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Misogyny is Everywhere

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> *Misogyny presents an interpretive embarrassment of riches: it is everywhere, unabashed in its articulation and so overdetermined in its cultural roots that individual instances sometimes seem emotionally underdetermined, rote and uninflected expressions of what would go without saying if it weren't said so often.*
>
> Mullaney (1994: 141)

This description of late sixteenth-century English culture is likely to ring true for readers of current feminist/historicist Shakespeare criticism. "In historical research," as a wise old teacher once warned me, "you're likely to find what you are looking for"; and what most of us have been looking for in recent years is a history of men's anxiety in the face of female power, of women's disempowerment, and of outright misogyny. I want to interrogate that history, not because it is necessarily incorrect but because it is incomplete. It constitutes only one of many stories that could be told about women's place in Shakespeare's world, and I think we need to consider the implications of its current hegemony. Why does the evidence for misogyny in Shakespeare's world strike the writer as "an interpretive embarrassment of riches"? Who is enriched by the many "rote and uninflected expressions of what would go without saying if it weren't said so often" in recent feminist criticism?

One reason the story of patriarchal oppression has become so influential is that it has been disseminated in recent textbooks. The editor of a reader designed to illustrate *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-Century Woman*, for instance, states flatly that

> Woman's place was within doors, her business domestic. . . . Women of evident intelligence themselves accepted this divorce between the private (feminine) and public (masculine) spheres and, despite the recent precedents of Mary Queen of Scots, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth, they shared the age's "distaste . . . for the notion of women's involvement in politics." (Keeble 1994: 186)

However, even the most sophisticated scholarship often includes similar claims. For example, in what is likely to become a standard history of gender in early modern England, Anthony Fletcher writes,

> It was conventional, as we have seen, to assume men and women had clearly defined gender roles indoors and out of doors. . . . Femininity, as we have seen, was presented as no more than a set of negatives. The requirement of chastity was, as we have seen, the overriding measure of female gender. Woman not only had to be chaste but had to be seen to be chaste: silence, humility and modesty were the signifiers that she was so. (1995: 120–2)

Some of the most important recent feminist/historicist literary scholarship includes reminders that "the period was fraught with anxiety about rebellious women and particularly their rebellion through language" (Newman 1991: 40); that "women's reading was policed and their writing prohibited or marked as transgressive even when they were not engaged in other criminal activities" (Dolan 1996: 159); and that "an obsessive energy was invested in exerting control over the unruly woman – the woman who was exercising either her sexuality or her tongue under her own control rather than under the rule of a man" (Boose 1991: 195). In a sense, of course, these quotations are misleading because they are taken out of context, and they belie the subtlety and complexity of the arguments from which they were taken. Nonetheless, I believe the excerpts are significant because they indicate how often even the best feminist scholarship feels the need to situate itself within a patriarchal master narrative.

Feminist scholars found a brilliant explication of that narrative in Peter Stallybrass's essay, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed," which argued that women's bodies were assumed to be "*naturally* 'grotesque'" and that women were therefore "subjected to constant surveillance . . . because, as Bakhtin says of the grotesque body, it is 'unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits.'" This constant surveillance, Stallybrass continued, focused on "three specific areas: the mouth, chastity, the threshold of the house," which "were frequently collapsed into each other." "Silence, the closed mouth, is made a sign of chastity. And silence and chastity are, in turn, homologous to woman's enclosure within the house" (Stallybrass 1986: 126–7). Published in 1986, "Patriarchal Territories" theorized the relationships between sexual loathing, the silencing of women's voices, and the constriction of women's activities in a beautifully articulated analysis that has proved to have remarkable influence and explanatory power in subsequent feminist criticism. It is significant, I believe, that the conclusion of Stallybrass's article, where he suggests that the figure of the unruly woman was also valorized as a rallying point for protest against social injustice, was often ignored.

