

PENETRATING TENDENCIES:
FEMALE MASCULINITY AND A LOGIC OF LESBIANISM
IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This project provides a new account of taxonomies of sexual tendencies within English Renaissance popular thought. My argument departs from dominant scholarship, which has maintained that Renaissance culture did not correlate sexual acts and other aspects of identity. By contrast, my analyses reveal that such mainstream characters as Spenser's Britomart, Moll Frith, and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc and Queen Margaret possess definable identity traits that consistently evoke fantasies of erotic possibilities for early modern audiences. More precisely, these women are all represented as masculine women, largely due to their martial tendencies and ability to perform the acts and deploy the accessories and physical symbolism that men rely on to define masculinity. The women's declared aversion to procreative sexual encounters, coupled with their phallic accessories, are at the foundation of sustained homoerotic fantasies about them. This new account of early modern sexuality changes how we see the development of the relationship between sexual tendencies and other aspects of identity, and in particular challenges previous analyses of same-sex female sexuality in the Renaissance.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

PENETRATING TENDENCIES AND A LOGIC OF LESBIANISM

Historiographies of sexuality written in the previous three or four decades have proven incontrovertibly that whatever early moderns believed about the relationship between sexual desire and other aspects of self-identification (if they believed anything distinctly), their understandings of erotic taxonomies were not equivalent to modern categories of sexual identity. In many ways, we still do not comprehend the full implications of recognizing this different way of thinking about sexuality: the recognition that sexual behavior might exist apart from the consistent and determinate identities that we often assume to be inseparable from our own experiences of sexuality provokes challenging new questions about how people in the past did think about sexual behaviors. Further interrogation of this difference has led to the development of extensive scholarship on the kinds of erotic acts we find documented, represented, or discussed in Renaissance texts and to insightful analysis of how such erotic practices were understood in relationship to other aspects of Renaissance life. While most scholars maintain that early moderns did not categorize erotic acts along the homo-hetero axis that dominates modern discussions of sexuality, recent research has nonetheless provided an increasingly nuanced understanding of Renaissance responses to various kinds of non-reproductive and homosexual activities and erotic relationships.

It is important to continue the project of writing the history of sexuality, and it is particularly important to consider female sexual history more adequately within this discussion. The stakes of this historicizing project are high: not only will a better

understanding of erotic life enhance our readings of early modern texts, but if Eve Sedgwick's theory of overlapping histories of sexual identity is correct, then a better comprehension of sexual history will also permit us to better understand the ideas we have inherited about sexuality. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick proposes that sexual identity categories are not simply replaced or erased by later models; rather, she suggests that constructions of identity interact with past models in ways that include overlapping epistemologies. Because of this, I believe that the stakes are not only literary and historiographic, but also political, as understanding the past may inform current discussions of sexuality. My hope is that my readings in this dissertation may be helpful for understanding Renaissance constructions of female erotic possibilities and also for understanding the epistemological framework that has informed western thinking about same-sex relationships, in particular the historical logics that may have influenced later assumptions about the relationships among sex, gender, and homosexual desire.

This project contributes to the work that has been done on the history of sexuality by offering a new hypothesis about the way that people in the early modern period thought about female sexuality.¹ I argue that early modern texts demonstrate more consistent assumptions about the relationship between female gender performance and the possibility of female homoeroticism than has previously been acknowledged. I analyze representations of female sexuality in *The Roaring Girl*, *The Faerie Queene*,

¹ I use the terms "early modern" and "Renaissance" somewhat interchangeably because I believe that both terms have some value and some limitations for my work in this project. In many ways, "early modern" is the more convenient term for my purposes, since my project involves revealing new continuities between early modern and modern sexualities. However, the term "Renaissance" also serves as a more effective reminder of historical distance, which is important because the texts I describe here and the meanings therein are distinctive to a different time and culture.

