, in which he associates exaggeration, bad taste, extreme aestheticization, excess and lack with Camp: *Under the Sign of Wilde: An Archeology of Posing*. In: *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*. Ed. Moe Meyer. New York and London 1994, pp. 75-110, here pg. 76.

**18** Susan Sontag: *Notes on Camp*. In: *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject. A Reader*. Ed. Fabio Cleto. Ann Arbor, MI 1999, pp. 53-66, here pg. 54.

example, the humorous but loving emulation of female celebrities by gay men.<sup>19</sup> As Jack Babuscio puts it, the aesthetic mode of Camp, predicated on exaggeration, artifice and incongruencies, mimics structurally the passing and performance that are part and parcel of every queer's daily life.<sup>20</sup>

Steidle's novel reiterates the incongruities and gaps that Camp reveals through its comic book representations of its protagonists and its anachronisms hidden in plain sight. Ludwig's famous „over the top“<sup>21</sup> love of Wagner and spectacle, of „künstliche Natur“ (RS, pg. 89) are practically parodies of Camp.<sup>22</sup> As Ludwig expresses gleefully with reference to his castle project in a letter to Elisabeth of Austria: „Nein, ich ahme Versailles nicht nach, sondern ich erschaffe ein Abbild *echter* als das Original“ (RS, pg. 200). Ludwig's castles and grottos are Camp aesthetics on steroids. Together with Müller he attends a séance where „Gräfin Paumgarten“ tries to bring Rosenstengel back from the dead, writing the words of the deceased for those in attendance. In response to Müller's question, „Bist du es, Rosenstengel?“, Paumgarten writes, „Rose ist eine Rose ist eine Rose ist eine Rose“ (RS, pg. 90). The scenario of the male queers enjoying the séance elicits a performative response that invites us to think of the rose as a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy. In these passages, the novel's Camp aesthetic allies with the gay male history of the term. Sontag points to this history when she writes that Camp, represented by objects such as Tiffany lamps and feather boas, is curated by the modern dandy and „aristocrat“ of taste and the (male) „homosexual.“<sup>23</sup>

What, then, of lesbian Camp? The novel's markers of Camp aesthetics informed by a dominant gay male taste are clearly coded, as indicated above. The novel's structure and rhythm itself are, however, driven by a lesbian mode of Camp. We must not forget that it is Rosenstengel's comic book image on the cover of the novel, and Linck/Rosenstengel's narrative is the moving force for the relationship between Ludwig and Müller. We can point, as well, to a mode of lesbian Camp that provides the code for humor via „a private language“ created between the reader and the lesbian characters.<sup>24</sup> There is no doubt that lesbian Camp is an undertheorized concept.<sup>25</sup> Scholars point to the „ghosting“ that characterizes not only the representation of lesbians, but also the recognition of lesbian Camp.<sup>26</sup> It is precisely this ghosting that produces

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19 See Richard Dyer: *The Culture of Queers*. New York 2002. See also Elly-Jean Nielsen's critique of the dominance of gay diva worship in Camp aesthetics in Lesbian camp: An unearthing. In: *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 20.1/2016, pp. 116-135, here 118.

20 Jack Babuscio: *The Cinema of Camp (aka Camp and the Gay Sensibility)*. In: *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*. Ed. Fabio Cleto. Ann Arbor, MI 1999. pp. 117-36, here pp. 124-25.

21 Marsha Bryant and Douglas Mao use this term in their Introduction to their special issues on „Camp Modernism“: Marsha Bryant/Douglas Mao: Introduction to Camp Modernism. In: *Modernism/Modernity* 23/2016, No 1, pp. 1-4, here pg. 2.

22 Sontag hilariously notes that Wagner is not Camp, an indicator that Camp aesthetics shift over time.

23 Sontag: Notes on Camp, pp. 63-64. As Nielsen: Lesbian Camp, points out, „Sontag's early work fueled the initial ghosting of lesbian camp,“ pg. 124.

