

2013

“MY RESOLUTION’S PLACED AND I HAVE  
NOTHING OF WOMAN IN ME”: THE  
SUBJUGATION OF SHAKESPEAREAN  
WOMEN

Jennifer A, Nicholas  
*Northern Michigan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.nmu.edu/theses>

---

**Recommended Citation**

Nicholas, Jennifer A., "“MY RESOLUTION’S PLACED AND I HAVE NOTHING OF WOMAN IN ME”: THE SUBJUGATION OF SHAKESPEAREAN WOMEN" (2013). *All NMU Master's Theses*. 472.  
<https://commons.nmu.edu/theses/472>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Works at NMU Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in All NMU Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of NMU Commons. For more information, please contact [kmcdonou@nmu.edu](mailto:kmcdonou@nmu.edu), [bsarjean@nmu.edu](mailto:bsarjean@nmu.edu).

“MY RESOLUTION’S PLACED AND I HAVE NOTHING OF WOMAN IN ME”:  
THE SUBJUGATION OF SHAKESPEAREAN WOMEN

By

Jennifer A. Nicholas

THESIS

Submitted  
to  
Northern Michigan  
University  
In partial fulfillment of the  
requirements  
For the degree  
of

MASTER OF ARTS, ENGLISH

Office of Graduate Education and Research

2013

## ABSTRACT

“MY RESOLUTION’S PLACED AND I HAVE NOTHING OF WOMAN IN ME”:

THE SUBJUGATION OF SHAKESPEAREAN WOMEN

By

Jennifer A. Nicholas

The sexist aura of early modern England permeated the pages of Shakespeare’s texts. Humoralism and strict homilies were everywhere, making it impossible for the playwright to ignore the view of Woman as a lesser being. Since the primary goal in the theater has to be to fill the house and thereby make a profit, Shakespeare could not afford to turn a blind eye to the customs and beliefs of his generation. Whether he bought into such subjugation himself is irrelevant; he would have to incorporate at least a trace of sexism within his writing in order to make it relatable to theatergoers. If an audience cannot connect to a text or a production in any way, they will quickly lose interest and the art will not make an impact or generate revenue. In light of the need for relatable art, I intend to prove that female subjugation can be seen throughout even the most unexpected Shakespearean text.

Copyright by

JENNIFER A. NICHOLAS

2013

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1: A Social Explanation for the Tyranny of Sexism .....	4
Part I: Early Modern Women in Theology .....	4
Part II: Early Modern Women in Medical Science .....	12
Part III: Women, Culture, and Society in Early Modern England .....	22
Chapter 2: Prejudice Through Language and Performance .....	26
Conclusion .....	57
Works Cited .....	59

## INTRODUCTION

To be a woman in Renaissance England was to be silenced. It meant you were dominated. You were less than human. Early modern English women property, just like the horses in the stable or the chicks in the coop. This is not to say Shakespeare's England never experienced a revolt or any kind of gender-stimulated backlash, but merely that the predominating aura was overtly sexist. This palpable sexism was particularly ironic, considering Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne for almost half a century—forty-five years, to be exact. As I will explore, even the English queen could not completely extricate herself from the prescribed gender binary. Even her rise to power was not met with full appreciation; Elizabeth's legitimacy was questioned often throughout her rule.

With a strong undercurrent of inequality saturating Shakespeare's society, it is impossible not to notice traces of such sentiments in the writing of the time. In his essay entitled "Fiction and Friction," Stephen Greenblatt explains that sexual difference is the one difference that cannot be overcome. He writes, "Male writers of the period regarded gender as an enduring sign of distinction, both in the sense of privilege and in the sense of differentiation. A man in Renaissance society had symbolic and material advantages that no woman could hope to attain... All other significant differential indices of individual existence—social class, religion, language, nation—could, at least in imagination, be stripped away, only to reveal the underlying natural fact of sexual

difference” (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 76). If we cannot surpass gender oppression in “real” life, how can we ignore it in our art? What is art if not an imitation of life?

The existence of such an unavoidably oppressive art does not prove that Shakespeare or any of his contemporaries bought into this ideology themselves, but we must remember their ultimate goal was to generate an audience for their productions. Like everyone else, they needed to be making a profit in order to eat. Shakespeare, like all the rest, would be forced to depict at least some male domination in all of his shows in order to appeal to the masses and thereby sustain his livelihood.

Take *The Taming of the Shrew*, for instance. This play is the obvious example of the silenced woman. While women like the mouthy Kate could get away with being rude and boisterous at the beginning of a play, they could not sustain such momentum up through the play’s conclusion. Shakespeare seemed to be free to run the gamut of emotions within his female characters just so long as he chose to silence such unruly women before the show’s end. Whether his boisterous women were married off or killed off, their opinionated ways had to be eventually cut short.

I propose that societal norms inevitably bleed into literature and consequently that there are noticeable traces of female subjugation in even the most unexpected of Shakespeare’s plays; the *Taming of the Shrew* text is not the only example of the unruly female in need of dominance and control. While many have argued that Petruccio eventually does come to love Katherine, I posit that it is still important to acknowledge his initial greedy intentions. As with most Shakespearean characters, their behavior is not always consistent. I do not plan to argue that Shakespeare penned one dimensional beings; inconsistencies are what ultimately make characters feel like they are “real”

people. Hidden in these inconsistencies are characteristics that speak to societal influences, though, and that is important to acknowledge.

In this paper, I am planning first to offer a backdrop of what it meant to be a woman, both politically and biologically, in early modern England. Such a groundwork will offer both medical and theological explanations as to why degradation was so prevalent. I will be using the *MLA style manual and guide to scholarly publishing* to document these findings. Having established exactly where women stood conceptually during this period, I will then launch into close readings of *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Tempest*, and *The Second Part of the Life of Henry the Fourth*. In doing so, I will examine one play from each of Shakespeare's most prominent genres: tragedy, comedy, and history. I will show that each woman's relationship with a man inevitably degrades her in some way; her life, unfortunately, is mirrored by her society.

## CHAPTER 1: A SOCIAL EXPLANATION FOR THE TYRANNY OF SEXISM

### Part I: Early Modern Women in Theology

In order to establish exactly what that society was like, we need to shine a light on the four hundred year long women's rights debate, part of which took place during Shakespeare's time. In her essay "Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789," Joan Kelly begins by explaining that before the French Revolution women not only wielded no political power, they also had no voice by which to complain. Kelly writes, "Because there was no women's movement [in European society before the French Revolution], it has seemed legitimate to allow the men who spoke on behalf of women to figure just as much, and usually more, than women in such accounts" (Kelly 5). By acknowledging that women were rarely even permitted to vocalize their own problems, let alone solve them, we can see where some of the tension would have started. Given that hundreds of years later men are often still the mouthpiece for female concern, we can only imagine how silenced sixteenth-century women felt.

Christine de Pisan was one of those ladies—and she chose to push back and to speak out, launching this four-century-long women's rights debate in 1402 (Kelly 5). Called the *querelle des femmes*, the debate developed most early feminist thinking and included three basic positions. These positions were:

1. The defenses of women that belong to the *querelle* and the educational writings related to them are almost all polemical. In these writings, women took a

conscious stand in opposition to male defamation and mistreatment of women. Their ideas arose as a dialectical opposition to misogyny.

2. In their opposition, the early feminists focused on what we would now call gender. That is, they had a sure sense that the sexes are culturally, and not just biologically, formed. Women were a social group, in the view of early feminists. They directed their ideas against the notions of a defective sex that flowed from the misogynous side of the debate and against the societal shaping of women to fit those notions.

3. Their understanding of misogyny and gender led many feminists to a universalist outlook that transcended the accepted value systems of the time. Feminists of the *querelle* appreciated how their opponents' misogyny reflected the social position of their male authors. By exposing ideology and opposing the prejudice and narrowness it fostered, they stood for a truly general conception of humanity. (Kelly 6-7)

The third position is perhaps the most directly correlated with Shakespeare's writing.

Here feminists acknowledge that the same misogyny their opponents applied was also impacting many male authors of the time. Such an observation depicts all Elizabethan and Jacobean texts that were penned by men as inevitable products of a sexist environment. The fact that women like de Pisan were eventually able to fight back by drawing attention to this misogyny does not indicate a rapid shift toward equality. In her essay, Kelly explains that early feminist theory gained momentum through "the humanistic form of literacy some women acquired while it was being denied to women as a sex" (Kelly 7). Her assertion indicates that women had to fight to learn how to read and write before they could begin an endless cycle of fighting for other reasons.

The irony of the situation, however, was that literacy allowed women to move away from the Church and toward humanism, a concept with an even more narrow view of the female. Neither the Church nor humanism believed Woman and Man stood on equal footing, but the Church did allow women salvation and sainthood if they lived in their prescribed submissive, cookie-cutter roles. The only way women could achieve sexual, even political, equality through humanism was to become viragos and be

considered exceptions to their sex (Kelly 8); humanism brought with it an audience to listen to a woman's ideas, but it also carried a heavy judgment. Kelly's assertion that vocal women chasing equality were viewed as "exceptions to their sex," suggests that the population of the time was hesitant to see the female sex as a whole in any kind of authoritative role.

If women were not to be in charge, men would clearly have to take their place. In her book entitled *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, Juliet Dusinberre explains that it was important for men to keep their wives submissive because, "The household was the microcosm of the State, and women's subjection a happy paradigm of civil order" (Dusinberre 79). If you view yourself as a representative of your government, it is not a stretch to believe a certain amount of paranoia can come with such responsibility. The fear of what would happen if you acted outside of the norm kept people compliant.

According to a popular sermon of the time entitled "An Exhortation Concerning Good Order, and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates," the social order was ordained by God and therefore disobeying it was equal to disobeying God—which is why the fear of noncompliance was such a powerful motivator. The sermon quotes Saint Paul, saying, "... But they that resist [the power of God], or are against us, shall receive to themselves damnation" (*Certain Sermons or Homilies* 108). A man refusing to subdue his woman was going against the social order, the Godly order, and was asking for damnation as a result. Damnation, the ultimate punishment, was within the realm of possibility for being "against us." The sermon goes on to explain that townspeople were to obey the laws of their time unconditionally, whether they were just or unjust. The example of Pontius Pilate is brought up to showcase how even the wicked rulers receive their power from

God and therefore it is not lawful to go against them under any circumstances (*Certain Sermons or Homilies* 109-110).

As this popular sermon excerpt demonstrates, the religious doctrine of the time called for complete obedience on every level of the social ladder. There may be no single more powerful motivator than one's spirituality. If a chain of command was built into their physical *and* metaphysical lives, it would be quite difficult to imagine breaking it.

