

Venetia: Georgette Heyer's Pastoral Romance

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Abstract: Georgette Heyer's *Venetia* (1958) is Heyer's most complex, literary, and also physically sensuous and emotional work, in being a combination of the formulas and style of Heyer's usual Regency romances and the conventions and themes of the literary genre of the pastoral romance. Heyer makes her use of the pastoral genre explicit, in her rake-hero's references, as he breaks off with Venetia, to their love affair as having been a temporary idyll in Arcadia--the traditional location of the pastoral; and the novel's character types, plot, emphasis on the natural world, and figurative language, together with a heightened artifice of writing style through much use of literary quotation, all come from the adaptation of pastoral romance to the typical conventions, manners, and style of Heyer's Regency novels..

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"We have been dwelling in Arcadia, my green girl." Damerel to Venetia.

The historical-romance novels of Georgette Heyer (1902–74), written over a 50-year period from the 1920s to the 1970s, do not normally attract much serious scholarly attention, although Heyer's life as a publicity-shy bestselling author, dependent on her fiction for her livelihood, has been the subject of two book-length biographical studies (Hodge; Kloester, *Biography*).^[1] The majority of her historical romances, the so-called Regency romances set in early nineteenth-century England, insofar as they have attracted any academic attention at all have largely been the province of those interested in Heyer's meticulously-researched use of the social history, manners, and language of the Regency

period, although some literary critics have also praised Heyer's polished writing style—precise, mannered, balanced, and witty.[2] Heyer has otherwise usually been dismissed as simply a writer of well-crafted and well-written popular historical romances.[3] Her Regency heroes and heroines are types, as she herself in her correspondence humorously defined the heroes; and her plots typically focus on social manners and intrigues in the context of a Regency society drawn in rich and careful detail.[4] The hero is most often dark, aristocratic, and rich; the heroine is most often beautiful, or at the least very attractive, and either youthfully innocent or wisely mature but in either case beneath the hero in social standing and in wealth. The younger heroine often, and the older heroine sometimes, is prone to actions and reactions unusual in the context of the social mores of the day. The hero and heroine are normally strangers or at odds at the novel's beginning, and encounter social as well as personal obstacles to their relationship as the plot moves along; scandals are threatened or ensue; but eventually the protagonists reach a happy matrimonial ending. A thoroughly professional writer, aiming at providing her publishers with one or two books every year, Heyer well understood the kinds of characters, plots, settings, and descriptions of social manners that appealed to her readers, and largely followed the formulae she had created, early on in her writing career, that resulted in the best sales of her work.[5] Her forte was not ideas, or literary or philosophical depth, but what A.S. Byatt has called a stylish escape from ordinary life, into a world of "money and wit and gaiety," yet with a great deal of common sense, plausible conduct of her characters, and often down-to-earth comedy.[6]

A few of Heyer's historical romances were, however, a special achievement, and of these, the Regency romance *Venetia* is arguably the finest. Of *Venetia*, first published in 1958, Heyer herself wrote that it was "not quite like Me," and "rather different from my usual froth;" and in 1963 she called *Venetia* and *The Unknown Ajax* (1959) "the best of my later works" (*Biography*, 326; Hodge, 127, 152).[7] *Venetia* is in fact unique among Heyer's novels: it is the only example of a Heyer Regency romance incorporating any additional genre other than adventure or mystery/detective fiction (the latter a genre in which Heyer also regularly worked);[8] and because of the ways in which Heyer uses this genre, *Venetia* is Heyer's most complex, "literary," and also physically sensuous and emotional work. In *Venetia*, Heyer combines the usual characteristics of her Regency romances with the conventional character types, plot pattern, focus, style, and thematic meanings of the literary genre of pastoral romance. That Heyer knew exactly what she was doing is shown in the statement she gives to the novel's hero, Lord Damerel, addressing the heroine, Venetia, about three-quarters of the way through the book, as their idyllic romance in rural Yorkshire comes to an abrupt ending. "We have been dwelling in Arcadia, my green girl," says Damerel to Venetia. "The rest of the world is not so golden as this retired spot!" (*Venetia*, 258). Arcadia – the name coming from classical Greece, the origin of the pastoral genre – is the traditional, idyllic, rural location of the pastoral in general and of pastoral romance in particular; and the pastoral also is traditionally associated at times with the Golden Age (and also with the Garden of Eden).[9]

The pastoral is a standard literary genre going back to classical Greece, and was extremely popular in England from the sixteenth century onward.[10] Sometimes described as a city dweller's dream of the country, it celebrates, with stylistic artifice, rural life as an idyllic escape from the burdens and anxieties of everyday existence in a non-rural environment. In traditional pastoral, shepherds and shepherdesses tend their flocks, with little labour, in a rural landscape of beauty, peace, and sensuous pleasure. The sun always

shines. There may be recitations, singing contests, or other festivities, and one focus is on love and its physical consummation. The highly conventional and artificial style of the writing indicates that an ideal of country life is being portrayed; this is not the real world, but a pre-lapsarian one (the Golden Age, Eden) existing now only in art. For the sophisticated readers of pastoral, enjoyment of the pastoral experience comes about through artifice, not through engagement with actual rural living; the traditional pastoral provides a temporary escape from reality, into ideal nature and love. Also, in the ages-old debate on the superiority or inferiority of nature to art, or of simplicity to complexity, the pastoral indicates by its very artifice that the beauties of nature and of simplicity, in a post-lapsarian world, are heightened, made more valuable, by the complexities of art.