The pervasive scholarly investment in Renaissance misogyny has led to a massive rereading of Shakespeare's plays. As Valerie Traub observes, "It is by now a commonplace that Shakespeare was preoccupied with the uncontrollability of women's sexuality; witness the many plots concerning the need to prove female chastity, the

threat of adultery, and, even when female fidelity is not a major theme of the play, the many references to cuckoldry in songs, jokes, and passing remarks" (1995: 121). 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; the connections between female speech and female sexual transgression are retraced and the anxieties evoked by the possibility of female power are discovered in play after play. "Female sexuality in Shakespeare's plays," we are told, "is invariably articulated as linguistic transgression – that is, a verbal replication of female obliquity" (Carroll 1995: 184). If speech is transgressive, reading and writing are even more dangerous. Lavinia's gruesome fate in *Titus Andronicus*, for instance, is "expressive of the anxieties she generates as an educated, and hence potentially unruly, woman" (Eaton, cited by Garner and Sprengnether 1996: 12–13).

Plays with overtly repressive and misogynist themes have proved increasingly popular, and the stories they tell are held up as historically accurate expressions of beliefs generally endorsed in Shakespeare's time. *The Taming of the Shrew*, for instance, is the subject of 105 listings for the years 1985–97 in the online *MLA Bibliography*, far more than any of the other early comedies (for those same years, the *Bibliography* lists twenty-eight for *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, forty-seven for *Comedy of Errors*, and sixty-one for *Love's Labour's Lost*). Other plays are reinterpreted. *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, "instructs its audience that daughters who submit, who know their place, will ultimately fare better than daughters who rebel" (Leventen 1991: 75). The heroines of Shakespeare's middle comedies were especially attractive to the feminist critics of the 1970s, when it seemed important to mobilize Shakespeare's authority in the service of our own political goals. In the 1980s, however, a more pessimistic picture emerged as scholars marshaled historical evidence to demonstrate the pervasiveness of patriarchal beliefs and practices and discredit the optimistic feminist readings of the 1970s as unhistorical.

One of the characteristics that traditionally made the heroines of Shakespeare's middle comedies attractive is their erotic appeal, but influential critics associated that attraction with the fact that they were portrayed by male actors. Stephen Greenblatt's widely cited article on "Fiction and Friction" used Thomas Laqueur's arguments about the conception of a single-sexed body in Renaissance anatomical theory to argue that "the open secret of identity – that within differentiated individuals is a single structure, identifiably male – is presented literally in the all-male cast." "Men," Greenblatt wrote, "love women precisely as *representations*, a love the original performances of these plays literalized in the person of the boy actor" (1988: 93). For Lisa Jardine, the heroines of these plays were "sexually enticing *qua* transvestied boys, and the plays encourage the audience to view them as such" (1991: 61). Moreover, at the same time that criticism like Greenblatt's and Jardine's taught us to recognize that cross-dressed boys may have been objects of desire for Shakespeare's original audience, we were also taught that sexualized women were not: female sexual desire, we are repeatedly told, was regarded as threatening. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, for instance, "Egypt's queen . . . resembles other Jacobean females who in desiring or being desired

become a source of pollution" (Tennenhouse 1986: 144). In *II Henry VI*, depicting "Margaret as a figure of open and unrestrained sexual passion is one way of demonizing her and representing the dangers of a femininity not firmly under the control of a father or husband" (Howard and Rackin 1997: 74).

Sexual passion is not the only characteristic that makes women threatening in recent feminist Shakespeare criticism, where it seems that virtually any manifestation of female strength or ability, even if it is admired by other characters on stage, would have had to evoke anxiety in the original audiences. Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well* is a good example. In the playtext her virtues are celebrated and her aspirations endorsed by the King and the Countess. The Introduction to the play in the Riverside Shakespeare summed up the traditional view of the character: "Helena is prized by the older generation not only because they recognize her intrinsic worth, but because she is a living example of the attitudes of the past" (Evans et al. 1997: 535). She is also the center of dramatic interest, with the longest part in the play. According to the Spevack *Concordance* (1968), she speaks 15.858 percent of the words in the script; Bertram speaks only 9.042 percent, a total that is exceeded not only by Helena, but also by his mother, who has 9.618 percent. Nonetheless, according to a leading male feminist critic,