Dusinberre explains:

Shakespeare would have heard many times from the pulpit the State-authorized Homily 'Concerning Good Order and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates,' opening with an eloquent apostrophe to Degree which makes Ulysses sound like a civil servant. Elizabeth, sponsor of the Homilies, was as fine a propagandist as any of her Lancastrian ancestors. Wives are only one link in a comprehensive catalogue of relation: 'Some Kings and Princes, some Inferiors and Subjects; Priest and Laymen, Masters and Servants, Fathers and Children, Husbands and Wives, Rich and Poor: and every one hath need of other: so that in all things is to be lauded and praised the goodly order of God: without the which no house, no city, no commonwealth, can continue and endure, or last.' (Dusinberre 79)

This homily goes as far as to say no "house" can endure a social change. With such preaching being common, it is not surprising Shakespeare would have to be cautious how he penned his female characters; the ideology of his time was telling him independent women were a threat not only to the broad term "society," but to *him* personally. His specific household was in danger of crumbling if he did not polish the links in the chain of command. By making the threat personal, the sixteenth century Church of England could be sure it had everyone's attention.

The Church did not leave this punishment open for interpretation, however. When it identifies no house, city, commonwealth, etc. being able to last, it explains *how* daily

lives would crumble. The sermon warns: ““No Man fhall ride or go by the highway unrobbed, no Man fhall fleep in his own Houfe or Bed unkilld, no Man fhall keep his Wife, Children, and Poffeffions in quietnefs, all things fhall be common, and there muft needs follow all mifchief and utter deftruction...”” (*Certain Sermons or Homilies* 106). Through a close reading of this homily, we can see that Englishmen were terrified into a kind of obedience of their own. They were made to feel as though they had to obey a Higher Power that told them to suppress the women in their lives.

“An Homily of the State of Matrimony” is a more obvious example of a sermon depicting the injustice women were up against. The sermon details the “wife’s duty,” while a list of demands the husband must obey is conveniently omitted. It explicitly says this duty is to “perform subjugation” to the husband (McDonald 286) because just as Christ is the head of the Church, so too is the husband the head of the woman (McDonald 287). The homily paints the picture of women who *need* husbands because they cannot make their own rational decisions. A clergyman of the time would have explained, “... For the woman is a weak creature, not endued with like strength and constancy of mind. Therefore they be the sooner disquieted and they be the more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind more than men be, and lighter they be, and more vain in their fantasies and opinions” (McDonald 286).

Even while attempting to protect the woman, the homily simultaneously manages to degrade her. It explains, “But yet I mean not that a man should beat his wife. God forbid that, for that is the greatest shame that can be, not so much to her that is beaten, as to him that doth the deed” (McDonald 288). The man is made out to be the victim even while enacting physical harm on his woman. Since her shame from being beaten is not

nearly as great as his, she does not have the Lord's permission to leave her husband (McDonald 288); she is told to "take it not too heavily" (McDonald 288). This is her only condolence.

The ninth chapter of William Whately's *A Bride-Bush* also deals with spousal abuse. In it, Whately declares it "seems" too impious for a husband to beat his wife. He wonders, "But whether [the husband] may correct [the wife], yea or no, with blows, because it seemeth too impious in him to do it, and too servile in her to suffer it, that is a question" (Dolan 223). Whately goes on to say he, personally, would be "loath" to allow husbands to treat their wives like slaves, but he makes this point by asking a series of questions, among which lies, "Is this to err in her love—to smite her on the face, or to fetch blood or blueness of her flesh?" (Dolan 224) The fact that Whately even has to ask whether abuse is the wrong choice is an outrage. Perhaps he is familiar with the homily on the state of matrimony and therefore remembers that the husband is the real "victim" if he abuses his wife. Perhaps Whately believes the wife really will "take it not too heavily," since that is what the Word of the Lord has told her to do.

If the obedience and matrimony sermons alone were not enough to terrify the average English citizen into social compliance, there were plenty of scriptures willing to do the job. Even now in twenty-first century America it is a common belief that Eve, the first woman, was the cause of the first Sin on earth. Closer examination of the primary *Bible* of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, the *Geneva Bible*, reveals that Eve is not the lone sinner, however. In the *Geneva Bible*, the passage that describes The Fall begins, "Now the ferpent was more fubtil then anie beaft of the field, which y Lord God had made: and he faid to the woman, Yea, hath God in dede faid, Ye fhall not eat of euerie

tree of the garden?” (*Genesis* 1). Here we can see the serpent was the one to instigate the original sin; it is described as being “more subtle than any beast of the field,” which automatically sets it up to be a shady character. It is through the snake’s prompting that Eve eats from the forbidden tree. She does not concoct the idea on her own.

She also does not enjoy the fruit on her own; Adam does not protest when she gives him his share. The *Geneva Bible* simply says, “So the woman... toke of the frute thereof, and did eat, and gaue alfo to her houfband with her, and he did eat” (*Genesis* 6). If he somehow did not know the fruit he was eating came from the forbidden tree, he would nevertheless be guilty of ignorance. If Adam was aware of where the fruit came from, the couple would be guilty of the exact same sin of disobedience. It seems plausible the latter could be true. The *Geneva Bible* explains, “... they heard the voyce of the Lord God walking in the garden in the coole of the day, and the man and his wife hid themfelues from the prefence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (*Genesis* 8). Adam tells God that he hid himself because he “was afraid because he was naked” (*Genesis* 10), but it is also possible he was ashamed by what he had done. His insistence on transferring the blame over to Eve could come from such a terrible feeling of guilt. God yells at Adam for eating from the tree, and rather than simply acknowledge what he had done, he puts Eve in the hot seat by telling God she is the one who gave him the fruit. Adam fails to mention he never protested eating it or tried to stop his wife in any way. This shifting of blame onto the woman is depicted as acceptable since both God and Eve make no fuss over it and Adam suffers no consequences because of it. This religious example is one people have been told to model their lives after for thousands of years, which indicates a sort of female scapegoating is acceptable.

In spite of the fact that Adam also sinned, God grants him domination over Eve. Eve's punishment is as follows: "Vnto the woman he faid, I wil greatly increafe thy forowes, & thy conceptiós. In forowe fhalt though bring forthechildré, and thy defire fhall be fubiect to thine houfband, and he fhall rule ouer thee" (*Genesis* 16). Not only does God curse Eve with painful child labor, but he says her husband must rule over her. He uses vague language and does not specifically tell Adam *how* to rule over Eve, leaving a wide range of interpretations. Without a *Bible* that directly specifies *how* the husband is to "rule over" his wife, early modern English clergymen were free to preach that such instructions were literal; every Adam had to literally dominate his Eve.

Even Adam's punishment is an indirect slap in the face to Eve. God begins by saying, "Alfo to Adám he faid, Because thou haft obeyed the voyce of thy wife..." (*Genesis* 17). The *Geneva Bible* scolds Adam first and foremost for listening to his wife. God does not simply say man is condemned for eating from the tree; he says man is cursed for "obeying the voice of his wife *and* eating of the tree." Mentioning eating the fruit second almost makes the consumption an afterthought.

After reprimanding Adam in this way, God goes on to say, "... curfed is the earth for thy fake: in forowe fhalt thou eat of it all the dayes of thy life" (*Genesis* 17). This passage is particularly important because the aforementioned homily does not seem to acknowledge that God says Adam is the reason the earth is cursed. Eve's punishment is the only punishment that seems to stick. Eve's weakness is at the forefront of sixteenth century English thought.

From church sermons preaching about the "wife's duty" to a *Bible* that promotes female scapegoating, we can see women like de Pisan had a lot to fight against. When we

remember that often times women could not vocalize their own concerns, the discrimination surpasses being intolerable. The Church of England painted Woman as a weak creature in need of guidance; these same guided women did not *want* to be guided, however, and thus an outcry like the *querelle des femmes* was sorely needed. Early modern English theology promoted the obedient woman who silently took her place in the social hierarchy, and thus we can see how the Church diligently contributed to an oppressive, sexist atmosphere.

## Part II: Early Modern Women in Medical Science

While the idea of the weak woman was certainly theologically emphasized, it was also supported medically. Outside of the *Genesis* excerpt, women are defined as both mentally *and* physically weak. One of the medical conditions she was thought to be predisposed to impacted her biologically and even morally. Women were thought to develop a medical condition that could only be cured two ways, one of which was sexual intercourse. During Shakespeare's time, there was a popular condition plaguing young women called "the virgin's disease" or the "green sickness," which appears to be anemia. In her book entitled *Humoring the Body*, Gail Kern Paster explains that the condition was treated with either blood-letting or with marriage (*Humoring the Body* 89). Such a treatment process implies that there was an underlying belief that women do require sexual intercourse to be healthy; yet they were (and still are) judged for doing so. If intercourse could be viewed as a medicinal cure, viewing it simultaneously as "dirty"

really put the woman in a difficult predicament. Should she choose to “cure” her disease and lose her reputation or to remain ill in order to uphold her image?

If having to choose between reputation and health is not demeaning enough, Paster proceeds to explain that “the virgin’s disease” was viewed as an inevitable medical condition a woman (and only a woman) must suffer if she does not eventually have intercourse. She finds viewing one woman’s health problem as a problem that all women have particularly problematic, claiming that reducing a specific person’s medical problem to an issue that will eventually plague all marriage-age women strips a woman of her individuality (*Humoring the Body* 91). Through Paster’s analysis we can see the “green sickness” not only forces women to choose between their health and their reputations (supposing they can’t get married quickly), but it also takes away their uniqueness.

In her book, Paster also points out that in reducing virginity to a medical condition in need of a cure, the institution of marriage loses its connection to personal desire and even individual choice (*Humoring the Body* 92). Arranged marriages for political gain were already taking desire and choice out of the equation, and thus the female predicament becomes that much more intolerable.

The double-standard fixation on virginity does not solely center on marriage, though. Men were out to prove their romantic interests were “pure” at all times. Even doctors of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras were looking for ways to be certain. The French physician Laurent Joubert believed he had really stumbled upon a tell-tale sign of virginity by examining the way a woman urinated. His logic was that a virgin’s “womb pipe” would still be tight and narrow and therefore her urine stream would be “more

unfettered and clear” than a non-virgin’s. Such a womb pipe would make her “piss straight and far, in rather the same manner as a man” (Paster 43-44).

This fear of a loss of chastity impacted both a woman and any future children she may conceive, meaning her sexual burden extended from generation to generation; the “mistakes” she made could never conceivably be forgotten. Dusinger explains *why* all the fuss over a woman’s virginity came into play: “At the heart of the double standard lay the concept of virginity as a property asset. Virginity is more cherished among the upper classes who have more property to dispose of... Fear of a bastard’s intruding on the succession of property dictated virginity in brides and faithfulness in wives...” (Dusinger 52). Such a world view paints women as a means to an end and not an end in and of themselves. You married a woman so you could have children with her and thereby pass down your family name and property. You did not marry her so you could tell the whole world how much you loved her.

If those reasons for having children are not disheartening enough on their own, Joubert’s other “findings” attempted to explain that women’s bodies were “less refined” because of this need to bear children. According to him, a woman’s blood has to be more watery in order to provide nourishment for babies; if the blood was not watered down, the woman would not be able to generate the quantity needed. Therefore, he argues, there is a medically justifiable reason female blood is “imperfect” (Paster 80). When both the clergymen *and* the physicians are portraying women as a lesser sex, it is easy to see why such an upsetting mentality thrived.