The pastoral romance, a literary development of the Renaissance period, is a narrative subgenre of the pastoral, with a set of narrative conventions involving, beyond the usual basic conventions of the pastoral, specific character types and plot patterning. The best-known English pastoral romances today are probably Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (a semi-parodic pastoral), *The Winter's Tale*, and, partially, *Love's Labor's Lost*. *The Tempest* is also often regarded today as a kind of pastoral. Another excellent example of the Shakespearean type of English Renaissance pastoral romance is found in Cantos 9-12 of Book 6 of Edmund Spenser's great allegorical epic poem *The Faerie Queene*, in which Spenser's questing knight-hero unexpectedly finds himself in Arcadia. Shakespearean and Spenserian pastoral romance adheres to a set of conventions of character types, plot, setting, and themes stemming from the Christian humanist belief that the world is inevitably imperfect, since the fall from Eden, and that the importance of the pastoral experience is that it can inspire, heal, or restore those who engage with it, so that they can return with renewed strength and purpose to responsible action in the everyday social world.[11] At its most thoughtful and complex, the (Christian humanist) pastoral romance narratively and metaphorically depicts the healing and rejuvenating power of nature and love, leading to individual and social improvement. Renewal is key, and it comes about from establishing a new individual foundation, through nature and love, onto which can be constructed, through art/thought/principles, a better self, which accepts human and social imperfection and strives towards, not the ideal, but both individual and social betterment.

The typical pastoral romance, as seen, with variations, in Shakespeare's plays and most clearly in Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, thus has an active hero from a courtly (i.e., socially-developed) environment who retreats, distracted or wounded in body or in spirit, into an idyllic countryside – an Arcadia – where the sun always shines, the shepherds and shepherdesses or their narrative equivalents live and love without undue labour or anxiety, and every day is holiday-like. For a while the hero remains, enjoying the pastoral environment. Inevitably part of his experience involves a romance with a beautiful shepherdess or equivalent, who prefers him to less-accomplished rural swain(s). Eventually a disruptive force from the outside world (e.g., bandits in *The Faerie Queene*, the hero's father in *The Winter's Tale*, news of death in *Love's Labor's Lost*) breaks into the idyllic pastoral world, and the hero realizes that no permanent retreat from the complications of life is possible or desirable. He returns, renewed and strengthened by his pastoral experience, to responsible action in the active social world from which he came, either leaving behind him the beautiful shepherdess or, as in Book 6 of *The Faerie Queene* and *The Winter's Tale*, taking her with him and discovering later that she is in fact no shepherdess but a member of his own social class, who was abandoned or hidden in the pastoral world as an infant, and so has

now been appropriately brought back by him to the non-pastoral world to which they both belong. (*As You Like It* and *Love's Labor's Lost* considerably vary this ending.) The shepherdess/heroine in the former case is the personification of the pastoral/rural virtues which revived the hero and which he has now internalized. In the latter case, she is the combination of pastoral/rural virtues and their refinement by art/society which the hero has now achieved and which is the literary goal of the pastoral genre itself: a deliberately artificial genre, obviously displaying its art as applied to the subject matter of nature, and even thus celebrating, through its obvious use of conventions and its artificial style, the sophisticated improvement of the natural through art/experience.[12]

In *Venetia*, Georgette Heyer has deliberately designed the character types and plot to conform simultaneously to the norms of her usual Regency romances and to the conventions of pastoral romance as found in English Renaissance works such as *The Faerie Queene*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *As You Like It* – the last being, significantly, one of Heyer's favourite Shakespearean plays (*Biography*, 84).[13] Her beautiful, innocent, and socially-inexperienced heroine, Venetia Lanyon, is the equivalent of the pastoral's rural shepherdess. She has lived all her life on her family's rural estate, her eccentric father not allowing her even to visit London with its fashionable society, let alone to "come out" into society there. At the time the novel begins, she is looking after the family lands, as her older brother (the head of the family since her father's death) is away on military service on the Continent. She has two rural suitors, one of whom – the "worthy" Edward (61, 89) – is noted for his abilities in handling his land and cattle (125): i.e., is a version of the pastoral's shepherd swain. The other suitor, much younger than Venetia, is in the throes of calf-love for her, and models himself, without great success, on the dashing heroes of Lord Byron's poetry; he is a boyish rural imitator of what he takes to be the experienced romantic hero of the world beyond his rural surroundings. Into this rural retreat, in an autumn of glorious warmth and sunshine, comes the dashing and experienced hero, the rich, rakish, and cynical Lord Damerel, wounded in spirit by an early love affair gone bad, who is now escaping – although we do not learn this for a while – from the responsibilities (settling down, marrying, producing an heir) his socially-respectable London aunts are attempting to thrust upon him. He is both Heyer's typical rake-hero and the wounded or distracted society-fleeing hero of pastoral romance. Damerel meets and falls in love with Venetia, and she with him. She puts aside all thoughts of her one serious rural suitor, Edward; he resolves to linger in this unexpected Arcadia for as long as possible. New arrivals, equivalent to the pastoral romance's bandits or similar figures, then upset the rural idyll, disrupting the romance; the pastoral interlude cannot continue; but Venetia is revealed eventually to be the daughter of a woman from Damerel's own social world, and at the end of the novel Damerel and Venetia are to be married, with Damerel now meaning to conform after all, at least to some degree, to the social responsibilities his aunts have outlined for him, removing Venetia with him from Yorkshire to enter London society. This plot pattern of pastoral romance also is in line with the typical very general plot pattern of many of Heyer's Regency romances: the hero and heroine, from very different social milieus and under unusual circumstances, unexpectedly meet; social and personal obstacles to their union present themselves; but eventually all is sorted out and a happy, responsible, and socially-appropriate marriage is assured. A significant difference from the most typical Heyer plot line is that most often, in Heyer's romances, the hero and heroine initially dislike one another or at least do not get along well, or one of them is romantically indifferent to the other. That plot line, however, would not have been suitable

for a pastoral romance, which in plot is always, in its Arcadian section, what Heyer herself described *Venetia* as: “a simple love-story” (Hodge, 124).[14]

