Rethinking Feminism in Early Modern Studies is a volume of essays by leading scholars in the field of early modern studies on the history, present state, and future possibilities of feminist criticism and theory. It responds to current anxieties that feminist criticism is in a state of decline by attending to debates and differences that have emerged in light of ongoing scholarly discussions of race, affect, sexuality, and transnationalism-work that compels us continually to reassess our definitions of ‘women’ and gender. Rethinking Feminism demonstrates how studies of early modern literature, history, and culture can contribute to a reimagining of feminist aims, methods, and objects of study at this historical juncture.

While the scholars contributing to Rethinking Feminism have very different interests and methods, they are united in their conviction that early modern studies must be in dialogue with, and indeed contribute to, larger theoretical and political debates about gender, race, and sexuality, and to the relationship between these areas. To this end, the essays not only analyze literary texts and cultural practices to shed light on early modern ideology and politics, but also address metacritical questions of methodology and theory. Taken together, they show how a consciousness of the complexity of the past allows us to rethink the genealogies and historical stakes of current scholarly norms and debates.

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Women and Gender in the Early Modern World

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Anna Maria van Schurman,‘The Star of Utrecht’
Anne R. Larsen
To our mothers—
biological and academic—
with whom we have quarreled
and from whom we have learned.
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Acknowledgments

Completing this volume has been a long—even epic—process, complete with all the high drama that seems inevitably to accompany a feminist project. We are grateful to our contributors for sticking with us during this long journey, even as many of them faced difficulties of their own. We also offer sincerest thanks to Erika Gaffney, who has patiently and carefully moved the project through every stage with utmost efficiency and grace.

Funding from the University of Pennsylvania jump-started the conversations that led to this volume.

And, last but emphatically not least, Suvir Kaul and Chris Diffee (and Quincy Sanchez-Diffee, in his many small ways) provided the foundation of love and comfort that makes any project possible.
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Introduction: Why “Feminism”? Why Now?

Ania Loomba and Melissa E. Sanchez

_The Woman’s Part_, published in 1980, was one of the first anthologies of early modern feminist criticism. Despite the increase in women’s studies programs, feminist work in scholarly journals, and panels on feminism at academic conferences, feminist methods were still considered suspect within the wider academy. Given that many responses to feminist work were dismissive, if not hostile, it is unsurprising that the editors of _The Woman’s Part_ reveal a certain anxiety about their project in their assurance to the reader that although feminist criticism is “avowedly partisan” in favor of women, the essays to come “resist substituting new bias for old.” Reviews of this volume affirm that such anxiety is not unwarranted, complimenting it as they do for refraining from “feminist sabre rattling”; avoiding “both the alienating rhetoric of so much feminist criticism and, for the most part, the critical naïveté beyond its prescriptive admonitions”; and “gently, tactfully” critiquing gender inequality. During those years, it should be remembered, some of the smartest and most innovative feminist early modernists found it hard to survive within the academy, to get jobs and tenure, and to lead the institutions in which they worked.

Looking back at the early modern feminist work of the 1970s through the early 1990s, one cannot help but be struck by the urgency that critics bring to their analysis, seeing it as directly implicated in debates about political change and resistance; the effect of
reading protocols on feminist thought (and vice versa); the relationship between pleasure and ideology; the impact of feminism on pedagogy; and the proper object and parameters, indeed the very definition, of feminism.\(^3\) As with early second-wave feminism generally, feminism in early modern studies was indebted to Marxist thought, and early studies sought to understand the significance of social, economic, and familial structures to the formation of gender in the period. As New Historicist methodologies came to dominate early modern studies in the 1980s, however, feminist politics and methods were frequently challenged by charges of anachronism and skepticism about the possibilities of political resistance. This stance tended to encourage a view of the past as utterly foreign to the present, on the one hand, and to discourage the optimism and political engagement of earlier feminist critics, on the other.\(^4\) In Britain, the situation was somewhat different. Many feminists within the academy were dispirited by the crisis in higher education, and their own numbers among early modernists were diminished as a result of this crisis. In both places, and beyond, even if they retained their earlier commitment to change within and outside the academy, many feminists within the field turned away from explicitly feminist critique to other, often related, fields such as queer studies, affect studies, and race and postcolonial studies. These fields themselves developed both in close dialogue with, and critique of, earlier feminist work, a subject to which we return later. For the moment, the point we want to make is that the newer scholarship was, in many cases, not explicitly engaged with women or gender at all, even as many of its premises and methods were derived from feminism.

One key debate within foundational work in feminist criticism and theory—and one that is, we argue, far from settled—was over how to define “woman” in the first place. White second-wave feminists tended to see women as a coherent group united by their shared experience of patriarchal oppression, and some of these writers even expressed concern that attention to race and class would limit the reach of gender as an identitarian and analytic category capable of uniting all women. The work of black, lesbian, Third World, and postcolonial feminists countered, however, that in prioritizing gender over other identities and forms of oppression, scholars and activists failed to recognize how feminism, despite its longing for universal sisterhood, itself had reproduced racist, heterosexist, and imperialist hierarchies of knowledge and power. As Crystal Bartolovich’s and Richard

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Halpern’s chapters in this volume forcefully remind us, collectivity and universalism remain vital topics of analysis for scholars of gender, race, class, sexuality, and colonialism, particularly in early modern studies, where the issues of historical difference and change (or the lack thereof) compel us to reassess continually many of the modern identifications and taxonomies that we might otherwise take for granted.

Whereas feminists of color had questioned the appropriateness of gender as the sole lens for feminist work throughout the 1970s and 1980s, it was not until the 1990s that this question was asked within early modern English studies, where it was particularly hard to challenge the legacy of Eurocentrism. When Kim Hall suggested that to read race into the Renaissance is to try and find what supposedly “isn’t there,” she was extending a fundamental tenet of feminist methodology: the need to play detective among archives, to read absence as well as presence, and to look beyond the canon. Since Hall’s work appeared, feminists have taken up this challenge, and the chapters by Leah Marcus, Natasha Korda, Kimberley Anne Coles, Sujata Iyengar, and Bernadette Andrea in this volume attest to the valuable insights such methods provide into the symbiotic formation of aesthetic, gendered, racial, class, and colonial hierarchies in this period. These chapters also demonstrate quite forcefully the continued work that feminists must do to redefine the “Renaissance” and “early modern” more generally. For as Hall and others stressed, the archival challenge of such an enterprise was not the only, or even the central, problem. In addition to looking at new materials, feminist scholars must question the cultural capital of the vision of the Renaissance as unproblematically white and elite, a valuation that has shaped entrenched historical, literary, and cultural attitudes to the entire period. A Eurocentric understanding of the subject of feminism combined with the “high” cultural framing of “the Renaissance” contributed to a narrow understanding of gender relations in the period. Through the 1990s, such a position was systematically repudiated by a number of scholars who called for a reassessment not just of concepts such as “woman” and “family” but also of the methodologies that early modern feminists had dominantly deployed.

Such reassessment necessarily prompted spirited debate within the field. In a review of Women, “Race,” and Writing in the Early Modern Period, a collection of essays published in 1994 that urged early modern feminist scholarship to think beyond white feminism, Susan C. Staub noted that the essays “often seem at war with each other, an appropriate result for a study concerned with difference.” She observed that methodologically, race and gender could only be brought into conversation by moving away from a narrow disciplinary and even period emphasis, and putting early modern texts and culture into conversation with writings from other spaces and time periods. Feminist early modernists, especially those interested in questions of race and colonialism, employed and extended such methodologies, which were especially useful in looking at appropriation, pedagogy, and institution formation, as well as questions of dramatic, cinematic, and cultural performance. Two decades later, it is appropriate to take stock of these issues, as they remain quite current: during the fraught

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2008 US presidential campaign gender and race were pitted against each other in the media; the United States is currently in the midst of a national debate about state protection of and funding for reproductive rights, an issue that disproportionately affects economically disadvantaged women and women of color even as it threatens the sexual rights of all women; and numerous US colleges and universities are under investigation for their systematic silencing of rape survivors, even as conversations about the global prevalence of rape culture occupies the national media. In the Anglo-American academy, women of color are still a minority at all levels: undergraduate, graduate, and faculty. The absence of diversity is even more pronounced in the field of early modern studies, and faculty of color still can find our credentials and value as Shakespearians and early modernists challenged by students, by librarians in rare books rooms, by administrators, and by faculty.

Within the field of historical and literary inquiry, questions of racial, cultural, and global difference have often successfully transformed the dominant view of gender, at least theoretically. Numerous studies of the early modern period have sought to understand how early modern conceptions of gender and nascent ideologies of race informed and complicated one another. In historicizing the concept of race, early modern critics have contributed to a radical rethinking of modern political discourses and identitarian categories. But there remains a tendency to simply assert that these categories intersect, rather than to venture into spaces where they trouble each other.

In “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” an essay that remained a methodological touchstone for decades, Joan W. Scott argued that feminist critique rested on the insights that (1) gender is a constitutive element of all social relationships and (2) that gender is a primary way of signifying relations of power.7 We would like to suggest that feminist methods have been more successfully deployed in relation to the second point, at least when it comes to that complicated relation of gender and sexuality to questions of race, class, colonialism, and globality in early modern studies. We have read gender into the vocabularies of power, and located women as the crucial site on which other political relationships are enacted, but it has not always been possible to locate ways in which gender is also constitutive of racial and economic forms of privilege and hierarchy. For example, in that pioneering essay, Scott admitted that political history has been the stronghold of resistance to the inclusion of material—or even questions—about women and gender. That is even truer of studies of global relations in the early modern world, despite the fact that the very language in which these relations are enacted relies on gendered views of difference and power. When we analyze literature, religious texts, paintings, letters, even maps, we can see the operations of sexuality, gender, and racial discourses—but they are not easy to locate as a constitutive element of early modern global economies. Early modern global history has been the domain of world system theorists who have not taken into account questions of culture, or even politics; economists and economic historians also tend to overlook culture and politics, with the result that gender disappears as a constitutive category. Consequently, feminists have found it hard both to intervene in those debates and to use gender as a primary category of analysis even when they do intervene.8 In this


8 To take just one prominent example: Lisa Jardine’s Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance (New York: Norton, 1998) is not centrally concerned with gender, and marks a radical
volume, chapters by Bernadette Andrea and Kathryn Schwarz bring to our attention forms of female agency and resistance that demonstrate the centrality of gender to seemingly neutral economic and political histories. They thereby affirm feminism’s continued value to scholarly inquiry that would seem not to be primarily “about” women or gender.

The relationship between feminism and queer theory in early modern studies has been even more explicitly contentious than that between feminism and race and colonialism. Early queer critics charged that feminism was implicitly heteronormative in its focus on the effects of marriage and the family on gender identity, and they proposed that a full understanding of gendered and sexual oppression must include analysis of early modern concepts of sodomy, friendship, and other forms of same-sex eroticism. Feminists, in turn, pointed out that queer theory was implicitly masculinist and that its practitioners thereby failed to appreciate the specific force of misogyny and patriarchal order on women’s lives.

Such opposition need not be the case, of course, particularly since early and foundational queer studies of the early modern period borrowed many of the methods of feminist criticism, even as they focused primarily on male sexuality. Since the 1990s, studies of female same-sex desire by such scholars as Valerie Traub, Carla Freccero, Kathryn Schwarz, and others have helped to bridge this gap. But for the most part—as Coppélia Kahn’s overview, in this volume, of recent essays in *Shakespeare Quarterly* shows—feminism and queer theory have become increasingly separate in early modern studies despite their shared concerns with affect, gender identity, and the oppressiveness of sexual norms. To be sure, several recent studies of women and sexuality in the early modern period bring together feminist and queer methods of reading in practice, but they tend not to engage directly in the explicit methodological debates and theoretical confrontations that occupied earlier scholars. Along with Kahn’s chapter, Will Stockton’s contribution to this volume departure from her early and path-breaking feminist work in *Still Harping on Daughters* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983); feminists have not participated in any significant way in debates around early globalization, or they have not done so wearing their feminist hats.


demonstrates that such debates are far from settled, for under the pressure of combined feminist and queer analysis, even as orthodox a feminist topic as chastity is revealed to implicate ideological assumptions that can complicate many accepted definitions of “feminist” aims and perspectives.

Silence about the relationship between feminist and queer criticism, however, does not mean that the question is either settled or exhausted. Precisely because these fields of study have had such a tense, even competitive, relationship, continued dialogue between them has the potential to change and enrich both. Studies of nonnormative sexuality that do not address the issue of gender hierarchy, for instance, run the risk of reinscribing racial, social, and masculine privilege. This is a problem for studies of female as well as male same-sex relations. For many studies of female homoeroticism have attributed to female relations a utopian egalitarianism that overlooks the hierarchies between women and thereby ignores the extent to which women as well as men may benefit from economic and racial distinctions. At the same time, feminist work that idealizes what Laurie Shannon has called “homonormative” relationships fails to consider the wide range of early modern representations of female sexuality that is queer insofar as it pursues pleasure apart from love or procreation, including representations of promiscuity, bisexual desire, and same-sex rivalry and domination.14

The lack of a theoretical model sufficiently complex to do justice to women’s sexual experience and oppression is particularly problematic for discussions of early modern racial and colonial histories. If there is insufficient conversation between feminism and queer studies, there is even less between race and colonial studies and sexuality studies. The relationship between discourses of global travel, race and colonialism, and those of gender and sexuality, has been charted by individual critics of course, but there has been little explicit consideration of the methods that are used to do so. Numerous theorists from outside the early modern period have addressed the Eurocentric tendency of queer theory, but what are the implications of such a tendency within early modern studies? Why have the conversations between feminist and race studies insufficiently informed sexuality studies? Has class and the economy dropped out of the conversation between these different areas? It is only by reassessing the methodological conflicts as well as overlaps between studies of gender, race, class, and sexuality that we can begin to appreciate the pressures that these sometimes incompatible identifications exert on early modern texts and on modern feminist criticism. Because this subject warrants a fuller discussion that cannot be undertaken in the space of an introduction, we pursue it in a separate chapter within this volume.

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The chapters in Rethinking Feminism reflect upon the history, the present, and the futures of feminism in light of scholarly work of the last two decades on race, affect, sexuality, transnationalism, and posthumanism, work that destabilizes earlier definitions of “women”

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Introduction

and gender. In addition, anything we may think of as a feminist methodology has also been transformed by such a shift in feminist objects of analysis, as well as by feminist attention to editorial practice and textual transmission. And of course, at a broader level, today’s technological and global world has altered the nature of identitarian, political, economic, and intellectual investments. While the scholars contributing to *Rethinking Feminism* have very different interests and methods, they are united in their conviction that early modern studies must be in dialogue with, and indeed contribute to, larger theoretical and political debates about gender, race, and sexuality. To this end, all of the following chapters will not only analyze literary texts and cultural practices to shed light on early modern ideology and politics, but also to show how a consciousness of the complexity of the past allows us to rethink the genealogies and historical stakes of current scholarly norms and debates. The scholars included here have been deeply invested in the links between gendered, racial, and sexual categories of identity, but they are also interested in questions of methodology and theory.

*Rethinking Feminism* demonstrates that there is still much to be gained from a comparative and “intersectional” approach, even as this approach looks markedly different today than it did, say, a decade ago. But intersectionality, we should note, is not easy to achieve: thus, whereas Jonathan Goldberg’s landmark volume *Queering the Renaissance* brought together feminist and queer studies, its essays give virtually no thought to race. And whereas Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker’s important collection *Women, “Race,” and Writing in the Early Modern Period* insisted on the vital role of race in feminist studies, its essays, with the important exception of Carla Freccero’s on friendship and homophobia, pay scant attention to sexuality. Inevitably, some terms get privileged over others; as Loomba and Sanchez argue in Chapter 1, below, perhaps a comparative, rather than intersectional, analytic may better allow us to conceptualize the multiplicity—and even irreconcilability—of analytic and identitarian categories. We recognize the value of an intersectional, or “convergentist” approach that argues that theories of oppression must converge because all are linked and that conflict between different identities and loyalties are part of the ideology that sustains inequality. However, we also propose that an optimistic pursuit of unity must recognize the value of a strategic collectivity that remains conscious of difference and incommensurability. To this end, we argue for a comparative, or “divergentist” approach, one that maintains that theories of oppression must be diverse and autonomous to account for the specificity of each form of oppression and acknowledges that because there may be irresolvable conflicts between different identities and loyalties, any single theory will privilege some and marginalize others.

Accordingly, the chapters included here do more than demonstrate a fuller and more inclusive intersectionality, though as a group they certainly strive for such consciousness. Together, the chapters in this volume also allow us to ask: does intersectionality itself assume a certain stability of, and separation between, the categories (the “sections”)?

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involved? If gendered, racial, and sexual categories of identity are themselves destabilized by religion, nationalism, material culture, and class structure, then what does it mean to try to bring them together? Material conditions and class positions of writers, whether women or men, shape not only their understandings of gender, race, and sexuality, but also their very access to cultural production. We know that the force of patriarchal privilege and homosociality in the early modern world shaped aesthetic as well as political activity. Such privilege may well also have shaped the modern development of scholarship on gender and sexuality, and indeed on power in general. But in using “women” and “gender” as topics of analysis do we end up re-inscribing such bias? How do—or can—these historical and material dimensions of gendered experience be reconciled with the universalizing discourses of psychoanalysis or religion that have also shaped modern critical practices? Does a critic attentive to all these issues necessarily call herself a feminist? What are the areas that mark the limits of feminism, or those that display productive debates within it? We have noted earlier that in its early days as a field of study, feminist theory and criticism was defined by debate rather than consensus. We believe that it is by continually challenging ourselves to think carefully and honestly about the logics, investments, and methodologies that we bring to our analysis that feminists can think about the future of any field to which they contribute. Accordingly, Rethinking Feminism seeks to raise vital methodological and conceptual questions by bringing together divergent and self-reflexive voices and positions.

This volume opens with three chapters discussing the importance of history to feminist work. Feminist histories, these chapters show, must include the history of feminist theory, method, and politics as well as the more conventional “history” of the past that feminism illuminates. In Chapter 1, Ania Loomba and Melissa E. Sanchez consider how the question of historicism has been differently debated within scholarship on gender, sexuality, colonialism, and race. They discuss some productive ways in which scholarship on these four areas (which are sometimes treated as too distinct, and sometimes simply collapsed into one another) can have a productive dialogue. One, they suggest, is for early modern studies to engage with current feminist scholarship on the non-Western world, which has offered new ways of thinking about gender and sexuality. Another is by re-examining the chronologies offered by Foucault, which have had different implications for the study of sexuality and for work on race. Loomba and Sanchez propose that rather than pursue an intersectional method of analysis that will fully or coherently account for overlapping and often contradictory racial, sexual, economic, and gendered identifications—which are themselves shaped by historically and geographically specific situations—feminist critics must embrace rather than avoid the debate and self-critique that shaped the field from the start and has kept it vital for four decades. Focusing more specifically on the disciplinary and institutional trajectories of feminism, chapters by Coppélia Kahn and Diana Henderson reflect upon earlier moments in their careers to highlight both what feminism has achieved and the work that remains. In Chapter 8, Coppélia Kahn revisits the debates between queer and feminist criticism that are also touched upon by other essays in the volume, in order to consider “the potential for rapprochement” between them. Acknowledging that many feminists of her generation were “unthinkingly liberal and identitarian,” Kahn charts the ways in which the deconstruction of identity changed feminist methodologies of literary
critique. However, Kahn also reminds us that endless deconstruction of identity can impede the possibility of a politically engaged analysis. To this end, Kahn engages with early modern queer criticism’s turn to “unhistoricism,” noting that many of the essays in *Shakesqueer*, a recent volume that ostensibly challenges historicist methods, in fact do not turn their back upon history but instead offer new ways of conceptualizing past experiences and expressions of gender and sexuality. In Chapter 9, Diana Henderson recalls how important it was for her as a graduate student to listen to early modernist feminists who challenged and extended feminist theory by invoking “historical specificity, subtle reading and distance.” She then recounts the years that followed, during which feminists pioneered key curricular changes and institutional practices and yet continued to be discriminated against. Henderson discusses several recent tendencies that challenge, and erase, the achievements and struggles of earlier feminists. These include the tendency to simultaneously evoke gender and deny its social and political effects; the conservative underpinnings of “the ‘cutting edge’ ‘new knowledge’ paradigm of achievement that drives the neoliberal corporate academy” and has led to an increasing division between adjunct and tenured faculty in terms of both income and prestige; the effacement of feminist scholarship and pedagogy in the new virtual or “flipped classroom”; and the gendered effects of the crisis in the higher education more generally. Both Kahn and Henderson pay a tribute to the feminist solidarities that were crucial not just in terms of ideas, but also in terms of institutional practice.

The essays in Section II turn to questions of feminist methods and influences, and particularly to the intersections of gender, race, class, and material history. In Chapter 4, Crystal Bartolovich argues that what has been seen as a “crisis” in feminism is part of a larger problem for social justice movements that depend on collectivity and solidarity, of which both liberal and libertarianism individualist discourse are suspicious. Bartolovich critiques a literary critical method that extracts individual characters from their socioeconomic contexts and thereby erases the structural causes of inequality and injustice, and she proposes instead a Marxist mode of reading that takes account of the structural and collective dimensions of gendered as well as class hierarchy. Offering an analysis of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* as an example of feminist reading that focuses on the revolutionary possibilities of collective rather than individual resistance, Bartolovich points to the methodological as well as political work that academic feminism has yet to do. In Chapter 5, Natasha Korda further draws our attention to the intersection of gender and class. Here, Korda examines another historical and methodological dimension of early modern feminist work: the study of material history. Tracing the historical circumstance of the association of material and economic history with domestic, particular, menial, and feminine concerns of little of interest to a masculine, universal intellect, Korda demonstrates that attention to seemingly ephemeral and decidedly nonelite archival materials such as laundry bills can allow feminists to theorize more specifically the economic and material conditions that shape women’s lives. Leah S. Marcus also demonstrates the importance of material history for feminist studies of race and empire in Chapter 6. As Marcus observes, because the establishment of Shakespeare as the exemplar of English literature developed alongside the consolidation of the British Empire, the editorial history of the plays is also implicated in the justification of racial and gendered hierarchies. Rather than accept modern versions of Shakespeare as disinterested expressions of the pursuit of accuracy or original intent, a feminist method of reading must be attentive to the “subtle but pervasive
Ania Loomba and Melissa E. Sanchez

misogyny and racism” that continue to inhabit editorial practice. Taking the significant differences between the quarto and folio versions of Othello as her example, Marcus shows how a desire for standardization may mask the ideological conflicts encoded in textual variants.

The essays in Section III offer three different ways of rethinking feminist analyses of the body as well as the presence of women as historical agents and producers of literature and art. New historicist scholarship has attended to the “discourse of gender” in imperial travel but largely overlooked the implications of this discourse for real women. In Chapter 7, Bernadette Andrea meditates on the place of women in English overseas ventures and the difficulty the feminist critic faces in making them visible. Andrea focuses on women who were abducted from Central Asia and North America and taken to England as gifts to Queen Elizabeth. Amplifying their involuntary yet distinct presence, Andrea demonstrates how we can read against the grain of the archives to discover gendered and racialized bodies that we have often assumed “weren’t there” (to recall the title of Kim Hall’s pioneering essay upon black presence in the archives and literature). To attend to the presence of these “gendered subalterns” is also to record the agency and resistance they practiced, a scholarly practice that compels us to revise our larger histories of early imperial and colonial projects. In Chapter 8, Kimberly Anne Coles looks at a play that has been very important for feminist critics: Elizabeth Carey’s Tragedy of Mariam, one of the few early modern dramas written by a woman. Coles engages with ongoing discussions about how discourses of “race” in the period involved skin color, religion, lineage, and rank, all of which were expressed through the language of humoral disposition, or “blood.” One of the most contentious subject in histories of race is the connections between inner and outer being; Coles’s analysis of the play sheds light upon this topic by examining how medical, political, and literary writings of the period drew upon older discourses of rank and blood to indicate how moral disposition was expressed through bodily difference. Coles thereby reminds us of the payoff of strategically isolating particular aspects of women’s identity in order to uncover differences as well as similarities in the gendered experiences of the past. Sujata Iyengar, in Chapter 9, turns to recent artistic representations of the female body to think about feminist method and the place of early modern literature in modern feminist cultural production. Noting that the figure of Ophelia “appears in women’s art all over the world, including in non-Anglophone countries, as an instantly recognizable icon, the subject, for example, of exhibitions in Kerala in 2007, Amsterdam in 2008, Hong Kong in 2012,” Iyengar shows how some female artists from the 1970s to the present trouble earlier representations of Ophelia as an object and depict her instead “as self-creating artist, not just as artifact.” Iyengar herself uses some of the insights gleaned from these representations to challenge older feminist readings of Gertrude as a figure complicit in Ophelia’s death, an observer whose passivity made her culpable, suggesting instead that her gaze upon Ophelia is neither passive nor hostile, but “directs us to feminism”—and particularly to women’s work as artists and creators.

The chapters in the fourth and final section of Rethinking Feminism focus in various ways on a problem that has long been central to studies of racial, gendered, and sexual injustice and violence—that of agency. Chapter 10, by Richard Halpern, begins by noting that feminist scholarship has long been caught up in the potential contradictions between historicizing gender and sex, and drawing upon theories that employ a more universalizing
language, such as the one used by psychoanalysis. This tension between historicizing and universalizing methods of analysis has been the subject of longstanding debates that are revived by the recent turn in early modern studies to religion and political theology. In reading Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* with Freud’s formulation of the Oedipus Complex, Halpern proposes that either offer a sexual universalism, or “gospel of sex,” that complicate but cannot fully erase distinctions between Jew and gentile and male and female. These “failed universals” are critically productive insofar as they compel feminists to keep in tension the impulses toward universalizing and particularizing analytic optics—neither, Halpern insists, is sufficient in itself—and thereby to remain mindful of the ethical implications of the scholarly work we do. In Chapter 11, Will Stockton considers the ethics of another form of historicized reading, that of the analysis of early modern and modern views of chastity. Situating the current critical consensus that Desdemona is absolutely faithful to her husband in the context of early modern definitions of chastity as not only physical but affective fidelity, Stockton argues that the very insistence on the “truth” of female chastity itself partakes in the same antifeminist standards by which Othello, Iago, and early Shakespeare critics evaluate Desdemona. Rather than defend Desdemona’s virtue, Stockton argues, feminists must defend women’s right to freedom from violence—even, or especially, when they do not live up to normative ideals of sexual behavior. Concluding the discussion of the contradictions and pitfalls of an idealization of agency, Kathryn Schwarz explores the ethical and methodological implications of exemplarity in Chapter 12. Examining the dramatic representation and critical response to female death, Schwarz proposes that the centrality of sexual virtue in these accounts troubles our ability to account for volition across time. Schwarz’s discussion of a series of women whose chastity as well as deaths have become exemplars of larger feminist concerns with truth, agency, and political efficacy—Desdemona, Lucretia, Lavinia, Joan of Arc—forcefully reminds us that “iconicity is a sacrificial scheme.” She thereby argues that a more ethical, and feminist, method of reading would accept the opacity and uncertainty of past performances of virtue and subjectivity.

The volume concludes with an Afterword by Valerie Traub, who examines the political and methodological implications of the chapters’ always innovative but not fully reconcilable arguments. Traub’s response to the volume provides a fitting conclusion to the book insofar as it takes us at our word when we call for continued debate and self-consciousness. Indeed, upon reading we were tempted to return to this Introduction and our chapter in order to refine our formulations and respond to Traub’s critiques, and to offer our contributors the chance to do the same. However, we recognized that such exchange could extend discussion and defer publication indefinitely. While such discussion would certainly be worthwhile for contributors and readers of this volume alike, we instead determined that the intellectually responsible course was in fact to publish the chapters and response as it was at the particular date the volume was due to go to press. For, as many of us who have published our work know all too well, there is no such thing as a perfect, unassailable argument. We ourselves may fail to state our claims or define our premises with the precision we intended; our readers may overlook or misinterpret key aspects of our argument. As we have hoped to make clear, feminism remains vital precisely when we push one another to think, write, read, and respond more carefully. It is in this spirit that we began this project, and we are grateful to Traub for explicitly challenging us, and our readers, to continue in this work.
The value of *Rethinking Feminism* lies partly in fact that its authors do not necessarily agree about the methods and parameters of feminist inquiry, but demonstrate a variety of ways in which we can engage with “feminism” both methodologically and politically. These collectively demonstrate that to rethink feminism at this historical moment in the Anglo-American academy is not to rethink our commitment to it, or to second-guess its relevance. Rather, it is to recognize that its value to our intellectual, institutional, and political lives comes from the debates that have marked its history and continue to shape it today. Far from being exhausted or over, feminism remains alive and kicking, and our collective commitment to rethinking its contours confirms its continued vitality.
SECTION I
Histories
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For the last decade or so, there has been a consensus in the United States that feminism is in trouble. Beginning in the early 1990s, feminist writing both within and beyond academia rang the alarm that feminism was under assault. Yet whereas popular works such as Susan Faludi’s *Backlash* (1991) located the danger outside feminism, in the cultural and political changes of the Reagan–Bush era, academic feminists constructed a more troubling narrative of an enemy within. Depending on who was offering this diagnosis, the identity of feminism’s adversary might be particular strains of feminism (all had their detractors); the limitations of feminism and “women’s studies” as such; and the trendiness or success of academic feminism. During this time, monographs, essays, special journal issues, and edited volumes expressed concern with the fate of feminism in the American academy.¹

This literature is too complex and copious to do justice to in the space of a single essay, but we give here a few of the more prominent (and polemical) examples. For a number of feminists who had been at the vanguard of feminism’s institutionalization in the Anglo-American academy, the unity and optimism of early feminism had been weakened by the conceptual challenges and rhetorical strategies of black, third-world, postcolonial, lesbian, woman-of-color, and poststructuralist feminists. Susan Gubar’s “What Ails Feminist Criticism?” (initially titled “Who Killed Feminist Criticism?”) lamented that “[s]elf-reflexive theorizing about criticism undermined the term women upon which feminist literary practice previously depended.” More specifically, Gubar contended, the attention to differences and inequalities among women on the part of women of color and poststructuralist feminists had produced a rhetoric of “election, abjection, and obscurantism” that “contributed to an atmosphere of censorship that silences or polices our feminist debates” and caused “white

feminists” to feel “beleaguered.” Gubar diagnosed this ailment as “a bad case of critical anorexia, for racialized identity politics made the word women slim down to stand only for a very particularized kind of woman, whereas poststructuralists obliged the term to disappear altogether.”

In response to such charges, other feminists argued that feminism’s very aspiration to such unity had been illusory and that the source of its demise could be found in its inability to address the multiple and possibly irreconcilable identities and identifications it sought to contain, much less live up to the promises of its most utopian aspirations. Wendy Brown, for instance, suggested that women’s studies programs may themselves be founded on impossibility, while Robyn Wiegman traced the “idiom of failure” in feminist self-assessment to feminism’s “critical claim” that critique of injustice would itself be a form of rectification, and Janet Halley proposed that the complexity of sexuality could be approached only by taking a break from feminism altogether. Others postulated that feminism’s ascendancy within the academy might have contributed to its crisis. For Sharon Marcus, feminism’s “success is the very sign of its failure, an indication that it has lost the renegade dynamism of its early days as an upstart outsider in the academy and declined into yet another stale paradigm on the verge of obsolescence.” Phyllis Rackin similarly laments the decreased prestige of feminism following its heyday in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but she attributes its seeming decline to intellectual impoverishment growing out of an instrumental, rather than sincere, engagement with feminist methods of reading. When writing about gender “started to look like a good career move,” Rackin shrewdly argues, the result was that “feminist studies were adopted as a conceptual tool by women and

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men without a serious political commitment to feminist political agendas.”⁵ We agree that
trendiness can be a curse, and we share Rackin’s distress that the acceptance of feminism
as politically correct has detracted from the continued urgency of its scholarly and political
pursuit. Yet to read this body of literature, one would have to believe that feminism
indeed needed to be rescued—from feminists, from itself, from academic trends and their
pernicious effects.

We want to rethink this narrative of crisis and obsolescence and to propose instead
not only that feminism has continued to thrive since the 1990s but also that there remains
much vital work to be done in feminist criticism. In making this argument we engage with
“history” in three ways: first, we indicate some landmark moments and issues in the history
of feminism; second, we discuss the place of historiography and temporality in current
debates about gender and sexuality; and third, we highlight some tensions and possibilities
in juxtaposing the histories of race and colonialism with those of gender and sexuality.
We do not wish to privilege these analytical categories above others such as class, with
which they are organically connected; however, just as during the 1970s and 1980s, the
relationship between Marxism and feminism was especially important, we think that today,
debates around sexuality, race, and colonialism (each of them deeply implicated in issues
of class) allow us to highlight some particularly pertinent issues in both feminist and early
modern studies.

Even as feminism has been declared moribund, work often read under the rubrics of
postcolonial, critical race, queer, and affect studies has continued to engage explicitly and
substantially with feminism: just a few titles published in the United States include Elizabeth
Freeman’s *Time Binds* (2010); Judith/Jack Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity* (1998), and
*The Queer Art of Failure* (2008); Sianne Ngai’s *Ugly Feelings* (2007); Sara Ahmed’s *The
Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) and *The Promise of Happiness* (2010); Grace Kyungwon
Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson’s collection *Strange Affinities* (2011); Anjali Arondekar’s
*For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (2009); Kathryn Babayan
and Afshanah Najmabadi’s collection *Islamicate Sexualities* (2008); and Annamarie Jagose’s
*Orgasmology* (2013). As this list—which could be considerably longer—demonstrates, far
from limping along as a tired paradigm endorsed by only a few unfashionable academic
wallflowers, feminist criticism and theory has remained a vital and central part of intellectual
and political debate.

So why the persistent and largely unquestioned narrative of crisis? As Robyn Wiegman
argues in a rebuttal published alongside Gubar’s “What Ails Feminist Criticism?,” such
a narrative bespeaks discomfort with the difference and contestation that has been part
of feminist discourse at least since the early days of second-wave US feminism. In other
words, anxiety about crisis may have derived less from any actual demise of feminist
criticism and more from a desire to preserve a certain version of feminism: the white,
straight, liberal, middle-class version championed by Gubar. In point of fact, the critiques
and retheorizations of the categories of “women” and “feminism” offered by black, woman-
of-color, lesbian, postcolonial, and poststructuralist feminists within the United States didn’t
argue that feminism was over but instead suggested that in order to succeed, its aims and

⁵ Rackin, “Dated and Outdated: The Present Tense of Feminist Shakespeare Criticism,”
in *Presentism, Gender, and Sexuality in Shakespeare*, ed. Evelyn Gajowski (New York: Palgrave
assumptions needed to be held up to continual scrutiny. Outside of the United States, too, feminists have consistently reassessed their earlier positions and argued that the health of their movement depends on consistent self-critique. Third world and postcolonial feminists have worried that their own earlier assumptions, even if different from those of Western feminists, have also ignored crucial aspects of difference—those of “sexual subalterns” and of women from marginalized races, castes, and classes. They too have examined how remaining within a liberal discourse of rights has made them unable to rise to the challenge of increasing religious fundamentalism, on the one hand, and to the co-optation of feminism by the state and NGOs, on the other. These reassessments have not spelt, for them, the death of feminism, but a renewed need for it.

Within the Western academy, to claim that a liberal, universalizing view of feminism and women was the harmonic and pure origin of academic feminism is itself to erase the voices of lesbian and woman-of-color feminists who were also there from the start. For, as Wiegman observes, Gubar cites as part of 1970s academic feminism Adrienne Rich, Toni Cade Bambara, Angela Davis, Barbara Christian, Tillie Olsen, and Mary Helen Washington, all of whose work emphasized differences of race, class, and sexuality and therefore challenged what Gubar celebrates as the “exuberant universalizing so common in the late seventies.” Rather than acknowledge the “ongoing and always present critique of feminism’s universalization of white women as woman,” Wiegman charges, Gubar describes this work as a “subtradition” and thereby “construct[s] a seemingly multicultural list of scholars for the first and second stages without articulating the critical or political intervention of their work, which more than supersedes the recovery of a generic woman.” As Wiegman further argues, “a more powerful interpretation would herald academic feminism’s encounter with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nationality as a critical reason it continues to exist. To read academic feminism this way means forfeiting the Edenic narrative and citing the multiple histories of struggle by, for, and among women as necessary to the vitality of feminist critique.”

Suggesting one model by which to engage the multiple histories of feminist thought, Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson trace queer of color critique not to early gay and lesbian theory, but rather to women of color feminism insofar as both queer and woman of color writing offer “comparative analytics rather than descriptions of identity categories.” Women of color feminism and queer of color critique therefore offer “a blueprint for coalition around contemporary struggles” in that their “mobilization of difference” was meant “not to erase the differentials of power, value, and social death within and among groups, as in a multiculturalist model, but to highlight such differentials and to attempt to

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7 Gubar, “What Ails Feminist Criticism?” 883 n. 8.

8 Wiegman, “What Ails Feminist Criticism?”, 369, 370. Wiegman develops this argument in detail in Object Lessons (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), where she argues that a narrative that sees feminism as having been (rightly) superseded by “gender studies” and “queer theory” obscures the complexity that has characterized academic feminism from its earliest days.
do the vexed work of forging a coalition of politics through these differences.” In privileging analytics over identities, the “strange affinities” traced in Hong and Ferguson’s volume present an alternative to what Robyn Wiegman describes as “the demand of intersectional analysis, which calls for scholars in identity studies to offer cogent and full accounts of identity’s inherent multiplicity in ways that can exact specificity about human experience without reproducing exclusion.”

We propose that “identity’s inherent multiplicity” becomes particularly striking when gendered, racial, and sexual categories are situated in a temporal frame that precedes modernity. Pursuing what Valerie Traub has described as the “simultaneously feminist and queer goal” to “render adequately the complexity and alterity of early modern sexuality,” scholars studying past discourses of gender, race, and sexuality have shown that modern analytic categories are neither essential nor transhistorical. Rather, early modern understandings of these categories were shaped through global contact. We further propose that insofar as it makes gender an essential category of historical analysis, feminism continues to be necessary and vital to early modern studies. Part of the continued work of feminists, we further propose, must be a consideration of methodological, ethical, and theoretical assumptions. Whereas in recent decades the question of method has indeed, as Rackin observes, receded from view as an explicit object of debate in early modern studies, foundational feminist work in the field, like feminist criticism and theory more generally, was deeply concerned with the question of what it meant to read as a feminist. This question was explicitly posed, and variously and contentiously answered, in work by Kathleen McCluskie, Carol Thomas Neely, Phyllis Rackin, Jean Howard, Patricia Parker, Ania Loomba, Lynda Bose, Coppélia Kahn, Ann Rosalind Jones, Kim Hall, Jonathan Dollimore, Dympna Callaghan, and Valerie Traub, among others. For the past decade or


so, however, explicit questions about feminist method and perspective have not garnered much attention in early modern scholarship. In editing this volume, it was our goal to reopen questions of method. How and why, we asked our contributors, do we study categories of gender, race, and sexuality in the past?

In our own attempt to think through this question, we want here to address the relations between those categories as, in Hong and Ferguson’s words, “comparative analytics” that have more often been treated separately. We begin by considering the relationship of gender to sexuality, and then we turn to that of race and sexuality. We propose that to think all three analytics together continues to present a challenge and is therefore all the more urgent to a feminist project of drawing on knowledge of the past, both as an end in itself and as a means of gaining perspective on the present. At the same time, we recognize, with Hong and Ferguson, that “identity’s inherent multiplicity” resists the “cogent and full accounts” promised by intersectional analysis. We offer instead a description of the relationship of analytic categories that must be thought together not because they seamlessly intersect or merge, nor because they are mutually supportive or analogous. Rather, it is precisely because analytics of race, gender, and sexuality resist the ideals of universality and coherence celebrated by multiculturalism that they must not be studied in isolation from one another nor marginalized as special interest topics relevant only to limited constituencies.

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A debate between feminism and queer theory is evident in early modern studies, as in academic discourse more widely. The emergence of the field now known as queer theory was accompanied by the speculation that feminism might be incapable of responding to the intricacies of sexual desire, practice, and identification. Gayle Rubin contested the “assumption that feminism is or should be the privileged site of a theory of sexuality,” contending instead that “Feminism is the theory of gender oppression. To automatically assume that this makes it the theory of sexual oppression is to fail to distinguish between gender, on the one hand,
and erotic desire, on the other.” While she continued to recognize that “because sexuality is the nexus of relations between genders, much of the oppression of women is borne by, mediated through, and constituted within sexuality,” Rubin nonetheless departed explicitly from her earlier formulation of the sex/gender system: “In contrast to my perspective in ‘The Traffic in Women,’ I am now arguing that it is essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to more accurately reflect their separate social existence.” Similarly, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s oft-quoted Axiom 2 in Epistemology of the Closet states that: “The study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender; correspondingly, antihomophobic inquiry is not coextensive with feminist inquiry. But we can’t know in advance how they will be different.” Observing that the “distinctly sexual nature of human sexuality has to do with its excess over and potential difference from bare choreographies of procreation,” Sedgwick warned that “a damaging bias toward heterosocial and heterosexist assumptions inheres unavoidably in the very concept of gender.” This alignment of feminism with the study of gender, the “bare choreographies of procreation,” and “heterosocial and heterosexist assumptions” suggested precisely the supersessionist relationship between feminism and “antihomophobic inquiry” that Sedgwick rejected in terms of historiography in Axiom 5: “The historical search for a Great Paradigm Shift may obscure the present conditions of sexual identity.” In other words, by this reasoning even if sexual acts had not been superseded by sexual identities, the insights of feminism had gone as far as they could, at least in the realm of sexuality. They now needed to be supplemented by a form of inquiry that did not focus only on gender, which in Sedgwick’s terms must always be focused on the cross-sex relations and oppressions that inhere in female reproductive capacity, and that are therefore always heterosexist.

This separation has taken several forms in early modern studies. First, “queer” and “feminist” work has often described itself in oppositional terms, with queer scholars accusing feminists of being homophobic and heteronormative and feminists accusing queer scholars of misogyny and blindness to male privilege. Second, “queer” and “feminist” critics have simply talked past each other, assuming that they are separate subjects. Third, and most recently, the relationship between queer theory and the history of sexuality has

16 One instance of this can be seen in two recent early modern volumes of essays: Dympna Callaghan’s The Impact of Feminism makes no mention of queer scholarship, while Madhavi Menon’s Menon, “Introduction: Queer Shakes,” Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare, ed. Madhavi Menon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 1–27; does not mention feminism’s place in the foundation of queer theory. There have been important exceptions: in the last decade, work by Valerie Traub, Carla Freccero, Julie Crawford, and Kathryn Schwarz explicitly situated itself as both feminist and queer, and these and other scholars demonstrated the continued significance of feminism to both early modern and queer studies.
been a prominent source of debate, with the result that gender has been largely left out of the discussion. In light of these debates, we might hypothesize that the queer turn from historicism as well as feminism is an attempt to move out of the material and specific that both have (wrongly) come to represent. Indeed, what Biddy Martin says of feminism can also be said of historicism: “Conceptually, then, as well as politically, something called femininity becomes the tacit ground in relation to which other positions become figural and mobile.”17 We argue not only that gender is central to sexuality, but also that attentiveness to the particularity of the historical moments in which gender (along with racial and sexual identifications and categories) is constructed allows us to think more precisely about how identity operates—not as a description of some essential truth of a person, but as a social and political point of identification, mobilization, and limitation.

Foundational work on early modern sexuality drew on Foucault’s distinction between a premodern discursive regime in which sodomy was an “aberration” and a modern understanding of the “homosexual” as a “species,” “a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology.”18 This scholarship tended to focus on recovering instances of premodern same-sex desire, and thereby made legible the heteronormative assumptions of much feminist and historicist scholarship. Rather than deviations from accepted norms, this work demonstrated, same-sex desire was strikingly common in early modern culture and literature, even constitutive of political and social order.19 At the same time, studies of race, empire, and colonialism in the early modern period critiqued feminist criticism focused on “the family” by demonstrating the particularity of the model that was being treated as a universal and transhistorical source of female oppression—in other words, this feminist work offered an early challenge to what

17 Biddy Martin, “Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias,” Diacritics 24, no. 2/3 (1994): 119. More recently, see Annamarie Jagose’s “Feminism’s Queer Theory,” Feminism and Psychology 19, no. 2 (2009): 157–74, and Wiegman’s Object Lessons. Within early modern studies, see Traub: “My resistance to the growing trend to ignore, despecify, or dispatch gender in the name of queer is theoretically grounded in an appreciation of the multiple vectors (gender, sexuality, race, class) that historically have underpinned and crosshatched embodiment in sometimes congruent, sometimes incongruent ways. It also stems from a historical sense that queer studies misrecognizes its own conditions of emergence when it categorically rejects affiliation with feminism in the name of analytically separating sexuality from gender” (“New Unhistoricism,” 23).


Lee Edelman has more recently dubbed “reproductive futurism” emerged within debates about feminist interventions and analytic parameters.20

Whereas initial work on early modern identities tended to stress historical difference in order to demonstrate the inadequacy of modern categories to account for earlier experiences of desire and embodiment, in the past decade this focus on alterity has been questioned by scholars who have argued that treating the past as different from the present assumes a self-identity for the present and thereby, as Sedgwick put it in a different context, “risks reinforcing a dangerous consensus of knowingness about the genuinely unknown” intricacies of modern sexuality.21 Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon, for instance, have argued that “the challenge for queer Renaissance studies today is twofold: one, to resist mapping sexual difference onto chronological differences such that the difference between past and present becomes also the difference between sexual regimes; and two, to challenge the notion of a determinate and knowable identity, past and present.”22 In Unhistorical Shakespeare, Menon offers an even more pronounced opposition to studies of historical particularity, contending “the attempt to denaturalize sexuality and emphasize its difference across time has fixed sexuality in terms of hetero-time, and concludes that the history of sexuality is always the history of the difference between past and present.” Proposing that the “insistence on ‘proper’ history can only produce a sanitized version of desire that actively abjects the homo in order to assert the triumph of the hetero that historicism has deemed its fit and proper subject,” Menon recommends that in place of a “heterohistory” that “points to social conservatism,” we practice instead “homohistory” or “unhistoricism” that “shuns homophobia by refusing to ignore the incoherence of desire” and “withholds stability from sexuality present and past, emphasizing instead its anti-identitarian agenda.”23

For the most part, we applaud opposition to those who would police the boundaries of early modern studies in the name of historical “truth.” Richard Strier has rightly observed that “The cry of anachronism almost always serves a conservative picture of the past,” and work that refuses to be cowed by that cry has usefully refuted historicist critics who denied the relevance of modern theories of race, gender, and sexuality to early modern texts.24 We are concerned, however, that in Menon’s account difference and sameness too easily become little more than erotic concepts, with the effect that attention to differences of gender and race both from a universal, disembodied modern critic and among different early modern characters and persons become a sign of the hetero and therefore the normative and

21 Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet, 45.
23 Madhavi Menon, Unhistorical Shakespeare: Queer Theory in Shakespearean Literature and Film (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1, 12, 14, 22.
conservative mind. “Queer” readings of the past, in this rhetorical and logical system, are fundamentally at odds with studies of gender and race.

This position has not gone uncontested by other queer critics of early modernity. Valerie Traub, among others, has questioned the association of historical difference with heteronormativity and social conservatism. Traub argues that “Not every diachronic or chronological treatment of temporality needs to be normativizing, nor is every linear arc sexually ‘straight.’” Moreover, “to fail to specify the terms of queer’s historicity is to ignore desire’s emergence from distinct cultural and material arrangements of space and time, as well as from what psychoanalysis calls libidinal predicates. It is to celebrate the instability of queer by means of a false universalization of the normal.” In opposition to Menon’s unhistoricism or homohistory emphasizing identification, synchronicity, and anachronism, Traub insists instead on the continued importance of “a queer historicism dedicated to showing how categories, however mythic, phantasmic, and incoherent, came to be.”

More recently, historians as well as literary critics have turned attention to the role that fantasy plays in our assessment of the past. Expressing distress that gender has often been “treated as a known referent instead of a way to get at meanings that are neither literal nor transparent,” Joan Scott maintains that feminist readings of the past must recognize that “It is precisely the futile struggle to hold meaning in place that makes gender such an interesting historical object, one that includes not only regimes of truth about sex and sexuality, but also the fantasies and transgressions that refuse to be regulated or categorized. . . . From this perspective, fantasy becomes a critically useful tool for historical analysis.” Turning to specifically literary representations of gender and eroticism, Traub argues that “how we access and produce the history of sexuality is as important as what we discover about prior organizations of erotic desire; that sex, like gender, is best approached as a flexible and capacious category of analysis (rather than a delimited or fixed object of study); and that methods used to write the history of sexuality—that is, historiography as practiced by both historians and literary critics—will benefit from sustained consideration of what it means to ‘know’ sex in the first place.” Examining the “opacities of eroticism,” Traub situates sexuality as an epistemological problem, with the result that her analysis focuses on “the synchronic contradictions of early modern knowledge relations, believing that it is by so doing that a diachronic history of thinking sex might become possible.” This means, for Traub, recognizing that empirical data become legible only through the histories through which we experience them. How we “know” what we are reading or seeing when we encounter artifacts of the past shifts the historiographical goal from one of uncovering facts to one of increasing consciousness of the interaction between scholar; object of study;


and available experiential, epistemological, methodological, and theoretical frameworks. Working in the same vein of estrangement, James M. Bromley and Will Stockton’s *Sex before Sex* begins with the premise that we have too easily presumed that we know what “sex” meant in early modernity. As the essays in this volume show, erotic acts, fantasies, and objects appear in early modern literary and cultural documents for which our modern taxonomies and vocabularies are inadequate to account. Finally, Carla Freccero has urged scholars of early modern gender, sexuality, and desire to “hesitate about the question of temporal propriety in relations among early modernity, queer theory, and subjectivity.” Because “history is lived as and through fantasy in the form of ideology,” Freccero argues, “reading historically may mean reading against what is conventionally referred to as history.” In other words, official legal, medical, political, religious, and economic records may exclude the lived experience of the past. Literature gives us access to this past, even as the different realities that it makes available reveal that what we can know of the past is perhaps inevitably partial and distorted.

To draw attention to the role of fantasy in critical approaches to the past almost inevitably means to evoke psychoanalysis. There is a rich body of scholarship discussing the place of psychoanalysis in early modern studies, and Traub notes that it has become “one of the more appealing trends in early modern queer criticism.” We agree that psychoanalytic concepts can be of great use in discussing the relationship of present to past, particularly insofar as it reminds us of our own projections and resistances. For, as Scott observes, “[w]hat psychoanalysis helps illuminate is the ultimate unknowability of sexual difference and the nature of the quest for knowledge of it, by way of fantasy, identification, and projection. The vertigo that ensues for the historian deprives her of the certainty of her categories of analysis and leaves her searching only for the right questions to ask.” We are especially drawn to Traub’s suggestion that we should think of the critic as analysand and early modern archives as the analyst, an inversion that allows us to appreciate that our studies of the past may tell us more about us than about it. And we appreciate the projects of the many queer theorists who have expressed the need to identify the “recursive eddies” and “back to the future loops that often pass undetected” in historicist work.

At the same time, we are mindful that, as Antonio Gramsci observes and as Homi Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty (among others) have also argued, such eddies and loops are a central feature of all ideologies, including those that are racial and colonial. Accordingly,

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32 Traub, *Thinking Sex*, 27.
scholars of race and psychoanalysis have also had to critique historicism and write history differently. Julia Reinhard Lupton argues that psychoanalysis enables us to move “beyond a contextualization” to understand how racial ideologies work “as fantasy,” and similar arguments have been made about identifying the work of sexual fantasy. Lupton, along with other scholars, usefully shows how psychoanalysis allows us to query some of the reductive protocols of crude historicism and its attendant fears of anachronism, so that we can appreciate resonances and continuities across time—as we discuss further below, such resistance to rigid historical chronologies can be especially helpful in the study of race. Particularly because literature registers not just bare empirical facts but experiential and fantasmatic responses to material conditions, it exceeds any simplistic effort at contextualization. However, attending to the apparently transhistorical manifestations of fantasy also enjoins us to think about why it apparently moves across time and space, for which we need to engage more deeply with both history and geography rather than to move “beyond” or above them. How do ideologies, fantasies, projections, narratives, and ideals emerge from the particular and concrete conditions that change over time? Why do some structures of feeling and fantasy persist while others change? Even if it is possible to imagine a transhistorical sexual impulse, that can hardly be the case for racial fantasies; that is why it is not as straightforward or appealing for scholars of race as for scholars of queerness to call for the abandonment of all distinctions between past and present. Even as scholars studying histories of race and global contact must find a method that can attend to the multiple forms taken by racial ideologies, they must also account for such ideologies within material and economic history, rather than solely within unchanging psychic structures.

Gender studies have also had to chart out ways of identifying the work of gender in space and time rather than across it. Both these fields have had to walk the tightrope between simultaneously deconstructing race and gender. This has meant showing that these categories exist only within social relations instead of prior to them, and at the same time, attending to their very real social effects. As Judith Butler has cautioned, if queer studies bypasses the difficulties of walking this tightrope, “a unitary ‘sex’ [will be] installed as the proper object of study.” Such an object of inquiry will necessarily be seen as unmarked by histories of colonialism and capitalism, isolated from the difficult questions raised by the

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formations of gender, race, class, and nationality. That is why the “hot topics” that Traub has identified in queer studies—“freeing” queer studies “from the tyranny of historicism,” taking “a break from feminism” and debating whether queer studies is “impervious to racial and class diversity”—are deeply interconnected. It is only by unyoking “desire” (queer or otherwise) from its troubling intersections with asymmetrical power relations that it can be celebrated as a transhistorical and inherently radical impulse.

We also think that it is important to take seriously the many critiques of psychoanalysis that have been advanced by scholars of race and colonialism, and by many feminists and queer critics as well. As has been widely discussed, Freud’s account of human sexuality was deeply implicated in the racial, colonialist, and developmental discourses of his time. The associations between European male adulthood, civilization, and rationality, on the one hand, and non-Europeans, children, primitivism, and madness, on the other, structured not just the theory but also the practice of psychoanalysis, especially as it intersected with colonial rule. In part because of this history, critical appropriations by both theorists and practitioners (including the Lacanian anticolonialist, Frantz Fanon) notwithstanding, it has been hard for psychoanalytically inflected scholarship to insert colonial histories and geographic difference into what Jacqueline Rose called the “two-way process between the field of psychoanalysis and politics.” If psychoanalysis can be made to speak with history (as Fanon and others have attempted), it can usefully illuminate the aspects of the past that do not fit into seamlessly coherent or logical narratives. But it when it is invoked to counter the need for contextualization, and offered as a blue-print for a universal subject, to dismiss the racial undertones of that universalization is to risk complicity with what Walter Benjamin memorably described as the “barbarism” of history’s master narratives. This question dovetails with some of the issues regarding debates about feminist and queer historicist practice that we have touched on our discussion of “homohistory” above.

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Feminist scholarship has been transformed by its engagement with issues of race, colonialism, and global contact, and Anjali Arondekar has suggested “the project of geopolitics in all its avatars has emerged to play a similarly redemptive role in the new formations of queer scholarship.” While we heartily agree with her goal, we worry that Arondekar’s assessment may be somewhat optimistic. There certainly have been many critiques of the complicity of US-based queer studies with neo-liberalism and with the “civilizing mission” of both the US state and many Western NGOs, along with thoughtful assessments of the implications of positing “desire” and “sexuality” as universal impulses detached from context. But such critiques also acknowledge that their task is far from

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over. And within early modern studies, the tendency of queer critique to detach itself from feminism and history has impeded its engagements with geopolitics, both with respect to the early modern period, and more generally with conversations in the larger field. This is not to suggest that there has been no dialogue between studies of race and studies of sexuality in early modern studies. Early modernists have engaged with the way in which ideologies of sexual desire (hetero- as well as homoerotic), ideal femininity, marriage, beauty, the body, family, and coupledom were deeply inflected and reshaped by travel writing, cross-cultural contact, the burgeoning slave trade, as well as older vocabularies of blackness and foreign-ness.43 Most of this work has been done by feminists and scholars of race and colonialism, and some by queer critics. Indeed, it is only by subscribing to the bifurcation between gender studies and sexuality studies, and the division of their “proper objects,” that the scholarship on the organic connections gender and race—the focus of so much early modern feminist scholarship—can be understood as being about gender but not about sexuality.

In incorporating racial and colonial histories into analysis of early modernity, we want to accentuate the complexity of the relationship between embodied experience, historical

pressures and norms, and critical analysis of both past and present. As we have argued above, Freccero and Traub offer useful models of reading insofar as they both emphasize the continued importance of gender. Resisting the reduction of feminism to a concern with reproductive sexuality and heterosexual oppression that Biddy Martin critiqued early on in the emergence of queer theory, for instance, Freccero reminds us that “for women at least, then and now, gender and sexuality are inextricable and coextensively constituted.”44 To this end, we might begin by questioning the status of “heterosexuality” as the normative construct shaping gendered as well as sexual relations, for such a presumption of normativity itself derives from a twentieth-century Western position. We propose that such an understanding is essential to rethinking what feminist studies of premodernity can (and should) bring to discussions of gender and sexuality more generally, but we also maintain that racial formations are “inextricable and coextensively constituted” with those of sexuality and gender.45 As we discuss further below, the very fact that Foucault could so nonchalantly distinguish a Western scientia sexualis from an Eastern ars erotica reminds us that histories of sexuality are also histories of racial, global, and gendered positionality and contact. As Michel de Certeau has argued, “historiography takes it for granted that the place where it is itself produced has the capacity to provide meaning. . . . In this respect, historical discourse, which is political in essence, takes the law of place for granted. It legitimizes a place, that of its production, by “including” others in a relation of filiation or of exteriority.”46 In other words, by overlooking the “law of place,” Foucault makes invisible the parochialism of a perspective in which the Western situation stands in for universality. As postcolonial historians such as Chakrabarty have shown, such parochialism can no longer be credited as History proper.47

Feminism in the Western academy has slowly and partially been dislodged from its parochial assumptions; queer scholarship and activism contributed to this process. But as Bruce Smith also warns us, “Critical movements may begin in polyglossia, but they tend to end in monologia.”48 Although our categories of analysis may carry urgency for us that make them appear both natural and inevitable, they are “subjective,” fashioned “to help us identify, organize and assess certain kinds of evidence of particular interest to us.”49 One of the consequences of pitting gender against sexuality, and of isolating race from either, is

44 Freccero, Queer/Early/Modern, 41. See also Martin, “Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias,” Traub, Thinking Sex, 23–42.


47 Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe.


that “race” and “sex” are understood as relevant only to bodies or behaviors categorized as transgressive or marginal, rather than as widespread principles of social organization that also define the normative. As Verena Stolcke has argued, “social and gender inequalities are constructed and legitimized by rooting them in the assumed biological ‘facts’ of race and sex differences;” so that the languages and operations of sexualized and racialized discourses are closely bound with those of class. Thus, even as we cannot conflate these different conceptual categories, we cannot understand the work they do if we isolate them from one another.

This is a point that has been made from the beginning of the emergence of queer studies, but which has been marginalized in work that has seen queerness as the opposite of identity—and thereby erases the particularity of racial and gendered embodiment from queer studies, as numerous critics have charged. As Judith Butler observed some years ago,

According to the logic of Rubin’s argument, it would be as wrong to claim that gender can only or best be understood in the context of class (as some Marxists have argued) as it would be to claim that sexuality can only or best be understood in the context of gender (as some feminists have argued). By extension, it would be equally fallacious to claim that sexuality is only or best understood in the context of lesbian and gay studies. Indeed, according to Rubin’s logic, sexuality is no more likely to receive a thorough analysis under the rubric of lesbian and gay studies than it is under that of feminist studies. Not only do central notions like the racialization of sexuality get dropped or domesticated as “instances” of either feminism or lesbian and gay studies, but the notion of sexual minorities, which include sex workers, transsexuals, and cross-generational partners, cannot be adequately approached through a framework of lesbian and gay studies.

It is productive to probe the dissonance between gender and sexuality, not with a view to carving up intellectual and political territories but precisely to locate the uneven ways in which they are articulated. If we take seriously Rubin’s argument that a “theory of gender oppression cannot also be the theory of sexual oppression,” that we should “distinguish

52 See Hong and Ferguson, Strange Affinities; José Esteban Muñoz, Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Judith/Jack Halberstam, The Queer Art of Failure (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). The most widely cited argument for queerness as that which refuses identification is Edelman’s No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive (2004), and this understanding of queerness has been taken up most forcefully within early modern studies by Menon, who describes queer theory as “All things that militate against the obvious, the settled, and the understood—in other words, nothing that may be fully or finally grasped,” “Introduction: Queer Shakes,” in Shakesqueer, 9.
between gender, on the one hand, and erotic desire, on the other,” then we must examine when and how gender identity may be formed apart from to sexual identity in the first place.54

It is feminist scholarship on the non-Western world that has attended to such a task most forcefully, extending and revising the implications of Joan Scott’s groundbreaking essay, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.” First published in 1986, Scott’s essay became globally influential because it so powerfully signaled the need to account for historical as well as geographical diversity in theorizing gender. It also opened up a conversation between literary critics and philosophers, for it proposed that interdisciplinary thinking would help in achieving “a refusal of the fixed and permanent quality of the binary opposition, a genuine deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference.” Scott dislodged the idea of gender binarism as anatomically grounded, arguing that “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relations of power.”55 Yet subsequent engagements with Scott’s essay indicated that such a task remained difficult for scholars working beyond a Western framework that assumes the primacy of gender difference. According to Jeanne Boydston,

This approach complicated the “sex/gender distinction” by deflecting analysis from the naturalized body to the perceived body, but this was a deflection, not a displacement, for perception now became the real subject. If perception is the ground of politics and if people perceive male and female bodies as gendered in a binary opposition . . . then we are left once again with a concept of gender as a natural oppositional binary: gender is as much hard-wired in the human psyche as Freud would have had it hard-wired in the human anatomy.56

Whether or not we agree with this assessment of Scott’s argument, Boysdon rightly pointed out that African feminists have long insisted that gender may not be primarily constituted by an opposition between sexualized bodies, but rather through other factors, particularly age and class. This work compels us to reassess, rather than take for granted, our understanding of gender as a category of analysis. Oyeronke Oyewumi made the controversial suggestion that if gender is socially constructed, then “it is logical to assume that in some societies, gender construction need not have existed at all.”57 While such an argument was not entirely supported by her work on Yoruba social life in western Nigeria, Oyewumi persuasively showed that seniority was far more fundamental


in structuring social hierarchies than gender, something that Western scholars could not see because they could not move past their own categories of analysis. As Molara Ogundipe-Leslie puts it, “African women continue to be looked at and looked for in their coital and conjugal sites which seem to be a preoccupation of many Western analysts and feminists.” Ifi Amadiume showed that in precolonial Igboland, particular practices, such as those of “male daughters” and “female husbands” had permitted individual females to inhabit social positions that were gendered masculine. Sexual relations were not the basis of the practice of prosperous women taking wives. Thus sexuality and gender often did not overlap among the Igbo. These and other feminists have shown how colonial regimes altered such landscapes, bringing diverse social, familial, gendered, and sexual relations more in line with those of the West.

Feminist scholarship on the non-Western world has also queried the global applicability of very particular modern Western theorizations of gender and sexuality. Afsaneh Najmabadi traces how in Qajar (nineteenth-century Iran), young men and all women were defined in opposition to adult men, and hence could be described in interchangeable ways. While “our contemporary binary of gender translates any fractures of masculinity into effeminization,” she writes, in nineteenth-century Iran there were “other ways of naming a young adolescent male and an adult man desiring to be objects of desire for adult men that were not equated with effeminacy.” This would mean that homoerotic relations between adult and young men were not deviations from an established norm. “Thinking of gender as man/woman,” Najmabadi concludes, “turned out to be a very modern imperative.” These arguments should be of great interest to those of us who work on early modern England, not because of any resemblances between these worlds and those we analyze, but because we are aware that contextual differences can, and should, lead us to revise our theoretical presuppositions.

As Ella Shohat warns, forms of multiculturalism and internationalism within global feminist formulations use a “sponge/additive” strategy that depends on reductive and ghettoized notions of identity and culture. The editors of a recent collection of essays on South Asian feminisms also worry that “‘Diversity’ and ‘multiculturalism’ can often strengthen instead of challenge Euro-American norms of gender, sexuality, and women’s identities; global diversity within these categories can then only be understood as difference.

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from such Euro-American norms.” As Mrinalini Sinha has emphasized, such work should lead us to query how we theorize gender:

We must distinguish between merely exporting gender as an analytical category to different parts of the world and rethinking the category itself in the light of those different locations. In other words, what do these different global locations contribute to the meaning of gender theoretically? . . . [They suggest] nothing less than a refusal to foreclose the meaning of gender on the basis of a limited, and limiting, parochial history of the concept in modern Europe. And its potential lies in the possibility of more robust histories of the concept in Europe as elsewhere. . . .

Theory, like historiography, can thus both resist ghettoization and provoke it. On the one hand, we cannot assume a universalist understanding of gender, sexuality, desire or any other form of belonging and alienation. But, on the other hand, the histories of cross-cultural exchange and animosity warn us against understanding different societies and cultures as hermetically sealed. Here our point is that even beyond these histories of contact, we may trace productive and unexpected resonances between disparate locations that help us retheorize the very categories of analysis through which we confront the past. To illustrate the value of such retheorization, let us consider the example of race in early modern Europe, which also has implications for theories of gender and sexuality then and now.

The view that because there was no developed “biological” vocabulary for difference, “race” was not a “fully developed” discourse in the early modern period has become deeply entrenched in both historical and theoretical work on race. As Ania Loomba has argued elsewhere, we accept such a perspective at our own peril: “the fear of being anachronistic should not keep us from investigating the history of racial difference. Even today, race is a confusing term that does not carry a precise set of meanings, but becomes shorthand for various combinations of ethnic, geographic, cultural, class, and religious differences.”

This determination to avoid the bogy of anachronism at all costs, however, is itself anachronistic. For this view not only takes a very particular historical form of “race”—that resulting from Atlantic slavery—as the only form possible. Equally problematically, it avoids interrogating the vocabularies of racist pseudo-science that were developed during colonialism. “Biological” explanations for all kinds of social and somatic difference emerged alongside the growth of modern science. Earlier, the same differences had been explained in religious terms, but that did not mean that they were understood as more flexible or transient. Geraldine Heng rightly points out that

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To scholarship on race that takes its examples from postmedieval periods, religion—which is always understood, in modern fashion, as an exclusively cultural system of customs, gestures and practices, and unimplicated in theories of biological essences—is the a priori determinant in hierarchical taxonomizations of difference in the medieval period, just as race—understood in biological and essentialist terms—is concomitantly seen to function as the operative determinant in retrograde hierarchies of power within postmedieval periods.66

Because “social” differences have neither been neatly distinct from, nor necessarily more pliable than differences cast as “natural,” premodernists understand that both categories are relational, historically mutable, and therefore conceptually interconnected rather than discrete. Thus they have questioned theories and histories of race that depend upon on the analytical division between “social” and “biological” categories of difference.67

This work has implications for scholarship on race in different periods and different geographies. It is because scholars have often adopted instead of querying the terms on which the culture/biology binary was constructed that so many forms of racialization are undertheorized or studied in isolation with one another. Whereas analysts of contemporary neo-racisms sometimes suggest that “culture” emerged in the late twentieth century as the “latest” manifestation of racial ideologies, early modern literature and history show us that culture and religion are one of the earlier and more constant boundaries of difference, often visible precisely when they are supposedly excluded. For instance, the question of caste in India can be understood as a form of racism, rather than a unique instance of “homo hierarchicus.” Caste can also be productively placed alongside histories of casta ideologies in Latin America; both intersected in Iberian colonies in Asia, and the intersection contributed to the ideologies of racism in Europe.68 Islamophobia or pre-Nazi anti-Semitism, which have also been excluded from being understood as “race,” can also be traced through a long history, stretching back to premodern Europe. This history shows how various categories dovetailed with ideas of blackness at several different junctures. It thereby forcefully reminds us that cultural and biological definitions of race cannot be fully disentangled, much less organized into a teleological narrative whereby early “cultural” definitions are displaced by modern “biological” science. Indeed, to return to our previous discussion of fantasy and ideology, a historicization of “race” can remind us just how much modern science was shaped by cultural fantasies and imperial desires.