In her book *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*, Gail Kern Paster shares Joubert’s claims alongside the claims of

other physicians from Shakespeare's time, such as James Hart. Hart concluded that women urinated frequently due to their "idle and sedentary lives," (Paster 41) but Paster indicates viewing women as essentially lazy is not the most embarrassing viewpoint. She conveys to modern readers that menstrual bleeding seems to be more shameful than any other bleeding, as it can be seen as a punitive process because it is involuntary (Paster 82). Paster writes, "Menstruation comes to resemble the other varieties of female incontinence—sexual, urinary, linguistic—that serve as powerful signs of woman's inability to control the workings of her own body. It is not too much to argue that these historical signs of uncontrol bear implications for the ideology and politics of reproduction that we live with still" (Paster 83). Paster is able to link incontinence of the female organs to "linguistic incontinence," gossip, because the mentality of sixteenth century England associated overproduction of one orifice with overproduction everywhere else (Paster 45). Through such an oversimplification, women are made to feel shame toward the workings of their bodies.

In early modern England, womanhood was described in even more demeaning ways, however. Paster explains that it was believed women menstruated because they were considered naturally plethoric due to their colder, moister temperament. "Their bodies—and here the argument becomes very circular indeed—were naturally less soluble, since by virtue of its colder temperature their blood tended to be slower moving, clammy, grosser," she writes. "Its natural attributes were also the attributes that, when magnified or increased, described disease. It follows—in the hierarchical logic peculiar to Galenic humoralism—that the finest female blood was less pure, less refined, less perfect than the finest male blood, and, one infers, the more inclined to corruption." After

offering such an explanation, Paster interprets her findings as a way of saying that in early modern England nature dictated the blood of women was “readily classifiable as superfluity or waste” (Paster 79). The case seemed to be that as long as “nature” was blamed for female “shortcomings,” a woman’s degradation was of no consequence.

Other than being overtly offensive, the idea of female blood being “inclined to corruption” and “less refined” was significant in that it prohibited women from traveling alone; not only were they to *feel* inferior, but they were to be *treated* as inferior too. In early modern England, women were not allowed to go abroad or even go into the city or commonwealth unless they had a person with “respected” blood, a person of authority, with them (Paster 90). The need for women to have the adult equivalent of a babysitter infantilizes them, suggesting they need a chaperone to make wise decisions.

John Skelton’s late-15<sup>th</sup> century poem “Tunning of Elynor Rumming” is a prime example of the fear of the unsupervised woman. Paster references it, breaking down the poem into a metonymic chain. She writes, “...a woman who leaves her house is a woman who talks is a woman who drinks is a woman who leaks” (Paster 46). This rapid progression of assumptions accurately mirrors the logic of Skelton’s contemporaries.

The early modern English seemed to categorize more than just a woman’s blood or urine as “other,” however. Bodily functions concerning reproduction were not the sole recipients of stigma. Humoralism, which was a popular medical theory during Shakespeare’s lifetime, explained that men’s bodies were thought to be hotter and drier, while women’s bodies were thought to be colder and more spongy. Paster explains, “In humoralism, the coldness and sponginess of female flesh, relative to the flesh of men, become traits of great ethical consequence by explaining the sex’s limited capacity for

productive agency, individuality, and higher reasoning. As with everything else in this cosmology, states of consciousness and cognitive awareness were ranked in terms of cold/hot, most/dry. Waking consciousness was thought to be a hotter and drier state than sleep; rationality was less cold and spongy than irrationality” (“Humoring the Body” 78-79). In essence, humoralism depicts women as nonproductive, common, unintelligent, dull, and irrational.

According to such a medical theory, women were thought to be biologically predisposed to behaving in these ways. Whether a lady’s behavior was consistent with the stereotyping of the time or not, early modern English society nevertheless found a way to judgmentally interpret her actions. If she had a flash of masculine heat and decided to show it, she was thought to be temperamentally inconsistent. If she hid the flash, she backed up the stereotype that women were not capable of that emotion (*Humoring the Body* 79-80).

Shakespeare’s Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing* is struck with just such a masculine heat flash when directing Benedick to kill Claudio. She laments, “O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart / In the market-place” (4.1.303-304). Such a proclamation would not have been viewed favorably, and hence she is married off only one act later.

Paster goes on to suggest Shakespeare also played into his time period’s perceived link between bodily temperature and the mind’s predisposition because the psychopathology of early modern thought “means that embodiment is everywhere assumed in affective discourse, just as bodily references always assume an affective

context or consequence” (*Humoring the Body* 85). This passage alone supports the theory that the critical way women were viewed can never be fully separated from a given text.

The inability to separate a medicinal view of women from a given fictitious text is underscored when we consider how long such medical theory persevered. The ideology humoralism presented was pertinent for hundreds of years. Late-fifteenth-century German calendar woodcuts that offer emblematic images of the four shades of humoralism (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholic) seem to have inspired writers like William Congreve approximately two hundred years after their creation. In these woodcuts, the woman’s signifying function “is to provide a neutral social background for the men’s temperamental self-display” (*Humoring the Body* 80).

What is even more problematic is that in these cuttings “neutral” seems to be synonymous with “victimized.” In the woodcutting depicting cholera, the man is beating the kneeling woman; the sanguine woodcutting shows the man making unreciprocated sexual advances toward the woman; in the melancholy woodcutting, he has his head in his hands while the woman looks away from him; in the last and different woodcutting, the phlegm woodcutting, the two are both playing instruments. The phlegm woodcutting is the only woodcutting where both man and woman are actively participating. Paster explains that the woman is only fully expressive among the phlegmatics because the “*normative* humoral woman is temperamentally constrained, and such behavioral oppositions as might be implied by temperamental un-self-sameness are here kept out of view” (*Humoring the Body* 85). Choosing to keep the behavioral oppositions out of view sends the message that acting against the stereotypes was frowned upon greatly.

This pressure women ostensibly were prescribed to portray submissive social roles was likely intensified by the fact that a woman's behavior was scrutinized by every society, not just *her* society. In her book entitled *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, Kim Hall explains how the bodies of white English women were on a platter for all the world to see. She writes, "The bodies of white English women become the map upon which imperial desire and national identity are marked" (177). If a nation's identity depends on you, the implication is that your every move is being carefully controlled. To take this idea a step further, it means a woman's actions were representative of femaleness as a whole, not her own individual whims. Just as reducing marriage to a medical cure strips a woman of her individuality, so too does viewing her as a part of a whole, a piece of the larger schema that is The Female Gender.

Medical discourse concerning the female body takes what may be its most complicated turn when Nathaniel Highmore's findings are considered. Greenblatt quotes the seventeenth century English physician, saying, "By how much more the Masculine Atoms abound in a Female Infant, by so much the more the Fetus is stronger, healthier, and more Man-like, a Virago" (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 78). One would assume that femininity and corresponding fragility would be deemed "healthy" for females since that is what is pushed upon them. It takes quite the reconditioning of the mind to comprehend that being less healthy could have been the goal for anyone—and yet Highmore's findings stand. Greenblatt says the physician's words demonstrate how weakness was built into the gender ideal. He writes, "One peculiar consequence of this view was that normal women had to submit to the weaker internal principle, to accept a certain debility,

in order to achieve full female identity, an identity that itself entailed submission to a man; women were by *definition* the weaker sex” (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 79).

The lengths people were willing to go to prove that women were indeed the weaker sex were astounding. The French surgeon Ambroise Paré perpetuated the Aristotelian belief that female genitalia is basically just male genitalia pushed up inside of a woman (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 79-80). Paré goes through an in-depth explanation of which male body parts are the equivalent of which female body parts. One would think seeing the woman as simply a “different” kind of male would hypothetically equalize her, but this is where Galenic theory intrudes and strikes down any sense of harmony. One of the physician’s theories posits that although women were a sort of “defective” male, they were nevertheless inferior because they were unable to “birth” their genitals due to their naturally colder state. Heat was required in order for them to drop down (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 80).

To complicate matters even more, the seventeenth century physician Jacques Duval also blurred the lines between Man and Woman, recognizing that virtually all males are effeminate even after coming out of the womb and do not transition into states “befitting an adult man” until childhood is complete (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 78). According to Greenblatt, he also presents the reverse picture of the woman as a virago and makes it clear that both sexes contain both “male” and “female” elements. In his most famous work *On Hermaphrodites, Childbirth, and the Medicinal Treatment of Mothers and Children* (1612), Duval cites a seventeenth century hermaphroditic man under the age of twenty-five who had been living as a woman for some years prior to falling in love. The man, Marin, confessed his “true” identity to the woman he loved in

hopes of marrying her. After escaping a death sentence that resulted from the discovery of his condition, the man longed to integrate himself into “normal” English society in spite of his non-normative circumstances. Greenblatt explains, “Even Marin le Marcis’s highly original improvisation, we might note, had the most conventional of goals: a publicly recognize name and gender, an officially sanctioned marriage” (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 75). Marin’s goals show how deeply the patriarchal social structure pervaded an individual’s psyche; he felt the pressure to project a clear gender identity and assume the corresponding social role no matter what.

Marin is not the only androgynous individual whose life depicts the inescapability of early modern England’s gender binary. Greenblatt’s essay also depicts a real life Viola, a woman choosing to live as a man. He tells her story through a 1580 Montaigne travel journal entry. After choosing to disguise herself as a man and live accordingly, the woman married another woman and the couple attempted a heterosexual marriage for four or five months. Eventually the transvestite was discovered, which set off a legal proceeding and not a psychological examination. Greenblatt believes the woman appeared to have been condemned to death “for the use of prohibited sexual devices, devices that enable a woman to take the part of a man” and not for deception (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 66-67). Not allowing a woman “to take the part of a man” harkens back to Greenblatt’s point that sexual difference is the only difference that can never be overcome. Even while attempting to live as the opposite sex, the social hierarchy inevitably seeks women out and lowers them to their “appropriate” standing—which we can see through Greenblatt’s assertion that any “violation” in the performing of one’s expected sex role was treated as a capital crime (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 82).

Medical theory during Shakespeare's time offers numerous explanations for the rampant sexism that permeates the writing of the period. From writings explaining the natural "impurity" of female blood to an examination of her "womb pipe" that would ensure virginity, physicians of the early modern English era fixated on bodily fluids as a means to embarrass women into accepting their roles as second class citizens. Biological shame was a powerful, effective tactic used in the silencing of women.

### Part III: Women, Culture, and Society in Early Modern England

All of the aforementioned biological impediments to equality also resulted in lifestyle barriers for women. Women were to remain in the home raising children; if they were temperamentally unstable, remaining out of sight and political matters would be a viable option. Consequently, developing their conversational skills was consequently considered unimportant. After all, what good would stunning female rhetoric do if a newborn was to be the sole listener? In their book *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England*, Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne explain the woman's dilemma:

The acquisition and dissemination of rhetorical skills is grounded in masculine institutions (schools, universities, inns of court), which are defined by their capacity to generate and cement homosocial bonds, and which rhetorical skill comes in turn to symbolize and consolidate. The means of institution is largely dictated by the perceived end—that of service in the public sphere—from which women are systematically excluded. Rhetorical skill is an ideological and cultural badge of personhood, indicative of a social identity that marks an individual as belonging to various institutional networks. As such, it is implicitly gendered, as well as marked by class and status... (Richards and Thorne 72)

It is true that pursuing higher education would benefit a sixteenth century English woman very little—unless the entire social structure of early modern England were to shift.

