

Prejudices, Stereotypes and Other “Crap”

Countering Misconceptions and Normative Assumptions Around Sexuality and Gender in LGBTQ-themed Young Adult Novels

Bachelor Thesis

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1.0 Introduction

Since the publication in 1969 of John Donovan's *I'll Get There, It Better be Worth the Trip*, the first young adult novel to deal with homosexuality, over 200 novels have been published centering around lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ), characters and conflicts (Cart 1356). According to Corrine Wickens in "Codes, Silences, and Homophobia", early novels generally depicted homosexuality as a passing phase, as a "lifestyle" that caused the characters to live lonely, joyless lives. Homosexuality was the problem in these novels, which needed solving through ostracism, violence, and even death. In young adult novels published since the 1990s, it is no longer homosexuality but in fact homophobia that is presented as the major problem of the novel. These books often try to normalize LGBTQ identities (Wickens 149).

However, although trying to normalize LGBTQ identities, often these novels do not successfully disrupt heteronormativity. Heterosexuality is still presented as 'normal' and homosexuality as 'deviant'. These novels often feature homophobic characters. In addition, sometimes the characters who are homosexual have a hard time accepting their sexuality. This is partly because these are mostly realistic novels, and in real life it is true that there are people who oppose homosexuality, as well as homosexuals who do not accept it themselves. However, a distinction can be made between texts that depict homophobic ideas and behavior and texts that propagate such matters.

Finding positive, nonjudgmental young adult books with LGBTQ themes, is more difficult than it might seem. Books often promise to be accepting and to propose new ways of thinking, but do not live up to these promises. Many young adult novels with LGBTQ themes present homophobia as inevitable. They do show, but do not counter homophobic ideas. Often LGBTQ novels reinforce certain cultural clichés such as the idea that a male character's homosexuality is caused by the lack of a father-figure in his life. This is for instance what happens in *Nooit Gaat dit Over* by André Sollie, and *Die Mitte der Welt* by Andreas Steinhöfel. In both novels the male protagonist has never known his father, and the protagonist's mother has many short relationships with different men. Both protagonists feel attracted to some of these men, and curse their mother for not being able to build a lasting relationship.

The importance of young adult literature is often characterized as teaching something to young adults about such matters as life, identity and differences among people. According to Roberta Seelinger Trites, this is especially true for books treating "controversial sexual topics, like homosexuality" (143). In "Queer Discourse and the Young Adult Novel" she says that after teaching college students about young adult books concerning homosexuality, she often receives comments

such as: “This book will really help gay teenagers” or “After reading this book, maybe more people will be more tolerant of the gay community” (Seelinger Trites 143). If the importance of LGBTQ young adult literature is in helping gay teenagers finding and accepting their sexuality, or helping teenagers in becoming more tolerant citizens, then the way homosexuality is represented in these novels deserves close attention.

Seelinger Trites states that books about gay teenagers often promise “freedom from past constraints, freedom from continued repression [and] freedom from narrow-minded discourse”, but that simultaneously “such books often undermine that alleged liberation” (143). What she does is show how books about gay male adolescents often send out mixed messages. She states that, to construct gay discourse, frequently these texts use a way of writing that is more repressive than it is liberating (Seelinger Trites 143). This is also what Wickens states in “Codes, Silences and Homophobia”. In this article she discusses examples from novels that she says “challenge homophobia, but ultimately leave it intact” (Wickens 149).

Wickens presents Levithan’s young adult novel *Boy Meets Boy*, published in 2003, as a novel that is different in this respect (149). Indeed this book is different from most other LGBTQ-themed young adult novels, because it does not make the mistake of using such cultural clichés I discussed earlier, and because it succeeds in countering normative assumptions around sexuality and gender. Wickens argues that “*Boy Meets Boy*, through its blurring of genre and inventive use of linguistic features, undermines heteronormative assumptions by presenting the unthinkable: children as sexual beings, hegemonic masculinity as in fact non-hegemonic and detrimental to success, and homosexuality as normalized and even ordinary” (156).

In this essay I analyze two other novels that I think deserve attention: *Out of the Shadows* by Sue Hines and *Girl Meets Boy* by Ali Smith. In discussing these novels I will pay attention to the way they portray homophobia, prejudices, stereotypes and cultural clichés, and whether or not they succeed in countering normative assumptions around sexuality and gender.

Out of the Shadows was published in 1998. I will argue that this book is extraordinary because it discusses many prejudices, stereotypes and cultural clichés and in contrast to other LGBTQ-themed young adult novels makes obvious that these are misconceptions and presents other ways of thinking. In addition, the novel elaborates on the problem of homophobia, presenting it not as one or two characters having problems with homosexuality, but as a complex social problem. Furthermore, *Out of the Shadows* successfully disrupts normative assumptions around sexuality and gender by emphasizing that heteronormativity is a cultural construct and by questioning the concept of ‘normality’.

Correspondingly, in my analyses of *Girl Meets Boy*, I will argue that this 2007 book discusses misconceptions surrounding homosexuality and presents other ways of thinking. In addition, I will

discuss how *Girl Meets Boy* focuses on the influence of cultural representations on the perception of homosexuality. Moreover, *Girl Meets Boy* successfully disrupts heteronormativity by questioning both the standard division of gender roles, as well as the binary opposition between men and women. However, first it is necessary to clarify exactly what is meant by heteronormativity.

2.0 Heteronormativity

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler analyzes the identity categories in political debate. As Vicki Kirby argues in *Live Theory*, Butler's aim is to "acknowledge the complex forces that render *any* identity inherently unstable" (Kirby 20). Butler criticizes feminism for its heteronormativity. What heteronormativity means and why Butler criticizes feminism for this I will explain here, because this is the central concept for the rest of the essay.

Important in Butler's argument is the idea that culture provides us with possible ways of thinking, or frames of reference outside which we cannot think. These frames of reference are so strong that they take on factual status, presenting themselves as irrefutable truths (Kirby 23). Poststructuralist theorists, such as Derrida, pay special attention to the way that language constructs reality, looking at binary opposites such as man versus woman, heterosexual versus homosexual, or normal versus abnormal. Derrida argues that these binary opposites are never impartial; one is always viewed higher or better. Derrida's tries to show that presenting the world in such opposite categories is problematic and untenable. At the same time, he does recognize that this is unavoidable, since we need these concepts to think (Leezenberg 206-208). Such concepts are always defined in contrast to each other. For example, a man is that which is not a woman, and vice versa. This helps us to make reality comprehensible, but contrary to popular belief, these are not natural truths, but in fact cultural constructs (Brillenbug Wurth 285).

This realization, that binary opposites such as man versus woman or homosexual versus heterosexual are cultural constructs, has been of great importance in gender theory. Butler proposes a way of thinking outside the binary opposites of man and woman, heterosexuals and homosexuals, arguing that in fact there are multiple 'bodies and desires'. She argues that heteronormativity, in a modern western context, works as a regulative concept to organize these bodies and desires into fictional coherence. This coherence then takes on factual status (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 135-136).