In combining in *Venetia* the character types and a typical plot line of her Regency romances with those of pastoral romance, Heyer has been creative within the pastoral conventions. *Venetia* focuses on a heroine, and her local family and neighbours, who are “rural” simply in being members of the landed aristocracy and gentry who do not form a part of London society; they belong to the typical middle and upper-class world of Heyer’s romances. *Venetia* herself is not an innocent rural maiden but one of the two main types of Heyer heroine: not the very young and innocent beauty, but the older beauty who is self-confident and intelligent (although in this case also socially inexperienced). *Venetia* is a well-read woman of 25, eager for marriage and for entry into a wider social world. Damerel is more culpable and cynical than the traditional pastoral hero (who, when he is at fault, is so largely for having set aside his social responsibilities); he is the typical Heyer rake who is reformed, in the end, through love; he is the “Wicked Baron” (27; also 229) about whom the Yorkshire neighbourhood tells whispered tales of debauchery. And although *Venetia* and Damerel are immediately attracted physically to one another, as in typical pastoral romance, the attraction simultaneously becomes – as in many Heyer romances – intellectual as well; both are well read, especially in older literature (largely poetry and drama) and the classics, and are interested in travel abroad. (They also have compatible senses of humour.) In plot terms, Heyer’s equivalent to the conventional disruption of the idyllic pastoral world by forces such as bandits is then the arrival at *Venetia*’s home of the new wife and unpleasant mother-in-law of *Venetia*’s older brother Conway, which badly disrupts rural tranquility and pleasure and makes it impossible for *Venetia* and her bookish younger brother Aubrey to continue in their former way of life on the family estate. And, finally, just as pastoral hero Damerel is apparently about to rescue *Venetia* from her difficulties, presumably with an offer of marriage which will remove her from her pastoral milieu, Heyer turns pastoral romance into pastoral feminist romance, with the heroine’s manipulations – as in the pastoral *As You Like It* — bringing about the novel’s happy ending. In *Venetia*, hero and heroine, after the disruption of their pastoral idyll first by Conway’s wife and mother-in-law and then by the arrival from London of *Venetia*’s uncle (set on breaking up her relationship with Damerel), change what have been until this point their conventional places, as shepherdess and as pastoral hero, in the pastoral pattern. Pastoral hero Damerel, genuinely in love with *Venetia*, determines, when confronted by *Venetia*’s concerned uncle, to break off his relationship with her rather than to take advantage of her inexperience by drawing her into what both he and her uncle agree would be a socially disastrous marriage. *Venetia*, not Damerel, then leaves the pastoral world and goes off into London society, albeit heartbroken because believing that Damerel did not wish, after all, to marry her. The pastoral hero, not the shepherdess, remains behind, inactive, in the countryside. Then, when *Venetia* in London finally discovers her own social parentage, and that Damerel had wanted to marry her and had been entirely altruistic (he had thought) in not proposing to her, she returns to Damerel, still in pastoral Yorkshire, and manages to work out a marriage with him after all. Both will return to London society together. The intelligent shepherdess, combining romantic love and social realism, engineers her own complex, permanent escape from the rural world, rescuing the rake hero and beginning his reintegration, along with her own, into the larger social world. In Book 6 of *The Faerie Queene*, all agency belongs to Spenser’s knight-hero, who rescues the shepherdess. In the final chapters of *Venetia* – as in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* – all agency

belongs to the heroine.[15] Helped by her mother and, inadvertently, by her aunt, i.e., by other women (from London society), Venetia takes the initiative and wins what she herself wants, despite the efforts of older male characters (Edward, Damerel, her uncle) to prevent it. "Have you settled between you," Venetia asks her uncle and Damerel, "what my future is to be? Or shall I tell you what *I* have settled?" (366; Heyer's italics).

In using in *Venetia* – suitably altered to fit into her Regency world – the basic plot pattern and character types of pastoral romance, Heyer also uses pastoral conventions such as a focus on both physical, sexual attraction and the (physical) natural world; and she also uses figurative language. She thus turns the novel into something quite different from her usual sexually-discreet Regency romances set largely in the social world – described in careful detail – of London or of Paris, and also from her other novels, such as *The Nonessuch* (1962), set wholly or in part in rural England but still dealing above all with social manners. *Venetia* begins, for example, in the country, with a comment by the heroine to her brother about a fox entering, the previous night, a hen enclosure and "ravishing" one of the hens (1). This is Heyer's comically rural/pastoral introduction to the novel's pastoral plot-to-come of the crafty rake Damerel intruding into the peaceful Yorkshire of Venetia and her neighbours and threatening – as some of the neighbours see it – the ravishing of the innocent Venetia. The sexual emphasis within a rural context continues; when Damerel first encounters Venetia, she is alone, picking blackberries on his lands, and he thinks her a village maiden (a pastoral shepherdess) and, seizing her roughly, kisses her. Physical attraction – as in pastoral romance – is explicitly immediate, for both of them, although mental attraction is also present and becomes of equal importance as the relationship progresses. Venetia, for example, although angry when Damerel seizes and kisses her, "for one crazy instant . . . had known an impulse to respond, . . . had caught a glimpse of what life might be" (37); and Damerel resolves to initiate a sexual pursuit of Venetia. Next, when Venetia and Damerel are subsequently thrown into one another's company on a daily basis, through an accident to Venetia's younger brother Aubrey, who is then cared for at Damerel's home, the Priory, the sun (a continuous presence in traditional pastoral romance, in part suggesting the natural heat and light of physical passion) shines every day but one; and here Heyer writes highly figurative prose, describing Damerel as creating inside the house, on that day, the sun and the autumnal trees outside – the pastoral landscape – by lighting a fire in the library, "and its light, flickering over the tooled backs of the volumes that lined the room from wainscot to cornice, made them glow like turning leaves" (111). Figuratively Heyer shows the attraction between Damerel and Venetia as combining nature and art/books, body and mind, while the fire that Damerel lights is not only an indoor-created version of the pastoral sun but also a metaphor, as is usual in romance, for physical passion. When Aubrey at last returns from the Priory to his and Venetia's home at Undershaw, the sun continues to shine, Damerel and Venetia almost kiss in a barn with a litter of newly-born kittens at their feet, and Damerel tells Venetia that when she smiles at him "it's all holiday with me!" (235). Damerel's sexuality is continually and explicitly emphasized (his previous mistresses and rakish exploits), as is Venetia's physical attraction for him, and there is a good deal of joking about what the gossips call his (previous) orgies. The heroine's frank awareness of her own sexuality is especially unusual for a Heyer romance, but appropriate for a pastoral. When in London, for example, Venetia sees her mother wearing a "foam of lace and gauze" as a dressing gown, wonders "whether Damerel would like the sight of his bride in just such a transparent cloud of gauze," and is "strongly of the opinion that he would like it very much" (325). This is an unusual

