A FEMINIST COMPANION TO

SHAKESPEARE

SECOND EDITION

EDITED BY

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with website

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Preface to the Second Edition

In the Introduction to the first edition of *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, published in 2000, I confidently defined feminism as a political and intellectual movement that took as its central object of concern the status of women. Sixteen years on (the lifetime of Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* from babyhood to marriageable princess) my conviction that this is the primary goal of feminist analysis remains intact. Although it is the convention in a volume such as this to emphasize new developments in the field and to stress innovation and transformation, and although there is no shortage of that, I want to resist the continual grasp for the new. Instead, I want to draw attention to the strong continuities of scholarship in this field and argue that over the course of the history of feminist criticism of Shakespeare there may have been distinct phases in the conversation but not different conversations altogether. My reluctance to assert that "Much has changed in the past sixteen years" is motivated neither by the dispiriting fact that in relation to the condition of women worldwide not nearly enough has changed, nor by a perverse desire to cling to a victimized identity for women. My diffidence on that score stems rather from my conviction that a feminist perspective remains an immensely powerful lens through which to view literary texts, and its potential, far from being exhausted, continues to generate fresh insights about Shakespeare's plays and poems as well as about the early modern world in which they were written.

We are still learning how gender designations are generated and embodied; how they operate in the early modern period and our own; how sexual identities become

attached to or disconnected from gender; and how gender intersects with all other aspects of culture and society. The operations of gender remain so naturalized that they are difficult to see, and even when made visible, they can all too soon again vanish from sight. Furthermore, some patriarchal ideas have a very long shelf life indeed. To give but one example, in her brilliant study *Marriage and Violence: The Early Modern Legacy* (2008), Frances E. Dolan details the ways in which some of the most egregious notions about conjugal intimacy, specifically ones which physically endanger women, remain alive and well in the twenty-first century. This is but one of the reasons why the topics of critical conversation underway in 2000 are still very much in progress, still vital, still significant. Moreover, because feminist analysis has always understood that gender does not exist in isolation from other social markers, it has not been superseded by ostensibly competing categories of analysis. Theatrical transvestism, race, ethnicity, gender, gendered aesthetics, sexuality, identity, social status, textual work, performance, and critical theory remain the constitutive elements of feminist Shakespeare criticism.

What, then, of the present-day status of women? There is no doubt that feminist Shakespeare criticism and, say, a World Health Organization's report on women occupy distinct discursive arenas. A description, no matter how accurate, of the welfare of women is not the specific goal here after all. However, that welfare remains the impetus to feminist critical analysis, and as such it behooves us to examine the gap between the apparent assimilation of feminism into the critical mainstream and the still secondary status of women in the world. There is, then, a great deal that has *not* changed, at least for women. The point here is not to adopt a grim, pessimistic view about women's lives, or even of cultural representations of those

lives. It is, however to resist the idea that “new and improved” is the only and inevitable understanding of developments not only in the status of women but also in the insights of feminist literary criticism. A reluctance to claim some brand new, shinier model of feminist criticism does not, of course, mean that the field is devoid of cutting-edge feminist work – far from it, as the new essays in this volume amply demonstrate. It is simply that the Whig view of feminism – which is to say, the view that there is an evolutionary progress in the sphere of gender equality – is not the one that we can readily espouse without annulling the specifically political aims of feminist criticism.

In rereading the earlier edition of the *Companion* I am also struck by how very relevant the essays remain to current debates and controversies, such as the argument about whether the term “woman” is oppressive because it excludes those who identify as female despite being born with male anatomy. Indeed, the feminist insistence on denaturalizing gender and its related categories is a constant theme in both editions of the volume. However, to denaturalize gender does not mean that it is without material foundation or that gender identities are “just made up.” On the contrary, to argue that the complex operations of gender identity are not an inevitable result of anatomy or biological “fact” allows that there are, as Stephen Whittle points out in his Foreword to *The Transgender Studies Reader* (2006), “deeply held self-understandings” of identity that are not “entirely due to nurture and environment.” Since on Shakespeare’s all-male stage there were no “women-born-women” (that is to say, persons whose female sexual identity corresponds with their biology) but only “women” with male anatomy,[1] feminist Shakespeareans tend to have a much more comprehensive and less exclusive sense of who fits in and falls out of the designation “woman” in any given historical

moment or theatrical context. As the French feminist theorist Monique Wittig pointed out almost forty years ago, women are not a “natural group,” or as Wittig’s predecessor Simone de Beauvoir famously put it in *The Second Sex*: “One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.”[2] While “Woman” as a blanket designation with a capital letter may conflate a vast range of anatomical configurations and lived experiences, including but not limited to those related to religious identity, sexual orientation, class, race, and ethnicity, as a constitutive idea, “Woman” nonetheless remains a fully operative idea in our world, and those operations, past and present, demand critical analysis. Such pointed relevance to current issues surely must dispatch the idea that since the literary establishment not only tolerates but actively embraces feminist analyses, then our work is done – or if not done, then shifted into ecocriticism, or the new formalism, to name only a few, where its feminist intellectual bite becomes a much smaller mouthful.