Heteronormativity is a concept that indicates that being heterosexual is the norm, while being homosexual, asexual, or anything not-heterosexual is deviant. In other words, heterosexuality is considered normal and natural, while anything not-heterosexual is considered not normal, unnatural or wrong. Heteronormativity also indicates that a coherence is assumed between sex,

gender and sexuality. Sex, gender and sexuality are presented as having a logic or even causal connection. This means that gender is considered the causal effect of sex and that sexuality is considered the causal or logical result of sex and gender. For example, if you are anatomically a man, you are supposed to 'dress like a man', 'act like a man' and be sexually attracted to women. According to Butler, this means that certain identities are thought not to be possible, namely those identities in which gender does not logically follow from sex, and those identities in which sexuality does not follow from sex and gender (Gender Trouble 17). Wickens defines heteronormativity as "[the idea] that proper femininity and masculinity are equated with heterosexuality. To be considered a proper woman/man, one must also be heterosexual, and to transgress social norms around sexuality is also to have one's gender called in dispute" (150). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that it is because of these norms that some gender identities, or some ways of enacting gender appear to be logically impossible, not because they are essentially so (17).

At first, feminist theories regarded 'women' to be an unproblematic category, because of sexual anatomy. Butler argues against a presumed universal woman experience that transcends differences in ethnicity, class and race. Feminism's insistence on a stable category of woman, Butler argues, "inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category" (Gender Trouble 4). In other words, feminism, by creating this seemingly unproblematic category of woman, in order to liberate oneself from oppression, is itself oppressive, since it excludes some from this category. This raises the question what actually constitutes being a woman. Butler says: "there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women" (Gender Trouble 1). In "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*" Butler argues that Simone de Beauvoir's statement that "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes, a woman" (qtd. in Butler 35), makes possible the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'. In this distinction, sex is viewed as an anatomical reality, while gender is viewed as a cultural construct (Butler, Sex and Gender 35). Butler, however, argues that 'sex' is perhaps as culturally constructed as 'gender', pointing towards the growing appreciation that biology itself has to be interpreted by humans and that cultural forces are powerful in determining how this is done (Gender Trouble 6-7).

In addition, Butler asks the question: "To what extent does the category of woman achieve stability and coherence only in the context of the heterosexual matrix?" (Gender Trouble 5). This presumed 'stability and coherence' of one's gender, is something that Butler argues against. She explains that a coherence between sex and gender can only exist if sex is understood as somehow requiring a certain gender, and that a coherence between sexuality and sex/gender, can only exist if sexuality is understood as heterosexuality. In that case, a logical oppositional relationship between the self and the other is created, where one's sex and gender are always confirmed in relation to the other's sex and gender (Butler, Gender Trouble 22). Butler therefore concludes: "The internal

coherence of unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality” (Gender Trouble 22).

At the end of *Gender Trouble* Butler discusses practices of drag to make the distinction clear between anatomical sex, gender identity and gender performance. She wants to explore how gender is a reflexive performance, arguing that the body rewrites itself constantly through “acts, gestures [and] enactments” (Butler, Gender Trouble 136). Butler hereby tries to show that there is no such thing as a fixed foundation. She argues that although gender appears to express a sexual identity that exists before the expression, these attributes actually “effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal” (Butler, Gender Trouble 141) .

In the light of Butler’s ideas, I will analyze the novels *Out of the Shadows* and *Girl Meets Boy*. In both novels, I will pay attention to the way the novel discusses homophobia and misconceptions surrounding homosexuality, as well as to the way the novel counters normative assumptions around sexuality and gender. I will summarize my findings in the conclusion.

3.0 Out of the Shadows - Sue Hines

In *Out of the Shadows* there are two narrators, Rowanna and Jodie. Rowanna is a heterosexual girl, who since the death of her mother lives with a woman called Deb. Deb used to be her mother’s partner. Jodie is a lesbian girl who is new at Rowanna’s school. They instantly become friends. Rowanna thinks her family situation is very different from anyone else’s and at first does not want to tell Jodie about it. Jodie, being bullied at her former school, does not want people to find out she is a lesbian, so she does not tell Rowanna. In the end, they do tell each other their secrets. Rowanna then writes a story called “Hateful Shadows” in which she tells about everything that happened after she found out that her mother and Deb were lovers, until the death of her mother. We then find out that Rowanna at first did not accept her Mother’s and Deb’s sexuality at all, and behaved terribly towards Deb. She even accused Deb of paedophilia, even though there was no reason for Rowanna to think this. When her mother did not believe this, she ran away from home. She lived on the streets for several weeks, before returning to her mother and Deb. They discussed their problems, and Rowanna apologized. The same night Rowanna’s mother got hit by a car and died. Rowanna feels this is her fault.

One of the central issues in this book is the problem of secrecy. In many young adult books with LGBTQ themes, problems occur after the protagonist tells others about his or her sexuality, or after friends, parents, or classmates find out about a character’s sexuality. Contrastingly, In *Out of the Shadows*, problems occur mainly because of secrecy: characters do not tell each other what they

think, they hide their feelings and they do not communicate well. Rowanna keeps her family situation hidden from Jodie. Jodie does not tell Rowanna that she is a lesbian. Deb advises Jodie not to tell Rowanna, because she thinks Rowanna might not accept it. This assumption turns out to be unjust, because when Jodie eventually does tell Rowanna, Rowanna does accept this. In addition, Rowanna's mother and Deb never explained their relationship to Rowanna. Rowanna found out that they were lovers from George and Sam, who also told her that homosexuality is a sickness. This is interesting, because in novels where problems occur when people find out, often there is the implied idea that it is better not to tell. In contrast, this novel implies that talking about sexuality can help prevent problems from occurring.

In some novels, character's are told it is better not to tell, like in *Die Mitte der Welt* by Andreas Steinhöfel where the protagonist's mother does accept his sexuality, but says it is better not to tell others, because not everybody thinks like they do. In other novels, characters come to this conclusion themselves, for instance in *Finding H.F.* by Julia Watts. In this novel the protagonist called Heavenly Faith (H.F.), is abandoned by her mother and therefore raised by her grandmother. At the end of the novel H.F. concludes that it is better not to tell her grandmother about her sexuality: "Memaw don't suspect a thing, and right now I want to protect her from what she can't understand - maybe because that's the best way to protect Wendy and me too. I like to think that someday, when I'm grown and out of her house, I can make her understand about the way I am, but I don't know if I can" (Watts 148).

Although in some cases it might be realistic that it is better not to tell, this not a very positive image to present to teenagers. In addition, these novels often imply that there is no problem as long as homosexuality is kept a secret, whereas in fact the inability to tell this can be a problem in itself. *Out of the Shadows* shows the problems of not talking, and 'staying in the shadows'. In this novel, the characters learn that everyone has secrets, and that they have to learn how to trust each other.