Richards and Thorne point out that the reformers believed women should be “learned enough to instruct young children, but also contained or managed in this role” (Richards and Thorne 73). Since everyone’s daily lives were centered on what was considered “functional,” the belief was that women should not simply try something because they are capable of it; they should pursue only what will assist them in doing their jobs, in maintaining their households. Men were free to attend universities to cultivate the homosocial bonds mentioned above, but fostering a sense of community among women was not a priority.

Even with a female queen sitting on the throne, England’s gender stereotypes continued to thrive. In her book *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England*, Naomi Miller reminds us that Queen Elizabeth I “... was able to command her male subjects through adept use of her society’s discourses of sexual difference in the face of resistance and even opposition” (Miller 111). Elizabeth I had to acknowledge and cater to the sexism of her court in order to be an effective monarch; she could not do away with the gender binary of her time, only use it to her advantage. The queen could not claim her sex was not correlated with her ruling abilities. Instead, she had to play the game and pretend to acknowledge her “downfall” of womanhood. In her famous speech that has become known as “Speech to the Troops at Tilbury,” Elizabeth I declared, “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too” (Miller 112). Elizabeth I’s rhetoric provided a model of the kind of balancing act that was required of

any woman wishing to attempt to rise above her subjugation. Miller points out that women can never truly separate themselves from an image of frailty, which is the problem of being trapped in “an order prescribed by the masculine” (Miller 112). Even while attempting equality, sixteenth century women had to degrade themselves.

Choosing Elizabeth’s path of acknowledging female “shortcomings” wasn’t without its share of backlash, however. In the very same year Elizabeth I ascended to the throne, John Knox published *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), a treatise condemning gynococracy. In the treatise, he claims that female rule is contrary to Nature, an insult to God, and finally “the subversion of good Order” (Miller 111). Knox had written the treatise in order to oppose the rule of the Catholic Queen Mary, and although the pamphlet was not published until the Protestant Elizabeth had become queen, Elizabethan society seems to back up his assertions. They backed them so much so that state legislation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries strengthened the household as an instrument of social control (Kelly 23).

Even if Elizabeth I seemed to be the figurehead for dominant females, the fact that she achieved all she did through an elaborate game of trickery speaks volumes. Yes, she was powerful, but her power came *through* accepting her “weak” role, not by dispelling it. What little progress that was made may have only been in terms of female morale—which James I instantly ruined. He worked diligently to discredit England’s previous ruler by attempting to view women as a whole all over again. Miller describes his speeches as being focused on “women in general as sexualized bodies needing to be ruled” (Miller 113). According to Miller, James I’s writings prior to his reign characterized “the drawbacks of female rule” in sexualized rather than political terms

(Miller 113), but once he ascended to the throne he was given a megaphone to conduct his inequality tirade.

As if James I somehow had not already gone far enough, Miller notices that he enjoyed putting women in the same category as servants, horses, and dogs, saying they could all be “put to bodily use” (Miller 113). This level of subjugation cannot go unacknowledged. After 1603 and the death of Elizabeth I, Shakespeare was writing in a country whose ruler stripped women of their human qualities. It is unlikely that he too bought into James I’s tyrannical ideology (which we can see by acknowledging what spitfires characters like Beatrice are), but that would not have made the king’s painful words any less powerful. Given that Shakespeare was not writing in a vacuum, he had to cater his plays to the masses to be able to make any money. Therefore, at least a modicum of the sexism perpetuated by his king would have inevitably leaked into his texts so he could continue to make a profit from his writing.

Given that monarchs were the figureheads for their nations, any sexism they perpetuated would reflect back on their townspeople. In pretending to acknowledge her gendered shortcomings, Elizabeth I inadvertently perpetuated the oppression of her time. This is not to say she had another choice, but her words keep with the bias of the time period nonetheless. There need be no explanation as to how James I perpetuated the gender hierarchy; by constantly referring to them in sexualized terms, he reminded his people where a woman’s true value lies.

## CHAPTER 2: PREJUDICE THROUGH LANGUAGE AND PERFORMANCE

England's monarchs impacted more than just the tone of Shakespeare's plays. Kim Hall has found some direct correlations between Queen Elizabeth I and Shakespeare's Cleopatra. Hall looks to the Ditchley portrait of the Queen to make her case, explaining that the English queen literally has kingdoms at her feet just as Cleopatra metaphorically has kingdoms at her feet. She goes on to cite the passage in Act 1, Scene 5 where Alexas tells Cleopatra that Antony intends to lay kingdoms at her feet and sends her the "treasure of an oyster" (1.5.45-49). Hall points out that where the two differ, however, is that Cleopatra's pearl is unlike Elizabeth's virgin pearl, which we can see by the way it is described. Antony refers to his gift as the "treasure of an oyster," not "a pearl"; this word choice is important because choosing to include the word "oyster" continues "the conflation of sexual and material exchange." Oysters were long thought to be an aphrodisiac (Hall 158) and Hall is quick to point out that Antony chooses sexually charged terminology to describe Cleopatra's pearl—which is significant because it perpetuates the hyper sexualized image of Woman whose primary appeal is procreation.

To conclude this exploration of what womanhood signified in early modern England, I would like to focus on *Antony and Cleopatra* because I believe it to be one of the most surprising examples of the subjugated woman in Shakespearean drama. When this particular Shakespearean text comes to mind, readers and playgoers are likely inclined to associate Cleopatra's bossiness and her quick tongue with her dominance of Antony. I will introduce my own findings that speak to the contrary momentarily. For now, I would like to examine what others have had to say on the matter.

Paul Barry's book *A Lifetime with Shakespeare: Notes from an American Director of All 38 Plays* offers insightful commentary on not only the action that takes place onstage, but also on the action that is omitted from sight. One of Barry's most powerful points concerning the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra is that none of their love scenes are ever shown. He writes:

... where are the love scenes in *Antony & Cleopatra*? First of all, there is no thunderbolt meeting; that happened before the play began, and that's the first big problem. Romeo, Juliet, Troilus, Cressida, Henry VIII, and Anne Boleyn all fare better, because we witness the meeting of the lovers, the phenomenon of love at first sight. We may be aware that Antony met Cleopatra when she was the mistress of his mentor, Julius, but we aren't shown that first encounter. Then, where are the one-on-one love scenes, the lover's meetings and partings? Shakespeare simply gives us no moments to substantiate the great love story. (Barry 89)

Barry's observation is particularly astute; it is often too easy to spend time interpreting what is there on the page and neglect to mention what has been omitted. By excluding all intimate scenes, this "great love story" becomes much more of a political drama. In fact, Antony spends a good chunk of the play not even in Egypt, let alone in Cleopatra's bedroom. At one point in his analysis Barry refers to Antony and Cleopatra as "ageless teenagers in the ferocity of their lust" (Barry 90), which underscores how much their union was not publicly respected. Cleopatra had the reputation of a "whore," and even when she did fall in love and have faithful intentions, she could be seen as nothing else. This mark of "impurity" was irreversible.

It was irreversible because, as the saying goes, history is often told from the point of view of the "winner." The dominant force is the one writing in the history books, preserving its legacy. Barry depicts this trend, saying:

Maintaining the affair with Cleopatra despite [Antony's] arranged political marriage to Octavia, sister of Octavius Caesar, in 39, could hardly have helped him strategically. Certainly the contemporary media never seem to lack stories of politicians who sacrifice their careers to dalliances with mistresses and prostitutes. History usually treats these affairs as simply disastrous lapses in judgment. Some powerful leaders caught in such scandals, like Henry VIII, may prove invulnerable if political opponents don't exploit the affairs. But posterity does not generally call them love affairs; the women involved are either prostitutes or are characterized as prostitutes. (Barry 90)

Regardless of their intentions, the women in such affairs would be characterized as prostitutes because the rationale humoralism created still has not been completely dispelled; stereotypes portraying the ideal meek, chaste women are alive and well. Humoralism not only had a great impact on Western medicine, but it was not until the nineteenth century that the bacterial theory of disease came into play and replaced it (*Humoralism and its Influence*). The longevity this medical theory had means that we have only been straying away from it for approximately two hundred years, or roughly three generations of people. While this line of thinking may seem very archaic to the Millennials, it is not unfathomable to their grandparents. When gendered stereotypes are put into perspective this way and we acknowledge they're still influencing us hundreds of years later, we have a better chance of grasping just how persuasive they would have been during Shakespeare's time.

Although a strong medical "explanation" for why women were the lesser sex could have been rather persuasive on its own, we must also remind ourselves such theories would have been made infinitely more powerful by sexist scriptures and sermons, as we have seen. From the Homily on Obedience that stressed breaking the societal hierarchy eventually resulted in damnation, to the Matrimony Homily which

literally says women must “perform subjugation” to their husbands, the religious doctrine of early modern England would not allow for equal treatment of the sexes. The *Geneva Bible* itself provided the Elizabethan and Jacobean populations with reasons to question Woman’s integrity. Elizabeth I herself, too, could not fully transcend her time period. Therefore, it is no stretch to believe the second-class mentality surrounding women during Shakespeare’s time inevitably seeped onto the page; it did, after all, permeate all other aspects of life.

\* \* \*

Having examined early modern England’s oppressive gender binary, we can now turn our attention to examining how this subjugation translates onto a reflective or possibly prescriptive “life” upon the stage. Although the female characters in Shakespeare’s plays don’t seem to be treated as second-rate citizens all of the time, there are still strong undertones of oppression that are worth noting. It is no real surprise that Doll Tearsheet from *The Second Part of the Life of Henry the Fourth* is undeservedly demeaned. She is, after all, a lower class prostitute; her treatment is not unfathomable even in twenty-first century America. What may be more surprising is that Miranda from *The Tempest* is also manipulated and disrespected. Even on a remote island in the middle of nowhere, this suppression seems to be so engrained in Shakespeare’s representation of humans that it happens even without any kind of societal influence. Although *The Tempest* is largely a comedy, traces of the hierarchy of early modern English society pervade it nonetheless. *The Tempest* doesn’t provide us with the most shocking example of a woman lacking substantial power, however. Cleopatra from *Antony and Cleopatra* steals this thunder. We see Cleopatra trying to control Antony’s every move, but is this

just the mark of someone who's deeply insecure? Taking a look at what's going on between the lines illuminates her truly weak self.

