



**Mrs Shakespeare: Muse, Mother, Matriarch, Madonna, Whore,
Writer, Woman, Wife - Recovering a Lost Life**

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**MRS. SHAKESPEARE: MUSE, MOTHER, MATRIARCH, MADONNA,
WHORE, WRITER, WOMAN, WIFE—RECOVERING A LOST LIFE**



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**SCHOOL OF ARTS
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ABSTRACT

MRS. SHAKESPEARE: MUSE, MOTHER, MATRIARCH, MADONNA, WHORE, WRITER, WOMAN, WIFE—RECOVERING A LOST LIFE

What if an extraordinarily gifted woman, of humble birth, were born in Elizabethan England and circumstances conspired to give her rare access to a world of privilege and the opportunity to learn how to read and write; how might such a clever woman have worked the system to her advantage? The absence of information about her life provides a space for speculation about Anne Hathaway.

The methodology of this dissertation includes elements of traditional scholarship in chapters and footnotes relating to theory and historical evidence, interspersed with a fictocritical narrative, allowing the inversion of modes and stylistic features of discourse considered feminine with modes of discourse long associated with the masculine. The alternating academic chapters explore the literature and particularly the sonnets, to address the central issue raised by the narrative: Why select a female candidate as the “real” writer of Shakespeare’s works? And why Anne Hathaway? Readers are invited to adopt a willing suspension of disbelief and for a brief time embrace the contrary notion that Anne Hathaway wrote the work attributed to her husband as they consider her story and the supporting theoretical arguments.

The content of the scholarly chapters is objective, logical, authoritative—
“hypermasculine”—while at the same time they are written in a style coded as feminine

with non-linear diversions that explore a multitude of issues, incorporating sudden changes in direction and, at times, conflicting positions and the use of personal pronouns. The narrative chapters blur the distinctions between the importance of public and private talk in an approach coded as feminine—though they are written in a linear style, coded masculine—in order to explain how Anne Hathaway was able to acquire the necessary skills, education and experience to write as she did.

Although this study risks alienating (a) traditionalists, including documentary historians who believe that you must be able to prove Shakespeare didn't write Shakespeare—using historical documentation; (b) feminists and advocates of cultural studies, who in recent years have successfully fired a few canons, including Shakespeare's, because they were written by misogynistic dead white males; (c) Maya Angelou, who announced in 1985, "I know that William Shakespeare was a black woman"; (d) heretics who believe it was Oxford/Bacon/Marlowe or one of more than sixty various combinations of individuals who are purported to have written the works attributed to Shakespeare; (e) queer theorists who might fairly argue that a theory of female authorship is just one more attempt to deflect attention from the obvious—Shakespeare was either gay or bisexual; (f) postmodernists, who, like Barthes, don't think it matters one way or the other who wrote it—or like Foucault, believe that the focus of inquiry should be on the writing and what it reveals about the power/knowledge system within a particular historical era and the resulting sexist, racist and imperialistic practices in place—or like Kristeva, would argue that the attempt to transform the world through a narrative blinds us to the void we embrace; (g) countless scholars who have built their reputations and livelihoods on their

study of the lad from Stratford; (h) bardolators who fetishize the iconic significance of *William Shakespeare*; (i) and institutions that have a financial interest in the authorship question, such as the township of Stratford-on-Avon, which enjoys a bustling tourist trade as the birthplace of England's most famous literary son—it should be pointed out that the tension existing between these divergent structures of thought and the human imagination that fosters new forms of life and growth is nothing new. In order to keep alive the paradoxes that characterize creative life, we can pay tribute to the value of systems that provide us with ways of thinking, while at the same time embracing those critical moments when we do not grow unless we depart from the very comfort zone those systems provide. Recent experiences in—for example—the reconstruction of conquered countries reveals that it takes a lot more than analysis or linear thinking to win the hearts, minds and inspiration of people who are involved in making such projects come to successful fruition.

In 1978 Judith Fetterley argued that “the first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader,” and she urges readers to enter “an old text from a new critical direction” (*The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, 1978, xxii). This work goes one step further—*authorship* becomes the text and the focus of a revisionary re-reading of the Shakespeare canon.

Feminist criticism began as resistance to a patriarchal heritage that excluded the feminine voice. For women, one of the advantages of being outside the power structure is the ability to look around and see the “other” marginalized members of the community

camped outside the fortress of power/knowledge—a view obscured to the power elite by the very walls they built to exclude gender, classes, religions, races, nationalities and individuals deemed deviant due to their perceived sexual preferences.

This dissertation examines the relationship between the historical silencing of women's voices and recent feminist-inspired efforts to discover and, in some cases, re-appropriate the work of lost and forgotten women writers.

At the same time women, because of their proximity to power—through fathers, brothers, husbands, sons or lovers—have been in a unique situation to influence the patriarchy, an advantage denied to other minorities. However, this privileged position also risks blinding women to the needs of these same minorities, as can be seen in early feminist writing which focused unreflectively on the needs of women—excluding issues of class, race and sexual orientation.

The narrow scope in this study, which is largely limited to the consideration of feminine authorship, is both a conscious choice and a necessary strategy for the specific purposes of the hypothesis proposed herein. At the same time, readers and like-minded scholars are invited to appropriate the strategies and tactics outlined here in order to create their own alternate theories that—in a non-hierarchical brave new world such as cyberspace—should eventually be able to co-exist without fear of paradox.

The story of Anne Hathaway provides a neutral playground where opposing ideologies can practice playing together instead of perpetually attempting to annihilate one another. Combined with laughter, learning to embrace a contrary notion can ease our passage between the Scylla of a moribund academy and the Charybdis of academic anarchy.

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The incomparable librarians and gracious surroundings at both the Huntington and the Bodleian libraries made my brief stays there as a reader memorable and happy. Henry M. Yapple, library director at the Penrose Memorial Library at Whitman College shared with me the rare books from the Morgan collection concerning the Baconian authorship theory. Thanks also to Carl Peterson, head of Special Collections and university archivist at the Colgate University Library for granting me permission to use the portrait of Shakespeare's consort that was found in a copy of the Shakespeare Third Folio of 1644 (the second issue), and to George Friend for providing me with a copy of his article about this picture, "A Possible Portrait of Anne Hathaway?"

Although I was initially unable to gain entrance to the Folger Shakespeare Library reading room in Washington, D.C.—the library officials suggesting that I be content with a microfiche copy of the journal kept by Anne Cornwallis—they did kindly relent in the

end, allowing me to examine V.a. 89, under close supervision, for an entire afternoon on a hot August day in the summer of 2000. I appreciated this opportunity.

I thank Dr Nigel Krauth, School of Arts, Griffith University, for his patient support, insightful editing and my lucky stars for the good fortune of having him as a supervisor for this project.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr David Bullock who, as the chair of my department at Walla Walla College, arranged for me to have a summer study-leave during which time I was able to complete the bulk of the writing and research contained in this work. I also wish to thank Dr Helen Zolber for agreeing to serve as my local supervisor for this project and Lois Marie Ortner for her painstaking copy-editing of the works cited.

Although the vicissitudes of life and heavy teaching loads have interfered with the completion of this dissertation until now, they have also enriched my life with experiences that in turn inform my thinking and writing. Both as a contract teacher at Griffith University and as an assistant professor at Walla Walla College, I have had the opportunity to interact with professors, colleagues and students in the stimulating atmosphere of the academy, a place conducive to the vigorous exchange of ideas. I consider it a privilege to have been able to participate in these explorations with some of my favorite people including Nigel Krauth, Pat Wise, Grahame Griffin, Chris Berry, Glenda Guest, Deborah Holmes, David and Anne Bullock, and many others.

To the countless scholars and writers—orthodox and otherwise—upon whose work I build my own, I owe much. Samuel Schoenbaum, Katherine Duncan-Jones, Helen Vendler (goddess of the sonnets), Marjorie Garber, Peter Elbow, Ann Thompson, Sasha Roberts, Joanna Russ, Candace Pert, Roger Stritmatter, Alan Nelson and Charlton Ogburn must be mentioned specifically, although they do not necessarily endorse the Hathaway authorship, having not had the opportunity to read this dissertation.

Even though they are a quarrelsome bunch, I confess a certain affection and affinity for the folks who balk at bardolotry whether they be Oxfordians, Baconians, Marlovians or Groupists. The annual Edward de Vere Studies Conference convened by Dr Daniel Wright at Concordia University in Portland Oregon provides the venue for a gathering of Oxfordian unbelievers, some of whom were open to considering the Hathaway Heresy when I presented a paper there in April 2000. Thank you all for leaving me untarred and without feathers.

I must also pay tribute to my constant canine companions. They have proven to be this woman's best friends—Chaucer, Milton, and Penelope, dissertation dogs extraordinaire.

To my dear sister Marti, who generously lent me her home as a research sanctuary, I wish to express my deep appreciation and love.

My father continues to inspire me, through his own example, to challenge the status quo. Just before retiring after a fifty-year career as a minister, church administrator and college

president, my father ordained the first woman to receive the same credentials as a man, despite an official church policy forbidding such action.

Finally I dedicate this dissertation to my mother—for reading to me every night when I was a child; for refusing, to this day, to have a television set in her house; for introducing me to Chaucer and Shakespeare from the tender age of five; for editing this dissertation—several times; for arguing with me about the ideas in this dissertation; for taking up yoga at the age of seventy-four and staying forever young in her thinking. I love you. Happy Mother's Day.

*Walla Walla Washington
May 9, 2004*

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the work contains no material previously published or written by any other person except where reference is made in the text itself.

.....

Marilynn Kaye Loveless

CITATION

This study examines the relationship between the historical silencing of women's voices and recent feminist-inspired efforts to discover and, in some cases, re-appropriate the work of lost and forgotten women writers. Employing a methodology that includes traditional scholarship combined with a fictocritical narrative, the study integrates modes and stylistic features long considered masculine with those associated with the feminine, in telling the story of how Mrs. Shakespeare acquired the necessary skills, education and experience to write the works appropriated by her husband, William.

I. INTRODUCTION: EMBRACING CONTRARIES¹

Men's novels are about men. Women's novels are about men, too, but from a different point of view. You can have a men's novel with no women in it, except possibly the landlady or the horse, but you can't have a women's novel with no men in it.²

What would happen if someone found a diary kept by Anne Shakespeare (nee Hathaway), proving that she was the real author and that her husband simply got all the credit?

I entered my proposal, Anne's Diary, in a 1995 screenplay-writing competition co-sponsored by the Australian Writers' Guild and the New South Wales Film and Television office in Sydney, Australia. My story dealt with the changing world of literary study in Australian universities. The traditional Shakespearean scholar, Cedric, is in an uneasy marriage to a fiery American feminist, Greta. He finds Anne Hathaway's diary and when her ghost appears to him, he falls in love with her. The story explores Australia's unique love affair with the looming specter of American cultural imperialism and the ghost of Australia's colonial past.

¹ A term coined by Peter Elbow in Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching (New York: Oxford UP, 1986).

² Margaret Atwood, "On Men's and Women's Novels," Age, 5 May 1993, Extra, 5.

After I received a second script-development grant, the project officer at the New South Wales Film and Television office announced that he was sending the script to its 'most savage assessor,' who lived up to the reputation, responding with a seriously flawed—though deliciously vicious—report on the second draft of the screenplay. "The dead, of course, can't defend themselves. You can pass off any posturing caricature as 'Shakespeare'; you can attribute his work to anyone you choose, without a germ of scholarship," said the unhappy anonymous assessor, who also complained that it was impossible for anyone to read the sonnets prior to 1609, "which is when they were *written*."³ The sonnets were published in 1609. And as early as 1598 Francis Meres wrote that Shakespeare was known for "his sugared sonnets among his private friends."⁴ As I delved into the infinite and stormy sea of available information concerning the various authorship positions put forward by Stratfordians, Oxfordians, Baconians, Marlovians and Groupists, I have at times felt faint and, like Virginia Woolf, wondered whether perhaps "it would be ambitious beyond my daring" to join the fray, having observed the passion, heat and threatened lawsuits generated by this debate.

Marjorie Garber describes the despair of a Danish critic who fulminated in 1895

against 'the troop of half-educated people' who believed that Shakespeare did not write the plays, and bemoaned the fate of the profession... 'Literary criticism,' which 'must be handled carefully and only by those who have a vocation for it,' had clearly fallen into the hands of 'raw Americans and fanatical women.'⁵

³ Private correspondence, Facsimile from John McQuaid, project officer from The New South Wales Film & Television Office. 23 October 1995.

⁴ Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia, Wit's Treasury* (London) 1598, sig. 0oI-0o2.

⁵ Marjorie Garber, "Shakespeare's Ghost Writers," *Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance*, Marjorie Garber, ed. (London: Methuen, 1988), 130.

Guilty on both counts, I nevertheless continued in my quest, though not undaunted.

In 1995 I had the good fortune to meet the late Professor Schoenbaum at his home in Washington, D.C. An avowed Stratfordian, he nevertheless laughed out loud and said, “I love it,” when told the premise of my work—going so far as to suggest a new title for my screenplay—Her Booke—though I have come to suspect his amusement had more to do with his comment in cataloging the schismatics of the authorship debate than with the notion of Anne Hathaway as author. Writing in Shakespeare’s Lives, he says,

If the well one day should run dry, it might be argued, we would be deprived of the harmless mirth occasionally provoked by heretical extravagance; but it would be an exaggeration to suggest that the gaiety of nations would be thereby eclipsed.⁶

Nearly a year later, Professor Schoenbaum asked me the question: “How did your Anne get the education and experience to write as she did?” Of course this is also a central issue in the long-running authorship debate with the question frequently applied to Will Shakespeare. The effort to come up with a reasonable answer to this question led me to pursue my present course, which is to provide a plausible explanation for how Anne Hathaway was able to acquire the necessary skills to write as she did.

Giving a paper arguing that Anne Hathaway is the author of work ascribed to her husband at the annual Edward de Vere Studies Conference, held every April at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon,⁷ could be likened to an atheist walking into a Southern

⁶ Samuel Schoenbaum, Shakespeare’s Lives, new ed. (New York: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1991), 450.

⁷ Marilyn Loveless, “Deconstructing Willy: A Matrix of Dissent,” Fourth Annual Edward de Vere Studies Conference paper, Concordia University, Portland, Oregon, 6-9 April 2000.

Baptist revival to announce, *God is dead*. The aim of the conference is to promote Edward de Vere as the author of Shakespeare's work.

The unconventional topic of this event inevitably draws an eclectic collection of conference participants and presenters including former CIA analyst Peter Dickson; novelist Sarah Smith; Brigadier General Jack Shuttleworth, an emeritus professor of English and chair of the Humanities Division at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs; The Culture Department editor of The New York Times, William Niederkorn; physicians, including a retired clinical professor of neurology at Stanford, Paul Altrocchi, and Merilee Karr, who is a doctor and playwright; lawyers, theologians; independent researchers; and even orthodox scholars such as University of California at Berkeley professor of English, Alan H. Nelson, *agent provocateur* of the Oxfordian cause.

As an indicator of the liveliness of Edward de Vere Studies Conferences, three years later at the 7th Conference, held in 2003, Nelson remained unforgiven for a remark he made in his 2000 presentation—"Why the 17th Earl of Oxford Does, or Does Not, Make the Best Candidate for the Authorship of the Works of Shakespeare"—in which he referred to the 17th Earl of Oxford as a "psychopath." Nelson's *enfant terrible* antics at the conference and on his website⁸ appear to be a calculated risk, spurring interest in his

⁸ On his home page at the University of California Berkeley, Alan Nelson, writes, "Finally, I wish to record my anxiety over engaging in this debate. In the past, I have been threatened with lawsuits by Oxfordians for expressing my objections to their positions or their particular arguments. Moreover, Oxfordians are notorious for suing one another. I will post here any legal threats I receive in response to statements I make on the authorship issue here or elsewhere." <<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson/nyt.html>> (11 July 2003).

biography of the Earl, then in preparation, a book that was most eagerly anticipated by the Oxfordian camp.

An alert crowd of approximately 100 conference participants gathered on the opening night to hear my paper. Because I had not attended this conference previously, I was unsure whether I would be invited to give a paper unless I was promoting the Oxfordian cause. For this reason I kept the specific details of my theory deliberately vague in the abstract I sent, along with the title of my paper, “Deconstructing Willy: A Matrix of Dissent.” At the time it seemed like a good idea—test my theory on a tough crowd and see how they respond. Now that I was facing a sea of potentially hostile faces, I wasn’t so sure. I expected to be heckled, and I was not to be disappointed.

Setting up the rationale for my paper, I talked about the difficulty of engaging in a meaningful dialogue about the authorship debate because it requires enthymematic⁹ collaboration between opposing camps. Because the premises of an enthymeme are probabilities rather than certainties, they work only if the dialoguers accept one another’s premises as probabilities worthy of examination. Academics, trained to doubt propositions lacking definite evidence, may in the process miss the *Eureka!* experience

⁹ An enthymeme is constructed like a syllogism—with a major premise, minor premise and conclusion—but an enthymeme’s premises are probabilities rather than certainties. In order to arrive at agreement, the creator of the enthymeme and the audience must agree on the premises. For example, most people would agree with the syllogism, “All men are mortal. Shakespeare is a man, therefore Shakespeare is mortal.” On the other hand, setting forth the probable premise found in Sonnet 121, that “All men are bad,” and following it with the minor premise that “Shakespeare is a man, therefore Shakespeare is bad,” would produce an enthymeme. Often, one of the premises or conclusions in an enthymeme is not stated, because there is an assumption that this information will be understood and agreed to by the audience—for example, The Complete Works of William Shakespeare constitutes an enthymeme based on acceptance of Shakespeare’s authorship.

possible when withholding doubts long enough to play with less substantial probabilities. In spite of the paucity of hard biographical data establishing authorship of works attributed to Shakespeare, I have found that introducing a new candidate into the authorship debate is not only considered peculiar but is often met with hostile resistance by an audience that has not even heard the arguments.

An inevitable tension exists between the need for structure or a *system* that honors tradition and ritual—like the academy—and the need to take a leap of faith every now and then into the inchoate world of human imagination in order to foster new ways of thinking and growth. This tension also exists in the world of scientific research. Both worlds—the academy and the scientific—have developed necessary systems and procedures of governance. The paradoxical irony is, of course, that without the occasional burst of renegade activity, they each would wither into insignificance.

Describing the working policy in Nobel prize-winning scientist Julius Axelrod's laboratory, Candace Pert describes how Axelrod's disciples, including Pert, were immersed in the following dictums:

Do not accept the conventional wisdom. Do not accept the idea that something can't be accomplished because the scientific literature says it can't. Trust your instincts. Allow yourself a wide latitude in your speculations. Don't depend on the literature—it could be right or it could be completely wrong. Spread all your hunches out before you, and go with the ones that you think are most probable.¹⁰

¹⁰ Candace B. Pert, Molecules of Emotion (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 40.

In her book, Molecules of Emotion, Pert tells the story of what happened when she adhered to this philosophy, refusing to obey a direct order from her lab supervisor—in order to follow a hunch. Fortunately for her, Pert’s clandestine experiment yielded a major scientific breakthrough—the discovery of the opiate receptor—and an automatic doctoral degree at the age of 26. Pert’s discovery was also the foundation for her groundbreaking research into the connection between the body’s information network and the newly-discovered biomolecular links between mind and body.

“So how do we collaborate? How do we know when to listen and what to say in order to breach the gulf that exists between us?” I asked, going on to assure my audience at the Edward de Vere conference that I had enjoyed some success in swaying even hardcore Stratfordians to consider my point of view. I explained that I had adopted a game strategy borrowed from Peter Elbow, a strategy that they too might find useful in winning people to the Oxfordian camp. I explained how Peter Elbow accuses academics of spending too much time doubting rather than believing. He suggests that this combative approach may be one of the reasons that “intellectuals often find it surprisingly difficult simply to hear and understand positions they disagree with.”¹¹

In Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching, Elbow describes an exercise he developed in the classroom to encourage his students to use their imagination when someone has a weird idea. Instead of arguing about it, they had to believe it, just for five minutes. According to Elbow, his *Believing Game* seems, and

¹¹ Elbow, Contraries, 257.

indeed is, extremely permissive. But a paradoxical principle of extreme rigor emerges:

“You may not reject a reading till you have succeeded in believing it.”¹² Elbow points out that

with respect to gender, doubting invites behaviors which our culture associates with masculinity: refusing, saying No, pushing away, competing, being aggressive. Believing invites behaviors associated with femininity: accepting, saying Yes, being compliant, listening, absorbing, and swallowing. Doubt implies interrupting and making noise, belief implies being mute or silent—behaviors which are differentially rewarded according to gender... Trying to believe someone we disagree with tends to make us feel vulnerable and our culture has seen it as the woman’s role to be vulnerable (or at least to acknowledge vulnerability). Some of our metaphors for argument and critical thinking reveal these gender associations: poking holes in the other person’s arguments, making or advancing points, seeing if a claim will stand up.¹³

Elbow urges that it is imperative to move beyond mere empathetic listening or sympathetic understanding because “we can seldom see clearly a position or point of view until we inhabit one that is genuinely different.”¹⁴ The intellectual tradition based on Socratic argument and Cartesian skepticism has led members of the academy to “assume that the ability to criticize a claim we disagree with counts as more serious intellectual work than the ability to enter into and temporarily assent,”¹⁵ Elbow contends, describing the notion of *embracing contraries* as

a kind of relaxation of care, ...[which involves] an act of will, temporarily to put aside the law of contradiction and the zero-sum

¹² Elbow, *Contraries*, 261.

¹³ Elbow, *Contraries*, 268.

¹⁴ Elbow, *Contraries*, 266.

¹⁵ Elbow, *Contraries*, 258.

model of truth: to assume, temporarily, anyway—that...[in this case several] views are right, however paradoxical it might seem.¹⁶

In my paper I described a game I had devised, based on Elbow's *Believing Game*, as follows:

The framework within which we will play this game requires that you “believe” that Anne was the author of the work attributed to her husband. I’m asking you to go beyond a mere “willing suspension of disbelief” or an empathetic or even sympathetic understanding. You’re invited to participate *if* you are able to move into the sphere of believing—if not, I suggest that you listen and watch. I have my stopwatch; try it for five minutes, that’s all. When the time is up, you can go back to believing in what or whomever you wish. While it may sound very permissive, you may find that this exercise can be very rigorous, moving you out of a comfort zone and requiring critical thinking skills that draw on intuitive knowledge, as well as logic. Let me explain how it will work. In this game we’ll play with the facts relating to the authorship debate. I’ll be asking you to draw inferences on the given facts based on your *however temporary* belief that Anne Hathaway is our author. For example, here is a fact:

In Renaissance England, husbands acquired absolute control over their wives’ personal property and real estate; husband and wife became one person in law and that person was the husband.

The inference you might draw from this fact is that anything a woman wrote during the Renaissance would be considered her husband’s, and because you believe that Anne was the author you would infer that this is how William Shakespeare became known as the greatest writer in the history of the English language. Ready to play?¹⁷

One woman in the audience, a graduate student and devout Oxfordian, took particular care in heckling me with inane responses when we began to play the game.

I threw out a fact:

¹⁶ Elbow, *Contraries*, 278-279.

¹⁷ Loveless, “Deconstructing Willy: A Matrix of Dissent.”

According to Katherine Duncan-Jones, editor of The Arden Sonnets, five-sixths of the sonnets are about or addressed to young men, or a young man.

The audience was meant to draw an inference, based on their however temporary belief that Anne was the author. My heckler's *inference* would be something like:

"The Yankees are going to win the World Series!"

Of course the audience laughed and so did I.

Eventually, a majority of the audience members were drawn into the exercise and able to play. As is often the case with this game, their ideas were unedited and fresh, and we had fun. Although I gained few converts to my theory, I noticed that on at least four occasions during the conference, my presentation was referred to, particularly when discussions were becoming dangerously heated. At the mere mention of her name, "Anne Hathaway," most folks smiled, seemed to relax and quit taking themselves so seriously.

On Sunday morning, my heckler approached me sheepishly to say, "It wasn't until I was in the shower this morning that I could finally play the game, and I realized what you were trying to do." This mellowing demonstrated to me both the patterned thinking that academics fall into and the intellectual, creative breakthrough that is possible, even if delayed, when playful make-believe is admitted. Taking a break from intense attention to a structured paradigm can illuminate the mind. I have a postcard in my office with a picture of Albert Einstein bearing his statement, "My best ideas come while I'm shaving."

Gratified by my heckler's insight gained in the shower, I pointed out that I was also there to promote a theory of authorship—informed by my evolving feminist inclinations—which would necessarily include the deconstruction of a literary canon while poking staid academy uncles in the eye with Anne's sharp quill.

“You can't be serious about the Anne Hathaway thing?” she exclaimed.

“Oh yes, but I am!” I assured her.

Aware perhaps of how the idea of games and play and artistic creativity conflicts with the entire weight of the gravitas of academia, my heckler seemed embarrassed but determined to tell me how she felt about my presentation. “I hope you don't take this the wrong way and I don't want to offend you but I found your presentation,” she hesitated here for a moment before finishing her sentence with “charming.”

I was not offended, having set out deliberately to use charm, fun, games, self-deprecating humor and whatever else necessary, in order to engage my audience with the idea of Anne's authorship.

Later on, another conference participant encouraged me to apply for a position as an instructor for the U.S. Navy—which would involve teaching college classes at sea on an aircraft carrier! A few weeks after the conference, I also received a kind letter from

the organizer, which included an open invitation to present at future conferences. It would be fair to say that I survived the experience unscathed and in fact I've grown rather fond of this gathering and look forward each year to hearing papers with titles such as: "Now is the Winter of Their Discontent: Why a Threatened Academic Orthodoxy is Beginning to Take the Oxfordian Thesis Seriously," and "Taking the Oxford Case Seriously: What Happens When a Mainstream Historian Examines the Case Against Stratford Will in History Today," and "The Not-so-Free Academy: Informal Observations on the Political Realities Surrounding Controversial Issues."

Of the various credos of those involved in the Shakespearean authorship debate, most seem to share a more-than-quasi-religious undertone that Garber describes as "the desire to believe in Shakespeare [whoever he or she was] as a kind of God, transcending ordinary biography and fact."¹⁸ Thus to consider an alternative author becomes sacrilege rather than an intellectual pursuit for some.

Harold Bloom's call to worship, "Bardolotry, the worship of Shakespeare, ought to be even more a secular religion than it already is,"¹⁹ is echoed in the work of writers and critics engaged in the authorship debate who demonstrate a persistent tendency to use religious rhetoric. Railing against what he terms *The School of Resentment* (New Historicists, Feminists, Marxists and Multi-culturalists), Bloom claims that

the exasperated New Historicist or Feminist critic has a curious affinity with the exasperations that keep creating partisans for the

¹⁸ Garber, 131.

¹⁹ Harold Bloom, Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human (New York: Riverhead, 1998), xvii.

idea of Sir Francis Bacon or the Earl of Oxford as the true author of Lear... The real Stratfordian wrote thirty-eight plays in twenty-four years and then went home to die.²⁰

In his 1915 biography of Shakespeare, Sir Sidney Lee points to

a wholesome corrective...to the whole notion of doubt [which] may be found in Mr. Charles Allen's "Notes on the Bacon-Shakespeare Question" (Boston, 1900), and many later vindications of the *orthodox faith* [emphasis added] are worthy of notice.²¹

Like Bloom, Lee finds the consideration of an alternative author somehow threatening to either a jealously-guarded belief or a comfortable status quo. Reaching for the ultimate authority—and blessings from heaven—Lee cites an archbishop in support of his argument that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare:

The accepted version of Shakespeare's biography rests securely on documentary evidence and on a continuous stream of oral tradition, which went wholly unquestioned for more than three centuries, and has not been seriously impugned since. Yet the apparent contrast between the homeliness of Shakespeare's Stratford career and the breadth of observations and knowledge displayed in his literary work has evoked the fantastic theory that Shakespeare was not the author of the literature that passes under his name. Perverse attempts have been made either to pronounce the authorship of his works an open question or to assign them to his contemporary, Francis Bacon... All the argument bears witness to a phase of that more or less morbid process of skepticism, which was authoritatively analysed by Archbishop Whately... The Archbishop...showed how "obstinate habits of doubt, divorced from full knowledge or parted from the power of testing evidence, can speciously challenge any narrative, however circumstantial, however steadily maintained, however public and however important the events it narrates, however grave the authority on which it is based."²²

²⁰ Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 60-61.

²¹ Sir Sidney Lee, *A Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Smith, Elder, 1915), 655.

²² Lee, 651.

And the earth is flat.

Perched precariously on the fence in his 1996 book, Who Wrote Shakespeare?, John Michell claims that “there is no prejudice in this book. It is conceived *agnostically* [emphasis added] without preconception about the identity of Shakespeare.”²³

Acknowledging that “some people do not approve of this subject,” Michell explains the divisions, starting with people who believe that William Shakespeare wrote the plays:

These very certain, positive people are called, in the jargon of Authorship studies, Stratfordians or the Orthodox. Opposing them are other groups, equally certain and positive, with names such as Baconians, Oxfordians, Rutlanders, Derbyites, Marlovians and Groupists. These are the anti-Stratfordians or *Heretics* [emphasis added]. They join together in attacking the Orthodox but, as is usual with free-thinkers, they divide and subdivide into numerous *sects* [emphasis added], each critical of the others.²⁴

In his discussion of the myriad attempts to re-order the sonnets according to various theories of authorship, the editor of the 1944 edition of the Variorum sonnets, Hyder Rollins, refers to those who would tinker with the original 1609 order as *brothers-in-heresy* [emphasis added] adding that “unluckily for their cause, the dissenters can agree no better than the *believers* [emphasis added].”²⁵ Regarding an arrangement of the sonnets by Tucker Brooke, Rollins expressed a tongue-in-cheek concern that it “will

²³ John Michell, Who Wrote Shakespeare? (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996) 11.

²⁴ Michell, 8.

²⁵ Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Sonnets (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1944), 107.

antagonize *agnostics* [emphasis added] and addicts to other autobiographical theories.”²⁶

And about Sir Denys Bray’s several revisions, Rollins says, “It must *shake the faith*

[emphasis added] of readers,”²⁷ including “his *converts*” [emphasis added].²⁸

Some orthodox literary historians have adopted a playful and more effective approach in discrediting authorial heretics. Treating them like errant children whose antics are comical and/or simply mad, these scholars dismiss those offering alternative notions of authorship with wit. Schoenbaum gleefully skewers—for their “complacent faith”—“unbelievers,” “heretics,” “converts,” and “schismatics,” noting that

in certain recurring features of anti-Stratfordian behaviour we may discern a pattern of psychopathology. The heretic’s revulsion against the provincial and lowly; his exaltation of his hero (and, through identification, himself) by furnishing him with an aristocratic, even royal pedigree; his paranoid structures of thought, embracing the classic paraphernalia of persecution: secrets, curses, conspiracies; the compulsion to dig in churches, castles, river beds, and tombs; the auto-hypnosis, spirit visitations, and other hallucinatory phenomena; the descent, in a few cases, into actual madness—all these manifestations of the uneasy psyche suggest that the movement calls not so much for the expertise of the literary historian as for the insight of the psychiatrist. Dr. Freud beckons us.²⁹

Equally amusing is an example of playfulness from Rollins. Offering up an Oxfordian-

inspired arrangement of the sonnets by G.W. Phillips, who confidently wrote that

“nothing more is necessary...for an understanding of these wonderful poems but to read

²⁶ Rollins, 110.

²⁷ Rollins, 111.

²⁸ Rollins, 111.

²⁹ Schoenbaum, *Lives*, 441.

them sympathetically in the order in which they here follow,” Rollins drolly responds that “sympathetic readers may wish to try it out.”³⁰

The reaction of some students in my Oral Interpretation of Literature class³¹ to an exercise involving the reading of the sonnets was also informative.

“No, no, no, don’t do this to me,” moaned Nick, one of the more capable students in the class. “It changes everything,” he said, curling up in a fetal position after I had explained my theory of authorship.

“It does not, you idiot,” replied an amused female classmate. “The words are the same; nothing’s changed.”

However, Nick remained genuinely dismayed and despondent, despite our several attempts to cheer him up.

I cannot explain Nick’s despair, which echoes that of Bloom, Lee and others, except that it seemed to involve a deep psychological dependence on the iconic significance of a name—*William Shakespeare*. Elbow argues that when “people...are too earnest, their thinking can get muddy.” For these people, “there is something crucial in

³⁰ Rollins, 107.

³¹ Oral Interpretation of Literature, taught at Walla Walla College, Winter quarter 2003.

the imaginative act of pretending—a note of literal play—that helps...[them] start to get free of the limitations of their present way of thinking.”³² Elbow goes on to say that

it also helps to make a conscious act of fiction: tell the *story* of what it would be like if the idea in question were true—tell all the things which follow from it—tell what the world would be like. Of course you can tell these stories destructively as an act of doubting—reducing the idea to the absurdity which follows from it, apply it unsympathetically. But when someone makes up these stories in a genuine effort to *find validity*, she often succeeds. The resulting fantasies may be odd or peculiar, but they can lead to helpful insights if entered into in a spirit of positive play.³³

Professor Andrew Taylor’s discussion of the notion of research rigor as it applies to both the sciences and creative writing supports the necessity of exploring what might appear to be tangents in research, in order to finally arrive at that sublime moment of *A ha!* He introduces his comment with an OECD definition which acknowledges the creative aspect of research:

Research and experimental development comprises creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including the knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock to devise new applications.

Then he adds:

There must be few people here today [creative writing academics] who would feel any discomfort in applying this definition successfully to Creative Writing. Perhaps the only point of discomfort might be that phrase “systematic basis”: what appears systematic to a writer might look wayward, perhaps even haphazard, to some scientists. Still, I can think of few writers of

³² Elbow, *Contraries*, 277.

³³ Elbow, *Contraries*, 277-278.

any real worth who do not apply themselves as rigorously, even punishingly so, to their discipline as any scientist.

Even here, though, there is a ghost-like element—one which defies simplification—and it seems to contribute to a major breakthrough in both the sciences and the Creative Arts. This is the phase of thinking known as “incubation” which, to use the terminology of the great nineteenth century physicist Hermann von Helmholtz, follows a researcher’s “saturation” in an idea or a problem which had been “investigated...in all directions.” As the psychologist Graham Wallas described it in his book, The Art of Thought, published in 1926, during incubation nothing seems to happen. No progress is consciously made, and it can continue for days, weeks and longer. Then suddenly, often without warning, there occurs what Helmholtz called illumination. Wallas points out that “much very important thinking, done for instance by a poet exploring his memories,” may not be “very easily fitted into a ‘problem and solution’ scheme”—the rather simplified paradigm of scientific research—but it follows exactly the same pattern. Murray Gell-Mann discusses this strange but everyday process in his book also [The Quark and the Jaguar, 1994], and similarly draws no distinction between its occurrence in the sciences and in the Creative Arts, both areas exemplifying, in his words, “the highest expression on Earth of that kind of skill...human creative thinking.”³⁴

The research and preparation of this dissertation has required a mix of defensive maneuvers. As my supervisor, Nigel Krauth, points out:

The process of shoe-horning creative endeavour into the academic research context is difficult enough without worrying about standardization of assessment. I have been running a postgraduate writing program where I tell students to break the literary and cultural rules and progress thereby, but then I need to get each student aside to explain that the PhD requires adherence to a swagload of academic conformities. I also have to impress upon my students that there are examiners out there who are

³⁴ Andrew Taylor, “The Ghost and the Machine: Creative Writing and the Academic System,” Text 3, no. 1. <<http://www.gu.edu.au/school/art/text/april99/taylor.htm>> (11 July 2003).

unpredictable. “They’re worse than critics,” I say. “They’re worse than national literary judges.”³⁵

My adherence to the “swagload of academic conformities” is prompted by a need to provide compelling evidence for a boldly creative hypothesis in order to convince the academy to open its gates and admit what some members might consider to be a large wooden horse. Certainly that was the perception of the bastion of Stratfordism and symbol of the uber-orthodox, the Shakespeare Quarterly, whose editor replied unequivocally to a premature paper I naively submitted for consideration several years ago saying:

While we are not uninterested in publishing essays *about* the authorship controversy as a popular phenomenon, we are not at all persuaded that the debate has serious intellectual standing.³⁶

On the other hand, E.P. Torrance makes an argument for the legitimate rigor of creative thinking and the research process it entails in his book Rewarding Creative Behaviour:

I tried to describe creative thinking as the process of: sensing difficulties, problems, gaps in information, missing elements, something askew; making guesses and formulating hypotheses about these deficiencies; evaluating and testing these guesses and hypotheses; possibly revising and retesting them; and finally communicating the results.³⁷

³⁵ Nigel Krauth, “The Creative Writing Doctorate in Australia: An Initial Survey,” Text, 5, no.1 <<http://www.gu.edu.au/school/art/text/april01/krauth.htm>> (11 July 2003).

³⁶ Private correspondence, Letter from Gail Kern Paster, editor of the Shakespeare Quarterly, 10 March 1998.

³⁷ Quoted in David Strand, Research in the Creative Arts (Canberra: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998), 36.

However, communicating results becomes increasingly difficult if academic dissertation writing has, as Gary Olson and Julie Drew insist, “become bogged down in a superfluity of discursive footnotes, and even the language changed to the defensive, obfuscatory, stilted prose now referred to as dissertationese.”³⁸ Olson and Drew speculate that part of the reason for these defensive maneuvers may be to “discourage agonistic questioning during the dissertation defense—a clear example of how the power hierarchy between student and professor can come into play in material ways.”³⁹

In my own experience, as a provisional candidate, I was called upon to defend this project. When I attempted to play Elbow’s *Believing Game* with members of the academy (gathered to assess my progress), the postgraduate coordinator informed me in no uncertain terms that this particular strategy was inappropriate and would I please “just get on with it.” And so I read a prepared paper.

One of the strategies of this dissertation is to provide readers with a story because, as Kristie Fleckenstein points out:

Narratives blend the particularity of material context and the universality of cultural ordering. As the basis of our folk psychology, narratives serve as the central means by which we create culturally ratified or canonical scripts that guide our social interactions and our sense of identity... A characteristic of narrative scenarios is the ability to commit oneself to another’s perspective, to identify empathetically with and experience another’s vicissitudes of Being.⁴⁰

³⁸ Gary Olson and Julie Drew, *(Re) Reenvisioning the Dissertation in English Studies*, *College English* 61, no. 1 (1998): 63.

³⁹ Olson and Drew, 63.

⁴⁰ Kristie Fleckenstein, “A Third Voice: The Heterophonic Blend of Culture and Psyche,” *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory* 17, no. 3 (1997): 477.

Like a complicated logarithm, stories can also demonstrate the process of how something might have happened or could have happened or *did* happen. In her 1971 preface to The Golden Notebook, Doris Lessing contends that “history, even social ethic[s] are taught by means of stories,”⁴¹ and Elbow argues that “the use of narrative and descriptive discourse usually taps more insight than efforts to ‘think’ or ‘find reasons.’”⁴²

An emphasis on *objectivity* in academic writing, with its reliance on evidence at the expense of subjective *intuition*—also fails to accommodate the role of emotion, intuition and imagination in critical thinking—preferences that appear to be gender specific, according to politically incorrect new research (the implications of which are also explored in Chapter VII of this study). And it appears that there may be some basis to feminist witticisms about the dangers of *testosterone poisoning*. New scientific evidence reported in Psychology Today challenges “Simone de Beauvoir’s famous dictum, ‘One is not born a woman but rather becomes one.’ Science suggests otherwise.”⁴³ According to the research, “Sex differences...unfold in the most private recesses of our lives, surreptitiously molding our responses to everything from stress to space to speech.”⁴⁴

In her article, “The New Sex Scorecard,” Hara Marano reveals that

⁴¹ Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), xxi.

⁴² Elbow, Contraries, 278.

⁴³ Hara Estroff Marano, “The New Sex Scorecard,” Psychology Today, (July/August 2003), 38.

⁴⁴ Marano, 38.

The differences between the sexes may boil down to this: dividing tasks of processing experience. Male and female minds are innately drawn to different aspects of the world around them. And there's new evidence that testosterone may be calling some surprising shots.⁴⁵

Citing the evidence from a study by Simon Baron-Cohen, Marano reports the findings that

the more testosterone the children had been exposed to in the womb, the less able they were to make eye contact at 1 year of age... What's more, the testosterone level during fetal life also influenced language skills. The higher the prenatal testosterone level, the smaller a child's vocabulary at 18 months and again at 24 months. Lack of eye contact and poor language aptitude are early hallmarks of autism [which overwhelmingly affects males]. "Being strongly attracted to systems, together with a lack of empathy, may be the core characteristics of individuals on the autistic spectrum," says Baron-Cohen. "Maybe testosterone does more than affect spatial ability and language. Maybe it also affects social ability." And perhaps autism represents an "extreme form" of the male brain.⁴⁶

And if, as the research indicates, men are wired to "focus first on minute detail, and operate most easily with a certain detachment," it follows that they are also liable to "construct rules-based analyses of the natural world, inanimate objects and events. In the coinage of Cambridge University psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen, Ph.D., they systemize."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Marano, 42.

⁴⁶ Marano, 44-45.

⁴⁷ Marano, 44.

Marano describes another important distinction in male wiring that was revealed in research conducted by Ruben Gur, the director of the Brain Behavior Laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania, who discovered that

the larger male cranium is filled with more white matter and cerebrospinal fluid... White matter, made of the long arms of neurons encased in a protective film of fat, helps distribute processing throughout the brain. It gives males superiority at spatial reasoning. White matter also carries fibers that inhibit "information spread" in the cortex. That allows a single-mindedness that spatial problems require, especially difficult ones. The harder a spatial task, Gur finds, the more circumscribed the right-sided brain activation in males, but not in females. The white matter advantage of males, he believes, suppresses activation of areas that could interfere with work.⁴⁸

It should come as no surprise to see these biologically-wired preferences in the academy. In their book, Teaching Writing: Pedagogy, Gender and Equity, Cynthia Caywood and Gillian Overing note the academy's privileging of

the expository essay...over the exploratory; the argumentative essay...over the autobiographical... "the impersonal rational voice" over "the intimate subjective one."⁴⁹

It seems obvious that we need to examine ways in which it becomes possible to accommodate a wider variety of writing styles. How can the exploratory-autobiographical-intimate-subjective voice find a home within the academy? Sensing a connection between the personal and the public, Lessing argued that

⁴⁸ Marano, 42

⁴⁹ Cynthia Caywood and Gillian Overing, eds., Teaching Writing: Pedagogy, Gender and Equity (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), xii.

writing about oneself, one is writing about others, since your problems, pains, pleasures, emotions—and your extraordinary and remarkable ideas—can't be yours alone. The way to deal with the problem of “subjectivity”, that shocking business of being preoccupied with the tiny individual who is at the same time caught up in such an explosion of terrible and marvelous possibilities, is to see him [sic] as a microcosm and in this way to break through the personal, the subjective, making the personal general, as indeed life always does, transforming a private experience—or so you think of it when still a child, “I am falling in love”, “I am feeling this or that emotion, or thinking that or the other thought”—into something much larger: growing up is after all only the understanding that one's unique and incredible experience is what everyone shares.⁵⁰

Miriam Brody looked closely at the way eighteenth-century rhetoricians “used metaphors of gender to divide and rank a conceptual field of aesthetic pleasure.”⁵¹ Her research is illuminating when it comes to understanding the historical baggage women must lug along when they arrive at the academy, hoping to find an available space. Men, having arrived a few hundred years earlier, have already unpacked and occupy the choice locations, although some of them are proving gracious and welcoming. However, their willingness to “show us the ropes” is a double-edged sword that offers acceptance via our transformation into “honorary” men. Being conscious of this state of affairs is the key to understanding the necessity to learn the language of the academy and gain entrance in order to be in a position to effect our own transformations—or at least change the drapery. Citing the work of George Campbell, Brody points out that Campbell saw “the production of discourse as a stratified and hierarchical structure”⁵² in which the masculine

⁵⁰ Lessing, xvi-xvii.

⁵¹ Miriam Brody, Manly Writing: Gender, Rhetoric, and the Rise of Composition (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1993), 72.

⁵² Brody, 72.

“sublime” took precedence over the feminine “beautiful.” Campbell embraced the sublime which “penetrate[s] further” than the mere “drapery and ornament” of the beautiful.⁵³ Seen as an antidote to weak florid writing and the “emasculating ornamentation” of feminine foppery, eighteenth-century rhetoricians celebrated the canonization of what they termed a “mysterious and awesome” force, “divine”⁵⁴ in nature and masculine, of course.

An inevitable clash occurs when women infiltrate the academy, bringing with them more gray matter. Marano reports Gur’s findings that

females have about 15 to 20 percent more gray matter than males... Gray matter, made up of the bodies of nerve cells and their connecting dendrites, is where the brain’s heavy lifting is done. The female brain is more densely packed with neurons and dendrites, providing concentrated processing power—and more thought-linking capability... The white matter in women’s brains is concentrated in the corpus callosum, which links the brain’s hemispheres, and enables the right side of the brain to pitch in on language tasks. The more difficult the verbal task, the more global the neural participation required—a response that’s stronger in females.⁵⁵

Marano explains that these physiological differences make evolutionary sense and mean that

women’s perceptual skills are oriented to quick—call it intuitive—people reading. Females are gifted at detecting the feelings and thoughts of others, inferring intentions, absorbing contextual clues and responding in emotionally appropriate ways. They empathize.

⁵³ George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Lloyd F. Blitzer, ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1963), 5.

⁵⁴ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. James T. Boulton, ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 57.

⁵⁵ Marano, 42.

Tuned to others, they more readily see alternate sides of an argument. Such empathy fosters communication and primes females for attachment. Women, in other words, seem to be hard-wired for a top-down, big-picture take.⁵⁶

In an effort to explore the possibilities for integrating diverse biologically-wired ways of thinking into the academy, I've employed a methodology that includes elements of traditional scholarship in chapters and footnotes relating to theory and historical evidence, interspersed with a fictocritical narrative, allowing this study to invert modes and stylistic features of discourse considered masculine with those associated with the feminine. The alternating chapters explore academic literature to address the central issue raised by the narrative: Why select a female candidate? And why Anne Hathaway? The content of the scholarly chapters is objective, logical, authoritative and what some have considered "hypermasculine," while at the same time these chapters are written in a style coded as feminine with the use of personal pronouns and non-linear diversions that explore a multitude of issues, incorporating the interruptive apparatus of footnotes and sudden changes in direction and, at times, conflicting positions. The content of the creative chapters is exploratory, intimate, subjective and what some have considered "superfeminine," written in a linear style—coded as masculine—in order to explain how Anne Hathaway was able to acquire the necessary skills, education and experience to write as she did. In these chapters, the deployment of endnotes is designed to minimize the distractions of academic necessity.

⁵⁶ Marano, 43-44.

Gentle reader, I invite you to adopt a willing suspension of disbelief. For a brief time embrace the notion that Anne Hathaway wrote the work attributed to her husband as you consider her story and the supporting arguments that meander like tributaries before flowing into the river that depends on them.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ In the following, as already mentioned, it will be noted that “academic” chapters alternate with “fiction” chapters. My concern to preserve a less interrupted experience of reading the story of Anne Shakespeare’s life has led me to the solution of placing footnotes for the story at the end of the chapters, while the footnotes for the discussion chapters are made accessible at the foot of the page.

II. THIS FAIR CHILD

Anne's birthdate

Although there are no records of her birth, Anne Hathaway's gravestone bears a brass marker, which says she was "of the age of 67 years" when she died on 6 August 1623, suggesting that she was born in 1555 or 1556.

Anne (Agnes) in Richard Hathaway's will

In the will that he drew up on 1 September 1581, when he was 'sick in body but of perfect memory (I thank my Lord God),' Richard Hathaway itemizes bequests for his three daughters and four sons. But he mentions no Anne. . . . Hathaway does, however, leave ten marks—£6.13s.4d.—to his daughter Agnes, to be paid out on her wedding day. In this period the names Anne and Agnes were interchangeable (the latter being pronounced Annes).¹

"Placing out" practice

The substantial nature of the Hathaways' farmhouse—which still stands today—is testament to their elevated standing in the community,² making Anne a likely candidate for the sixteenth-century practice of "placing out," in which "the lady of the house was served by young gentlewomen of good family, who in this way learned polite behavior and domestic economy until such time as a marriage was arranged for them."³

Literacy in Tudor / Stuart England

Citing personal correspondence from Professor David Cressy, who studied the issue of literacy in Tudor and Stuart England, Schoenbaum reports that "in the mid-seventeenth

century . . . there is good evidence [that] some 70% of all English men could not sign their names. Their sisters and wives were much worse, about 90% illiterate.”⁴

Education of Elizabethan women

Carroll Camden looks closely at the education of Elizabethan women, pointing out that “girls were taught either at home or in the elementary school. . . . During this period little girls were admitted to some of the regular grammar schools.”⁵

Commenting on the quality of such an education, Schoenbaum notes that “a child’s education began at the age of four or five, not in the grammar school proper but in an attached petty school, under the tuition of an usher. These ushers were not as a rule themselves especially well educated.”⁶

Witches

*By the sixteenth century, many people began to hold a . . . belief that . . . supernatural power came from the devil, who bestowed it chiefly on women, in return for their absolute obedience to him. In Europe, thousands of women were persecuted as witches by hanging, burning at the stake and drowning. The figures reveal that 80 to 95 percent of those accused and 85 percent of those killed were female.*⁷

Virginia Woolf wrote that

*any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. . . . And undoubtedly, I thought, looking at the shelf where there are no plays by women, her work would have gone unsigned.*⁸

Arthur Golding & Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford

Edward de Vere’s father—John de Vere, 16th Earl of Oxford—died before Edward reached his maturity; thus Edward became a royal ward at the age of twelve, and was sent to live with the Queen’s most powerful advisor, William Cecil.

Arthur Golding was Edward de Vere’s uncle, half-brother to his mother, Margery Golding. A noted scholar and translator, Golding dedicated several of his literary efforts to his nephew. Two of these dedications, in 1564, were “dated from Cecil House,

indicating that Golding was living there. It could hardly be otherwise than that he was taking a hand in his nephew's education."⁹ Golding is known primarily for his translation of Ovid's "Metamorphoses," which he also dedicated to Edward in April 1567.

Not only does Ogburn find "it odd and strange that the staunch and sober Puritan should have gone to the immense and surely uncongenial labor of rendering into English iambic heptameter couplets the 12,000-line Latin work . . . of a poet whose salacity contributed to his exile from Rome";¹⁰ he concludes that "this to me is simply not credible, and I do not believe it."¹¹ A staunch advocate of Edward de Vere as the real Shakespeare, Ogburn goes even further picturing "Edward and his uncle seated shoulder to shoulder over the taper-lighted Latin text, the elder elucidating the more difficult bits, the younger chewing the tip of his quill as he considered how to fit them to his rhymed fourteeners."¹²

1556-1566

It wasn't long before people of the district called Shottery, near Stratford, began to notice what a remarkable child she was. At the age of three, Anne happened to tread upon a duckling in the farmyard, the eleventh of a brood, and killed it, upon which, she composed the following rhyme for an appreciative audience that included her parents and older brothers:

Here lies good master duck
Whom Anne hath trod on;
If it had liv'd, it had been good luck,
For then we'd had an odd one.¹³

By the age of four, she spoke with a vocabulary far beyond her tender years. And although the precocious talent frightened her mother, who was a simple, god-fearing farmer's wife, Anne's father adored the fey sprite nicknamed Agnes. Thus she was not only allowed, but encouraged, to read and study with her brothers at the Stratford petty school.

And while they, the brothers, battled and struggled to master Ovid, Seneca, Holdsworth, Boccaccio and Chaucer, both in Latin and in English, their young sister surpassed them easily. Only the autocratic schoolmaster knew more than she. And he

vowed to keep it that way when news of the girl's intellectual prowess filtered through the village.

With unnatural maturity Agnes understood the importance of forestalling her brothers' jealousy. This she did by helping them set elaborate intellectual traps for the inept usher, whose grasp of Latin was as limited as his ability to laugh at himself. One of their favorite games involved the invention of an imaginary ancient Roman poet. Concealing his bewilderment and not wanting to appear ignorant, the foolish usher would offer knowing comment on the supposed poet's exploits. His evenings were often spent in fruitless searches for some detail about the elusive poet.

John Frith,¹⁴ a sympathetic village priest—somewhat mistaking Agnes' eagerness to learn for a spiritual thirst—took the young scholar under his wing, and together they explored the mysteries of the Old and New Testament. And again, it wasn't long before the young pupil's understanding matched, then surpassed, her tutor's.

An enlightened man for his age, Frith realized the danger posed by ignorant villagers likely to be fearful of so prodigious a talent as possessed the guileless Agnes. Too well he remembered the execution, disguised as a witch-hunt, of a beautiful young village girl, called Claire, who was accused of bewitching the men in his parish many years ago. He too had secretly fallen under Claire's spell, ready to forsake his vows if she glanced at him. When her father died, she took over the running of the family farm, which flourished—unlike the other farms in the hamlet. With her mother's blessing, she

refused all marriage proposals, failing to heed the growing jealousy and resentment of the men and women in their community. Blithely she allowed her keen intelligence and learning to show until it became too much.

After a fierce storm destroyed the harvest, the townspeople decided that Claire was a witch. Dragged from her home, she was taken to the lake for her trial. If she sank and drowned, she was innocent. If she floated, she was guilty. Arriving too late to save her, Frith was restrained by villagers, who would later seek his absolution for the part they played in her death.

Frith watched as she walked with dignity to the edge of the pier, flanked by the angry mob. Someone pushed her into the water. The crowd was silent; a moment later she burst to the surface. A roar went up from the mob as she swam for the opposite shore, clambered up the bank and ran. But her clothes were wet and she didn't get far before two of the village men, who had once begged her to be their wife, rowed across the lake and captured her. This time her hands were tied behind her back and ropes, attached to large rocks, were wound around her legs.

Frith wept as he recounted the story to Agnes, remembering how Claire's stubborn pride prevented her from begging for mercy from the murderous mob. Thus, part of his instruction included practical tuition in how best to conceal her brilliant mind from a superstitious populace of illiterate farmers. Again, she learned the lessons well. Out of necessity she embraced the role of an outsider and observer—habits that served

her well throughout a life so cloaked in mystery that no one, save a select inner circle, would ever know that Agnes was one of the most remarkable women of her century.

Growing frustrated with the increasingly difficult questions posed by his young pupil, the usher dismissed Agnes from daily lessons, giving her two Latin books he hoped would occupy her for a long time. However, she soon finished reading them, and so the usher suggested that she begin working on English translations. When that task too was completed, Agnes approached the usher, asking for permission to write a play, based on a story by Ovid. Delighted at the prospect of not having her in his classroom, the usher agreed.

Agnes began re-working Ovid's story of Venus and Adonis, turning it into a play. Next she added passages on the wooing of women of easy virtue from the first two books of *Ars Amatoria* and advice to women on the seduction of men, from the third book. Although she was too inexperienced to understand the full implications of everything that she wrote, Agnes' observations of the mating habits of farm animals, combined with her brothers' lurid tales of sexual conquest, gave her a few ideas—the rest she improvised. When Agnes brought her play to the usher, he—without reading it—told her to again absent herself from his classroom and prepare for a performance of the play—taking the rowdiest of the children with her, he added, pleased to be rid of his most troublesome students.

For the next several weeks the usher enjoyed his peace and quiet until a visit from Edmund Lambert, town alderman, set his world spinning. According to Lambert, a royal procession would be passing through Stratford in the morning and the town fathers wanted to prepare a special celebration, featuring the children of the Stratford Grammar and Petty School. After all, hadn't his own son, John Lambert, been excused from regular classes in order to participate in a play?

So it was that one fine spring morning in 1566, the students of Stratford Grammar School treated a visiting royal entourage to a performance of Agnes' play. Stuttering with nervous energy, the usher introduced the performance as a story by the great Roman poet Ovid, translated by students in his Latin class, under his close supervision.

A more sophisticated audience could not be found in all of England. Used to the best entertainments and the sharpest wits, the Queen and her courtiers, including fourteen-year-old Edward de Vere, had steeled themselves for an excruciating afternoon of rustic doggerel. Surprise and shock soon gave way to laughter and applause as the children from the local grammar school presented a raucous story of love and lust. But it was Agnes, luminous as Venus, who stole the show with her bawdy asides to the women in the audience.

Meanwhile the usher, beside himself with humiliation and fear, attempted to cut short the performance, but the townspeople prevented him from doing so, noting the positive response from the royal audience.

Impressed both by the accurate translation and the adroit recitation performed by the children—and especially that of the young girl in the role of Venus—Arthur Golding, a learned man himself, determined to secure the services of their tutor, the usher, for his own young nephew, Edward de Vere, the 17th the Earl of Oxford.

Following the performance, Golding approached the usher with a friendly question: “How much of Ovid have you translated?”

Quivering, the usher replied, “I didn’t do it.”

“What do you mean?”

“It was she who did it,” he said, pointing to Agnes, now surrounded by well-wishers.

Puzzled and doubtful, Golding probed the usher. “Are you saying that she wrote . . . or translated it?”

Sensing a trap, the usher answered slowly, tapping his head, “She’s touched, you know.” Then he scuttled away before any more difficult questions could be asked.

It was clear to Golding that not only did the usher fail to appreciate the clever words and performance of his pupils, but the man was a complete twit.

His curiosity piqued, Golding's investigations eventually led him to a farmhouse near Shottery and the young girl whose shy smile did not hide the gleam of precocious intelligence burning within. Joining the family in their evening meal, Golding tested her understanding of Latin.

Agnes' singular and knowing laughter told him she understood and, emboldened by his interest, she joined in a jousting word-play with the scholar.

Sick with a growing unease and fearing that no good could come from the discovery of her daughter's freakish abilities, Agnes' mother attempted to banish the girl to bed, but she was overruled by her husband, filled with pride at the antics of his clever daughter.

The next morning the father's pride turned to dread when Golding announced his intention to take the girl away from her family and into the care of one of the Queen's councilors. There was very little either parent could do in the face of such an opportunity.

And so it was that Agnes of Shottery came to wait upon young Anne Cecil in the London household of her father, the ambitious William Cecil. And although they were the same age and they shared the same name, that was where the resemblance between

the eleven-year-old girls ended. For Anne Cecil, the future Countess of Oxford, was a simple girl with limpid eyes, golden curls, dimples and an indolent nature, while Anne Hathaway of Shottery was dark and wild at heart.

II. THIS FAIR CHILD

¹ Samuel Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 81.

² See also Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare, 79-80.

³ G. B. Harrison, ed., Shakespeare: The Complete Works (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), 1640.

⁴ Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare, 321.

⁵ Carroll Camden, The Elizabethan Woman, rev. ed. (New York: Paul Appel, 1975), 48.

⁶ Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare, 63.

⁷ "The Lives of Renaissance Women: The Witchcraze," Gender Equity (28 January 1998), <<http://www.educ.gov.bc.ca/gender/www/ac4.html>> February 5, 1998.

⁸ Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (London: Penguin, 1967), 51.

⁹ Ogburn, Charlton, The Mysterious William Shakespeare: The Myth and the Reality (McLean, Virginia: EPM, 1992), p. 443.

¹⁰ Ogburn, p. 444.

¹¹ Ogburn, p. 446.

¹² Ogburn, p. 446.

¹³ James Boswell, "Life of Johnson," The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes, James Sutherland ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1987), 80. This story was attributed to a three year-old Dr. Johnson by his mother, but it was probably appropriated when Johnson was in the process of editing his 1765 edition of Shakespeare's work.

¹⁴ "A Puritan 'survey of the state of the ministry in Warwickshire' . . . describes the vicar of Grafton, John Frith, as 'an old priest and unsound in religion; he can neither preach nor read well, his chiefest trade is to cure hawks that are hurt or diseased, for which purpose many do usually repair to him.'" Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare, 87.

III. DECONSTRUCTING WILLY

I like to read novels in which the heroine has a costume rustling discreetly over her breasts, or discreet breasts rustling over her costumes; in any case, there must be a costume, some breasts, some rustling; and, over all, discretion. Discretion overall, like a fog, a miasma through which the outline of thighs appear only vaguely. A glimpse of pink through the gloom, the sound of breathing, satin slithering on the floor, revealing what? Never mind, I say, never mind.¹

“Yes, but where is your proof? You can’t go around suggesting these things without proof!” Gregory spluttered, his face growing redder by the minute. “You have to have proof!”

I had just finished describing my thesis to some Australian friends, including Gregory the barrister—an avowed Bardolator. Incensed, he was, as he continued to glare. Part of the problem may have been my unwillingness to argue on Gregory’s “lawyerly” terms. The legal system, based on past precedents, does not easily accommodate new or diverse ways of approaching legal canons. Current discourse about the way in which we look at the world raises questions, crumbles academic comfort zones and challenges tradition across disciplines. Citing Rob McQueen’s article, “Why

¹ Atwood, 5.

High Court Judges Make Poor Historians,” A. Portelli points out the mutually masturbatory process of creating historical truth and maintaining the status quo:

Historical truth is hardly ever more than a descriptive hypothesis; legal truth has a performative nature. Whether things happened as the court says or not, to all practical purposes they now did: a court’s [decision] creates truth... [L]egal...truth, in turn has a tendency to become historical truth as well.²

Little surprise then, that three U.S. Supreme Court justices ruled in favor of the Stratford man in a 1987 moot-court authorship debate that examined evidence for William Shakespeare and Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. Although the justices acknowledged the compelling nature of the evidence that Oxford was the true author, 400-plus years of precedent-setting case law won the day.³ Is it fair to consider it *judicial parsimony* when the legal system is reluctant to develop rules of law that are any wider than required to resolve the factual situation at hand?

The paucity of personal information about William Shakespeare’s life has failed to deter several generations of biographers from writing lengthy, albeit speculative, biographies. And yet their combined effort, to all practical purposes, has created literary truth which in turn has become historical truth as well—summed up by Harold Bloom thus: “If any author has become a mortal god, it must be Shakespeare.”⁴

Was there ever such a monolithic labyrinth of smoke and mirrors, so ripe for

² A. Portelli, “The Law and Making of History: The ‘April 7’ Murder Trial,” Federal Law Review 19 (1990): 265.

³ David Kreeger, “In RE Shakespeare: The Authorship of Shakespeare on Trial,” American University Law Review 37 (1988): 609-826.

⁴ Harold Bloom, Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 3.

deconstruction? Evidently Mark Twain thought so. In his 1909 anti-biography entitled Is Shakespeare Dead?, he wrote:

We set down the five known facts by themselves, on a piece of paper, and numbered it 'page 1'; then on fifteen hundred other pieces of paper we set down the 'conjectures', and 'suppositions', and 'maybes', and 'perhapses', and 'doubtlesses', and 'rumors', and 'guesses', and 'probabilities', and 'likelihoods', and 'we are permitted to thinks', and 'we are warranted in believings', and 'might have beens', and 'could have beens', and 'must have beens' and 'unquestionablys', and 'without a shadow of doubts'—and behold! Materials? Why we have enough to build a biography of Shakespeare!⁵

One of the most recent books dealing with the authorship issue is John Michell's Who Wrote Shakespeare? Michell points out that Twain's

little history of Shakespeare is neither complete nor correct, and he did not labour to make it so. It was a satire upon Shakespeare's monumental biographers, contrasting their long-windedness with the sparsity and paucity of known facts on their subject's life.⁶

An American woman, Delia Bacon, is frequently blamed for starting the authorship debate with the publication in 1857 of her book, The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded.⁷ The book contains a rather neutral foreword by Nathaniel Hawthorne who praised her sincerity and passion for the Francis Bacon theory of authorship. "The woman is mad," he wrote, "but the book is a good one: and as she threw herself on me, I will stand by her in spite of her nonsense."⁸ But when Hawthorne balked at Bacon's intention of dedicating her 675-page tome to him, a rift occurred,

⁵ Mark Twain, Is Shakespeare Dead? (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1909), 23.

⁶ Michell, 42.

⁷ Delia Bacon's book Shakespeare's Philosophy Unfolded (Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2001) was first printed in London in 1857 under the title, The Philosophy of Shakespeare's Plays Unfolded. Amazon.com listed the reprinted book (as of 20 December 2002) noting that occasionally a second-hand copy becomes available.