Shakespeare's *Henry VI* tetralogy and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *Gallathea*; as I will show, the texts I examine here suggest that early moderns believed that female gender deviance and non-heteronormative erotic possibilities were associated with each other. Based on this connection, I argue that such perceived associations constitute an early modern categorization of sexual tendencies, which, while different from modern categories of sexual identity, can nonetheless be identified as an important proto-identity category due to the consistency of its assumptions about the relationship between certain visible performative traits and erotic desire or erotic aversion. This complicates the received understanding, as described above, that early moderns had no concept of stable sexual identities.

The specific assumptions that drive my proof-texts' representations of female sexual possibilities seem to be related to the texts' considerable attention to the symbolism of clothing and to the power of external signifiers to represent and/or transform inward experiences. More specifically, I argue that fantasies of female homosexual possibilities particularly multiply around representations of masculine women. I use the term "masculine women," which I will define at greater length, to refer to female characters who usually dress in male apparel and, more importantly, who are also identified by other characters as successfully performing the roles and behaviors that early moderns relied upon to define masculinity. My project moves from this observation that masculine women frequently function at the center of homoerotic speculation to an extensive consideration of why and how female masculinity generates homoerotic speculation in these texts. In my analysis of the ways this speculation develops in my case studies, I trace similarities between these female characters in order to consider the

relationship that early modern writers seemed to imagine between female masculinity and the possibility of female erotic contact.

Although my readings describe diverse and complicated representations of erotic possibilities for masculine women, the claim I ultimately make is that female masculinity in Renaissance texts is figured in terms that inherently carry non-heteronormative erotic implications; in other words, the way that female masculinity is represented in these texts creates a connection between female performances of masculinity and non-heteroerotic possibilities. In the texts I analyze, representations of masculine women specifically fixate on the penetrative symbolism of men's clothing and accessories. The women in these texts wear codpieces and/or carry weapons, which are accessories that the male characters normally rely on to prove their own sexual and martial potency—two aspects of masculinity that are often rhetorically interchangeable in these texts. When women adopt men's apparel and play the social parts men usually play, their symbolic penetrativeness and potency prompt relentless textual exploration of how their penetrative exteriors might translate in erotic situations. Importantly, this often leads other characters to imagine homoerotic possibilities for the masculine women.

Additionally, the women's adoption of the sumptuary symbolism of masculinity includes elements that represent *impenetrability*, such as shields and armor. These physical representations of bodily inviolability combine with a rhetoric of masculine imperturbability and self-sameness that involves both literal and figurative ideas about protecting oneself from being physically or emotionally vulnerable to others. When masculine women present themselves as being impenetrable in this way, the texts associate the external signifiers of impenetrability with heteroerotic aversion—or at least

with aversion to procreative sexual encounters. This idea of aversion is important and one that I believe has been under-examined in the historiography of sexuality. One aspect of modern understandings of sexuality is the question of what an individual *does not* desire, and it is worth considering whether and to what degree this idea of aversion figured in historical understandings of sexuality. My analyses here suggest that female impenetrability and the possibility of heteroerotic aversion were an important source of interest and concern to early moderns. Heteroerotic aversion, the possibility of homoerotic encounters, and female masculinity are regularly associated in these texts, and thus, I propose that there existed in the Renaissance a category of “penetrating women,” whose performances of masculinity were defined by their dual tendencies toward penetration and against being penetrated. I define this category of characters as a kind of taxonomical organization because the women seem to share similar traits and seem to exist within a similar epistemological framework across early modern texts, even though the different traits are represented more or less prominently and are explained in different ways in the various textual representations.

Methodologically, my project proposes that one useful strategy for researching female sexuality is by prioritizing the impact of representations of sexual speculation, of imagination, and of fantasy on understandings of sexual tendencies and on the construction of sexual categories. In other words, sexual taxonomies—today and in the past—cannot be explained or explored simply in terms of actual sexual experiences. For instance, the modern term “sexuality” partially involves additional questions about desire unfulfilled and about aversion. These questions are about hypothetical, speculative erotic possibilities, not about practiced acts: they are about what a person *would* and *would not*