Only by understanding race in terms of the histories of empire, religion, and social status can we also trace how it articulates globally with the history of capitalism. We cannot isolate and privilege the histories of Atlantic slavery alone, as a host of recent scholarship


has reminded us. To use the resonance between our contemporary world and early modern Europe to query established historiographies and theories of race, then, is not to suggest that racial ideologies and practices have been unchanging. Rather, it is to pay attention to the uneven, messy and sprawling vocabularies of race, and also to pay attention to its histories and geographies—to eschew crude empiricism and simplistic contextualization in order to be deeply historical. It is also to think about historical change without simply confirming the paradigms of linear and “developmental” models of history.

These global histories are important in understanding the multiple intersections of sexuality with race, as Arondekar has repeatedly argued. She describes how her students embrace some of the new scholarship on sexuality in different parts of the world but stumble over

the question of race as a grid of intelligibility in non-US sites. An implicit and sometimes invisible US nationalism undergirds most discussions on racial formations, with students struggling even to imagine race, not simply as a racist practice but as a form of historical analysis as varied and slippery as the multiple geographic locations they are keen to study.69

However, tracing variable racial and sexual histories and practices will not accomplish the other task which Arondekar also enjoins queer critics to undertake—to show “how and why the languages of the geopolitical matter to the articulation and meaning-making structures of sexuality” and vice-versa.70 While such a task has begun in several fields, it cannot progress by theorizing queerness in isolation from history.71 Some of the difficulties in identifying these articulations have arisen because of the (differently) Eurocentric histories offered by the two founding fathers of sexuality studies—Freud and Foucault. Although, as we have noted, there have been brilliant attempts to revise their work, the frameworks offered by both thinkers continue to pose some problems for the study of race, particularly in a premodern context. We have briefly touched upon these in relation to Freud, and now turn to some of the limitations of Foucault’s work for thinking through the relation of sexuality and race in the early modern period.

In arguing that sexuality must not be described in psychoanalytic terms as an innate “stubborn drive” but rather as “a dense transfer point for relations of power,” Foucault’s history of sexuality offered a methodology for an alternative approach to the relationship between fantasy and history that is also useful for understanding race.72 But Foucault’s understanding of both temporality and geography makes it difficult to use his work as a model for the kind of intersectional and comparative scholarship we are advocating. Women and the history of colonialism are elided in Foucault’s work, and the conceptual limits posed by these omissions are only increased by his sporadic remarks on race. Because the

71 For some examples of the challenge that non-Western histories and literatures pose to modern queer theory, see Rouhi, Amer, Epps, and Al-Kassim in *Islamicate Sexualities* (2008); and Menon, *Indifference to Difference: On Queer Universalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 47.
72 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 103.
period that Foucault analyzes as formative to modern regimes of sex was also the heyday of European empires, he ignores the very context of his own theories of sexuality, as Edward Said noted.\textsuperscript{73} Other scholars have shown that there are not only \textit{parallels} between “the management of sexuality and the management of empire” but also important overlaps and intersections between the two. Tracing the consequences of such overlaps for the “specific chronologies Foucault offers, his critique of the repressive hypothesis, or the selective genealogical maps that his work suggests” Ann Laura Stoler argues that European theories as well as histories of sexuality cannot be charted in Europe alone. In short-circuiting empire, Foucault’s history of sexuality misses key sites in the production of that discourse, discounts the practices that racialized bodies, and thus elides a field of knowledge that provided contrasts for what a “healthy, vigorous, bourgeois body” was all about. Europe’s eighteenth-century discourses on sexuality can—indeed must—be traced along a more \textit{circuitous imperial} route that leads to nineteenth-century technologies of sex.\textsuperscript{74}

But we cannot understand the imperial shaping of sexuality by analyzing only what happened in the colonies or in contact zones. We must also uncover the deep connections between metropole and colony, and how bourgeois identities in both locations “emerge tacitly and emphatically coded by race.”\textsuperscript{75} Thus Stoler rightly suggests that European erotic practices and fantasies cannot be examined “without a racially erotic counterpoint, without reference to the libidinal energies of the savage, the primitive, the colonized—reference points of difference, critique and desire.”\textsuperscript{76}

Stoler’s work can be seen as part of the field of “connected histories” that is not limited to the work of historians but has developed over a range of disciplines and in relation to a number of time periods, and that has also influenced recent work in medieval and early modern studies. This work is markedly different from New Historicism, which also sought to indicate the importance of the non-European world for shaping English aristocratic identity and English culture in general. But new historicism often flattened the “other” worlds it purported to study insofar as it tended instrumentally to invoke them in order to suggest the pervasive nature of European power and the asymmetry between Europe and its others. For this reason it usually concentrated on selected European encounters with the New World. While this work was important in understanding that the “early modern” was also “the early colonial,” early modernists working on English as well as Iberian materials have increasingly recognized the urgent need to expand our geographical lens.

Accordingly, recent studies of race and empire in early modernity have not only included European contact with the Mediterranean as well as with other parts of Africa and Asia, but have also begun to engage with scholars working within those fields—Ottomanists, Subalternists, and East Asianists. The implications of this expanded vision


\textsuperscript{75} Stoler, \textit{Race and the Education of Desire}, 7.

for understanding race, gender, and sexuality, and of situating sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England more complexly in relation to emergent capitalism are enormous, as has been traced by a rich body of scholarship.\(^77\) As this work has shown, not all non-Europeans were Europe’s “others”—in fact, their constructions as “others” indicate not a simple binary but a network of uneven intersections of Europe within a wider world. European medical knowledge, for instance, was shaped by Arab texts and reflected a long history of borrowing from the very places that were later constructed as sexually deviant in some European narratives.\(^78\) Moreover, as Traub’s account of the “psychomorphology” of the clitoris suggests, the European projection of deviance upon foreign peoples within travelogues and medical accounts was often designed for internal consumption, to control female sexuality at home.\(^79\) At the same time, hostility and “othering” were not the only way of making sense of foreign sexual practices. Saher Amer’s work on French medieval literature reminds us that “the very notion of what constituted sex between women seems to have derived from cultural interstices,” by borrowing from and imitating Arab literatures.\(^80\) Such exchange, often mediated by the circuitous travels of texts, tropes, and languages, significantly shaped many European literatures, including English ones, through the medieval and early modern period.\(^81\)

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This long history of global contact is made available by, and itself shapes, early modern literature. This history allows us better to understand colonial dynamics, including the intersection of nascent racial and imperial worldviews with sexuality. Foucault neglects this history, but he does not entirely ignore the question of race. Instead, he detaches it from the colonial context by treating it as an internally constituted feature of premodern European societies, coextensive with an aristocratic preoccupation with lineage. In his 1976 lectures at the Collège de France, he writes:

The social body is basically articulated around two races. It is this idea that this clash between two races runs through society from top to bottom, which we see being formulated as early as the seventeenth century. And it forms the matrix for all the forms beneath which we can find the face and mechanisms of social warfare.82

Foucault uses race here as a word and a concept that denotes class, a sense that is familiar to early modernists. He then suggests that these earlier vocabularies of race/class were reanimated in the nineteenth century to serve the new discourses of bio-power about the bourgeois self. He is thinking of state racism, particularly as deployed by the Nazis. Timothy Mitchell suggests that

This argument represents a double overlooking of empire, for eighteenth-century racism, as much as the later nineteenth-century forms, was a product of colonialism. . . . Treating race as an anachronism preserves a particular way of thinking about modernity, in which the modern is constructed not just as an historical era but a particular relationship between space and time. . . . Modernity is produced as the West . . . . The narrative of history, even in the brilliant revisionism of Foucault, is the story of Europe. To stage this homogenous time-space, there can be no interruptions from the non-West.83

But that is not Foucault’s only omission. His usage also ignores the continuously altering history of race within the West, including that which predates colonialism. Therefore Foucault’s suggestion that race is really class could return us to conventional theories of race, which claimed that because the word “race” meant “lineage” and denoted class difference in the early modern period, it could not possibly have the same connotations as “race” in the modern sense.84 As we have argued above, this culture-biology binary blinds
us to the real resonances between past and present conceptions of race, even as it reinstates
an imperial teleology.

Of course, the overlap between “lineage” and “race,” has also been used to illuminate
the intersecting histories of both class and race. These junctures may be what Foucault had
in mind, but whereas he indicates them by skipping over the very centuries in which the
terms were shaped and reshaped, medievalists and early modernists have amplified their
points of connection. They have pointed out that the concept of class was regarded much
as race was later—as an attribute rooted in the blood, or inherited, rather than a changeable
socioeconomic positioning. Because family, household, class, nation and religious groups,
and gender and sex could be defined in interchangeable ways, we are obliged to consider
what these overlaps meant for social as well as individual lives. Each of these groups was
policed and secured through lineage, and therefore sexualized. Traub observes that in the
period “sex” meant “gender”—women and men were each a sex. But “sex” in this sense was
also indicated through the word “race”—in the early modern period, for women were not
just a sex, but also a “race.” Indeed, “sex” was sometimes also used to denote “a ‘kinde’
in the sense of a species, or a religious grouping, or an ethnic type.85 The point here is that
not just “race” but a whole host of other terms carried different meanings, and the shifts in
meaning allow us to chart the complex history of race, rather than pit premodern “lineage”
or “class” against the modern biological definitions of “race.”

Foucault’s time line of race is therefore erroneous not because it understands race as
class—for this was indeed one meaning—but because it fails to understand that at every
point the meanings of the two terms overlapped, and also dovetailed with gender, faith,
nation, and geography. Foucault’s “paradigm shift” has been richly critiqued by scholars
of sexuality working on different historical periods. However, the critique of the same shift
offered by scholars of race has concentrated only on the colonial period. Stoler’s brilliant
attempt to understand the implications of Foucault’s omission of colonialism for his theory
of sexuality broke important ground for the modern period, but this work is incomplete
insofar as it confines itself to a fairly conventional history of race and colonialism. The
early modern period offers a different and important view of the history of race and an
opportunity to articulate it more full with histories of sexuality. For instance, it has often
been noted that Foucault’s time line for the emergence of a particular regimentation of
sexual identity also turned upon a geocultural division between “the societies—and they
are numerous: China, Japan, India, Rome, the Arabo-Muslim societies—which endowed
themselves with an ars erotica” and “our civilization” which is “undoubtedly the only

85 Brian Melbancke, Philotimus. The warre betwixt nature and fortune (London: Roger Warde,
1583), 81; John Hoskin, “A sermon vpon the parable of the King that taketh an account of his seruants”
(London: G. E, 1609), B 1r.
civilization to practice a *scientia sexualis.*"\(^{86}\) Although Foucault invokes this difference in order to suggest that the West is in fact not without a new *ars erotica*, he nevertheless leaves intact the idea of a clear temporal and geographic separation between the West and the Rest, using the latter as merely a foil as he investigates the dynamic of the former.\(^{87}\) The binary Foucault constructs is partly the result of a parochial understanding of Europe, or “the West,” as a distinct cultural location, sealed off from, in particular, the “Arabo-Muslim” societies. This division is not sustainable historically, as recent literary, historical, and economic scholarship has amply demonstrated. Literary and other writings of the medieval and early modern period amply demonstrate that transnational contact shaped identities and sexualities in many of these locations.

Over the last decade or so, medievalists and early modernists have shown that race is born not only, or even primarily, of colonial contact but equally of class, religious difference, and precolonial histories that shaped the nature and form of colonial contact itself. We have suggested that a longer and more complicated time line allows us to bring together critiques of Foucault’s understanding of sexual identities with those of his understanding of race and colonialism. This simultaneous attention to time and space that help us understand both the connections between diverse spaces, and understand the histories that constructed their separation. It also helps us rethink the scholarly divisions that have dominated the Anglo-American academy. For a good deal of early modern work on race has also been queer and feminist—it has just not necessarily been received as such.\(^{88}\)

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We want to conclude by returning to the proposition that defining fantasy as an historical as well as psychic construct—and therefore a site for multiple and conflicting identifications and definitions of gender, race, and sexuality—can attune us to the transfer of desire from one register to another. Will Stockton and James M. Bromley remind us of the “indeterminacy of sexual desire” and the surprising range of practices and fantasies that might count as erotic in the early modern period?\(^{89}\) Similarly, Lara Farina has written that in reading medieval texts, “erotic response . . . [is a] learned practice, dependent on individual and cultural memory and therefore variable.”\(^{90}\) We insist that our methods of reading must recognize that such erotic responses may come from other impulses, and invests those, in turn, with erotic undertones. Nationalism, for example, is also a sexual desire. To take one instance, in *The Home and the World,* Tagore’s heroine Bimala has an affair with her husband’s friend, a radical nationalist, and the novel suggests that it is her desire for nationalism that leads her to desire the man who stands for it rather than the other way around.\(^{91}\) It is Bimala’s desire to

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86 Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* 57.
88 See, for example, Traub, “The Psychomorphology of the Clitoris”; Rouhi, “Cervantes’s Muslims”; and Amer, “Cross-Dressing.”
89 Bromley and Stockton, “Introduction: Figuring Early Modern Sex,” in *Sex Before Sex.*
escape the circumscribed world that leads to her erotic involvement. In this case sexuality is an integral part of other desires, not necessarily primal in the ways that we are often schooled to imagine. Early modern literature is rich with similar examples: one only has to think about the double meaning of Desdemona’s assertion that she fell in love with Othello upon listening to stories of his escapades, which made her wish that “heaven had made her such a man.” Desdemona’s desire for such a man—a soldier, statesman, and adventurer—and her desire to be such a man, are inextricable.

The complexity of our identifications, interests, loyalties, and attachments is something that feminism has taught us to appreciate and explore. We have suggested here that this complexity is best understood as historically and geographically situated, and that literary texts from different periods teach us that bodies and psyches are deeply historical even as they push us to rethink what “history” means and how we might recover it. The connection between the histories we inherit and the futures we imagine is also what feminism compels us to examine. In discussing the history of studies of race, gender, and sexuality in the early modern world, we have sought to show that scholarship on these topics is indebted to feminism at its careful and capacious best. And in rethinking feminist history in terms of ongoing self-questioning and internal difference—that is, in questioning a history that begins with universal sisterhood and ends in identitarian squabbles and/or postmodernist, postcolonial theoretical babble—we have sought to show the necessity and productivity of debate among feminist thinkers, as well as between feminists and other scholars. The burdens of history do not so much weigh us down as provide gravity, reminding us of the discourses and debates that precede and haunt our academic as well as political identifications and investments. At the same time, the stories we tell about our pasts are also articulations of what we want to be now and in the future, so to remain conscious of history is also to remain conscious of—and responsible for—our own place in making (and remaking) it.

92 William Shakespeare, Othello, ed. Kim F. Hall (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), 1.3.165.
Chapter 2

Family Quarrels: Feminist Criticism, Queer Studies, and Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century

Coppélia Kahn

[Doing away with feminism, queerness, and race as epistemological certitudes would open a site of potentiality where these particularities exist as methodologies that free new meaning.]

José Esteban Muñoz, “The Sense of Watching Tony Sleep”

Since Madhavi Menon and Jonathan Goldberg published “Queering History” in 2005, a debate about the usefulness of history in queer studies has been simmering. They advocate abandoning what they see as the inevitably teleological project of history, on the grounds that “we must never presume to know in advance how questions of sexuality will intersect with or run aslant the prevailing forms of sociality marked by gender or status.” In their view, queer studies must abandon the historical difference, first posited by Foucault in The History of Sexuality, between homosociality, homoeroticism, and sodomy as acts in the Renaissance, and homosexuality as a distinctively modern identity that dates from the early nineteenth century. They see such historical alterity as based on the assumption of “a determinate and knowable identity, past and present,” and it is this notion that they reject because in their view, “paying attention to the question of sexuality as a question involves violating the notion that history is the discourse of answers, a discourse whose commitment to determinate signification . . . provides false closure.”

Thus Goldberg and Menon call for a queer criticism of Renaissance literature that radically departs from the feminist agenda I grew up with, so to speak. For us feminist critics starting out in the 1970s, history was central to a critique of the sex/gender system. Under the pressure of new historicism in the 1980s, we refined that critique. In the twenty-first century, feminist scholars, marshaling new research, have continued to reinterpret the literary history of the early modern period. Some branches of queer studies have pursued a similar project, while others, along with Menon and Goldberg, advocate ahistorical kinds of temporality to explore conceptions of sexuality. As a feminist critic working on the early modern period, I’ve found queer studies by turns invigorating and baffling but consistently

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3 Goldberg and Menon, “Queering History,” 1609.
changing, developing, challenging—as is feminist criticism. In this essay, through my own history as a feminist scholar, I want to assess the differences between and the potential for rapprochement of feminist criticism and queer studies.

Encouraged by Melissa Sanchez and Ania Loomba, and by my British feminist colleague Ann Thompson, I’ve been taking a trip down memory lane, researching and remembering the early years of my career to reconstruct how my academic feminist cohort founded the field. When I started doing feminist criticism in the mid-1970s, it hardly had a name. As an anxious young female assistant professor, I believed in “women’s lib,” but had no models or guides for bringing its insights into the Shakespeare scholarship in which I had been carefully trained at Berkeley. Close reading in historical context, with some attention to form, was all I knew. “Gender” was hardly more than a grammatical term. Less than a decade later in 1981, to my astonishment, I had written Man’s Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare—and could call myself a feminist critic.

Central to the whole endeavor then were the beliefs that gender was a matter of identity, and that the foundation of identity was laid in the family, the patriarchal family with its straitjacketed roles (as we understood them then) of husband and wife, mother and father. The 1970s and 80s were, of course, the era of identity politics, but in a deeper sense, women’s liberation was bound up with liberal ideas of the individual as unique and entitled. And women Shakespeare scholars wanted to claim that entitlement. We saw Shakespeare’s women, to some extent, as mirrors of ourselves—as produced by a patriarchal society, yearning to gain a voice and be recognized.

Furthermore, we had realized that, in Simone de Beauvoir’s words, “a woman is not born, but made.” Suddenly we saw Shakespeare’s female characters not as innately subordinate but rather, socialized into submission, and the evidence of that socialization was to be found in the language and action of the poet’s works. This founding distinction between person and social role, woman as opposed to daughter or wife, licensed a new agenda of interpretation.

To understand how patriarchy molded women and men into their identities, we thought we had to reckon with its central institution, the family. This idea now seems obvious, if not banal, but in the 1970s it was a startling insight, for at least two reasons. First, as Lynda Boose pointed out in 1987 in an astute assessment, before feminist criticism mainstream Shakespeare scholarship didn’t consider the family as an object of study. Rather, it was an unregarded microcosm of “the Elizabethan world picture,” constructed by E. M. W. Tillyard in his handy little book of that name published in 1944. That world picture was patriarchal through and through but unrecognized as such. Rather, in Tillyard’s widely cited work, it was naturalized and totalized as a divinely mandated, universally accepted scheme

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4 Professors Sanchez and Loomba invited me to participate in “Historicizing Sex,” a conference at the University of Pennsylvania on March 18, 2011. The talk that I wrote for that conference developed into a lecture I gave on feminist criticism of Shakespeare to honor Professor Ann Thompson’s retirement from King’s College London on March 18, 2013, and finally into this essay. I am grateful to all three distinguished feminist critics for their encouragement and support.


based on binarisms of superior and inferior. In such a scheme, women’s place was clear (though unremarked and uncriticized), but it certainly wasn’t on top. So to identify male domination and female submission in the patriarchal family and trace their effects on the formation of men and women in Shakespeare was a radical step. Instead of valorizing the patriarchal family as Tillyard implicitly had, we problematized it.

The first special session in feminist criticism of Shakespeare at the MLA took place in 1976. It was titled “Marriage and the Family in Shakespeare.” In the same year, I had published my first scholarly article, on The Taming of the Shrew, in which I argued that Kate wasn’t innately shrewish but rather, punitively labeled as such by men when she tried to wield the same powers of speech and action as they did. I focused on her character and Petruchio’s, treating him as the caricature of a masculine ideal, the husband who keeps his household in order by ruling over his wife. Through the 1970s and 80s, in special sessions at MLA and in papers and seminars at SAA, feminist criticism reinterpreted Shakespeare’s works in terms of female and male characters and the social roles delineated for them as fathers and daughters, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers. We discovered misogyny (it hadn’t been noticed before), the patriarchal oppression of women, and the sexist stereotyping of female characters. At the time, this agenda was considered by many to be biased, presentist, and politicized; while for us, it was revelatory and fascinating. We were creating a new Shakespeare.

The intellectual stimulation, generosity, and sense of mission we shared as feminist critics from these beginnings through the 1980s were personal, as well. Many of us became lifelong friends. I will always be grateful for what I learned from my fellow feminist critics, and with them. It enabled me to find my own voice, to write Man’s Estate, and last but hardly least, to get tenure. The book had its beginnings in the article on The Rape of Lucrece that I had published in 1976. There I wasn’t trying to reclaim a neglected female character but rather to understand what I would now call the ideology (a word not in my vocabulary then) of the patriarchal family, which seemed to underlie the shame that Lucrece embraced even though it was Tarquin, the rapist, who had committed a criminal act. Not only did nearly all criticism of the poem ignore the rape, discussing instead questions of rhetoric, genre, and Shakespeare’s biography, all but one essay echoed Lucrece’s self-blame, treating the rape as her fault. The one exception contained at most a paragraph on the rape. I sought instead, and finally found, a systemic explanation of her shame, in the centrality of female chastity to patriarchy and to the men in charge of it. The meaning of rape, I concluded, lay in “the terms of marriage in a patriarchal society . . . and the role of women in marriage”; that postulate enabled me to establish “a psychosocial context which takes account of sex roles and cultural attitudes toward sexuality,” for interpreting the poem. The idea of marriage as the central institution of patriarchy, and the family as its corollary, gave me the purchase I needed on a poem that criticism, it seemed to me, hadn’t so far understood.

In order to write this essay, I had to re-read Man’s Estate. I hadn’t thought to bring a copy of it with me to New York, where I was living while on leave at the time, nor was it in my computer files, for I had written it in the 1970s on an electric typewriter, before

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computers. So I went to my alma mater, Barnard College, checked it out of the library, and sat there amid the undergraduates reading my own book. On page 17, next to a paragraph doggedly explaining that “men originally learn their sexual identities by differentiating their masculinity from the femininity of their mothers, but must as adults reunite with women in marriage to fulfill their roles in society,” I found this penciled comment: “Heterosexist.” Guilty as charged! But from the vantage point of today’s critical landscape, that was hardly the only crime I committed in that book. As I’ve noted, we early feminists were unthinkingly liberal and identitarian. Our crimes were collective, the shortcomings of feminist criticism of Shakespeare at that point in its development. I will, for the next few pages, take Man’s Estate as a good enough example of what feminist criticism was doing in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

First, the theoretical cornerstone of that book is its psychoanalytically inflected conception of the patriarchal family and its division of psychosocial labor: fathers rule the family, but women raise its children, who are crucial to their fathers’ masculine identities. Thus women have a largely unacknowledged power over their children, significantly over their sons, who will succeed their fathers. Like Janet Adelman, Peter Erickson, Madelon Sprengnether, Richard Wheeler, and others, I adopted, and adapted, psychoanalytic theory as revised by such thinkers as Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow, because it was the only theory I found that gave me a way of thinking about how gender identity is formed. The gender division structured by the family as I understood it then was indeed heterosexual to the core: heteronormative and heterosexist to boot. But as I and other psychoanalytic feminists understood the theory we used, it was above all feminist, because it allowed us to denaturalize the family’s gendered division of labor in order to see how gender difference was constructed. Second, the concept of identity as a coherent, stable, and knowable psychic structure, inadequately theorized in my book by recourse to the writings of Erik Erikson, was (alas) central to the argument. Like all feminist critics

in that moment I sought, in the words of my introduction, “to examine sexual identity as shaped by patriarchal culture.”14 Eriksonian as I was, I organized the book around the male life cycle, itself centered on the male’s central task of disidentifying from the mother to establish his sexual identity over and against the bedrock of his identity per se in the unity of the mother-child dyad.

In my feminist zeal, I also believed that Shakespeare agreed with me as to the fashioning of male and female within the patriarchal family. I enlisted Shakespeare in the feminist cause (and so did other feminist critics), in many statements like this one:

Today we are questioning the cultural definitions of sexual identity we have inherited. I believe Shakespeare questioned them too, that he was critically aware of the masculine fantasies and fears that shaped his world, and of how they falsified both men and women.15

I’m no longer so sure that Shakespeare was “critically aware” enough to have such control over the “fantasies and fears” I considered common to all men. In 1981, I hadn’t read Foucault on the author-function and had no idea that a language could speak its speakers rather than the other way around. But I would still defend the book’s gender-specific focus on the vicissitudes of male identity, which is far from mere gender bashing. Rather, that focus on masculinity is grounded in a systemic analysis of patriarchal marriage and family as crucibles of gender identity for men and for women. As a feminist, I thought it was just as important to look at male characters and the representational design of their actions as at female characters. I didn’t question the very concept of gender identity, which, prompted partly by queer studies, I have since learned to do.

In 1985, Carol Thomas Neely published _Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare’s Plays_, a book that focused on female characters but rested on a theoretical grounding similar to that of _Man’s Estate:_ the two books might be considered complementary to each other. “Marriage,” Neely asserted, “is the social context that centrally defines the female characters in Shakespeare’s plays. . . . Their roles and status are determined by their place in the paradigm of marriage . . . which likewise governed the lives of Renaissance women.”16 “Likewise” smoothly sutures together fiction and world, plays and marriage. Like me, Neely adopted an unproblematically mimetic approach in establishing patriarchal marriage as the social context for her interpretations of the “broken nuptials” in the plays. Juliet Dusinberre, in her 1975 book _Shakespeare and the Nature of Women_, had also read the plays as relatively straightforward reflections of gender differences in society. She and I were appropriately taken to task by Kathleen McLuskie, in her important essay “The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare,” published in 1985.17 McLuskie criticized us for overlooking “the narrative, poetic, and theatrical strategies which construct the plays’ meanings and position the audience to understand their events from a particular

14 Kahn, _Man’s Estate_, 1.
15 Kahn, _Man’s Estate_, 20.
point of view”—that of “the patriarchal bard.” She argued that the feminist critic’s task was to make “the text reveal the conditions in which a particular ideology of femininity functions . . . by both revealing and subverting the hold which such an idea has for readers both male and female.” “Ideology”: I still didn’t realize its power as a concept.

It was only when I read Catherine Belsey’s *The Subject of Tragedy*, published in the same year as McLuskie’s essay, that I understood what McLuskie meant. (I wrote a review of Belsey’s book and sent it to her with what amounted to a feminist mash note. She responded kindly, and we’ve been friends ever since.) Shakespeare’s characters, Belsey made me see, weren’t necessarily all representations of coherent identities. She treated patriarchal marriage as a site of social contest rather than a stable hierarchy, and identity as a matter of voice and position rather than of innate condition. Grounding her interpretation historically, in legal, religious, and visual sources, she demonstrated “a discursive instability” in texts about women and artistic representations of them—an instability that derived precisely from their contradictory position in marriage, as bound to obey their husbands but at the same time commandeering obedience from their children and servants: “In the family as in the state women had no single, unified, fixed position from which to speak. . . . [P]arents and mistresses but also wives, they were only inconsistently identified as subjects. . . . [T]he speech attributed to women themselves tended to be radically discontinuous, inaudible or scandalous.” While McLuskie read Shakespeare as affording only one patriarchal position to the reader, Belsey read him as participating in and representing a widespread social confusion about whether women were or could be subjects, endowed with choice and voice as men were. “Identity” now seemed to me a limited, inadequate concept of how gendered subjects were socially constituted and textually represented.

While feminist criticism was opening up to a productive controversy about theory and method, however, Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self Fashioning*, published in 1980, presented a new critical paradigm that brought with it a gendered division in the field of Renaissance studies in general. This cleavage was famously represented at the 1982 meeting of the SAA in Cambridge. In Lynda Boose’s account, on one side of a hotel ballroom divided down the middle,

several of the major feminist psychoanalytic critics had been invited to confess their shortcomings in a forum entitled “The Limitations of Psychoanalytic Criticism.” On the other side of the barrier . . . several . . . major new historicist critics held forth in an authoritative show called “The Implications of the New Historicism.”

I was actually accorded what Boose terms an “anomalous position” on the second panel as the only woman and only feminist critic among the new historicists. She credits me with pointing out “the disturbing division” that the simultaneous panels suggested, but I’ve

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repressed all memory of the occasion (I was probably rattled merely to be sitting on the same platform with Stephen Greenblatt, the man of the hour). At any rate, it has been widely noted that, with few exceptions, new historicists worked on discourses of absolutist rule and male-authored texts, often interpreting them as fully determined by the ideological conditions of their production. They tended to downplay or efface the cultural presence of women, while feminist critics for their part were beginning to historicize and interpret the position of women in terms of discourse and ideology, as Belsey had.

Such was the state of feminist criticism in 1988 when *PMLA* published an eye-popping article by Richard Levin titled “Feminist Thematics and Shakespearean Tragedy,” an attack on feminist criticism of Shakespeare intended to demolish it. After a complimentary first paragraph in which Levin wrote, “Today [feminist criticism] may surely be said to have come of age and to have taken its place as one of the established branches of Shakespearean research,” he proceeded to place it in a category of his own making he called “thematic criticism.” By this term he meant criticism that instead of dealing with “particular characters” and “dramatizations of actions,” focuses on “some general idea” and regards texts as “commentaries on or inquiries into or critiques of that idea.” Since all the feminist interpretations of Shakespearean tragedy that he cited dealt in some way with “patriarchal attitudes,” “gender concepts of womanhood and manhood,” “the politics of gender,” and the like (he quotes from feminist critics both male and female), they qualified as “thematic,” which meant to Levin that they turned on “a polar opposition between two abstractions.” Then he dismissed this opposition as “some version of the eternal struggle of yang and yin.” Pursuing his binaristic argument further, he claimed that feminist critics always posed male against female, that “one always turns out to be the guilty party,” that is, the male, and that “the one defining characteristic of this approach to Shakespearean tragedy is its location of the cause of the tragic outcome in ‘masculinity’ or ‘patriarchy.’” Levin’s crude Aristotelianism blinded him to the possibility that character and action in tragedy may well serve the examination or even the critique of an idea—in this instance, patriarchy and its gender constructions. Moreover, he simply didn’t grasp the fact that feminist criticism had moved beyond “rectifying sexist misinterpretations of Shakespeare’s female characters,” to deal with patriarchy and the gender differences it maintained as an ideology sustained by discursive systems. In its assimilation of deconstruction, new historicism, and psychoanalysis, feminist criticism had moved with the times, becoming increasingly sophisticated.

Feminist criticism threatened not only Richard Levin’s concept of criticism per se as something that dealt only with characters and their actions—just the facts, ma’am—but also his gender identity as a man. Most of his article lambasts feminist critics for allegedly conducting a campaign against male characters. He laments “the general evolution of this body of criticism . . . has been from freeing Shakespeare’s women of negative stereotypes to imposing such stereotypes on the men.” Ten months later, in January 1989, *PMLA*
printed a letter from twenty-four feminist critics of Shakespeare, myself among them; the signatories included four men. The letter notes that while Levin applauds feminist criticism for providing “‘many valuable new insights . . . into [female characters’] . . . situations as women in male-dominated worlds.’ . . . [H]e wants us to provide these insights without revealing the strategies, structures, psychologies, and oppressiveness of the domination that particular male characters enact.”

This episode illustrates the conjunction of two important, intertwined developments: the “theory revolution” in literary studies and the engagement of feminist criticism with it. As I’ve tried to show in this very selective personal mini-history, feminist criticism was part of that revolution, in that it introduced gender as a category of analysis to literary study, and gradually assimilated deconstruction, new historicism, and cultural materialism to its increasingly sophisticated agenda of interpreting and critiquing the representation of gender in Shakespeare.

Notably, feminist criticism began to look at same-sex relationships, which challenged the monolithic view of marriage and family that its earlier work had purveyed. In *Man’s Estate*, for example, my heteronormative bias led me to view male dyads as simply part of the patriarchal system of male domination, and my commitment to a psychoanalytic theory of identity development made me blind to a continuum of homosocial relations, at that time not addressed in the psychoanalytic theory I looked to, in the formation of male identity: a subtle spectrum ranging from boys learning Latin with their schoolmasters to playwrights collaborating artistically and sharing households. A spectrum of women’s homosocial relations has now also been brought to light. Both fields of scholarship have enabled me to see that the patriarchal family isn’t the sole matrix of gender, and to appreciate homosocial bonds as other than mere instruments of patriarchal oppression.

It was in the nineties that queer theory, queer studies, and queer criticism of Shakespeare came to prominence and challenged the identitarian basis of feminist criticism, which rested on the belief that gender identity was formed in the patriarchal family. Catherine Belsey’s critique of the unified subject in her 1985 book may be seen as anticipating this development. In what follows, I will try to articulate what divides and what links feminist criticism and queer criticism in the current moment.

At its inception, queer criticism was sharply differentiated from feminist criticism by its rejection of identity to focus instead on what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called “the open

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29 Feminist criticism also began to assimilate the burgeoning field of race studies: Ania Loomba’s *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1989) was the first extensive attempt to introduce questions of race and cultural otherness into gender issues.
30 In this regard, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), broke new ground for feminist criticism as well as for queer criticism, especially in a chapter on Shakespeare’s sonnets.
mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.” Queer critics don’t think that anyone’s gender or sexuality can be explained, whether by the psychosocial structure of the patriarchal family as a crucible of gender identity understood historically or psychoanalytically, or in fictions (such as Shakespeare’s plays and poems) interpreted through those historical and psychological concepts. They reject the assumptions governing the feminist criticism of Shakespeare that I’ve just explicated: heteronormativity, identitarianism, and mimeticism—as indeed, by now, most feminist critics also have.

Daniel Juan Gil describes three waves in queer studies of Renaissance literature. The first, which “sought to recover lost ‘gays,’” was, he says, “displaced by a second that dispensed with the notion of gays as a timeless category of people that could be recovered in the past.” This second wave, inaugurated by Jonathan Goldberg’s Sodometries in 1992, focused on “same-sex sexuality [that] was intertwined with and inextricable from seemingly non-sexual relationships between men.” Gil’s third wave, influenced by Leo Bersani’s concept of sexuality as a kind of “self-shattering,” detaches sexuality from the homoerotic or homosocial, and figures it as “a distinct social and psychological phenomenon without reducing it to a sexual identity.” One might add that this third wave was influenced by Lee Edelman’s construction of nonreproductive sexuality as a queer alternative to heteronormativity, and by attention to “forms of intimacy and community in which perverse, shameful, and irrational feelings and desires have a place.”

It would be easy, but not the whole truth, to see queer criticism, which in general has little if anything to do with the patriarchal family, as a reaction to feminist criticism. Both approaches began in the wake of movements—women’s liberation, gay liberation—with a commitment to identity politics. Within early modern literary studies, queer criticism, like feminist criticism, was first concerned to identify historical differences between sexualities then and now. Later, under the influence of deconstruction, both turned to more sophisticated ideas about sexuality and the formation of the subject. There, parallels end. During the last decade, queer criticism has become resolutely anti-identitarian, on what I would call deconstructionist grounds: that the self, constructed in language, like language is a matter of difference, or as Lee Edelman puts it, “Queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one.”

In her introduction to the remarkable collection of essays she edited, Shakesqueer, Madhavi Menon links queer criticism’s rejection of identity to the rejection of history. As she and Goldberg did in the PMLA article, she calls for queer critics to “dispense with a model of temporal linearity that translates into causal linearity,” that is, the construction of past sexual identities as alterities that precede and thus in some sense produce our

34 Melissa E. Sanchez, “‘Use Me but as Your Spaniel’: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Early Modern Sexualities,” PMLA 127, no. 3 (2012): 496.
contemporary sexualities. She poses the intriguing question, “Is Shakespeare the recipient or the antecedent of queer theory?” In readings of *Pericles* and *All’s Well That Ends Well*, she argues that he is a queer critic avant la lettre in “upsetting the two fixed poles” of before and after, causality and linearity, through the structure and style of his works. In those works as I and other feminist critics interpreted them, those “two fixed poles” were imaged in the relations of reproduction, kinship, authority and power, dependency, and subjugation expressed through the family, relations that we saw as basic to his society and his imagination. It’s hard to imagine a feminist criticism of Shakespeare that wouldn’t depend on such postulates, or on the idea that gender roles enjoined by the patriarchal family mold character, if not identity. Does queer criticism really dispense with them, either?

Taking *Shakesqueer* as a major achievement in queer criticism of Shakespeare, I ask, do the essays fully conform to the queer agenda Menon sets out for them, specifically the rejection of historicism with its alleged teleology, causality, linearity? Does queer criticism in practice dispense with the idea of the patriarchal family and its before and after of generational relations? I begin with the first essay of the collection, which is alphabetically ordered according to the titles of Shakespeare’s works: the essay on *All Is True*, a.k.a. *Henry VIII*, by Steve Bruhm, which would come next to last in the familiar chronological terms of composition. This alphabetical ordering does, as Menon intends, unmoor Shakespeare from the all too familiar framework of early–middle–late, creating unusual juxtapositions and sequences, such as that of *King Lear*, *A Lover’s Complaint*, and *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, for example, in which a major tragedy, a largely ignored poem, and an early comedy rub shoulders.

Bruhm’s treatment of this play starts off by casting its titular hero as a twenty-first-century gay type, a bear—“chubby, bearded, and hirsute”—to be found, Bruhm says, on “hairyboyz.com or any website devoted to ‘bears.’” On facing pages we contemplate Holbein’s famous portrait of Henry paired with a photograph that mates Holbein’s bearded head of the king to the chubby, hairy torso of a contemporary “bear” garbed in low-slung jeans and an unbuttoned work shirt. The juxtaposition of the sixteenth century with the twenty-first is comic, startling, even mildly shocking. But Bruhm isn’t really thumbing his nose at history. The first paragraph pelts us with references to seventeenth-century sources linking beards to virility, capped by the historical fact that Henry VIII introduced beards to the English court, followed by an astute reading of the way Holbein paints Henry’s clothing so as to suggest “how the filigree of Henry’s costume images his actual bodily flesh.” Thus the fanciful photograph only literalizes what the historical references to beards, Bruhm

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39 Both Melissa Sanchez, in her review of *Shakesqueer*, *Renaissance Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2001), 1006–8, and Will Stockton, in his, “Shakespeare and Queer Theory,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2012), 224–35, make this point.
argues, make clear and the painting hints at: the king looks like a veritable twenty-first-century gay “bear.”  

Bruhm then points out that the ostensibly hyper-masculine king was, despite his six wives, unable “to live up to the normative promises that Henry’s body makes,” unable to produce a male heir who lasted. Thus his career suggests “an unregenerate queerness.” This almost predictable queer interpretive move to “reproductive futility” leads to another more novel one: the many instances of “sideways growth,” the aggrandizement of body fat, status, and wealth by the play’s characters not through reproduction or inheritance but rather through clever courtly one-upmanship. Whatever queer turns Bruhm’s argument takes, however, it depends on historical facts to make them, as many other “queer” readings in the collection do.

Other essays produce readings that, though presented as queer, actually have a sound historical basis. Matt Bell’s insightful treatment of 1 Henry IV in terms of the Prince and Hotspur as uncanny doubles, both named Harry, is queer but only to an extent. He takes their doubling as representing “love’s likeness,” by which he means homosexuality as the repressed force that returns to imply “that all love is predicated on likeness,” thus refusing distinctions between homo- and heterosexual love. In explicating the two Harrys’ rivalry, however, he actually delivers what amounts to a historicized reading of it as the widespread practice of emulation. Compounded of both imitation and envy, emulation makes rivals want at the same time to be like and to eliminate and replace each other. As Prince Harry says, he and Hotspur are like “two stars [that] keep not their motion in one sphere”: only one can be king. This pattern of emulation, widely diffused in English Renaissance culture as in Shakespeare is, I would say, normative rather than queer. Thirty-two of the forty-eight contributors being by Menon’s design not Renaissance scholars and not, perhaps, fully conversant with historical research in the field, some of their readings aren’t actually as queer—as deviant from Renaissance norms—as the authors think they are. 

At their best, however, the essays that follow a queer agenda of interpreting social and sexual constructions as nonnormative challenges to heterosexual coupling, marriage, and reproduction—to the patriarchal family, in short—are brilliantly original and unsettling. In this regard, I would single out Madhavi Menon’s interpretation of Love’s Labor’s Lost. She calls it a play “posing as a comedy” in that it doesn’t follow the comic telos of courtship culminating in marriage. Its multiple courtship plots break up in distress at the sudden

42 For a densely documented and well theorized argument that in the early modern period in England beards “were constitutive of masculine identity,” distinguishing men from boys, Protestants from Catholics, and men from women, see Will Fisher, “His Majesty the Beard,” in Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 83–128.


47 Again, Sanchez and Stockton also make this point; see n. 38.
death of the Princess’s father and disarray caused by the women’s mourning and departure: the play refuses the usual comic closure of marriage. Menon’s key move is to employ the term “lipstick lesbian” that was in vogue in the 1990s to describe lesbians who dressed and acted in conventional feminine fashion, concealing their actual sexuality. On the outside, the lipstick lesbian, Menon explains, appears to follow the heterosexual norm, while on the inside, she doesn’t. She thus presents “a problem of legibility on the surface” because “she does not coincide with herself,” defying both the assumption “that identity should be transparent” and “that femininity in and of itself is putatively hetero.”

As such, Menon implies, the lipstick lesbian models all sexuality, in that wayward internal desire can’t be coherently matched with normative external signs. Menon also sees the lipstick lesbian as a figure for the play’s staging of futile movements from “an unreliable outside to an internal truth,” in the men’s search for knowledge at the beginning and the women’s concluding, “dictate that the men need to learn true love.”

Menon’s appropriation of a twentieth-century sexual type for the interpretation of a sixteenth-century play carries out the twin postulates that she and Goldberg presented in their 2005 PMLA article. First, the queer critic must “resist mapping sexual difference onto chronological difference such that the difference between past and present becomes also the difference between sexual regimes.” The queer critic, then, can make the Princess of France a lipstick lesbian, effacing historical difference between constructions of sexual identity then and now. Second, the queer critic must “challenge the notion of a determinate and knowable identity, past and present.” He or she, then, can interpret the courtship moves of Love’s Labor’s Lost—the disguisings and maskings that ultimately fail to produce couplings—as paradigms of the slippage between external sign and internal truth that always already frustrates any coincidence between truth and desire or self and sexuality. In Menon’s words, “This thwarting of the play’s comic ends is also a thwarting of heterosexual identity.”

And “thwarting,” revealing the illogic or speciousness of not only heterosexual identity, but also any sexual identity and the social structures framing it, is queer criticism’s project. How does it line up with feminist criticism’s project? Some feminist critics (Dympna Callaghan, Phyllis Rackin, for example) adhere to the category of women in the sense of a coherent sexual identity, but on the whole, as I have argued, the field has assimilated a deconstructionist sense that all identities are discursively constructed, and fissured rather than coherent. Nonetheless, I am reluctant to surrender the category altogether. Even though identities are constructed and fissured, they still operate, representationally and socially. They operate especially in Shakespeare, whose language is a hypersensitive medium of the crises arising from their incoherences and fissures. Normative sexuality as constructed through the patriarchal family can’t be entirely reread as or reduced to nonreproductive sexuality, as queer critics might like it to be.

Goldberg’s and Menon’s queer unhistoricism rejects a historical approach to sexuality because the inevitable teleology of history, as they see it, maps sexual difference onto

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48 Menon, “The L Words,” 188.
50 Goldberg and Menon, “Queering History,” 1609.
51 Goldberg and Menon, “Queering History,” 1609.
52 Menon, “The L Words,” 190.
chronological difference. But what is the basis of this analogical thinking that ties sexuality in all its varieties over time and at any given moment, to historical thinking of whatever mode? As Valerie Traub argues in a recent *PMLA* article,

> Sexuality, the diverse enactments of erotic desire and physical embodiment; temporality, the various manifestations of time; and history, historicism, and historiography, the aggregate repertoire of cognitive and affective approaches to the past are not intrinsically connected. . . . These links, far from being immanent in either sex or time, are historically and discursively produced.53

Constructions of sexual identity that occur over time aren’t necessarily in lockstep with it. Post hoc doesn’t necessarily mean propter hoc. History is a matter of contingencies, accidents occurring unpredictably in time, with unpredictable effect. For example, a critic, feminist or queer, may look at the title character of Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* as personifying the dynastic drive to reproduce that organizes the Renaissance patriarchal family, a drive cruelly thwarted in Henry’s case by the contingencies of fertility, infant mortality, erratic desire, papal intransigency, the Reformation, and so on. On the other hand, events widely separated in time may look similar. Henry’s serial divorces might be viewed synchronically as postmodern events undercutting Renaissance belief that the family is divinely mandated; as errancies of many desires, demonstrating the “open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances” that queer critics insist makes up desire.

Finally, because queer defines itself in relation to normative, and historical understandings of normative change over time, then queer too, must be redefined in relation to those changing configurations—in other words, in relation to history. Precisely because “there is no single, transhistorical definition of sex . . . [which is] a non-self-identical concept, subject to different constructions,” Will Stockton and James M. Bromley argue in the introduction to their collection of essays, their concern lies in “exploring acts of sex in their *historical*, theoretical, and textual specificity and complexity.”54 How can we know what is queer without knowing what’s straight?

As I stated in discussing Matt Bell’s essay on *1 Henry IV*, the doubling of Harrys that he calls queer is arguably normative in the Renaissance, though it may be queer in comparison to other earlier or later normativities. Sexual behaviors, like other behaviors, may be inflected by vestiges of earlier practices, anachronistic holdovers that no longer make sense but persist and thus seem queer. (The father giving away his daughter to the groom in a Christian wedding ceremony today, when she is socially and financially independent of her parents, is one example.) To reject chronological sequence is to close off an important way of identifying and understanding the queerness of sexual arrangements, whether in the Renaissance or the twenty-first century.

So, to use a domestic, reproductive metaphor, I don’t think queer criticism needs to throw the baby of history out with the bath water of exposing or “queering” heteronormativity as


arbitrary and oppressive—a project that it shares with feminist criticism. Feminist criticism in the last decade has increasingly registered the imprint of queer criticism, attending to the incoherence, indeterminacy, and instability of sexual relations. Moreover, in doing so, it has drawn extensively on historical research, without arguing teleologically that Renaissance sexual identities or constructions of sexuality are precursors of later ones. Feminist criticism has in effect become hybrid, bringing together a multiplicity of agendas that engage social and political structures with sexual ones. Like much queer criticism, it now “lodge[s] the ‘non-sexual’ firmly within the ‘sexual.’”55 Examples of this critical practice abound; I will discuss briefly three of them, articles published within the last decade in Shakespeare Quarterly.

Natasha Korda’s “Dame Usury: Gender, Credit, and (Ac)counting in the Sonnets and The Merchant of Venice” demonstrates that women were prominent moneylenders in early modern England, loaning large sums not just to friends and family but to distant clients for sizeable profits, participating fully in the discourse and practices of a credit culture.56 She then marshals this historical argument in service of an edgy interpretation of Portia as a canny manipulator of credit both in her marriage and in her judgment on Shylock. A wheeler and dealer in the marriage market, as were less privileged women in the credit market, she doesn’t give herself to Bassanio; rather, she loans herself. By resituating women outside the domestic sphere in a public one, and suggesting that their financial power might carry sexual power with it, Korda’s article thus overturns any assumption that the patriarchal family invariably succeeded in making women per se “chaste, silent, and obedient.”

In “Malvolio at Malfi: Managing Desire in Shakespeare and Webster,” Barbara Correll links Twelfth Night and The Duchess of Malfi through their representations of the steward, whose social liminality as gentleman-servant makes Malvolio and Antonio such charged figures.57 She is interested in a “social-erotic thematics” in which “desire and social-erotic energy collide and circulate” in a way “often indeterminate or threatening to ordered social energies . . . and continually defiant of containment.”58 Building on the historically based scholarship on the concept of service by Schalkwyk, Neill, Evett, and Whigham, she shows how stewards in these plays serve as “prostheses” of and for others’ desires.59 Historical understanding enables her to reveal and interpret queerness that had gone unremarked.

Finally, Ben Saunders’s “Iago’s Clyster: Purgation, Anality, and the Civilizing Process” is concerned with the mutual imbrication of sexual, social, and racial ideologies.60 He identifies in Othello an anal-erotic lexicon of cleanliness and control (as opposed to dirtiness and unruliness) that we have abjected from polite discourse. This lexicon makes as much sense of Emilia’s racialized epithet for the Moorish general (“as ignorant as dirt”) as it does

58 Correll, “Malvolio at Malfi,” 69, 70.
of the image from which Saunders generates the essay: Iago comparing Cassio’s fingers to “clyster pipes,” the apparatus of anal purgation, or in our terms, of enema. Sexual desires, according to Iago, must like shit be “manured” into gardens by our wills. The essay works to establish connections between sexuality, a discourse of anality, “the civilizing process” marked out by Norbert Elias among others, and a nascent racism. All three work together, Saunders argues, through “a logic of abjection . . . that both generates and is sustained by the crudest somatic and visceral metaphors.” Interpreting anality as a yet-untethered, unnamed “site of racist origins,” Saunders doesn’t see it teleologically as leading to modern racism but rather as the voice of “a repulsion that, culturally and historically speaking, does not yet have an idiom” An anal discourse that queer critics have sometimes associated with the homoerotic operates here to a different end, as it were.

I began this essay by recalling that concepts of identity, and identitarian politics, were basic to the inception of feminist criticism. To reject historical sequence in one’s own critical history is to place oneself in the specious position of being outside history. I now can see queer studies as part of my own history as a feminist critic, and some queer critics, at least, acknowledge feminist criticism as germane to theirs. After all, it was feminist criticism that first understood gender as construction and ideology.

What if feminist critics and queer critics today queried those very labels, the terms of their intellectual identities, as José Esteban Muñoz suggests in the passage I’ve used as an epigraph to this essay? Would such querying necessarily jeopardize their projects, their commitments? The late Barbara Johnson, trying to read “as a lesbian,” found the enterprise problematic:

> If I tried to “speak as a lesbian,” wouldn’t I be processing my understanding of myself through media-induced images . . . or through my own idealizations . . . ? Wouldn’t I be treating as known the very predicate I was trying to discover?

We are all, queer or feminist critics, subject to those images and idealizations. Might we not admit to, or discover, feminist traces in queer critical practice, and vice versa? Might we not recognize some family resemblances?

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63 See Will Fisher, Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). He credits feminists with having begun the rethinking of gender construction as culture operating on a preexistent substrate of biology, and states, “My own work seeks to contribute to this feminist project,” 4, 17.
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Chapter 3
Tempestuous Transitions and Double Vision: From Early to Late Modern Gendered Performances in Higher Education
Diana E. Henderson

Edgar: What, in ill thoughts again? Men must endure Their going hence even as their coming hither. Ripeness is all. Come on.

Gloucester: And that’s true too.

*King Lear*, 5.2.9–12

Imagine a cross-gendered production of *Lear* (if you never saw The Company of Women’s, starring Kristen Linklater); imagine just prior you’d watched the viral video of Emma Watson telling assembled UN delegates what “feminism” means. Free-associating as you now listen to a young actor tell her stage parent what she should think and embody—a new “click” of recognition when you were simply expecting to hear a favorite Shakespearean chestnut—you recall a recent flare-up within your women’s and gender studies program. It was prompted by a poster juxtaposing the semester’s offerings with an image of Beyoncé performing hysterical abandonment from her “Why Don’t You Love Me?” video; you can recall a time when recognizing feminist singers was a good bit more straightforward, and you make a mental note-to-self to do an online search for Holly Near. Having yet once more survived *Lear*’s apocalyptic finale, imagine you return home, set aside the stack of undergraduate essays that should have been returned last week, the administrative tasks and research commitments long overdue, loved ones’ personal demands on your time, and—


2 “Emma Watson HeForShe Speech at the United Nations | UN Women 2014,” YouTube video, 11:47, speech delivered during the HeForShe Special Event at the United Nations Headquarters on September 20, 2014, posted by “HeForShe,” September 22, 2014, accessed June 1, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0Dg226G2Z8. Watson became globally famous playing Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* films. From a feminist perspective, the most contentious aspect of Watson’s speech launching her HeForShe initiative for the UN was its seeming assumption that she was the first to provide a welcoming “formal invitation” for men to become involved in feminist action. But the general tenor of ignorance and hate aimed at feminism within the YouTube public commentary confirms that it still remains a brave and much-needed action to speak out about gender inequities; even Watson’s gestures of extreme compromise with the dominant culture and acknowledgment of her privileged location did not fend off vitriolic attacks.
What, a leap too far? “I cannot daub it further—,” do I hear you echoing Edgar (4.1.55)? Fair enough: even if you could empathize with crotchety Gloucester and the older woman playing that role in my performative thought experiment, having time to defy conventional demands and protocols (be they of scholarly articles or our mundane workplaces) has indeed become the luxury of all too few. The general pace of our modern, now digital, age and what Heidegger called the unmitigated bustle of distraction are not the only culprits. Given current skepticism about the humanities’ value beyond academia, and the concomitant administrative changes in higher education that have marginalized literary studies, eliminated professorial lines, and increased the number of contingent laborers, your patience even with this type of fictional play—that is, production without an obvious product, a “payoff”—might well be running thin. Nevertheless, while I shall forego further forays into imaginary performances of the sort many of us nevertheless spend substantial fractions of our lives studying, in what follows I ask that you entertain how these forces of imagination and constraint might be reconsidered to more productive ends, both mental and practical, by feminist scholars. And to begin doing so, I turn from play to history.

November 1984, Columbia University

The topic of an annual poetics colloquium sponsored by the Maison Française was, for the first time, The Poetics of Gender. As organizer Nancy K. Miller later recalled in introducing the essay collection of the same name, the event was intense and transformative; she cited her senior colleague and colloquium sponsor Michael Riffaterre’s closing remarks, in which he opined, “never before did we have such large audiences, never before such passionate audiences.”3 Appearing alongside the many groundbreaking feminist speakers—including Monique Wittig, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Catharine Stimpson and Naomi Schor—were two scholars not yet quite so advanced in their careers or well-known, (uniquely) representing the premodern period: they were Ann Rosalind Jones and Nancy Vickers. One spoke of early modern women lyricists, the other of “The Mistress in the Masterpiece,” therein encapsulating the dual impulses of recovering lost or underappreciated women’s contributions and using gender as a category of analysis to rethink traditional interpretive assumptions.

I was thrilled. Struggling to write my dissertation using dominantly formalist and historical methodologies, I attended the conference in great part as a sign of solidarity with my feminist friends in later fields, and as an intrepid member of the English and Comparative Literature graduate student women’s group. (I had been a political feminist and fan of Gloria Steinem since seventh grade, laminating pictures of Angela Davis and Jane Fonda on my high school notebook at the tail end of the Vietnam War, and writing my undergraduate thesis on Virginia Woolf. Why I had turned back from Modernism to what we then called Renaissance would be another essay.) I remember being so proud of the speakers representing “my” period, who in my not-so-humble graduate student opinion had outshone all others. Yes, an unsisterly way to judge, but it was telling: what struck me

at the conference was not only that early modern feminist criticism existed—crucially, *The Woman’s Part* had been published four years earlier—but more importantly for my young self was the comparative style and particular emphasis of these two newer voices who seemed close to my generation.4

They were demonstrating what early modern studies had to offer the mainstream and even the theoretical “cutting edge” of contemporary feminist criticism: in a nutshell, they were invoking historical specificity, subtle reading, and distance as means to complicate the ways we were talking about difference in the contemporary frame, which in those days often verged on flatly political pronouncements, or used psychoanalytic models of which I was increasingly skeptical, or gave heroically romanticized accounts of women’s artistry (reifying with a different power dynamic the very dichotomies that social constructionist theories of gender analysis were supposed to undo). Putting the royal mistress Diane de Poitiers back into the picture of Cellini’s artistic masterpiece of triangulated gazing at Fontainebleau, and looking at continental women’s struggles to have their highly accomplished lyric voices heard, Jones and Vickers were uniting what until that time had seemed two parallel strands of my life, unlikely to become braided: an academic passion for historicist precision and aesthetic discernment when interpreting early modern literature and culture, and my feminism—which had been active and institutional but not an obvious part of my scholarly profile in Renaissance and performance studies nor in my dissertation project . . . or at least, not explicitly.

This was a time when we still had to struggle to have even a single woman writer included in the required readings for “great books” courses such as Columbia’s famed Literary and Philosophical Humanities sequence, or more broadly to acknowledge within the academy gender as a useful category of analysis (to cite the title of Joan Scott’s breakthrough essay of 1986). So integrating feminism with my graduate studies was not so easy. Nevertheless, somehow it always crept in: my first two published articles, neither connected with the dissertation, were structural readings of *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and the “Penelope” chapter of *Ulysses*. Even if the techniques and categories of the former were not explicitly feminist, the need to grapple with women’s representation, which has come to be a constant in an ever-changing career, had already been established. (The latter essay, summarily rejected and sent back within 24 hours by the editor of *ELH*, was published by *Modern Fiction Studies* in a special issue, “Feminist Readings of Joyce”—another sign of the difference between feminist and mainstream literary studies then.) In an ironic twist on the relative obscurity of early modern women’s writing within the academy at the time, it was Madame de Lafayette’s seventeenth-century novel about sixteenth-century France that finally broke through Columbia’s “Lit Hum” glass ceiling as a required female-authored text (along with the Homeric Hymn to Demeter and fragments of Sappho) during the year I was an instructor in that core curriculum; this success stemmed in great measure from the fact that the male English professors who had nixed Jane Austen, George Eliot, George Sand, and Virginia Woolf didn’t know enough about *La Princesse de Clèves* to mount an opposition (thanks again are due to Nancy Miller). Reflecting on that decade, I realize that there was simply no way I would have stuck with nor survived in this profession—my love of poetry and

drama, of history and theory, of Shakespeare and teaching notwithstanding—without the examples and the fellowship of feminist colleagues who charted a way to dance through the minefields.

Fast Forward: September 2014, MIT

Respected colleagues in Anthropology, the Visual Arts and Architecture, and the Program in Science, Technology, and Society are hosting an interdisciplinary conference on Seeing/Sounding/Sensing at which Bruno Latour is the keynote speaker. The panels include neuroscientists and artists, with MIT’s “virtual” Center for Arts, Science, and Technology as the named sponsor. Progressive, unconventional men and women are present in abundance, and two of the driving organizers are impressive feminist scholars, one of each sex. We are light years from 1984—both the autobiographical and Orwellian versions.

Yet I am not happy. I leave the Saturday afternoon session seething inside, and indeed unable to hide my feminist dissatisfaction appropriately. I forget the first rule of after-performance etiquette learned from years in the theater: never, ever share negative feedback on the spot! My lapse is duly rewarded: when I express my amazement at white European and American men holding forth on everything from the posthuman to “our” universal experience of breastfeeding to the need for greater sensitivity to the Earth understood as “Gaia,” without once acknowledging either their debt to gender studies or its lessons that would have suggested the need for more discursive specificity and humility, a fellow (female) audience member says to me without any irony, “Well, Gaia is a woman.” Take that, Marina Warner!

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6 Thanks to the editors for suggesting the congruence between this sense of convention drawn from my theatrical experience and the affective prohibition of feminist critique analyzed in the “Feminist Killjoys” chapter of Sara Ahmed’s The Promise of Happiness (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 50–87.

7 In Bruno Latour’s “Waiting for Gaia: Composing the Common World through Arts and Politics,” A Lecture at the French Institute, London, November 2012, 1–12, accessed June 1, 2015, http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/124-GAIA-LONDON-SPEAP_0.pdf, he writes that “the Earth has metamorphosed of late into something that James Lovelock has proposed to name Gaia. Gaia is the great Trickster of our present history” (8). He elaborates on how Gaia differs from the sublime “Nature of olden days” as epitomized by Shelley’s poetry: Gaia is “highly and terribly local,” and is not “indifferent to our plight”; She is “a ‘scientific’ concept,” and “is no more unified an agency than is the human race” (8–10). Tied in a complex way with Latour’s notion of compositional politics, the theorization of the Earth as Gaia—whatever She isn’t—is assuredly feminized (and capitalized as such). Equally certain: She is not a human female. Even as Latour wishes to distinguish Gaia from Nature, Margaret Homans’s several books on the (limited) agency of feminized Nature and women writers in the Romantic era pertain here.

More recently, “Bruno Latour & Company” has been engaged in a theatrical exploration known as the Gaia Global Circus, discussion of which Latour wove into his MIT keynote address (paper presented at the Seeing/Sounding/Sensing conference, MIT, Cambridge, MA, September 26, 2014). He also emphasized the parallelism-with-a-difference between his allegory of an Angel of GeoStory (representing our interrelationship with Gaia) and Walter Benjamin’s allegory of the backward-looking,
Actual women were not invisible at this conference: they were cited as important scholarly sources, they provided introductions, they served as moderators, and one provided a first-hand account of experiencing artist Tomás Saraceno’s “On Space Time Foam.” Moreover, the demands of my administrative job meant I missed two other panels that did include women, at one of which my male feminist colleague raised Donna Harraway’s gendered critique of Latour’s recent turn to “matters of concern” focusing on Gaia. So my partial experience does not necessarily generalize to the objective reality—if we still believe we can use such a phrase—of this conference as a whole. Notwithstanding, my experience was one of witnessing not only the political distinctions and power differentials among humans being effaced (even in the wake of national debate and outrage over the shooting in Ferguson, Missouri, and other cases of unarmed black civilian deaths) but also the distinction between invoking women as symbolic icons or muses and as variously modified human beings. This came on the heels of the English Institute’s “Medium” conference in which the only premodern engagement came second-hand, not even including the usual singular early modernist (and medievalist); with a few notable and enjoyable exceptions, that conference likewise seemed engaged with Latourian matters of concern and object-oriented ontology to the near exclusion of analysis addressing gender, race, and other sociohistorically constructed categories.

These bookending conferences from 1984 and 2014 serve as biographical shorthand for larger changes in our field(s), the progressive and new interdisciplinary directions of which I applaud even as I highlight here a gap—or, perhaps more fairly, a missed opportunity to make visible what has in great part allowed the progress. I have no desire forward-moving, ever weeping Angel of History; he did so using a video clip of a female dancer. Natasha Dow Schüll’s subsequent visual prompt juxtaposing Latour’s and his fellow keynote speaker’s dueling female allegorizations during her September 27 2014 panel introduction suggested a *sub rosa* critique of gender’s unacknowledged functions: an implicit challenge that remained unaddressed, alas, by those in the session she was introducing.

8 Below I shall return to the question of “service” and other administrative work, the dynamics of which are very much an urgent feminist concern. When I was on the committee that wrote MIT’s School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences report on gender equity over a decade ago (one of the companions to the famed Women in Science report), we found a correlation between female faculty’s disproportionate representation on university-wide committees (overrepresented) and in receiving prizes and chairs (underrepresented). Faculty time being finite, this is not surprising within a system that privileges individually attributable research accomplishments. Nonetheless, other forms of institutional power or at least acknowledgement follow from participating in faculty governance and administrative demands, and the women involved (including myself) tended to prioritize being active members of their local community as mattering, whether rewarded or not. Knowing the facts led us to challenge some individualist biases such as rewarding those who solicited outside offers to get pay raises; overt acceptance of the “star system” elsewhere, however, has as yet undermined our attempts to alter this dynamic. (My graduate alma mater, Columbia University, even publicized within their capital campaign the goal of fundraising to cover high salaries for star professors—prompting my vow not to give them one penny.) Within such a system, feminists fortunate enough to have tenure-track and tenured jobs need to be assessing whether or not to participate in existing structures to avoid self-victimization and/or—I would say and—to advocate for system changes. As illustrated by the recent outcry over a Microsoft CEO’s advice that women trust their supervisors to reward them equitably, expecting this to happen without knowing the system’s mechanisms (with a nod to Sylvia Plath) “will not do.”
to romanticize the past moment in which methodological distinctions among (almost exclusively white) women working on different literary periods heralded the onset of a paradigm shift in early modern studies, combining—sometimes uneasily—an emergent new historicism with feminism: I do, however, want to make this past history visible and pertinent in the present, because of ongoing and sometimes seemingly retrograde invisibilities that still characterize discourse within universities and beyond. I want to put our generationally, geographically, and ethnically shaped variety into the picture in a different way than is encouraged by the still-haunting capitalist/modernist binary between the conservative and the new—the “cutting edge” “new knowledge” paradigm of achievement that drives the neoliberal corporate academy and often conspires against now somewhat familiar (though still often unrealized) feminist and other forms of diversely agentive, collaborative community. Specters of identity still haunt feminist discourse, and thus I want to emphasize that it is gendered experiences and events, plural and fragmented, that I am hoping to keep vital in our projects and professions, rather than identity categories that abstract and flatten those historically situated experiences and events. For example, hailing an author’s writings as “female,” “homosexual,” or even “queer” does far less to disrupt normative hierarchies than does pursuing with care which particular discursive conventions and departures such an author might perform in a given time and place. The temporal differences within and between my paradigmatic academic conferences cited above, like the disjunctions caused by studying gender in the early modern period while confronting differently constructed gender problems and challenges in the twenty-first century, become means to see major transformations, but also disturbing continuities that need still to be questioned. They encourage us to acknowledge both the consequentiality and the ongoing urgency of gendered and intersectional analysis, recognizing that the content of that very analysis has been—and should continue to be—dynamic, with revolutionary potential.


Five years past receiving my PhD and building on those experiences at Columbia, I have helped bring some female writers into a liberal arts college’s great books course; helped start a women’s studies major and co-chaired that program; fundraised and with my gender studies colleagues overseen the opening of a Women’s Center (20 years later I will return to find it flourishing); and have published articles and written a book manuscript

9 See the special issue of the *Journal of Gender Studies* 23, no. 3 (2014), “Feminism, Academia, Austerity,” for more on the issues broadly facing the academy, though I add my own caveat against the general identification of disciplines and departments with negative consequences for feminism. This is specifically untrue for many English and literature departments given the paradigm shifts emblematized above, which, on the other hand and complicating such generalizations, have not permeated fields such as philosophy and political science—nor interdisciplinary work in several hot areas that intersect with my interests in theory and comparative media.