⁸ Vivian C. Hopkins, Prodigal Puritan: A Life of Delia Bacon (Cambridge, Mass., printed by author: 1959), 237.

leading Hawthorne to declare, “This shall be the last of my benevolent follies and I never will be kind to anybody again as long as [I] live.”⁹

Bacon’s style of writing may also have played a part in Hawthorne’s reluctance, as the following *sentence* from her book illustrates:

The proposition to be demonstrated in the ensuing pages is this: That the new philosophy which strikes out from the Court—from *the Court* of that despotism that names and give form to the Modern Learning,—which comes to us from the Court of the last of the Tudors and the first of the Stuarts,—that new philosophy which we have received, and accepted, and adopted as a practical philosophy, not merely in that grave department of learning in which it comes to us professionally as philosophy, but in that not less important department of learning in which it comes to us in the disguise of amusement,—in the form of fable and allegory and parable,—the proposition is, that this Elizabethan philosophy is, in these two forms of it,—not two philosophies, not two Elizabethan philosophies, not two new and wondrous philosophies of nature and practice, not two new Inductive philosophies, but one,—one and the same: that it is philosophy in both these forms, with its veil of allegory and parable, and without it; that it is philosophy applied to much more important subjects in the disguise of the parable, than it is in the open statement; that it is philosophy in both these cases, and not philosophy in one of them, and a brutish, low-lived, illiterate, unconscious spontaneity in the other.¹⁰

Confident that his enthymeme¹¹ would settle the matter once and for all, Lee declared that “Miss Delia Bacon, who was the first to spread abroad a spirit of skepticism respecting the established facts of Shakespeare’s career, died insane on September 2, 1859.”¹²

⁹ Hopkins, 243. Hawthorne’s reluctance may have something to do with Bacon’s admonition to her readers that “there is no room here for details... This is the account, in the general, which will be found to be, upon investigation, the true one. And the more the subject is studied, even by the light which this work [The Philosophy of Shakespeare’s Plays Unfolded] brings to bear on it, the more the truth of this statement will become apparent.” (Bacon, xxii)

¹⁰ Bacon, xvii-xviii.

¹¹ To doubt Shakespeare’s authorship indicates approaching insanity. Miss Bacon doubted his authorship. Thus insanity overtook her.

¹² Lee, 652.

Though it may strain credibility to consider whether Bacon was simply ahead of her time, demonstrating a prescient understanding of Roland Barthes' privileging of *illisibilite*¹³ (unreadability) in order to rebel against a monolith¹⁴—the Shakespearean authorship paradigm—she demonstrates an aptitude for writing the dense obfuscatory prose¹⁵ prized by some members of the academy and decried by others like Alan D. Sokal. Maybe it was inevitable that someone like Sokal would come along and write “an article¹⁶ liberally salted with nonsense” and get it published in the refereed journal, Social Text, in 1996—a move Sokal acknowledged was designed to inflict maximum humiliation on what he considered to be the “utter absurdity” of much academic theorizing, “concealed through obscure and pretentious language”¹⁷ emerging from this influential new wave called *cultural studies*.

On his New York University website, Sokal describes the reasons he decided to play the prank:

¹³ See Roland Barthes, Le Degre Zero de l'écriture (Writing Degree Zero), translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Jonathan Cape, London, and Hill & Wang, NY 1967).

¹⁴ In Barthes' case, he was rebelling against the French literary world's insistence that clarity is the key quality to be found in a work of literary prose. Barthes saw clarity as a class attribute, signifying that the writer is a member of a particular class, writing to another member of the same class.

¹⁵ Compare Bacon's sentence with the following opening sentence from Christian Metz's famous treatise, “The Imaginary Signifier,” for example: “Reduced to its most fundamental approach, any psychoanalytic reflection might be defined in Lacanian terms as an attempt to disengage the cinema-object from the imaginary and to win it for the symbolic, in the hope of extending the latter by a new province: an enterprise of displacement, a territorial enterprise, a symbolising advance; that is to say, in the field of films as in other fields, the psychoanalytic itinerary is *from the outset a semiological one*, even (above all) if in comparison with the discourse of a more classical semiology it shifts from the attention to the *enonce* to concern for the *enonciation*.”

¹⁶ Alan D. Sokal, “Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity,” Social Text 46/47 (spring/summer 1996): 217-252. Reported also by Sharon Begley and Adam Rogers, “‘Morphogenic Field’ Day,” Newsweek (3 June 1997): 37.

¹⁷ Alan D. Sokal, “A Physicist Experiments With Cultural Studies,” June 1996. http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/transgress_v2/transgress_v2.singlefile.html (18 July 2003).

For some years I've been troubled by an apparent decline in the standards of intellectual rigor in certain precincts of the American academic humanities. But I'm a mere physicist: if I find myself unable to make head or tail of *jouissance* and *difference*, perhaps that just reflects my own inadequacy. So, to test the prevailing intellectual standards, I decided to try a modest (though admittedly uncontrolled) experiment: Would a leading North American journal of cultural studies—whose editorial collective includes such luminaries as Fredric Jameson and Andrew Ross—publish an article liberally salted with nonsense if (a) it sounded good and (b) it flattered the editors' ideological preconceptions?¹⁸

The answer was *yes*, and Sokal's parody appeared in a special issue dedicated to the "Science Wars." Chiding the editors at *Social Text* for feeling "comfortable publishing an article on quantum physics without bothering to consult anyone knowledgeable on the subject," Sokal gleefully admits that his assertion—"postmodern science' has abolished the concept of objective reality"—lacks "anything resembling a logical sequence of thought."¹⁹ Citing his concern about a theory that denies the existence of objective realities and the "spread of subjectivist thinking," Sokal argues that "there *is* a real world; its properties are *not* merely social constructions; facts and evidence *do* matter. What sane person would contend otherwise?"²⁰

"There is no objective reality!" asserts Candace Pert,²¹ a research professor in the Department of Physiology and Biophysics at Georgetown University Medical Center in Washington, D.C., where she conducts AIDS research. In her eminently readable book, Molecules of Emotion—which is part science lesson, detective story, feminist treatise, and revelatory personal narrative—Pert describes what happened when she embraced

¹⁸ Sokal (1996).

¹⁹ Sokal (1996).

²⁰ Sokal (1996).

²¹ Pert, 146.

facts and evidence that challenged a century-old paradigm constructed by the scientific community to describe the way the brain functions in the human body. Pert explains that until very recently neuroscientists and immunologists were educated to believe the “blood-brain barrier” theory, “the existence of which had been ‘proved’ by turn-of-the-century experiments in which huge dye molecules injected into the body could not get into the brain.”²²

Pert points out that it took a while for the orthodox scientific community to accept the growing evidence that there are many ways in which immunopeptides can breach the brain’s barrier:

Finally, in 1983, an editorial in *Nature* admitted the presence of brain peptides in the immune system, but warned the scientific community against those ‘radical psychoimmunologists’ who might prematurely interpret this work to mean that ‘no state of mind exists that is not reflected by a state of the immune system.’²³

Although delivered as a warning barb, Pert explains that she and her fellow researchers “embraced the moniker with pride, proudly referring to...[themselves] as radical psychoimmunologists.”²⁴

Inspired primarily by a desperate effort to find a cure for her father’s cancer, Pert’s paradigm-shattering research and approach—“threateningly interdisciplinary, in complete violation of all kinds of traditional boundaries”²⁵—challenged another scientific

²² Pert, 183.

²³ Pert, 162.

²⁴ Pert, 162.

²⁵ Pert, 174.

construct—the idea that the brain is the control center, telling the lesser body what to do.

Pert explains:

A network is different from a hierarchical structure that has a ruling ‘station’ at the top and a descending series of positions that play increasingly subsidiary roles. In a network, theoretically, you can enter at any nodal point and quickly get to any other point; all locations are equal as far as the potential to ‘rule’ or direct the flow of information... Mind doesn’t dominate body, it becomes body—body and mind are one...²⁶ The point I am making is that your brain is extremely well integrated with the rest of the body at a molecular level... We can no longer think of the emotions as having less validity than physical, material substance, but instead must see them as cellular signals that are involved in the process of translating information into physical reality, literally transforming mind into matter. Emotions are at the nexus between matter and mind, going back and forth between the two and influencing both.²⁷

And so, with hard scientific evidence to back it up, Pert declared the death of *objective reality* because

in order for the brain not to be overwhelmed by the constant deluge of sensory input, some sort of filtering system must enable us to pay attention to what our bodymind deems the most important pieces of information and to ignore others. As discussed, our emotions decide what is worth paying attention to... Emotions are constantly regulating what we experience as ‘reality.’²⁸

She goes on to explain how peptides—“tiny pieces of protein”...consisting of “a string of amino acids, each joined together like beads in a necklace”²⁹—play the key communication role in what she describes as weaving

the body’s organs and systems into a single web... Peptides are the sheet music containing the notes, phrases, and rhythms that allow the orchestra—your body—

²⁶ Pert, 186-187.

²⁷ Pert, 188-189.

²⁸ Pert, 147.

²⁹ Pert, 64.

to play as an integrated entity. The music that results is the tone or feeling that you experience subjectively as your emotions.³⁰

Pert offers a scientific explanation for why it is difficult, if not impossible at times, for human beings to “see” or “believe” so-called *objective reality*, even as it presents itself:

There is a plethora of elegant neurophysiological data suggesting that the nervous system is not capable of taking in everything, but can only scan the outer world for material that it is prepared to find by virtue of its wiring hookups, its own internal patterns, and its past experience. The *superior colliculus* in the midbrain, another nodal point of neuropeptide receptors, controls the muscles that direct the eyeball, and affect which images are permitted to fall on the retina and hence to be seen. For example, when the tall European ships first approached the early Native Americans, it was such an ‘impossible’ vision in their reality that their highly filtered perceptions couldn’t register what was happening, and they literally failed to ‘see’ the ships. Similarly, the cuckolded husband may fail to see what everyone else sees, because his emotional belief in his wife’s faithfulness is so strong that his eyeballs are directed to look away from incriminating behavior obvious to everyone else.³¹

In scanning the outer world for material that they were prepared to find, Delia Bacon found Francis Bacon; Thomas Looney found Edward de Vere; Thomas Mendenhall³² found Christopher Marlowe while Samuel Schoenbaum never lost sight of William Shakespeare.

Delia Bacon’s ideas did not perish, although she spent her final days incarcerated in a mental hospital, while other dissenters were left free to project their heresies on a

³⁰ Pert, 148.

³¹ Pert, 147-148.

³² T.C. Mendenhall was a distinguished physicist who worked out a method of “fingerprinting” an author by frequency of word lengths. Hired by the Baconians to prove their man was the author, Mendenhall found Christopher Marlowe instead. His findings, “A Mechanical Solution to a Literary Problem,” were published in The Popular Science Monthly (December 1901): 29-32.

gullible public and less than receptive community of scholars.

In noting “how innocently appropriate are some anti-Stratfordian names,”³³ Schoenbaum lumps skeptics, Sherwood E. Silliman, George M. Battey and Thomas J. Looney [sic]³⁴ together. Schoenbaum reports that Silliman was a Scarsdale attorney who, in 1956, privately printed a play he had written, The Laurel Bough, which told the fanciful story of how Christopher Marlowe came to write the complete works attributed to Shakespeare.³⁵ While dismissing Battey’s ideas as one of “many curious theories [that] lie outside the ken of my selective history,” Schoenbaum adds that Battey apparently employed the use of “the alphabetical numerical clock count,” leading him [Battey] to conclude that Daniel Defoe—“or rather, as Battey prefers, Daniel Foe”—wrote the plays.³⁶

It would probably be fair to acknowledge that the 17th Earl of Oxford—Edward de Vere—is the current front-runner in the authorship debate, for those willing to consider the possibility of someone other than the Stratford lad. And J. Thomas Looney’s 1920 book, “Shakespeare” Identified, was the spark that ignited the Oxfordian cause. Acknowledging that Looney’s book “has given the Baconians a run for their madness,” Schoenbaum reveals the structure of exclusion, which Foucault identified as the genealogy of power/knowledge. Seeing history as a multiple, overlapping and interactive

³³ Schoenbaum, Lives, 448.

³⁴ In his preoccupation with the gentleman’s surname, Schoenbaum seems to have overlooked the correct order of Looney’s Christian name, *J. Thomas Looney*.

³⁵ Schoenbaum, Lives, 448.

³⁶ Schoenbaum, Lives, 450.

series of legitimate vs. excluded histories, Foucault showed how power and knowledge combine to create social categories that help to define legitimate history apart from the mad, criminal and the deviant.

By lumping all of the heretical theories in a chapter titled, “Deviations,” Schoenbaum essentially equates less credible ideas with the painstaking effort made by Looney to answer one of the more difficult questions concerning the author of the Shakespeare canon—how did a commoner like William Shakespeare manage to write about the nobility with such ease and precision?

In his book, “Shakespeare” Identified, Looney listed the attributes³⁷ that he felt were necessary for the author to possess. Looney also noted what he considered to be a striking similarity in the stanza and cadence used in “Shakespeare’s” *Venus and Adonis* and one of Edward de Vere’s early poems, *Woman’s Changeableness*.³⁸ Admitting that

³⁷ They are: 1. A matured man of recognized genius. 2. Apparently eccentric and mysterious. 3. Of intense sensibility—a man apart. 4. Unconventional. 5. Not adequately appreciated. 6. Of pronounced and known literary tastes. 7. An enthusiast in the world of drama. 8. A lyric poet of recognized talent. 9. Of superior education—classical—the habitual associate of educated people. 10. A man with Feudal connections. 11. A member of the higher aristocracy. 12. Connected with Lancastrian supporters. 13. An enthusiast for Italy. 14. A follower of sport (including falconry). 15. A lover of music. 16. Loose and improvident in money matters. 17. Doubtful and somewhat conflicting in his attitude to women. 18. Of probable Catholic leanings, but touched with skepticism. Thomas J. Looney, “Shakespeare” Identified in Edward De Vere the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford 2nd ed. (London: Cecil Palmer, 1920), 118-19 and 131.

³⁸ “Woman’s Changeableness” by Edward de Vere.

If women could be fair and yet not fond, / Or that their love were firm not fickle,
Still, I would not marvel that they made men bond, / By service long to purchase their good will,
But when I see how frail those creatures are, / I muse that men forget themselves so far.
To mark the choice they make, and how they change / How oft from Poebus do they flee to Pan,
Unsettled still like haggards wild they range, / These gentle birds that fly from man to man,
Who would not scorn and shake them from the fist / And let them fly, fair fools, which way
they list?
Yet for disport, we fawn and flatter both, / To pass the time when nothing else can please,
And train them to our lure with subtle oath, / Till, weary of their wiles, ourselves we ease;
And then we say, when we their fancy try, / To play with fools, Oh what a fool was I
(Ogburn, 380-381).

he lacked training as a literary critic, Looney nevertheless concluded that it required an outsider to solve the authorship problem, which until this time had “been left mainly in the hands of literary men.”³⁹

However, there is a significant number of literary men who have expressed doubt about the authorship, including Charles Dickens, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain and Henry James.⁴⁰ The questions and doubts persist, presenting a seemingly infinite sea of uncertainty, making this topic ripe for deconstruction.

In *Writing and Difference*, Jacques Derrida writes: “The absence of a transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.”⁴¹ In a very real⁴²—albeit *undecidable*—sense, the spoken and written utterances about the authorship issue present a model of—as Derrida puts it—*disseminated* meaning. In *Deconstruction-speak* this translates (and here I must also acknowledge that this written utterance is, knowingly or unknowingly, in the process of dismantling itself even as I write it and you read it) as a semantic effect of dissolving meanings among numerous options, and of opposing any specific meaning.

And in another sense, the construction of this dissertation offers something of a Derridaian *double reading*, with the narrative chapters providing a provisional *lisible*

³⁹ Looney, 16.

⁴⁰ The Shakespeare Oxford Society, “The Honor Roll of Skeptics: Questioning the Orthodoxy,” 14 July 2000: <<http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com/skeptic.htm>> (26 December 2002).

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 280.

⁴² Here I use the word “real” aware of the once-forgotten metaphoric nature that it represents.

(readable) interpretation, while the scholarly chapters offer a deconstructive *critical reading* which disseminates the provisional meaning into an inevitable *aporia*—gridlock or *double bind*, between irreconcilable or paradoxical meanings which are *undecidable*, because we do not have a concrete basis for selecting them.

Literary criticism, it is often noted, tends to say much about the literary critic and far less about the actual literature. For nearly 400 years, the elusive author of the sonnets has teased literary critics with paradoxical gender confusion, secrets, lies and betrayal, leading more than one critic on a merry chase to discover the identity of the mysterious Mr. W.H., to whom the sonnets are dedicated. For example, consider the explanation offered by Rowse for the problematical *dramatis personae* of the sonnets:

For, make no mistake about this, Shakespeare's interest in the youth is not at all sexual—as Marlowe's or Bacon's might well have been: that was clean contrary to Shakespeare's highly heterosexual nature.⁴³

On the other hand, Oscar Wilde offered a homoerotic reading of the sonnets in "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," concluding that

the 'rose-cheeked Adonis' of the Venus poem, the false shepherd of the 'Lover's Complaint,' the 'tender churl,' the 'beauteous niggard' of the Sonnets, was none other but a young actor; and as I read through the various descriptions given of him, I saw that the love that Shakespeare bore him was as the love of a musician for some delicate instrument on which he delights to play.⁴⁴

⁴³ A. L. Rowse, *Shakespeare the Man* (London: Book Club Assoc., 1973), 67.

⁴⁴ Oscar Wilde, "The Portrait of Mr. W.H." in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 1173.

Barbara Everett offered yet another theory in her 1986 article, “Mrs. Shakespeare,”⁴⁵ in which she names Anne’s brother William Hathaway as the mysterious Mr W.H. In her reading of Mrs. Shakespeare, Everett imagines

a powerful, even attractively masculine woman, eight years older than the writer; one capable of obsessing her young husband for many miserable jealous years, then of maddening and amusing and at last (“second-best bed”) boring him—it is believable that this perhaps ambitious, clever and willful woman impatiently sent her brother off to London with the bundle of fair-copied, brilliant, confused poems which her obstinate husband wouldn’t publish and which she in any case remembered, rightly or wrongly, as being mostly addressed to herself and therefore arguable her own.⁴⁶

“Rubbish! Absolute rot!” declared Rowse in response to Everett’s article, “Is there no end to human foolery?”⁴⁷

In a November 1997 lecture at the Queensland Museum—“Will the Real Will Please Stand Up”—Dr Pat Buckridge pointed out that “you could spend the rest of your life reading nothing but books and articles on the authorship question, and still never get through it all.”⁴⁸ Also commenting on the enormous library of books on the authorship *problem*, Michell cites the legend of Belgian professor, Celestin Demblon, who “read 5,000 books while researching” his book, *Lord Rutland est Shakespeare*, published in 1912—long “before the flood of Authorship writing had fully risen. It would now be impossible to read it all,” Michell concludes.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Barbara Everett, “Mrs. Shakespeare,” *London Review of Books* (19 December 1986): 7-10.

⁴⁶ Everett, 8

⁴⁷ Rowse is quoted in Herbert Mitgang, “New Answers to Shakespeare Riddle,” *New York Times* (3 March 1987): 38.

⁴⁸ Pat Buckridge, “Will the Real Will Please Stand Up?” Lecture at Queensland Museum, Brisbane, Australia, 15 November 1997.

⁴⁹ Michell, 9.

Chapter Two of Robert Sean Brazil's self-published 2000 work, The True Story of the Shakespeare Publications Volume One: Edward de Vere & the Shakespeare Printers, titled, "33 Reasons to doubt that Mr. Shaksper wrote Shakespeare,"⁵⁰ outlines the dissenters' case. But like many anti-Stratfordian polemics I have come across in my research, Brazil's work would be more compelling had he adopted a more scholarly approach to the subject, particularly when it comes to providing sources for the information contained in his book. Brazil offers this explanation; "Future editions of this work will contain complete citations, footnotes, and indexes. In the mean season, it has been thought best to delay no further, and present the material that is at hand as it is."⁵¹

With more than 63 claimants⁵²—a fluid number that shows no sign of abating, only increasing—the sheer volume of literature spawned by the various authorship theories about works attributed to Shakespeare is vast even if much of it is, as Michell points out, "repetitive, dull and cranky. It is the sheer weight of it that is so impressive."⁵³ Almost as impressive is the sheer weight and volume of the existing biographies of the Stratford lad, based on a slim list of known facts that would fit on a postcard. Yet how reliable are facts—especially 400-year-old facts?

⁵⁰ Among the reasons cited, Brazil notes that Shaksper's [sic] "daughters remained illiterate and uneducated...[yet] the Shakespeare plays abound with female characters who read, who discuss philosophy, who are in every way literate;" and "When Shaksper died in 1616, there were at least 16 masterpiece plays that had never been published. These plays appeared in print for the first time in the Folio of 1623." Mrs. Shakespeare lived until 1623.

⁵¹ Robert Sean Brazil, The True Story of the Shakespeare Publications Volume 1: Edward de Vere & the Shakespeare Printers, (White Plains NY: published by the author, 2000), 126.

⁵² The number stands at 64 if one includes Anne Hathaway. See also page 115 of The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare which lists five female claimants and Michell, pp. 37 & 38, who lists four female claimants.

⁵³ Michell, 9.

For example, my research has revealed significant discrepancies in the date and description of a recent bibliography that catalogued the doubters. According to Schoenbaum,

In the 1840s [it should be “1940s”] Joseph S. Galland, a professor of Romance Languages at Northwestern University, compiled a typescript bibliography, Digesta Anti-Shakespeareana, that fills six large volumes and describes 4,509 items. A number of these are enormous, and many more have of course appeared since.⁵⁴

Marjorie Garber (citing William F. Friedman and Elizabeth S. Friedman's The Shakespearean Ciphers Examined, published by Cambridge University Press in 1957) gives an account of this unpublished report by stating:

When, in 1947 [emphasis mine], Professor Joseph Galland compiled his bibliography of the controversy, entitled Digesta Anti-Shakespeareana, no one could afford to publish the 1,500-page manuscript.⁵⁵

Others, including David Kreeger, have cited Schoenbaum but varied the date: “By the 1940s [emphasis mine] a professor at Northwestern University could list no less than 4,509 articles and books questioning or denying the Stratford authorship”;⁵⁶ and Charlton Ogburn reports: “In the 1940s [emphasis mine], according to Samuel Schoenbaum, Joseph S. Galland of Northwestern University compiled a bibliography of dissent.”⁵⁷

In an email message in December 1997, Mr. Scott Krafft, the reference

⁵⁴ Schoenbaum, Shakespeare's Lives, 449-450.

⁵⁵ Marjorie Garber, “Shakespeare's Ghost Writers,” Cannibals, Witches and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance, ed. Marjorie Garber (London: Methuen, 1988), 125.

⁵⁶ Kreeger, 610.

⁵⁷ Charlton Ogburn, The Mysterious William Shakespeare: The Myth and the Reality (McLean, Virginia: BPM, 1992), 151.

librarian/bibliographer of the McCormick Library of Special Collections at Northwestern University, informed me that

Professor Galland died in 1947, leaving the final draft of his Digesta Anti-Shakespeareana almost complete. This draft was then polished and finished by Burton A. Milligan, who submitted the typescript to be microfilmed in 1948, the cost of book publication then considered too onerous. It would be 1948, then, that one would give as a date for this work. Sorry to give you yet one more contending date possibility, but the typescript is on my desk as I write this email, and I think its evidence is as compelling as you're likely to encounter.⁵⁸

Of course these are mistakes easily identified. But left uncorrected, how easy would it be to fix them in, say, 400 years time—particularly if some of the documents in question were lost or destroyed?

Schoenbaum catalogues the first doubter as a Reverend James Wilmot, who in 1781 retired to a village on the Avon where

he amused himself with his friends and books...[undertaking a] quest of information respecting the poet. What he found disconcerted him, for he learned that Shakespeare, the son of a butcher who could neither read nor write, was at best a Country clown at the time he went to seek his fortune in London, that he cod [sic] never have had any school learning, and that that fact would render it impossible that he could be received as a friend and equal by those of culture and breeding who alone could by their intercourse make up for the deficiencies of his youth.⁵⁹

Wilmot eventually arrived at the conclusion that Francis Bacon authored books attributed to Shakespeare and that he [Francis] had burned his papers to conceal “the fact that so exalted a personage had descended to the base art of playwriting.” Before he died

⁵⁸ Scott Krafft, “Digesta Date,” 14 December 1997, personal email (16 December 1997).

⁵⁹ Schoenbaum, Shakespeare's Lives, 397.

Wilmot apparently--according to Baconian tradition--

summoned before him his housekeeper and the schoolmaster of Long Compton. 'Take, then, my keys,' he commanded, 'and burn on the platform before the house all the bags and boxes of writings you can discover, in the cabinets in my bedroom.' Thus were Wilmot's papers, with their records of local traditions and the Baconian heresy, committed to the flames.⁶⁰

Of course there are a few problems with this story, including the fact that a number of exalted personages wrote for the Elizabethan theatre quite openly. Marjorie Garber wonders if

there is something in the nature of the plays themselves that somehow provokes, as it responds to, the authorship controversy. Is the authorship controversy in part a textual effect?... There are in fact an uncanny number of ways in which the plays can be seen to dramatize the controversy, ...handwriting analyses, signature controversies, the deciphering of codes, the digging of graves, the silencing of madwomen, the staging of plays that get away from their authors, and the thematizing of myriad other forms of doubt and discontinuity within authorial identity and control.⁶¹

Garber points out that "other English Renaissance authors...left similarly scanty paper trails. Yet no one quarrels about Spencer's authorship, or Raleigh's, or Webster's, or Milton's." She asks, "Why is it different for Shakespeare?"⁶²

Perhaps the most compelling argument dissenters have is the lack of evidence and a myriad of unanswered questions including: why do we have only six (some argue more) signatures in his own hand? How did he get the education to write with such knowledge about a wide range of subjects, including the law, for instance? Where are his

⁶⁰ Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 398.

⁶¹ Garber, 136.

⁶² Garber, 124.

“foul papers”?⁶³ and, Who were his friends, such that he was able to write so convincingly about the nobility? How could he write about distant countries without having visited them? What happened to his books? (He must have had them—his will is very detailed and specific, yet he makes no mention of books.) Why didn’t anyone make a fuss about his death? Why did it take 93 years before someone bothered to sit down write his biography?⁶⁴ How did Shakespeare manage to write his women so sympathetically and why are a majority of the sonnets addressed to a *boy*—the Fair Youth?

Although there have not been any earth-shattering discoveries, advances in technology may soon provide the answers to some of these tantalizing questions. Just as Elizabethan literary folk relished the practice of ciphers and codes, a number of academics have developed artificial intelligence systems, currently searching for linguistic tendencies in order to identify the author/s of Shakespeare's work.⁶⁵

Writing in Atlantic Unbound, Edward Dolnick noted, “It is a strange image, a computer fingering a ghost. Eventually the prejudice against computers in literary

⁶³ A working draft of the author’s play, with notes, corrections and stage directions. According to the Reader’s Encyclopedia of Shakespeare, the King’s Men “preserved in its archives available copies of a play which they owned in order to prevent its falling into the hands of a rival company” (242). Heminges and Condell state in the Preface to the First Folio, “that wee have scarce receiued from him a blot in his papers.”

⁶⁴ Tom Fuller’s History of the Worthies of England (London 1662) represents the first to attempt to record the scant details of William Shakespeare’s life although Fuller was apparently unable to find the date of Shakespeare’s demise. It wasn’t until Nicholas Rowe’s 1709 Some Account of the Life, &c. of Mr. William Shakespear, that an authoritative biography was published.

⁶⁵ Ward Elliot and Robert Valenza, “Was the Earl of Oxford the True Shakespeare? A Computer-Aided Analysis,” Shakespeare Clinic of Claremont College, 7 April 1991 <<http://www.bcpl.lib.md.us/~tross/ws/elval.html>> (6 June 1997).

studies will give way.”⁶⁶ Then again, maybe Charles Dickens had something when he said, “It is a great comfort, to my way of thinking, that so little is known concerning the poet. The life of Shakespeare is a fine mystery and I tremble every day lest something should turn up.”⁶⁷

And of course, even when something does turn up, will Gregory the barrister—who spluttered, ‘You can’t go around suggesting these things without proof!’—simply filter the evidence, scanning ‘the outer world for material that...[he] is prepared to find by virtue of...[his] wiring hookups,...[his] own internal patterns, and...[his] past experience’?⁶⁸ While Gregory’s lawyerly claims of objectivity were sincere—we are all capable of claiming objectivity by eliminating biases that *we are aware of*—in a real sense those people who claim to be objective are particularly dangerous because what was an acknowledged *overt* bias becomes *covert* and ergo, hidden biases are imposed under the guise of an “objective” impartiality.

We have a choice—to criticize the *other’s* perspective for a lack of objectivity, or we can choose to talk about how a particular issue or perceptions of an issue have been enriched by the diversity of opinion about that very issue. To be a critical thinker does not mean to be an unbiased or objective thinker, but rather to be aware of the influences and cultural biases in all people and communication. In striving for the elusive notion of objectivity we may dismiss those characteristics of our background as biases which

⁶⁶ Edward Dolnick, “The Ghost’s Vocabulary,” *Atlantic Unbound*, October 1991, <<http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/flashbks/shakes/dolnick.htm>> (26 December 2002).

⁶⁷ The Shakespeare Oxford Society, “The Honor Roll of Skeptics,” (26 December 2002).

⁶⁸ Pert, 147.

determine our perspectives, as hindrances to objectivity, rather than valuing them for enabling us to possess a unique perspective.

IV. FROM THINE EYES MY KNOWLEDGE I DERIVE

The Joan Jockey-de Vere liaison

Professor Alan Nelson, who recently completed a biography of Edward de Vere, offers historical evidence that Edward's father, the 16th Earl of Oxford, had a mistress, Joan Jockey, whom he married bigamously:

*One day when the earl had left Joan Jockey by herself, a gang consisting of at least five men approached her residence in Earl's Colne. . . . The gang broke down Joan Jockey's door; then several of the gang pinned her down while John Smith 'spoiled' or 'disfigured' her: in the words of Enowes, 'this examinantes fellowe Iohn Smyth cutt her nose.' Presumably Smith either cut her nose clean off, or cut the skin at the base of the nostrils to give her a permanently grotesque appearance. Though Joan apparently survived the attack and outlived Dorothy [the countess], the earl's ardor for Joan Jockey cooled and he 'put her away.'*¹

Apparently this cutting off of the nose was "traditional punishment for a whore."²

The de Vere-Thomas Bricknell altercation

Edward de Vere (the 17th Earl of Oxford) was only twelve when his father died and he became the ward of Sir William Cecil—who later became Lord Burghley—one of the most powerful of Queen Elizabeth's advisors. Burghley used his influence to further the interests of his own family, including a forced marriage between his daughter and his ward, Edward de Vere. Burghley took great care to protect his future son-in-law.

Ogburn reports that

in July 1576 . . . [Edward de Vere's] guardian [Sir William Cecil] wrote in his diary:

“About this time Thomas Brincknell, an under-cook, was hurt by the Earl of Oxford at Cecil House in the Strand whereof he died, and by a verdict found felo-de-se [one who ‘deliberately puts an end to his own existence, or commits any unlawful malicious act, the consequence of which is his own death’], with running upon a point of a fence sward of the said Earl’s.”

The episode, certainly shocking enough in itself, stands alone in the record, without antecedents or aftermath.³

Not quite, actually, according to Nelson, who points out that the records show that

on 23 July 1567, while practicing fencing with Edward Baynam, a tailor, in the backyard of Cecil’s house in the strand, the seventeen-year-old Oxford killed an unarmed undercook named Thomas Brincknell with a thrust to the thigh. A packed jury instructed by Cecil found that Brincknell had caused his own death by wilfully hurling himself on Oxford’s rapier. Condemned as a suicide, Brincknell was denied Christian burial, his pregnant widow Agnes and three-year-old son Quyntyn stripped of their assets and abandoned to her relatives and the parish church.⁴

In my subsequent correspondence with Nelson, he informed me that Brincknell’s widow was left to care for two children and that Sir William Cecil did express some sympathy for the plight of the widow.⁵

Much has been written about “Shakespeare’s” legal know-how;⁶ thus it is worth noting that shortly after the Brincknell affair, Oxford was “admitted to Gray’s Inn, there to acquire . . . legal knowledge.”⁷

1567-1569

Transplanted from the wooded glens of rural Shottery to the hearth of a man at the center of England's power struggles and one of the 16th century's greatest statesmen, Sir William Cecil, Agnes enjoyed the substantial benefits her new position afforded. Rare beauty and greenness gave her license to play a wise fool with those she was sent to serve. The novelty of her superior intelligence was considered every bit as entertaining as were the spoilt terriers that walked on their hind-legs in exchange for table scraps.

Together with Sir William's daughters, Agnes took lessons, which soon bored her because of the tedious repetition required for the languid and placidly uninspired Lady Anne Cecil. Whenever she could, Agnes spent time in the library, and it was here that she had her first real encounter with Edward, the 17th Earl of Oxford. On a quiet rainy afternoon after the ladies of the house had gone to their rooms for an afternoon nap, she found a seat before the open hearth, book in hand, and was soon lost in the pages.

Sometime later Edward entered the library. At first he didn't see Agnes, and so was startled when he finally noticed her.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“Agnes,” she replied, without looking up.

“And what are you doing there?”

“Reading.”

“Why should you read?” he demanded, recognizing her as the girl from Shottery.

“If you read these books, you would know the answer to that question,” she replied, still immersed in the pages.

“I am able to read these books—better than most,” he retorted, feeling the ground giving way around him.

Sighing impatiently, she looked up at him and shrugged, “Not well enough it would seem,” and went back to her book.

“I can read these books better than you, I’d wager,” he said, willing the girl to see his mastery.

At the same time he couldn't help but notice the way her cool gray eyes had measured and found him wanting. He liked it.

When she didn't look up, he cleared his throat impatiently. Still she gave all her attention to the pages.

"What are you reading?" he finally asked.

She looked up, amused. "A book, but not so well as you would, I'd wager."

He stared at her while he tried to think of a reply.

"What do you want?" she finally asked.

"Only to know what book you read." But he was lying and she knew it.

Just then a servant came to fetch Agnes: "The Lady Anne is awake and desires that you attend her."

Agnes stood and crossed the room, handing Edward the book she had been reading. "Here it is. Read it well," she whispered, as she disappeared through the door.

â â â

He soon began to look forward to their private encounters. She never deferred to his superior social position, and their lively conversations excited him. Her questions surprised him, and he scarcely noticed how deftly she changed the topic when he did not have an answer.

One spring afternoon as Edward shared with Agnes a sonnet that he had written, it occurred to him that he wished to possess her. Holding her eyes firmly in his gaze he recited, "My mistress' eyes are bright like the sun . . ."

Imitating him perfectly, Agnes mocked the verse. "My mistress' eyes are *nothing* like the sun."

He continued, "Coral is far less red than her lips red . . ."

"Coral is far *more* red than her lips' red," she laughed.

"If snow be white, her breasts are from snow spun," he said, reaching for her.

"If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun," she smiled wickedly.

He moved closer. "Soft ink ropes, the loose plaits frame her sweet head."

Agnes moved out of reach, improvising as she managed to stay one step ahead.

“If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.”

Deftly she fainted in the direction of the door. Anticipating her move, Edward lunged for the door-handle, giving her an opportunity to move behind a large couch instead.

“I have seen roses damasked, red and white,” he said meaningfully.

She replied, “but no such roses see I in her cheeks.” But the effort to elude Edward proved her words untrue; her cheeks were indeed rosy red with exertion and her voice was becoming breathless.

He struggled to remember the words he had planned for her seduction, words that had always worked like a charm on the ladies of the court, “Thy breath is the perfume and when you speak . . .”

“And in some perfumes is there more delight than in the breath that from my mistress reeks,” Agnes laughed.

His poem all but forgotten, Edward engaged fully in the hunt, his breath quickened along with his desire. They circled the couch.

Teasing, Agnes continued to recite, “I love to hear her speak, yet well I know that music hath a far more pleasing sound.”

And now she pretended to give in to him, sinking into the couch cushions.

His eyes glittered with the anticipation of a successful conquest. “I grant I never saw a goddess go,” she spoke softly, demurely, but suddenly she was up, vaulting over the couch and disappearing through the door with a parting salvo, “My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.”

And then she was gone.

Edward called after her, “And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare as any she belied with false compare.”

á á á

Knowing that she walked in the gardens every day, Edward schemed to catch her there alone. This morning she was late and that made him madly impatient—as if some contract between them had been broken. Soon the household would be stirring and she would be called away on a whim.

Thomas Bricknell crouched behind a bush and watched Agnes cross the lawn to meet her earl. The kindly undercook loved the girl. He had heard the servants gossiping. Now he saw that the rumors were probably true. She was so young.⁸

He determined to warn her of the dangerous game she played.

“At last you are awake!” Edward greeted her. Agnes heard the note of impatience in his voice.

“No,” she answered; “I still sleep in my bed.”

“I should like to see your bed, and you asleep there,” he replied. And though the tone of familiarity made her burn, she laughed.

Till this morning in the garden they had never touched. So Agnes was taken by surprise when he grabbed her arms in a fierce grip and drew her close. His fingers dug in sharply, bruising her upper arms. She was oddly elated by the bright spark of lust that pierced through her when she felt him stir against the soft part of her belly. He leaned forward to kiss her—she closed her eyes, her head going to vapor.

“AGNES!” The cry came from the direction of the house. Reluctantly Edward released her. She stumbled backwards, dizzy, nearly tripping over a tree root. His arm reached out to steady her.

“AGNES!” Again the insistent call—closer this time. A short stocky figure came across the lawn. Agnes recognized Thomas, the ruddy-faced undercook, who always saved the best food for her.

“You are wanted in the house,” Thomas called, as he continued to make his way toward them.

Angry at the interruption, Edward snapped, “She will be there in a moment,” dismissing the servant, who remained—watching.

In exasperation Edward said, “Go and tell them she will be there shortly.” But the undercook stayed where he was, his eyes lowered in deference to the earl.

“Leave us,” Edward commanded.

But Thomas did not move.

“Are you dumb?” Edward said with menace.

“She is wanted in the house,” Thomas repeated.

Uncertain, Agnes moved toward the house. But Edward caught hold of a sleeve, stopping her.

“She is wanted here.” Edward maintained his iron grip.

Thomas sensed his fate hanging heavy in the damp morning air.

“I shall see what they want,” Agnes announced.

The sound of her voice broke the spell. The dangerous moment passed. Edward released his hold, allowing her to return to the house with Thomas, who waited until they were safely out of earshot to turn on her.

“Rash and foolish girl! Meddling with your betters—you have heard what happened to Joan Jockey?”

“I have made him love me,” she announced defiantly.

Inwardly Thomas groaned as he looked at the girl with pity. Lady Mildred must be told. And now she would be sent away.

The unlucky Thomas was unable to confide in anyone before he was summoned to deliver morning tea to the earl as he practiced his fencing in the garden. Still smarting over the interruption to his tryst, Edward made a threatening feint in the vicinity of the undercook—intending merely to frighten him. With a curious detachment Thomas stood his sturdy ground, refusing to duck out of the way. For a moment the two men surveyed each other, each one in love with Agnes. This time Thomas did not avert his gaze. The next thrust sliced cleanly through his tunic, breaking the skin across his heart.

Several of the servants in the yard stopped what they were doing to watch. Edward’s fencing partner—Baynam—attempted to distract him calling out, “M’lord, shall we finish?”

Meanwhile, Thomas watched the nobleman’s graceful movement, refusing to show Edward the fear he felt or the sting of his wound.

Again Edward’s rapier found its mark, leaving an angry gash on the undercook’s right forearm. Then another across his cheek—and again on his neck.

The servants began to murmur, calling out to Thomas, “Don’t be daft, man!” and, “Run now!”

Edward, growing more angry and reckless with the stubbornly implacable servant, jabbed at him with the sharp blade.

“You’ll never have ‘er, m’lord,” the undercook muttered so that only Edward could hear him. “I’ll see she’s sent away today.”

Growling with fury Edward attacked, driving the shaft at Thomas’ heart. At the last moment Thomas managed to deflect the stroke of the blade away from his heart into his thigh. And as he staggered and fell to the ground, the blood spurting from the artery in his leg, Thomas knew the wound was mortal.

Edward’s rage and frustration melted into remorse.

â â â

At his trial, a stacked jury exonerated Edward and the unfortunate Thomas Bricknell was found to have committed suicide by willfully hurling himself on Edward’s rapier.

For her part, Agnes no longer walked in the garden, keeping herself close to the nursery, unapproachable and aloof. Her friend’s death left her full of sorrow. Making

sure that she was never alone with Edward, Agnes refused to meet his gaze when they met by chance. Pride forbade him from seeking her out.

A short time later Edward was sent to live at Grays Inn to study law, Sir William having decided that a busier schedule might keep his royal ward out of further mischief.

Time passed, and with Edward away and fully engaged with his study, Agnes once again felt safe to resume reading in the library and walking in the garden alone. He came to her in dreams. She would wake breathless and full of self-loathing for the fire she could not extinguish. "All men are bad," she chanted like a mantra to herself. And although it was futile, she raged too against the fates that conspired to cause her lover to kill her friend and leave a young mother and child without a husband and father.

Unannounced, Edward returned to Cecil House from his studies in London, where he caught Agnes in the library alone on another rainy afternoon. His resolve melted and he forgot the cruel things he had planned to say.

"I love you," he said instead.

Knowing that he spoke the truth Agnes began to cry, big shuddering sobs of grief mixed with anger.

"Do you hate me now?" he asked, bewildered.

She set her face against him.

“Ay, I hate,” she began slowly.

The quiet was unendurable.

“Not you,” she finally whispered, “In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds.”⁹

That night Edward woke her from a sound sleep and stole her innocence, which he paid for with a sonnet and promises he could never keep.

Those lips that love's own hand did make¹⁰
Breathed forth the sound that said 'I hate',¹¹
To me, that languished for her sake;
But when she saw my woeful state,
Straight in her heart did mercy come,
Chiding that tongue that, ever sweet,
Was used in giving gentle doom,
And taught it thus anew to greet:
'I hate' she altered with an end
That followed it as gentle day
Doth follow night, who like fiend
From heaven to hell is flown away.
'I hate' from 'hate' away she threw¹²
And saved my life, saying 'not you'.¹³

For a very long time Agnes would be unable to extricate her mind, body and soul from Edward's controlling power over her. And she would continue to curse the fates that made her love for him an obsession that sometimes overwhelmed her with the self-

loathing she catalogued in her diary of sonnets. “For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,” she often mused over him, “who art as black as hell, as dark as night.”¹⁴

IV. FROM THINE EYES MY KNOWLEDGE I DERIVE

¹ Alan H. Nelson, "Sexual Exploits of John de Vere, 16th Earl of Oxford," Alan H. Nelson Home Page, Spring 2000:

<<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson/ITALY/EarlJohn.html>> (26 December 2002).

² Alan H. Nelson, "Position Statement on Oxford," Alan H. Nelson Home Page, 5 July 1998:

<<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson/oxposit.html>> (11 November 2002).

³ Ogburn, 454-455.

⁴ Nelson, Position Statement.

⁵ Personal email from Alan Nelson. 20 October 1997.

⁶ Edmund Malone was the first to suggest that William Shakespeare must have worked as a legal clerk in his 1780 Supplement to the Edition of Shakespeare's Plays Published in 1778 by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens. See also Shakespeare's Legal Acquirements Considered (1858) by Lord Campbell; The Shakespeare Problem Restated (1908) and Shakespeare's Law (1920) by Sir George Greenwood MP; The Baconian Heresy: A Confutation by J.M. Robertson MP contains a refutation of the legal know-how of the bard, as revealed in the plays; and The Real Shakespeare (1995) by Eric Sams.

⁷ Ogburn, 453.

⁸ At the age of twelve, Agnes was old enough to marry. The legal age for marriage in Elizabethan England was "set downe twelue yeares for the floure of the females age, and fourteen of a males." Camden, 93.

⁹ Sonnet 131.

¹⁰ According to notes for Sonnet 145, "Gurr has suggested that the sonnet is very early. . . . Booth calls it the "slightest of sonnets," and Pooler said, "Perhaps not Shakespeare's." Katherine Duncan-Jones, ed., Shakespeare's Sonnets: Arden Shakespeare, 3rd series (London: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 406.

¹¹ "This periphrastic way of indicating that the woman's lips uttered the phrase 'I hate' suggests some play with the puffing aspirate at the beginning of 'hate'" (Duncan-Jones, 406).

¹² "'Hate away,' Gurr suggests, [is] a pun on 'Hathaway'" (Duncan-Jones, 406).

¹³ "'And,' Booth suggests, [is] a play on 'Anne'" (Duncan-Jones, 406).

¹⁴ Sonnet 147.

V. REVISIONARY RE-READING

She had the startled eyes of a wild bird. This is the kind of sentence I go mad for. I would like to be able to write such sentences, without embarrassment. If I could only do these two simple things, I feel I would be able to pass my allotted time on this earth like a pearl wrapped in velvet.

She had the startled eyes of a wild bird. Ah, but which one? A screech owl, perhaps, or a cuckoo? It does make a difference. We do not need more literalists of the imagination. They cannot read *a body like a gazelle's* without thinking of intestinal parasites, zoos, and smells.¹

Katie

Blond hair

GRE—96th percentile

TV producer/writer

Tennis, skiing, bungee jumping

New Year's Eve—danced all night

R & B, jazz

Mary

Gray hair

GRE—16th percentile

7th grade English teacher

Reading & walking

New Year's—in bed at 8:30pm

Opera & classical

In my writing classes, I sometimes present students with my Katie/Mary paradox. Katie, I explain, has blond hair. Mary's is gray. Katie scored in the 96th percentile on her GRE (Graduate Record Exam). Mary scored in the 16th percentile. Katie has worked in three

¹ Atwood, 5.

countries as a television producer and writer—once interviewing Sir Edmund Hillary in his New Zealand backyard. Mary is a seventh grade English teacher. Katie is the captain of her tennis team; she likes to ski and can hardly wait to go bungee jumping. Mary likes to read and take walks. On New Year’s Eve, Katie got home at 6am after dancing all night at a party in Hollywood. Mary was in bed at 8:30 on New Year’s. Katie listens to R&B, jazz and rock ‘n’ roll. Mary likes classical music.

After listing their various attributes, I ask students to characterize Katie and Mary. Katie is invariably described as attractive, fun, smart—the life of the party. Mary is generally perceived to be 60ish, boring, quiet, plain and dull.

Then I explain that my nickname, as a child who stuttered, was Katie, but college friends call me Mary. My hair is gray but now is blond, thanks to my hairdresser, David. I scored in the 96th percentile in the humanities category on my GRE and in the 16th percentile in the mathematics section. I’ve worked as a television producer in the United States, Australia and New Zealand, once interviewing Sir Edmund Hillary in his backyard. I’ve also taught seventh grade English. I was in bed at 8:30 New Year’s “night” because I had danced into the wee hours on New Year’s “Eve.” I like R&B, jazz and classical music and I enjoy skiing, walking, reading and playing tennis. A true fact, each one, but by their arrangement *and what gets left out*, they present two strikingly different pictures.

I refer to this simple introductory exercise in my classes when we're discussing ideas including the complexity of truth, the difference between a fact and an inference, the vulnerability of statistics, the role of interpretation and speculation in critical thinking and historical research, and how what is left out is often as important as what is included.

In her 1978 book, The Resisting Reader, Judith Fetterley argues that "feminist criticism represents the discovery/recovery of a voice." She admonishes her readers:

The first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us. The consequence of this exorcism is the capacity for what Adrienne Rich describes as re-vision—"the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction."²

Reflecting the trend in feminist criticism, Fetterley's more recent book, Writing out of Place—co-authored with Marjorie Pryse—expands to include Michel Foucault's idea of resistance as a "multiplicity of points...[that] are present everywhere in the power network."³ Warning against the "cosmopolitans who have much to gain by 'regionalizing' and thereby containing the power of certain groups of people," Fetterley targets all "hierarchical structures of gender, race, class and nation" as worthy of resistance.⁴

² Judith Fetterley, The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction (Indiana: Indiana UP, 1978), xxii.

³ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, reissue ed. (New York: Vintage Press, 1990), 95.

⁴ Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 12.

My own attempt, in May 2002, to resist and exorcise some of the old textual meanings generated at the Christian college where I am the artistic director of the theater program, illustrates the lengths to which a patriarchal church hierarchy will go in maintaining the status quo. The issue revolved around my decision to produce and direct Bill Davis' play, *Mass Appeal*, which tells a story about the friendship of two priests: Mark Dolson, a fiery young radical with a bisexual past, and Father Farley, an alcoholic who is concerned primarily with pleasing his parishioners and the church hierarchy.

On Monday morning—the show was scheduled to open the following Saturday night—I was summoned by the then-president of the college to ‘please explain my decision to produce a play about priests who were Catholic, bisexual, alcoholics on a Christian—albeit *liberal arts*—college campus on alumni weekend. Facing off against a trio of male administrators—the president, academic dean and the dean of theology—and the female administrator who initiated the proceedings, I was presented with the prospect of having the show cancelled. ‘I am uncomfortable with the idea of canceling this show having never seen it or read it,’ admitted the female administrator, and fortunately the others concurred.

That evening our rehearsal was overseen by a delegation of administrators, after which we reconvened in the president's office and I was given a choice: Cancel the Saturday night performance (which was already sold out) or the production would be cancelled altogether. But that wasn't enough. They also insisted that I make it clear that the decision to cancel the performance was one that *I* had made, in order to avoid a

backlash from the students. Through tears of anger and disappointment I made it clear that I believed that their decision was wrong, but I wanted the show to go on. And it did, to sell-out crowds and a standing ovation after each performance. The academic dean later sent flowers as an apology, admitting that his wife was furious with him for allowing the show to be cancelled.

Documentary historians searching for the reason this performance was cancelled will find an innocuous press release issued by the PR department at the college announcing *my* decision to cancel the Saturday night performance. The student newspaper also contained a brief announcement about *my* decision to cancel the performance. The winners of this particular skirmish obscured the truth of what actually occurred, and documentary historians searching for the facts are unlikely to find them.

Although anecdotal, this incident supports Nancy F. Partner's definition—cited by Cheryl Glenn—of

history as 'the definitive human audacity imposed on formless time and meaningless event with the human meaning-maker: language.' She [Partner] calls history writing 'the silent shared conspiracy of all historians (who otherwise agree on nothing else these days).'⁵

Feminist criticism began as resistance to a patriarchal heritage that excluded the female voice. For women, one of the advantages of being outside the power structure is the ability to look around and see the 'other' marginalized members of the community

⁵ Cheryl Glenn, "Comment: Truth, Lies and Method: Revisiting Feminist Historiography," College English 62, no. 3 (2000): 388.

camped outside the fortress of power/knowledge—a view obscured to the power elite by the very walls they built to exclude gender, classes, religions, races or nationalities.

Recovering Anne Hathaway is doubly difficult because she is both female *and* a commoner, despite her proximity to a man considered to be the greatest writer in the history of the English language. Writing about recent attempts to recover such marginalized voices or texts of women in history, Professor Xin Liu Gale asks:

Is it possible to recover great historical women whose achievements have been erased from the traditional history by men? Who are those women whose voices were silenced by men in history?⁶

Although the explicit details concerning the life of William Shakespeare failed to survive the ravages of time, Shakespearean historians and biographers have managed to cobble together enough factoids to delight their readers with thousands of pages devoted to probable historical data that seems to fit with other accounts—their stories then taken up by the community and embraced as truth.

Will history repeat itself? Can we take the scant details of Anne Hathaway's life and delight a reader with probable historical data that seems to fit with other accounts? Will her story be taken up by the community and embraced? Is it possible to approach the authorship canon with what Fetterley calls a "re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction"?"⁷ Susan Jarratt asserts that the trend among historians of rhetoric suggests that

⁶ Xin Liu Gale, "Historical Studies and Postmodernism: Rereading Aspasia of Miletus," College English 62, no. 3 (2000): 378.

⁷ Fetterley, Resisting Reader, xix.

new histories will be evaluated by rhetorical criteria: Does this history instruct, delight, and move the reader? Is the historical data probable? Does it fit with other accounts or provide a convincing alternative? Is it taken up by the community and used? Or is it refuted, dismissed, and forgotten?⁸

In a paper he presented at the sixth annual Edward de Vere Studies Conference in April 2002, Professor Alan Nelson began by describing himself as a “documentary historian,” a scholar who insists that “if you say something—you must be able to prove it.” Nelson went on to enrage some members of his audience—composed almost entirely of true believers in the notion of de Vere as the real author of Shakespeare—by reading a chapter from his biography of Edward de Vere in which he shared documentary evidence of de Vere’s gross mismanagement of his school in Earls Colne. Nelson used the facts to imply that de Vere was criminally irresponsible. Two years earlier Nelson had given a paper at the fourth annual conference in which he referred to de Vere as a “psychopath,” with reference to the Thomas Bricknell affair. Needless to say, Nelson’s ideas were not taken up or embraced by this particular community of scholars.

How should a documentary historian interpret a telling lack of evidence? For example, browsing through the 1980 Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations, one reads the front plate, which declares it to be “a collection of passages, phrases and proverbs traced to their sources in ancient and modern literature.”

In the key word index, note the statistics regarding the number of references to the following words:

⁸ S. Jarratt, “Comment: Rhetoric and Feminism: Together Again,” College English 62, no. 3 (2000): 391.

| <u>Key word</u> | <u># of references</u> |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| Man | 1059 |
| Woman | 232 |
| Men | 554 |
| Women | 161 |
| Mankind | 80 |
| Womankind | 1 |
| Man's | 93 |
| Woman's | 36 |
| Men's | 24 |
| Women's | 5 |

Of the 119 names listed in the volume's "Index of Authors" under the letter "A" alone, only 11 are women. A cursory glance through the rest of the index reveals a mere sprinkling of female names.⁹

Citing an example from Dale Spender, Janet Wolff explains that

descriptive linguistics has shown that...those supposedly generic terms 'man' and 'he'...don't in fact operate as neutral in respect to gender. Dale Spender demonstrates this with the telling comparison of the perfectly acceptable 'man is the only primate that commits rape' and the totally ridiculous statement 'man, unlike other mammals, has difficulties giving birth.'¹⁰

Remembering the first time I heard the term, *chairperson*, I recall how eccentric and odd it sounded back in the 1970s. Thumbing through Henry Beard and Christopher

⁹ Emily Morison Beck, ed., Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, 15th ed. (Boston: Little Brown, 1980), xvii-xviii.

¹⁰ Janet Wolff, Women's Knowledge and Women's Art, A Special Publication of the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Division of Humanities, Griffith University (Queensland, Australia, 1989), 5.

Cerf's 1992 The Official Politically Correct Dictionary and Handbook, which was designed to expose what the authors believed to be the more outrageous excesses of PC-speak, I find that many of the examples cited no longer have the sting they once boasted.

To be successful, writers must learn to straddle the opposing pressures of appealing to an audience that paradoxically has both a love and fear of anything new or novel. The trick is finding a balance between the two. The idea of a great writer being female is a relatively new and novel concept. I picked up a pack of "Women Writers Knowledge Cards," described as the product of an exploration

into the rich resources of the Library of Congress to present historical photographs and brief biographies of 48 of the world's greatest and most powerful women writers—including poets and playwrights, novelists and journalists, Pulitzer Prize winners and Nobel Laureates.¹¹

Of the 48 women writers, 19 were born in the twentieth century; 28 were born in the nineteenth century; with one born in the eighteenth century. No surprise then, that Bloom's historical truth canon (The Western Canon) salutes only four female authors—and 22 males.¹² Australian feminist Dale Spender contends that

it is no accident of course that girls cannot draw on a body of knowledge about women to illustrate how inaccurate and partial are the beliefs about the unworthiness of the female. It is no accident that they cannot present evidence to counter the belief that women deserve contempt because they are women. Such evidence, while it may have been produced by women for centuries, is not handed on by men.¹³

¹¹ Women Writers Knowledge Cards™, (Rohnert Park CA: Pomegranate Publications, n.d.).

¹² No surprise either that Bloom should write, "At what date in the history of secular writing did men (sic) begin to speak of poems or stories as being immortal?" (Bloom, The Western Canon, 19).

¹³ Dale Spender, "Make Trouble—Get Results," Gender and Education, Paige Porter, ed. (Melbourne: Deakin University Press, 1986), 79.

Writings by Elizabethan women that were considered worth handing on were primarily moral or religious in nature. Carroll Camden reports that “more than sixty percent of...[Elizabethan women’s] printed efforts are given over to religious subjects.”¹⁴ And the women who had the time to write, the quills and expensive paper upon which to write, and the education enabling them to do so, were primarily upper-class members of the aristocracy. Or so the historical records say. Ironically, the very absence of information about her also provides a space for speculation and theory about the life and times of Anne Hathaway. Just as some non-Stratfordians are accused of elitism for insisting that Shakespeare must have been a member of the aristocracy, wouldn’t it be both elitist and sexist to argue, as Virginia Woolf’s bishop did, that a woman—especially a commoner—could *never* have written the plays of Shakespeare?¹⁵

What happens when traditional memory or practice is disrupted and a paradigm begins to shift? A lot! Reporting on her ground-breaking research into who “gets the teacher’s attention in class”—which revealed that a disproportionate amount (63 percent to boys and 34 percent to girls) of teacher time is lavished on boys in mixed-sex classrooms—Spender described what happened when teachers, including herself, attempted to address the imbalance of attention:

Many of the boys protested that slightly more than one third [of the teacher’s attention given to girls] was unfair, and that they were missing out on their *rightful* share of teacher attention... From this it would seem that in a sexist society boys assume that two thirds of the teacher’s attention constitutes a fair

¹⁴ Camden, 58.

¹⁵ Woolf, 48.

deal and if this ratio is altered so that they receive less than two thirds of the teachers' attention they feel they are being discriminated against.¹⁶

As the artistic director of the theater program at the college where I work, part of my job involved selecting the plays for the 2001/2002 season. In the fall of 2001 we produced The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: Abridged, starring three men. The Collegian, a student newspaper, ran a news story and two reviews. None of the stories featured specific remarks about the fact that the play had three male leads. In the spring of 2002, I directed Mass Appeal with all male actors. Although The Collegian ran a review and a news story, no mention was made of the fact that the boys were getting a lot of time on the stage in our 2001/2002 season. For the first play in our 2002/2003 season, I directed Lee Blessing's Eleemosynary. The following week The Collegian ran a review of the play and a news item on the back page. Some excerpts:

*You know, it's interesting to note that this play has no male actors or characters. Some people might be tempted to say it's a play for women, by women.*¹⁷

*There are indeed a number of anti-male lines in the play, but this certainly isn't feminist propaganda. Remember that the playwright is male.*¹⁸

*Women may have an easier time relating to the themes of motherhood.*¹⁹

*'Eleemosynary' . . . is an acclaimed play about relationships among familial women . . . Relationships and women are two things I know little about so maybe I could learn something.*²⁰

¹⁶ Spender, 73.

¹⁷ Brian Bell and Alan MacGuffin, "WWCDrama: *Eleemosynary*," The Collegian (10 October 2002): 10.

¹⁸ Bell and MacGuffin, 10.

¹⁹ Bell and MacGuffin, 10.

²⁰ Josh Reinbold, "3 Girls and Some Props," The Collegian (10 October 2002): 16.

Admittedly, a patriarchal church hierarchy amplifies the gender bias on this particular campus. However, in some ways overt discrimination is easier to address than the covert discrimination disguised as a play review which, perhaps without consciously meaning to, sends a coded signal to at least half of the population—*Warning! Warning! Woman's voice ahead—beware.*

Why is the feminine voice and story so often minimized by men, and should we care? I do. I happen to care a lot, particularly if it's going to have an adverse effect at the box office! Predictably our box office suffered. Later, two male students sheepishly admitted to me that they didn't attend because they heard the play was a kind of "chick fest."

In her study of Australia's 36 universities, Dr. Clare Burton found that "it was not uncommon for male staff to argue that EEO had gone too far and that women were 'more equal than others.'" Despite charts and graphs which demonstrate the opposite, "men...appeared to overestimate the numbers of women around them, in academic and general staff areas."²¹ In her report, Burton notes that "the University of Western Australia's draft equity review report states: 'The single most important change required is to the *culture of Masculinity* and its implicit values.'"²²

²¹ Clare Burton, *Gender Equity in Australian Universities*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service 97, no. 18 (1997). <<http://www.deetya.gov.au/divisions/hed/highered/eippubs.htm>> (8 February 1998).

²² Burton, 7.

This situation is mirrored elsewhere in the world, in a phenomenon Susan Faludi coined as “backlash”²³—a predictable reaction to the loss of power. The phenomenon was vividly demonstrated in New Zealand when Maori tradition, which “holds that women cannot speak during speech ceremonies on the marae (meeting place),” came into direct conflict with the parliamentary leader of the opposition (later she became Prime Minister) who was female. “When...Helen Clark...rose to speak on the marae, she was so forcefully challenged she was reduced to tears and silence.” Clark also reported that she had been fearful of her physical safety during the challenge. And although “many Maori, including men, say it is time for traditions to change, others insist that so much has already been lost to Maori, it is important some traditions are maintained.”²⁴

Witness also the glib dismissal of “inclusion” in David Williamson’s ode to Shakespeare—Dead White Males. Not all critics were enamored of the play, however. John McCallum wrote:

Dead White Males is an ideologically driven satire on the tyranny of ideology. Its demonic spokesman is one Grant Swain, an appallingly hypocritical teacher who uses fashionable theories of feminism to manipulate his female students into bed. He is the sole voice in this play of more than a century of serious thought about the way ideas circulate in our world. Such thought has included a critique of men’s power by women. It has often been a sympathetic critique. There is no reason why living white males need to get all defensive about it.²⁵

Whether or not Williamson’s play will be seen as a curious relic of male angst or

²³ Susan Faludi, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992).

²⁴ Jane Dunbar, “Girls’ Talk Gagged for Some But Not for Others,” Australian (13 February 1998): 10.

²⁵ John McCallum, “Correctness Satire Wounded by Williamson’s Tyranny,” Australian (13 March 1995): 7.

an incisive critique of dangerous new ideas, remains for future literary and theatre critics to determine.

“Women In The War Zone,” a journal article published in 1993, is Phillip Knightley’s cautionary tale in which he “describes how women journalists have affected the reporting of the war in Bosnia, and shows how media emphasis on human interest stories can distort other issues.” In justifying his approach, Knightley admits that “my description above of Penny Marshall’s appearance may not appear *politically correct* but I justify it by citing how she looked as a factor in the impact her report created.”²⁶ Knightley argues that while “most male war correspondents... seem more interested in writing about possession of territory—who’s winning the war and how,” women correspondents “would concentrate on stories about these victims. This approach has been common to the limited number of female correspondents allowed to report in previous wars.” He concludes that the female reporters’ stories have had such an impact—

fewer than 20 minutes after [Penny] Marshall’s report was broadcast on American TV, President Bush (Senior) had changed his policy toward Serbia. In Britain, Prime Minister John Major recalled his cabinet from holiday for an emergency meeting which decided to send 1,800 ground troops to Bosnia.

—precisely because they are women. He points out that

when male correspondents write stories about victims, as did seasoned TV reporter Michael Nicholson on children trapped in Sarajevo, they seem to pass without the attention [Maggie] O’Kane and Marshall attracted.²⁷

²⁶ Phillip Knightley, “Women in the War Zone,” *The Independent Monthly* (10 October 1993): 10.

²⁷ Knightley, 10.

By approaching an old familiar text—the reportage of war by men—with fresh eyes, O’Kane and Marshall engaged in a revisionary re-reading of a text which had been read mostly through a masculine eye. The emotional impact of their insights changed radically the relationship between reporters and military planners, who have been more careful to limit access to sensitive information in subsequent conflicts, while adopting a new approach called “embedding”—carefully placing journalists with a particular troop of soldiers as was done recently in the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Whether O’Kane and Marshall’s reports will be seen as merely an emotional reaction typical of women, or as a new insight about the implications of war for the marginalized “other,” remains to be determined by military and other historians. To paraphrase Fetterley, being aware is power.