> Helena's gender makes impossible any one-sided identification with Helena against Bertram. . . . Reacting against Helena's triumph, Shakespeare remains in part sympathetically bound to the besieged male positions of both Bertram and the king; the play thereby gives voice not only to the two male characters' discomfiture but also to Shakespeare's. The authorial division that blocks a convincing resolution is significant because it dramatizes a much larger cultural quandary: the society's inability to accommodate, without deep disturbance, decisive female control. (Erickson 1991: 73–4)

The last two sentences are carefully worded, attributing ambivalence about Helena's achievement and anxiety about the spectacle of "decisive female control" to Shakespeare and to the culture in which he wrote, thus authorizing ambivalence and anxiety as the historically appropriate responses to Helena's triumph. But the first sentence I quoted – "Helena's gender makes impossible any one-sided identification with Helena against Bertram" – seems to claim even more. The present tense of the verb seems to universalize Erickson's reading and deny its historical specificity, implying that ambivalence and anxiety are the only possible responses to the character for any reader or viewer in any time or place.

It may be unfair to make too much of Erickson's use of the present tense, but it points to a larger problem for historicist literary criticism, which has pressing implications for feminist/historicist scholarship. The conventions of scholarly writing have been to write about literary texts in the present tense, thus expressing their imaginative presence, and about historical events in the past tense to mark their temporal distance from the writer who recounts them. This distinction is breaking down, both in popularized history, where the present tense is increasingly used to describe past

events, and in postmodern historical theory, which is shaped by the recognition that history, no less than fiction, is constantly updated to fit the shapes of present interests and assumptions. The question of grammatical tense poses an especially pressing problem for new historicist literary criticism. The present tense effaces historical distance, the past denies literary presence, and the distinction between past tense for history and present tense for fiction implicitly denies the imbrication of the literary text in its historical context that animates the entire new historicist project. If the text and its historical context are components of a seamless discursive web, it is difficult to sustain the grammatical distinction between present and past tenses that marks the separation of literary text from its historical context. But if that distinction is elided, where does the new historicist scholar situate herself in relation to the literary/historical objects of her analysis? Using the present tense, as Erickson does in the passage I quoted, seems to claim universal validity for a historically situated response. At the same time, however, it implicitly acknowledges that the version of past experience being constructed is a projection of current interests and anxieties.

The present tense is also the conventional form for references to the work of other scholars, as if it too existed in a timeless, ahistorical space. As we all know, however, scholarly texts, no less than the texts scholars study, are imbricated in the historical contexts in which they were produced and shaped by the social locations and personal interests and desires of their writers, even though the conventions of academic civility make those factors difficult to discuss. Nonetheless, I believe it is important to note, not only that the feminist/historicist Shakespeare criticism of the 1980s often tended to privilege male experience, emphasizing masculine anxiety in the face of powerful women, but also that some of the most influential work of that period was, in fact, the work of male critics.

One of the most influential modern readings of *As You Like It*, for instance, Louis Adrian Montrose's 1981 article, "'The Place of a Brother,'" proposed to reverse the then prevailing view of the play by arguing that "what happens to Orlando at home is not Shakespeare's contrivance to get him into the forest; what happens to Orlando in the forest is Shakespeare's contrivance to remedy what has happened to him at home" (Montrose 1981: 29). Just as Oliver has displaced Orlando from his rightful place in the patriarchy, Montrose's reading displaces Rosalind from her place as the play's protagonist, focusing instead upon the relationships among brothers, fathers, and sons. Although Oliver appears only briefly on stage and the brothers' reconciliation is narrated, not shown, the main issue in the play is said to be Orlando's troubled relationship with his brother and consequent loss of his rightful place in society; Rosalind is reduced to a vehicle for its restoration: marrying her enables Orlando to become "heir apparent to the reinstated Duke" (Montrose 1981: 38). Montrose does not cite Gayle Rubin's 1975 article on "the traffic in women," but this is the paradigm that seems to lie behind his argument.[1] The power of Rubin's paradigm is so great that it supersedes the textual evidence that the marriage satisfies Rosalind's own long-standing desire (see, e.g., I.iii.9) and that it is she, not her father, who tells

Orlando "To you I give myself" (V.iv.106). In fact, none of the marriages in the play is arranged by a father. The only marriage that can be said to be arranged is that of Silvius and Phoebe, which Rosalind herself arranges. Rosalind dominates the action of the play (she has the longest part in the script, speaking, according to the Spevack *Concordance* (1968), 26.744 percent of the words in the playscript). Nonetheless, Montrose's argument that the play "is a structure for her containment" (1981: 52) has been widely influential in subsequent criticism.