I use shudder quotes around “cutting edge” to mark it as an antihumanities and gendered metaphor: on the latter, see May Swenson’s poem, “Bleeding.”
transforming my dissertation material through the addition of overt and sustained gender analysis (published in 1995 as *Passion Made Public: Elizabethan Lyric, Gender, and Performance*). I have received outstanding teaching assessments and a unanimous positive vote by the English department in my tenure case. The president of the College denies my promotion.

Four years prior, with the assistance of the ACLS Travel Grants program, I had spoken at a conference in St. Andrews, Scotland on *Women and Sovereignty*, and in 1992 the eponymous volume of essays edited by Louise (now Aranye) Fradenburg had been published. The fellowship of that conference will extend well beyond, as those I met there—most notably, Lynda Boose—will provide support, guidance, and introductions as I face what turns out to have been a common experience for “first generation” feminist scholars in the early modern field. Again, though less happily so, the precedent of those pioneers (along with the remarkable support of many colleagues and students) offers sustenance and networks that help me pursue another stage of an academic career at a moment that could have been bleak indeed. They help me risk the unconventional jump from college to research university, to a less secure position that will involve a second series of reviews before I eventually earn my tenured position.

And so, Back to the Future: 2014

During the 450th anniversary month of Shakespeare’s birth, I am first presiding over and speaking at the annual luncheon of the Shakespeare Association of America as its president, and then flying to Weimar, Germany, to provide a keynote address at the 150th anniversary of the world’s oldest professional Shakespeare society. At the latter meeting, the first female president of the Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft is finally elected. More fundamentally, if one looks at the thought leaders in early modern literary studies, the paradigm shift that began 30 years ago seems completely integrated into the norms of the discipline.

At the same time, a huge number of those with degrees in early modern studies are struggling to remain in academia or to cobble together viable alternative careers—and they are disproportionately female. The Alt-Ac movement has made great strides in making visible the important work of those not on the tenure track and in honoring alternative ways of sharing its members’ passion and knowledge about the early modern world. But the
inequities, and the humanities landscape more generally, are chastening. A pattern familiar to students of gender emerges: as disciplines become “feminized” in their membership and priorities, the fields themselves lose prestige and power. In my presidential address I deplored the faculty dismissals being proposed at the University of Southern Maine on the “last hired, first fired” model; although subsequent outcry led to revocation of that proposal, now, months later, even more sweeping cuts are being initiated. Differences between scholars of early and late modernity become trivial when viewed through this lens: we are all struggling to keep a serious space for literary and cultural studies alive in the academy.

Thus at the MLA in January 2014, sitting on the panel “Women in the Expanding University: Global and Local” alongside one of those speakers I first heard at The Poetics of Gender conference, Kate Stimpson, and sponsored by the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (CSWP), we do our best to make cases for new consciousness and courses of action to sustain our feminist community. And at the SAA I tell my story, as I do again here, of having been in a professionally tenuous situation, sharing it in solidarity with those now in similarly precarious situations. To reiterate part of what I said at the MLA:

What “out” feminists were, and were experiencing, in terms of academic power structures in the 1980s and early 90s, contingent faculty are, and are experiencing, today. Feminists are, and should be, using our experience and vocabulary more persistently to encourage alliances across status and power differentials. . . . [T]hose who are lucky enough to have tenure should at least periodically be teaching alongside our graduate students and contingent faculty in freshman and sophomore classes, as well as in our more advanced subjects, and we should thereby demonstrate to those outside our field that scholarly expertise matters at all levels and that all teachers need good working conditions. In so doing, we might also reduce what contingent workers are seeing as tenured faculty’s micro-aggressions and prejudices, which in turn create hostile environments.

The ellipsis above signals a turn from the general to just one among several specific suggestions I (and others) shared, trying to shift the conversation toward concrete feminist actions. My other two points concerned the need to make visible the experiences and knowledge we’ve gleaned from 30 years of feminist pedagogy that should be informing—but goes well beyond most of what is now being hailed as new in—the “flipped classroom”; and the need for us to be involved in online experimentation if for no other reason than to counter the comparative invisibility of feminist epistemologies and female authorities in most current MOOCs and modules. In all three instances, those who have the institutional

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13 I am referring to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) but also modules used in “blended learning” contexts (i.e., within residence-based educational structures), and the forms more popular among some feminists including SPOCs (Small Private Online Classes). The flipped classroom,
leadership opportunities afforded by a faculty position and those who have honed their teaching and computation abilities through alternative routes will benefit by partnering—at least in advancing these particular activities, if not in the larger efforts to create a more equitable workplace. We can’t afford to allow further diminishment to the professional status of our field and to our ability for advocacy with senior administrators, trustees, and government by relinquishing tenure systems where they persist, any more than we can afford to deny differentials in power and job security: that would indeed be a suicidal collective action within academia. But understanding one another’s strategies and strengths within and beyond the shared work of teaching seems one promising—and crucial—beginning point for a resurgence of political action, not just scholarly analysis, among early modern feminists. Doing so will also make more visible the reach of some Alt-Ac and contingent professionals’ lives and contributions in realms beyond our field and indeed outside higher education. The less attractive alternative is a growing divide between the privileged few and the undervalued many, echoing the worst of current economic systems beyond—and imperiling—the academy.

These tensions currently are affecting both literature and gender studies programs, compounding those produced by different generational (inter alia) perspectives and individual sensibilities, and sometimes leading to internal fractures we can ill afford. Recently a women’s and gender studies director told me that, due to complaints and criticisms about the adequacy of her institutional outreach strategies and leadership, she was wondering whether she herself was truly a feminist and whether she should resign her post. Having myself been repeatedly quizzed by others within WGS over the course of my career (“But is she really a feminist?” one scholar—now a dear friend—asked, even after I had lost my job), I assured this director she was, and she should keep going. Under such conditions, turning our criticism on one another strikes me as an understandable symptom but ill-advised, indeed an indulgence—often signaling obliviousness to the larger political landscape in which we are participating whether we like it or not. If there is a zero-sum much lauded of late in STEM fields, tends to mean in practice the substitution of online video for in-class lectures, with the possibility of more hands-on practice and discussion during class time with a professor; if the online lectures are regarded as comparable in learning function to assigned readings, the resulting flipped classes resemble the basic small-class norms of the humanities during the last 50 years (though without even the questioning of authority structures that radical teaching raised during the previous generation). If some readers have not yet encountered the vocabulary of the more recent developments in digital education, which have been seized upon in mainstream journalism as well, this seems another instance in which early modern scholarship will not benefit by maintaining the status quo: too much energy and money is being directed to this field for us to afford ignoring the trend. Regarding feminist interventions: good work has been done by the FemBot collective in particular, and early modernists are among those experimenting productively with online modules, Massive Open Online Courses, Apps for iPads, and more. While most scholars are now well aware of the archival and open access benefits of digitization, the educational impact is as differential and potentially divisive as are the conditions of our employment. One need not—should not, in my opinion—be a fan of all things online (or even all things Open Access, though that is the liberal as well as libertarian mantra as I write) in order to recognize the global scale and transformative nature of whatever form digital humanities will take in the coming decade. Early modern feminists have specific interests in this global debate and need to be part of the wider discussion.
game involved, it is surely not at the disciplinary or subfield level but at a much higher level of administrative decision-making, which is where economic arguments should be aimed. Simply put, misrecognizing the problem as an “us versus us” debate (as in much of our scholarship) rather than an “us versus them” restructuring, wherein we need to be united and “they” are much larger and uninterested in our academic debates, will not serve any of us well. If our twin impulses as humanities scholars are appreciation and critique, it seems especially apt now to appreciate (each other) locally, while we critique (systems and ideas) globally.

To do so would necessitate a sea change in many of our scholarly habits and practices in ways that are theoretically consistent with collectivist feminism, but difficult to enact within our currently privileged reward systems. At the same time, the diversity of conditions and educational institutions, even in the United States alone, is far too great for a one-size-fits-all mode of change (just witness the MOOC backlash and valid resistance to Education Department rating systems). For some of us, departments and tenure are crucial to maintaining any voice in wider decision-making, whereas in other places, unions and interdisciplinarity appear more essential. Within this variegated context, seeking new collaborative approaches in both teaching and scholarship nevertheless seems both pragmatically and intellectually compelling, though also time-consuming and counterintuitive to sensibilities long cultivated by, as well as despite, the academy (i.e., desires for independence, for stability, and in some instances for some semblance of work/life balance). Any discussion of collective lab-style, digital, or online activity also requires readdressing that vexed word just broached: global. And with that, I return to the master in this Ms.-piece, Shakespeare, who is increasingly being paired with the global even by those of us deeply suspicious of neoliberalism’s homogenizing tendencies.

Global Shakespeares—Plural

Specters of identity still haunt Shakespeare studies as well as feminist discourse, perpetuating the authorship debate and generating a surfeit of biographies. At the same time, the neoliberal logic of ownership and “branding” (of everything) adds new problems for those who wish to convey the diversity of embodiments that constitute Shakespeare (and gender) in modern performance. Especially when discussing productions across the

14 Here I am speaking of the ways (noted above) in which scholarly profiles continue to be evaluated and prioritized predominantly on the basis of solo research and publication of a quite traditional form (versus collaborative and nontraditional forms, dedication to teaching, and especially what many academics scornfully regard as service—i.e., service to one’s peers, place of employment, or community rather than one’s own advancement). I am also acknowledging the privileging of those tenured and tenure-track lines that now constitute only a quarter of US academic positions, because they have been afforded and continue to exert near hegemonic importance in terms of institutionalized power hierarchies; furthermore, they still hold strategic importance for maintaining anything like robust faculty governance (so obviously under threat at present) and for feminist advocacy at the university level. With refreshing optimism (we’re still dancing through those minefields, Annette), Stephanie Murray blogs that Alt-Ac careers can be less constrained than the tenure-track route in this regard: see her “On the Alt-Ac Jungle Gym: Toward a Feminist Approach,” #alt-academy, September 8, 2014, http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/alt-ac/pieces/alt-ac-jungle-gym-toward-feminist-approach.
globe, questions of cultural ownership arise alongside legitimate concerns about lack of local understanding when a scholarly “outsider” ventures to offer an interpretation. To some extent these are comparable issues to those long acknowledged by cultural anthropologists, or by those in literary studies sensitive to the different demands of artistic production and scholarly critique; notwithstanding, for those who would adhere to a feminist praxis that builds on consciousness of intersectionality and the need to hear a multiplicity of voices, these realities can make it even harder (and more dubious, ethically) to then generate the kinds of writing rewarded for their newness and transformative “impact”—which usually means positing large claims, theories, and methods that are easily transferable to other scholars and objects of inquiry. The global landscape is problematic, and no less so when partnered with Shakespeare.

Elsewhere I have considered the lessons gender studies offer for those pursuing intercultural analysis of Shakespeare in performance, using Vishal Bhardwaj’s brilliant remediation of Othello’s handkerchief as Omkara’s kummerband to illustrate the kind of materially specific yet polysemous representation that opens up a treasure trove of issues with dialogic potential.15 In that contemporary Hindi film’s desert landscape of Uttar Pradesh, the piece of jewelry that the half-caste Omi gives Dolly—specifically, a chain designed to emphasize and adorn the female belly—plays a major transformative role within the narrative, which both echoes and upends the generic expectations of the film “western” while concurrently highlighting specifically Indian themes, social structures, and spirituality. It also makes vivid Bhardwaj’s specific reworking of Othello’s gendered patterns and associations to befit Omkara’s fictional location and its internationally circulating performance medium. Media, performance, social categorizations, politics, geography, history, and collaborative art-making all jostle for attention and prioritization, without the possibility of collectively endorsed closure. As I wrote in introducing that article,

the scrutinised object’s dynamic narrative demonstrates both the difficulty and rich potential in trying to identify gender’s meanings within and across cultural locations. It reveals as well the crucial role of closely analysing materiality in order to counter oversimplified identity politics or philosophical platitudes about “the body”—within Shakespeare studies, and beyond.

That is the kind of scholarly practice I find most appropriate to the study of diachronic collaborations with the past, especially when they cross cultures and involve Shakespeare (what I have somewhat playfully dubbed “Shake-shifting”).16 It hinges on methods of close reading that may now seem to some, like gender itself, old hat, though the media and perspectives being represented are new. While I am by no means averse to big data or distanced reading, they cannot reveal what matters about this particular translation and remediation, which constitute its value as an artwork and as a reflection on gender


16 See especially the introductory chapter to Diana E. Henderson, Collaborations with the Past: Reshaping Shakespeare across Time and Media (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 1–36.
within a precise social context that nevertheless resonates widely; nor can social science methodologies capture what Omkara can make new or newly visible about the early modern source text and its gendered assumptions.

“Magic in the Chains” is the kind of Global Shakespeares article I could not have conceived of in 1984, and which I was still somewhat hesitant to offer as a keynote address in Taiwan 28 years later. As a white westerner, I expected to be criticized for speaking about a film whose verbal nuances (despite my enlisting “native informant” friends as translators) I could not understand, whose allusions to other Indian film tropes and norms would evade my sight. Instead, the talk was warmly welcomed, with several attendees from the subcontinent pleased that I had explored this South Asian film alongside a Shakespearean text with seriousness and in detail.

Perhaps more than usual and for the reasons outlined above, I had been careful to resist making totalizing claims or to critique other readings as a conventional method of marking territory, or perhaps it was just the luck of the draw that day. That granted, it seems at least possible that I was participating in another one of those iconic conferences (certainly it was so for me) that mark a new attitude or experience, this time at the intersection of postcolonial, performance, and Shakespeare studies—with gender analysis an explicit priority in moving the conversation forward. Gender was helping to complicate tendencies toward arguments rooted in medium specificity or essentialist notions of national or regional identity. The roles of Bi-qi Beatrice Li and Yong Li Lan both at this conference and as leaders of archival projects capturing Asian Shakespeare performances reinforced that women were full partners in this area of early modern digital studies; presentations by Eleine Ng Hui Ru and Shreyosi Mukherjee, graduate students working with Li Lan on the Singapore-based A/S/I/A archive, testified to a promising future for intercultural theater studies. As at The Poetics of Gender conference (and within Omkara), multiple categories of difference were productively colliding, here decentering the British Bard in service of a dialogue; the experience was enabled by cosmopolitan movement and digitized media circulation across the globe, while aware of the economic inequities and performative constraints those contexts have produced. This is a world of plural Shakespeares which (at least for me, and those with whom I spoke) matters in our moment—with neither the past nor present forgotten, nor one time, culture, angle, or social category prioritized tout court.17

Nobody “owns” the larger field of Global Shakespeares, including (or especially) those of us affiliated with archives, projects, and programs that bear this or a similar moniker. At the same time, the locations of many of these projects—in the United States, the United Kingdom, Taiwan, Singapore—are a reminder that even this less bounded conception of Shakespeare(s) needs to be the starting point for debate and inquiry, rather than being accepted as benign. Even if MIT’s Global Shakespeares Archive partners with Brazilian, Arab, and Eastern European theatrical companies and editors, obviously we could not be more implicated in the technological privileges and exploitative economics of the global North. As a member of MIT’s Global Shakespeares curriculum project, building on more than two decades of digital humanities experimentation initiated by Peter Donaldson (the

17 Subsequent online exchanges with India-based scholars, including Poonam Trivedi and Rupendra Guha-Majumdar, have reinforced this welcome invitation to cross-cultural exchange.
man who went to bat and hired me at my most tenuous moment in the profession) I can hardly speak as a neutral observer.\textsuperscript{18} The ironies of location are self-evident.

But looking back at the long durée of feminist achievement in reconceiving “Shakespeare” as a site for contestation and reconception provides a precedent that can now be applied to the oxymoronic juxtaposition of global with the plural name. The contingent, partial, and serendipitous collections of material that are being explored under that title need to be understood as such, not turned into new canons; and the efforts to create and sustain them need to be acknowledged as valid forms of collective labor, the twenty-first-century humanities form of labs—that unlike current scientific practice, need not have any single living individual’s name attached. A feminist praxis (as the trailblazers at FemBot collective and elsewhere have advocated) means refusing what I call the “Wild West boys’ club” model of much MOOC creation, while making sure women are in the room for the high-tech discussions and decisions. It means building on the 30 years of feminist pedagogy that preceded talk of “flipped classrooms” (only some of which have altered their epistemology and authority structures); and it means holding out for nonprofit and open source models of digital archiving wherever possible. It might also mean those in my situation don’t write single-authored books any more, so that the scarce publishing resources can be distributed among our younger colleagues until and unless we decide that the field no longer demands the monograph (though I would be loathe to see book-length studies go, especially if they could be detached from a time-pressured promotion model). More positively, we have a world of multimedia possibilities both online and off, from whence to select objects of study for reasons other than those of prestige or ease. By focusing more energy on collective projects that mix translation (across media, time, and location) with interpretation and teaching, we could conceivably be more authentic about creating acceptable forms of “new knowledge” and “impact” than we can be individually, and in the process give more significance to those phrases than the current systems of measurement have imagined. The experiences and achievements of feminism do not erase my skepticism—far from it. But they do promote another more optimistic perspective as well. To give my most enduring employer the last word and some appropriately ironic credit: “And that’s true too.”

\textsuperscript{18} Donaldson also made a successful case to hire not one but two early modernists, leading to my scholarly collaborations on the Global Shakespeares curriculum and other projects with Shankar Raman. The curriculum project has crucially relied on the labors of Emily Griffiths Jones, Belinda Yung, and Suzana Lisanti.
SECTION II
Methods
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Chapter 4
“First as Tragedy, then as . . . ”: Gender, Genre, History, and *Romeo and Juliet*

Crystal Bartolovich

In the Introduction to this volume the editors observe: “This collection responds to current scholarly and political anxieties that feminist criticism is in a state of decline and crisis by meditating upon what it means to do feminist work in early modern studies at this historical juncture.” Their sense of “crisis” is easy to corroborate. In a recent article for *differences*, Emily Apter makes a similar observation, giving an account of a 2009 event on “Contemporary Feminist Practice” she attended at which:

What came to the fore—in addition to the manifest rifts among self-identified feminists—was a distinct uncertainty about where feminism stands at the current pass: pro- or anti-theory? Alive or dead? Stuck in white middle classness or responsive to wider communities of race, ethnicity, and social belonging? Politically activist (on behalf of equal pay, same-sex marriage, abortion rights) or politically enervated by reflexive pieties? Faithful to feminocentrism or committed instead to sex and gender pluralism (trans / homo/ bi / inter / neutral / queer)?

So what is a “feminist” to do? Apter, prudently, does not attempt to answer such a thorny question definitively but instead suggests that the problem of time be confronted self-consciously in approaching it. She observes of the event she attended: “while temporal references abounded (labor time, the biological clock, intergenerational tensions in the women’s movement) nobody addressed the problem of time as such.” Her concern with “Women’s Time”—echoing an earlier influential essay by Julia Kristeva—not only seems very apt to me, but of special interest to a volume such as this one that includes a “temporal reference” (“early modern”) in its title.

I will not be coming at the problem of time the same way Apter does, however, because I privilege a different temporal mode, that of the “incomplete project”: a recognition that the quest for social justice has been paved with the bones of myriad oppressed who—having been decimated by dominant interests—never accomplished the goals for which they struggled in their own time. Thus, Walter Benjamin movingly

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2 Apter, “‘Women’s Time,’” 2.
reminds us in “On the Concept of History” that past generations have a “claim” on us to make good on these “unrealized possibilities.” Feminism, I argue here, is one such project through which past (and present) oppressions continue to make claims on us (by which I mean any reader who accepts this collective responsibility). Hence, I would diagnose the “crisis” in feminism observed by Apter and others as part of a wider crisis in “collectivity” given the depletion of radical mid-century liberation movements in the United States—a state of affairs that has encouraged a retreat into the “individual.” As one of the interviewees in Michael Pollan’s Omnivore’s Dilemma evocatively puts it, reflecting on his own path from collectivist, counterculture hippy organic farmer on a commune in the 1960s and 70s to individualist, capitalist executive in the “organic” food industry today: “everything eventually morphs into the way the world is.” This tragic assessment (I will elaborate what I mean by tragedy shortly) illustrates that social justice movements must struggle against not only injustice, but also against the formidable forces and interests that work to make injustice seem inevitable. Such struggle is, of necessity, collective, as the forces stacked against us are. Kristeva’s concept of “Women’s Time” captures this imperative nicely for feminism, precisely because it directs our attention to how—and why—women might forge, self-consciously and strategically, a “we” over time: “how can we reveal our place, first as it has been bequeathed to us by tradition, then as we want to transform it?” These issues of inheritance and “we” brings me to the “Early Modern.”

Among the symptoms indicating the tendency of dominant interests to “morph” resistance “into the way the world is” in the United States today, one might add the current obsession with the “individual” in early modern studies. Critics such as David Evett, Paul Kottman, and David Schalkwyk have been writing strenuously of late against what they take to be tired, reflexive critical imperatives to focus on the “social” or “groups” rather than “individuals.” On the one hand, these critics correctly identify a

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6 Michael Pollan, Omnivore’s Dilemma (New York: Penguin, 2007), 152.

7 Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time,” trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, Signs 7, no. 1 (1981): 13–35; 24; emphasis added. In case it does not go without saying: my elaboration of Kristeva’s temporal emphasis should not be taken as an endorsement of her project as a whole, since I am doing something quite different with “time” and “woman” here. Yet I am also tired of nigging academic battles that turn potential allies into enemies while the real—structural—enemies continue to undermine us all. In that spirit, I am trying to learn a more inclusive approach without forgetting salient critiques of Kristeva’s emphasis on language and psychoanalytic paradigms, as well as of her Eurocentrism. For a good summary of the latter critique in particular, see Su-lin Yu, “Reconstructing Western Female Subjectivity: Between Orientalism and Feminism in Julia Kristeva’s About Chinese Women,” Jouvert 7, no.1 (2002).
real concern of various explicitly “political” criticisms (“Marxist,” “queer,” “feminist,” etc.) and position themselves against them; on the other hand, though, they simply polemicize a *commonplace* of modern Shakespeare criticism in which disproportionate attention is given to individual characters, and characters as individuals, in contrast with early modern (Aristotelian) preoccupation with the total action of drama, as Margreta deGrazia reminds us. In any case, I will argue, turning to the “individual” as a response to perceived failures of “social” criticism, as Kottman et al. do, addresses the wrong problem. *There is no individual outside the social.* On this point, liberal, idealist and pre-Lacanian psychoanalysis comes head to head with materialist interpretations of the social order. From a materialist perspective, a focus on groups and social relations is irreducible—which does not mean it condones reflexive, unthinking critiques (or ignores “individuals”). Rather it demands that we assess historical situations—including our own—in their totality, and draw attention to the specificities of the social *relations* in which “individuals” (including critics) are necessarily caught up, past and present.

Hence, Raymond Williams proposed in *Modern Tragedy* that the shift in emphasis from the “total action” to the fate of the central characters in drama—such as we see in the “individual” trend in Shakespeare criticism today—is itself a learned, and dubious, synecdochic response: “When we confine our attention to the hero, we are unconsciously confining ourselves to one kind of experience which in our own culture we tend to take as the whole . . . [:] the individual.” This gesture often attempts to depoliticize criticism, but is “political” just the same. Where “individuals” are interpelated hundreds of times a day to buy this or that, to “be” this or that—it is easy for meaningful politics to regress into individualist preoccupations, as Alain Badiou, Jacques Ranciere, and Slavoj Žižek have been arguing of late, with their adamant contention that a resurgence of politics (understood as irreducibly collective) will necessarily involve the claims of excluded and deprivileged groups on the universal “we” of social totality. Early modern studies, as all social sites, has a role to play in determining whether or not such liberatory projects prevail, but for criticism to be politically progressive it must pay attention to blind spots produced by the dominant-hegemonic social relations of the world in which critics live as well as the incomplete projects we inherit from the past. To this end, I—unlike Badiou, Ranciere, or even Williams—focus here on “Women’s Time.”

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Libertarian Anti-Feminism and Feminist Collectivity

First, inheritance. The tumultuous 1640s and 50s in England produced many remarkable political events and documents. Among them are numerous petitions that came before Parliament from women. The language of seventeenth-century women’s petitions demonstrates the specifically collectivist egalitarian consciousness that emerged with considerable force at that time, as groups considered by elites to be properly excluded from political agency make claims on it: “we are assured of our Creation in the image of God, and of an interest in Christ, equal unto men, as also of a proportionable share in the freedoms of this Commonwealth.” Female petitioners explain what they mean by “freedoms” in remarkable (status quo challenging) detail, albeit with an interesting shift from the declarative to the interrogative as they do so: “Have we not an equal interest with the men of this Nation, in those liberties and securities, contained in the Petition of Right, and other good laws of this land? Are any of our lives, limbs, liberties, or goods to be taken from us more than from men, but by due process of law . . . ?” Given that the “liberties” of women were actually not secure (those of most men were not either), these rhetorical questions pointedly transform the world as it is into one that, from the petitioner’s perspective, it should be—a world in which freedoms are assured for all. It is thus a utopian gesture. They even insert a temporal dimension into their appeal by closing with the reminder that Parliament should address their demands, lest they be thought “dis-honourable to all Posterity.” As it happened, Parliament displayed its shortsightedness and proved their point, since, as early historians tell us, they not only ignored the women’s petitions but dismissively directed the petitioners to “go home and wash their Dishes,” despite the fact that, as Thomas May sympathetically observes, the women “reply’d they had neither Dishes nor Meat left.” Given Parliament’s adamant refusal to acknowledge direct female collective participation in political affairs, as well

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12 “To the supreme authority of England the Commons assembled in Parliament. The humble petition of diverse well-affected weomen of the cities of London and Westminster, the borrough of Southwark, hamblets, and places adjacent” (London, 1649).

13 Although Amy Louise Erickson’s influential Women and Property in Early Modern England (New York: Routledge, 1993) has largely shifted discussion of female legal constraint to the robust economic activity in which women participated despite these constraints, no one would describe the legal position of women in early modern England as clear cut (in fact “ambiguous” is one of the more common adjectives one encounters in history writing). The assumption of “freedoms” by the women petitioners thus goes very much against the grain of explicit legal thought, and, indeed, many social, religious, and political norms as well, rendering the petitioners’ gesture a refusal of the status quo that I view as utopian in an affirmative sense. I discuss this mode of female utopianism at more length in “Optimism of the Will: Isabella Whitney and Utopia,” Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies 39, no. 2 (2009): 407–32.

as the relatively limited explicit demands made by the petitions themselves (restricted as they were, for the most part, to agitating for the release of male “friends” from prison and the according of due process to them), the claims of women on “freedom” here must be seen as an opening to, and a placeholder for, a long—still incomplete—project.

Indeed, “equal” participation in the “freedoms of the Common wealth” in minimal legal terms, such as franchise (nowhere even demanded by the women petitioners), would take more than three centuries to achieve in Great Britain—for that matter, would not be achieved by all adult men there for over two. In this “long revolution,” women’s petitions of the seventeenth century are important, though, nevertheless, because they recognized that women as a group were “thought unworthy to Petition, or represent our Grievances to this Honourable House,” but rejected this categorical exclusion by addressing Parliament as a specifically female “we” anyway. Unlike private letters of petition to authority, for which aristocratic women had long had recourse, the midcentury parliamentary petitions from women are not only collective but typically delivered en masse and followed up with print versions that extend their claims into a public sphere in the process of being created by the massively increased pamphlet output during the civil war years. Implicitly declaring women’s exclusion from political participation to be a problem for the “Commonwealth” as a whole, the “we” of the women’s petitions assumes a universality that comes into contradiction with the female-subordinating legal and political structures of the time. Some historians misunderstand the identification of such “contradiction” as “anachronistic” or even as casting aspersions upon the logical capacities of the writers. Contradiction in the materialist sense, however, points


16 On private letters of petition by women, see James Daybell, Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). Nabil Matar, “Wives, Captive Husbands, and Turks: The First Women Petitioners in Caroline England,” EIRC 23 (1997): 111–28, has uncovered an interesting precursor to the midcentury women’s petitions in the various collective appeals made by the wives of captured sailors to secure their husbands’ release from “Turks.” I do not find these petitions to be as similar to the women’s petitions as Matar does (the ones he cites are appeals of “wives” as such, and seek succor for a specific group of wives, while the later “women’s” petitions recognize women as a distinct social group, and make a claim on universal freedoms in their name). Still, these earlier petitions indicate a rising sense by aggrieved parties that a court of public opinion is worth appealing to when authorities fail them. In that sense, the wives’ petitions are continuous with the later women’s petitions. I take from Matar’s material, then, a different point: the midcentury petitions are best understood in relation to a tradition of petitioning, and as indicating an increasing awareness of a “public” to whom one addresses grievances. In these terms, the wives Matar discusses are actually more striking in their low status as compared with the leveler women petitioners, who, like leveler men, appeared typically (albeit not entirely) to come from the respectable “middling sort”—though they were disparaged as “oyster wives” and “lemon sellers”—that is, as if they were very “low” in social status. See Ann Marie McEntee, “‘The [Un] Civil Sisterhood of Oranges and Lemons’: Female Petitioners and Demonstrators,” Prose Studies 14, no. 3 (1991): 92–111.

17 Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green, Women’s Political Thought in Europe, 1400–1700 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); they are thus doubtful about the extent to which the women petitioners can be viewed as “feminist.” I would note, however, that, careful as they are to evade charges of “anachronism,” even Broad and Green concede that “some” of the female petitioners
to a flaw in the social order, not to a flaw in the logic of individuals. In this materialist sense, the female petitioners’ “we” disrupts the status quo and opens it to possibilities that remain before us well as before them since the UN commission on women observes it is still the case that “in every region, there are laws that discriminate against women, in relation to property, the family, employment and citizenship”; the continued existence of such laws demands an ongoing exertion of the feminist “we” already asserted by the female petitioners, even if they did not—could not—yet imagine fully where the demand for freedom would lead. We can’t fully imagine it either.

Feminist intervention remains crucial today, then, even though feminism as such is in “crisis,” as is the category of “woman” after decades of deconstruction. A telling example: a Tumblr thread that went viral and attracted a lot of attention during the summer of 2014. It invited women to submit photos of themselves holding up signs (or with text superimposed over their images) declaring “I don’t need feminism because . . .”; responses submitted include: “I am not oppressed—I am free”; “it destroys families”; “I made my own choice to be a stay at home mom”; “I’ve never been discriminated [against] as a woman (only as a mother)”; “egalitarianism is better”; “I don’t need others to fight my battles for me . . . [I] believe in earning things for myself . . . [I] believe in proving I am worthy of what I want, and not expecting them to be handed to me because I feel entitled”; “there is no war against me. I have and will continue to succeed in life because I work for it, not used my gender as a ‘get out of jail free’ card.” Some of the posts suggested that there may have been a time when feminism was necessary, but that time is past: “twenty-first-century women,” we are told, “are [not] oppressed.” Such sentiments are frequent: “Do I look oppressed?” one pert, well-groomed young white

were “motivated to air their political grievances as a social group” (142; emphasis added). This articulation of a specifically female “we” is precisely what makes them “feminist,” in my view, even if the agendas they elaborate do not correspond to those of later feminisms—which, in any case, are themselves plural. Indeed, that the petitions often proposed women should participate with (rather than against) men in struggling for freedoms of the commonwealth actually strengthens the case (from the perspective of Ranciere, for example) that they are “feminist” (rather than weakening it, as Broad and Green argue), because such an assertion positions the female “we” as a site in which universal freedom can be pursued.

18 See, for example, the UN’s In Pursuit of Justice. The quote is taken from the webpage for the document: http://progress.unwomen.org/.

19 Deconstruction has produced salient debates concerning problems with predicating politics on gender or sex, which can problematically reify these categories, as well as on the extent to which differences among women (class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on) undermine any easy or homogeneous understanding of women as oppressed; however, in a social order in which women as women are still demonstrably subject to social and political exclusions, silencing, inequality, and bias in relation to men, such deconstructions can undermine progressive politics as well as underwrite it—as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak recognized long ago. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Strategy, Identity, Writing,” in Postcolonial Critic (New York: Routledge, 1990), 35–49.

20 A Facebook page associated with it managed to elicit over 24,000 “likes.” While I have been writing this essay many thousands of “likes” have been added (in the first draft I reported only “7,000!”). For comparison: the “I need feminism” Facebook page collected over 39,000 likes, but has been active since April 2012, while the “Women against Feminism” page has only been up since January 2014.
woman asks, rhetorically. Striking, of course, is the strongly libertarian tone of these postings. Whereas social movements of the 1960s and 70s were collectivist struggles, explicitly articulated in terms of securing social justice for oppressed groups by combatting the material structures that enable injustice, over time much of the originary collectivist insurgent force has dissipated into a focus on “individuals,” as the “I don’t need feminism” posts attest. From the critique of “identity” politics, we have all learned to appreciate “singularity,” which is everywhere in radical political discourse today. However, as Kristeva recognized long ago, political affirmation of singularity that fails to address the nitty-gritty of solidarity is in danger of morphing into the individualism and atomization of the status quo.

In this broader context of widespread libertarian suspicion of collectivity, the focus on the “individual” that recent Shakespeare criticism posits as novel can be seen for what it actually is: the norm. As Neil Gross has shown, university faculty, especially in the humanities and social sciences, lean far to the left of the population as a whole in the United States, so it is a mistake to assume that attitudes commonplace in the academy—such as the importance of the “social”—are also commonplace in the world beyond it. Differentials of power and social oppressions manifestly still operate in US society (as elsewhere), and are still papered over by “individualist” ideology.

The overwhelmingly positive mainstream response to John Madden’s Oscar-winning, high-grossing Shakespeare in Love (1998)—a reworking of Romeo and Juliet—is a case in point. While Romeo and Juliet gives equal billing to the lovers, the film’s title signals that only half of the couple really matters: the male half. Furthermore, while queer studies had already done much to expose heterosexist normativity in early modern studies by the time this film was made, Shakespeare in Love depicts its eponymous hero as emphatically hetero, even giving us a long list of his (female) lovers early on in case the “master-mistress” of the sonnets had made any viewers uneasy on that score. But what most interests me here is the individualist focus of the film, underscored by its heavy-handed deployment of anachronism. In one of the very first scenes, we see young Shakespeare visiting his “apothecary” (therapist) where he lies on a couch and complains about writer’s block, setting up our expectations for a tale of personal fulfillment in 1990s “me generation” terms. Meanwhile, the daughter of a wealthy family, Viola de Lessups, longing for “poetry” and “adventure,” spunkily dresses as a boy and applies to the Rose Playhouse for a job—which she readily secures. Since she consistently behaves as if institutional constraints (family, gender, etc.) are challenges to be overcome individually, it is easy enough to imagine her (especially given her relative privilege) holding up a placard at the Rose: “Do I look oppressed?” In any case, insurgent solidarity with other women is

21 For an account of this trajectory within Western feminism in particular, see Angela McRobbie, Aftermath of Feminism (London: Sage, 2008).

22 Kristeva, “Women’s Time,” thus underscores—albeit too hastily and elliptically—the importance of simultaneous attention to “the community of language” and the “singularity of each person” (35).


outside her—and the film’s—imaginary. Furthermore, despite the demonstrable vexations of “duty” to which she eventually accedes, Viola—and the film—keep their ideological emphases on individual choice and the inevitability of the status quo at the same time, putting it in a continuum with libertarian imperatives, which, after all, do not promise happiness, but only that the individual is responsible for making the most of the situation in which she finds herself.

Hence Madden’s “Shakespeare” and “Viola” choose “duty” in the end—underscored since they consider running off together at several junctures, but reject the idea as unrealisitic; not only would they be poor, but if Viola refuses Wessex “the Queen will know the cause and there will be no more Will Shakespeare.” Their parting is, then, ultimately rationalized as a sacrifice made for “poetry.” Viola protests when Will says he is “done with theater” if he has to lose her: “if my hurt is to be that you will write no more, I will be the sorrier.” She thus prods him to turn his sorrow into a play, which they immediately start composing together before she dashes off to be replaced by Will’s fantasy of her as he writes. On screen, “Viola” transforms from a person into a name on the sheet of paper inscribed by Shakespeare before our eyes. The idea of Viola matters most in the end, since this is “Shakespeare’s” story; he loses his “Juliet,” but is compensated not only with the return of his poetic “gift,” but also with the 50 pounds he needs in order to buy a share in the theater and be “a hired player no more.” Meanwhile, living Viola having been sadly-conveniently disappeared, “Woman”—as a construct of male fantasy—can seem necessary, even desirable (who would want the world to have been deprived of Shakespeare’s plays?). In the end, “individual” sacrifice (the flip side of individual pleasure) is a good thing, however sad, because it leads to poetic and commercial success—conveniently freed from the challenges of cultivating love over the long run. In this way, Madden seemingly moves the play beyond tragedy by sublimation of love into “poetry”—but a poetry that is securely commoditized in the theatre. To soften the crasser implications of the couple choosing family, career, and wealth over love in obscure poverty (or death as Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet do), Elizabeth I (“a woman in a man’s profession” as she declares herself) arrives as a Regina ex Machina to send them on their separate ways as the only choice (“those whom God has joined in marriage, not even I can put asunder”). This Royal affirmation of structural relations as necessity assures that the status quo is challenged in no respect. Time freezes. “You will never change for me,” Shakespeare tells Viola as she prepares to leave forever. Ditto for the social structure.

User reviews of the film on Amazon or Rotten Tomatoes attest that it still elicits exuberant accolades (“great movie,” etc.), while it is critiqued in such venues—if at all—for its uneven acting and the liberties it takes with history. Casual viewers in the United States apparently take the film’s individualist ethos entirely for granted, or silently approve it. This is not surprising in a country where the libertarian solution to every remediable social ill prevails—that is, make the best of the situation in which you (individually) find yourself. Raymond Williams deems social conditions of this kind as more “tragic” than a stage littered with corpses. “Tragic” for him describes a world in which liberatory transformation of the social order is possible but prevented. Shakespeare in Love encourages viewers to believe that accommodation to the status quo is inevitable, so everyone should just make the best of it. The Women Petitioners of the 1640s and 50s—utopianly—suggested otherwise: The point is to change it.
The Disappeared

If *Romeo and Juliet* is, as Marge Garber and many other critics suggest, the “normative love story of our time,” we can easily see the undesirability of *Shakespeare in Love* “morphing” that story “into the way the world is,” as well as of audiences accepting its take.\(^{25}\) I thus want to read Shakespeare’s play as participating in an incomplete project of feminism rather than undermining it as Tom Stoppard, et al.’s, script, willy nilly, does, in hopes that colleagues will want to bring the film and the play together in the classroom and engage students in critical readings of both along the lines I unfold here. Although his insights on feminism as such were few, Bertolt Brecht provides guidance in such a project because of his investment in making legible the “social” signature in art, which he viewed as participating in the human aspiration to inhabit a truly just and free society. To the end of exposing the impediments to such aspiration imposed by existing social relations, he wrote a series of exercises to help actors consider the class contradictions that underwrite the societies in which drama is written and performed. In one for *Romeo and Juliet*, he invented a servant (“Nerida”) who is, like Juliet, in love.\(^{26}\) Mistress and maid converse familiarly and Juliet is supportive of Nerida’s wish to slip out to prevent her lover from meeting another girl until she hears Romeo leap over the wall into her garden. Then, to ensure that she will be able to talk to Romeo undisturbed, Juliet orders Nerida to distract the rest of the household by rattling noisily around Juliet’s rooms. Although she promises Nerida she will be “brief,” she isn’t, and thus causes the maid to miss her chance to meet her own lover at a crucial juncture. Brecht reminds us that Juliet may have “means much less” than her male lover to escape domestic confines, as Shakespeare’s “Chorus” frankly observes at the beginning of Act 2, but she is nonetheless a member of a “household” of “dignity” in Verona, and that “dignity” confers status privileges as well as constraints.

Of the many possibilities, there are two main ways that Brecht’s exercise serves as a starting place for my approach to *Romeo and Juliet* here. First of all: academics need such an exercise for themselves, so that they remember to pay attention to the social relations of the world that they inhabit. About *Romeo and Juliet* in particular, though, I am interested in the implications of the play’s staging of exclusion. That is, just as Brecht writes a scene to draw our attention to class relations that otherwise might seem invisible, desirable, natural, or inconsequential, we might, in a feminist-Brechtian mode, also wonder about the ending of *Romeo and Juliet*: “Where are the women?”\(^{27}\) There are at least 15 people (including corpses) on stage in the last scene (the number is variable in performance depending upon how many “attendants” and “watchmen” are on hand). Of this number, only two—Juliet and Lady Capulet—are identified as female, and one of them is dead. Given this remarkable gender imbalance, we might wonder where the women are, especially if we agree with Raymond Williams’s counternormative insistence that the conclusions of tragedies are best understood as reminders that “life does come back, that its meanings are reaffirmed and

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27 This is Cynthia Enloe’s repeated question in *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Whereas Brecht’s playlet indicates a rupture in female solidarity imposed by class, Enloe uses the historical specificity of relations—local and global—to pose the question of a potential female “we”s.
restored, after so much suffering.”28 Without women, though, life will not “come back”—and I do not only mean biologically. From a feminist perspective, Williams’s claim makes the absence of women from the ending of *Romeo and Juliet* all the more conspicuous—which is not to say that it has been given the attention it deserves.

So, I ask: why does Juliet’s Nurse, like the Fool in Lear, simply disappear?

After the eponymous lovers and Friar Lawrence, the Nurse has the most lines in the play, testifying to her significance to it, yet, after she dismisses the musicians at the end of Act 4, we never hear from her—or even see her—again.29 Her absence from Shakespeare’s final scene at the tomb is all the more striking because in the conclusion to Arthur Brooke’s poem (that Shakespeare usually follows closely in his plot) Prince Escalus draws particular attention to the Nurse by passing a sentence of exile on her for failing to warn Juliet’s parents about the secret marriage.30 Not only does Shakespeare leave out that judgment, but also—in his otherwise heavily populated final scene—the Nurse. Indeed, there is an interesting reversal in emphasis on her character and the Friar’s over the course of Shakespeare’s play, since the Nurse is particularly prominent in the first “comic” act, while the Friar is absent from it; she, conversely, is absent from the last “tragic” act, in which the Friar has a major role. Why there is no place for the Nurse in the social order that continues after the lovers die, given her prominence in earlier scenes, is very much worth considering it seems to me. Indeed, I think that we are meant to note it, given what the Nurse represents socially. I focus here on three attributes.

First, the “Nurse” represents nurturing, the relationship of care that promotes the flourishing of living beings over time. As Act 1 underscores, the Nurse sets Juliet on the path to broader socialization by rupturing the nurse-infant dyad, which is why so much emphasis is laid on her weaning rather than the three years prior to it. Weaning is progressive rupture—an opening to a new stage of life for an infant (or, in this instance, a toddler). Later, the Nurse similarly attempts to nourish Romeo’s and Juliet’s love even though it might disrupt not only her relationship to Juliet, but also the entire social order. To understand the significance of this nurture, it is useful to bring it into dialectic with Alain Badiou’s use of *Romeo and Juliet* as a literary example of love as an evental opening to the new. For him, true love always opens individuals to “Truth”—the universal promise of rupture with an atomizing, unjust status quo—given that Two must work to maintain a life together while each is “challenged by the perspective of difference” posed by the other.31 Crucially, while the “event” of an unexpected meeting opens each to love’s transformative potential, love is what comes after the originary encounter in “duration and process”—the making of a life together. Although Badiou does not put it this way, love, then, irreducibly involves nurture. Indeed, the Nurse of *Romeo and Juliet*, who carries messages and rope ladders, guards the lover’s bed from parental interruption, and defends Juliet in the face of her father’s wrath, manifestly nurtures the love of the young couple in ways that are hard to separate fully from their own nurture of their love for each other. Enacting something like the “love of another” as a “slow, difficult and delightful apprenticeship” that Kristeva

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associates with its *maternal* form, the Nurse also illustrates the supporting role that such love can play in its *romantic* form.\(^{32}\) Badiou does not consider the Nurse’s (or, for that matter, the Friar’s) roles in attempting to sustain Romeo and Juliet’s love in these terms since he views romantic love as purely dyadic.\(^{33}\) Love is how *two* “individuals” access “Truth” by engaging in the hard work of sustaining life together. “Politics” is the name Badiou gives to the *collective* mode of aspiring to Truth: making *society* together. However, if we view the Nurse as a potential bridge between “love” and “politics,” we can understand that her absence from the conclusion of Shakespeare’s play casts doubt on the premise that “life goes on”—as Williams puts it—in a potentially liberatory direction.

This is all the more so because the Nurse not only nurtures, but she also draws attention to social relations as dynamic—a second attribute I want to emphasize. Never alone on stage, the Nurse inserts herself *between* characters in scene after scene to negotiate their social ties that change over time, indicating the complexity—and dynamic potential—of sociality. *At first* it appears that she might be a blocking figure, like Juliet’s parents, since she interrupts the couple’s initial meeting, sending Juliet to her mother. She is also the call from “within” Capulet family space in the “balcony scene,” dynamically indicating Juliet’s predicament as she is pulled two ways. Immediately after, though, the Nurse becomes “the drudge” who will “toil” for Juliet’s and Romeo’s “delight” in the rest of Act 2, as they attempt to make a *new* social unit in manifest dialectical tension with the old. In Act 3, she continues her transactional role between the old and the new, demonstrating the tug of the old (mourning Tybalt) and the new (coming around to Juliet’s view, and going off to find Romeo to “comfort” her).

Above all, however, she is a *comic* woman—the third attribute to which I want to draw attention. Critics almost invariably comment on her speeches being not only lengthy but also earthily funny and idiosyncratic. Her humorous, frankly sexual and self-assured speech and behavior conspicuously contradict advice-book views of good nurses—a topic of some anxiety in the early modern period. She is so much at variance with these norms, in fact, that Beatrice Groves argues that she must serve as an illustration that the terrible consequences promised by the books are unwarranted, since Juliet turns out to be the Nurse’s antithesis in speech and behavior.\(^{34}\) Alternatively, Barbara Everett suggests that the Nurse’s memorably comic stage presence provides a “foil” for Juliet, just as Mercutio provides for Romeo—the seriousness of the lovers being underscored by contrast with their comic companions.\(^{35}\)

Typically, though, the Nurse’s comic speech—and by extension, her character—have


\(^{34}\) Beatrice Groves, “The Morality of Milk: Shakespeare and the Ethics of Nursing,” in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics*, ed. John D. Cox and Patricia Gray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 139–58. This view of Juliet seems dubious to me, I should add, since Juliet (to Shakespeare’s credit) defies (and deceives) her family, is eager for, and unafraid of, sexual experience, and otherwise deviates from handbook upper-class daughterly behavior.

\(^{35}\) Barbara Everett, “*Romeo and Juliet: The Nurse’s Story,*” *Critical Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1972): 129–39.
been dismissed as “inconsequential,” “irrelevant,” and the like. The manifest dramatic impact of her character, and even her clear significance to the plot, are ignored in order to focus on the vivid inventiveness of her speeches, an accidental effect, we are told, of Shakespeare refining his craft and learning to create characters imbued with “realism”—by which is meant convincing “individuality.” But this understanding of the Nurse merely extends to “supporting” characters the problem that Williams detected long ago in critics’ overemphasis on the “individuality” of the hero. I want to suggest instead, then, that the Nurse as a comic woman—in a strong Bakhtinian sense—draws our attention to the social interdependence on which all life, all “individuals”—indeed all love—depends.

This is the case, even though—or rather, because—the Nurse is not always funny; she is at times very serious, and not at all a “foil” to Juliet—which teaches us something about how to understand comedy. Indeed, in Act 3, scene 5 the Nurse stands up for Juliet against her father more boldly than her birth mother or even the girl herself when he insists his daughter marry Paris. As Juliet kneels in a desperate attempt to assuage her father’s wrath with its vehement imprecations and promises of physical violence for disobedience (“I will drag thee on a hurdle hither;” “My fingers itch!”), the Nurse intervenes to draw his fire: “God in heaven bless her! / You are to blame, my lord, to rate her so.” Capulet immediately transfers his rage to her: “And why, my Lady Wisdom? Hold your tongue, / Good Prudence, smatter with your gossips, go.” The Nurse protests, “I speak no treason” and (in response to Capulet’s dismissive “O Godigigoden!”) “May not one speak?” Capulet gets the last word by saying no, she may not speak, and puts her in her place: “Peace, you mumbling fool! / Utter your gravity o’er a gossip’s bowl, / For here we need it not.” That critics have agreed with Capulet’s assessment that the Nurse is “stupid” or “irrelevant” sits very uneasily with the fact that it is difficult to imagine any audience, early modern, current, or in between, fully and easily taking Capulet’s side against Juliet—or the Nurse—in this scene.

Although it does not triumph in the end, the resistance of the Nurse and Juliet is neither “inconsequential” nor “irrelevant,” which is why the representative of patriarchy responds so strongly to it. The Nurse’s invocation of “treason” after all raises the specter of the political, especially since Capulet reminds her that he, not she, is the judge both of what behaviors

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37 Although Mikhail Bakhtin’s view of the “carnivalesque,” Rabelais and his World, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), has been rightly critiqued for ignoring the violent underbelly of “carnival” (see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, Politics and Poetics of Transgression [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986], for example), it would be a mistake, I think, to therefore throw out entirely the comic promise of liberation that Bakhtin and other radical thinkers have defended.

38 Glenn Clark, “Civil Mutinies of Romeo and Juliet,” ELR 41, no. 2 (2011): 280–300, briefly discusses the Nurse’s resistance to Capulet as a form of “civil mutiny”—which he sees as successful. My argument goes in a different direction.
are “treason” and who is permitted to speak. And he dismisses her precisely as female, excluding her by sending her off to her “gossips,” the only proper auditors of her speech in his view. The Nurse, thus, marks the limits of individual resistance. The intransigence of the father, the birth mother’s feeble attempt to calm him, Juliet’s and the Nurse’s failure to sway him, demonstrate the power of the patriarchal forces Capulet represents. As individuals—or even as partners—the Nurse and Juliet are not going to overturn patriarchy’s power. In the light of this power, one can see why the Women’s Petitioners sought the augmentation of their individual voices in collective resistance. Relegated to political marginality, they too are “thought unworthy to Petition, or represent [their] Grievances,” and sent off to “wash their dishes.” But they enact the transformation of excluded “gossips” (as defined by men) into a “we” defined by women themselves—a we that makes a claim on “freedoms” that they assert should belong to them because they should belong to everyone.

The Nurse’s “betrayal” of Juliet, too, recognizes the limits of individual resistance. She urges Juliet to make the best of a bad “case” (like Madden’s Viola de Lessups or latter day libertarians) and marry Paris. That we are supposed to find this advice unsatisfactory seems clear enough, but Juliet’s “choice” of death, too, is unsatisfying. Patriarchy remains intact to oppress other women despite Juliet’s death or the Nurse’s pragmatic accommodation. Furthermore, even if the tomb scene had gone according to the Friar’s plan, the Neridas in Verona would be no better off. That this might not always be so, though, is the still incomplete project of materialist feminism. In Brechtian fashion, then, I like to imagine the Nurse as having gone off to her “gossips” to plot revolution while the men in the last scene are preoccupied with comparing the size of their monuments. The play’s (perhaps unwitting) demonstration of the failure of individual resistance to topple entrenched power provides an opening for a canny feminist to intervene and suggest that the “comic woman” is excluded from the social order in Romeo and Juliet’s last scene because she represents an incomplete project—for which we are now responsible.

The stakes of such a recognition become all too clear when we examine the ongoing silencing and denigration of women today. Jagdish Bhagwati’s In Defense of Globalization, for example, dismisses studies—by women—that account for migration of low-waged female laborers in structural terms (poverty and uneven development between the global North and South), instead drawing attention to “individual choice” by adducing the “happiness” of his own children’s nanny, who he uses as “evidence” that: “The migrant female worker is better off in the new world of attachments and autonomy; the migrant’s children are happy being looked after by their grandmothers, who are also happy to be


40 Paul Kottman, “Defying the Stars,” attributes the “unsatisfying” impact of Romeo and Juliet’s conclusion to its failure to address what “we”—in his view—“care about”: Romeo and Juliet (as individuals) alone. While I too find the ending unsatisfying, I attribute this unease to a quite different cause since I am unable to assume, as Kottman does, that a happy ending for Romeo and Juliet would be a truly happy ending so long as the social order persists in which remediable oppressions persist as part of this outcome. Thus we cannot look aside from the “social” (or reduce the social to the feud!) in order to focus on Romeo and Juliet’s “freedom,” as if this can be extricated from the social relations in which they (and it) are necessarily embedded.
looking after the children; and the employer mothers, when they find good nannies, are also happy that they can work without the emotionally wrenching sense that they are neglecting their children.”41 Leaving aside the accuracy of Bhagwati’s representation (we never hear from the nanny herself, and just how freely she could speak with her job on the line is doubtful in any case), I want to underscore the limits of the “individual” approach he prefers to a structural one. Women who inhabit oppressive conditions might rationalize their choices in any number of ways (duty, love, God’s will, “whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger,” and the like), but this says nothing—nothing at all—about whether or not the circumstances of such accommodation are just. If your children will starve, or not get educated, unless you travel thousands of miles to become the nanny for someone else, you may well be “happy” to do it given the alternative, but this hardly means the choice is “free” in a way that justifies the system in which such “choices” are made. For any determination of how “free” a choice may be, the mediation of the total social situation—and an assessment of how just it is—must be undertaken, and this is exactly what apologists for capitalism, like Bhagwati, propose we not do.

Meanwhile, Shakespeare critics, like David Evett, who assert that we can assess the “volitional freedom” of early modern “servants” at the level of “individuals”—and suggest that such an approach can help us better understand why subordination might “freely” be chosen today as well—make a similar error, a symptom of the same accommodationist imperatives that inform Bhagwati.42 Shifting the emphasis to individual “choice” severed from consideration of structural constraint (instead of in dialectic with it) always benefits the—tragic—status quo. Against this, the Nurse represents an opening to other possibilities. After tragedy.

“After Tragedy”

In the Eighteenth Brumaire, Marx famously observes:

Hegel remarks somewhere that all the great events and characters of world history occur, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. . . . Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted. . . . And just when they appear to be engaged in the revolutionary transformation of themselves and their material surroundings, in the creation of something which does not yet exist . . . they timidly conjure up the spirits of the past to help them.45

Marx goes on, after elaborating this point for several pages, to call for a revolution that manages to “create its poetry from the future, not from the past.”44 On the one hand, the Eighteenth Brumaire underscores the limits on free will imposed by “inherited” historical circumstances: it has no illusions that revolution is a simple matter of will. At the same

42 Evett uses these terms repeatedly in Discourses of Service.
44 Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 149.
time, though, the passage warns against making the past even *more* of an impediment than it already is by *clinging* to it. With both moves, Marx emphatically (and, as it were, in advance) rejects the recurrent prognosis—Burke’s, Popper’s, David Scott’s, and the “Change is Bad” campaign for Hershey’s Chocolate—that the revolutionary struggle for social justice must *necessarily* end badly.\(^{45}\) Hitherto, history has been—is—tragic (or farcical), but since human beings *collectively* make their own history, it need not always be so. As cogently laid out by Hayden White, Marx’s (and Hegel’s) overall view of history is therefore “Comic” although Humanity’s “reconciliation, with itself and with nature” (implied by the “Comic”) is achieved “by means of Tragic conflicts” along the way.\(^{46}\) As White’s formulation underscores, *both* the endpoint—never guaranteed—toward which struggle aspires *and* recognition of the “tragic” consequences unleashed along the way are *crucial* to the Marxian understanding of history. In the terms I have been using in this essay, then, we might say that *Comedy* is the name for the *incomplete project* of the “long revolution”—the promise of the just and free world that we do not yet have, but that is possible, and the accomplishment of which we owe not only to ourselves, but to all those who have struggled to bring it into being before us. This project is different from *clinging* to the past because it is a pursuit of *unrealized possibilities*—the past that never happened. The ongoing nonrealization of these possibilities is tragic; comedy is the promise that there is something *after* tragedy—something that I call here “Women’s Time.”

Though it in effect aspires to Women’s Time, “After Tragedy,” the last chapter of Linda Bamber’s 1982 book, *Comic Women, Tragic Men*, does not yet realize how radical that “after” might be. Her chapter takes its title from its discussion of the Shakespearean Romances, usually assumed to have been written “after” most of the Tragedies (and Comedies), but I want to push Bamber’s evocative title further. Writing as she was in response to the first outpouring of explicitly feminist literary criticism in the US, her primary goal was attempting to figure out a way to write about Shakespeare’s plays without labeling their author either a “feminist” or a “misogynist” (typical at the time). Although there are at least two additional waves of feminism, as well as postfeminism and libertarian antifeminism, between her moment of writing and my own, I want, in the spirit of incomplete projects, to affirm solidarity with the feminism to which she frankly and unapologetically allies herself, even though her argument about male “Selves” and female “Others” now sounds outmoded. In assertions like “the festive spirit is always waiting for its moment,” Bamber affirms the Shakespearean comic heroine as a substantive alternative to the male tragic hero.\(^{47}\) To be sure, by this she has in mind that “ordinary life” and “holiday” are equally significant to human existence: “holiday, play, festivity are endlessly recurring alternatives to the difficulty of ordinary life.” But from the perspective of “Women’s Time” as *incomplete project* that I have been developing here, another interpretation of the comic is possible: not the *endless* back and forth between “holiday” and the “ordinary,” but Comedy as the


realization of the denied possibilities toward which feminism, and other social movements have struggled—and are struggling.

Hence I want to put Bamber’s attempt to rescue Shakespeare’s plays for feminism in dialectic with Raymond Williams’s attempt to rescue tragedy from the radical left who dismiss it as a form of elitist fatalism.48 He concedes that this radical view is understandable given that the right (and liberal left) decry revolution as “tragic” in exactly the fatalistic sense that Williams criticized the left for taking tragedy to be—that is, as leading necessarily and only to suffering, failure and more suffering. Alternatively, Williams wanted to preserve the tragic emphasis on attending to suffering but without the fatalism with which the genre (wrongly, in his view) became associated. Hence, he (re)emphasized the “total action” of tragedy rather than the death of the hero in order to pull us back from a static contemplation of individual death to a dynamic consideration of the society that lives on. In this way, he, in effect, discovers in tragic drama a gesture toward the comic, albeit not, of course, a realized comic ending; indeed, in the language of this essay, he viewed tragedy as a symptom of human history as an incomplete project, opened toward other possibilities. He did so because he viewed revolution dialectically—as tragic and comic—to combat the fatalism with which it had been widely burdened. Revolution was the historical tragedy whose last act could, finally, be other than fatality or farce. A truly liberatory society would be comic, even though the path to it was tragic. Women’s Time—understood as an incomplete project—offers one path toward such a comic denouement.

Women’s Time?

Julia Kristeva asked long ago in her “Le Temps des femmes” [“Women’s Time”]: “What can be our place in the symbolic contract?” Her referent for “our” was “women,” of course, but in a complex way—as a problem rather than as an ahistorically constituted group. Thus, she asked: How (and why) does one say “our” today? What are the politics of space and time that necessarily inhabit collective pronouns? How does one account for both the subjective and the structural without betraying or over-simplifying either? How do activists resist assimilation to the very dominative apparatuses that they organize themselves to struggle against? Relatedly, how can one contrive to think differently within/against a sociosymbolic order one inhabits willy-nilly? In answer, Kristeva poses feminism as a “moment” whose goal is a time in which feminism, along with all other forms of identity thinking, would no longer be necessary.49 In this respect, she anticipates the insistence of Badiou and others more recently that the most progressive way for oppressed groups to make a claim on political agency is to assume a universal “we,” refusing exclusion by both claiming and leaving behind in the same gesture the “identity” through which they are excluded. Too often, though, the mechanisms by which “singularities” might organize are left so vague that “individuality” can easily step into the breach. Kristeva’s sense of feminism as a “moment” (like Gayatri Spivak’s “strategic essentialism”) tries to address this dilemma, which we, like she, cannot evade.

48 Williams, Modern Tragedy.
49 Kristeva, “Women’s Time,” 35.
In early modern studies, *Romeo and Juliet* provides a particularly compelling site in which to pursue a feminist “we,” I have suggested, not only because of its status as the “normative love story of our time,” which makes it worthy of feminist interrogation, but also because trends in criticism that privilege “I” are currently stifling its feminist potential. Feminism and other collectivist resistance to structural oppression remain incomplete projects, which continue, emphatically, to lay claims on us. As teachers and critics, as well as feminists and activists, we owe a responsibility to those claims.
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[W]e know that the discovery of Shakespeare’s laundry bills would not be of much use to us; but we must always reserve final judgment as to the futility of the research which has discovered them, in the possibility that some genius will appear who will know of a use to which to put them.

_T. S. Eliot, “The Function of Criticism” (1923)_1

I have not discovered Shakespeare’s laundry bills, but am intrigued by the attention they have received in Shakespeare scholarship for well over a century. A commonplace of nineteenth-century literary criticism, historiography, and biography, the “washing-bills of great men,” was first used in relation to Shakespeare by Sir Leslie Stephen, founding editor of the Dictionary of National Biography, when in 1877 he complained of scholars “gaping for every scrap of knowledge about the petty details” of great men’s lives, including even their “washing-bills,” and reserved particular scorn for those who would search out “similar information about Shakespeare.”2 In the view of Stephen and his contemporaries, the desire to “know all about his [Shakespeare’s] washing-bills” marked a critical turn “downward towards trifle,” rather than “upwards to the ideal,” a reduction of the sublimely poetic to the ridiculously prosaic.3 By the early twentieth century, the trope had become

Special thanks are due to Pamela Allen Brown, Julie Crawford, Mario di Gangi, Matthew Garrett, Will Fisher, Ania Loomba, Bella Mirabella, Melissa Sanchez, Nancy Sellek, and Henry Turner for providing helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.


sufficiently familiar that one Shakespeare critic simply referred to “the washing-bill method of research.”

The ubiquity of washing-bills within the Victorian cultural imaginary should hardly surprise us, given its occurrence during the “heyday” of the newly industrialized laundry trade. The gender of the workforce that comprised this trade, however, which was at the time 99 percent female, might prompt us to ponder the stakes of casting archival research as feminized drudgery. The recurrence of the laundry trope is of more than merely antiquarian interest, for it concerns the construction of the “merely antiquarian” itself as a gendered category against which modern Shakespeare scholarship was and continues to be defined: references to laundry have recently resurfaced in several important critiques of what is variously termed the “new antiquarianism,” the “new new historicism,” or the “new materialism.” Marjorie Garber thus titles an essay criticizing the “historical correctness” characteristic of some scholarship in this vein “Shakespeare’s Laundry List.” Jonathan Gil Harris, in a critique focused on the anthology Renaissance Culture and the Everyday (1999), mentions buck baskets (and other products of female labor analyzed in the collection) as symptomatic of its “positivist underbelly”:

For many of the current crop of new new historicists, the early modern object, even when most alien or unfamiliar, seems to provide reassuringly safe ground upon which to acquire a more or less unmediated access to the real. Buck baskets, embroidered books of psalms, and tortured pigs destined for the dining table thus become signifiers of a new plenitude, of the world of Renaissance material culture.

The new antiquarianism is from this perspective anything but new; rather, it is a positivist throwback to a pretheoretical past defined by archival rummaging through the laundry

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6 L. Wyatt Papworth and Dorothy M. Zimmern, The Occupations of Women: According to the Census for England and Wales, 1911 (London: Women’s Industrial Council, 1914), Table 5, 23; see also 440.
8 Jonathan Gil Harris, “The New New Historicism’s Wunderkammer of Objects,” European Journal of English Studies 4, no. 2 (2000): 111–23; 114; see also Harris, Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 1. Harris’s critique reworks a passage found in the introduction to our coedited collection of essays, where we argue that Renaissance Culture and the Everyday “takes as its starting point de Certeau’s dictum that everyday practices and their objects transform rather than simply reproduce social structures and cultural systems. Through detailed descriptions of objects such as buck-baskets and embroidered psalmbooks, the volume’s essays seek to show that early modern materials are not simply static things, but points of intersection for myriad relations of property and power.” Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, “Introduction: Towards a Materialist Account of Stage Properties,” in Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16.
baskets of history in search of arcane facts and trivial artifacts. This critique begs the question of what we are to make of the feminist framework within which much of the scholarship being described as newly or “merely” antiquarian is being done. The abovementioned essays in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, for example, are centrally concerned with the “everyday making of women,” focusing on the “gender and status specificity of buckwashing and other laundry work” (Helgerson), “the everyday occupation of needlework” and its role in “gender construction, patriarchy, and domestic ideology” (Orlin), and the extent to which “the everyday tends to place upfront particular kinds of subjects: the common person, the marginalized, women,” and as such, is “indebted to feminists” (Fumerton).9

In this essay, I want to suggest that feminist scholars’ enduring attachments to hands-on work with archival materials should neither be construed as a “backlash” against theory,10 nor as “redolent of the logic of fetishism”11 (or even worse, as “tchotchke criticism”12), but that to grasp the theoretical stakes of such scholarship, we must reconceive our archive of theory to make room for its descriptive richness and affective as well as political investments. I do so in the interest of elaborating how the attentiveness of such work to the minute details, textures, and contingencies of the archive may inform as much as they are informed by the totalizing truths of theory, including feminist theories of “anachronism” (Garber) and the “untimely” (Harris).13 At stake in this inquiry is what Derrida terms the “promise” of the archive (why we archive, what counts as an “archive,” what we do with archives, and the future of archives),14 as well as the promise of theory (why we theorize, what counts as “theory,” what we do with theory, and the future of theory), and how we conceive of the relationship between the archive and theory. As the phrase “archive of theory” suggests, this relationship need not be construed as antithetical, or as a fight for precedence or prestige: theory need not be positioned as ante- or antiarchival,

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10 Harris, “The New New Historicism’s *Wunderkammer* of Objects,” 114; see also Harris, *Untimely Matter*, 19.


12 “To the extent that it succumbs to what Harris calls the ‘allure’ of its objects without justifying its focus on them (by means, for example, of a more comprehensive theory both of objects and object-criticism), the new materialism runs the risk of being seen as tchotchke criticism, its anthologies the belated J. Crew catalogues of the early modern era.” Douglas Bruster, “The New Materialism in Early Modern Studies,” in *Shakespeare and the Question of Culture: Early Modern Literature and the Cultural Turn* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 191–205; 203.


14 The project of reconceptualizing the archive is not simply a question of how we conserve the past, Derrida argues, but of how we constitute the future; indeed, it is perhaps the “question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.” Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 36.
any more than archives must be construed as pre- or antitheoretical.\(^{15}\) For to do so is to ignore the constitutive role that ephemeral archives and everyday artifacts (even laundry!) have played in feminist (as well as queer and subaltern) theoretical paradigms. Indeed, as we shall see, the “washing-bill method of research” from its very inception inspired an important feminist counterdiscourse which opposed early (male) positivists’ use of the washing-bill trope to stigmatize women’s work in counterarchives. By taking this counterdiscourse into account and including it in our archive of theory, I argue, we may better understand the future potential of the “washing-bill method of research” for feminist scholarship, and respond to Eliot’s provocation by imagining what we might do with Shakespeare’s laundry.

### The “Washing-Bill Method of Research”

Once upon a time washing bills and memorandum books were below the “dignity of history.”

Now we esteem them far above acts of parliament or diplomatic memoranda.