thought for Heyer to give to one of her Regency romance heroines; her romances are usually more discreet, especially about their heroines' thoughts on the sexual side of romance and marriage.[16]

Besides focusing to an unusual extent (for a Heyer Regency romance) on physical desire, in pastoral *Venetia* Heyer also uncharacteristically replaces the lengthy descriptions of social scenes and manners, common in her other Regency romances, with a focus on nature. In *Venetia*, the characters, the weather, and the natural landscape interact, and furthermore the rural scenes are sometimes described by Heyer in words evocative not only of their literal beauty but also of their reflection of the emotions and thoughts of the characters.[17] The morning after *Venetia* has had her first long conversation with Damerel, for example, she wakes early, in her bed at home; and the natural world outside her window, awakening at dawn, reflects her own physical awakening, within an autumnal idyll, to her new acquaintance.

Venetia opened her eyes to sunlight.... Somewhere in the garden a thrush was singing, the joyous sweetness of its note so much in harmony with her mood that it seemed as part of her happiness.... At once the blood quickened in her veins; her body felt light and urgent; and a strange excitement, flooding her whole being like an elixir, made it impossible for her to be still. No sound but bird-song came to her ears; quiet enfolded the house.... She tried to recapture sleep. It eluded her; the sunlight, blotched by the pattern on the chintz [blinds], teased her eyelids: she lifted them, yielding to a prompting more insistent than that of reason.... [S]he slid from the smothering softness of her feather-bed, and went with a swift, springing step to the window, sweeping back the blinds, and thrusting open the casement. A cock pheasant, pacing across the lawn, froze into an instant's immobility, his head high on the end of his shimmering neck, and then, as though he knew himself safe for yet a few weeks, resumed his stately progress. The autumn mist was lifting from the hollows; heavy dew sparkled on the grass; and, above, the sky was hazy with lingering vapour. There was a chill in the air which made the flesh shudder even in the sun's warmth, but it was going to be another hot day, with no hint of rain, and not enough wind to bring the turning leaves fluttering down from the trees. Beyond the park, across the lane that skirted Undershaw to the east, beyond its own spreading plantations, lay the Priory... ." (67-68)

Later, at the Priory, *Venetia* looks across a stream and green lawns and exclaims at the prospect, and here Damerel first calls her his "green girl" (96), in reference to her innocence of the world; but author Heyer is also thus likening *Venetia* to the pastoral landscape in which she lives, with rejuvenating power for the world-weary pastoral hero. Eventually, *Venetia*'s marriage to Damerel will be one of nature to art, innocence to experience, pastoral world to the social world of London, although with *Venetia*, like the heroines of Book 6 of *The Faerie Queene*, *As You Like It*, and *The Winter's Tale*, already having achieved within herself the integration that Damerel will now also experience through his union with her.

Heyer also uses the pastoral's focus on the natural world to give *Venetia* a seasonal emphasis which is not only literal but also a figurative way of conveying both the ages of Damerel and *Venetia* and the social timing of their relationship. Damerel is 38, and *Venetia*,