Let us start by reminding ourselves that the only way Cleopatra can even keep Antony's attention is by seducing him. In her book *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, Juliet Dusinberre quotes A.C. Bradley, saying, "The exercise of sexual attraction is the element of [Cleopatra's] life; and she has developed nature into a consummate art" (Dusinberre 67-68). Bradley does not refer to sexual attraction as "an" element of Cleopatra's life, but "the" element of her life. This is the metaphorical basket in which she keeps all of her eggs, which is particularly problematic for a woman; this kind of supremacy brings with it a great shame and thus Cleopatra is demeaning herself even while attempting to exude temporary dominance. Dusinberre writes, "Unchaste women have a sense of betraying their own sex because they know that their weakness will be taken as female weakness rather than as an individual weakness" (Dusinberre 55). Whether Shakespeare's females intend to represent their entire sex, they do nonetheless. In the second act, Enobarbus makes a statement about women as a whole, saying, "But there is never a fair woman has a true face" (2.6.100). There are many other rampant female stereotypes in *Antony and Cleopatra* that indicate women were viewed as a collective. The idea of viewing one woman as representative of the larger collective of womanhood makes every play a kind of morality play, and because of this mindset a woman with a loose tongue and loose legs has no choice but to be subjugated and ultimately punished.

Even without the shameful effects of rising to power through sex, it's painful because this kind of power will never last. Due to inevitable aging and the mundaneness

born from intercourse devoid of a personal connection, Cleopatra's "power" over Antony is temporary at best. Antony says outright that he would rather spend his time having fun than discussing anything "harsh" (1.1.46-48); this admission shows the shallowness of their connection and thus audiences understand its impermanence.

This impermanent connection between the two characters allows Cleopatra periodically to dominate Antony politically and physically, but never emotionally. From the very beginning, Antony knows he will have to break up with her. His will power is what's lacking, not his awareness. He says to himself, "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break, / Or lose myself in dotage" (1.2.112). If we view his relationship as a sort of sexual addiction, the clichéd first step in recovery is supposed to be admitting there is a problem. Antony has already moved beyond step one by the time we meet him and thus his "recovery" is already in progress.

Even the language he uses to describe his lust indicates its temporariness. He says he must break his Egyptian "fetters." Fetters, or shackles, are used to restrain prisoners. Being a prisoner is usually a temporary situation; one will typically serve his time and be released. Even life-long sentences often offer the possibility for parole.

Regardless of this association of the word "fetters," it does unarguably carry a negative connotation with it. In many early modern contexts, love is referred to as a "disease," perhaps because emotional "uncontrol" was thought to be a feminine quality and thereby a weak quality. Such a negative view of love could easily have rubbed off on Antony, which we can see by his choosing to describe his affections in negative terms. If he was ever actually in *love* and not simply *lust*, choosing to use pessimistic words to describe his union suggests whatever connection was once there has dissipated.

Antony's reaction to his ex-wife's death also seems to suggest his feelings for Cleopatra are waning. He says, "What our contempts doth often hurl from us, / We wish it ours again" (1.2.120-121) after finding out Fulvia has died, which could indicate his desire to get back together with her. He seems fickle and incapable of loving anyone but himself, making Cleopatra a victim of lust. The word "lust" carries with it the assumption of transience, and thereby we return to the point that Cleopatra will never have dominance over him. The only thing impeding their eventual break-up is their deaths.

"Fetters" isn't the only word worth examining in order to showcase Cleopatra's sorry predicament. After speaking to the soothsayer, Antony decides to return to Egypt. He says, "I will to Egypt; / And though I make this marriage for my peace, / I'th'East my pleasure lies" (2.3.37-39). It is worth noting that our male protagonist never says his "love" lies "i'th'East." While it is true that in order to keep with the iambic pentameter Antony would need a two syllable word, he could have said "sweetheart," "darling," or another pet name appropriate to sixteenth century courtship. The word "pleasure" has a very sexual connotation and returns us to the aforementioned connection between lust and impermanency; Cleopatra currently has some sway with Antony, yes, but we must question its longevity. Antony does not refer to Cleopatra as his "love" until he's lost a great deal of his power (4.4.15). We must consider that he says "love" at this point in the play just to keep Cleopatra faithful and not because these are his genuine feelings.

The symbolism found in Lepidus's discussion of crocodiles is also particularly enlightening and could be another lens through which to explore Cleopatra's mistreatment. While drinking with Antony, Caesar, and other captains, Lepidus wants to know what Egypt is like and only asks about its crocodiles (2.7.37). He fixates on no

other animal. Udo Becker's *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols* says crocodile symbolism is "frequently associated with the symbolism of water" (Becker 72). If we explore what Becker's book has to say about water, we can uncover that, "As an unformed, undifferentiated mass (regardless of whether it is spring, lake, or sea water), it symbolizes the abundance of all possibilities or the primeval beginning of all that exists" (Becker 322). Therefore, it could be interpreted that Egypt is a land of "abundant possibilities." This viewpoint has a positive connotation. For the purposes of this play, Cleopatra is considered the personification of Egypt. In fact, that's Antony's pet name for her. If we interchange Egypt the woman and Egypt the country, we are able to view Cleopatra herself as "the abundance of all possibilities." Viewing the Egyptian queen as the embodiment of "all possibilities" paints her in an optimistic, positive light, which suggests her subjugation throughout the play could be unwarranted.

Among Becker's other symbolic interpretations of water is one that emphasizes the importance of early modern England's gender differences. Becker explains that water can also be seen as "an element of the union of opposites" (Becker 323). If this is the case in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra must ultimately find a way to be stereotypically feminine and subservient because her partner, Antony, is a masculine, powerful warrior. The yin must balance out the yang, and since the masculine, powerful role is already being forced on Antony, Cleopatra must contort herself into the corresponding submissive piece or cease to exist. Her haughty, impulsive personality makes this an impossible task, and thus she must defect to the latter option.

Antony even seems to know how impossible feminizing his partner would be. From the onset of the play, he seems completely turned off by her personality. He points

out that Cleopatra is “cunning past man’s thought” (1.2.141). He says this in an abusive way, which is yet another indicator he knows he needs to leave her. He does not seem to genuinely believe she falls to pieces when he is gone, but rather that she is a wonderful actress. It is interesting, though, that he refers to her as “cunning.” Can Cleopatra be all that cunning if Antony’s *aware* he’s being manipulated? Look at Iago from *Othello*; everyone kept calling him “honest Iago” because his victims were unaware they were being deceived. Cleopatra’s targets know where they stand. Yes, lust is a powerful emotion that can override such awareness—but not permanently. The expression “eternal love” persists, not “eternal lust.” Cleopatra’s transparency will not allow her to remain in a position of power indefinitely. The fact that she has Enobarbus fooled is of no consequence because he is not at the top tier of the social ladder.

Antony seems to be the one who is more cunning. He’s full of excuses and attempts every twist of the tongue to get back into Caesar’s good graces. While arguing with him, Antony claims he didn’t “deny” Caesar’s request to lend him arms, but “neglected” it (2.2.97-104). Everyone in the room knows Antony is at fault, including Antony. Earlier in the play we saw his view of inaction when he said, “O, then we bring forth weeds / When our quick minds lie still...” (1.1.105-106). Antony knows not taking action “brings forth weeds.” Regardless, he is still trying to twist the situation in his favor—and succeeding. As soon as he half-heartedly apologizes, Lepidus buys into it, saying, “’Tis noble spoken” (2.2.105).

Antony is clearly unwilling to see a situation from a different perspective and wants to “win” at any cost. We can see just how low Antony will stoop by examining how his marriage to Octavia comes about. Shockingly, he is the one who spurs that

conversation. Agrippa plants the seed, but Antony heartily accepts the invitation (2.2.131). His desire to be in a favorable political standing easily trumps any and all feelings his significant other has; he does not care if he makes the main woman in his life feel like she is a second-rate mistress by marrying someone else.

Let us pause for a moment to acknowledge the fact that the aforementioned points focus on how Cleopatra can effect Antony. The only way she can achieve even transient influence is by going through a powerful man; she is not a presence in and of herself. She must latch onto whoever is top dog at the moment to remain relevant. Antony knows Cleopatra must attach herself to a man in order to be significant, so he throws some of her past sexual conquests in her face:

I found you as a morsel cold upon  
Dead Caesar's trencher; nay, you were a fragment  
Of Cneius Pompey's, besides what hotter hours,  
Unregistered in vulgar fame, you have  
Luxuriously picked out. For I am sure,  
Though you can guess what temperance should be,  
You know not what it is. (3.13.119-124)

Even more embarrassingly, they are not alone when this heated exchange takes place. Enobarbus, Charmian, and Iras are all present. Cleopatra is blatantly degraded and called a whore publicly. It is arguable whether she did deserve the degradation she faced throughout the play, but the defamation is there nonetheless.

Cleopatra is the one being openly demeaned for her sexual exploits, but Enobarbus reveals Antony may also know the heat of many a luxurious bed. While relaying the story of how the couple met, Enobarbus tells Agrippa, "Our courteous Antony / Whom ne'er the word of 'No' woman heard speak..." (2.2.232-233). If the

story Enobarbus relays is true and Antony never says “no” to women, how faithful can he be? Furthermore, the fact that Enobarbus needed to include Antony’s lascivious ways in his story says Antony is frequently being propositioned by women. This snippet of Enobarbus’s dialogue makes Antony seem like equivalent of a modern-day player. During the Jacobean period, cuckoldry was a great sign of a loss of power; Cleopatra would seem to be experiencing the female equivalent of cuckoldry.

If Antony’s reputation does not create enough romantic upheaval, Antony and Cleopatra are not even shown kissing on stage until more than half of the play is over (3.11.69). It is true that Shakespeare was a minimalist when it came to giving stage directions, but the fact that he does pepper his plays with strategic ones tells us the this delayed public display is intentional. Antony waits until he lost an important battle at sea, until he is in big trouble with Caesar, to be appropriately affectionate with his girlfriend. It is possible that up until this point he believed she could never possibly leave him; now that he may not be the most powerful man she knows, he is willing to put in a bit more effort. It took a tragedy to force Antony to kiss Cleopatra in public when they are not even in front of anyone “important”; if played true to the script, such a lack of affection completely debases her regardless of whether she realizes it or not.

Whether Cleopatra understands all of the *ways* her authority is undermined, she nevertheless knows it *is* being undermined; she realizes her huge limitations. She admits she cannot get what she wants without the help of others when she says, “That Herod’s head / I’ll have; but how, when Antony is gone, / Through whom might I command it?” (3.3.4-6). She knows *saying* whatever she pleases is far different from *doing* whatever she pleases. When she tries to *do* whatever she pleases by commanding a fleet of war

ships, she finds herself unable to do so and flees in terror. This moment shows that Cleopatra cannot hold her own and consistently be a dominant force in the play.

The anxiety she displays when Antony is not around her should have been the strongest indicator of her secretly weak demeanor. One minute she is calling for music, the very next she is changing her mind and calling for a game of billiards—which also gets instantly nixed. The severity of her indecision is obviously sped up to accommodate the length of the overall play, but the point that Cleopatra cannot make decisions and is obsessively clingy is still obvious. When the pair is separated, she seems to waste much of her time in a dither and accomplish very little. Antony, on the other hand, is usually highly productive. Antony's focus compared with Cleopatra's flightiness shows us he is more in control of himself; Antony does not spend his time fretting over what Cleopatra may be doing in his absence, but Cleopatra's every action is based on Antony. She is always talking *to* or *about* him. Even the dream she talks about before she commits suicide is about him. This intense dependence and inability to function on her own make Cleopatra seem like a puppet without a puppeteer. Without Antony, she is useless because she has decided that all of her eggs do belong in that proverbial lust basket.