To create a new understanding of a...[text] is to make possible a new effect of that...[text] on us. And to make possible a new effect is in turn to provide the conditions for changing the culture that the...[text] reflects.²⁸

In their article, “Watery Passion: The Struggle Between Hegemony and Sexual Liberation in Erotic Fiction for Women,” the authors Patthey-Chavez, Clare and Youmans explore the representation of the feminine in “the first erotic genre explicitly directed to a female audience.”²⁹ Quoting J. Berger’s 1973 study, *Ways of Seeing*,³⁰ this article looks at how “women’s erotic romances challenge a pervasive and long-standing

²⁸ Fetterley, *Resisting Reader*, xix-xx.

²⁹ Genevieve Patthey-Chavez, Lindsay Clare, and Madeline Youmans, “Watery Passion: The Struggle Between Hegemony and Sexual Liberation in Erotic Fiction for Women,” *Discourse & Society* 7, no. 1 (January 1996): 77.

³⁰ J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Viking, 1973), 47.

unilateral arrangement in which ‘men look at women while women watch themselves being looked at.’”³¹ And if we agree that the old text is objectification with *men gazing at women*—then Candace Pert unwittingly offers a revisionary re-reading of said text with her fresh (pun intended) eyes.

A respected scientist, nominated for a Nobel prize, Pert brazenly objectifies the male scientists who come within her sphere of influence. Turning her unblinking gaze to the male of the species—“Later, when I had my own lab, I would see the potential for combined male-female energy as a positive force to do great science”³²—she offers these observations:

“It was heavenly... Handsome postdocs scurried hither and yon.”³³

“Ken...was incredibly handome.”³⁴

“I was stunned by the slides Miles showed... And he himself was as gorgeous as his slides—a real hunk!”³⁵

“I found myself gravitating toward the end of the bar, where two young, good-looking postdocs were holding forth.”³⁶

“For all my feminist leanings, I was intrigued by the idea of working with someone whose style and presence were so quintessentially masculine.”³⁷

Again, not everyone is comfortable with these shifting reversals. Journalist Cameron Stewart questioned whether a “new genre of in-your-face women writers”—

³¹ Patthey-Chavez, Clare, and Youmans, 80.

³² Pert, 41.

³³ Pert, 36.

³⁴ Pert, 41.

³⁵ Pert, 124.

³⁶ Pert, 158.

³⁷ Pert, 199.

who push “the boundaries of public taste by writing about rape, incest and paedophilia”—are “literary liberators or clever marketers.” While Stewart admits that “they are...taking women’s writing to places it has never been before,” he also pouts that “there is little doubt that in today’s *politically correct* society, a male author would be savaged if he dared to write about paedophile murderers and women enjoying rape.”³⁸

More than once, Stewart dismisses the work of what he derisively terms “shock jockettes” and “new cliterati” saying, “Are young women writers seizing and expanding a literary tradition once the sole domain of male writers, or *are they just trying to sell more books by upping the ante on sex?*” [emphasis mine]. Describing how they look, he adds, “What’s more, many of them...are relatively young and attractive, making the darkness of their writing more intriguing to many readers. *It also makes them more marketable*” [emphasis mine]. Then there is Stewart’s parting salvo: “Maybe history will eventually be just as kind to this new generation. But for the moment these novelists are going to have to weather the critical storm—*while laughing all the way to the bank*”³⁹ [emphasis mine].

How dare a woman try to make money from her writing, after all? For Stewart, the most shocking aspect of these texts has to do with authorial gender, rather than content. At the same time Stewart also identifies one of the historical reasons some

³⁸ Cameron Stewart, “Sex Writes,” *Australian* (24 November 1997): 10. Stewart is referring specifically to *The End of Alice* by Amy Homes, *The Kiss* by Kathryn Harrison and *Transgressions* by Sarah Dunant.

³⁹ Stewart, 10.

women have adopted a male pen name—it enables them to sell their work more readily. For example, the desire to live an independent life as a writer collided with societal taboos forcing Amandine-Aurore Lucille Dupin, Baronne Dudevant (1804-1876) to adopt the pen name, George Sand, in order to have her novels published.

If Fetterley is right and women have been “taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values,”⁴⁰ are these manifestations of male values—albeit written by women—a reflection of the truism, *The apple doesn't fall far from the tree*? Or do they somehow fit with Fetterley's notion of re-reading? In this case the old text—men writing about rape, incest and pedophilia—is re-read through feminine *authorship*. Taking this one step further, *authorship* becomes the *text*, and the focus of our revisionary re-reading.

And if an Australian journalist is getting upset with the things women are writing about in 1997, we must wonder what audiences might have thought in 1603—about a *woman* writing about murder, rape, and cannibalism.

In a chapter from a book edited by Andrea Lunsford, Cheryl Glenn points out that

so far as a woman's, or a feminine, or a womanly rhetoric might go—I think the rhetoric of the disenfranchised and the disempowered is gendered feminine. It's doubly ironic that the rhetoric of the (seemingly) disempowered could and does continually incite such powerful response (and overreaction) on the part of those who are in power. Those in power are all too often *enraged* by such rhetoric, and their overreaction manifests itself in shunnings, beatings, silencings, killings,

⁴⁰ Fetterley, *Resisting Reader*, xx.

tortures—punishments of all degrees and kinds. The enraged must be terrified and threatened.⁴¹

How should a documentary historian interpret this fear and loathing? How should a documentary historian interpret the absence of a feminine voice in recorded history? Perhaps the feminine voice is not absent, but merely missing the moniker of authorial identification—the key to having the voice heard at all (and avoid shunning, beating, killing and/or torture) requiring some female authors to hide behind a man or a masculine name.

In a challenge to the scientific community and the traditional “pure science myth” which resembles Nelson’s description of the role of a documentary historian, Thomas Kuhn points out that

observation and experience can and must drastically restrict the range of admissible scientific belief, else there would be no science, but they cannot alone determine a particular body of such belief. An apparently arbitrary element, compounded of personal and historical accident, is always a formative ingredient of the beliefs espoused by a given scientific community at a given time.⁴²

For example, the fact that *string theory* (which “proposes that all matter, from our skin to a slab of stone, is made of tiny loops of vibrating strings, ‘dancing filaments of energy’”⁴³) is unproven, did not prevent Columbia University physicist Brian Greene’s 1999 book, The Elegant Universe, from becoming a New York Times bestseller and

⁴¹ Andrea A. Lunsford, ed., Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 321.

⁴² Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd ed., enlarged, International Encyclopedia of United Science, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 2.

⁴³ Claudia Kalb, “Physics Envy,” Newsweek (31 July 2000): 62.

Pulitzer finalist. Claudia Kalb points out that “when he’s not interpreting the [unproven] theory [Greene] is busy helping to build it.”⁴⁴

The observable experiences and motivations that have led women to place a male autograph on their writing include (a) the fact that they had no choice in the matter; (b) a wish to have their work read accompanied by a belief that their gender would preclude this; (c) financial concerns accompanied by a belief that their gender would preclude them from selling their work; (d) a desire to promote the career of their male partners or—as in the case of the Countess of Pembroke—their brother; (e) in the case of Bertolt Brecht, an apparent exchange of sex for text; (f) and a self-effacing belief that their own name and authorship is irrelevant, and what matters is the message of the text.

Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette (1873-1954) had no choice. Her husband, Henry Gauthier-Villars published her early novels under his own name. Her talent was eventually recognized and on her own she became simply “Colette,” creator of Cheri and Gigi. In Elizabethan marriages, the husband and wife became as one, and that “one” was the husband. Feigning madness, Hamlet (*Hamlet* IV, ii, 51-54) inverts this practice, referring to Claudius as “dear *Mother*.” When Claudius corrects him saying, “Thy loving *father*,” Hamlet responds insistently, “My *mother*. Father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh, and so, my *mother*.”

Is Anne offering an authorial clue in Sonnet 136 when she writes that as husband

⁴⁴ Kalb, 62

and wife, Will and she are one, “Make but my name thy love, and love that still; / And then thou lov’st me, for my name is Will”? Whatever her motivations may have been, Anne Hathaway-Shakespeare did not have the choice—under Elizabethan law—to question any decision her husband made to claim her written work as his own.

Other women have adopted a male name in order to have their work read and sold. With an intuitive understanding of the cultural bias against feminine authors, Charlotte Brontë described the decision she and her sisters made to veil their names

under those of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because—without at the time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called ‘feminine’—we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice.⁴⁵

Brian Wilks recounts the reaction of the Brontës’ contemporary readers. “Critics at the time, who did not know at first that the novels were written by women, generally fell under their spell and acknowledged their power, but frequently denigrated them for ‘courseness’ and ‘grossness.’”⁴⁶ And in fact, “Anne Brontë’s The Tenant of Wildfell Hall was judged by Charles Kingsley, author of The Water Babies, as ‘utterly unfit to be put into the hands of girls.’”⁴⁷ Let alone be written by one! Any reader in danger of succumbing to smug superiority that this could never happen in a brave new world should consider the following account by Beatrice Faust:

⁴⁵ Brian Wilks, The Illustrated Brontës of Haworth (London: Tiger Books, 1991), 8.

⁴⁶ Wilks, 8.

⁴⁷ Wilks, 8.

Who now remembers Isabella Fey? Probably only a few veterans who worked on the ABC's Books and Ideas program in the early 1970s or on Nation Review when it was still The Sunday Review. Fey was a minor poet who decided independently of the growing women's movement, that she would have more success if she submitted her work under a man's name. Editors who had formerly rejected poems now welcomed the same work under her pseudonym. Pressed for personal details, Fey said the man was young (she was on the slippery side of 60); he limped (she had a gammy leg); he was half-blind (she had a cataract). Soon she admitted that her protégé not only resembled her—he was she. The story did not make any great flutter. Still, it was a genuine hoax, set up to expose discrimination, cleverly executed and promptly admitted.⁴⁸

More recently, John Fuegi's 1994 biography of Bertolt Brecht, The Life and Lies of Bertolt Brecht, outlines the egregious way that Brecht assumed credit for the writing of at least four women who were his lovers. What motivated Elisabeth Hauptmann, Margarete Steffin, Naima Wifstrand and Ruth Berlau to give Brecht all the credit? Fuegi, the London-based scholar and founder of the International Brecht Society, was able to interview former members of the Brecht Collective, who described Brecht's talent for dazzling people, especially the women who came within his sphere of influence. He would often keep several women at his beck and call, and they would "collaborate" with him, although he was careful to ensure that his name alone appeared on the text as author.

According to Fuegi, only 5 percent of The Threepenny Opera was written by Brecht. Thinking that he meant to marry her, the author of the play—Elisabeth Hauptmann—allowed it to go on with Brecht's name attached. When he married someone else instead, Hauptmann insisted on a contract for their next "joint" venture, Happy End, resulting in an unhappy ending for her when she was booted from his bed. Although she was reluctant to speak with him at first, Fuegi reports that Hauptmann later

⁴⁸ Beatrice Faust, "Only Frauds Fear Judgment on Merit," Weekend Australian (29/30 March 1997): 23.

seemed relieved to tell him what had actually happened. The women in Brecht's collective were also driven by their ideology and as socialists, believed that they were going to change the world through their plays.

In a review of Fuegi's book, Peter Lewis asks a series of provocative questions, leading us back to the notion of *authorship* as a text ripe for a revisionary re-reading.

Lewis writes:

There they sit on the library shelves, the collected works patriarchally ascribed to the Good Socialist Brecht. Will 'Brecht' now be renamed 'The Brecht Collective'? (Brecht once mused whether Shakespeare was 'the work of a collective') and if 'Brecht' is believed to be predominantly the work of three women, can he be considered a genius any longer?⁴⁹

The answer must be a resounding "no." What is curious about Lewis' final question, is the absence of any consideration of feminine genius and the implication that *Brecht's work* is somehow no longer valid because the authors have been identified as female.

The difficulty of recovering the appropriated writings of earlier women, is a lack of eyewitness accounts to the theft. It could prove useful to extrapolate what happened many years ago, based on contemporary accusations such as those leveled at Australian playwright David Williamson, author of *Dead White Males*, in an open letter that appeared on the correspondence page of Nation Review on March 3, 1977. Anne Brooksbank addressed Williamson's wife, Kristin Green, writing:

⁴⁹ Peter Lewis, "Brecht's Ha'penny Contribution," The Australian (1 July 1994): 14.

It was you yourself who, one Easter weekend at Woy Woy, told me at some length how lucky I was to have a man [Bob Ellis] who was so generously prepared to share the literary credit with me, while you, though you felt you contributed a great deal in terms of both ideas and lines of dialogue to David's plays, never cracked it for a mention on the title page.

As a feminist, Cheryl Glenn necessarily rejects the approach adopted by documentary historians pointing out that

history is not frozen, not merely the past. It provides an approachable, disruptable ground for engaging and transforming traditional memory or practice in the interest of both the present and the future. Writing women (or any other traditionally disenfranchised group) into the history of rhetoric, then, can be an ethically and intellectually responsible gesture that disrupts those frozen memories in order to address silences, challenge absences. This ethical practice not only accepts the 'possible insufficiency' of one's understanding of history and implies an 'openness and reflexivity in one's encounters,' but it may also initiate a 'restructuring of one's understanding of the interrelation among the past, present and future; establishing possibilities for the alteration of one's priorities, evaluations and actions.'⁵⁰

Extrapolating from this, it is no longer enough for feminists to recover lost writings by the forgotten others.

The time is ripe for feminist critics to adopt a pro-active stance and state the obvious. Behind every canonized male writer are women—mothers, sisters, wives, lovers, cousins, aunts, muses and daughters—with whom he has co-created, to varying degrees, his text. The task of the feminist scholar is to identify those hidden feminine voices obscured by time and a literary tradition that includes fifteenth-century education experts comparing "a woman with education to a madman with a sword: he handles it

⁵⁰ Glenn, 389.

not with reason, but only as the violent fits of illness impel him,"⁵¹ and Poet Laureate Robert Southey's warning to Charlotte Brontë in March 1837 that her "daydreams were likely to induce a distempered state of mind"; after all, he told her, "literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be."⁵²

Although it may never have occurred to a male scientist to challenge the accepted wisdom that education would induce a distempered state in the female brain, Mary Jacobi decided to test the theory in 1877. Susan Wells reports that Jacobi's essay, "The Question of Rest for Women During Menstruation," was the first medical essay in the United States to gather information by surveys; drawing on reports from 2,500 women to demonstrate that education does not cause menstrual irregularity and that women need not rest from mental labor during their periods, Jacobi's work earned her the prestigious Boylston Prize from Harvard Medical School,⁵³ while helping to earn for future generations of women including myself—medical clearance to enter the academy.

The future task of resisting readers lies in identifying, re-naming and telling stories with impunity about the creators and co-creators of canonical texts credited to authors such Chaucer, Milton and Ovid. The author is dead. Long live the authoress!

What I am suggesting is a guerrilla tactic of necessary impertinence. Necessary because, nearly ten years after Professor Fuegi offered his compelling eyewitness

⁵¹ Camden, 44.

⁵² Wilks, 47.

⁵³ Susan Wells, "Women Write Science," *College English* 58, no. 2 (February 1996): 85.

accounts of Elisabeth Hauptmann's, Margarete Steffin's and Ruth Berlau's massive contributions to the Brecht canon, there they sit on the bookstore shelves and in the advertising and marketing for the plays that are regularly staged throughout the world—unchallenged, patriarchally ascribed to the good socialist Brecht and to him alone.

Identifying appropriated feminine voices may no longer require eyewitness accounts to the theft. Clive Thompson reports that in a series of forthcoming articles, Moshe Koppel, a professor at Israel's Bar-Ilan University, and his colleagues will present what he has described as a successful attempt to identify a writer's gender using a “computer algorithm that can examine an anonymous text and determine, with accuracy rates of better than 80 percent, whether the author is male or female.”

Koppel's group found that the single biggest difference is that women are far more likely than men to use personal pronouns—'I', 'you', 'she', 'myself', or 'yourself' and the like... These differences are significant enough that even when Koppel's team analyzed scientific papers—which would seem to be as content-neutral as you can get—they could still spot male and female authors. 'It blew my mind,' he says.⁵⁴

Bruce Smith's recent study of the use of pronouns in the sonnets—*I, You, He, She, and We: On the Sexual Politics of Shakespeare's Sonnets*—provides fascinating fodder for further work on this subject. Although Smith's conclusions diverge somewhat from my study, by logically assuming a homoerotic reading, Smith does offer evidence from Giorgio Melchiori's research⁵⁵ that “the proportion of pronouns to other words is higher

⁵⁴ Clive Thompson, “He and She: What's the Real Difference?” *Boston Globe* (6 July 2003): H3.

⁵⁵ Giorgio Melchiori, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Meditations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), cited in Bruce R. Smith, “I, You, He, She, and We: On the Sexual Politics of Shakespeare's Sonnets,” in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, James Schiffer, ed. (New York: Garland, 1999), 414.

in Shakespeare's Sonnets than in the sonnets of Sidney, Daniel, Drayton and Spenser: 14.7 percent."⁵⁶ Smith also cites Marvin Spivack's work⁵⁷ in which Spivack counted the number of times the author of the sonnets refers to forms of the first-person pronouns "I," "me," "my," "mine"—concluding that these pronouns "constitute the single most frequently occurring word group in Shakespeare's Sonnets: 1,062 instances in all."⁵⁸ Heather Dubrow's provocative approach to the sonnets challenges centuries of assumptions about the male/female voice, pointing out that "it would hardly be Shakespeare's first or only experiment with cross-dressing."⁵⁹

After the work of Koppel's research team was rejected by the prestigious journal, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, on the grounds that the results of the study were potentially oppressive to women, Thompson reports that one of the co-authors, Anat Shimoni, "added her middle name 'Rachel' to her byline, to make sure reviewers knew [that at least] one [of the three] member[s] of the group was female;...the papers were [then] accepted by the journals Literary and Linguistic Computing and Text."⁶⁰ Apparently a paradigm is shifting, albeit ever so slightly, when it becomes necessary to identify an author as female in order to overcome prejudice in publication!

Thompson also reported on the work by linguist Deborah Tannen, author of the

⁵⁶ Bruce Smith, 414.

⁵⁷ Marvin Spivack, A Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of Shakespeare (Hildesheim: Olms, 1968), 1255.

⁵⁸ Bruce Smith, 424.

⁵⁹ Heather Dubrow, "Incertainties Now Crown Themselves Assur'd," in Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays, James Schiffer, ed. (New York: Garland, 1999), 126.

⁶⁰ Thompson, H3.

bestseller, You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation, who conducted a study in which her students examined magazine articles to see if they could guess whether the articles had appeared in men's or women's magazines. Although the students were able to identify the class of publication, identifying the gender of the author was more difficult. Women who wrote for men's magazines adopted a "male" voice. Thompson cites Tannen's conclusions: "It clearly was performance. It didn't matter whether the author was male or female. What mattered was whether the intended audience was male or female."⁶¹

The author of the works attributed to Shakespeare demonstrated a keen understanding of the Elizabethan audience. This can be seen in practical ways. For example, historical accuracy was a secondary concern for the writer. In some cases, deviating from historical facts became necessary in order to survive the politics of the day. In writing the pageant play, Henry VIII, the playwright had to contend with a living monarch who remembered well her father. In order to deal with the ticklish problem of Henry's divorce from his first wife and subsequent marriage to Queen Elizabeth's mother, Anne Bolyn, the playwright portrays the king as a man stricken with guilt about his first marriage to his former sister-in-law, "But conscience, conscience! / O, 'tis a tender place; and I must leave her" (II, ii, 143-144). With memories of Henry's myriad wives fresh in their memory, Elizabethan audiences must have appreciated the Second Gentleman's sardonic comment after he describes Anne's physical beauty: "I cannot blame his conscience" (IV, I, 47).

⁶¹ Thompson, H3.

It is probably just a matter of time before Koppel's methods are applied to the authorship debate over who wrote the work ascribed to Shakespeare. However, it is interesting to note that, according to Thompson, Tannan said that the findings in Koppel's study about the female use of personal pronouns should come as no surprise: "Women typically write in an involved style, trying to forge a more intimate connection with the reader [audience]." ⁶² (Certainly for four hundred years audiences have continued to connect with the playwright's stories and the extraordinary women who have led more than one literary historian to wonder how a man could possibly have created such sympathetic female characters.)

In the meantime, it isn't enough to deconstruct texts said to be written by dead white males, identifying and exorcizing the patriarchal biases found therein because to do *only* this reinscribes this approach to argument and critical thinking as our only method. As Elbow pointed out, the metaphors of this thinking "reveal...gender associations: poking holes in the other person's arguments, making or advancing points, seeing if a claim will stand up." ⁶³

The conundrum remains--how to counter forceful resistance to change? I've recently had an opportunity to employ the writing strategies outlined in this dissertation,

⁶² Thompson, H3.

⁶³ Elbow, Contraries, 268.

in my workplace. Faculty members (primarily male) from the sciences met a proposed shift in the curriculum of the communications department with vigorous opposition. Although the matter was outside of their discipline and jurisdiction, the science professors successfully quashed the proposal two years ago.

The new proposal I've written addresses the questions and concerns raised by the science professors, in a logical pattern that is both linear and concrete. The proposal also includes anecdotal narratives from the small number of students who would be affected by this slight shift in the curriculum. I've spent time explaining reasons for the change, to faculty members both within and outside of my discipline. This time I've been assured that the proposal will go through.

The back cover of a book recently published by the University of Western Australia press describes The Space Between: Australian Women Writing Fictocriticism as a collection of Australian women's contemporary writing that embraces a "space between" scholarly argument and narrative. This new genre, fictocriticism, celebrates "writing practices that collapse critical distance, that reflect on the conditions of writing, and that reach across disciplinary borders traditionally limiting the scope of fiction and criticism."⁶⁴

The trick is, it seems, to find that rare supervisor in an atypical branch of the

⁶⁴ Heather Kerr and Amanda Nettelbeck, eds., The Space Between: Australian Women Writing Fictocriticism (Nedlands, WA: Western Australia UP, 1998), back cover.

academy that is open to exploration. In writing a dissertation in this new genre named fictocriticism--with nine alternating chapters of creative fiction that tell the story of how she did it, along with nine chapters comprised of literary, feminist and historical theory, I discovered a new vista in revisioning the old—I also found a writing strategy of dissent.

VI. THE LOVELY APRIL OF HER PRIME

De Vere's annotated Geneva Bible

An item from an account-book in Cecil's papers record[s] a payment "on behalf of the Earl of Oxford," then nineteen, "to William Seres, stationer . . . for a Geneva Bible, gilt, a Chaucer, Plutarch's works in French, with other books and papers."¹

More recently, in 1992, the Geneva Bible, once owned by Edward de Vere, was discovered in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., by Paul Nelson and Isabel Holden.

The marginalia (consisting of about 1,000 underlined or marked verses and about forty brief marginal notes) exhibit a striking correspondence to the Bible verses and themes found in Shakespeare. . . . De Vere Bible naysayers and detractors—most notably the Folger Library itself, the Smithsonian Magazine, and Iona College's Shakespeare News Letter . . . have all claimed that the de Vere Bible annotations were made by someone other than de Vere!²

In February 2001 Roger Stritmatter successfully defended his dissertation, "The Marginalia of Edward de Vere's Geneva Bible: Providential Discovery, Literary Reasoning, and Historical Consequence."³ This event signaled a hairline crack in the academy regarding the authorship issue—for the first time a higher degree was conferred for a dissertation that advocated someone other than the Stratford lad as the true author of Shakespeare's eponymous works.

Educated Elizabethan women

Although the popular opinion of the day concerning the education of women seemed to be that study would injure the beauty and glory of their delicate minds, this did not prevent scholars including Sir Anthony Cook—Edward IV's tutor—from giving his "daughters a remarkably liberal education, equal to that which men received. . . . These young ladies

were wonders of the age, and were especially singled out for praise,"⁴ particularly Mildred, who married the Queen's close advisor William Cecil, who later became Lord Burghley.

Even maids were taught to read; ". . . indeed, this reading was often a part of the duty of a lady's maid."⁵

Casual Elizabethan marriage contracts

Elizabethan "law recognized that a legal contract of marriage had been made when the two parties agreed before witnesses to take each other as man and wife. Such betrothals were neither registered nor officially recorded, but either party could claim the fulfilment of the bargain and all that it implied. If either married some other party, that marriage was void. So easy a form of contract led to many abuses."⁶

1570-1571

Lady Anne Cecil's tutor had long ago quit pretending that he was anything but madly in love with her, as she was with him. Under the pretense of Latin lessons, they retired to the library where they spent this afternoon, like many others, exploring sweet secrets of love behind the velvet, curtain-covered window seat. Of course they were not alone. Lady Anne's companion and confidante, Agnes, kept watch for the lovers. This afternoon Agnes busied herself with the new books that had arrived for Edward, including a Geneva Bible.

At fourteen, Agnes was nearly finished reading the books in the Cecil library. The tutor had also long ago quit pretending that there was anything he could teach the girl from Shottery, who was without equal in her grasp of languages—better than any pupil and many of the scholars Cambrio had encountered in the five years he'd spent tutoring the lords and ladies of the realm. That a woman could understand so much was something he would not have thought possible unless he had seen it himself. Indeed, she often surprised him with her wit, which was more like a man's, he sometimes thought.

So preoccupied was she with her books that Agnes failed to notice the arrival of Lady Mildred until it was too late to warn the lovers.

“Where is my daughter?” Lady Mildred asked.

At the sound of her voice the murmurs behind the velvet curtains ceased.

Surveying the scene, Lady Mildred felt sadness for the fate that awaited her daughter. But her heart broke as she gazed at Agnes, the luminous pixie elf she loved more than her own children.

“What have you learned of Latin this afternoon?” Lady Mildred continued, walking toward the velvet curtains.

Agnes replied, “Only that one should not always believe what one may think one sees.”

By now Lady Mildred had reached the curtains. “And wouldn’t you see better if I were to open these curtains and let the sunlight in?” Pointedly, she grasped the gold braided cord.

“NO!” Agnes gasped.

“No?” said Lady Mildred.

“I’m hungry,” Agnes said, desperate to distract Lady Mildred.

“Yes, so am I. Call for bread and butter while I open these curtains.”

“If *you* call for them,” Agnes replied urgently, “they will bring cakes.”

Lady Mildred relented. Turning from the window, she rang the bell and ordered cakes to be brought into the library.

“What has Cambrio taught my daughter this afternoon?” she asked. “I should very much like to know.”

“Latin grammar,” Agnes replied. “Have you lost weight?” she then inquired, still anxious to distract the formidable Lady Mildred.

“Cheeky girl,” said Lady Mildred. “What else did you do?”

“We wrote sonnets.”

“In Latin?”

“No, in English.”

“My daughter wrote sonnets this afternoon?”

“She wrote *a* sonnet.”

“I should like to hear my daughter read her sonnet tonight after supper. The Earl of Oxford returns this day. Lady Anne will read her sonnet in his honor.” Lady Mildred spoke these words pointedly in the direction of the velvet curtains.

Then Lady Mildred turned her attention back to Agnes. “I was walking in the garden just now,” she continued, “and glancing up at the library window I would not like to believe what I think I may have seen.”

As she turned to leave the library Lady Mildred said, not without pity, “Tell my daughter to prepare herself for the Earl.”

â â â

Each girl had endeavored to conduct her affair in secret—Lady Anne with Cambrio, and Agnes with her Edward. They confided all, plotted and schemed to thwart those who would part them from their lovers. Together Lady Anne and Agnes had devised what

they believed a foolproof scheme to foil Sir William's intention of consolidating his fortunes by marrying the Earl of Oxford to his daughter. Now it appeared that Lady Anne's future happiness was in peril. Perhaps, Agnes thought, she could use her considerable influence with Lady Mildred, who thought softly of her. If Lady Mildred could see how her daughter loved Cambrio, and he loved her, what mattered public honor or proud titles?

That evening when the household gathered for conversation and entertainment, Lady Mildred surprised everyone by announcing, "Lady Anne's written a sonnet she should like to recite for our Lord Oxford." She beckoned her daughter to stand by the fire.

Reluctantly Lady Anne rose, instinctively backing into the velvet curtains, away from the light.

"Move into the light; come here before the fire. We cannot see you there," her father directed.

All eyes were on her now, and Lady Anne's cheeks burned with embarrassment at the unwanted glare of their attention as she moved into the light. Nervously she attempted to untie the scarlet ribbon that held the rolled sheet of parchment, dropping it instead. Agnes quickly stepped forward to pick it up, handing it to the Lady Anne, after she had untied the ribbon and unrolled the page for her.

Lady Mildred was not the only one who noticed the page Lady Anne held in her hand was tied with Agnes' signature scarlet ribbon.

Then, at last, Lady Anne began to read the unfamiliar words. Her voice was flat. Agnes listened to the mangled reading of lines she had so recently penned and left in Edward's bed:

Let those who are in favour with their stars
Of public honour and proud titles boast,
Whilst I, who fortune of such triumph bars,
Unlooked for joy in that I honour most;
Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread
But as the marigold at the sun's eye,
And in themselves their pride lies buried,
For at a frown they in their glory die.
The painful warrior famoused for worth,
After a thousand victories once foiled,
Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toiled:
 Then happy I, that love and am beloved
 Where I may not remove, nor be removed.⁸

"Bravo! Excellent!" exclaimed Cambrio, applauding with the others. Flushed with triumph Lady Anne looked up, smiling shyly at her tutor.

But Edward had a queer glint in his eye. "What crow is this who has stolen a sonnet?" For Agnes had not seen him to offer warning. "No, no," she moaned inwardly, but it was too late.

With a forced laugh, Lady Anne tried to make light of his pointed accusation. But Edward did not smile. Wordlessly he crossed the room and ripped the page from Lady Anne's hand, returning it to Agnes amidst a murmur of dismay from the assembled group.

Sir William's keen eyes did not miss the look his daughter exchanged with Cambrio; the time was come for the Earl to marry. Long years of experience in the shadowy world of court politics had served the wily Sir William well. The Queen had assured him that he would be given the title, Baron Burghley. Soon there would be nothing standing in the way of a match between his daughter and a peer of the realm. He had once hoped that Agnes would influence his daughter; instead her presence had served to reinforce the stark contrast between the girls. Sir William berated himself for not anticipating the situation before it was too late. And while he could understand why Edward had fallen for the girl from Shottery, the very idea of a sanctioned union between them was simply not in the equation. No, Edward would marry Lady Anne, the sooner the better. And the hapless tutor Cambrio would be sent packing that very night.

Of course, Sir William did not know that Edward was about to marry his beloved Agnes in a secret ceremony.

VI. THE LOVELY APRIL OF HER PRIME

¹ Ogburn, 477.

² Mark K. Anderson, "Shakespeare's Bible Brings Truth to Light: Conference Seminar Reports on Work-in-Progress on Edward de Vere's Bible," *The Shakespeare Oxford News Letter*, 32, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 8. For a rundown on the annotations in Edward de Vere's Geneva Bible from a Stratfordian perspective, see Dave Kathman, "Annotations in Edward de Vere's Geneva Bible," undated <<http://shakespeareauthorship.com/oxbib.html>> 30 November 2002.

³ Roger A. Stritmatter, "The Marginalia of Edward De Vere's Geneva Bible: Providential Discovery, Literary Reasoning, and Historical Consequence" (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2001. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2001. 3001149). Stritmatter offers an Oxfordian reading of the annotations.

⁴ Camden, 57.

⁵ Camden, 154.

⁶ G.B. Harrison, *Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 20.

⁷ Duncan-Jones, 160. According to Duncan-Jones, "In Elizabethan usage [princes'] . . . could be female or male, so an allusion may be present either to Elizabeth 1 or James 1." For our purposes, we choose Elizabeth 1.

⁸ Duncan-Jones, 160-161. In her notes for this sonnet, Duncan-Jones describes the speaker as a private and obscure *man*, securely happy in *his* loving friendship, aware that it could all vanish in an instant. There is nothing in the sonnet itself that necessarily requires the speaker to be male.

VII. ORGASMIC MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Men favor heroes who are tough and hard: tough with men, hard with women. Sometimes, the hero goes soft on a woman, but this is always a mistake. Women do not favor heroines who are tough and hard. Instead, they have to be tough and soft. This leads to linguistic difficulties. Last time we looked, monosyllables were male, still dominant but sinking fast, wrapped in the octopoid arms of labial polysyllables, whispering to them with arachnoid grace: *darling, darling*.¹

In her essay about the nineteenth-century writer, Margaret Fuller, Annette Kolodny argues that Fuller was “silenced not only for what she wrote, but for how she wrote it.” Her book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* was first published in 1845. “In it she rejects traditional argumentation in favor of a dialogic style that incorporates several voices, sudden changes in direction, and conflicting positions.” Kolodny points out that Fuller’s fellow social reformer Orestes Brownson, panned the book at the time, writing that it

is no book, but a long talk. It has neither beginning, middle, nor end, and may be read backwards as well as forwards, and from the center outwards each way, without affecting the continuity of the thought or the succession of ideas. We see no reason why it should stop where it does, or why the lady might not keep on talking in the same strain till doomsday, unless prevented by want of breath.²

¹ Atwood, 5.

² Annette Kolodny, “Inventing a Feminist Discourse: Rhetoric and Resistance in Margaret Fuller’s *Women in the Nineteenth Century*,” in *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, Andrea A. Lunsford, ed. (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh UP, 1995), 137. Also cited in Jacqueline Rhodes, *Review of Rediscoveries, Returns, and Reclamations: “The Feminist Project of Reclaiming Rhetorica”* in *Composition Forum*, Special Issue: *Feminist Pedagogy* 7, no. 1 (1996): 59.

Elizabeth Flynn insists that

we ought not assume that males and females use language in identical ways or represent the world in a similar fashion. And if their writing strategies and patterns of representation do differ, then ignoring those differences almost certainly means a suppression of women's separate ways of thinking and writing.³

But precisely how separate are men and women in their ways of thinking and writing? As previously discussed, researchers at Israel's Bar-Ilan University, delving into the issue, have discovered "the single biggest difference is that women are far more likely than men to use personal pronouns." Thompson reports that "the language differences the researchers discovered would seem...to be rather benign."⁴

How much of the long-standing tradition of systemizing what comprised feminine vs. masculine discourse, is a just that—tradition? Or—to reiterate Marano—if, as the research indicates, men are wired to "focus first on minute detail, and operate most easily with a certain detachment," it follows that they are also liable to "construct rules-based analyses of the natural world, inanimate objects and events." In the coinage of Cambridge University psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen, PhD, they "systemize."⁵

Hinting that a cyborg-fem slouches towards Bethlehem, McKenzie Wark describes "the emerging movement of cyberfeminism" and how it "is re-interpreting the

³ Elizabeth Flynn, "Composing as a Woman," *College Composition and Communication* 39, no. 4 (1988): 431-32.

⁴ Thompson, H3.

⁵ Marano, 44.

history of scientific thought” in relation to a recent book by Sadie Plant, Zeros + Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture. Wark contrasts Plant’s book with the “tree-like structure” in most books: “a main trunk of argument that roots itself in some fundamental grounding proposition, before branching out into subsidiary findings, always coming back to the main trunk of the thesis.” In Plant’s book, Wark finds a structure “more like the tangled roots of a tuber plant, or the criss-crossed runners of those hardy grasses that weave across sand dunes.” Wark sees the structure aligning with Plant’s preferred style of thinking: “Beneath the hard and fast hierarchical structures of western thinking runs a network of multiple non-hierarchical interconnections.”⁶

Echoing Candace Pert’s research into the brain/body connection,⁷ Wark looks upon the new structures as promising for women:

In the emerging technoculture, what were once disabilities might have a new value. If the supposed lack of such a central point was once to women’s detriment, it is now those who thought themselves so soulful who are having to adjust to a reality in which there is...no central system of command in bodies and brain which are not, as a consequence, reduced to a soulless mechanistic device but instead hum with complexities.⁸

According to Wark, Plant’s book also re-appropriates the accomplishments of women such as Ada Lovelace, Lord Byron’s daughter, and “the eccentric woman who

⁶ McKenzie Wark, “The Women’s Web,” Australian (4 Feb. 1998): 41.

⁷ Pert wrote that “a network is different from a hierarchical structure that has a ruling ‘station’ at the top and a descending series of positions that play increasingly subsidiary roles. In a network, theoretically, you can enter at any nodal point and quickly get to any other point; all locations are equal as far as the potential to ‘rule’ or direct the flow of information... Mind doesn’t dominate body, it becomes body—body and mind are one” (Pert, 186-187).

⁸ Wark, 41.

programmed” the computer Charles Babbage is credited with creating.⁹

As we continue to uncover accomplishments wrongly attributed to men,¹⁰ feminists face a two-pronged challenge: to fill in omissions from records of the past and to forge alternative thought patterns that portray new realities. We are reaching for a flexibility that prevailed on the pages of the Elizabethan playwright described by Will and Ariel Durant with delight as one who

makes simple characters, moveth polysyllabic circumlocutions,... plays jolly havoc with grammar: turns nouns, adjectives, even adverbs into verbs, and verbs, adjectives, even pronouns into nouns.¹¹

“Can there be such a thing as ‘women’s writing?’” asks Janet Wolff in her essay, “Women’s Knowledge and Women’s Art.” She then goes on to describe Virginia Woolf’s contention that

the literary sentence...does not fit women; it is ‘too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman’s use.’ A woman must make her own sentence, altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it.¹²

Some might argue that one of the rich ironies in Janet Wolff’s well-written essay lies in the very workmanlike structure and tenor of her writing about women finding their voice.

⁹ Wark, 41.

¹⁰ The online Museum of Women in Science and Technology lists other women of science whose significant scientific discoveries were appropriated by men including: Emilie du Chatelet (1706-1749); Rosalind Elsie Franklin (1920-1958); Trotula of Salerno (?-1097); Lise Meitner (1878-1968) and others. <<http://www.amazoncity.com/technology/museum/lovelace.html>> (January 20, 1998).

¹¹ Will and Ariel Durant, The Age of Reason Begins (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1961), 97.

¹² Janet Wolff, Women’s Knowledge and Women’s Art. A Special Publication of the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Division of Humanities, (Brisbane: Griffith University, 1989), 1.

But how easy is it for women to articulate their “voice” in scholarly writing when to be a successful scholar means writing the way “scholars write,” and scholars have, historically at least, been men until quite recently? Stephanie Vanderslice addresses the prevailing writing protocols prescribed by males:

Although writing pedagogy is certainly changing, the masculine style remains an unspoken norm. This norm may further persist because many teachers in this field still tend to resist innovative pedagogical and textual theories.¹³

How pervasive is the masculine pedagogy? Burton’s report, Gender Equity in Australian Universities, clearly indicates an on-going struggle that feminist scholars continue to face when they strive to effect real change. She offers a contributing reason:

Tradition is a powerful mobiliser of personal investments, interests and sentiments. Women are expected to accommodate to the ‘way things are’—ways which, in important respects, reflect a more homogeneous population than currently exists.¹⁴

In her Los Angeles Times obituary, feminist scholar and writer Carolyn Heilburn is quoted saying:

I was profoundly caught up in biography because it allowed me, as a young girl, to enter the world of daring and achievement. But I had to make myself a boy to enter that world: I could find no comparable biographies of women, indeed almost no biographies of women at all.¹⁵

In her obituary of Heilburn, Elaine Woo reports that Heilburn often quoted the

¹³ Stephanie Vanderslice, “John Gardner’s Enlightenment Aesthetic and ‘The Art of Fiction,’” Composition Forum, Special Issue: Feminist Pedagogy 7, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 54.

¹⁴ Burton, 2-3.

¹⁵ Elaine Woo, “Carolyn Heilburn, 77; Feminist Scholar Wrote Mystery Novels,” Los Angeles Times (12 October 2003): B10.

mystery writer Dorothy Sayers, who once said: “Time and trouble will tame an advanced young woman, but an advanced old woman is uncontrollable by any earthly force.”¹⁶ And many years later when Heilburn retired from her position at Columbia University, she refused to go quietly. Newspapers carried her parting salvo in which she referred to the university as

a bastion of male bias, run by professors ‘who behave like little boys saying; “This is our secret treehouse club, no girls allowed.”’ She said she was sick of the treehouse gang.¹⁷

Tradition also plays a powerful role in other fields such as law, engineering, science and the arts, requiring the women who aspire to enter these fields to undergo something of a sex change in their thinking—becoming honorary men—the resulting denial of feminine selfhood producing an individual and societal loss that we are only beginning to acknowledge or examine.

The first woman appointed to the Australian High Court, Mary Gaudron, gave a speech launching a new organization, Australian Women Lawyers, on September 19, 1997, in the Mayfair Ballroom of the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Melbourne. In her speech she accused

the Australian legal system...[of being] no more accessible, affordable and barely more responsive to the needs of women and minorities than it was 30 years ago... In a real sense...women did not really dare to be different from their male colleagues, did not dare to be women lawyers. To be different, to challenge the codes of conduct derived, as often as not, from the rules developed on the playing fields of Eton for the male members of the British aristocracy, would have been to

¹⁶ Woo, B10.

¹⁷ Woo, B10.

invite ostracism. To assert that women were different with different needs would have been construed as an acknowledgment of incompetence; to question the bias of the law would have been to invite judgment as to one's fitness to be a member of the profession. And thus very many of us became honorary men.¹⁸

The notion of women adapting to a male world is also discussed in connection with another male aegis:

University engineering faculties are dominated by a strongly Anglo masculine culture that actively discourages women... Women are seen as not only inferior but also undeserving of measures designed to help them in a male-dominated faculty... One student says: 'I think you have to be aware, when you come into the course—because there's so many guys in there—that you'd better learn to fit in, otherwise you'll fit yourself out.' The [1997] report [Masculinity and the Culture of Engineering] criticizes existing measures to assist women in engineering faculties because 'they are about enabling girls to cope in the existing culture of engineering rather than about challenging and changing that culture.'¹⁹

Of course it's not all bad news. Because once inside the academy, legal profession, scientific community or art world, women do effect change—we can't help it.

An example of what can happen when an existing culture is challenged may be seen in the scientific world. Reporting on a recent book by Penn State historian Londa Schiebinger, Has Feminism Changed Science?, Sharon Begley points out that although "women do research the same way men do,...the questions they ask nature may be different." She explains:

One story from the annals of science seems destined to become a minor classic

¹⁸ Mary Gaudron, Speech to launch Australian Women Lawyers, Melbourne, 19 September 1997. <<http://www.hcourt.gov.au/wlasp.htm>> (7 March 1998).

¹⁹ G. Newman, "'Bingeing Blokes' Culture Turns Girls Off Unis," Weekend Australian (11-12 October 1997): 35.

among certain biologists, and it is no coincidence that it concerns sex. Out on the Western plains, biologists were studying herds of mustangs, in which the reigning stallion was believed to have the sole right to procreate. Then a [female] researcher got the bright idea of running DNA tests on the horses. As paternity tests often do, these proved embarrassing: fewer than one third of the herd's foals had been sired by the resident stallions. Instead, mares had snuck over to other herds, mating with males there. Blinded by the 'harem' metaphor of mustang social structure, [male] researchers had not even looked for such female behavior.²⁰

Have male researchers neglected to ask some questions because the answers might prove threatening to a patriarchal world order that relies—more than some might wish to admit—so heavily on feminine assent? And if this is so, why have women acquiesced? Camille Paglia boldly asserts: "Happy are those periods when marriage and religion are strong. System and order shelter us against sex and nature."²¹ Believing that the "male domination of art, science and politics, an undisputable fact of history, is based on an analogy between sexual physiology and aesthetics,"²² Paglia connects this historical domination of the arts and sciences with a masculine need to project, which she identifies with "urination and ejaculation,"²³ observing that "male urination really is a kind of accomplishment, an arc of transcendence."²⁴ Reducing her discussion to the primitive sexual instincts over which she believes human beings have little control, Paglia concludes: "What an abyss divides the sexes! Let us abandon the pretense of sexual sameness and admit the terrible duality of gender."²⁵

²⁰ Sharon Begley, "From Both Sides Now," *Newsweek* (14 June 1999): 52-53.

²¹ Camille Paglia, *Sex and Violence, or Nature and Art* (London: Penguin, 1995), 36.

²² Paglia, 25.

²³ Paglia, 44.

²⁴ Paglia, 30.

²⁵ Paglia, 39.

And while the male manifestation of sexual power is an obvious penis, the female equivalent remaining hidden and secret, Paglia also notes that a “woman’s eroticism is diffused throughout her body,” while “man’s genital concentration is a reduction but also an intensification.”²⁶ This concentration allows the male to—for short bursts of time at least—overcome his fear of approaching the female, while giving him “the delusion of temporary control.”²⁷ And what does the female gain by gifting the male with delusions of control? His hard-to-predict penis may be more likely to perform and procreate within a stable society ostensibly controlled by men. Do men suspect subterfuge? J.M. Barrie did. Juliet Fleming includes the following excerpt from a tongue-in-cheek speech given by Barrie on 3 July 1925, in her chapter from A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare:

The other sex—if so they may still be called—have long complained that his women, however glorious, are too subservient to the old enemy for these later days, as if he did not know what times were coming for women. Gentlemen, he knew, but he had to write with the knowledge that if he was too advanced about women his plays would be publicly burned in the garden of Stationer’s Hall. So he left a cipher, not in the text, where everybody has been looking for them, but in the cunning omission of all stage directions, and women, as he had hoped, have had the wit to read it aright, with the result that there is to be another edition, called appropriately ‘The Ladies Shakespeare.’ For the first time on any stage, some fortunate actress, without uttering one word, but by the use of silent illuminating ‘business,’ is to show us the Shrew that Shakespeare drew. Katherine was really fooling Petruchio all the time. The reason he carried her off before the marriage feast, though he didn’t know it, was that her father was really a poor man, and there was *no* marriage feast. So Katherine got herself carried off to save that considerable expense. On the first night in Petruchio’s house, when he was out in the wind and rain distending his chest in the belief that he was taming her, do you really think with him that she went supperless to bed? No, she had a little bag with her. In it a wing of chicken and some other delicacies, a half bottle of the famous Paduan wine, and such a pretty corkscrew. I must tell you no more; go and book your seats, you will see, without even Sir Israel Gollancz being

²⁶ Paglia, 28.

²⁷ Paglia, 28.

able to find one word missed out or added, that it is no longer Katherine who is tamed.²⁸

Katherine is one example of many unruly women in the plays ascribed to Shakespeare. Whether Lady Macbeth ever allowed her husband to believe that he had tamed her is unclear. The nature of their relationship and childless state leads to speculation—was Macbeth unable to put aside fear of his formidable wife in order to perform the necessary deed? Are men more sensitive creatures than women have imagined?

They can be very sensitive about portrayals of their penises, as Amy Heckerling discovered in 1982. Directing a film that was destined to become a cult hit (*Fast Times at Ridgemont High* [1982]) Heckerling was determined to portray teenage sexual angst, warts and all. Her decision to show Phoebe Cates emerging naked from a swimming pool was not a problem. However, Heckerling's decision to also show Robert Romanus in the buff, as he fumbled awkwardly to sow his first wild oats, was met with threats of censorship in the form of an "X" rating, effectively making it impossible for the intended audience of teens to see the film.. Although Heckerling protested, pointing out that the scene in question was anything but erotic, the Motion Picture Association of America remained unmoved. Heckerling asked the association to please explain why full-frontal female nudity was okay, while full-frontal male nudity was not. Their bizarre explanation revealed a convoluted anxiety. The male sexual organ is, by its very nature, "aggressive," according to officials at the MPAA, and thus merely showing the penis would be

²⁸ Juliet Fleming, "The Ladies' Shakespeare," in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, Dymphna Callaghan, ed. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2001), 3.

essentially an act of sexual violence, deserving—according to MPAA guidelines—an “X” rating.²⁹

However, celebrating the fact that she was a female director in a Hollywood dominated by men, turned out to be an advantage for Heckerling. By approaching a familiar genre—teen-movie—and insisting on telling the story through her eyes, she was able to create something new, a brashly hilarious film that was sensitive to coming-of-age teens at the same time. The portrayal of teen sex was realistic—funny, messy, painfully awkward and off-putting. And it was a film that audiences flocked to see. Responding to an interviewer’s reminder—“Roger Ebert wrote a really misguided review of *Fast Times* in which he asked, ‘Whatever happened to upbeat sex?’ He was very upset that the sex in *Fast Times* was real”—Heckerling recently described what happened:

I very deliberately want to make it *not* upbeat. I had a lot of battles because of that. I actually didn’t win. It was a major battle. I grew up in the ‘60s, when people saw naked women all over the place, and it was no big deal at all. Suddenly, sexual freedom meant sexual freedom to see naked women. And so I had the boy take his clothes off and look very uncomfortable, and the ratings board said, ‘That’s an X rating.’ They said a female can be naked but a man can’t, because the male organ is ‘aggressive,’ and the female organ isn’t. They told me I could go to Washington and try to fight it, but at the time my executive had cancer, so I couldn’t say, ‘You go to Washington and fight this.’ The first time a young person has sex it’s not, ‘Yahoo! We’ll rip our clothes off and know exactly what we’re doing.’³⁰

²⁹ Jim Hosney, “Amy Heckerling on Underage Actors, Full-Frontal Nudity and Other *Fast Times*,” E online interview, Film School Comedy 101 Archive, n.d., <<http://www.eonline.com/Features/Live/Folmschool2000/Heckerling/index4.html>> (30 October 2003).

³⁰ Hosney, online interview.

With the growing global influence of moving images, accompanied by non-linear digital technologies that make the art of film/video-production more accessible to a wider community of artists, we have more access to the voices of the traditionally disenfranchised—be it nationality, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, or a non-heterosexual orientation—if we live in a large enough city to support an art house cinema and/or film festival and if we make the effort to see and hear these voices. However, because the images and voices may be unfamiliar and strange to us, it is possible to be both repelled and drawn to the “other” and the novelty of the ideas or visions portrayed.

Elizabethan audiences were likely to have been suitably repelled and strangely drawn to the murderous mistress of the Scottish play. “Unsex me here” (I, v, 42), Lady Macbeth invokes the daemons of Hell to remove all feminine traces from “my woman’s breasts,” and “take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers” (I, v, 48) so that she will have the necessary strength to overcome the “the milk of human kindness” (I, v, 18) in her own husband’s breast. Offering up a stark contrast to Elizabethan ideals of womanhood, Lady Macbeth reveals the extreme measures this wife is willing to undertake in order to advance “vaulting ambition.” Without the requisite testicles, Lady Macbeth will never be king; but as the *kingmaker*, she will experience the power vicariously through her husband, who has learned to fear her feminine power. “Bring forth men-children only, / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males” (I, vii, 73-74), he mutters. Has that very fear—that she would spawn daughters in her own image—made him loath to impregnate his wife?

Has feminine power, like female genitals, remained obscured from historical view? This power Paglia associates with “the woundlike rawness of female genitals,” a symbol, she says, “of the unredeemability of her chthonian nature.”³¹ Claiming for women a closer connection to the primordial inchoate soup from whence we came, Paglia asserts:

Female genitals are lurid in color, vagrant in contour, and architecturally incoherent. Male genitals, on the other hand, though they risk ludicrousness by their rubbery indecisiveness...have a rational mathematical design, a syntax. This is no virtue, however, since it may tend to confirm the male in his abundant misperceptions of reality.³²

In her raw descriptions of female and male genitalia, Paglia points out that both sexes are suitably repelled and strangely drawn to the other. “Sex *is* power,”³³ but whether feminine power has been hidden or repressed is another question. Citing a study from 1908, Paglia quotes Ferenczi on the aesthetics of female sexuality:

The periodic pulsations in feminine sexuality (puberty, the menses, pregnancies and parturitions, the climacterium) require a much more powerful repression on the women’s part than is necessary for the man.³⁴

The revulsion men feel about female sexuality has a long history. The early Christian church father, St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430), said, “We are born between feces

³¹ Paglia, 24.

³² Paglia, 24-25.

³³ Paglia, 3.

³⁴ Sandor Ferenczi, “The Analytic Conception on the Psycho-Neuroses” (1908), in Further Contributions to the Theory and Technique of Psycho-analysis, John Rickman, ed., Jane Isabel Suttie et al., tr. (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1950), 25. Cited in Paglia, 24.

and urine.”³⁵ In the 1997 movie, *In the Company of Men*, a dark celebration of male misogyny, one of the characters reveals his fear and loathing of women in a joke: “Never trust anything that bleeds for seven days and doesn’t die.” Paglia suggests that “male homosexuality may be the most valorous of attempts to evade the *femme fatale* and to defeat nature.”³⁶

“Why can’t a woman be more like a man?” opines the confirmed bachelor, Henry Higgins, in the musical, *My Fair Lady*. In his review of Stephen Orgel’s revisionist text, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England*, Anthony Dawson points out that Orgel is suggesting that “transvestite actors on the Elizabethan stage helped to empower women by doing just that, showing women the value of acting like a man.”³⁷

Over and over again women have been expected to sublimate their feminine identity and thinking, adopting a male persona in order to enter the world of academia, law, engineering, science, and the arts. Over and over again, in an earlier draft of this particular chapter, my doctoral supervisor Nigel Krauth insisted that I voice my thoughts on the various quotes and ideas presented. I counted. On ten occasions in this chapter alone, he insisted that I needed to add “the glue of [my]...own voice, making the

³⁵ Paglia, 25.

³⁶ Paglia, 21.

³⁷ Anthony Dawson, Review of *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England*: *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 11 September 1997, <http://www.shu.ac.uk/emls/02-2/rev_daw2.html> (13 January 2003).

argument flow and stick.”³⁸ A safe space was created with this unrelenting insistence—without qualification or direction—that I simply needed to add my own voice. Alas, not all doctoral supervisors are men of heightened enlightenment.

I considered whether my reluctance to impose an authorial structure on my reader had to do with my own equivocation about choosing to agree with Paglia’s essentialist absolutes, which she argues handily; and Pegeen Reichert who, arguing against the essentialist stance (“that femaleness makes women better suited to less competitive, more open and collaborative environments, and that the academy, and the men in it, are inherently hostile to feminine nature”³⁹), asserts:

I disagree with the notion of a female essence. I want to assertively participate and successfully compete in academia. To subscribe to the essentialist position denies the possibility that success for me could lie in innovating and playing with what has been coded as ‘masculine’ discourse.⁴⁰

The question remains: Is Reichert buying into the notion of a metaphorical sex change? Is my own self-conscious effort to write, using “academy-approved” discourse, a repression of my feminine nature and an unconscious betrayal of self? As women and writers, do we aspire to write like men in order to succeed in a world still run according to their rules? What would it mean to challenge the rules, rather than write to them accordingly? According to Abrams, Luce Irigaray argues for

³⁸ Nigel Krauth, supervisory feedback on the February 2003 draft of this chapter.

³⁹ Pegreen Reichert, “A Contributing Listener and Other Composition Wives: Reading and Writing the Feminine Metaphors in Composition Studies,” *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory* 16, no. 1 (1996): 146.

⁴⁰ Reichert, 146.

a 'woman's language' which evades the male monopoly by establishing as its generative principle, in place of the monolithic phallus, the multiplicity and diversity of the female sexual organs and sexual experiences.⁴¹

What would this language sound or look like? Will I know it when I hear it? In the Biographical Notice to the 1850 edition of Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey, Charlotte Brontë describes how she responded to her own sister's writing:

One day, in the autumn of 1845, I accidentally lighted on a MS volume of verse in my sister Emily's handwriting...and something more than surprise seized me,—a deep conviction that these were not common affusions, nor at all like the poetry women generally write. I thought them condensed and terse, vigorous and genuine. To my ear, they had also a peculiar music—wild, melancholy, and elevating.⁴²

Duncan-Jones observes that

a noticeable feature of work on Sonnets in the later twentieth century has been the high incidence of distinguished and original studies by women... Whatever the underlying reasons, female predominance is striking.⁴³

Have feminist scholars been unwittingly drawn to a voice in the sonnets that is familiar? Certainly there is a profusion of personal pronouns used in the sonnets, which, as pointed out earlier, researchers have identified as the most significant difference between male and female writing, even in "scientific papers, which would seem to be as content-neutral as you can get."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Abrams, M.H., ed. A Glossary of Literary Terms, 5th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988), 211-212.

⁴² Cited in Wilks, 23.

⁴³ Duncan-Jones, 83, 85.

⁴⁴ Thompson, H3.

The most recent research into the differences between the male and female brain, reported by Marano, also indicates that females “more readily see alternative sides of an argument.”⁴⁵ On the surface, the writings attributed to Shakespeare may appear to celebrate the Elizabethan ideals of patriarchal order, but just beneath that comfortable facade, a bubbling cauldron of subversive ideas seethes, spewing forth the more than occasional barbed observation, particularly in the sonnets, as Vendler notes:

No received idea of sexuality goes uninvestigated; and the thoroughly unconventional sexual attachments...stand as profound (if sometimes unwilling) critiques of the ideals of heterosexual desire, chastity, continence, marital fidelity, and respect for the character of one’s sexual partner. Shakespeare’s awareness of norms is as complete as his depiction, in his speaker, of experiential violations of those norms.⁴⁶

Vendler also argues, “Any commentator must—given Shakespeare’s frequent authorial irony—make a division between Shakespeare the author and his fictive self, whom we name the speaker of the poems.” She goes on to concede, “Yet often the two are designedly blurred, since the fictive self, too, is an author.”⁴⁷

The author of works attributed to Shakespeare clearly possessed the skill to adopt a variety of voices. As does Jacqueline Royster, who described her dismay when a well-meaning colleague approached her to congratulate her for using her “authentic voice.” The colleague went on to say, “You weren’t so formal. You didn’t have to speak in an appropriated academic language.” Royster’s reaction she kept to herself because the

⁴⁵ Marano, 42.

⁴⁶ Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 20.

⁴⁷ Vendler, 14.

response “my friend surely would have perceived as angry.” Royster explains: “I claim all my voices as my own very much authentic voices, even when it’s difficult for others to imagine a person like me, an African-American, having the capacity to do that.”⁴⁸

Similarly, if the accepted literary tradition reads feminine discourse as florid, emotional, banal and sentimental, how easy it would be to mistake the terse, elevating prose of a woman as having been written by a man. In fact it might seem impossible to consider the possibility that a woman could write such prose, and literary critics in past decades would not even pause to consider or explore that possibility. And yet, in her reading of works attributed to Shakespeare, Marilyn French points out that “Shakespeare considered, in play after play, the consequences to men and the worlds they dominated, of undervaluing the fluid, insubstantial, and emotional dimension of experience,”⁴⁹ which she [French] identifies as a “feminine” quality.

Recounting her journey of discovery through the minefield of male politics, research scientist Candace Pert describes how uncomfortable she was because of the seemingly fluid, insubstantial and ephemeral thinking that led to her greatest breakthroughs:

Everything about this project [her successful effort to make breakthroughs in AIDS research], it seemed, had depended on some hard-to-fathom combination of intuition and/or mystical intervention and/or sheer good

⁴⁸ Katherine Jones-Royster, “When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own,” College Composition and Communication 47, no. 1 (1996): 37.

⁴⁹ Marilyn French, Shakespeare’s Division of Experience (London: Abacus, 1983), 340.

luck, all of which were somewhat suspect to my scientific mind at the time.⁵⁰

The likely reason for her self-doubt probably had to do with her early conditioning in the “testosterone frenzy”⁵¹ of the scientific community, conditioning that she describes with some regret:

With the benefit of hindsight, I can see how willingly I embraced this macho ethos—the intense rivalry, the competition for credit, and the overriding desire to make the big score, regardless of who got burned in the process. With the lack of any female role models, I thought that to accomplish great breakthroughs in science, you had to be tough and aggressive. Most of the women I saw were stuck on the lower rungs of the hierarchy, rarely rising above their assigned stations, always stepping in to do the menial labor and then becoming invisible when it came time to hand out the credit.⁵²

Later, when she had her own lab, Pert says that she “consciously tried to develop a nurturing, even maternal mode of management, motivating people by praise rather than criticism, by team spirit rather than competition with each other.”⁵³ At the same time she points out that

even today, few females ascend to alpha status, . . . the unspoken belief that women lacked the right kind of mentality to do science because they were too emotional was a bias solidly in place at the Palace [National Institutes of Health].⁵⁴

Pert contends that it wasn’t until she got up close and personal with her science that she “was able to take a giant step out of the old paradigm and boldly follow what,

⁵⁰ Pert, 205.

⁵¹ Pert, 91.

⁵² Pert, 51.

⁵³ Pert, 123.

⁵⁴ Pert, 96.

deep in [her] heart, [she] knew to be the truth.”⁵⁵ One of the strategies she adopted involved trusting her intuitions and designing “experiments around them with an enthusiasm my colleagues often dismissed as unscientific.”⁵⁶ Unscientific or unmasculine? Citing the research about gender traits and their connection to the brain, Marano points out that women apparently have a more “concentrated processing power—and more thought-linking capability”⁵⁷ than do men. He credits women with distinctive characteristics:

Women’s perceptual skills are oriented to quick—call it intuitive—people reading. Females are gifted at detecting the feelings and thoughts of others, inferring intentions, absorbing contextual clues and responding in emotionally appropriate ways. They empathize.⁵⁸

Lacking these same skills—while possessing a more finely tuned ability to operate “most easily with a certain detachment”⁵⁹ and a tendency to “construct rules-based analyses of the natural world, inanimate objects and events,”⁶⁰—how have men responded historically to these innately foreign feminine skills of divining? With fear that manifests itself occasionally in cries of “witchcraft.” It is no coincidence that during the Renaissance alone “80 to 95 percent of those accused [of witchcraft] and 85 percent of those killed

⁵⁵ Pert, 129.

⁵⁶ Pert, 168.

⁵⁷ Marano, 42.

⁵⁸ Marano, 42.

⁵⁹ Marano, 44.

⁶⁰ Marano, 44. It is important to note that Marano qualifies these contentions by citing Baron-Cohen, who says that “almost everyone has some mix of both types of skills, although males and females differ in the degree to which one set predominates.”

were female.”⁶¹

Suppression has been another reaction to feminine skills that men found unfamiliar. Two years ago (2002) I wrote a proposal suggesting a slight shift in the curriculum of my department that would have allowed approximately 20 Bachelor of Arts students to choose between a traditional speech class and an acting class, in order to fulfill their communication requirement for graduation. After several weeks of vigorous discussion within the department, it was decided that as long as the acting class incorporated a unit of logic and argumentation, the proposal could go forward. There was no discussion about incorporating the skills learned in an acting class that reflect the polarity, the contradictions, and the tension that are an everyday part of real world work—skills such as collaboration, empathy with and understanding of people from a diversity of backgrounds, along with a heightened discernment concerning the aesthetic presentation of complex and at times contrary ideas—into our traditional speech classes.

Sadly, rigor in creative effort is often not recognized because creativity in key ways uses skills such as pattern recognition and intuition, and these seemingly subtle forms of mental rigor are not nearly as easy to codify by Occam’s razor. Not surprisingly, one of the first things the Taliban regime in Afghanistan eliminated from academic study was the arts, recognizing the power of creative expression to erode attempts at unilateral control.

⁶¹ The Lives of Renaissance Women. “The Witchcraze,” British Columbia Ministry of Education: Gender Equity Education, <<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/equity/lives.htm>> (January 5, 1998).

I would argue that a math department that must grapple with the apparent futility of learning drama or supporting a course in creativity, is actually engaged in the very kinds of interdisciplinary interaction skills that my proposed class would have taught. Mathematicians, like everyone else, are confronted by demanding administrators, irrational bean-counters, and people who just want their way. At such times, mathematicians with a background in acting class could look back and be grateful for having realized that all the world is a stage and theirs is just one part to play on this shrinking globe of diversity—with multiple career changes—where creativity and getting along with and understanding people plays a vital role in their success as mathematicians.

When he created the academy, man did so in his own image. And words written and spoken in the academy, first passed the test of *logos*. *Pathos* was banned and sent to live with the women where it was thought she could do no harm. After promising to eschew all things sentimental, foreign, irresponsible and trivial—i.e. feminine, *Ethos* was allowed to remain. And all was well for quite some time.