With the turn to history in literary studies generally, and especially in the field of the Renaissance, feminist Shakespeare criticism has been almost completely shaped by the scholarly consensus about the pervasiveness of masculine anxiety and women's disempowerment in Shakespeare's world. Much of this criticism is sympathetic to women's plights, exposing women's oppression and describing the sociological, psychological, and ideological mechanisms that produced it, but it poses problems which are simultaneously intellectual and political. Feminist scholarship needs history, and it needs the analytic instruments the new historicism provides. 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. What Kathleen McLuskie wrote about *Measure for Measure* in 1985 seems increasingly applicable to the entire Shakespearean canon and to historical accounts of the world in which he wrote: "Feminist criticism," she argued, "is restricted to exposing its own exclusion from the text. It has no point of entry into it, for the dilemmas of the narrative and the sexuality under discussion are constructed in completely male terms" (McLuskie 1994: 97). How then can we enter the discourse of current feminist/historicist Shakespeare criticism without becoming so thoroughly inscribed within its categories that we are forced to imagine both the plays and the culture in which they were produced from a male point of view?

It is important to remember that feminist criticism began with a political agenda, although – especially in the United States – it has increasingly entered the mainstream of academic discourse. The current interest in issues of sex and gender has provided increased academic visibility for feminist concerns and increased professional visibility for academic feminists, but it has not come without costs. Adopted as a conceptual tool by women and men without a serious political commitment to feminist political agendas, criticism designated as "feminist" has provided arguments that can just as easily be used to naturalize women's oppression as to oppose it. Among the consequences of this selective history 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. Even academic historians often turn to Shakespeare for evidence of past practices and attitudes (the index to Anthony Fletcher's *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500–1800*, for instance, lists fifty-four references to Shakespeare's plays). For the feminist political project, there are obvious dangers in contemplating our past from

the point of view of late twentieth-century academic men who may – consciously or not – be anxious or ambivalent about the progress women have made in the wake of the contemporary women's movement. The stories we tell about the past have consequences for the present and future, and if the story of misogyny and oppression is the only story we tell about the past, we risk a dangerous complacency in the present. Like the Virginia Slims ads that tell us, "You've come a long way, baby" because we can now smoke openly rather than hiding our habits from our menfolk, an oversimplified history that emphasizes past oppression is likely to encourage an equally oversimplified optimism about our present situation. As Lena Cowen Orlin observes, "if we have enjoyed this construction of women, perhaps it is because it offers us the comforting reassurance that history has made progress and that we have come a long way (baby) from our early modern predecessors."[2]

This is not to deny that there is ample evidence for a history of misogyny and of women's oppression in Shakespeare's world and that there are good reasons why it needed to be told. All the statements I have cited are documented with quotations from early modern texts and citations of early modern cultural practice; and, as Linda Boose has eloquently written in her brilliant study of *The Taming of the Shrew*, it is essential to "assert an intertextuality that binds the obscured records of a painful women's history" to the Shakespearean text because "that history has paid for the right to speak itself"; and "the impulse to rewrite the more oppressively patriarchal material in this play serves the very ideologies about gender that it makes less visible by making less offensive" (1991: 181–2). However, as Boose also makes clear, although the history of male misogyny is inextricably entangled with the history of women's oppression, those histories had strikingly different consequences for women and men. In considering the evidence for Renaissance misogyny and the oppressive practices it produced, it is essential to remember an essential axiom of postmodern historical study – the fact that, as Sandra Harding has wittily remarked, there is no such thing as a "view from nowhere." We need to view the textual evidence for misogyny and oppression more critically, considering both the social locations of the original writers and those of the contemporary scholars who have put those texts back into circulation.