*H. G. Wells, The Shape of Things to Come (1933)*\(^{16}\)

The “once upon a time” to which Wells’s historian of the future refers is roughly the middle of the nineteenth century, when allusions to the “washing bills of great men” began to appear with surprising and increasing frequency as shorthand for archival evidence deemed beneath the “dignity of history.”\(^{17}\) According to positivist historian Frederic Harrison (1831–1923), author of *The Meaning of History* (1862) and *The New Calendar of Great Men* (1892), the modern Historian distinguished himself from the “mere antiquary” by concerning himself not with the “flotsam and jetsam” of local history or the “interminable trivialities” of the domestic sphere—which only served to “degrade History”—but rather with the “great deeds” of “Man in the Past.”\(^{18}\) Harrison deployed the laundry-bill trope repeatedly in his effort to differentiate modern History from its antiquarian past and to define the disciplinary...
Shakespeare’s Laundry

path of its scientific future. In his view, the empirical methods of the social sciences, with their valorization of primary sources and quantitative methods, represented History’s best hope and greatest threat, for in opening the field to ever wider and more diverse forms of evidence, they threatened to dilute its proper focus by inundating its great men in “heap[s] of dirty linen.”19 For the Historian to occupy himself with “washing-bills,” he warned, was like a scientist applying an “oxyhydrogen microscope . . . to the pimples on his chin or the warts on his thumb.”20 In doing so, he threatened to “unman” both himself and his discipline.21

Harrison’s intervention came in response to studies such as Hubert Hall’s Society in the Elizabethan Age (1886), which included extensive appendices of primary documents, including inventories, rent-rolls, and records of household expenditures such as washing-bills.22 Although Harrison acceded that “all manuscript authorities of the smallest value should be accurately deciphered, copied, and edited,” such archival drudgery was in his view “quite distinct from the work of the historian proper” and better left to “[r]aw girls,” who might “devote years of their lives to deciphering the washing accounts of a medieval convent.”23 Female scholars working in archives were thus cast as the antiquarian “handmaidens” of modern History, who provided the “raw” materials used by male Historians to construct their monuments to great men.24

The gendered division of scholarly labor Harrison here describes emerged with the professionalization of History as an academic discipline, as female scholars who were unable to obtain university posts became librarians, research assistants, archivists, and editors.25 Scholars such as Mary Bateson (1865–1906) and Lucy Toulmin Smith (1838–1911) transcribed, edited, and annotated massive, multivolume tomes of medieval and early modern manuscripts, thereby making “the archive” available to a far wider readership.26 Although many of these women worked within traditional historiographical paradigms,

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19 Harrison, Historical Method of Professor Freeman, 18; see also 14, 16.
22 One of Hall’s appendices includes the shirts, handkerchiefs, nightherchiefs, socks, and collars found in the Darrell family’s laundry basket. Hubert Hall, Society in the Elizabethan Age, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1888 [1886]), Appendix II: The Darrell Papers, 209.
focusing on state papers and political institutions, others began to interrogate what was excluded by such archives and disciplinary methods, and to produce pioneering studies of women’s social, cultural, and economic history. Departing from earlier efforts in the field of women’s history, which emulated the “great men” model by chronicling the public lives of exceptional “women worthies,” they documented the everyday lives of ordinary women, putting their archival training to work on unconventional sources.27 Influenced by the emergence of first wave feminism in the 1870s, this first generation of feminist historiographers were particularly interested in the everyday material conditions that differentially shaped women’s lives.28

Exemplary in this regard was Lucy Maynard Salmon (1853–1927), founder of the History Department at Vassar College in 1887, who drew on a wide range of ephemeral sources to document her groundbreaking histories of everyday life and to inform her rethinking of what constitutes an “archive.” She was especially fond of laundry lists, arguing that they are “closely and continuously connected with everyday life,” and therefore reflect “custom and change in social conditions, industry, [and] in language, with a detail and rapidity with which other sources seldom do” (see Figure 5.1). Like other proponents of what was then called the “New History,” Salmon insisted on the “significance of the small . . . and the obscure,” including “common men and common things,” while broadening her focus to encompass “common things” that shaped the lives of ordinary working women.29 Her feminist appropriation of the “washing-bill method of research” revealed how the micro illuminates the macro, how a “humble laundry list” might shed light on labor patterns, the distribution of wealth, technological change, shifting norms of hygiene, and so forth.30 To working women like Salmon, the material processes of laundering—its gendered division of labor, location inside or outside the home, transformation by labor- and time-saving technologies—were neither inconsequential nor beneath the “dignity of history.” In seeking to remove the stigma attached to laundry and other unorthodox forms of evidence relating to ordinary women’s everyday lives in the past, she aimed not only to legitimate them as proper objects of intellectual inquiry, but to advocate for social change in the present. Her groundbreaking 1897 study of domestic service as a “labor question” thus analyzed the gendered division of labor and undervaluation of women’s work as a means to advance

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30 The appearance of the “shirt waist, stockings, and the separate dress skirt” in laundry lists, for example, reflected “the entrance of women into business life.” Lucy Maynard Salmon, Historical Material (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), 89.
LUCY MAYNARD SALMON

THE UBIQUITOUS LAUNDRY LIST

Poughkeepsie, New York,
December, 1925.

From The Vassar Miscellany News,
March 21, 1925.

"COLLECT LAUNDRY LISTS"

For some time Miss Salmon has been
making a collection of laundry lists,
both American and foreign. Laundry
lists, being closely and continuously
connected with daily life, reflect custom
and change in social conditions, industry,
or in language, with a detail and
rapidity with which other sources sel-
dom do. The collection numbers now
about 60 lists,* and Miss Salmon and
members of her class in historical ma-
terial will gladly receive additional lists
gathered by members of the College
during vacation, either this spring or
this summer. Each list should be ac-
 companied by the date, the name of the
locality where it has been found, and
the concern which issued it.

E. M. V. H., '23.
(E. M. Van Houten)

* 200, December, 1925.

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Figure 5.1 Lucy Maynard Salmon, “The Ubiquitous Laundry List,” 1925.
Salmon Papers, 54.1. Courtesy Archives and Special Collections
Library, Vassar College

single women’s independence, equal pay for equal work, female production networks, and
unconventional domestic arrangements.31

Salmon therefore encouraged feminist scholars to create heterodox, counterarchives
of their own, arising from the pressing political concerns manifested in their daily lives,
and thereby to shape the future contours of the archived past.32 In this regard, her work

31 See Lucy Maynard Salmon, Domestic Service, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1901 [1897]),
212, 260, 269, which paved the way for such later and better-known studies of female labor as Alice
Clark’s Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century (London: Routledge, 1919), and Ivy
Salmon modeled such alternatives in her own domestic life with Vassar librarian Adelaide Underhill,
with whom she set up housekeeping in 1901 and maintained a lifetime romantic partnership. Nicholas
Adams and Bonnie G. Smith, “Introduction,” in Lucy Maynard Salmon, History and the Texture of
Modern Life: Selected Essays, ed. Nicholas Adams and Bonnie G. Smith (Philadelphia: University of

was profoundly anti-antiquarian, and “untimely” in precisely the ways Harris endorses, “producing the possibility of a new future even as it evokes the past.” Her use of seemingly trivial sources helped to redefine what constitutes an “archive” by incorporating ephemera (such as newspapers, check books, laundry lists) and everyday artifacts (such as “the family Christmas tree,” the “garbage can,” and the “laundry line and pulley”) in ways that anticipate the current “material turn” in the social sciences and humanities, and from which contemporary feminist scholarship might draw inspiration.

In resisting rigid distinctions between History and Literature (endorsed by practitioners of the “New History”), Salmon was inspired less by her discipline’s belletristic past than by its avant-garde present, and the generic and stylistic experiments of early women writers of historical fiction, including those of Leslie Stephen’s own daughter, Virginia Woolf, who throughout her life defied the dictates of Victorian historiography and biography epitomized by her father. Like Salmon, Woolf challenged the notion that “the lives of great men only should be recorded,” arguing that “the humble as well as the illustrious” are part of history, and that what is deemed small and great are matters of perspective. She praised the efforts of feminist scholars to illuminate the “unlit corridors of history” by incorporating the “lives of the obscure,” including those of women and “queer people living out-of-the-way lives,” and sought to awaken feminist consciousness of the poetic and imaginative potential of archives and archiving, suggesting that they could “produce something of the intensity of poetry, something of the excitement of drama, and yet keep also the peculiar virtue that belongs to fact—its suggestive reality, its own proper creativeness.” What is needed, she maintained, is “much more than another [antiquarian] fact to add to our collection,” but rather “the creative fact; the fertile fact; the fact that suggests and engenders.”

Woolf’s early experiment in historiographical fiction, “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” (1906), thus narrates the creative awakening of an unmarried female antiquarian who has spent her life cataloguing “fragments of yellow parchment, which only a few people can read and still fewer would care to read if they could,” but who, through the discovery of the

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33 Harris, *Untimely Matter*, 11.
34 That this future may lie in counterarchives is suggested by Salmon’s own work, which is only fully accessible through her archives at Vassar College: most of her heterodox scholarship remained unpublished during her lifetime (much remains unpublished today), and her full contribution can only be understood by considering the counterarchives she compiled, including her archive of laundry lists. See Smith, “The Contributions of Women to Modern Historiography,” 725–26; Claire Bond Potter, “Ahead of Her Time,” *Women’s Review of Books* 19, no. 2 (2001): 21–22; and Anthony Grafton, “History’s Postmodern Fates,” *Daedalus* 135, no. 2 (2006): 54–69, 61.
diary of a medieval spinster (described as a “Queer old lady” who wrote “queer things”), comes to recognize the “large substantial things” that may be accessed through queer, “out-of-the-way” archives. 

Woolf’s revaluation of the “trivialities” of history would later lead her to appropriate the trope of “Shakespeare’s laundry bills” invented by her father in her own daring, gender- and genre-bending experiment, Orlando: A Biography (1928). Orlando is delighted to discover that Shakespeare’s “poetry was scribbled down on the backs of washing-bills held to the heads of printer’s devils [i.e., apprentices] at the street door. Thus Hamlet went to press; thus Lear; thus Othello.” The Shakespearean text-as-process is here inseparable from the material processes recorded in washing-bills: the playhouse and printing-house belong to a commercial network that includes the laundry-house. In A Room of One’s Own (1929), Woolf went on to develop a countervailing intellectual paradigm for the study of gender and material culture with reference to Shakespeare, insisting that his plays were inextricably intertwined with the material conditions and gendered constraints in which they were produced. Literary texts, she famously argued, “are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures,” but “are attached to grossly material things.” She encouraged scholars to search in “parish registers and account books” for remnants—including washing-bills—of the material conditions that led to Shakespeare’s flourishing and to the silencing of his sisters. Later the same year she went still further, urging, “Anyone who should seek among those old papers, who should turn history wrong side out and so construct a faithful picture of the daily life of the ordinary woman in Shakespeare’s time, . . . would not only write a book of astonishing interest, but would furnish the critic with a weapon which [s]he now lacks.”

Shakespeare’s Laundry

**Bottom:** In any case, let Thisby have clean linen . . .

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (4.2.40)

**Falstaff:** [T]hey’ll find linen enough on every hedge . . .

*Henry IV, part 1* (4.2.48)

**Ophelia:** White his shroud as the mountain snow . . .

*Hamlet* (4.5.36)

**Autolycus:** The white sheet bleaching on the hedge . . .

*The Winter’s Tale* (4.3.5)


43 Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 45.

44 Woolf, “Women and Fiction,” 5:29. The archive of “old papers” and ephemera Woolf compiled for her own uncompleted history of women’s contributions to literature was recently donated to the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University by activist-collector Lisa Unger Baskin.

If early modern literary texts were “not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures,” neither were linen textiles: every aspect of their production and maintenance was touched by female hands. It is thus not surprising that scholars of women’s social, economic, and cultural history have taken a special interest in textile culture, and linen in particular.46 Laundered linens were ubiquitous in Shakespeare’s work and world: they appear in every dramatic genre in which he wrote, as noted above, and were as visible onstage as they were in the culture at large, where they could be found bleaching on “every hedge.” Yet from its very inception, Shakespeare criticism has deemed such “trifles” beneath the dignity of criticism, and the poet’s own attention to them unseemly—much ado about nothing. Thus, Thomas Rymer, in his Short View of Tragedy (1693) famously opined of Othello: “So much ado, so much stress, so much passion and repetition about an Handkerchief! Why was not this call’d the Tragedy of the Handkerchief? . . . Yet we find, it entered into our Poet’s head, to make a Tragedy of this Trifle.”47 The critical stigma attached to Shakespeare’s laundry thus long predates the nineteenth-century “washing-bill” trope, and is therefore only partially attributable to it. The elevation of the page over the stage within a strand of criticism that gained ascendency during the eighteenth century, but whose terms were already established by Ben Jonson’s quarrel with Inigo Jones, laid the ideological groundwork for the anathema of laundry in Shakespeare’s own lifetime. For if laundry has a “tittle” of theatrical significance, it seems pertinent to the sweaty body of the actor, the sordid business of playing, and the fripperies of stage-spectacle.48

In Jonson’s view, these material trappings belonged to the transiently sensuous, effeminate (and overvalued) “body” of theater, as opposed to its enduringly intellectual, masculine (and invaluable) poetic “soul.”49 Within this familiar—and still arguably entrenched—hierarchy of theatrical value, the arduous exertions of production and performance are subordinated to the transcendent, intellectual labor of the dramatic poet-as-author. The “washing-bill” trope merely extends this logic to the labor of scholarship: the laborious toil of scholars who work in archives, soiling their hands with “grossly material things” is cast as women’s work and subordinated to the rarified, intellectual endeavors of modern historians or (postmodern theorists). The assumption that laundry pertains solely to the “body” rather than the “soul” of theater, however, misconstrues the very “grossly material” processes the critical tradition has


48 The “washing-bill method of research,” according to one nineteenth-century critic, was comprised of those who scoured archives for every ephemeral “tittle of evidence, however minute,” including laundry lists! Anon., “Shakespeare’s Personality,” 367.

eschewed, and in so doing, obfuscates the cultural poetics of laundry.\textsuperscript{50} Indeed, as practitioners of “the washing-bill method of research” have revealed, unlike outer garments, which were refreshed by superficial brushing and spot cleaning, linen undergarments (as well as sheets and table-linens) required “deep” cleansing by soaking in water and lye, and beating with bats to drive water through the fibers and force dirt from the fabric.\textsuperscript{51} For this reason, clean linen was viewed as a sign of inner cleanliness and virtue. In contrast to the dissimulative status of most clothing, pristine linen undergarments purported to be self-evident signifiers of what lay within: a purity not merely of body, but of spirit. The emphasis of Protestant reformers on “cleannesse of heart,” rather than “outward cleannesse,” reinforced this distinction. Spiritual purification was thus frequently likened to the laundering of linens, as when Thomas Taylor speaks of “Gods laundrie, wherein his children by beating, scouring, and rubbing are made whiter and whiter.”\textsuperscript{52} The deep cleansing of the soul necessitated more than brushing soil off the exterior: it required the scrupulous industry and violent vigilance of the laundress scouring her linens.

Paradoxically, as linen gained importance as a signifier of spiritual as well as bodily cleanliness and virtue, linen underclothes became increasingly visible on the exterior of the body. Once concealed, they were now subject to extravagant display both onstage and off. Bands, cuffs, and ruffs, originally part of undergarments (such as shirts and smocks), developed into separate, detachable accessories, which grew ever larger. Fashionable outer garments, such as doublets and bodices, were cut and slashed to reveal the quality and purity of linen shirts and chemises worn underneath.\textsuperscript{53} When displayed onstage in the commercial playhouses, clean linen visually associated the professional players and their playing spaces with both moral virtue and social refinement, distancing them from the soil and toil of their vagrant past, as well as from the perceived filth and contagion of the surrounding suburban “stews” (or bathhouse-brothels). Indeed, it was fears of contagion following repeated outbreaks of plague and other epidemics like syphilis that produced the dramatic shift during the sixteenth century away from immersing the body in water to laundering linens as the preferred mode of bodily hygiene.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} For a more extended discussion of the material processes and cultural poetics of laundry, see Natasha Korda and Eleanor Lowe, “‘In Praise of Clean Linen’: Laundering Humours on the Early Modern Stage,” in \textit{Ashgate Research Companion to Material Culture in Early Modern Europe}, ed. David Gaimster, Tara Hamling, and Catherine Richardson (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2015).


At stake in the staging of laundered linens was from this perspective the very “soul” of theater: the visibility of bleached and starched linens onstage worked to counter contemporary antitheatrical diatribes against players and playhouses as purveyors of physical and moral filth and contagion. John Stephens’ “Character of a Common Player” characterizes the typical actor as “profess[ing] himselfe, (being unknowne) to be an apparant Gentleman. But . . . his foule Linnen, and faire Doublet, doe (in him) bodily reveale the Broker.” The actor’s “fair Doublet,” according to Stephens, conceals a filthy, lousy interior: he is only an “apparant Gentleman,” but underneath his showy costume lie “foule Linnen” undergarments purchased from a second-hand broker. Contemporary portraits of players and playwrights attired in clean linens—including the Droeshout engraving of Shakespeare in the First Folio (1623) sporting a starched linen collar—likewise worked to combat antitheatrical prejudice by asserting the virtue, civility, and rising status of the theatrical profession.

A stunning portrait believed to be of Nathan Field (dated c.1615), described in William Cartwright’s inventory as “master fields pictur in his shurt . . . an actour,” depicts the actor/playwright in a linen shirt elaborately embroidered with black-work to enhance its whiteness. The portrait invites the viewer’s gaze to examine the cleanliness, beauty, and refinement of the actor’s undergarment, which together with his striking gesture—his linen-cuffed right hand is placed over his heart—visually convey his inner virtue (see Figure 5.2). Like the clean linen undergarment exposed to view, the gesture presents itself as a self-evident signifier or outward manifestation of inward truth. According to John Bulwer’s taxonomy of hand-gestures:

To Lay the Hand Open to Our Heart . . . is a garb wherein we affirm a thing, swear or call God to witnesse a truth, and so we seem as if we would openly exhibit unto sense, the testimony of our conscience, or take a tacite oath, putting in security, that no mentall reservation doth basely divorce our words and meaning, but that all is truth that we now protest unto.

In Bulwer’s view, it is the “touch” or tactility of the gesture that renders it touching, and therefore “Scenical” or apt for the emotive performance style of a stage actor: “the touch doth most availle in a sharpe and inflamed stile, when the motions of the minde are by Action unfolded,” as when one “would expresse an incredible ardour of love lodged in his bosome, and cleaving to his very marrow; or griefe deeply setled in his yearning bowells.” Rather than striking the “bosome” to unleash the heart’s “ardour” or deep grief like an actor,
the civil orator is therefore instructed to “touch his Breast with his Fingers ends only,” as does the subject of the portrait, thereby signaling his own civility and gestural decorum.60

Viewed from this vantage, the portrait illuminates the performative efficacy of “touch,” both in the archive and on the stage, to stir “deeply settled” emotion (perhaps all the more so when the toucher is also touched, as in the portrait), while reminding us that touch is never unmediated by the material world. In the portrait, the actor’s touch draws the viewer’s gaze to the pattern and texture of the linen “shurt,” and in particular, to its delicately wrought, black-work lace, tenderly caressed by “his Fingers ends only.” As they press against the worked stitches, they in turn impress his flesh (and heart beneath it) on the underside of the undergarment. The touch of his thumb and forefingers against the raised stitches, meticulously rendered by the “touches” or brushstrokes of the anonymous artist, also

calls our attention to the craft of the anonymous sempstress who produced them. In contrast to the immaculately bleached and stiffly starched linen ruff, which elevates and frames the head, distancing it from the lower body and the domain of labor, the softness and texture of the black-work shirt, underscored by the wearer’s touching gesture, exposes the artifice out of which whiteness is wrought, rather than simply functioning to reify its hegemony as a “badge” of spiritual virtue or social privilege (and increasingly, of racial purity).  

It is worth underscoring that whiteness in early modern England was not yet naturalized or dominant as an attribute of skin or complexion. Indeed, whiteness in Shakespeare’s work and world was more commonly associated with the ubiquity of laundered linen, and the material processes of its making (its bleaching on every hedge). Shakespearean skin only becomes “white”—is whitened or made white—metaphorically: it is “white as lawn” or fine linen (LUC, 259). If the metaphorical juxtaposition of linen (or snow, or lilies) with skin served to whiten the latter, Shakespeare (like the anonymous portraitist) exposes the artifice of this whitening: “If snow be white,” he maintains in Sonnet 130, then his mistress’ “breasts are dun,” and to suggest otherwise is to belie with “false compare” (ll.3,.4). In life, laundered linen was used to cleanse and brighten the complexion by absorbing the body’s excess humors; yet it is precisely because the humors were not white that linen’s whiteness had to be continually reproduced. In the portrait, the subject’s “black” complexion (his dark eyes and hair, and melancholy demeanor), rather than simply being whitened and distanced from the humoral body by the immaculate barrier of a starched ruff, is more complexly juxtaposed with the black-on-white shirt. In touching and being touched by the textured black-work that produces its whiteness, he invites us to move beyond the critical disgust engendered by laundry to consider the varied affective responses it may have elicited on the stage and in the archive, including counterarchives created by women.

**Counterarchives: A Laundry-Room of Her Own**

*Hamlet:* Nay, but to live  
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed  
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love  
Over the nasty sty—

*Shakespeare, Hamlet (3.4.89–92)*

A nasty sty, indeed! Not that it’s any of your business, but I change those sheets twice a week, which is more than you do, judging from that student slum pigpen in Wittenberg. . . .

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62 For a related argument on how black cloth functioned onstage as a prosthetic “supplement” to signify black skin and “to give it meaning,” see Ian Smith, “Othello’s Black Handkerchief,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2013): 1–25; 4.

63 Only phlegm was occasionally described as “white.”

I see that laundry of yours when you bring it home, and not often enough either, by a long shot!

*Margaret Atwood, “Gertrude Talks Back” (1994)*

The feminist rage Margaret Atwood attributes to Gertrude, enabling her to “talk back” to Hamlet, as well as to *Hamlet*, and thereby to refute the critical tradition’s disgust at and disdain for laundry, is but one of many affective responses that early modern women may have had to the linens that defined their everyday lives. Atwood’s Gertrude seems enraged not so much at laundry itself as at her scholarly son’s hypocritical stigmatizing of its gross materiality, a stigma saturated in revulsion at female sexuality and embodiment. Unlike Shakespeare’s Gertrude, who responds to his castigation with shame, internalizing his accusation that her “enseamed” (i.e., greasy) sheets are indicative of a soul deeply stained with “black and grieved [or, in the Folio, grained] spots” (3.4.88), Atwood’s Gertrude asserts agency through the labor of laundering, taking pride in its product. She schools her son by asserting that he too has a body that sullies linen and relies on the female labor of laundering (improbable as it may be that a queen would engage in such labor herself). Readers may here be reminded of Hamlet’s earlier visitation to Ophelia in his “shirt,” his “fouled” linens betraying the disorderly state of his body and spirit (2.1.76, 78). When, just after Hamlet impugns the “enseamed” sheets in which Gertrude lies with her “king of shreds and patches” (3.4.99), the ghost of Old Hamlet appears “in his night gowne” (according to the stage direction in Q1), the as yet unpurged “foul crimes” (1.5.33) that stain his virtue may likewise have been signaled by the shredded, patched, or otherwise befouled state of his linen nightshirt. Staged in this way, the closet scene’s airing of Gertrude’s dirty linen would suggest her culpability for the rotten state of Denmark, an imputation that Atwood’s rebuttal seeks to counter. Atwood’s imaginative appropriation of Shakespeare’s laundry thus builds on earlier feminist appropriations of the “washing-bill method of research” by exposing *Hamlet’s* dirty laundry. Not only does she make room in the theatrical archive for early modern women’s everyday lives and cultural expression, she reinvents it as a space of play.

A similar impulse has motivated contemporary art makers and theorists to playfully engage with archives of all kinds, and in the process, create “counterarchives” that “open up possibilities for new ways of writing histories” as “part of a living process.” Certain artists “working through objects” have thus created “collections or assemblages of things” that have “been thrown away,” or are considered “rubbish, of no value.” The contemporary archival turn is from this perspective a creative act: an act of re-collection, re-valuation and re-presentation. The “artist-as-archivist” (and the archivist-as-artist/activist), according to Hal Foster, “draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private.” The counterarchive, he maintains, turns “belatedness

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into becomingsness,” by finding in “a misplaced past... possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations,” thereby turning the shreds and patches of history into “so many promissory notes for further elaboration or enigmatic prompts for future scenarios.”

Within the academy, this impulse may be seen in contemporary queer and performance theory, which extends in new directions Lucy Maynard Salmon’s and Virginia Woolf’s creative expansion and reconceptualization of the archive to include “queer things” and “queer people living out-of-the-way lives.” Ann Cvetkovich thus encourages queer and feminist scholars working with archives to “transform our ideas about what an archive can and must include” by recognizing “the value of apparently marginal or ephemeral materials.” The affective turn in such scholarship, rather than stigmatizing or shaming affects elicited by archival materials as fetishistic, antiquarian or “backward,” has embraced the affective and political investments through which counterarchives are created and preserved. The “archivist of queer culture,” Cvetkovich maintains, “must proceed like the fan or collector whose attachment to objects is often fetishistic, idiosyncratic, or obsessional.” Such investments reveal, according to Jack Halberstam, that the “archive is not simply a repository; it is a theory of cultural relevance.” By redefining what constitutes the archive, these theorists have opened new imaginative possibilities in counterarchives by recognizing their affective power to “produce something of the intensity of poetry, something of the excitement of drama.”

Queering the early modern archive is not simply a matter of applying new theoretical paradigms to a preexisting canon of dramatic texts or theatrical documents, but of turning our concept of “theater” wrong side out, to incorporate its eclipsed, abjected “body”—including those of the sweat-soaked actor and of the lye-chafed laundress charged with cleaning his dirty linens. To better understand the female networks of production surrounding the commercial theaters, I have argued elsewhere, we need to look beyond the canonical archive of theater history to consider records that pertain to its commercial environs. In the Returns of Aliens Dwelling In The City And Suburbs Of London From The Reign of Henry VIII. To That Of James I, for example, we find not only details regarding the many female occupations relating to linen manufacture, maintenance, and sale, but evidence about the “queer” domestic arrangements of immigrant starch women and laundresses, who lived and worked together in all-female households, and who were accused of wielding phallic “poking sticks” (used to pleat ruffs) for their own sexual pleasure, as well as for profit.

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71 Cvetkovich, “In the Archives,” 116.
72 Halberstam, In a Queer Time, 169–70.
73 Korda, Labors Lost, 31–41, 93–143.
To access the ways in which female affective lives and relations were channeled through linens, we must study how they were handled in counterarchives created by women. Consider, for example, the female curiosity cabinets known as *Puppenhäuser* or *Kinderhäuser*, created or commissioned by women of the middling sort and merchant class (mostly in the Low Countries and Germany). These miniature archives, akin to modern dollhouses, are considered to have “exceptional cultural-historical value” among scholars of material culture due to the accuracy and detail with which they have preserved ephemera of women’s everyday lives that otherwise would not have survived.\footnote{Heidi Müller, *Good Housekeeping: A Domestic Ideal in Miniature: The Nuremburg Doll Houses of the Seventeenth Century in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum*, trans. Sarah C. D. Slenczka (Nuremberg: Verlag der Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2007), 7; Leonie Von Wilckens, *Mansions in Miniature: Four Centuries of Doll’s Houses*, trans. Vivien Greene (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 18. The oldest extant *Puppenhaus*, in the Germanische Nationalmuseum, dates from 1611, but the earliest known example was commissioned in 1557–1558.} Most extant examples, such as that of Petronella Dunois in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, feature exquisite linen attires and fully equipped laundry rooms, manufactured in minute detail with meticulous care (see Figure 5.3).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{petronella_dunois_dollhouse}
\caption{Linen room in doll’s house of Petronella Dunois, Anonymous, c. 1676. Courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam}
\end{figure}
Previous scholarship has assessed their social function in highly conservative terms, arguing that, like Wunderkammern, they were an expression of “the acquisitive instinct, the desire to possess and collect,” and were used to instruct girls in their future domestic duties, and thereby to reinforce the social order.  

They were “undoubtedly not intended as playthings,” it is maintained, but rather as “object lessons.” This argument is based on a 1631 broadsheet advertising the “Kinder-haus” of Anna Köferlin, in which she claims to use it “to provide instruction for the young.” To define these tiny archives as tools of ideological indoctrination, however, is to occlude their status as spectacles and spaces of play, created and presided over by women. Anna Köferlin proudly charged admission to see hers, and promises in her broadsheet that her spectators will marvel at the miniature scenes, costumes, and properties displayed in her “show”:

Look all around you . . . look everywhere, how much there has been put on show for you, hundreds of pieces. Of bedding, of handsome presses . . . fitted up in such a way that though small, yet everything may well be put to general use. . . . [All] to be beheld and marveled at, that you may forget to shut your jaw.  

The “mysteries of the world of play,” Walter Benjamin argues, is in no way confined to children, but is “enticing for adults” as well, including those who “desire to make light of an unbearable life” and to remove “its sting by playing with its image in reduced form.”

The Nuremberg regional archives indicate that Köferlin’s “Kinder-haus” may indeed have been prompted by unbearable loss, as her two children, born in 1598 and 1599, died at a young age, after which she “devoted herself” to its “production and display.”  

Unlike Wunderkammern, which as Jonathan Gil Harris has argued, domesticated “marvelous objects from around the globe” by rendering them familiar, “comfortingly docile and unchanging,” female Puppenhäuser instead rendered the everyday wondrous and strange by transforming the domain of women’s work into a space of imaginative play. The care required to reproduce in miniature household linens and the technologies used to manufacture and launder them (including tiny sewing baskets and pin-cushions, buckets, tubs, scrubbing brushes, irons, and linen-presses), suggests the affective investments women had in archiving the material conditions of their everyday lives. In the case of less affluent women, like Anna Köferlin, these play-spaces may have allowed women to work through affects induced by loss, hardship, and hard work. Köferlin links the labor of making her Kinderhaus, which she claims was “put together with industry and much effort,” to the status of women as “born to labor,” yet unable “to direct big works,” as well as to “the great

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77 Von Wilckens, Mansions in Miniature, 22.

78 Von Wilckens, Mansions in Miniature, 15.

79 Von Wilckens, Mansions in Miniature, 15–16.


81 Müller, Good Housekeeping, 20; Von Wilckens, Mansions in Miniature, 15.

care and trouble” they have in bearing children. Even in the case of those commissioned by more affluent women like Petronella Dunois, the acquisitive impulse Puppenhäuser are thought to express was qualified by their status as female property, handed down within families from mother to daughter over many generations, before finally being acquired by museum collections. Far from being static or unchanging repositories in the hands of their original owners, however, they were continually updated and reassembled, rendering them “untimely” and “anachronistic” in precisely the senses advocated by Harris and Garber. For this reason, I would argue, they are as instructive about the future promise of feminist work in counterarchives, as they are about the antiquarian past.

83 Von Wilckens, Mansions in Miniature, 15.
84 Contemporary examples of dollhouses that function as counterarchives include those of the avant-garde art collector, Carrie Walter Stettheimer (1871–1944), in the Museum of the City of New York, which contains a miniature version of the Nude Descending a Staircase painted by Marcel Duchamp in c. 1918 (as well as a laundry room) and the dollhouse of Judith Young Mallin, the Surrealist archivist and collector, which contains numerous miniatures of Surrealist artworks, presided over by figurines of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas. See Sheila W. Clark, The Stettheimer Dollhouse (New York: The Museum of the City of New York/Pomegranate, 2009). My thanks to Judith Young Mallin for allowing me to view her dollhouse and for sharing her expertise on their history and significance.
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The first national sentiment discoverable in the day-spring of the ages of Gothic history, is the love of war; but the second is the reverence of woman. . . . Although in after years, the national migrations of the Goths changed the national temperament, although their ancient mythology was exchanged for the worship of Christ, this prevailing sentiment of their earliest existence as a people never entirely deserted them; but with different modifications and in different forms, maintained much of its old supremacy through all changes of manners and varieties of customs, descending finally to their posterity among the present nations of Europe, in the shape of that established code of universal courtesy to women, which is admitted to be one great distinguishing mark between the social systems of the inhabitants of civilized and uncivilized lands.

*Wilkie Collins, Antonina or, the Fall of Rome*

Unless we count Anne in *Richard III*, whose death is mysterious, *Othello* is the only play by Shakespeare in which a man kills his own wife, and also the only play in which the title character is a black man of non-European origin. What is the relationship between these two bits of information? Wilkie Collins would have known the answer: by killing his wife (in full view of the audience!) and thereby sinning against an “established code of universal courtesy to women” Othello shows that he is insufficiently acculturated to the social system of a civilized land. Of course Shakespeare complicates the question by having the unquestionably European Iago also kill his wife in the same play. But the tendency in recent years has been to read *Othello* as an enactment of the xenophobia and fear of contagion that attached to foreigners and people of different religious faiths in Elizabethan London.

Othello’s distinctive style, which used to be called the “Othello music,” is above all cosmopolitan, full of the romance of trade in exotic substances—Arabian gums and spices—and the exploration of unknown worlds peopled by Egyptian soothsayers, “Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders.” (1.3.144–5). Othello is a Christian, though whether by birth or conversion is not stated. He is Venice’s best hope for the defense of Cyprus from the Ottoman Turks, who are threatening to invade it. He is, at the beginning of the play, an admirable figure—a powerful leader whose status as a Moor has not stood

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1 Wilkie Collins, *Antonina or, the Fall of Rome* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1893), 143–4.
in the way of his achieving military prominence. But he is all too easily contaminated by Iago, who links him with fears of miscegenation early in the play and sullies his mind with fantasies of Desdemona’s sexual infidelity. In the end, rather than return to Venice as a captive destined for execution, Othello kills himself and in doing so famously identifies with the Turkish enemy:

. . . In Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban’d Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduc’d the state,
I took by th’ throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him—thus.

(5.2.352–6)

By this point in the play, the Turkish fleet has dispersed and no longer represents a threat to Venetian Cyprus. In killing himself and the dangerous stranger within him Othello symbolically rids the Venetian state of an internalized version of the Ottoman menace. The historical record was rather less optimistic. The Turkish navy had not dispersed, and the Venetians had not held off the Ottomans in Cyprus, who had captured the island in 1571 after massacring many Christians and looting Christian monuments. They were to hold it until 1878, when it came under British rule. Shakespeare’s play literally undoes the recent history of Cyprus and symbolically effaces the Ottoman presence there by extinguishing the person of Othello, who is simultaneously the dangerous, attractive, cosmopolitan outsider and the remedy for the threat of Turkish domination. With Othello’s suicide, Venice is saved at a symbolic level from the menace of internal contamination by Islam and blackness, but it is also emptied of the “valiant,” heroic leadership and protection that Othello offered at the beginning of the play.

The process by which Othello is gradually enmeshed in negative images of blackness is not limited to the world within the play; it can also be traced in the history of the material text. The editing of Shakespeare is an enterprise that developed alongside the growth of the British Empire, or what historian John Darwin might prefer to call the “British world-system,” and as part of that process Shakespeare was enlisted, perhaps more than any other English writer, as the poet of empire. Edward Capell, who edited Shakespeare in 1768, argued for the importance of his task because of Shakespeare’s status as exemplar of British civilization: since Shakespeare is “talk’d of wherever the name of Britain is talk’d of, that is (thanks to some late counsels) wherever there are men” it behooves the editor to remove the “numerous and gross blemishes, spots in the sun’s body; which prevent his glory breaking forth” so that “this glorious Poet” can shine forth in his “due state of brightness” (Sig. A3r–v). Editing Shakespeare to set him at best advantage to the world was both a national and an imperial duty.


In the case of *Othello*, as I shall argue here, the editorial imperative to set Shakespeare in the best possible light has continued to haunt textual scholarship on the play down to the present. There has in recent years been a seismic shift in the way Shakespearean textual scholars view the early printed versions of the plays. Through much of the twentieth century, earlier-published, shorter quarto versions were generally viewed as derivative—pirated versions or “memorial reconstructions” of the play in performance—while longer, later-published quarto and folio versions were regarded as more authoritative, closer to the plays as Shakespeare originally wrote them, or at least closer to the form in which he envisioned them for performance on stage. More recently, as in the case of the quarto and folio versions of *King Lear*, some scholars have been willing to argue for Shakespeare as a reviser and augmenter of his own work, so that shorter and earlier published versions could be understood as earlier stages in his evolving conception of his own creations. As part of the same process, we have also begun to assimilate the insights of recent race and gender theory, which have allowed us to recognize how seemingly disinterested editorial choices can mask a subtle but pervasive misogyny and racism.6

There are two important and very different early texts of *Othello*: the first quarto first printed in 1622 and the First Folio version published the very next year in 1623. In the heady early days of the paradigm shift, *Othello* was mentioned alongside *King Lear* as a two-text play whose early quarto and folio printings should be regarded as distinct versions, each with its own artistic integrity and theatrical logic. Countering Alice Walker’s definitive statement of the older view of the first quarto of *Othello* (1622) as a corrupt and vulgarizing perversion of Shakespeare’s intentions for the play, which she saw as more nearly reflected in the First Folio version of 1623, E. A. J. Honigmann announced optimistically in 1982, “A strong case can be made for the ‘revision’ of *Othello* and of *King Lear*, the fact that Shakespeare is thought to have re-touched not one but two of his greatest tragedies, and to have strengthened both in similar (and unusual) ways, makes the ‘revision-theory’ more compelling—and more exciting.”7 In the case of *King Lear* there was a spectacular aftermath: the 1986 Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor edition of *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare* offers both the quarto and folio versions separately and as equals, and that editorial decision is repeated in the more recent *Norton Shakespeare* (1997), based on the Oxford text, and in Michael Warren’s *The Complete King Lear* (1989).8 No editor of the play can now afford to ignore the two-text theory of *King Lear*. What of the two-text *Othello*?

As I shall argue here, the differences between quarto and folio (hereafter referred to as Q and F) versions of *Othello* are at least as important for interpretation as the differences

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between the two early versions of *King Lear*. There are various possible explanations why the two-text *Othello* has taken so long to establish itself while the two-text *King Lear* has flourished. Within the play, Othello sets himself resolutely, if futilely, against the doubling of meanings. In his destruction, engineered by a villain whose personal oath is “by Janus” and whose virulent duplicity goes beyond anything to be found elsewhere in Shakespeare, the idea of a double text may carry a special, if unacknowledged, stigma. But I will argue here that a more accessible, more intractable, explanation has to do with Othello’s status as an exemplar of racial and colonial difference. *Q* and *F* *Othello* offer markedly different constructions of race and its relation to other elements of the play, especially female purity and sexuality. Most of the key passages critics have repeatedly cited to define the play’s attitude toward blackness, miscegenation, and sexual pollution, derive from the First Folio version of the play, and do not exist in the quarto. To imagine “gentle Shakespeare” as a reviser who began with a text resembling *Q*, then amplified and refocused it into a text resembling *F*, is to imagine a Shakespeare who deliberately intensified what look from our modern perspective like racist elements of the play. Ania Loomba and others have recently emphasized the relative indefinition of racial identities and boundaries in the early modern era by comparison with our own. Loomba characterizes Shakespeare’s time as “either the last period in history where ethnic identities could be understood as fluid, or as the first moment of the emergence of modern notions of ‘race’.”

Where we place *Othello* in this shifting calculus of difference will depend to a significant degree on whether we choose *Q* or *F*.

The two texts contain numerous small variants in wording, punctuation, and lineation of the type that we have come to expect from Shakespearean two-text plays. But the most interesting difference is that *F* contains approximately 160 lines of text that are not present in *Q*. Conversely, *Q* presents a few lines that are not present in *F*. The source of the folio-only lines is an intriguing editorial puzzle. Were they in the play from Shakespeare’s first composition of it, then cut, perhaps for a specific performance, or were they Shakespeare’s own additions as part of a broader revision of the play? The added lines are by no means innocuous: they contain what now appears to us to be some of the play’s most racially charged language. What would the play look like without them?

The first long *F*-only passage occurs during Iago and Roderigo’s jeering encounter with Brabantio (1.1.82–144), during which they attempt to convince the old man that his daughter has eloped with Othello. Both texts include Iago’s scathingly clever, yet indirect, references to the coupling of Othello and Desdemona: they are a black ram and a white ewe making the “beast with two backs,” spawning coursers and jennets. But only in

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the folio version does Roderigo chime in with his own much more graphic imagining of Desdemona’s pollution (1.1.120–40). Here and for later passages as well, I cite from the First Folio, using brackets to indicate the portions of the speech that are F only:

Rod. Sir, I will answere any thing. But I beseech you
[If’t be your pleasure, and most wise consent,
(As partly I find it is) that your faire Daughter,
At this odde Euen and dull watch o’th’night
Transported with no worse nor better guard,
But with a knaue of common hire, a Gundelier,
To the grosse clasps of a Lasciuous Moore:
If this be knowne to you, and your Allowance,
We then haue done you bold, and saucie wrongs.
But if you know not this, my Manners tell me;
We haue your wrong rebuke. Do not beleue
That from the sence of all Ciuitie,
I thus would play and trifle with your Reuerence.
Your Daughter (if you haue not giuen her leave)
I say againe, hath made a grosse reuolt,
Tying her Dutie, Beautie, Wit and Fortunes
In an extrauagant, and wheeling Stranger,
Of here, and euery where: straight satis
fi[ef]e your selfe.
]
If she be in her Chamber, or your house,
Let loose on me the Iustice of the State
For Thus deluding you.

(TLN 133–53)\(^{11}\)

The characterization of Othello as an erratic outsider, an “extrauagant, and wheeling Stranger, / Of here, and euery where” is F only, as is the graphic depiction of the “Lasciuous Moore” grossly clapping a “faire Daughter” who has hired a common knave to transport her, in “grosse reuolt” against her father’s authority. The lines that critics most often rely on to establish Othello’s (stereotypical) Moorish lust and his marginality to Venetian culture even at the beginning of the play, the lines they cite most often to demonstrate the normative culture’s intolerance of miscegenation—these do not exist in the quarto, where Roderigo’s speech reads in full,

Sir, I will answer anything: But I beseech you,
If she be in her chamber, or your house,
Let loose on me the Iustice of the state,
For this delusion.

(sig. B3r)\(^{12}\)

\(^{11}\) Here and throughout, quotations from the First Folio version of *Othello* are cited by Through Line Number (TLN) from Charlton Hinman, ed., *The Norton Facsimile: The First Folio of Shakespeare* (London and New York: Paul Hamlyn, 1968).

\(^{12}\) In parallel with folio citations, quarto citations are also given in facsimile, from Michael J. B. Allen and Kenneth Muir, eds., *Shakespeare’s Plays in Quarto* (Berkeley: University of California
In Q it is possible to regard Iago’s taunts about animal sexuality as his own twisted, personal vision, since Roderigo does not contribute to them, unless we count his reference earlier in the scene to Othello as “thicklips.” By having Roderigo join and even best Iago in articulating this “primal scene” of miscegenation, F establishes it as a community view, even if the community consists at this point of two men plus Brabantio, who responds to Roderigo, “This accident is not unlike my dream, / Belief of it oppresses me already.” (1.1.142–3). His speech exists in both Q and F, but only in F do we know exactly what dreadful things he has been dreaming. Roderigo’s speech in F may taint our vision of their love even before we see them together in scene 3 as a valiant general and his forthright wife.

Remarkably, the greater sexual explicitness created by Roderigo’s speech in the folio version of the play extends, as though by contagion, to the language of later scenes, where Q is often more general. Here are some examples. At 1.3.158–9, during Othello’s exposition before the Senate of the “arts” he used to win Desdemona, Q reads “my story being done; / She gaue me for my paines a world of sighes;” (sig. C3v, p. 796), while F reads “My Storie being done, / She gaue me for my paines a world of kisses.” (TLN 503–4). In this case, anomalously, the Q reading is the one that has survived into most modern editions—early editors like Alexander Pope were shocked at the idea that the lady would be so “forward” as to give Othello “a world of kisses upon the bare recital of his story.”13 Similarly, at 2.1.80 Q has Cassio imagine Othello “swiftly come to Desdemona’s armes” (sig. D4r, p. 800), while F reads, more explicitly, “Make loues quicke pants in Desdenoamas Armes” (TLN 844). Tiffany Stern speculates, “Perhaps, looking at the play again, Shakespeare decided to intensify the sexuality of the couple’s love.”14

As would be expected, the greater explicitness is concentrated in the last two acts of the play, when the F-only passages painfully intensify the debate about Desdemona’s virtue. Othello’s fit upon hearing Cassio’s “confession” of adultery from Iago (4.1.34–43) is much more extended in the folio version, and introduces, as Honigmann has observed,

Press, (1981). Since this edition does not supply Through Line Numbers, citations are given by quarto signature number plus page number in the edition. The present citation is to p. 791.

13 Alexander Pope, as cited in Othello, The New Variorum Edition, vol. 6, ed. Horace Howard Furness, (Philadelphia: J. Lippincott, 1886), 57n. Furness offers a fairly extended discussion of his decision to keep F “kisses” as opposed to the more decorous Q “sighs.” There is at least one case, however, in which Q is more explicit than F: in Q, Desdemona protests before the Senate that her heart’s “subdued, / Euen to the vtmost pleasure of my Lord” (sig. C4v, 797); modern editions, following F, usually read “Even to the very quality of my Lord” (TLN 601). As Lois Potter has shown in “Editing Desdemona,” in Arden: Editing Shakespeare, ed. Ann Thompson and Gordon McMullan (London: Thomson Learning, 2003), 81–94), there are several points in this particular scene in which Q is more explicitly erotic than F.

14 Tiffany Stern, Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page (London: Routledge, 2004), 55; Stern’s book and my “The Two Texts of ‘Othello’ and Early Modern Constructions of Race,” in Textual Performances: The Modern Reproduction of Shakespeare’s Drama, ed. Lukas Erne and Margaret Jane Kidnie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21–36, which offered an abridged version of my argument here and more emphasis on textual history as opposed to race and gender theory, came out the same year. See also Potter, “Editing Desdemona,” (2003), 83–4: Potter agrees with Honigmann’s Arden 3 argument that there are several points in 1.3 where F is more protective than Q of Desdemona’s honor; as Potter points out, however, that pattern is reversed later in the play. See Honigmann, Othello (Walton-on-Thames, Surrey: Thomas Nelson, 1997); and Denise A. Walen, “Unpinning Desdemona,” Shakespeare Quarterly 58, no. 4 (2007): 487–504.
“sexual overtones that are peculiarly revolting and effective—conjuring up images of male and female sexual organs, thinly disguised.” In its longer folio version, which is the only one to include the “organs, thinly disguised,” Othello’s ranting is a tortured, fragmented elaboration of the “gross” images from Act 1:

Othello. Lye with her? Lye on her? We say lye on her, when they be-lye-her. Lye with her: {at this point, Q adds “Zouns,”} that’s fullsome: Handkerchiefe: Confessions: Handkerchiefe. [To confesse, and be hang’d for his labour. First, to be hang’d, and then to confesse: I tremble at it. Nature would not inuest her selfe in such shadowing passion, without some Instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus, (pish) Noses, Eares, and Lippes: is’t possible. Confesse? Handkerchief? O diuell.]

(TLN 2412–20)

In his next extended F-only speech (4.2.71–81) Othello finally confronts Desdemona directly with the charge of whoredom:

Othello. Was this faire Paper? This moost goodly Booke
Made to write Whore vpon?
What committed,
Committed? Oh, thou publieke Commoner
I should make very Forges of my cheekes,
That would to Cynders burne vp Modestie,
Did I but speak thy deedes.] What committed?

(TLN 2767–72)

After this powerfully incendiary language, Othello finally comes out and asks her whether she is a “Strumpet” a few lines later. The Q version omits the fiery image of the forge and cinders; its version of lines 2768–72 is only two words “impudent strumpet,” (sig. K4r, p. 824), which are usually added on for good measure to the F-only insults in the conflated texts of modern editions, so that in our modern texts Othello is more extensively abusive than in either early text considered separately. At 4.2.83–5, Q has Desdemona protest in response, “If to preserue this vessell for my Lord, / From any hated foule vnlawfull touch, / Be not to be a strumpet, I am none.” (sig. K4r, p. 824). The F version of the passage reads instead “any other foule vnlawfull touch,” (TLN 2781), implying that Othello’s touch is also unlawful: in F, her marriage is itself construed as whoredom.

The best-known segment of F that does not exist in Q is most of the Willow Scene (4.3), which requires Desdemona to sing her song of abandoned love. The standard explanation for its absence from Q is that the playtext had to be adjusted quickly for a performance in which a boy singer was not available—perhaps because of a sudden adolescent change of voice. But some editors have made a case for the Willow Scene as an element of Shakespearean revision, noting that at other points toward the end of the play, Emilia’s role is also significantly expanded in F.16 During the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries, most or all of the Willow Scene was conventionally cut on stage because its sexual banter between Desdemona and Emilia was considered to be indecorous. All of the most sexually suggestive speeches of the scene are among its F-only lines: Emilia’s affectionate teasing about a “Lady in Venice” who would walk barefoot to Palestine for a touch of Lodovico’s “nether lip,” (TLN 3009–10), Desdemona’s ventriloquizing of the lover’s voice in the Willow Song: “If I court mo women, you’le couch with mo men,” (TLN 3026), her questioning of Emilia about whether can possibly be women who “abuse their husbands / In such grosse kinde” (TLN 3002–3), and Emilia’s extended argument that “it is their Husbands faults / If Wiues do fall,” which claims for women the same passions and frailties as men have:

Let Husbands know,
Their wiues haue sense like them: They see, and smell,
And haue their Palats both for sweet, and sowre,
As Husbands haue. What is it that they do,
When they change vs for others? Is it Sport?
I thinke it is: and doth Affection breed it?

I thinke it doth. Is’t Fraiilty that thus erres?
It is so too. And haue not we Affections?
Desires for Sport? And Fraiilty, as men haue?
Then let them vse vs well: lese let them know,
The illes we do, their illes instruct vs so.

(TLN 3059–60 and 3066–76)

By the point of this impassioned F-only speech, the topic of sexual misbehavior has shifted from the scene of miscegenation in the first act to a more generalized questioning of sexual mores that takes place in a bedchamber. Critics Lynda Boose and Michael Neill have emphasized the play’s enlistment of the audience’s capacity for a prurient, even pornographic, interest in the bed of the two lovers—an interest that culminates in the eroticized sight of Desdemona’s murder between her wedding sheets. By hammering away at the topic of sexual transgression within the context of marriage between a Venetian and a Moor, by scratching away at a wound and continually reopening it, the formidable series of F-only passages outlined above helps to keep alive in the play an itch of sexual prurience that turns its audience much more decisively than does Q into complicitous voyeurs upon a scene of vice that is the more powerful because it is a figment of our (and Iago, Roderigo, and finally Othello’s) imaginations.


What would Q look like without the sexual overlay of F? For one thing, the F-only passages put additional burdens on the tragic protagonist. As we have seen, in the F version of Act 1, Othello is defined as a deviant and lascivious outsider even before he appears on stage. Iago, Roderigo, and Brabantio constitute a miniature culture of xenophobia: while in Q it is possible to imagine Iago as the sole source of contagion, the effect of the group effort in F is to intensify the social pressures against Othello’s marriage. In the final two acts of the folio version, the micro-culture of female domesticity and intimacy created by the Willow Scene, with its affectionate banter between the two women, and the concomitant expansion of Emilia’s role at other points in the final scenes of F, similarly form a miniature society which closes out Othello. By this late point in the play, however, the group dynamics have changed: Othello has become the menacer rather than the menaced. In Act 5 of the folio version, Emilia protests much more vigorously against Othello’s injustice and Iago’s “Villany” and threatens to kill herself “for greefe,” (TLN 3475–80); in F she dies addressing her dead mistress and echoing Desdemona’s Willow Song, a fleeting reminder of the intimacy of the F version of the earlier scene, the only one to include the song:

Aemil. What did thy Song boad Lady?
Hearke, canst thou heare me? I will play the Swan,
And dye in Musicke: Willough, Willough, Willough.

(TLN 3545–7)

Between the culture of xenophobia aimed against Othello at the beginning of the play and the fragile culture of female domesticity at the end of it, audience sympathies have been forced into realignment. The more Othello rants against Desdemona, the more he sacrifices the sympathy of bystanders within the play and also of the audience outside it. Kenneth Burke has argued that Emilia’s vehemence functions otherwise—“her voicing of our resistance,” he claims, serves to redirect audience reaction away from the horror of Othello’s acts; she “protects, rather than endangers, the tragic engrossment.”19 But as we shall see, this effect is counteracted by a number of other devices by which the folio version of the play renders Othello as dangerously alien in his final moments. We have already noted how Roderigo’s F-only speech defines the Moor as “extrauagrant” and unsettled even before he comes on stage. It will come as no surprise that several other F-only passages serve to intensify our sense of Othello as not the urbane Venetian we briefly glimpse in 1.3 and at his arrival on Cyprus, but as a threatening outsider. The revisions discussed here are systematic and all lean the same direction, transforming the play from a powerful study of jealousy into a play in which the issue of jealousy is complicated by a pronounced sexualization of the central characters and a heightened emphasis on Othello’s outsider status.

Much critical attention has been devoted to the question of Othello’s color. Is he coal-black, as several lines from the play seem to suggest, or is he instead tawny or swarthy, like Shakespeare’s Dark Lady or like the Moorish ambassador to England whose portrait

survives from his visit in 1600–1601? It has by now been established that there were numerous “blackamoors” in England. For London audiences in the early seventeenth century, the sight of black skin would not have been the monstrous anomaly that later critics influenced by colonial assumptions took it to be. Elizabeth’s notorious edicts attempting to deport “negars and blackamoors” did not meet with success: many courtiers had black servants, and there are records of black property holders and taxpayers in the period. It is overwhelmingly likely that in seventeenth-century productions, Othello was portrayed as black, like the Moor Aaron in Titus Andronicus, for which we have Henry Peacham’s sketched record of a scene as it appeared on stage, or like Queen Anne and her ladies when they appeared as blackamoors in The Masque of Blackness, which was performed on January 6, 1605, and which may well have been in rehearsal the previous November when Othello was performed at court.

Early audiences, it seems likely, liked their “black” Moors to look black, but that leaves open the question of what stereotyped reactions they may have brought to the sight of that skin color on stage. The massive evidence on the question suggests that even though alien status was associated with blackness in early modern culture, black skin was only morally suspect by fits and starts. The term racism itself dates only from the 1930s, but the concept goes back much further. If we base ourselves upon George M. Fredrickson’s recent definition, then Shakespeare’s England was not quite racist. According to Fredrickson, racism exists when differences that “might otherwise be considered ethnocultural are regarded as innate, indelible, and unchangeable” and are combined with efforts at exerting control over the stigmatized group. “Racism, therefore, is more than theorizing about


human differences or thinking badly of a group over which one has no control. It either
directly sustains or proposes to establish a racial order, a permanent group hierarchy that
is believed to reflect the laws of nature or the decrees of God.”

According to most recent
readings of the play, Othello is not quite racist, at least not all the way through, in that it
is capable of presenting, even if only briefly, a powerful portrait of a man who is marked
by ethnocultural and color differences from the Venetians, but appears to be accepted by
them because he has adopted the ethos of the dominant group. In the words of the Duke
to Brabantio, “If virtue no delighted beauty lack, / Your son-in-law is far more fair than
black” (1.3.289–90).

In this view, Othello’s black skin is a liability, but not a marker of “innate difference”
that demands subordination in a “permanent group hierarchy.” What Othello does, and
much more explicitly and powerfully in F than in Q, is enact a process by which skin
color comes to be associated even by Othello himself with innate differences that demand
his subordination or exclusion on ethical grounds. On this view, the play is a powerful
laboratory in which many of the stereotyped racial attitudes that were to dominate later
culture are allowed to coalesce. The play was enormously popular on stage during the
seventeenth century, when imperial expansion and plantation slavery were becoming key
elements of England’s economic prosperity, and English racial attitudes were coming to be
defined more rigidly along color lines. Small wonder that the controversy over quarto and
folio Othello has been placed on a back burner rather than receiving the attention it deserves
as a parallel case to King Lear. If Shakespeare was the reviser who turned Q into F, then he
revised in the direction of racial virulence.

The lines most frequently cited by modern critics to establish both the skin color of
Othello and its association with filth and moral turpitude (3.3.386–8), exist only in the folio
version of the play. Here is the F passage in its broader context:

Othello. Nay stay: thou should’st be honest.
Iago. I should be wise; for Honestie’s a Foole,
And looses that it workes for.

[Othello. By the World,
I think my Wife be honest, and thinke she is not:
I thinke that thou art iust, and thinke thou art not:
Ile haue some prooffe. My name that was as fresh
As Diams Visage, is now begrim’d and blacke
As mine owne face. If there be Cords, or Kniues,
Poysion, or Fire, or suffocating streames,
Ile not indure it. Would I were satis
fi
fied.
Iago.] I see you are eaten vp with Passion:

(TLN 2026–37)

23 George M. Fredrickson, Racism: A Short History (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
2002), 5–6. I am also indebted to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s review, New York Times Book Review
(August 4, 2002): 12, which agrees with Fredrickson’s definition in general but urges more attention to
the damage that racist ideology can do even in the hands of the powerless.
In Q, the issue is Iago’s honesty—something that should indeed be subject to doubt. The parallel Q version reads in full:

Othello. Nay stay, thou shouldst be honest.
Iago. I should be wise, for honestie’s a foole,
And looses that it works for:
I see sir, you are eaten vp with passion.

(sig. H2v; p. 815)

In F, by contrast, Othello expands the whole question of honesty into an interrogation of the relation between skin color, reputation, and moral rectitude. In modern editions, “My name” at TLN 2032 is almost always altered to “Her name,” following the second quarto of 1630, which has no particular textual authority but ironizes the gender trouble of imagining a seasoned black warrior who can think of his name as resembling fair “fresh” Diana’s face. In this passage, an ugly demand for congruence between a “fair” inside and a “fair” outside begins to push Othello toward a mistaken self-imaging that blackens his name and nature to match his skin. Desdemona’s purity is required for his own: if she is sullied, then what now looks to us like a racial stereotype linking external skin color with shame and degradation begins to click into place.

Elsewhere in the folio, what Fredrickson would call Othello’s “ethnocultural differences” are further negativized and orientalized in ways that they are not in the quarto. In one of several F-only passages that associate Othello with exotic charms and spells, Brabantio reiterates to the Venetian Senate his conviction that Othello must have bound Desdemona in “Chaines of Magick” in order to gain her love:

Iudge me the world, if ’tis not grose in sense,
That thou has practis’d on her with foule Charmes,
Abus’d her delicate Youth, with Drugs or Minerals,
That weakens Motion.

(TLN 283, 290–93)24

The “foule Charmes” suggest heathen magic, but elsewhere in F Othello is strongly associated with the Muslim infidel. The famous lines in which he likens the icy current of his passion for revenge to the current of the Bosporus, running straight, swift, and deep past Istanbul into the Mediterranean, exist only in the folio. And the source of that passion, geographically speaking, is the Black Sea, a name for the Pontic Sea that was in common use in England by at least the 1590s. The lines establish a connection with dangerous blackness, but also to the Ottoman Empire that Othello’s allegiance to Venice would require him to identify as the enemy:

24 See Coghill’s discussion of thematically connected lines, Shakespeare’s Professional Skills, 1835; and Stern, Making Shakespeare, 55. Honigmann found Coghill’s arguments unpersuasive (‘Shakespeare’s Revised Plays,” 157–8), but he did not take into account the broader issues of racial construction that I am discussing here. By contrast, Stern argues, as I do, that the references to Othello and magic by characters surrounding him in F makes them “more implicitly racist than their counterparts in the Q1; the folio hero is more isolated,” 55.
Constructions of Race and Gender

Othello. Neuer [Iago. Like to the Ponticke Sea,
Whose Iceic Current, and compulsiue course,
Neu’r keepes retyring ebbe, but keepes due on
To the Proponticke, and the Hellespont:

Euen so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace
Shall neu’r looke backe, neu’r ebbe to humble Loue,
Till that a capeable, and wide Reuenge
Swallow them vp. Now by youd Marble Heauen,]
In the due reuerence of a Sacred vow,
I heere engage my words.

(TLN 2103–12)

In this powerful F-only speech identifying Othello’s passion with the terrain of the Ottoman foe, it is almost as though the blood racing through his veins has already “turned Turk”: his unstoppable, implacable “bloody thoughts,” like an icy black flood racing toward his revenge, contrast with the (pale?) fixity of the Christian “Marble Heauen” he invokes in his oath to Iago.

Finally, at the very end of the play, as Othello attempts to justify his murder of Desdemona before the horrified Venetian onlookers, the folio version alone includes lines that require the on-stage audience to recoil in horror from Othello’s person, which by this point in the play has become dangerous, almost contagious, in itself:

. . . But (oh vaine boast)
Who can controll his Fate? ‘Tis not so now.
[Be not affraid, though you do see me weapon’d:
Heere is my iournies end, heere is my butt
And verie Sea-marke of my vmmost Saile.
Do you go backe dismayd? ‘Tis a lost feare:
Man but a Rush against Othello’s brest,

And he retires. Where should Othello go?
Now: how dost thou looke now?] Oh ill-Starr’d wench,
Pale as thy Smocke: . . .

(TLN 3564–73)

Not once but twice during the F-only lines Othello refers to the fearful retreat of his Venetian onlookers. In Q, the primary focus of the speech is on his reaction to Desdemona’s death—the pity of it! In F, by contrast, the speech is divided between the lines on Desdemona and his perception of his own isolation as a contaminant from his erstwhile culture. As Arthur Little has noted, Othello dies in exile at the end, defined as irredeemably alien from it by a sequence of actions that consolidate the audience’s negative “cognitive assonance to physical blackness.”25 Whatever it may have been at the beginning of the play, Othello’s blackness at the end of it is indelibly associated with hypersexuality, predation upon white

womanhood, demonism, and alien status. And these connections are drawn with particular power and explicitness in the folio. Through his suicide, Othello tries to undo the set of descriptors that have so fatally clicked into place. But that action against the infidel “Turk” he has become cements his isolation by relieving the dominant culture of the disturbing difference that his presence has come to represent.

Before the quarto version of Othello came to be viewed as Shakespeare’s first version of the play, it was reviled by English and American editors in a language of miscegenation that demonstrates the uneasiness textual scholars may frequently have felt but could not directly express toward the more benign construction of racial difference offered in Q. Alice Walker, for example, records her dismay with the “contamination” of the folio, which has “taken colour in linguistic forms” from the quarto: “the pollution holds in the exchange.”26 In this judgment, the terminology of textual scholarship is overlain with a language of miscegenation: the folio is polluted by its “exchange” with the “coloured” quarto. Walker should have regarded Q as less “contaminated” than F if we measure contamination by references to sexuality, miscegenation, and racial hatred. What she is subliminally reacting against, I would suggest, is the recognition that Q does not rein in the cultural danger represented for her by Othello’s blackness and sexuality with anything like the virulence of F. In a mechanism similar to one characterizing the operation of racial prejudice in regard to humans, Q is deemed inferior and made the scapegoat for F: glaring but unacknowledged “defects” in F are projected onto Q.

It is common, particularly in older textual scholarship, to encounter praise for the many “beauties” of F that are only embryonic in Q. But those beauties—such as Othello’s powerful speech about the icy current of the Black Sea—are not necessarily value-neutral. We need to recognize the extent to which the more powerful language of F gains its special force through its strikingly concrete representations of the dangers of racial difference and its ratcheting up of racial conflict to—and some would say past—the limits of human endurance. Shakespeare was, above all, a man of the theater: if he revised Q into F, he may well have intensified the racialized elements of the play in order to give Othello more power on stage. It would, of course, be possible to rescue Shakespeare from the implications of this recognition, as Honigmann tried to do when he suggested that Shakespeare “knew more about racism than modern critics have cared to admit,” the implication being that Shakespeare aired contemporary racial attitudes in order to critique them out of some greater and more refined sense of humanity.27

But that benign construction becomes less tenable when we recognize that what looks to us now like heightened “racism” in F is accompanied by a different construction of gender between Q and F. As Lara Bovilsky has pointed out in an important chapter titled “Desdemona’s Blackness,” discourses of race and gender “are not fully separable in the early modern period and indeed possess numerous identical features,” making “traffic between gender and race harder to detect.” Othello’s “racial logic” “simultaneously insists on Desdemona’s flawless ‘fairness’ and disturbing ‘blackness.’”28 She is “fair” as a foil to

28 Lara Bovilsky, Barbarous Play: Race on the English Renaissance Stage (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 39; see also Margaret W. Ferguson’s discussion of women and
the blackness of Othello, but she is blackened by her sexuality, which in both Q and F is progressively negativized thanks to the carefully planted insinuations of Iago. As Bovilsky shows, the word “black” was frequently associated with women’s sexuality during the period (39). Modern editors have typically resisted the blackening of Desdemona and have, through their annotations, created a more distinct color line between Desdemona’s whiteness and Othello’s blackness than exists in either early version of the play.

Desdemona is the first to call herself black in the play, at least implicitly, in her 2.1 banter with Iago about possible satiric descriptors of herself: “how if she be black and witty?” to which Iago responds in Q, “If she be blacke, and thereto haue a wit, / She’le finde a white, that shall her blacknesse hit” (sig. D4v, 801). The F reading is, not surprisingly, more directly sexually suggestive, substituting “fit” for “hit”: “She’le find a white, that shall her blacknesse fit” (TLN 908). Of course in her playful jesting with Iago Desdemona may refer not a black woman in our modern racialized usage, but to a black-haired woman—both women and men in the period could be called “black” in the sense of dark haired and/or olive-complexioned. But modern editors typically prefer the Q reading here and empty the lines of their dangerous suggestion that Desdemona could be imagined as “black.” Neill suggests that “white” could actually mean “wight” and “blackness” could be a reference to a woman’s sexual organs, so that the joke is about a man (any man)’s hitting his sexual target. Neill prefers Q on grounds that that F “misses the point of the conceit.” But what if F means differently rather than being a corrupt version of Q? It would be equally possible to read “white” in either text as “white man,” a reading that Gary Taylor has precluded in his argument that “white” is consistently gendered in the play—never used of men, only of “a particularly prized and idealized woman, Desdemona.” By avoiding the most available reading of F, both recent editors manage to wiggle out of a textual transaction in which Desdemona is imagined not as white, but black and her seducer as not black, but white.

Similarly, in Q 4.2 Othello addresses Desdemona, “O thou blacke weede, why art so louely faire?” (sig. K4r, 824); the equivalent passage in F is “Oh thou weed: / Who are so louely faire” (TLN 2762–3). Atypically, in this case Q’s language appears more racialized than F: Othello’s calling Desdemona “black” relates most obviously to his developing view of her sexual corruption, but the word resonates with other points in the play in which “black” is a marker of race attached to Othello rather than a marker of gender. Most modern editions follow the folio and read simply “weed.”

In this instance, as in the earlier case from 2.1, editors police a color line that is evident in neither Q nor F by chivalrously policing a color line that is evident in neither Q nor F by chivalrously...
preferring, when the early texts give them a choice, the reading that does not contribute
to the blackening of Desdemona. Both early texts of the play offend against an unspoken
modern taboo that requires editors to keep Desdemona white.