One of the most obvious examples of Cleopatra's dependence occurs in the second scene of the play. While childishly pouting, she goes off looking for Antony to make sure he sees her pouting; she does know, after all, that throwing a temper tantrum does not work without witnesses. She tells Enobarbus to "bring [Antony] hither" (1.2.80) and audiences assume she wants to whine in his ear. Enobarbus never has the chance to fetch Antony, however, because the lover enters the room as soon as the order is issued. Rather than speak to him, Cleopatra haughtily stomps out of the room with her train right

in front of him. Such an action makes her seem like an ornery toddler. Being likened to such a young and underdeveloped person shows the powerlessness to which this queen has succumbed. She cannot rely on her rhetoric to be persuasive, and thus she must make a spectacle to be heard—which is quite degrading.

This fixation on her partner may also indicate an assumption that audience members do not want to get to know her personality independent of Antony (after all, every choice that's made must be made to sell tickets). We never see Cleopatra giving her backstory to Charmian or simply engaging in light-hearted gossip with Alexas. We know very little about her, and what is more, we would not even have the tidbits we do have if she were single. She is only relevant to the story because of her ties to Antony. This is not a compassionate position to be in.

Returning to the mention of the debacle at sea, Cleopatra asks Enobarbus, “Is Antony or we in fault for this” (3.13.3)? Knowing who is at fault will not alter their military strategy from this point forward. We may then assume that Cleopatra is simply asking because she is insecure and needs some comfort in this moment. By focusing non-productively on her own hurt feelings, we see Cleopatra's weakness. If Antony were to instruct her to take some course of action after this turmoil, we may rightly assume their roles would be instantly reversed and she would obey like a frightened child.

This is not the only frenzy Cleopatra throws herself into, unfortunately. Her reaction to Antony's marriage to Octavia also shows her insecurity. She is being fidgety with her speech even before the messenger can relay the bad news to her, interrupting him about five times. Her jitters take a turn for the worse in her last speech, which includes more hyphens than her previous dialogue (2.5.111-121). The use of hyphens

indicates she is even interrupting herself at this point because she is having a total meltdown.

Her dialogue in the first act reminds us that a good portion of her insecurity comes from her vanity. Cleopatra confesses that she “was” a “morsel for a monarch” (1.5.28-35). Saying “was” here indicates her arrogant behavior may be a mask at this stage in her life. Since she cannot stop aging, she will continue to be less and less secure. She will also wield less and less power. The alternative to Time’s damning hand, of course, is death. It seems entirely possible that the idea of never aging again was in the back of Cleopatra’s mind when she chose suicide. After all, we do not see her contemplating such a permanent decision for very long. She has no Hamlet “to be or not to be” moment. If she genuinely still believed her looks could sway the most powerful men, perhaps she would have thought twice before purchasing the asp.

Surely we cannot pin Cleopatra’s decision to kill herself solely on the death of Antony. It is true that she seems obsessed with the man, wanting to keep him in her life even after he intends to kill her. She will not leave the monument to give him a proper goodbye after he has been fatally stabbed, however. The risk of getting captured outweighs her desire to be with him one last time. She is too timid and afraid for her own well-being to sacrifice anything for Antony.

Cleopatra demonstrates this same nervous energy even in the way she chooses to commit suicide. While speaking to the clown, she says, “Hast thou the pretty worm of Nilus there, / That kills and pains not” (5.2.242-243)? She has made up her mind she wants to die, but she wants to do so in the most tranquil way possible. Caesar’s last speech proves Cleopatra was looking for an easy death: “For [Cleopatra’s] physician tells

me / She hath pursued conclusions infinite / Of easy ways to die” (5.2.348-349).

Searching for such a docile exit really paints Cleopatra in a sad, lonely light. After perusing these “easy” ways to die, she chooses a small viper as her executor.

It is not a coincidence she settles upon death by snakebite, though. According to Becker’s encyclopedia, snakes were frequently seen as a sexual symbol and were considered both masculine (due to its phallic shape) and feminine (due to its engulfing belly) (Becker 263). We must remember that regardless of any knowledge Shakespeare may have had of African cultures, he was still writing to please an English audience. This desire to please Englishmen means their social norms would have been the ones being spotlighted, so Cleopatra must not survive the snakebites; she chose to thoroughly incorporate masculinity and sexuality in her life and she paid the ultimate price. She must be made an example within the morality play traditional framework I have discussed.

What is more, Egyptian culture sometimes depicted Fate in the form of a serpent (Becker 264). If we run with this idea, an asp killing Cleopatra is likened to Fate itself killing her. Such a death, whether self-inflicted or not, could stand as punishment for sexual impurity, abundant masculine energy emanating from a female, and even infertility. Although Cleopatra had children, Shakespeare’s Cleopatra never conceives by Antony, by the man she claims is the love of her life—which is what sixteenth century English society would have told her to do. The infertility Shakespeare’s Cleopatra experiences directly contradicts the historical Cleopatra, and thus we can acknowledge it as a deliberate attempt to bend to early modern English ideals.

Becker’s encyclopedia also explains that serpents were often kept in Roman houses as symbols of family spirits (Becker 265)—which makes Cleopatra’s death by

serpent rather ironic. Through Becker's findings, we can see the fictitious Cleopatra kills herself with the symbol of the family spirit, even though she had no traditional "family" with Antony. This decision could speak to her desire to avoid fulfilling the traditional nurturing mother role—which is another reason the snake of Fate could want to condemn her.

Continued digging into Becker's encyclopedia reveals that the asp, the exact kind of snake Cleopatra uses to commit suicide, is a symbol of evil and callousness (Becker 25). In order to kill her the asp must bite her, and thereby she is literally devoured by evil. When contrasted with Antony's death, Cleopatra's appears to be surrounded with far more judgment and negative connotations. Antony dies by sword, and according to Becker, swords seem to have more of a positive, powerful connotation (Becker 290-291). Becker writes, "Often, the sword is primarily a mere symbol of martial virtues, especially of manly strength and courage..." (Becker 290). This keeping with masculine values underscores the importance of the gender binary of the time; the sword's strength is "manly." Although Antony fails to kill himself seamlessly, his mishap is not as permanently degrading as insinuating Fate devoured Cleopatra because she lived a masculine, non-traditional life.

Fate could also have devoured the Egyptian queen because of her vanity. After seeing her lifeless body, Octavius Caesar gasps:

O noble weakness!  
If they had swallow'd poison, 'twould appear  
By external swelling: but she looks like sleep,  
As she would catch another Antony  
In her strong toil of grace (5.2.338-342).

Such a line indicates beauty mattered to Cleopatra even after she would be able to reap its benefits. Her society condemned the highly sexualized woman. It did tell her she would be an object of desire no matter what, though. Enobarbus illustrates this idea perfectly while trying to convince the queen not to go into battle. He tells her that if horses and mares both participated in battle, the horses would be too preoccupied riding the mares to accomplish anything else (3.7.6-8). Essentially, Cleopatra received conflicting messages about sexuality, thereby making it difficult for her to do anything right.

The means by which this queen committed suicide are worth examining, but it is also important to note that she died mid-sentence. Cleopatra's final words are: "As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle— / O Antony! — Nay, I will take thee too. / What should I stay—" (5.2.305-307). In Naomi J. Miller's *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England*, Miller explains that women of Shakespeare's era were instructed to remain chaste, silent, and "above all" obedient (Miller 109). Even in death, Cleopatra is committing two of these cardinal sins by being unable to hold her tongue and going against Octavius Caesar by killing herself in the first place. In order to avoid any kind of social turmoil, such a publicly disobedient woman would likely have to be punished during the Jacobean era. (Cleopatra is always "in public" because her actions are being depicted on a stage.)

Given the level of Cleopatra's disobedience, some may say it is a wonder she survived as long as she did. In word and deed she is both rash and violent, which demeans her even without the intervention of Antony. Woman or not, generation after generation has revered the powerful but *controlled* individual. Cleopatra was definitely not that individual. When an unfortunate messenger brings her the news of Antony's

marriage, she physically beats him and threatens him, saying, “Bring it to that, / The gold I give thee will I melt and pour / Down thy ill-uttering throat” (2.5.33-35). She makes the poor man repeat himself several times, knowing full well he has to stick to the same story and therefore will continue to be tortured. By making the messenger continuously back up his message, Cleopatra has made it clear all she wants is a scapegoat, a punching bag. The inability to harness her rage and use it productively makes Cleopatra a rather weak woman; giving into one’s impulses takes no effort at all.

Throughout *Antony and Cleopatra*, we can see a great deal of foreshadowing dialogue that lets us know a particularly debasing light is shining on Cleopatra, even within her own relationship. Many of the characters speak in a sexist manner, particularly Enobarbus, who seems to be Antony’s best friend. Since they are so close, we must wonder how many of his ideas have taken root in Antony’s mind, which would be particularly problematic for the Egyptian queen. One of the strongest examples of sexism occurs when Enobarbus is comforting Antony after Fulvia’s death. Enobarbus says:

Why, sir, give the gods a thankful sacrifice. When it pleaseth their deities to take the wife of a man from him, it shows to man the tailors of the earth; comforting therein, that when old robes are worn out, there are members to make new. If there were no more women but Fulvia, then had you indeed a cut, and the case to be lamented. This grief is crowned with consolation; your old smock brings forth a new petticoat: and indeed the tears live in an onion that should water this sorrow. (1.2.156-163)

This belief that all women were essentially interchangeable was widely held. If we recall Enobarbus telling Agrippa that Antony never said “no” to a woman, we can see Antony’s

behavior seems to indicate he's of one mind with Enobarbus on this issue. Cleopatra, like all sixteenth century women, was subject to degradation simply by existing.

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that women did have the chance to be respected. These women would need to personify traditional femininity in order to even be considered for that respect. The Octavias of the world had the greatest hope of being respected because chastity, silence, and obedience are all stereotypically feminine characteristics. Compare, for instance, Octavia's reaction to being betrayed by Antony to Cleopatra's reaction. Octavia says, "Ay me, most wretched, / That have my heart parted betwixt two friends / That do afflict each other" (3.6.79-81)! She does not hit anyone or even curse. She simply says the equivalent of, "Oh, no!" Not only is her language respectful, it is brief. This short passage is all she says about the matter, thereby upholding the agreement of silence her sex is bound to. In return, the men in the room comfort her, going as far as to say, "Each heart in Rome does love and pity you" (3.6.95). Cleopatra, as we will recall, has the opposite reaction; she is long-winded, vulgar, and downright abusive.