24 See Nielsen's use of this phrase, pg. 119.

25 On this point, see Nielsen; Barbara Jane Brickman: 'A Strange Desire that Never Dies': Monstrous Lesbian Camp in the Age of Conformity. In: *Discourse* 38/2016, No. 3, pp. 356-89; and Clare Hemmings: Rescuing Lesbian Camp. In: *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 11/2007, No. 1-2, pp. 159-66.

26 See Terry Castle: *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture*. New York 1993. See also Nielsen: Lesbian Camp, pg. 118.



lesbian Camp as a symbolic or „invisible wink.“<sup>27</sup> Lesbian Camp induces laughter at the „incongruous contrasts“ that are often overlooked by otherwise adept readers of Camp.<sup>28</sup> Lesbian Camp represents, like all Camp, the position of the minority, but it produces a particular kind of laughter. Pamela Robertson defines what she calls feminist Camp „as a kind of parodic play between subject and object in which the female spectator laughs at and plays with her own image [...] without losing sight of the real power that image has over her.“<sup>29</sup> This mode of Camp is quietly and hilariously subversive; the joke is clear to some, hidden to many. The reader of Steidele's *Rosenstengel* experiences the pleasure of being aware of the incongruities between the misreadings of the characters and the obvious lesbian practices within the narrative and is initiated into a kind of queer kinship with the lesbian figures within the novel. Steidele's *Rosenstengel* is filled with moments of lesbian Camp that produce a „private language“ between the reader and the novel's lesbians.<sup>30</sup> Some of the best examples of this include the figure of Sophia, the daughter of the pietist Anna Magdalena Francke. Francke takes in Linck, as she is convinced Linck speaks directly to God. In her pious fervor, Francke has likewise refused to move to a new abode with her husband. Instead, she heads a household of pietists including her daughter, Sophia, and Linck, who share a room. Francke's presumed ignorance of the sexual activities of the two is presented to the contemporary reader in Francke's language of the early Enlightenment:

Meine liebe Tochter Sophia theilet ihre Kammer mit derselben, die weil unter Christen kein Unterschied zwischen Herr und Knecht seyn solle, wie das zärtliche Kind selber meynet. Sie wircket zuletzt stets etwas müde und gähnet oftmalen am Tag [...].  
Ich schicke sie früh zu Bette, und die liebe Catharina gehet dann gleich mit ihr in die Kammer, um sie später nicht aufzuwecken. (RS, pg. 165)

The contemporary reader enjoys the incongruity of the early modern spelling juxtaposed with a narrative of lesbian sexual activities. The „ghosting“ of lesbian sexuality is precisely the tool that produces Francke's misreading. As she writes to her friend Dorothea Rosina Pott, „Insbesondere meine Sophia ist fröhlicher und liebreizender als je“ (RS, pg. 166).

Sophia's reaction when Linck leaves Halle to return to Halberstadt likewise reiterates the private joke of lesbian desire. As Anna Magdalena Francke writes to her friend, „Meine Sophia heulet Rotz und Wasser darüber und will sich nicht von ihrer Freundin trennen, will am liebsten mit ihr fliehen und habe größte Noth, sie zurück zu halten [...]“ (RS, pg. 176). Sophia's suffering at Linck's departure and the subsequent news of Linck/Rosenstengel's marriage to Susanna Mühlhahn is relayed more than once by characters in the novel and is always interpreted incorrectly. For example, Thomasius inexplicably mentions Sophia's anguish at hearing the news from him in a letter to Friedrich Wilhelm von Grumbkow, a general serving under Friedrich Wilhelm I with whom Thomasius corresponds about the case of Linck/Rosenstengel: „Wie Sophia

27 Ibid., pg. 127.

28 Babuscio: *The Cinema of Camp*, pg. 41.

29 Pamela Robertson: *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna*. Durham, NC 1996, pp. 16-17.

30 See S. Long: *The Loneliness of Camp*. In: *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*. Ed. D. Bergman. Amherst, MA 1993.