Precisely because they remain so relevant, the essays from the previous edition have been integrated into the current volume. But what then of the specifics of new contributions to feminist Shakespeare in this volume? As with the previous edition, contributors come from across the feminist generations and from different career stages. The essays address what is new in the field in terms of historical and textual discovery, and especially in analyses of recent performances and appropriations of Shakespeare. However, these essays also acknowledge and confront the historical facts around dynamics of the gender hierarchy in early modern England, that is, the restrictions imposed

upon women as a group no matter what degree of (sometimes considerable) latitude they were able to achieve in the exercise of personal or political agency. This is because for feminism, changing history does not mean denying or downplaying women's subordination in the past, but rather changing the present by coming into a much fuller understanding of the history that has produced it.

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Notes

1 Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. xiii.

2 Monique Wittig, "On ne naît pas femme," *Questions Féministes*, 8 (May 1980), and as "One Is Not Born a Woman," *Feminist Issues*, 1 (2) (Winter 1981); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantam, 1952), p. 249.

Introduction

Dympna Callaghan

> To read … texts against themselves is to concede that the performativity of the text is not under sovereign control. On the contrary, if the text acts once, it can act again, and possibly against its prior act. This raises the possibility of resignification as an alternative reading of performativity and of politics.
>
> Butler (1997: 69)

In my more distrustful moments, I sometimes feel that feminist Shakespeareans are a persecuted minority, vulnerable to attack from all sides. More reactionary non- (if not anti-) feminists claim that feminism has "gone too far" and is only outlandishly brought into juxtaposition with the venerable activities of Shakespearean scholarship. Rather than dismissing concerns about gender and sexuality (as "pelvic studies" in one particularly retrograde instance I came across recently), a more progressive school of thought claims that these issues are already assimilated into the mainstream of a post feminist, postgender world. Nor is there much comfort to be had within the feminist community, where there is an insistent critique of abstruse intellectualism in general, and the energy spent on elite literary culture in particular. For feminists in other spheres of life and academic discipline often regard Shakespeare as at worst irrelevant and at best marginal to the core of its concern: the status of women.

Feminist Shakespeareans must tackle the onslaught, then, from both outside the perimeters of feminist concern and, more significantly, within them. For if the essentialist view of identity has been dispatched in terms of gender, race,

class, and a host of other categories, so that we no longer consider, for example, people to be wholly or primarily defined by their biology, skin color, or socioeconomic status, it remains in relation to the feminist Shakespeare scholar. Under the mantle of this identity, it is unfairly assumed that one reads Shakespeare but none of his contemporaries, no early modern women writers, no noncanonical writers. Allegedly insulated in the bowels of the library from the toils and troubles of life in general, at the start of the millennium feminist Shakespeareans were even thought, however unwittingly, to contribute and compound social ills by failing to engage in practical politics.

I will admit that such perceptions, though not wholly unwarranted, may unreasonably amplify the dilemmas facing people of a feminist persuasion who study Shakespeare. I must further concede – however reluctantly – that such criticism, paradoxically, is itself an integral part of feminist Shakespeare scholarship. For questions about both scholarly and political relevance are of course also questions that feminist Shakespeareans ask themselves all the time because we necessarily also belong to broader intellectual and political communities, whose critiques not only pressure but also shape feminist studies of Shakespeare. Even, or perhaps especially, blunt, uncomfortable questions like “What’s the point?” – often posed not by “experts,” but by students, those most vigorous representatives of a feminist future – have an invaluable place here. A scholarly example of this phenomenon is to be found in a recent commentary by feminist cultural historian Margaret King, who argues against canonicity in all its forms, and whose argument has crucial implications for the study of Shakespeare as literature’s most venerated and studied canonical object:

> The scholar must turn away from the grand monuments: the palaces, cathedrals, fortifications, and most of the painted and sculpted works of art. To understand women, it is necessary to look at the objects most associated with them: textiles, above all, spun, woven, sewn, embroidered by female hands; their boxes, books, and toys; the beds, chairs, stools and buckets associated with cooking, laundering, and giving birth; the rooms in which they sat to spin, sew, weave, embroider, cook, and talk.
>
> (King 1997: 22)

For if the object of feminist inquiry is “women” of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, then Shakespeare, undoubtedly the grand monument of literary studies, would seem to offer only a very oblique bearing on the subject. While, indeed, there must be something to be gleaned about women’s diurnal domestic activities in Shakespeare’s plays, these are heavily mediated by male representation and the constraints of literary convention.

Of course, the importance of juxtaposing canonical information with all kinds of new knowledge about women in Shakespeare’s time cannot be underestimated. However, feminist Shakespeareans are also interested in how the plays may reflect real women, as well as how they help produce and reproduce ideas about women that then shape, perpetuate, or even disturb prevailing conditions of femininity. For “woman” is never an already accomplished, cold, hard, self-evident fact or category, but always a malleable cultural idea as well as a lived reality that, to use a Derridean formulation, *always already has a history*. An example framed within the theoretical terms of Judith Butler’s important book, *Excitable Speech*, may make this clearer. In misogynist diatribe, for instance, the word “whore” (examined in detail by one of the contributors to