at 25, though very much his junior, is almost on the marital shelf, since women usually married young in Regency society (Kloester, *World* 85). When Damerel eventually breaks off with Venetia, against his own wishes but for what he believes to be her benefit, he tells her that they have been “dwelling in Arcadia” in an “autumn idyll,” for “one magical month” (258). (Damerel, who read classics at Oxford in his youth, recognizes that he has been living in a late-in-life – as he sees it – pastoral romance. Pastorals are usually set in the spring or summer.) For Venetia, “a golden autumn” (the pastoral, as previously noted, is sometimes linked traditionally with the Golden Age) thus ends “in storm and drizzling rain” (261), both figuratively and literally, as cold rain drenches her as she rides alone back to her home after their parting. In the same autumnal and figurative vein, Marston, Damerel’s valet, worrying about his master’s unusual behaviour (none of his love affairs, since the first, had been serious until now), had previously indirectly warned him that it was time to leave Yorkshire, given the increasing seriousness of his relationship with Venetia; but Damerel had not wanted to heed him. “With the weather so remarkably warm,” Marston had commented (155), “one hardly realizes that we shall soon be into November.” Throughout the novel Damerel is continually worrying about the passage of time – about his dissolute life past, and the impossibility at this late (autumnal) stage (as he thinks of it) of making a new start with a much younger and socially naive bride. The gods won’t “annihilate . . . space and time” to make him once again young and worthy of her (234).[18] Heyer uses the natural cycle of the seasons, however, together with the rejuvenation theme of the pastoral, to create the novel’s movement towards a happy ending. Damerel – as aware of social proprieties as any of the respectable members of society who condemn him – is failing to recognize, when confronted by society’s opinions and expectations (above all, towards the novel’s end, in the person of Venetia’s uncle), the power of the rejuvenating/restorative pastoral idyll into which he recognizes he has plunged. His own growing concern, as a dissolute, experienced rake, that he not cause any harm to Venetia is already a sign not simply of the potential of the pastoral experience but of its actual effect. Seasons cycle, as the genre of the pastoral elegy emphasizes; autumn and winter are followed by spring; and in the novel’s happy ending, Damerel finally accepts the possibility of new beginnings. After their pastoral autumn, he and Venetia will be married in winter (in December or January (375)), literally and figuratively leading into a new life/spring for them both. Heyer neatly fits together the seasonal emphasis of the pastoral and its theme of rejuvenation with her typical romantic narrative of the rake’s redemption through love; and the sophisticated, integrative endings of pastorals such as *As You Like It* and *The Winter’s Tale*, combined with Heyer’s own characteristic mixing, in her Regency novels, of realism and romance, result in an ending for *Venetia* that mixes romantic love with a realistic recognition of the inevitability in human life of imperfection and fallibility.[19] In the novel’s otherwise romantic conclusion, Damerel does not think that he will make Venetia unhappy, “but I will offer you no promises” (367). Venetia – who has already accepted, in a conversation with her mother, the possibility that Damerel one day might be unfaithful to her (but “I think he will always love me. You see, we are such dear friends” (330)) – states that “it would be quite unreasonable” (368) to wish a man to change all of his (bad) habits. We should also remember Heyer’s description, at the start of the novel, of Venetia’s desire to make a marriage which would be an escape from rural Yorkshire, and of her interest in seeing the world (22–6). This marriage, with the imperfect but non-rural and travel-experienced Damerel, who also (unlike the patronizing Edward) gets along well with her younger brother Aubrey, satisfies her practical as well as

emotional needs. This world is a fallen one; there is no lasting Arcadia; but the fallen world nevertheless can be large and fulfilling – more so, indeed, than Arcadia – as long as one does not expect perfection.

In her emphasis in *Venetia* on the natural/pastoral world and the cycle of the seasons, Heyer also literally and figuratively associates Venetia and Damerel's relationship with rose petals and leaves and with their dying and growing seasons. Stories had been told in the neighbourhood of the younger Damerel's amatory adventures as having included, for one mistress, the strewing of rose petals over apartment floors for her to walk on (106) and, shortly after his first encounter with Venetia, when he is still thinking of her as sexual prey, Damerel offers to have the rose bushes in his garden pruned, to please her, when she remarks on how they have run wild. At this point in their relationship, she replies, "not at this [autumn] season!" She then adds, however, "But later I wish you will: it might be such a delightful garden" (94–95); and at the novel's end, as she determines to marry Damerel, she moves metaphorically out of autumn and into anticipation of the following spring – following the pastoral cycle of the seasons – as she declares her intention of being the woman to walk on any rose leaves Damerel may henceforward strew (343). (Damerel, always conscious of his age, jokes about the rose leaves, as he begins now to realize that marriage to Venetia may be possible for him after all, "But, my dear girl, at *this* season?" (364–65, Heyer's italics).) Damerel's country house, the Priory, is also presented by Heyer in terms of decay and new growth, age and renewal. The two servants who largely run it, the Imbers, are old, the furniture is under covers, and most of the house is unused. Marston, Damerel's longtime valet, notes, in relation to Imber, that the changes in Damerel's normal (pre-Venetia) plans and conduct, if not temporary, would require household renewal: "He's old, my lord. If you were meaning to remain here it would be necessary to hire more servants" (155). But meanwhile Venetia's longtime Nurse (ironically, given her initial censorious view of Damerel) unconsciously signals the beginning of Damerel's renewal process, when she stays at the Priory to look after Aubrey and to provide herself (as Damerel points out is necessary) as a chaperone for Venetia's visits there. Damerel, a notable rake, is unexpectedly taking care with social proprieties, after many years of deliberately flouting them, and in actions which are a metaphor for his changing attitude, at the Priory Nurse now, with his permission (though he means it only to keep her busy), has the furniture covers removed, the furniture polished, and the whole house cleaned. In the process, Nurse's opinion of Damerel also changes. Nurse, who is full of biblical references and precepts, comes to believe that, although a sinner, Damerel can still be saved, through repentance and self-reformation. Nurse's attitude towards Damerel moves from one of Old Testament justice to one of New Testament possibilities of forgiveness: another kind of renewal, foreshadowing the pastoral rehabilitation of Damerel, "*bred a gentleman*" (66, Heyer's italics) by the novel's end.