Then along came those pesky Feminists, Marxists, New Historicists, Afrocentrists, Deconstructionists, Queer Theorists, and among them Avital Ronell, who accused the academy—with some justification—of being Anal Retentivists:

To be irresponsible implies a feminization, the double entendre, the double meaning, so there's this slippery feminine kind of masking and masquerading and make-up that's going on: she is 'making it up,' she's 'faking' and 'making,' and so on. And, in literary history, that kind of notion of wordplay and fooling around with language and sedimented levels of signification always got linked to forms of anality...so that the anal retentive hegemony of the academic stronghold is, I am

sure, upset by this kind of thing. But to call someone irresponsible is, in the first place, a gesture that doesn't read the political implications of undermining monolithic meaning, doesn't read what it means to refuse to underwrite the notion that there is just the sanctioned dimension of accepted meaning. Language is arbitrary, radically arbitrary, which means that to a certain extent I am being extremely faithful to the rhetorical imperative, the imperative to understand the artifice and affirm the disjunctive nature of linguistic positing.⁶²

Other feminists started to complain about having to leave their Pathos at home instead of bringing her to work or school with them. And they had the effrontery to borrow Logos for their arguments, and then Ethos broke his promise not to do anything trivial. And all was not well.

Joyce Hinnefeld admits to experiencing some unease with what she sees as a call for an irresponsible free-for-all in the academy:

In this student-centered field at this refreshingly post-canonical time, my background in critical pedagogy and feminist theory prompts me to seek out texts that are *subversive*, that question assumptions, that attempt disruptions—of expectation, of the status quo. Texts that are, in the language of Foucault via Spellmeyer, *transgressive*—that position themselves outside both responsibility-free Inclination and rule-clad Institution, [but] I'm still leery of much so-called experimental writing—of its ahistorical and apolitical tendencies, and of the danger of a whole new set of rules and expectations arising from those who are only interested in playful, parodic, postmodern work.⁶³

However, by positioning herself as a neutral Switzerland in the hurly-burly world of a post-canonical academy, Hinnefeld is, in effect, re-inscribing the muscle-bound Institution as the center of all things considered. What is required to effect change and

⁶² Cited in D. Diane Davis, "Confessions of an Anacoluthon: Avital Ronell on Writing, Technology, Pedagogy, Politics," *JAC* 20, no. 2 (2000): 272.

⁶³ Joyce Hinnefeld, "Stepping onto the Tightrope: Feminism, Critical Pedagogy, and the Idea of Transformative Texts," *Composition Forum* 7, no. 2 (1996): 86-87.

disrupt the citadel is flexibility, improvisation and a multifaceted series of assaults that includes various strategies of dissent such as embracing contraries; re-appropriating feminine voices and accomplishments; re-reading and re-visioning authorial gender in canonical texts; while continuing the good work of feminists to integrate what has been coded “feminine,” into the masculine world of academia.

Deeming that “the hypermasculinity of many cultural studies approaches to [writing] undermines the transformative possibilities of affective processes,” Lisa Langstraat contends that a “disdain for ‘sentimental realism’ is a reflection of a historical disdain for the feminized features of mass culture.” Quoting Suzanne Clark, who argues that “the category of the sentimental, associated with rhetorical emotion and the ‘banality of mass culture’ is denigrated as a bourgeois, emotional state that undermines reason and logic,” Langstraat adds that the hypermasculine approach equates “sentimental realism with the affective dimensions of lived culture,” and pits “emotive reactions” against “critical” ones. Langstraat goes on to say,

I agree with Lynn Worsham who insists that scholar[s]...must ‘place emotion, which has been severed from meaning, at the disposal of meaning again and thereby produce affective investments in forms of knowledge that will lead to empowerment and emancipation.’⁶⁴

In practical terms, what might this knowledge look like? It could resemble Candace Pert’s book, Molecules of Emotion—the story of a scientist and the scientific world, the personal narrative of a woman operating in an impersonal and inherently hostile

⁶⁴ Lisa R. Langstraat, “‘Hypermasculinity’ in Cultural Studies and Composition,” Composition Forum, Special Issue: Feminist Pedagogy 7, no. 1 (1996): 7-8.

masculine environment, an eyewitness account of the attempted appropriation of a woman's voice and ideas and what happens when that woman cries, "Stop thief!" rather than acquiescing to *the way things are*.

Our chronicle begins with Pert's doctoral research in the early 1970s, research that, it was hoped, would lead to the discovery of the opiate receptor. At the time, it was thought that identifying the human body's opiate receptor would enable researchers to develop a cure for drug addicts. The experiments proved expensive because Pert had to send her material to a lab to be tagged with radioactive isotopes before she could proceed with the tests. Weeks went by with no tangible results. Finally her supervisor, Dr Sol Snyder, told Pert that he was shutting down the research, despite her protests.

Taking a huge risk, Pert disregarded his specific directive to cease all spending on the project, in order to follow her hunch and run a final assay. Sending her material to a lab in Boston to be labeled with a radioactive isotope, she held her breath, hoping the lab operators wouldn't call Dr Snyder to confirm the costly order. They didn't. The material arrived, and Pert ran her final assay late one Friday afternoon when everyone was gone. The following Monday, 25 October 1972, she checked the results and discovered that she had indeed found the elusive opiate receptor. In March 1973 Pert's findings were published in *Science*, with her name listed first. In the tradition of scientific paper-writing, she notes, the first name identifies

the person or persons who did the bulk of the actual work, last the name of the 'senior author,' who had raised the money to make the work possible; with the names of other contributors, if there were any, distributed in between.⁶⁵

So it came as something of a shock in the fall of 1978, for Pert to discover her former mentor, Dr Snyder, and two of his male colleagues, were nominated for the Lasker Award [an American version of the Nobel Prize] for their opiate receptor research. Often, the scientists who have been nominated for the Lasker Award, go on to receive the Nobel Prize. Pert was outraged when Dr. Snyder asked her to attend the awards ceremony, assuring her that he wanted her to stand and take a bow at the luncheon.

Familiar with the story of Rosalind Franklin—whose own findings were appropriated by Francis Crick and John Watson, enabling them to win a Nobel Prize in 1962—Pert wrote, "I woke up one morning and looked in the mirror—only to find Rosalind Franklin looking back at me."⁶⁶ Sage friends warned her: "Be careful—if you upset the boys, they might not let you play with them anymore."⁶⁷ Processing the alternatives, Pert concluded:

I was the one who had done the brain-breaking work to put the cap on the opiate-receptor search, and had done it despite the abandonment of the research by a man who was now accepting the award for it. No, I told myself, I couldn't let this happen, to be forgotten and ignored by history, while the boys waltzed away with the prize.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Pert, 74.

⁶⁶ Pert, 110.

⁶⁷ Pert, 111.

⁶⁸ Pert, 111.

The fall-out from what became known as the Pert/Snyder Lasker fiasco is chronicled in Pert's book, and it was considerable. Snyder lost what was probably his only chance at a Nobel Prize and for a time Pert became a pariah within the scientific community. In retrospect, Pert regretted "involving journalists in what should have been a private spat within my own scientific family, I'd stepped too far over the line."⁶⁹

In a telling prelude to the entire Lasker Award controversy, Pert recounts an odd conversation she had with her former mentor, Dr Snyder, just prior to her departure to the NIH (National Institute of Health) in Washington, D.C., where she would run her own lab—a conversation that made no sense to her at the time. Describing the setting, Pert remembers that Snyder

stared at me intently for a full minute. As if he had just seen me in a new and puzzling light, he said, 'Have you ever heard of *The Prince* by Machiavelli?' ... 'You really should read the chapter about killing the king,' he said dryly, straightening up. Then, looking me straight in the eye: 'If one is going to kill the king, then one should never wound him, but finish the job and be done with it.'⁷⁰

Pert's youth, inexperience with male politics and ambition made her a target the moment she stuck her head above the crowd. No doubt Snyder's epiphany was one that has surprised many an unwary man—a realization that it may be the similarities between men and women that divide us, rather than our differences. A desire to write, build, discover and succeed and be recognized for our accomplishments is not exclusive to men. And

⁶⁹ Pert, 115.

⁷⁰ Pert, 93.

now that marrying well is not the primary avenue available for women to succeed, the rules of engagement have shifted.

Transition is often perceived as loss. And in real and practical ways men have lost power and prestige. Therefore it behooves feminists to remain alert; and, armed with documented contemporary evidence of appropriation, the feminist literary critic must now cast a wider net, reaching out to women from previous centuries, in order to tell their stories, for it is through stories that we understand our world, our place in it and our ability to re-vision it.

Drawing authorial inferences from the fictional worlds created by a poet who lived more than 400 years ago is a venture fraught with peril. However, this same poet seems to whisper encouragement through the women rendered clever by their disguise as men and sonnets that express a melancholic yearning for remembrance: *I, once gone, to all the world must die / The earth can yield me but a common grave.*⁷¹

Troubled by and “in reaction against a tendency for feminist critics to interpret Shakespeare as if his work directly supports and develops feminist ideas,” feminist writer Linda Bamber considers the contradictions between the tragedies and the comedies:

In the comedies Shakespeare seems if not a feminist then at least a man who takes the woman’s part. Often the women in the comedies are more brilliant than the men, more aware of themselves and their world, saner, livelier, more gay. The

⁷¹ Sonnet 81, ll. 6-7. Duncan-Jones, 273.

tragedies are populated by castrating mothers, fiendish daughters, bearded witches.⁷²

The writer of the comedies and tragedies understood the complexity and contradictions inherent in the feminine psyche. And in the world where laughter and happiness abound, women are supreme. In the dark world of the tragedies, women are relegated to a Madonna-like victim-hood—Desdemona, Cordelia, Ophelia—or whore-like daemonization—Lady Macbeth, Goneril, Regan.

Christine Sutherland admonishes her readers that one problem

in reaching out to women of earlier times, [is that] we sometimes evince a kind of historical naivete, neglecting to see them in their own context. We are so anxious to make common cause with these women that we tend to underplay views and values that differ significantly from our own. In order to do justice both to ourselves and to the women we write about, we must resist the temptation to ‘rewrite’ them.⁷³

Vendler echoes Sutherland, saying, “There is a philosophical impropriety in anachronistic reproaches to speakers of earlier centuries whose theological, ethical, and socially regulative concepts are alien to ours.”⁷⁴ For example, Camden reports that “a large number of Elizabethan writers turned out books in the main current of the traditional anti-feminist literature,” among them Robert Greene, who wrote “that howe perfect a woman

⁷²Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 2-3.

⁷³ Christine Mason Sutherland, “Mary Astell: Reclaiming Rhetorica in the 17th Century,” in *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, Andrea A. Lunsford, ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 328.

⁷⁴ Vendler, 15

be eyther in vertue, beautie, or wealth, yet they are to men necessarie euils”.⁷⁵ Duncan-Jones argues that there is a “strongly misogynistic bias” in a number of the sonnets, and “male disgust” in the sequence of “dark lady” sonnets (128-54). Consider Sonnet 130, for example:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun
Coral is far more red than her lips red
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.⁷⁶

But Vendler emphatically argues that although Sonnet 130 has been sometimes read as denigration of the mistress, it is no such thing; instead it is a parody of Petrarchan praise.⁷⁷

Rosalind, disguised as the boy Ganymede in *As You Like It*, says with impudent irony: “I thank God I am not a woman, to be touched with so many giddy offenses as he hath generally taxed their whole sex withal.” After discovering Orlando’s bad verses pinned to the trees in the forest, she goes on to complain:

There is a man haunts the forest that abuses our young plants with carving ‘Rosalind’ on their barks, hangs odes upon hawthorns and elegies on brambles—all, forsooth, deifying the name of Rosalind. If I could meet that fancymonger, I would give him some good counsel for he seems to have the quotidian of love upon him (III, ii, 377-383).

⁷⁵ Camden, 17.

⁷⁶ Duncan-Jones, 375.

⁷⁷ Vendler, 556-557.

Except for the story in Greek mythology of Tiresias (transformed for a time into a woman) who is asked to settle an argument between Zeus and Hera about whether man or woman derives more pleasure from love, “most research on sexual function [has] focused in large part on men and the control of penile erections,” writes Irwin Goldstein in the August 2000 edition of Scientific American. Goldstein points out that the focus is changing. Conceding the “dramatic differences” between the sexes, Goldstein notes that “women can have multiple orgasms and therefore have virtually no refractory period, but most men have a refractory period that lasts from several minutes to many hours.”⁷⁸ A sociopsychological critic might examine the ways in which this important gender difference could affect the reading of a text. For example, in Helen Vendler’s introduction to her stunning 1997 study, The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets, she points out a fundamental difference between her understanding of the complex *dramatis personae* found in the sonnets, and Stephen Booth’s position. Vendler believes that

the greatest strength of the sonnets as ‘contraptions,’ [is] their multiple armatures. Booth sees these ‘overlapping structures’ as a principle of irresoluble indeterminacy; I, by contrast, see them as mutually reinforcing, and therefore as principles of authorial instruction.⁷⁹

Booth acknowledges, “Shakespeare’s sonnets are hard to think about” because

perhaps the happiest moment the human mind ever knows is the moment when it senses the presence of order and coherence... As *he* [emphasis added] reads through the 1609 sequence, a reader’s mind is constantly poised on just such a threshold to comprehension. The source of that pleasurable sense of increased mental range is the same multitude of frames of reference that frustrate him when

⁷⁸ Irwin Goldstein, “Male Sexual Circuitry,” Scientific American (August 2000): 75.

⁷⁹ Vendler, 21.

he looks for a single label or formula by which *his* [emphasis added] mind may take personal possession of the sonnets.⁸⁰

Although it is probably too simplistic, perhaps understanding the long-preferred mode of discourse in the academy, with its history of patriarchal dominance—and opposition to what has been typically attributed to a feminine mode of discourse—may be explained, in part, using the metaphor of gender-specific experience with single or multiple orgasms and a resulting—if not *orgasmic envy*—then perhaps an *orgasmic misunderstanding* informed by a masculine fear or dismissal of the unknowable.

Metaphorical pun intended or not, Vendler says that “the Sonnets raise powerful sexual anxieties”⁸¹ because

what is always unsettling in Shakespeare is the way that he places only a very permeable osmotic membrane between the compartments holding his separate languages...and lets words ‘leak’ from one compartment to the other in each direction.⁸²

Vendler describes a Shakespearean sonnet as “fundamentally structured by an evolving inner emotional dynamic. The sonnet is a system in motion, never immobile for long, and with several subsystems going their way within the whole.”⁸³

One of the strategies of this dissertation is to find ways to integrate modes and stylistic features long considered masculine with those associated with the feminine in a

⁸⁰ Stephen Booth, *An Essay On Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1969), 14.

⁸¹ Vendler, 15.

⁸² Vendler, 34.

⁸³ Vendler, 22.

gesture of inclusivity. Thus, in addition to one “monolithic” idea or theory—Anne’s authorship—this study invites readers to explore a multiplicity of ideas, connected in a style “more like the tangled roots of a tuber plant, or the criss-crossed runners of those hardy grasses that weave across sand dunes”.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Wark, 41.

VIII. NO LOVE, MY LOVE

The significance of William Cecil's rank elevation

Shortly before the Earl of Oxford married Anne Cecil, her father became Baron Burghley. Ogburn argues that there is a "plausible suggestion in 'All's Well That Ends Well' that Cecil was created Baron Burghley at this time to give Anne sufficient rank to marry an earl of ancient title."¹

The ill-fated marriage of Anne Cecil & Edward de Vere

Ogburn provides commentary based on historical record to describe the ill-fated wedding of Lady Anne Cecil and the 17th Earl of Oxford:

On 28 July 1571 Lord St. John wrote to the Earl of Rutland:

*'The Earl of Oxford hath gotten him a wife—or at least a wife hath caught him; this is Mistress Anne Cecil; whereunto the Queen hath given her consent, and the which hath caused greet weeping, wailing, and sorrowful cheer of those that had hoped to have that golden day. Thus may you see whilst that some triumph with olive branches, others follow the chariot with willow garlands.'*²

On September 21st, five weeks after Burghley's letter to Rutland about the engagement, Hugh Fitz-Williams wrote to the Countess of Shrewsbury that 'They say the Queen will be at my Lord of Burghley's house beside Waltham [Theobalds] on Sunday next, where my Lord of Oxford shall marry Mistress Anne Cecil his daughter.' (One notices the use of the imperative 'shall')³

Ogburn reports that although the Queen showed up, no marriage took place. And it wasn't until "just before Christmas with the Queen in attendance" that the twenty-one-

year old Edward finally married the fifteen-year-old Anne Cecil in a marriage that would be fraught with grief and controversy.⁴

Commenting on a letter written by Burghley to Rutland, Ogburn quotes Conyers Read, who says, "It reveals, as all of Burghley's letters do on the subject of the marriage of his children, that their views about the matter never appear as a factor in his arrangements."

Ogburn goes on to speculate:

If Burghley's motives in forwarding the match present no mystery, the same cannot be said of Oxford's. Knowing how ill-advised it was to prove, one wonders what led him into it. Was it indeed the girl who 'caught him'? If so, how? How could little Anne at fourteen (just Juliet's age at her marriage) have worsted in competition the more experienced and sophisticated young ladies at Court, who in some cases at least must have excelled her in beauty and wit, for neither of which was Anne known.⁵

Edward de Vere's financial fiascos

Much is made of Oxford's inability to handle his finances, which were carefully controlled by Lord Burghley, his guardian and father-in-law and the Queen's chief councilor. Burghley wrote that "my Lord of Oxford be for his part [in] matters of thrift inconsiderate."⁶

Ogburn reports that the Earl's numerous requests to the Queen that he be allowed to travel on the continent were refused. Nevertheless, in mid-1574, Oxford fled out of England only to be fetched home again by Thomas Bedingfield. The Earl was suspected of sympathizing with the Queen's enemies, and surviving correspondence suggests that Burghley's intervention saved the Earl from charges of treason although, "we know little about the episode; nothing Oxford wrote about it survived the records."⁷

In 1573, the records of the Savoy show Oxford paying at least part of the costs of two apartments being occupied by writers. In any event, Oxford was branching out as a literary patron. It is probably because of his associations with writers (and actors) that his father-in-law would accuse him of keeping 'lewd companions.'⁸

De Vere's literary connections & reputation

*A seventeenth century antiquary, Anthony `a Wood, reported that "this most noble Earl of Oxford . . . was, in his younger days, an excellent poet and comedian, as several of his compositions that were made public showed, which I presume now are lost and worn out."*⁹

Ogburn relates that, of the Earl's poetry,

*only two dozen examples have come down to us identified as his [Oxford's]. It was on the strength of this sampling, however, that Macaulay would write of him: "The seventeenth earl shone at the court of Elizabeth, and had won for himself an honourable place among the early masters of English poetry."*¹⁰

One of the key figures in the authorship debate, J. Thomas Looney, in Shakespeare Identified (1920), devised a list that named "special characteristics" required of the author, which he named as follows:

- 1. A man with feudal connections*
- 2. A member of the higher aristocracy*
- 3. Connected with Lancastrian supporters*
- 4. An enthusiast for Italy*
- 5. A follower of sport (including falconry)*
- 6. A lover of music*
- 7. Loose and improvident in money matters*
- 8. Doubtful and somewhat conflicting in his attitude to women*
- 9. Of probable Catholic leanings, but touched with skepticism*

In addition, Looney noticed that a stanza used in "Shakespeare's" Venus and Adonis was also used in a poem written by Edward de Vere, "Woman's Changeableness."¹¹ Looney eventually concluded that Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, was the author of work attributed to Shakespeare.

Ogburn describes the Earl's literary activities thus: "As if to emphasize the significance of the step he was taking, Oxford presented the work boldly under the full panoply of his titles."¹²

Ogburn argues that Oxford's later concealment of his authorship had to do with dignity, which included nobles' not wanting to have their "poems printed during their lifetimes," even though Oxford's poems were published in his lifetime, a fact Ogburn dismisses by claiming that "De Vere, in whom the writer contested with the nobleman, was not above

infringing the taboo, but his doing so was highly exceptional."¹³ Ogburn never reconciles this conflicting evidence.

Anne Cecil, a substituted bed partner

*In 1943, Charles W. Barrell discovered . . . the story of the substituted bed-partner from a source with a connection to the de Vere family. Francis Osborne (1593-1659) . . . told of a quarrel . . . in which the Earl had been worsted and was left 'nothing to testify his manhood but a beard and children, by the daughter of that last great Earl of Oxford, whose lady was brought to his bed under the notion of his mistress and from such a virtuous deceit she (the Countess of Montgomery) is said to proceed.'*¹⁴

*In The Histories of Essex, of 1836, by Morant and Wright, J.T. Looney found a passage about the rupture between the Earl and Countess of Oxford in which he read to his astonishment that 'he [de Vere] forsook his lady's bed, [but] the father of Lady Anne by stratagem, contrived that her husband should unknowingly sleep with her, believing her to be another woman, and she bore a son to him in consequence of this meeting.'*¹⁵

An apocryphal anecdote?

In his note for the following event, Schoenbaum points out that this particular "episode . . . has escaped the noses of the Oxfordians," and he cites Aubrey who recounts the following incident:

This Earl of Oxford, making of his low obeisance to Queen Elizabeth, happened to let a fart, at which he was so ashamed that he went to travel, 7 years.¹⁶

1571-1574

Father Frith waited anxiously for the arrival of his former pupil Agnes and the nobleman she would marry. Though his hearing was nearly gone and he was crippled with age, Frith's eyes were sharp and observant still. He did not hear the horses arrive, nor the quick footsteps on the wooden porch. Forbidden by the Queen to practice his Catholic faith, Frith's home had become a secret sanctuary for believers in the old faith. The front door opened, causing the candles to flicker and announcing that Agnes was arrived and with her the Earl of Oxford. And they were married to one another without fanfare. Two weeks later Father Frith died quietly in his sleep, content in his belief that Agnes was safe and secure with her earl. However, no sooner having secured the bride of his fancy, the Earl embarked on a series of romantic liaisons at the court that broke his young bride's heart. But worse was to follow.

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The newly-appointed Baron, Lord Burghley, stepped forward to welcome the Queen, who had received and accepted an invitation to attend the hastily arranged nuptials of Lady Anne Cecil to the Earl of Oxford.

Massive preparations in the great hall transformed it with gleaming silver, a musician's gallery and newly-hewn benches at the banquet table. The last summer roses hung in garlands from the ceiling beams, making the air heavy with their scent. From the ovens would issue meats, fish and breads. Puddings would arrive at the table in silver dishes accompanied by wooden spoons for the guests. The clatter and traffic of the arriving guests and their retinues increased as the time drew near for the wedding.

The mother of the unhappy bride attended her young daughter—as the servants dressed her in a fine satin gown. When the servants were finished, Lady Mildred ordered them away and when they were alone, the mother turned to her daughter with sympathy: “Thou hast a careful father, child. One who, to put thee from thy heaviness, hath sorted out this sudden day of joy.”

“I pray you tell my lord and father,” Lady Anne cried in desperation, “I cannot marry for I am wed already to Cambrio. And the Earl, whom my father intends for me, was wed to another last month in Shottery.”

Shocked by the implications of these revelations, Lady Mildred sank heavily onto the bed. “Your father must never know of this, or he will have Agnes marked for death and he will throw you away. Fie, fie! What, are you mad girls?”

“I love him and I don't love him,” moaned Lady Anne.

“How, how! Chop-logic! What is this?”

“I love Cambrio! I do not love the Earl,” replied Lady Anne.

“Cambrio too shall die unless you do this,” Lady Mildred said urgently.

This was the message needed to make her daughter understand the danger.

Just then Lord Burghley burst into the room, his face flushed red with anger. “Thy groom is fled!” he roared. “And the Queen here! With all the royal court. He shall pay for this humiliation. I shall see him pay!”

Relief at her reprieve was short-lived; three months later the grand hall was once again decorated, this time with garlands of evergreen bows, and Lady Anne was married to the Earl of Oxford before the Queen and her royal court. Although each was married already, they followed the deal brokered by Lady Mildred after Lord Burghley had discovered the truth, and he made it clear that the lives of Agnes and Cambrio were forfeit unless the wedding took place as planned.

Just after the prelate pronounced them husband and wife, the twice-married Earl of Oxford turned to his new father-in-law and bowed low, letting loose a fart—making clear his displeasure with the enforced contract. Turning, he then apologized

disingenuously to the Queen who had borne the brunt of his assault for the part she played in the forced union. Then, amid the nervous laughter and murmurs of the assembled wedding guests, he strode from the chapel, leaving his new wife to celebrate her wedding night alone and humiliated while he made rough-and-tumble love to Agnes.

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Lord Burghley dipped his quill and continued writing the letter to his son-in-law, inviting the errant earl to spend Christmas at Theobalds, the Baron's country seat on the northern outskirts of London.

Burghley wondered again briefly if releasing Agnes to the Earl had been wise, not that he had much choice in the matter. Edward had remained adamant despite reluctant pressure from the Queen—either Burghley would release the girl unharmed or no formal marriage would take place with Lady Anne. In the end even his own wife, Lady Mildred, had turned against him. Burghley sometimes suspected that she cared more for the farmer's daughter than she did for their own.

Even now the Earl promised ruin to Lady Anne should anything untoward happen to Agnes.

By any reckoning the marriage was an unmitigated disaster. Whispered rumors circulated about the Earl's purported refusal to consummate the marriage. Burghley's spies informed him that Edward kept Agnes in a London apartment and, contrary to all expectations, he was enamored of her still. And now that Lady Anne was pregnant with Cambrio's bastard, it had become imperative for Burghley to intervene.

Burghley worried that it was simply a matter of time before the gossips would hear of the ill-conceived prior contract of marriage between Agnes and the Earl. He would need to move quickly and carefully to ensure the legitimacy of his daughter's claim as the Countess of Oxford. And he prayed that Agnes would not become pregnant, for he was fond of her still and loath to order the disposal of Agnes' offspring, about which he would have no choice.

Other reports confirmed Burghley's suspicion that Agnes' undue influence was closely connected to the love she and Edward shared for literary endeavors. Indeed, since his marriage, the restless Earl had immersed himself in literary pursuits, contributing a preface to Bartholomew Clerk's translation of Baldassare Castiglione's Il Cortegiano, and writing poems. Burghley did not doubt the source of the Earl's inspiration and muse, having witnessed the brilliance of Agnes' wit and learning.

But the wily statesman had already begun to spin the web with which he intended to capture his former ward, finally and forever. It would depend upon enticing both Agnes and Edward to his estate at Christmas. Having made it his hobby to study a man's

weaknesses in order to know how to best manipulate him, Burghley was confident the lure of money would bring his son-in-law within reach.

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Two weeks later a procession of carriages arrived, pulling into the drive at Theobalds, carrying the Earl of Oxford and his retinue, including the reluctant Agnes. Gazing at the imposing edifice, she urged Edward to flee obvious entrapment. But Edward could not be dissuaded, and so against her better judgment, she allowed him to lead her into the enemy's lair.

From a window high above, Lord Burghley watched the scene, his daughter beside him. "Remember, he must suspect nothing," he instructed. "Smile and say nothing."

"I hate him!" she cried.

Fixing the girl with a harsh stare, Burghley said, "My care has provided you with a gentleman of noble parentage; to answer *I hate him* does not become you, daughter."

Weeping, the countess fell to her knees. "I beseech you, good father. I cannot love him."

Unmoved, Lord Burghley dragged her up. “Disobedient wretch. You will obey me in this. Your husband must not leave until he is convinced that he is the father of the bastard you carry.”

“How can he be my husband when he is married already?”

Lord Burghley slapped her.

What had been unspoken between them now lay exposed, combined with the recent memory of Edward’s earlier escape to the continent with Agnes, and Lord Burghley’s fear that he would not return.

“Obey me in this or I shall turn you out of my house and where will you then? Your husband will not have you. The wretched Cambrio is returned to Padua. Where then?” Lord Burghley’s grip tightened. “Obey me in this or you are lost.”

“Yes, Father,” the Countess agreed bitterly.

That night, when the Earl was carried to his darkened bedroom in a drunken state, it was not his true wife who lay waiting for him in the bed—for she had been spirited away and plied with mulled wine spiked with sleeping powder—it was the Lady Anne. Rolling on top, he took her roughly, marveling at how she was able to surprise and excite

him still as she fought and scratched, crying out what he perceived as mock protests of pain.

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Winter gray light filtered into the dismal little room. Still fully dressed, Agnes woke.

She rose, trembling from a combination of the damp icy cold and a painful hangover that shot like a hot brand through her body.

Opening the door, she crept down the narrow staircase, making her way to the corridor leading to Edward's apartments.

A frozen winter gale howled gusts of frigid air through chinks in the windows and doors.

The slight sound of the opening door brought the Countess of Oxford fully awake. Edward slept soundly beside her.

Drawing back the heavy brocade bed curtain, Agnes whispered softly, "My love?"

The Countess looked into her waiting-woman's eyes. "It was my father's plan," she pleaded. "Do not hate me."

Agnes observed the way their bodies spooned together and how Edward's arm held the Countess, even in his sleep.

"He is your husband now," Agnes replied.

Protesting, Lady Anne answered, "He is thine own still and believed that I was *you*. They put drops in his wine, as they did in yours, it was my father . . ."

Turning away dumbly, Agnes stumbled from the room.

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As soon as Agnes was gone, the Countess tried to slip quietly from the bed, fearful of Edward's wrath and anxious to tell her father that his ruse had worked. Her movement woke Edward who gazed at her first as if she were a stranger.

"How now, what is this?" he growled.

Recognition and a dawning realization seized him and he sat up.

“Loathsome creature. Be gone!” he shouted.

Lady Anne did not wait for more abuse—she ran from the room to escape Edward’s rage.

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Finding a quiet place high on a turret, “To be or not to be,” Agnes wondered, considering whether or not to leap—thinking herself lost to both lover and friends. The bright winter sun glinting off the water of the half-frozen lake mocked her dark thoughts. The light became her muse, and instead of death Agnes chose to compose a sonnet:

Take all my loves, my love; yea, take them all;
What hast thou then more than thou hadst before,
No love, my love, that thou mayst true love call;
All mine was thine, before thou hadst this more:
Then if for my love thou my love receivest,
I cannot blame thee, for my love thou usest;
But yet be blamed, if thou thyself deceivest
By wilful taste of what thyself refusest.
I do forgive thy robb’ry, gentle thief,
Although thou steal thee all my poverty;
And yet love knows it is a greater grief
To bear love’s wrong, than hate’s known injury.
Lascivious grace, in whom all ill well shows,
Kill me with spites; yet we must not be foes.

VIII. NO LOVE, MY LOVE

¹ Ogburn, 483.

² Ogburn, 483.

³ Ogburn, 491.

⁴ Ogburn, 493.

⁵ Ogburn, 485.

⁶ Cited in Ogburn, 530.

⁷ Ogburn, 531.

⁸ Kreeger, Jazsi and Boyle, 706.

⁹ Cited in Ogburn, 460.

¹⁰ Ogburn, 459.

¹¹ Ogburn, 380. See examples of de Vere's poetry: Shakespeare Oxford Society, "The Poems of Edward de Vere," (undated), <<http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com/verepoemslny.htm>> (14 December 2002).

¹² Ogburn, 497.

¹³ Ogburn, 459.

¹⁴ Ogburn, 575.

¹⁵ Ogburn, 576.

¹⁶ Cited in Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 432, see also note 85 in Chapter VI.

IX. PREFERENCE MODEL FOR A SECOND-BEST BED

I no longer want to read anything about anything sad. Anything violent, anything disturbing, anything like that. No funerals at the end, though there can be some in the middle. If there must be deaths, let there be resurrections, or, at least, a heaven, so we know where we are. Depression and squalor are for those under 25; they can take it; they even like it, they still have enough time left. But real life is bad for you; hold it in your hand long enough and you'll get pimples and become feeble-minded. You'll go blind. I want happiness, guaranteed, joy all around, covers with nurses on them or brides, intelligent girls but not too intelligent, with regular teeth and pluck, and both breasts the same size and no excess facial hair, someone you can depend on to know where the bandages are and to turn the hero, that potential rake and killer, into a well-groomed country gentleman with clean fingernails and the right vocabulary. *Always*, he has to say. *Forever*. I no longer want to read books that don't end with the word *Forever*.¹

Shakespeare's infamous final bequest to his wife—"Item I gyve unto my wife my second best bed with the furniture"—is one of the few documented "facts" about Mrs Shakespeare. It is also one of the most talked about—from Mr Shakespeare's point of view usually. How does it inform the argument about the interpretation of historical facts or myth making and the fluid nature of the relationship between writer, reader and the text?

Ellen Schaubert and Ellen Spolsky introduced the concept, *conditions of*

¹ Atwood, 5.

significance, to explain the factors influencing a reader's interpretations of literary evidence. The phrase, "conditions of significance," is used in the debate concerning the relationships between textual evidence and the reader's values and assumptions; the theory stresses that differences among interpreters typically derive from variations in each reader's conditions of significance. The resulting *preference model* refers to

how rules that concern linguists (specifically, a combination of well-formedness and preference rules) can help solve one of the most pressing current problems facing literary critics: how to allow a variety of conflicting interpretations for a given text without abandoning all possibility of controlling the range of those interpretations, or judging among them.²

John Mebane describes the preference model as an explanation of why readers prefer one interpretation to others as they struggle with complex problems of categorization that underlie understanding.³ Using Schaubert and Spolsky's work as a foundation, Mebane takes one step further with his *contingently objective criteria of plausibility*⁴—a call for canons of evidence to be based on criteria that are "objective" at a particular time, given the existing circumstances. These criteria should also "transcend political groups and theoretical subcommunities," allowing for a plurality of plausible assertions when dealing, for example, with paradoxical and conflicting evidence in "Shakespeare's" work. Mebane offers his model as an alternative to both the problematic issue of a zero-sum model of truth and the nihilistic abyss of a complete suspension of

² Ellen Schaubert and Ellen Spolsky, *The Bounds of Interpretation: Linguistic Theory and Literary Text*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 2-3.

³ John S. Mebane, "Pluralism, Relativism, and the Questions of Evidence in Shakespeare Studies," *College English* 58, no. 5 (Sept. 1996): 524.

⁴ Mebane, 537.

meaning. Mebane points out that

one criterion of plausibility is whether the interpretation is based upon accurate description of the facts of the text as it appears independently of interpretation. The typical objection, of course, is that the interpretation creates the facts of the text.⁵

Another objection is demonstrated by the Katie/Mary example in Chapter V, which highlights the vulnerability of facts to interpretation based on their arrangement or on the privileging of some facts over others. For an example of how some facts are considered unworthy of examination, consider how scholars have responded to Shakespeare's bequest in his will, leaving Anne his "second best bed." Ogburn reports that

the lone and slighting reference to his helpmeet and mother of his children has, Professor Gerald Eades Bentley of Princeton complains, 'given rise to many romantic or lurid tales.' Chambers declares that 'a good deal of sheer nonsense has been written about this.'⁶

Schoenbaum describes the bequest as an "endless, mostly unprofitable controversy."⁷

Gale wonders, "Should we eschew the traditional concern about validity, reliability, and adequateness of historical sources when we purposefully turn away from the traditional way of doing history?" How else can we re-conceive the story of Anne Hathaway in what Gale calls "a rediscovery of the obliterated 'truth' independent of the existing historical discourse of men?"⁸

⁵ Mebane, 526.

⁶ Ogburn, 34.

⁷ Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare*, 302.

⁸ Gale, 366.

It is somewhat ironic that this study—which seeks to reconsider the scant details of Anne Hathaway’s life and ease her from the illegitimate silence of a feminized private space and into a rich inheritance—relies so heavily, on deconstructing Willy first. Xin Liu Gale refers to Gayatri Spivak’s warning that “‘women are doubly displaced in deconstruction because the “woman” whose displacement is recognized in Derridean deconstruction is not the real women whose bodies are subject to codes of legitimacy and inheritance.’”⁹

In an act of what Avital Ronell (professor of German, English and comparative literature at New York University) would consider impervious ‘self-assured assertiveness,’ I reject deconstruction and choose instead to re-construct Anne Hathaway, embracing an alternative contrary to the hierarchy that has been while ignoring the postmodern skepticism embodied in Kristeva’s 1981 assertion that ‘any rationalist attempt to transform the world into its own image is only one more interpretation which cannot see that it embraces a void.’¹⁰

In her book, Stupidity, Avital Ronell situates stupidity on a slippery slope that defies definition, saying, ‘In fact, stupidity, purveyor of self-assured assertiveness, mutes just about everything that would seek to disturb its impervious hierarchies.’¹¹

⁹ Gale, 376.

¹⁰ Julia Kristeva, “Ne dis rien,” Tel Quel 90 (1981). Also cited in Richard Appignanesi and Chris Garratt, eds., Postmodernism for Beginners (UK: Icon, 1995), 104.

¹¹ Avital Ronell, Stupidity (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 3.

D. Diane Davis explains that Avital Ronell's writing engages in "rigorously deconstructive rereadings of *everything*" in order to "take up that which has been 'marginalized, minoritized, evicted, persecuted, left out of the picture...feminized.'"¹²

Davis points out that Ronell's work

is remarkable, in part, because of the unusual connections it makes, its determination to blur the distinctions between big thought and small talk, philosophy and rumor, literature and headline news—to blur, that is, the very divisions through which academia sustains itself.¹³

An example of why this blurring between *big thought* and *small talk* gets labeled as a feminine attribute may be found in Candace Pert's description of her successful efforts to discover the body's opiate receptor. Forced to run her final assay in secret, Pert writes that she received a phone call from her husband—on the day she had planned to run the test—who informed her that the babysitter was sick and unable to pick up their son from preschool. Although her husband was apparently able-bodied, Pert was the one elected to pick up five-year-old Evan, taking him with her to the lab where she ran her successful experiment.¹⁴

Why don't we hear stories such as these from male scientists? Is it because they simply don't engage in "small talk," or is it because they have compartmentalized those functions and spheres as feminized spaces, leaving mothers, wives, daughters, lovers and feminine others to look after them? Or could it be that the newly documented evidence of

¹² Davis, 243.

¹³ Davis, 243.

¹⁴ Pert, 56-62.

the feminine brain's being wired to multi-task with more agility, allows women to map the rhizomic connections between thoughts big and small? How small is the task of raising a son while simultaneously gaining recognition as a world-class scientist? Citing the examples of many women who were compelled to balance a working life with their domestic obligations, author Joanna Russ recalls:

Marie Curie's biographer, her daughter Eve, describe[d] her mother's cleaning, shopping, cooking, and child care, all unshared by Pierre Curie and added to a full working day during Madame Curie's early domestic years, which were also the beginnings of her scientific career.¹⁵

In her discussion about designing writing assignments informed by feminist theory and research, Karyn Hollis urges the use of "non-androcentric types of evidence such as the personal, psychological, anecdotal, and commonplace."¹⁶ Of course these approaches are problematic, as Gale points out:

It is a paradox that feminist historians have to find a way around: they have to challenge the traditional masculine assumptions about women and women's ways of thinking and writing and at the same time seek their colleagues' acceptance of the legitimacy and credibility of their research and scholarship. In short, overcoming these obstacles demands of the feminist historian both commitment and ingenuity.¹⁷

Accused of racism and homophobia, feminist scholar Joanna Russ describes the epiphany she experienced after immersing herself in what she terms the parallel literary traditions that co-exist with her own. "It's very difficult to convey to others that sudden

¹⁵ Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 8.

¹⁶ Karyn L. Hollis, "Feminism in Writing Workshops: A New Pedagogy," *College Composition and Communication* 43, no. 3 (Oct. 1993): 344.

¹⁷ Gale, 363.

access of light, that soundless blow, which changes forever one's map of the world."¹⁸

But rather than parallel literary traditions, Russ points out that "the nightmare [for the privileged] is not that what is found in the 'other' art will be incomprehensible, but that it will be all too familiar."¹⁹ She goes on to make connections devoid of the linear hierarchy that the "privileged group" relies on—without it, their superior aesthetic taste and training "will suddenly vanish"²⁰ along with their privileged "preference model" canons—pointing out:

Women's lives are the buried truth about men's lives.
The lives of people of color are the buried truth about white lives.
The buried truth about the rich is who they take their money from and how.
The buried truth about 'normal' sexuality is how one kind of sexual expression has been made privileged, and what kinds of unearned virtue and terrors about identity this distinction serves.²¹

I add to this list, the lives of Diego Rivera's, Jacopo Robusti's, Tintoretto's, Jean Honore Fragonard's, Pieter Brueghel's, Vincent van Gogh's, Alexander Calder's, Max Ernst's, and Marcel Duchamp's wives/lovers/sisters/mothers/daughters and the buried truth of their undocumented contribution to the work of their better-known male relatives.²² The editors of Women Artists, Peterson and Wilson, write that

we discovered that if we looked up the family names of well-known male artists [see above list]...we often found some account of a wife / lover / sister / mother / daughter who was an artist too...van Gogh's mother, Anna Cornelia Carbentus...loved nature and wrote very well; she also showed ability at

¹⁸ Russ, 137.

¹⁹ Russ, 118.

²⁰ Russ, 118.

²¹ Russ, 119.

²² Karen Petersen and J.J. Wilson, Women Artists: Recognition and Reappraisal from the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper & Row, 1976). Cited in Russ, 50.

drawing... In fact his [van Gogh's] nephew tells us that van Gogh's very first paintings were actual copies of her works.²³

The buried truth of Anne Hathaway's life lies in fragmented shards of small talk including her husband's final bequest.

In his book, Who Wrote Shakespeare?, Michell admits that "this [second-best bed] is a unique bequest, but since nothing is known about Mrs Shakespeare and the circumstances of her life, it is impossible to be sure what her husband meant by it."²⁴ And while this may be the case, it has not deterred other—less unsure—biographers, including Sir Sidney Lee, from speculating in his 1915 edition of A Life of William Shakespeare:

Probably [Anne's] ignorance of affairs and the infirmities of age (she was past sixty) combined to unfit her in the poet's eyes for the control of property, and, as an act of ordinary prudence, he committed her to the care of his older daughter, who inherited, according to such information as is accessible, some of his own shrewdness, and had a capable advisor in her husband.²⁵

While plausible, Lee's description of Susannah as *shrewd* is based on evidence that she was able to sign her name and that her grave bore the following epitaph—preserved by the antiquary Sir William Dugdale (1605-1686):

Heere lyeth ye body of Svsanna,
Wife to John Hall, Gent.
Ye davghter of William Shakespeare, Gent.
She deceased ye 11th of Jvly, A.D. 1649, aged 66.
Witty above her sexe, but that's not all,
Wise to salvation was good Mistress Hall;
Something of Shakespeare was in that, but this

²³ Cited in Russ, 50.

²⁴ Michell, 102.

²⁵ Lee, 489.

Wholy of Him with whom she's now in blisse.
Then, passenger, ha'st ne're a teare,
To weepe with her that wept with all ?
That wept, yet set herselfe to chere
Them up with comforts cordiall.
Her Love shall live, her mercy spread,
When thou has ne're a tear to shed.²⁶

More bold still is A.L. Rowse, who airily dismisses Anne altogether in his book, Shakespeare the Man: "One hears nothing of...[Anne]; evidently there was nothing to be said."²⁷ That does not, however, prevent Rowse from further assured commentary as he points out how Shakespeare "left his widow in her daughter's care, who looked after everything, though he reserved for Anne the next-best bed—the big double-bed would be needed by Susanna and John."²⁸

Garry O'Connor feels confident enough to assert that Anne got the "second best bed with the furniture" of the bedroom it furnished because she

had asked for this, which otherwise would have gone to Susanna. A correspondent in the *Times* in 1977 suggests that this is roughly similar to a modern testator who, having disposed of the bulk of his estate, turns to his solicitor and says, 'And don't forget to leave Anne the mini.'²⁹

Lee, Rouse and O'Connor reveal, in their various speculations, model preferences that have more to do with their own masculine projections rather than a reliance on *contingently objective criteria*. Historically, in the gendered world of the academy,

²⁶ Cited in Lee, 512.

²⁷ Rowse, Man, 264.

²⁸ Rowse, Man, 271.

²⁹ Garry O'Connor, William Shakespeare: A Life (London: Sceptre, 1992), 301.

masculine projections such as these received more weight than their counterpart—feminine intuition. Again, it is the yawning gaps in her life, and the silence, that lures scholars to the risky business of speculation.

Ever reaching and striving for an elusive state of being that doesn't exist—objective reality—other scholars reveal their preference models through the facts they present and the inferences drawn from those facts. For example, in a more recent 1999 biography, Shakespeare: A Life, Park Honan quotes Richard Wilson and Margaret Spufford's research, which indicates that "English common law did not always guarantee a widow the dower right of one-third of her husband's estate."³⁰ Honan concludes:

Shakespeare's 'second best bed,' then, may possibly have an indirect purpose, if by acknowledging Anne's existence with a named, specific item, he is able to deny her dower right to one-third of his estate. One purpose of his will, which seems urgent, is to deprive her of power, and this casts no light, of any kind, on his affection for her, or the possible lack of it. He knew the Halls would look after her, but, again, he seems to wish to deny Anne *control* of any portion of his heritable estate.³¹

Schoenbaum relates Edmond Malone's eighteenth-century commentary as it appeared in the Supplement to the Edition of Shakespeare's Plays Published in 1778 by Samuel Johnson and George Stevens, which Malone edited:

His wife had not wholly escaped his memory. He had forgot her,—he had recollected her,—but so recollected her, as more strongly to mark how little he esteemed her; he had already (as is vulgarly expressed) cut her off, not indeed with a shilling, but with an old bed.³²

³⁰ Park Honan, Shakespeare: A Life (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 396.

³¹ Honan, 397.

³² Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare, 302.

Admitting that “the bed presents a problem,” Schoenbaum’s search for contingently objective criteria of plausibility—based on contemporary Elizabethan precedents—was rewarded with the following discoveries: “When Francis Russell...died...in 1585, he willed his ‘best bed’...not to his wife but to his youngest daughter.”³³ When William Palmer died in 1573, he left “his wife Elizabeth...his ‘second best’ featherbed for herself furnished.”³⁴ As an alternative explanation, Schoenbaum points to Sir Walter Raleigh’s advice to his son: “For if she love again, let her not enjoy her second love in the same bed wherein she loved thee.”³⁵

Unencumbered by a need to provide documentary evidence, fictional speculations about Shakespeare’s last bequest to his wife provide another clear example of the preference model in practice. Connie Willis included the story “Winter’s Tale” in her collection *Impossible Things*.³⁶ It draws on the rather fantastical notion that Christopher Marlowe was the real author of Shakespeare’s work. In her version, Willis has Christopher Marlowe returning to Stratford pretending to be William Shakespeare in order to foil his would-be murderers. Although Willis’ Anne knows that Marlowe is not her husband—in the story Will Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe do bear a striking resemblance to each other—she falls in love with the imposter and they live together as husband and wife, and he writes the plays pretending to be “Mr. William Shakespeare”

³³ Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare*, 302.

³⁴ Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare*, 302.

³⁵ Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare*, 303.

³⁶ Connie Willis, “Winter’s Tale,” *Impossible Things* (New York: Bantam, 1994).

until his death. Not wishing to disinherit her daughters, Anne hides the plays in the new feather bed, thinking that in years to come people will find them and the true name of the author will then be known. As a final sentimental gesture of thanks, Christopher Marlowe—still pretending to be Will Shakespeare—leaves Anne their “second-best bed.”

In Robert Nye’s novel, Mrs Shakespeare: The Complete Works, Anne describes Shakespeare’s best bed—“It’s like some Papist altar!”—housed in his lodgings above a wet fishmonger’s:

It was a gigantic four-poster, each post as thick as a man, with heavy crimson velvet curtains hanging right down to the floor from the canopy, and fat gold cords that dangled like bell ropes.³⁷

Nye’s Anne is a “never-quite-tamed but not unloving shrew,” who refers to herself as “mutton dressed up as lamb” on her first and only trip to London to visit her husband. Will confesses to her that he is besotted with his patron (whose money paid for the bed they are lying on), the Earl of Southampton. Anne accepts the news with curiosity, wanting to know what “buggered” means. “How do you do it?” she asks. “Like this,” said Mr Shakespeare. “And then he did it to me.”³⁸ Writing as Anne, Nye describes her experience:

It hurt me at first. Then it didn’t hurt. Hurt me or not, once Mr Shakespeare had started there was no stopping him. “Good?” he cried. “Like it?” “No!” I cried. “No, I don’t, no, I won’t, no, no...” But, then, after some more of it: “Yes!”³⁹

³⁷ Robert Nye, Mrs Shakespeare: The Complete Works (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993), 140.

³⁸ Nye, 169.

³⁹ Nye, 170.

Ironically it is the very the absence of a feminine sensibility that creates a space inviting the perilous practice of reinterpretation and speculation in Nye's work. Does the fact that it is a man who appropriates Anne's voice—crying "No!" five times as her husband anally rapes her, only to discover in the end (no pun intended) that she really likes it—change the reading? Should it? In her article, "The Artist as Housewife," Erica Jong described her literary education:

Being a woman means, unfortunately, believing a lot of male definitions... I had learned what an orgasm was from D.H. Lawrence, disguised as Lady Chatterley... (For years I measured my orgasms against Lady Chatterley's and wondered what was wrong with me...) I learned from Dostoevski that they [women] have no religious feeling. I learned from Swift and Pope that they have too much religious feeling (and therefore can never be quite rational). I learned from Faulkner that they are earth-mothers and at one with the moon and the tide and the crops. I learned from Freud that they have deficient superegos and are forever 'incomplete.'⁴⁰

Is the feminine reader meant to learn how to enjoy being anally raped from Robert Nye, disguised as Anne?

With a nod of assent to Barthes and authors both living and dead, Ronell announces that "a text's got to do what a text's got to do."⁴¹ When her interviewer offers Ronell an opportunity to "address any misunderstandings about her work," she is "touched by the gesture and...the kind of 'rescue mission' it entails." But as Davis explains,

⁴⁰ Erica Jong, "The Artist as Housewife," in *The First Ms. Reader*, Francine Klagsbrun, ed. (New York: Warner Paperback Library, 1973), pp. 116-17. Also cited in Russ, 89.

⁴¹ Davis, 246.

She [Ronell] declined to assume a posture of authority about her texts, declined to step into the 'control tower' that would presume to 'land the right reading,' noting only that it's not 'her place' to do so. She insists that it is not she who takes risks but that 'language is risk-taking and risk-making.' So in writing, Ronell surrenders to these risks, signs her name to them, and then refrains from trying to control their effects.⁴²

Cheryl Glenn believes that "whether they result in advances or setbacks, these risks invigorate our field, signify our progress, and illuminate possibilities. But they will not always be understood, let alone welcome."⁴³ According to Davis, Ronell's writing suggests

that the 'message' (the work, the writing) 'murmurs incessantly' and has a tendency to take off on its own, quite oblivious to the conscious intentions or desires of the one who writes and the one who reads. And this implies, she says, the necessity to rethink the place, which is never stable, of both the writer and the reader.⁴⁴

Mark Twain is not the only famous writer to question the authorship of the canon,⁴⁵ and Shakespeare's last bequest to his wife is fuel for Twain's doubt. He describes it as

a thoroughgoing business man's will. It named in minute detail every item of property he owned in the world—houses, lands, sword, silver-gilt bowl, and so on—all the way down to his 'second-best bed' and its furniture... He left her that 'second-best bed.' And *not another thing*; not even a penny to bless her lucky widowhood with. It was eminently and conspicuously a business man's will, not a poet's.

⁴² Davis, 246.

⁴³ Glenn, 389.

⁴⁴ Davis, 244.

⁴⁵ Charles Dickens (1812-1879), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Henry James (1843-1916) and Walt Whitman (1819-1892) all expressed doubt about the man from Stratford. See The Shakespeare Oxford Society, "The Honor Roll of Skeptics: Questioning the Orthodoxy of Skeptics," 14 July 2000, <<http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com/skeptic.htm>> (26 December 2002 and 17 January 2003).

It mentioned *not a single book*.

Books were much more precious than swords and silver-gilt bowls and second-best beds in those days, and when a departing person owned one he gave it a high place in his will.

The will mentioned *not a play, not a poem, not an unfinished literary work, not a scrap of manuscript of any kind*.

Many poets have died poor, but this is the only one in history that has died this poor; the others all left literary remains behind. Also a book. Maybe two.

If Shakespeare had owned a dog—but we need not go into that: we know he would have mentioned it in his will. If a good dog, Susanna would have got it; if an inferior one his wife would have got a dower interest in it. I wish he had had a dog, just so we could see how painstakingly he would have divided that dog among the family, in his careful business way.⁴⁶

Thus Shakespeare's final bequest—"Item I gyve unto my wife my second best bed with the furniture"—has taken on a 400-year-old life of its own despite the myriad scholars who have dismissed it as mere "small talk" and an "unprofitable controversy." Yet still this strange bequest murmurs and whispers doubt and rumors of *ordinary prudence, last requests, a mark of little esteem, deprivation of control, sexual rivals, "no"* that doesn't really mean "no" and *a business man's will, not a poet's* revealing little more than the practical operation of each author's preference model.

Joanna Russ' guide, How to Suppress Women's Writing, outlines the historical conditions of significance and resulting attitudes that have led to a preference model insisting that women did not have the ability to write nor did they have anything worth saying.

⁴⁶ Mark Twain, Is Shakespeare Dead? From My Autobiography (New York: and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1909), 30, 31.

She didn't write it. (But if it's clear she did the deed...) She wrote it but she shouldn't have. (It's political, sexual, masculine, feminist.) She wrote it, but look what she wrote about. (The bedroom, the kitchen, her family. Other women!) She wrote it but she wrote only one of it. ('*Jane Eyre*. Poor dear, that's all she ever...') She wrote it, but she isn't really an artist, and it isn't really art. (It's a thriller, a romance, a children's book. It's sci fi!) She wrote it, but she had help. (Robert Browning, Branwell Bronte. 'Her own masculine side.') She wrote it, but she's an anomaly. (Woolf. With Leonard's help...) She wrote it BUT...⁴⁷

At the same time Russ provides a wealth of examples and contingently objective criteria of plausibility to support her contention that women's writing has been appropriated and suppressed.

The author of *As You Like It* has a wife warn her future husband about the impossibility of such suppression:

Make the doors upon a woman's
wit and it will out at the casement. Shut that and 'twill
out at the keyhole. Stop that, 'twill fly with the smoke
out at the chimney (IV, i, 162-166).

Unruly are the fictional voices of women in these plays, unstoppable and witty when hidden behind a masculine disguise that enables them to participate in a patriarchal society. And until now, efforts to entertain a preference model notion of feminine authorship for the Shakespeare canon have been light or half-hearted.

I endorse Camille Paglia—who, like me, does not welcome a theory that disconnects the writer from her or his text:

⁴⁷ Russ, front cover.

Most pernicious of French imports is the notion that there is no person behind a text. Is there anything more affected, aggressive, and relentlessly concrete than a Parisian intellectual behind his/her turgid text? The Parisian is a provincial when he pretends to speak for the universe. Behind every book is a certain person with a certain history. I can never know too much about that person and that history.⁴⁸

Were it not for the plays, sonnets and poems, no one would care why Shakespeare left his second best bed to his wife. And again, it is the absence of information about both author and spouse that creates a space for speculation and inference over the tantalizing shards of biographical information that have survived.

⁴⁸ Paglia, 50.

X. MY LOVE IS AS A FEVER

Edward de Vere's escapades

Ogburn writes about the well-documented five-year break in Oxford's marriage to Burghley's daughter during which Oxford traveled through Europe with—"so Burghley noted for his records—'two gentlemen, two grooms, one payend, a harbinger, a housekeeper [emphasis mine], and a trencherman.'"¹

"Oxford first arrived in Venice in May 1575, [and] made it the base of his operations," according to Professor Alan Nelson, who cites Sir Henry Wotton's 1617 report in reference to Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford and father of the 18th earl: "When he arrived in Venice, [he] took no trouble to see the rest of the country, but stopped here, and even built himself a house."²

Nelson points out that "the idea that Oxford owned a house [in] Venice is supported by the testimony of Orazio Cogno, who informed the Inquisition that he had joined Oxford at his house on 1 March 1576." Nelson writes that in 1580-81, in letters directed to members of the Privy Council, Henry Howard and Charles Arundel accused Oxford of numerous crimes. These included multiple instances of pederasty, and of having sodomized an Italian servant, . . . who, they reported, had left Oxford's employ without Oxford's permission, citing sexual abuse as his reason.³

One of Oxford's peers, the Earl of Arundel, said of him:

To record the vices of this monstrous earl were a labour without end; they are so many and so vile and so scandalous that it would be a shame to write them. He is a most notorious drunkard and very seldom sober; —in his drunken fits he is not man but a beast; —all acts of cruelty, injury and

*villainy, sparing no woman be she never so virtuous nor any man, be he never so honourable.*⁴

The Earl's escapades appeared in a Fugger newsletter, a publication of "a wealthy family of German merchants and bankers . . . whose foreign agents reported in a form of communication from which newspapers were to evolve."⁵ The Fugger newsletter dated 25 April 1581, reports that

the Earl of Oxford, also arrested . . . but soon set at liberty, is again in the Tower for forgetting himself with one of the Queen's Maids of Honor, who is in the Tower likewise. This in spite of his having a pretty wife, daughter of the Treasurer. But he will not live with her.

For two and a half months, evidently, he languished in the tower. The Maid of Honor in question was Anne Vavysor who, according to Sir Francis Walsingham, was

*on Tuesday at night . . . brought to bed of a son in the maidens chamber. The E. of Oxford is avowed to be the father, who hath withdrawn himself with intent, as it is thought, to pass the seas. The ports are laid for him and therefore if he have any such determination it is not likely that he will escape. The gentlewoman the selfsame night she was delivered was conveyed out of the house and the next day committed to the Tower.*⁶

Entertaining the Queen

Ogburn observes that despite Oxford's disgrace, the Queen released him a mere two months later. And although he was out of favor for a time, by 1584 he was again one of the court favorites, winning a prize at "one of five great tournaments of Elizabeth's reign."⁷ Ward offers detailed eyewitness accounts of the tournaments that involved the participants in a medieval-like contest of arms with lances and spears, while mounted on horses.⁸ One such account in a letter written to the Earl of Rutland suggests that Oxford's triumphs may have had more to do with his position than skill:

*Lord Oxford has performed his challenge at tilt, tourney, and barriers, far above expectation of the world, and not much inferior to the other three challengers.*⁹

At his castle, a mere "twelve miles north-east of Stratford," the Earl of Warwickshire entertained the Queen for 19 days in the summer of 1575. The sumptuous royal

entertainment was described by eyewitness Robert Laneham. In a letter he comments on the Queen's sojourn to Lord Robert Dudley's castle in Kenilworth:

*On the large lake in the castle grounds a water-pageant displayed Arion on the back of a dolphin carried by a boat of which the oars simulated fins. Accompanied by the instrumentalists within the dolphin's belly, Arion sang . . . 'a delectable ditty of a song well apted to a melodious noise.'*¹⁰

Shakespeare / Dudley / Hathaway interaction

Schoenbaum speculates that William Shakespeare may have been one of the onlookers who gathered to observe Lord Dudley's spectacular entertainment.¹¹

Park Honan points out that the Shakespeares and the Hathaways were acquainted:

*His [William's] father had twice helped her own father as a surety in 1566, and had paid Hathaway's debts of £8 to John Page, the ironmonger, and £11 to Joan Biddle. The sums suggest that Shakespeares had not been unwelcome at the Hathaways' farm.*¹²

The Virgin Queen and her purported paramours

In her 1999 novel, *The Queen's Bastard*, Robin Maxwell imagines that the Queen gives birth to an illegitimate son by her married lover, Robin Dudley, Earl of Leicester.¹³

Alan Nelson writes that Gilbert Talbot's letter of May 1573, indicates, "Lady Burghley was jealous of Oxford's attachment to the Queen."¹⁴ Eleven years later, Mary Queen of Scots, while imprisoned, reportedly wrote to her sister, the virgin Queen Elizabeth:

. . . the Earl of Oxford dared not cohabit with his wife [out of fear of losing the favour which he hoped to receive from making love to you].¹⁵

Elizabeth Sears wrote a novel based on the Tudor Rose theory that Queen Elizabeth gave birth to an illegitimate son, fathered by the Earl of Oxford. Sears speculates that Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, was the secret product of their union.¹⁶

Peter Stallybrass records the cultural hysteria surrounding the "repeated act of putting straight" the gay or bisexual Shakespeare that emerges from the sonnets, pointing out:

One of the most drastic responses . . . [was] a letter purporting to be from Elizabeth I to Shakespeare, thanking him for his sonnets. The Sonnets, in other words, were addressed neither to a male beloved nor to a common

woman but to the monarch herself . . . [with] the supposition that Shakespeare's beloved was Elizabeth I . . . justified at great length (and with considerable learning) in two books by George Chalmers.¹⁷

The Death of Anne's father

Richard Hathaway "did not live to attend the ceremony [of his daughter Agnes' wedding], but was buried in the churchyard of Holy Trinity a few days after he made his will on 1 September 1581."¹⁸

1576-1581

A five-year idyll came to an abrupt end on an unseasonably cold spring morning in 1581 with the Queen reluctantly bowing to persistent pressure from her treasurer to intervene in the affairs of her favorite pet. However, it was a fit of jealous rage that caused the Queen to act in the end. Edward had slipped away from Elizabeth's bed to be with her Maid of Honor, Anne Vavasor, who gave birth to his bastard son.

Soldiers burst into a London apartment in the Savoy, seizing the Earl of Oxford. They were followed closely by Lord Burghley's minions—sent to capture Agnes. Rough hands were laid on, and although the lovers seemed resigned to the inevitable, Edward shouted a warning oath, promising death to Agnes' captors should any harm befall her. After that they were careful.

The Earl they placed under house arrest in the Tower while Agnes was taken to a lonely road several miles from Shottery and there released to make her way on a hired horse the remaining miles to her father's home.

Her grey cloak was heavy with the wet drizzle that turned to sleet as night fell.

How heavy do I journey on the way
When what I seek, my weary travel's end,
Doth teach that ease and that repose to say,
'Thus far the miles are measured from thy friend!'
The beast that bears me, tired with my woe,
Plods dully on, to bear that weight in me,
As if by some instinct that wretch did know
His rider loved not speed, being made from thee.
The bloody spur cannot provoke him on
That sometimes anger thrusts into his hide,
Which heavily he answers with a groan
More sharp to me than spurring to his side.
For that same groan doth put this in my mind:
My grief lies onward, and my joy behind.¹⁹

She pushed forward, willing her imagination to take flight. And the memories came back of a warm Mediterranean sun streaming through an open window in the villa. And though she rode alone on a dark muddy highway in the rain, the stored recollections transported her back to Italy at the close of another perfect day: the late afternoon sun paints the Venetian canal with shimmering points of light that converge in a molten river of gold. On the opposite shore, a sun-bronzed child lingers by the wharf at the water's edge, ignoring his mother's call. The woman fetches him with scolding good humor.

Sound carries on the fragrant foreign breeze—silver notes of water splashing in the elegant courtyard fountains, palm fronds whispering secrets and lies.

Edward makes love to her—she grips the metal balcony rail, straining to meet his urgent thrusts; their bodies buckle and tumble, then sway as one.

Later, the night breeze cools their naked flesh.

Then another recollection. A midsummer's night eve with the Queen's splendid retinue. Fireworks set the night sky alight, reflecting in a large lake where a water pageant displays a player, Arion, on the back of a dolphin carried by a boat with oars shaped as fins. Accompanied by instrumentalists within the dolphin's belly, a boy sings an exquisite melody. In turns, Agnes woos Edward with her body, words and play. Tonight she is a Queen of the Nile with kohl-darkened eyes. But it is the beautiful boy who captures his attention.

The next day as they walk through the forest she transforms herself into a woodland fairy, Puck, able to stay just out of his reach. Unable to catch her, he tires of the game. So that night she becomes a shrew, allowing him to tame her.

He grows restless. A player, she can pretend but never be both things he desires—master and mistress. He roams in ever-widening circles as the Italian summer fades from fall to winter and his desire for her wanes.

A grey sky weeps against the window where she watches. She knows he is with one pricked out for women's pleasure.

Mad with fear that he is gone forever—when he returns she flies at him, a wild tiger scratching and biting. The noise of their coupling frightens the servants and the horses.

But always he returns to her.

My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease,
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
Th'uncertain sickly appetite to please:
My reason, the physician to my love,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
Hath left me, and I, desperate, now approve
Desire is death, which physic did except.
Past cure I am, now reason is past care,
And frantic mad with ever more unrest;
My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,
At random from the truth vainly expressed:
For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.²⁰

The beautiful Italian boy Orazio is the siren that captures Edward's roving eye. His hair as black as night and his skin kissed by the sun—"my Indian boy," Edward calls him, casting Agnes aside when they return to London with the boy. So she seduces the lad, winning his affection easily.