Through the differences between Q and F Desdemona is not only blackened, she is also
rendered alien from her previous self; as Othello comes to distrust her she is gradually reduced
from free, independent agency to a state of inert passivity—a position of victimization that
was already beginning, along with increasing contact with the East in early modern England,
to represent a prominent Western image of a non-western wife. It was a truism already in
Shakespeare’s England that married Englishwomen were freer in their behavior than married
women elsewhere in Europe, let alone women of the East. One foreign observer explained
why England was commonly called “the Paradise of married women:”

Wives in England are entirely in the power of their husbands, their lives only excepted . . .
yet they are not kept so strictly as they are in Spain or elsewhere. Nor are they shut up: but
they have the free management of the house or housekeeping, after the fashion of those
of the Netherlands, and others their neighbours. They go to market to buy what they like
best to eat. They are well dressed, fond of taking it easy, and commonly leave the care of
household matters and drudgery to their servants. They sit before their doors, decked out
in fine clothes, in order to see and be seen by the passers-by. In all banquets and feasts they
are shown the greatest honour; they are placed at the upper end of the table, where they are
the first served; at the lower end they help the men. All the rest of their time they employ
in walking and riding, in playing at cards or otherwise, in visiting their friends and keeping
company, conversing with their equals (whom they term gossips) and their neighbours,
and making merry with them at child-births, christenings, churchings and funerals, and all
this with the permission and knowledge of their husbands, as such is the custom.32

By contrast, as Pompa Banerjee has documented, travelers’ accounts beginning as early as
1500 flooded Europe with observations about the extraordinary submissiveness and devotion
of wives in the barbarous lands of the Orient and Muslim world. Westerners constructed
their image of eastern wives in a multitude of ways, but one of the most persistent across
disparate regions of Europe was to imagine them as exemplars of an idealized chastity,
silence, and obedience that western wives usually failed to attain. The Muslim practice of
keeping women pent up in harems was of particular fascination, as was the Indian practice
of widow-burning or sati, available to sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century England
through classical texts, the essays of Montaigne, and numerous printed travel accounts,
some of which included illustrations of the sati perishing calmly in the flames in proof of
her love and chastity.33 Similarly, travelers frequently pointed out the ultra-submissiveness

32 Emmanuel Van Meteren, Belgische ofte Nederlandtsche Historie (Delft, 1605), fol. 221v–222r,
trans. William Brenchley Rye, in England as Seen by Foreigners in the Days of Elizabeth and James
the First (London: John Russell Smity, 1865), 72–3. For more examples of the commonplace of
England as a paradise for women, see Rye, trans. (1865), 8, 197 n. 31. See also Pamela Allen Brown,
Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England (Ithaca:

33 See Pompa Banerjee, Burning Women: Widows, Witches, and Early Modern European
Travelers in India (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 73–4, 85–101, 105, and 201; and more
of “stranger” women who “out-doormated” Chaucer’s Custance and Griselda as examples of proper wifely humility: one tract published in England in 1620, only shortly before the publication of the two texts of Othello, was titled News of an Amazing Woman Whom a Merchant Recently Brought over by Sea from India and praised the South Asian wife as unfailingly helpful and supportive of her husband, even when he gambles, gets drunk, and dances with other women.34

As Banerjee shows, the alleged thralldom of non-western wives served Europeans as a way of feeling culturally superior to “savages” while at the same time suppressing a recognition of similarities with their own European expectations about the conduct of women—a phenomenon still evident centuries later in pronouncements like Wilkie Collins’s epigraph to the present chapter, where adherence to an “established code of universal courtesy to women” is a touchstone for distinguishing between civilized Europe and the uncivilized East. The platitude made unthinkable the many cases in which European men brutalized women: such barbarities could only happen under oriental despotism in the state or household. As Lena Orlin has shown, Desdemona breaks most of the rules in the conduct books in her initial interactions with Othello and the Venetians: she acknowledges her attraction to him through sighs (or even kisses in F!); she defends her choice of sexual partner openly before the Senate, she openly advocates for Cassio, confident that Othello will pardon him out of love for her.35 As she is blackened and rendered alien, however, she retreats from her initial freedom and agency and begins to resemble the “model wife” of the conduct books. Desdemona’s murder is a stage event to which western audiences can react with both horror and satisfaction because her murderer is a black man of Barbary. By killing her Othello demonstrates his monstrosity as a non-European unable to respect womanhood. By dying in heroic submission, unwilling to blame her murderer even in her final words, Desdemona displays her kinship with the non-western wives that the English and other Europeans both praised for heroic fidelity and held up as victims of barbarous “Islamic-erotic tyranny.”36

The “alienization” of Desdemona is managed with particular clarity in F, where Othello actually describes the mechanism by which his language blackens her. In this F-only speech immediately following the “weed” speech discussed above, he imagines his accusing language as writing the word “Whore” on the “faire paper” that was his wife—figuratively turning his mouth into a blowtorch that scorches it / her by making “Forges of my cheekes, / That would to Cynders burne vp Modestie” (TLN 2770–71). Appropriately, given this powerful


34 See Brown, Better a Shrew than a Sheep (2003), 198–9. Brown interprets this pamphlet as a spoof satirizing the expectations of women expressed in conduct manuals, but I strongly suspect that many readers took it seriously.


metaphoric blackening of her person, Desdemona’s speech of self-justification before Iago later in the same scene (4.2.148–64) is much longer in F than in Q and more precise about the dreadful accusations against her (TLN 2862–78). Only in F does her speech specifically name the abhorred charge of whoredom Othello has leveled against her and only in F does she kneel before Iago, a gesture which increases both her abjection and the hideous irony of her situation—protesting her virtue to the very man who best knows her truth. As Nevill Coghill was the first to notice (188–91), the F-only lines in this speech, in which Desdemona kneels before Iago to protest her innocence of the unspeakable crime of whoredom, parallel the earlier F-only speech in which Othello speaks of the icy Propontic current of his revenge and kneels before Iago to formally vow vengeance against Desdemona.37 The parallel structure in F arguably helps to identify Desdemona with an increasingly blackened Othello in that it places her and the “stranger” in similar positions of abjection before Iago.

In both early texts of the play, once Desdemona understands clearly that Othello believes her to be a whore, she is metamorphosed by his bullying accusations into a curiously inert, cowering shadow of her former self. She lapses into a seemingly passive torpor that contrasts markedly with her earlier vitality and free agency. At 4.2, she calls herself “half asleep” and, like “young babes,” a “child to chiding”; she refuses to blame Othello and attributes her situation to “wretched fortune.” Her transformation arguably reaches its culmination in the Willow Scene (4.3), where in F she sings her plaintive song of forsaken love learned of—and re-performing—the despair of a maid called “Barbarie.” In Harry Berger’s language, she has retreated from being “a warrior, a trooper” into the “childlike and wounded bewilderment of poor Barbary.”38 Editors used to normalize the maid’s name to “Barbara,” since the Willow Song was in fact a well-known English folksong. But in the play’s version of it, the song is defamiliarized by its connection through her name with the “Barbary” Moors and with the alleged “barbarity” of Othello, called a “Barbary horse” by Iago at 1.1.110–11.39 As Imtiaz Habib has noted, many blackamoors were servants in early modern England and the name “Barbary” or “Barbaree” occurs for several of them; one woman called “Barbary Moore” enters the records because she was coerced into an act of prostitution.40 Through her song, Desdemona performs an abjection that the play associates with a non-western woman of a similar geographic origin as Othello’s. The cozy bedchamber has become “unhomely” in Homi Bhabha’s phrase, following Freud, in that the domestic space does not confirm Desdemona’s cultural identity as a white European but instead ripples with frissons of “cultural displacement and diasporic movement.”41 F’s

37 Coghill, Shakespeare’s Professional Skills, 188–91.
39 Neill, ed., Othello, 357 n.
40 Imtiaz Habib, Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677: Imprints of the Invisible (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 107–44. I am also indebted to Urvashi Chakravarty’s unpublished research on Guildhall records. As she points out in a manuscript titled “‘Leaue to liue More at libertie’: Pedagogy, Slavery, and the Early Modern Mastery of Terence,” presented at the Vanderbilt Group for Pre-modern Cultural Studies in April, 2011, the parish register entries preserved in London’s Guildhall Library document several black maidservants.
41 Homi Bhabha, “The World and the Home,” in Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 445–55. Although Bhabha is interested in applying the idea
blackening and “alienization” of Desdemona goes along with our earlier conclusions about F’s racialization of Othello: if we imagine F as amplified from an earlier version in Q, then the revisions infuse the play with a proto-colonial imaginary that links the racialization of men with the “barbarous” debasement of women.

It is possible, of course, that the revision theory of Othello is in error, as Scott McMillin has recently contended, and that what have looked for the past several decades like additions to Q are instead cuts from an original Shakespearean version resembling F.42 In that case, we are back in Alice Walker’s territory with F as Shakespeare’s “original,” but able, we can hope, to view the issue of Q–F racial difference with a bit less obliquity by confronting the ways in which racism and sexism have shaped editorial choices in the past and continue to influence our own views of these texts. If the F-only passages are cuts—and a strong argument can be made for that position—then someone—Shakespeare? His company? The Master of Revels?—deliberately excised the most racially explicit passages of the play, presumably to meet the demands of a specific performance or series of performances. One likely occasion might have been Othello’s inaugural staging at court in November 1604. There are numerous reasons why the King’s Men might have wanted to tone down the racial virulence of the play at that particular time: The Masque of Blackness, in which Queen Anne and her ladies danced in blackface, was about to be performed; James I had just formally concluded peace with Spain in August, 1604, and an increased Spanish presence at court might make it wise to tone down some of the play’s most flamboyant language about Moors, blackness, and miscegenation since Spaniards were sensitive on the topic of their own “mixed” Moorish past.43 There are many possible scenarios and there is little agreement among editors.

What is most interesting about this alternative scenario by which F precedes Q is that it requires us to imagine Shakespeare or some other agent during the period as able to perceive and dampen the play’s most virulent language of racial difference for the sake of a given performance at court or elsewhere while simultaneously preserving it for later performances in which it might be expected to prove more palatable. Neither the reviser nor the cutter much resembles the “gentle Shakespeare” we have been taught to know and love, though if we were truly desperate we could perhaps conjure up a Shakespeare

of the “unhomely” to postcolonial settings, he also states that it “has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically” in many other forms of fiction that negotiate “the powers of cultural difference” (446). It might not be too much of a stretch to suggest that early modern playgoers steeped in travel writing could have associated Desdemona’s death with sati: the sati put on her wedding clothes and sang before joining her husband on the funeral pyre; Desdemona puts the wedding sheets on her bed and sings (at least in F) before being murdered by Othello. Over time, as the English in India became involved in efforts to ban sati, the association might have become stronger. See Gayatri Spivak’s classic study, “Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow-Sacrifice,” Wedge 7/8 (1985): 120–30; and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 15–63.


who, preternaturally anticipating the abolition of slavery and the Civil Rights developments of the twentieth century and beyond, repented the racial and sexual extremities of F and sought to make amends through cuts that produced something resembling Q. Either way, by avoiding discussion of race as related to gender in the two early texts of the play, we are arguably perpetuating a subtle, durable form of racism—the kind that is so deeply inured that it cannot be spoken at all.
SECTION III
Bodies
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Chapter 7
“Travelling Bodyes”: Native Women of the Northeast and Northwest Passage Ventures and English Discourses of Empire
Bernadette Andrea

In addressing the methodological challenge of “tracking” subaltern agency in English discourses of global expansionism as they emerged in the mid-sixteenth century, I focus on aboriginal or native women’s travels—generally dismissed as “mere physical movement”—as inscribed in the historical record of the first official English overseas venture westward for the purpose of trade, colonization, and empire: Martin Frobisher’s voyages from 1576 to 1578 ostensibly in search of a northwest passage to the riches of Asia. While considered failures in terms of their immediate aims of exploration, resource extraction, and settlement, Frobisher’s voyages subsequently were deemed to have established the foundation of a British seaborne empire as articulated by the advisor to the short-lived Cathay Company, John Dee. Dee also advised the Muscovy Company, which had launched a series of voyages over a decade prior in search of a northeast route via Central Asia and Safavid Persia.

While men dominated these voyages and for the most part did not bring women with them, a small percentage of elite women are listed as investors in Frobisher’s ventures, with Queen Elizabeth I preeminent. Even less visible are those gendered subalterns transported

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3 For a list that includes the female investors in Frobisher’s voyages, see Richard Collinson, ed., The Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher, in Search of a Passage to Cathaia and India by the Northwest, A.D. 1576–8 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1867), 164–5. For more, see James McDermott, “The
to England as a result of these voyages: a Nogai “Tartar girl” whom Anthony Jenkinson, agent of the Muscovy Company and royal envoy to the Russian and Persian courts, gifted to Queen Elizabeth around 1560 and an Inuk woman whom Frobisher abducted, along with her “baby-in-arm,” as a prize for the queen in 1577. The latter, the first recorded “New World native” girl or woman in the British Isles, is grouped in the records of the Frobisher voyages with the “people of Cathay, Tartars, Tartar Indians, country people, strange people, and even Moors.” This confusion is not surprising given many of Frobisher’s men had traveled the northeast route across Central Asia, where the preponderance of natives they encountered were Tartars (or, properly speaking, Tatars). The catachresis “Tartar Indian” that emerges from these documents thus resonates with the marginal notation identifying the “Tartar girl” in the first volume of Richard Hakluyt’s The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation (1599) to signal the triangulations, rather than the binary oppositions, that constituted England’s—and, more broadly speaking, Britain’s—“proto-imperial” project during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Signaling the supplementary position of these gendered subalterns in the emerging English discourses of global expansionism—whereby they were rendered simultaneously marginal and constitutive—Thomas Churchyard in his widely read composite volume from 1578 restricts his definition of “travelling bodys” to those men who established the material basis for Dee’s projected British empire. As Churchyard specifies, he means “thereby Sir


For the designation “New World” or “American” native for these captives, see Alden T. Vaughan, Transatlantic Encounters: American Indians in Britain, 1500–1766 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1, 10. On the terms Frobisher and his crew used, see William C. Sturtevant and David Beers Quinn, “This New Prey: Eskimos in Europe in 1567, 1576, and 1577,” in Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays, ed. Christian F. Feest (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 68. For more, see Kirsten A. Seaver, “How Strange Is a Stranger? A Survey of Opportunities for Inuit-European Contact in the Davis Strait before 1576,” in Meta Incognita, 2:523–52.


For the connection between Spivak’s “account of the term ‘subaltern’” and Jacques Derrida’s “deconstructive concept of ‘the supplement,’” see Stephen Morton, Gayatri Spivak: Ethics,
Humfrey Gilbert, Maister Henry Knolles, and others, right worthy Gentleman,” even though the volume includes a synopsis of one of Queen Elizabeth’s many progresses through her realm (“The entertaynemente of the Queenes Majestie into Suffolke, and Norffolke”). To counterbalance this account of Queen Elizabeth’s domestic travels, as she never ventured beyond British shores, Churchyard adds a poem in praise of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, a widely traveled soldier and explorer who two years earlier lobbied for the northeast route (“A matter touching the Journey of Sir Humfrey Gilbarte Knight”) and an account of Martin Frobisher’s several ventures in search of the northwest passage (“A Prayse, and Reporte of Maister Martyne Forboishers [sic] Voyage to Meta Incognita”). Furthermore, even though the records of the Frobisher voyages detail several encounters with the Inuit, those natives transported to England were not considered “travelling bodyes” due to their lack of volition.

In this contribution to Rethinking Feminism, I challenge the exclusion of these diverse bodies from the category of travel that subtended the emerging anglocentric discourse of trade, colonialism, and empire. Specifically, I argue that gendered subalterns such as the “Tartar girl” and the “Tartar-Indian” woman exercised their agency through acts of resistance and survival as encoded in these discourses and in concomitant “ideologies of racial difference,” for which the narratives from the Frobisher voyages were foundational. I also complicate the current turn to “domestic travel” by including native women transported to and through England as a result of these proto-imperial ventures. Still, the question of their agency—or “survivance”—remains fraught, as they were captives, with the former likely traded to Jenkinson and the latter forcibly kidnapped by Frobisher’s men.

The “Tartar girl,” as I have detailed elsewhere, found a place at Queen Elizabeth’s court as her “welbeloved woman Ipolita the Tartarian.” By contrast, the “Tartar Indian” woman,

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8 Thomas Churchyard, A Discourse of The Queenes Majesties entertainment in Suffolk and Norfolk ... Whereunto is adjoyned a commendation of Sir Humfrey Gilberts ventrous journey (London, 1578), sig. A4.

9 For an important study of Queen Elizabeth’s domestic travels, see Mary Hill Cole, The Portable Queen: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Ceremony (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999). See also Andrew McRae, Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), especially his analyses of Queen Elizabeth’s progresses (145–73), and Churchyard’s role as a “deviser” of these entertainments (154–5, 157–61).


11 For this key term, see Gerald Vizenor, Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 24, 99–103.

whom the English labeled “Ignorth,” the generic Inuktitut word for “woman,” succumbed to a fatal disease approximately six weeks after her arrival on British shores. Attending to the traces in the narratives of the Frobisher voyages of this woman’s negotiation of her forced movements alongside oral histories from the northern native tradition, I track how she emerged as a historical agent within and beyond the emerging anglocentric discourse of empire.

To situate this argument, I first engage the critical debate over what constitutes “travel” as a necessary preliminary to tracing the agency of gendered subalterns such as the “Tartar girl” and the “Tartar Indian” woman into and within proto-imperial England. As Andrew McRae in his influential study of Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England relates, “in the early modern period to ‘travel’ typically meant to leave the nation’s shores.” Problematically, this definition erases the movements of those subaltern subjects who were brought to British shores via the early modern/colonial circuits of global exchange, as well as those who traveled “domestically” after their arrival. By explicating the conditions and consequences of these women’s journeys to and within the British Isles, I establish that their exclusion from the category of “travelling bodys”—to recall Churchyard’s accolade for the men of the northwest passage ventures—instantiates an unsettling absent presence in the anglocentric discourse of empire from the mid-sixteenth century onward. By way of conclusion, I broach how integrating the “Tartar Indian” and other native woman from the northeast and northwest passage ventures into our considerations of proto-imperial and domestic travel demands a rethinking of feminist approaches to both.

Genealogies of Travel and Their Gendered Exclusions

As indicated above, Jaś Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés, in the synoptic introduction to their collection, Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel, define their key


15 Andrew McRae, Literature and Domestic Travel, 14, 176.
term “travel as a culturally significant event rather than as mere physical movement.”16 The Odyssey is the bedrock of this cultural history, with Odysseus “the model of the wanderer who finally returns home through numerous adventures (military, sexual and magical).” From the medieval through the early modern era, he also stood as “the ideal model of a traveller whose journey brought inner as well as outer fulfillment.”17 Frobisher himself was frequently compared “with Ulysses and also with other heroes of Greek legend, especially Hercules and Jason.” Hence, even though Elsner and Rübes acknowledge the female pilgrim Egeria, who traveled from Galicia in Spain to Jerusalem sometime between 381 and 384 CE and left a widely distributed record of her journey, they embed an implicit gender binary in their definition: men travel abroad (Odysseus), chaste women remain behind (Penelope), and women encountered abroad are promiscuous witches (Circe).19 This gendered differential subtends the opposition between the designation of “travel as a culturally significant event” (associated with the ideal male traveler) and “mere physical movement” (relegated to subalterns such as women “following” their husbands, lower-class men and women seeking employment, and slaves transported as commodities).20 Ironically, the physician, Edward Dodding, who performed the autopsy on the Inuk man transported to England with the “Tartar Indian” woman, deploys this very binary in his epitaph: “Had hardy Ulysses escaped his plight, / How great his Lady’s joy: her fame how slight!”21 Dr. Dodding thus celebrates male travel, even when such journeys were not voluntarily undertaken but coerced, and contrasts it to the ideal of the chaste—and, he presumes, homebound—woman. Ignorth’s physical movement—doubly erased due to her status as a woman and a native from the lands the English sought to exploit—fails to register in this masculinist and imperialist paradigm as a significant event. It therefore does not count as travel.

17 Elsner and Rübes, Voyages and Visions, 8–9.
21 Cheshire et al., “Frobisher’s Eskimos,” 42, 49 n. 17, citing “Doctor Doddyngs Report of the Sickenesse and Death of the Man at Bristol Ws [which] Capt. Furbisher brought from the North-west: And of the Nature of the Woman of that Contrie Yet Livynge.” For the Latin original, see Collinson, ed., The Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher (1867), 189–91. The captives arrived in England at the end of September 1577; the man was buried in Bristol on November 8, 1577, dying from the injuries sustained during his capture; the woman died next and was buried in Bristol four days later; the child died shortly thereafter on the way to London. For details, see James Watt and Ann Savours, “The Captured ‘Countrey People’: Their Depiction and Medical History,” in Meta Incognita, 2:553–62.
To cite an important counterexample, Alison Games in *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660*, who focuses on “different types of men who traveled outside of England,” nevertheless acknowledges those women from the British Isles who remained at home and those who traveled abroad with their husbands despite the general ban on women’s travel. An influential articulation of this ban was disseminated in *The Traveller of Jerome Turler* (1575), which intones: “the wide wandering of Weemen cannot want [“lack”] suspension, & bringeth some toke[n] of dishonestie. Whereupon the Tragicall and Comical Poets, when they bringe in any far traveiling [traveling] Woman, for the most parte they feine [“fashion, form, shape”] her to be incontinent [“unchaste”].” Another popular travel guide, Thomas Palmer’s *An Essay of the Meanes how to make our Trauailles, into forraine Countries, the more profitable and honorable* (1606), lists women in general—along with “Infants,” “Decrepite persons,” “Fooles,” “Madmen,” and “Lunaticke[s]”—under “What persons are inhibited traualle” or prohibited from traveling. Yet, as Games documents, some early modern English women did exploit the loophole allowing for “special cases” by traveling with their husbands, as did Lady Catherine Whetenall who traveled to Italy from 1649 to 1650, where she died in childbirth. Richard Lassels, who accompanied Lady Whetenall and her husband, “mark[ed] the death of his patron by writing a manuscript account of her journey,” which served as “the first draft of what would become a standard guide to travelling to Italy,” published 20 years later. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu—who traveled with her husband, the British ambassador, to the sultan’s court, through the western half of the Ottoman Empire as far as Istanbul from 1716 to 1718 and whose travelogue was published posthumously in 1763—is another famous case. Games also mentions Lady Teresa Sampsonia Sherley, albeit anonymously as a “Persian” woman who married Robert Sherley, Shah ‘Abbas’s early seventeenth-century envoy to the Christian sovereigns of Western Europe. She, in

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23 *The Traveller of Jerome Turler* (London: William How, 1575), translated from Jerome Turler’s *De peregrinatione* (Argentorati [Strasbourg], 1574), 9; emphasis added. Unless otherwise indicated, glosses are from the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

24 Thomas Palmer, *An Essay of the Meanes how to make our Trauailles, into forraine Countries, the more profitable and honorable* (London: H. L. for Mathew Lownes, 1606), sig. I.B. For more on these guidebooks, see Games, *The Web of Empire*, 17–46.


fact, was a Circassian subject of the shah, who famously traveled with her husband to England on two occasions and across Eurasia after his death.28 Her even more famous contemporary Pocahontas, indexed as Rebecca Rolfe, is the only Native American woman, along with an anonymous “Indian woman from Virginia,” that Games lists as traveling to England, primarily because she married an English man.29 Subaltern women such as the “Tartar girl” and the “Tartar Indian” woman, whose travels to England precede Pocahontas’s celebrated trip by over 50 years, are consequently rendered invisible even in this laudatory attempt to adapt the masculinist and imperialist model of travel to include women in relation to men.

Rather than adding a few exceptional women to the largely male litany of early modern travelers, Laura A. Ambrose, in “Plotting Movement: Epistemologies of Local Travel in Early Modern England, 1600–1660,” argues that the category of “travel” itself is too restrictive due to its dependence on “the tropes of ‘distance’ and ‘encounter’ derived from the foreign voyage narrative.”30 In a salutary double move, Ambrose, following McRae, assembles “an archive of local travel texts”—including “stage plays, pamphlets, city views, narrative accounts, almanacs, and travel guides”—to elaborate “a non-subjective phenomenological lexicon of space, time, difficulty, and technology.” This approach enables a more nuanced attention to forms of travel that have been labeled, and often dismissed, as excursions, gadding about, itinerancy, exile, exploration, journeying, migration, mobility, peregrination, pilgrimage, progresses, translation, travail, traversal, ventures, voyages, or wandering.31 Ambrose proposes to “represent journeying as a phenomenon of movement” to account for this diversity of local travel by English women and men, which enables her to address class and gender differences. Yet, she does not discuss the colonial registers of local travel in the period, which included the coerced travel of non-English (and, more broadly speaking, non-British) subalterns to and within Britain. Rather, she sets “local movement” against the long-distance voyages of men such as Jenkinson to the northeast and Frobisher to the northwest during the 1560s and 1570s. This move, which allows for a more comprehensive view of early modern travel than the definition Elsner and Rubiés proffer, nevertheless marginalizes the local movements of those women transported to England, such as the “Tartar girl” and the “Tartar Indian”


29 On this anonymous “Indian woman from Virginia,” who was sent from London to Bermuda, see Games, The Web of Empire, 163–4. Vaughan identifies her as “Matachanna, a half-sister of Pocahontas” (Transatlantic Encounters, 84; see also 78, 93, 290 n. 44).


31 This partial list of early modern synonyms for “travel” is drawn from Ambrose, “Plotting Movement”; Oakley-Brown, “Churchyard Thomas”; and Oakley-Brown, “Taxonomies of Travel and Martial Identity.”
woman, whose trajectories simultaneously require attention to the categories of “distance” and “encounter.” Informed by Ambrose’s productive interrogation of the limits of “travel writing” as a genre, I return to these overseas voyages to argue for the utility of a more capacious category of “movement” for assessing the resonance of these native women in emerging English discourses of global expansionism.

**Objects that Speak in Proto-Imperial England**

Elsewhere, I have linked the Nogai “Tartar girl” Anthony Jenkinson acquired in Central Asia to Queen Elizabeth’s “welbeloved woman Ipolita the Tartarian” and to Elizabethan cultural productions such as the *Masque of Proteus* that concluded the 1594–1595 Gray’s Inn Revels, which also premiered Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors*. Here, I highlight the connection between native women from the northeast and northwest Passage ventures brought to England to underwrite this global expansionist project, which in the case of the Frobisher voyages explicitly list trade, colonization, and empire as their aims. The “Tartar girl,” I propose, served as a template for English understandings of the “Tartar Indian” woman, who had she not died shortly after her arrival in England might also have become one of the queen’s “‘innocents’ [in the sixteenth-century sense of “half-wit” or fool], or freaks [in the sixteenth-century sense of *lusus naturae* or “sport of Nature”].”

The “Tartar girl,” from the “Old World” of Eurasia, against all odds survived her ordeal of war, starvation, slavery, and forced transportation to find herself in a position of some comfort, even if as a court “pet.” The “Tartar Indian” woman, as a native from an isolated community in the “New World,” did not carry the necessary immunities against Eurasian diseases; within six weeks of her arrival in England, she “was troubled . . . with boils,” to cite “Doctor Doddyngs Report,” “which broke out very densely on her skin” and from which she died shortly thereafter. However, she evidently was meant as a display, and perhaps another gift for the queen, as indicated by the attending doctor’s response to her male companion’s death: “I was bitterly grieved and saddened, not so much by the death of

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33 Vaughan’s *Transatlantic Encounters* elaborates how merchants and colonists used captured natives to underwrite these aims in his chapters on Frobisher (“New World Exotics,” 1–20) and Walter Ralegh (“Ralegh’s American Interpreters,” 21–41).

34 For these terms, see David Loades, *Elizabeth I* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2003), 316, who adds that the English queen “did not, apparently, indulge in . . . [this] common practice,” with Ippolyta the Tartarian and Tomasina de Paris (who “appears to have been a dwarf”) possible exceptions.


the man himself as because the great hope of seeing him which our most gracious Queen had entertained had now slipped through her fingers, as it were, for a second time.37 Her baby, the last survivor, was rushed toward the queen’s palace during his final illness, but he died prior to reaching her.38

The Frobisher voyages, because they resulted in a fiasco over the false gold that became their focus, were narrated in several versions, which are supplemented by copious state records.39 Two narratives, largely based on direct evidence, provide detailed accounts of the English encounters with the natives of the northern regions Queen Elizabeth dubbed Meta Incognita or “the unknown limits.”40 The earliest published, *A true reporte of the laste voyage into the West and Northwest regions . . . worthily atchieued by Captaine Frobisher of the sayde voyage the first finder and Generall. With a description of the people there inhabiting, and other circumstances notable. Written by Dionysse Settle, one of the companie in the sayde voyage (1577)*, was “the first piece of English travel-literature to be translated into the main European languages,” including French, German, Italian, and Latin.41 Settle consequently offers the first, and most famous, printed account of the Inuk woman’s capture:

Two women, not being so apt to escape as the men were, the one for her age, and the other being incombred with a yong childe, we tooke. The olde wretch, whome dyuers of our Saylere supposed to be eyther a Diuell, or a Witche, plucked off her buskins [boots], to see, if she were clouen footed, and for her oughly [ugly] hewe and deformite, we let her goe: the young woman and the childe, we brought away.42

The old woman here is cast as a debased Circe, the witch who leads traveling men astray and therefore must be abandoned; the young woman, though, is retained for the English men’s presumed pleasure. While subsequent narratives emphasize her chastity in refraining from sexual contact with the captive male, the possibility of her abuse by the English men

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37 Cheshire et al., “Frobisher’s Eskimos,” 41; “a second time” refers “to the fact that the previous Eskimo man, brought back on the 1576 expedition, had also perished before he could be exhibited at court” (48 n. 11).

38 Cheshire et al., “Frobisher’s Eskimos,” explains that “[t]he child is referred to as ‘him’ because the information that it was a boy is contained in one of the two other surviving references” (30).

39 For the cultural import of the ore found on the expedition, see Marianne Montgomery, “‘All that glisters’: The Moral Meanings of Gold in the Frobisher Narratives and *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Studies in Travel Writing* 17, no. 3 (2013): 250–63.


(intended or realized) cannot be discounted. Perhaps Frobisher’s plan to deliver her as a gift to the queen, as Jenkinson did with the “Tartar girl,” offered her some measure of protection. As Settle elaborates, further contact with the natives involved negotiations for a possible “hostage” exchange, with Frobisher intent on recovering five men who went missing on their prior voyage. The English and the Inuit accounts of their fate varies: Frobisher concluded the men had been murdered by the Inuit; however, Inuit oral history suggests that the men survived the winter with the help of the native people, only to perish in the icy seas as they tried to return to England on an improvised boat. Settle also records attempts by the Inuit to rescue the man, woman, and child on the English ship, none of which were successful.

Analogously, Thomas Harriot’s *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia, of the commodities and of the nature and manners of the naturall inhabitants: Discouered by the English Colony there seated by Sir Richard Greinuile Knight In the yeere 1585 (1588)*, which featured John White’s drawings of the Algonquian and concluded with the Picts, ancestors of the British, showed women from both groups with facial tattoos. This famous example from White, who had earlier depicted the Inuit abducted on Frobisher’s voyages, underscores the “difference and sameness,” which Walter Mignolo in *Local Histories/Global Designs* conceptualizes as early modern “Occidentalism,” rather than the absolute otherness associated with later colonial discourses. The operative mode in the emerging English discourse of global expansionism is rather “the denial of coevalness”—in Mignolo’s formulation, “the end result of relocating people in a chronological hierarchy rather than in geographical places”—which nevertheless leaves room for assimilation into the imperial norm. This mode explains how the first “American natives” brought to England in the context of the Cabots’ voyages at the turn of the sixteenth century seemed indistinguishable from English males once divested of their native clothing. The Inuk

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43 Margo Hendricks, “Feminist Historiography,” in *A Companion to Early Modern Women’s Writing*, ed. Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 361–76, adduces the parallel example of “the Negress Maria” whom Drake and his crew abducted from a Spanish ship in 1577 (368). After a few months, he abandoned “a pregnant Maria . . . on a deserted island in the Indian ocean” (369).


48 Vaughan, *Transatlantic Encounter*, 10–11. Focusing on the voyage of 1502 launched from Bristol to “the new founde lande [Newfoundland and environs],” David D. Quinn, in *North America from Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) records that “three men were brought to the king’s court, described as being dressed in skins and eating their meat raw (or perhaps half raw). They were seen there a year later dressed as Englishmen, but were not heard to speak.” Quinn identifies this capture as evidence of “the first recorded contacts between English and Amerindians” and specifies that “[t]he captives appear to have been Indians rather
man captured 75 years later on Frobisher’s second voyage, even though he died after less
than two months in England, also appeared in English clothes. The Inuk woman, with
her distinctive facial tattoos, likely assimilated less easily and is not known to have worn
English women’s attire.49

The second published narrative detailing the capture of the Inuk woman—George Best’s
A Trve Discovrse of the late voyages of discouerie, for the finding of a passage to Cathaya,
by the Northwest, vnnder the conduct of Martin Frobisher Generall (1578)—is “the only
contemporary account of all three of Frobisher’s voyages by one who participated in them.”
As the twentieth-century Arctic explorer and editor Vilhjalmur Stefansson continues, “Best
went on the second expedition as Frobisher’s Lieutenant aboard the Aid, and on the third as
Captain of the Anne Frances.”50 During this second voyage, in which colonization of North
America was added to the initial goal of finding a northwest passage to Cathay, Frobisher
and his crew intensified their efforts to capture some Inuit, whom they characterize as
“this new pray [prey].”51 As Settle’s account earlier conveyed, in addition to the Inuk man,
who was captured in a prior ambush, an Inuk woman was abducted at what the English
memorialized as “[t]he bloudy point.”52 Rehearsing Settle’s binary opposition between the
old woman and the young one, Best adds that an English arrow had

pierced through the childs arme, wherevpon she [the child’s mother] cried out, and was take[n],
& our Surgeon[n], meaning to heale hir childs arme, applied salues [salves] thervnto. But, she
not acquainted with such kinde of surgerie, plucked those salues away, & by co[n]tinuall
licking with hir owne tongue, not much vnlike our dogges, healed vppe the childs arme.53

than Eskimo, and they are likely to have been Micmac or other mainland Algonkians” (126). For the
original report, see “A note of Sebastian Cabotes voyage of discouerie, taken out of an old Chronicle
written by Robert Fabian, sometime Alderman of London,” in Richard Hakluyt, Divers voyages touching
the discouerie of America, and the islands adiacent vnto the same, made first of all by our Englishmen,

49 Cheshire et al., “Frobisher’s Eskimos,” indicates that the Flemish painter Cornelis Ketel “did
five paintings of Calichough in all: three in his native dress, one in English dress and one naked”; “two
of his four pictures of ‘the strainge woman’ . . . were intended from the start ‘for the Quene at new
yeares day’” (34).

50 Stefansson, “Appendix 3: Notes on the Accounts of Frobisher’s Voyages,” in Three Voyages,
2.226–8; 227. Thomas Ellis, A true report of the third and last voyage into Meta incognita: atchieued
by the worthis Capteine, M. Martine Frobisher Esquire, Anno. 1578 (London: Thomas Dawson, 1578),
records several encounters with the natives; however, Ellis does not mention the woman.

51 George Best, A True Discourse of the late voyages of discouerie, for the finding of a passage to
Cathaya by the Northeast, vnnder the conduct of Martin Frobisher Generall: Deuided into three Books
(London: Henry Bynnyman, 1578), 1:50; Stefansson, Three Voyages, 1:50. As Nathan J. Probasco points
out in “Researching North America: Sir Humphrey Gilbert’s 1583 Expedition and a Reexamination of
Early Modern English Colonization in the North Atlantic World,” (PhD diss., University of Nebraska-
Lincoln, 2013), “In 1578, Frobisher planned to establish a mining settlement, most probably in modern-
day Nunavut, Canada. Like the European fish drying grounds on Newfoundland’s eastern coast, it was
not to be a self-sustaining colony” (4 n. 4). Frobisher and his crew did erect the first stone house in
North America, the remains of which can be seen today. For details, see Robert McGhee and James A.

52 Best, A True Discourse, 2:23; Stefansson, Three Voyages, 1:68.

53 Best, A True Discourse, 2:23–4; Stefansson, Three Voyages, 1:68.
Here and elsewhere in this narrative, Best likens the Inuit to animals; yet, his description also inadvertently gives voice, and perhaps a resistant form of agency, to the woman as she heals her child through traditional—and effective—means. As Inuit oral history documents, “[s]ome people were born with the gift of healing,” which meant (among other things) “[t]hey could cure cuts and other wounds by licking the affected area.”54 Notably, when her male companion was on his deathbed in England, he also refused English medical practices—in his case, bloodletting—inscribing another act of resistance in an otherwise lethal narrative of captivity.

Best finally posits a motive, if only post hoc, for the abduction of the woman: “Hauing now got a woman captiue for the conforte of our man, we broughte them both togethe, and euery man with silence desired to beholde the manner of their meeteing and entertaynement, the whiche was more worth the beholding, than can be well expressed by writing.” The English men’s voyeuristic motive for bringing the man and woman together, who did not seem to have a previous relationship, is nevertheless foreclosed through the woman’s resistance, who “at the first verie suddaynely, as though she diseyled or regarded not the man, turned away, and beganne to sing, as though she minded another matter.”55 From the perspective of the Inuit, “[s]ongs are thoughts, sung out with breath when people are moved by great forces and ordinary speech no longer suffices.”56 What the woman sang, therefore, Best and the rest of Frobisher’s crew could not know on several levels. However, after communicating directly with each other, the two adult captives joined efforts in trying to escape and ultimately to survive their transport to England:

the man brake vp the silence first, and with sterne and stayed [staid] countenance, beganne to tell a long solemnne tale to the woman, wherevnto she gaue good hearing, and interrupted him nothing, till he had finished, & afterwards, being growen into more familiar acquayntance by speéech, were turned togither, so that (I think) the one would hardly haue liued, without the comfort of the other.

Best concludes, “yet did they neuer vse as man and wife, though the woman spared not to do all necessarie things that apperteyned to a good huswife indifferently [“impartially”] for them both, as in making cleane their Cabin, and euery other thing that apperteyned to his ease.”57 Best, along with other commentators, emphasizes the Inuits’ “shamefasteness and chastitie,” even as he diminishes his praise by labeling them “those savage Captives.”58

In his closing ethnography, “A generall and briefe Description of the Countrey, and condition of the people, which are found in Meta Incognita,” Best judges the native people he encountered on his northwest voyages “to be a kinde of Tartar” like those the English men encountered on their northeast voyages, an assessment he shared with other commentators.59

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54 Bennett and Rowley, “Medicine,” in Uqalurait, 210–20 (210; for an example, see 210–11).
55 Best, A True Discourse, 2:25; Stefansson, Three Voyages, 1:69.
58 Best, A True Discourse, 2:25; Stefansson, Three Voyages, 1:70.
59 Best, A True Discourse, 3:60–61; Stefansson, Three Voyages, 1:122–3. For other accounts that identified the natives encountered on Frobisher’s northwest voyages as Tartars, see Christopher Hall’s
His personal experience with the captured man and woman led him to conclude that the Inuit “are exceeding friendly and kinde harted, one to the other, & mourne greatly at the losse or harne of their fellowes, and expresse their grief of minde, when they part one from an other, with a mournefull song, and Dirges,” even though elsewhere in his narrative he uses derogatory labels for the native people by linking them to “savages” and beasts. He reiterates that the captive Inuit were “verye chaste in ye [the] manner of their living,” adding that while in England “[t]hey beganne to grow more ciuill, familiar, pleasaut, and docible [‘teachable, docile; submissive to teaching or training, tractable’] amongst vs in a verye shorte time.” While the Inuk man had learned some English phrases, reportedly dying on the words “God be with you,” the Inuk woman registered her final act of resistance through her gestures when she refused to see her companion interred, even though the attending physician prevailed: “at my persuasion she was led with me, albeit unwillingly, to the burial.” Dr. Dodding explains that he forced her to join him to prove the English did not practice human sacrifice or anthropophagism, as he assumes the Inuit did.

Since incidents of English explorers and settlers killing and consuming humans were not unheard of during the first stage of their colonization of the Americas, with the practice persisting in the Arctic region as late as the nineteenth century, this report conveys the anxiety that they might not merely succumb to “cannibals,” but become cannibals themselves. Certainly, the doctor’s insistence bespeaks a further colonial projection onto

“The first Voyage of M. Martine Frobisher, to the Northwest, for the search of the straight or passage to China . . . made in the yeere of our Lord 1576,” and “Michael Lok’s Account of the First Voyage: East India by the Northwestw[ard],” in Stefansson, Three Voyages, 1:149–54 (153) and 157–66 (166). Almost 50 years later, John Smith, who had traveled extensively in Ottoman lands as a soldier and captive prior to his foundational colonizing efforts in Virginia and New England, likewise “compared Indians to Tartars,” Kupperman, Indians and English, 168.

60 Best, A True Discourse, 63; Stefansson, Three Voyage, 1:125.

61 Cheshire et al., “Frobisher’s Eskimos,” 41, citing “Doctor Doddyngs Report.” Steckley, White Lies about the Inuit, states that the stereotype of “Inuit cannibalism was popularized in Britain, in large measure to shift blame from English gentlemen,” who resorted to this practice on their northern voyages from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth (22). For a report of early sixteenth-century English cannibalism, see Richard Hakluyt, “The voyage of master Hore and diuers other Gentlemen, to Newfound land, and Cape Breton, in the yeere 1536. and in the 28. yeere of King Henry the eight,” in Richard Hakluyt, The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English nation, made by sea or ouer Land, to the most remote and fairest distant Quarters of the earth at any time within the compasse of these 1500. yeeres (London: George Bishop and Ralph Newberie, 1589), 517–19, and in a slightly but significantly extended version in Hakluyt, The Third and Last Volume of the Voyages, Navigations, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation, and in some few places, where they haue not been, of strangers, performed within and before the time of these hundred yeeres, to all parts of the Newfound world of America, or the West Indies (London: George Bishop, Ralph Newberie, and Robert Baker, 1600), 129–31. For additional sources, see E. G. R. Taylor, “Master Hore’s Voyage of 1536,” Geographical Journal 77, no. 5 (1931): 469–70. For an astute analysis of these records, see Philip Levy, “Man-Eating and Menace on Richard Hore’s Expedition to America,” Atlantic Studies 2, no. 2 (2005): 129–51.

this desolate woman. She died, possibly of measles, shortly thereafter. However, her visual and discursive image continued to be circulated as part of the nascent English discourses of global expansionism, which encompassed exploration, trade, and colonization. As I have sought to show, so did her agency through acts of survival and resistance. Her movement into proto-imperial England, along with the “Tartar girl”—who was better equipped, if only immunologically, to survive and perhaps even to thrive in Queen Elizabeth’s court—consequently counts as a significant cultural event within the larger schema of early modern travel, both local and global. Ultimately, despite her lack of volition, having been forcibly removed from her homeland by English explorers, the “Tartar Indian” woman emerges as a historical agent and not simply a cipher in the records of the Frobisher voyages and their aftermath. To assess her movements and those of other native women within the circuits of the early modern/colonial world system, we therefore must expand our understanding of traveling bodies to include those gendered subalterns whose lives subtended and ultimately unsettled the anglocentric discourse of empire.
Any feminist inquiry must assume that the gravity of political power bears upon the sexed subject, notwithstanding other considerations of subject position. But the way that other categories engage and inflect the position of woman as a social actor and subject—how these fundamentally change what a “woman” is—in many ways defines the inquiry itself.1 Years ago, Dympna Callaghan wrote brilliantly and provocatively about how Elizabeth Cary “deploys and manipulates the concept [of race] as a vital aspect of her construction and interrogation of femininity” in her drama, *The Tragedy of Mariam*. I revisit this observation because, as much as I admire the piece, I believe that a contemporary—which is to say, early modern—application of the concept of race needs to be applied to Cary’s interrogation. The embodiment of moral differences in the play, color-coded in black and white, are grounded in prevailing medical theory as it attaches to rank.

If *The Tragedy of Mariam* is “about” anything, it is about rank—and the privileges of moral courage and superiority that rank inherently bestows. The term “race” most commonly referred to family lineage, or bloodline, in the early modern period, and relied upon pervasive notions of what were believed to constitute the properties of blood.2 This historically older construction of race as lineage, or rank, understands the body as

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1 These shifting categories are certainly not confined to gender, rank, or education—although these classifications will largely be the concern of this present study. Allyson M. Poska’s groundbreaking book, *Women and Authority in Early Modern Spain: The Peasants of Galicia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), has shown how special circumstances outside wealth or rank allowed women in northwestern Spain to wield authority in defiance of traditional gender expectations.

2 While blood was only one of the four humours, it serves as metonymy in tracts of this period for the fluid transactions of the body—particularly where the nature of noble blood or hereditary blood is considered. For the purposes of this argument, I will also use the term “blood” to denote humoral disposition in noble subjects.
a hydraulic machine—and as the site of moral production. Mariam’s whiteness against the colored background of Salome and of Herod does constitute the moral encoding of raced subjects—but the race in question is a difference in rank. If we read these binaries of white and black as Christian semiotics mapped onto people of different origin, we miss two components of Cary’s interrogation that are most revealing of her representation of early modern subjectivity. First, Cary represents subjectivity from the inside out: moral differences are literally a feature of the blood—or humoral disposition—and are revealed in the external complexion of her characters; second, that rank, or race, is a more essential constituent of human being than is either sex or sexual identity and identification.3

Callaghan’s analysis does not overlook the fact that the power relations in the play are a function of rank: she perceives the “differences of power and morality” presented in the drama as determined “not only by gender, but also by ‘race,’ and class.”4 Her critique recognizes that the transgressive natures of Herod and Salome have their “origins in . . . inferior heritage,” but the heritage upon which she most often focuses is that of nation and not family relation.5 I want to refocus attention on race in the play as that of family line or rank because of what it reveals about contemporary medical philosophy and the color of blood.

To be sure, an exterior complexion read as a set of interior (moral) characteristics is not a construction that is new to race. But how this construction is applied to the race of ruling families in the early modern period exposes assumptions of moral composition and constitution as an inherited trait. Jean Feerick has recently explored the collusion of the categories of rank and race, arguing that racial discrimination grounded in chromatic distinction emerges “in dialectical relation to social rank, [and allows for] social tensions originating with the difference of rank to be resolved, mitigated, or exploited with reference to this emerging difference of colour.”6 My argument inverts Feerick’s claim: color does

3 The attitudes reflected in the play may well be altered by 1626, when Cary’s confrontation with her husband makes her political and economic power—or the absence of it—painfully evident. But this is c. 1605. While we do not know exactly when Cary wrote The Tragedy of Mariam, it was probably between 1602, when she married Henry Cary, and 1609 when she gave birth to the couple’s first child. It was certainly after the circulation of Thomas Lodge’s translation of The famovs and memorable workes of Iosepvs (STC 14809) in print or manuscript, since the play is obviously indebted to this translation. This would place the composition of the play after 1598 when Lodge’s translation was licensed. But a passage in The Lady Falkland: Her Life, written by one of her daughters, refers to a time when Cary wrote “many thinges for her private recreation, on severall subiects . . . all in verse,” (see Elizabeth Cary, Lady Falkland: Life and Letters, ed. Heather Wolfe [Cambridge: RTM Publications, 2001], 110). Heather Wolfe assigns this period to around 1605, and assumes that the play was written during this prolific time. In the most recent edition of the play, Ramona Wray sets the period of composition to between 1603–1606, with 1605 as the most likely date (The Tragedy of Mariam, ed. Ramona Wray, Arden Early Modern Drama Series [London: Bloomsbury, 2012], 10–11).


5 Callaghan, “Re-reading Elizabeth Cary’s The Tragedie of Mariam,” 173.

6 Jean Feerick, Strangers in Blood: Relocating Race in the Renaissance (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 5. Rank is an underexplored topic in existing scholarly work on race, at least as the concept takes shape in the discourse of the anglophone world. Feerick’s study is the first
not accrue value as a marker of difference in cooperative relation with an emergent system of racialization. Rather, surface markings of the body are read and interpreted through an earlier system of racial encoding—one that reads the body in terms of moral taxonomy. The implications of this reversal matter: in this orientation, color marks moral qualities that are assumed to have a physiological manifestation in the subjects that they score—and these narratives draw their political power from contemporary medical arguments. Further, these markings signify moral differences that, while cultural and contingent in our terms, are embodied and essential in theirs.7

In light of research that suggests that the concept of race descends from animal husbandry (and discourses about races of dogs, pedigrees, and selection methods), we need to revisit questions concerning noble blood. As Charles de Miramon writes, this transformation of heredity is not limited to hounds, but “the revival of hereditary blood early in the fourteenth century is . . . [an] example of the cultural and political evolutions that explain the birth of race.”8 Of course, there is no “birth of race,” but a process by which existing discourses get pressed into different service with shifting political agendas—and the discourse concerning the governing social hierarchy was particularly well-developed in the early modern period. The humors—the four bodily fluids of yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood—were thought to be in equilibrium in noble subjects. This condition supplied them with better physical, intellectual, and moral capacities, and conferred their license to rule. Anxieties anatomized in texts such as Thomas Elyot’s Boke named the Governour (1531) about the corruption of noble blood also describe the operations by which virtue—both physical and moral—was understood to convey through bloodlines.

Race in the early modern period is a concept at the crossroads of a set of overlapping concerns of lineage, religion, and nation.9 But for the purposes of social and cultural study, it is sometimes necessary to isolate a road within a busy intersection. Recent
scholarship has emphasized the embodied nature of these categories. I would argue that Galenic materialism is a shared discourse in the production of the ideologies that attach to them. Medical tracts and political polemics make clear that the humoral constitution of noble subjects must be cultivated and maintained; but equally clear is the fact that their superior qualities are understood as a set of inherited, if unstable, traits. The instabilities of the humoral model do not undermine the political force of the narratives. The virtue of understanding the race described in the Tragedy of Mariam as that of rank is it allows us to see how moral differences originating in the body are apprehended in the surface markings of the skin. Color functions as an index of moral character in Cary’s play, but the marker fastens to status as the crucial category of difference. And crucially, it attaches to Mariam. In the competing claims of gender and status, Mariam’s rank ratifies her moral authority, and alters her position as gendered subject within the drama.

Since race as both category and political concept is imbricated, it seems unsophisticated to make the distinction between rank and nation at all. The manner in which raced subjects are encoded in the drama, however, helps us to perceive the black/white binary deployed as something other than Christian typology or the evaluation of an external hue. Understanding race as the constitution of noble subjects reveals how moral rectitude is appreciated in essentialist terms: the body is literally the original site of moral capacity. To apprehend racial logic in this way puts a particular field of early modern medical knowledge—and its


11 Any argument of restricted size will inevitably gesture to lacunae that will later be filled in longer book chapters, and religion is one such gap in my present reading. I have omitted the consideration of how the early modern English cultural understanding of moral authority as an interior humoral disposition gets appropriated and exploited in terms of religious affiliation, and have left this to later consideration in my book, “A Fault of Humor: The Constitution of Belief in Early Modern England,” which is currently in progress. However, two studies, in particular, have begun this work for me: see Angus Gowland, The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and James Hankins, “Monstrous Melancholy: Ficino and the Physiological Causes of Atheism,” in Laus Platonici Philosophi: Marsilio Ficino and His Influence, ed. Stephen Clucas, Peter J. Forshaw, Valery Rees (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 25–43. Scholarship on early modern Spain has, of course, considered the connection—but the Spanish political situation is markedly different from that of England. Scholars are only now appreciating the effects of a shared system of humoral medical theory.

application to social arrangements—open to our inspection. This encoding of raced subjects informs both current and later incarnations of racial logic, although the particulars of each occasion informs precisely how. Each time, however, that we examine such strategies of naturalization, we better understand the strategies themselves—how these polemics serve specific interests (political, economic, social). Such intellectual histories often lack the subjects for whom the ideological discourses are produced. Cary’s Tragedy of Mariam places an actor within the discursive field of race at this early modern moment and shows how it colors her imagination.

In The Boke named the Governour, Elyot demonstrates the extent to which bloodlines and blood relations determine the physiological and moral temperament of human subjects. His instruction on the rearing of the infant children of English nobles concentrates upon the careful maintenance of their inherited moral constitution. Elyot pays particular attention to the choice of a wet nurse, advising that the selection for noble children must be dictated by her “complection”—or the distribution of the humors expressed in her milk. His concerns about the humoral complexion of the nurse demonstrate the extent to which blood was believed to direct character. He says that the “nourise . . . shulde be of no seruile condition, or vice notable. For as some auncient writers do suppose often times the child soukethe the vice of his nouryse, with the milke of her pappe.” Rather, “her complection most be of the right and pure sanguine.” Since a nurse of noble rank was usually out of the question, Elyot tries to safeguard against the pollution of noble blood through its mingling with the blood of the servant (breast milk was considered blood in another form). The nurse, therefore, must not be “seruile,” or, of very low status, must be of a young and healthy age, and must demonstrate a strong moral character—the grounding of which was thought to be the quality of her blood.

While Elyot’s fixation upon blood as a source of moral corruption might appear strange to us, his advice is ultimately derived from an inherited set of physiological assumptions. This advice has classical origins, but is a commonplace within sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Galenic medical philosophy. Elyot explains the susceptibility of noble children to their wet nurse in the following way: “the braynes and hertes of children, whiche be membres spirituall, whiles they be tender, and the litle slippes of reason begynne in them to burgine, ther may happe by iuel custome . . . some . . . vice to perse the sayd membres, and infecte and corupt the softe and tender buddes, whereby the frute may growe wylde.” Elyot situates the mind among the higher faculties of the rational soul, as one of the “membres spirituall.” This would seem to put it out of reach of the body’s operations, thereby rendering it invulnerable to the quality of milk that the wet nurse dispenses, or to other impressions from her weakness of character. And yet virtually every medical treatise of the sixteenth century grappled with the proximity of the body to the soul—and to what

14 Thomas Elyot, The Boke named the Governour (London, 1531) (STC 7635), 16v.
15 See Feerick, Strangers in Blood, 55–77; 60.
16 Elyot, Boke named the Governour, 17r.
extent the body could affect the soul, and vice versa. Thomas Wright claims that it is the work of “naturall Philosophers, to explicate the maner how an operation [of the mind] that lodgeth in the soule can alter the body, and moue the humors from one place to another.” The body has a reciprocal ability to affect, or infect, the soul.

As Levinus Lemnius explains, the soul’s “concretion” with the body occurs at conception when it mixes with “the Parentes Seed, which is . . . of the purest and best concocted bloude.” Lemnius delivers a fairly straightforward Aristotelian brief in which the soul is united and spread throughout the body as its substantial form, endowing the “rest of the members of the bodyce” with its powers and giving “such shape and proportion to the things animated, as daily we see represented and set before our eyes.” The soul directs and governs “the mynd and vnderstanding,” but these faculties, insofar as they inhabit the body, are subject to its corruption. Lemnius’s whole treatise concerns the complexion, or humoral disposition, of the body in order to maintain both mind and body in health. Indeed, in his description of a soul taking a body, Lemnius makes clear that it is the mixture of parent’s blood from which humoral complexion is initially composed. But while superior humoral disposition was thought to descend through bloodlines, it was left to the individual to maintain the quality of his or her constitution. This moral-psychological obligation compelled the analysis of the vices and virtues attached to various complexions that filled folios of contemporary medical tracts. Lemnius proceeds to deliver such a moral exposition of bodily temperament in subsequent pages. So that “euery man may perfectlye know the nature and condicion of this complexion and constitution,” as well as the potential hazards of its degeneration,

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20 Lemnius, The touchstone of complexions generallye appliable, expedient and profitable for all such, as be desirous & carefull of their bodylye health (London, 1576) (STC 15456), 62.  
21 Lemnius, The touchstone of complexions, 62. For an explanation of the contemporary Aristotelian arguments, see Dennis Des Chene, Life’s Form: Late Aristotelian Conceptions of the Soul (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 55–66.  
22 Lemnius, The touchstone of complexions, 63. Two recent studies in intellectual history have explored this phenomenon in detail: see Angus Gowland, The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy; and Jeremy Schmidt, Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007).  
23 Lemnius justifies the composition of his treatise in terms of the operation of the soul: the soul is unable to fulfill its office and effect its will in an impaired body (The touchstone of complexions, 1v). But the distinction that he draws between body and soul at the start quickly disappears, and the soul and rational mind are treated almost interchangeably. This is precisely because the compromised mind can misdirect the human subject to vice, and ultimately, the soul to damnation (2r).  
24 Lemnius, The touchstone of complexions, 4r–v, 63r–65v, 146r, 149v. See also Juan Huarte, The Examination of Mens Witts (STC 13891), 147–8; Wright, The Passions of the Minde, 61–3; and Edward Reynolds, A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man (STC 20938), 291–2.
Lemnius provides the “marks and tokens” of humoral disposition in color-coding: which constitutions make “the colour of the face and bodye fayre or foule, good or badde.”

The humors are the product of digestion, but these concoctions of the body are vulnerable to internal and external conditions of diet and climate and even psychic and emotional states. The ingredients of such a complicated mixture makes the brew of noble blood susceptible to the impression of the immediate environment. The fact that affected humors also disturb the operation of the rational mind—and consequently, the soul—renders the moral constitution of human subjects pliant to outside forces. Elyot’s preoccupation with noble blood not only demonstrates its perceived vulnerability, but also its value in relation to the blood of others. The assumption regarding the superiority of noble blood—and the physical, intellectual, and moral supremacy that attended it—offered stability to the social hierarchy that it naturalized (hence, Elyot perceives the “destruction of a realme” in the poor selection of a nurse).

Similar to other forms of racial logic, race as family lineage in the early modern period buttressed a political arrangement with a fantasy of the body. Similarly too, this concept of race bore a signature of color expressed in the face. Shakespeare plays upon these contemporary apprehensions of race in II Henry IV:

Prince Henry: Before God, I am exceeding weary.
Poins: Is’t come to that? I had thought weariness durst not have attached one of so high blood.
Prince Henry: Faith, it does me; though it discolours the complexion of my greatness to acknowledge it.

(2.2.1–5)

Of course, Henry simply means that it discredits his rank to admit that he is physiologically (humorally) as weak as other men. But his terms are no accident: Elyot maintains in The castel of helthe that those possessed of “equalytie of humoures” are visually marked by “redde and white” skin, whereas those with an “inequalytie of humoures” have skin that is “blacke, sallowe, or whyte onely.” “Complexion” in Prince Henry’s phrasing refers to both the humoral constitution of an individual, and the external hue that is a sign of inner disposition. He is therefore suggesting that his

25 Lemnius, The touchstone of complexions, 63r–v. We can see in Lemnius’s logic the progress of the term “complexion” from an internal distribution of humors to an external expression of humoral balance. Both senses of the word are in current use, although “complexion” more often refers to temperament at this time. But we can also perceive in this migration of the term a progress of racial logic from interpreting inner disposition in moral terms to reading outward hue as a set of inward characteristics.

26 Elyot, Boke named the Governour, 16r.


28 Elyot, The castel of helthe gathered and made by Syr Thomas Elyot knyghte, out of the chiefe authors of physyke, whereby evey manne may knowe the state of his owne body, the preseruatio[n] of healthe, and how to instructe welle his physyton in syckenes that he be not deceyved (London, 1539), (STC 7642.7), 11.

29 Cf. note 25, above.
admission sullies his noble status, but he is also punning on the visible marker of his noble blood: the color of his skin.

Since race is shaped by a complex set of pressures, this observation is not an attempt to offer an evolutionary theory. It is rather to suggest the availability of the humoral system as a scheme for reading moral difference. The assumptions that underwrite power are naturalized in Cary’s culture and reproduced in graphic terms in her play. The color differences that distinguish Mariam from Salome and Herod signify her authority over them—in both moral and political terms. As Margaret Ferguson notes, Cary’s drama represents one of the key problems between Herod and Mariam as a “serious, though occluded, competition for the throne.”30 While patriarchal control is asserted with force at the end of the play, for much of it, Mariam is imagined as the legitimate ruler. In many ways, the play reproduces the judgments of the history from which it draws. In Thomas Lodge’s translation of Josephus’s Antiquities of the Jews, the narrative constantly affirms the illegitimacy of Herod’s rule due to his low birth—having deposed the man that Cary calls Judea’s “rightful king[s] and priest[s]” (Argument, 67).31 Complaints against Herod extend to his appointment of “certaine [men] of bace condition” to the priesthood and to high levels of government.32 Cary’s assertion that Herod desired Mariam in the first place for “her high blood” suggests that she principally understands the differences drawn in her play in terms of rank.33 The claim not only sets Mariam’s lineage at a higher premium than that of Herod or Salome, it underscores the distinction between them as one of rank. The play insists, as does the history, upon Mariam’s “purest blood” (1.6.489).34 The effect is to delegitimize the rule of Herod and to elevate Mariam to a position that neither her sex nor gender would permit. This reordering rests upon a racial ideology—that of rank—so culturally visible that its representation is rendered in color.

“Race” can refer to either rank or nation in the early modern period. The distinction that I am making between concepts, and how they are employed in The Tragedy of Mariam, requires a careful separation of terms and ideas. For one thing, noble families were not easily separable from the nation(s) they ruled. For another, as I have described, lineage, faith, and nation are concepts with interlocking anxieties and modes of production.35 But in Josephus’s history, Herod and his kin are persistently represented as outliers and usurpers to the rule of Judea—and their place of origin has little to do with this appraisal. Rather, it is their social situation that constantly affirms their rule as illegitimate. Cary replicates this logic, and rank is the key term around which the power struggle depicted in her drama turns. The first confrontation of the play is between Mariam and Salome, Herod’s sister.

30 Ferguson, Dido’s Daughters, 266.
34 Cary, The Tragedy of Mariam.
Moral Constitution

Mariam: My birth thy baser birth so far excell’d,
I had to both . . . you [and Herod] the princess been.
Thou parti-Jew, and parti-Edomite,
Thou mongrel: issu’d from rejected race . . .
Salome: Still twit you me with nothing but my birth,
What odds betwixt your ancestors and mine?
Both born of Adam, both were made of earth,
And both did come from Holy Abraham’s line.

(1.3.231–42)

Mariam appears to be drawing lines of separation based on tribal inheritance, particularly with slurs such as “mongrel: issu’d from rejected race.” But I will insist that the race that she intends here is a rejected family line. (The animalistic imagery should not surprise us if indeed the concept of the superior blood of rank descends from tracts on breeding and animal husbandry.36) As Salome points out, she and Mariam ultimately share an ancestry. Esau, the supposed progenitor of the Idumeans, or Edomites, sold his birthright as the elder of two sons to his younger brother Jacob for pottage. On first feeling her twins fighting inside of her, Rebekah is told by God that “Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels” (Genesis 25:23). This pronouncement supports the division of nations as the principal category of distinction. But the Lord further declares, “the elder shall serve the younger” (my emphasis). The Hasmonean dynasty, from which Mariam descends, had ruled Judea for over one hundred years before yielding to the Herodian dynasty in 37 BCE. But the Idumeans had already been part of the Jewish nation for 88 years—nearly the full term of Hasmonean rule. Their assimilation was complete: they were integrated in the governing structure, and Herod’s father was close enough to power to grab it. The displacement of the Hasmoneans was facilitated by the machinations of Antipater, but was secured by Herod and his marriage to Mariam. Which is to say that the struggle represented in the play is an internal one for rule of Judea, not an external one involving the conquest of one nation over another. Herod’s assassination of Mariam’s remaining male relatives was a political gesture: its motivation was the elimination of political competition, not any kind of ethnic rivalry.

In Lodge’s translation of the Antiquities of the Jews, “race” is used to denote “nation” only once over the history that traces Herod’s rise to power. In the list of the contents to Book 14, Josephus includes a heading, “Of the race of Antipater, and how he purchased renowne, great power and authoritie both to himselfe and his children.”37 The subsequent introduction of Antipater indicates that “race” here refers to “nation”: he is described as “[A] certaine friend of Hircanus (by nation an Idumean, and by name Antipater).”38 This is the single instance in the account, which spans over 85 pages, where the term “race”

36 For the examination of a historically later development of this phenomenon—where the logic and language of veterinary handbooks and farmer’s manuals becomes a source for a New World essentialism linking blood and skin color, see Ruth Hill, “The Blood of Others: Breeding Plants, Animals, and White People in the Spanish Atlantic,” in The Cultural Politics of Blood, 45–64.
37 Lodge, The famous and memorable vvorke of Iosephus, 349.
38 Lodge, The famous and memorable vvorke of Iosephus, 350.
appears to invoke Antipater’s place of origin and not his ignoble birth. The term is put to use often throughout the history, but in all other occasions (in the particular story of Herod) it refers to lineage and family line. Further, the next sentence illuminates the real problem concerning Antipater’s Idumean ancestry: “Nicholas Damascene writeth of [Antipater], that he was descended from the noblest amongst those lewes who returned from out of Babylon in Iury: but this he did of set purpose to gratifie Herode Antipaters sonne, who . . . became afterwards King of the lewes.”

Herod compels the rewriting of family history to achieve a nobler heritage, where he is descended from among the ancient families of Jews taken into Babylonian captivity. This revised account served two purposes: elevating Herod’s status and legitimizing his religious affiliation. Antipater’s origins complicated Herod’s rule because he had no claim to an ancient line. Further, since Idumeans had been compelled to convert under John Hircanus (the great-great-grandfather of Hircanus), and forced conversion was not recognized, the religious commitment of Herod’s family was suspect. In Josephus’s narrative, the Hasmonean dynasty is largely overthrown by themselves and their own infighting. But the principal objection to Herodian rule is their mean descent and questionable religion: “Thus Hircanus and Aristobulus [his brother] thorow their dissensions and civill broiles, were the cause of that servitude . . . that fell vpon the lewes. For [the Jews] haue lost [their] liberty, and haue beene subdued by the Romanes . . . and the roialty which before time was an honour reserued for those that were of the race of the high priests, hath been bestowed on men of obscuritie and community.”

Josephus consistently emphasizes Mariam’s rank, not her nation—and, by contrast, that of Herod and his kin. Indeed, Josephus attributes Salome’s hostility to the tendency of Mariam to taunt her for the mean quality of her birth. Cary’s drama conflates two episodes where Herod travels abroad in order to maintain his political alliances with Rome. Upon his return from the first trip, Salome implies that her husband Joseph, to whom Herod had committed “the gouernment both of the kingdome and his priuate estate,” had been too familiar with Mariam.

Josephus makes the policy of Salome clear, but emphasizes that her hatred is directed more to Mariam than her husband: “she spake thorow the malice she had long time conceiued . . . for that in a certaine debate Mariammme had in her rage despitefully hit them in the teeth with their obscure birth.” In the history, it is both Salome and Herod’s mother who accuse Mariam—and it is implied that Mariam denigrates the birth of the entire family, including Herod, just as she does in the play. Indeed, Mariam’s tendency to “[upbraid] and publikely [reproach] both the kings mother and sister, [and to] tell . . . them that they [are] but abiectly and basely borne” is represented as something of a habit in Josephus’s narrative. Mariam’s slur of Salome as “parti-Jew, and parti-Edomite,” in their dramatic encounter is consistent with Cary’s source. Salome is “parti-Jew” because the


40 Lodge, The famous and memorable workes of Iosephus, 355–6. It is important to bear in mind that Antipater ruled as “gouernour of Iudea by the commaundement of Hircanus” (359), and gave the governorship of Jerusalem to his eldest son, Phasaelus, and that of Galilee to Herod (361). After his assassination, Herod and Phasaelus ruled as Tetrarchs with Hircanus (370).