The emphasis on physical desire and on the natural world, the seasonal imagery, the figurative language often used: all are unusual for a Heyer romance and are an important part of the novel's pastoral nature, as is the "art" itself of Heyer's writing style in *Venetia*. Typically the pastoral, a highly artificial, metaphoric genre, calls attention to its own artifice through its stylized character types, plot, and language, and in *Venetia* Heyer goes beyond the normal stylization of her writing in her Regency romances, and her use here of pastoral conventions, through incorporating into the dialogue – as in none of her other works – a plethora of quotations from and references to specific older literary works, as well as, through Nurse, from and to the Bible. Elizabeth Barr has recently argued that Heyer includes

so many quotations in *Venetia* simply in order to make her own writing seem of higher literary/cultural quality. But Heyer uses quotations to this extent in none of her other Regency romances, and quotation and allusion always increase a work's impression of artifice.[20] Heyer's quotations are part of the pastoral artifice of *Venetia*; they heighten, through their own "art," the usual stylization of Heyer's Regency romance writing. Damerel and Venetia, for example, in part court one another through literary quotations. Even in their first meeting, when Damerel roughly seizes Venetia and kisses her, they toss lines of poetry back and forth at one another (perhaps also a nod by Heyer to the singing contests and recitations of traditional pastoral). Aubrey, Venetia's brother, is studying, refers to, and quotes from, the classics, which Damerel (and occasionally Venetia) quotes from and refers to at times as well. Nurse provides unintentional comedy through her Biblical quotations, which are often, gloomily, about sin and punishment. And Heyer thus not only emphasizes the artifice of her writing; she also – besides bringing out the rapport between Damerel and Venetia, indicating their membership in the same world of literary education and empathetic intelligence – simultaneously emphasizes pastoral physical attraction, as much of the literature from which both Damerel and Venetia quote, when talking to one another, is about physical beauty and sexual desire. Such literary works quoted from include, for example, Shakespeare's romantic comedies *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, and Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, three tragedies of physical desire. Indeed, Damerel's first comment to Venetia when they meet – "Oh, how full of briars is this working-day world" (30) – is from the highly artificial and pastoral *As You Like It* (I.iii.11-12) and is about physical attraction at first sight.[21] Also quoted in that first meeting is Champion's poem "Cherry-Ripe" ("There is a garden in her face") (34), from which both Damerel and Venetia quote, with Venetia responding to Damerel.[22] Especially sexually suggestive is the line from an anonymous poem, "My Love in her Attire," that Damerel quotes to Venetia, as an apt description of her, on that same occasion: "But beauty's self she is," he exclaims (31). The poem (appropriately for a pastoral) is about the poet's beloved dressing herself to suit the seasons of the year; and the line quoted by Damerel is followed by one he does not utter aloud but which the well-read Venetia would presumably know: "When all her robes are gone." [23] Damerel also repeats, as his continuing view of Venetia, that she is "a beautiful, desirable creature" (102, 234), which was John Aubrey's description, in his late seventeenth-century *Brief Lives*, of Venetia Digby, a sexually alluring beauty who, according to Aubrey, was originally "left by her father" to live privately in Oxfordshire (Aubrey, 100–01).[24] From the classics, among other references, *Oedipus Rex* is featured as a work Venetia's knowledge of which shocks her uncle but not Damerel (366); and *The Bacchae* is alluded to near the start of Venetia and Damerel's acquaintance (65).[25]

Significantly, Venetia and Damerel begin their relationship by conversing largely in quotations, from literature dealing with physical desire, and later move largely into frank conversations about Damerel's past mistresses and requirements for a future wife. Then, when Damerel breaks off with Venetia, for reasons he does not want to give her, Heyer has him resort once again to quotations about beauty and desire (256–59), and above all (259) to the first line of Drayton's highly emotional sonnet, "Idea LXI" ("Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part"), about a parting of lovers. The complete sonnet, spoken by the male lover/poet, is emotionally harrowing but, for those familiar with the poem, with the speaker's emotions held in check by the artifice of the sonnet form and by the use of personifications – Love, Passion, Faith, Innocence – in the third quatrain. Venetia's despair

at Damerel's words comes in part from her own knowledge of the sonnet's second line: "Nay, I have done, you get no more of me" (261). Physical desire, here as suppressed, is once again emphasized by Heyer through her use of quotations/artifice. Here, however, Heyer, in her complex use of art/artifice, not only uses quotations to emphasize the physical tension between Damerel and Venetia but also counts on some of her readers to think more carefully about the sonnet than the emotionally-distraught Venetia does; for the sonnet's last two lines suggest the possibility of a reunion of the lovers if the poet's beloved initiates it, thus providing a hint of how the novel's eventual happy ending will be effected. ("Now, if thou [the beloved] wouldst, when all have given him [Love, personified] over, / From death to life thou might'st him yet recover." [26] Venetia – although the novel gives no sign that she thinks again about the sonnet – eventually initiates and successfully works out, in a second highly emotional meeting which this time *she* manipulates and controls (even quoting *Twelfth Night* on desire) (351), her reunion with Damerel.[27]

The artifice of Heyer's writing in *Venetia* is most obvious in her use of pastoral conventions, highly figurative language, and quotations. Its unusual, unobtrusive depth is present throughout, however, as when Venetia thinks about her dinner with Damerel on her first visit to the Priory, after Aubrey's accident has led to his being temporarily housed there.

Then, a little wonderingly, she thought over that protracted dinner, and of how they had sat talking long after Imber had removed the covers, Damerel leaning back in his carved chair, a glass of port held between his long fingers, she with her elbows on the table and a half-eaten apple in one hand; and the dusk creeping into the room unheeded, until Imber brought in candles, in tall, tarnished chandeliers, and set them on the table, furnishing a pool of light in which they sat while the shadows darkened beyond it. (63–64)

This description, vividly visual in itself, quietly conveys the differing manners and social levels of Damerel and of Venetia, and is also unobtrusively both symbolic and partly pastoral. It figuratively brings out the "tarnished" past of Damerel (his defiance of social norms), and the lighting up now of both Venetia's life and his own by their growing attraction to one another, and it also figuratively points to the limited autumnal idyll (the "pool of light") into which Venetia and Damerel have now moved, while difficulties (shadows) they do not yet recognize surround them, with Venetia's half-eaten apple a symbol of the start of her fall from Edenic natural innocence in the pastoral world towards physical desire and painful emotional and social knowledge/ experience.[28]