this volume, Kay Stanton) does not secure its injurious effect because women are powerless victims who wilt at its very utterance. Rather, the word is injurious because in the long history of its usage it has become freighted with systemic patriarchal violence. (Notably, this remains true whether enunciated by males or females – women regularly slandered and defamed one another in early modern England – because women, no less than men, inhabit and implement the social and conceptual structures of the patriarchal order.) A staggering old man who drinks to allay the poverty and misery of his life and calls a woman a "whore" before he passes out cold on the stone floor of a tavern is not a powerful representative of patriarchy, but his words nonetheless may have the power to wound. "Whore" is probably the worst name you can call a woman in Shakespeare's England and its capacity to "wound" means not only the power to hurt someone's feelings but potentially also to deprive women (who might be disowned by their kin as the result of allegations of unchastity) of all means of social and economic support. This word has accrued patriarchal power and its attendant material effects by means of its insistent reiteration in the culture. That is, there is no such thing as an isolated instance of the denigration of women – were it isolated, it would be devoid of cultural power. However the way that history is always inextricably woven into the materiality of discourse applies not just to particular words relating to women, but to the entire edifice of gender organization itself. Thus, femininity is continually produced and reproduced in ways that may subvert conventional understandings or, more commonly, in ways that may further subjugate women, and the operation of this reiteration has to be carefully unraveled and examined in any given historical and/or discursive instance. If language in general is crucial to any understanding of gender organization, then canonical representations of women – that is, preeminent cultural representations,

reiterations, self-conscious reenactments and rearticulations of the condition of femininity – hold a hugely important place. However, they do so only in relation to all manner of noncanonical knowledges and texts. That is, we can only tell what Shakespeare means about gender, sexuality, race, or social relations by reading his texts in the context of the culture in which he wrote them.

What answers there are, then, to the critiques of feminist Shakespeare studies it must be emphasized are historically complex and intellectually demanding. Indeed, this volume aims to push ahead with uncomfortable questions rather than to offer reassuring answers. For only by doing so can feminism thrive both in its intellectual agenda and as a vibrant social politics. Crucially, all work that conceives itself as feminist necessarily situates itself within a wider political purpose. That purpose, however, is not necessarily, of course, a practical or pragmatic one. Thus, none of the contributors to this volume believes that their essay will diminish patriarchal violence, the number of women on the welfare rolls, or demolish the ubiquitous glass ceiling. Of course, attention to Shakespeare does not prohibit feminist scholars from vigorous participation in the social issues so central to the feminist agenda, and, more to the point, it does not magically extricate Shakespearean feminists from the world of gender trouble, or more specifically, the institutional issues which daily concern feminist educators and students. The point is that no single feminist intervention is an isolated act. Contributors to this volume are part of an ever growing body of scholarship that has set out to discover what the world, and in this instance, quite specifically what a hugely influential body of canonical literature, might look like from the perspective of women, from the margins of hitherto patriarchal knowledge.

While the objection to feminist pragmatism can be fairly readily dispatched, perhaps a more difficult critique of the

intellectual project of feminist Shakespeare scholarship is one I have only touched on so far, namely, that it further marginalizes already neglected noncanonical women writers. Feminist Shakespeareans no longer consider themselves as purely literary scholars but as cultural historians who are especially interested in women's own representations of themselves, which range from poetry to embroidery. Indeed, the interest in women's writing in particular has been a vital part of redrawing the map of Renaissance literature in general. As Maureen Quilligan points out in making the case for reading noncanonical women writers in relation to canonical men, the effect is not merely "sticking a heretofore unnoticed feature onto the map but by seeing how that new feature changes the relationship among all other features" (1997: 42).

The kind of intervention feminist Shakespeare scholarship understands itself to be making is gestured to in another context by Judith Butler in the epigraph to this introduction. What is at stake for Butler is how to do things differently, how to understand differently. Interestingly, what she says is something Shakespeare scholars have known all along, namely, that performance altered Shakespeare's playtexts and continues to do so – that is, that changes in understanding and interpretation of the variety that feminist scholarship seeks to effect are already written into the cultural transactions of theater.

Other forms of reiteration have, however, also proved necessary: feminists have had to repeat themselves in order to be understood. But now, at least in the realms of Renaissance literary criticism, feminism is so much a part of the common currency of the discourse, that, as Carol Neely pointed out at the 1997 meeting of the Modern Language Association in San Francisco, feminism barely needs announce itself. Thus, feminist Shakespeare is caught in the position of being, depending on how you look

at it, completely integrated or completely invisible. On the one hand, it is in an important sense a measure of the work done by feminist Shakespeareans over the last twenty years that our project is likely, as we have noted, to be subject to far more rigorous scrutiny and interrogation from within the feminist ranks than outside them. No class or conference worth its salt, after all, fails to include some reference to the gender hierarchy which so fundamentally informs the culture of Shakespeare's England. On the other hand, the questionable progress of feminism may be measured by Stephen Orgel's infamous declaration that "Everyone in this [Renaissance] culture was in some respects a woman" (1996: 124). Orgel writes from the position of an anti-essentialism so radical that it is impossible to posit the real historical existence of women, let alone women's oppression. He argues, in other words, that back then everybody – male and female – was victimized anyway. However, the difference between men being subordinate within the social hierarchy, to which Orgel alludes, and the position of women is not just a relative but rather an absolute distinction. This distinction is, in fact, foundational to the feminist enterprise and constitutive of the very core of feminist politics, which concerns itself with the historical, structural, and systemic facts of women's subjugation. (There was, for instance, no notion in the period of releasing women from traditional social roles.) Even where the oppression of women overlaps with certain other instances of difference – such as race and class – it is never wholly coincident with them. Furthermore, despite backlash rumors to the contrary, feminism has no investment in identifying the complex subjugation of women in patriarchy with mere victimization. Nor can the position of women be reduced to or elided with all other forms of social hierarchy. In short, feminism, while in some sense more prominent than ever, has not quite escaped the danger of being swept under the

carpet, and has certainly not escaped the necessity of repeating itself in order to be properly understood.