3.1 Countering Misconceptions

Out of the Shadows, when talking about prejudices, stereotypes and cultural clichés, makes obvious that these are misconceptions. In other books in which characters are homophobic or have prejudices about homosexuals, it is not always made obvious that they are in the wrong. For instance in *Empress of the World* by Sara Ryan, where friends of Nicola (the protagonist) and Battle (Nicola's girlfriend) express many homophobic ideas which are never explicitly called misconceptions in the novel. For instance, when Nicola says she is in love with Battle, she gets very emotional, so her friend

Katrina hugs her and then says: “Don’t take that as a come-on” (Ryan 83). This novel never clarifies that Katrina’s sudden anxiety that Nicola would think she is ‘coming-on’ to her is unjustified. Other novels do not discuss homophobic ideas at all, such as *Dance on my grave*, in which the protagonist called Hal keeps his sexuality a secret for the people around him throughout the novel. At one point in the novel, Hal’s mother does tell about his uncle, who she says sometimes wears women’s clothes. When Hal says he has never heard of this uncle before, she says: “Your dad won’t hear him mentioned”. Hal reacts: “Good God! Just because he wears woman clothes?” (Chambers 223). Except for this remark, the novel does not discuss homophobia, or transphobia, or any misconceptions surrounding these topics at all.

In contrast, *Out of the Shadows* discusses many misconceptions about homosexuality. For instance when Rowanna tells her good friend Mark about her family situation. This is what happens:

There was an awkward silence. I had to hand it to Mark - most people would’ve either quizzed me about what my mum and Deb did in bed (as if I’d know. Do kids ever think about their parents’ sexual habits?) or they would’ve avoided me as though I had something contagious. I’m not joking. It happened at my last school. But not Mark. After a few seconds, when he realized I wasn’t going to say anything, he said in a careful tone, ‘Deb must be pretty special.’

See why he’s my best friend? (Hines 19-20)

This quote shows the different ways in which people can react. Rowanna’s experience is that people directly ask her about sex. *Out of the Shadows* shows how strange such a question is, by arguing that kids often do not think about their parents’ sexual habits. The novel also addresses the idea that homosexuality is contagious, but by directly saying “I’m not joking”, *Out of the Shadows* shows that thinking this is quite strange, and sounds like a joke. Mark reacts carefully, does not ask about sexual habits, and does not look at Ro like she has something contagious. Hereby *Out of the Shadows* presents another way of reacting.

Out of the Shadows also addresses stereotypes. When Selina, a girl from Rowanna and Jodie’s school, bullies Jodie by implying that she is a lesbian, Jodie gets really upset. Rowanna and Mark talk about this:

‘Maybe it’s the first time anyone’s called her that’, said Mark. (...) ‘Could be,’ I said, nodding away. ‘She was probably the resident babe at her old school. No one would dream of calling her a dyke, ‘cause she doesn’t fit the stereotype. She shaves her legs, you know. I looked.’ Mark chuckled. ‘And she’s got long hair.’ I joined in. ‘And she’s *slim*.’

'I bet she doesn't even own a pair of overalls!'

I cracked up. (Hines 30)

This quote shows ideas people might have about the way lesbian girls look. Namely, the idea that lesbians do not shave their legs, that they all have short hair, are not slim, and wear overalls. Because this is presented as a joke, it is made clear that these ideas are based on stereotypes.

Similarly, *Out of the Shadows* portrays other misconceptions, such as the idea that homosexuality is contagious, like in the example I gave earlier, or that if you are raised by same sex parents, you automatically become gay yourself: "Some of the cretins at my old school figured because my mother was living with another woman, I would have to be a lesbian too - you know, some kind of dyke-by-association crap - and they gave me hell" (Hines 32). Here again, *Out of the Shadows* depicts a popular idea about homosexuality, but because Rowanna calls this "crap", it is made obvious that this is a misconception.

Rowanna explains that she used to have erroneous ideas about homosexuality herself, such as ideas about what 'made her mother gay':

She didn't ever date, but I don't know when she would've found the time anyway, and she didn't go anywhere to meet people. On top of that, a fabric shop isn't the kind of place where many guys hang around. I used to think, in my more bitter moments, that it was the lack of opportunity to meet men that made her gay, but I don't think so now. (Hines 34)

Rowanna used to think that homosexuality is something you 'become'. She was looking for an explanation as to what it was that 'made her mother gay'. The idea that homosexuality must have some sort of external reason, that there must be something that turns a heterosexual person into a homosexual one, is a heteronormative way of thinking. This idea is based on another idea, namely, that everybody is born heterosexual and therefore that heterosexuality is the natural sexuality. Since heterosexuality is the norm, there does not have to be a reason or explanation to be heterosexual. To be homosexual, though, does need a reason or explanation, because it deviates from the norm. Rowanna's explanation for her mother's sexuality used to be that she did not meet many men, and therefore became a lesbian. Eventually, Rowanna realized that she was mistaken about this. She says "I don't think so now", because she changed her mind, but this took her a while: "For a long time I couldn't admit, even to myself, that perhaps she'd been that way all along, but didn't realize it" (Hines 34).

Jodie also talks about the mistaken ideas people have about homosexuals. After reading Rowanna's story, in which Rowanna talks about her behavior towards Deb after she found out that

Deb and her mother were lovers, Jodie gets really angry. She thinks Rowanna behaved terribly, and that she too easily believed what others told her about homosexuals. Jodie says:

You know, people believe an awful lot of absolute crap about gays. There's the old idea that gays are all child molesters, when it's a fact that most child molesters are straight. *Most* people involved in sex crimes of any kind are heterosexual. I think that's what annoyed me the most about what Ro had written. She'd bought into that lie so easily. Oh, and I mustn't forget the mistaken belief that gays are all AIDS carriers, when in fact the rate of growth of AIDS is greater among heterosexuals. It's just easier to bag a minority, right? (Hines 166)

Jodie hereby comments on all the misconceptions expressed by Rowanna in her story, such as the idea that all homosexuals are child molesters or involved in sex-crimes, and that all homosexuals carry AIDS.

Jodie tries to argue against the idea that child molestation and sex crimes are more likely to occur among homosexual people than among heterosexual people. The way she does this, however, is a little problematic. By saying "most people involved in sex crimes of any kind are heterosexual", she does not make clear whether she means in absolute or in relative terms. If she means in absolute terms, the argument is useless, because this does not contradict the assumption that there is a casual relationship between homosexuality, child molestation and sex crimes. Because the majority of all people are heterosexual, it is logical that in absolute terms, more heterosexuals are involved in these matters. If she means that there are relatively more heterosexuals than homosexuals involved in sex crimes then this does contradict this assumption. It is questionable though, whether it is really the case that there are relatively more heterosexuals than homosexuals involved in sex crimes. What is more important in this analyzes, is that Jodie names the idea that all gays are child molesters as an example of 'the absolute crap people believe about homosexuals' and that she explicitly calls it a lie.

This is also what she does when she comments on the idea that all homosexuals carry aids. She names this as another example of the 'absolute crap people believe about homosexuals' and calls it a "mistaken belief" and says that "in fact the rate of growth of AIDS is greater among heterosexuals". By saying: "It's just easier to bag a minority, right?" She also comments on why it is that people express these ideas against homosexuals. A little later she also says: "The bottom line is this: if you're different, you're a target, end of the story" (Hines 166). In other words, it is precisely because homosexuals are in the minority, that these misconceptions exist.