We must also recall Becker's symbolism that saw water as "an element of the union of opposites" (Becker 323). If we once again liken Cleopatra to water, Antony must serve as her opposite. This enraged behavior falls into the category of traditional masculinity, thereby leaving Antony to temporarily take up the role of feminine counterpart. With peers like Enobarbus, this will never be acceptable. Early modern English society will not allow Cleopatra to "reduce" Antony to a woman—which appears to be exactly what she's done. After fleeing from battle, Antony laments, "Take [my treasure]. O, / I followed that I blush to look upon" (3.11.11-12)! Blushing was typically

considered a feminine act, which was unbecoming of a masculine male. Antony admits he has “fled [himself]” (3.11.7) before he blushes in an attempt to apologize for his lost masculinity. Apologize he must, for being in the position of a feminized male was not a desirable position. Enobarbus begs “transform us not to women,” (4.2.35-37), while Caesar says, “Women are not / In their best fortunes strong” (3.12.29-31). Clearly, sixteenth century English society would devour such a role reversal before long. Nevertheless, Cleopatra cannot fully feminize herself and thus she is still stigmatized and subjugated thousands of years later.

\* \* \*

Let us turn now to *The Tempest* and take a look at the position of its female protagonist, Miranda. Her father, Prospero, tells us she has been marooned on an island with him since before she turned three years old. At the onset of the play, her father is the only human contact the young girl has ever had. Consequently, she does not fully understand Jacobean societal pressures because she has nothing with which to compare her own life. In spite of this lack of exposure, however, the traditional gender hierarchy is engrained in her subconscious. This innate knowledge of her “lesser” sex does not mean that Miranda is traditionally silent and obedient, but when she does go against her father she does so in a timid manner; her most disobedient act is to visit a boy and tell him her name. She is far from being the unchaste, boisterous Doll Tearsheet, yet Miranda is subject to her own level of debasement nonetheless. The degree of dishonor Cleopatra, Miranda, and Doll Tearsheet feel varies, of course, but none of the women are completely exempt from degradation.

When we first meet Miranda, her father Prospero is trying to tell her what has happened to them. Near the onset of one of his initial speeches, he stops mid-sentence to ask, “Dost thou attend me” (1.2.78)? Depending on what the actress playing Miranda chooses to do, Prospero could be saying this because she has started doing something distracting like fussing with her dress or picking flowers. Prospero has to stop speaking and tell Miranda to pay attention two more times after his initial reprimand. She might not be downright bored, but she is only about fifteen years old and therefore plagued with a wandering mind. Someone with this kind of a lack of focus would be easy to manipulate; we must wonder if she even hears all of what is being said to her.

The first private exchange she has with Ferdinand would suggest she does not. While trying to compliment Miranda, Ferdinand inadvertently admits he has been seduced by a lot of women. He says, “Full many a lady / I have eyed with best regard, and many a time / Th’harmony of their tongues hath into bondage / Brought my too diligent ear” (3.1.40-43). This passage makes it sound like Miranda could just be one of many, a “notch in his belt,” so to speak. Given that right before this admission he has to ask for her name, it is not farfetched to assume that although Ferdinand is trying to pass his emotions off for love, they are no more than lust.

Miranda is not offended, though, because she does not understand. In fact, she does not even acknowledge that he has admitted to being a serial dater. She tells him she does not remember seeing any woman’s face that is not her own and then launches right into how much she wants to be with him and only him. Yes, Miranda is sheltered and only a teenager, but she is also a victim of attempted rape. One would think such a traumatic experience would cause a woman to put up her guard, particularly if the

traumatic experience was her *first* sexual encounter. Given that this experience does not seem to have resulted in being more cautious or attentive around men, Miranda comes off exceptionally naïve for a fifteen-year-old. Generally, naivety is not seen as a positive quality to possess, and thereby Miranda is disgraced by looking ignorant.

The fact that Caliban's attempted rape is included in the text in the first place shows just how highly sexualized women were. Even on a remote island with no real societal influence, a woman must still act as an object of desire. What is more, Caliban says he would have "peopled else / This isle with Calibans" (1.2.350-351) if the rape had been successful. He specifically mentions procreation, not pleasure, which drills into Miranda's head that intercourse is a means to an end and not an end in and of itself. Such ideology creates the chaste and fragile women early modern England valued.

What Caliban says prior to complaining about not being able to "people" the isle also establishes Miranda as the fragile flower. He whines, "[Prospero] didst prevent me" (1.2.350). The fact that Prospero was the one to save Miranda shows that she was not strong enough mentally or physically to ward off her slave. Her father had to intervene and save her. In the "list of characters" displayed before the text of the play, Caliban is listed as "a savage and deformed slave" (Lindley 88). The stigma that deformed individuals are somehow weak does exist; whether or not it is a fallacy is irrelevant because that unfortunate mindset is out there regardless. In light of such a mindset, some audience members would surely have believed Miranda capable of saving herself. Since she cannot, she could be viewed as even more powerless than the ideal submissive woman. Miranda is not able to take control of her own body, both literally and metaphorically.

We can also see this lack of bodily autonomy through the fact that she is not the one who determines who she is allowed to date. Her father has the final say in whether Ferdinand will be her match, which could be one reason why Miranda is so upset by Prospero's initial roughness with Ferdinand. It is true that she could simply want her father to like Ferdinand because it is a common sentiment for lovers to want their parents' approval of their partners. It is just as likely, however, that she is coming to grips with how Prospero can forbid her from seeing Ferdinand. Her exact words are, "Pity move my father / To be inclined my way" (1.2.445-446). Through this statement we can not only see that Miranda is not fully autonomous, but we can also see a bit of stereotyped sexism seeping through. She says she hopes pity is inclined "her" way and not "Ferdinand's" way. Although she is speaking on behalf of a desire they both share, men of any generation do not typically want to be pitied; women, however, are told it is just necessary in some instances. Prospero's daughter wants to be pitied, thereby wanting to flaunt a certain amount of weakness.

Alongside desiring pity, Miranda also seems to want others to view her as humble. Her humility is almost at the point of being self-deprecating, though. She was only about three years old when she was exiled with her father, but even knowing this cannot stop her from saying, "Alack, what trouble / Was I then to you" (1.2.152-153)! Rather than acknowledging their exile was not her fault and toddlers are completely blameless, she feels terrible for being an extra weight on her father's shoulders. She responds to the education she has been given in a similar manner. She says, "Heavens thank you for't" (1.2.175). A simple "thank you" would suffice, but adding "Heaven" to the reply shows the intense gratitude Miranda feels. Most over-the-top thank you

exclamations or apologies tend to feel like the speaker is being hard on herself, as if she is somehow suggesting she does not believe she is worth the trouble.

Miranda also has a particularly extreme reaction when Ferdinand tells her he loves her. After crying over her “unworthiness,” Miranda swears, “I am your wife, if you will marry me; / If not, I’ll die your maid. To be your fellow / You may deny me, but I’ll be your servant / Whether you will or no” (3.1.85-88). The young girl has not had the opportunity to be conditioned by any kind of society, so how can she know she is “unworthy” without a point of comparison? It would appear the implication is that this submissive ideology is somehow innately female. Miranda’s behavior is reminiscent of Helena from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Helena’s love, Demetrius, doesn’t love her in return, and yet she tells him:

I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius,  
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you:  
Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,  
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,  
Unworthy as I am, to follow you. (2.1.204-207)

Miranda’s desperate, passionate reaction to Ferdinand’s words seems to suggest she, like Helena, would be her love’s spaniel if he fell out of love with her. Her use of the word “servant” underscores this pathetic dependence. She does not say she will love Ferdinand forever and leave it at that; she chooses a subservient word to convey her desperation.

The word “servant” isn’t the only degrading word exchanged between the lovers. In order to find out whether Miranda is a human or a spirit, Ferdinand asks, “My prime request, / Which I do last pronounce, is — O you wonder — / If you be maid, or no” (1.2.424-426)? By “maid” he means “human,” but “maid” is, of course, also a sexually

charged word frequently meaning “virgin.” One of Ferdinand’s initial questions for Miranda could be interpreted as extremely personal; if the sheltered girl understood what her new suitor was asking, she would likely feel embarrassed and therefore vulnerable.

If we choose to give Ferdinand the gentlemanly benefit of the doubt here, we have concluded too hastily; he does eventually flat out ask Miranda if she is a virgin. He says, “O, if a virgin, / And your affection not gone forth, I’ll make you / The Queen of Naples” (1.2.446-447). He seems primarily concerned with is the girl’s chastity. This makes Miranda seem a bit like a commodity, which is degrading. The importance of a woman’s chastity was no foreign concept in the Jacobean era, which indicates how intricately sexism was woven into the fabric of society.

Miranda does not understand her debasement, though. Even after such an interrogation, Miranda is willing to do anything to benefit Ferdinand. Her desire to please him causes her to offer to carry his logs herself so he can sit and rest. This causes a bit of a role reversal to momentarily take place. Miranda is trying to step into the shoes of the provider and move Ferdinand into the shoes a trophy wife would wear. We have seen how well a woman behaving in a masculine manner worked for Cleopatra. Therefore, it is for Miranda’s benefit that she not sustain this role. Although he does end up “condescending” to carry the logs for her, we must remember the pair is on a desert island; how much of a blow to his reputation is it if there are no witnesses?

This attempted masculinity is not Miranda’s only tie to Cleopatra. Just as the Egyptian queen was overly rash and dramatic, so too is Miranda. When the girl sees Ferdinand in danger we see a bit of this kind of personality emerging. She has not known the boy for more than about five minutes, but the thought of him getting hurt brings her to

her knees—literally. The stage directions indicate she kneels before wailing, “Beseech you, father” (1.2.473)! She is instantly willing to do absolutely anything for a perfect stranger, including go against her only family and caretaker—and she does not stop the theatrics there. Miranda actually *cries* when she later sees Ferdinand hauling logs. She is not upset because he is in excruciating physical pain, but because she thinks he has too high of a social standing to be doing menial labor. Although her societal norms would have indicated Ferdinand is indeed “too good” to be “lowering” himself in such a way, tearing up is nevertheless an extreme response. Miranda’s over-the-top antics make her seem infantile, which results in less societal respect.

Putting aside all of the problems of Ferdinand and Miranda’s courtship, their actual “marriage” is no feminist dream either. While giving Ferdinand his daughter’s hand in marriage, Prospero says, “Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition / Worthily purchased, take my daughter” (4.1.13-14). Prospero says Ferdinand worthily “purchased” his daughter, which brings us right back to the aforementioned idea of the woman as a commodity. It also reminds us that Miranda has zero bodily autonomy and Prospero has the ultimate say in who she will be given to. To borrow a line from Juliet’s father, “An you be mine, I’ll give you to my friend” (3.5.191).

Prospero does indeed give his daughter to his friend, the son of the king of Naples. As soon as Miranda’s father establishes this union, he has to say, “Look thou be true! Do not give dalliance / Too much the rein. The strongest oaths are straw / To th’fire i’th’blood. Be more abstemious, / Or else good night your vow” (4.1.51-53). It is possible Prospero is simply being over protective and Ferdinand has not gotten too cozy with Miranda; it is also possible Ferdinand really is having difficulties keeping an appropriate

physical distance from Miranda. If the latter is the case, it is clear that Ferdinand's "love" runs skin deep—which returns us to the fact that the expression "eternal love" persists, not "eternal lust." If Ferdinand is *already* having a problem controlling himself, his loyalty to Miranda is on shaky ground.