The aim of this volume is to demonstrate feminist visibility – even to the point of conspicuousness – *and* its integration into the broader field of Shakespeare studies via a series of overlapping categories: the history of feminist Shakespeare criticism, text and language, social economies, sexuality, race, and religion. Beginning with an account of the origins of feminist readings of Shakespeare and their contribution to the political project of feminism, the essays included here cover historical and theoretical contexts and perspectives as well as readings of Shakespeare's texts within a feminist problematic. In particular, the essays in this volume demonstrate that feminism, because it commands a view from the margins, is especially well placed to access the eccentric categories of Renaissance knowledge – those aspects of thought in the period ranging from female circumcision to early modern ideas about the blood – that sit uneasily with our own but are nonetheless central to the period's core concerns – in these instances, religion and national identity.

Feminism is about creating the future differently by looking at history differently. And, of course, we cannot tell what the future, what that world beyond patriarchy might be. Here our project might be seen to parallel that of our Renaissance humanist forbears who ushered in the era of modernity only by looking back and examining afresh a world long past.

The volume begins with two essays that address the origins of Shakespeare criticism. **Juliet Fleming** historicizes the project of Shakespearean feminism or feminist Shakespeare by addressing its late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century precursor, "The Ladies' Shakespeare." The concept of such an enterprise was proposed, tongue in

cheek, by J. M. Barrie in a speech to the Stationers' Company. Fleming explores the need of all Shakespeareans – male, female, feminist, and otherwise – "to identify Shakespeare's interests with our own." Fleming takes the parodic proposition of the Ladies' Shakespeare to its logical conclusion. She looks also at those notoriously eccentric projects of editing and interpretation (a high proportion of them, notably, undertaken by women) in order to show that, like Freud's patients, far from being so aberrant that they are irredeemably distinct and separated from the norm, rather they are but exaggerated versions of it. Thus, Henrietta Bowdler, for example, in purging Shakespeare of "indelicacy," merely enacted with a self-consciously ideological clarity nowhere available until the Oxford Shakespeare the standard principles of textual editing. Delia Bacon, too, whose intellectual labor seems at first far beyond the margins of sanity, believed that Shakespeare was written by a consortium of playwrights of the Baconian persuasion. Textual studies now demonstrates, of course, that she may have been right – or at least less off the mark than those critics who support the model that Shakespeare's plays were a product of his isolated genius.

Katherine M. Romack, in "Margaret Cavendish, Shakespeare Critic," argues that though the Duchess of Newcastle may have been the first Shakespeare critic, she was far from being the feminist late twentieth-century scholars have sought to make her. In fact, Cavendish's retrograde political views are deeply enmeshed in her cultural theory, which argues that women can only exercise their rational capacities under the strict supervision of their husbands. Furthermore, she asserts, they have no business in the commonwealth. It is odd, then, that she regards Shakespeare as a writer able to metamorphose himself into a woman. However, as Romack explains, feminizing Shakespeare is vital to Cavendish's attempt to

depoliticize the realm of letters. The latter project is particularly charged in a period in which women are beginning to assert their rights not only to cultural representation but also to political representation. Cavendish is careful to distance herself from the women who petitioned Parliament in this period. While the standard critical line on Cavendish is the contradictory and complex nature of her thought, Romack's placement of it in its historical context of other women's arguments for representation serves to lay bare the reactionary ideological thrust of her views in ways that not only place Cavendish beyond the confines of protofeminism, but place her vividly in the antifeminist camp. There were, however, many radical women who were active in this period, and Romack asserts it is no accident that their political representation became possible in the period during which neither Shakespeare, the boy actress, nor the woman actress were anywhere on the scene.

Phyllis Rackin, in "Misogyny is Everywhere," asks about critics' own investments in their readings of Shakespeare. She interrogates the standard feminist assumption that in early modern culture men were anxious in the face of female power and that women were invariably disempowered, and that misogyny was rampant and pervasive. Rather, Rackin suggests, reports of women's victimization in an unrelentingly misogynist culture are everywhere not so much in Shakespeare's England as in late twentieth-century cultural criticism: "Reminders that women were expected to be chaste, silent, and obedient probably occur more frequently in recent scholarship than they did in the literature of Shakespeare's time." Why, she asks, are critics so deeply invested in this view of history, and who benefits from the investment? Rackin argues that "The problem is that the conceptual categories that shape contemporary scholarly discourse, no less than the

historical records of the past, are often man-made and shaped by men's anxieties, desires, and interests. As such, they constitute instruments of women's exclusion, and often of women's oppression." Interest in gender is now, at least in the American academy, an accepted conceptual tool which has become detached from feminism's earlier and explicitly political agenda.