do, as opposed to what a person does or does not do. In this way, a subject's understanding of his or her own desires and aversions is not the only factor that plays into societal constructions of sexual identity categories; the assumptions a community makes about an individual also affect and inform cultural understandings of sexual tendencies. Thus, it is important to analyze how an individual's own accounts, appearance, or visible public behaviors prompt observers to fantasize about the individual's erotic preferences. This is particularly important to consider when it comes to women, who were not generally the ones recording their own experiences. I look, then, at erotic acts and relationships that these texts represent directly, but also at erotic possibilities that other characters imagine based upon the penetrating women's visible and behavioral traits. Additionally, while I do not mean to suggest that the literature I analyze here represents a complete picture of all early modern fantasies about masculine women, I make an effort to access a wide sampling of cultural fantasies by deliberately working with a variety of textual genres that would have been presented to a wide spectrum of audiences: I work with a poem dedicated to the queen, a city comedy staged at one of the most affordable London theaters as well as several other plays that would most likely have been commercially staged, and a courtly masque that would have been presented to an elite audience.² Such breadth allows me to maximize the extent to which my analysis is

² According to Andrew Gurr's *The Shakespearean Stage*, *The Roaring Girl* was performed at the Fortune Theater, which charged audience members a minimum admission price of one penny (Gurr 12, 224); Gurr estimates that this would have been affordable to most London workers, whose weekly salaries averaged about five or six shillings (12). According to the Arden Shakespeare, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* was likely performed at Blackfriars (59), which Gurr suggests charged a slightly more exorbitant sixpence (215), though "the working class seems to have paid of to 2d. [2 shillings, or about 24 pennies] for their plays" (215). Performance history for the *Henry VI* plays is uncertain, but Leah Marcus asserts that at least *1 Henry VI* "was enormously popular"

inclusive of texts that would have been available to early modern English men and women.

In these texts, the imagined female eroticism that is based on characters' assumptions about the connection between gender deviance and non-heterosexual erotic alternatives participates in what I call a "logic of lesbianism": masculine women's non-erotic behaviors (such as cross-dressing or participation in masculine activities) spur speculation about the erotic acts—often homoerotic acts—that other characters in turn are represented as believing to be associated with such behaviors.³ This perceived association between gender and erotic tendencies is often represented in inconsistent ways: the causal

(51), based on documented audience responses to it. Ultimately, Gurr assesses that about 15,00-25,00 Londoners went to plays every week (213). This does not guarantee that the plays I analyze here were attended by any specific groups of people; however, the popularity of the theater for rich and poor alike makes it a helpful source for considering the representation of ideologies, as such representations would have been witnessed by many and would have relied on the audience's approval for commercial success.

³ I use the noun "lesbianism" and the adjective "lesbian" throughout this project in much the same way that Valerie Traub does in *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*: I do not use "lesbian" as a noun to describe specific people, and I do not invoke it to imply that early modern figurations of female homoeroticism were the same as modern ideas of lesbian identity. Rather, I rely on it as a "strategic anachronism" (Traub 16), which I hope can function within the term "logic of lesbianism" as a kind of place-marker for the idea that early moderns may have developed identity categories, but that those categories would have been different. My preference for the term is in part due to my own bias toward it, though such a bias is actually relevant to the argument I make in this project: the term "lesbian" is one of the more historically rich modern terms for sexuality, coming as it does from a peculiar literary logic wherein analyses of literary representations of female intimacy in Sappho's poems are extrapolated to assume a kind of localized taxonomy where the all the inhabitants of "Lesbos" become a metonymy for the specific homoerotic figurations in the poetry of one Lesbian. This idea of female homoeroticism developing within a community of similar women who exclude men actually describes some of the logics that develop within the early modern literature I examine here. That the term existed in the Renaissance in highly inconsistent ways makes it additionally appealing for describing the slippery logics I analyze in this chapter. For more on the history of the term "lesbian" and Renaissance attitudes toward Sappho in particular, see Harriet Andreadis's *Sappho in Early Modern England*.

logics that other characters develop to explain the connection between a penetrating woman's masculinity, her aversion to heterosexual acts, and the possibility of homoerotic desire are frequently reversed or re-worked, even within a single text. Still, the idea that there *is* a connection between gender performance, erotic aversion, and erotic attraction is a consistent belief, and it is one that is imagined and interrogated at length, with varying degrees of pleasure and anxiety, in the texts I consider here.