Spurned by Orazio, who is now besotted with Agnes, Edward is full of sound and fury for a little while. The servants flee before him as does Orazio finally. And then Edward is hers again. Always he returns to her.

The smell of burning wood and a faint yellow glow ahead told Agnes that she was nearly home. Furious barking from the dog turned to frenzied yelps and whimpers when he recognized her scent. Sliding from the horse, she leaned over to rub her hand across his pungent wet back. "Good boy, Chaucer," she murmured.

Approaching the house, Agnes saw the front door open and her mother's figure silhouetted by the soft firelight within.

"Who's there?" she called.

"It's me, Agnes."

"You've come back then," she said. "Your father'll be pleased."

"And you?" Agnes asked.

"It's never mattered what I think," her mother replied matter-of-fact. The older woman stepped into the house gesturing for Agnes to follow.

Inside, the table, chairs and dresser, everything, was the same. Except that her once-robust father lay wasted away in a bed beside the crackling fire. Alarmed, Agnes turned to her mother who shrugged, "He didn' wish to worry you."

"You should have sent word," Agnes said, kneeling beside her father.

"He forbade it," her mother replied.

Her parents began to argue and bicker, and Agnes was oddly comforted to hear the familiar domestic bluster.

The presence of his beloved Agnes seemed to rally Richard Hathaway's spirits, and for four months she nursed his ailing until it seemed he would recover. Never did they speak of the earl, her travels or the life she led in London.

Mornings Agnes spent reading the books she had sent from London. Afternoons were given to tramping about the glens of Shottery. She almost felt a carefree girl again in the company of her own people.

â â â

Although the Queen placed him under house arrest following his release from the tower, Edward managed to steal away with two horses in order to fetch Agnes back to London. He arrived in Shottery late one morning, unannounced.

The Hathaways stared in awe at the richly-dressed man when Agnes brought him inside. “The Earl of Oxenford,” was all that she could think to say, having never told them about her marriage.

Edward broke the awkward silence, turning to Agnes’ father, “I think this is your daughter?”

“Her mother hath many times told me so,” replied Richard Hathaway.

“Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?”

“M’Lord, no, for then were you a child.” Agnes answered for her father, who did not catch the meaning of her words.

Turning to Agnes’ father, Edward lied, “I am come to fetch your daughter back to London. The Queen hath urgent need of her services.”

A royal summons was not something to be questioned, and so Agnes and her mother hurriedly gathered a few belongings in a sack. She hugged her father goodbye and departed for London with the earl.

Just before they left Agnes' father called out to her, "When you depart from me, sorrow abides and happiness takes his leave."

"I will come back soon, father," Agnes replied.

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They rode in silence for a while. Agnes, sad to leave her father and wounded by Edward's recent public betrayal, concealed from him her relief that he had come for her.

For his part he was wary of the sting of her sharp tongue.

"Be happy, lady, for you are with one who loves you," Edward said finally.

"I wonder that you will still be talking, my Lord Oxenford. Nobody marks you."

"What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet angry?"

“Is it possible Disdain should not be angry while she hath such fuel to feed it as you provide? Loved as you are by *all* of the ladies, excepting myself. I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than hear you swear love to me.”

“God keep your ladyship still in that mind! So some gentleman or other shall ’scape a predestinate scratched face!”

“Scratching could not make it worse an ’twere such a face as yours were.”

“Oh ho!” Edward warmed to the familiar jousting that always preceded a bout of passionate love-making. “Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.”

“A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.”

“I would my horse had the speed of your tongue.”

“You always end with a jade’s trick. I know you of old,” answered Agnes, digging her heels into the horse’s side. And away she galloped, followed soon after by Edward.

That night they made love and Edward, drunk from the wine and exhausted by the long ride, fell sound asleep. Only then did Agnes allow herself to caress him with the tenderness she felt. A predator by nature, the chase was everything to him. As long as

his prey remained just out of reach, he would pursue. This she understood. Tenderness and love could play no part in this drama, for they would then become the weapons he would use to discard her.

Unable to sleep, Agnes took her customary place and resumed her role as Edward's muse in a fiction that she was merely an amanuensis for plays presented as his own for the Court Revels. And as she sat down to write on the parchment he provided, she smiled at the sound of his snoring, murmuring to herself that the plays were, after all, "much ado about nothing."

â â â

When her father died peacefully in the middle of a cool September night, Edward gave Agnes leave to attend his funeral.

Accompanied on her journey by an affable young thespian and childhood friend of her younger brother, she arrived on the outskirts of Shottery near sunset. Agnes changed as they drew closer, a shadow crossing over her and cheerful banter giving way to uneasy silence.

"I am sorry about your father," her companion said.

He was startled when she answered urgently, "I am in trouble."

Not knowing the source of her woe, he replied gently, "Trouble is a burden best shared."

"I have no husband."

"Then we are both fortunate for I have no wife!" he replied cheerfully.

"I am with child and the Queen hath stolen my love." At this, her voice broke and she began to weep, great shuddering sobs of fear. "They will kill my babe."

The news did not entirely shock him, nor did he wonder who the father was. The Earl's liaisons were common grist for the London gossip mill and everyone was talking about the Queen's obsession with her latest paramour, Edward.

Not knowing what else to do, the bewildered boy who would eventually become her husband gathered Agnes awkwardly in his arms and murmured soothing words until she stopped crying.

X. MY LOVE IS AS A FEVER

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- ¹ Ogburn, 539. Also cited in Ward, 101, in reference to Hatfield MSS. 146.13.
- ² Logan Pearsall Smith, ed., Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 123 (note 3).
- ³ Alan Nelson, "Oxford and Orazio Cagno, the Italian Choirboy," University of California Berkeley, Spring 2001, <<http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~ahnelson/ITALY/Orazio/html>> (17 June 2002). A more complete account is provided by Nelson in Chapter 28 of his biography, Monstrous Adversary.
- ⁴ Ogburn, 644.
- ⁵ Ogburn, 645.
- ⁶ Ogburn, 646.
- ⁷ Ogburn, 680-681.
- ⁸ Ward, Bernard M. The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford 1550-1604: From Contemporary Documents (London: John Murray, 1928), 56-61.
- ⁹ Cal. Rutland MSS, George Delves to the Earl of Rutland, 14 May and 24 June 1571. Cited in Ward, 60.
- ¹⁰ Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare, 115-116.
- ¹¹ Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare, 116.
- ¹² Park Honan, 74-75.
- ¹³ Robin Maxwell, The Queen's Bastard (New York: Arcade, 1999).
- ¹⁴ Alan Nelson, Monstrous Adversary: The Life of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 293.
- ¹⁵ Nelson, Monstrous Adversary, 293.
- ¹⁶ Elizabeth Sears, Shakespeare and the Tudor Rose (Seattle: Consolidated Press Publishing, 1991).
- ¹⁷ Peter Stallybrass, "Editing as Cultural Formation," in Peter Schiffer, ed., Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays (New York: Garland, 1999), 79-80. George Chalmer's books were titled An Apology for the Believers in the Shakespeare Papers (London: Egerton, 1797) and A Supplemental Apology (London: Egerton, 1799).
- ¹⁸ Schoenbaum, Shakespeare's Lives, 11.
- ¹⁹ Sonnet 50.
- ²⁰ Sonnet 147.

XI. "I AM STUPID"

Some people think a woman's novel is anything without politics in it. Some think it's anything with a lot of operations in it, medical ones, I mean. Some think it's anything that doesn't give you a panoramic view of our exciting times. Me, well, I just want something you can leave on the coffee-table and not be too worried if the kids get into it. You think that's not a real consideration? You're wrong.¹

A friend of mine wanted to know, "Why Mrs Shakespeare? Why not Mrs Chekov, Mrs Euripides, Mrs Chaucer or Mrs Milton?" Chapter Two of Harold Bloom's controversial 1994 book, The Western Canon, entitled, "Shakespeare, Center of the Canon," helped to clarify the significance of my choice to reconstruct Mrs Shakespeare as a good place to start—Mrs Chaucer, Mrs Milton, Mrs Ovid, Miss Judith Shakespeare and the others I leave for a later time or to the intuitive imagination of similarly inclined scholars. Clearly there is much work to be done.

Bloom proclaims—from his ivory-Anglo-Celtic-American-Ivy-League tower—that "literary criticism, as an art, always was and always will be an elitist phenomenon."² Bloom stands on increasingly shaky ground as he argues against the inclusion of

¹ Atwood, 5.

² Bloom, The Western Canon, 17.

ideologies that challenge his own. “All that we can do now is maintain some continuity with the aesthetic and not yield to the lie that what we oppose is adventure and new interpretations,”³ he expounds. Bloom’s insistence upon the “autonomy of the aesthetic” begs the question of how the aesthetic can be autonomous. It still has to be *somebody’s* aesthetic sense.

Bloom’s unease with the current of change is shared by other members of the academy, including some feminists. Reviewing Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge’s book, Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales from the Strange World of Women’s Studies, Mary Loeffelholz describes “the authors’ own ‘sadness and dismay’” at their findings:

Professing Feminism deploys its much criticized methodology to represent the landscape of academic Women’s Studies as unrelievedly harsh, windswept, tyrannical and bleak—ridden with ‘ideological policing,’ intimidation of students, intellectual ‘intolerance’ and ‘belligerent anti-intellectualism.’⁴

In Backlash? Balderdash! Where Feminism is Going Right, Beatrice Faust takes to task those she terms “wimp feminists”:

Wimp feminists in academia provide dubious research to bolster existing prejudices, for example Catherine MacKinnon’s claim in Feminism Unmodified that men are the enemy because adding together a number of studies shows that 92.2 percent of American women have been sexually assaulted or harassed. This statistic mixes cashews and wingnuts—that is,

³ Bloom, The Western Canon, 18.

⁴ Mary Loeffelholz, “Women’s Studies on Trial,” review of Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales from the Strange World of Women’s Studies, by Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, College English 58, no. 1 (1996): 86.

it mixes flashers, frotteurs, and heavy breathing freaks, with bashings and pack rape. It is also innumerate.⁵

Nevertheless, Bloom's rhetoric wins him few friends among those he derides as "the School of Resentment"—multiculturalists, Marxists, feminists, neoconservatists, Afrocentrists and New Historicists. Bloom dismisses the study of non-canonical texts for being written by "writers who offer little but the resentment they have developed as part of their sense of identity."⁶ Of course, as Thomas O'Donnell points out, valuing the experience of such writers "is not the same thing as leaving the articulation of their experience unchallenged."⁷ That challenge is, or could be, met through literary criticism. But Bloom would first need to embrace a contrary, both listening to and hearing a different and unfamiliar voice.

Perhaps another explanation for Bloom's ebullition may be found in the essay "Teaching and Learning as a Man" by Robert Connors, who describes the classroom challenges of teaching men who tend to be "resistant, full of self-display, testing behavior and tacit aggression." Connors explains that "our culture trains men to do that." Then he cites Robert Brookes, who terms such activity as underlife:

Underlife allows individuals to take stances toward the roles they are expected to play and to show others the stances they take. The point is not to disrupt the functioning of the classroom [or academy], but to provide the other participants in the classroom [academy] with a sense that one has

⁵ Beatrice Faust, Backlash? Balderdash! Where Feminism Is Going Right (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1995), 60.

⁶ Bloom, The Western Canon, 7.

⁷ Thomas O'Donnell, "Politics and Ordinary Language: A Defense of Expressivist Rhetorics," College English 58, no. 4 (1996): 436.

other things to do, other interests, that one is a much richer personality than can be shown in this context.⁸

There is also an unmistakable undercurrent of “If you don’t play by my rules, I’m taking my marbles and going elsewhere” in Bloom’s rhetoric:

We need to teach more selectively, searching for the few who have the capacity to become highly individual readers and writers. The others, who are amenable to a politicized curriculum, can be abandoned to it. Pragmatically, aesthetic value can be recognized or experienced, but it cannot be conveyed to those who are incapable of grasping its sensations and perceptions.⁹

The protective shell of privilege that attaches itself to persons of a particular gender, sexual orientation and class is semi-translucent. The person inside is unable to see the rest of the world clearly. And when he does peer outside, the naked sea of humanity is likely to daunt him—their unfamiliar voices sound a cacophony to ears that have been taught that great works of literature are long, written by men in such and such a manner. Feminist scholar Joanna Russ described an attempt to write about her foray into the literary traditions of women of color—after being accused by a white critic, Elly Bullkin, of being a racist homophobe:

My invented categories were clearly inadequate and any other structure that did justice to the stuff instantly introduced six subjects for each one I had begun with and demanded excursions into history, psychology, economics, and politics, while interconnections proliferated with the speed of the carnivorous flora in horror movies. It was like trying to put the Atlantic Ocean in a teacup... As I was going under a sea of index cards for the third time, somehow sanity reasserted itself. *Why on earth* (said a

⁸ Cited in Robert J. Conners, “Teaching and Learning As a Man,” *College English* 58, no.2 (February 1996): 144-45.

⁹ Bloom, *The Western Canon*, 17.

still, small voice) *do you want to describe the conditions of work and life for women writers of color when they are doing so perfectly well themselves, and better, in fact, than you ever can?*¹⁰

Russ was able to recognize the risks involved for literary critics and writers who elect to speak as, or on behalf of, the “other.” An extreme—and entertaining to my writing students—example of these risks is provided in Freud’s projections about women and penis envy:

The psychical consequences of penis-envy...are various and far-reaching. After a woman has become aware of the wound to her narcissism, she develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority. When she has passed beyond her first attempt at explaining her lack of a penis as being a punishment personal to herself and has realized that that sexual character is a universal one, she begins to share the contempt felt by men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect.¹¹

“Freud is stupid!” one of my students insisted. I pointed out that a consideration of his writing within the historical context in which he wrote reveals a remarkable effort to approach a new frontier—*some* understanding of the feminine mystique.

In her survey of the word *stupidity*, Avital Ronell points out that “stupidity refers to something other than itself, and yet it falls short of anything theorizable.”¹² Diane Davis describes how Ronell “explores the possibility of a mode of ethics and activism that begins with, ‘I’m not sure I know,’ that begins, in fact, with the humbling utterance:

¹⁰ Russ, 138.

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, “Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinctions Between the Sexes,” in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 19, standard ed., James Strachey, ed. and tr. (London: Hogarth Press, 1931), 258.

¹² Ronell, 67.

‘I am stupid before the other.’”¹³ But it is difficult and risky to emerge naked and vulnerable to admit, “I am stupid.” And it is easier and safer to shout from the safety of a protective shell, “You are stupid!”

Alexander Astin, has contended that

the greatest obstacle to well-intentioned efforts to expand educational opportunities for under-represented groups, and to achieve greater equity in our society in general, may well be our obsession with being smart. The real problem is that we value being smart much more than we do developing smartness. We forget that our institutions’ primary mission is to expand students’ intellectual capabilities, not merely to select and certify those whose intellectual talents are already well developed by the time they reach us.¹⁴

“There is a displacement, a violence in the question of who gets designated as stupid,” according to Ronell, who points to the use of the bell curve as a decision “made about minorities” to humiliate and degrade them.¹⁵ “There is something about stupidity that is violently resisted by philosophy,” Ronell asserts, explaining one motivation for her book,

Stupidity:

Certainly, one of the impetuses for reading Stupidity is promoted by a kind of post-feminist passion, protesting the way women have been called ‘stupid bitches’ and noting what this might involve, how stupidity became an accusatory force, a devastating demolition of the other. Minorities are considered stupid, women are considered stupid and so forth.¹⁶

¹³ Davis, 247, and Ronell, 60.

¹⁴ Alexander Astin, “School of Thought That’s Not So Clever,” Australian (10 December 1997): 35.

¹⁵ Davis, 267, and Ronell, 67.

¹⁶ Davis, 261.

Interviewed by Davis, Ronell said that she responds with a strategy borrowed from the class clown, who learns that by making fun of herself and inviting others to laugh at her, she is able to deflect the slings and arrows of her tormentors. Donning the mantle of the academy clown—or the “buffo” who “breaks into fixed narrative structure or theater and performs feats of ironic destruction, . . . the buffo releases an expression of rage.”¹⁷ Davis records Ronell’s explanation:

I am interested in the humbling that occurs when one says, ‘I am stupid before the other,’ which is absolutely a taboo. You cannot imagine someone in a university saying, ‘I am stupid’ or ‘I am stupid before my students.’ This humbling and destabilizing of the subject who is supposed to know . . . creates minor insurrections that interest me.¹⁸

The fools appearing in the Shakespeare canon arouse laughter through a combination of impudence and verbal shiftiness. The Fool in King Lear provides ironic commentary, much like the chorus in a Greek tragedy—“His speeches delivered in a picturesque jumble of disjointed images and snatches of songs and proverbs, are the touchstones of the audience’s reaction to the play’s events.”¹⁹ In his 1927 book, Pre-Restoration Stage Studies, W.J. Lawrence describes the Elizabethan stage practice of actors “doubling,” or playing more than one role. Lawrence notes that the Fool and Cordelia are never on the stage at the same time. Commentators have puzzled over the disappearance of the Fool in Act III. It is likely that the playwright wrote the parts to be

¹⁷ Davis, 273.

¹⁸ Davis, 267-268.

¹⁹ Oscar James Campbell, ed., The Reader’s Encyclopedia of Shakespeare (New York: MJF, 1966), 239.

played by one actor, which may also help to explain Lear's peculiar lament over the dead body of his daughter, "And my poor fool is hanged"(V, iii, 305). This reading raises intriguing sub-textual questions about the author's intent. According to Ronell, the spirit of the buffo "breaks up the syntax of the performance in order to assert distance and difference, the existence of another world of reference that proves to be destructive of the first world."²⁰ The witty women in Shakespeare's comedies are able to unleash a hint of the chaos that exists beneath the neatly ordered Elizabethan world. Ironically, in the Tragedy of King Lear, it is Cordelia and the Fool who both hold fast to the idealized worldview, even as they see it slipping into a fearsome void of nothing.

Like the Fool, Cordelia's honesty is as sincere as it is blunt. Her failure to flatter her father with false praise when he commands her, "Speak" (I, i, 88), is misconstrued. "Nothing, my lord," she replies simply.

"Nothing will come of nothing" (I, i, 90-92), Lear rages with tragic irony, and despite his lament—"I loved her most"—he foolishly banishes Cordelia.

In his growing confusion, Lear foreshadows the close connection between his fool and his daughter when he seems to mix them up, calling first for one and then the other, "Where's my knave? My fool? Go you, and call my fool hither. You, you, sirrah, where's my daughter?" (I, iv, 44-47), and "Go you, and tell my daughter I would speak with her. Go you, call hither my fool" (I, iv, 82-84).

²⁰ Ronell, 137.

When the knight returns without the Fool, Lear cries, “How now! Where’s that mongrel?” To which the knight makes a peculiar response, “He says, my lord, your daughter is not well” (I, iv, 53-55).

It seems that Cordelia’s banishment corresponds with the disappearance of the Fool. “But where’s my fool? I have not seen him this two days,” Lear asks. The knight replies, “Since my young lady’s [Cordelia’s] going into France, sir, the fool hath much pined away” (I, iv, 76-80).

And like the clever women pretending to be men in the comedies examined for this study, the wise Fool—Cordelia in disguise—takes risks and says things that a proper Elizabethan woman could not. Even while caring for him, the Fool concedes that Lear is a fool, “All other titles thou hast given away. That thou wast born with” (I, iv, 163-165).

With nothing left to lose or gain, the dutiful daughter/Fool remains faithful to the symbol of patriarchy—Lear. And while on the surface the story appears to be a warning about the danger of ceding control over to women, at the same time the author creates a space for us to speculate about what might have happened had Lear bequeathed power to his deserving youngest daughter instead.

Lear is “foolish before the *other*”; his lack of intuition and susceptibility to flattery prove to be his undoing. However, it could be argued that a consideration of the story,

within the historical context in which it was written, reveals a sub-textual effort to point out the dangers posed by a world controlled by men, where the ethics of care and moral responsibility succumb to rigid rules offering a falsely objective perspective.

Ronell calls for “another type of activism that begins with ‘I’m not sure I know,’” believing that it “would provide for a very different politics to say ‘I don’t know’ or ‘I am stupid before the other,’ but not in the oppositional sense that stupidity is the opposite of whatever opposes it—let’s say, provisionally, intelligence.”²¹ But in her introduction to “A Symposium on Feminist Experiences in the Composition Classroom,” Marian Sciachitano raises this practical catch-22 for women in the classroom:

Though we acknowledge the liberatory potential of calling institutional authority into question and revaluing student experiences, some of us question whether a pedagogy which fails to examine multiple power relations can create the best conditions for female teachers who have yet to experience an ‘authorizing voice’ in the classroom.²²

Sciachitano observes that women are more likely to be challenged by their students with questions such as “Do you have a doctorate?” than are their male counterparts.

Writing about her experience as a novice composition teacher, Karen Powers-Stubbs points out:

Feminist teachers who reject the banking model of education and often use collaborative methods are seen as less competent. Along similar lines,

²¹ Davis, 268.

²² Marian M. Sciachitano, “Introduction: Feminist Sophistics Pedagogy Group: A Symposium on Feminist Experiences in the Composition Classroom,” *College Composition and Communication* 43, no. 3 (1992): 297.

Sandler concludes that ‘students, whose teacher is trying to actively engage them in the learning process, may feel instead that she is not well-organized or does not have a good grasp of the subject.’²³

Of course, novice and experienced teachers, male or female, are likely to encounter resistance when attempting to challenge the way things are. Sciachitano cites Kathleen Weiler’s reminder that the “classroom is always a site of conflict, and will be a site of conflict for the feminist or critical teacher trying to create a counterhegemonic vision.”²⁴ Karyn Hollis advocates a student-centered perspective when she argues that “faculty should be aware of the great variety of composing styles practiced by college students.”²⁵ I would argue that if teaching is a collaboration between teacher and student—as I believe it should be—then it is also important for students to be aware of the variety of teaching styles practiced by members of the academy, vividly illustrated in the following two responses to what many scholars have argued is an autobiographical “voice” in the sonnets.

In 1973 A.L. Rowse announced:

Hitherto the Sonnets of Shakespeare have been regarded as the greatest puzzle in English, possibly world literature. They were, of course, autobiographical. All the questions are now answered ‘definitely and finally.’ This definiteness and finality could never be achieved by the road of literary conjecture: only by precise dating and by following simple and rigorous historical method. In the sterilising specialisation of this age it seems to have been regarded with some recalcitrance by literary folk, that

²³ Karen Powers-Stubbs, “Watching Ourselves: Feminist Teachers and Authority: A Symposium on Feminist Experiences in the Composition Classroom,” *College Composition and Communication* 43, no. 3 (1992): 312.

²⁴ Sciachitano, 299.

²⁵ Hollis, 342.

an historian should assail these problems, and with anything but a generous response that he should solve these for them.²⁶

Alternatively, writing in the introduction to the 1997 edition of the Arden Sonnets, the editor, Katherine Duncan-Jones, points out:

This is one of the joys of Sonnets for modern readers. Here even more than in the rest of Shakespeare's work, it is open to each and every reader to arrive at an individual and original response. The notorious truism that no two people ever concur in interpreting Sonnets is not cause for despair, but for rejoicing.²⁷

This illustrates one of the most persistent sources of conflict—described as a preference for “perceiving” vs. “judging,” according to the authors of Please Understand Me, which includes the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test that profiles sixteen different psychological orientations.²⁸ People who score higher on the “P” scale tend to prefer *the process* of arriving at a decision—leaving things “open-ended,” a “let’s-see-what-happens” attitude. Alternatively, people who score higher on the “J” scale prefer careful planning in the execution of decisions and a sense of *closure*. These preferences emerge in a writer’s composition process.

I acquaint my college—speech, acting and writing—students with the Myers-Briggs test and actively encourage them to take it, believing that it will help them

²⁶ A.L. Rowse, Shakespeare's Sonnets: The Problems Solved, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1973), i-xi.

²⁷ Duncan-Jones, 97.

²⁸ David Keirse and Marilyn Bates, Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types (Del Mar California: Prometheus Nemesis, 1984).

understand their own learning style. At the same time I offer them insights into the way my psychological profile influences my teaching strategy, which is unabashedly collaborative. Though I don't shy away from the feminist label, the Myers-Briggs test builds a preliminary bridge between me and students who may initially find theories of diversity threatening. The following journal entry from one of my female students, Katie, highlights the positive impact such self-awareness can engender:

I thought I would really enjoy acting, but so far I've felt really out of place and intimidated. Today I discovered why—when we divided up into groups according to personality type, the entire class was together in one corner and I was alone at the other side of the room. I was a little surprised that our class isn't more diverse, but I must admit I was proud to be different.²⁹

A majority of the students who enroll in my acting class, tend to be ENFP's—E = *extroverts*, people who gain energy by interacting with others; N = *intuitives*, who are more innovative than practical; F = *feeling* types, who make decisions on personal basis rather than on an impersonal one; and P = *perceiving* types, who prefer to keep their options open rather than experiencing a sense of closure.

Katie's personality profile was rare, she was an INTJ—I = *introverted*, which means that she gains energy through solitude; N = *intuitive*, as described above; T = *thinking*, which means that she prefers to make decisions based on objective and logical evidence rather than on a personal basis; and J = *judging*, which meant that she likes to have things settled rather than fluid and open.

²⁹ Katie Kyle, journal for acting class, Walla Walla College: November 1999.

Clearly these differences in preference models are a potential source for much misunderstanding in the classroom and in life. I like to point out that each pair of preferences has the potential to complement and support the other. In my acting classes I encourage the students to study alternative personality types as a research method in building a role, and this was a suggestion that appealed to Katie's sense of logic, enabling her to visit the parallel universe occupied by a majority of her classmates even as they visited hers.

Katie's preference for "thinking" rather than "feeling" places her in a minority among females, 65% of whom (compared to 40% of the males) indicate a "feeling" preference.³⁰ The Myers-Briggs investigations do not discuss possible reasons for this gender difference, the only category in the profile where genders produce different results. Is the difference the result of cultural conditioning? Is this preference likely to shift, as women transition into fields formerly dominated by men?

Carol Gilligan's seminal book, In A Different Voice, projects no such transition but rather prizes the distinctions evident in specific developmental traits. In the process, it challenges the male bias in developmental psychology, which traditionally has found women to be deviant and morally inadequate. Along the way Gilligan suggests that test results are skewed because of the very design of the psychological tests. In their

³⁰ Keirsey and Bates, 20.

investigations of developmental issues, Piaget and Kohlberg, for instance, used only boys in their studies.³¹ Gilligan also points out that women apply a different ethic in their decision-making process. The study she critiques reported that most males were attuned to an ethic of obligation or justice, while the majority of women applied an ethic of caring or trust. Seizing upon attributes traditionally held up as prime examples of female inferiority and immorality, Gilligan seeks to empower women by transforming perceived weakness into strength. She points out that

the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. This [female] conception of morality as concerned with the activity of care centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the [male] conception of morality as fairness ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules.³²

Some feminists question the underlying essentialist assumptions in Gilligan's argument, that women are by their very nature more caring and nurturing. "As a woman, I become a symbol of maternal authority to my students. They expect me to be nice, loving, nurturing—and feel betrayed when I am not,"³³ says Sara Farris, who goes on to reflect that

while I recognize the danger of focusing feminist scholarship on the needs of male students—reinscribing the male as the center of women's

³¹ Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory In Women's Development*, reissue edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 18.

³² Gilligan, 19.

³³ Sara Farris, "'What's in It for Me?' Two Students' Responses to a Feminist Pedagogy: A Symposium on Feminist Experiences in the Composition Classroom," *College Composition and Communication* 43, no. 3 (1992): 308.

attention—as a teacher of women and men I have an obligation to question what feminism offers to all of my students.³⁴

The closest Freud came to saying “I am stupid” was voiced as a complaint suggesting women were to blame: “The great question...which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul is, ‘What does a woman want?’”³⁵ If the patriarchy has taught us anything, it has taught us that categorizing an entire gender singly as either Muse, Mother, Matriarch, Madonna, Whore, Writer, Woman, or Wife, fails to account for the multiplicity of variations inherent in feminine nature. To be fair, women should acknowledge the confusing paradoxes found in the multiple roles men are invited to play: part Romeo, a little bit of Hamlet, a healthy dose of ever-reliable Horatio, a lot of conquering hero Henry V and not too much—just a dash—of the Petruchio bad-boy to keep things interesting thank-you-very-much.

Psychological profiles that cross boundaries of gender, race or sexual preference—connecting disparate groups of people—may be one practical way of deconstructing the patriarchal order and reconstructing a society more amenable to valuing diversity. Learning to admit that “I am stupid before the other” or “I’m not sure I know (who wrote ‘Shakespeare’)” could be another useful strategy.

³⁴ Farris, 307.

³⁵ Emily Morison Beck, ed. *Familiar Quotations* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980), 679.

XII. THE MARRIAGE OF TRUE MINDS

Childbirth in Renaissance England

“Most Renaissance women, rich or poor, feared and dreaded childbirth because as many as 10 percent died during, or as a consequence of, childbirth.”¹

Money owed to the Hathaway’s shepherd

When he died in 1601, Thomas Whittington left a will that included a reminder of a debt never paid by Agnes.

I give and bequeath unto the poor people of Strafford xls that is in the hand of Anne Shaxspere, wife unto Mr. Wyllyam Shaxspere, and is due debt unto me.²

Lawful wife beating in Elizabethan England

Carroll Camden explored the question of whether the Elizabethan husband had the right to beat his wife. She found that in 1609

William Heale published a work the full title of which reads: An Apologie for Women, or An Opposition to Mr. Dr. G. his Assertion. Who held in the Act at Oxforde. Anno. 1608. That it was lawfull for husbands to beate their wiues; he insists that he has never seen it set down that a man was permitted by law to beat his wife.

Camden continues, pointing out that

a work of 1568, however, states the opposite in recording that ‘though the ciuill lawe giueth man the superioritie ouer his wife, that is not to offende, or despise hir, but in misdoing, louingly to reform hir.’ But in 1632 was published The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights: or, The Lawes Provision for Woemen. A Methodicall Collection of Learning in the Law, as doe properly concerne Women; this author seems to have canvassed the

*situation more carefully, and it is his opinion that a husband has such a right but should not use it.*³

*However, Camden reports that even William Heale, defender of women against husbands who beat their wives, would draw the line at adultery: "A husband taking his wife in adultery might lawe-fully kill her, yet not without the guilte of heinous offence."*⁴

Historical records of the Hathaway-Shakespeare nuptials

Schoenbaum catalogues several irregularities concerning the marriage of Anne Hathaway and William Shakespeare:

*The marriage license was issued by the Bishop of Worcester despite the fact that the law required banns of marriage to be read out in church for three succeeding weeks prior to marriage. Although William was underage and thus required written consent from his father to marry, no spokesman from the Shakespeare clan was present. And finally, when the clerk of the court entered the grant of a license in the Bishop's Register on 27 November 1582, . . . he gave the bride's name as Anne Whateley of Temple Grafton.*⁵

*Thus two William Shaxsperes were married to two Annes—Hathaway and Whateley—on the same day in November 1582, provoking much romantic speculation over the years. To dismiss this "problem" as pure coincidence strains credibility. Schoenbaum speculates that the wedding may have taken place at St Peter's church in Bishopston, or at All Souls' in Luddington, three miles west of Shuttery.*⁶

Lady Mildred was adamant. Nothing must happen to Agnes. It mattered not that she and the child she carried posed a serious jeopardy to the future of the Burghleys' own daughter, now the Countess of Oxford. Lady Mildred despised the Earl for making a life of misery for her daughter. And now her cherished Agnes was pregnant with his child.

However, Lady Mildred reserved the full fury of her wrath for her husband, whose ruthless ambition had sacrificed both girls. It was left to her to fix his blundering and put wrong to right—as usual.

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Lady Mildred's meticulous scheming began with her husband, who did not dare but go along with her plan. Following his wife's instructions, Lord Burghley arranged for the Bishop of Worcester to issue a marriage license sans the required reading of the banns,

making sure that John Shakespeare received rich compensation for his—and his wife’s—cooperative silence regarding the marriage of their eldest son.

At the same time, Lady Mildred enlisted Agnes’ support. “It is your only chance,” she wrote to the young woman whom she cared for as a daughter. “It is arranged for Bishopton, but you must keep it secret.”

Agnes agreed, even though great dark parts of her heart and body clamoured for the plan not to work.

Then, a day before the appointed date—and knowing that her own daughter, the Countess of Oxford, was ever loyal to Agnes—Lady Mildred bolstered her plan with subtle information about the impending nuptials and their location. “I hear there’s to be a marriage in Bishopton,” she said, within listening-range of her gossiping servants. “A secret marriage. At St Peter’s.”

Regardless of Lady Mildred’s elaborate maneuvers, early on the day of the wedding Edward learned of the impending marriage from the Hathaways’ shepherd, Thomas Whittington. On promise of a rich reward from Agnes, Thomas had traveled before dawn to deliver to the Earl her brief message about the goings-on in the Hathaway household.

“I am to marry,” Agnes’ the note said.

She could not write more—the guilt of betraying Lady Mildred’s trust was too great. But nor could she say any less to the man whose child she carried.

Not leaving anything to chance, at the same time that the Earl was reading Agnes’ note, Lady Mildred was delivering the *coup de grâce* of her careful planning. She summoned her most trusted messenger, sending him to Shottery with a cryptic one-word message for Agnes’ mother—“Luddington.”

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The Countess of Oxford was discussing the weekly menu with her cook, when Edward burst in upon them.

“When is she to marry?” he demanded.

The countess did not pretend that she didn’t understand. “This very day,” she answered. “Already, I think.”

“Where?” he screamed at her.

“I’m not sure,” the Countess cried, fearful of his reaction.

Edward slapped her hard across the face.

The servants, who were busily preparing food, disappeared quickly from the kitchen.

“Where?” he asked again.

“I cannot tell you,” she said, flinching as he raised his hand and struck her again.

The second blow broke her nose, knocking her to the floor. She began to scream.

Hauling her up by the hair, Edward put his hand over her mouth to muffle her cries.

“I will beat you until you tell me where she is,” he said. “Do you understand?”

Anne ceased struggling, her eyes wide with fear and pain.

Edward released his grip. “Where?” He raised his hand to hit her again.

“St Peter’s church in Bishopton,” she said finally, having heard the servants speak of it that very morning.

Edward strode from the kitchen into the courtyard, shouting for a horse.

As the Countess watched him go she prayed, “Forgive me, Agnes, but for thy sake I pray he will not find thee ’til ’tis too late.”

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Agnes heard her mother rise before the sun to light the fire. Her brothers and sisters soon followed. This was her wedding day.

Closing her eyes, Agnes conjured Death. She wasn’t afraid, not even when the specter emerged and beckoned to her. The child she carried gave her reason enough to resist the restful death he proffered. And Thomas had delivered her message to Edward about the wedding. That he would arrive in time and rescue her, she was certain.

A sudden sharp movement pulled her back and brought her fully awake.

“Oh!” Agnes cried out, as the child in her belly moved for the first time.

The bedroom door opened. Her mother looked in, anxious.

“What is it?”

“The baby moved,” she said.

Looking beyond the wonder in Agnes’ eyes, at the dark hollows where death prowled, the mother hid her regret at having deceived her daughter. “You should rise now,” she said, before turning away. “Luddington is a fair ride from here,” she added, closing the door quietly.

“Luddington?” Agnes called after her, wide-eyed.

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Mid-morning, Agnes’ mother wove through her daughter’s dark hair brightly-colored autumn leaves, and she tied blue ribbon and sprigs of rosemary to her arm. Neither of them spoke. Neither could start to un-pick what she thought was being sewn up around them.

By late morning Agnes began to worry that Edward was delayed, though she never doubted that he would arrive in time to rescue her from a loveless marriage. Together they would flee to the continent and their villa in Italy--away from the intoxicating scent of power and wealth the Queen used to lure courtiers to her bed.

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Riding at full speed across the fields, Edward arrived at Bishopton in time to hear bells ringing in the St Peter's church belfry. Pulling his horse up, Edward accosted a man on the path, "You there, why do the bells ring?"

Bowing low to the high-born nobleman, the man answered, "They are wedding bells, m'lord."

"Whose wedding?" the Earl demanded.

"William Shaxpere and Anne Whateley," he said.

A minute later, all eyes turned to stare at the wild man who burst through the door of the church crying, "Agnes!"

At the altar, the bride and groom turned to see the commotion. Relief filled Edward. He was saved. It wasn't Agnes.

Edward did not linger to see the curious manner in which the wedding party at St Peter's church in Bishopton parted company.

The hired players, including bride and groom, went their separate ways, laughing at the elaborate prank played on the Earl of Oxford.

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Meanwhile, three miles west of Shottery at All Souls' Church in Luddington, Agnes Hathaway, twenty-six years old (and three months pregnant with Edward's child) was married to William Shakespeare of Stratford, aged eighteen.

Lady Mildred's ruse had worked. Agnes was safely married and her babe would live. The Countess' title was assured and no one could now question the legitimacy of her offspring.

But best of all, the Earl was dispossessed of the only thing he cared for. And that made Lady Mildred positively cheerful.

XII. THE MARRIAGE OF TRUE MINDS

¹ Lives of Renaissance Women: Childbirth, 1997, <<http://www.educ.gov.bc.ca/gender/www/ac2.html>> (12 December 98).

² Whittington's will is dated March 25, 1601. Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare, 82.

³ Camden, 116.

⁴ Camden, 98.

⁵ Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare, 83.

⁶ Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare, 87-88.

XIII. CATS DO NOT AS A MATTER OF FACT GO TO HEAVEN

Women do not usually write novels of the type favored by men, but men are known to write novels of the type favored by women. Some people find this odd.¹

New York playwright Charles Mee recently pointed out that it would be out of the question for another “Shakespeare” to flourish today because of impossibly restrictive global intellectual property laws, adding, “It certainly has to give you pause to wonder if you’re not choking off the possibility of producing work as great as the Greeks and Shakespeare.”² By way of protest, Mee provides copyright-free (for a nominal fee) access to his work on his website—calling for others to join him in liberating the arts through similar acts of literary anarchy:³

I really think basically people who write plays appropriate everything. It’s just that most people appropriate things from the lives of their wives and lovers and friends. But it’s just the difference between whether you take it out of the page of a book or take it out of the dreams of your wife, whether you’re entitled to call it appropriated or original, but it’s the same deal really.⁴

¹ Atwood, 5.

² Rick Karr interviews Charles Mee, *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, Walla Walla Washington, 17 August 2000.

³ See Charles Mee’s Homepage, <<http://www.panix.com/~mcejr/invitation.html>> (18 August 2000).

⁴ Karr, interview.

Rick Karr, who interviewed the playwright, reported that Mee freely “purloins one of his wife’s dreams in every play he writes these days,”⁵ and Karr explains that although

we may be taught to think of the great writers as people who create whole worlds from nothing but their imaginations, yet some of history’s greatest playwrights were what today’s critics might call plagiarists. Take Shakespeare.⁶

In 1814 Byron charged that

Shakespeare’s name, you may depend on it, stands absurdly too high and will go down. He had no invention as to stories, none whatever. He took all his plots from old novels, and threw their stories into a dramatic shape, at as little expense of thought as you or I could turn his plays back again into prose tales.⁷

Harold Bloom contends in his 1973 book, The Anxiety of Influence, “Every poem is a misinterpretation of a parent poem.”⁸ Bloom suggests that since there are no longer any original ideas, what is worth examination is the way in which literary critics/writers/poets deliberately misread and distort what their predecessors wrote in order to arrive at what Bloom considers a “strong misreading.” Or, as Josh Billings points out, “About the most originality that any writer can hope to achieve honestly is to steal with good judgment.”⁹

⁵ Karr interview.

⁶ Karr interview.

⁷ Cited in Colin Jarman, ed., The Guinness Book of Poisonous Quotes (Chicago, Ill.: NTC/Contemporary Publishing Co. 1993), 106-107. “Sources for plots, incidents and characters in Shakespeare’s plays have been quite thoroughly investigated and well documented in critical commentary to date, but sources for imagery have only rarely been touched upon,” according to Nigel Krauth, whose thesis, “A Study of the Imagery of Shakespeare’s Major Tragedies in Relation to Their Sources” (Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, Australian National University, 1972), provides a fascinating and informative exploration of this hitherto neglected topic.

⁸ Even the author of the sonnets was prone to this anxiety; see Sonnet 123.

⁹ Cited in Jarmon, 50.

One of the dilemmas for women and other marginalized groups without an accessible literary history from which to draw, is that their works are expected to assimilate into an existing family as the stepchildren of ‘parent poems,’ whose mother and father have one voice—and that voice tends to be both white and masculine. The motivation for recent feminist efforts to recover once lost or silenced female voices might be more accurately termed an “anxiety about a *lack* of influence.”¹⁰ In Woolf’s 1929 address, *A Room of One’s Own*, she called for information about the role of women in Elizabethan England:

The life of the average Elizabethan woman must be scattered about somewhere, could one collect it and make a book of it. It would be ambitious beyond my daring, I thought, looking about the shelves for books that were not there, to suggest to the students of those famous colleges that they should rewrite history, though I own that it often seems a little queer as it is, unreal, lopsided; but why should they not add a supplement to history? calling it, of course, by some inconspicuous name so that women might figure there without impropriety? What I find deplorable, I continued, looking about the bookshelves again, is that nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century.¹¹

The online education program sponsored by Gender Equity—an initiative of the British Columbia Ministry of Education—titled *The Lives of Renaissance Women*, poses and answers the question, Why are there so few female Renaissance artists? Citing the general position of women in the Renaissance as a major factor preventing women from pursuing the arts, the study guide notes that

¹⁰ See, for example, *Celebration of Women Writers*, University of Pennsylvania Digital Library Initiative, 1998-2000, <<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/wr-faq.html>> (20 July 2000) and *The Perdita Project*, Nottingham Trent University, 30 July 2000, <<http://human.ntu.ac.uk/perdita/PERDITA.HTM>> (14 January 2003).

¹¹ Woolf, *A Room*, 47.

women in the Renaissance were the primary bearers and rearers of children, as well as keepers of the household. The domestic duties in the Renaissance were arduous and time consuming. Artists were expected to have a liberal arts education. Such a level of education and freedom of movement were hardly possible for women in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Women who attempted to become artists...faced extreme prejudice. Most men believed that women were inferior and the men who gave advice to women artists were patronising and confident of the inferiority of women as artists. [Thus] much of their work was left unsigned.¹²

Collectively they are, “as Gertrude Stein would put it, a woman whom patriarchal poetics dismembered and whom we have tried to remember. Detached from herself, silenced, subdued.”¹³ To reprise Virginia Woolf’s speculation:

Any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. And undoubtedly, I thought, looking at the shelf where there are no plays by women, her work would have gone unsigned.¹⁴

And signing the work was no guarantee of ownership either. The first critical essay ever published on Shakespeare was in the form of a letter by Margaret Cavendish (nee Lucas), Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673), who wrote of Shakespeare:

One would think that he had been metamorphosed from a Man to a Woman, for who could Describe *Cleopatra* Better than he hath done, and many other Females of his own Creating, as *Nan Page*, Mrs. *Page*, Mrs. *Ford*, the Doctors Maid, *Bettrice*, Mrs. *Quickly*, *Doll Tearsheet*, and others, too many to Relate?¹⁵

¹² “The Lives of Renaissance Women: Renaissance Women Artists,” *Gender Equity*, 28 January 1998, <<http://www.educ.gov.bc.ca/gender/www/ac4.html>> (12 December 98).

¹³ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, “The Madwoman in the Attic,” *Women’s Voices Visions and Perspectives*, Pat C. Hoy II et al., eds. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 570.

¹⁴ Woolf, *A Room*, 51.

¹⁵ Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, *Letter CXXIII* in *CCXI Sociable Letters* (London: William Wilson, 1664), cited in Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts, eds., *Women Reading Shakespeare 1660-1900: An Anthology of Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 13.

Woolf points out that Cavendish was thought to have hired a male scholar to write her works

because she used terms and ‘wrote of many matters outside her ken.’ She flew to her husband for help, and he answered that the Duchess ‘had never conversed with any professed scholar in learning except her brother and myself.’ [The Duchess adds] She had only seen Des Cartes and Hobbes, not questioned them; she did indeed ask Mr. Hobbs to dinner, but he could not come.¹⁶

In Joanna Russ’ delightfully impertinent guide, How to Suppress Women’s Writing, she presents a compelling feminist critique of the politics of literary canonization. Supplying a wealth of stunning examples to support each of her claims, Russ describes the various strategies employed by a patriarchy determined to avoid feminine cooties. I am indebted to her for compiling this treasure trove of historical evidence. Russ begins her book with a discussion about the prohibitions against female writers, pointing out that

first of all, it’s important to realize that the absence of formal prohibitions against committing art does not preclude the presence of powerful, informal ones. For example, poverty and lack of leisure are certainly powerful deterrents to art... It’s commonly supposed that poverty and lack of leisure did not hamper middle-class persons during the last century, but indeed they did—when these persons were middle-class women. It might be more accurate to call these women attached to middle-class men, for by their own independent economic exertions few middle-class women could keep themselves in the middle class...and, if married, they could own nothing in England during most of the century (1882 was the year of the codification of the Married Woman’s Property Act).¹⁷

¹⁶ Virginia Woolf, “The Duchess of Newcastle,” in The Common Reader (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925), 75. Cited also in Russ, 21.

¹⁷ Cited by Russ, 6-7.

Just as this study seeks to re-attribute the Shakespeare canon, Russ reveals the *She didn't write it; he did* strategy used by the patriarchy in relation to the work produced by women. Citing the 1848 review of Jane Eyre by Percy Edwin Whipple as the source of the rumor that Branwell Brontë was the real author of works attributed to his sisters,¹⁸ Russ then provides other examples of re-attribution including the subtle variations of *It wrote itself*—as was the case with Mary Shelley's Frankenstein¹⁹ and Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights²⁰—*Part of it wrote itself; she wrote the other part* as was the case with George Eliot²¹—and *The man inside her wrote it* as was the case with Mary McCarthy²² and Colette.²³

Of course another option for female artists was to assume a male pseudonym as did the Brontë sisters and the Georges—Sand and Eliot. But as we have already seen with the example of Bertolt Brecht and contemporary critic, Peter Lewis—“if ‘Brecht’ is believed to be predominantly the work of three women, can he be considered a genius any longer?”²⁴—authorial gender does influence a reader's response to the literature. Elaine Showalter points out that “many critics bluntly admitted that they thought the book [Jane Eyre] was a masterpiece if written by a man, shocking or disgusting if written by a

¹⁸ Cited by Carol Ohmann, in “Emily Bronte in the Hands of Male Critics,” College English 32, no. 8 (May 1971): 907. Also cited by Russ, 20-21.

¹⁹ Ellen Moers, Literary Women (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977), 144. Also cited in Russ.

²⁰ Ohmann, 909-10. Also cited in Russ, 21.

²¹ Gordon S. Haight, ed., A Century of George Eliot Criticism (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 168. See also Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot: A Biography (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968), 29. Also cited in Russ, 22.

²² Mary Ellmann, Thinking About Women (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 41-42. Also cited in Russ, 22.

²³ Colette, The Pure and the Impure, Herma Briffault, tr. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), 59-63. Also cited in Russ, 22-23.

²⁴ Peter Lewis, “Brecht's Ha'penny Contribution,” Australian (1 July 1994): 14.

woman.”²⁵ And she provides a dozen examples of women who elected to write using a masculine moniker between the years 1850-1880.²⁶

And again the question arises: Do women aspire to write like men in order to be successful in a world that not only privileges the masculine name, but the voice as well? What does it mean to write ‘like a woman’? Is a woman’s voice distinctive from a man’s? James Oldham doesn’t think so. Answering Janet Woolf’s question, “Can there be such a thing as women’s writing?” he writes:

I am not persuaded that there exists a distinct women’s rhetoric or feminine rhetoric (just as I doubt there exists a single men’s/masculine rhetoric). On the other hand, it is clear that women’s voices have been deliberately stifled, that women have been barred from the study of academic rhetoric, and that the ways in which women have practiced and promoted rhetoric have not obtained canonical status in the places where rhetoric is studied. I think that rhetoric is most useful and interesting when seen as a bridge between differences in understanding, whatever the traces of such differences. I remain foolishly optimistic about the possibility of good faith between opposed partisans.²⁷

In his 1993 unpublished dissertation—*Couples in Transition*—from the Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, Eric Olson describes the “Invisible Weight of Privilege” that envelops white males in Western culture. Using the metaphor of weight scales, Olson describes the way in which white males may have perceived their ability to get a bank loan, a book or poem published, or a promotion, as equal, failing to recognize the

²⁵ Elaine Showalter, “Women Writers and the Double Standard,” in Women in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness, Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran, eds. (New York: New American Library, 1972), 475. Also cited in Russ, 27-28.

²⁶ Showalter, 456.

²⁷ A. Lunsford, ed., 319.

unspoken and unseen weight of privilege attached to the color of their skin and to their gender.²⁸

Aware that this study risks charges of limiting the discussion of difference to gender when, as Margreta de Grazia points out, “sexual difference is only one differential category;...class is another; so is age, reputation, marital status”²⁹ and sexual orientation—I answer with an open invitation to other like-minded scholars to appropriate the strategies and tactics outlined in this dissertation freely, in order to create their own alternate realities and challenge the status quo as Margreta de Grazia did in 1994, when she wrote: “Tradition has ever been slower to entertain the possibility that these poems [the Sonnets] express desire for a black woman rather than desire for a boy.”³⁰ And Marvin Hunt suggests that Grazia “might better have written ‘as well as’ for ‘rather than,’ but her point is nevertheless compelling.”³¹

Granting an invisible weight of privilege to the assumption that the “Shakespearean sonnets” were created by a man, some sociopsychological scholars argue that the textual evidence in the sonnets points to a gay or bisexual Shakespeare. Because it is considered a bench mark when it comes to Shakespearean scholarship, the 1997 edition of the Arden Sonnets was released in a flurry of controversy when the editor,

²⁸ Eric Olson, phone conversation with the author, 2 August 2000.

²⁹ Margreta de Grazia, “The Scandal of Shakespeare’s Sonnets,” in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets: Critical Essays*, James Schiffer, ed. (New York: Garland, 1999), 100.

³⁰ Grazia, 106.

³¹ Marvin Hunt, “Be Dark but Not Too Dark,” in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets: Critical Essays*, James Schiffer ed. (New York: Garland, 1999), 386.

Katherine Duncan-Jones, convinced her board of academics that “it was time to state what is increasingly obvious: that five-sixths of the sonnets are about [or addressed to] young men, including the famous lines about ‘comparing thee to a summer’s day.’”³²

Despite the tenor of hysteria and hyperbole in the popular press, it should be pointed out that Duncan-Jones is meticulous in qualifying her reading of the sonnets as homoerotic, which, as she points out, is not without precedent. Academics have been wrangling over the sexuality of William Shakespeare since John Benson’s somewhat radical decision to change masculine pronouns to feminine in his 1640 edition³³ and George Steeven’s boycott in his 1793 edition, in which he included the following preface:

We have not reprinted the Sonnets, &c. of Shakespeare, because the strongest act of Parliament that could be framed, would fail to compel readers into their service.³⁴

Oscar Wilde’s reading, “The Portrait of Master W. H.” in 1889, identifies the mysterious dedicatee of the sonnets as the boy actor, Willie Hughes, helping to give Wilde’s enemies the proof they needed to convict him of sodomy.

For two weeks I worked hard at the Sonnets, hardly ever going out, and refusing all invitations. Everyday I seemed to be discovering something new, and Willie Hughes became to me a kind of spiritual presence, an ever-dominant personality. I could almost fancy that I saw him, with his golden hair, his tender flower-like grace, his dreamy deep-sunken eyes, his delicate mobile limbs, and his white lily hands. His very name fascinated me. Willie Hughes! Willie Hughes! How musically it sounded. Yes;

³² J. Harlow and M. Austin, “Sonnets Lift Bonnet on Bard Beaus,” *Australian* (17 September 1997): 45. See also Grazia, 93-94.

³³ Grazia, 89.

³⁴ Cited in James Schiffer, ed., 21.

who else but he could have been the master-mistress of Shakespeare's passion, the lord of his love to whom he was bound in vassalage, the delicate minion of pleasure, the rose of the whole world, the herald of spring decked in the proud livery of youth, the lovely boy whom it was sweet music to hear, and whose beauty was the very raiment of Shakespeare's heart, as it was the keystone of his dramatic power?³⁵

Stephen Booth announced equivocally that "William Shakespeare was almost certainly homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual,"³⁶ but not, apparently, a woman.

In her introduction to the sonnets, Duncan-Jones cites the work of numerous women who have produced "distinguished and original studies" on the sonnets. Duncan-Jones speculates that "perhaps there is something particularly attractive to women readers about the enclosed space of the 'sonnet's narrow room' and its predominantly reflective, introspective subject matter."³⁷ Could one of the underlying reasons for this predominance also have to do with an unconscious decoding of a familiar discourse? As Annette Kolodny argues:

Women have been both persuasive speakers and theorists of rhetoric for a much longer history than we have dared to dream. I think, however, Dame Rhetorica would also warn us that—even after all these centuries—men still do not know how to hear, read, and decode women's discourses accurately. Or, perhaps, Dame Rhetorica might whisper that they do not *want* to.³⁸

Vendler quotes Eve Sedgwick who wrote, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets seem to offer a single, discursive, deeply felt narrative of the dangers and vicissitudes of one male

³⁵ Oscar Wilde, 1169.

³⁶ Stephen Booth, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale UP 1977), 548.

³⁷ Duncan-Jones, 83.

³⁸ A. Lunsford ed., 319.

homosexual adventure.’ Vendler dismisses the sociopsychological critic ‘whose aim is less to inquire into the successful carrying-out of a literary project than to investigate the representations of gender relations,’ though she does concede that “it is perhaps a tribute to Shakespeare’s ‘reality-effect’ that ‘one most wishes the Sonnets were a novel.’”

Vendler concludes, ‘It does no good to act as if these lyrics were either a novel or a documentary of a lived life.’³⁹ However, many scholars agree that the sonnets are the most autobiographical of Shakespeare’s work. Schoenbaum notes, “The Sonnets themselves reveal—or appear to reveal—in fascinating detail their creator’s innermost feelings.”⁴⁰

If Kristie Fleckenstein is right—and I believe she is—in saying, “We cannot pursue a research agenda, create a writing core, or respond to a student’s draft without either implicitly or explicitly singing a song of self, the music of which makes our scholarship and teaching human,”⁴¹ then it must also be true that we cannot write a sonnet, stage play, screenplay or novel without also “either implicitly or explicitly singing a song of self.” Reacting to Barthes’ 1967 declaration announcing the “death of the author,” Peter Elbow describes a writer’s concern for identity:

If we are lost in the woods, we have a better chance of being found if the searchers think we exist, care deeply about us, and feel there is hope of finding us. And it goes without saying, writers are interested in staying alive.⁴²

³⁹ Vendler, 2.

⁴⁰ Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare’s Lives*, 34.

⁴¹ Fleckenstein, “A Third Voice,” 477.

⁴² Peter Elbow, “Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals,” *College Composition and Communication* 46, no. 1 (1995): 75.

When I have challenged my students to read all of the sonnets in one sitting with the Anne-authorship paradigm in mind, some have reported, “It works!” and, “Now I believe she did it!” Such is the power of suggestion in the sonnets—with what Vendler identifies as their uniquely subversive “permutational and combinatorial forms,”⁴³—that enables multiple readings. Thus Oscar Wilde reads a story about a boy with golden hair and flower-like grace while I perceive an author who is toying with gender identity, while endeavoring to keep her sex under wraps with less success because of the autobiographical “reality-effect” of the story she tells. As in the plays, issues of gender are blurred and confused in the sonnets—“A woman’s face with nature’s own hand painted / Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion” (20).

Once primed, the students often note the teasing ambiguity within the text that hints of purloined writing—“I do forgive thy robb’ry, gentle thief” (40), “the prey of every vulgar thief” (48), “he stole that word” (79), “thy tables are within my brain” (122); and secrets contained in the writing—“Which hides your life” (17), “what silent love hath writ” (23), “Every word doth almost tell my name” (76), “I, once gone, to all the world must die” (81), “sweet beauty hath no name” (127).

Ogburn dismisses Frank Harris’ claim “that the poet ‘used the sonnets’ to reveal ‘his feminine qualities—passionate self-abandonment’ and ‘self-pity’” as “overstating the case,” though he does concede that “when it comes to his ‘maiden virtue’ having been ‘rudely strumpeted’ [66], we may feel that he was perhaps overdoing it. It is not a

⁴³ Vendler, 2.

complaint one often hears from men.”⁴⁴ Duncan-Jones mentions the early seventeenth-century writer, Sir John Suckling, who is shown to have read the sonnets in his tragedy

Brennoralt:

It is rather striking that virtually all of the reminiscences of *Sonnets* occur in speeches by Iphigene, a woman disguised—not transiently, but throughout her life—as a man. Suckling’s ascription of so many lines and images from *Sonnets* to a transvestite character suggests that, like other early readers, he took full note of the sequence’s sexual ambivalence—of the male addressee of 1-126, the ‘master mistress’ of the speaker’s ‘passion’—but that, unlike most readers, he enjoyed its unconventionality and gender confusion.⁴⁵

In her introduction to the Arden Sonnets, Duncan-Jones traces the unease created for critics by the ideas found in the sonnets and the personal story they tell that hints of scandal and a confusing triangle of love and lust that is not necessarily heterosexual. Asserting that it was Lee’s reputation for “diligence and scholarship” that led scholars to accept his unfounded claim in 1905 that “hundreds of sonneteers had celebrated, in the language of love, the charms of young men,”⁴⁶ Duncan-Jones reveals that only one other Renaissance poet, Richard Barnfield, addressed “a lovely boy” in a sequence of sonnets.⁴⁷

As Duncan-Jones points out, many critics have attempted to explain away these perceived difficulties—including Henry Essex whose unpublished 1911 manuscript, Remarkable Revelations of Shakespeare’s Sonnets: A Literary Discovery, I came across

⁴⁴ Ogburn, 512.

⁴⁵ Duncan-Jones, 73-74.

⁴⁶ Cited in Duncan-Jones, 33. Lee does provide the example of Mark Antony who describes Caesar as the “boy Caesar” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, III, ii, 17) and Spencer in his *Astrophel* who refers to Sir Phillip Sidney on his death as “oh wretched boy” (l. 133) and “luckless boy” (l. 142). See Lee, 233, note 3.

⁴⁷ Duncan-Jones, 91.

at the Bodleian Library. Essex elected to explain these troublesome passages by pointing out that Shakespeare was writing metaphorically about two things in the sonnets, *Imagination* and *Luxury*. Imagination becomes an all-encompassing metaphor for Essex, who argues that it is the umbrella topic for a majority of the sonnets. Thus the friend and lover addressed in the sonnets are merely the spirit or god of Imagination and may refer to any one of the following sub-topics: a) one of his [Shakespeare's] works of Imagination, i.e. a play; b) all of his [Shakespeare's] works of Imagination; c) the spirit or god of Imagination is his [Shakespeare's] friend; d) his [Shakespeare's] faculty of Imagination, and e) the subject of Imagination itself. At the same time, the spirit or goddess of Luxury becomes his [Shakespeare's] mistress. Echoing Rowse's delight at having solved, once and for all, the mysteries of the sonnets, Essex writes:

In imparting this discovery, the complete meaning of Shakespeare's poetical enigma, the Sonnets, it is a great pleasure to thus increase the enjoyment of their readers for the future. Where before they were so little understood or so misunderstood that they gave a singular, incongruous, equivocal idea of Shakespeare, and their greatest beauties were obscured, they now agree with the plays in the impressions they give of his refinement and good sense.⁴⁸

Asserting that "it has long been noted that Shakespeare's plays are full of questions of authority, legitimacy, usurpation, authorship and interpretation,"⁴⁹ Garber points to Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* (with "her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out, and ravish'd"), Cassandra in *Troilus and Cressida* (granted the gift of prophecy and the

⁴⁸ Henry Essex, "Remarkable Revelations of Shakespeare's Sonnets: A Literary Discovery," unpublished Bodleian MS, Ms.eng.misc. c. 305, iv.

⁴⁹ Garber, 136.

curse of never being believed) and Ophelia (a fragile victim driven to madness) as a few examples of

another whole group of ghost writers in his [Shakespeare's] plays who are similarly under erasure, and these ghost writers are women—women marginalized by their gender, by their putative or real madness, or by their violation.⁵⁰

Garber also notes that

it is significant that the Shakespeare authorship controversy presents itself at exactly the moment Foucault describes as appropriate for appropriation: the moment when the 'author-function' becomes, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an item of property, part of a 'system of ownership' in which strict copyright rules define the relation between text and author in a new way. It is not until there is such a thing as property that violations of property can occur; it is not surprising that the claims for rival authorship arise at the moment at which, in Foucault's words, 'the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing became the forceful imperative of literature.' It may well be, therefore, that an analysis of the Shakespeare case will shed light on the general question raised by Foucault: 'What is an author?'⁵¹

And if the author "Shakespeare" is thought to be a woman, will *she* be considered a genius?

Just as early films were once considered unworthy of saving,⁵² virtually no Elizabethan playhouse manuscripts have survived. Perhaps in the hurly-burly of the early days of the Elizabethan theatre scene, the work was not considered worthy of saving. But

⁵⁰ Garber, 142.

⁵¹ Garber, 125-126.

⁵² Thomas Y. Levin, "Iconology at the Movies: Panofsky's Film Theory," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1996), <http://direct.press.jhu.edu/demo/...ournal_of_criticism/9.1levin.html> (2 December 2002).

although copyright laws, as we know them, did not exist at the time, Ogburn insists that “publication was by no means *ad liberum*. It was rigidly controlled.”⁵³ And Ogburn reminds us that William Shakespeare was anything but a shrinking violet when it came to litigious matters—including a 1608 lawsuit against John Addenbrooke to recover a small debt⁵⁴—therefore it seems highly unlikely that he would have resisted any opportunity to seek financial redress for the mishandling of his work, as occurred during his lifetime—unless, of course, it wasn’t his work.

Schoenbaum remarks that the “celebrated denunciation of the ‘upstart crow’ by Robert Greene in his Groatsworth of Wit, is no question—a desperate shaft directed at Shakespeare.”⁵⁵ Regarding the imagery of the “crow,” Schoenbaum offers the following explanation:

In A Strappado for the Devil Richard Brathwait sneers at thieving crows that steal ‘selected flowers from other’s wit.’ Is Greene then maliciously suggesting that Shakespeare has appropriated the flowers of *his* wit? This is the second interpretation, and is of long standing. As far back as the eighteenth century it gave rise to the view that Shakespeare began his literary career as a Johannes Factotum in the sense of a Jack-of-all-trades who—in addition to acting—revised and adapted the plays of others, including Greene.⁵⁶

Stratfordian scholars dismiss the pamphlet as sour grapes, but could there be a gender clue in Greene’s phrase “tyger’s hart wrapt in a Player’s hyde,”⁵⁷ an obvious allusion to a

⁵³ Ogburn, 114.

⁵⁴ Schoenbaum, Shakespeare’s Lives, 15-16.

⁵⁵ Schoenbaum, Shakespeare’s Lives, 151.

⁵⁶ Schoenbaum, Shakespeare’s Lives, 152-153.

⁵⁷ From “Greenes Groatsworth of witte, bought with a million of Repentance. Describing the follie of youth, the falshood of make-shifte flatterers, the miserie of the negligent, and mischiefes of deceiving

line in an earlier Shakespearean play? In 3 Henry VI the petty and cruel Queen Margaret is the target of a line that reads: “O tiger’s heart wrapp’d in a *woman’s* hide” (I, iv, 138). Was Greene simply accusing Shakespeare of borrowing “selected flowers from other’s wit,” or did Greene suspect that Shakespeare the actor was assuming the credit for a woman’s writing?