Like Juliet Fleming's opening essay, **Laurie E. Maguire** argues that the processes of textual and therefore ideological selection have always been with us. Maguire adds, so has feminism, though neither feminism nor textual editing were formalized until the early years of the twentieth century. While Christabel Pankhurst was being imprisoned for suffragist activities in Manchester, W. W. Greg and R. B. McKerrow were founding the Malone Society. Though these contemporaneous movements appeared completely alien to one another at the start of the century, there is now an emergent phenomenon which promises to merge their disparate agendas. That phenomenon is feminist editing, and Maguire goes on to develop its practical and epistemological implications in relation to the infamous textual crux in *As You Like It* on the pairing of Rosalind and Orlando, which troublingly (for many editors at least) implies a male marriage: "That thou mightst ioyne his hand with his." However, as Maguire points out, textual cruces are not the only, or even the primary, space in which feminism can insert itself in the grand and hitherto wholly white male enterprise of textual studies. A feminist editor must confront head-on the way that Renaissance texts abound in the politically incorrect and, in doing so, confront the history that has made feminist politics necessary in the present.

Kay Stanton's "Made to write 'whore' upon?" begins by exploring the sometimes startling results of feminist pedagogy in the Shakespeare classroom, and, like Maguire,

argues that historicizing Shakespeare's words (and thus our own) is a fundamental political act of empowerment. "Whore," she argues, that word by which Desdemona is so tragically defamed, is unique in the lexicon of debasement. For whereas homophobic slurs and racist epithets have been reappropriated by the groups they were used to denigrate, feminism has been unable to rehabilitate the stubborn misogynist insistence inherent in the word "whore." Further, while "callet," "drab," "stale," "strumpet," "harlot," and "minion" have fallen out of everyday usage, "whore" has had an appalling longevity. Because, rather remarkably, neither the sonnets nor Shakespeare's long poems use the word at all, Stanton argues that we should be cautious about asserting that the word's usage provides evidence that Shakespeare is "the patriarchal bard." In marked contrast to the poems, in *Troilus and Cressida* Thersites uses the word ten times, and the play with the most usages is *Othello*, in which, Stanton argues, Othello commits the "verbal rape" of Desdemona. Furthermore, as readers and audiences we are complicit in this violation if we continue to believe that Desdemona is not a whore because Bianca really is one: "[W]e continue to give cultural sanction to the abusive use of the term for women of any status who are not professional sex workers like Doll Tearsheet, who 'owns' the term by applying it to herself."

Margo Hendricks, in "'A word, sweet Lucrece': Confession, Feminism, and *The Rape of Lucrece*," takes up Lucrece as a rape-suicide text that seems inherently problematic for, and perhaps even actively resistant to, feminist readings. The problem Hendricks extrapolates is one that extends far beyond the historical and textual limits of Shakespeare's poem, namely that female agency may manifest itself in ways that do not accord with feminist prescriptions. In order to unravel these issues in fresh

though still feminist ways, Hendricks approaches the play via the discourses of the confessional (newly troubled by the Reformation) as a primary way of constructing subjectivity and the issue of race, both as lineage and as ethnicity. Far from being two discrete concerns, however, race and confession are linked as features of the narrative representation of Lucrece's psychologically complex subjectivity, which "highlight the relationship between speech and a gendered notion of 'self' as part of the process of identity-making." Rape engenders Lucrece's lengthy pre-suicide confession, much of which is concerned with evading the consequences of her violation understood as Tarquin's pollution of Collatine's "stock."

Mihoko Suzuki's "Gender, Class, and the Ideology of Comic Form: *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*" claims that even Elizabeth I felt the couplings at the end of Shakespeare's comedies were a reproach to her own unmarried state. This, Suzuki argues, is an indication of the degree to which people in early modern England possessed a consciousness of the social politics of drama. Suzuki claims that contemporary anxiety about social mobility and unrest – changes for which the culture had inherited no ready-made conceptual or rhetorical framework – is articulated as anxiety about the behavior of women. There is in this period a historically new and explosive convergence between anxieties about gender and anxieties about class. In her exploration of these social tensions, Suzuki juxtaposes instances from Shakespearean comedy with two domestic tragedies, *Arden of Faversham* and *A Warning for Fair Women*. While the latter explicitly connects transgressive femininity with issues of social mobility, the former represses "anxieties about unruly women to displace them onto male scapegoats," a phenomenon which points to the nature of the cultural work Shakespearean comedy performs. Ironically, as

Suzuki points out, we always assume, largely because it is so profoundly punitive, that tragedy is the expression of the reality principle that enacts a male fantasy of assigning to women the blame for social disorder. In fact, comic denouement foregrounds its displacement of the problematics of gender and class as its plots unravel the tropes of cross-dressing and cross-class marriage.

Jyotsna G. Singh offers a feminist reading of *The Merchant of Venice*. Singh's feminism is particularly attuned to the economic system which underlies the early modern gender hierarchy and which she addresses via an analysis of the cultural practices of gift exchange as they appear in the play. The gift marks the cusp both between the strictly economic and the sociocultural mechanism of communication and reciprocity, as well as between symbolic exchange in a feudal/agrarian economy and the libidinally charged exchange of commodities characteristic of emerging capitalism. While such exchanges are clearly evident in the play's traffic in women, far from being a romantic version of the circulations of global trade, romantic alliances are complicated by their inextricable implication in the bloody transaction of Shylock's bond. This, Singh argues, is the play's ingenious demystification of economic violence as literal rather than symbolic. Obligations are variously discharged in the play as gifts and commodities in a way that anticipates the ideological occlusions capitalism needs to obscure the coercion inherent in its transactions.