My intervention into the history of homosexuality—and particularly the history of female homosexuality—comes after and takes advantage of significant recent strides in the field. The earliest work historicizing female sexuality, perhaps influenced by other scholars' hints that female homosexual desire was entirely unknown, frequently focused on questions of *whether* any women had sexual encounters with each other. For instance, in the 1981 text *Surpassing the Love of Men*, Lillian Faderman argues that early modern passionate communications between women that invoked the language of heterosexual love “were love relationships in every sense except perhaps the genital, since women in centuries other than ours often internalized the view of females as having little sexual passion” (16). This initial dismissal of the possibility of erotic contact has been disproven through evidence of historical documentation of at least some explicit references to female-female sex acts between women in the Renaissance—and through compelling analysis of potentially erotic female-female representations in other texts. The extent to which people in early modern England would have been aware of female homosexual activity among the actual English population remains difficult to interpret. Female homosexual acts could have been interpreted as punishable under sodomy laws, but, as was generally the case with male homosexual acts in the Renaissance, such

prosecution rarely happened.⁴ Still, some European court cases against women who had sex with other women have been documented. Valerie Traub interprets the limited prosecution of female-female sexual acts as representative of limited concern about lesbian activity; she writes that

The disproportionate conceptual weight accorded to marriage, combined with a phallic standard of sexuality and the absence of a concept of erotic identity, provided the conceptual and social framework for *lesbianism* across Europe. Within this framework, the treatment and semiotics of *lesbianism* were paradoxical. Authorities in European societies were concerned about the threat posed by behaviors that crossed gender boundaries and/or the conjugal unit; thus, certain female-female erotic acts were met with harsh denunciation, punishment, and considerable publicity. Other behaviors that seem manifestly *lesbian* to twentieth-century minds, however, did not cause much social concern, and often were compatible with patriarchal marriage and alliance. (*Renaissance* 41, italics original)⁵

Her subsequent analysis actually puts into question whether the lack of prosecution can be equated with tolerance, assimilability, or lack of concern—for, as she points out,

⁴ For more on the history of legal prosecution of homosexual acts, see Valerie Traub's *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, as well as Alan Bray's *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* and Gregory Bredbeck's *Sodomy and Interpretation*, which I discuss later on.

⁵ Traub explains that she uses the term "*lesbian*," in italics, "because the nouns 'lesbian' and 'lesbianism' clearly are relevant to [Renaissance] histories, figures, and investments[...], [and] the persistent typological strangeness of *lesbian* and *lesbianism* will remind readers of their epistemological inadequacy, psychological courseness, and historical contingency" (16).

sexual crimes were generally local matters and only taken to trial when they could not be resolved by the affected parties (*Renaissance* 50)—but it does seem to have been the case, as Traub claims, that the most available legal and ostensibly historical accounts of female homosexual activity during the early Renaissance involved additional transgressions, such as cross-dressing, fraud, or the use of penetrative devices. For instance, women in various European countries, including Switzerland, Holland, Spain, and Italy, went to trial for sleeping with other women or for marrying other women throughout the 16th century and earlier.⁶ By the mid-17th century, on the other hand, New England colonies had specified the illegality of sexual acts between women, and at least two court cases document punishment of women for “attempting To Do that which man and woman do” and for “leud behavior each with other upon a bed”; the fact that female homosexual activity was made illegal in New England suggests that such acts were common enough occurrences in the colonists’ native England that they found it necessary to guard against them via their new penal code.⁷ And although the first court case emphasizes the imitation of male-female sexual roles (or perhaps only frames it in this way somewhat euphemistically), the other case identifies the erotic contact as the primary offence, which suggests either changing or fluid concepts of the transgressiveness of female homosexual behaviors between the 16th and 17th centuries.

Besides direct legal accounts, a few other essays and travel narratives claim to relate historical instances of female homosexual acts in Europe. For instance, in the French writer Ambroise Paré’s 1573 accounts of “Memorable Stories about Women who

⁶ For more on these court cases, see Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, Chapter 1.