Finally, Heyer in *Venetia* also deliberately refers to and twists a well-known fairytale, thus further adding to the deliberate artificiality of her pastoral romance and also to its Shakespearean feminist emphasis. Venetia and her mother refer explicitly to the fairytale of the Sleeping Beauty, in a conversation near the book's end (328), but although Venetia, as the Beauty, has been metaphorically asleep to romance and desire in rural Yorkshire (as she and her mother both point out) until awakened by Damerel's first rough kiss, she then moves into the social world of normal human experience not easily through her rake-prince's kiss (indeed Damerel subsequently kisses her a second time as a goodbye, in the highly emotional scene in which he breaks off their relationship) but through her own intelligence, determination, and art. Damerel enters the pastoral world and physically awakens Venetia; but Venetia herself eventually engineers both his release and her own from this limited

world, and with clear-eyed recognition of Damerel as no fairytale prince but a very fallible real man, as she makes clear to her worried uncle. (“You mean to warn me that he may continue to have mistresses, and orgies, and—and so-on, don’t you, sir?” (367)) A fairytale ending—of pastoral regeneration and a movement beyond pastoral limitations—takes place through determined female agency which is simultaneously romantic and realistic.[29]

In the art of its telling, *Venetia* is Heyer’s most complex Regency novel. It combines Regency romance with the plot patterning, character types, and nature/art and rejuvenation themes of the pastoral romance. As a pastoral it emphasizes the natural world (often metaphorically used), the cycle of the seasons, and the physical side of romantic attraction. And in its use of specific literary quotations, descriptions with figurative depth, and references to fairytale, it both heightens its artifice as a pastoral and deals further with the primal human emotions of physical desire, love, and loss, while its biblical quotations on sin and salvation provide a comic touch yet with further social and moral depth. *Venetia* is unique among Heyer’s Regency romances, and shows her powers, as a writer, at their peak.

[1] Kloester also wrote *Georgette Heyer’s Regency World* (2005).

[2] It is telling that two of the most recent academic articles on Heyer’s romances focus in one case on biographical information (Vivanco) and in the other case on writing style (Barr).

[3] Heyer wrote in other genres as well, especially the genre of crime/mystery/detective fiction, but is best known today for her historical romances, especially those of the Regency period.

[4] Heyer herself described her two typical hero types as Mark I, “[t]he brusque, savage sort with a foul temper,” and Mark II, “enigmatic or supercilious,” and “suave, well-dressed, rich, and a famous whip” (*Biography*, 274).

[5] See, e.g., *Biography*, 250–51. Occasionally, when Heyer temporarily ran out of character and plot inspiration, her dependence on formulas led to very similar works: e.g., *Black Sheep* (1966) and *Lady of Quality* (1972).

[6] Byatt, “Ferocious Reticence.” Byatt’s brief, largely biographical article is still probably the best overview of Heyer’s work in her Regency romances.

[7] Heyer once also wrote that she disliked *Venetia* (and *The Grand Sophy*, 1950) (Byatt, 91); but Heyer was secretly proud of her historical research and her craftsmanship as a writer (see, e.g., *Biography*, 145, 281, 284–85), and Byatt cites the comment on *Venetia* and *Sophy* simply as an example of Heyer’s typical self-defensive mockery of her own work. Heyer was working at the time on *Venetia*, and worrying that her new book – except for her rake hero – might not be popular with her readers. Byatt notes, “It was part of Georgette Heyer’s style not to appear to take her romances seriously” (91).

[8] For a listing of all of Heyer’s published novels, each one identified by genre and its date of first publication, see *Biography*, 401–03.

[9] Heyer, well read in English Renaissance literature, also uses the pastoral genre in one of her other Regency romances, *Sprig Muslin* (1956, two years before *Venetia*), but only briefly, in a short pastoral interlude towards its end.

[10] For a brief overview of the pastoral genre, see Abrams & Harpham, Mikies, and Beckson & Ganz, in all three cases s.v. pastoral.

[11] For a brief account of Christian humanism, see Abrams, s.v. humanism.

[12] Modern cinematic examples of pastoral romance include the 1984 American film *Witness* and – a tragic example – the Sicilian sequences of 1972's *The Godfather*. In both of these examples, the “shepherdess” is left behind: dead, both literally and metaphorically, in *The Godfather*.

[13] Heyer had been rereading Shakespeare's plays, Restoration drama, and related works before she began writing *Venetia* (Hodge, 128).

[14] Heyer, apparently surprised by her own writing of such a story, added, “God knows what's come over me!” (Hodge, 124).

[15] Both *The Winter's Tale* and *Love's Labor's Lost* also reach a positive resolution – full in the former play, partial in the latter – devised by women, though not by a single shepherdess figure as in *As You Like It* and *Venetia*. In *The Tempest*, the resolution is brought about by the heroine's father.

[16] Heyer's Regency romances have sometimes been accused – most notably by Laski (16) – of being devoid of sexuality, but, as Hodge writes (202, 123), sexuality is usually discreetly present. In *Venetia*, however, it is a constant undercurrent which often comes explicitly to the surface. *Devil's Cub* (1932) is the one other Heyer Regency romance in which sexuality is also a driving force and is often explicitly on the narrative surface. Its plot is based on an initial attempted rape of the heroine by the hero, who is Heyer's perhaps most dissolute and certainly most violent rake, and who of course is eventually reformed by love.

[17] Hodge also points to the unusual (for Heyer) amount of nature description in *Venetia*. She ascribes this to Heyer's attempt “to convey romantic mood” (128).