When Rowanna wrote the story, though, she did not believe these things herself anymore either. In the story she tells how she eventually came to terms with her mother's and Deb's sexuality:

I had allowed other people's ideas to sway me for long enough, with tragic results. From now on I would follow my heart. Stuff the rest of the world. Stuff the Georges and Sams and small-minded morons . Stuff the people who were blind to everything outside their own narrow world, who thought love was only legitimate if it followed a certain, prescribed pattern. Stuff the lot of them. (Hines 195)

Rowanna has realized that she was influenced by people like George and Sam to think in a homophobic way, and that this has had its consequences. She now calls people like George and Sam "morons". By saying that they "thought love was only legitimate if it followed a certain, prescribed pattern" she comments on heterosexuality being the sexuality that fits into the social construct, that is expected, that is "prescribed". She has realized that although homosexuality deviates from social norms, it is not wrong.

To conclude, *Out of the Shadows* shows many misconceptions surrounding homosexuality, thereby recognizing the problems society might have with homosexuality. In contrast to other LGBTQ young adult novels, *Out of the Shadows* does not merely show these ideas, but also comments on them and presents other ways of thinking. Whenever a homophobic idea is presented in the novel, it is directly contradicted, because it is shown as an example of the mistaken beliefs people have about homosexuals, or because it is called 'crap' or a lie. Whenever characters express homophobic ideas, it is made obvious that they are in the wrong.

3.2 The Problem of Homophobia

Another interesting aspect of the way in which Jodie argues against the misconceptions expressed by Rowanna in her story, is that Jodie calls these ideas "crap", just like Rowanna called the idea that children raised by same sex parents grow up to be gays themselves "crap". Rowanna complains about others discriminating her for having two mothers, and the mistaken assumption that because of this, she must be gay too. At first, however, Rowanna had mistaken assumptions herself, and was not at all accepting of her mother's and Deb's sexuality. When she first found out that her mother and Deb were lovers, she was very shocked, because George and Sam, boys from her class, told her it was something terrible and that it was sick. She slowly learns to accept it, but at first does not want to talk about it with others because she thinks they will not accept it.

Jodie tells how she has "joined into the anti-gay jokes [and] made derisive comments about women in sensible shoes" (Hines 48), because she did not want people to know about her sexuality. In other words, even though she is a lesbian herself, she used to behave in a homophobic way. Later, when she is bullied by a girl from her school called Selina, she says: "'It says here,' she [Jodie] went on, 'that the majority of gay bashers are gay themselves, but can't face the truth. Bashing other gays

is a kind of self-hatred. Now what does that say about you [Selina], hmmm?" (Hines 128). This is a dubious argument, because it sounds like blaming homosexuals for homophobia, reducing it to a form of self-hatred, but the book later elaborates on this, showing that this in itself is caused by a 'narrow minded world'.

After reading Rowanna's story, Jodie is very shocked: "How could someone who seemed so warm, so liberal-minded and understanding be the same manipulative, wicked creature who had come to life on the carefully written pages before me?" (Hines 165). But then she starts wondering who is really to blame: "Ro? Sam and George? Or society itself, for having the view that it does about homosexuality?" (Hines 166). Consequently, Jodie goes to Rowanna and tells her: "I suppose it's not all your fault, Ro, as much as you'd like to think it is. You did some lousy stuff, but if we didn't live in such a narrow-minded world, the gay thing wouldn't even be an issue" (Hines 170). Jodie realizes that homophobia is a complex social problem and that it is hard to think outside of cultural clichés. Therefore, she forgives Rowanna. This does not mean though, that she approves of what Rowanna has done. She says it is not *all* her fault, therefore, *partly* it is her fault. She does have to take responsibility for her own actions.

To summarize, in *Out of the Shadows* there are some characters who are outwardly homophobic, but the problem of homophobia is not reduced to just these characters. Instead, homosexuality is presented as a complex social problem. Although the novel presents homophobia in this way, the people who behave in a homophobic way are held accountable. Homophobic ideas, although strongly present in society, are not inescapable. Rowanna eventually came to terms with her mother's and Deb's sexuality. The novel shows that, precisely because these ideas are based on cultural constructs, it is possible to differ from them.

3.3 Countering Heteronormativity: About Being Normal

After Rowanna accuses Deb of paedophilia, Deb cries: "Why, Ro? Why can't you understand that love sometimes doesn't fit into the system that society has created? Love is - *love*. How can you do such a - a -" (Hines 164). *Out of the Shadows* hereby emphasizes the constructedness of heteronormativity as a system into which homosexuality does not fit. In this construct heterosexuality is the norm, and anything not heterosexual is deviant. Heterosexuality is seen as normal and natural, and homosexuality, or anything not heterosexual, is seen as abnormal or unnatural. The novel hereby emphasizes that these ideas are social constructs instead of natural truths. Deb says that "love is love" because she thinks that essentially there is no difference between different sexual relationships.

Out of the Shadows tackles the idea that heterosexuality is normal and homosexuality abnormal. Rowanna thinks that her living situation is extremely unconventional and unlike anyone else's, but then she learns that there are other children being raised by same sex parents:

When I think back, I know there must've been other kids in the same position as me. There's this mathematical thing called Probability which I could use to support my argument here, but at the time it didn't occur to me. In any case, I never got to meet anyone else who had two 'mothers' - or fathers, for that matter - (...). (Hines 150)

Not only does Rowanna realize that there are more families like hers, she also starts to rethink ideas she had about what is normal and what is not. She finds out that her best friend Mark sometimes gets hit by his father. Rowanna then reasons that because of this, Mark, although living in a conventional family, being raised by his biological mother and father, perhaps has a less 'normal' and certainly a less happy life, than Rowanna used to have when her mother still lived. "My family was supposedly the wacko one, yet there was more happiness and normality in our non-traditional family (...) than poor Mark will ever have in his so-called 'normal' set-up" (Hines 124). Correspondingly, when Rowanna lived on the streets she met a girl, Michelle, whose stepfather sexually abused her. She says: "No matter how weird I thought my family life was, it was a dream compared to Michelle's" (Hines 180). By contextualizing normalness with happiness and weirdness with unhappiness, the novel suggests that 'normality' is not so much about what is most common, but about what constitutes better living conditions. Rowanna's comments, however, could be criticized, because they seem to suggest that same sex parenting should be justified by mentioning the possibility of abuse and rape in opposite sex parenting. In a way, the novel seems to imply that 'things could always be worse'.

Another, more successful way in which the novel attacks heteronormativity is by questioning the possibility to be normal altogether. Rowanna says: "In all the fuss that blew up over Mark's father (Geez, are there any normal people left in the world?) I didn't get to tell my tale of woe" (Hines 121). Here, the novel counters heteronormativity by proposing that perhaps it is not possible to be normal at all. This counters the heteronormative idea that heterosexuality is normal and natural, and homosexuality abnormal and unnatural.

Conclusively, *Out of the Shadows* successfully disrupts normative assumptions around sexuality and gender, firstly by emphasizing that heteronormativity is a cultural construct, and secondly by questioning the concept of 'normality', suggesting that what is most common, is not necessarily what is 'normal', and that perhaps it is not possible to be 'normal' at all.