\* \* \*

Falstaff, like Ferdinand, is also a less than perfect partner. Turning to *The Second Part of the Life of Henry the Fourth*, we can see a more significant instance of a power imbalance within a relationship. The situation between Doll Tearsheet and Falstaff probably does not warrant the label "relationship," but given that at least a certain amount of chemistry is present in their interactions it is safe to say the two are not "just friends." In Act 2, Scene 4, Doll hangs on Falstaff "like a new-married wife about her husband's neck, hardly to be shook off," as Henry V would say in *The Life of Henry the Fifth* (5.2.171-172). Falstaff, however, continuously disrespects Doll. Shakespeare has Falstaff accuse Doll of having a venereal disease she is spreading about town and then, in the very same scene, he expects her to kiss him.

If such hot and cold behavior is not problematic enough, Falstaff *says*, "Kiss me, Doll" prior to the onstage kiss they have (2.4.235). Of course an actor playing Falstaff has the freedom to choose whether to *order* or *charm* Doll with this line, but given the conversation prior to the kiss was centered around Prince Harry the setting does not feel particularly charming. Falstaff goes from yelling at her to expecting her to be affectionate in only a matter of moments. This hot and cold behavior feels vaguely abusive. It is difficult for audience members (or readers) to rationalize what Falstaff is doing by reminding ourselves that Doll is a prostitute and her job is to share her affections with

everyone because Falstaff *isn't* paying for Doll's love. Their interaction gives a whole new meaning to the term "stolen kisses."

Kisses don't seem to be the only thing being stolen here, though. Doll makes it perfectly clear that Falstaff has her heart as well. What is particularly sad is that this confession comes at another point when Falstaff seems to be rebuffing her emotions. Right before telling him she loves him, Doll says, "By my troth, I kiss thee with a most constant heart," (2.4.241-242) and Falstaff replies, "I am old, I am old" (2.4.243). Of course this rebuff could be interpreted as a defense mechanism on Falstaff's part; he could be trying to imply that he is too old for someone young like Doll to love. His reply could be another way of saying, "Nonsense." Conversely, this line could also be interpreted as Falstaff allowing his mind to wander again, thus ignoring Doll for the umpteenth time. No matter how the actor chooses to play the line, though, the verdict remains the same: Doll does not hear her affections being reciprocated. She is putting herself out there and being left emotionally raw.

Moving forward to the actual line where she says those three magic words, we can see Falstaff's response falls short once again. Doll swoons, "I love thee better than I love e'er a scurvy young boy of them all," (2.4.244-245) while Falstaff changes the subject again: "What stuff wilt have a kirtle of? I shall receive money o'Thursday; shalt have a cap tomorrow—A merry song!" (2.4.246-247) How we interpret Falstaff's response will always inevitably come down to each individual actor's choice, but in this case the actor seems to have two predominant options once again: Falstaff is either deeply touched and terrible at expressing his feelings or deeply uncomfortable and changing the subject because he does not share Doll's intimate feelings. Regardless of

which choice is made, we know the simple act of avoiding reciprocating those words is painful in and of itself.

Doll does throw out a quick, frantic, “I love thee” earlier in the scene after Falstaff is done fighting, but this confession does not seem to hold the same weight because she is also very busy cursing Pistol right then and there. Given that she herself does not seem to be making a big deal out of that moment, it is possible for us to infer two things: that she does not expect an answer from Jack just then *and* that she has said this to him before. Taking into account that they are, in fact, having intercourse, she would probably need to be careful how she first said “I love thee” to him in order to avoid scaring him off. There are, after all, many other prostitutes capable of sleeping with him that would not get emotionally involved. Thinking about all of this could allow us to conclude it is highly likely the casual nature of the first “I love thee” we see was possible because she has been planting this seed for some time. Therefore, in the previous paragraph I have chosen to highlight the pain behind what I deem is the more intimate of the “I love thee” moments—at least for Doll.

Taken out of context and examined alone, the “I love thee” exchange is obviously hurtful. To look at the beginning of this scene only adds insult to injury. We must wonder whether Doll has cause to feel such strong feelings in the first place because, aside from insulting her, Falstaff also makes a habit of ignoring her. Right before Falstaff jumps into the brawl with Bardolph and Pistol Doll entreats him, “I pray thee, Jack, I pray thee, do not draw” (2.4.177). Falstaff not only draws, but he does not even respond to her. *Much Ado About Nothing*’s Beatrice gets upset and Benedick is so touched by her emotions he

agrees to murder his friend, yet Jack Falstaff cannot even shout, “Watch out, woman!” in acknowledgement of Doll.

Given that the nature of this relationship is rather abrasive, it is no small wonder Doll needs to stand up for herself and hurl a few fiery lines at Jack between “I love thee.” In giving the upper hand to the male, Falstaff is the first to insult Doll and his insults seem to sting more than hers (which we see by the fact that she responds to his, while he usually ignores her’s). She does get in a jab about his weight and even gets away with calling him “sirrah,” though. While all of this yelling could seem rather toxic to those of us on the outside of the relationship looking in, neither party seems to be discouraged by the heat. When he leaves at the conclusion of the scene, Falstaff sends Bardolph back to fetch Doll so they can have what audiences assume must be a more intimate goodbye. Falstaff will not even give her a hug goodbye in front of the Eastcheap crew, but then he makes it clear he is having a hard time leaving her. Doll does exactly what she is told and does not even push for a public kiss; it would seem as though Jack is the one in charge here.

It is possible that Doll’s very name indicates she is not going to be the one in charge in her relationships. Momentarily putting aside the obvious provocative interpretation of her last name, her first name suggests innocence and even youth: a “doll” can often refer to a child’s plaything. When we think of dolls, we first think of caricatures of human beings devoid of feelings and autonomy. Although it is sad, it does appear to be true that the definition applicable to the caricature can also be used on Doll herself. When she tries to have genuine feelings and express them, she is rebuffed and even ignored. The old saying goes, “If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it, does it

make a sound?” I propose there is a connection here to Doll’s romantic entanglement with Jack; if she has strong feelings but they are not being heard, what then? This all ties to the second element she is being denied—and that is autonomy. Being able to express oneself verbally is a big chunk of what makes up free will, right? Audience members and readers watch as Doll has no one trying to restrain her physical actions, both in her sexual pursuits and even when she is brandishing a knife because Pistol has angered her. No one even *speaks* to her while she has got the knife, let alone steps in the middle of the argument. She can do what she wants bodily, but her words are censored. I, of course, am broadening the definition of censorship: censorship, at its heart, is designed to prevent a message from being spread. A message cannot be spread if it is not heard, can it? In this way, the willful ignoring of someone’s words acts as a kind of censorship. Words are the vehicles of our thoughts and thereby ignoring Doll does paint her as a kind of figure “without” thoughts. Calling this lady “Doll” automatically sets her a few paces behind Jack, the male counterpart in this equation.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Close textual examinations of *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Tempest*, and *The Second Part of the Life of Henry the Fourth* all reveal traces of the female subjugation that was also occurring off the stage. No literature, theatrical or not, is born in a vacuum and thus it is subject to a great many societal influences. Plays, in particular, would have to be extra sensitive to the mindset of their time periods in order to generate audiences and thereby make a profit. While novels, short stories, pamphlets, and other printed documents could all be circulated and read at any time, specific theatrical productions had a limited number of chances to make an impact, to entertain. This narrow window of opportunity meant playwrights like Shakespeare had to find ways to crowd their venues on “opening night.” While plays unquestionably needed a certain amount of drama and upheaval to maintain audience interest, they also needed a pinch of reality for viewers to relate to and sympathize with. One such pinch of reality came in the form of the silenced woman. She may be loud, she may be bossy, she may even be violent, but in the end she will likely be either married or dead.

Such masculine women would have had difficult lives in early modern England. They were, after all, unnatural and going completely against the grain. The medical texts told ladies they were impure, the religious texts told them they were naturally in need of guidance, and the gossip on the street warned them to secure their inheritance and not be “whores”—yet around all of the extreme judgment, they were told not to take their burdens “too heavily.” To don masculinity would be one way to “take it too heavily,” which was not a viable option in a world where even the calendar depicted thorough male

dominance. On the Shakespearean stage, choosing to go against the grain and live as a masculine female would likely result in marriage. As we have seen through the Marriage Homily, matrimony brought with it obedience expectations; thus, the belief is that such rowdy women would eventually be calmed.

There's a reason the *querelle des femmes* lasted four hundred years; the patriarchy of Shakespeare's time was not ready to loosen its hold on Europe. Greenblatt tells his readers about the existence of an elaborate medical literature "on the purpose of erotic pleasure—as that which enables men to overcome their natural revulsion at the defectiveness of women" (Greenblatt 83); this sentiment seems to have been a prevalent one during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. In the middle of such stark sexism, how could any text *completely* transcend it? If art is to act as a representation of life, as the saying goes, the oppression would have to be present. Since "representation" does not have to be synonymous with "mirror," the female degradation does not have to be *everywhere*; it does, however, have to surface *somewhere*. This inevitable surfacing of societal oppression is the reason even unexpected Shakespearean texts contain examples of sexism. Whether apparent in the language itself or hidden within the stage directions, Shakespearean drama is peppered with unflattering gendered stereotypes.

## WORKS CITED

- Barry, Paul. *A Lifetime with Shakespeare: Notes from an American Director of All 38 Plays*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010.
- Becker, Udo. *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1994.
- Bevington, David, ed. *Antony and Cleopatra: Updated Edition*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- “Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory: and Now Reprinted for the Use of Private Families, in Two Parts.” London. 1687.
- Dolan, Frances, ed. *The Taming of the Shrew: Texts and Contexts*. Massachusetts: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1996.
- Dusinberre, Juliet. *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*. 3rd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Geneva Bible, The*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.
- Greenblatt, Stephen, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus. “The Norton Shakespeare, Based on the Oxford Edition: Histories.” *The Second Part of the Life of Henry the Fourth*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2008. 685-757.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations*. California: University of California Press, 1988.
- Hall, Kim F. *Thing of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- “Humoralism and its Influence on Western Medicine.” National Center for Biotechnology Information. U.S. National Library of Medicine, 31, July, 2001. Web. 30, June, 2013. <<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11760775>>.
- Kelly, Joan. “Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789.” Chicago Journals. Vol. 8, No. 1. (Autumn, 1982): 4-28. Web. 6, July, 2013. <<http://graphos.pomona.edu/P4P/wp-content/uploads/kelly-querelle.pdf>>.

- Lindley, David, ed. *The Tempest*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- McDonald, Russ. *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare: An Introduction with Documents*. 2nd ed. Massachusetts: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.
- Miller, Naomi J. *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996.
- Paster, Gail Kern. *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Paster, Gail Kern. *Humoring the Body*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Richards, Jennifer and Alison Thorne. *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England*. New York: Routledge, 2007.