Franckin dies erzählt, fließen ihr Rotz und Thränen über die Backen, und warumb?, weil die junge Braut doch gar zu gern einen Ehrentanz mit mir getanzt hätte“ (RS, pg. 274). In her frustration over the loss of Linck, Sophia has agreed to marry her father's assistant. Again, we have Sophia's snot and tears, Steidele's visceral depiction of Sophia's suffering. Thomasius' radical misinterpretation of Sophia's pain is a ludicrous instance of the patriarchal inability to see lesbian desire, lest a narcissistic wound be inflicted. The reader's joke that the characters never figure out what has occurred between Sophia and Linck is revived again when, after twice marrying Mühlhahn in the clothes of Rosenstengel, Linck/Rosenstengel returns to Mühlhahn, who resides again with her mother in Halberstadt. In a letter to her friend Pott, Anna Magdalena Francke again refers to her daughter's reaction upon hearing news of Linck/Rosenstengel: „worauff sie schier zusammen gebrochen, als sie von der Entdeckung der Linckin im Hause der Schwiegermutter gelesen. Vermuthe wegen ihrer schwachen Nerven, daß ihr Leibe bereits geseget“ (RS, pg. 292). Within Steidele's novel, no one in Linck/Rosenstengel's world comprehends lesbian desire. Steidele likewise makes jokes about the pietist Eva Langin's hatred for Linck/Rosenstengel's wife Mühlhahn, with whom Linck/Rosenstengel had originally travelled as Rosenstengel. Members of the Lutheran community write inexplicably to Anna Magdalena Francke about this detail: „Wir leben der Hoffnung, daß sich die Abneigung der Eva Langin gegen das Weib ihres alten Gefährten legen wird ...“ (RS, pg. 272). Again, lesbian desire, plain for all to see, is invisible to those in its vicinity.

## Lesbian Desire Before Lesbians

The text passages cited above highlight the „ghosting“ of lesbian desire within literature and film as well as Steidele's method of de-„ghosting“ via lesbian Camp. Terry Castle writes about the „ghost effect“ linked to the representation of lesbians in cinema and literature: „When it comes to lesbians [...] many people have trouble seeing what's in front of them.“ The lesbian is „elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot—even when she is there, in plain view, mortal and magnificent, at the center of the screen. Some may even deny that she exists at all.“<sup>31</sup> The problems of representing and categorizing lesbian desire and sex are well known. In Steidele's novel, Christian Thomasius corresponds with General Grumbkow about the appropriate punishment in the Linck/Rosenstengel case. Both are confused about whether the crime of sodomy can be applied in the case of Linck/Rosenstengel and Mühlhahn. Thomasius eventually decides that sodomy, like heterosexual copulation, necessitates that „der eine Leib seinen Safft in den eines andren Leibs ergiebet“ (RS, pg. 314) and determines that this cannot happen between women. As a consequence, Thomasius argues for a lighter punishment than that which would be given to male lovers: the act is invisible, incomprehensible, elusive, so the crime is likewise less egregious. Here, Steidele points to the history of lesbian invisibility and simultaneously evokes the private language of lesbian Camp: those in the know are fully aware that bodily fluids have been exchanged between the female lovers and laugh at the naivete of male incomprehension.

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31 Castle: *The Apparitional Lesbian*, pg. 2.

Steidele's novel situates lesbian desire as a model for love and sex that is both elusive and superior to alternative modes of desire and romance. She draws the link between the Pietism movement and lesbian „Schwärmerei,“ elevating the latter to a desirable model for community.<sup>32</sup> Despite later revealing himself to be a stalwart patriarch, the Pietist theologian August Hermann Francke articulates the democratizing qualities of Pietism in an early letter in the novel written to Lutheran community leaders in Cologne. He advises these leaders to allow Bible reading groups to take place without a pastor so that individuals can learn to understand scriptures as a community:

Ein einfacher Mensch kann so wohl und besser als der Gelehrteste die Schrift auslegen  
[...] Ladet zu einem solchen collegio pietatis jedermann von Herzen ein, Männer, Weibe und Jungfern,  
Knechte und Mägde, Handwerksburschen und Studenten, Händler und Krämer, Vornehme und Geringe,  
Gelehrte und Ungelehrte und wer noch sich am Worte Gottes erbauen will. (RS, pg. 22)

The collection of individuals listed here couldn't be more heterogeneous. The Pietist ideal represents a collective from below in a manner particularly well executed by Francke's wife Anna Magdalena after she refuses to live with him any longer.