4.0 Girl Meets Boy - Ali Smith

Girl Meets Boy also uses two narrators: Anthea and Imogen, who are sisters. They both work at a creative agency called Pure. Anthea falls in love with Robin, who she meets when Robin vandalizes one of the Pure Billboards with feminist statements. They start a relationship. When Imogen finds out about this, it confuses her. I want to specify here that Robin is anatomically a girl, but her gender-identity is ambiguous. Therefore to call Robin and Anthea lesbians is a little problematic, and neither Anthea nor Robin call themselves this. This is also because Anthea does not have a problem at all with her sexuality and as a narrator, therefore, she does not feel the need to name her sexuality to the reader. She just tells about her fascination for Robin. For practical reasons, though, I will use the term 'lesbian' in my discussion.

Imogen has many mistaken ideas about homosexuality, and does not know how to cope with her sister being a lesbian. This, and the fact that Robin protests against the company that Imogen and Anthea work for, creates tensions between the sisters. Eventually, though, Imogen changes her views about homosexuality, and quits her job at Pure. Anthea and Imogen then reconcile. The novel ends with Anthea telling the reader that she eventually married Robin. Anthea says: "Reader, I married him/her. It's the happy ending" (Smith 149). This is not possible though, because the story takes place in Great Britain, where two people of the same sex are not allowed to get married. Two men or two women can get a civil partnership in Great Britain, but Anthea explicitly says this is not what she means. "I don't mean we had a civil ceremony. I don't mean we had a civil partnership. I mean we did what's still impossible after all these centuries. (...) I mean we got married" (Smith 149). Therefore, in the story, their marriage is described as a dream, or a utopian idea of Anthea, instead of something that really happens.

4.1 Misconceptions

As I argued above, Anthea does not have a problem at all with her sexuality. Imogen, on the other hand, does have a problem with her sister's sexuality. She freaks out and thinks it is her mother's fault, because she left them when they were little. Imogen says: "It's our mother's fault for splitting up with our father"¹ (Smith 49). But then she realizes that if that were the case, it would mean she would have to be gay too: "But if that's true then I might also be a gay. Well obviously that's not true

¹ In the narration of Imogen, many sentences are put between round brackets, to show that for Imogen these topics are uncomfortable to talk about. To avoid confusion, I have chosen not to include these brackets in the quotations.

then, that's not true at all. I am definitely, definitely not a gay" (Smith 50). A little later she seems to have forgotten this reasoning and she blames her mother again: "I would rather give up everything including any stupid political principle than leave children that belonged to me. Look how it ends" (Smith 53). A few minutes later in the story, though, she says that it is Robin's fault. She thinks that Robin somehow persuaded her sister into being a lesbian. "[A]nd now this person has turned my sister into one of them, I mean One of Them" (Smith 55).

In addition to Imogen's mistaken beliefs about how Anthea 'became' a lesbian, Imogen has many other ideas concerning homosexuality that are false. She thinks Anthea will live a lonely, joyless life, not know real love, and die. This is not surprising, because in other books this is either what actually happens (as I have argued before), or it is what characters think will happen. Therefore, the fact that these ideas appear in the novel is not surprising, but the interesting thing in this novel is that it shows where these ideas come from. Imogen's negative ideas about homosexuals, and specifically about lesbians, are based on representations in visual media. The following two quotes make this clear:

My little sister is going to grow up into a dissatisfied older predatory totally dried-up abnormal woman like Judi Dench in that film *Notes on a Scandal*. Judi Dench plays that sort of person so well, is what I thought when I saw it, but that was when I didn't think my sister was going to maybe be one of them and have such a terrible life with no real love in it. My little sister is going to have a terrible life. (Smith 56)

There is also that gay woman doctor character on ER whose lovers always die in fires and so on. Gay people are always dying all the time. (Smith 58)

The novel hereby comments on previous representations of homosexuals. In such representations homosexuality is presented as something that is abnormal and causes the characters to live terrible lives, with no 'real' love in it, and eventually die. As I have argued in the introduction, these are the same ideas that are represented in early LGBTQ young adult novels.

Criticism of such representations is seen in more LGBTQ young adult novels published since the 1990s. In *Empress of the World* the protagonist called Nicola writes in her journal: "[T]his was supposed to be a summer class in archeology, not some idiotic soap opera mess. [E]xcept that no soap operas would have a love affair between girls as a storyline, unless one of us died tragically in a car crash, and then the other one was comforted in her grief by some charming young man"² (Ryan

² Nicola does not use capital letters in her journal. In addition, the last sentence was actually put between square brackets. To avoid confusion, I have chosen not to include these brackets in this quotation.

185). *Empress of the World* hereby comments on the representations of homosexuals in other media, specifically soap operas. The novel argues that homosexuals are often not represented in such shows, and if homosexuals are represented, they are often misrepresented. *Girl Meets Boy*, in addition, also shows that such representations can in fact influence ways of thinking about homosexuals.

In addition to the ideas that are presented to Imogen in movies and television series, other misconceptions she has come from her friends, who regularly make homophobic remarks. They talk about this girl called Chantelle, who is supposedly a lesbian. They call her a 'greg', a word they made up themselves and refers to Gregory Dyke from BBC. Imogen does not know that they mean Chantelle is a lesbian, so they tease her with this. Then after a while they say:

She's, like, a thespian, Norman says.

A what? I say.

A lickian, Norman says. Well, she looks like one.

Like that freakshow who daubed the Pure sign that day, Dominic says. Fucking dyke. (Smith 68)

Apart from the fact that the way Imogen's friends talk about lesbians is not really politically correct, they also specifically express many homophobic ideas. The following quote shows some of these ideas:

Freud defined it, Norman says (Norman did psychology at Stirling), as a state of lack. A state of lacking something really, you know, fundamental. (...) Adolescent backwardness. Marked underdevelopment, Norman says. Yeah, but a really heavy case of underdevelopment, Dominic says. I mean, never mind anything else. Never mind how weird it is. Like, what gets me is, there's nothing to do the job. Nothing to do the jiggery-pokery with. And that's why Queen Victoria didn't make rugmunch illegal.

(...) Apparently she said there was no such thing, like, it didn't exist. And she was right. I mean, when men do it, poofs, in sexual terms, I mean, it's fucking disgusting and it leads to queer paedophilia and everything, but at least it's real sex they have, eh? But women. It's like, how can they? I just don't get it. It's a joke, Dominic says.

Yeah, but it's good, Norman says, if you're watching and they're both fuckable.

Yeah, but the real ones are really mostly pretty unfuckable, you have to admit, Dominic says.
(Smith 69-70)

Firstly, Imogen's friends think that there is no such thing as female homosexual intercourse. This is because they equate sex with penetration (by the penis). This is a heteronormative way of defining 'sex', in which penetration is considered the main sexual act, and other forms of sexual acts are dismissed as less important or merely foreplay. In their opinion, therefore, two men can have sex, but two woman cannot. Secondly, Norman's remark, that although the sex is not 'real', it is "good",

“if you’re watching and they’re both fuckable”, shows that Norman can only understand sexuality between two woman as something that is interesting for him, as a male, to watch, not as actual sexual intercourse between two woman. These two remarks are examples of phallocentrism: “The privileging of the masculine (the phallus) in understanding meaning or social relations” (Felluga). In phallogentric thinking, female sexual response is understood as primarily related to phallic intercourse. Thirdly, Dominic declares he thinks male homosexual intercourse is appalling and states that it would lead to paedophilia. Fourthly, Dominic’s comment that “the real ones” are “mostly pretty unfuckable”, is probably meant to say something like girls who are lesbians are often not very pretty, or at least do not look like the girls he would want to have sex with.