[18] Damerel quotes from Alexander Pope's “Martinus Scriblerus, Of the Art of Sinking in Poetry,” Chapter XI. Pope's lines (one and a half only: “Ye Gods! annihilate but Space and Time / And make two lovers happy”) (Pope, 241) are a satiric example of the misuse of hyperbole in poetry. Damerel's quotation is thus in part a self-aware, self-deprecating comment on his own extreme emotion.

[19] A.S. Byatt commented in 1969 on Heyer's typical “romanticized anti-romanticism” (*Biography*, 372).

[20] Hodge partly recognizes the purpose of the quotations in *Venetia*, in saying that they are “used like the Regency language as a kind of distancing for the serious romantic plot” (128).

[21] For the Shakespeare quotations from these five plays, see: 30 (*As You Like It*, I.iii.11-12); 34 (and 103), 60, 351 (*Twelfth Night*, I.v.247, II.iv.110-115, I.v.268); 32-3 (*Othello*, II.i.247, II.iii.264-5); 258 (*Romeo and Juliet*, II.ii.184); 99 (*Antony and Cleopatra*, II.ii.234-5). *Venetia* also includes three quotations from *Hamlet* and one from *Julius Caesar*, and a reference to each of *King Lear* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (along with another to *Romeo and Juliet*), but these quotations and references largely have other purposes.

[22] The first line of Campion's song (“There is a garden in her face”) and “Cherry-Ripe” are both titles which can be used for the same work: the first given, e.g., in the table of contents (sig. A1v) of Campion's *The Third and Fourth Booke of Ayres* (1617), simply because it is the first line of the song (all the songs in the book are so identified, without titles otherwise; there are no titles on the pages of the songs themselves), and the second given, e.g., when the song was printed in 1861 in Francis Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* (76, 1865 edn.). Google today produces Campion's song when one searches for it, as Campion's, under either title. Barr has stated, pointing to Robert Herrick's song titled “Cherry-Ripe” (also seventeenth-century, and

reproduced by Garrett, along with Campion's song with "The Garden" as its title, in her compilation of *Venetia* quotations), that Heyer deliberately has Venetia misidentify here, by using Herrick's title, the song by Campion from which both she and Damerel are quoting (14). "Cherry-Ripe," however, appears to have been (and still is) an acceptable title also for Campion's work.

[23] Another notable quotation in *Venetia* involving beauty and desire, from Congreve's "Pious Selinda goes to prayers" ("Would she could make of me a saint / Or I of her a sinner"), is spoken by Damerel about, but not to, Venetia (147).

[24] Damerel also quotes from Aubrey's life of Venetia Digby (Aubrey, 100–01) as he breaks off with Venetia, telling her that she has beautiful eyes "and about the eyelids much sweetness," and referring to the "young eagles" who will admire her in London (259). Shortly after their first meeting, when he first calls her a "beautiful desirable creature" (102) he also quotes to her ("Sweet Mind, then speak yourself" (101)) from part of Ben Jonson's poetic tribute, "Eupheme," to Venetia Digby (Jonson, 25).

[25] There are of course other kinds of quotations in *Venetia* as well. Barr discusses the associations of a large number of the quotations and references (including the classical and biblical ones); and a number of these are also listed by Garrett, although only sometimes giving full contexts. See also Caroline Wright, "Booklet Notes" (to a *Venetia* audio book), for a discussion of the sexual contexts of the *Othello* quotations.

[26] The full sonnet runs as follows: "Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part./ Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;/ And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart,/ That thus so cleanly I myself can free./ Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,/ And when we meet at any time again,/ Be it not seen in either of our brows/ That we one jot of former love retain./ Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,/ When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies;/ When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,/ And Innocence is closing up his eyes—/ Now, if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,/ From death to life thou might'st him yet recover!" The formal restraint of intense emotion, through the sonnet form itself, makes Drayton's poem an ideal fit with the pastoral artifice of *Venetia*, and the personifications in the third quatrain are also, in themselves, all appropriate to *Venetia*.

[27] The Drayton sonnet is an especially good example of the complexity of Heyer's use, in general, of quotations and references throughout the novel; they provide not only heightened stylistic artifice, recitation, and indirect expression of physical passion, all especially appropriate to the pastoral genre, but also associative depth, comedy (Nurse's biblical quotations), characterization, and sometimes signals involving plot development. Does Damerel, e.g., hope that Venetia will remember the last two lines of the sonnet from which he quotes? The novel gives no hint of this, but Heyer may want her readers to wonder. The *Twelfth Night* quotation by Venetia in the novel's finale is from a passionate declaration by the play's heroine (I.v.268–76) of how she would express, to an unresponsive beloved, the strength of her desire. She would, e.g., "Make me a willow cabin at your gate,/ And call upon my soul within the house . . ."

[28] Damerel, as a rake, is a culpable pastoral hero who, invading rural Yorkshire-as-Arcadia-as-Eden, is also a tempter, the Byronic "laughing devil" Venetia has identified him as, in their first meeting (35; from Byron's *The Corsair*, Canto 1, line 223). In post-lapsarian Yorkshire, however, the fallen Damerel ("*bred* a gentleman" (66, Heyer's italics)) in the end is an ordinary sinner, capable of redemption, with above all the two virtues Venetia discerns in him early on: a "well-informed mind, and a great deal of kindness" (104).

[29] *Venetia* includes other references, as well, to remind readers of its artifice as a type of traditional fiction of awakening and renewal/recovery. In a folktale reference near the novel's start, Damerel is "the ogre who would infallibly pounce on every naughty child in the district" (36); and the novel's plot then becomes partially reminiscent of that of *Beauty and the Beast* (though with this Beauty having been immediately attracted to the Beast). And Venetia herself is likened, by her young admirer Oswald, to a statue brought to life by Damerel (130–31), which very broadly calls to mind the classical myth of Pygmalion and also Shakespeare's pastoral *Winter's Tale*.

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