In particular the radical Pietists Anna Magdalena Francke and Dorothea Rosina Pott are associated with religious gatherings that are characterized by the „Schwärmerei“ of the Pietists. Both Linck/Rosenstengel and Susanna Mühlhahn are celebrated by this community led by women for their perceived abilities to directly communicate with God and to express these experiences in ecstatic outpourings of poetry and incomprehensible discourse. Here, again, we have the link between Pietism, „Schwärmerei,“ and lesbians. Steidele's novel includes a correspondence between Müller and the Berlin physician Paul Julius Westphal, a „Kunstfigur,“ as Steidele puts it in the biographical notes (RS, pg. 370), in which the two correspond about the character and meaning of same-sex desire. Westphal codes lesbian love clearly within the category of „Schwärmerei“: „Gewöhnlich reizt die Conträrsexuelle die gesunde junge Frau zu einer schwärmerischen Liebe auf [...]“ (RS, pg. 254). Javier Samper Vendrell interprets the quintessential German lesbian film *Mädchen in Uniform* via the history of „Schwärmerei“ and its use in Weimar Germany. Samper Vendrell points out that the term was used following the Reformation as a critique of rogue Protestant religious movements: „The word evoked a swarm, an unruly crowd of religious fanatics.“<sup>33</sup> Enlightenment scholars likewise used the term to critique what they saw as a lack of reason in excessive emotion. Immanuel Kant uses the term „to describe the inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy.“<sup>34</sup> In G.E. Lessing's Enlightenment drama *Nathan der Weise* Nathan chastises his daughter Recha and her nursemaid Daja for their „Schwärmerei,“ pointing to the harm caused by this kind of lapse of reason.<sup>35</sup>

The comingling of Pietist excess and female-female desire finds its narrative in Anna Magdalena Francke's gift to Dorothea Rosina Pott of Gottfried Arnold's *Das*

**32** See also Fulda: *Liebe geht durch alle Zeiten?* „Schwärmerischer Pietismus erscheint im *Rosenstengel* demnach als ein Homosexualität begünstigender Rede- und Empfangsstil,“ pg. 95.

**33** Javier Samper Vendrell: *Queer Adolescence in Mädchen in Uniform*. In: *German Life and Letters* 75/2022, No. 1, pp. 22-39, here 32.

**34** *Ibid.*

**35** Nathan calls Recha and Daja „grausame Schwärmerinnen“ for believing the Templar who saved Recha's life was an angel. G.E. Lessing: *Nathan der Weise*. In: G.E. Lessing: *Werke*. Vol. I: *Dichtungen*. Munich 1974, pg. 722.

*Geheimniß der göttlichen Sophia* (1700), a retelling of the creation of Adam and the birth of gender. The narrative is reminiscent of Aristophanes' story of the birth of love in Plato's *Symposium* in which the whole individual is split in two and spends their life searching for their other half (who could be male or female). Francke writes to Pott that in Arnold's book, Adam was initially a „Mann und Weib zugleich,“ but then he loses his „geheime Braut“ Sophia when he searches for love elsewhere. As he falls asleep, God creates Eva out of his rib: „So hat Adam die himmlische Sophia und also sich selbst verloren, ist halbirt und als Thiermensch erwacht und hat die sündige Eva bekommen“ (RS, pg. 57). As modern versions of Adam it is the goal of all humans „neu mit der himmlischen Sophia verschmelzen und also zu dem Gantzen werden, als welches Gott uns eigentlich erschaffen. Die heilige Begierde nach unsrer theuren Sophia bestimmet daher seit langem schon meine nächtlichen Uebungen [...]“ (RS, pg. 58). Here is an origin story that produces the „schwärmerisch“ desire to become one with that which is lost, and the lost half is feminine. Indeed, within this frame, the impetus for desire renders all women lesbians. Francke admits (and here we have lesbian Camp again) to her nocturnal obsessions about Sophia. And Pott writes passionately after reading the book, „Auch mich giert nach der himmlischen Sophia“ (RS, pg. 62).