As I have argued when I discussed *Out of the Shadows*, *Girl Meets Boy*, by showing all these different misconceptions, recognizes the problems society might have with homosexuality. *Girl Meets Boy* shows heteronormative ideas and phallogentric thinking, that cause the characters to express homophobic ideas. In addition, *Girl Meets Boy* also comments on the representation of homosexuals in the media, thereby commenting on the power of cultural representation.

4.2 Countering these misconceptions

The discussion above has shown that Imogen and her friends have many misconceptions surrounding homosexuality. *Girl Meets Boy* does not only show these ideas, but also comments on this and presents the reader with other ways of thinking.

I have argued that Imogen thinks her sister will lead an awful life “with no real love in it”, and that Imogen’s friends think there is no such thing as female homosexual intercourse. In other words: In the narration of Imogen, the idea is expressed that love between two woman is not real, as well as the idea that sex between two woman is not real. These two ideas, which are related in the novel, are both contradicted in the narration of Anthea.

The idea that the love between two woman is not ‘real’, is contradicted in the story of Iphis and Ianthe. Robin tells the story of Iphis and Ianthe, in which a man says to his pregnant wife that they can only keep their child if it is a boy. If it were a girl, it would have to be killed. The mother asks the Gods what to do and they tell her that if she gives birth to a girl, she has to raise it as a boy and everything will turn out fine. When she gives birth to a daughter, she calls her Iphis, a name that can apply to both boys and girls, and she raises the child as though it were a boy. When Iphis is older, she meets a girl called Ianthe and they fall in love. Iphis then gets really mad at the Gods, because - so she says - she cannot be a ‘real boy’ for Ianthe. The Gods then turn Iphis into a beautiful young man and Iphis and Ianthe live happily ever after.

Somewhere in the telling of the story Robin says: “The thing is, Iphis and Ianthe had actually, for real, very really, fallen in love” (Smith 94). Robin explicitly emphasizes the ‘realness’, of the love between these two women, thereby arguing that two women can in fact really fall in love. This is of extra importance when you take into account the similarities between the story of Iphis and Ianthe and that of Robin and Anthea. Robin is also a name that can apply to boys as well as girls, and Robin and Anthea actually call themselves Iphis and Ianthe. There are some differences between the stories, which will become clear in the rest of the discussion, but overall the story can be seen as a *mise en abyme*, mirroring the greater story of the novel. Therefore, the ‘realness’ of the love can be interpreted as referring to the love between Robin and Anthea as well. Robin’s comment can therefore be seen as a reaction to the idea expressed by Imogen that her sister will never know real love.

The idea that the sex between two women is not real, is also contradicted when Robin and Anthea talk about the story of Iphis and Ianthe. Robin tells how Iphis was mad at the Gods, because she had fallen in love with a girl, and now she wanted to marry her, but since she was a girl herself, she would never be able to pleasure her. Therefore she asked the Gods to make her into a boy:

I’m never, ever, ever going to be able to please my girl. And she’ll be mine, but never really mine. It’ll be like standing right in the middle of a stream, dying of thirst, with my hand full of water, but I won’t be able to drink it!

Why won’t she be able to drink it? I said.

Robin shrugged.

It’s just what she thinks at this point in the story, she said.

(...) [W]ith this story, well, he [Ovid - the writer of the story] can’t help being the Roman he is, he can’t help fixating on what it is that girls don’t have under their togas, and it’s him who can’t imagine what girls would ever do without one. (Smith 96 - 97)

Anthea’s question “why won’t she be able to drink it?” is answered by a shrug of the shoulders by Robin. The fact that Anthea asks this question, and that Robin does not have an answer, indicates that Anthea and Robin do not see why Iphis would necessarily have to be a boy to pleasure Ianthe. This is followed by Robin saying that it is the writer’s fault for focusing on the fact that women do not have a penis, and that it is because he cannot imagine what sexual acts could be performed without this organ, that in this story Iphis has to become a boy. In other words, they think it is not actually true that two women cannot have ‘real’ sex, it is simply what Iphis thinks in the story, because it was probably what Ovid thought when he wrote it. These remarks can be seen as a reaction to the phallogocentric ideas expressed by Imogen and her friends in the narration of Imogen.

The idea that two women cannot have 'real' sex is also contradicted in the narration of Anthea in another way. Anthea describes her and Robin having sex. The following quote shows in what way this is described:

Her beautiful head was down at my breast, she caught me between her teeth just once, she put the nip into nipple like the cub of a fox would, down we went, no wonder they call it an earth, it was loamy, it was good, it was what good meant, it was earthy, it was what earth meant, it was the underground of everything, the kind of soil that cleans things. Was that her tongue? Was that what they meant when they said flames had tongues? Was I melting? Would I melt? (Smith 102)

Although this description is not at all explicit, but instead very poetic, certain sexual acts can be read. First Anthea describes Robin biting her nipple, then she says 'down we went' and something happens with a tongue, so probably she is talking about oral sex. Anthea says 'it was good, it was what good meant', which indicates she found it pleasurable. This again can be seen as an argument against phallogocentric thinking, since it contradicts the idea that female sexual response is primarily related to phallic intercourse.

Another way in which the ideas of Imogen and her friends are contradicted, is that Imogen eventually realizes that she was mistaken in her beliefs about homosexuality. In the end she accepts her sister's sexuality, and dares to tell her friend Paul that Anthea and Robin are lovers instead of friends: "Robin is not her friend, I say. Robin's her other half. Right, Paul says" (Smith 136). This is something she would have never dared to say at the beginning of the novel, when she just found out about Robin and her sister.

To summarize, the heteronormative and phallogocentric ideas that caused Imogen and her friends to express homophobic ideas, are contradicted in the narration of Anthea. In addition, Imogen eventually realizes that she was mistaken in her ideas about homosexuality and comes to accept her sister's sexuality. At the end of the novel she even explicitly tells her friend Paul that Anthea and Robin are lovers instead of friends.

4.3 Countering Heteronormativity: Male and Female Gender Roles

Girl Meets Boy questions the standard division of gender roles. Anthea talks about how after her mother left, they were alone with their father. She explains that this caused problems, since their mother used to do all the things that women were supposed to do, such as washing and cleaning, and it was thought to be strange for a man to do such work. Imogen therefore took over, even though she was only seven years old. Anthea writes:

I thought about our father, out in the garden in the first days after she went, hanging out the washing. I thought about Midge [Imogen], seven years old, running downstairs to take over, to do it instead of him, because the neighbours were laughing to see a man at the washing line. Good girl, our father had said. (Smith 99)

This quote shows that doing the laundry is thought to be a woman's job. This is an example of socially constructed gender norms. By saying that 'the neighbours were laughing to see a man at the washing line' the novel shows that transgressing such social norms can be frowned upon by society.