Duncan-Jones also points out that it was “extremely uncommon” for a woman to be called a “Lover,” as is the case in *A Louers Complaint*:

Just as such a reader may have been startled to discover that the majority of the sonnets are addressed, not to a chaste lady, but to a fair youth, they will be startled afresh, probably, to learn that the complaining ‘Lover’ of this second title [*A Lover’s Complaint*] is female... The title declares Shakespeare to be the author, yet the poem itself relegates him to the position of a mere reporter or eavesdropper, whose personal interest in the nameless maid’s narrative is left open to conjecture.⁵⁸

According to Duncan-Jones, the female speaker of *A Lover’s Complaint* has “much in common with the poet-speaker of the sonnets.” Both are “in the grip of an obsessive devotion to a fair youth.” And they are both driven by a self-destructive lust. Taken “together [sonnets and *A Lover’s Complaint*], we can see that this book of sonnets turns out to be a book of lies and lying.”⁵⁹

Courtezans. Written before his death and published at his dyeing request.” Cited in Honan, 158. On 20 September 1592, following Greene’s death, Henry Chettle licensed Greene’s pamphlet.

⁵⁸ Duncan-Jones, 86-88.

⁵⁹ Duncan-Jones, 94-95.

As I have looked at the shelf where there are no scholarly articles that examine the possibility of a female voice in the sonnets, I am reminded of something else Virginia

Woolf said:

And I thought of that old gentleman, who is dead now, but was a bishop, I think, who declared that it was impossible for any woman, past, present, or to come, to have the genius of Shakespeare. He wrote to the papers about it. He also told a lady who applied to him for information that cats do not as a matter of fact go to heaven, though they have, he added, souls of a sort. How much thinking those old gentlemen used to save one! How the borders of ignorance shrank back at their approach! Cats do not go to heaven. Women cannot write the plays of Shakespeare.⁶⁰

In a short playful article published in 1938, J.P. de Fonseka (1897-1948)—considered to be one of the greatest English writers Ceylon ever produced—challenged Woolf's complaint and, letting "the cat...out of the bag," wrote:

Mrs. Virginia Woolf the other day bewailed the servile lot of women who, because of dependence on men and the lack of a room of their own, have not yet produced a female Shakespeare. Mrs. Woolf is wrong; and Shakespeare was a female all right, and the greatest poet of the world was a poetess.⁶¹

Drawing on little more than his intuition, Fonseka boldly asserts that Mrs. Shakespeare was the real author—based on the characterizations of the women in *her* plays. Fonseka adopts a tongue-firmly-in-cheek tone that nevertheless suggests that anyone who disagrees with his self-assured conclusion is wrong. The article pokes fun at Woolf's complaint in a Room of One's Own, with an attitude that is reminiscent of James Barrie's 1925 speech in which he called for an edition of "The Ladies Shakespeare." Juliet Fleming points out that Barrie—and I would include Fonseka here as well—was

mimicking many of the various resources that women (or at least those women who have wished to retain the poet as an object of affection and veneration) have repeatedly brought to the problem of Shakespeare [including]...women's promotion of Shakespeare, within the heritage industry, as a man who loved women.⁶²

Fonseka's argument parodies what nineteenth-century Shakespearean critic Elizabeth Latimer referred to as "fugitive Shakespearean Criticism," that was for women an intersection of social and intellectual communities not necessarily "coincident with those of their male counterparts."⁶³ So successful is Fonseka's parody that I was initially convinced a woman wrote the piece—until further research revealed otherwise. The article is short, lacking a serious tone and objective voice and scholarship such as documentary evidence and the imprint of footnotes. Instead there are fresh tracks in the snow heading away from the snow-plowed road that leads to a snug cabin—away and toward the woods. And while Fonseka's intention is to point to the feminine error of following a frivolous path, I am inclined instead to be of the same mind with his however speciously intended treatise. I want to know what is hidden in those woods.

I also want to agree with Russ, whose background as a science fiction writer leads her to conclude that

one can't get minority work into the canon by pretending it's about the same things or uses the same techniques as majority work. It probably

⁶⁰ Woolf, *A Room*, 48.

⁶¹ J.P. de Fonseka, "The Plays of Mrs. Shakespeare," *G.K.'s Weekly* (3 March 1938): 427.

⁶² Fleming, 3-4.

⁶³ Fleming, 4.

isn't and doesn't. It may very well look like nothing ever before seen on earth.⁶⁴

At the same time I want to challenge her assertion about the academy's canon that "the center is such a dead center" and "as in cells, growth occurs only at the edges of something."⁶⁵ To paraphrase comedian Roseanne Barr, whom I once heard say, "The fastest way to a man's heart is through his chest," perhaps the quickest way to re-vision the academy is to begin at the center, with the founding fathers. What would this academy look like, one in which at least 50 percent of the canon was comprised of female authors and other minority groups were also represented? It would look like nothing ever before seen on earth.

In his presentation at the 7th Annual Edward de Vere Studies Conference—"Taking the Oxford Case Seriously: What happens When a Mainstream Historian Examines the Case Against Stratford Will in *History Today*?"—William Rubinstein amused his audience by reading a letter written in response to his article, "Who was Shakespeare?"⁶⁶ The letter was, of course, not printed by the editors of *History Today*. However, Rubinstein kindly provided me with a facsimile:

Sir,
Re: William Rubinstein's article 'Who was Shakespeare?' (8 August 2001), I am happy to be able to settle the question once and for all. Some years ago I was in the George Inn, in Southwark, where I met a Miss Doris Quickley, whose ancestress had been Shakespeare's landlady during

⁶⁴ Russ, 130.

⁶⁵ Russ, 131-132.

⁶⁶ William Rubinstein, "Who Was Shakespeare?" *History Today* 51 (8 August 2001): 28-35.

his years in London. She had in her possession a collection of letters, passed down through the family, which showed that it was Anne Hathaway who wrote the plays. She sent a letter to her husband with each batch of plays that she dispatched to him. He passed the plays off as his own, having convinced his wife that nobody would stage plays written by a woman. Eventually she grew weary of writing plays for which she received neither money nor recognition, and the last letter informed her husband that she was not going to write anymore.

It was well known in the Quickley family that Shakespeare carried on something awful when he got that last letter, kick marks that he made in the wall of his room were still clearly visible after four hundred years. He had no choice but to retire to Stratford, and in revenge he left his wife nothing but his second-best bed in his will.

I trust this has cleared the authorship question up once and for all.

Yours sincerely,
Louise O'Conner

Why is it that those who propose the notion of feminine authorship tend to amuse members of the academy, even those members who have elected to explore seriously and challenge the Shakespearean authorship question? Perhaps in years to come, J.P. de Fonseca and Louise O'Conner will be accorded the status of wise fools in the finest of Hathawayean traditions—outsiders who subverted authority, using humor to voice unpalatable-to-the-powers-that-be wisdom and insight.

And while there has not been a comprehensive scholarly work that specifically examines the possibility of an authorial voice that is feminine in the sonnets, Vendler makes it clear that there is an empty space to be filled. 'Inevitably, rather few sonnets have been examined in detail, since critics tend to dwell on the most famous ten or fifteen out of the total 154,' she points out. 'In fact, the Sonnets represent the largest tract of

unexamined Shakespearean lines left open to scrutiny.⁶⁷ Time now to don a pair of cross-country skies and create a new set of tracks I say.

⁶⁷ Vendler, 13.

XIV. EVERY WORD DOTH ALMOST TELL MY NAME

De Vere's rocky in-law relationships

The Earl of Oxford's biographer, Bernard Ward, outlines the reasons for an icy letter written by the Earl of Oxford to his father-in-law, Lord Burghley:

The allegations against Lord Burghley are: not providing him with sufficient money; ill-treating his followers; purposely arousing the Queen's indignation against him; while Lady Burghley is accused of having declared she wished him dead; undermining his wife's affection for him; and of slandering him.¹

Ogburn records Barrell's finding regarding de Vere's contemporaries:

Oxford, with characteristic disregard of his own financial uncertainty, appears to have taken over about 1584 Fisher's Folly described in an account of 1598 as a 'beautiful house with gardens of pleasure, bowling alleys and such like It hath since for a time been the Earle of Oxford's place.'²

In 1586, with Burghley's help, Oxford was granted "an extraordinary annuity of £1,000 by the Queen with no accounting to be required by [the] Exchequer."³ At the same time Oxford was accused of leaving his three daughters nearly destitute.

Following the death of his daughter in 1588, Lord Burghley called in Edward's debt never paid—the purchase of his marriage [to Anne Cecil] from the Court of Wards. In what Ogburn describes as an effort to avoid paying Burghley, Oxford secretly sold Fisher's Folly to William Cornwallis. "The prospect of being on the wrong side of the Lord Treasurer [Burghley] . . . frightened . . . Sir William's father, Sir Thomas Cornwallis" who wrote to Burghley,

I never saw nor heard any part of the assurance which hath passed between the Earl and my son And, good my Lord, . . . think me not so doting and foolish in my age that for the attaining of Fisher's Folly, I

would once put in adventure to lose the goodwill and favor which I have ever found towards me.⁴

Attributions: Shakespeare-de Vere links in Anne Cornwallis' book

Barrell's interpretation of de Vere's estate acquisition is that "Oxford acquired the mansion 'as headquarters for the school of poets and dramatists who openly acknowledged his patronage and leadership.'"⁵ This financial arrangement may help to explain contemporary references to de Vere's brilliant writing abilities based on the scant two dozen surviving examples of his verse.⁶

Writing in 1945, Charles Barrell recounts that

some sixty years before J. Thomas Looney began work on his revolutionary identification of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, as 'Shakespeare,' James Orchard Halliwell (later Halliwell-Phillips), one of the greatest collectors of Shakespeareana and most painstaking student of the Stratford native's career that has ever lived, brought out the fact that the names of the mysterious Bard and the mysterious poet Earl have actually been linked together in unmistakable significance since the 1590's at least. The evidence is contained in a small volume of poems copied in the handwriting of one Anne Cornwallis. And Halliwell-Phillips dates the transcription of this unique collection between the years 1585 and 1595.⁷

"In 1852 a small volume of poems copied out by hand by Anne Cornwallis (William's daughter) was discovered. . . . Among the poems in Anne Conrwaleys her booke are the Verses Made by the Earl of Oxforde and . . ." an anonymous poem that appears to be the only handwritten copy of a Shakespearean poem from the sixteenth century.⁸

In his recent article, "The Cultural and Textual Importance of Folger MS V.a.89," Arthur F. Marotti identifies Anne Cornwallis not only as the daughter of the Sir William Cornwallis, but as a distant relative of both Edward de Vere and the Sidneys.⁹

De Veres' and Shakespeares' progeny

Three weeks before Susanna Shakespeare was born, the Countess of Oxford gave birth to a baby boy who lived only two days and was buried on the ninth of May 1583.

After the birth of his twins in 1585, little is attributed to William Shakespeare for the next seven years, leading several generations of biographers to term these the so-called "Lost Years."¹⁰

Attribution: Ben Jonson

*After Shakespeare's death, Ben Jonson wrote, "I remember, the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out [a] line. My answer hath been, 'would he had blotted a thousand.'"*¹¹

1582-1592

Having endured years of cruelty and heartache in her relationship with the Earl, Agnes found her young husband's kindness a surprising change. Despite his youth, William understood the tenuous nature of his hold over his wife, however unaware she was of having captured his heart most assuredly on the road to Shottery.

She taught him to pen his name and she tried to teach him to read from the precious books Edward had given her. But the only things she could interest him in learning to read were the words she wrote.

He wooed her, which both annoyed and flattered Agnes. Anticipating her needs, Will devoted his considerable energy to fulfilling them.

She found his "bray-like" laughter disconcerting. One day he returned from the village wearing an ass's mask he'd borrowed from a band of players. At first she didn't know what to think, until he began to "whinny" and "neigh" like a donkey with unselfconscious merriment—making her laugh so hard she pissed herself. After that, she didn't mind the sound of his laughter so much.

And yet still he did not force his claim on her, as it was his right to do.

â â â

Will was gone when the Earl of Oxford arrived. His demand to see Agnes met with deference, and without delay he was ushered into her presence and there left alone.

John Shakespeare positioned himself on the floor in the next room and spied through a rat-hole in the wall in order to both hear and see what transpired between his new daughter-in-law and the important visitor.

Edward appraised Agnes with keen eyes. Her once girlish figure was grown into that of a woman—winsome and ripe; her gray eyes were as he remembered, luminous, though no longer sad. He sensed in her a self-containment that excluded him, and it made him awkward and unsure.

The baby Susanna fussed in her cot. “Hush now,” Agnes murmured, lifting the infant. Slipping the tunic from her shoulder she held the child to her breast swollen with milk.

“I only wanted to see her,” he said.

“Only her?” Agnes asked, teasing him as in the old days.

With mother and child self-sufficiently content, the baby suckling noisily at the breast, Edward saw his future without her.

“Come away with me, Agnes,” he blurted without intending to.

Immediately she grew solemn; and the nursing babe, feeling her body stiffen with distress, began to mew.

Turning all of her attention to her infant, Agnes did not reply. Edward felt himself fading.

“Come away with me, Agnes.” This time his voice spoke of high-born entitlement rather than entreaty.

At his rat-hole in the wall, John Shakespeare’s eyes narrowed in understanding at the easy familiarity between them. “So this was what the cuckold dragged in,” he muttered to himself, beginning to understand the extraordinary conditions of his son’s recent marriage.

“You will have your own estate with a library, quills and parchment.” Now it was a command, “You shall be my secretary.”

She must tread carefully here. The baby, now placid, was laid in her cot. From a wooden chest at the end of the bed, Agnes took a small book. This she handed to the Earl. Inside were some sonnets chronicling the ebb and flow of their affair, private thoughts shared until now with no one. The Earl tucked the small book into his belt, knowing that her answer was no.

Suddenly and without warning he reached for the infant.

“No!” Agnes cried.

But he snatched the infant from her and moved out of reach. Now the power was his again.

Frozen with fear, Agnes held her breath as Edward cradled the babe’s head in one hand, holding the tiny face close to his own as he studied his daughter’s features. Startled by the sudden movement, the infant stared back at him.

“She has your eyes,” he said.

“All babies have eyes of blue,” Agnes’ reply was also an entreaty.

“Ay. My son did too,” he said.

“How is the countess, . . . your wife?” she asked softly.

“As one might expect,” he shrugged.

Agnes bowed her head to mourn the recent loss of a son, suffered by her friend from childhood.

Edward continued to gaze into his infant daughter’s unblinking eyes. “These gray windows see right through men, like her mother’s eyes.” Looking then at Agnes, he continued, “How frail these creatures are, these gentle birds that fly from man to man.”¹²

He kissed Susanna’s forehead and placed her in her crib where she promptly began to howl.

Through her window, Agnes watched him go, relieved—wondering if she would ever see him again and fearing that she would.

â â â

Will left to tour the provinces with the band of players the day after Oxford's visit.

Before he left, he stole into Agnes' room with a bouquet of cowslips picked earlier. He watched his wife sleep for some time before brushing his lips softly across her cheek.

Stirring in her sleep, Agnes dreamed she was in love with an ass.

Later when she woke, Agnes saw the bouquet of wild flowers and realized that she did indeed love her young Will.

â â â

A short time later, another important visitor arrived at the Henley Street residence. Lady Mildred, accompanied by her retinue of six assorted footmen, drivers and other servants, crowded the small parlor. The Shakespeares' frightened kitchen maid was quickly dispatched to fetch Agnes from the town market.

Meanwhile Lady Mildred dismissed her servants and the curious elder Shakespeares so that she would be able to talk freely with Agnes, who arrived breathless from the market.

Agnes bowed low when she saw that it was Lady Mildred. "Milady, I am your unworthy servant," she said gravely.

“Bollocks!” declared Lady Mildred. “What did that pox-ridden rascal want?”

“Madam?” Agnes replied.

“Thou knowest very well what I mean.”

“He offered me quills and parchment.”

“And?”

“And he offered me an estate, from whence I should be his secretary.”

Lady Mildred snorted her contempt. “Secretary! Ha! I should like to see what he shall do without you to write *his* plays.”

Agnes smiled.

Suddenly serious, Lady Mildred fixed Agnes with a piercing glare. “And what will you, child? Shall you join that green-sickness carrion in his school of night?”

“No, madam,” Agnes replied.

“Why not, then?”

“I am married.”

Softening, Lady Mildred said, “I was sorry to abandon you to this rustic boy. I thought only to keep you and your babe safe from harm. We miss you, my Lady Anne and I. We are bereft without your wit.” At this her voice broke. “Forgive me, Agnes.”

Taking Lady Mildred’s hand, Agnes knelt before her. “Nothing needs forgiveness; I love my husband!”

“You are lying to ease my conscience,” Lady Mildred replied.

“No, I would not do that.”

“What is there to love in him?” Lady Mildred asked, mystified.

“He makes me laugh,” Agnes said. “And he loves me.”

“He is a player?”

“Yes,” Agnes answered uncertainly.

“A good player?” Lady Mildred wanted to know.

“Forgive me, sweet husband,” Agnes smiled wryly. “But I had as soon the town crier spoke my lines! He does saw the air too much with his hands!”

Both women laughed and Lady Mildred asked, “And yet you love him?”

“I do!” Agnes replied happily.

“Gods be praised!” cried Lady Mildred. “And could you not transcribe your *husband’s* plays as you once transcribed that horned beast’s?”

“I have not quills nor parchment, and the baby”

Lady Mildred interrupted. “I have made Her Majesty the Queen somewhat aware of your role in the court entertainments.”

Summoning her servants, one of whom carried a large parcel, Lady Mildred gestured to the man who handed the parcel to Agnes.

“Quills, parchment *and* ink,” she smiled triumphantly. And pointing to certain members of her retinue she said, “A nurse maid for the baby, a lady’s maid for you and a cook.”

â â â

Although she was finally able to write again, Agnes found that she longed for her husband's return. One afternoon she heard a great commotion, and when she went to investigate she found a large bed wedged half-way through the front door.

Will had returned, bringing with him a bed to replace the single cot in which she slept.

That night she took him by the hand and led him to her new bed where she forced her claim on him, as it was her right.

Twins were born a little more than a year later. For the next seven years Agnes and Will were lost in newfound love for each other and their children. Evenings before the fire, Agnes lulled the little ones to sleep with stories she spun from her imagination, stories that enchanted Will. Later, in their own bed, he would beg her for more. Thus Will became her muse and best audience. And with the generous patronage of Lady Mildred, Agnes continued to write, although she never did get used to the idea of an endless supply of precious parchment and quills, thus she was careful not to blot a line.

Meanwhile, the Earl purchased Fisher's Folly, determined to make it a base from which to launch his theatrical ambitions sans his once-beloved Agnes, whose book of sonnets he took great pains to treat carelessly—leaving them all but forgotten on a shelf in the library to be discovered by the next owner's daughter—Anne Cornwallis, the future Duchess of Argyll, who would copy one of them in her diary to be shared privately with other ladies of the realm who enjoyed a similar interest in poetry.

Heedless of the cost and seduced by the flattery of his coterie of sycophantic beneficiaries, Edward's profligate imagination soared with short-lived dreams of legendary literary prowess, grounded finally and forever by financial reality four years later when he was forced to sell not only Fisher's Folly, but Vere House in Oxford Place as well. This despite a £1,000 annuity granted by the Queen, the result of pressure again brought to bear by Lord Burghley, concerned for the financial future of his daughter and her three young children.

Thereafter the Earl's literary star faded from view, obscured, as were all his contemporaries', by an emerging comet whose unprecedented light, though distant and dim to begin, waxed gloriously bright in the years that followed.

In due course, back in Stratford, Agnes delivered into the hands of the fair youth more precious bundles—the final drafts of her plays. And gradually, over a period of some years, the reputation of William Shakespeare grew to such an extent that when the plague closed the theatres in London, he had no difficulty finding a publisher willing to

print any verse with his name attached, knowing that there would be no shortage of readers willing to pay for a copy.

XIV. EVERY WORD DOTHT ALMOST TELL MY NAME

¹ Bernard M. Ward, The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford 1550-1604 From Contemporary Documents (London: John Murray, 1928), 128.

² Ogburn, 671.

³ Ogburn, 777.

⁴ Cited in Ogburn, 711.

⁵ Ogburn, 672.

⁶ For the best edition of Oxford's poems, Marotti points to Steven May's Elizabethan Courtier Poets: The Poems and their Contents (Columbia, Missouri: 1991), 287-316.

⁷ C. Barrell, "Earliest Authenticated 'Shakespeare' Transcript Found With Oxford's Personal Poems," The Shakespeare Fellowship Quarterly VI, no. 2 (April 1945): 22-23.

⁸ Ogburn, 711. The original volume is held at the Folger Library in Washington, D.C., MS V.a. 89.

⁹ See also Marotti's "Women and the Manuscript System" in Manuscript, Print and the English Renaissance Lyric (Ithaca & London: Cornell UP, 1995), 48-61 and Jane Stevenson, "Women, Writing and Scribal Publication in the Sixteenth Century," English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700, 9: Writings by Early Modern Women (2000), 1-32.

¹⁰ Campbell, 880.

¹¹ Schoenbaum, William Shakespeare, 258-259.

¹² From "Woman's Changeableness" by Edward de Vere. Ogburn, 380-381 and Nelson, Adversary, 388.

XV. HOW MANY FEMINISTS DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE A LIGHT BULB?

Sometimes, men put women in men's novels but they can leave out some of the parts: heads, for instance, or the hands. Women's novels leave out parts of the men as well. Sometimes it's the stretch between the belly button and the knees; sometimes it's the sense of humor. It's hard to have a sense of humor in a cloak, in a high wind, on a moor.¹

How many feminists does it take to change a light bulb?

“One—and it's *not* funny!”

Susan Jarratt describes what happened when she seriously sought to use humor in her feminist classroom: “We fell into a pattern of sharing jokes at the beginning of class each day.” Her light bulb joke resonated particularly because, Jarratt says, “I was more sensitive than others to the bad rap feminists get about being humorless because I am generally a pretty serious person.”²

In her 1975 study of Language and Woman's Place, Robin Lakoff admitted:

¹ Atwood, 5.

² Susan Jarratt, “Teaching Across and Within Differences,” College Composition and Communication 43, no. 3 (1992): 315.

It is axiomatic in middle-class American society that, first, women can't tell jokes—they are bound to ruin the punch line, they mix up the order of things, and so on. Moreover, they don't 'get' jokes. In short, women have no sense of humor.³

While acknowledging the “stereotypical assertion that women lack a sense of humor,” Linda Naranjo-Huebl claims that “much of women’s humor has been either censored or misinterpreted.”⁴ And just as Carol Gilligan’s study, *In A Different Voice*, revealed the methodological flaws in research that accorded women a morally bankrupt status, Mary Crawford catalogues the serious flaws in research experiments that “prove” that women are not so funny as men. For example, 250 students were asked to choose how they would respond to seeing someone’s briefcase open unexpectedly, spilling papers everywhere. Given the choice of one of three possible responses—a) ignoring (“I would avoid looking at him and keep on walking”); b) helping (“I would stop and help him pick up his papers”); or c) using humor (“I would tease him about being a master paper shuffler”)—most men chose humor while women chose helpfulness. No surprise there. However, the structure of the study did not allow for the integration of helpfulness and humor.⁵

Mercilee Jenkin has described how the typical content of male and female jokes reveals a fundamental difference of purpose in the telling:

³ Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman’s Place* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 56.

⁴ Linda Naranjo-Huebl, “From Peek-a-boo to Sarcasm: Women’s Humor as a Means of Both Connection and Resistance,” *Studies in Prolife Feminism* 1, no. 4 (Fall 1995) <<http://www.fnsa.org/v1n4/v1n4-home.html>> (17 September 2003).

⁵ Mary Crawford, “Just Kidding: Gender and Conversational Humor,” in *New Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, Regina Barreca, ed. (Philadelphia: Gordon and Breach, 1992), 24.

Joking for men establishes them as credible performers and affords them an audience for whom they demonstrate their prowess. Their jokes are less personal, like their social groups, and they can be told in a variety of settings. Men can develop a repertoire of jokes which they can use to compete with other men for audience attention and honors. Their jokes are exclusive in that they more often put down others or are told at the expense of others. The joker rarely identifies with the butt of the joke.⁶

While she does not explore the ways in which pressures to perform may have an adverse effect on a man's health or longevity, Jenkins argues that for women, humor is

much more context bound. It is more often created out of the ongoing talk to satisfy the needs of [that] particular group of women. Since the goal of interaction is intimacy, there is not the same need to compete for performance points... [Female] humor includes and supports group members by demonstrating what they have in common.⁷

Naranjo-Huebl describes the unique catch-22 for women who employ subversive humor "as a means of responding to and battling [patriarchal] domination" while not wanting to jeopardize significant relationships with males through alienation and atomization. "Thus it [female humor] seems at times ambiguous, ambivalent or inconsistent"⁸ and

because women live in such close relationships with members of the dominant group (men) in ways that members of other socially subordinated groups do not, their humor reflects the unique dynamics of those intimate relationships.⁹

⁶ Mercilee Jenkins, "What's So Funny? Joking Among Women," in *The Proceedings of the First Berkeley Women and Language Conference*, N. Caskey, S. Bremner, B. Moonwomon, eds. (Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group, 1985), 6.

⁷ Jenkins, 6.

⁸ Naranjo-Huebl, 6.

⁹ Naranjo-Huebl, 15.

And if women do not always appreciate male humor that tends more to consist of jokes told at the expense of others, including minorities, perhaps it is because women are members of a community that has also been the victim of more than their share of nagging-wife-hated-mother-in-law-woman-driver-dumb-blond-fat-woman-flat-chested-stupid-bitch-Jewish-American-Princess jokes. Naranjo-Huebl points out that several studies, including Paul McGhee's The Role of Laughter and Humor in Growing up Female,¹⁰ have supported the idea that "those in power within a culture prefer humor that disparages the powerless, whereas those not in power tend to prefer self-deprecatory humor."¹¹ Growing up in our house, I learned my mother's rule of thumb—the only person who should tell a joke about a particular minority was a person from *that* minority—unless, of course, it was a joke about lawyers.

In a sub-section of her paper entitled, "Women Rarely Prefer the Quickie," Naranjo-Huebl points to studies that suggest "men's jokes tend to be shorter than women's jokes and are more likely to be sexual," while on the other hand "women's jokes are longer, more anecdotal, more often involve wordplay, and are more likely to be self-deprecatory."¹² And according to Nancy Walker, a woman's humor works "by cumulative effect, not by one-liners," taking the form of "lengthy conversations between women that are basic to communication among women,"¹³ returning us again to the notion of a fundamental *orgasmic misunderstanding*, rather than a woman's *penis envy*,

¹⁰ Paul McGhee, "The Role of Laughter and Humor in Growing up Female," in Becoming Female: Perspectives on Development, Claire B. Kopp, ed. (New York: Plenum Press, 1979), 199.

¹¹ Naranjo-Huebl, 23.

¹² Naranjo-Huebl, 16.

¹³ Nancy Walker, A Very Serious Thing: Women's Humor and American Culture (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1988), 13.

as a root cause of man's difficulty when it comes to *getting* a woman's sense of humor.

Walker points to the differences:

First, women tend to be story-tellers rather than joke tellers. Humor functions for them more as a means of communication than as a means of self-presentation, a sharing of experiences rather than a demonstration of cleverness.¹⁴

At the same time women have a dirty little secret that men have long suspected—when they are alone together, women are more likely to ridicule men and make sexual jokes.¹⁵

However, according to Naranjo-Huebl, “women do not necessarily need to make males the brunt of their jokes to use humor to their advantage, because it is the joking itself, rather than its content that brings them together and keeps them connected.”¹⁶ Or as

Nancy Reincke puts it:

Women's laughter counteracts dominance when it constructs a counterknowledge, a counterknowledge that is collectively produced through female bonding across barriers of class and race. The threat to male dominance isn't women laughing at men; the threat is women laughing with women.¹⁷

Candace Pert described her decision to form a women's group at the National Institute of Health—“after decades of sexism that had never been honestly confronted”—following her harrowing confrontation with the alpha Big Boys of science over the Lasker award and her subsequent Nobel Prize nomination:

¹⁴ Nancy Walker and Zita Dresner, Redressing the Balance: American Women's Literary Humor from Colonial Times to the 1980s (Jackson: Mississippi UP, 1988), xxiii.

¹⁵ Mahadev L. Apte, Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985), 70.

¹⁶ Naranjo-Huebl, 27.

¹⁷ Nancy Reincke, “Antidote to Dominance: Women's Laughter as Counteraction,” Journal of Popular Culture 24, no. 4 (Spring 1991): 36.

In the early eighties, I joined with a number of other female neuroscientists to start an organization called WIN, Women in Neuroscience. We selected as our motto 'WIN with Brains' and posted an announcement in the Palace's [National Institutes of Health's] women's rooms stating our intention that at the next Society of Neuroscience meeting, WIN would convene its own symposium. Much to our amazement, about three hundred women showed up for an event that turned out to be part group therapy session, part serious scientific meeting. It began in a spirit of lighthearted camaraderie, everyone happy to be in the company of women and for once not made to feel like outsiders at the boys' clubhouse. I gave my lecture barefoot, and, since I was pregnant at the time (with my third child, Brandon), wore a wildly colored hippie gown. But underneath the laughs and good time, there was an undercurrent of anger so strong that we could do nothing but ride it for many hours. So we steamed and vented, raged and wept, sharing horror story after horror story. And even though I knew firsthand how tough it was to be a woman in science, I was completely overwhelmed by what I heard. The purpose of WIN, as it evolved, became increasingly political. By organizing ourselves in this way, we women were attempting to change our status from that of an oppressed minority to that of a modest interest group. We intended to lobby for more women to serve as chairs of our professional meetings, as well as set up a system of mentorship so that the more successful could assist the less successful to learn the ropes of grant-writing and political maneuvering. My involvement with WIN was very healing, even energizing for me at this time. I enjoyed being in a position of leadership, and I liked making waves that rocked the boats of the power boys and their established structure.¹⁸

This chapter supports the premise that women's humor can ape men's humor, but can also provide insights into the nature of female humor, if you know what to look for. What is often called Will Shakespeare's unusual deftness in portraying females could better be explained as the production of a self-possessed female playwright. Drama also provides a rich arena for this female playwright to tell men about themselves.

Clearly, some men have found a woman's sense of humor and laughter threatening. When conquering hero, Henry V, is faced with his winsome French

¹⁸ Pert, 119.

princess, he alludes to this fear as the bravery he displayed on the battlefield dissolves:
“It is as easy for me, Kate, to conquer the kingdom as to speak so much more French. I shall never move thee in French, unless it be to laugh at me” (Henry V, V, ii, 194-197).
The invisible weight of privilege that inscribes men as the center of the universe must make it difficult for them to imagine that they are not the focus of all things, including a woman’s amusement. And while there is something fearfully emasculating in a woman’s laughter for some men, Paglia argues that

Man is sexually compartmentalized. Genitally, he is condemned to a perpetual pattern of linearity, focus, aim, directedness... Women have no problem to solve by sex. Physically and psychologically, they are serenely self-contained;...men are out of balance. They must quest, pursue, court, or seize. Pigeons on the grass, alas: in such parkside rituals we may savor the comic pathos of sex. How often one spots a male pigeon making desperate, self-inflating sallies toward the female, as again and again she turns her back on him and nonchalantly marches away. But by concentration and insistence he may carry the day. Nature has blessed him with obliviousness to his own absurdity. His purposiveness is both a gift and a burden. In human beings, sexual concentration is the male’s instrument for gathering together and forcibly fixing the dangerous chthonian superflux of emotion and energy that I identify with woman and nature. In sex, man is driven into the very abyss which he flees. He makes a voyage to nonbeing and back.¹⁹

With his yellow stockings cross-gartered and a strange smile on his face, Malvolio sallies forth to pursue and court Olivia, oblivious to the trick being played upon him by her chambermaid Maria. So impressed is Sir Toby Belch with Maria’s clever ruse, that he exclaims, “I could marry this wench for this device,” although a moment later he also acknowledges his unease, wondering: “Wilt thou set thy foot o’ my neck?” referring to Maria as “thou most excellent devil of wit!” (Twelfth Night, II, v, 200, 204,

¹⁹ Paglia, 28-29.

226). Succumbing finally to Maria's charms, he summons her, "Come by and by to my chamber" (IV, ii, 76), and we learn that he has indeed married her in the end—an upwardly mobile (in a social-position sense only!) move for her and a gesture that entitles him to at least *try* to control her, although we are left in little doubt what that outcome will be.

Although Rosalind's heart was tripped up in an instant by Orlando, she manages to keep her wits unlike Orlando, who develops a fever that drives him to strut around the forest pinning badly-written odes to Rosalind on the innocent young trees.

Likewise Benedick—set up for a glorious fall by the playwright when he declares, "I will live a bachelor" (Much Ado, I, i, 249), and concerning Beatrice he remarks, "I would not marry her though she were endowed with all that Adam had left him before he transgressed" (II, i, 257-259)—will soon be reduced to complete distraction by his attraction to Beatrice, rationalizing his turnabout thus, "When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married" (III, i, 251). Beatrice suffers a similar fate when she falls for Benedick, but she does not balk at using his devotion to right the terrible wrong committed against her kinswoman Hero. Although her motivation is revenge, not naked ambition, Beatrice shares Lady Macbeth's frustration at her feminine limitations; "Oh, God, that I were a man!" she taunts Benedick, "Oh, that I were a man for his [Claudio's] sake! Or that I had any friend would be a man for my sake!" (IV, ii, 308, 319-321). In other words, "If you really loved me you would kill Claudio," Beatrice insists. And Benedick reluctantly agrees, "I will challenge him...by

this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account” (IV, ii, 334, 336). Having won his love, Beatrice drops whatever pretense of the *femininity* that is expected of her—in a ferocious display of loyalty to Hero and by now it is too late for Benedick.

Olivia’s chambermaid Maria, Celia’s cousin Rosilind/Ganymede, Hero’s cousin Beatrice, Orsino’s page Cesario/Viola, Proteus’s page Sebastian/Julia; all share a common characteristic. Like the Agnes in our story, they serve higher-born albeit less worthy persons and each woman, to varying degrees, must rely on her wit to survive and thrive within the narrow confines of her social sphere. In the case of both Maria and Portia, it is their writing that singles them out as extraordinary.

Finding another brilliant and successfully disguised female in Ser Giovanni Florentino’s *Il Percorone*,²⁰ the playwright has adapted the story for stage²¹ and given us Portia. Bent on a serious task, in disguise as a Doctor of Law, she is so able that she arouses no suspicion about her identity. In a celebrated speech of just twenty-one lines, Portia awes the court, eliciting praise first from the plaintive, “A Daniel come to judgment! Yes, A Daniel!” (*Merchant of Venice*, IV, i, 223) and then from the defense, “O upright judge! Mark, Jew. O learned judge!” (IV, i, 313). Portia is also a woman in love, which doesn’t mean she won’t give her beloved a hard time. Once she has transacted a promise from her Bassanio never to part with the ring she gives him, she reenacts on a comic level Antonio’s standing surety of his life for Bassanio. Still in disguise, she requests with typical persuasive skill the ring as reward for her triumph in

²⁰ Francis Griffin Stokes, *Who’s Who in Shakespeare* (London: Bracken Books, 1996), 213.

²¹ *The Merchant of Venice*.

court. Then she gives the ring extracted from Bassanio to Antonio with the comment, “Then you shall be his [Bassanio’s] surety. Give him this and bid him keep it better than the other” (V, i, 254, 255).

Before revealing her role at court, Portia will needle Bassanio for parting with the ring and then confound him with the information that she has lain with the Doctor of Law. Conclusion: Portia is pleased to be outwitting her Bassanio. It’s likely that the playwright is equally pleased. Ultimately the hapless Bassanio succumbs to Portia’s charms: “Sweet Doctor, you shall be my bedfellow when I am absent, then lie with my wife” (V, i, 284, 285).

When wooing the French princess Katherine, the halting, inept Henry V is quite full of himself on every line. And when his self-awareness leads him to demean his wooing skill, he immediately accuses “fellows of infinite tongue” with fraud:

Take a fellow of plain and uncoined constancy, for he perforce must do thee right, because he hath not the gift to woo in other places. For these fellows of infinite tongue that can rhyme themselves into ladies’ favors, they do always reason themselves out again. What! A speaker is but a prater, a rhyme is but a ballad. (Henry V, V, ii, 159-166)

Henry’s intentions are to woo Katherine, but there is also an underlying menace beneath his marriage proposal: “I love France so well that I will not part with a village of it. I will have it all mine” (V, ii, 183-185). He goes on to wrap in pretty paper the fact that both she and her belongings will become his possession once they marry, “And, Kate,

when France is mine and I am yours, then yours is France and you are mine” (V, ii, 185-186).

Over and over again, the playwright reminds the audience of male inconstancy and male ineptness with women. This theme emerges again when women undertake the wooing business themselves. We hear, in Rosalind’s voice, the playwright’s most authentic voice, wise and vigorous. In an earlier Rosalind story, a likely source for As You Like It, Thomas Lodge describes Roselyhnde’s tutoring in a few swift lines:

Ganymede, to persuade him to stay longer, pretended to be Roselyhnde and encouraged Rosader [Orlando in AYLI] to woo her.²²

In Lodge’s version, the reader is left to imagine Ganymede’s instructions. In As You Like It, the disguised Rosalind not only tells Orlando in a series of role-playing dialogues how to woo a woman; after the disguise is unveiled, she gets the last word in the play’s epilogue, articulating another coup in performing lines normally assigned to a man:

It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue, but it is no more unhandsome to see the lord the prologue. (Epilogue, 1-3)

When Twelfth Night’s Viola, disguised as Cesario, presses the Duke’s suit with a reluctant Olivia, she is winsome and witty:

If I did love you in my master’s flame,
With such a suffering, such a deadly life,
In your denial I would find no sense,
I would not understand it. (I, v, 283-286)

²² G. B. Harrison, ed., Shakespeare: 23 Plays and Sonnets (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), 494.

Falling for the disguised Cesario, Olivia asks what “he” would do were he to woo her.

The audience knows that Viola responds as she would like Orsino to address to her. “I would,” she avers,

Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out ‘Olivia!’ Oh, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth,
But you should pity me! (I, v, 287-294)

The lines carry with them a pretty assumption: “A woman knows quite naturally what a man should do to accomplish proper wooing. See how Olivia falls for it!”

Like Rosalind and Viola, Isabella (Measure for Measure) and Portia (Merchant of Venice) provide the ironic humor associated with women in disguise. Each character manages her disguise successfully and the humor for the audience—in on the duping—is both seditious and ultimately restorative of the social order with its resolution. In Measure for Measure, the duping falls initially on the ruthless Angelo, who has been deputized to a position of power. Smitten after Isabella’s first visit to plead for her brother’s life, Angelo is in a dither as he anticipates her return:

Why does my blood thus muster to my heart,
Making both it unable for itself,
And dispossessing all my other parts
Of necessary fitness? (II, iv, 20-23)

Isabella confronts and undoes the propositioning Angelo, who has been enjoying his imperious position and doesn't like to be laughed at:

Oh, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant...
Man, proud man,
Dressed in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven
As make the angels weep—who with our spleens,
Would all themselves laugh mortal. (II, ii, 107-109, 117-123)

The noble duke offers no clues about his affections before he mentions his intentions to Isabella. His position, like Henry V's, seems to grant him the right to make quick work of wooing, when he addresses Isabella at the city gate (in the presence of all the major players and townspeople). The proposal comes from a character used to issuing commands:

For your lovely sake,
Give me your hand and say you will be mine. (V, i, 496-497)

He winds up his proposal with business-like lines that remind us once again that the Elizabethan woman gives up everything to her husband, when she marries:

Dear Isabel,
I have a motion much imports your good,
Whereto if you'll a willing ear incline,
What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine.
So bring us to our palace, where we'll show
What's yet behind, that's meet you all should know. (V, i, 540-545)

The dramatist settles, as the audience would expect, for a tidy display of the competent male swooping in to claim his bride, but the subtext of feminine maneuvering is strong.

The other side of male absurdity in pursuit of the female, according to Paglia is the “element of entrapment in female sex, a subliminal manipulation leading to physical and emotional infantilization of the male.”²³ And those manly men, who appear to resist this feminine manipulation most successfully, tend to make their appearances in the tragedies.

In her 1876 article entitled “The Mistaken Vocation of Shakespeare’s Heroines” Emily Perkins Bissell chides the author for putting the wrong women in the plays: “The masculine conception of feminine character has thus been forced upon us. Shall we submit?... Or shall we test the poet by the higher criticism of advanced Womanly thought?” She argues that “the tragedy is not, as some have falsely asserted, in the nature of the heroes of these plays, but in the misplacement of the heroines.”²⁴ While expressing sympathy for the “gentle, obedient” Ophelia, Bissell insists “the woman for Hamlet, ladies, was Lady Macbeth!” because “it is sixteen to one, my sisters, that Hamlet would have killed the king half an hour after Lady Macbeth came to court.”²⁵ Bissell then places Portia in Lady Macbeth’s place; either Beatrice or Juliet as a substitute for Desdemona for, “Beatrice, by her quick wit, would have dispersed his jealousies like a

²³ Paglia, 38.

²⁴ Emily Perkins Bissell (pseudonym Pricilla Leanard), “The Mistaken Vocation of Shakespeare’s Heroines,” *The Century Magazine* LIII, no. 2 (new series vol. XXXI) Christmas number (December 1876): 319-20 [reprinted in *The American Shakespeare Magazine* 3 (December 1897): 369-72]. Reprinted in Thompson and Roberts, 233.

²⁵ Thompson and Roberts, 234.

summer cloud, laughed away his suspicions, and teased him out of his authority,"²⁶ and Rosalind takes Cordelia's place, "She would have been more than a match afterward, single-handed, for Regan and Goneril combined."²⁷ Bissell finishes by declaring, "In a word, ladies, with these heroines in their appropriate places, there would have been no tragedies at all among Shakespeare's works!"²⁸

Juliet Fleming points out that parodies such as Barrie's "The Ladies' Shakespeare" reveal that male scholars have failed to recognize "that self-directed humor has also been characteristic of women's approaches to Shakespeare,"²⁹ as is demonstrated in Bissell's article and in Mrs Lauch Macluarin's 1897 piece, "The Woman whom Shakespeare did not Contemplate." Macluarin bemoans the fate of Shakespeare's heroines as "maidens out of employment...with no way out of distress or dilemma but a husband," unable to "go out in the world...and demand her share of purse and property."³⁰ Macluarin reproaches the playwright for failing to write a businesswoman into any of the plays, while forgiving him at the same time: "We do not blame him. How could he anticipate her, great man that he was, any more than he could the typewriter and phonograph and other pleasant and surprising things we have?"³¹

Wit and humor have functioned, often in undetected ways, to define and alter the

²⁶ Thompson and Roberts, 234.

²⁷ Thompson and Roberts, 235.

²⁸ Thompson and Roberts, 235.

²⁹ Fleming, 5.

³⁰ Mrs Lauch Macluarin, "The Woman whom Shakespeare did not Contemplate," The American Shakespeare Magazine 3 (November 1897): 331-5 (read at the reception given to the board, of the State Federation of Literary Clubs, by the Shakespeare [sic] Club of Dallas, 28 October 1897). Reprinted in Thompson and Roberts, 245.

³¹ Thompson and Roberts, 245.

balance of relationships. In a recent study conducted jointly at Vanderbilt and Cornell universities, anthropologists looked at how “men and women respond to and use laughter.”³² When women are “alone or with other women, they...[are] more subdued.” Other significant differences are also apparent in the way each gender uses laughter. “Women laugh more wildly around male strangers, but men laugh the most with their buddies.” The researchers concluded, “Laughing is not just an emotional reaction but also a social signal” that makes “evolutionary sense”.³³ Speculating that “laughter evolved as a unique way to make and break alliances,” Michael Owren (the only male researcher involved in the study) theorizes that

when the women in this study laughed more wildly with male strangers, they may have been unconsciously arousing the men. Not in a sexual way, but enough to make the guy feel positive. That’s a good idea, because unfamiliar males pose a physical and sexual threat to women. ‘When women have men in this state—in a good mood and ever hopeful [for sex]—they are more malleable.’³⁴

Thus a woman’s laughter and self-deprecating wit when directed at males, instead of carrying the bite it might otherwise suggest, is more likely to be accepted as a signal of friendly intentions even though self-deprecatory humor can also operate as a tool women use to fight their devaluation in a patriarchal culture. As Walker points out:

Laughing at one’s shortcomings is not only a way of diminishing their importance and potentially overcoming them but is also a technique for cleansing them of pejorative connotations imposed by the dominant culture and, thereby, turning them into strengths.³⁵

³² Meredith F. Small, “More Than the Best Medicine,” *Scientific American* (August 2000): 24.

³³ Small, 24.

³⁴ Small, 24.

³⁵ Nancy Walker, xxiii.

We see this happen in As You Like It when Rosalind, disguised as the boy Ganymede, offers to help Orlando get over his infatuation with her. Pretending to be a great expert in such matters she describes her previous experience with another love-sick lad:

He was to imagine me his love, his mistress, and I set him every day to woo me. At which time would I, being but a moonish [fickle, changeable as the moon] youth, grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles, for every passion something and for no passion truly anything, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this color. Would now like him, now loathe him; then entertain him, then forswear him; now weep for him; then spit at him; that I drave my suitor from his mad humor of love to a living humor of madness, which was to forswear the full stream of the world and to live in a nook merely monastic. And thus I cured him, and this way will I take upon me to wash your liver as clean as a sound sheep's heart; that there shall not be one spot of love in't. (III, ii, 427-445)

For the audience, who are in on the game, the source of humor in this passage is connected to the gender identity of the speaker. A witty woman, pretending to be a man, is disparaging her own sex. Ironically, it is Rosalind who manages to keep her wits, using reverse psychology by pointing out that the only—and unattractive—alternative to Orlando's present state of love-sick angst is to lock himself away in a monastery. In other words, resistance is useless and more often than not it will lead to tragedy.

Another explanation for the misogyny in works attributed to Shakespeare may be found in Christopher Wilson's explanation of Freud's contention that the ability to laugh at oneself was a "triumph of narcissism and assertion of invulnerability."³⁶ Of course Freud also theorized that self-deprecatory humor was aggression directed at others, which

³⁶ Christopher Wilson, Jokes: Form, Content, Use and Function (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 142.

had turned inward.³⁷ This idea offers an alternative interpretation of Grazia's contention that the Sonnet's speaker promotes paederastic love between men while at the same time disparaging gynerastic ["the love that inflameth men with lust toward womankind"³⁸] love. Grazia, proposes that the traditional male/female categories

be reconsidered under rubrics available in the period, appearing in E. K.'s note to the Shepherdes Calendar defending Hobbino's passion for young Colin Clout on the grounds that 'paederastice [is] much to be preferred before gynerastice.'³⁹

Grazia contends that the preference for paederastic love was based on the importance of social distinctions, in danger of becoming muddled when adulterous affairs produce less than pure copies of *the lovely April of her prime*.⁴⁰ A consideration of Freud's theories must be accompanied by an acknowledgement of the cultural context within which the plays and sonnets were written—the English Renaissance—when both the audience and reader expected to be told that women were inferior beings.

Citing Thomas Laqueur's bold contention that 'sometime in the eighteenth century, sex as we know it was invented,'⁴¹ Grazia points out:

Until then there was essentially one sex rather than two. According to the classical or Galenic model, the female possessed an inverted, interior, and inferior version of male genitalia; as countless anatomical drawing attest, the uterus was imagined as an inverted scrotum, the vagina an inverted penis, the vulva an inverted foreskin... Not until the eighteenth century

³⁷ Sigmund Freud, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (1905), in vol. 8 of The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, James Strachey, ed. and trans. (London: Hogarth Press, 1931).

³⁸ Grazia, 102.

³⁹ Grazia, 102.

⁴⁰ Sonnet 3.

⁴¹ Thomas Laqueur, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), 149. Cited in Grazia, 98.

were male and female typically divided into two discrete sexes...hence the invention of 'sex as we know it.' The shift is reflected in an array of verbal and graphic representations: the construction of a different skeleton for women than for men; anatomical drawings representing incommensurate reproductive structures rather than homologous ones; the division of formerly shared nomenclature into male and female so that once ungendered sperm, testicles, and stones are gendered male and differentiated from female eggs and ovaries. In short, a reproductive biology was constructed based on *absolute* rather than *relative* difference.⁴²

Grazia traces the ways in which the hierarchy preserved the male preference in reference to grammatical agreement. For example, "in his popular rhetoric (1553), Thomas Wilson considered natural order violated when women preceded men in syntactic construction, since man was clearly the dominant gender,"⁴³ and

in his official Latin grammar (1567), William Lyly assumed the same principle in explaining that an adjective describing both a male and female noun must agree with the male ("Rex et Regina Beati") because "The masculine gender is more worthy than the feminine."⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the strong female characters in the plays attributed to Shakespeare are subversive in part because they prove more worthy than their male counterparts. And they are funny, particularly when they dress as men. Women are not supposed to be funny when they dress as men, according to incongruity theorists who—as Naranjo-Huebl points out—would argue that "it is assumed that women have something to gain by assuming a male role, so we are not surprised when women sport men's clothing."⁴⁵ On

⁴² Grazia, 98.

⁴³ Grazia, 99.

⁴⁴ Grazia, 99.

⁴⁵ Naranjo-Huebl, 14.

the other hand, Naranjo-Huebl posits that “it is perceived that men have nothing to gain in a female role; to do so strikes anyone in a patriarchal culture as extremely incongruous and catches us by surprise,”⁴⁶ and the result is laughter when loveable scoundrel Falstaff dons Mother Prat’s dress to evade a husband he intends to cuckold and the hapless mechanicals in A Midsummer Night’s Dream inspire “very tragical mirth” with their mangled rendition of “a tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe” (V, i, 56-57).

The life and death stakes are much higher and the reasons for cross-dressing more serious for Portia, Rosalind, Viola and Julia, who engage in what Regenia Gagnier would call “a process of imaginative engagement,”⁴⁷ that enables them to use their temporary status to revision their place in a patriarchal world that threatens them.

Naranjo-Huebl urges the use of humor as a tactical measure designed to diffuse the strong undercurrent of anger in minority expressions of dissent because women who define and defend their own position in a focused (male) manner as marginalized females report finding slower acceptance.

A new teacher, Karen Powers-Stubbs, provided her class with what she “thought was solid evidence that women and their accomplishments are devalued in contemporary society”. She describes the reaction of her students:

⁴⁶ Naranjo-Huebl, 14.

⁴⁷ Regenia Gagnier, “Between Women: A Cross-class Analysis of Status and Anarchic Humor,” Women’s Studies 15 (1988): 140.

Ironically, although my position as a teacher granted me the authority to present my view through readings and discussion, my students' nearly unanimous rejection of both my experiential knowledge and my scholarly knowledge worked, in effect, to silence me. The class as a whole (with the exception of one minority female student) systematically denied that social inequity shapes our culture despite my arguments to the contrary... The glares and body language of most of the other students in the class signified tacit, if not vocal, agreement.⁴⁸

Like many new teachers, Powers-Stubbs' earnest approach may have contributed to the student reaction to her research. Owren's research on laughter also indicated that "the right laugh at the right time can even manipulate others".⁴⁹ Certainly laughter can make our audience/readers vulnerable and thus more receptive to our ideas. Women utilizing humor to achieve acceptance of their positions have learned to be clever. In their long history of modulating their voices to be tentative—never strident—in the not-so-open forums, they have even resorted to precise rules regarding laughter.

In her 1897 book that opens with a question—"Can anything be nicer than a really nice girl?"—Mrs Humphry devotes an entire chapter on "Learning to Laugh". Her Manners for Women offers detailed advice to her readers, urging them to guard against "the inculcated laugh [as it] is apt to grow stereotyped, and few things are more irritating than to hear it over and over again." In describing "the perfect laugh," Mrs Humphry opines, "There is no greater ornament to conversation than the ripple of silvery notes that forms the perfect laugh."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Powers-Stubbs, 313.

⁴⁹ Small, 24.

⁵⁰ Mrs Humphry, Manners for Women (1897; Kent, England: Pryor, 1993), 13.

The earnest Mrs Humphry assures her readers that “there are many reasons why the careful culture of the laugh should be attended to.”⁵¹ At least one of those reasons concerns the lesson psychologist Jo-Anne Bachorowski learned from her research on laughter more than a century later: “I know now to snort and grunt only with friends but never around men I want to impress.”⁵² Apparently Bachorowski has a circle of female friends who respond positively to her snorts and grunts. No longer appropriating male disguise to achieve academic or publication acceptance, women are finding their broadened repertoire of responses a challenge to both male and female liaisons.

The title of an article that appeared in the student women’s magazine at Melbourne University—“Help, I’m a High Heel-Wearing, Lipstick-Loving, Man-Crazy Feminist!”—illustrates Kathy Bail’s contention that “we can no longer assume that young women will want to experience feminism in the same way as their older sisters. Indeed many feminist texts have been left on the shelf.”⁵³ One of the tasks for the next wave of feminist writers must be to consider how best to package the rhetoric of dissent.

In her essay, “Frock Power”, Australian funny *grrrl*, Lisbeth Gorr, tells how she beat the bully boys at the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission) to become one of the first women working in television sports: “I made my own way: by making jokes, sending the whole situation up, and smashing anything ‘uncomfortable’ that was lobbed at me straight back down the line.”⁵⁴ But at the same time Gorr wonders if feminists’

⁵¹ Humphry, 13.

⁵² Small, 24.

⁵³ Kathy Bail, introduction to *DIY Feminism*, ed. Kathy Bail (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 7.

⁵⁴ Lisbeth Gorr, “Frock Power,” in *DIY Feminism*, Kathy Bail, ed. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 27.

advancement toward freedom and changing roles is accompanied by a naïve expectation that males are not also changing their traditional roles. She asks,

Do we allow men the same choices as we now have? Do we still expect them to be breadwinner and protector, regardless of our own position in life? Has our early conditioning of princes on horses and living happily ever after caught up with the realities of the nineties?⁵⁵

If today's women sound confused, it may be because they are walking a fine line between genuine, comfortable interaction that assumes equal interplay of good-humored negotiation and a more radical position of self-defense, forged in loyalty to a sisterhood that preaches vigilance against the threat of retrenchment. Dale Spender points out:

It was once stated in a volume signed by John Stuart Mill—but on his own admission the ideas within it were generated by [his wife] Harriet Taylor—that it was not enough for women to be slaves, they must be willing slaves. When women begin to generate their own knowledge they are often no longer willing, . . . the hold that men have over women may be pervasive but it is fragile, for it relies so heavily on women's consensus.⁵⁶

The seductive power of a prince on a white horse is hard to shake. One of the tasks facing feminists must be to consider how to continue making gains on behalf of women and marginalized others, while maintaining the fragile consensus of a growing population of men who are also able to see the need for a transition.

Lynn Worsham argues that “feminism names a rich and variegated history that moves in many directions and develops from many different, contradictory, and

⁵⁵ Gorr, 30-31.

⁵⁶ Spender, 81.

competing interests.”⁵⁷ And it is that “rich and variegated history” that provides a touchstone for larger questions to be raised, examined and remembered. What was the political and cultural climate that gave birth to feminism? And has that climate become more hospitable to women? The answer must be an equivocal *yes*. Compelled to disguise their efforts as men’s, women long ago demonstrated an ability to write and publish in a man’s world, to compete in work output and to employ language popularly identified as men’s. They were swimming against a powerful stream of accepted stereotypes.

Even in the setting of what is considered to be the scientific study of language, female readers must have questioned Otto Jespersen’s characterization of women’s language. Lillian Bridwell-Bowles offers an excerpt from his 1922 book (Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin) written “during the genesis of modern linguistics.” She explains that “many students are shocked to see the biases in the foundational texts of linguistic ‘science’”—for example, in the following passage:

Men will certainly with great justice object that there is a danger of the language becoming languid and insipid if we are always to content ourselves with women’s expressions, and that vigour and vividness count for something... [T]he vocabulary of a woman as a rule is much less extensive than that of a man... [W]oman is linguistically quicker than man: quicker to learn, quicker to hear, and quicker to answer. A man is slower: he hesitates, he chews the cud to make sure of the taste of the words, and thereby comes to discover similarities with and differences from other words, both in sound and in sense, thus preparing himself for the appropriate use of the fittest noun or adjective.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Lynn Worsham, “Working Titles and Entitlement(s): Feminism, Composition Studies, and the Politics of Publication,” Composition Forum 8, no. 2 (1997): 24.

⁵⁸ Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, “Discourse and Diversity: Experimental Writing within the Academy,” College Composition and Communication 43, no. 3 (1992): 355.

The “fittest noun or adjective” is scarcely the concern of the dramatist whose works are under examination here. Copious use of anthismsria (the use of one word class with the function of another) in these works would drive a purist grammarian to editorial mayhem. Instead of using the “fittest noun,” this dramatist crossed borders then established for parts of speech, excelling particularly in making verbs from nouns:

Season your admiration for a while...

It *out-herods* Herod...

Grace me no grace, nor *uncle* me no uncle...

Julius Caesar/Who at Phillip the good Brutus *ghosted*...

Destruction straight shall *dog* them at the heels...

I am *proverbed* with a grandsire phrase...

Citing an example from 2 Henry IV, Kay Stanton points out that “at least...Shakespeare [does something] that lexicographers rarely do: crediting women for linguistic coinages.”⁵⁹ The passage that Stanton refers to has Falstaff describing Justice Shallow as “lecherous as a monkey, and the whores called him mandrake” (III, ii, 337-38). In another favorite word play, we find neologistic compounds:

a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy worsted-stocking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking whoreson, glass-gazing superserviceable, finical rogue. (King Lear II, ii, 15)

⁵⁹ Kay Stanton, “Made to write ‘whore’ upon?": Male and Female Use of the Word ‘Whore’ in Shakespeare’s Canon,” cited in Callaghan, 89.

More linguistic play emerges in naming characters, especially characters on the bottom rung of social classes, although we also have Miranda (meaning “fit to be admired”) in The Tempest, a name invented by the playwright.⁶⁰ The cast lists of any of the comedies yields a colorful array: Bottom, Flute, Starveling, and Snout in A Midsummer Night’s Dream; Fang, Snare, Moldy, Shadow, Wart, and Feeble, soldiers in 2 Henry IV; Sir Toby Belch in Twelfth Night; Sir Owen Mar-Text, clergyman, in As You Like It whose Biblical interpretations are suspect; and yes, some women as well: Mistress Overdone, a bawd in Measure for Measure, and Madam Quickly, tavern hostess in 2 Henry IV, Henry V, and Merry Wives of Windsor. We are asking Jespersen, “Shall we attribute the coinages and inventions to a man’s sense of fitness or a woman’s linguistic quickness?”

Jespersen’s pompous pronouncements almost mirror those made by the poet laureate, Robert Southey, in correspondence with Charlotte Brontë, contained in Brian Wilks’ account of their lives:

Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation. *Keswick, March 1837.*⁶¹

Brontë responded to Southey with a ladylike compliance that veiled her defiance:

Following my father’s advice...I have endeavoured...to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil... I don’t always succeed, for sometimes when I’m teaching or sewing, I would rather be reading or writing; but I

⁶⁰ David Crystal, Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 150

⁶¹ Wilks, 47.

try to deny myself; and my father's approbation amply rewarded me for the privation. *Roe Head, March 1837.*⁶²

Brian Wilks remarks:

How thankful we should be that the 21-year-old Charlotte stood up to Southey; and how interesting it is to note her unwavering insistence on a woman's need to think...[failing to heed] Southey's warning that her 'daydreams (were) likely to induce a distempered state of mind.'⁶³

Of course Southey was merely passing on certain unquestioned historical assumptions also voiced by a Renaissance specialist on the education of women. Carroll Camden reports that, in The Necessarie Fit and Convenient Education of Yong Gentlewomen, Giovanni Michele Bruto warns against young ladies learning the "humane Arts" because

woman was given by nature to man to serve as a companion in his labors, and she should therefore be so busy in running the house that she has no time for recreation, not to speak of the fact that studies which bring pleasure can only be granted to women with the danger that they will have the beauty and glory of their delicate minds injured; and as far as the profit is concerned, they cannot profit by something which will do them harm, and they have no need for the profit anyway, since they are neither to govern estates or commonwealths nor to teach the laws of philosophy.⁶⁴

Camden concludes that "Bruto's reasoning seems to be of the circular variety; having wound himself up in a veritable cocoon of ratiocination, he remains a prisoner of his own tenuous theorizing".⁶⁵

⁶² Wilks, 47.

⁶³ Wilks, 47.

⁶⁴ Camden, 46.

⁶⁵ Camden, 46.

Naranjo-Huebl likes to amuse students in her women's literature classes with discussions of the etymological history of words such as "uterus," which is related to "hysteria" because Victorian doctors believed "that the uterus traveled throughout the female body causing mysterious and unaccountable illnesses in women."⁶⁶ Martin Luther's ideas about the roles of men and women provide some mirth and offer insight into the patriarchal roots of the church he founded:

Men have broad shoulders and narrow hips, and accordingly they possess intelligence. Women have narrow shoulders and broad hips. Women ought to stay at home; the way they were created indicates this, for they have broad hips and a wide fundament to sit upon (keep house and bear and raise children).⁶⁷

Although it is impossible to predict with any certainty what comic story will tickle a person's funny bone, Naranjo-Huebl describes what happens when a joke is told:

For a joke to occur, the performer must get (demand?) the attention of the audience, and the audience must signal their attention with eye contact, verbal response, and so on. The performer then presents a set of circumstances, often in the form of a question ('How does a Jewish-American Princess...?'). This is a position of power for the performer in that he or she possesses information about these circumstances that the audience does not. The audience signals that they are allowing the performer to be funny by responding to the question ('I don't know, how does a Jewish-American Princess...?'). The performer then delivers the punch line, an unexpected outcome of the circumstances, and expects the audience to be impressed or amused. The audience responds, showing that they 'get' the humor by laughing or rolling their eyes, or providing some other nonverbal response.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Naranjo-Huebl, 8.

⁶⁷ Martin Luther, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 1531; cited in Tama Starr, ed., *The "Natural Inferiority" of Women: Outrageous Pronouncements by Misguided Males* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1991), 178.

⁶⁸ Naranjo-Huebl, 18.

At the risk of over-generalizing—and conscious of the enlightened sensibilities of several extraordinary male friends who do not fit into this broad category—it is useful nevertheless to consider the findings of several studies summed up by Crawford who concludes:

Men talk more, hold the floor, tell jokes, interrupt women and ignore women's contributions to dialogue. Women tell more personal stories, support others in the conversational spotlight, and collaborate more than they compete.⁶⁹

Naranjo-Huebl goes on to point out that this scenario closely parallels the description of male-female interactions in Deborah Tannen's book, You Just Don't Understand, in which "the male is performer and the woman is audience/helper," supporting "Barreca and Lakoff's notion that women, in leaving the joke telling to men, are simply fulfilling culturally prescribed roles."⁷⁰ In The Taming Of the Shrew, this practice is inverted. Scholars and critics have long puzzled over the domestication of Katherina and her final speech in praise of the culturally prescribed role of a wife. Often perceived as an apology for misogyny by directors who fail to read the nuances of Petruchio's sensitive actions because they are blinded by the bravado of his words—the play also examines the difference between wife-taming and fantasies about wife-taming.

At the conclusion of The Taming of the Shrew, it is Katherina who demands the attention of the audience, for a wager has been placed on Petruchio's ability to rule her. Katherina then presents a question, "What is your will, sir, that you send for me?" (V, ii, 99). Now she is in a position of power over her audience because she alone appears to

⁶⁹ Crawford, 32.

⁷⁰ Naranjo-Huebl, 18.

possess information about her likely behavior. What then follows are Katherina's surprising punch lines—rich with irony—where she chastises her insufferably sweet younger sister Bianca and the other wives who have knit their brows unkindly towards their husbands. Having once borne the brunt of their humiliating taunts, it must give Katherina some satisfaction to turn the tables on her detractors, while earning a nice fee in league with her eccentric husband. The joke is a private one between husband and wife. That they are engaged in a sting operation seems apparent when Petruchio finally interrupts Katherina, worried perhaps that she is overdoing it in the 44 lines the playwright has given her to chastise the ladies for their “peevish, sullen, sour” disobedience to their husbands. “Why, there’s a wench! Come on and kiss me, Kate” (V, v, 179), he says, fearing that those assembled will soon realize they are being duped. After all, the playwright has already told us that it is important not to exaggerate if the action is to be believed. At the beginning of the play, Christopher Sly, a drunken tinker, is fooled into believing that he is a nobleman by pranksters, one of whom urges the others to

This do, and do it kindly [naturally], gentle sirs.
It will be pastime passing [exceedingly] excellent
If it be husbanded with modesty [carried out without excess, not overdone]. (I, i, 66-68)

Beneath the horseplay and farce in this story, lies a remarkably hopeful testament to unconventional relationships between men and women along with a celebration of an unruly woman and the man who dares to love her.