The expressed desire to marry the „himmlische Sophia“ (RS, pg. 159) is both coded with lesbian desire and the fantasy of androgyny and even with the negation of gender. As Anna Magdalena Francke puts it: „Denn es ist gewiß: Daß in der Gottheit kein Geschlecht sey. Die unsichtbare Natur ist nicht in Mann und Weib getheilet, wird auch nicht durch Vermehrung oder Geburt fortgepflanzt“ (RS, pg. 98). The radical nature of this female fantasy beyond gender and reproduction leads to Francke's decision to refuse her husband and leave behind the „Ehejoch“ (RS, pg. 152). Pott writes to Francke: „Verlaß dein eheliches Bett“ (RS, pg. 160). Liberation is sexual and gender-based. Francke thinks through the distinction between „Jungfrau“ and „Weib,“ calling Maria a „männliche Jungfrau“ (RS, pg. 98). The distinction is reminiscent of Monique Wittig's classic argument that lesbians are not women.<sup>36</sup> If one doesn't take part in the reproductive logic of patriarchy, then is one a woman? Francke defends Linck/Rosenstengel's choice to wear men's clothing along these lines, arguing that the Biblical taboo on women cross dressing „gienge nur die Weiber an, und keine Jungffern“ (RS, pg. 153). If lesbians are „Jungfern“ and not „Weiber,“ then the rule does not apply. As Francke writes, Linck/Rosenstengel is a creature of „beyderley Geschlechts.“ She represents the „Geburt eines neuen, gantzen Mann-Weibs oder Weib-Manns“ (RS, pg. 166). Even the name Rosenstengel indicates this androgyny, „der gantze Mensch vor dem Fall!“ (RS, pg. 218): „Rosen“ and „Stengel“ combines the feminine and the masculine, whereas Francke posits that Anastasius „verteutschet sich dazu in der 'Aufferstandene'“ (RS, pg. 218). And Pott's description of her vision as Linck/Rosenstengel finally drowns is one of Linck/Rosenstengel embracing a man with a fuzzy beard, dancing a „Todtentanz“ as she decends into the water (RS, pg. 339), an image of androgyny and rebellion.

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<sup>36</sup> See Monique Wittig: *One is Not Born a Woman*. In: Monique Wittig: *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Boston 1992, pg. 20.

The lesbian Camp mode that characterizes these letters elicits a wistful laughter in the knowing reader, as the contortions Francke must undergo in order to rationalize her queer and feminist desires are plain for all to see. Even when Linck/Rosenstengel decides to marry Susanna Mühlhahn, Francke defends this love in Biblical terms. Pott believes that Susanna must be enlightened as to Rosenstengel's „true“ sex identity („daß er ein Weib“ RS, pg. 223), to which Francke responds that the best course is „Liebe ihren Lauff zu lassen, welche Gott begründet“ (RS, pg. 225), reiterating the writings of Thomasius (her husband's nemesis) that nothing in nature is unnatural. By the time Linck/Rosenstengel and Susanna are imprisoned for their crimes, Francke has become an open supporter of lesbian love, citing the Ruth-Naemi Biblical narrative as precedent. They have hurt no one, she argues:

Ist es also, daß sich dem äußern Anschein zween Weiber verbunden? Doch spricht Ruth zu Naemi: *Rede mir nicht drein, daß ich dich verlassen sollte und von dir umkehren. Wo du hingehst, da will ich auch hingehen; wo du bleibest, da bleibe ich auch. Wo du stirbest, da sterbe ich auch, da will ich auch begraben werden. Nur der Tod muss mich und dich scheiden.* Siehet der Herr also gnädig auff die Verbindung zweyer Weiber und ist die Mühlhahnin der Linck eine treue Ruth und folget ihr bis in den Kerker nach. (RS, pg. 292, emphasis in original)

By this point in the narrative, Francke writes like a Pietist lawyer for lesbian rights, assuaging the desires of the readers. But lest we imagine that Steidele has written a flat lesbian wish fulfillment narrative, the enlightened lesbian suddenly returns to her husband: „Ich habe mich vor dem Herrn gedemüthiget, Francke abgegeben und mich zu aller Willigkeit verstanden“ (RS, pg. 275).