41 Lodge, The famous and memorable workes of Iosephus, 366.

42 Lodge, The famous and memorable workes of Iosephus, 388.

43 Lodge, The famous and memorable workes of Iosephus, 398.
religious identity of her family is suspect, and “parti-Edomite” because even her Idumean ancestry is partial and divided.44

Mariam’s insults against Salome ultimately concern the hierarchy of families and not nations: Mariam invokes the politics of a past; Salome, those of the present. But both resort to the status of family line to declare their superiority over the other. Cary is depicting a family drama—the conflict between a ruling family in decline and one in ascension. She shrinks the political conflict to the proportions of a domestic struggle. That women should be at the center of this struggle is entirely appropriate to the genre of a closet drama. But it is also apposite to the nature of the conflict itself: where internal strife weeds political rivals, the women of the family are ultimately the members who survive. Hence, the opening scenes of the play pit Alexandra and Mariam against Salome: the “Hebrew women [are] now transformed to men” (1.6.421), engaging in a battle of words where men are absent. We should not lose sight of the fact that this is a contest between two families in a shifting political order. The women ultimately seek to have the authority of their family recognized.

That Cary chooses sides in this conflict is starkly apparent. None of my observations thus far counter previous claims that “[t]he use of complexion to accentuate status, cultural, and religious differences is quite striking in Mariam.”45 What is different in my analysis is the shift from exterior to interior complexion. But this makes a difference in terms of how moral authority (and reprobation) is appraised in the play. Scholarship that has explored the intersection of race and rank has not dwelt much on the humoral theory that grounds moral production.46 But this is the ground on which government is laid—and for that reason, the theory is particularly rigorous and well-disseminated. Mariam’s moral authority is signaled by the white images used to describe her, a signal that a contemporary audience or readership would have recognized as a privilege of rank. A cluster of brilliant images around Mariam increases as the play progresses, and is set against the darker aspect of Salome and Herod. At the conclusion of Mariam’s argument with Salome she says that she will “not pollute [her] breath,” with the “black acts” that Salome has committed (1.3.243–4). Salome is painted black by other characters as well: her husband tells her that she blushes for her because she has lost the capacity (1.6.378). Even Salome speaks of her “tainted brow” (1.4.283) that obscures blushing. But her “darkness” is thrown into particular contrast against the superior color of Mariam. Herod is most inclined to the comparison; Salome is “so unlike ... Mariam in [her] shape:”

That when to her you have approached near,
Myself hath often ta’en you for an ape. . . .
You are to her a sun-burnt blackamoor.

(4.7.458–62)

44 Many Nathateans had long been comingled with the Jews, adopting their religion and customs. Herod’s mother was one such Nathatean, and was a voluntary convert. Hence, according to Pharisaic tradition, which held forced conversion under suspicion, but which also assumed religion to descend through the maternal line, Herod was a religious, as well as a cultural, Jew.

45 Hall, Things of Darkness, 185.

46 I am certainly not suggesting that existing scholarship on rank has ignored humoral theory; see, in particular, Steven Shapin, A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
He calls Salome his “black tormentor.” (4.7.513). She is “outmatchèd in [her] sex” (5.1.162) when placed in contradistinction to the “white” Mariam:

[Mariam] was fair,
Oh, what a hand she had, it was so white,
It did the whiteness of the snow impair.

(5.1.149–51)

While moral differences—or, rather, the construction of moral differences—are plotted along the lines of Christian semiotics in Cary’s Mariam, we can see how these readings of moral character begin in the blood. The superior quality of blood itself accounts for the superior moral character of the human subjects of the play. Mariam’s whiteness is an index of her higher rank and of her fitness to rule. It marks her as constitutionally—physically and, particularly, morally—superior.

Perhaps the strongest evidence that Cary ascribes a moral constitution to rank lies in her rewriting of the history of England, not Judea. Cary opens her History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II, King of England with this assessment of Edward’s moral character: “He could not have been so unworthy a Son of so noble a Father . . . if either Vertue or Vice had been hereditary.” But in spite of the conditional clause with which it begins, the history affirms throughout—relentlessly so—that “Vertue [and] Vice” are indeed “hereditary.” Edward is quickly marked as “a meer Imposture” to the “honour of his Birthright” and the rest of the history is an anatomy of political corruption. Cary attributes Edward’s “degenerate” nature to having been “mis-led in [in] his unripe knowledge” by “Gaveston his Ganymede, a man as base in Birth as in Condition.” Edward’s temperament is obviously affected by his “diseased Passion” for Gaveston, but it is principally the fact that he surrounds himself with people of inferior birth (at Gaveston’s urging) that effects his full alteration. Further, Gaveston, “advance[d] . . . beyond proportion, or his birth and merit” remakes the kingdom in his own image: “the sacred Rules of Justice were subverted, the Laws integrity abused, the Judge corrupted or inforc’d, and all the Types of Honour due to Vertue, Valour, Goodness, were like the Pedlers pack, made Ware for Chapmen.”

47 Elizabeth Cary, The History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II, King of England (London: J. C., 1680; Wing F313), 2. Most critics have followed Donald A. Stauffer’s convincing appraisal that Elizabeth Cary wrote The History . . . of Edward II (“A Deep and Sad Passion,” in Essays in Dramatic Literature, ed. Hardin Craig [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935], 289–314). The confidence in this argument, however, has been undermined by the presence of a related, much shorter, octavo text, The History of the Most Unfortunate Prince King Edward II (STC F314). Margaret Ferguson and Barry Weller declared themselves “agnostic on the question of who wrote either” history (The Tragedy of Mariam, 16). However, the discovery of the manuscript sources for both printed texts in the 1990s by the late Jeremy Maule has led to subsequent analysis that, to my mind, positively establishes Cary as the author of both works; see Margaret Reeves, “From Manuscript to Printed Text: Telling and Retelling the History of Edward II,” The Literary Career and Legacy of Elizabeth Cary, 1613–1680, ed. Heather Wolfe (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 125–44.

The History of . . . Edward II reads as a cautionary tale of the hazard of surrendering government to those constitutionally unfit to rule. Edward turns over government of his kingdom to “Sycophants and Favorites” of base heritage (or, in the case of Hugh Despenser, those who are newly made), until he himself becomes “a mere stranger to those Abilities that are proper to Rule.” The king’s natural temper is corrupted through these influences, and the whole kingdom mimics his degenerate nature: “The intemperate and indiscreet Government had alien’d the hearts of this People . . . the Ulcers festered dayly more and more.” The outbreaks of internal revolt are characterized as humoral disease (literally distemper), mapped onto the king’s body, for “[i]t is a very dangerous thing when the Head is ill, and all the Members suffer by his infirmity.”

Cary’s chromatic contrast of Salome and Mariam denotes the social hierarchies that the play itself naturalizes. Alexandra concludes the argument with Salome with the dismissal: “let us go: it is no boot / To let the head contend against the foot” (1.3.259–60). This declaration forms the central argument of the play. Elyot’s contention that the corruption of noble blood risks the “destruction of [the] realme” is writ large—although the corruption lies in the exchange of families. While the principal distinction of the play is made between “The King of Jewry’s fair and spotless wife” (5.1.198) and Salome, his sister, whose spots are acknowledged even by her (“Had I affected an unspotted life / Josephus’ veins had still been stuff’d with blood,” 1.4.286–7), the differences in the blood of families is identified by the tincture of the skin. Herod and Salome are dark. They are marked as usurpers, and not the “natural” rulers of Judea. Herod is a “Base Edomite, the damnèd Esau’s heir”; “[m]ust he,” Alexandra asks, “ere Jacob’s child [Mariam] the crown inherit?” (1.2.84–5). Family affiliation is identified by color, and Herod is red because he descends from another branch of the family tree. Because Esau “despised his birthright,” and sold it for a stew of red lentils (and by consequence, constrained his descendants to a position subordinate to Jacob’s line) the Idumeans, are associated with the color red (Genesis, 25:30–34):

Alexandra: His cruel nature which with blood is fed:
That made him me of sire and son deprive,
He ever thirsts for blood, and blood is red.

(1.2.104–6)

Herod’s excess of choler shows in his face, but it is also evident in his rule: he is rash and impressionable, bloody-minded and easily led. He seems unable to rule, and even less so after he kills Mariam: as he complains, “She was my graceful moiety; me accurs’d, / To slay my better half and save my worst” (5.1.133–4). What is noble in him, or at least about him, dies with his wife.

It is because Mariam is the “natural” ruler of Herod that she is permitted (within certain terms of the play) to break the codes of female behavior and still retain her moral superiority. Salome, by contrast, cannot. Her defiance of her husband(s), and presumption

52 Cary, The History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II, 39. When the king’s favors transfer to Hugh Despenser, whose father was a newly created baron who rose by Edward, Despenser is dubbed a “false Imposter” (62), and even turns to piracy (a suggestion of his theft of a title) when he is banished from England (64–5).

53 Cary, The History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II, 44.
that she shares in the rights and privileges afforded to men, such as the right of divorce, are chief among the “black acts” with which she is charged. When she is found in conference with another man, her husband upbraids her:

Oh Salome, how much you wrong your name
Your race, your country, and your husband most! . . .
I blush for you, that have your blushing lost.

(1.6.375–8)

Once again Salome is dyed in a dark color. “Race” here does not refer to nation or tribe. It echoes the “name” of the previous line (as in “lineage, nation, and husband”). It also seems clear from Constabarus’s subsequent railing against Hebrew women, among whom he counts Salome, that he means the nation of the Jews, and that he is not setting the Idumeans apart. Salome is blackened and “damnèd” (4.6.295) by her own bad actions. But her actions are, in many ways, identical to those of Herod. This raises the question of to what extent moral incontinence attaches to status, and to what extent it fastens to gender.

Constabarus is also Idumean. But he is morally approved in the logic of the play. This is, in large measure, because his “natural” position has been seized by Salome; his words to her are “intended for [her] good, / To raise [her] honour and to stop disgrace” (1.6.412–13). His subsequent description of a world turned upside down by women ruling men also seems to receive the approbation of the play (1.6.421–32). But it is Salome alone who should be restricted by this “natural” order, not Mariam. Mariam also divorces her husband, in that she refuses conjugal relations with him, but she remains unique among women. Women are a “wavering crew” whom Constabarus curses to the end; but Mariam is the “one to give [women] any grace” (4.6.311–12). Even Herod claims that Mariam cannot be “darken[ed]” because she is by “Heaven made so bright.” (5.1.38). Those whose rule is accepted as “natural” are brilliant; those who “unnaturally” seize power are dark.

Indeed, Constabarus might be the case-in-point that rank prevails as the moral determinate in Mariam. Constabarus is noble, “one of the greatest account” among the Idumeans.54 Whereas the race of Antipater, and subsequently, Herod, is consistently affirmed as base or common in Josephus, the nobility of Salome’s husband is underscored. While Constabarus’s descent from Idumean priests would not be recognized within the Jewish tradition, his moral role in the play seems to draw from his noble heritage.55 The only characters colored against type are Graphina and Cleopatra. Graphina is a slave girl, and Cleopatra, a queen. And yet, “Graphina’s brow’s as white, her cheeks as red” (2.1.40) as Mariam’s, and Cleopatra is a “brown Egyptian” (1.2.190) whose face cannot compare. In both cases, color seems to signal moral judgments about the appropriate rule of (certain) women. Cleopatra often seems to overrule Antony in Josephus, whereas Graphina is a model of female subordination of Cary’s own making.56 While much of the critical tradition

54 Lodge, *The famous and memorable vvorke of Iosephus*, 400.
55 When Salome claims that she “uprear[ed]” him from a “low estate” (1.6. 397), she means that she rescued him when he was laid low due to his plots against Herod.
56 As the notes to Weller and Ferguson’s edition make clear, Graphina originates in a passing mention in Josephus’s *Jewish War* (1.24.5), but she is Cary’s invention (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, 160).
concerning *The Tragedy of Mariam* has emphasized Cary’s own defiance of her husband for the cause of religion, we should also bear in mind the extent to which she wished to appear subordinate.\(^{57}\) *The Lady Falkland: Her Life* goes to great lengths to stress that “though she had a strong will, she had learnt to make it obey [her husband’s].”\(^{58}\) The author (one of Cary’s daughters) insists that “[w]here his interest was concerned, she seemed not able to have any consideration of her own”—with the notable exception of questions of conscience and religion: “she seemed to prefer nothing but religion and her duty to God, before his will.”\(^{59}\) As Alison Shell points out, while we should treat the presentation of Cary in *Her Life* with suspicion, “such texts can provide potentially excellent evidence of the moral and religious ideals most valued by their subjects.”\(^{60}\) If female subordination is similarly represented in *Mariam*, then only moral imperatives license female rule.

Clearly, the gravity of political power bears upon Mariam as a sexed subject in the play: her husband executes her. But what precisely is interesting about *The Tragedy of Mariam* is the extent to which this position is ameliorated by other material conditions. The “natural” hierarchies of the play are appreciated through a system of color, but this is not (or not only) metaphor. Color marks the humoral equilibrium—the superior moral disposition—of the social superiors of the play. The play supplies us with a representation of a political order naturalized by a fantasy of physiological supremacy, and this distinction reorganizes the social relations within it. Mariam can assume the rights and privileges of men and retain her moral authority because she is—or so the play would have it—inherently superior to her husband. Indeed, Herod declares that “if she had been like an Egyptian black, / And not so fair, she had been longer liv’d” (5.1.239–40). His argument is that if she had not “pass’d [all women] / In every gift, in every property” (5.1.227–8) she would not have provoked such an extremity of feeling. This would have spared her both Salome’s jealousy and his own. It is clear, however, that in his contrast of “black” and “fair” he is not simply speaking of an exterior quality; rather he says that “her excellencies [in every gift, in every property] wrought her timeless fall” (5.1.228–9).

What we witness in *Tragedy of Mariam* are signs of an internal disposition that works its way to the surface of the skin. The binaries of black and white in the play are not, or not only, tropes. While they exhibit an effort to, in Kim Hall’s phrase, blacken “groups that needed to be marked as other,” their application is not topical.\(^{61}\) Rather, the ideology at work is a medically affirmed moral dispensation of human beings. Ferguson has argued that in *Mariam* “we can see some of the early complexities of racist thinking,” which she describes as an ideological formation whereby “some invisible quality [is] carried by the blood in one’s veins.” This prior mode of racist thinking, “becomes yoked to ideas about nation and about hidden religious belief.”\(^{62}\) I have resisted yoking this ideological thinking

\(^{57}\) Dympna Callaghan has raised appropriate objection to reading the play as an “allegory of the events of Cary’s . . . life” (“Re-reading Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedie of Mariam,*” 165). I am rather trying to read a set of values as they are represented in Cary’s play and in *Her Life.*


\(^{60}\) Alison Shell, “Elizabeth Cary’s Historical Conscience: The Tragedy of Mariam and Thomas Lodge’s Josephus,” in *The Literary Career and Legacy of Elizabeth Cary, 1613–1680*, 57.


\(^{62}\) Ferguson, *Dido’s Daughters*, 317.
to concepts of nation in the play precisely because I think that by refusing the attachment we render visible how these qualities are transmitted through the blood. Lineage, nation, and religious identity intertwine because humoral theory underwrites the production of all of these ideologies.63 But privileging one line of ideological production permits us to view its operations more clearly. The medical theory that guarantees the transmission of certain characteristics as a privilege of rank conveys to later formations of racial logic. But a system of social arrangements and discriminations articulated through a language of the body, and defined by a medical scheme, precedes the development of biological science—and this fact has raised an increasingly vexed set of questions for early modern scholarship.64 Cary’s Mariam allows us to see how social prejudice informs a particular dramatic imagination; and it is perhaps useful to notice (once more) how a political construct is naturalized in its fantasy. If race is rewritten and redeployed for occasion—answering the political and economic interests of a particular time—then each instance where the fiction is produced has value both in terms of what it conveys about its cultural moment and what it predicts about the strategies of production for other occasions. Taken in this context, the play serves as both a reiteration of early modern racial logic and a site of its manufacture. The Tragedy of Mariam vividly portrays how the early modern humoral model underwrites a reading of the skin as an expression of interior disposition—the semiotics of black and white utilized throughout the play mark territory that is more than skin deep.

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63 See note 11, above.

64 Obviously, Michel Foucault raises the most vexing issues for scholars to confront. In his lecture at the Collège de France dated January 28, 1976, Foucault assumes a “mobile . . . polyvalent discourse” of race that appears “at a very early stage”—certainly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; see Michel Foucault, “Society Must Be Defended,” Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76, ed. Mauro Bertani, et al. (New York: Picador, 1997), 77. But Foucault also assumes that the discourse of racism is premised on a shift to a “biological and medical sense” of the term “race” (80). It is clear, however, that both the term and its medical sense had sixteenth-century existence. Obviously, racism is a political fiction, with attendant state apparatus, that exceeds either the term “race” or a medical theory that supports it. But Foucault’s history should be, as any good theoretical exposition is, the starting, and not the end, point. As David Nirenberg has cogently argued, we should use it as the stimulant to further investigation. See “Race and the Middle Ages,” in Rereading the Black Legend, 86.
Did Gertrude drown Ophelia? To a Shakespearean, the question seems absurd, yet students and readers ask it repeatedly in class and online in fan-sites such as Shakespeare Geek, or in response to the amateur video artists who upload versions of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in which the hero’s vindictive mother drowns his innocent love. It might be tempting to dismiss such attempts as crowd-sourced ignorance, but if we pay fan culture the compliment of taking it seriously, it can teach us something new about the plays and speeches that we think we know well. Moreover, as early as 1805 Shakespearean editor E. H. Seymour asked why Gertrude did not save Ophelia instead of watching her drown and listening to her old lauds or old tunes. The young women (or users who self-identify as women online) who accuse Gertrude of murdering her potential daughter-in-law are responding to Gertrude’s characterization in the play as what we might call a culpable “ekphrast.” Analyzing Gertrude’s best-known and widely anthologized speech—her *floral eulogy to the drowned Ophelia*—and building on Laura Mulvey’s influential essay about the “male gaze” of the camera in classic Hollywood cinema, Martha Ronk argues that Gertrude occupies a male, ekphrastic subject-position and that she frames the dead girl as analogous to the subject of a painting, aestheticized, sanitized, objectified, and restrained into art, as she attributes overwhelmingly to the dead girl the quality that Mulvey calls “to-be-looked-at-ness.” Ronk suggests that some readers encounter Gertrude’s speech as an admission of guilt—or at least, as a failure to save Ophelia—because the text establishes a distantly voyeuristic subject-position for the queen, one that evokes no “maternal intimacy” such as

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that later implied by Gertrude’s expressed wish to have cast flowers on Ophelia’s marriage-bed, rather than her grave.⁴

Ronk’s reading corresponds to Elaine Showalter’s pioneering essay arguing for a feminist approach to Shakespeare’s Ophelia that “reads” her not through Shakespeare’s play but through the appropriations of this character developed by the early psychiatrist Jean-Martin Charcot and by artists such as those of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Showalter outlines three earlier feminist approaches to understanding Ophelia: as a girl subordinated by the older men and authority figures around her; in Lacanian terms, as a Woman deprived of language by the workings of the Symbolic Order; and, in archetypal terms, as the repressed anima or female half of Hamlet, able to express what is unutterable by protagonist or playwright. Showalter finds each of these approaches to be limiting; she argues that the most nuanced way for a feminist critic to study Ophelia is through the study of the appropriations or adaptations of this character. Since critical commentary is by its nature restricted by the historical and social position of the writer, she suggests, we can only access the multiple potentialities in the character of Ophelia by historicizing the ways in which artists and critics use her. Showalter concludes with an analysis that carries out this plan, one that considers the representation of Ophelia in visual art, from the ardent brush-strokes of the Pre-Raphaelites to the clinical photographs of Jean-Martin Charcot, as an index to cultural attitudes surrounding female “hysteria” or madness.⁵

Both Showalter and Ronk identify the framed and aestheticized Ophelia as a cipher or a victim or a lacuna, inaccessible as a subject except through the work or vision of male observers whom feminist critics must carefully historicize. In the twenty-first century, however, perhaps inspired by Mary Pipher’s popular psychology book Reviving Ophelia and its off-shoots such as Cheryl Dallasega’s Surviving Ophelia and Nina Shandler’s Ophelia’s Mom, both from 2001, we see women and girls re-imagine Ophelia as a speaker and a subject.⁶ Ophelia additionally appears in women’s art all over the world, including in non-anglophone countries, as an instantly recognizable icon, the subject, for example, of exhibitions in Kerala in 2007, Amsterdam in 2008, Hong Kong in 2012, and many others. It is perhaps now time to generate a fifth approach to Ophelia, one that considers the material and social contexts of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century appropriations of Ophelia by women and girls as indices to changing global attitudes toward auto-eroticism and overt sexual display. To what extent do such fine art and social media representations of Ophelia by women merely reiterate the “phallic” or objectifying gaze identified by Mulvey or the attribution of hysteria to girlhood identified by Showalter? Differently put, if woman artists depict Ophelia, do they necessarily become culpable ekphrasts (as Ronk suggests Gertrude is) or does

the self-conscious, self-identification of the artist as feminist (on the one hand) or the supposedly demotic medium of Web 2.0, with its user-generated content (on the other) make a difference?

Feminist artists and filmmakers have long examined in what ways (if any) artists can represent women’s experience, art, and lives without objectifying the women they portray. In what follows I suggest that by examining representations of Ophelia by women (or creators self-identified as female, in the case of online avatars) in the twenty-first century through theories of intermediality we can explore the following questions: under what circumstances might we imagine femininity as essential, constructed, or contingent and in between? Can the subject of an artwork express a kind of selfhood or is such a subject invariably objectified through being turned into art? Can artists’ ironic use of sexist tropes interrogate such tropes without reinforcing them? Major theoretical concerns in feminist studies emerge as we consider such representations, which include the mixed media of pop artist Jann Haworth, the watercolors of Ann Arnold, the harsh lithographs of Louise Bourgeois, the witty oil-paintings of Ophelia Redpath, the intermedia “bacterial painting” and associated telephone poetry of Jo Wonder, the conceptual and book art of Eugénia Balcells, Margot Ecke, or Ophelia Chong, the sculptures of Kiki Smith, Liza Lou, or Liz McGrath, and the many photographic and computer-edited intermedia self-portraits as Ophelia that are visible in traditional exhibition spaces and also on social networking cultural production sites such as Flickr, Pinterest, Etsy, DeviantArt, and other venues where artists blur the boundary between social and professional cultural production (since many creators are paid by other users for copies of their content).

It helps at the outset to use the term intermediality rather than “ekphrasis” or even “inter-arts theory.” “Ekphrasis” properly refers to the description of one work of art within another (W. H. Auden’s poem “The Shield of Achilles” is often cited as an example). “Inter-arts studies” has extended the work of ekphrasis to multimedia art forms (looking at, for example, the representation of music within novels, of text within paintings, and so on), but, as Irina Rajewsky helpfully argues, interarts studies has neglected the specific material forms of cultural productions. Intermediality accounts for and fills in this ellipsis. Jens Schröter distinguishes among synthetic, formal, transformational, and ontological intermedialities, but Rajewsky offers both a narrower and a broader definition for literary critics. Her general explanation defines intermediality as

> a generic term for all those phenomena that (as indicated by the prefix *inter*) in some way take place between media. “Intermedial” therefore designates those configurations which have to do with a crossing of borders between media, and which thereby can be differentiated from *intra*medial phenomena [what Schröter would call “transformational intermediality”] as well as from *trans*medial phenomena (i.e., the appearance of a certain motif, aesthetic, or discourse across a variety of different media [what Schröter calls formal or transmedial intermediality]).

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Rajewsky’s expansive definition of intermediality fits most closely Schröter’s “synthetic” intermediality, a blurring between and among media that creates in itself a new medium or art form. Rajewsky also develops stricter categories of intermediality: “The first concentrates on intermediality as a fundamental condition or category [this would be Schröter’s “ontological intermediality”] while the second approaches intermediality as a critical category for the concrete analysis of specific individual media products or configurations.” It is this last definition that Rajewsky finds most helpful for literary study, particularly as, she insists, we must continue to historicize the specific materializations of media within the arts even as we identify such arts as intermedia and theorize them.

In what follows I will shine both the broad and the narrow beams of intermedia theory upon representations of Shakespeare’s Ophelia in women’s art. I argue that, on the one hand, the figure of Ophelia in some of the artworks produced does seem to give women and girls explicitly feminist avenues for self-expression and self-realization by deploying a primary or fundamental intermediality: they present Ophelia as self-creating artist, not just as artifact. Others, however—because of the material contexts in which they are created and disseminated—reiterate the culpable ekphrasis that Ronk finds in Gertrude’s speech and that Showalter finds in the Pre-Raphaelites’ paintings and Charcot’s photographs of hysterics. Finally, I will revisit Gertrude’s speech itself, arguing that the speech’s frequent appearance in anthologies, sans textual apparatus, masks its potential for multiple meanings and, in particular, for a subject-position for Gertrude as a loving mourner rather than a voyeuristic viewer. If, however, we consider textual variants, both accidental and substantive, within the text, we can locate spaces for tenderness and interactivity in Gertrude’s elegiac speech, which presents both Gertrude and Ophelia as artist and object and attests to the complex, nonbinary solutions available to women artists as they seek to represent themselves and each other in their arts.

From Culpable Ekphrasis to Capable Intermediality

Ronk identifies as culpable ekphrasis the guilty gaze of a Gertrude who observes and aestheticizes the dying Ophelia. Formally, culpable ekphrasis frames the subject (within a literal picture frame or within the confines of iambic pentameter), displays the woman’s body as a manufactured object independent of the observer, and demonstrates its beauties to a third-party observer, often implicitly male. Laura Mulvey has called this voyeuristic effect the “male gaze” and suggested that the quality of such representations connotes for women’s bodies the quality of “to-be-looked-at-ness.” We might also object that such a frame restricts what Ophelia’s body can “say” by turning it into one kind of art—a monomedium—and denying what, using Schröter’s terms, we might assert is its primary or ontological intermediality. Ophelia’s body within the speech can serve not only as a monomedium or bearer of cultural values about womanhood but also as a reminder of the intermediality of women’s bodies themselves. To adapt Showalter’s formulation of a “Cubist” Ophelia who exists in fragments, an intermedia Ophelia exists among the

9 Rajewsky, “Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation,” 47.
bodies of the boy-actors who play both Ophelia and Gertrude in the early modern period and the female actors who play them after the Restoration; the spoken and printed words heard, seen, and read about her; the traditional or classical paintings of her; and in more recent explicitly multimedia iterations. Even when read in Folio or Quarto, Ophelia in Gertrude’s speech exists as intermedia, not merely ekphrasis, evoking as it does what Harry Berger Jr. has called the “imaginary audition” of Shakespeare’s plays (and, in a second-order focalization, an image within an image as we hear Gertrude make and re-make Ophelia).

Describing Ophelia as the object of a “gaze” is therefore less helpful than imagining how a mutual or collaborative endeavor among performers, readers, viewers, and artists might bring her to life. Andrea Liss retains Mulvey’s term “gaze,” but calls this collaborative mutuality a “maternal gaze,” one that she identifies in Mulvey and Peter Wollen’s own experimental film Riddles of the Sphinx. For Liss, this mutuality recalls and prefigures the intersubjective and pleasurable combination of breastfeeding an infant and reading a book in a completely melded form of intellectual, engaged maternity. Liss argues that to foreground the maternal in art is not to risk essentializing or reifying maternity but to engage more fully with its nuances. Citing the philosopher Sarah Ruddick, she deploys the word “mothering” as both a noun and a verb, “gender-full and gender-free.” In a chapter on photographer Gail S. Rebhan’s black-and-white images of her growing sons, Liss identifies aspects of the maternal in representations of children—one’s own, or others’; in another, she considers women’s usually undocumented domestic work as cultural production. Finally, Liss addresses maternal mourning in May Stevens’ grief-stricken tributes to her dead photographer-son through re-appropriations of her son’s own work in Stevens’ own. Feminist maternal elegy, Liss concludes, makes sacred the creative work of mothers and children together.

Although Liss writes specifically about the maternal in the work of individual artists, I would suggest that we could extend her notions of both the maternal and of the feminist. Ruddick’s “gender-full and gender-free” mothering, a care-full love or power-sharing that humans of any gender or maternal status can extend to each other, connects obliquely to Martha Nussbaum’s model of “capabilities feminism” in Women and Human Development. A capabilities approach asks democracies to affirm 10 core human capabilities: life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination, and thought, emotions, practical reason or critical reflection, affiliation, other species, play, and control over one’s environment. Capabilities feminism critiques measurements of economic well-being that rely upon gross national product or measures of output without taking into account the activities that engender these products or measures and their impact on women (for example, a capabilities approach might find common cause with

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12 Liss, Feminist Art, 74–5.
13 Liss, Feminist Art, 67.
labor activists who note the unpaid domestic labor of working women as an invisible or unmeasured factor in an industrialized country’s economy). Nussbaum’s feminist work has proven controversial because it generates a normative list at all, because it privileges a list of Eurocentric capabilities, because it places physical well-being above spiritual integrity, and because it refuses to preserve cultures for their own sakes or for the sake of history (although her recent book *The New Religious Intolerance* goes some way toward countering these charges). Some feminist theorists who incline more toward the social constructivist side of the spectrum (such as Judith Butler) identify capabilities feminism as neoliberal or essentialist. I am comfortable deploying a strategic or delimited essentialism within this essay in part because the nature of intermedia representation demands material, historical, nuanced specificity in each instance. In other words, even as I am drawing broad ontological conclusions about what feminist intermedia art might be, I am doing so by distinguishing finely among artworks and artists and their material contexts.

“Maternal” artistry or feminist intermediality (a phrase I’d prefer and that I will use from now on) in this sense could encompass all compassionate human subjects who try to understand, access, or represent each other through art and a given society’s support of women’s artistry and labor (and here I’m returning to Liss’s suggestion that we reimagine or reframe women’s often-invisible domestic work as artistic process). What Liss calls “maternal art” or Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux calls “feminist ekphrasis” or “ethical ekphrasis” are subspecies of feminist intermediality, engagements in cultural production that “[recognize] that a woman’s place as viewer is established within, beside, or in the face of a male-dominated culture, but that the patterns of power and value implicit in a tradition of male artists and viewers can be exposed, used, resisted, and rewritten”; such cultural productions can be created by both men and women, although Loizeaux’s essay concentrates upon the “ethical ekphrasis” of Marianne Moore and the historical ekphrasis of Adrienne Rich. The traits of “nonpredatory looking,” self-parody and self-restraint, and the expression of a moral point of view that Loizeaux finds in Moore’s poetry—what Moore herself calls, using the imagery of light and eyesight, “re-vision,” correspond, perhaps, to the mutually constitutive, collaborative gaze that Liss identifies in maternal art. Similarly, Rich’s interartistry or intermediality, which generates both a women’s history (a history OF women) and a women’s historiography (a history BY women), “invokes the work of art’s presence as evidence,” celebrates the subject of art as an artist in her own right, just as, we might suggest, feminist intermediality incorporates another person’s creative presence in the new artwork.


Gertrude/Ophelia

To this synthesized list of what might constitute a feminist intermediality I would add a number of formal characteristics that will emerge as we look at women’s late twentieth and early twenty-first representations of Ophelia. Kaara Peterson and Deanne Williams observe in the introduction to their recent essay collection *The Afterlife of Ophelia* that twentieth- and twenty-first-century Ophelias in art and photography tend toward the “metarepresentational,” to comment upon their own status as artwork and to contextualize themselves as part of a tradition of women’s appropriation of Shakespeare.20 Remedios Perni’s essay on contemporary photography in the same volume further suggests that the work of contemporary women photographers deploys “the marginality” of Ophelia “creatively . . . to emancipate female subjects.”21 Feminist intermediality in these artworks often chooses to portray a subject who is youthful, relative to the artist; exhibits a certain tenderness of approach, whether in the position of the subject, the color-scheme, or the medium; interests itself in the domestic or small-scale in either the content of its imagery or in its literal size, or both; and imagines stories and scenes from outside the frame of Shakespeare’s words. I also include a material (some might say, a *materialistic*) criterion. Adapting Woolf’s germinal pronouncement that “A woman must have money and a room of one’s own if she is to write fiction,” we can measure the success of “feminist movement” (to quote bell hooks’s antithemeria in *Feminist Theory*) by whether women are able now, nearly 90 years after Woolf, financially to survive through making feminist art.22 Indeed, in my adaptation of capabilities feminism, for art to succeed as feminist art, it must enable its practitioners to make a living or at least to supplement financially an artist’s income; both the art and the environment that produces it must mutually support each other and tend toward the full realization of human capabilities. For this reason, I restrict my analysis below to the work of self-identified, professional female and feminist painters, photographers, digital artists, and sculptors.23 This distinction is perhaps the most controversial aspect of my argument here about feminist aesthetics. Women have, obviously, always made art in the domestic or amateur realm, and such art has historically been relegated to the realm of “craft” or “housework.” But here I take as axiomatic the union cry of “We want bread, and roses too”—in other words, I place self-actualization, dignity, and the aesthetic not at the top of a pyramid of human needs but at the center of overlapping circles of what we need to be human—including physical and financial sustenance. I maintain that if women can now make their lives and livings through feminist art, feminist art is finally beginning to become possible.

23 For a wonderfully detailed and sensitive account of fan- or amateur-generated images of Ophelia online on Flickr and other photo-streams, see Alan Young, “Ophelia and Web 2.0” (http://www.opheliapopularculture.com/home/ophelia-essay-title-page/ophelia-essay-section-5#Nbref39); for fan-fiction and Ophelia on YouTube, see Iyengar and Desmet, “Rebooting Ophelia.” Work in progress by Ariane Balizet also notes bridal portraits with brides posted as Ophelia on the social curation network Pinterest as part of a phenomenon called the “trash the dress” photoshoot.
Gertrude Paints and Prints Ophelia: The 1970s and 1980s

During the 1970s and 1980s a group of male and female English artists retreated from the increasingly conceptual and abstract London art world to the countryside, styling themselves (in emulation of both the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and of Samuel Palmer’s Brotherhood of Ancients) The Brotherhood of Ruralists. Later known for their cover designs for Methuen for the Arden Shakespeare, second series, the Ruralists agreed that their first joint major exhibition should comprise a series of paintings, drawings, and sculptures on Shakespeare’s Ophelia. Describing these images in sequence foregrounds a contrast between the men’s images and the women’s. Peter Blake exhibited Ophelia in two states, each of which emphasized the character’s encounter with sexual violence. The first recalls Ophelia’s own words about her encounter with Hamlet in her closet, his “doublet all unbraced,” his face pallid and “piteous,” “perus[ing her] face / As he would draw it,” but in this painting it is Ophelia herself, seminude, hair disheveled, who gazes fixedly upon the viewer (2.1.88). The later state partly clothes Ophelia in a torn blouse; her nose is bloodied, and she holds a bedraggled bunch of flowers. She still directs her uneven gaze unflinchingly toward the viewer. David Inshaw’s eerie The River Bank (Ophelia) depicts two female figures in a highly manicured and pollarded English garden. One is fleeing, with her hands holding on to her broad-brimmed hat; the other lies drowned in the river. The postmodern hyperrealistic style, with vivid colors and granular detail on, for example, the petals of an iris, elongates and twists the women’s bodies, the clothing of the drowned girl, and the shapes of greenery in a way that makes it hard for us to know whether we are seeing Gertrude (or a ladies’ maid) discovering Ophelia’s corpse, or Ophelia herself in both past and present, both contemplating suicide and achieving it. Graham Ovenden rendered his Ophelia (1979–1981), like Inshaw’s, in oil, but unlike Inshaw’s, Ovenden’s painting suggests the deceptive simplicity of commercial art (such as an album cover, or a poster). A blonde, teen- or ‘tween-aged girl, standing against a background of marshy green water and a twilit blue sky with a crescent moon, looks defiantly down her nose at the viewer, holding on to her hair in two bunches. Stylized, tiny, crisp flowers in bright colors are woven into her hair and the buttonholes of her shocking-pink dress. Graham Arnold’s Ophelia lies supine on a bed in the ruins of a castle, the outdoor blues and greens and yellows of the sky and earth around her picking up the variegated colors of a patchwork tablecloth beside her. She wears a frilled pinafore dress, like a child, but her mood suggests abandonment, and the assorted objects beside her (a seashell, a folded chess board, a rock, and other traditional subjects for still-lives) hint at a larger, still unexplained mystery.

The three women Ruralists, however, emphasized the character’s youth and innocence, as noted in the exhibition catalogue. This tactic allies them with the proto-feminist

25 Arnold Wilson, Paintings and Drawings on the Theme of Ophelia by The Brotherhood of Ruralists, July 5–August 2, 1980, Exhibition Catalog (Bristol: City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, 1980).
tradition of Mary Cowden Clarke’s “Ophelia: The Rose of Elsinore” in her *Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Heroines* (1851) and, in different ways, with what Liss has called the feminist art of the maternal.26 Most conventional, perhaps, is Ann Arnold’s watercolor, which presents a thoughtful, girlish figure in a natural setting surrounded by flowers. Where Graham Arnold’s child is surrounded by human-made artifacts, however, and displayed supine (although elaborately clothed) to a viewer’s gaze, Ann Arnold’s belongs to the natural world and controls the display of her own body. She sits pensively on what we assume is the river bank (the water is not seen) against a background of archetypally English downs, hugging her legs and hunching her back as if to hide her developing body from the viewer’s gaze. Removing the water from the image translates this young Ophelia away from what Gaston Bachelard termed the “Ophelia complex,” the association of beauty, femininity, and water, that eroticizes a passively suffering or abject girlhood, and moves into an alternative, imaginary future.27 The eager, blooming energy of Annie Ovenden’s child-Ophelia likewise contrasts the sulky, nascent sexuality of Graham Ovenden’s teen Ophelia. Annie Ovenden’s child-Ophelia, in a crocheted black shawl beneath an ivied tree and bearing a bunch of poppies, forget-me-nots, and other flowers, displays a girlish quest for approval, standing as if posed for a family photograph. Posing her beneath a tree, firmly on her feet, makes her flower-gathering a sign of young exuberance and aesthetic appreciation, rather than a suicidal ideation.

Most innovative, however (and the work of the only Ruralist to identify herself as feminist), is Jann Haworth’s art, which anticipates Liss’s suggestion that maternal creativity presents the subject multivalently and with candor, but also supports my suggestion that feminist art is powerfully intermedial. With her usual sardonic feminism, Jann Haworth exhibited two pieces, both terracotta and fabric sculptures: *Baby Ophelia*, an infant’s head; and *Ophelia*, a be-ribboned terracotta mask of an adult face with a haunting expression of extreme emotional release, somewhere between ecstasy and anguish. One way for an artist to escape objectifying her subject can be to represent her in multiple states and in multiple media; in combination, the cherubic infantine head, as smooth and bland and rounded as a marble putto, with the adult mask of tortured femininity tells a story about what we might call, following Judith Butler, the process and history through which Ophelia is “girled.” Butler argues that the body itself is a variable or culturally defined boundary and that it is through discourse that gender is fabricated: the exclamation, “It’s a girl!” upon a newborn confers sex along with socialization upon the child.28 The infant head appears gender-neutral in both material and expression, but the mask features the long hair we traditionally attribute to Ophelia and the floating ribbons that we might associate (and that the Ruralists certainly would) with the customs of girls dancing round a maypole or with braided hair. Moreover, Haworth in particular validated women’s work in textiles as valuable artistic

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production, most famously in her construction of the large cloth sculptures for the cover of the Beatles’ Sergeant Pepper but throughout her work on more classical themes, too. As Mark Rappolt notes in the catalog for Haworth’s recent retrospective at the Kunsthalle Vienna, “At its root, [Haworth’s] move to fabric was an attempt to find a language that could be exclusively her own, and in the process, almost incidentally make her gender a weapon rather than an impediment.”

Almost diametrically opposed to the Ruralists’ nostalgia, craftedness, and English specificity stand the modernism, photographic processes, and abstraction of Louise Bourgeois. Her disturbing five-color lithograph “Hamlet and Ophelia” (1979) seems to blame an archetypally male Hamlet for Ophelia’s death; the faux-naïve figure penetrates Ophelia sexually as he appears to push her under the water. The lines and blue color of Ophelia’s hair associate her with the waves that pull her under and with the cultural femaleness also indicated by her heavy, black, high-heeled shoes (Hamlet’s feet, in contrast, disappear into crude circles, and the signs of his maleness are broadly physiological—an erect and penetrating penis and a protuberant Adam’s apple, darkly outlined in black). This is feminist or ethical ekphrasis in Loizeaux’s sense, not only because we are called to make a moral judgment upon Ophelia’s fate but also because, on a second glance, Hamlet himself turns into victim, like Ophelia. It is also formally and ontologically intermedial, refracting play-text, photography, printing, and what Schröter calls the “life-medium” of the human body. Hamlet, too, is “out at sea,” and the intertwined lines of the lovers’ bodies transform them into a single, sinuous movement. The image reminds us that the world of Hamlet polices the sexuality of young people and sexualizes the politics of their elders. Something is rotten in Denmark, and only Bourgeois’s water remains free and clean.

But framing death as art is dubiously feminist, even though it does pass a judgment on “ethical ekphrasis.” The British artist Ophelia Redpath ignores Ophelia’s drowning altogether in her painted reframings of Hamlet. Redpath’s witty self-portrait, “I have heard of your paintings,” reappropriates in a mischievous context Hamlet’s strictures against women’s use of cosmetics (and by extension, his implicit critique of female sexual and artistic expression). In this oil on canvas, we see (framed by a heavy brocaded curtain that might cover a painting or, perhaps, a stage) the dungaree’d, barefoot, and beret’d artist sketching William Shakespeare himself, who looks skeptically at her from the corners of his eyes. A large ginger tom nests behind Ophelia, and a tabby arches over the easel; Shakespeare clutches, cautiously, a bound book. The image nods to several iconic early modern artworks through its pose (think of Velasquez painting himself painting, or, even more pertinently, Artemisia Gentileschi’s images of herself as “La Pittura,” or the allegory of painting) and its technique (the careful perspective of the black-and-white marble tiles upon the floor; the velvet brocade). Technically perfect, its use of humor takes it close to illustration or graphic design, and the close relationship between painting and title (you need to know the name of the painting fully to enjoy the joke) makes its gaze collaborative, mutual, ethical, and historiographic.

30 Schröter, “Four Models of Intermediality,” 19.
Gertrude Sculpts Ophelia

Just as there is a feminist or protofeminist tradition of representing Ophelia in girlhood or infancy, starting with Mary Cowden Clarke, so there exists a tradition of sculpting Ophelia in three dimensions, starting with the statues hewn by actress Sarah Bernhardt to “subversive” acclaim. Alan Young has recently discovered and tracked the changes that Bernhardt made to versions of her marble Ophelia statues, including the way that Bernhardt incorporated aspects of her own physical appearance into the “ecstatic,” eroticized sculpture: “By incorporating [her elegant neck] into her sculpture, Bernhardt is able to create a version of the sinuous, serpentine movement of her body that she frequently employed in her death scenes and that is occasionally found in portraits of her,” writes Young. After discussing Bernhardt’s practice of bringing her own body on stage on a bier as the dead Ophelia, Young suggests that Bernhardt’s multimedia representations of Ophelia (as sculpture, as performance, and as performance art) contribute significantly what critics have called a Victorian “necrosexual” cult of femininity and to representations of an eroticized, dead Ophelia that persist today.

Three-dimensional installations, by definition, allow Ophelia to break out of her confining frame. Bernhardt worked in marble, considered a medium literally too hard for a woman to use, but at the turn of the twentieth century, Kiki Smith deploys bronze; South-Africa-based American artist Liza Lou crafted an Ophelia of wood, glass, fabric, and hundreds of tiny glass beads; and Liz McGrath gilded and bejeweled a polycarbon head of Ophelia in 2004. Kiki Smith’s bronze sculpture of Ophelia recalls the casts of Degas or Rodin (I’m thinking in particular of Degas’s Little Dancer or Rodin’s Thinker), but unlike the conventionally posed, large scale and highly textured bronzes of these artists, her table-top-sized, smooth and girlish Ophelia “lies with her back arched and her legs slightly raised, as if she were both convulsing and floating.” The figure’s nudity and traditionally limniadine locks, her upraised feet and her legs extended as though in levitation, render her not just aethereal but asexually aesthetic, completely self-contained, as a well-wrought urn. In that sense, the “convulsi[ve]” elegance of the figure fits right into the tradition of pathological, beautiful, drowned femininity identified by Showalter. If we call this art “feminist,” we do so in Loizeaux’s sense, as art that exposes the history of male connoisseurship of the smooth, aestheticized bodies of adolescent girls. In contrast, Liza Lou’s Relief (2003), a self-described “riff” on “the Ophelia painting by John Everett Millais,” intermediates not only the “Victorian obsession with photographs of dead children,” “glass reliquaries,” and communion rites

32 Young, “Sarah Bernhardt’s Ophelia.”
33 Young, “Sarah Bernhardt’s Ophelia.”
of practicing Catholics but also, through its medium, to the history of women’s labor. Relief presents a wooden Ophelia-doll in a white beaded gown of what seems like silk, on her back in a red box with a blue background. Lou’s sculptures feature thousands of tiny, gleaming, glass beads, added in a time-consuming, painstaking process that recalls the work of the impoverished nineteenth-century “seamstress” half-blinded by her travails and championed by Oscar Wilde in “The Happy Prince” as well as John Ruskin’s testimony in The Nature of Gothic to the repetitive, torturous labor of the men compelled to manufacture such beads. Ophelia herself is rendered sightless by a white blindfold; this gaze cannot be mutual or collaborative, because the subject cannot see. At the same time, however, the brilliant beads of Relief blind or dazzle the viewer and allow us to “re-vision” (to return to Rich’s term) women’s history and ekphrasis. Lou’s sculptures now command thousands of dollars: this is intermedia feminist art that works materially to enrich the artist as well as culturally to historicize women’s artistic production.

Covered in gold leaf and bedecked with Swarovski crystals and semiprecious stones, Liz McGrath’s resin and fiberglass bust The Eyes of Dead Ophelia (2004; also called “Ophelia”) comments through its media upon the historical tendency to value women as beautiful or precious-seeming objects and for that value to increase when women are passive, commodified—or dead. The bust is deliberately grotesque in its culturally feminine aspects: its staring golden eyes, mermaid-like hair, shiny, smooth, white “skin,” and puffy lips (see Figure 9.1). For a Shakespearean, the transformation of the dead body into precious stones recalls Ariel’s “ditty [that] does remember [Ferdinand’s] drowned father” (1.2.483) in The Tempest, in which the eyes of (not-)dead Alonso become pearls, his bones become coral, and his whole body transforms “Into something rich and strange” (1.2.479), or the anguished dream-recollection of the doomed Duke of Clarence, where dead men’s skulls at the bottom of the sea lie amid anchors, gold, jewels, “and in the holes / Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept /—As 'twere in scorn of eyes—reflecting gems” (1.4.30–32). McGrath collected the precious stones to embellish Ophelia while on tour with her rock band; although known as an artist, she suggests that “art is how I make my living, but music is my passion.” As a self-portrait, then, the bust of Ophelia self-consciously refers to women as artists and to the history (personal, in this case) of its cultural production and its enmeshment in other forms of art.

Gertrude Installs Ophelia

More serious in its form and its political concerns than the earlier works I have described, Nalini Malani’s mixed media image *Hamlet* (2005) presents, she writes, the Indian subcontinent, unable to decide “which way to go.”39 She engages differently and at greater length with the notion of India as *Hamlet* in her intermedia video installation *Hamlet Machine* (1999–2000, revived 2010), inspired by Heiner Müller’s *Hamletmachine*, which I discuss below. First, however, Malani’s painting: mysterious, it features the circles or cylinders connected by a thick cord that appear through her many paintings as potentially

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an umbilicus, a set of gears, a rope tied with knots, or even the rotating translucent Mylar cylinders on which her work is painted and projected during some installations. None of the figures in *Hamlet* is instantly recognizable as any character from Shakespeare’s play, nor is any of the action. Malani uses her typical muted browns, yellows, and greens, what Chaitanya Sambrani calls the “palette . . . of the flesh—living, throbbing, bloated, clotted, suppurating and decomposing,” apart from the blue circles and the vivid red water-smeared polka-dots on the dress of a kneeling figure in the foreground whose face is half-obscured by the prominent blue circles. The polka dots, Malani has said, are inspired by the work of Japan-born and raised New York conceptual and avant-garde artist Yayoi Kusama, which lends itself to feminist commentary although Kusama herself maintains of her career, “I was only thinking about myself and my art, and not women’s liberation.” Another kneeling figure, half-human, half-animal (it has goats’ horns and a tail), a bald figure that might belong to an infant, and a black shape in Western shoes populate the rest of the foreground. The middle ground contains two figures squatting like weightlifters or perhaps defecating (one appears to be squatting over a pit) and a distorted, mustard yellow human-shaped figure with its head crooked to one side. The background contains one animal and one human face to the far right of the picture, in yellowish-green. The circles and chains suggest the connections among human beings of all gender identifications, social classes, and origins, and the animal or animal-like figures, along with the muted earth tones of the image, evoke our connections and responsibility toward the nonhuman word.

Malani’s work extends the reach of feminism to global human concerns and politics. Often she uses women’s voices, women’s work, and women’s suffering in order to foreground the intransigent political and social problems of poverty in India. Her gripping *Hamlet Machine* dramatizes the 1993 destruction of the Babri mosque by Hindu fundamentalists, quoting an unnamed woman who cries out (like Ophelia, the voice of the repressed) “What are you doing to this country!” and including on the looped soundtrack what I assume is Malani’s own voice saying, “I feed my own data into the computer.” The four video projections, which themselves feature film projected on to the body of a Japanese Butoh dancer (and which according to some accounts include video from a production of Müller’s play), loop continuously on three screens and on the floor for 20 minutes. The floor-screen of the room in which the installation takes place is covered with a layer of table salt that evokes Gandhi’s famous Salt March. Recorded and titled voices speak over each other in Hindi and English to turn Müller’s play about the partition of East and West Germany into a parable about the partition of India and to break down binaries (including the gender binary) in this stunning example of intermedia feminist art in its tenderly chilling appropriation of children’s and women’s suffering voices. Any “gaze” here is certainly collaborative and mutual; “gender-full and gender-free.” Malani’s installation defies

43 A segment is broadcast here on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEdgZXrGOxo, accessed May 28, 2015.
44 Sarah Ruddick, quoted in Liss, *Feminist Art*, 76.
categorization, especially in this piece that screens on the body of a Japanese dancer, to the soundtrack of children’s voices, filtered and colored black-and-white video of a German playwright’s adaptation of an English classic text.

In hailing feminist intermedia artists as Gertrude, I aim to break down the false dichotomy between the two female characters in Shakespeare’s play and to reframe their relationship (and by extension, the ties that bind women artists to one another) as loving rather than competitive. The representations above are third person, as it were—but the dominant mode currently to represent Ophelia in art is through young women’s photographed and computer-edited self-portraits widely and freely disseminated online. Shakespearean Alan Young summarizes the cultural anthropologist Michael Wesch to argue that young women’s self-portraits as Ophelia on “Web 2.0” (including Flickr, Pinterest, YouTube, and other sites of user-generated creative content, curation, and collection) can offer both artist and viewer a new freedom and even a new humanity: “online [viewers] are permitted to stare unrestrictedly at their fellow human beings in ways not otherwise socially acceptable. The result is often the development of an appreciation of the beauty and humanity of others. There is a new and potentially beneficial kind of communication involved in this process.” Young, however, continues: “However, it should be noted that while Wesch offers a positive interpretation of the viewing process, the more skeptical critic will no doubt see the viewer as engaged in an unhealthy voyeurism, and the objects of that voyeurism as narcissistic, self-promoting, and engaged in behavior that reduces the self and agency to sexual object.”

Indeed. Since Young and others have documented and continue to analyze Ophelia in fan-fiction and user-generated art, however, I will concentrate here on the work of the young professional Los Angeles artist Ellina Kevorkian, because it seems to me to participate in the same kinds of multi- or intermedia synthesis, ironic commentary, and methodological innovation as Malani’s work, even as its political anger concentrates more explicitly on sexualized women’s bodies.

Kevorkian’s portrait of her non-identical twin Soseh Kevorkian as Shakespeare’s Ophelia and as what she calls (in an electronic mail message to this volume’s editors) her own “psychic likeness” (in her Love Poems of Infidels) deploys feminist intermediality in multiple senses, as a visual ekphrasis that dramatizes and mocks sexual competition among women; as the ethical gaze that parodies female suffering as aesthetically pleasing; as the re enactment of women’s work and art within art itself—and in multiple material modes, using archaic, twentieth-century, fine, and demotic methods of production and dissemination. Love Poems for In fidels as a whole parodies and restages well-known images by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and features the artist herself along with her twin sister to bring out concerns of women’s identity and beauty along with the idea of twinning or duplication and mechanical reproduction. Each artwork is multiply remediated: first scripted and staged, blocked as a theatrical production; then photographed, digitally edited, and printed; then rendered by hand in acrylic paint. Kevorkian’s Ophelia wears a peach bustier and diaphanous white western gown that recall Kate Winslet’s garments in Kenneth Branagh’s Hamlet (see Figure 9.2). Ellina and Soseh in this artwork “reference the only other twins noted in [their] family; male train robbers from Texas a century ago,” writes Ellina Kevorkian, who adds, “The costumes are literally made from our mother’s curtains [. . .] hung in the bedroom Soseh and I shared as children through the

45 Alan Young, “Ophelia and Web 2.0.”
1970s [. . .in] a nod to the intergenerational teachings of feminism and Shakespeare, as it was our mother Karen Kevorkian, a poet, who provided us access to her Riverside Shakespeare.” Posed in a white, ceramic bathtub with old-fashioned, heavy, steel faucets, she gazes fixedly in full makeup at the single flower she holds in her hand. Her knees are raised and her pudendum is unselfconsciously visible through her translucent gown. One side of the bathtub is overgrown with realistic-seeming foliage (some taken from Millais’s image directly); the other abuts pixelated circles in cyan and magenta, like a computer-game from the 1980s. Both Ellina and Soseh are essential to the project, the latter, “trained in performance, brought the sense of theatricality to the paintings that was required.”

Here is the decentered or collaborative gaze; the self-referential incorporation of women’s artworks, women in artworks, and the historiography of women artists; and human, capacious tenderness in scale and subject.

**Gertrude Speaks Ophelia**

We can find a feminist intermedia artistry in Gertrude’s elegy to Ophelia in Shakespeare’s text itself, although this feminist history has been camouflaged, on the one hand, by the speech’s frequent extraction and placement in anthologies and, on the other, by the

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46 Ellina Kevorkian, Personal Communication (electronic mail message to Ania Loomba and Melissa Sanchez), September 15, 2015.
smoothing out of its textual irregularities. Deanne Williams’s recent essay on the stage direction in Q1, “Enter Ofelia with a Lute,” similarly foregrounds primary printed texts of Hamlet in order to uncover what I would identify as an intermediality that is potentially feminist: the interlude, and the stage direction, suggests Williams, presents the aesthetic skill of a woman artist with “time and space to express herself, and to be heard.”47 I offer here a diplomatic transcription of Q2 (1604), from the British Library copy, which I use as my copy-text, indicating Folio readings in square parentheses.

There is a Willow growes ascaunt the [aslant a] Brooke
That showes his horry [hore] leaues in the glassy stremme[,]:
Therewith fantastique [There with fantastick] garlands did she make [come]
Of Crow-flowers [Crow-flowers], Nettles, Daisies [Daysies], and long Purples
That liberall Shepheards gie a grosser name[,]:
But our cull-cold maydes [cold Maids] doe dead mens fingers [Dead Mens Fingers]
call them[,]:
There on the pendant boughes[,] her cronet weedes [Coronet weeds] Clambring to hang[,] an enuious sluer broke,
When downe her [the] weedy trophies[,] and her selfe Fell in the weeping Brooke, her clothes spred wide,
And Marmade like awhile [Mermaide-like, a while] they bore her vp,
Which time she chaunted snatches of old laudes [tunes],
As one incapable of her owne distresse,
Or like a creature natuie [Natiue,] and indewed [indued] Vnto that elament, [Elament:] but long it could not be[,] Till that her garments[,] heauy with theyr [her] drinke,
Puld [Pul’d] the poore wretch from her melodious lay [buy] To muddy death. (Mv)

On the level of content, the speech corresponds to Liss’s “maternal mourning” in its incorporation of the lost child’s (Ophelia’s) artistic production into the woman-speaker/artist’s utterance/performance.48 The first line of the speech presents perhaps its best-known crux; does the willow grow “ascaunt the Brooke” or “aslant a Brooke”? Q2’s “ascaunt” or askant derives from “askance,” a sidelong glance, and thus begins the personification of the “horry” or “hore” (hoary, white-haired, that is, silvery-leaved) weeping willow as an “envious” elderly husband eager to pull his young wife down out of a tree (as if old January from Chaucer’s “Merchant’s Tale” suddenly took his revenge on youthful May only to fall a-“weeping” with remorse afterward). Gertrude memorializes Ophelia’s “weedy trophies” not so much to emphasize the latter’s insanity through an off-kilter value-system (weeds cannot be valuable and hence cannot be trophies) but in order to emphasize the process and labor through which weeds can become trophies or prizes. The word “Clambering” appears as the catch-word in Q2, as if Ophelia clammers from the foot of one page to the top of the next (and it’s worth recalling that until the

48 For an excellent and thorough, if idiosyncratic, reading of the speech in linear, grammatical, exhaustive detail, see the poet Stephen Ratcliffe’s Reading the Unseen: (Offstage) Hamlet (New York: Counterpath Press, 2010).
Pre-Raphaelites dominated imagery of Ophelia, she had overwhelmingly appeared upright, active, and “clambering” to secure her garlands, as in the late eighteenth-century oil painting by Mary Hoare, now in the Yale Center for British Art. Here is the clear-eyed, ironic and complete picture of the child at work, focused and rapt. Note, too, that Ophelia’s garlands are “fantastique”—an adjective that commentators take to describe pathological delusion but that more commonly refers to phantasy, the essential early modern brain power that orders overwhelming sensory impressions into coherent ideas and perceptions, and that shapes imagination into art.

Q2 gives us “Therewith . . . did she make”; F, “There with . . . did she come,” a substantive variant, since “Therewith” would mean, “She made fantastic, imaginative garlands out of the Willow leaves with other flowers” and “There with” would mean, “She brought to the glassy stream fantastic garlands of flowers” fabricated by someone else, or by Ophelia at a different time (the periphrastic auxiliary, “did she” could suggest either habitual action in the past or sustained action in the recent past, immediately prior to her drowning). Q2’s “make” emphasizes the process of fabrication; F, the space for this artistic expression and, perhaps, its premeditation. The Quartos attribute the name “dead mens fingers” to “cull-cold maydes,” but the Folio gives “cold maydes,” an emendation that usually stands. “Cull” is a Cotswold term for a Bull-head fish, however, so the phrase “cull-cold maydes” connotes the slimy chill of the water and prefigures Ophelia’s “mermaid-like” demise. As Stephen Ratcliffe points out, the “pendent” or hanging bough associates (through the figure of necklace or earring) Ophelia’s crownet or coronet (“crownet”) with Gertrude’s own crown and the corona of the flowers she gathers, although he seems unaware that in fact OED gives “coronet,” “corona” or “crownet” as synonyms for the distinctive flowering of umbelliferous plants (crow-flowers are ranunculaceae, nettles are urticaceae, and long purples are archideaceae, but Ophelia’s earlier bouquet contained “fennel,” which does grow in coronas or ring-like clusters of blossoms).

“Weeping,” as many have noted, is a transferred epithet from the willow and perhaps from the speaker; “mermaid-like” modifies both Ophelia and the wake of her garments, billowing around her as a fish’s tail. Ratcliffe notes that we do not hear the “old lauds” or “old tunes” that Ophelia sings—even suggesting that Gertrude figuratively stops Ophelia’s breath by failing to tell us what the “snatches” of overheard melody were—and joins with earlier commentators to find Gertrude, if not guilty, then at least complicit in the concealment of Ophelia’s murder by a person unknown. But I find in that crux “lauds/tunes” another way to read Gertrude’s speech. “Lauds” are songs of praise and magnification, and Gertrude’s speech attempts to ascribe glory and significance not just to Ophelia’s death but also to her power as artist or creator. Liss suggests that feminist art that incorporates maternal mourning can do so through collaboration with the dead child and through an engagement with children’s work; G. W. Pigman and others suggest that early modern maternal elegy aims to memorialize dead children and young adults by ascribing coherent identities to them, since their lives had not yet taken form. Katie Norman Grubbs suggests (in her dissertation-in-progress) that child and young-adult elegies additionally share formal characteristics missing or scant in elegies for adults.

49 Ratcliffe, 72.
including a predominance of lamentation (rather than praise or lauds), botanical detail, and figures of lending or redemption. If we contextualize Gertrude’s horticultural references as elegiac, Ophelia becomes one of her own flowers, plucked too soon, and the pronominal confusion surrounding “the weedy trophies” and “her weedy trophies” and “garments heavy with her drink” or “their drink” (through a confusion of weeds, meaning wild flowers, and weeds, meaning clothing) unites girl, flower, and garment. Like Nature in “Sonnet 126,” water and willow are “envious” to win back their “native”-born (a figure used to justify or console grieving parents by suggesting that the child never belonged to them anyway).

Ophelia and the water become one as her clothing soaks through so that she is “endued” or en-dewed into the liquid around her. So at one, in Gertrude’s imagining, is Ophelia with the brook that it is not the water that drowns her but the mud—the interstitial boundary between land and water—that murders her. Her “melodious lay” is the song (OED, lay n. 4) she trolls, the lay or lake that she turns into performance space (OED, lay n. 1) but also the breaking down of barriers between field and stream, lea and lay (OED, lay n. 13). The water can “drink” her up and digest or “endue” her (OED endue, v. 2, b.) painlessly, but when her earthly “garments . . . drink” the water, they “pull” her down to the bed of the stream. Gertrude herself disappears during this speech. I suggest that we can find no rational explanation, diegetic or extra-diegetic, for her apparent witnessing of Ophelia’s death, unless we take her seriously when she tells us that she thought of Ophelia as a daughter or a daughter-in-law and that she grieves her loss. If we consider Gertrude’s speech as feminist intermedia art that consecrates Ophelia’s lost human capabilities, we realize that she did not need literally to witness Ophelia’s drowning, because the speech testifies not to Ophelia’s death (which Gertrude breaks to Laertes before her speech directly and, moreover, must repeat again after her speech in response to Laertes’ “Alas then she is [is she] drownd”) but to Ophelia’s life and creativity. Gertrude’s gaze is neither voyeuristic nor culpable, but collaborative and capacious. It directs us to imagine the inner lives of others as nuanced, rich, and creative; it directs us to feminism.

SECTION IV
Agency
This essay began as a talk at a conference titled “Historicizing Sex.” When the conference talks were gathered into a volume for publication, however, the book title became “Rethinking Feminism.” This is a metamorphosis that would have impressed Ovid himself. Among the accomplishments of feminist scholarship—on the early modern period and more generally—is certainly a much-needed historicizing of sex. But feminism’s brief went well beyond this one narrow if important task. At the same time, feminism’s commitment to historicism has always been somewhat equivocal, not least because of theoretical influences that do not always point in a historical direction. In the field of early modern literature alone, critics such as Janet Adelman, Lynn Enterline, and Elizabeth J. Bellamy, for instance, have done important nonhistorical work that is at once feminist and psychoanalytic in orientation.

In addition, feminist literary critics attempting to historicize sex were subsequently joined by queer theorists and new historicists who had their own, sometimes conflicting, contributions to make. Perhaps the most influential, almost manifesto-like insistence on the need to historicize sexuality came not from a feminist but from Stephen Greenblatt in his 1986 essay “Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture.” There Greenblatt offers a nuanced assessment of the (mis)fit between psychoanalytic procedures of reading and early modern texts as a way of contesting the “universalist claims of psychoanalysis.”

It is in his opposition to the universal that Greenblatt finds common ground with feminists and queer theorists with whom he otherwise has little enough in common. Feminist suspicion toward universals goes back at least as far as Simone de Beauvoir. Psychoanalysis offers feminism a paradigm of the ways in which putative universals obscure both historical contingency and male privilege. Indeed, it seems fair to say that claims to universality have constituted the premier target both for historicism and for varieties of political criticism eager to demystify the claims of ideology.


In recent years, of course, the category of the universal has undergone something of a theoretical rehabilitation at the hands of Alain Badiou and (following his lead) Slavoj Žižek. Here I want to split the difference between the historicist and universalist camps by making an argument for dehistoricizing sex—or rather, for historicizing it in a way that reveals a delocalizing, and thus dehistoricizing, tendency within the sexual itself. This universalizing impulse is, as we shall see, destined to failure. But I think we can see that failure as a kind of virtue—something that usefully modifies, rather than negates. Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* and Freud’s invention of psychoanalysis show this universalizing impulse at work in roughly analogous ways in two very distant historical moments, and that similarity across historical difference will itself be part of my argument.

The problem of the universal in *Samson Agonistes* is encountered above all in the national or tribal divisions that both constitute and fracture its world. While it is relatively easy to contrast Dagon as an idol or false god to Jehovah as the true one, things become much murkier in the realm of ethics. Both of his Philistine interlocutors, Dalila and Harapha, are simultaneously foes and mirror images of Samson, which makes ethical adjudication between them frustratingly difficult. John Rumrich voices an increasingly widespread perspective in pointing out the ethical contradictions and inconsistencies that riddle Samson’s encounter with Dalila:

Samson blames Dalila for violating the sanctity of marriage in betraying him, but he himself “still watching to oppress / Israel’s oppressors,” shows the way, betrothing Philistine women as a provocative tactic and so subordinating the proper ends of marriage to his political and religious agenda: “I . . . / . . . therefore urg’d the marriage on,” he admits, “that by occasion hence / I might begin Israel’s Deliverance” (232–3, 222–5). Rumrich describes Samson and Delila as “opposite numbers, champions of their respective nations, more alike than different.” They both regard themselves as justified in defending their respective nations and gods, even if this involves falsifying the bonds of marriage and betraying a spouse. And the play can offer no universal ethical framework that would decide between these conflicting tribal claims.

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6 From a theological standpoint, no such universalizing framework is necessary. God’s decision to make Israel his chosen nation is strictly speaking unconditioned and unconditional. It does not depend on or convey upon Israel any ethical superiority compared to other nations but is a pure expression of divine will. Indeed, there is an element of what Kierkegaard would call the absurd in
Of course, this dilemma may be precisely Milton’s point: *Samson Agonistes* takes place in an historical era prior to the advent of Christian universalism, the absence of which results in the dizzying mirror effects of Samson’s encounters with Dalila and Harapha. Lacking access to the universal, Samson’s actions are not tragic in the Hegelian sense. Indeed, one critic regards Samson’s predating of Christian universalism as precisely his Aristotelian *hamartia*—not an ethical flaw, exactly, but a historically determined ignorance that fuels a blindly tribal form of aggression.