Imogen is also the only woman working in a high position in Pure. When she talks about how much money she earns, she says:

Thirty-five thousand, very good money for my age, and for me being a girl, our dad says, which is a bit sexist of him, because gender is nothing to do with whether you are good at a job or not. It is nothing to do with me being a woman or not, the fact that I am the only woman on the Highland Pure Creative board of ten of us - it is because I am good at what I do. (Smith 57)

Imogen says that when it comes to jobs, gender does not influence the quality of your work. She feels that she works in such a high position because she is good at her job, but in reality it was probably because they needed a woman in the team. Even though she might actually be good at what she does, this was not the reason they chose her, neither is she appreciated because of this. When she is promoted, this is what her boss Keith says to her:

With your natural tact [...]. With your way with words. With your natural instinctual caring talent for turning an argument on its head. With your understanding of the politics of locale. With your ability to deal with media issues head-on. Most of all, with your style. And I am the first to admit right now we need a woman's touch on the team, ah, ah. We need that more than anything, and at Pure we will reward more than anything your ability to look good, look right, say the right thing, on camera if necessary, under all pressures, and take the flak like a man if anything goes pear-shaped. (Smith 120-121)

This quote makes clear that Imogen is chosen for this position because she is a girl, and they "need a woman's touch". The qualities that are adjusted to her are qualities that are traditionally appointed to women. Keith's expression that Imogen has "natural instinctual caring talent" confirms traditional representations in which women are represented as standing closer to nature and acting more instinctively. In addition, this remark also confirms the traditional idea that women are more caring persons than men are. These qualities, together with Keith's expression that she will be rewarded for

her good looks, seem to have little to do with the actual job. In addition, Keith expresses the idea that if anything goes wrong, she has to deal with these problems like a man would. In other words, according to Keith her 'womanly' qualities and/ or her ability to look good, will not help her when actual problems arise.

In addition, when Keith describes his 'dream vision', in which a man goes through the day using nothing but products produced by Pure, his ideas about male and female gender roles, become more clear:

So, when his wife turns on his tap to fill his coffee machine, the water that comes out of it is administered, tested and cleaned by Pure. When she puts his coffee in the filter and butters his toast, or chooses him an apple from the fruit bowl, each of these products will have been shipped by and bought at one of the outlets belonging to Pure. (...) When his wife changes the baby's diaper, it's replaced with one bought and packed by Pure Pharmaceuticals (...). When he slips the latest paperback into his briefcase, or when his wife thinks about what she'll be reading at her book group later that day, whatever it is has been published by one of the twelve imprints owned by Pure (...). (Smith 117-118).

This quote shows that Keith has certain ideas about the appropriate male and female gender roles. In the vision he describes the man works, while the woman stays at home, takes care of the baby, makes dinner for her man, etcetera.

Such ideas, about appropriate gender roles, can be described as *myths*. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes discusses cultural images and products to explain the difference between meaning and connotation. Using examples from advertising, he argues that myths are stereotypes that present cultural constructs as natural truths. These myths represent constructed ways of thinking and acting, created by conventions, as the natural way to act and think. In this way ideologies are created. According to Barthes, these ideologies can be exposed by analyzing such myths (Leezenberg 173). I discuss this here, because Robin and Anthea explicitly talk about myths:

I mean, do myths spring fully formed from the imagination and needs of a society, I [Anthea] said, as if they emerged from society's subconscious? Or are myths conscious creations by the various money-making forces? For instance, is advertising a new kind of myth-making? Do companies sell their water etc by telling us the right kind of persuasive myth? (Smith 89)

This is clearly a reference to the company Pure, because Pure sells bottled water, among other products. Important in this respect is that most of the ideas of appropriate gender roles that are expressed in the novel, are strongly linked with Pure, such as expressed in Keith's vision. When

Anthea and Robin talk about myths, Anthea says that she is lucky, because she “was born mytheless” (98). Robin answers: “Nobody grows up mytheless, it’s what we do with the myths we grow up with that matters” (Smith 98). In other words, cultural ideas, for example about appropriate gender roles, although strongly present in society, are not set in stone. It is one’s own responsibility what he or she does with such ideas.

In this respect, it is important that Anthea, Robin and eventually even Imogen turn against Pure. Anthea never really liked working at Pure, and never really agreed with the ideas expressed by the company. She meets Robin when Robin vandalizes one of the Pure Billboards. They fall in love, and start writing all sorts of statements on buildings and statues. All of these statements are feminist statements that have to do with woman rights. For example: “ALL ACROSS THE WORLD, WHERE WOMEN ARE DOING EXACTLY THE SAME WORK AS MEN, THEY’RE BEING PAID BETWEEN THIRTY TO FORTY PERCENT LESS. THAT’S NOT FAIR. THIS MUST CHANGE. Iphis and Ianthe the message boys 2007” (Smith 134). Eventually even Imogen turns against Pure. After Keith talked to her about the promotion, telling her about his dream vision for Pure, Imogen realizes that some of the things he says, she strongly disagrees with and thinks are unfair. Finally she decides to quit and when she tells her sister this she says “(...) [A]t Pure, everything’s wrong. Everything in the world. But you know this already” (Smith 144).

To conclude, *Girl Meets Boy* shows some of the standard ideas about appropriate male and female gender roles. In the novel, these ideas are strongly linked with the company Pure. Because both Anthea and Imogen eventually turn against Pure, the novel differs from these ideas, showing that these are not natural truths, but cultural constructs, which you can choose not to participate in. In this way the novel successfully disrupts normative assumptions about appropriate gender roles.

4.4 Countering Heteronormativity: Outside of the Binary

The novel *Girl Meets Boy*, does not only comment on standard gender roles, but actually tries to counter the binary opposition between male and female gender, mainly in the character of Robin. As I explained before, Robin is a name that can apply to both girls and boys. Even though Robin is anatomically a girl, her appearance can be quite boy-like. Anthea says about Robin: “He was the most beautiful boy I had ever seen in my life. But he looked really like a girl. She was the most beautiful boy I had ever seen in my life” (Smith 45). Later she says:

She had the swagger of a girl. She blushed like a boy. She had a girl’s toughness. She had a boy’s gentleness. She was as meaty as a girl. She was as graceful as a boy. She was brave and handsome and rough as a girl. She was pretty and delicate and dainty as a boy. She turned boys’ heads like a girl. She

turned girls' heads like a boy. She made love like a boy. She made love like a girl. She was so boyish it was girlish, so girlish it was boyish (...)" (Smith 84)

Hereby the novel argues against the binary opposition between man and woman, male and female. Anthea attributes qualities that are mostly seen as 'male', to Robin's femininity, and qualities that are mostly seen as 'female', to Robin's masculinity. Hereby the book comments on standard ideas of masculinity and femininity. Being 'graceful', or 'pretty' in this novel is considered masculine, while being 'handsome' and 'tough', is feminine. And by saying "She was so boyish it was girlish, so girlish it was boyish", the novel presents male and female gender not as binary oppositions, but as a circle: when you're very boyish, you become girlish, when you're very girlish, you become boyish.