Ania Loomba's "The Great Indian Vanishing Trick: Colonialism, Property, and the Family in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" examines the play's ideological investments in the discourses of travel, trade, and colonialism even though it was produced five years before the setting up of the East India Company in 1600. Loomba addresses the way criticism has habitually segregated

gender issues from questions of race and colonialism, and like Joyce MacDonald in the next essay, suggests ways in which the ostensible focus on discourses about gender and the family can actually work to amplify their historic interrelation with matters of race and exoticism. Loomba reads the dynamics of Titania and Oberon's tussle over the Indian boy in terms of a contest about colonial goods set in the context of familial strife. She argues that there is an important sense in which "India" – as both place and concept – might have contributed to the emergence of the normative ideals of companionate marriage and the nuclear family. The Amazon, for example, is not only a figure of potentially or formerly unruly femininity within the play, but simultaneously a category of the exotic, of racial difference, and of colonial conquest. Like Rachana Sachdev in a later essay, Loomba analyzes the envy with which English travelers comment on barbaric practices used by alien peoples to discipline women. Drowning as a punishment for adultery and the immolation of widows are remarked upon with frank admiration by English commentators. All women, these writers charge, are like those foreign women who will in their wantonness even abuse a cucumber if it is not given to them sliced, and drug their husbands so that they can cavort at their leisure. This is, of course, the reverse of the situation in *Dream* where Oberon has his wife drugged. The nuclear family of Western culture, Loomba argues, "was established by othering, but also appropriating and transforming *both* the dynastic marriages and family structures of a feudal past, and the domestic institutions of the non-Western world."

Joyce Green MacDonald's "Black Ram, White Ewe: Shakespeare, Race, and Women" offers an exploration of the entanglements of racial and gender identity in the complex process of vindicating social authority in early modern England. That the connections between race and

gender are solidly historical rather than purely metaphorical becomes vividly apparent in the fact that in 1619, approximately sixteen years after the first production of *Othello*, the first Africans and the first white women landed in Virginia, where a white woman could be bought for 120 pounds of tobacco. In 1662, in a reversal of English common law, white men who fathered children on black women were excused of any legal or moral responsibility for them. Race, MacDonald insists, is constituted by a complex interaction of social, familial, and economic interests. Because the languages of racial identity are heavily dependent on gender and sexuality, when Cassio calls the onomastically white Bianca a "monkey" he links her with those black women in the period who were believed to copulate with apes. When Lucrece stabs herself, she bleeds corrupted black blood as well as red, as emblems of both her violation and her virtue. Lucrece is the "white hind" to Tarquin's "rough beast" so that "his intended crime takes on some of that aura of cross-species impropriety Brabantio sees in his daughter's union to Othello." Less ideologically adept than either of these texts, *Titus Andronicus* demonstrates that the race and gender hierarchies which purport to constitute social order are demonstrated as raw power – a license to kill. The demonization of Tamora and Aaron provides vital support for the play's restored patriarchal order.

Rachana Sachdev's essay demonstrates the flexibility of feminist reading practices in a postcolonial approach to Sycorax, the fugitive female "other" of *The Tempest*, by utilizing early modern medical discourse. Sycorax, Sachdev argues, represents both the threat and promise male European travelers found in the foreign procedure of female circumcision with which Algiers, Sycorax's birthplace, was particularly identified. On the one hand, female circumcision could serve as the standard of the

uncivilized, the irrefutable mark of the difference between England and its African others, and on the other it presented a novel and hitherto unrealized prospect of disciplining English women once and for all, controlling their unmanageable sexual desires. Albeit that this discipline was deployed at the level of ideological prescription rather than practice, it served to render womanhood itself as racialized and unEnglish, alienated from the normative conceptualization of nationhood that the concept of female circumcision helped construct. But even the idea of female circumcision at the level of ideology could never quite allay the problem of sexual difference, especially the fear/belief that, as one sixteenth-century commentator claimed, the clitoris "gradually increases in bulk and finally rises up into a penis that is fully formed in every respect." As a consequence, careful directions for undertaking the procedure were included in English medical treatises such as the popular *Directory for Midwives* by Nicholas Culpeper and Jane Sharp's widely circulated *The Midwives Book*. Sachdev uses this information to construct a cultural history of Sycorax as the play's enigmatic, disembodied other. Although banished from Algiers, we are told, "for one thing she did / They would not take her life." It is Sycorax who provides the ideological underpinning of Miranda's much prized virginity on which, after all, the future of Prospero's line depends.

Denise Albanese's "Black and White, and Dread All Over" analyzes ideological issues constellating the 1997 "photonegative" production of *Othello* in Washington, DC in which Patrick Stewart (a.k.a. Captain Picard of the starship *Enterprise*) played the lead while black actors comprised the majority of the rest of the cast. The production, Albanese argues, demonstrates the one-sidedness of the purportedly utopian notion that race does not "matter." The

production's director, Jude Kelly, sought to emphasize the problematic relationship between signs and referents in the instance of race. However, white and black, it transpires, are not interchangeable because they are profoundly unequal elements of the racial equation in American society: "[T]he staging of Othello's anger against Desdemona before he murders her introduces a hauntingly (in)apposite juxtaposition of white male body against black female that makes it especially difficult to view Stewart as the racially beleaguered subject of the play." A further aspect of the production is that it comports rather disturbingly with white America's belief that it is being attacked by affirmative action policies, which attempt to make some compensation for the historical prejudice against African Americans in hiring practices. That is, the reverse of the photo image – the photonegative – nicely coincides with the judicially supported belief in reverse discrimination. Albanese makes clear, however, that the point isn't to condemn the bold experiment of Kelly's production, but rather to explore the unintended resonances of racially innovative casting practices.