As Deborah Payne has argued in another context, certain anecdotes, texts, and passages from texts are repeatedly cited and assumed "to represent dominant social views: for positivists, a historical transparency; for poststructuralists, a sign within a culturally determined system of signification. This 'short-circuit fallacy' . . . can occur only by ignoring [the writer of the text's or the recorder of the anecdote's] vexed position within the social space" from which he writes (1995: 22). Payne adopts the phrase "short-circuit fallacy" from Pierre Bourdieu, who defines it as ignoring "the crucial mediation provided by . . . the field of cultural production . . . a social space with its own logic, within which agents struggle over stakes of a particular kind." "The most essential bias," he goes on to warn, is the " 'ethnocentrism of the scientist,' which consists in ignoring everything that the analyst injects into his perception of the object by virtue of the fact that he is placed outside of the object, that he observes it from

afar and from above" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 69–70). Carol Thomas Neely makes a similar point in a recent study of madness and gender in Shakespeare's tragedies and early modern culture:

> The complexities of reading the discourse of madness in Shakespeare and his culture reveal the difficulty and necessity of historicizing: examining one's own position and that of one's subject(s) in contemporary culture in relation to the construction of those subject(s) which emerged in early modern culture, working to tease out disjunctions and connections. This project reveals that the shape of gender difference cannot be assumed but must always be reformulated in specific historical contexts. (1996: 96)

The lesson, in the words of Jean E. Howard's famous essay on the new historicism, is that "there is no transcendent space from which one can perceive the past 'objectively.'" "Our view," she continues, "is always informed by our present position" (Howard 1986: 22). It follows from this that "objectivity is not in any pure form a possibility," that "interpretive and even descriptive acts" are inevitably political, and that "any move into history is [therefore] an intervention" (Howard 1986: 43).

One strategy for intervention adopted by feminist scholars in the 1980s and 1990s has been to look for places for female agency within patriarchal scripts. In 1981, for instance, Coppélia Kahn argued in *Man's Estate* that the power over women given to men by patriarchy made men paradoxically "vulnerable to women" because "a woman's subjugation to her husband's will was the measure of his patriarchal authority and thus of his manliness" (Kahn 1981: 15–17). In 1985, Catherine Belsey pointed out in *The Subject of Tragedy* that women convicted of witchcraft were empowered at the moment of their execution by the "requirement for confessions from the scaffold," which, "paradoxically . . . offered women a place from which to speak in public with a hitherto unimagined authority which was not diminished by the fact that it was demonic" (Belsey 1985: 190–1). In 1994, Frances E. Dolan focused in *Dangerous Familiars* on early modern representations of domestic crimes perpetrated by women in an effort "to uncover the possibilities, however contingent and circumscribed, for human agency in historical process" because "accounts of domestic violence" are "one set of scripts in which women could be cast as agents, albeit in problematic terms" (Dolan 1994: 5).

Increasingly, however, feminist scholars are challenging the patriarchal narrative itself, recovering the materials for alternative narratives and emphasizing that repressive prescriptions should not be regarded as descriptions of actual behavior. In her 1993 study of *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, Amy Louise Erickson points out that

> it is one thing to observe that early modern male writers invariably described women's place in the social hierarchy, the "great chain of being", entirely in terms of marriage. It is quite another to remember that they did so in a society in which most adult women in the population at any given time were not married – they were either widowed or they had never married. (Erickson 1993: 8–9)

Similarly, in a 1997 essay, Diana E. Henderson reminds us that

> Some aristocratic women, in fact, managed to avoid being confined to any of their numerous homes, much less "the" home; those at the other end of the social scale might have no home at all, and they could hardly afford to create gendered space. . . . Texts (especially literary ones) tend to preserve the voices and perspectives of those who dominated within society; we must supplement them with both historical data and our scholarly imaginations if we wish to hear more of the conversation. Female-headed households in *Gammer Gurton's Needle* may be only a schoolmaster's source of comedy or deflected anxiety, but it is also true that there were many female-headed households in town and city alike; historical study of Southwark, the theater district itself, reveals that at least 16 percent of households were headed by a woman. The type of historical evidence we bring to bear when interpreting plays undoubtedly informs what types of domesticity we see represented, what gaps we notice, how we value them. (Henderson 1997: 192)