⁷ For more on these episodes, see Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, p. 44.

have Degenerated into Men” in *Monsters and Marvels*, he describes several episodes of women who experienced the spontaneous appearance of male genitals; in one such story, the girl had been thought to be biologically female until “while disporting himself and frolicking, having gone to bed with a chambermaid, his male genital parts came to be developed” (31).⁸ Paré uses male pronouns in all the accounts and is apparently uninterested in how the two young women came to be in bed together *before* the sex change, as he simply concludes that “the mother and father, recognizing him to be [male], had him by authority of the Church change his name from Jeanne to Jean, and male attire was given him” (31). The French courtier Pierre de Bordeille, Seigneur de Brantôme, wrote more explicitly about sexual relationships between women, directly invoking the

⁸ Montaigne’s *Essaies* contains an account of one of the same stories, though not one that involves sexual activity. Paré and Montaigne both talk about a situation when Marie Germain developed male genitals “as he was straining to jump [...]” (Montaigne 38). In “On the Power of Imagination,” Montaigne includes this story within his musings on the relationship between the mind and body in “On the Power of Imagination,” concluding that “It is not very surprising that this sort of accident happens frequently, for the imagination is so continually drawn to this subject that, supposing it has any power over such things, it would be better for it to incorporate the virile member in a girl once and for all, rather than subject her so often to the same thoughts and the same violence of desire” (38). It is important to note that these examples of female-to-male sex transformation, though recurrent, may not represent dominant Renaissance understandings of anatomy. As Christian Billing points out, the Galenic one-sex model was contested by newer theories during the early modern period. Billing asserts that despite the “exaggerated rhetoric” and “hyperbolic claims” in anti-theatricalist arguments and stories of sex change in Montaigne and Paré, “the treatises of physicians such as Ambroise Paré can in no way be read as proof of the early modern spectator’s perception of biological sex as an unstable construct, or the theatre as a locus of anatomical irregularity, or of a dominant biological paradigm in which sex identity was thought unstable” (7). While I take issue with Billing’s absolutist stance here, I do not mean to suggest that Montaigne’s and Paré’s narratives prove that people in the Renaissance expected sex changes. However, the existence of such narratives does suggest (if not “prove”) that early modern readers and audiences at least encountered assumptions about the fluidity of biological sex, and such possibilities—whether dominant or peripheral—are relevant for considering Renaissance understandings of gender and erotic fluidity as well.

imitation of Sappho as a way to describe “*donna con donna*” eroticism; his account seems more interested in addressing the question of whether women who sleep together are cuckolding their husbands than it is in describing these women.⁹

Such evidence, though heterogeneous, implies that many people in the early modern period would most likely have heard stories involving erotic contact between women, whether or not private erotic acts between actual women would become known with any regularity—whether, in other words, women would openly engage in erotic relationships with each other. A vocabulary for discussing female-female sex acts also existed, though whether this lexicon described the acts or the women who performed them was not consistent. The words “lesbian” and “tribade” had been used in English by the Renaissance and were sometimes used to reference female homoerotic contexts. Ancient usage of the word “lesbian,” as David Halperin thoroughly documents, *could* be associated with female homoerotic activity after the first century B.C., but it did not strictly refer to same-sex tendencies; references to Sappho and the women of Lesbos could also be more generally associated with “sexual abandon” (*How To* 49).¹⁰ The Greek word “tribade” referred more restrictively to same-sex erotic contact, and Halperin states that it “was originally understood in antiquity to signify a phallic woman, a hypermasculine or butch woman, and/or a woman who sought sexual pleasure by rubbing her genitals against those of another woman” (*How To* 51); the word appeared in France and England during the Elizabethan period, though less often in England, and it still

⁹ For more on Brantôme, see Traub’s *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, p.54, and Halperin’s chapter, “The First Homosexuality?” in *How to Do the History of Sexuality*.

¹⁰ For more on Sappho’s reputation in early modern England, see Harriete Andreadis’s *Sappho in Early Modern England*.