In "Women and Boys Playing Shakespeare," **Juliet Dusinberre**, like Albanese, considers the issue of casting. While much critical ink has been spilt on the matter of the female impersonation required by the boy actor playing Rosalind in *As You Like It*, and even a few drops on Celia, the impersonations of Phoebe and Audrey have received no comment at all. "Phoebe must be all woman" in order to convince the audience about the plausibility of Rosalind's disguise, while Audrey appears to be "all body," to have a physical solidity to her which might appear to negate any sense of problematic gender identity. Not so, argues Dusinberre, even though the play's plot does not highlight these instances of gender identity to the degree that it does for Rosalind and Celia. The fictionality of gender in relation

to both Phoebe and Audrey, furthermore, resides not only in the extradiegetic nature of male bodies of the actors who play them, but also in the discursive context of pastoral. Gender impersonation does indeed change the play – in an all-male Cheek by Jowl production, Audrey rose to new levels of hilarity, while audiences used to women – all legs – in tights in the forest of Arden found Celia and Rosalind less charming and palatable when played by grown men. The problem of cross-dressing is not just the politics of gender but in our literal-mindedness about dramatic representation, which is always, preeminently, a matter of fiction.

Molly Smith's "Mutant Scenes and 'Minor' Conflicts in *Richard II*" begins, like Joyce MacDonald's essay, with a contemporary reference to Shakespeare in a scene of intense feminist moment, namely the Clarence Thomas–Anita Hill congressional hearings of 1991. The nation's attention was captivated by the testimonies of Thomas, an African American nominee for the Supreme Court, and Hill, also an African American, who had charged him with sexual harassment. Shakespeare was brought to weigh in for Thomas, while the opposition could only come up with a quotation from Congreve, which leads Smith to meditate on the issue of "minor," relatively marginalized and feminized texts as a specifically feminist issue, taking as her focus the allegedly minor scenes and characters from a relatively marginalized play in the Shakespearean canon, *Richard II*. Borrowing Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "minor language," Smith suggests that Shakespeare endows the language of women in the play with revolutionary force.

Carol Thomas Neely, in "Lovesickness, Gender, and Subjectivity: *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*," examines the ways in which comedy can serve to license wayward desires, while lovesickness offers a means by which early modern subjects acted through and against the actual and

ideological constrictions their social structure imposed upon them. Desire, even though it is ubiquitously constructed as pathology – lovesickness – is, argues Neely, a potentially powerful locus of agency. Although initially men, not women, were understood to be subject to lovesickness, in the course of the English Renaissance there was increasing interest in women's vulnerability to the disease. Precisely because eroticism was recognized as inherently perverse and unpredictable, the comedies do not neatly reproduce patriarchal hegemony. Furthermore, not all marriages are the same. In *Twelfth Night*, the relation between gender and desire is completely unhinged, unleashing women's erotic potential and social power. Olivia, for example, meets no resistance from Sebastian when she declares, reversing the traditional gender hierarchy, "Would thou'dst be ruled by me!" Although in *As You Like It* Neely discovers desire to be more deeply embedded in the dichotomy of gender, she nonetheless finds Rosalind's insatiable desires ("My affection hath an unknown bottom") an expression of her improperly feminine subjectivity.

Theodora Jankowski's "… in the Lesbian Void: Woman–Woman Eroticism in Shakespeare's Plays" addresses, via an irreverent interrogation of standard critical protocols, the resurrection of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, an event that is unique in the canon, because unlike other revivified characters, Shakespeare's audience, and not just certain of the characters on stage, believes her to be dead. Where, precisely, asks Jankowski, was Hermione for the sixteen years she has feigned death? Perhaps, muses Jankowski, she was in the closet behind the bedchamber, or in the withdrawing room or lodge associated with a post-banquet phenomenon known as the void. These speculations are deliberately outside the perimeters of typical literary criticism and are so in order to address the specifically

gynocentric spaces of woman–woman eroticism. Jankowski wrestles with the problem of making visible those aspects of women's eroticism occluded by generations of heterocentric critical commentary, a problem that can only be addressed by a reading practice that refuses the typical limits of scholarly inquiry. There are, however, as Jankowski discovers, traces of an eroticism which jars with patriarchal and critical precept in several of Shakespeare's plays. The point is not so much that this space can be "proved" (that is, verified in the terms of masculinist criticism) to be the exact equivalent of late twentieth-century lesbian encounters, but rather that this space can be marked by the feminist critic as "lesbian" precisely because it is shrouded in the indecipherability of relations between women that have hitherto not been subject to the kind of cultural attention that could produce them as "fact." The void she addresses, Jankowski claims, can only ever be, to use Terry Castle's terminology, an apparitional production because historically women's love for women, in whatever form it takes, has never been granted the solid facticity of heterosexual love.