### Lesbian Desire as a Model for Male-Male Desire

Steidele's queer archive of *Rosenstengel* intersperses letters from the early eighteenth century concerning the case of Linck/Rosenstengel with those from the late nineteenth century that concern Ludwig. It is important that, despite the non-linear presentation of the letters, the Linck/Rosenstengel narrative is the primary one. It is this story of lesbian life and female masculinity that provides the frame for the later narrative of Ludwig II. Indeed, the male-male love story between Ludwig and Müller is precipitated and shaped by the Linck/Rosenstengel narrative. Lesbian desire, that unrepresentable and invisible concept, is the form which male homosexual love borrows. This is surely the work of the lesbian archive, collecting and presenting the material of the past in a way that speaks to the fantasy of the structural dominance of lesbian desire. Whereas Camp has, as discussed above, been generally associated with gay men, Steidele's lesbian Camp novel reverses the order and hierarchy of gendered queerness: without Linck/Rosenstengel, there would be no Ludwig-Müller love story.

Ludwig's interest in Müller is only sparked when one of the letters from Müller's Rosenstengel project falls out Müller's book when he visits Ludwig for the first time. At this point, Ludwig is no longer interested in talking to Müller: „Der Höhepunkt der Unterhaltung schien ihm überschritten, er winkte Adieu“ (RS, pg. 39), but his curiosity is piqued by the letter: „Von den altmodischen Schriftzügen angezogen fragte S.M., was das sei. 'Ein Brief über einen ungewöhnlichen Fall zu Beginn des letzten Jahrhunderts'“ (RS, pp. 39-40). As Ludwig presses to learn more, Müller admits the case

concerns a woman in man's clothing: „Ein Weib in Mannskleidern?“ Der König hielt kurz inne und schmunzelte dann: ‘Sie werden mir demnächst davon erzählen!’ (RS, pg. 40). This is the catalyst for the relationship between Ludwig and Müller, and it remains the bond that connects the two lovers. Indeed, Ludwig's first letter to Müller contains his effusive language about the Linck/Rosenstengel case: „Die Aufschlüsse, die Sie Mir über die Geschichte besagten Rosenstengel's gegeben, seiner Zeit und Umstände, hallen lebhaft in Mir wider“ (RS, pg. 68).

Ludwig and Müller engage in a form of „Schwärmerei“ vis-à-vis the Linck/Rosenstengel project and Ludwig's Wagner projects. Gay male Camp meets lesbian Camp. Ludwig writes Müller in the language of „Schwärmerei,“ of the mingling of identities reminiscent of Anna Magdalena Francke's discourse about the holy Sophia: „unsere Seelen sind, ich glaube es durchzufühlen, verwandt“ (RS, pg. 84); Ludwig: „Ach Gott, die Begierde, eins mit dem Geliebten zu werden, war so mächtig, so unbezwinglich!“ (RS, pg. 177). This is the discourse of „Verschmelzung“ with the holy Sophia.

Müller's Linck/Rosenstengel project resides at the center of the Müller/Ludwig relationship. The „Doppelchor“ of *Parsifal* has, Ludwig later writes to Müller, inspired him „göttlich für Ihr Rosenstengel-Buch [...]!“ (RS, pg. 128). When Ludwig reads some of the letters from the Rosenstengel project Müller has sent to him, he writes to Müller:

Wie wonnevoll! Volkommen! So angegriffen von Entzücken! [...] Kaum hatte ich Ihr kostbares Schreiben erhalten, so eilte ich nach dem geliebten, traulichen Linderhofe, um dort auf hoher Linde Ihrer zu harren und im heimlichen Walde in der Hundingshütte mich in die fesselnde Lektüre zu versenken. Ich habe diese Hütte genauestens nach Wagner's Anweisung im ersten Akt der *Walküre* errichten lassen [...] Ihr hohes Werk dürfte nirgends zuerst gelesen werden als hier, wo stets der Sog einer Geschichte mich ergreift bis zum Selbstvergessen! Keine Worte habe ich für das übermenschliche Glück, jene himmlischen Wonnen [...]. (RS, pg. 139-40)