Thus, while *As You Like It* is a fantasy, the female household that Rosalind and Celia establish in the forest had precedents in the very district where the theater was located. Moreover, Rosalind's role in arranging her own marriage and Phoebe's as well also had ample precedents in the real world. As Margaret Ezell has demonstrated, early modern women played central roles in arranging marriages, not only their own, but those of their daughters, nieces, and granddaughters as well. Far more fathers than mothers had died by the time their children reached marriageable age (Ezell 1987: 18). Moreover, even when both parents were alive, great numbers of women lived away from their parents' homes, often supporting themselves independently and negotiating their own marriages. Vivien Brodsky Elliott's study of single women in the London marriage market during the years 1598 to 1619 shows that women who had migrated from the country to work in London tended to marry later than London-born women and to marry men who were closer to their own age, statistics which, Elliott concludes, suggest "a greater freedom of choice of spouse and a more active role for women in the courtship and marriage process" (Elliott 1982: 89): "without the control or influence of their parents the marriage process for them was one in which they had an active role in initiating their own relationships, in finding suitable partners, and in conducting courtships" (Elliott 1982: 97). Among the upper levels of society where there was more property involved and parents were more likely to take an active role in arranging their children's marriages, Ezell's study of women's correspondence with other women reveals that mothers, grandmothers, and aunts played central roles in negotiating marriages for their children (Ezell 1987: 20–34).

Women's power and authority extended beyond the limits of their families. The example of the Tudor queens Mary and Elizabeth is well known, and the "anomaly" of Elizabeth's position has been endlessly noted; but they were not the only women who exercised political authority. Patricia Crawford's examination of voting registers reveals that in some parts of England, "women had been regularly voting in parliamentary elections during the seventeenth century into the 1650s at least" (Orgel

1996: 74). Women also possessed considerable economic power, not only through inheritance from fathers and husbands (and from mothers and other female relatives as well), but also by virtue of their own gainful employment. Widows were usually named executrix in their husband's wills, and when a husband died intestate, the widow was legally entitled to administer the estate (Erickson 1993: 19, 61–78, 175). Bess of Hardwick began with a marriage portion of forty marks, but ended, after inheriting the property of four successive husbands, as the Countess of Shrewsbury and one of the wealthiest women in England (Hogrefe 1977). Women lower on the social scale earned their livings, not only as servants, but also in a variety of trades that took them outside the household. Itinerant chapwomen peddled a variety of goods, and Amy Louise Erickson has noted that "prohibitions upon girls and women appearing in public places like markets and fairs are entirely absent from early modern ballads and broadsides" (Erickson 1993: 10). Women's prominence in the marketplace is also attested by the drawings of thirteen London food markets produced by Hugh Alley in 1598, which include numerous images of women, both alone and with other women or men, both buying and selling. These images are particularly significant, because Alley's text is not specifically concerned with the activities of women in the markets; the women are simply there, apparently as a matter of course.

Even the guilds, generally believed to be bastions of male privilege, included women. The Statute of Artificers referred to apprentices as "persons"; and individual acts mentioned girls as well as boys and mistresses as well as masters: women were legally entitled, not only to enter apprenticeship, but also to take on apprentices of their own (Snell 1985: 177). As Stephen Orgel points out,

> until late in the seventeenth century women in one place or another, were admitted into practically every English trade or guild. Women did not, moreover, limit their efforts to ladylike pursuits: in Chester, in 1575, there were five women blacksmiths. Elsewhere, women were armourers, bootmakers, printers, pewterers, goldsmiths, farriers, and so forth . . . and they pursued these trades not as wives, widows, or surrogates, but as fully independent, legally responsible craftspersons. This point needs especially to be stressed, since a common modern way of ignoring the presence of women in the Renaissance workforce is to claim that they were there only as emanations of absent or dead husbands: this is not the case. The *percentage* of female apprentices is especially notable, for a practice that Lawrence Stone and E. P. Thompson believe did not exist. In Southampton, for example, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, 48 percent – almost half – the apprentices were women. (Orgel 1996: 73; see also Clark 1992; Snell 1985)