Susan Zimmerman's "Duncan's Corpse" turns our attention to the uncategorizable, the twilight zone between life and death, which in *Macbeth* is intimately related to androgyny and the indecipherability inherent in the nature of sexual difference. Zimmerman's essay marks the way in which feminist criticism is now able to extend itself so far from "women" fictional and real, in this instance focusing especially on death and the body of the slain king. His corpse emblematizes the violent and generative power of nature which simultaneously murders and reproduces, and whose vertiginous indeterminacy was newly charged by the Protestant insistence on the distinction between flesh and spirit. *Macbeth*, then, dramatizes the horrors of a world without, or rather, beyond difference. The terrifying

liminality of human remains suspended, at least in pre-Reformation thought, between life and death shifted in Protestantism and with the advent of anatomical dissection, which then suggested that the deceased was definitively an object rather than a partially animated subject. Popular belief was tenacious, however, and still held that anatomical practice constituted the desecration of the corpse. In *Macbeth*, Zimmerman argues, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth "seek Duncan's power as king, but discover instead Duncan's power as corpse." Lady Macbeth, who rationalizes the murder by objectifying Duncan as a mere representation not to be feared, "The sleeping, and the dead/ Are but as pictures," now becomes haunted by his blood. The corpse, finally, serves to articulate the possibilities but also the limits of theatrical representation itself.

M. Lindsay Kaplan's essay on *The Merchant of Venice* takes as its starting point Emmanuel Levinas's work on alterity in *Totality and Infinity* in order to explore the tension between the same and the other in relation to Jews and married women in Shakespeare's play. Issues of difference, especially around matters of religion, reached their peak in the Renaissance when Protestantism's separation from the Catholic Church replayed a much earlier crisis of difference, namely the Christian deviation from Judaism, whereby the former posits that it supersedes the latter. Christians hoped that Jews would disappear by conversion, while women, in an analogous manner, vanished, at least in legal discourse, under the law of coverture. While Elizabeth I might seem to be rather too conspicuous a figure to leave the ideology of female invisibility undisturbed, some contemporary commentators in their extrapolation of this doctrine signally never troubled themselves with the anomaly she constituted to theories of female subjection. Kaplan goes on to theorize

this subsumption and suppression of women and Jews in relation to Levinas's philosophical interrogation of a concept of difference which cannot be assimilated or subordinated into another entity. Kaplan argues that Bassanio's marriage to Portia, Antonio's debt to Shylock, Launcelot's relation to his old master, and Jessica's to her father involve structurally analogous abrogations of contract, complex negotiations of the relation between the other and the same.

Philippa Berry's essay touches upon a key new element of Shakespeare criticism in general, namely Shakespeare's Catholicism. While Berry is not concerned to establish Shakespeare's own religious identity, there are, she demonstrates, many Catholic resonances in *Romeo and Juliet*, in particular many references to the pre-Reformation calendar of saints. Numerous saints and saints' days appear in the play in a way that suggests a religious temporality not yet erased by either a Protestant or a secular understanding of time. However, this temporality marks not just the persistence of residual Catholicism, but also the pagan and astrological temporality whereby the fate of the lovers is always already written in the stars. The first edition concluded with this essay, which is subtly informed by Julia Kristeva's work on monumental time, because it demonstrates feminism's conceptual and critical reach by undoing linear notions of temporality and, more locally, squabbles about Shakespeare's own religious affiliation. Notably, Juliet and her relation to July, and the bawdy "Jule," is a significant figure in Berry's analysis, but not the sole focus of the piece. A feminist epistemology can thus address itself to fundamental questions of historicism by unraveling the logic of patriarchal history, and even of time itself. Such an investigation suggests the distance feminism has traveled from "images of women."

The essays in Part VII on “Character, Genre, History” demonstrate the continued commitment among contributors to specifically literary categories of analysis and to the importance of historical context. **Anna Kamaralli**’s essay “Putting on the Destined Livery: Isabella, Cressida, and Our Virgin/Whore Obsession” offers a very clear example of why it is at times imperative to resist the idea of “making it new” in feminist Shakespeare criticism. It is an oft-rehearsed commonplace that feminist criticism from the 1970s through the 1980s was merely naive, defending the honor of female characters, advocating for them as if they were real women who had turned up at a consciousness-raising group in need of protection from brutal husbands. There has been thus a turn away from feminist character criticism as too simplistic and for being based on erroneous assumptions about women’s inherent victimhood. However, Kamaralli shows via the examples of Isabella’s chastity in *Measure for Measure* and Cressida’s unchastity in *Troilus and Cressida* that although feminist criticism may have ceased to advocate for women characters, surprisingly, critics have not ceased to attack them just as simplistically on misogynist grounds that remain wholly based on gender bias about female sexual (mis) conduct. In the case of the two characters in question, the critical debate is still framed in terms of whether Isabella is unfeeling and frigid and whether Cressida is a promiscuous whore. This situation arises from the fact that critics of all stripes have been unwilling to understand the ways in which these characters are subjected to sexual violence, and that fundamental misunderstandings specifically about rape have obscured crucial aspects of the relation between sex and power, both in the play and in the period. Kamaralli also points out that of all the characters in the play, only Angelo is actually raped, in the sense that he is made, via