“remained closely tied to specific sexual practices or anatomical features [such as an enlarged clitoris], and it continued to signify a masculine woman, a phallic woman, or a woman who performed genital rubbing with other women” (52). This does not mean that the term couldn’t have been used to describe broader concepts beyond a specific kind of genital contact, but in general the available vocabulary for discussing female homosexual encounters—like that for discussing male homosexual encounters—cannot be equated with modern terms for sexual identity and sexual orientation.

If it is clear that homosexual contact between women was not unheard of and that it garnered at least some attention during the Renaissance, what we are to make of accounts of homosexual contact remains at issue. Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* quite rightly established in later scholarship an understanding that the sex acts in which an individual engaged may not have been culturally understood to place that individual in a certain identity category—and even if they did, the cultural assumptions about how specific acts related to other aspects of identity may not have included concerns about the sex of the sexual partner. As Foucault puts it in *Volume I*, discussion and categorization of sexual acts did not happen before the 18th century; prior to this, he says, when non-reproductive, extrafamilial sexual conduct was observed or made known, “What was taken into account in the civil and religious jurisdictions was a general unlawfulness. Doubtless acts ‘contrary to nature’ were stamped as especially abominable, but they were perceived simply as an extreme form of acts ‘against the law’” (38). With the “discursive explosion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (38), however, definitions of “normal” and “deviant” sexuality were scrutinized, defined, and talked about to the point that, as Foucault puts it, “It was time for all those figures, scarcely noticed in the past, to

step forward and speak, to make the difficult confession of what they were” (39). In other words, the earlier emphasis on regulating acts (and even doing that rarely) transformed only later into a defined framework wherein an individual could (or was forced to) claim those acts within an overarching confession of what he or she “was”—of the identity that corresponded to those acts. Therefore, as Alan Bray’s subsequent *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* puts it, any effort to read a historical figure as a homosexual (as a person who seeks out exclusively same-sex partners and who thinks of him- or herself as existing within a category of others who do so) “is a search for something that does not exist. Certainly references to homosexuality are easy to find, but one will also find that the terms used to carry other meanings as well: the concepts involved were broader” (8). He advises that the “historian’s duty” is “to see past [the historian’s] own terms. [...] It can scarcely be stressed too often that the society of Renaissance England is at an immense distance, in time and culture, from our own” (10), and he cautions, “we need to carry our preconceptions lightly if we are to see in Renaissance England more than the distorted image of ourselves” (17). The importance of separating acts and identity has remained the dominant axiom in Renaissance queer studies, even as scholars have expanded, challenged, and qualified the specificities of Foucault’s argument. Bray’s study, for instance, expands Foucault’s representation of the Renaissance by focusing on the way that sodomy was understood and defined, and he takes issue with some interpretations of Foucault’s work as evidence of a Renaissance where anything was acceptable; although acts were not related to identity in the way that they are now, he points out that there was still considerable concern about sexual acts. He argues that Renaissance rhetoric against sodomy was strong, but that intolerance of

sodomy was generally more related to charges of atheism, witchcraft, and treason than to an overarching concern about homosexual relationships. Sodomy was considered to be the culmination of other forms of debauchery and transgression, not a sin likely to stand alone, and it was generally not prosecuted without being linked to other charges such as treason or heresy. Bray's work has been influential for queer scholarship generally because it models a way of understanding sex acts as separate from identity but still categorized by Renaissance culture in other ways.

As later critics have pointed out, however, one problem with Foucault's and Bray's discussions of sexuality is that the focus on acts ignores other aspects of sexuality. While Bray is clearly right that there was no exact Renaissance equivalent to modern categories of homosexuality, the dismissal of any connection between sexual desire, the sex of the desired object, and identity is premature. Bray's definition—like Foucault's—focuses on acts or “relations,” largely ignoring desire, attraction, and aversion, all of which might contribute to Renaissance understandings of and categories of sexuality. The strict focus on *acts* as separate from identity reduces the importance of considering other aspects and therefore risks diminishing our ability to historicize sexuality. Gregory Bredbeck's later *Sodomy and Interpretation* points out that even defining what constitutes a sexual act is difficult, and he supports this claim by demonstrating that Renaissance definitions of “sodomy” were fluid and did not always strictly pertain to acts alone—and some early modern definitions of sodomy, he argues, link sodomy to identity more than Bray or Foucault acknowledge. He concludes that sodomy cannot be considered only as an untolerated act and that the “doubleness of speech” surrounding sodomy leaves more room for interpretation than Bray and Foucault permit (29). Mario