Gay male Camp – the excessive performativity of Wagner and Ludwig's over the top reproductions of the scenery from his *Walküre* – gives way to the elusive and indefinable „Schwärmerei“ of the Rosenstengel narrative and lesbian desire. From this vantage point, Wagner's „Walküren“ remind of us the power of female desire.<sup>37</sup> And this letter likewise includes Ludwig's offer of the „Du“ to Müller via the inclusion of the passage from Schiller's *Don Carlos* in which Carlos says to Posa, „Und jetzt noch eine Bitte: Nenn mich du“ (RS, pg. 140). Here Steidele produces a constellation of queer intertexts that can be subordinated to lesbian desire. The Carlos/Posa friendship is famously homoerotic, and the queerness of *Don Carlos* is cued by its role as the coming out catalyst in Leontine Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform* (1931).<sup>38</sup> Contemporary queer and especially lesbian readers will interpret *Don Carlos* via *Mädchen in Uniform* so that a retrospective lesbian interpretation colors Ludwig's letter.

Müller's fascination with the Linck/Rosenstengel narrative makes him an early feminist; indeed, he and Ludwig seem to idealize women and lesbian love. Müller

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37 Fulda also points to the „grenzenlose Schwärmerei“ (97) for art and theater that connects Müller and Ludwig, though he does not link Müller and Ludwig's behaviors to the metonym *Schwärmerei*/lesbian.

38 In *Als wenn Du mein Geliebter wärest* Steidele provides an earlier example of a lesbian use of *Don Carlos* in the form of a love letter written in 1800 from Lisette von Mettingh to Karoline von Günderode in which Lisette interpellates Günderode into the role of Carlos and herself into the role of his forbidden love/stepmother Elisabeth, pg. 260. See also Tobin's queer reading of the intertexts between *Don Carlos* and *Mädchen in Uniform* in *Warm Brothers*, pp. 147-73.

writes to Sisi, whom Ludwig had earlier compared to Rosenstengel in his letters (a „schlanker biegsamer Bursche“ in an Amazon costume on a horse [RS, pg. 77]), that lesbian love instills honor in women: „eine homosexuale Liebe ehrt das Weib vielleicht sogar mehr als das heterosexuale Verhältnis. Katharina II. von Rußland, Königin Christine von Schweden sowie sicherlich George Sand gehören in diesen Kreis, und auch meine Catharina Margaretha Linck“ (RS, pg. 247). Müller and Ludwig indulge in their fascination with women via drag performances. Ludwig writes to Elisabeth: „Franz und ich weihten Schloß und Park vor kurzem mit einem zauberhaften Fest ein, ich im Costüm der unsterblichen Marie Antoinette, der ich eine Art religiösen Cultus widme, Franz als ihre Freundin, Mme de Lamballe“ (RS, pg. 201). When framed by Müller's Rosenstengel project and his stated respect for lesbians, the appropriation of femininity described in these letters seems more like wish fulfillment than misogyny. Indeed, Müller and Ludwig reverse roles as to who plays the revered Marie Antoinette: whereas Ludwig had played the role of his idol earlier, he writes to Müller that the rooms being prepared for him in the new Schloss Herrenchiemsee will be „im Trakt der Marie Antoinette“ (RS, pg. 203). In this new castle, Müller will be Marie.

Ludwig's fascination with the French monarchs is, indeed, driven by his obsession with Marie Antoinette. In discussing his own genealogy, he describes Louis XVI simply as „Gatten der unsterblichen Marie Antoinette“ (RS, pg. 208). The feminine is primary. Indeed, Ludwig questions his genealogy at various points in the novel, in particular his biological connection to the Prussians: „Doch liegt mir nichts ferner, als in dem Soldatenkönig einen Ahn zu verehren, auch wenn sein Blut in meinen Adern fließt“ (RS, pg. 87). Ludwig rewrites his genealogy as a matriarchal/artistic one, in contrast to a military/patriarchal heritage: „Nicht der Krieg sei der Vater, so S.M. wörtlich, sondern die Theaterbühne sei die Mutter aller Dinge“ (RS, pg. 148). As Müller writes to Sisi, „[...] mir scheint, auch er stelle seine eigene Abkommenschaft in Frage“ (RS, pg. 210). And Sisi confirms that Ludwig's birth date was changed so that it would fall on the same day as his grandfather's. Ludwig's desire to redefine his own kinship bonds is both queer and gynophilic.