Thinkers as different as Alain Badiou and Daniel Boyarin have identified the locus classicus of Christian universalism in the following verse from Paul’s epistle to the Galatians: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Jesus Christ” (3:28). Samson is the point-by-point refutation of this verse. Not only is he a Jew, but as a Nazarite, God’s covenant with Israel has been redoubled for him personally. Set apart even from the rest of his tribe, he is a kind of Jew to the second power. Not only is Samson male; he is possessed of an almost parodic hypermasculinity, just as Dalila embodies an explicitly Cleopatra-like hyperfemininity. Samson may be no more a slave than his fellow grinders at the prison house, but his enslaved condition is felt all the more keenly because of his former religious and social eminence. Samson not only embodies all the forms of difference that the Christian covenant will supposedly cancel, according to the famous verse from Galatians; he drives these differences to their outer limit. In his person he condenses and exaggerates every mode of particularity that Christian universalism will take it upon itself to dissolve. All that being said, Samson nevertheless exhibits certain obscure and primordial impulses toward the universal, but they either fall short of their aim or else achieve a universalism that is itself failed or tragic. These impulses center on two fundamental human activities—sex and labor—of which I will examine only the former here.

Despite the hostile maneuvering on both sides, Samson’s marriages with Philistine women do threaten to breach the barrier separating Jew and Gentile. Samson, of course, insists that he undertook these marriages only so “that by occasion hence / I might begin Israel’s Deliverance” (224–5) and that he was “still watching to oppress / Israel’s oppressors” (232–3). Yet his father Manoa is openly skeptical of this explanation (420–24), and Samson himself later gives a somewhat different account, claiming that “swoll’n with pride into the snare I fell / Of fair fallacious looks, venereal trains, / Soft’n’d with pleasure and voluptuous life” (532–4). His insistence that he married solely for political or military advantage clearly covers up, at least in part, for an uncontrollable libido that is attracted to forbidden, Philistine women. Yet Samson’s roving eye does indeed prompt him to “love his enemies,” if not quite in the sense that Jesus intended, and thus works to erase the line between Jew

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and Gentile. As Samson remarks to Harapha, “Among the daughters of the Philistines / I chose a Wife, which argued me no foe; / And in your City held my Nuptial Feast” (1192–4). Something like Pauline universalism can be glimpsed here, but because it takes place under the aegis of eros rather than of agape, it allows hatred, jealousy, and aggression to mingle with love. Another way to put this is that Samson’s sexual impulses produce a bodily—and thus fallen—counterpart to a Christian universalism that in St. Paul relies instead on spirit. For Paul, the body—and particularly the penis—is the site of difference, bearing the marks of both circumcision and sexual morphology. It is a site on which two of the three forms of difference mentioned in Galatians 3:28 come to bear. But ironically, Samson’s penis, though carrying the mark of Jewish particularity, is a kind of divining rod that leads him against his will into foreign liaisons. Philo of Alexandria interpreted circumcision as a mortification of the sexual passions; but if this is so, the operation has spectacularly failed to “take” in Samson’s case.10 Cutting his hair may temporarily sap his strength, but cutting his foreskin does not apparently dampen his sexual enthusiasms.

But what would happen—to pose a counterfactual—if Samson’s marriage with Dalila had worked out? What if they had had a child together? Would this mixing of blood have begun to repair the rift between Hebrew and Philistine? Milton’s play does not explore this possibility directly. But I think it does so in a kind of negative fashion. For in the play’s catastrophic denouement, Samson achieves a deathly version of precisely this union with his enemies. He is described as “tangled in the fold / Of dire necessity, whose law conjoin’d / Thee with thy slaughter’d foes” (1665–7; my emphasis). Here the verb “conjoined” manages faintly to evoke marriage even in the context of slaughter. Again, “Samson with these innix’d, inevitably / Pull’d down the same destruction on himself” (1657–8; my emphasis, except for Samson). Manoa urges the Chorus: “Let us go find the body where it lies, / Soak’d in his enemies’ blood, and from the stream / With lavers pure and cleansing herbs wash off / The clotted gore” (1725–8). Here the mixture of blood that would have taken place with Dalila alone has been extended to the entire Philistine nation, whose bloods now run together with Samson’s. These mangled but therefore united bodies offer a grotesquely inverted image of the Pauline universality achievable through love. That images of both childbirth and abortion suffuse the play’s catastrophe only underlines the fact that it substitutes for the child that Samson and Dalila never conceived.11 In place of

10 On Philo, see Boyarin, Saint Paul, 26–7, 80.
11 William Kerrigan hears (correctly, in my view) echoes of childbirth as well as defecation in these lines:

Thus utter’d, straining all his nerves he bow’d;
as with the force of the winds and water pent,
when Mountains tremble, those two massy Pillars
With horrible convulsion to and fro,
he tugg’d, he shook, till down they came and drew
The whole roof after them with burst of thunder
upon the heads of all who sat beneath.

(1646–52)

that life born of love, and the universality it might have foretold, is one founded upon what Paul in the Epistle to the Romans calls “this body of death” (7:24).

If Samson’s erotic desire gestures toward the undoing of national or tribal divisions, it does something similar with gender division. Once conjoined with Dalila, the formerly virile Samson describes himself as “Effeminately vanquish’d” and “shor[n] . . . like a tame Wether” (562, 437–8), while Dalila leaves their interview bearing a phallic if merely metaphorical “sting / Discover’d in the end, till now concealed” (997–8). Both enemies, formerly paragons of their respective sexes, end up in an ambiguously gendered state, neither fully male nor female—just as their marital union renders them neither fully Hebrew nor Philistine. And finally, Dalila promises Samson that if he returns to her,

I to the lords will intercede, not doubting
Their favourable ear, that I may fetch thee
From forth this loathsome prison-house, to abide
With me, where my redoubled love and care
With nursing diligence, to me glad office,
May ever tend about thee to old age.

(920–25)

Released from prison but confined to a kind of pleasurable house arrest, Samson would find himself once again in an ambiguous state, neither fully enslaved nor fully free. His marriage to Dalila thus gestures at undoing all three forms of particularity listed in Galatians 3:28. Yet this undoing is not so much a cancellation or sublation of antithetical states as their endless confusion. It is not as though Jew and gentile, male and female, slave and free would cease to exist; it is simply that they would lose their sharp outlines in Samson’s condition. What Samson can achieve is only the typological prefiguring of the universal—or rather, the universality of man’s fallen state, not of the redeemed one. This is a universality that regresses to a time before the covenant with Israel. It is the universality of wayward sexual desire—that is, of the shared but fallen condition of humanity. Sex, we may therefore say, is a failed universal. While desire is experienced by all, it cannot provide the encompassing ethical framework that both Hegel and Kierkegaard find requisite for tragedy. And by absorbing or contaminating love, it likewise forecloses the Christian universalism announced by Paul.

These issues have a literary as well as a thematic dimension. For what is *Samson Agonistes* if not an exogamous “marriage” of Hebraic content and Greek form?12 In this respect the play invokes Renaissance humanist efforts to combine Greek and Hebrew studies into a unified field of knowledge. But *Samson Agonistes* does not accomplish—or does it really attempt—a Pauline sublation of Hebraic and Greek strains. Rather, it remains a conspicuously and, I think, an intentionally failed effort at synthesis—a bad marriage of incompatible elements that works out no more amicably than Samson’s marriage with Dalila. The play, in other words, registers the absence of a globalizing framework in its very form.

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Despite all this, it would be wrong to discount the universalizing impulse that marks Samson’s sexual desire. That impulse points toward Pauline universalism, in almost typological fashion, despite falling short of it. Samson can therefore be seen as announcing a kind of primordial and premature gospel of sex. This is a gospel that he practices rather than preaches; it is not articulated as doctrine or principle but remains implicit in his sexual choices, which tend to undo the old tribal distinctions of Jew and Gentile. It contradicts, without quite managing to cancel or sublate, his fierce antagonism toward the Philistines, and in that sense too is a failed universal. And yet it outlines another, if merely virtual, path that history could and will ultimately take when the time is ripe.

I want now to turn to a different yet not unrelated gospel of sex offered by another Jew, this one living in a distinctly post-Pauline world. That Jew is Sigmund Freud, whose invention of psychoanalysis attempts to trace a logic of sexuality that is global in its reach. Freud’s universalizing claims have, of course, made him attractive prey for historicizing critics, who like to point out (not incorrectly) that Freud’s notion of the Oedipus complex, for example, generalizes the structure of the late-nineteenth-century bourgeois family and applies it improperly across cultural and historical divides. But a different and, I think, useful perspective on Freud’s universalizing impulses is offered by the cultural historian Sander Gilman, who understands them as a strategic reaction to the antisemitic milieu of fin-de-siècle Vienna.13

In Freud’s historical moment, the Jew’s difference is understood to be primarily racial rather than religious, rendering obsolete the possibility of assimilation by conversion. Moreover, nineteenth-century medicine contributes to the image of the Jews as diseased and disease-producing members of the polity by attributing a number of specific ailments to the Jew’s body and culture. In Gilman’s view, Freudian psychoanalysis was a response to this situation that involved two major strategies. The first was to relocate the causes of illness from soma to psyche, thus neutralizing the claim that they originated in a distinctively racialized physiology. And the second was to rewrite supposedly “Jewish” ailments as universal ones, in large part by attaching them to ancient Greek rather than Jewish mythologies.

An obvious case in point is the so-called Oedipus complex. Gilman connects the very meaning of Oedipus’ name (“swell-foot”) both to the widespread belief that Jews’ feet were “one of the salient markers of Jewish difference” and to the fact that limping was one of the prime symptoms of the hysteric (including Freud’s patient Dora).14 More pertinent to the context of this paper was a tendency to attribute illness to the Jews’ practice of marrying solely with their own. “For [the sexologist] Kraft-Ebbing,” writes Gilman, “the ‘anthropological’ cause of the greater incidence of insanity among the Jews was their endogamous marriages, which, as a liberal, he compared to the degeneracy found in the inbred upper classes.”15 Jewish endogamy, in other words, bordered pathologically on incest and reinforced the naturally diseased state of the Jewish body.

Freud’s formulation of the Oedipus complex, Gilman claims, rewrites this reputedly “Jewish” ailment as a universal one: “The fantasies of parricide and incest framed by the

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14 Gilman, The Case of Sigmund Freud, 118, 127.
15 Gilman, The Case of Sigmund Freud, 84.
Oedipus complex become one male Jew’s answer to the charge of incest and inbreeding lodged against Jews. It is Freud’s attempt to present as a universal phenomenon the very core of the argument about the origin of Jewish disease.”16 I want to call this maneuver Freud’s gospel of sex, and note its relation to Samson’s. Like the Biblical hero, Freud employs sexuality to erode distinctions between Jew and Gentile—distinctions now rooted not in religion but in body and culture. But whereas Samson finds an actual Gentile wife, Freud effects a theoretical coupling with Greek myth—a cultural source which, in nineteenth-century German society, counts not as a second particularity ranged against the Hebraic one but rather as the very embodiment of universal human values.

What we might call Freud’s theoretical exogamy has aims not dissimilar to Samson’s practical exogamy, and it exhibits a comparable, pseudo-Pauline logic. Just as Freudian psychoanalysis neutralizes the distinction between Jew and Gentile, so it complicates, without quite erasing, distinctions between male and female, since irreducible anatomical differences are counterbalanced by an originary, shared bisexuality. (We might compare this to the softening of the hard gender outlines of Samson and Dalila at the beginning of Milton’s play.) And if psychoanalysis does not bother with the Pauline distinction between bonded and free, it does considerably muddy a related distinction between illness and health or normality. For Freud we are all, at best, somewhat ill. We all bear sexual stigmata that might count as a modern, secular counterpart to the old theological doctrine of original sin.

Freud’s universalism is a failed one in that our shared condition partakes of failure. But in addition, Gilman notes a “tension between the universalizing desire of psychoanalysis and the particularistic charge that this is but the masked language of the Jews.”17 It was all too easy, in other words, to stigmatize this universalizing discourse as itself another “Jewish” form of mental pathology. And then of course there are the various varieties of theoretical overreaching that Freud’s project entailed, and that have rendered it vulnerable to historicist critique. Yet at the same time, we should recognize that the universalizing impulse is not in all circumstances a reactionary or benighted one, and that a dehistoricized—that is to say, a delocalized—sexuality also has its legitimate claims to make.

A gospel is an announcement, an annunciation, an enunciation, and it is at the level of the enunciation rather than the enunciated (to invoke an old structuralist distinction) that the utopian potential of the gospel of sex resides. The trick is to historicize the enunciated or content of this gospel without merely rejecting the universalizing impulse of the enunciation itself. To historicize sex will therefore involve the difficult task of holding in productive tension these two contradictory impulses. And the product of this difficult practice, I suggest, will be failed universals.

But failed universals are more than failures.18 They are, in some sense, the “best” universals and therefore not merely junk to be discarded. Carrying their failure within them, and adapting in response to it, they nevertheless still cling to their cosmopolitan impulse. We might describe them as self-aware or self-critical universals, which are therefore less likely to engage in imperial expansion at the expense of local difference. Yet they likewise

16 Gilman, The Case of Sigmund Freud, 198.
17 Gilman, The Case of Sigmund Freud, 37.
remain vigilant to the dangers of parochialism: dangers that both Milton and Freud illustrate in their related ways. I don’t want to suggest that sex offers a privileged or unique instance of such a failed universal. But it has proven, at least, a durable and provocative one. Samson’s gospel, so implicit as to be almost inaudible beneath the ongoing clatter of his aggression, is still worth listening for.
This essay contests the certainty with which many recent critics of Shakespeare’s *Othello* maintain that Desdemona never commits the crime of adultery. It proceeds on dually feminist and skeptical grounds, querying the connection between chastity and female virtue reified in critical accounts of Othello’s jealousy and Desdemona’s victimhood, and arguing that many apologies for Desdemona selectively define chastity in order to exonerate her. Before advancing on such polemical territory, however, it is first worth recalling that for several centuries the case of Desdemona’s chastity was hardly so clear. In the play’s long critical history, Desdemona has been tried and found wanting for sins that include elopement, elopement with a Moor, jesting about women’s virtue with Iago, advocating on Cassio’s behalf, advocating adamantly on Cassio’s behalf, lying to Othello about the loss of the handkerchief, talking about adultery with Emilia, taking the blame for her own murder, and, in at least one wildly speculative instance, sleeping with Cassio before the play begins.1 These denunciations begin, at least in the critical archive, with *Othello’s* first critic, Thomas Rymer. In his 1693 *Short View of Tragedy*, Rymer includes among his many objections to *Othello* that Shakespeare takes “a Venetian Lady to be the Fool.” Rymer justifies Othello’s suspicion of his wife, declaiming Desdemona’s audacity in running off with the Moor, “Bed[ding]” him on their wedding night, and then, the very next day, “importuning and teasing him for a young smock-fac’d Lieutenant.”2 Roughly a century later, US President John Quincy Adams echoes Rymer when he proclaims Desdemona to be “little less than a wanton.”3 W. H. Auden only slightly more graciously suspects, still another century later, that had Desdemona lived, and spent more time with the likes of Emilia, she might soon “have taken a lover.”4 As late as 1974, Jan Kott hedges that “Desdemona is faithful, but must have something of a slut in her. Not in actu, but in potentia.”5

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To be sure, a number of prominent critics have defended her against such calumny by confirming Cassio’s representation of her as the “divine Desdemona” (2.1.74). Robert B. Heilman argues in 1956’s *Magic in the Web* that Shakespeare “gives us devil and saint,” Othello and Desdemona respectively, to dramatize “the extremes of hate and love.” Likewise, Robert G. Hunter maintains in 1976’s *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God’s Judgment* that Desdemona “is not only capable of goodness,” but “incapable of anything else”—she is “a natural embodiment of grace apparently untainted by original sin.” (Contrast Charlotte Ramsey Lennox’s far more ambivalent 1754 response to Rymer. Whereas Rymer finds Desdemona’s love for Othello unnatural, Lennox allows that “Such Affections are not . . . Impossible,” then lets the matter alone.) Heilman and Hunter offer extreme examples of sanctification, but neither matches A. C. Bradley’s even more fawning 1905 hagiography of Shakespeare’s “‘eternal womanly’ in its most lovely and adorable form”—

> simple and innocent as a child, ardent with the courage and idealism of a saint, radiant with that heavenly purity of heart which men worship because nature so rarely permits it to themselves . . . Desdemona had no theories about universal brotherhood, and no phrases about “one blood in all the nations of the earth” or “barbarian, Scythian, bond and free. . . .”

So divine is Bradley’s Desdemona that prejudice, much less adultery, never even occurs to her. She knows only a love so natural and strong, so Christian, that it needs no foundation in “theory” and no prop in the egalitarian theology of Galatians 3:28 (“There is nether Jewe nor Grecian: there is nether bonde nor fre . . .”).

Early feminist criticism on Desdemona worked to find a way between these binary judgments. S. N. Garner argues in 1976, for example, that “Desdemona is neither goodness nor slut.” Between these poles lies the figure of the “human”—a woman who, if hardly guilty of adultery, is still “capable of treachery.” Ann Jennalie Cook proposes in 1980 that Shakespeare structures his play so that we are unsure of Desdemona’s honesty “until it is too late.”

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to trust in Desdemona’s chastity when she testifies to it with her famous last words, “A guiltless death I die” (5.2.132). (The subtitle of Cook’s piece, “Doubts Raised and Resolved,” concisely plots this tragic trajectory.) 1980 turned out to be something of a watershed year for Othello criticism, however, with Cook’s essay authorizing a suspicion of Desdemona’s honesty that would soon thereafter reflect poorly on the critic. In concert with Stanley Cavell, whose 1979 essay “Epistemology and Tragedy: A Reading of Othello” is better known today as “Othello and the Stake of the Other” from 1987’s Disowning Knowledge. Stephen Greenblatt and Edward Snow published pieces whose considerable influence partly consisted in turning the critical current away from the “saint or strumpet” debate altogether. With varying degrees of intent, these critics distance themselves from condemnation or sanctification, recalibrating the binary as the product of the same erotic revulsion that drives Othello to kill his wife. Snow is the most explicit in this endeavor, reading the “cause” (5.2.1) for which Othello kills Desdemona as the general’s own “pathological male animus toward sexuality.”14 Greenblatt’s Othello suffers an Augustinian fear of sexual pleasure that leads him to construe even marital sex as a violation of the seventh commandment.15 Characterizing the accusation against Desdemona as “insanely false,” Cavell finds Othello writhing in skeptical torment about his wife’s independence as a desiring subject; Cavell’s Othello creates the fantasy of her infidelity as a response to the terrible fact of her individuation.16 In each analysis, the division of Desdemona into sexless saint or hypersexed strumpet bespeaks a problem with Othello’s judgment—a problem the critic should recognize regardless as to his or her immediate alliance with any feminist cause.17

Published alongside Cook’s essay in the 1980 issue of Shakespeare Studies, W. D. Adamson’s “Unpinned or Undone?: Desdemona and the Problem of Sexual Innocence” most succinctly articulates the position on Desdemona’s chastity that has become critically commonplace over the past 35 years. Arguing that the standard binary amounts to a false choice, Adamson maintains that Desdemona’s innocence coexists with a rich sexuality. The “conspicuous expression of her innocence,” he writes, “is her vital exuberance, including the hot, moist hand of sexual vitality. She herself is a natural alternative to ‘saint or strumpet,’ which is all along a tragically false dilemma exploited

17 Both Renaissance Self-Fashioning and Disowning Knowledge have been criticized for failing to engage with feminism. See, for example, Marguerite Waller’s discussion of the former in “Academic Tootsie: The Denial of Difference and the Difference It Makes,” Diacritics 17, no. 1 (1987): 2–20; and Timothy Murray’s review of the latter in MLN 105, no. 5 (1990): 1080–85.
by Iago.”\textsuperscript{18} For Adamson, Desdemona’s fusion of innocence with vital exuberance—materialized in the hand Othello feels as “Hot, hot and moist” (3.4.37)—purifies the meaning of her most seemingly incriminating statements, including the long damning “Lodovico is a proper man” (4.3.33). Regarding the doubts about Desdemona’s honesty that bedevil even feminist critics like Garner (whom he critiques for reading too much into Emilia and Desdemona’s conversation in 4.3), Adamson stakes out what he identifies as an “absolutist” position:

She must be read as having been unwaveringly faithful to the Moor—though we may not be absolutely assured of this until just before her murder—or Iago begins to seem correct in principle when he makes obscene slanders against her, Othello begins to appear justified in murdering her as an unfaithful wife, and the play’s entire structure of meaning collapses like a house built of sand.\textsuperscript{19}

I bracket Adamson’s assumption that an unfaithful wife might well deserve murdering to emphasize his imperative replacement of doubt with faith: although we may not know that Desdemona has been faithful until she acquits herself in the final scene, we have to read her as such anyway. There is otherwise no tragedy. In the decades since, the corollary idea that Desdemona is both a sexual agent and innocent of infidelity has helped most critics, feminist critics included, produce a wife who obviously never cheats on her husband. The hermeneutic mandate is no longer necessary.

Here are several statements of the obvious from some of the most significant modern critics of Othello. In her chapter on the play from 1985’s Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare’s Plays, Carol Thomas Neely argues that Othello needs some “realistic grounding in the facts of sex.”\textsuperscript{20} Othello suffers “contempt for women, disgust at sexuality, terror of cuckoldry, [and] the preference for literal death over metaphorical ‘death,’” whereas Desdemona simply “consecrates herself to [her husband] physically and spiritually.”\textsuperscript{21} In 1992’s Suffocating Mothers, Janet Adelman diagnoses Othello with a “diseased imagination” of women as inherently promiscuous, yet she distinguishes Othello from the earlier Troilus and Cressida by arguing that Desdemona, unlike Cressida, is “innocent not only of the crime Othello imagines, but also of the fantasies that infect him.”\textsuperscript{22} In 2002’s Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism, Ania Loomba remarks that the audience knows Desdemona’s “honesty” as a matter “of course,” and maintains that this knowledge helps tie the play’s Gordian knot of racial and sexual

\textsuperscript{19} Adamson, “Unpinned or Undone?,” 173–4.
\textsuperscript{20} Carol Thomas Neely, Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare’s Play (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 112.
\textsuperscript{21} Neely, Broken Nuptials, 113, 116.
politics: “any sympathy for Othello reinforces the misogynistic sentiments mouthed by some characters, and any sympathy for Desdemona endorses the view that Othello is a ‘gull, a dolt, a devil.’”\textsuperscript{23} Introducing his 2006 Oxford edition of the play, Michael Neill inserts a parenthetical reminder of Desdemona’s honesty as he puzzles over the play’s discourse of occluded monstrosity: \textit{Othello}, he writes, “taunts its audience with the possibility that (despite Desdemona’s fidelity) Iago only discovers what was always there beneath the Moor’s civil manners, advertised by the blackness of his skin—the barbarous and ‘malignant’ alien. . . .”\textsuperscript{24} I take Neill’s nonrestrictive assertion of chastity’s certainty to illustrate what often functions as a structuring paradox in this past 35-odd years of \textit{Othello} criticism: the play casts all truths in doubt, except the truth of Desdemona’s chastity.

This certainty about Desdemona’s chastity—synonymously termed her fidelity, honesty, constancy, and innocence—indeed proves curious for a number of reasons frequently explored in contemporary \textit{Othello} criticism. From its opening line, “Tush, never tell me!” (1.1.1), \textit{Othello} sets in motion dizzying dynamics of revelation and occlusion in which Desdemona’s honesty, like Iago’s, is inextricably bound. (“Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see,” Brabanzio warns the target of his racist fury. “She has deceived her father, and may thee” [1.3.291–2]. Othello sets his “life upon [Desdemona’s] faith” immediately before addressing “Honest Iago” [1.3.293].) If my reader will pardon me more literature review, it is worth demonstrating that these dynamics have themselves become critical commonplaces since their “discovery” in the late 1980s and early 90s. In an essay that first joined feminist and critical race scholarship on the play, Karen Newman argues that these dynamics form a “scopic economy that privileges sight”; they structure the “spectacular opposition of black and white,” and motivate “Othello’s demand for ocular proof of Desdemona’s infidelity.”\textsuperscript{25} Patricia Parker reframes this scopic economy as one of dilation—of opening, especially, the “secret female place to show.”\textsuperscript{26} Michael Neill reads the bed on stage in Act 5 as the “grimly material form” of this deep structural “tension between secrecy and disclosure”—the “hideous” revelation, finally, of the marital consummation scene the play has teased but not shown.\textsuperscript{27} (“This object poisons sight,” Lodovico says of the bodies on the bed. “Let it be hid” [5.2.374–5].) To conclude amid all this grim teasing and upset sight that Desdemona has certainly not had sex with Cassio or anyone other than her husband (or even with her husband, as Neill points out) is to reach a conclusion despite the play’s Iago-like insistence that it will never tell.

This certainty about Desdemona’s chastity is also curious because fugitive honesty cuts a readily familiar figure across the stage of early modernity. Kathryn Schwarz


\textsuperscript{27} Neill, “Introduction” to \textit{Othello}, 135.
reminds us that the “virginal body is one of early modernity’s great escape artists, receding ever farther from proof as technologies of verification advance.”

Laura Gowing has likewise argued that “Bodies rarely furnished reliable testimony of chastity or unchastity. Even pregnancy and childbirth were often impossible to prove.”

Although irreducible to the already-dubious standard of an “intact” hymen, virginity was supposed to evince itself visually, at the moment of its loss, as blood on the wedding sheets. This blood may or may not spot the sheets Desdemona orders Emelia to put on her bed. This blood may or may not be figured, too, by the strawberries on the play’s most notorious, and notoriously convoluted, symbol of loss: the handkerchief. (The strawberries were dyed in the fluid of mummiified “maidens’ hearts” — the hearts of women who, in a possible anticipation of Desdemona’s fate, died, pun intended, with their hymens intact.) Outside the bedroom, virginity was supposed to evince itself in modest deportment and quiet speech; these qualities were frequently regarded as signs of sexual integrity, as “outward, visual manifestations,” in Theodora Jankowski’s words, of inner virtue.

At other times, as we will see below, there was no difference between exterior and interior, signifier and signified: to seem unchaste was to be unchaste. Maidenhood was still further called upon to prove itself through urological and astrological analyses, as well as incredible exams like the one Thomas Middleton and William Rowley imagine in The Changeling—the consumption of a potion that makes the maiden coordinately gape, sneeze, and laugh. (These tests were hardly foolproof, as The Changeling demonstrates when Beatrice-Joanna fakes the symptoms and pays Diaphanta to substitute for her in bed.) Differentiated from virginity by the allowance of a hymen-breaking experience with one’s husband, marital chastity only proved more elusive. As the guarantor of children’s legitimacy and, reflexively, a husband’s proper performance of his watchful office, chastity was the usual subject—especially in the theater—of suspicion and doubt.

In cuckold plot after cuckold plot, audiences and characters witness chastity’s loss in scenes responsive to the desire to see what Iago deems “an essence that’s not seen”.

To be fair, modern critics have not uniformly ignored Othello’s engagement with the epistemological quandary of proving chastity. Reading the play against early modern standards of evidence, for example, Katharine Eisaman Maus rightly observes that


Othello would do better to “accept a degree of uncertainty in his relation to Desdemona.”\textsuperscript{32} Michael Neill, too, excavates the racist logic at work in the play whereby miscegenation signifies as adultery and adultery as miscegenation.\textsuperscript{33} And playwright Paula Vogel has taken the accusation of adultery seriously enough to imagine a Desdemona who enjoys a Tuesday night residency in Bianca’s brothel and has slept with everyone in the camp except Cassio.\textsuperscript{34} Rarely considered, however, is the possibility that, in Shakespeare’s play at least, suspicion of Desdemona is anything more than the product of Iago and Othello’s misogynistic, racist conjuring. (Neill explicitly forecloses this possibility again when he substitutes a racist logic for a homophobic one, describing Iago’s “seduction” of Othello as “the one real adultery of the play.”\textsuperscript{35}) In what follows, I argue that the just response to chastity’s flight from evidence is not further pursuit and arrest. The just response is the relinquishment of chastity as an object of certain, critical knowledge. Shakespeare’s play “knows” as much—that is, Othello invites, confirms, refuses, and generally confounds judgments surrounding Desdemona’s chastity. It does so in the Renaissance as much as today.

My argument to this effect proceeds in three sections. In the first, I strategically draw on a strict but ubiquitous construction of chastity as unimpeachable self-display to quite easily “prove” Desdemona unchaste. I therein aim to demonstrate that modern apologies for Desdemona often separate “seeming” from “being” in order to lay claim to better knowing her. In the second section, I pivot off Neely’s claim that Othello needs education in “the facts of sex” to argue that the play is skeptical about one’s ability to know which acts occasion chastity’s loss. In the third section, I maintain that the assumption of Desdemona’s chastity has choreographed our acrobatic efforts to parse Desdemona’s otherwise plainly contradictory final words. My overarching claim in this essay is not that Desdemona needs defense as an adulteress, although Adamson’s entertainment of imposing the death penalty on an unfaithful wife certainly cues us to the need for this defense. This entertainment provides stark evidence of what Gayle Rubin calls the “fallacy of misplaced scale,” wherein “[s]exual acts are burdened with an excess of significance.”\textsuperscript{36} My claim is that the criteria for knowing change over time and across moral perspectives, and that to deem Desdemona chaste risks a conservative guardianship of an idea and an ideal that Othello rather mercilessly deconstructs.


\textsuperscript{33} Michael Neill, “Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in Othello,” \textit{Shakespeare Quarterly} 40, no. 1 (1989): 407–11. Lara Bovilsky pursues this same logic in her argument about Desdemona’s legibility as a black woman: “As long as female desire is identified with ‘gross’ transgression and female chastity with unmatchable purity, all the possibilities imagined for marriage in Othello are interracial or racially compromising ones.” See \textit{Barbarous Play: Race on the Renaissance Stage} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 64.

\textsuperscript{34} Paula Vogel, \textit{Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief} (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1994).

\textsuperscript{35} Neill, “Unproper Beds,” 400; emphasis added.

Seeming Is Being

The construction of chastity on which I want to strategically draw to “prove” Desdemona unchaste encompasses both sexual action and sexual thought, and it coalesces around female self-display.37 This construction often appears in praise of virtuous women. Edmund Spenser, for example, celebrates his bride Elizabeth Boyle’s chastity as a virtue evidenced by her humble demeanor and mental guardianship; Boyle keeps her gaze “still fastened on the ground,” conscious that any “glaunce awry / . . . may let in a little thought unsownd” (“Epithalamion,” 234, 236–7).38 This construction of chastity also circulates throughout Renaissance marriage manuals and sermons that urge wives, like maidens, to demonstrate their chastity through modest deportment.39 Seeking to balance the traditional Catholic idealization of virginity with the emergent Protestant celebration of marriage and marital sex, Juan Louis Vives is doubtless the most influential early modern advocate of this construction. In his 1524 Education of a Christian Woman, Vives admonishes wives to police their habitus, even more carefully than maidens do, for any sign of dishonesty, including inappropriate dress, speech, and facial expressions. In a discussion of how wives should behave on those hopefully few occasions when they appear in public, he justifies his instructions with a logic that evokes Othello’s preoccupation with reputation:

When she was unmarried, she could have the excuse of ignorance if she heard or said anything obscene without blushing. Now, as a married woman with carnal experience of a man, she will not be exempt from the charge of licentiousness and disgrace if that sort of thing should arise.40

What’s remarkable about this justification is that Vives, unlike critics of Othello, shows almost no concern with the truth behind the charge. What matters for Vives, as he makes plain in a subsequent chapter relevantly titled “On Jealousy,” is the existence of the charge itself: “I warn women often, not to be deceived into thinking that it does not matter whether you actually do something or seem to do something.”41 In Vives’ court of chastity, seeming is being, and the accusation of licentiousness carries the force of a speech act. A wife can thus lose her (reputation for) chastity with merely a blush someone reads the “wrong” way; the blush signifies a knowledge whose possession registers as illicit regardless as to how rightfully it was attained.

37 This construction, and its accompanying jurisprudence, is not the only one in the early modern world, of course. The jurisprudence of defamation provides a relevant alternative in which the accused are sometimes vindicated after challenging their accusers. Lisa Jardine pursues this alternative in “‘Why Should He Call Her a Whore?’: Defamation and Desdemona’s Case,” in Reading Shakespeare Historically (New York: Routledge, 1996), 18–33.
39 For a survey, see Jankowski, Pure Resistance, 75–110.
41 Vives, Education, 231.
Vives further stresses that chastity is a virtue of pure or unadulterated thought. He opens *Education* with a definition of virginity as “integrity of the mind, which extends also to the body, an integrity free of all corruption and contamination.”\(^{42}\) Thought, he writes, is the first line of chastity’s defense: “The mind must be particularly fortified, lest it be defiled in a virgin body, so that all the treasures and beauty of integrity will endure there, firm and unassailable.”\(^{43}\) Marriage does not loosen the cognitive restraints, moreover. The third section of *Education* opens with a chapter entitled “What Thoughts Should Occupy the Mind of a Woman When She Marries.” Only the plural is misleading. A wife’s thoughts must be solely on Genesis 2:24’s “They shall be two in one flesh”:

To fulfill this law and express it manifest in her deeds will be her one thought night and day, conscious that no virtue will be lacking in the one who considers herself to be one with her husband. May she so live that she both plainly appear to be and truly be one with him. On the contrary, she who does not do this will be entirely without virtue.\(^{44}\)

Vives emphasizes again the absolute connection between seeming and being, and the consequent loss of all virtue with any slip in “this” (both thought and action). Today, in much of the world, such strictures flow principally from the pens of minoritized religious fundamentalists, but in the Renaissance they are commonplace. Also commonplace is Vives’ position that all loss of chastity tracks back to an adulteration of thought. As Alexander Niccholes writes in his 1615 *Discourse of Marriage and Wiving*, “True chastity doth not onely consist in keeping the body from uncleanesse, but in withholding the minde from lust.”\(^{45}\) Similarly, Daniel Rogers, in his 1642 *Matrimoniall Honour*, distinguishes four interrelated types of chastity (spirit, prevention, bed, and body), but makes “the center of Chastity . . . the mind.” “If the thoughts bee impure,”

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44 Vives, *Education*, 177. The Chorus of Elizabeth Carey’s *Tragedy of Mariam* (a play to which *Othello* is often compared) follows Vives here when they indict Mariam for adultery. “‘Tis not enough, for one that is a wife / To keep her spotless from an act of ill” (3.3.96–7) The chaste wife must also “bare herself” of “will” to her husband (3.3.99), relinquishing all that will entails—thoughts, desires—to her husband when she joins with him as one flesh. The questions the Chorus asks about Mariam’s willingness to speak her mind rather than Herod’s are rhetorical, posed as if the answers were common sense: “When to their husbands they [wives] themselves do bind, / Do they not wholly give themselves away? / Or give they but their body, and not their mind, / Reserving that, though best, for others’ prey?” (3.3.114–17). It is by no means clear that Carey means the Chorus to speak with final authority. Sohemus has just addressed Mariam as “chaste queen” (3.3.87), and Mariam herself has just declared her “innocence” (3.3.53, 62). Herod’s former wife Doris deems Mariam an adulteress for the altogether different reason that Mariam replaced her: “You in adul’t’ry lived nine year together, / And heaven will never let adult’ry in” (4.8.53–4). The Chorus’s judgment of Mariam is nonetheless damning. Chastity is a virtue of mind and body, both properties ceded to the husband at marriage. Any wife who withholds her mind, even if that mind is “free from thought of ill” (that is, an intent to deceive or commit adultery), “Doth, in a sort, her pureness overthrow” (3.3.126, 129). I quote here from Elizabeth Carey, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, ed. Karen Britland (London: Methuen, 2010).

he explains, “they will betray the body to the eyes, eares, and companie of the uncleane, and Satan will play the Proctor, soone bringing one uncleane person to another.”

Comparing glosses on Desdemona and Iago’s historically troublesome exchange about witty women in 2.1 illustrates how we as critics have come to hold Desdemona to a much less stringent standard of chastity that excuses unseemly show. M. R. Ridley, editor of the 1958 Arden edition of Othello, refers to Desdemona and Iago’s exchange as “one of the most unsatisfactory passages in all of Shakespeare” and “a long piece of cheap backchat.” Ridley speaks for many before him with his wish that the scene had never been written, the hardly subtle assumption being that joking about being a whore is almost as disgraceful as being one. In his 1997 Arden edition, E. A. J. Honigmann queries whether his predecessor’s sour opinion “tell[s] us more about the critics or about Desdemona.” The question is rhetorical, but it is telling that to rescue Desdemona from such old-fashioned judgments Honigmann must also lift her from history: “The purpose of 2.1.100ff, we would say today, is to portray Desdemona as aware of the way of the world.” (If Honigmann’s Desdemona suffers any fault, it is one of mere “[o]verconfidence . . . that reflects an essential innocence.”) Edward Pechter more forthrightly comes to Desdemona’s defense in his 1999 survey of Othello’s critical history. Allowing that the scene seems written to instill doubt about Desdemona’s chastity, Pechter points out that it also “goes out of its way to reassure us” through Desdemona’s remark that she needs distraction from her concerns about her husband’s ship: “I am not merry, but I do beguile / The thing I am by seeming otherwise” (2.1.125–6). Muffling the otherwise eerie echo of Iago’s “I am not what I am” (1.1.65), Pechter concludes that

46 D[aniel] R[ogers], Matrimoniall Honour: or, The Mutuall Crowne and Comforthe of Godly, Loyall, and Chaste Marriage (London, 1642), sig. Z2v. Statements like these are perhaps readily familiar as wedges driven into accusations of loss of chastity through rape: if chastity is a virtue of mental cleanliness, it may well survive the body’s adulteration with the seed of a man other than one’s husband. At the same time, statements like these also admit a porous boundary between mind and body that only makes the body more susceptible to loss. Shakespeare’s Lucrece asks about the extent of her adulteration after Tarquin rapes her: “May my pure mind with the foul act dispense, / My low-declinèd honour to advance?” (1704–5). Yet when her audience of lords assents that her “body’s stain her mind untainted clears” (1710), Lucrece refuses the severance: “‘No, no,’ quoth she, ‘no dame hereafter living / By my excuse shall claim excuse’s giving.’” (1714–15). By stabbing herself, Lucrece not only releases her “soul . . . from the deep unrest / Of that polluted prison where it breathed” (1724–6); she attempts to foreclose any severance of mind and body to which more dishonest women than her could appeal.


49 Honigmann, “Introduction” to Othello, 43; emphasis added.

50 Honigmann, “Introduction” to Othello, 43.

51 Edward Pechter, Othello and Interpretive Traditions (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 72.
all this worry over Desdemona’s virtue amounts to much ado about nothing: “Surely it is not ‘dirty’ to understand sexual banter. A sexual nature doesn’t make you a whore.” Yet the problem remains that unless one is willing to posit what forever and everywhere a whore is, understanding alone very well may. When held to one fairly pervasive Renaissance standard of chastity presumably shared by more than a few in the play’s early seventeenth-century audience and more than a few throughout the play’s history, Desdemona can be regarded as a whore simply for comprehending Iago’s jokes, to say nothing of urging them on.

Iago turns this exacting standard of chastity to his own advantage in his ensuing exchange with Roderigo, whom he instructs in the art of reading Desdemona’s “padd[ing] with the palm of [Cassio’s] hand” (2.1.245–6). Roderigo decriminalizes the gesture as “courtesy” (2.1.247), only to have Iago reenlist it as evidence of both past and future sin: “Lechery, by this hand; an index and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul thoughts. . . . When these mutualities so marshal the way, hard at hand comes the master and main exercise, th’incorporate conclusion” (2.1.248–53). In Iago’s narrative, holding hands provides the front matter for a story (“history”) of illicit thought and action—the “marshal” for the “main exercise,” in the second metaphor. Simultaneously, holding hands provides evidence of what has already happened—the other meaning of “history,” the “conclusion.” Here we find a ready instance of the play’s pervasive investment in the trope of the preposterous, the collapse of in actu and in potentia authorized by no one less than Christ himself. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus holds that “whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hathe committed adulterie with her already in his heart” (5:28). Jesus’s “already” equates “the main exercise” with the thought of the exercise, bracketing the often-mediating issue of whether one intends to act on one’s thoughts. Jesus’s “already” even more preposterously renders the act of adultery a precedent for thought: the paradigmatic man, in this standard so much more often deployed against women, has committed adultery before he looks. Both state and ecclesiastical courts throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were obliged to distinguish intent, act, and desire, but the jurisprudential logic of Matthew’s Jesus and Shakespeare’s Iago (and Roderigo and Othello under Iago’s tutelage) insists on their merciless consonance. Every evidence of illicit thought (a look, a laugh, a blush) is itself evidence of both simultaneous and previous action. There is no foul thought, no slight relaxation of the sensory guard, which is not already an act of adultery. Not long before he works himself into a vengeful fury, Othello implies his foregone conclusion about

52 Pechter, Othello, 71.
53 See Joel Altman, “‘Preposterous Conclusions’: Eros, Enargeia, and Composition in Othello,” in The Improbability of Othello: Rhetorical Anthropology and Shakespearean Selfhood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 183–205; Parker, Shakespeare from the Margins, 51; and Jonathan Gil Harris, Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 182–87. The temporality of the preposterous nullifies any claim that Desdemona would not have the time to cheat on her husband.
54 See Marc Shell, “Individual Act and Intent,” in The End of Kinship: ‘Measure for Measure’: Incest, and the Idea of Universal Siblinghood (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 79–93, for an incisive analysis of how that play exercises this logic and a more merciful alternative: condemning Angelo to death for intending to sleep with Isabella, and then pardoning him because his attempt failed.
Desdemona’s infidelity when he describes her “Devour[ing]” his stories “with a greedy ear” (1.3.149, 148)—letting down her sensory defenses and opening her “appetite” to this man she has yet to marry.

For most modern critics and audience members, this preposterous standard of chastity begs the substitution, in the name of justice, of a more lenient one. Implying that Jesus, Vives, and Iago are simply wrong, we detach action from thought and potential, and find for chastity’s presence or absence on more “solid” grounds. In doing so, however, we necessarily posit, or more often assume, what chastity really is. Furthermore, we do so even though Othello already deconstructs fantasies of physical and mental chastity through its skeptical hyperfocus on the problem of other selves. In Stanley Cavell’s account, which I referenced earlier, the truth Othello finds so intolerable is not that the other (Desdemona) does not exist, but that she does: “Nothing could be more certain to Othello than that Desdemona . . . is flesh and blood; is separate from him; other.”55 Cavell’s Othello knows Desdemona to be innocent. Her fidelity, he argues, is simply a more awful truth—the accusation of infidelity is the general’s response to the fact that Desdemona is “separate from him, outside, beyond command, commanding, her captain’s captain.”56 To claim, as Cavell does, that Desdemona never commits adultery, that the accusation is “insanely false,” nonetheless posits a standard of chastity that decouples thought from action and effectively shortens the extent of Desdemona’s separateness from the “knowing” audience. The claim implies that, despite all her time off stage (not to mention the fact that she is not even a real person), we know her every move—an impossibility that Brabanzio’s ignorance of her elopement underscores. It also implies that unlike every other character in the play, and despite what she says about herself, Desdemona is simply incapable of dissembling. (In this respect she is also, paradoxically, nothing but a stage character, too one-dimensional to deceive.) To do justice to Desdemona’s separateness, I maintain, means recognizing it in action and thought, flesh and mind. It means withholding judgment about her chastity and asking instead about the shifting historical and moral contexts that inform the criteria one would otherwise use to indict or acquit her.

The Facts of Sex

W. D. Adamson’s coupling of sexuality and innocence affords Desdemona the ability to think about sex, and even joke about it, without being unchaste. This uncoupling of thought from action, I have argued, underwrites assertions of Desdemona’s honesty as a matter of course. Critics who uncouple action from thought neutralize Jesus’ claim that every thought is always an afterthought. They also neutralize the force of Othello’s fixation on the question of exactly what act would occasion chastity’s loss. In other words, what act answers to Iago’s metaphors of “the main exercise” and “incorporate conclusion”? Elsewhere I have argued against importing into the study of early modern literature an erotically constraining definition of “sex” as penile-vaginal intercourse.57 This definition constrains our ability to recognize and grant the significance of a wide range of other erotic acts. My titular pun

55 Cavell, Disowning Knowledge, 138.
56 Cavell, Disowning Knowledge, 136.
on Desdemona’s “case” notwithstanding, I argue here against a similar constriction of the “main exercise” and “incorporate conclusion.” By asking us to consider exactly what act both phrases index, Othello repeatedly marks the possible identity of prologue and end. The play thereby renders dubious any pronouncement about who has and has not had sex and with whom.

Nowhere are the facts of sex more inscrutable than in 4.1. Repeating the play’s opening drop of the audience into the discursive dynamics of secrecy and disclosure, this scene opens on Othello and Iago in the middle of a conversation about the facts of adultery:

**Iago:** Will you think so?
**Othello:** Think so, Iago?
**Iago:** What, to kiss in private?
**Othello:** An unauthorized kiss.
**Iago:** Or to be naked with her friend in bed
An hour or more, not meaning any harm?
**Othello:** Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm?
It is hypocrisy against the devil.
They that mean virtuously and yet do so,
The devil their virtue tempts, and they tempt heaven.
**Iago:** If they do nothing, ’tis a venial slip.

(4.1.1–9)

At stake in this conversation that began with a declarative we do not hear—what was Othello thinking? Where is he delimiting, however tenuously, the sexual?—is the definition of an adulterous act. Is a kiss adulterous? What about a private kiss? An unauthorized kiss? Lying naked with one’s “friend” in bed? Lying naked for an hour or more? The same act with criminal intent? What if the friends do not mean any harm? Are they lying to themselves while lying together? Does lying naked in bed count as “do[ing] nothing,” and if so, why is this nothing still a venial sin? These interrogatives of action parallel those of thought one might ask of Vives. Exactly what qualifies as a lustful thought? What is the difference, for instance, between lust and admiration? Entertainment and adultery? Where, precisely, is the line between epistemological purity and impurity? Vives’ totalizing logic of chastity depends as much as Iago’s manipulations do on leaving such questions of fact unanswered; the mind that delimits the sexual must also allow for strategic re-limiting. At the same time, because the evanescence of illicit sex plays handmaiden to its damning ubiquity, the answer to questions about sex and sin need also to appear obvious. To ask about the line is already to have crossed it.

As the exchange continues, the act of adultery becomes only more paradoxically elusive and precise. The handkerchief briefly reenters this factual nebula as the “ocular proof” (3.3.365) Othello seeks and these questions about action unsettle: “he [Cassio] had my handkerchief” (4.1.22). Then the act the handkerchief is supposed to index takes off again. Othello now demands that Iago’s hearsay report of Cassio’s supposed confession clear up the visual mystery:

**Othello:** What hath he said?
**Iago:** Faith, that he did—I know not what he did.
Othello: What, what?

Iago: Lie—

Othello: With her?

Iago: With her, on her, what you will.

Othello: Lie with her? Lie on her? We say “lie on her” when we they belie her? Lie with her? ’Swounds, that’s fulsome! Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief... (4.1.32–6)

What torments Othello now is the grammatical fact that “with” and “on” may index the same act while also being differently indexed to truth and falsehood. The identity of the prepositions with respect to sex is itself riven by the punning difference of the preceding verb “to lie.” Iago’s seemingly dismissive “what you will” clarifies only a fact that he has been manipulating all along: there is no single way of determining what counts as sex, and no way to know if Desdemona has had what at any moment meets the criteria of determination. But Othello does not take the hardly well meant point. Bedeviled by these “lies,” Othello stammers, “Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief,” as question and answer to the facts of sex. He then “falls down into a trance” (4.1.sd), which we may read as his body’s response to the cognitive overload supplied by the now overwhelmingly familiar insufficiency of the evidence to answer the questions of culpability he poses. To his homicidal frustration, neither the handkerchief nor the confession clarifies what exactly Desdemona did against his will.

What makes Iago’s “what you will” even more ironic as a statement of the obvious is that he has already cued Othello to the insufficiency of even the most pornographic ocular proof: “Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on, / Behold her topped” (3.3.400–401)? Iago postures as if such a sight would confirm Desdemona’s infidelity, but he is quick to point out that “it is impossible [Othello] should see this” (3.3.407). Desdemona and Cassio are simply too careful: “Damn them then, / If ever mortal eyes do see them bolster / More than their own” (3.3.403–5). In Katharine Eisaman Maus’s reading, Iago “pretends that the merely practical difficulty of surprising an illicit couple in bed represents a real epistemological limitation.”58 Iago’s use of the word “topped,” which recalls his earlier taunt of “an old black ram / . . . tupping [Brabanzio’s] white ewe,”(1.1.88–9) nevertheless reminds us that the primal scene of sex is already wrapped in metaphor.59 What precisely would Othello behold? “Topped” may index penile-vaginal intercourse, and thereby prove Desdemona’s infidelity through the spectacle of vaginal penetration. Yet “topped” may also index Desdemona’s loss of chastity to a nonpenetrative configuration of bodies—Cassio lying on Desdemona, or with her, but not necessarily in her. And how close would Othello have to be to Desdemona and Cassio to bear sufficient witness to

58 Maus, 118.
59 I use the phrase “primal scene” with a nod to Arthur Little’s superb discussion of fugitive blackness in “‘An essense that’s not seen’: The Primal Scene of Racism in Othello,” Shakespeare Quarterly 44, no. 3 (1993), 304–24.
this topping? He would have to be closer than he is to Iago and Rodrigo later in the same scene, when he misconstrues their conversation about Bianca. He would also have to be closer than Much Ado’s Claudio and Don Pedro are to Hero’s bedchamber. We miss the point of Iago’s mobile army of metaphors if we account them as techniques for manufacturing pornographic evidence of a crime never committed. Their pornographic imprecision points rather to the epistemological caesura between the spoken, the scopic, and the thing-in-itself.

“Nobody, I Myself”

But what of Desdemona’s own self-account? Her claims to honesty? Before we abandon the fantasy of chastity and the evidence of our senses, we should ask how we are to hear her emphatic answers to the charge of “strumpet” and “whore”: “No” and “No” (4.3.85, 89). Critics suspicious of Desdemona’s virtue have heard her testimony as insufficient self-defense of the strumpet in potentia if not in actu. Defenders of her virtue, whether that virtue attains sainthood or remains that of a sexual but innocent mortal, take her denials at face value. Meanwhile, the disputed matter of Bianca’s profession—is she or isn’t she a Venetian cortigiana honesta?—serves as the play’s subplotted reminder of the dangers inherent in not authorizing women’s self-description. Bianca accounts herself “no strumpet” and “honest” (5.1.124) against all charges to the contrary, prompting us to consider how she defines “honest,” and testing our willingness to imagine unmarried female sex and desire outside the figures of misogyny. Similarly, refusing to hear Desdemona’s testimony risks Othello’s own misogynistic deafness. Yet my brief closing argument is that what remains ironically unthinkable—the constant in our constructions of this tragedy as one of false accusation—is a guilt that Desdemona arguably suggests in her own final words.

A response to Emilia’s plea that Desdemona “speak” for herself (5.1.131), these final words, as with so much else she says, have served to both damn and sanctify her:

Emilia: Sweet Desdemona, O sweet mistress, speak!
Desdemona: A guiltless death I die.
Emilia: O, who hath done this deed?
Desdemona: Nobody, I myself. Farewell.
Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell!

(5.2.132–4)


61 For more on Bianca, see Pechter, Othello and Interpretive Traditions, 131–40; and Marianne Novy, Shakespeare and Outsiders (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 108–9.
In her study of elegy, Diane Fuss uses these lines to pattern what she calls the “Desdemona complex” of “women who prove their love and fidelity by using their dying words not merely to forgive their abusive or jealous lovers, but, more often than not, to exculpate them.” Indeed, the assumption that these words prove fidelity, in act if not also in thought, belongs not only to Fuss, but to Garner, Cook, Adamson, and others. Carol Thomas Neely claims, for instance, that “Desdemona’s refusal to blame and hurt Othello is at the heart of her loving virtue.” Desdemona’s effort to condition the collective memory of her husband as “kind” indicates nothing so much as her constancy to the point of death. Joyce Green MacDonald likewise writes that Desdemona “ends by confirming her fidelity and bounty.” These claims troublingly imply that a woman’s virtue depends upon excusing her murderous husband. They also resist hearing equivocation in these final words—any contradiction to her claim that she dies a “guiltless death.”

Without going so far as to accuse Desdemona of lying, for another group of critics Desdemona’s paradoxical “Nobody, I myself” at least hints at a certain measure of complicity in her own demise. While accounting Desdemona an unqualified “truth-teller,” Eamon Grennan wonders whether “I myself” means “my husband,” with the reciprocal pronoun indicating, “the absolute commitment she feels to the sacramental union of marriage.” Harry Berger Jr. hears Desdemona speaking in the discourse of injured merit and unjust desserts: the self-negating fragment, in his words, “edges toward self-accusation,” an acceptance of “responsibility, but not culpability.” Equally “edgy” is Joel Altman’s reading of “myself” as akin to Hamlet’s “that within which passeth show” (Hamlet, 1.2.85)—“something immaterial, interior, unseen,” as opposed to the material “body” or “person.” Altman’s Desdemona acknowledges “her own disruptive potentiality,” the portion of herself “beyond her grasp that has been appropriated, actualized, and given a ‘character’ by her ‘kind Lord.’” Especially instructive vis-à-vis feminism’s supposed inability to broker any ambiguous reading of this paradoxical statement is Kaara Peterson’s opposition of “feminist impulses” to the line’s suggestion that Desdemona is “wrongly accused of sexual betrayal but on some level, still guilty of having an errant female pathology.” All these readings are compelling, but especially striking about each is that they mute a reading of the fragment easily heard if we simply

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63 Neely, Broken Nuptials, 125.
67 Altman, The Improbability of Othello, 283.
68 Altman, The Improbability of Othello, 283.
suspend our certainty that Desdemona was never once guilty of intentionally betraying her husband.

In the play of doppelgängers, Desdemona’s “Nobody, I myself” echoes nothing so much as the self-negating statement of her partner in the discourse of injured merit: Iago’s “I am not what I am.” To allow Iago’s self-negation but deny Desdemona’s only denies her the same capability of duplicity, the same ability to equivocate, which a critic like Garner would note is simply “human.” An alternative reading, one that doesn’t protect Desdemona from the play of the signifier, affords her ability to be guilty, whether in thought or action, and to know it. This alternative reading affords her the rather basic ability to contradict herself—to refuse (“Nobody”) and accept (“I myself”) responsibility for the deed in her dying moment—without specifying what exactly she did and did not do. This alternative reading does not turn Desdemona into the “sweet body” Othello imagines (and Paula Vogel stages) “tasted” by the “general camp, / Pioneers and all” (3.3.350–52). These constructions of Desdemona as a whore imagine chastity as a virtue of bodily, and even more specifically genital integrity, over and against the period location of chastity in body and mind. This reading also does not imply that Desdemona is justly murdered; quite the contrary, the standard of sexual and rhetorical purity to which most critics hold Desdemona does little justice to the play’s pervasive deconstruction of that mutable ideal. If we grant the ability of self-contradiction to Desdemona, her “I myself” simply chafes against her claim that she dies a “guiltless death,” and edges toward an acceptance of culpability—a confession regarding some dishonesty behind the doing of the “deed.”

The tragic charge of Othello is not to “rescue” Desdemona from false accusation, to defend her word as the final, honest word. The charge is to recalibrate our imagination of erotic life in ways justly responsive to the play of the signifier that guarantees honesty’s fugitive status. “I hope my noble lord esteems me honest,” Desdemona pleads with Othello, whose reply turns on the plea’s double syntax: “O, ay—as summer flies are in the shambles / That quicken with every blowing” (4.2.67–9). For Desdemona, there is no way to stop even the word honesty from evoking its opposite. For us as critics, there is likewise no way to establish Desdemona’s chastity except by divorcing her thoughts from her actions, asserting our complete knowledge of both, and denying her the ability to testify otherwise. If Othello “proves” anything about chastity, that thing is only chastity’s unknowability—an unknowability we as might leverage as we respond to the play’s charge to think more capably about the ethics of sex.
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One day, not so long ago, I was teaching *Othello* badly. I posed each problem as if it held an arcane solution known only to me, trapping my students in an itchy tangle of boredom and alarm. I said “I’m really not looking for a particular answer” three or four times, thus establishing that this strategy does not work at all. So I asked whether the play’s ending criticizes the social restrictions imposed on women. Even if I implied that the only credible answer was yes, we could talk about why. A student raised her hand. “Yes,” she said. “Why?” I asked. “Because,” she said, “the fact that Desdemona had sex with Cassio doesn’t give Othello the right to kill her.”

We enjoyed an interval of chaos, during which some students offered corrections both strict and mild while others hastily flipped through the play. Three responses still stand out. The student who seemed most dismayed called on cultural fluency: “Don’t you know the story?” The student who had spoken first cited evidence: “Desdemona admits it before she dies.” And I was startled into silence. In light of the professional tools at my disposal, silence made little sense; it is not only possible but common to read against the grain of self-evident virtue. I could invoke paternal anxiety (it is a wise father that knows his own child); logic (Iago’s mendacity does not confirm Desdemona’s fidelity); decorum (Desdemona spars too glibly with Iago); or proof (one cannot prove a negative). My pause, then, reflected not the far-fetched nature of the proposition, but the aggregate effect of proposition and response. If one knows the story, Desdemona’s statement “A guiltless death I die” matches preconception. If one does not know the story, her statement “I myself” could be a confession. But both conclusions speak the social code that separates faithful from adulterous wives.

Desdemona’s third statement scrambles the code: “Nobody.” “Nobody” is not a social actor, is not a deceived or deluded husband, is not a corrupt or constant wife. “Nobody” is the answer and the avatar of a subject who slips the bonds of knowledge. Bracketed by taxonomic indices, it is the uncanny iteration of between—“dead or alive, neither dead nor alive”—that counters common sense with nonsense. This, for me, is the point of that pedagogical moment: the subject of a judgment held in common cannot be identical with the subject whose process of dying exceeds the grasp of social vocabularies. Certainties shift as mortality stretches manifest change across a space of delay, so that the integral character created by a text or a life recedes into something notional and vague. The familiar subject of quotidian experience shades toward the alien subject of death, but is not yet the reified object of death; interlocution remains possible as the grounds of correspondence erode. “‘Communication’ cannot proceed from one full and intact individual to another. It requires

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individuals whose separate existence in themselves is risked, placed at the limit of death and nothingness,” Georges Bataille writes.² Does this mean that social subjects cannot engage dying persons? Some Shakespearean endings hint that the door stays open, but interrelation requires us to surrender the privilege of postmortality, to shatter the illusion of a collective existence that endures across ephemeral lives. Connections between the living and the dying forfeit assurance to affinity, and allow a confident “we” to be set adrift by a precarious “you and I.”

Entangled Subjects

What does dying have to do with feminism? The violence done to women in the name of rules they neither make nor choose suggests that one answer must be “everything.” In Shakespearean texts, for example, a number of female characters die on the point of contested chastity. We can subject this to rough math, where “rough” means not only approximate but harsh: among female characters who speak at least 50 lines, Lavinia, Lucrece, Desdemona, and Joan la Pucelle comprise about 5 percent of the pool. The death tricks that kill and resurrect Hero, Helena, Imogen, and Hermione—each implicated in suspect chastity—bring that percentage close to 10. Within the subset of female characters who die at all, whether for a while or for good, the math becomes rougher still.

I am less invested in a statistical profile (which is manipulable, as I have just shown) than in that small phrase “for good.” Shifted from an index of permanence to a gauge of profit, the phrase compresses a thorny set of questions about ideology, instrumentality, agency, and desire. For whose good do female characters die? Which institutional priorities orchestrate the careful, awful arithmetic of sacrifice? What purposes and interests do these deaths serve? As a finite event susceptible to retroactive adjudication, death is a useful commodity. In historical terms, it can be argued that Lucretia dies for republicanism and Joan dies for hagiography; in social terms, it can be argued that Lavinia dies for sexually sanitized lineage and Desdemona dies for racially sanitized marriage. These are arguments about the future anterior, about what we know will have happened after each death: Rome will have banished the Tarquins, the French will have acquired a saint, bloodlines will not have been compromised by rape or miscegenation. As arguments that reduce dead women to integers in a coldblooded calculus, they seem profoundly anti-feminist. Yet feminist criticism has been a powerful force in the study of Titus Andronicus, The Rape of Lucrece, 1 Henry VI, and Othello, demonstrating that these female characters are not integers but constellated fractions. None of them tells us only one thing; each of them at once confirms and challenges orthodoxies of sexual value. As such insights imbue emblematic figures with mobile potentialities, they highlight the tension between stasis and change and thereby—in ways I will continue to develop—touch on the difference between the certitudes authorized by death and the equivocality created by dying. Here is one implication of contested chastity: if we establish that no one knows what to make of feminine sexual virtue (what to understand by it, or what to build on it), we target a weak spot in the foundations of oppressive social structures. It is then imaginable, in the

future anterior logic that places consequence before cause, that the good for which these characters die will have been ours.

Such a proposition carries risks of its own, not least the risk of being merely provocative. Yet I suspect there is more to it than that: the momentum of feminist scholarship is deeply entangled with the dynamism of early modern sexual politics. When I began to write about chastity and agency more than a decade ago, I drew on a stunning archive of thought. From Philippa Berry’s description of chastity as “the survival of a quality of feminine autonomy and self-sufficiency which could not be appropriated in the self-serving interests of the masculine subject” to Valerie Traub’s account of chastity as “a cover for erotic activity that, if publicly expressed in repudiation of reproductive ideology, would have invited censure,” from Theodora Jankowski’s case for virginity as “a queer space within the otherwise very restrictive and binary early modern sex/gender system” to Kathleen Coyne Kelly’s definition of virginity as “an abstract idea residing in an anatomical metonymy,” both the virginal body and the chaste subject appear as sites of self-government that defy annexation. The scholars engaged in this enterprise do not succumb to simple inversions; they neither swap containment for subversion nor retrieve mutiny from subsumption. The preeminence of sexual virtue—“a woman hathe no charge to se to, but hir honestee and chastitee”—retains its position, and the precept distilled by Ruth Kelso retains its force: “Let a woman have chastity, she has all. Let her lack chastity and she has nothing.” But the questions of what it means to have, to be, and to seem become infinitely complex.

These questions set up a positive feedback loop, within which feminist methodologies excavate modes of feminine agency that reinforce the project of feminist inquiry. In the

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theoretical models I have cited, chastity can be a weapon, a tool, a mystification, an evasion, a sovereign prerogative, or a communal covenant, active possibilities which resonate not only for early modern social subjects but for us. “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” Audre Lorde famously warns; still, proprietary doubts surround the apparatus in the bedroom and the utensils in the kitchen and the ghosts in the attic, so that the master’s house may never be exclusively or persuasively his. Then, too, Lorde proposes an escape route: “Interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows the I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. This is a difference between the passive be and the active being.” Isn’t this what we do when we both recognize and exercise volition across time, when we both apprehend and achieve action amidst dispassion? I can say “yes” without hesitation but not without unease, an ambivalence rooted in the degree to which chastity and volition remain legible terms.

In an incisive critique of historicist trends, Lena Orlin writes, “Literary historians have so often repeated the mantra that women were enjoined . . . to be chaste, silent, and obedient; have so often described the spatial restrictions on women; and have so often ‘explained’ playtexts in terms taken from the most conservative literatures of their time that the reigning orthodoxy of historiography has become that of patriarchal ideology.” I will come back to this issue of historically constrained replication; for now, I want to turn the question of orthodoxies to a different end. The scholarship to which I have alluded, which includes my own, sustains a vigorous skepticism about cultural mantras, and although skepticism cannot disable seduction, it does confer some powers of resistance. Yet this resistance may tend toward another seduction: the elegant fit between chastity and performativity. In our capable hands, early modern virtue slips neatly under Judith Butler’s familiar rubric, “gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.” If we rush toward that italicized phrase, we might lose track of “tenuously,” just as in the rush toward Lorde’s active being, we might lose track of the “I.”

This is cryptic and curiously difficult to expand. As we elucidate the performative aspects of chastity, do we naturalize its constancy as a performance, a public enterprise that eclipses local practitioners? Even if our angles on patriarchal ideology are not direct but oblique, might they reinforce the precedence of systems over persons? The idea that social structures derive collective stability from functional, transposable subjects has a long history. A basic premise is voiced by the King in All’s Well That Ends Well, who says, “I fill a place, I know’t” (1.2.69); it is repeated by Michel Foucault in Discipline and Punish, who writes, “In discipline, the elements are interchangeable, since each is defined

8 Lorde, “The Master’s Tools,” 111, emphasis in original.
10 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), 140; emphasis in original.
by the place it occupies in a series.”\textsuperscript{12} Durable forms subsist on replaceable constituents, and it therefore seems urgent to insist on the distinction between a particularized “I” and an abstract “we.” How can we—and I trust this is a different sort of “we”—do that when our matter is chastity, or any ideological system that makes the subjects it needs? If a premise can be acted upon only by those upon whom it has acted, how can we extricate the automata from the machine? Orlin proposes a more responsive approach to the archive: “Cumulatively, archival fragments construct a radically different picture of women’s history than that we have gathered from more coherent, culturally motivated narratives.”\textsuperscript{13} I too am inclined to think about fragments, the corporeal fragments of social life that flicker into visibility at moments of articulate dying.

As a Shakespearean crux, chastity reaches its zenith at such moments: in Lucrece’s Augustinian paradox, “‘Though my gross blood be stained with this abuse, / Immaculate and spotless is my mind’” (\textit{The Rape of Lucrece} 1655–6); in Titus’s classical citation as he murders Lavinia, a muddled precedent of virtue preserved and virtue lost (\textit{Titus Andronicus} 5.3.35–46); in York’s scornful, astonished response to Joan, “Now heaven forfend—the holy maid with child?” (\textit{1 Henry VI} 5.6.65); most notoriously, in Desdemona’s final exchange with Emilia:

\textit{Emilia:} Sweet Desdemona, O sweet mistress, speak!
\textit{Desdemona:} A guiltless death I die.
\textit{Emilia:} O, who hath done this deed?
\textit{Desdemona:} Nobody, I myself. Farewell.

(\textit{Othello} 5.2.131–3)

Each locution refutes taxonomy: drastically individuated, nearly but not neatly severed from sociality, these are persons in process who tell too much. By attending to the excess that binds to loss, I hope to explicate the critical and ethical value of transience. I take these scenes as incitements to negative capability, “being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”\textsuperscript{14} Mystery and doubt loosen our possessive grasp on facts when dying (fleetingly, elusively) becomes a communicable process. The erosion of embodied existence exposes gaps—between animation and inertia, between action and passion, between valuable and devalued flesh—which cannot harbor any absolute state. The social performance of an identity, its stylized repetition of acts redoubled within the theatrical performance of a role, becomes at once volatile and unfathomable under the pressures of spectacular mortality. How might occasions when performance falters, fractures, or withdraws beyond discernment enable us to dispossess ourselves of certainty without stripping our subjects of capacity?