XVI. AS BLACK AS HELL, AS DARK AS NIGHT

Shakespeare's visit to Mary Sidney's estate

Documents from the 17th century identify Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, as a woman of excellent literary taste and of distinctive literary talent, . . . the most famous patroness of literature of her time. She was praised by a host of poets . . . The countess' estate at Wilton became an academy of learning where poets and artists were encouraged and supported. On December 2, 1603, Shakespeare's company performed at Wilton, while the court was residing there to escape the plague in London. According to a story printed in 1865 and regarded as credible by E.K. Chambers, there was in existence at one time a letter from the countess to her son, William Herbert, 3rd earl of Pembroke, telling him to invite James I to a performance of 'As You Like It.' The letter concluded with the comment, 'We have the man Shakespeare with us.'¹

DeVere's tangle with Sir Philip Sidney

Some years earlier (1579) a highly-publicized quarrel ensued between Mary Sidney's brother, Sir Philip Sidney, and the Earl of Oxford. According to eyewitnesses, Sidney was playing tennis when the Earl arrived and rudely insisted that Sidney leave so that he could play. Ogburn cites Greville's Life of the Renowned Sir Philip Sidney, in describing the incident:

Sir Philip answers that if his lordship had been pleased to express desire in milder characters perchance he might have led out those that he should now find would not be driven out with any scourge of fury. The answer (like a bellows) blowing up sparks of excess already kindled, made my Lord scornfully call Sir Philip by the name of 'puppy.'²

Playing to a gallery full of spectators, Sidney then

asked my lord, with a loud voice, that which he had heard clearly enough before. Who—like an echo, that still multiplies by reflexions—repeats this

*epithet of 'Puppy' the second time. Sir Philip resolving in one answer to conclude both the attentive hearers and passionate actor, gave my lord a lie, impossible—as he averred—to be retorted; in respects all the world knows, puppies are gotten by dogs, and children by men.*³

Oxford was apparently left speechless. "Thereupon, Sir Philip, tender of his Country's honour; with some words of sharp accent, led the way abruptly out of the Tennis-Court."⁴ The Queen, eventually forced to wade in, seeing

*that by loss or disgrace of either could gain nothing, presently undertakes Sir Philip, and (like an excellent Monarch) lays before him the difference in degree between Earls and Gentlemen, the respect inferiors owed their superiors, and the necessity in Princes to maintain their own creations, as degrees descending between the people's licentiousness and the anointed sovereignty of Crowns; how the Gentleman's neglect of the Nobility taught the peasant to insult both.*⁵

Ogburn also points out that Oxford had a reputation for spending considerable sums on his eccentric apparel and he was, according to Ruth Lloyd Miller, "a singular passing odd man,' independent in dress."⁶

Female performance in the Elizabethan theater

Stephen Orgel's study, Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England, challenges long-held beliefs about the role of women in Elizabethan theatre. According to Orgel, "There was no stigma whatever attached to women performing in plays, so long as they did not do it as a profession."⁷ Citing newly discovered evidence of the roles played by women, it is Orgel's contention that historical "evidence does not support any blanket claim that women were excluded from the stages of Renaissance England, but it may certainly indicate that the culture, and the history that descends from it, had an interest in rendering them unnoticeable."⁸

King James I married Princess Anne of Denmark in 1598. Queen Anne is credited with helping James develop an interest in drama. There is also historical evidence that the Earl of Oxford's daughter, Susan de Vere (who married the Countess of Pembroke's son, Philip Herbert, in 1605) took a part in a masque presented at Whitehall in 1605. Ogburn refers to Ruth Loyd Miller's evidence that

of the twenty-nine ladies of the court who appeared in the four masques by Jonson given between 1605 and 1610, Susan was one of the only three who took part in all four, . . . the other two being the Queen and Elizabeth's [Elizabeth de Vere, also Oxford's daughter] mother-in-law, the dowager Countess of Derby.⁹

The death of Queen Elizabeth is not mourned by William Shakespeare

When she died in March 1603, Queen Elizabeth's passing was commemorated and eulogized by poets throughout the land with one glaring exception according to Ogburn, who shares the accusing verse written by a "mischief-making Henry Chettle:"

*Nor doth the silver-tongued Melicert
Drop from his honeyed muse one sable tear,
To mourn her death that graced his desert
And to his lays opened her royal ear
Shepherd, remember our Elizabeth,
And sing her Rape, done by that Tarquin, Death.¹⁰*

1593-1603

The eerie sight of a specter silenced even the groundlings when Will appeared on the stage with his face painted a sickly gray as the ghost of Hamlet's father. From her favorite vantage point among the groundlings, Agnes watched her young husband with pride.

Although reluctant in the beginning, over ten years and twice as many plays Will had learned to embrace the fame and fortune associated with his role as the most popular dramatist in London. His keen ability to memorize long passages from the plays Agnes wrote lent credibility to the fiction, and Will's effort to contribute an occasional word or phrase helped to convince even him that he was worthy of some approbation. But fame and fortune had not been enough for the aspiring young thespian. He wanted to act. Agnes obliged by creating parts that he could handle along with advice on how to negotiate with the other members of the acting troupe for the roles—either they gave him the role or no script was forthcoming. Wanting to spare her husband from the sad truth about his acting skills, Agnes assured him that the others were jealous of his abilities and that it was best to let them take the larger roles, so that he could concentrate on his

writing. With his confidence thus bolstered, he attacked the part of the king's ghost—as he had done others—with gusto.

Agnes' nervous energy dispelled as it became apparent that the new play was working. Her attention wandered away from the stage to the noble men and women sitting in the galleries, including the sour-faced Peg Ramsey, who was reputed to be the author of anonymous Puritan tracts condemning the emerging influence of the theater. It gave Agnes some satisfaction to note that interest in what was happening on the stage had forestalled the usual flirtations and audience intercourse that occurred in less successful productions. Even the groundlings, who had paid a penny to stand and watch for two hours, were spellbound by the action.

Looking up at the open sky above and then back at the players on the stage and the multitude of dreams and dramas represented by each rapt member of the audience, a thought occurred to Agnes. "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." She must write that into a script somewhere.

Two hours later the capacity audience burst into applause as the actors took their bows. When Will appeared, a roar went up along with cries of, "Author! Author!" Searching the sea of faces, Will found Agnes and saw that she was pleased. And she was—for not only was this play working, she had already begun writing the next.

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When news of an outbreak of the plague caused the theaters in London to close, Will and Agnes were happy to return home to Stratford earlier than expected, and their arrival was met with much excitement by the children. Their joy was short-lived, however, when 11-year-old twins, Hamnet and Judith, were struck down with the plague. Although Judith recovered, little Hamnet remained dangerously ill. For the next few desperate days Agnes did not leave his side, while Will spent most of his time away at the tavern, drowning himself in strong drink—a habit that had begun to create friction between husband and wife.

On a warm August night, Hamnet called out for his father. Thinking that he was delirious with fever, Agnes went to his bedside, muttering, “Fathered he is, and yet he’s fatherless.”

“Where is my father?” Hamnet insisted.

Distraught and sleep-deprived, Agnes picked up his limp hand and replied bitterly, “Sirrah, your father’s dead.”

“My father is not dead, for all your saying.”

“Yes, he is dead. How wilt thou do for a father?” Agnes continued.

“Nay, how will you do for a husband?”

At this Agnes paused, realizing that the small boy was not delirious. Adopting a light-hearted tone she answered, “Why, I can buy me twenty at any market.”

“Then you’ll buy ‘em to sell again,” Hamnet replied, an obvious reference to arguments he’d overheard in which Agnes always insisted that the work she produced—in her husband’s name—should be sold and not given away, as Will was wont to do.

Amused by her son’s precocious wit, Agnes answered, “Thou speak’st with all thy wit, and yet, i’ faith, with wit enough for thee.”

After a moment, Hamnet asked, “Is your husband unfaithful, mother?”

Thinking of Edward, she answered, “Aye, that he was.”

“What is unfaithful?”

“Why, one that swears and lies.”

“And must they all be hanged that swear and lie?”

“Every one.”

“Who must hang them?”

“Why, the honest women.”

“Then the liars and swearers are fools, for there are liars and swearers enow to beat the honest women and hang up them.”

Laughing, Agnes replied, “Now, God help thee, poor monkey! But how wilt thou do for a father?”

“If he were dead, you’d weep for him,” Hamnet answered with a boyish grin.

“Poor prattler, how thou talk’st. Sleep you now,” she murmured soothingly.

Then with a little sigh, he turned over and fell into a deep sleep from which he never woke.

The death of their only son drove a wedge of heartbreak between Agnes and Will. For his part, Will gave himself over to drinking, while Agnes became lost in her writing, abandoning both of their grieving young daughters, who were left to cope on their own. Attempting to purge the guilt she felt for bringing sickness into her home, Agnes wrote of

dark things, foul and fetid stories of murdered children and destruction until one day the sound of her daughter Susanna's laughter woke her from the nightmare by reminding her of the children she had still living. Emerging from the solitude of her sorrow, Agnes was gradually able to write stories of love and laughter again. Will then began spending more time at home, although his heavy drinking was becoming more of a problem because it sometimes transformed him into an uncharacteristically cruel man.

One late night when Will was quite drunk and Agnes too had shared in the stoup of wine, they began to sing loud enough for the neighbors to hear.

Older than her years, Susanna appeared, "Do you make an alehouse here? Is there no respect of place, persons nor time in you?"

Staring at his daughter as if he was seeing her for the first time, Will answered, "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?"

"Yes, by Saint Anne, and ginger shall be hot i' the mouth too," Agnes added giggling.

With wordless disapproval, Susanna turned and swept from the room. Surprised, Will and Agnes waited until they thought she could not hear before bursting into gales of laughter.

“Marry, sir, sometimes she is a kind of Puritan,” Agnes gasped.

“If I thought that, I’d beat her like a dog,” Will slurred. “The devil a Puritan that he is. An affectioned ass she is. Another stoup of wine!”

On another such occasion when Agnes had already gone to bed, Will lashed out, “Thou art a bastard,” he snarled at Susanna, watching her piety crumble in a heap of confused hurt.

The next morning Will did not remember the incident and Susanna never spoke of the raw wound that would not heal. Although when sober, he was her kind and gentle father, Susanna kept at a distance from him ever after—unsure whether he had spoken the truth, she had grown fearful of hearing words inspired by his drunken temper.

Although the family settled into a routine, supported by a growing income from the plays, the death of their son had changed everything. The tension of blame and guilt hung perceptibly over the household. Agnes became increasingly caught up in the world of her imagination and books and both Judith and Susanna learned to resent the work that took her away from them.

The only place that Agnes and Will were able to forget about their son was the theater, where they enjoyed much success. And so, increasingly, that is where they spent their time, leaving the girls in the care of servants and relatives.

When Queen Elizabeth died on the 24th of March 1603, Will and Agnes fought bitterly over her refusal to join the other poet courtiers in writing a tribute to the monarch. Despite a great out-pouring of verse from lesser poets, Will was stranded by Agnes' steadfast refusal to honor the Queen with a eulogy.

However, so well established was Will that, two months after the Queen died, James I elevated him to the status of a "King's servant." When the worst plague outbreak in living memory struck London, the King provided his players with economic support. This, combined with the income from private performances, enabled Will and Agnes to support their household in comfort.

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The invitation to perform for the court at Wilton, the Earl of Pembroke's estate, in December was a welcome diversion. The Countess of Pembroke, patroness of several poets who were Will and Edward's rivals, intended to have some fun with the obnoxious Oxford, but also, she hoped, to indulge in a bit of rough trade with the now famous William Shakespeare.

The Countess looked forward to rubbing the Earl's nose in the acclaim enjoyed by the *rustic* from Stratford. With some glee she directed the players to perform the popular As You Like It, featuring a thinly-veiled caricature of the Earl.

At the age of 38, Will Shakespeare was a man in his prime, still in love with his wife of 20 years, yet haunted with a niggling doubt of her regard for him. It did not help that the Earl of Oxford met the players in the courtyard at Wilton as they arrived. Bowing low before the Earl, Will's heart sank as Edward waved everyone away—except for Agnes. Will remained kneeling, pretending not to understand that the Earl meant to dismiss him.

Although the courtyard was full of servants, time seemed to pause and the bustle and noise melted away as Edward reached down, to lift Agnes' chin, forcing her to meet the gaze of a man who had for a brief time called her "wife." She was surprised to find that the sight of his face—ravaged by licentious living and venereal disease—could still ignite in her the ghost of desire.

"Dear heart..." He spoke the words gently, and then overcome by the sight of her, he shuddered.

"Are you well, M'Lord?" she asked.

"No. Thou dost wound me with thine eyes, Agnes," he replied.

As if to answer him, Agnes lowered her head, bowing low before Edward and glancing to Will, who still knelt beside her.

Edward did not miss her glance. He stepped back as if struck. Then he roared as he dragged Agnes to her feet:

“Tell me thou lov’st elsewhere; but in my sight, dear heart, forbear to glance thine eye aside.”

Wild with thwarted possession, Edward continued to rant:

“Since I am near slain, kill me outright with looks and rid my pain. All my honest faith in thee is lost.”

Summoning the well-earned piss and vinegar that comes from spent youth, Agnes replied evenly, “Why of one oath’s breach do you accuse me when you break twenty? Thou art perjured most.”

Will caught his breath, fearful of the reaction her words would inspire. But Edward threw back his head and began to laugh. And when his laughter subsided, he once again fixed Agnes with an intent gaze. “Attend me in my chamber this evening,” he commanded before striding away.

In his wake the silence was thick and heavy—broken at last by Will. With feigned innocence he asked, “Why, I wonder, should the Earl of Oxford wish to have *me* attend him in his bedchamber this evening?”

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Later, Agnes pled with her husband not to antagonize the Earl by going in her place. But the alternative was something he was unwilling to contemplate. That night it was Will Shakespeare who knocked on the door of the Earl’s bedchamber. The door was opened by an attendant who stepped aside, allowing Will to pass.

Inside, a magnificent table was set before the open hearth, where a crackling fire blazed. Will saw that the sumptuous feast included Agnes’ favorite Christmas dish—a shield of brawn with mustard consisting of boar meat.

The Earl of Oxford stood next to the fire with a goblet of mulled wine in his hand, dressed in his signature style—a strange suit of purple and green silk. He was not happy at the sight of Will. “Where is Agnes?” he demanded.

“My wife attends the Countess in her chamber,” Will replied, bowing low. “Her Will attends thee in thine.”

“Clearly her *will* is not in this chamber because she is not here,” retorted the Earl.

“Her *desire* is for me,” Will paused meaningfully, “to attend thee here.”

After a moment of frozen silence the Earl replied, “It is not my desire that her Will should attend me in my bedchamber.”

Sighing as if in commiseration with the Earl, Will answered, “That is well because Agnes does not have a will, indeed I am the only Will my wife has, except for her own which bids me attend thee here.”

“I know thy wife’s will better than most,” Edward growled.

“Nay, sir. For we have only now been formally introduced and I am my wife’s Will.”

Growing annoyed, the Earl said, “What double talk is this, man?”

“Nay, she is a woman therefore she is without a will, ‘cept myself and her own.”

It dawned upon Edward that the rustic from Stratford was attempting to outwit him with some success. Amused, he countered with, “And does your wife command your will?”

“When I am fortunate she does so with her tongue.”

“A sharp tongue?”

“Nay, a tongue as soft and gentle as spring.”

“I remember such a tongue once ruled my will.”

With a forced smile, Will conceded the palpable hit.

Invigorated by the exchange and now curious to know more about Agnes’ husband, the Earl relented.

“Sit down and feed, and welcome to our table,” the Earl enjoined, pointing to the banquet, which filled the room with an intoxicating aroma.

And they fell upon the food with gusto. But despite Will’s best efforts to earn his supper with bawdy stories and anagrams, Edward’s mood darkened as the evening wore on.

Will's wicked anagram—about a London prelate with a well-known penchant for beautiful young men—“John Smithe why shit on him and then I think, my anagram will make his worship stink,”¹¹—met stony silence.

The fire had begun to die. The Earl fixed Will with a smoldering stare. “Drink,” said the Earl, “is a great provoker.”

“Ay, of three things, nose-painting, sleep and urine,” Will replied.

“Lechery, it provokes,” the Earl continued, with meaning.

“It provokes and unprovokes. It provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance. It makes him stand to and not stand to,” Will said, beginning to understand where the conversation was leading.

“A woman should take an elder than herself.” The Earl's speech was slurred. “For, boy, however we do praise ourselves, our fancies are more giddy and unfirm than women's are.”

“You know my play then?” Will countered.

“Your play? Your play!” the Earl laughed bitterly. “Yes, I know *her* play well. Come now, you and I are merely players and all the world is her stage.”

The Earl pushed away from the table and stood unsteadily, “I should like to have your part.”

“Thou art pricked out for women’s pleasure.” Will said this as he stood and began to back away from the Earl whose intentions were now clear as he closed the distance between them.

“She hath shown you the sonnets she writ to me?” the Earl gloated.

“We have no secrets,” Will replied.

“Then I shall give you one now that you’ll durst not share.”

The Earl lunged for Will, knocking into the table—sending the remnants of the dinner flying in all directions. They grappled for a moment before the Earl lost his footing, slipping on the slick of boar fat and wine that now spread across the stone floor, and landing with a sharp grunt. Will attempted to step around him, but the Earl grabbed his leg, causing him also to slip, coming down heavily beside him. The Earl rolled onto Will and tried to pin him, but in the natural flow of the struggle, Will’s knee came up

hard into Edward's crotch. Bellowing with pain, the Earl turned onto his back and cursed, "Thou whoreson, son and heir of a mongrel bitch."

Scrambling to his feet, Will replied, "Nay, it is thy mother who bore a bastard son my Agnes tells me. *My Agnes.*"

Now bawling with anger, the Earl reached up and viciously ripped Will's codpiece away, exposing his manhood.

In return, Will yanked the Earl's wig off, pressing the furry mess into a bowl of mustard that remained on the table.

But when Edward pulled Will down to the floor again and attempted to sodomize him, he was saved—the Earl was simply too drunk to perform.

Will crawled to the door. Dragging himself to his feet, he turned to survey the carnage and the limp body of the Earl, now slumped in a mash of brawn.

Will never spoke of what transpired that night in the Earl's bedchamber. Agnes noted the ripped codpiece, the food scraps, the sour wine stains—and, sick at heart, she watched her beloved scrub his body raw with cold water from the washbasin before he came to bed. Neither of them slept, relieved when the morning arrived and they could busy themselves with preparations for the evening's entertainment.

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A musician set under an arbor, signifying the entrance to Arden Forest, played a lyre and sang, “Come hither, come hither, come hither,” as the guests arrived in the great hall leaving the choice seats adjacent to the stage for the royal party. King James entered without his Queen who was to play the role of Celia.

It was when the musician modulated to a higher key introducing Jacques’ song, that the guests began to murmur, “He’s a woman!”, pointing to Agnes.

Using her uncanny gift for mimicry, Agnes attacked the role with savage accuracy, wearing a facsimile of the singular purple and green suit favored by the Earl. She walked and even lisped like the Earl, so that when *Rosalind* dismissed *Jaques* with, “Farewell, Monsieur Traveller, Look you lisp and wear strange suits, Disable all the benefits of your own country . . . or I will scarce think you have swam in a gondola,” there was much laughter at the Earl’s expense.

But it was Will’s blistering retort—as the *Duke*—to the melancholy *Jaques* that brought the audience to a stunned silence. “Most mischievous foul sin, in chiding sin: For thou thyself hast been a libertine, As sensual as the brutish sting itself; And all the

embossed sores and headed evils, That thou with license of free foot hast caught, Wouldst thou disgorge into the general world.”

The spectators stirred with recognition, looking around to see if the Earl was aware that the play was an accurate indictment of both his dress and character.

The Earl of Oxford did not seem to notice that the eyes of the audience were upon him. As from the beginning, the focus of his attention was on Agnes, and she felt the anger of his gaze weaken her resolve.

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When the play finished, the costumed actors joined the guests for a festive supper and dancing. The mulled wine flowed freely and before too long Will was quite drunk. When Agnes attempted to take him back to their quarters, he grew angry, “More wine,” he bellowed, still dressed and playing the role of a Duke.

“Come to bed, my love,” she cajoled him; worried that he would offend their important guests by prolonging his role-play.

“This duke requires more wine. Fetch it, wench,” he demanded.

“I made you a duke but it seems I cannot prevent you from making yourself an ass,” she said taking his arm firmly to guide him from the hall. “Thou art a fool who hath drunk too much wine.”

Just then the Countess intervened. “Dance with me, Duke,” she commanded, grabbing Will’s hand and pulling him away from Agnes.

For the rest of the evening and into the wee hours of the morning, Will drank and danced with the Countess watched by Agnes who, in turn, was observed by the Earl. When Agnes turned her back on them for a moment, Will and the Countess disappeared from the crowded hall.

A weary Agnes retired to her room alone. A moment later she heard the door open softly. “Will?” she called out hopefully. Instead it was the Earl of Oxford who stepped into the light of the single candle that flickered in the small room.

“Wife,” he said, with uncharacteristic tenderness. “Wilt thou return to me?”

Having expected his anger, she was surprised to find him a pitiful supplicant instead. The dark shadows under his eyes and the flickering candle gave a momentary illusion that he was a mere skeleton.

“A dog may return to his vomit, but I cannot return to you,” she said without rancor.

The loss of her overcame him, and he fell to his knees with a cry of anguish.

She knelt on the floor and took him in her arms to comfort him as she would a child, leading him to the bed where he fell asleep almost immediately.

Self-loathing overwhelmed Agnes as she watched him snoring softly beside her. “I have loved what others do abhor,” she murmured with sorrow.

By the time a contrite Will returned from his tryst with the Countess the next morning, Edward was gone.

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Six months later news came to Stratford that the 17th Earl of Oxford had died of the plague. Agnes was surprised when the news made her weep.

XVI. AS BLACK AS HELL, AS DARK AS NIGHT

¹ Campbell, 619-620.

² Ogburn, 620.

³ Ogburn, 620.

⁴ Ogburn, 620.

⁵ Ogburn, 621.

⁶ Ogburn, 470.

⁷ Stephen Orgel, Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England (Great Britain: Cambridge UP, 1996), 4.

⁸ Orgel, 8-9.

⁹ Ogburn, 221-222.

¹⁰ Ogburn, 759.

¹¹ Anon., "ANAGram," Bodleian Library. MS.Rawl.poet 160 14652, 175r. This anonymous anagram is contained in a volume that is also said to include "An Epitaph" by William Shakespeare.

XVII. AT ONCE COWARDLY AND ABSURD

Men's novels are about how to get power. Killing and so on, or winning and so on. So are women's novels, though the method is different. In men's novels, getting the woman or women goes along with getting the power. It's a perk, not a means. In women's novels you get the power by getting the man. The man is the power. But sex won't do, he has to love you. What do you think all that kneeling is about, down among the crinolines, on the Persian carpet? Or, at least, say it. When all else is lacking, verbalisation can be enough. *Love*. There, you can stand up now; it didn't kill you. Did it?¹

The notion of playfulness in academic discussion can have a polarizing effect. There is something dangerously anarchic in the idea of play for some academics that don't mind *talking about* or *analyzing* play within a text, as long as they don't have to *do* it.

Of course, few *orthodox* scholars have explored the possibilities of a canon from the perspective of an author that is not William Shakespeare and fewer still have entertained the notion of a female author. Part of the reason may be the lack of serious scholarship in the notions put forward. Hyder Rollins describes what he calls the "picturesque and imaginative contention of William Ross, Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects"² as

¹ Atwood, 5.

² Rollins, 46.

a remarkably fantastic notion...advanced in 1939...(Story of Anne Whateley and William Shakespeare); namely, that Q was composed by Anne Whateley, a nun whom Sh. [Shakespeare] had jilted in 1582 to marry Anne Hathaway, the dark woman. 'Shaxpere'...was the only begetter of her sonnets because he was her 'lover and consort in their spiritual union.' When Whateley decided to print her lyrics, a 'policy of concealment' prevented their being dedicated to 'Mr. W.S.' Hence she substituted 'the second letter of "Shaxpere"...for the initial letter of the name. By a singular coincidence, "W" and "H" happen to be the surname initials of the two women concerned with Shaxpere in the story told by the sonnets. The initials, therefore, represent all three, and no better selection was possible.' T.T., for a wonder, remains Thorpe, who addressed Shaxpere in lines 'inspired by the author.' While applauding its originality, I regret my inability to believe in this passing 'singular coincidence.'³

Rollins points out that the groupist theory of sonnet authorship is old, beginning perhaps with D.L. Richardson in 1835.⁴ Since then numerous writers have speculated about the possible contributors. Among a vast majority of male names, there is a sprinkling of female candidates including Mary Queen of Scots,⁵ Queen Elizabeth I,⁶ Elizabeth Sidney, Countess of Rutland,⁷ with the foremost contender being, Mary (Sidney) Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke,⁸ The most provocative candidate would have to be the one put forward by Maya Angelou in 1985. In her address to the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies in Washington, D.C., she "famously remarked, 'William Shakespeare was a black woman,' for he had marvelously understood and written about her 'outcast state.'"⁹

³ Rollins, 227.

⁴ Rollins, 46.

⁵ Ron Allen, Who Were Shake-speare? (San Diego: Silverado, 1998), 176.

⁶ R.C. Churchill, Shakespeare and His Betters: A History and a Criticism of the Attempts Which Have Been Made to Prove That Shakespeare's Works Were Written by Others (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), 115-117. See also George Elliott Sweet, Shakespeare The Mystery (San Francisco: Stanford UP, 1956), 71-75.

⁷ Allen, 176.

⁸ Alfred J. Evans, Shakespeare's Magic Circle (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 68-71.

⁹ Juliet Fleming, "The Ladies' Shakespeare," in A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare, Dymphna Callaghan, ed. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2001), 18.

In the recent past, the tendency of some feminists has been to reject canonical texts summarily because dead white males wrote them about dead white males. One of the dilemmas this theory of authorship entails is what to do when the author is then revealed to be a woman whose work was appropriated by a man. In her essay, "Dancing through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," Annette Kolodny says,

As I see it, our task is to initiate nothing less than a playful pluralism, responsive to the possibilities of multiple critical schools and methods, but captive of none, . . . and if feminists openly acknowledge ourselves as pluralists, then we do not give up the search for patterns of opposition and connection—probably the basis of thinking itself; what we give up is simply the arrogance of claiming that our work is either exhaustive or definitive. (It is, after all, the identical arrogance we are asking our nonfeminist colleagues to abandon.) If this kind of pluralism appears to threaten both the present coherence of and the inherited aesthetic criteria for a canon of 'greats,' then, as I have earlier argued, it is precisely that threat which, alone, can free us from the prejudices, the strictures, and the blind spots of the past. In feminist hands, I would add, it is less a threat than a promise.¹⁰

"Woman's words, woman's thoughts, coming from a man's lips, a man's heart—it is monstrous to think of!"¹¹ wrote British actress Helena Faucit-Martin in 1885. Describing her book about Shakespeare's heroines—consisting of letters written to her contemporaries—Faucit-Martin goes on to say that

my best reward would be, that my sister-women should give me, in return, the happiness of thinking that I have . . . led them to acknowledge with myself the infinite debt we owe to the poet who could portray, as no other

¹⁰ Annette Kolodny, "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," in *Women's Voices: Visions and Perspectives*, Pat C. Hoy II, ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 559-560.

¹¹ Helena Faucit-Martin, *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1885), 4.

poet has so fully done, . . . all that gives to woman her brightest charm, her most beneficent influence.¹²

Readers of the works attributed to Shakespeare have long assumed that as a male author, Shakespeare would have had an obvious advantage when it came to understanding and thus writing male characters. What has eluded some of these same critics is the author's facility when it comes to presenting complex female characters. For example, a brief survey of almost two centuries of male and female criticism regarding *Cymbeline*'s Imogen is instructive.

In describing Imogen, William Hazlitt wrote in 1817: "It is the peculiar characteristic of Shakespeare's heroines, that they seem to exist only in their attachment to others; . . . they are the prettiest little set of martyrs and confessors on record."¹³ Seventy years later, and from a female perspective, Faucit-Martin argued that "the best proof of the worth of Posthumus lies in the fact that such a woman as Imogen has chosen him for her husband."¹⁴ Faucit-Martin points to the text to support her claim. Early in the play the first gentleman describes Posthumus:

To his mistress,
For who he now is banished, her own price
Proclaims how she esteemed him and his virtue.
By her election [choice] may be truly read
What kind of man he is. (*Cymbeline* I, i, 50-54)

¹² Faucit-Martin, viii-ix.

¹³ William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, 3rd ed. (London: John Templeman, 1838), 3-4.

¹⁴ Faucit-Martin, 170.

One hundred years after Hazlitt, Sir Sidney Lee reads Imogen as a symbolic role-model for women:

On Imogen, who is the main pillar of the action, Shakespeare lavished all the fascination of his genius. She is the crown and flower of his conception of tender and artless womanhood.¹⁵

Eighty years later (1998), Harold Bloom is troubled by Cymbeline's heroine, concluding that "Imogen ought to be in a play worthier of her aesthetic dignity."¹⁶ Bloom recognizes Cymbeline as a "radically experimental" play in which

Shakespeare establishes what might be a new mode of drama, . . . one we have trouble recognizing, since his remaining plays do not resemble it, and our modern theater has nothing like this juxtaposition of aesthetic dignity with the absurd, . . . [though] each time Imogen speaks in Cymbeline, self-parody stops and the beautiful voice that reinvented the human returns to us.¹⁷

The author of Cymbeline presents a conception of irresistible womanhood in Imogen, who—because of her feminine charm—is also threatened by the masculine world that wants to possess and control her mind, body and soul. Even the extreme misogyny of her wretched husband in ordering her death because he believes that she has been unfaithful, fails to deter her from "an ever-fixed mark, / That looks on tempests and is never shaken". For Imogen, "love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds". She is constant, bearing her love for Posthumus *even to the edge of doom*.¹⁸ Whether this attitude makes her simply one in Hazlitt's band of the "prettiest little set of martyrs" ever,

¹⁵ Lee, 424.

¹⁶ Bloom, Shakespeare, 618.

¹⁷ Bloom, Shakespeare, 618 and 623.

¹⁸ Sonnet 116.

or whether it was the author's intention to reveal that *all men are bad*,¹⁹ provides a fascinating intersection for interpretation by actors, directors, readers and audience members.

In 1898, Laura Stubbs agreed with John Ruskin's contention (in *Sesame and Lilies*, 1865, page 185) that "Shakespeare has no heroes; he has only heroines". She wrote:

I cannot insist too strongly on the fact that in nine cases out of ten the weakness, insincerity, or moral blackness of the man is thrown into relief against the strength, the virtue, or the stainless purity of the woman... If you study the plots of the plays you must notice that the catastrophe is invariably caused by the fault or folly of a man; the redemption, if there be any, by the wisdom or virtue of a woman.²⁰

How does the voice of a clever cross-dressing woman, who *must forget to be a woman* (*Cymbeline* III, iv, 157), inform the "song of self"²¹ that every author sings? In what ways has the weight of male critical commentary influenced the preservation of a masculine Shakespeare, in collaboration with the necessary silencing of the feminine echoes heard in the author's voice? And does this voice hint of authorial irony in its depiction of women who are capable of running circles around a world of villains, all the while mocking male misogyny?

No one ever doubts that Rosalind is Orlando's better when it comes to wordplay.

¹⁹ Sonnet 121.

²⁰ Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts, eds, *Women Reading Shakespeare 1660-1900* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 246-247, quoting Laura Stubbs, "That Shakespeare's Women Are Ideals," *The Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 3 parts: 1 July 1898, 22 July 1898, 29 July 1898.

²¹ Fleckenstein, 477.

in As You Like It. Making fun of his badly-written sonnets, she calls them a “tedious homily of love” (III, ii, 163-164). Although Silvia is the object of affection for all three suitors in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, her character is a mere sketch compared to the passionate and reckless Julia, who disguises herself as a page in order to follow the feckless man she loves. Also in the guise of the page Cesario, Viola woos her beloved Duke Orsino in Twelfth Night, arguing: “We men may say more, swear more, but indeed our shows are more than will, for still we prove much in our vows, but little in our love” (II, v, 119-121).

Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts note their objective to correct a neglect of recognition accorded to women’s commentary on the Shakespeare canon in their introduction to Women Reading Shakespeare 1600-1900:

The canon of Shakespeare criticism inherited by readers of Shakespeare in the late twentieth century has been one dominated by men... In part the neglect of women’s Shakespeare criticism has been a question of the hierarchy of recognised genres of criticism within the academy,...and because few women published in these genres before 1900, the enormous output of women’s writing on Shakespeare—discovered in autobiographies, theatre criticism, books for general readership, club records, popularisations, adaptations and, perhaps above all, in periodicals—has been overlooked in histories of Shakespearean criticism... The history of Shakespeare criticism is one in which women played a significant role before 1900: we hope this anthology will demonstrate that their work should not be forgotten.²²

Thompson and Roberts have assembled a remarkable body of obscure writings by little-known women writers that offers an intriguing insight into a parallel universe that exists quite apart from the one occupied by male members of the canonical literary

²² Thompson and Roberts, eds., 6-7.

criticism club. More than a few of these women found it significant that the author of the plays should be able to understand women so well, as is revealed by these excerpts from Thompson and Roberts' collection:

Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673):

One would think that he [Shakespeare] had been Metamorphosed from a Man to a Woman, for who could Describe Cleopatra Better than he hath done?²³

Elizabeth Griffith (1727-1793):

What a power of natural sentiment must a man have been possessed of, who could so adequately express that kind of ingenuous surprise upon such a challenge [in reference to Imogen's shocked response when Pisanio tells her that Posthumus believes she has been unfaithful to him], which none but a woman can possibly feel! Shakespeare could not only assume all the characters, but even their sexes too.²⁴

Anna Brownell Jameson (1794-1860):

[In Shakespeare's plays] the male and female characters bear precisely the same relation to each other that they do in nature and society—[women] are not equal in prominence or in power—they are subordinate throughout...[however, his heroines were] in truth, in variety, in power, equal to his men.²⁵

Mary Cowden Clarke (1809-1898):

In Shakespeare's page, as in a mental looking-glass, we women may contemplate ourselves. Of all the male writers that ever lived, he has seen most deeply into the female heart; he has most vividly depicted it in its strength, and in its weakness...the advantage in generosity which he has always assigned to women over men when drawing them in their mutual relations with regard to love, gives us excellent warrant for supposing that he had reason to know this truth respecting

²³ Thompson and Roberts, 13, quoting Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, "Letter CXXIII" in *CCXI Sociable Letters* (London: William Wilson, 1664).

²⁴ Thompson and Roberts, eds., 32, quoting Elizabeth Griffith, *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (London: Cadell, 1775).

²⁵ According to Thompson and Roberts, "Jameson redefined the status of Shakespeare's female characters within Shakespeare criticism...after Jameson it became commonplace to describe Shakespeare as the *champion* of women." Thompson and Roberts, 67. From Anna Brownell Jameson, *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical*, 2 vols (London: Saunders and Otley, 1832).

her sex from the mother of his children...²⁶ [Then also...] Our great poet-teacher, who has given us 126 clearly-drawn and thoroughly individual female characters...himself possessing keener insight than any other man-writer into womanly nature—Shakespeare may well be esteemed a valuable friend of woman-kind.²⁷

Kate Richmond-West (active 1882-1890):

It is the feminine element in Shakespeare which, beyond all others, insures the immortality of his genius. For as woman is closer to nature than man, so a literature that would endure must combine the masculine and feminine.²⁸

Grace Latham (active 1883-1893):

Viola is the ideal woman that almost every great writer has attempted to portray [sic] under various names and in different circumstances; but only Shakespeare [sic] has been able to perceive the qualities which compose it, the springs which move it, and to reproduce the exquisite charm of Viola's perfect womanhood, which affects us like a sweet harmony or a delicate perfume.²⁹

The reasons for a lack of recognition for feminine interpretation of the work attributed to Shakespeare may be found, in part, by examining the work itself. Elizabeth Wormeley Latimer (1822-1904) wrote the following self-deprecating apology in the preface of her 1897 volume, Familiar Talks on Shakspeare's Comedies:

To the erudite who write for University men, I leave all points of what is called Shakspearian [sic] criticism. I have attempted nothing but to bring out obvious points of dramatic interest, and to enable those whom I addressed to get a clear view of the story and the characters.³⁰

²⁶ Cited in Thompson and Roberts, 82-83. From Mary Cowden Clark, Shakespeare's Works, Edited, with a Scrupulous Revision of the Text, by Mary Cowden Clark (London: Trubner and Appleton, 1860).

²⁷ Cited in Thompson and Roberts, 101. From Mary Cowden Clark, "Shakespeare as the Girl's Friend," Shakespeariana, vol. 4 (1887), 355-69 [reprinted from The Girl's Own Paper (London) June 1887].

²⁸ Cited in Thompson and Roberts, 155-156. From Kate Richmond-West, Interpretation of "A Winter's Tale." (Chicago: Knight and Leonard, 1882).

²⁹ Cited in Thompson and Roberts, 171. From Grace Latham, Julia, Silvia, Hero and Viola, New Shakspeare [sic] Society, Monthly Abstract of Proceedings (February 1891), 319-50.

³⁰ Thompson and Roberts, 198.

Another treatment of the plays attributed to Shakespeare, Mary Anne Lamb's (1764-1847) book, Tales from Shakespear: Designed for the Use of Young Persons, was initially printed in her brother's name, Charles Lamb. It wasn't until the seventh edition (in 1838) that her name appeared as the author. Lamb's subjugation to her brother's will is revealed in the preface she wrote.

For young ladies...it has been my intention chiefly to write, because boys are generally permitted the use of their fathers' libraries at a much earlier age than girls are; they are permitted to look into this manly book; and, therefore, instead of recommending these Tales to the perusal of young gentlemen who can read them so much better in the originals, I must rather beg their kind assistance in explaining to their sisters such parts as are hardest for them to understand; and when they have helped them to get over the difficulties, then perhaps they will read to them (carefully selecting what is proper for a young sister's ear) some passage which has pleased them in one of these stories, in the very words of the scene from which it is taken; and I trust they will find that the beautiful extracts, the select passages, they may chuse [sic] to give their sisters in this way, will be much better relished and understood from their having some notion of the general story from one of these imperfect abridgments.³¹

Perhaps embarrassed to admit that she, "an unmarried gentlewoman of fifty, understood Shakespeare's obscenity enough systematically to remove it,"³² Henrietta Bowdler (1754-1830) had her brother place his name as the author on her 1807 edition of Family Shakespeare. The book was written "for those 'who wish to make the young reader acquainted with the various beauties of this writer, unmixed with any thing that can raise a blush on the cheek of modesty.'"³³

In contrast to the voluminous writings of male critics, much of the work produced

³¹ Thompson and Roberts, 50.

³² Thompson and Roberts, 46.

³³ Thompson and Roberts, 47.

by women appeared in short essay form and the voices are personal and subjective. As Joanna Russ points out in How to Suppress Women's Writing, it is in the very way that they express themselves which alienates women from men. Russ chronicles the reception of Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* by the male critics of her day:

Her vocabulary is non-technical and she speaks of the abstract in concrete terms—like the brilliant novelist she is—which may be one of the reasons the men of her circle disliked the book so much. Although crammed with facts and references, it has the wrong *style*; it is personal and sounds unscholarly, a charge often levelled at modern feminist writing. That is, the tone is not impersonal, detached, and dry enough—in short, not patriarchal enough—to produce belief.³⁴

Women such as Emily Perkins Bissell³⁵ (1861-1948) were not averse to using humour and satire in their writings, making it even more difficult for “serious” scholars to consider their work worthy of notice. This did not prevent Bissell from launching an impertinent challenge to Shakespeare's commentators in 1896:

The world needs to hear a loud and convincing protest from the progressive Womanhood of this new era against Shakespeare's attitude with respect to his heroines. Doubtless you have been taught in youth, as I was, to consider him as an unsurpassed delineator of female character; doubtless Rosalind and Juliet, Portia and Cordelia, Ophelia and Imogen, Viola and Beatrice, have been held up before you as the ideals of a perfect Womanhood. Doubtless, also, you have believed it all, and never stopped to think that Shakespeare himself was but a man, and that his commentators have been men without being Shakespeares. The masculine conception of feminine character has thus been forced upon us. Shall we submit? (Cries of “No!” “No!”) Or shall we test the poet by the higher criticism of advanced Womanly thought? (Cries of “Yes!” “Yes!” and enthusiastic applause.)³⁶

³⁴ Russ, 75.

³⁵ Pseudonym, Priscilla Leonard.

³⁶ Thompson and Roberts, 233.

One of the reasons the essays written by women are shorter is often cited as the reason, too, for the lack of women writers in general—women are frequently consumed with the duties of domesticity, raising children and taking care of husbands and their households. Writing requires money and a room of one's own far from the distractions of mewling infants, needy toddlers, hungry families, dishes in the sink, piles of dirty laundry and the financial necessities of an additional career outside the home.

Although little is known about M. Leigh-Noel (active 1884-1885) except for two books that she wrote in the late nineteenth century, she predicted the “superwoman” of the twenty-first century, remarkably unencumbered by domesticity:

In Portia, Shakespeare anticipated the intellect of women who can wield gracefully the tools of men, not sacrificing a trait of their essential womanliness. To most the idea of an intellectual woman is associated with the absence of everything that is tender, or, at any rate, romantic. But it is not so with Portia... Portia is a judge upon the bench, an advocate at the bar, a preacher in the pulpit, a wit in company, a student when alone, a philosopher in thought, a poet in expression, and, above all, a tender and romantic girl growing up into the truest of women and sweetest of wives.³⁷

Indeed Portia was everything a woman should be, except a mother. Known primarily for her religious writings, Mary Bradford-Whiting (active 1889-1932) has noted that Shakespeare wrote about ideal daughters, wives, maiden lovers, women's friendship, faithful servants and sisters. “But where is the ideal mother?” she asked in her 1898 essay, “Mothers in Shakespeare”:

Shakespeare is said to have entered into all phases of human experience, and to have depicted all shades of human character, but from his gallery of portraits he has omitted one figure, the absence of which does not seem to have been

³⁷ Thompson and Roberts, 181.

generally noticed by his critics: the ideal mother, tender, constant, and true, sympathetic alike in the prosperity and adversity of her children.³⁸

A recurring motif for heroines in the plays is maternal absence—Miranda, Desdemona, Cordelia, Rosalind, Celia, Silvia, Hero, Jessica, Imogen, Portia and Helena are all motherless.

As both a solitary and selfish vocation, writing requires sacrifices. In 1585, the Shakespeares had a two-year-old toddler and newborn twins to contend with. Designated “The Lost Years”—because the historical record is blank concerning the whereabouts of William Shakespeare—1585 to 1592 must have been busy years for the Shakespeares. The author of the plays would have needed to absent herself from the inevitable domestic turmoil associated with raising three children in order to write the plays and keep a diary of sonnets.

The transgressive mothers in the plays produced in Stratford can be remote from their children: for example, Juliet’s mother has clearly abdicated her maternal responsibilities, leaving Juliet to be raised by her nurse. Other mothers are portrayed as too consumed by passion for their partners to notice the children, as is the case with Gertrude. Lady Macbeth makes it clear that she prefers to suckle ambition rather than an infant—all of her considerable energy is devoted to promoting her husband to the throne.

It is a curious charge laid against Constance by the French King Philip. Uncomfortable with the distraught mother who has just learned that her son is dead, he

³⁸ Thompson and Roberts, 250.

accuses Constance of histrionics saying, “You are as fond of grief as of your child” (King John III, iv, 92). However, the King’s lack of sympathy for this mother may already be shared by the audience; they have heard Constance admit to her son that if he were ugly, “I would not care, I then would be content, for then I should not love thee” (III, i, 48-49).

In stark contrast to the dysfunctional mothers found in the plays, fathers seem to muddle through with more success. Brabantio and Desdemona, Prospero and Miranda and even the belatedly-aware Lear and his daughter Cordelia, portray the tender bonds between a father and daughter.

Whether or not this state of affairs reveals any truths about the Shakespeare household as one in which William assumed responsibility for the children, freeing Anne to write undisturbed, is a point for conjecture. At the same time it must be noted that the author was fond of inverting expectations, challenging societal norms and almost—but never quite—alienating her bread and butter—the play-going public of Elizabethan England.

Although it is far from the sort of definitive proof required by a skeptical academy, a preliminary test of the sonnets, using an online version of Moshe Koppel’s computer algorithm,³⁹ revealed an 80 percent likelihood that they were written by a woman. A similar sampling of a translation of Petrarch’s sonnets, indicates that there is an 80 percent chance that they were written by a man.

³⁹ The Gender Genie, <http://www.bookblog.net/gender/genie.html> (April 29, 2004).

Writing in 1897, Louise Rossi (active 1874-1909) discussed the feminine voice she detected in the sonnets:

It would seem as though they were written in the manner of a diary, forming thus a context or accompaniment to the plays of their period... It is certain that through the sonnets we may approach more nearly to the man Shakespeare than by any of the plays. He lays bare the deepest feelings of his passionate heart, and shows a side of his character unrevealed to any friend. Who could have supposed that the man who carved his way from rustic obscurity to triumphant success had in him such a capacity for a feminine depth of devotion? Or that a man who had so keen an interest in property could plead so piteously for love?⁴⁰

The reasons that make it difficult for some members of the academy to embrace a contrary notion of authorship are as varied as they are numerous. Traditionalists, including documentary historians—who believe that you must be able to prove Shakespeare didn't write Shakespeare, using existing historical documentation—find enough proof to satisfy their curiosity in a self-perpetuating 400-year-old tradition. Not long after my presentation at the 4th Annual Edward de Vere Studies Conference, Roger Stritmatter described to me the academy's response to the successful defense of his groundbreaking dissertation⁴¹ suggesting that Edward de Vere authored the Shakespearean canon:

My experience as an Oxfordian graduate student has been that the English Departments will take extreme measures to induce ideological conformity on the authorship question . . . they seem proud to announce to the rest of the world that everyone who knows anything agrees with them. They are the authorities—they have spoke, and everyone else is expected to agree or at least be silent . . . You are perhaps fortunate in that your own work is neutral enough that people can snicker about it without feeling too threatened. The orthodoxy desperately needs people

⁴⁰ Thompson and Roberts, 238.

⁴¹ Roger A. Stritmatter, "The Marginalia of Edward De Vere's Geneva Bible: Providential Discovery, Literary Reasoning, and Historical Consequence." Diss. U of Massachusetts Amherst, 2001. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2001. 3001149.

like you right now—they have for so long so completely cut themselves off from even a glimmer of rationality, that [they] don't have much 'wriggle' room.⁴²

As early as 1886, Caroline Dall noted that “the literature connected with the subject [Shakespearean authorship] has now reached such proportions that wholly to ignore it is at once cowardly and absurd.”⁴³

Feminists and some advocates of cultural studies, such as Phyllis Rackin, approach the Shakespeare canon with reluctance and resistance because

among the consequences...for feminist students of Shakespeare's plays is the fact that we are being taught to read from the subject position of a man, and a misogynist man at that. The cultural prestige of Shakespeare makes his plays a model for contemporary values and the privileged site where past history is reconstructed.⁴⁴

Also resisting conformity on the fringes of mainstream academia are the various heretics who believe it was the Earl of Oxford or Frances Bacon or Christopher Marlowe or one of more than sixty various combinations of individuals who are purported to have written the works attributed to Shakespeare. The fervor such heretics display in support of their chosen candidates is considerable. Conversions to orthodoxy are infrequent.

Beginning as early as 1780, editors have attempted to edit or explain away the problem of a homoerotic sexual scandal in the sonnets. Margreta de Grazia surveys the

⁴² Email to the author, 17 July 2000.

⁴³ Caroline Dall, “What We Really Know About Shakespeare, Reviews: A New Guide to Shakespeare, anon.,” *Shakespeareana* 3 (1886): 141.

⁴⁴ Phyllis Rackin, “Misogyny is Everywhere,” in Dymphna Callaghan, ed. *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare* (Massachusetts, Blackwell: 2001), 47.

various historical attempts to deflect attention from the obvious, Shakespeare must have been either gay or bisexual.⁴⁵ A theory of female authorship could be read by some as another attempt to disenfranchise queer theory of an important icon.

In response to a front-page article in the Australian (6 December 1995) about a Shakespeare Conference at the University of New South Wales, I contacted the organizer, who turned out to be a postmodernist disciple of Barthes. With an impatient sigh he reminded me, “It doesn’t matter who wrote the plays, Shakespeare, de Vere, Bacon or Uncle Tom Cobbley; I really don’t care.” Other postmodernists, such as Foucault, have argued that the focus of inquiry in literary criticism should be on the writing and what it reveals about the power / knowledge system within a particular historical era and the resulting sexist, racist and imperialistic practices in place.

Marjorie Garber outlines four key investments that she believes contribute to the continuing resistance of some scholars to entertain the notion of an alternative author—they include institutional, professional, psychological and territorial.⁴⁶ Each of these investments converges spectacularly in Stratford-upon-Avon—Mecca for the faithful. *William Shakespeare Inc.* is the equivalent of a multi-national corporation with unlimited resources now that the copyrights have expired. The township enjoys a bustling tourist trade as the birthplace of England’s most famous literary son.

⁴⁵ Grazia, 89-112.

⁴⁶ Garber, 132.

A readiness to attribute the playwright's intuitive development of female characters to genius, rather than gender, also prompts ready attribution to the bard. One hundred years ago, Faucit-Martin described the impetus for her writing as a desire to record "my impressions of certain female characters in Shakespeare, which...had not been duly appreciated," and a desire that they "not [be] allowed to fade away with the talk of the moment."⁴⁷ And although Faucit-Martin's 1885 book was received "with acclaim both in England and America,"⁴⁸ few people have heard of her today; and her contribution to literary criticism of the canon has faded away, just as she had feared would happen to the female characters she once played on the London stage.

At the same time, Faucit-Martin's work serves as a remarkable retrospective of the context of the times in which she wrote, in which men were firmly inscribed at the center of the universe: "Shakespeare's heroines...illustrate the part women have played, and are meant to play, in bringing sweetness and comfort, and help and moral strength, into man's troubled and perplexing life."⁴⁹ That Faucit-Martin should then disapprove of Beatrice, with "all her sportive and somewhat domineering ways,"⁵⁰ is not surprising:

I cannot write with the same full heart, or with the same glow of sympathy, with which I wrote of Rosalind. Her character [Beatrice] is not

⁴⁷ Faucit-Martin, vii.

⁴⁸ "In 1887 the journal *Shakespeariana* (published in Philadelphia) welcomed the swift reprint of 'Lady Martin's excellent and suggestive volume of essays' (*Literary Notes*, 1887: 87), while Horace Howard Furness, the Philadelphia-based Shakespeare scholar and editor of the *Variorum Shakespeare* (which collated commentaries by male critics and editors of Shakespeare's works), marked out Faucit-Martin's book for particular praise... Four editions of Faucit-Martin's book appeared within six years of its first publication." From the introduction to *Helena Faucit, Lady Martin 1817-1898* in Thompson and Roberts, 185.

⁴⁹ Faucit-Martin, 291.

⁵⁰ Faucit-Martin, 301.

to me so engaging. We might hope to meet in life something to remind us of Beatrice; but in our dreams of fair women Rosalind stands out alone.⁵¹

Perhaps if Beatrice had assumed a male disguise when “she flashes around her the playful lightning of sarcasm,”⁵² Faucit-Martin may have found her worthy to join the ranks of women such as Portia, whose “character combines all the graces of the richest womanhood with the strength of purpose, the wise helpfulness, and sustained power of the noblest manhood.”⁵³ Or Rosalind, who employs self-deprecating humor when she mutters to her cousin, “Do you not know that I am a woman? When I think, I must speak” (III, ii, 264). It is only when she is disguised as a man that Rosalind’s sense of humor becomes more aggressive and masculine: “I thank God I am not a woman, to be touched with so many giddy offences as he hath generally taxed their whole sex withal,” she remarks ironically (II, ii, 365-368).

The popularity of Faucit-Martin’s book, when it was published, indicates that the author understood her audience and was able to write material that appealed both to women and to male scholars of her day. In her book, Faucit-Martin also celebrated the author’s ability to allow the actor and actress to interpret the work: “How much has he [Shakespeare] left to be filled up by accent, by play of feature, by bearing, by action, by subtle shades of expression.”⁵⁴

This range of interpretation permitted by the text has led to some controversial

⁵¹ Faucit-Martin, 292.

⁵² Faucit-Martin, 292.

⁵³ Faucit-Martin, 26.

⁵⁴ Faucit-Martin, 160.

decisions. Lady Macbeth—in the written text—has the power to terrify and threaten. Roman Polanski's preference was to strip her of this power in his 1971 film, with a simple visual gesture. Writing in 1978, Jack Jorgens describes the scene:

At the crucial moment when Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth they will 'proceed no further in this business' and walks away leaving her weeping in shame and indignation, it is Malcolm's smug vaunting of his power that persuades Macbeth to kill Duncan: the newly proclaimed Prince of Cumberland forces Macbeth to fill his goblet with wine like a common steward, adding with heavy irony, 'Hail Thane of Cawdor.'⁵⁵

Without tampering with the text, Polanski's message is clear. Lady Macbeth has no real power. It remains both an absurd and cruel irony that her guilty nightmares, madness and suicide are unnecessary, for it becomes Malcolm's goading and not her own that leads to the murder of Duncan. But that is not the only indignity bestowed on Polanski's Lady Macbeth.

Artistic advisor for the film, Kenneth Tynan, describes the controversial decision to present Lady Macbeth in the buff:

Lady Macbeth must be nude in the sleepwalking scene. It's true that in the text she is said to put on a 'nightgown' (Elizabethan for 'dressing gown') after getting out of bed; but then Shakespeare had no alternative but to clothe her in something, since the part was played by a boy. This convention created necessities that are not binding on us. And the historical evidence is unequivocal: in the Middle Ages everyone slept naked. Moreover, in an ironclad embattled castle, she will look effectively vulnerable. And apart from anything else, as Roman says, it is pleasant to look at a naked girl.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Jack J. Jorgens, *Shakespeare On Film* (New York: University Press of America, 1977), 165.

⁵⁶ Kenneth Tynan, "The Polish Imposition," *Esquire* (September 1971): 81.

Many critics uncharitably pointed to the Playboy connection (Hugh Hefner was the film's executive producer) as a more likely influence for Lady Macbeth's nudity. In her review of the film, Molly Haskell poked fun:

Lady Macbeth's sleepwalk in the buff is a little silly, especially when neither the doctor nor Gentlewoman seems to notice, being too absorbed in her words (the ultimate poetic revenge of Shakespeare on cinema).⁵⁷

By casting a young actress in the role of Lady Macbeth, stripping her naked and disempowering her, Polanski effectively renders one of Shakespeare's most formidable characters into a vulnerable, trembling girl-child. When it came to the issue of authorship Tynan reported that someone asked Roman: "Are you going to give Shakespeare equal billing?" "Why should I?" he buoyantly replied. "For one thing, it's already fairly well known that he is the author. For another thing, he hasn't got an agent."⁵⁸

I recently discovered J.P. De Fonseca's article that had appeared in G. K.'s Weekly in 1938, in which Fonseca argued that Mistress Anne Hathaway Shakespeare was the real author of her husband's work:

To read Mrs. Shakespeare's plays with some little discernment is to be more than tolerably sure of her authorship. They reveal a woman author at every turn... Now, who can blame Mrs. Shakespeare if she gave her good word to the women and her bad to the men? It would be so natural, so like a woman. She managed to hide many things, but this fatal partisanship of a woman for her sex she could not hide; and so the cat was let out of the bag. Her women are all heroines; but her men, idiots or scoundrels. It was the one secret of her female genius that she could not keep.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Molly Haskell, "The Nuances and Wrinkles of Horror," The Village Voice (30 December 1971): 51.

⁵⁸ Tynan, 189.

⁵⁹ Fonseca, 426.

It appears that Fonseca's intention is to make fun of Woolf's feminist treatise, A Room of One's Own, which had been written nearly ten years earlier. Sixty-six years later, his idea does not seem as far-fetched as it must have at the time.

Although the tone of the article is sarcastic and a denigration of the notion of a female author of the Shakespeare canon, Fonseca could not have anticipated how much the world would change. His article remains a curious reminder of a bygone era when authoresses were more "liable to be looked on with prejudice,"⁶⁰ just as the notion of voting rights for women was once considered loony.

Although during her lifetime she was as popular as her contemporary Mark Twain, few people have heard of humorist Marietta Holley who assumed the name "Josiah Allen's wife" in order to respond to her farcical husband and his views on issues such as a woman's right to vote. Using sarcasm to cloak frustration and rage, she wrote:

'Josiah Allen,' says I, 'you think that for a woman to stand up straight on her feet, under a blazin' sun, and lift both her arms above her head, and pick seven bushels of hops, mingled with worms and spiders into a gigantic box, day in, and day out, is awful healthy, so strengthenin' and stimulin' to women, but when it comes to droppin' a little slip of clean paper into a small seven by nine box, once a year in a shady room, you are afraid it is goin' to break down a woman's constitution at once.'⁶¹

Wherever I take and deliver my ideas about Mrs Shakespeare nowadays, I

⁶⁰ Charlotte Bronte describing the reason she and her sisters decided to use masculine pen names in 1850. In Wilks, 24.

⁶¹ Marietta Holley, My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet's (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company 1874), 92.

consider it well worth the price of playing a fool, admitting that *I am stupid*, and ignoring the *snickers*, to see members of the academy able to play the *believing game*, even if only for a few moments. For in these moments we all become vulnerable to change and growth. Education is the non-violent revolution. Combined with laughter, it can ease our passage between the Scylla of a moribund academy and the Charybdis of academic anarchy.

XVIII. A COMMON GRAVE

Anne's grave

The following is a translation of the memorial brass marking the grave of Anne Hathaway at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon:

*Thou, O mother, gavest me the breast, thou gavest milk and life.
Alas! for such great gifts, I, in return, give unto thee a sepulcher!
O, that some good angel would move away the stone from its mouth,
That thy form might come forth, even as did the body of Christ!
But wishes are of no avail! Come quickly, O Christ!
My mother—though shut up in the tomb—shall rise again and seek the stars.¹*

Susanna Hall (nee Shakespeare)—her literacy

Surmising that the Shakespeares' eldest daughter, Susanna, was able to read and write, Schoenbaum cites evidence that, unlike her sister Judith, Susanna could sign her name to legal documents and that when she died at the age of 66 on the 11th of July 1649, her epitaph read, "Witty above her sexe."²

A Shakespeare family relic

In the small leather-bound volume of Ovid's Metamorphoses³ held at the Bodleian Library, there is a distinctive "H" burned onto the edge of the pages opposite the binding. The volume is described in the Annals of the Bodleian Library as follows:

A copy of Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' printed at Venice in 1502 with a signature 'Wm Sh' on the title page, believed to be a genuine autograph of William Shakespeare. On the inner front cover is the following genuine note, 'This little Booke of Ovid was given to me by W Hall who sayd it was once Will. Shaksperes. TN 1682.' There are many 16th cent. Latin notes and glosses in the book. A later owner's name seems to be Michael Temple.⁴

According to *The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare*, "The signature of Shakespeare on the title page is not generally accepted as genuine, but if the work is a forgery it is an extremely plausible one. Shakespeare is more likely to have owned a copy of this book than of any other."⁵

Authorial relics

In his biography of Shakespeare, Park Honan reports that the Folger Library in Washington, D.C., recently acquired a copy of *Poems on Several Occasions* by Walter Harte, "with this inked note on the verso of the last leaf:

*A gift from My Dear
Father
Thomas Hart
With manye other items of my
Noble Ancestors [sic] Joan Shakespeare
Had it not been for the great
Spirit of kindness of Mr William
Oldys I should not of [sic] had the
joy of having in my safe keeping
our great Poets Bible. in the little
Chest with the keys.*

"If genuine, that was probably written by John Hart (1753-1800), a turner and chair-maker in the sixth generation of lineal descendants of Shakespeare's sister. A tiny sketch of a box or small chest, is drawn under the note."⁶

Honan also provides a clue to the mystery of what may have happened to the library books and other manuscripts of the author:

*Baldwin Brooks, later to be bailiff, broke into her [Susanna Hall's] house in 1637 after failing to collect a judgement [sic] against John Hall's estate. . . She [Susanna] charged in Chancery that Brooks, with 'men of meane estate', did 'breake open the Doores and study of said howse, and Rashlye [did] seise upon and take Divers bookes, boxes, Deskes, moneyes, bonds, bills, and other goods of greate value.'*⁷

Honan points out that the historical record is silent as to whether these belongings were ever returned to Susanna.⁸

The Sonnets

Unless otherwise noted, all references to the sonnets in this chapter are taken from the 1997 Arden edition.

CODA: 1623

When Death arrives for her one fine summer morning, Agnes persuades him to let her stay a while longer even though he is expected.

Hearing Agnes' voice, Susanna hurries to see what she wants. "Did you call, Mother?" she asks, looking down at the frail woman.

"Bring me the pages tied with scarlet ribbon," Agnes says. Handing her daughter a delicately carved key, she indicates the small wooden chest where her secrets are kept. Until this moment, Agnes has forbidden anyone to touch her precious chest. But her life is slipping away and soon all that remains will be words.

Obediently Susanna goes to the chest and opens it. Inside are neat stacks of manuscripts and papers. In the far right corner of the chest she spies a rolled-up bundle of pages, yellow with age and tied with a faded ribbon.

"Is this it?" she asks, holding the pages up for her mother to see.

Sighing, Agnes whispers, "Ay."

After gently closing the chest's lid, Susanna brings the pages to her mother.

"Read to me," Agnes entreats her.

Fearful of what her husband, the Puritan, would say if he were to catch her reading, especially something so scandalous as words penned by her mother, she pleads, "I mustn't."

"I have little time left, will you not read to your poor mother?"

At this, Susanna begins to cry.

"Good daughter, why mournest thou?" Agnes chides her.

"For thy death."

"You think my soul goes to hell, Susanna?"

"I know your soul will be in heaven, Mother," she answers in a choked voice.

“The more fool, Susanna, to mourn for your mother’s soul going to heaven. Now dry your tears and read to me for my eyes can no longer see the words.”⁹ Agnes speaks with a bravado that she does not feel. Glancing at the Specter waiting to take her away, she notices that he will not meet her eye. In that moment she surmises that the path of her after-life journey will likely be paved with hot coals rather than the heavenly soft grass she was hoping for.

Oddly comforted by the return of the querulous mother she knows, Susanna pulls a chair up to Agnes’ bedside and unties the ribbon. Smoothing out the rolled pages on her lap, she begins to read, heedless of her husband’s disapproval.

The effort expended in talking to her daughter causes Agnes to sink into the goose-down pillows, exhausted. She floats toward an abyss of nothingness, drawn back only by Susanna’s voice reading—*From fairest creatures we desire increase*¹⁰—the words bring her fading memory into sharp relief.

Each time her daughter pauses to turn a page or catch her breath, Agnes stirs uncomfortably. And if Susanna misses even a word, Agnes becomes restless and anxious until it is corrected.

Forgetting that she is a mother and was twice a wife, a deep yearning for children overtakes her. Though she cannot see him clearly, Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford is there. She entreats him: *When forty winters shall besiege thy brow, / And dig*

deep trenches in thy beauty's field,¹¹ . . . Make thee another self, for love of me.¹² As if to answer her, in the next moment she holds her baby daughter Susanna. *Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee / Calls back the lovely April of her prime,¹³* she croons happily.