The historical evidence I have sampled undermines the current scholarly consensus that respectable women were expected to stay at home, that they were economically dependent on fathers and husbands, and that they were subjected to constant surveillance by jealous men, obsessively anxious about their sexual fidelity. I found it because I was looking for it. Historical evidence, as my old teacher reminded me, is subject to selective citation and motivated interpretation. The same, of course, is true of literary texts. In a 1985 study of *King John*, I easily discovered that

> Lady Faulconbridge's infidelity has created the nightmare situation that haunts the patriarchal imagination – a son not of her husband's getting destined to inherit her husband's lands and title. Like Shakespeare's ubiquitous cuckold jokes, the Faulconbridge episode bespeaks the anxiety that motivates the stridency of patriarchal claims and repressions. (Rackin 1985: 341)

That reading seemed valid to me because it confirmed the paradigmatic view of women's place in Shakespeare's world. Looking at it now, I realize that it elided a number of features of the text: the facts that the revelation of Lady Faulconbridge's adultery is depicted in humorous terms, that the Bastard it produced is a sympathetic character, that he welcomes the revelation of his bastardy, and that it results in his acceptance as the son of Richard Cordelion and consequent social elevation. Of course, the lady's husband, who might indeed have been jealous, is no longer alive when the revelation occurs.

Nonetheless, if we reexamine the representations of male sexual jealousy in Shakespeare's other plays, it is difficult to sustain the assumption that it expresses a normative view. Othello's jealousy of Desdemona is the source of tragedy, Leontes's jealousy of Hermione is the source of near-tragedy, Ford's jealousy of his wife is the subject of comic debunking. And all are mistaken. To be sure, Shakespeare does depict unfaithful wives. Goneril and Margaret are obvious examples. But it is worth noting that in neither case is the woman's infidelity her only, or even her chief, offense; and neither husband is wracked by jealousy. In other plays of the period, unfaithful wives are forgiven. Sometimes, in fact, their infidelity goes undetected. Consider, for instance, the case of Winnifride in *The Witch of Edmonton*, who is pregnant by another man when she marries Frank Thorney, who believes the baby is his. Never punished for her transgression, she is depicted throughout in sympathetic terms and, at the end of the play, is welcomed into the home of the supremely virtuous Carters. Sir Arthur Clarington, the coldhearted aristocrat who seduced Winnifride when she was his maidservant, is denounced as "the instrument that wrought all" the "misfortunes" of the other characters. According to Old Carter, he is "worthier to be hang'd" than Frank Thorney, who murdered Carter's daughter (V.ii).

In attempting to interpret plays historically, probably the best starting place for a feminist critic is Jean E. Howard's reminder that women were paying customers in early modern theaters (Howard 1988: 439–40; see also Gurr 1996: 61–5 and appendices 1 and 2; Levin 1989). According to the records of early English playgoers compiled by Andrew Gurr, these included respectable women, such as the wife of John Overall, who was Regius Professor of Theology at Cambridge from 1596 to 1607 and Dean of St. Paul's from 1602 to 1618 (Gurr 1996: 207). In fact, Gurr found far more references to citizens' wives and ladies than to whores (1996: 62), even though references to prostitutes seeking customers are more familiar to modern readers whose assumptions about the women in the playhouses have been shaped by scholarly citations of anti-theatrical literature. Those assumptions were not, apparently, shared by the players, who explicitly defer to female playgoers in prologues and epilogues and express the players' awareness that the women in the audience, as well as the men, had to be pleased. The Epilogue to *As You Like It* is a good case in point. Spoken by