The most explicitly erotic letters between Ludwig and Müller are the ones each writes in lesbian drag. When Müller travels to Halberstadt to research his project, Ludwig points out that the actual letters between the lovers, Linck/Rosenstengel and Mühlhahn, are missing in the correspondence. He writes a letter on March 15, 1886 in which the presumed author is not cued until the letter's close: „Ich zähle die Stunden bis zu unserem Wiedersehen. Dein Anastasius Rosenstengel“ (RS, pg. 254). The salutation reads „Mein vielgeliebtes Weib!“ (RS, pg. 253) and tells the narrative of the first meeting between Linck/Rosenstengel and Susanna Mühlhahn as Ludwig imagines it. Linck as Rosenstengel was working for the stocking maker (Gilles de Leuze!) and serves Mühlhahn as she tries on fine French stockings:

O wie köstlich war der Blick auf deinen zarten Fuß, o wie durchschauerte mich die Wärme Deiner Haut, als ich Dir zärtlich den Strumpf bis über das Knie zog. Doch wie traf mich Dein Blick bis ins Mark, welchen Du tief in meine Augen und bis zu meiner Seelen Grund versenktest. Sanft legtest Du Deine Hand auf die meine und zogst sie, mir unverwandt in's Auge blickend, unwiderstehlich weiter. So ward ich von Stund an Dein Sklave für immer. (RS, pp. 253-54)

Without a doubt the most descriptive erotic scene in the novel, Ludwig's passion for Müller can best be expressed via lesbian erotica. By channeling the lesbian figure of Linck/Rosenstengel, Ludwig can imagine a sexual scene reminiscent of Leopold von

Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Pelz* (1870) in its discourse of master and slave that is simultaneously one of mutual desire expressed in the exchange of gazes. There is no doubt where Mühlhahn leads Linck/Rosenstengel's hand. This is the only letter in which Ludwig's passion for Müller is expressed in explicitly sexual terms. As a response, Müller writes as Susanna, queering the discourse one more time at the letter's closing, as we learn that the letter is a pastiche of „Brautbriefen der Anna Magdalena von Wurmb an August Hermann Francke“ (RS, pg. 256).

Steidele's queer archive *Rosenstengel: Ein Manuskript aus dem Umfeld Ludwig II.* stages a reversal: it is not gay male desire but lesbian desire that structures queer history. This is perhaps the most fantastical element of the archive, but it is also a matter of curation. We read Ludwig and Müller through the lens of the Linck/Rosenstengel narrative so that the more obvious scenes of gay Camp are queered yet again as residues of lesbian Camp. Might this be a method for de-„ghosting“ the lesbian narratives that are in plain sight and letting everyone in on the joke? Queer figure *par excellence* Sisi has the last word in Steidele's novel, and she, too, frames Ludwig's death as a companion scenario to Linck/Rosenstengel's drowning. Ludwig's death is imagined by Sisi as a Wagnerian *Liebestod* that is coded lesbian via the Rosenstengel intertext. She posits that Müller killed Ludwig at Ludwig's request: „Er hat sich den Tod gewünscht von Deiner Hand. Und Du bist ihm zu Willen gewesen. So seid Ihr endlich eins geworden“ (RS, pg. 351). In Sisi's vision Müller and Ludwig struggle together in the water, a repetition of Linck/Rosenstengel's death dance with the bearded man. The lesbian discourse of „Verschmelzung“ that characterizes Anna Magdalena Francke's desire to marry the holy Sophia is realized in the unity of two achieved in Ludwig's death: Sisi's vision of Ludwig's death is a „schwärmerische“ erotic fantasy and lesbian merging joke fused into one: „So seid Ihr endlich eins geworden.“