I have emphasized the relationship between feminine sexuality and feminist methodology, and it is worth examining the terms on which that relationship is conducted. It can be hard not to know too much, not to delimit and sequester those we value by building

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\textsuperscript{13} Orlin, “A Case for Anecdotalism,” 77.
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what Michel de Certeau calls “scriptural tombs.”15 Here is another implication of contested chastity: it becomes contested if interrogators cannot seize the answers they need, but it remains contested only if we, as belated interlocutors, can relinquish the answers we want. Those answers often speak less to belief in unsullied bodies than to faith in agential subjects, yet such faith, for all its principled complexities, might arrest persons in process. Dying breaches the wall that divides active life from static death, and interposes an illogical concurrence. Our analytic methods, however ethical, are also logical, and tend to sort out vital subjects from lost objects. It is easy to overwrite the space between, the space of a tenuous “I”; it is difficult to inhabit the ambiguities of process if we inscribe our distance from it. “What is perishable is its data; progress is its motto,” de Certeau writes of history, and historical distance might all too easily reduce transient persons to the data points that mark our scholarly advance.16 We worry, as we should, about assertions that we are postfeminist or postracial or postcolonial; I suggest there are costs to being postmortal as well.

Mimetic Limits

From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, the confluence of psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and historicism infused a fractious array of energies into the projects of academic feminists. Given the long arc that passes through Margaret Cavendish, Elizabeth Montagu, and Virginia Woolf, one could scarcely say that Shakespearean feminism exploded onto the scene. But the crossings and conflicts among analytic paradigms brought heightened urgency to the question of how critics approach their subjects, and to the corollary question of what “subject,” in these contexts, might mean. I return from this angle to Orlin’s account of critical mimesis, with its disquieting intimation that feminist inquiry is shaped not by the lives it attempts to reanimate, but by the ideologies to which those lives are bound. In her 1985 essay “The Patriarchal Bard,” Kathleen McLuskie makes a forceful argument about the limits of feminist response. Through readings of Measure for Measure and King Lear, she models the tensile strength of the hinge that joins subjugated characters to circumscribed critics. “Isabella, for all her importance in the play, is similarly defined theatrically by the men around her for the men in the audience,” McLuskie writes of Measure. She extends this predicament to the reader: “Feminist criticism of this play is restricted to exposing its own exclusion from the text. It has no point of entry into it, for the dilemmas of the narrative and the sexuality under discussion are constructed in completely male terms.”17 A similar causality underlies her account of Lear: the depiction of unnatural women—“Goneril’s and Regan’s treatment of their father merely reverses existing patterns of rule and is seen not simply as cruel and selfish but as a fundamental violation of human nature”—leads to a proscription of interpretive moves: “A feminist reading of the text cannot simply assert

16 De Certeau, The Writing of History, 5, emphasis in original.
the countervailing rights of Goneril and Regan, for to do so would simply reverse the emotional structures of the play, associating feminist ideology with atavistic selfishness and the monstrous assertion of individual wills.”¹⁸ Men define Isabella, and readers enter the story on male terms; Goneril and Regan violate human nature, and any defense repeats the violation. In a memorable passage on Lear’s madness, McLuskie writes, “the most stony-hearted feminist could not withhold her pity even though it is called forth at the expense of her resistance to the patriarchal relations which it endorses.”¹⁹ Feminists participate in repressive schemes when they engage the “narrative, theatrical and intellectual pleasures” of Shakespearean plays.²⁰

Valerie Wayne also questions the provenance of our tools, connecting historical conditions to historicist methods: “The risks of appropriative writing were high in the Renaissance when women were enjoined to silence and compliance; they are high now as we write about a silent past that cannot talk back. Approaching the past through dominant discourses only doubles the risk of that appropriation.”²¹ Phyllis Rackin returns to this enmeshment of matter and method: “The historical narratives we choose (or have chosen for us) have consequences for the present and future, and if the story of misogyny and oppression is the only story we tell about the past, we risk a dangerous complacency in the present.”²² The link between description and perpetuation suggests that fantasies of critical distance trap us in a *mise en abyme*. This recalls Louis Althusser’s point about art and ideology; he argues that works of art might “make us ‘perceive’ (but not know) in some sense *from the inside*, by an *internal distance*, the very ideology in which they are held.” Perception is neither abolition nor escape: “The fact that the content of the work of Balzac and Tolstoy is ‘detached’ from their political ideology and in some way makes us ‘see’ it *from the outside*, makes us ‘perceive’ it by a distanciation inside that ideology, presupposes that ideology itself.”²³ Althusser anticipates the trajectories of ideological theory, which often tend toward ever-narrower subjective space: from biopolitics to necropolitics to thanatopolitics, from ideological cynicism to ideological disidentification to Slavoj Žižek’s chilling account of ideological *jouissance*, “the enjoyment which is at work in ideology, in the ideological renunciation itself.”²⁴

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Still, if ideological inscription straitens the paths of action, there are insights that complicate its totalizing power. Through interventions that date at least from the period of intense methodological confluence I previously described, feminist scholarship has uncovered spaces in which feminine subjects perform, revise, arrogate, or manipulate the requisites of custom, cracking the facade of social constraints.25 On the one hand, then, we hazard our efficacy when we locate gendered orthodoxies at the center of our work; on the other hand, efficacy might inhere in doing exactly that. This is not a conflict I feel impelled to resolve. Risk and reward are familiar bedfellows, and if we avoid chancy ground we simply stand still. My interest lies in the link between our agency and that of our early modern subjects, as if we need to know the scope of their actions to assess the quality of our own. What happens to this symbiosis when we witness suspended, disjointed moments of dying, when the demand on us intensifies as its intelligibility slides from our grasp? If we are tempted to refract our endeavors through a constant performative artifact, the fragile threads that hold corporeal persons to social formations remind us that iconicity is a sacrificial scheme.

We make icons through conceptual cryogenics, freezing persons in precise qualitative states and emptying the carapaces of variable intentions, discordant actions, and mutable substance. It is a motivated project, at once proleptic and belated, in which selective ideation constructs for the future a meaning retrojected into the past. Žižek writes, “we are all

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the time ‘rewriting history,’ retroactively giving the elements their symbolic weight by including them in new textures—it is this elaboration which decides retroactively what they ‘will have been.’26 This grammar of the future anterior shapes Augustine’s chapter on Lucretia, which begins with a conclusion: “We maintain that when a woman is violated while her soul admits no consent to the iniquity, but remains inviolably chaste, the sin is not hers, but his who violates her.”27 Stated as a conditional “is,” the principle rests on the absolute “will have been” of Lucretia’s spiritual purity. “What shall we call her? An adulteress, or chaste?” Augustine asks, only to add, “There is no question which she was.” Ventriloquized virtue carries an icon across time, from Livy—“They tell her it is the mind that sins, not the body; and that where purpose has been wanting there is no guilt”—to Ovid—“Her husband and her sire pardoned the deed enforced”—to Shakespeare: “With this they all at once began to say / Her body’s stain her mind untainted clears.”28 And univocality obliterates the connotative power of flesh, reducing the embodied subject to an object buried in the shroud of an emblem.

This is the cost exacted by a postmortal gaze: the construction of stable knowledge requires the erasure of individuated personhood, with its brief and messy vicissitudes of meaning. Yet the cost is also the reward, or we would have ceased to write exemplary catalogues some time ago. We still do write them, and, more often than seems entirely probable, we write them about Shakespearean characters. Desdemona is a staple of the parable industry: Samuel Johnson’s comment on “the soft simplicity of Desdemona, confident of merit, and conscious of innocence” anticipates her current popular image.29 In the management guide Power Plays, the authors write, “her problem is that she will operate only as if the world is good, sticking to her ideals of Christian marriage and love even while Othello is strangling her and she’s in her death throes.”30 The self-help book Will Power! labels her “young and pitifully innocent,” and indexes her under such headings as “trusting too much” and “the silence of the lamb.”31 Harold Bloom’s Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human—which I imagine must be understood as an exemplary catalogue—describes her as “Desdemona, persuasively innocent in the highest of senses.”32 The word “innocent” is inescapable, as if only this one fact need survive. Orlin writes of second-wave feminism, “Here, the female victim has been an object of our scholarly desires.”33 Such desires are limited neither to scholars nor to second-wave feminists; they map a cultural landscape in

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26 Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology, 56.


which the static iconic object is cherished by subjects for whom it answers a demand. Žižek cites opaque feminine meaning to illustrate a gap between demand and desire: “It is this intuition which is behind the ill-famed male chauvinist wisdom that ‘woman is a whore’: woman is a whore because we never really know what she means. . . . In other words, ‘woman is a whore’ is a vulgar version of the unanswerable Freudian question ‘Was will das Weib?’ (‘What does the woman want?’).”34 If what a woman wants can be supplanted by what others want from her, there need be no gap at all.

That prospect is rather grim. It is also antithetical to much feminist scholarship, which has long been preoccupied with feminine capacities and desires. Through such scholarship Desdemona reappears as an agent of choice, whose innocence does not equal ignorance and for whom innocence itself may be active and complex.35 Lucretia reemerges as the double agent whose suicide sets Augustine an impossible conundrum: “That Lucretia so celebrated and lauded slew the innocent, chaste, outraged Lucretia. Pronounce sentence.”36 As fault lines spread across domains of knowledge, the question of what Lucretia means recovers its full intractability: to isolate and arrogate her significature, one must first wrestle with her intentions. Augustine’s twofold Lucretia is also the Lucretia of feminist criticism: the victim “we” desire, and the agent many of us have desired even more. In a 1992 essay, Berry defines Shakespeare’s Lucrece as a conscious player in the advent of republicanism: “Close analysis of her lament reveals Lucrece as the deliberate rather than accidental cause of that historical change which follows her death, and which leads to the expulsion and death of the Tarquins and the establishment of the Roman republic.”37 When we recognize our subjects as actors, desire remains in play, but it cannot simply take an object.

If fixation on feminine victims imposes mimetic limits on our practices, then awareness of feminine agents opens those practices to translative expansion. Before he wrote an exemplary catalogue, Bloom wrote A Map of Misreading, in which he argues that reading “is a belated and all-but-impossible act, and if strong is always a misreading.”38

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34 Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology, 112.
35 See, for example, Emily Bartels’s cogent account of Desdemona’s strategic compliance in “Strategies of Submission: Desdemona, the Duchess, and the Assertion of Desire,” SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900 36, no. 2 (1996): 417–33.
36 Augustine, The City of God, Book 1, Chapter 19.
The eccentric activity of early modern women enables us to misread, with strength and conviction, the centripetal systems that circumscribe their roles. Through a sympathetic mutation, performative modes that undercut historical hierarchies beget analytic modes that cross the grain of historicist orthodoxies. The link between then and now is a Möbius strip, a continuous interconnection with a twist. If we can imagine a Lucrece whose choice of death catalyzes the Roman republic, we can be catalyzed to consequential realizations in our turn. And yet—because my more optimistic conjectures seem always to lead toward “and yet”—catalytic agents increase the rate of reactions, but themselves remain unchanged. This returns to my concern about durable collectives and disposable persons: when we accumulate evidence of feminine volition, do we build a sturdy countercultural structure from ephemerae who should be both more and less than bricks in our wall?

Transient performances resist the consolidation of agency, identity, or social consequence: Lucretia’s mixed messages, like Desdemona’s compound response, do not resolve issues of virtue or intent. Then there is Lavinia, whose attenuated process of dying abrogates knowledge of what she means. Until Titus kills her, she exemplifies the chastity Augustine describes; yet even after Titus kills her, she cannot be abridged to an icon. Titus attempts that unworkable project by invoking an exemplar: “Was it well done of rash Virginius / To slay his daughter with his own right hand / Because she was enforced, stained, and deflowered?” (5.3.36–8). But Lavinia dies on a notorious crux. In sources from Livy to Chaucer, Virginius kills his daughter to prevent rape, and editors fret at the discrepancy. Some are quite stern: “Either the dramatist has got the story wrong or he is failing to convey the idea that Titus has a better case for killing Lavinia than Virginius had for killing his daughter.”

Others unearth accounts that match Shakespeare’s, and impart them with some relief. Still there are two stories, a “before” and an “after,” which divide Lavinia’s death between fixed points as the play displays her dying in continuous time. Before or after: in Augustine’s model it should not matter, because untouched virtue disallows death; in the model extolled by exemplary catalogues it cannot matter, because both threat and act require death. But the enigma of Lavinia’s meaning, of its temporal and conceptual relationship to the redoubled brutality of rape and murder, matters a great deal. This opacity, framed by the fusion of life and death, underscores all that we do not understand about agency as it informs virtue, violence, and consent.


41 The argument that defines suicide as more virtuous than rape is pervasive; see for example Edward Gosynhyll, The prayse of all women (London: Wylyam Myddylton, ca. 1542), sig. Elv; Vives, Instruction of a Christen Woman, 34–37; and Thomas Heywood, Gynaikeion (London: Adam Islip, 1624), 274–84.

Kathryn Schwarz

long time dying before our eyes, and for all our analytic dexterity, we can do no more than
guess how she inhabits the body that suffers such drastic change. As her animate, moribund
flesh finds a terrible energy in dissolution, Lavinia invites us to abandon, for the arc of a
moment, the illusions of common knowledge and integral perpetuity that cement our social
selves. “What places me outside myself, in common with others, is rather the death of the
other, not because one can experience that more than one’s own but exactly for the opposite
reason: because it isn’t possible. In fact, it is this impossibility that we share as the extreme
limit of our experience,” Roberto Esposito writes. This is the cost of shared mortality:
acceptance of a bond that bears no gifts of social privilege, and that bears witness only
to what we cannot know. But if the goal is something other than certitude, if engagement
means something other than annexation, perhaps it becomes possible not to know but to
learn.

Tactical Excess

In his preface to Saint Joan, George Bernard Shaw meditates at some length on 1 Henry VI.
He concludes,

The impression left by it is that the playwright, having begun by an attempt to make Joan a
beautiful and romantic figure, was told by his scandalized company that English patriotism
would never stand a sympathetic representation of a French conqueror of English troops,
and that unless he at once introduced all the old charges against Joan of being a sorceress
and harlot, and assumed her to be guilty of all of them, his play could not be produced.

The friction generated by Shakespeare’s Joan inflects a range of responses to the play.
E. M. W. Tillyard attributes disputed origins to this one figure: “the chief reason why people
have been hostile to Shakespeare’s authorship is the way he treats Joan of Arc.” Coppélia
Kahn describes the character as a pastiche of masculine anxieties: “As virgin prophetess,

Emily L. King, “The Female Muselmann: Desire, Violence, and Spectatorship in Titus Andronicus,”
in Titus Out of Joint: Reading the Fragmented Titus Andronicus, ed. Liberty Stanavage and Paxton
Hehmeyer (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 125–39; Little, Shakespeare Jungle
Fever, 48–57; Cynthia Marshall, The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern
Texts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 106–37; Bethany Packard, “Lavinia as
Coauthor of Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus,” SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900 50,
significance of Women’s Consent in Legal Discourses of Rape and Ravishment and Shakespeare’s
Titus Andronicus,” in Women, Violence, and English Renaissance Literature: Essays Honoring Paul
Jorgensen, ed. Linda Woodbridge and Sharon Beehler (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and
Renaissance Studies, 2003), 1–27.

43 Roberto Esposito, Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community, trans. Timothy Campbell
manny amazon, and seductive courtesan, Joan is a composite portrait of the ways
women are dangerous to men." Gabriele Bernhard Jackson links Joan’s disparate traits
to “the varied ideological potential inherent in the topically relevant figure of the virago,”
concluding, “At no stage is the allocation of value clearcut.” 46 1 Henry VI festoons Joan
with labels: in Act 1 alone, she is a “holy maid,” “an Amazon,” “a witch,” a “high-minded
strumpet,” “Divinest creature,” “Astraea’s daughter,” and “France’s saint.” 48 We might
split the conundrum between English and French perspectives, and let chauvinism reassure
us that the only problem is to choose a side. But taxonomy cannot negate the impact of
contiguous incongruities, and the competing valuations of Act 1 are commandeered
and encapsulated by Joan herself in Act 5. 49 There is little push toward answers in the play;
Talbot’s pun “Pucelle or pucelle” articulates a tension between sexual virtue and sexual
vice that remains unresolved (1.6.85). 50 Within this condensed homonymous space, the
virgin/whore opposition becomes a metonymic relation, shorthand for a representational
world in which the urgent question “which” elicits the useless answer “either or both.”

Ideological jurisdiction is clearly at stake and even at risk, but incongruence does not
mark Joan as a free radical. She instead poses a problem of synchronic excess: interpellated
into too many cultural functions, she is a subject of social disorder because she is subjected
to a palimpsest of social clichés. The profligate agency she exerts in 1 Henry VI fulfills
the terms by which she is defined, forming a kinetic knot around the issue of consent. To
what extent does the play present a feminine actor who writes her own chaotic story, and

46 Kahn, Man’s Estate, 55.
47 Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, “Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare’s Joan of
Arc,” English Literary Renaissance 18, no. 1 (1988): 40–65; 64–65. See also David Bevington, “The
Domineering Female in 1 Henry VI,” Shakespeare Studies 2 (1966): 51–8; Nancy Gutierrez, “Gender
and Value in 1 Henry VI: The Role of Joan de Pucelle,” Theatre Journal 42, no. 2 (1990): 183–93;
42 (1990): 25–35; Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of
Shakespeare’s English Histories (London: Routledge, 1997): 43–64; Marcus, Puzzling Shakespeare,
55–65.
48 1 Henry VI, 1.3.30; 1.3.83; 1.7.6; 1.7.12; 1.8.4; 1.8.4; 1.8.29.
49 The histories of Joan that circulate in early modern England often blur nationalist lines.
Thomas Heywood yokes Joan to his own national heroines in a chapter titled “Of English Viragoes.
And of Joan de Pucl!” (Gynaikeion, 236). Christopher Newstead places Joan in the company of
Even Edward Hall, who calls Joan a “monster,” “wytch,” and “orgayne of the devill,” pauses in
his diatribe to commiserate with France over the “blotte” on her fame (The Union of the two noble
and illustrate famelies of Lancastre and Yorke [London, 1548], fols. Cvii, Cxiii’i). See also Heinrich
Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Female Pre-eminence, trans. Henry Care (London: T. R. and
M. D. for Henry Million, 1670), 66–7; and Alexandre de Pontaymer, A Womans Woorth
(London: John Wolfe, 1599), 12–12v. For modern collections of documents concerning Joan,
see Craig Taylor, Joan of Arc: La Pucelle. Selected Sources Translated and Annotated by Craig Taylor
(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); and Philippe Contamine, Olivier Bouzy, and Xavier
50 For the double meaning of “pucelle” as “a maid” and “a drab, a harlot, a courtesan,” see The
Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “pucelle” (n), 1b, 2. Variations include “pucell,” “pussel,” “puzzel,”
etc. Both meanings were current in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century usage.
to what extent is this the case history of a feminine body onto which a surfeit of meanings has been inscribed? Elaine Scarry’s comments on consent reformulate the question: “active and passive are so mystified in consent that the phenomenon of consent actually calls into question the reality or usefulness of the categories of passive and active.” Scarry describes this as “one of the features of consent that makes it so potentially resonant for feminist theory,” and connects that resonance to the politics of embodiment: “If it is the case that consent is a redistributive site, then it is also appropriate that consent entails an immersion in the body where active and passive are already profoundly confounded. One is forced to discard old patterns of active and passive and emerge with a new set in hand.” Swapping old patterns for new has obvious appeal, but what exactly are the methods, the contours, and the effects of this feminist coup? Shakespeare’s Joan does not provide an answer, but her trial opens up conjectural space.

It is a mock trial at best, which begins with York’s command, “Bring forth that sorceress condemned to burn” (5.6.1). Joan offers successive and incommensurate defenses of her worth. She alleges both noble birth and divine inspiration: “Not one begotten of a shepherd swain, / But issued from the progeny of kings; / Virtuous and holy, chosen from above / By inspiration of celestial grace” (5.6.37–40). She asserts her chastity: “Joan of Arc hath been / A virgin from her tender infancy” (5.6.49–50). She claims to be pregnant with a child that acquires three fathers in 17 lines (5.6.62–78). What exactly is she doing? According to a number of readers, she is falling apart: “By the end of Henry VI, Part I, her shocking military success is explained as the illicit supernatural power of a disorderly woman who has refused to abide by the limits of her natural role.” Yet often the same readers call attention to Joan’s theatrical power, which challenges the masculinist historical project of the play. It might then be useful to view this trial scene not as the foreseeable collapse of a person, but as the explosive finale of a performance.

In her influential essay “Anti-Historians,” Rackin writes, “Talbot, the English champion, and Joan, his French antagonist, speak alternative languages. His language reifies glory, while hers is the language of physical objects.” Rackin makes a nuanced argument about conflicts between matter and spirit, things and names, reproductive facts and patrilineal ideals. Still, the tradition that opposes women to historical grandiloquence tends to feminize literalism in a fairly uncomplicated way. At the end of 1 Henry VI Joan instead confronts the literalism of her enemies, recalling Bloom’s correlation between literal meaning and death: “Death is therefore a kind of literal meaning, or from the standpoint of poetry, literal meaning is a kind of death. Defenses can be said to trope against death, rather in the same sense that tropes can be said to defend against literal

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53 Howard and Rackin, Engendering a Nation, 45. See also Jackson, “Topical Ideology,” 60.
54 For an unexpected convergence on this point, see Howard and Rackin, Engendering a Nation, 54–8; and Bloom, The Invention of the Human, 45–6.
meaning.”56 I would suggest that in the trial scene, Joan mobilizes an active faculty that tropes against death. I have argued elsewhere that she can be understood not as a literalist but as a rhetorician, whose use of meiosis counters historical auxesis.57 I want to press this point further, and consider Joan’s defense as an exercise in hyperbole. Henry Peacham associates hyperbole with “augmenting, diminishing, praysing, and dispraysing of persons and thinges,” a definition that closely anticipates the rhetorical mélange Joan compiles.58 In its inherent contradictions, hyperbole proliferates away from any singular notion of truth; so George Puttenham writes of “the figure which the Greeks call Hiperbole, the Latines Dementiens or the lying figure. I for his immoderate excesse cal him the over reacher . . . or lowd lyar.”59 Joan has been condemned as a loud liar by audiences both onstage and off, but this verdict fails to isolate a meaning. Her final performance presses us to ask how a hyperbolic amalgamation can be sorted into neat iconic parts.

The English hold a strategic advantage, in the sense developed by de Certeau: strategies, de Certeau writes, “are actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power (the property of a proper), elaborate theoretical places (systems and totalizing discourses) capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed.”60 The only mode available to Joan is tactical, and a tactic, by contrast, “is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus . . . This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment.”61 Joan’s torment by her English captors is her process of dying: pragmatically, literally, she has no means available to save her life. She is in durance, her capacity to refuse or consent rapidly approaching the endgame of Scarry’s paradigm: “The patient may even be dead.”62 And yet Joan reaches for rhetorical strategies that affirm her embodied value, citing the ideological gold standards of chastity and procreativity. In her hands, at this moment, they cannot be strategies in de Certeau’s meaning of the term: centered, institutional, and ruthless in their practiced mechanisms of control. Instead chastity and procreativity become tactics, opportunistic assaults on the strategic position from which she will be killed.

So we watch truth-claims morph, not only in content but also in social operation: the most fundamental tenets of masculine control over feminine sexuality become arrows shot in the dark. If for Joan they strike no target—if no sexual value can be proof against the desire for her death—she nonetheless makes the active choice to deploy them. It is arguable, perhaps even obvious, that dying mystifies the relationship between active and passive states. Joan’s process of dying enmeshes mystification with translation, the translation of strategic imperatives into tactical gambles. No bodily condition can be literal in this scene, or rather the serial displacement of bodily conditions renders each potentially true at the instant of its controversy. Virginity, promiscuity, and maternity intermingle

56 Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, 91; emphasis in original.
as counterfactuals, simultaneous imaginative possibilities in the curtailed moment of corporeal life. Joan performs her roles with volition but without efficacy, if we understand efficacy as salvation from death. But this is not the only way to understand efficacy, and as we witness the mutation of truths into tactics, we witness as well a performance of the tenuous, idiosyncratic “I” whose condition of being we comprehend no better than our own. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler writes, “if it is precisely by virtue of one’s relations to others that one is opaque to oneself, and if those relations to others are the venue for one’s ethical responsibility, then it may well follow that it is precisely by virtue of the subject’s opacity to itself that it incurs and sustains some of its most important ethical bonds.” How might we, as feminist scholars, draw on the interplay of opacity and ethics to become tactical about the truths of our subjects, forging methods that refuse to calcify social effects, agential capacities, or distinctions between vitality and loss?

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“Alive and kicking”: this is Ania Loomba and Melissa Sanchez’s assessment of feminism in early modern studies at the current moment. 2015 seems to be a watershed year for revisiting the relevance of feminism in our field. I write this immediately after having edited the Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, Race and as Dympna Callaghan brings her A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare, 2nd ed. to press.¹ This convergence of publication suggests not only the felt need to respond to the perception that feminist early modern studies is on the decline, but also that the salience of feminism for the future should not be taken for granted. Loomba and Sanchez make a powerful case that, in order to remain vital, feminism must adapt to new configurations of politics and knowledge. Inspired by previous “critiques and retheorizations of the categories of women and feminism offered by black, woman-of-color, lesbian, postcolonial, and poststructural feminists” within the US, as well as third world feminists living elsewhere, Loomba and Sanchez advocate holding the “aims and assumptions” of feminism “up to continual scrutiny.” “Part of the continued work of feminists,” they aver, “must be a consideration of methodological, ethical, and theoretical assumptions” because feminism is not only an ongoing achievement but—as Bartolovich puts it in her attempt to shift the rhetoric away from that of a “crisis” in feminism—an “incomplete project.” Feminism’s project remains incomplete because, as Bartolovich says, “the quest for social justice has been paved with bones of the myriad oppressed who . . . never accomplished the goals for which they struggled in their own time,” as well because its preoccupations must shift and change in response to new exigencies and self-reflexive critique. The subtitle of this volume, in particular, announces that feminism can no longer be conceived solely in terms of gender, but must take up a more inclusive, comparative, or “intersectional” method. Indeed, the editors of this volume insist, invoking Robyn Wiegman, that “academic feminism’s encounter with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nationality” is “a critical reason [feminism] continues to exist.”²

Such “encounters” certainly are more robust here than is often the case. Furthermore—and I think these two issues are related—many of the contributors make good on the editors’


hope that they would address issues of method. In light of this hope, my comments focus on the methodological contributions, both explicit and implicit, on offer here. While I find much of interest and much to praise, I dwell on those moments when the contributors’ arguments have particularly productive or potentially unforeseen implications for feminism’s understanding of its unfinished project. Although I point to some strategies that we may want, in the words of the volume’s title, to think about some more, I do not offer my observations in the spirit of critique; rather, in an effort to draw out and advance the insights abundantly on display here, I have focused in the penultimate section on moments that run aslant the authors’ main argumentative point, precisely to draw attention to where further explication or self-reflexivity could be helpful.

I begin with the four concepts that organize the 12 essays included here: histories, methods, bodies, and agency. As is usual when attempting to organize diverse arguments, such rubrics necessarily are limited, for many essays have multiple affinities. Andrea’s “Travelling Bodyes,” the lead essay in the “Bodies” section, is centrally concerned with agency; Schwarz’s “Whose Body?,” the final essay in the “Agency” section, is centrally concerned with corporeality. But the inadequacy of organizational rubrics is not my point. Even if fields, like the ideas that animate them, do not inevitably settle into strictly delineated paradigms or bounded camps, we necessarily rely on such conceptual rubrics as pragmatic tools. I will return to the tension between pragmatic choices and the messiness of scholarly debate later. For now, I simply want to applaud the reconceptualizations of bodies and agency on offer here, as well as the foregrounding of method and the history of feminism as particularly pertinent to the present state and future prospects of our field.

Bodies and agency are obviously familiar rubrics, and with good reason: much archival and conceptual work remains to be done. Agency provides the motivating force of Andrea’s essay, which seeks to reclaim it for women whose voices are silent in the archives. Pursuing the feminist and postcolonial aim of detailing as much as possible of the identities, agency, and “survivance” (survival and resistance) of two “Tartar” women—one likely traded and one likely kidnapped—Andrea adopts the concept of an “unsettling absent presence” that has long motivated feminist scholarship. In so doing, she maps the analytical moves required to confront the “methodological challenge of ‘tracking’ subaltern agency in English discourses of global expansionism as they emerged in the mid-sixteenth century.” Inspired by the ethical critiques proffered by political philosophers, Schwarz and Stockton are intent on a more thorough-going reconceptualization of female agency. Arguing that the “just response” to the unchaste woman is “the relinquishment of chastity as an object of certain, critical knowledge,” Stockton defends the right of women and female characters such as Desdemona to forego chastity. Recasting the appropriate defense of women from the protection of an idealized virtue to the right to live free from violence, he redeployes strict early modern accounts of chastity to “prove” Desdemona unchaste. This queer-inspired defiance of sexual normativity allows him to expose the presumption of women’s knowability, as he deploys queer skepticism about knowledge relations on behalf of a sex-positive feminist ethics.

Stockton’s analysis is in at least one respect anticipated by the undergraduate of Schwarz who proffered the vertigo-inducing interpretation that “the fact that Desdemona had sex with Cassio doesn’t give Othello the right to kill her.” Sex versus death: that is one way to pose the question. A different way is Schwarz’s scrutiny of Desdemona’s
response to the question of who is responsible for her murder: “Nobody.” “Nobody,” says Schwarz, is both “the answer and the avatar of a subject who slips the bonds of knowledge.” At issue here is the “dying subject” who not so much exceeds social norms (as in Stockton’s essay) as “exceeds the grasp of social vocabularies,” thereby receding “into something notional and vague.” Focusing on moments of articulation that occur in the space between the quotidian experience of living and the reifications that death imposes, Schwarz asks: “What does dying have to do with feminism?” “For whose good do female characters die?” And what kind of colloquy is possible between those of us who are (still) alive and those who are in the process of dying? In pursuing these questions, she offers substantive evidence that the attribute of female virtue, hypostatized as it is in the “death of a good woman,” demands the kind of epistemological orientation displayed by Stockton.

History, too, is hardly an unfamiliar concept within feminism or early modern studies. Yet, one of the things I most appreciate about this volume is the extent to which it offers a historical perspective on feminist criticism itself. Kahn and Henderson enact the self-reflexivity that has been a crucial source of revitalization of feminism since the 1980s, as they trace their own academic trajectories and the forces that have altered them. Kahn, who has been exemplary in rethinking her own positions in the face of others’ critiques, explores the contending claims of history and “unhistoricism” in contemporary feminist and queer studies via her “very selective personal mini-history.”3 Henderson’s use of a vacillating temporal frame—juxtaposing “bookending conferences from 1984 and 2014” and various “flashbacks” with the present moment—likewise renders the history of feminist involvements in the academy “visible and pertinent in the present,” not least because of “ongoing and sometimes seemingly retrograde invisibilities that still characterize discourse within universities and beyond.” And in their coauthored essay, Loomba and Sanchez provide an overview of debates within feminism, including its sometimes harmonious, sometimes vexed, relationship to studies of sexuality and race. Their particular innovation is to argue that the history of sexuality and the history of race are not easily brought into conversation because both of these histories are refracted through the experiences and legacies of colonialism and empire.

Beyond these essays in the “Histories” section, other contributions discuss the rich repository to be found in the inheritances of feminism. Most overt are Bartolovich’s brief on behalf of feminist inheritance as an ongoing project and Korda’s laying claim to the archival practices of nineteenth-century feminist historians. Notably, several of the essays reclaim “liberal” or “essentialist” feminists such as Virginia Woolf (Korda) and Julia Kristeva and Linda Bamber (Bartolovich); make common cause with “essentialist” lesbian feminists of color such as Audre Lorde (Schwarz); or pay homage to feminist historians such as Lucy Maynard Salmon (Korda). Others, like Henderson, are unequivocal in their appreciation of those feminist early modernists who came before them. With the 1970s and 80s fading from consciousness, we need more such histories, particularly regarding feminism’s contentious and overlapping interactions with other approaches, to augment the histories that have been

proffered for academic feminism more generally. Such histories not only remind us where we have been, but encourage us to revisit concepts and methods that may have been passed over too quickly in the drive toward new paradigms.

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Many of the essays here speak to enduring feminist concerns, putting tried and true strategies to new use. Women’s domestic labor and the gendering of the “ephemeral” are at stake in Korda’s defense of feminist archival labor. Countering critiques of the new materialist scholarship—disparagingly characterized as the “washing-bill method of research”—Korda demonstrates the historical and interpretative purchase of laundry and laundry bills to Shakespeare and his culture. While exposing the conscious or unconscious gender stigma attached to the critique, the hierarchical division of labor that sustains it, and the historical value in what has been devalued, her strategy is made all the more persuasive by providing what her critics demanded: a theory of material culture, grounded in and derived out of a history of feminist archival practices.

Bartolovich revisits the crucial feminist strategy of training one’s eye on what is missing. By zeroing in on the absence of the Nurse in the final act of Romeo and Juliet, she recenters the Nurse’s comic function at the heart of the tragedy through a materialist analysis that risks the formulation, “speak truth to power.” Like Korda, she takes issue with a group of critics who, she contends, aim to reinsert individualism at the expense of the collective. Arguing that “turning to the ‘individual’ as a response to perceived failures of ‘social’ criticism addresses the wrong problem,” Bartolovich offers this desideratum: “There is no individual outside the social.”

While Schwarz would no doubt agree with this desideratum, her brief on behalf of “individuated personhood” calls on the political philosophy that Bartolovich decries. According to Bartolovich, “From the critique of ‘identity’ politics, we have all learned to appreciate ‘singularity,’ which is everywhere in radical political discourse today.” She responds that “political affirmation of singularity that fails to address the nitty-gritty of solidarity is in danger of morphing into the individualism and atomization of the status quo.” To this, Schwarz might answer that a recognition of singularity and individuated personhood need not be promulgated against alliance and solidarity, but rather return to a reconfigured ethics and politics cognizant of the difficulties of “we.” Whereas Bartolovich maintains that “feminism must return again and again to the problem of how to say ‘we’ in specific historical conditions,” Schwarz argues that “[e]xpressions between the living and the dying forfeit assurance to affinity, and allow a confident ‘we’ to be set adrift by a precarious ‘you and I.’”

The tension between these two perspectives runs throughout Rethinking Feminisms. If Schwarz and Stockton share ambivalence about the possibility of knowledge and thus are less confident in the politics that pertain to such epistemological conditions, Schwarz’s divergence from Bartolovich suggests the extent to which she makes common cause with Halpern’s appreciation of universalism. Seeking to “split the difference between the historicist and universalist camps” (the latter represented by the political theology of Badiou and Žižek), Halpern argues “for dehistoricizing sex—or rather, for historicizing it in a way that reveals a delocalizing, and thus dehistoricizing, tendency within the sexual itself.” Situating his reading of Samson Agonistes in terms
of the “roughly analogous ways” that Milton and Freud activate “the problem of the universal” in regards to sex and nation across distant historical moments and cultures, Halpern argues that Samson’s erotic desire—his “practical exogamy”—aims at “the undoing of national or tribal divisions.” It thus is heralded by Halpern as achieving “the typological prefiguring of the . . . universality of man’s fallen state” in ways that mirror “Freud’s theoretical exogamy.” In both instances, sex becomes “a failed universal,” one that has the positive potential to be “self-aware or self-critical.” Although Halpern attributes to queer theory, feminism, and new historicism hostility to universalist claims, methodologically he seeks to negotiate the tension between the particularism and universalism that, I would argue, persistently have informed feminism and queer theory. And, although the differences among forms of universalism need to be factored into this discussion, I could not agree more that “[t]o historicize sex will therefore involve the difficult task of holding in productive tension these two contradictory impulses.”

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How to “open a site of potentiality,” in José Esteban Muñoz words (cited as an epigraph by Kahn), while not erasing the particularities of gender, race, sexuality, and empire is a hinge upon which many of the essays in Rethinking Feminisms revolve. One of the ways to hone in on the investment in particularity is to track the volume’s aspiration for a more thorough-going intersectionality. In eschewing the practice of reading for gender, or race, or sexuality independently or sequentially, intersectional theory attempts to trace the ways that identity categories (and related oppressions) are constituted by means of one another. Race is sexualized and gendered; gender is racialized and sexualized; and sexuality is gendered and racialized. All of these dynamics are manifest in and contribute to relations of colonialism and empire. At the same time, intersectional theory recognizes that even as identities are co-constitutive, they may also be dissonant, even in contradiction. Few early modernists, as Loomba and Sanchez observe, have addressed the complexities involved: “there remains a tendency to simply assert that these categories intersect, rather than to venture into spaces where they trouble each other.” They draw attention, in particular, to the pervasive absence of direct discussion of methodological difficulties in work that strives to enact an intersectional perspective.

Several of the essays pursue intersectional dynamics by demonstrating the payoff of analyzing gender and race or ethnicity in terms of one another. Andrea offers a successful intersectional reading of gender and ethnicity in her attempt to center gender “at the foundation” of England’s “‘proto-imperial’ project.” Her methodological innovation is to

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4 This claim is belied by the dominant universalizing strand of queer theory that would seek to queer everything. The idiom of “universalizing” was introduced by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her theorization of the “minoritizing” and “universalizing” models of homosexuality in Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); since then, “to queer” has become ever more capacious in its meanings.

5 On negotiating this tension, see my Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).
insist on the “triangulations, rather than the binary oppositions,” that constituted the nascent anglocentric discourse of empire from its emergence in the sixteenth century. Elizabethan policy toward trade often depended on efforts to forge political and economic alliances with one “other” against another “other” (in this case Tartars and Indians), thus complicating the self-other binary that continues to organize many analyses of race, ethnicity, colonialism, and empire.

Marcus’s history of the gendered, racialized, and to some extent sexualized rhetorics of the first quarto and folio of Othello is similarly decisive in its ability to deliver on the promises of intersectionality. Profiting from scholarship that has made Shakespeare’s play a touchstone for understandings of early modern gender, sexuality, race, colonialism, and empire, her textual analysis signals a complete game changer. While her main aim is to make clear how “the editorial imperative to set Shakespeare in the best possible light has continued to haunt textual scholarship on the play” and to place the differences between the quarto and folio of Othello on par with those of the multiple texts of King Lear and Hamlet, she conclusively shows that “Most of the key passages critics have repeatedly cited to define the play’s attitude toward blackness, miscegenation, and sexual pollution derive from the first folio version of the play.” Recognizing that discourses of race and gender, in the words of Lara Bovilsky, “are not fully separable in the early modern period and indeed possess numerous identical features,” her analysis provides a textually material basis for the “shifting calculus of difference” that scholars of race and colonialism have been assiduously documenting for precise places and times. And the results aren’t pretty: “Small wonder that the controversy over quarto and folio Othello has been placed on a back burner. . . . If Shakespeare was the reviser who turned Q into F, then he revised in the direction of racial virulence.”

Focused on traditions of textual criticism, Marcus sees gender and race operating in tandem. Writing about criticism of the same play but bracketing textual issues, Stockton adduces contradictions between gender and sexuality, on the one hand, and race, on the other. Although not particularly motivated by intersectional theory, his analysis shows that the destabilization of some identity categories has, in certain circumstances, been more acceptable than others: “Most critics of Othello now agree that Othello is the murderous victim of an ideological system that naturalizes culturally constructed and incoherent categories of human differentiation. In recent analyses of the play’s spectacularization of racist, Islamophobic, and misogynist fantasies, however, Desdemona’s chastity has ironically served as our constant: our single guarantee in a play that carries both characters and audience to the limits of knowledge.” As I’ve begun to intimate, by approaching the relationship of categories of identity as a problem of knowledge relations, Stockton heightens the epistemological stakes of such contradictions.

In light of these conflicting discourses, the opening exhortation of Kimberly Anne Coles’ reading of the trope of blood in Elizabeth Cary’s Tragedy of Miriam becomes all the more incisive: “Any feminist inquiry must assume that the gravity of political power bears upon the sexed subject, notwithstanding other considerations of subject position. But the way that other categories engage and inflect the position of woman as a social actor and

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subject—and how these fundamentally change what a ‘woman’ is—in many ways defines the inquiry itself.” By recalibrating understandings of race to more closely approximate that of rank (and to separate both from nation), Coles seeks not only to demonstrate the import of early modern humoralism, but to highlight race’s evolution out of discourses of animal husbandry and inherited blood. Having established the importance of blood to race/rank, Coles then returns to gender: “Clearly, the gravity of political power bears upon Mariam as a sexed subject in the play; her husband executes her. But what precisely is interesting . . . is the extent to which this position is ameliorated by other material conditions. . . . Mariam can assume the rights and privileges of men and retain her moral authority because she is—or so the play would have it—inherently superior to her husband.” In other words, according to Cary, “rank, or race, is a more essential constituent of human being than is either sex or sexual identity and identification.”

The methodological prospects of Coles’ argument are twofold. First, although medical philosophies emphasize that the humoral constitution of noble subjects is unstable and must be maintained, “The instabilities of the humoral model do not undermine the political force of the narratives” of noble inheritance. Second, she resists yoking race to nation because “by refusing the attachment we render visible how these qualities are transmitted through the blood. Lineage, nation, and religious identity intertwine because humoral theory underwrites the production of all these ideologies. But privileging one line of ideological production permits us to view its operations more clearly.” Whether one accepts Coles’ causal argument about humoral theory (a line of argument that has been critiqued by many for over-privileging medical conceptions of the body), her proposal that strategically privileging one line of ideological production enables us to see its operations more clearly pushes provocatively against the intersectional injunction to always keep multiple terms in play.

These essays demonstrate the editors’ contention that “there is still much to be gained from a comparative and ‘intersectional’ approach, even as this approach looks markedly different today that it did, say, a decade ago.” In “Feminism and the Burdens of History,” Loomba and Sanchez address even more self-consciously what is to be gained—and not gained—by means of intersectionality. “To think all three analytics together [gender, sexuality, race] continues to present a challenge,” they note, yet doing so is “all the more urgent to a feminist project of drawing on knowledge of the past both as an end in itself and as a means of gaining perspective on the present.” Even as they invoke intersectionality as a worthy goal, however, they propose that “perhaps a comparative, rather than intersectional, analytic may better allow us to conceptualize the multiplicity—and even irreconcilability—of analytic and identitarian categories.” More specifically, they argue that “rather than pursue an intersectional method of analysis that will fully or coherently account for the overlapping and often contradictory racial, sexual,
economic, and gendered identifications—which are themselves shaped by historically and geographically specific situations—feminist critics must embrace rather than avoid the debate and self-critique that shaped the field from the start and has kept it vital for four decades.”

In offering an “alternative,” Loomba and Sanchez are, I believe, suggesting that strategies of comparison might help address three related problems with intersectionality as it is often practiced. First, they draw from Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson who, citing strategies of women of color feminism and queer of color critique, articulate their preference for “comparative analytics rather than descriptions of identity categories.” This statement, as Loomba and Sanchez note, privileges “analytics over identities”; it also privileges comparison as a more deft form of description. Unlike “identities”—which can seem to settle into segmented and cohesive parts—“analytics” emphasizes relationality and the continuing and contingent manufacture of similarities and differences. In the case of Loomba and Sanchez, a comparative analytic is applied to “considering the relationship of gender to sexuality” and “of race and sexuality.” Second, they suggest that a comparative analytic holds the potential to expose the tensions and contradictions that often trouble identity categories—both within categories and across them. Third, they suggest that comparison might enable scholars to resist the ways that intersectional aspirations can settle into a fantasy of comprehensiveness. Here, they draw from an influential discussion by Robyn Wiegman, who argues that intersectionality “calls for scholars in identity studies to offer cogent and full accounts of identity’s inherent multiplicity in ways that can exact specificity about human experience without reproducing exclusion.” It is the demand for fullness in such accounts, Loomba and Sanchez imply, that is problematic, for not only is identity heterogeneous, but collectivities are themselves fractured by differentials of power and value.

These three problems are related and their coarticulation helps to explain the appeal of women of color feminism and queer of color critique, both of which are, in the words of Hong and Ferguson, “fundamentally organized around difference, the difference between and within racialized, gendered, sexualized collectivities” and the effort “to do the vexed work of forging a coalitional politics through these differences.” When Loomba and Sanchez identify one problem as the pervasive assumptions that identity categories “seamlessly intersect or merge” and necessarily “are mutually supportive or analogous,” they remind us that both privilege and oppression can be secured simultaneously, urging scholars to be as attuned to the variety of power differentials that divide minoritized subjects


11 Robyn Wiegman, Object Lessons (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 2. Wiegman, who says that she is not critiquing intersectionality (249), nonetheless argues that intersectional analysis circulates as a primary figure of political completion in US identity knowledges, wherein intersectionality itself becomes anointed as a ‘critical act of political intervention’ (248). Her point is to moderate the force of the aspirational claims made on its behalf. In ways that are relevant to Rethinking Feminism, she explores the tension lodged within intersectional aspirations between particularity and universalism.

as those that link them. And they offer one such indicative instance when they describe the conflicts between certain forms of queer studies, in which “difference and sameness . . . become nothing more than erotic concepts,” and those studies of gender and race that insist on the specificity of material embodiment. A comparative analytic, in other words, does the hard labor of maintaining a sense of contingency, revealing tensions, and refusing the satisfactions of closure.\textsuperscript{13}

In applying friendly pressure to intersectionality as a method, Loomba and Sanchez enact a commitment to precisely the kind of methodological reassessment they call for throughout the volume. And indeed, the warrant for thinking through the unfulfilled promise of intersectionality seems to stem as well from some of the essays in \textit{Rethinking Feminism} which, Loomba and Sanchez contend, “do more than demonstrate a fuller and more inclusive intersectionality, though they certainly strive for such consciousness. Together, the chapters in this volume also allow us to ask: does intersectionality itself assume a certain stability of, and separation between, the categories (the ‘sections’) involved? If gendered, racial, and sexual categories of identity are destabilized by religion, nationalism, material culture, and class structure, then what does it mean to try to bring them together? This recognition of the instability of identity categories, it seems to me, goes to the heart of the issue of intersectional method for early modernists. It is not just identity’s multiplicity but its dynamism—both conceptual and temporal—that is hard to grasp and analyze.\textsuperscript{14} Elsewhere I have hazarded some reasons why it is difficult for early modernists to practice a fully fledged intersectionality, arguing, among other things, that the very trope of “intersections”—which derives from a spatialized rather than temporal epistemology—tends to privilege stasis over mobility. To the degree that intersectionality carries the historical baggage of spatialized epistemologies with it, it may be limited in its capacity to handle the mobile contingencies manifest in early modern formations of race and sexuality.\textsuperscript{15} As Looba and Sanchez make clear, recognition of such limits

\textsuperscript{13} In this respect, Loomba and Sanchez would seem to have common cause with Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, when they say that “intersectionality is best framed as an analytic sensibility . . . conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power” (“Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis,” \textit{Signs} 38, no. 4 [2013]: 785–810; 795).

\textsuperscript{14} The concerns expressed here converge with other recent attempts to deal with the perceived limits of intersectionality. For three very different critiques from within, see Jasbir K. Puar, \textit{Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Jennifer C. Nash, “Re-thinking Intersectionality,” \textit{Feminist Review} 89 (2008): 1–15; and Sandra K. Soto, \textit{Reading Chican@ Like a Queer: The De-Mastery of Desire} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010). For a helpful overview, see also the issue of \textit{Signs} devoted to “Intersectionality: Theorizing Power, Empowering Theory,” \textit{Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society} 38, no. 4 (2013). The critical desire that Wiegman argues undergirds identity knowledges more generally—the hope that “if only we find the right discourse, object of study, or analytic tool, our critical practice will be adequate to the political commitments that inspire it” (\textit{Object Lessons}, 3)—is relevant to this discussion.

Valerie Traub

urges the need to be vigilant in identifying how particular processes—historical, political, conceptual, analytical—can render identity singular and static: when available methods fall short of apprehending the complexity of power’s array, we must return to and refine our methods.

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Loomba and Sanchez “propose that ‘identity’s inherent multiplicity’ becomes particularly striking when gendered, racial, and sexual categories are situated in a temporal frame that precedes modernity.” One of the reasons for this, they go on to clarify, is the effect of empire on gender, sexuality, and race at a time of unprecedented global encounters. Empire, of course, has been a topic of early modern scholarship for over 20 years, not least because Shakespeare has been, as Marcus puts it, “enlisted, perhaps more than any other English writer, as the poet of empire.” Furthermore, attention to early modern global trade, settlement, and diplomacy has made clear how race signifies differently in different geo-political locations—both in the past and the present. What has been less evident in this body of work are the effects of empire on gender and sexuality and the effects of gender and sexuality on empire. Several essays in this volume seek to address such issues through different methods. For instance, a historicist approach to empire is represented by the contributions of Andrea and, to a certain extent, Marcus. The focus in Iyengar and Henderson, however, concerns what we might call the after-effects of empire as they are manifest in the global circulation of Shakespeare in the present day. Their essays present contrasting approaches to universalism and particularism within a global frame. Iyengar’s consideration of “the material and social contexts of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century appropriations of Ophelia” by professional artists are, she maintains, “indices to changing global attitudes toward auto-eroticism and overt sexual display.” Her use of “intermediality” focuses on “how a mutual or collaborative endeavor among performers, readers, viewers, and artists might bring [Ophelia] to life” and allow us to reimagine Gertrude’s relationship to Ophelia as collaborative, “feminist intermedia art.” Despite her rhetorical emphasis on material and social contexts—which, she says, license her to deploy “a strategic or delimited essentialism” regarding gender—her concern is neither global differences nor the poet of empire, but the formal characteristics that are revealed in women artists’ pursuit of “self-actualization, dignity, and the aesthetic.” These qualities, she argues, not only reside “at the center of overlapping circles of what we need to be human,” but direct us toward feminism—and, I would add, an implicit universalism.

The affects circulating between artist, object, and text appear as well in the final section of Henderson’s essay, entitled “Global Shakespeares—Plural,” but here the drive toward universalism is considerably tempered. For Henderson, reading Shakespeare adaptations across the globe requires one to confront profound cultural differences. In the context of intercultural analysis of Shakespeare in performance, she remarks, “questions of cultural ownership arise alongside legitimate concerns about lack of local understanding when a scholarly ‘outsider’ ventures to offer an interpretation.” In light of these concerns, Henderson reverts to “methods of close reading that may now seem to some, like gender itself, old hat,” because such methods “reveal what matters about [a] particular translation and remediation, which constitute its value as an artwork and as a reflection on gender.
within a precise social context that nevertheless resonates widely.” Her reflections on the experience of giving a keynote in Taiwan strike their own resonate chord: while admitting that she may just have been lucky in receiving a positive audience response, she also admits that she “had been careful to resist making totalizing claims or to critique other readings as a conventional method of marking territory.”

The careful methodological treading narrated here might shed light on one reason why few of the contributors responded unequivocally to the editors’ call to address the question: “What are the benefits or limits of intersectional approaches to questions of early modern identity, power, and desire?” Does the silence of some contributors on this issue serve as its own implicit answer? Both the presence and limits of intersectional analysis—as well as analysis of its limits—draw attention to the fact that feminist scholars are still working out and working through the terms of this challenge.

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The fact that categories of identity are multiple, inextricable, mutually constitutive, and dynamic can theoretically refer to various forms of collective identification. Most apparent in this volume is the conjunction of, and tension between, gender and sexuality—or, as it is often posed, feminism and queer studies. The title of Kahn’s essay on “the potential for rapprochement of feminist criticism and queer studies,” is “Family Quarrels”; as such, it harkens back to the terms of earlier methodological contention: that narrated in Lynda Boose’s “The Family in Shakespeare Studies; or—Studies in the Family of Shakespeareans; or, The Politics of Politics,” which anatomized the “quarrels” among feminism, new historicism, and psychoanalysis. Kahn’s aim is to discover “feminist traces in queer critical practice, and vice versa,” and she offers a carefully historicized narrative of conceptual overlaps and divergences. Beyond providing an admirably self-reflexive account of activities in which she was intimately involved, she offers a welcome defense of historicism within queer and feminist work and a critique of the historical applicability of “queer” to what was normative in the early modern period. One might pause, however,

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16 Because of its initial development within race-oriented feminism, intersectionality is often assumed to focus on the relations of race with other identity categories: what might be called “race multiplied by x.” The origins of intersectional method, however, as well as its prior emergence avant la lettre within different racial, ethnic, and national sites are subject to debate. Whereas the term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” University of Chicago Legal Forum (1989): 139–66, some would cite as “founding” documents nineteenth-century abolitionist writings, the Combahee River Collective statement, the writings of Angela Davis, Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Deborah King or, outside the United States, the work of Hazel Carby, Pratibha Parmar, and Valerie Amos. The perceived movement of intersectionality away from race-specific analysis toward sexuality, religion, disability, etc., has drawn both approval (see Nash; and Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall above) and critique; see Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd, “Disappearing Acts: Reclaiming Intersectionality in the Social Sciences in a Post-Black Feminist Era,” Feminist Formations 24, no. 1 (2012): 1–25.

over Kahn’s use of “family resemblances” to describe what could unite feminist and queer studies because critical kinship is presented as something that describes a happier future, but not, it appears, the past. As she narrates the emergence of queer studies: “At its inception, queer criticism was sharply differentiated from feminist criticism by its rejection of identity,” citing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Tendencies* of 1994. What gives me pause is the “sharpness” of this “differentiation,” which, I would argue, is based on a partial view of “feminist criticism” at that moment in time: “Central to the whole endeavor then [the 1970s and 1980s] were the beliefs that gender was a matter of identity,” and that identity was presumed to be stable and coherent. Although Kahn’s intention is to critique that strand of feminism (and she scrupulously narrates her own participation in and prior identification with it), an alternative history would see at least some early modern feminist work and work on sexuality as co-implicated even back then. Whereas gender identity was certainly the dominant preoccupation of feminist Shakespeareans throughout the 1980s, by the latter part of the decade some feminist Shakespeareans, variously influenced by poststructuralism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Foucauldian genealogy, cultural materialism, and sex-positive feminism, were pursuing projects focused on the contradictions of identity. By 1990, they were publishing essays that sought to reconcile the unfixedness of identity (including the destabilizations of erotic desire and the apparent absence of early modern sexual identities) with feminist investments in power and gender hierarchies. And they were doing so before “queer” became a term of art.

My point in raising this slightly earlier chronology is not so much to contest or “correct” Kahn’s narrative. As I’ve said, we need more such histories, in part because, due to our different locations within them, the stories they tell will not agree in all particulars. Rather, I want to suggest that even in scholarship committed to self-critique and to advancing


19 Kahn does note that “Catherine Belsey’s critique of the unified subject in her 1985 book may be seen as anticipating” queer critiques of identity; see Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985).

20 After titling a section of “Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism, Feminism, and Marxist Humanism,” *New Literary History* 21, no. 3 (1990): 471–93, with the rubric “Feminisms, Sexualities, and Gender Critique,” for instance, Jonathan Dollimore provides “a preliminary word about the cumbersome subheading to this section. Its categories, as well as my pluralizing of each, are meant to indicate not distinct areas of inquiry, but ones that overlap and intersect. I truly believe that some of the most illuminating discussions of gender and sexuality are at the points of connection and controversy between these areas,” 472–3. See also Jonathan Dollimore, “Subjectivity, Sexuality, and Transgression: The Jacobean Connection,” *Renaissance Drama* 17 (1986): 53–81, and Valerie Traub, “Desire and the Differences It Makes,” in *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Valerie Wayne (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 81–114.

21 This raises the larger issue of how the field formation of “queer” has succeeded in eliding prior work on sexuality (gay, lesbian, psychoanalytic, historical) in its own narrative of succession.
mutually beneficial dialogue, and even in scholarship that has a strong awareness of the messiness of history, there can be a tendency to rely on an understanding of fields as if they are separate, bounded, and internally coherent. As my own contribution to “rethinking feminism,” I want to reexamine this boundedness in a way that speaks directly to Kahn’s own desire for “feminist critics and queer critics” to query the utility of “those very labels.”

I do so with the belief that Kahn’s desire opens onto the larger project of Rethinking Feminism: a mindfulness regarding how scholars construe field formations such as gender studies, sexuality studies, and studies of race—as well as the relations among them. Loomba and Sanchez, for instance, note that the implicit construction of field boundaries can impoverish our understanding of key concepts. Describing the way early modernists have engaged with the way “ideologies of sexual desire . . . ideal femininity, marriage, beauty, the body, family, and coupledom were deeply inflected and reshaped by travel writing, cross-cultural contact, the burgeoning slave trade,” they assert that “it is only by subscribing to the bifurcation between gender studies and sexuality studies . . . that the scholarship on the organic connections between gender and race . . . can be understood as being about gender but not about sexuality.”22 Similarly, they point out that “a good deal of early modern work on race has also been queer and feminist—it has just not necessarily been received as such.”

Given this volume’s emphasis on feminist histories and the ways concepts and categories function and fields develop and interact, I would suggest that an aspect of feminist methods that we might collectively scrutinize is the difficulty of maintaining an intersectional perspective at the levels of scholarly identification, citation, and critical assessment.23 In particular, I would point to the way that terminology, labels, binary syntax, and citational practices can unintentionally stabilize concepts, approaches, and fields that are mobile, dialogic, and internally fractured. This tendency is evident in statements such as “queer critics charge that . . .” while “feminists argued back that . . .”—a formulation that implies that feminist and queer studies (and scholars) are distinct. Similarly, reference to a given field’s “emergence” and “succession,” and even the use of concepts of “encounter” and “tension” to describe relations between them, can have a way of staging an oppositional debate between two seemingly homogenous and static entities. Such language, I’m beginning to suspect, fosters an implicit logic of field formation that occludes overlaps and influences between fields as well as differences within them.

This logic of field formation becomes particularly noticeable when narratives point to perceived “shifts” in scholarly preoccupations. Although I agree with Stockton that “there is no way to narrate critical shifts without giving some arguments short or no shrift,” I think we (and I include myself in this) could more deliberately resist taking recourse in the spatial delineation of bounded fields or the temporal emplotment of successive “waves.”24 If the former narrative inadvertently imposes stasis and erects

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22 Emphasis mine.

23 It is helpful to recall Crenshaw’s argument in “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” Stanford Law Review 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99, that identity groups might better be thought of as coalitions and that one problem with identity politics is that it elides intra-group difference.

24 Witness Daniel Juan Gil’s description of “three waves in queer studies of Renaissance literature” summarized by Kahn.
boundaries, the latter narrative not only establishes winners and losers, but implies that scholarship is always progressively moving toward increasing sophistication. What is lost in such narratives is resistance to certain “waves”—a compelling example of which is evident in Kahn’s astute identification of the attachment to historicism within a purportedly “unhistorical” project.

Implicated in this problem is the status of the “representative” scholar or work. Clare Hemmings has argued that the apparatus of scholarly citation is a “key technique” for securing feminist narratives of its own past. In light of this broader feminist interest in a “political grammar” of which citation is a crucial tactic, I would suggest that certain citational practices tend to erect lines around scholars’ work that flatten their contributions.

For instance, it is fairly common for a feminist working on race to be included within a footnote on race, but not on feminism, and for a feminist known to be lesbian to be described as queer but not feminist. In such cases, an intersectional practice remains elusive, not in the exposition of one’s analysis, but in the scholarly apparatuses that undergird it. And this, I suggest, runs counter to efforts, such as those on display throughout this volume, to acknowledge overlap and convergence and to foster cross-fertilization and dialogue.

On a pragmatic level, such citational practices are as understandable as they are conventional: we all have to navigate between the limits of what we can cite and the need to represent accurately the nuances and complexities of any given field. But because conventional practices encourage quick reference to substitute for descriptions of scholars’ complex intellectual investments, our understanding of scholarship and the larger fields in which it is located can become reified over time. For this reason, even of work that is comprehensive in its citational apparatus—as is often the case in this volume—we might want to direct a few questions. How, for instance, might Stockton’s assiduous mapping of 35 years of debates about Othello and Desdemona’s erotic desires—from which I learned a great deal—look different if it factored in the changing historical conditions of feminist thought? To raise these questions is not to critique any scholar’s integrity, responsibility, or rigor. My point, rather, is that just as the solution to partial histories is not to be found in the gesture of correction, the solution to the political grammar of citation is not to be found in providing more comprehensive lists of references.

If citation enjoins implicit taxonomic imperatives that carry implications for how the lines separating fields are drawn, feminism is conceptualized, and its histories narrated, then citational practices would benefit from some of the scrutiny we more typically bring to expository arguments. Here, by way of an opening, are some broad questions to consider: How do the citational choices that we all make shape, challenge, and limit our representations of fields and their histories? What practices might we devise that honor the complexity of individual scholarly investments and achievements? To what extent is it the responsibility

25 Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 20. Hemmings argues that citation “is the primary technique through which people and approaches are assigned an era, positioned as pivotal to key shifts in theoretical direction, or written out of the past or present.” 20.

26 Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 1. Hemmings also argues that citational practices are an affective technology insofar as they exclude and marginalize some scholars while creating intellectual heroes of others. Her attempt to experiment “with how we might tell stories differently rather than telling different stories,” 16, is pertinent here.
of the critic, bent on making a particular argument, to provide contextualization of the historical conditions of her interlocutors’ thought? And how can we do so within the market exigencies of contemporary academic publishing, with its emphasis on word limits and brief endnotes?

One way to indicate the historical contingency of thought and the porousness of fields is to signal exceptions to dominant trends. For instance, when discussing what they see as the increasing separation of feminist and queer studies, Loomba and Sanchez footnote four “important exceptions” of early modern work that has “situated itself as both feminist and queer.” One might push further by asking how the exception has and has not pressured the norm, and whether it offers an “epistemological challenge” to the narrative being proffered. Another strategy attuned to the complexity of theoretical investments is to acknowledge both what unites and what separates a given group of critics, as Schwarz does in her genealogy of criticism on chastity. A third strategy is to differentiate, as Loomba and Sanchez do, between the proffering of readings and explicit methodological debate: “And while some recent studies of women and sexuality in the early modern period bring together feminist and queer methods of reading in practice, they tend not to engage directly in the direct methodological debates and theoretical confrontations that occupied earlier scholars.” Such subtle discriminations helpfully articulate the specific stakes of scholars’ work.

Instructive in this regard is the editors’ description of Stockton’s essay. After noting that debates between feminism and queer theory “are far from settled,” Loomba and Sanchez point to the challenge Stockton poses to “accepted definitions of ‘feminist’ aims and perspectives.” Readers thinking metacritically about the contingencies of field formation might ask: which “accepted definitions” and accepted by whom? Stockton’s exposure of the “dogged moral conservatism surrounding female sexuality” which “demands not only that tragic women be chaste women, but also that female sexuality be fully apprehensible by the critical gaze” is, after all, a core feminist concern. Including Stockton’s essay in Rethinking Feminism is Loomba and Sanchez’s implicit answer to those questions; their posing of the challenge his essay proffers is clearly meant to prod feminism in that direction. Henderson’s autobiographical musings, I suggest, offer a desideratum and some concrete tactics that can help guide the way. We need, Henderson argues, to “keep vital in our projects and professions” the “gendered experiences and events, plural and fragmented” that motivate us. More specifically, “hailing an author’s writings as ‘female,’ ‘homosexual,’ or even ‘queer’ does far less to disrupt normative hierarchies than does pursuing with care which particular discursive conventions and departures such an author might perform in a given time and place.” Whereas we witness many astute narrations of (early modernist) feminist critical histories in this volume, we might pay even more attention to such “particular discursive conventions and departures” in order to keep the analytical categories that inform our knowledge production supple, agile, and responsive to our own historicity.

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28 Emphasis mine.
When Henderson lauds Ann Rosalind Jones and Nancy Vickers for “demonstrating what early modern studies had to offer the mainstream and even the theoretical ‘cutting edge’ of contemporary feminist criticism,” she invokes an aspiration articulated by the editors of *Rethinking Feminism* when they claim that this volume “demonstrates how studies of early modern literature, history, and culture can contribute to a rethinking of feminist aims, methods and objects of study.” Given the historical consciousness of this collection, we might well ask: what has changed in the years since 1984 in the terms by which such a contribution can be measured? Henderson describes her feminist pride in Jones and Vickers as stemming from their dedication to “historical specificity, subtle reading and distance as a means to complicate the ways we were talking about difference in the contemporary frame.” While these are still critical skills to admire, the center of gravity for today’s standards has shifted, in Loomba and Sanchez’s words, toward the “conviction that early modern studies must be in dialogue with, and indeed contribute to, larger theoretical and political debates about gender, race, and sexuality.”

This is an ambitious but by no means uncommon critical claim, familiar to all who engage in forms of political critique. But to what extent do these essays make good on it? They do so in a number of ways, but a bit of culling is required to see precisely how. Individual instances provide glimmers of possible criteria. First and most broadly, the contributors engage with the theories and methods that circulate more generally in the humanities, from intermediality to ethics. Second and more specifically, Loomba and Sanchez assert that the contributors “show how a consciousness of the complexity of the past allows us to rethink the genealogies and historical stakes of current scholarly norms and debates,” pointing to how Andrea and Schwarz’s demonstration of “the centrality of gender to seemingly neutral economic and political histories . . . affirm[s] feminism’s continued value to scholarly inquiry that would seem not to be primarily ‘about’ women or gender.”

Picking up on their invocation of genealogy, we might say, third, that the use-value of *historicist* work on gender, race, and sexuality is that we can catch modern formulations in their moment of inception, when their terms are still being worked out. Halpern implies as much when he affirms on the basis of Milton “that the universalizing impulse is not in all circumstances a reactionary or benighted one, and that a dehistoricized—that is to say, a delocalized—sexuality also has its legitimate claims to make.” Although she is motivated more by historicist particularity, Coles enacts a similar position when she points to how “a political construct is naturalized in its fantasy.” Such moments are provocations to comparison: “if race is rewritten and redeployed for occasion . . . then each instance where the fiction is produced has value both in terms of what it conveys about its cultural moment and what it predicts about the strategies of production for other occasions.” Loomba and Sanchez likewise maintain that “early modern literature and history show us that culture and religion are one of the earlier and constant boundaries of difference, often visible precisely when they are supposedly excluded.” Henderson is perhaps the most forthcoming about what the concept of gender can do for other fields; in her story of a conference on postcolonial, performance, and Shakespeare studies, “multiple categories of difference were productively colliding” and “[g]ender was helping to complicate tendencies toward arguments rooted in medium specificity or essentialist notions of national or regional identity.” Rather than hinging relevance solely on the lessons of historical alterity, these
scholars hinge it, to cite Loomba and Sanchez, on the “historical stakes of current scholarly norms and debates.”

There is one additional idea that gestures toward something at which early modernists, who regularly train their eye on the gap between what is and what may have been, may be particularly adept. When Bartolovich speculates about the missing Nurse in _Romeo and Juliet_ that she has “gone off to her ‘gossips’ to plot revolution while the men in the last scene are comparing the size of their monuments,” she intimates that the incomplete project of feminism depends on taking imaginative leaps. When Korda demonstrates that “twenty-first-century feminist scholars might draw inspiration from” the “heterodox archives” of their forebears, she specifies imagination as a critical and political resource. When Henderson insists on integrating into feminist practice the politics of the contingent academic labor force, she asks those of us in positions of comparative privilege to imagine in contingent faculty our own prior selves and immediate forebears: “What ‘out’ feminists were, and were experiencing, in terms of academic power structures in the 1980s and early 90s, contingent faculty are, and are experiencing, today.”

With Henderson’s exhortation regarding “the consequentiality and the ongoing urgency of gendered analysis” ringing in my ear, I end by asking: What, dear (feminist) reader, do these essays make you imagine? With what sense of urgency do they speak to your own attachment to feminism? What do they make you rethink? And what will they inspire you to do?


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