Now married secretly to Edward, she must cajole him with images of domestic bliss when he begins to entertain second thoughts about their union:

*Mark how one string, sweet husband to another
Strikes each in each by mutual ordering,
Resembling sire and child and happy mother
Who all in one, one pleasing note do sing.
Whose speechless song being many, seeming one,
Sings this to thee: "Thou single wilt prove none."¹⁴*

When he strays, Agnes learns the sugared words that will bring him back: *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?¹⁵* He is with her, wanting more. *Thou art more lovely and more temperate.* Then he is gone, like the flashes of fleeting memories that besiege her.

My love shall in my verse ever live young,¹⁶ Agnes promises, but Edward spurns the immortality she offers him and another figure emerges from the shadow of her memory. Unbidden, Will proffers his heart, and in return he earns for later the legacy intended for Edward.

Time and space shift. The room is crowded with her rival poets, who entice Edward with their sycophantic flattery. Determined not to sink to their level—*I will not praise, that purpose not to sell*¹⁷—she is losing him.

Then she is alone, *in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes*,¹⁸ an outcast, *summoning up remembrance of things past*¹⁹—her friendship with Anne Cecil, who betrays her by becoming betrothed to Edward while knowing that he is already married. *Aye me, but yet thou mightst my seat forbear*,²⁰ she calls out to her childhood friend.

Sorrow ensues as Agnes attempts to console herself following the ceremony of Edward's marriage to her former friend: *I loved her dearly / That she hath thee is of my wailing chief*.²¹

Outside a cloud obscures the sun, and night seems to fall for Agnes, *All days are nights to see till I see thee / And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me*.²²

Although Edward returns to her, Agnes fears he will *be stol'n*,²³ in part because of the *strength of laws*²⁴ attending his marriage to Anne Cecil, but also due to his predilection to wander with others—including the Queen's lady-in-waiting, Anne Vavasor, whom he has impregnated, incurring the Queen's wrath. With Edward confined to the tower, Agnes makes her way home to the relative safety of Stratford though, *How heavy do I journey on the way*.²⁵

Edward's absence makes her heart grow ever fonder; ruminating over his inconstant heart does not make him any less attractive to her: *In all external grace you have some part / But you like none, none you, for constant heart.*²⁶ And jealous thought²⁷ causes Agnes to resent the freedom Edward has to choose, when she herself is caught, *being at your beck, / Th' imprisoned absence of your liberty.*²⁸ His absence from her leads to a melancholy depression and thoughts of how *Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth.*²⁹ Yet still, she waits: *For thee watch I, whilst thou dost wake elsewhere / From me far off, with others all too near,*³⁰ even though *Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminare, / That Time will come and take my love away.*³¹

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When the gentle voice of her daughter Susanna ceases reading the sonnets, Agnes stirs. She opens her eyes to see the girl hovering over her with concern written on her face. "I thought you were asleep," Susanna murmurs. "Can I get you anything?"

"Read," Agnes whispers. Not wanting to upset her daughter, she does not answer what every fiber of her being longs to say, *For restful death I cry.*³²

Susanna resumes reading from the yellowed pages, some written in her mother's neat hand, while others are written in a hand that is unfamiliar. The soft drone of her daughter's voice soothes Agnes.

An emissary from Anne Cecil, now Countess of Oxford, brings news that Edward denies paternity of their daughter Elizabeth.³³ The Countess pleads for intercession in the very public scandal, her *maiden virtue rudely strumpeted*.³⁴ Agnes mourns the corruption of the world and the effect it is having on Edward: *Ah, wherefore with infection should he live?*³⁵ and she refers obliquely to the birth of “illegitimate” children to both Anne Cecil and Anne Vavasor: *Before these bastard signs of fair were borne*.³⁶ Nevertheless she continues to be infatuated with Edward, though a shadow of doubt—*A crow that flies in heaven’s sweetest air*³⁷—is emerging, as she sees the future and her absence from recorded history even as the author of her sonnets: *Remember not / The hand that writ it*,³⁸ *My name be buried where my body is*.³⁹

*In me thou seest the twilight*⁴⁰—Agnes pleads poignantly for Edward’s love despite her fading youth. Knowing that their liaison places her in danger of *fell arrest*⁴¹ and perhaps even at risk of falling victim to *a wretch’s knife*,⁴² she is hopeful that *this*⁴³ (her sonnets) will survive.

Aware that she is losing her hold on Edward, Agnes hungers, *clean starved*,⁴⁴ for the limited time they spend together.

Suffering from writer's ennui, Agnes is also beginning to chafe at Edward's appropriation of her work: *Every word almost doth tell my name.*⁴⁵ With self-deprecating irony, she belittles her own work at the same time offering up a suggestion, disguised as a compliment, that Edward try writing for himself for a change, saying it *shall profit thee, and much enrich thy book.*⁴⁶

Continuing with an ironic deprecation of her own *heavy ignorance*,⁴⁷ Agnes attributes her ability to write to her muse—Edward—who alas, also inspires many other *alien pen[s]*.⁴⁸ Even so she pays him accolades, *thou art all my art.*⁴⁹

Although she remembers too well the pain caused by Edward's dalliances with her many rivals—including John Lyly and Christopher Marlowe—an older, wiser Agnes no longer cares, knowing that she will soon fall in love again. Even so, a sudden ache surprises her, and she reaches out to comfort the image of her younger self huddled in grief,

*Sweet love, thy lovely argument
Deserves the travail of a worthier pen,
Yet what of thee thy poet doth invent
He robs thee of, and pays it thee again;
He lends thee virtue, and he stole that word . . .
 thank him not for that which he doth say.
 Since what he owes thee, thou thyself dost pay.*⁵⁰

Agnes watches herself, presaging that it is Edward who will be remembered because of her writing: *When all the breathers of this world are dead / You still shall*

*live—such virtue hath my pen.*⁵¹ And she smiles with satisfaction knowing that it is Will instead whose *name from hence immortal life shall have.*⁵²

Facing competition—other poets vying for Edward’s financial favor and a place in his bed—with a stoic’s restraint, a younger Agnes dismisses their flattery as false, *strained . . . rhetoric,*⁵³ with, *There lives more life in one of your fair eye / Than both your poets can in praise devise.*⁵⁴ But her words are not enough for Edward, with his infinite appetite for flattery, *being fond on praise,*⁵⁵ and he casts her aside like some Cordelia for *this silence.*⁵⁶

Stung by Edward’s decision to forsake all women, including her, and join *his compeers by night* (in the meetings with Walter Raleigh’s “School of Night”),⁵⁷ Agnes is resigned to the separation, and she relinquishes him: *Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing.*⁵⁸ *And in my tongue / Thy sweet beloved name no more shall dwell.*⁵⁹ But she cannot resist adding a reminder of his previous legal commitment to her, *For term of life thou art assured mine,*⁶⁰ when he married her in their clandestine ceremony.

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She and Edward have set sail from Calais on a blustery spring day. The hold is full of Edward’s beautiful new Italian garments. Below deck, Edward indulges his insatiable lust with his latest conquest, the nubile young page Orazio Coquo.

Meanwhile, Agnes beguiles the ship's captain and his sailors with her quick wit and a genuine eagerness to learn how to sail. Donning a pair of breeches, she clambers over the deck, following their shouted instructions with enthusiasm and answering their insults with saltier ones still.

As night falls, a pirate ship appears on the horizon, closing fast, and the alarm sounds. The crew takes battle stations, and the ship's captain urges Agnes to hide below as the renegade ship pulls alongside theirs, knowing that she will likely be raped, if not killed.

"Conceal me what I am, and be my aid," Agnes implores, tucking her long hair under a sailor's cap.

Hesitating for a moment, the captain then replies, "Your mute I'll be. When my tongue blabs, then let mine eyes not see."⁶¹

When the pirates board the ship, they are amused to find a girlish cabin boy guarding the door leading to the captain's quarters, and although the cabin boy is easily overcome, they are surprised by the fierce struggle he offers. Within, they discover a rich treasure trove of garments and Orazio hiding under a bunk with Edward.

Because he is clearly of noble birth and his whimpering annoys them, the pirates release Edward—along with his page and the brave cabin boy who risked his life to protect the nobleman—on the Dover coast. The ship they plunder. Oblivious to the fact that Agnes has risked her life to save his, Edward rages and cannot be consoled over the loss of his new clothes.⁶²

Agnes imagines what Edward might say to her if he were a better man:

*Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,
Some in their wealth, some in their bodies' force,
Some in their garments, though new-fangled ill . . .
Thy love is better than high birth to me,
Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost.*⁶³

She is not comforted by the knowledge that he is undeserving of her love, although the Agnes that lies dying in her bed is satisfied to know that he proved unworthy and history would record him so.

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Agnes compares Edward's outward appearance to the soul within: *How like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow,*⁶⁴ musing that *Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds,*⁶⁵ and the love they once shared decays *like a canker in the fragrant rose.*⁶⁶ She tries to warn him that his lascivious conduct will lead to ruin and disease—*The hardest knife ill used doth lose his edge*⁶⁷—but he will not hear her, although she pleads with him not to misuse

the *strength of all thy state*⁶⁸ that keeps her in perpetual servitude to his vaulting literary ambitions.

Although on mornings that pass the sun shines brightly outside, Agnes descends ever deeper into *a winter of dark days*,⁶⁹ unable to write or *any summer's story tell*⁷⁰ and pregnant with Edward's child, she sinks into a *white despair*⁷¹ and to contemplation of a wedding she never wanted to an awkward youth she hardly knows.

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Beside her, Susanna senses her mother slipping away, and she calls her back from the brink. "Mama!" comes a familiar voice. Opening her eyes, Agnes smiles wanly as she looks into the eyes of her frightened daughter.

"I am with thee yet," Agnes reassures her. But again, the effort of speaking takes all of her energy and once more she drifts into a pool of memories that bring a confusing mixture of pleasure and pain.

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Surprised by the epiphany of a new and true love, Agnes regrets her former efforts spent in *fury on some worthless song*⁷² and invokes her new muse to *Give my love fame faster than time wastes life*⁷³ and *make him much outlive a gilded tomb*.⁷⁴

After *three winters cold . . . three April perfumes in three hot Junes burned*⁷⁵ and three years of married bliss, Agnes celebrates her lover and *fair friend*⁷⁶ who, because he is her junior by eight years, *never can be old*.⁷⁷ Edward fares poorly when compared to Will, who is *Fair, kind and true*,⁷⁸ three things Edward never was—*Which three, till now, never kept seat in one*.⁷⁹

Seeing her previously-written sonnets as a *chronicle of wasted time*,⁸⁰ Agnes compares Will to the beautiful people she once consorted with. Hiding playfully within the conceit that he is fortunate to possess her, *such a beauty as you master now*,⁸¹ she assures him of her own writing talents as she points out that few have the *skill enough your worth to sing*.⁸²

Time is out of joint as the memories come rushing back in no particular order. Agnes is hopeful—*I'll live in this poor rhyme*⁸³—determined to see Will's reputation immortalized in her written monument to him when *tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent*.⁸⁴

Now she whispers to Will the words she once gave Edward: *Your sweet semblance to some other give . . . you had a father; let your son say so*.⁸⁵ Unlike Edward,

he needs no encouragement to perform a husband's duty with eager joy and a son is born, *the first conceit of love there bred.*⁸⁶

Her happiness is short-lived as time slows—sudden fresh grief at a vision of her beloved Hamnet taken by the plague—a swirling cloud of gray fog makes her dizzy. *My sweet boy,*⁸⁷ she cries, reaching to stroke his cold little hand. And she sees, waiting patiently at the foot of her bed, Death is shamed at the memory of having taken a child before its mother.

Something in Death's mournful repose fills Agnes with premonitory dread, and she reaches beyond the shadows crowding around for the reassuring flesh-and-blood hands of her husband. As if to answer her wish, the fog lifts. An 18-year-old Will is asleep beside her on the bed. *O thou, my lovely Boy,*⁸⁸ Agnes calls to him. His eyes open, but he smiles at her the way he would a stranger, for she is gray with age and he doesn't know her. She entreats him to count *no old thing old*⁸⁹ and weigh *not the dust and injury of age,*⁹⁰ and he responds with a tender reassuring kiss.

Will's absences are not fraught with the fear and uncertainty that once attended Edward's absences, because Will is her *home of love.*⁹¹ Agnes concedes that *though in my nature reigned / All frailties*⁹² *that besiege all kinds of blood [passion],* yet she will remain faithful to Will, *my rose;*⁹³ *in thou art my all.*⁹⁴ Conceding her misspent youth and other lovers, *Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there,*⁹⁵ Agnes assures Will that these

worse essays proved thee my best of love,⁹⁶ and that Will should not worry about Edward because *Mine appetite I never more will grind / On newer proof, to try an older friend.*⁹⁷

Filled with a Catholic's guilt and shame for past *harmful deeds*,⁹⁸ Agnes fears that her very nature is influenced by the words and deeds she writes of, and that her name is stained just as her hands are stained by the quill she used to write them *like the dyer's hand*.⁹⁹ And just as the dyer creates the fabrics worn by others, Agnes considers her own ink-stained hands and the words she writes—which are worn by Will.¹⁰⁰

Though happy and in love with her young husband, unbidden thoughts of Edward intrude upon her life. And despite *the vulgar scandal stamped upon*¹⁰¹ her brow due to the compromises Edward causes, Agnes throws all caution into a *profound abysm*¹⁰² admitting, *You are so strongly in my purpose bred / That all the world besides me thinks you're dead.*¹⁰³

Rousing herself from the unwelcome memory, Agnes calls for Will. When he doesn't answer, she remembers that he is touring with the players and since he left, her *eye is in [her] . . . mind*¹⁰⁴ and everything she sees—*The mountain, or the sea, the day or night, the crow, or dove*¹⁰⁵—her mind *shape[s] them to [his] . . . feature.*¹⁰⁶

Will returns to her unexpectedly one night—angry and jealous because the players are taunting him about her former liaison with Edward.

“Who’s there? Will?” she calls out, hearing him in the house.

“Aye, Agnes,” he answers strangely.

“Will you come to bed, my love?”

“Have you prayed tonight, Agnes?”

“Aye,” she answers, getting up from the bed to go to him.

“If you bethink yourself of any crime unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace, solicit for it straight.”

“What mean you by this?” Agnes asks, finding him standing, barely advanced inside the front door.

“Think on thy sins,” he shouts. “That love which thou gave me, belongs to the Earl of Oxenford. Confess now; he hath used thee.”¹⁰⁷

She weeps. “Aye, accuse me thus. *Book both my willfulness and errors down.*”¹⁰⁸

He relents and moves towards her, taking her around the shoulders to their bed.

In the aftermath of spent passion she tells him that as their love changes, it also grows stronger, reassuring Will that the former marriage vow made to Edward was simply one of a *millioned accidents*¹⁰⁹ while their *marriage of true minds . . . is an ever-fixed mark*,¹¹⁰ and she whispers, “*If this be error and upon me proved / I never writ, nor no man ever loved.*”¹¹¹ Offering an unfavorable comparison of *true minds*¹¹² with Edward’s *unknown mind*,¹¹³ Agnes answers Will’s doubt. Citing maladies, sickness, bitter saucers, disease and ills, she refers to Edward as the unpleasantly sweet—a *ne’er-cloying sweetness*¹¹⁴—medicine that taught her to see Will’s *rank of goodness*.¹¹⁵ Admitting her *wretched errors* brought on by a *madding fever*¹¹⁶—she points hopefully to a *ruined love when it is built anew / Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater*.¹¹⁷ Finally convinced, Will begs forgiveness for doubting her love, and she replies that his *trespass now becomes a fee / Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransom me*.¹¹⁸

Still, she is bitter that the players and Edward’s spies make sport of her acknowledged *frailties*,¹¹⁹ spreading rumors and ugly innuendo. In frustration she concludes, *All men are bad*.¹²⁰ And for a time there are no more play-scripts forthcoming. When Will asks, she tells him that her gifts to him—the play-scripts—are safe and secure *within my brain / Full characterized with lasting memory*¹²¹ where they will remain. Finally, in desperation, the players plead with Will to write, but he must first secure their promise to never again impugn her reputation.

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At times Agnes seems to rally, recalling the words and murmuring fragmented phrases in unison with Susanna, who marvels at her mother's keen memory.

For her part, Agnes clings to the voice of her daughter, whose every word beckons her away from the splintered light, dark shadows between, and a rushing noise like a storm-swollen river.

Dark figures emerge from the light growing brighter—ghostly figures that beckon—Edward and Will. Fear dissipates in a sudden tranquil calm. Serene, she wants to leave herself and become one with them. If only she could stay, but the slightest effort brings on nausea. Give in. Giving in to the outstretched hand, Death grips her fingers in his, but there is no comfort in the cold grasp. Susanna's voice summons Agnes—pulling her back to the safety of familiar words.

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Agnes compares Edward, *compound sweet*,¹²² to her savior Will, *simple savour*,¹²³ offering him her written work, *my oblation, poor but free*,¹²⁴ as she pledges a wife's obedience, *let me be obsequious in thy heart*.¹²⁵

Agnes defies time and the ancient written *registers* and *pyramids*,¹²⁶ claiming that her love for Will is a more lasting monument, for she *will be true despite . . . [death's] scythe and thee*.¹²⁷

Thou, my lovely Boy,¹²⁸ Agnes pleases, picturing herself *withering as thy sweet self grow'st*.¹²⁹ Personifying herself as nature and a mature woman, she reminds Will, *Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure*,¹³⁰ because it is her skill that keeps him from *wrack*¹³¹ by immortalizing his youth and beauty in the sonnets and by allowing him to claim her work as his own: *And her quietus is to render thee*,¹³² / *To Anne's will frame all thy ways / If thou would'st live forever in her prayse*.¹³³

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The sound of a horse announces the arrival of the emissary from William Jaggard's print shop, come to make corrections at Agnes' behest.

Resenting the intrusion as her mother lies dying, Susanna meets Isaac, the printer's son, and leads him to her mother's bedside.

"I'm not sure she will hear you. It won't be long now," Susanna says in a matter-of-fact way that belies the emotion she keeps carefully hidden inside.

“I am sorry for that,” Isaac answers sincerely.

“Who is it, Susanna?” Agnes whispers.

“Isaac is here from the printers,” Susanna answers gently. “Do you wish to speak with him?”

Agnes attempts to sit up, though the effort makes her dizzy. Susanna steps forward to help, adjusting the down-filled cushions behind her mother.

“Thank you,” Agnes murmurs, then turning to Isaac she says, “I have corrections for the folio.”

Isaac tries to take notes as Agnes struggles to point out the mistakes in the handwritten manuscript being used for the printing of the first folio. But her memory begins to list in the gathering gloom—in anguish, unable to recall words once etched clearly upon her brain, she pleads, “Wait, I must finish it first.”

“What must you finish, Mama?” Susanna cries to her mother, who no longer hears.

“The words, what are the words?” Agnes moans. And although she wants to say more, the effort to speak is becoming agony. She tries to tell Isaac that Laertes should

say, “Thus *diest* thou” and not “Thus *diddest* thou.”¹³⁴ But he misunderstands, thinking that she curses him.

There was more. “O that this too too *solid* flesh would melt,” was wrong. The line was meant to read, “Oh that this too too *sullied* flesh would melt.”¹³⁵ Again, Isaac misunderstands, thinking that she welcomes her own death.

Agnes rallies and her mind clears. The manuscripts are there, in the chest—she might simply hand them over. Considering for a long moment the cost of revealing the plays written in her own inscription, she decides the errors will simply have to remain, in order for her Will’s reputation to thrive as she had promised it would.

It is too late for changes, and Agnes sinks wearily onto her goose-down pillow as Death draws nigh.

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Floating almost free of the mortal coil that once bound her, Agnes observes both her memories and her younger self within them, with the same curious detachment she has used to her advantage in writing the sonnets and plays.

Employing the distance of an adopted persona to examine herself critically, Agnes concludes that although she was low-born and is dark-complexioned, at least she does not paint her face like the ladies of the court including the Queen, *Fairing the foul with art's false borrowed face*,¹³⁶ and she considers her beautiful Susanna, who will never know her true father—*sweet beauty hath no name . . . a beauty slandered with a bastard shame*.¹³⁷

The unexpected jolts—as her mind shifts from one memory to another—take a toll on Agnes' diminishing strength. A happy remembrance proves a welcome diversion as Will seeks to please her with his sonnet composed of tired clichés about a lover envying the instrument played by his beloved—*Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap*.¹³⁸ She does her best to transform his efforts into a sonnet. His pride in the final result is her reward.

But then, returning after a Royal Command performance, Will cannot look Agnes in the eye. Full of remorse he confesses finally that he has perjured his vow to be faithful—with the Virgin Queen. Knowing too well Elizabeth's voracious appetite for sexual conquest, Agnes sees that Will is *full of blame* and *no sooner had*¹³⁹ the Queen, than she became *hated as a swallowed bait*.¹⁴⁰ In the ache of betrayal she wounds him, crying, *Murd'rous, bloody, full of blame, / Savage extreme, rude cruel, not to trust*.¹⁴¹

Unwelcome, Edward slips quietly into her reverie when she isn't paying attention. He is young—so is she. He loves her though she taunts his purple prose, *My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun*.¹⁴² They are laughing. He chases her. Inexplicably, Will is

there too—watching them but she doesn't care, celebrating her power to *make love groan*¹⁴³—both in heartbreak and in the sounds of their love-making—Will's grief finally chides her to conclude of herself, *In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds*.¹⁴⁴

Offering Will the assurance that her eyes *Have put on black, and loving mourners be*,¹⁴⁵ Agnes acknowledges the pain she causes him while at the same time hinting that he needs to *swear beauty herself is black / And all they foul that . . . [her] complexion lack*,¹⁴⁶ including Lady Pembroke and the especially the Queen, if he wants to return to her good graces.

Guilt, regret and self-hatred possess her for the pain her obsession with Edward causes. Agnes curses *that heart that makes my heart to groan / For that deep wound it gives my friend and me*,¹⁴⁷ and she is in torment—*of him, myself and thee I am forsaken*.¹⁴⁸

Admitting defeat, *Him have I lost; thou hast both him and me*,¹⁴⁹ Agnes offers a plea to the Queen—who is covetous of Will's devotion to his wife and his literary reputation—to release Will saying, *He is kind / He learned but surety-like to write for me*¹⁵⁰ because of the marriage *bond that him as fast doth bind*.¹⁵¹

â â â

On a late afternoon in summer at the Globe the players are performing when the Queen decides to make her way onto the stage. The crowd shouts, “Long live the Queen!” She nods, before proceeding towards Will, who is playing the ghost of Hamlet’s father. He ignores her until she drops her gloves pointedly, for him to pick up.

Agnes’ eyes narrow in anger as she watches the Queen seduce her hapless husband in front of a crowd of hundreds gathered to watch the play.

And so she pens a bawdy sonnet suggesting that there is room in the Queen’s *large and spacious*¹⁵² vagina—made so by promiscuity—to accommodate *thy [Will’s] large Will*.¹⁵³

Using Will’s voice, Agnes suggests that the Queen’s capacious—*In things of great receipt*¹⁵⁴—vagina is capable of handling more than one *will* at a time, punning on the Queen’s own desire / will for sexual congress, *Ay, fill it full with wills*.¹⁵⁵

Consumed by her sexual obsession with Edward, Agnes creeps inside his mind’s eye—drawn unwillingly—in an effort to understand and then free herself of his vise-like grip on her heart.¹⁵⁶ Knowing the risks, she is unable to resist the temptation of losing herself in him.

At first the taste is bittersweet and their love is mutual. She hears Edward say: *When my love swears that she is made of truth / I do believe her, though I know she lies*.¹⁵⁷

Agnes smiles at his self-knowing vanity and fixation with youth. *She thinks me young / Although she knows my days are past the best.*¹⁵⁸

The taste grows acrid as Edward becomes jealous and bitter, demanding that Agnes *forbear to glance thine eye aside*¹⁵⁹ and threatening to slander her if she pushes him with *too much disdain*.¹⁶⁰ Noting her *thousand errors*¹⁶¹ with his eyes, he nevertheless concedes that his *heart . . . loves what they [his eyes] despise*.¹⁶² He accuses her lips of having *sealed false bonds of love as oft as mine*¹⁶³ while conceding that he longs to be the one she pursues, and paradoxically he threatens her Will unless he gets his way: *So will I pray that thou mayst have thy "Will," / If thou turn back and my loud crying still.*¹⁶⁴

The hum of Susanna's voice is muted by the regret Agnes has for the debauched life she leads as Edward's mistress / wife.

*To win me soon to hell my female evil
Tempteth my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.*¹⁶⁵

Sensing danger, Agnes is too slow to escape the lash of Edward's jealous tongue that paints her unfairly a fiend full of *foul pride*¹⁶⁶ spreading venereal disease to any man who dips his torch in her hell—*I guess one angel in another's Hell.*¹⁶⁷

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The end is near. Susanna finds her husband, John Hall, in the garden tending his herbs.

The time is come to summon her sister Judith, and she sends him on the errand. Susanna watches him leave before she returns to her mother's bedside. Placing a fresh damp cloth on Agnes' fevered brow, she softly sings a song her mother once sang to her.

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter,
Present mirth hath present laughter
What's to come is still unsure,
In delay there lies no plenty,
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
Youth's a stuff will not endure.¹⁶⁸

The sweet song banishes the baleful memories, and Agnes is back in another place at a time when Edward is mindful of her esteem and *languished for her sake*.¹⁶⁹

When she is certain that John Hall is well away from the house, Susanna calls for a servant. "Fetch Father Knowles, quickly," she orders.

Knowing that her staunchly-Puritan husband would forbid a Catholic priest from entering their home, Susanna nevertheless has promised to honor her mother's final request to receive last rites. When the priest arrives, the curtains are drawn as the sacraments are hurriedly said.

In her semi-conscious state, Agnes hears the familiar Latin chant, and her thoughts turn once more to Edward; for the first and last time she entreats him to consider

matters of a spiritual nature, addressing his *Poor soul*¹⁷⁰ while reminding him that worms will inherit his costly efforts in this short life,

*Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,
Painting they outward walls so costly gay?
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?*¹⁷¹

While recovering from a bout of influenza in Italy, a sudden epiphany strikes Agnes like a bolt of jagged light. Deserted by Edward who is made impatient by her illness, she can see that her *love is as a fever, longing still / For that which longer nurseth the disease, / Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill, / Th'uncertain sickly appetite to please*.¹⁷² Too late she recognizes that much of her life is wasted on an unworthy love. *My thoughts, and my discourse as madmen's are . . . For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright, / Who art as black as hell, as dark as night*.¹⁷³

Bemoaning her *cunning love who with tears . . . keep'st me blind*,¹⁷⁴ Agnes blames the tears for preventing her from *seeing thy [Edward's] foul faults*.¹⁷⁵ Full of reproach and self-loathing, Agnes recognizes the love-madness that blinded her to *worship [Edward's] defect*.¹⁷⁶ With abject hopelessness, Agnes considers his ability *my heart to sway*,¹⁷⁷ though she finds some comfort in the idea that her loyalty—despite his “unworthiness”—should ensure that *More worthy I to be beloved of thee*.¹⁷⁸

â â â

Thinking that her mother has died, Susanna stops reading and leans over to listen for her breath.

“There is more,” Agnes whispers without opening her eyes.

Surprised and relieved, Susanna smiles down at the frail figure that is her mother. Resuming her bedside vigil, she takes the last page and begins to read the four sonnets written there.

â â â

The words she has written are beginning to melt, becoming indistinct from Agnes’ remembrance of who spoke them and to whom they were spoken.

In the world of her imagination, Edward is waiting for her. Full of fury and despair, he blames Agnes for his venereal infection. After knowing him for so many years, she wonders at his ability to say things that shock her still, as when he refers blasphemously to his tumescence and detumescence in a word play on the Resurrection and *Her “love” for whose dear love I rise and fall.*¹⁷⁹

Some of the memories cut her with their sharply etched shards of regret.

Embittered and dying, Edward accuses her of breaking their marital *bed-vow*¹⁸⁰ for the second time when she returns to Will: *All my honest faith in thee is lost.*¹⁸¹ She answers him:

*In loving thee thou knowst I am forsworn;
But thou art twice forsworn to me love swearing,
In act thy bed-vow broke and new faith torn,
In vowing new hate after new love bearing.*¹⁸²

With curious indifference, Agnes considers the news that Edward is dead and she feels nothing, having expended all of her grief over losing him many years before. Her final tribute to him is a whimsical conceit,¹⁸³ in which he becomes Cupid, whose torch—phallus—is quenched in her cool spring, which heats the water permanently.¹⁸⁴ And with some sadness, Agnes pens his lament that he *found no cure; the bath for my help lies / Where Cupid got new fire: my mistress' eye.*¹⁸⁵

The hot baths fail to cure Edward's advanced case of venereal disease. And now, with a surprisingly light tone, Agnes hears Edward acknowledge that he has been hopelessly smitten ever since he was *by [her] . . . virgin hand disarmed.*¹⁸⁶ And there being no cure for the *heat perpetual* of his passion, he is resigned to his fate, *Love's fire heats water, water cools not love.*¹⁸⁷

â â â

Thinking to please her, Will secretly takes her sonnets to a printer in London. He never does understand Agnes' horrified reaction when he proudly presents her with a printed copy of her most private thoughts. They argue and she utters unfair words that wound him because he loves her.

Later he brings her a small wooden chest that locks with a delicately wrought key. He tells her that no one will ever touch her papers kept there. She wants to forgive him—but it's too late. The shame of seeing her personal life in print burns a blush in her cheeks.

She is young again, and Will, withholding his own pleasure with seeming ease, teases and pleases her in their second best bed until she is breathless. In a languid interval between their lovemaking she traces W-I-L-L-I-A-M across his naked back with her finger. When he asks, she tells him what she wrote, and then she teaches him to write her name, which he does again and again—tenderly across her breasts until she can stand it no longer. Urgently she pulls his body on top, groaning with pleasure as he enters her. Then it is a lusty Edward whose thrusting brings her into a single white headache explosion, fully awake for the first time that day.

â â â

An anxious Susanna is there beside the bed, along with her odious husband, Dr. John Hall.

“You were moaning, so I called for John,” Susanna explains.

“The devil, a Puritan that he is,” Agnes mutters so that only he can hear.

Turning to her husband, Susanna asks, “What did she say?”

“Never mind; she is mad,” he replies grimly.

“Good sir, give me leave to prove you a fool,” Agnes growls.

Both Susanna and her husband are startled by the unexpected strength in her voice, and Susanna cannot stifle her laughter in time.

John Hall’s face flushes with anger. Having borne the brunt of his mother-in-law’s wicked wit on more than one occasion, he is not about to engage in a verbal joust with the irksome old witch who somehow manages to frighten him still. “Your mother is not well,” he pronounces with authority he does not feel.

“Thy husband is a genius!” Agnes murmurs sardonically.

“I will prepare an infusion,” John Hall mutters to no one that listens. And he leaves the room, certain that they will laugh at him when he is not there.

With great effort, Agnes pushes herself up to a sitting position. “There is something I want you to have,” she whispers to her daughter.

“What is it, Mama?”

“A book.”

Shaking her head with uncertainty, Susanna replies, “I don’t know . . .”

Pointing to the wooden chest where she has kept her precious papers, Agnes urges her daughter to hurry. The effort of sitting causes the shadows to approach.

Always obedient, her beautiful Susanna goes to the chest and opens the lid.

“There is a small box beneath the papers; bring it,” Agnes says, sinking back on the bed exhausted. Knowing that she has little time before John Hall returns, she wonders again if she should tell Susanna about her father.

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Agnes drifts to another fine sunny day. Will entertains all three children with finger-puppets so that she can write undisturbed. Summoned by their shrieks of laughter, she watches him play as one of them.

When she attempts to tell them bedtime stories from the Latin scripture she's translated, they clamor for his gruesome stories instead—even though Susanna invariably wakes screaming in the middle of the night from terrifying nightmares about the monsters that eat wicked children. Will comforts her best. He loves her too well for anyone to guess that he isn't her father. The warmth of the memory chases the *strange shadows*¹⁸⁸ back.

Turning to her daughter, Agnes decides that Will's "monument shall be my gentle verse,"¹⁸⁹ hoping that her monument to him will, "Give my love fame faster than time wastes life."¹⁹⁰

â â â

Susanna has the small box in her hands.

"Open it," Agnes whispers, hoping not to wake the specter that has fallen asleep waiting for her.

Susanna takes the small leather-bound volume from its box. Running her finger over the distinctive “H” burned onto the edges of the pages opposite the binding, she looks at her mother with a question.

“Your father gave it me,” Agnes answers, and it isn’t a lie.

“He would want you to have it,” she says, which is a lie.

Just then John Hall returns with the sleeping potion, which he administers with some difficulty.

“It is vile, like you,” Agnes grimaces. Then closing her eyes, she allows herself to float away.

Seeing the book in his wife’s hand, John Hall takes it from her. Sternly he asks, “What is this?”

“My father gave it her,” Susanna pleads. “She wants me to have it.”

Noting the title—Metamorphoses—John Hall’s face becomes grim, and he tucks the book into his tunic. “Women should not read; it causes them to neglect their domestic

duties.” And although it is too late to do anything about Susanna, he will do his best to ensure that their daughter Elizabeth is not similarly corrupted.

â â â

Edward intrudes as the long afternoon seems to pass into early evening and time speeds up.

Agnes is a maiden of thirteen when he comes to her bed. He’s brought the books—the ones he will use to seduce her.

Holding her in his arms, he murmurs in her ear, “There, don’t let your slip make you over shy, or not allow your thigh to press against a thigh: there, let my tongue be buried between your rosy lips, and let desire shape a thousand ways to love.”¹⁹¹ His hands trace the words across her willing body—but she resists him when he tries to remove her night-slip. So he removes his own clothes instead. It’s cold, so he asks her to hold him—under the blankets now. She does and of course they eventually make love. She weeps so beautifully for the burning pain and her shame that he promises to marry her. Her engagement present is the precious copy of Ovid’s Metamorphoses that she so much loves to read. “They won’t allow me to keep it,” she says, caressing the book; “’tis too dear.”

Edward takes a half-burnt twig from the fire and brands the edge of the pages with an “H’ for Hathaway,” he says; “now let them try and take it from you.”

Later, when Agnes discovers that she is in love with her young husband Will, she gives him the book when he learns how to write his name. On the title page he proudly signs, “Wm Sh.”

Will even claims the “H” as his own, turning it into a joke they share. “You and I are man and wife, man and wife is one flesh, and so my name is Hathaway.”

“Mr. W.H.,” she now calls him, responding tenderly in a sonnet:

*Make but my name thy love, and love that still;
And then thou lov’st me, for my name is Will.*¹⁹²

å å å

Last scene of all, that ends her strange eventful day, is second childishness and she is once again a wee girl of three, who accidentally treads upon a duckling in the yard, “Here lies good master duck whom Anne hath trod on . . .” she can no longer remember the rest nor she does care.

At her bedside, Susanna begins to weep for her mother and the secret literary life that estranged them. “Forgive me, mama,” she sobs, too late for her mother to hear.

In her bed Agnes drifts into mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.¹⁹³ The two men she loves call out to her. Satisfied finally, the sound of their voices reassures her. She shakes free of death’s grip and joins them gladly.

â â â

In the yard below, John Hall builds a bonfire—feeding it with the manuscripts and papers from his mother-in-law’s chest, everything except for the Bible. Though he lacked the power to prevent the publication of the plays, he is nevertheless determined to erase all remaining traces of her unnatural appetite for literary nonsense.

The pungent scent of smoke wafts through the open window where Susanna and her sister Judith prepare their mother’s body for burial.

Glancing at the pages before he tosses them into the greedy blaze, John Hall sees the distinctive neat handwriting on the parchment strangely glow as the ink catches fire—

“If you read this line, remember not / The hand that writ it”¹⁹⁴

“My name be buried where my body is.”¹⁹⁵

“Every word almost doth tell my name.”¹⁹⁶

“I, once gone, to all the world must die.”¹⁹⁷

He watches the words burn.

Although he knows that it is his mother-in-law’s writing, John Hall cannot begin to conceive of the notion that a woman could have a thought in her head other than those placed there carefully by a father, brother, or husband.

Staring grimly into the hungry flames, he feels no regret—just relief to be rid of the eccentric old woman who defied him until the end, disrupting the domestic harmony of his household.

XVIII. A COMMON GRAVE

¹ "The Memorial Brass of Anne Hathaway, the wife of William Shakespeare at Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon," tr., August 2002. Provided to the author by the rector, the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon, during a recent visit.

² Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 13.

³ Bodleian Library, MS Autogrif.1 S.C. 28902.

⁴ W. D. Macray, *Annals of the Bodleian Library*, 2nd ed. (1890), 379.

⁵ Oscar Campbell, ed. *The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare* (New York: MJF, 1966), 539.

⁶ Honan, 401.

⁷ Honan, 399-400. See also Frank Marcham, *William Shakespeare and his Daughter Susannah* (London: Grafton, 1931), 66-71.

⁸ Honan, 400.

⁹ See *Twelfth Night* I, v, 72-77.

¹⁰ Sonnet 1. Circa 1567-1571. Although Agnes would have been very young, consider the contemporary Australian example of the precocious 13-year-old Xenia Natalenko, who became an award-winning playwright at the age of 12. "It feels very weird to be a very young person who's done all this adult stuff," Xenia admitted. See her story in Katrina Strickland, "Enter stage left, the teenage playwright," *The Australian* (17 November 1997): 3.

In her article about the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, Ruth Franklin points out that "by the age of sixteen, he had written one of the most celebrated poems in French literature," *Une Saison en Enfer* (*A Season in Hell*). Franklin goes on to say, "The crucial questions about Rimbaud's life and work remain unanswered: How could he write poetry like this at such a young age?" Ruth Franklin, "Arse Poetica", *The New Yorker*, (17 November 2003): 150.

¹¹ Sonnet 2. Circa 1567-1571.

¹² Sonnet 10. Circa 1567-1571. Compare with Sonnet 11, "Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die," with Cesario's exhortation of Olivia, "Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive / If you will lead these graces to the grave / And leave the world no copy" (*Twelfth Night*, I, v, 259-261).

¹³ Sonnet 3. Circa 1567-1571.

¹⁴ Sonnet 8. Circa 1570.

¹⁵ Sonnet 18. Circa 1567-1571.

¹⁶ Sonnet 19. Circa 1567-1571.

¹⁷ Sonnet 21. Circa 1567-1571.

¹⁸ Sonnet 29. Circa 1571.

¹⁹ Sonnet 30. Circa 1571.

²⁰ Sonnet 41. Circa 1571.

²¹ Sonnet 42. Circa 1571.

²² Sonnet 43. Circa 1571.

²³ Sonnet 48. Circa 1572.

²⁴ Sonnet 49. Circa 1572.

²⁵ Sonnet 50. Circa 1575-1581.

²⁶ Sonnet 53. Circa 1575-1581.

²⁷ Sonnet 57. Circa 1575-1581.

²⁸ Sonnet 58. Circa 1575-1581.

²⁹ Sonnet 60. Circa 1575-1581.

³⁰ Sonnet 61. Circa 1575-1581.

³¹ Sonnet 64. Circa 1575-1581.

³² Sonnet 66. Circa 1575-1581.

³³ Elizabeth de Vere was born on 2 July 1575; Edward initially denied paternity of Elizabeth. See Alan H. Nelson, *Monstrous Adversary: The Life of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2003), 121 and 123.

³⁴ Sonnet 66.

- ³⁵ Sonnet 67. Circa 1575-1581.
³⁶ Sonnet 68. Circa 1575-1581.
³⁷ Sonnet 70. Circa 1575-1581.
³⁸ Sonnet 71. Circa 1575-1581.
³⁹ Sonnet 72. Circa 1575-1581.
⁴⁰ Sonnet 73. Circa 1575-1581.
⁴¹ Sonnet 74. Circa 1575-1581.
⁴² Sonnet 74.
⁴³ Sonnet 74.
⁴⁴ Sonnet 75. Circa 1575-1581.
⁴⁵ Sonnet 76. Circa 1575-1581.
⁴⁶ Sonnet 77. Circa 1575-1581.
⁴⁷ Sonnet 78. Circa 1575-1581.
⁴⁸ Sonnet 78.
⁴⁹ Sonnet 78.
⁵⁰ Sonnet 79. Circa 1575-1581.
⁵¹ Sonnet 81. Circa 1575-1581.
⁵² Sonnet 81.
⁵³ Sonnet 82. Circa 1575-1581.
⁵⁴ Sonnet 83. Circa 1575-1581.
⁵⁵ Sonnet 84. Circa 1575-1581.
⁵⁶ Sonnet 83. See also King Lear I, ii, 81-122.
⁵⁷ Sonnet 86. Circa 1575-1581. Love's Labours Lost was the first published play to have William Shakespeare's name on it—"Newly corrected and augmented by W. Shakespere." Sir Walter Raleigh was the leader of a shadowy group of intellectuals, who named their study of the occult and astronomy "School of Night." One member of the group, George Chapman, wrote a poem, "The Shadow of Night," which "is a glorification of the life of study and contemplation as opposed to the frivolities of woman's companionship." For many years the phrase in Love's Labours Lost, "Black is the badge of hell, / The hue of dungeons and the schoole of night," was regarded as a misprint and corrected to read "suit of night." In 1903, Arthur Acheson argued that the line was a satiric jibe at Raleigh's school. The play features characters who have foresworn the company of women, only to see the error of their thinking. See The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare, 746.
 In his biography of Oxford, Alan Nelson includes a letter Walter Raleigh wrote to Burghley from Greenwich. The letter reveals Raleigh's efforts to restore Oxford to the Queen's favor. See Nelson, 290.
⁵⁸ Sonnet 87. Circa 1575-1581.
⁵⁹ Sonnet 89. Circa 1575-1581.
⁶⁰ Sonnet 92. Circa 1575-1581.
⁶¹ Twelfth Night I, ii, 53 and 63-4.
⁶² Nelson, 135 and 137. Nelson reports that Oxford apparently left Paris on 10 April 1576 and "having made his way safely to Calais, as he crossed the Channel Oxford's ship was taken by pirates. Nathaniel Baxter recalled the event in his 1606 Sidneys Ourania (sig. A3v):

Aked we landed out of Italie,
 Nthral'd by Pyrats men of noe regard,
 Orror and death assayl'd Nobilitie,
 F Princes might with crueltie be scar'd
 O thus are excellent beginnings hard."

According to Nelson—who refers to PRO 31/3/27 ("Baschet Transcripts"), No. 75; noted by Conyers Read's Mr. Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth (1925), 557, note 64:

. . . on 21 April [1576] the French ambassador Mauvissière reported of the Queen: 'She too is here, and is marvelously angry that the Earl of Oxford, son-in-law of the High Treasurer and one of the premier counts of this land, on his return from Italy was left naked, stripped to his shirt, treated miserably, his life in danger if he hadn't been recognized by a Scotsman. The Queen dispatched

Lord Howard to Dover to welcome and console him, for it is said that he had brought with him a great collection of beautiful Italian garments, which were taken from him, over which his regret is infinite.

- ⁶³ Sonnet 91. Circa 1575-1581.
⁶⁴ Sonnet 93. Circa 1575-1581.
⁶⁵ Sonnet 94. Circa 1575-1581.
⁶⁶ Sonnet 95. Circa 1575-1581.
⁶⁷ Sonnet 95.
⁶⁸ Sonnet 96. Circa 1575-1581.
⁶⁹ Sonnet 97. Circa 1575-1581.
⁷⁰ Sonnet 98. Circa 1575-1581.
⁷¹ Sonnet 99. Circa 1581.
⁷² Sonnet 100. Circa 1581-1582.
⁷³ Sonnet 100.
⁷⁴ Sonnet 101. Circa 1581-1582.
⁷⁵ Sonnet 104. Circa 1584.
⁷⁶ Sonnet 104.
⁷⁷ Sonnet 104.
⁷⁸ Sonnet 105. Circa 1585-1592.
⁷⁹ Sonnet 105.
⁸⁰ Sonnet 106. Circa 1585-1592.
⁸¹ Sonnet 106.
⁸² Sonnet 106.
⁸³ Sonnet 107. Circa 1603.
⁸⁴ Sonnet 107.
⁸⁵ Sonnet 13. Circa 1567-1571.
⁸⁶ Sonnet 108. Circa 1596
⁸⁷ Sonnet 108.
⁸⁸ Sonnet 126. Circa 1585-1592.
⁸⁹ Sonnet 108.
⁹⁰ Sonnet 108.
⁹¹ Sonnet 109. Circa 1585-1592.
⁹² Sonnet 109. Hamlet says of Ophelia, "Frailty, thy name is woman" (Hamlet I, ii, 146).
⁹³ Sonnet 109. Ophelia calls Hamlet the "rose of the fair state" (Hamlet III, i, 154).
⁹⁴ Sonnet 109.
⁹⁵ Sonnet 110. Circa 1585-1592.
⁹⁶ Sonnet 110.
⁹⁷ Sonnet 110.
⁹⁸ Sonnet 111. Circa 1585-1592.
⁹⁹ Sonnet 111.
¹⁰⁰ See Sonnet 111.
¹⁰¹ Sonnet 112. Circa 1585-1592.
¹⁰² Sonnet 112.
¹⁰³ Sonnet 112.
¹⁰⁴ Sonnet 113. Circa 1585-1592.
¹⁰⁵ Sonnet 113.
¹⁰⁶ Sonnet 113.
¹⁰⁷ Othello V, ii, 23-49 *passim*.
¹⁰⁸ Sonnet 117. Circa 1585-1592.
¹⁰⁹ Sonnet 115. Circa 1585-1592.
¹¹⁰ Sonnet 116. Circa 1585-1592.
¹¹¹ Sonnet 116.
¹¹² Sonnet 116.
¹¹³ Sonnet 117.

- ¹¹⁴ Sonnet 118. Circa 1585-1592.
- ¹¹⁵ Sonnet 118.
- ¹¹⁶ Sonnet 119. Circa 1585-1592.
- ¹¹⁷ Sonnet 119.
- ¹¹⁸ Sonnet 120. Circa 1585-1592.
- ¹¹⁹ Sonnet 121. Circa 1585-1592. Again, "Frailty thy name is woman" (Hamlet I, ii, 146).
- ¹²⁰ Sonnet 121.
- ¹²¹ Sonnet 122. Circa 1585-1592.
- ¹²² Sonnet 125. Circa 1585-1592.
- ¹²³ Sonnet 125.
- ¹²⁴ Sonnet 125.
- ¹²⁵ Sonnet 125.
- ¹²⁶ Sonnet 123. Circa 1585-1592.
- ¹²⁷ Sonnet 123.
- ¹²⁸ Sonnet 126. Circa 1585-1592.
- ¹²⁹ Sonnet 126.
- ¹³⁰ Sonnet 126.
- ¹³¹ Sonnet 126.
- ¹³² Sonnet 126.
- ¹³³ These last two lines for Sonnet 126 are not included in any printed version of the sonnets, and may have existed only in the original handwritten copy, now presumed lost or destroyed.
- ¹³⁴ Hamlet IV, vii, 56-58. In the 1604 "Good Quarto," the line reads, *Thus didst thou*. In the 1623 First Folio version it reads, *Thus diddest thou*. Scholars argue over whether the 1603 "Bad Quarto" (discovered in 1823) was an early draft or a bootlegged copy based on faulty memory. In the "Bad Quarto," the line reads *thus he dies*. Some scholars, including Harold Jenkins, editor of the 1997 Arden Hamlet, believe that the line is meant to read, *Thus diest thou*. In a controversial forthcoming Arden edition of Hamlet, the editors—Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor—will present all three versions of Hamlet: the 1604 Good Quarto, the 1623 First Folio, and the 1603 Bad Quarto. According to Ron Rosenbaum, their approach is "the product of scrupulous historical scholarship—and not a deconstructionist, literary theorist's conceit about textuality. But that will not diminish its impact on readers, who will no longer be certain which is the true Hamlet." Ron Rosenbaum, "Shakespeare in Rewrite," The New Yorker (13 May 2002): 68-77.
- ¹³⁵ Hamlet I, ii, 129. In the 1604 Quarto the line is *too too sallied flesh*. The 1623 Folio reads *too too solid flesh*. Again, Jenkins argues that *sullied* is what the author intended.
- ¹³⁶ Sonnet 127. Circa 1593-1603.
- ¹³⁷ Sonnet 127.
- ¹³⁸ Sonnet 128. Circa 1593-1603. Duncan-Jones points out that the conceit in this sonnet is stale. It has been satirized by both Marston and Jonson. Duncan-Jones suggests that the author may here be satirizing the notion of an erotic connection between the lover, an object (virginal) and the mistress.
- ¹³⁹ Sonnet 129. Circa 1593-1603.
- ¹⁴⁰ Sonnet 129.
- ¹⁴¹ Sonnet 129.
- ¹⁴² Sonnet 130. Circa 1569.
- ¹⁴³ Sonnet 131. Circa 1593-1603.
- ¹⁴⁴ Sonnet 131.
- ¹⁴⁵ Sonnet 132. Circa 1593-1603.
- ¹⁴⁶ Sonnet 132.
- ¹⁴⁷ Sonnet 133. Circa 1603.
- ¹⁴⁸ Sonnet 133.
- ¹⁴⁹ Sonnet 134. Circa 1603.
- ¹⁵⁰ Sonnet 134.
- ¹⁵¹ Sonnet 134.
- ¹⁵² Sonnet 135. Circa 1593-1603. Schoenbaum recounts Richard Ryan's 1825 tale about the Queen and William Shakespeare:

It is well known that Queen Elizabeth was a great admirer of the immortal Shakespeare, and used frequently (as was the custom with persons of great rank in those days) to appear upon the stage

before the audience, or to sit delighted behind the scenes, when the plays of our bard were performed. One evening, when Shakespeare himself was personating the part of a King, the audience knew of her Majesty being in the house. She crossed the stage when he was performing, and, on receiving the accustomed greeting from the audience, moved politely to the poet, but he did not notice it! When behind the scenes, she caught his eye, and moved again, but still he would not throw off his character, to notice her: this made her Majesty think of some means by which she might know, whether he would depart, or not, from the dignity of his character, while on the stage.—Accordingly, as he was about to make his exit, she stepped before him, dropped her glove, and recrossed the stage, which Shakespeare noticing, took up, with these words, immediately after finishing his speech, and so aptly were they delivered, that they seemed to belong to it:

And though now bent on this high embassy,
Yet *stoop* we to take up our *Cousin's* glove!

He then walked off the stage, and presented the glove to the Queen, who was greatly pleased with his behaviour, and complimented him upon the propriety of it. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, 225.

¹⁵³ Sonnet 135.

¹⁵⁴ Sonnet 136. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁵⁵ Sonnet 136.

¹⁵⁶ Vendler points out that

the self-lacerating intelligence in the later sonnets, 138-144, produces a voice so undeceived about reality (*the truth*) and himself[herself] (*his [her] perjured eye*) that the reader admires the clarity of mind that can so anatomize sexual obsession while still in its grip, that can so acquiesce in humiliation while inspecting its own arousal, that can lie freely while acknowledging the truth. To represent such a voice in all its paradoxical incapacity and capacity is the victory of Shakespeare's technique in the second subsequence. (645)

And again we are reminded of the complexity of thinking and the linking of thoughts demonstrated in the sonnets, a complexity that has been identified as feminine; see Marano, 38-46.

¹⁵⁷ Sonnet 138. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁵⁸ Sonnet 138.

¹⁵⁹ Sonnet 139. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁶⁰ Sonnet 140. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁶¹ Sonnet 141. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁶² Sonnet 141.

¹⁶³ Sonnet 142. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁶⁴ Sonnet 143. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁶⁵ Sonnet 144. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁶⁶ Sonnet 144.

¹⁶⁷ Sonnet 144.

¹⁶⁸ *Twelfth Night*, II, iii, 49-53.

¹⁶⁹ Sonnet 145. Circa 1569. Susanna probably noticed that this sonnet was different and like some of the other—now lost or perhaps destroyed—sonnets in her mother's collection, it was written in an unfamiliar hand.

¹⁷⁰ Sonnet 146. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁷¹ Sonnet 146.

¹⁷² Sonnet 147. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁷³ Sonnet 147. Although Agnes likens her "thoughts" and "discourse" to "madmen's" here, in her notes for this sonnet, Duncan-Jones points out that it has been compared to Sidney's *Old Arcadia*, 41, in which the voice is also feminine,

the duchess of Gynecia lament[ing] . . . her unfulfilled and unfulfillable desires:

Like those sick folks, in whome strange humors flowe,
Can taste not sweetes, the sower onely please:

So to my minde, while passions daylie growe,
 Whose fyrie chaines, upon his freedome seaze,
 Joie's strangers seeme, I cannot bide their showe,
 Nor brooke ought els but well acquainted woe.
 Bitter grieve tastes me best, paine is my ease,
 Sicke to death, still loving my disease. (See Duncan-Jones, 410)

It is only recently that descriptive linguistics have demonstrated that the so-called generic terms, "man" and "men," do not operate as neutral in respect to gender, so the use of the term "madmen's" in this sonnet does not necessarily reflect any particular insight into the gender identity of the author; rather it demonstrates the author's sensibility within the context of the times in which she wrote when the term "madmen's" would have been considered a generic term—both men and women were as one, and that one was "men." It may also be relevant to note that although Sidney died before completing *Arcadia*, it was a woman who finished it—his sister, the Countess of Pembroke.

¹⁷⁴ Sonnet 148. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁷⁵ Sonnet 148.

¹⁷⁶ Sonnet 149. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁷⁷ Sonnet 150. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁷⁸ Sonnet 150.

¹⁷⁹ Sonnet 151. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁸⁰ Sonnet 152. Circa 1593-1603.

¹⁸¹ Sonnet 152.

¹⁸² Sonnet 152.

¹⁸³ According to Vendler these sonnet-twins, 153 and 154, do "not represent the Shakespearean colloquial speech-pattern, formed by dramatic writing, which prevails in the other sonnets" (Vendler, 649), which could be explained, in part, by considering the shock of Edward's death upon Agnes.

¹⁸⁴ Hot baths were considered a curative for venereal disease in Hathaway's day (Duncan-Jones, 422).

¹⁸⁵ Sonnet 153. Circa 1604.

¹⁸⁶ Sonnet 154. Circa 1604.

¹⁸⁷ Sonnet 154.

¹⁸⁸ See Sonnet 53.

¹⁸⁹ Sonnet 81.

¹⁹⁰ Sonnet 100.

¹⁹¹ From Ovid's, *The Amores*, Book III, Elegy XIV.

¹⁹² Sonnet 136. In Elizabethan marriages, the husband and wife became as one, and that "one" was the husband. Agnes goes on to say, "Among a number one is reckoned none," acknowledging her erasure from history with "Then in the number let me pass untold," finishing with a plea that because Will and she are one, "Make but my name thy love, and love that still; / And then thou lov'st me, for my name is Will." In sonnet 108 Agnes writes, "Thou mine, I thine, / Even as when first I hallowed thy fair name". See also *Hamlet* IV, ii, 51-54, where Hamlet inverts this practice, referring to Claudius as "dear *Mother*." When Claudius corrects him saying, "Thy loving *father*," Hamlet responds insistently, "My *mother*. Father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh, and so, my *mother*."

¹⁹³ *As You Like It*, III, ii, 163-166.

¹⁹⁴ Sonnet 71.

¹⁹⁵ Sonnet 72.

¹⁹⁶ Sonnet 76.

¹⁹⁷ Sonnet 81.

APPENDIX A
“The Lost Years” or “Known Facts About Anne/Agnes Hathaway”

The following information was gleaned from a number of sources including Charlton Ogburn’s The Mysterious William Shakespeare; B.M. Ward’s The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford 1550-1604 From Contemporary Documents; Samuel Schoenbaum’s William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life; Garry O’Connor’s William Shakespeare: A Life and The Reader’s Encyclopedia of Shakespeare (1966) edited by Oscar James Campbell. Approximate dates for when the plays were written are based on “orthodox” scholarship and taken largely from Major British Writers, edited by G.B. Harrison with reference to The Reader’s Encyclopedia of Shakespeare. The translation of the Latin verse marking Mrs. Shakespeare’s grave in the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon was given to me there by the rector in August 2002.

| Agnes-Anne | Contemporary Events | Play Written (approx. date) | Play Published |
|------------|---|---|-------------------|
| 1550 | | April 22-Edward de Vere born. | |
| 1556 | Agnes born--no birth record, however her gravestone says she died at the age of 67 (in 1623). Baptismal records were kept beginning in 1558. | Anne Cecil born. | |
| 1562 | | September-Edward’s father, the 16 th Earl of Oxford, dies. As the 17 th Earl of Oxford, Edward is sent to live as a ward of the Queen’s councilor, William Cecil (who later becomes Lord Burghley). His mother marries a few months later. Some scholars | |

suggest that this makes him the possible inspiration for the character Hamlet, devastated by the death of his father and the hasty re-marriage of his mother.

1564

April 26-William Shakespeare is baptized at Stratford-on-Avon

1566

September-John Shakespeare (William's father) stands surety for Richard Hathaway (Agnes' father) in two actions.

1571

September 21-In a letter he wrote to the Countess of Shrewsbury, Hugh Fitz-William says, "They say the Queen will be at my Lord of Burghley's house beside Waltham on Sunday next, where my Lord of Oxford shall marry Mistress Anne Cecil, his daughter." (MWS, p. 491). The Queen did arrive on September 22 although no wedding took place until . . .

December 19-Edward de Vere and Anne Cecil wed.

1573

Edward keeps two apartments at the Savoy, the abode of writers. His father-in-law accuses him of keeping lewd companions. Edward accuses his mother-in-law of wishing him dead.

A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres published, including sixteen of Edward's lyrics.

1575

January 7-Edward travels to France and Italy accompanied — according to his father-in-law Lord Burghley -- by “two gentlemen, two grooms, one payend, a harbinger, a *housekeeper* (emphasis added), and a trenchman.” (Ward, 101. Hatfield MSS. 146. 13.)

July 2-Anne Cecil gives birth to a daughter, Elizabeth. Her father, Lord Burghley, is unable to get word of the birth to Edward until September because he is traveling abroad. There is some suggestion that the child may actually have been born in September, which would

- mean that Edward could not possibly be the father. He denies paternity.
- 1576-81 A five-year break between Edward and his wife Anne Cecil. During this time more of Edward's poems are published in *The Paradyse of Daintie Devices*
- John Shakespeare falls on hard financial times.
- 1581 September-Richard Hathaway dies leaving bequests for his three daughters and four sons. He leaves ten marks to his daughter *Agnes*, to be paid on her wedding day. Schoenbaum points out that the names Anne/Agnes were interchangeable. March-Anne Vavasor gives birth to Edward's son. They are all sent to the tower.
- December-Edward resumes living with his wife.
- 1582 September-Agnes becomes pregnant.
- November 28-A marriage bond is issued with the names "William Shagspere" and Anne Hathwey of Stratford, without benefit of the required banns and sans a representative from the Shakespeare clan, also required because William was underage. November 27-Willelmum Shaxpere and Anne Whately of Temple Grafton are granted a marriage license.

1583 May 26-Daughter, Susanna, is baptized.

May 9-Anne Cecil and Edward bury their newborn son.

1584

April-Daughter, Bridget, is born to Anne and Edward.

1585

February 2-Twins, Hamnet and Judith, are baptized. .

1585-'92

Designated as "The Lost Years" because the historical record is blank concerning the whereabouts of William Shakespeare.

1587

May-A daughter, Susan, is born to Anne and Edward.

September-Anne and Edward's daughter, Frances, dies.

1588

June-Anne Cecil dies.

1590-94

Henry VI (three parts) 1623 (folio)
Richard III 1597
Titus Andronicus 1594
Love's Labors Lost 1598
Two Gentlemen of Verona 1623 (folio)

| | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------|---|----------------------------|--------------|
| | | | <i>Comedy of Errors</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| | | | <i>Taming of the Shrew</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| 1591 | | Edward marries Elizabeth Trentham. | | |
| 1593 | | February-An heir, Henry, is born to Edward and Elizabeth. | | |
| | | April- <i>Venus and Adonis</i> by William Shakespeare is published following the closure of the playhouses due to an outbreak of the plague. | | |
| 1594 | | <i>The Rape of Lucrece</i> by William Shakespeare is published. | | |
| 1594-1597 | | | <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> | 1599 |
| | | | (pirated 1597) | |
| | | | <i>Midsummer Dream</i> | 1600 |
| | | | <i>Richard II</i> | 1597 |
| | | | <i>King John</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| | | | <i>Merchant of Venice</i> | 1600 |
| 1595 | | March-Will Shakespeare is paid for performing before the Queen. | | |
| 1596 | August-Son, Hamnet, is buried. | John Shakespeare is granted a coat of arms. | | |

1597

Willielmum Shakespeare
buys one of the finest homes in
Stratford--New Place.

1597-1600

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Henry IV, Pt. 1</i> | 1598 |
| <i>Henry IV, Pt. 2</i> | 1600 |
| <i>Henry V</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| <i>Much Ado</i> | 1600 |
| <i>Merry Wives</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| <i>As You like It</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| <i>Julius Caesar</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| <i>Troilus & Cressida</i> | 1609 |

1601

March 25-Thomas Whittington, the
Hathaway's shepherd leaves a will which
includes the following: "I give and
bequeath unto the poor people of
Stratford xls. That is in the
hand of Anne Shaxspere, wife unto Mr.
Wyllyam Shaxspere, and is due debt unto
me, being paid to mine executor by the
said Wyllyam Shaxspere or his assigns
according to the true meaning of my
will."

1601-1608

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Hamlet</i> | 1604 |
| <i>Twelfth Night</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| <i>Measure for Measure</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| <i>All's Well</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| <i>Othello</i> | 1622 |
| <i>King Lear</i> | 1623 (folio) |

| | | | |
|------------|--|-------------------------------|--------------|
| | | <i>Macbeth</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| | | <i>Timon of Athens</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| | | <i>Antony & Cleopatra</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| | | <i>Coriolanus</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| | | <i>Pericles</i> | 1609 |
| | | (omitted from folio) | |
| 1603 | March 24-Queen Elizabeth dies. | | |
| 1604 | June 24-Edward de Vere dies. | | |
| After 1608 | | <i>Cymbeline</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| | | <i>A Winter's Tale</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| | | <i>The Tempest</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| | | <i>Henry VIII</i> | 1623 (folio) |
| 1609 | Sonnets published following an outbreak of the plague that closed the theatres. | | |
| 1612 | November 25-Edward's wife, Elizabeth Trentham, dies leaving "x pounds" to her "dumb man." | | |
| 1613 | William Shakespeare of Stratford is able to purchase a house near Blackfriars theatre in London. | | |

- 1616 March 25-Wm Schackspeare makes out his final will, leaving the bulk of his estate to daughter Susana. He does leave his second-best bed to Agnes, while at the same time he ensures that she is excluded from a widow's dower right to his share in the Blackfriars theatre.
- 1622 April 25-The burial registry records the death of "Will. Shakspere gent." The grave bears the following doggeral verse:
 "Good frend for Jesus sake forebeare,
 to digg the dust enclosed heare:
 bleste be y man y spares thes stones,
 and curst be he y moves my bones."
- 1623 August 8-Agnes is buried. The grave bears a Latin inscription which translated reads: "Thou, O mother, gavest me the breast, thou gavest milk and life / Alas! for such great gifts, I, in return, give unto thee a sepulcher! / O, that some good angel would move away the stone from its mouth / That thy form might come forth, even as did the body of Christ! / But wishes are of no avail! Come quickly, O Christ! / My mother—though shut up in the tomb—shall rise again and seek the stars."
- 1623 November-First Folio published. Ben Jonson provided a verse commenting on the Droeshout Portrait that appears on the first preliminary page:
 "To the Reader.
 This figure, that thou here seest put,
 It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
 Wherein the Grauer had a strife
 with nature, to out-doo the life:
 O, could he but haue drawne his wit
 As well in brasse, as he hath hit
 His face; the Print would then surpassse
 All, that was euer writ in brasse.
 But, since he cannot, Reader, looke
 Not on his Picture, but his Booke."
- 1708 A drawing, bearing this date, exists in a copy of the Third Folio of 1664 (the second issue). It is accompanied by the following verse:

“This figure, that thou here seest put
It was for Shakespear’s Consort cut
Wherein the Graver had a strife
With Nature to outdo the Life
O had he Her Complexion shewn
As plain as He’s the outline Drawn
The plate, believe me, woud surpass
All that was ever made in brass.”

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