When Robin tells Anthea the story of Iphis and Ianthe, they talk about why Iphis so desperately wanted to be a boy. When Robin tells how Iphis was screaming at the Gods saying: "I can't be a boy to my girl!", Anthea says: "But maybe her girl, what's her name, Ianthe, *wants* a girl (...). Clearly Iphis is exactly the kind of boy-girl or girl-boy she loves". Robin then says: "Well, yes. I agree (...). That's debatable. But it's not in the original story" (Smith 95). Because of the similarities between the story of Iphis and Ianthe, and Robin and Anthea, Anthea's remark that it is clear that Iphis is the kind of "boy girl or girl boy" Ianthe likes, can be interpreted as referring to Anthea's love for Robin as well. In other words, Anthea likes Robin for the boyish girl or girlish boy that she is, and she would not want Robin to change. In contrast to the story of Iphis and Ianthe, Robin does not change into a boy at the end of the story.

Robin is described as a boyish girl or girlish boy, but just like Anthea never calls herself or Robin lesbians, in addition, Robin is never explicitly given a label like transgender or genderqueer. Anthea and Robin simply do not care much for such labels. Imogen, on the other hand, is really concerned by calling things by the right name. Imogen says: "I am the one who knows the correct words, the right words for things" (Smith 76). When she does not know the correct word for Robin, this bothers her: "[W]hat's the correct word for it. I mean, for you? I need to know it. I need to know the proper word". Robin answers: "The proper word for me (...), is me" (Smith 76- 77). In other words, Robin chooses to be called neither a woman nor a man, neither does she label herself 'transgender', or 'genderqueer'.

However, it is not only in the character of Robin that the novel tries to counter the binary opposition between male and female gender. Anthea and Robin call themselves boys as well as girls. In addition, Anthea, when describing sexual intercourse with Robin, says:

I was a she was a he was a we were a girl and a girl and a boy and a boy, we were blades, were a knife that could cut through myth (...). We were all that, in the space of about ten minutes. Phew (...) both

genders, a whole new gender, no gender at all and God knows how many other things (...). (Smith 103 - 104)

This quote shows that in Anthea's experience it is not only Robin, but her too, who slides from male to female and back. Interestingly, she says here that they could "cut through myth", and that they were "both genders, a whole new gender, no gender at all", which indicates that she feels they could escape the binary opposite of 'male' versus 'female', which she thinks is a myth.

Conclusively, *Girl Meets Boy* successfully disrupts normative assumptions around sexuality and gender by countering the binary opposite between male and female gender, mainly in the character of Robin. Anthea attributes qualities that are mostly seen as 'male' to Robin's femininity and vice versa. Robin is described as a boyish girl or girlish boy, without having to pick a side. Male and female gender are not presented as opposites, but as a circle. In addition, Anthea and Robin call themselves boys as well as girls, and Anthea feels they can both escape the binary opposition between male and female gender.

5.0 Conclusion

In this essay I have presented two novels, *Out of the Shadows* by Sue Hines and *Girl Meets Boy* by Ali Smith. I have analyzed the way both novels discuss homophobia and misconceptions surrounding homosexuality. In addition, I have analyzed the way in which both novels counter normative assumptions around sexuality and gender.

To summarize, both novels discuss homophobic ideas and misconceptions surrounding homosexuality. I have argued that in showing all these different misconceptions, the novels recognize the problems society might have with homosexuality. In contrast to other LGBTQ young adult novels, they do not merely show these ideas, but actually comment on them and present other ways of thinking. In *Out of the Shadows*, when such an idea is presented, it is also directly commented on, because it is presented as a joke, or an example of the mistaken beliefs people have about homosexuals, it is called 'crap', or it is called a lie. Whenever characters express homophobic ideas, it is made obvious that they are in the wrong. In *Girl Meets Boy*, Imogen and her friends express many misconceptions in the narration of Imogen, many of which are contradicted in the narration of Anthea. Another way in which *Girl meets Boy* differs from these ideas is that Imogen eventually comes to realize that she was mistaken in her beliefs about homosexuality. At the end of the novel she accepts her sister's sexuality and dares to name this towards her friend Paul.

Both novels elaborate on the problem of homophobia. *Out of the Shadows* presents some characters who are outwardly homophobic, but the problem of homophobia is not reduced to these

characters alone. Instead, in both novels homophobia is presented as a complex social problem. The novels do not argue, however, that homophobic thinking is inescapable. Rowanna used to have homophobic ideas, but eventually came to terms with her mother's and Deb's sexuality. Correspondingly, Imogen eventually realizes she was mistaken in her beliefs about homosexuality. The novel shows that precisely because homophobic ideas are based on cultural constructs, it is possible to differ from them. In addition, *Girl Meets Boy* shows that homophobic ideas are based on heteronormativity and phallogocentric thinking, and comments on the influence of cultural representations of homosexuals in the media.

The novels both succeed in countering normative assumptions around sexuality and gender. *Out of the Shadows* does this by questioning the concept of 'normality', suggesting that what is most common is not necessarily what is normal, and that perhaps it is not possible to be 'normal' at all. This counters heteronormativity, because in heteronormativity, heterosexuality is seen as normal and natural, while homosexuality is seen as abnormal and unnatural. *Girl Meets Boy* also successfully disrupts normative assumptions around sexuality and gender. Firstly, by questioning the standard division of male and female gender roles. The novel shows cultural ideas about appropriate gender roles, but differs from these ideas and shows that these are cultural constructs, instead of natural truths. Secondly, the novel disrupts normative assumptions around sexuality and gender by disproving the binary opposition between male and female gender, mainly in the character of Robin.

In the introduction, I have argued that although in LGBTQ young adult novels since the 1990s it is not longer homosexuality, but in fact homophobia, that is presented as the major problem of the novel, it is still difficult to find positive, nonjudgmental young adult books with LGBTQ themes. I have argued that these books often promise to be accepting, to liberate the reader from narrow minded discourse, and to propose new ways of thinking, but that often these novels do not succeed in doing so. Often, these novels do show homophobic ideas and behaviors, but they do not successfully counter these ideas or present other ways of thinking. Instead they present homophobia as inevitable, or evoke cultural clichés. Also, these novels often do not successfully disrupt heteronormativity. In other words: heterosexuality is still presented as 'normal', and homosexuality as 'deviant'.

Out of the Shadows and *Boy Meets Boy* are different in this respect, because they both counter misconceptions around homosexuality, and normative assumptions around sexuality and gender. *Out of the Shadows* was published in 1998, and *Girl Meets Boy* in 2007. Together with *Boy meets Boy*, which was published in 2003, these novels can be seen as a development within the field of LGBTQ themed young adult novels. The other novels I gave examples from in this analyzes, do not show the same trend. Although these novels are representative for the field of LGBTQ young adult novels published in the last 15 years (apart from *Dance on my Grave*, which was published in 1982),

my research was necessarily limited. To say, therefore, whether *Out of the Shadows*, *Girl Meets Boy* and *Boy Meets Boy* do or do not reflect a larger change within the field of LGBTQ-themed young adult novels, more research is required.

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