the actor who played Rosalind, it addresses female and male playgoers separately, beginning with the women, whom it charges "to like as much of this play as please you," thus suggesting that the "you" in the play's title refers primarily to them. The Epilogue to Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* expects to hear "good" about the play "only in / The merciful construction of good women, / For such a one we showed 'em," acknowledging that positive representations of female characters were likely to appeal to female playgoers. In *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, a citizen and his wife repeatedly interrupt the players to demand changes in the represented action, and although both are the subjects of satire, there is no suggestion that her interruptions are more inappropriate than his because she is a woman or that her husband's wishes are more to be honored than hers. Ben Jonson, whom it would be difficult to accuse of excessive deference to women, dedicated *The Alchemist* to Lady Mary Wroth, and declared in the Prologue to *Epicoene* his intention to provide a dramatic feast "fit for ladies . . . lords, knights, squires, . . . your waiting-wench and city-wires [i.e., citizens' wives who wore fashionable ruffs supported by wires], . . . your men, and daughters of Whitefriars." Jonson's assumption that women's interests might be different from men's and that both needed to be pleased is supported by no less a personage than Queen Anne, who not only patronized two companies of players (The Children of the Queen's Revels and Queen Anne's Men), but also, according to the French ambassador, attended plays in which "the comedians of the metropolis bring [King James] upon the stage." The Queen, the ambassador reported, "attends these representations in order to enjoy the laugh against her husband" (Chambers 1951: I, 325).

It is generally assumed that private playhouse audiences were more homogeneous than those in the large public amphitheaters like Shakespeare's Globe, but even the private playhouses catered to women as well as men, and, as these examples show, those women came into the playhouses with tastes, interests, and allegiances which were not necessarily the same as men's. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine a totalizing master narrative that would account for the varied experience, tastes, interests, and allegiances of all the women who enjoyed playgoing in Shakespeare's England. They included applewives and fishwives, doxies and respectable citizens, queens and great ladies (Gurr 1996: 60–4). Because playing was a commercial enterprise, it was in the players' interests to please as many of the paying customers as they could, the women no less than the men. The female playgoers in Shakespeare's London brought their own perspectives to the action. Perhaps we should try harder to emulate their example. *Women* were everywhere in Shakespeare's England, but the variety of their roles in life and in the scripts of plays too often "goes without saying." If we wanted to look for it, I think we could find "an interpretive embarrassment of riches" for a revitalized feminist criticism.[3]

Notes

1 "The Traffic in Women" is a core text for contemporary feminist/historicist criticism, but, as Stephen Orgel observes, this "brilliant, classic essay" illustrates how "even the most powerful feminist analyses are often in collusion with precisely the patriarchal

assumptions they undertake to displace." "To define Renaissance culture simply as a patriarchy," he explains, is "to limit one's view to the view the dominant culture took of itself; to assert that within it women were domestic creatures and a medium of exchange is to take Renaissance ideology at its word, and thereby to elide and suppress the large number of women who operated outside the family system, and the explicit social and legal structures that enabled them, in this patriarchy, to do so" (Orgel 1996: 125).

2 I am grateful to Lena Cowen Orlin for sharing with me her brilliant unpublished essay, "The Witness Who Spoke When the Cock Crowed," and allowing me to quote from it. Here is the context of her comment: "Here [in second-wave feminism], the female victim has been an object of our scholarly desires. Literary historians have so often repeated the mantra that women were enjoined to be chaste, silent, and obedient; have so often described the spatial restrictions on women; have so often 'explained' playtexts in terms taken from the most conservative literatures of their time, that the reigning orthodoxy of historiography has become that of patriarchal philosophy. I have myself been oppressed by the sheer weight of the homiletic record, by the sermons and conduct books that are so readily available, so generically familiar, so textually congenial. I and perhaps others have been seduced by the efforts of our own research into thinking these prescriptions were culturally operative in a way that they cannot have been in many women's daily lives. Even though we have reminded ourselves that such admonitions would not have been necessary had their strictures been more generally observed, we have nonetheless persisted in depicting women as victims of unrelenting misogyny, patriarchy, and oppression. If we have enjoyed this construction of women, perhaps it is because it offers us the comforting reassurance that history has made progress and that we have come a long way (baby) from our early modern predecessors" (Orlin 1998).

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