DiGangi's *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama* furthers Bredbeck's call for a more nuanced understanding of Renaissance definitions of relationships between men by promoting the study of homoeroticism more broadly—as he aptly observes, “we cannot always be entirely confident that we know which bodily acts count as ‘sexual.’ When is kissing an expression of sexual desire, or affection, or of a social bond? Under what circumstances might our ability even to distinguish these realms be frustrated? In a patriarchal culture, is intercourse always more ‘sexual’ than kissing? It is more *erotic*?” (11). Because of the inadequacies of evaluating acts on the basis of whether modern culture considers them sexual or erotic, one of his goals is to displace sodomy as the focus of Renaissance studies in sexuality.

I am indebted to work that has been done on male homoeroticism, and much of it is helpful in establishing foundational concepts that should also inform work on female homoeroticism. All queer scholarship faces the challenging fact that modern Western understandings of homosexuality are based upon culturally and historically specific representational systems that may not have been present elsewhere and at other points in time. Therefore, despite newer evidence of representations of female homoeroticism and homosexual contact in Renaissance literature, we cannot fully know what behaviors in the early modern period would have fit into normal patterns of same-sex intimacy or friendships (and what “normal” same-sex relationships would have entailed), and what behaviors would have been considered disorderly, different—or, well, queer. In response to this ambiguity, the best work in the history of scholarship on male homosexuality and homoeroticism has relentlessly complicated our understandings of relationships between men, taking nothing in the Renaissance as familiar or recognizable—not sexual identity,

not definitions of friendship or of sex acts, not even the idea of the sexual itself. It is clear, based on the progressively more nuanced work on male homosexuality that has come out over the last half-century, that even the seemingly historically correct divorcing of acts from identity does not go far enough—and simultaneously goes too far—to help us understand how early modern individuals understood their overall identities in relation to their desires, their genital sex acts, their other sex acts, their other erotic acts, and their relationships. We are moving toward a better understanding through scholars' thorough interrogation of each of these terms.

Histories of female sexuality can benefit from a similar reassessment of the acts/identity division that Foucault and Bray established. Still, my objective is not to contradict Foucault's argument, but rather to expand on it, and I rely on some of his premises in *History of Sexuality Volume I and II* to establish my own argument here. As David Halperin has pointed out, Foucault frequently becomes an easy target for scholars who work against his theories (often still relying on some of the major concepts he introduced). As Halperin put it,

Michel Foucault has become the sort of intellectual figure with whom it is no longer possible to have a rational or nonpathological relationship. One of the most brilliant and original thinkers of our era, Foucault now appears to represent such a powerful, volatile, and sinister influence that his ideas—if they are not to contaminate and disqualify whoever ventures to make use of them—must first be sanitized by being passed through an acid bath of derogation and disavowal. (*Saint Foucault* 5-6)

My project is no exception to this rule; in order to find Foucault useful, I find it necessary to distill from his work some sanitized premises while dismissing some of his more problematic hypotheses—a process which, as he acknowledges, Halperin himself practices in the earlier *100 Years of Homosexuality*.¹¹ However, Halperin further defines his concern about the standard treatment of Foucault, saying, “What strikes me most forcefully about such attacks is the brutal, cheap, and effortless way they mobilize the attackers” (*Saint Foucault* 7-8). I work to avoid this kind of treatment.

Still, while Foucault’s contribution to the history of sexuality is irrefutable, I believe it also falls into the kind of “strong theory” or “paranoid reading” that Eve Sedgwick analyzes in *Touching Feeling*, and it is important to emphasize the ways that paranoid readings can inhibit or discredit “weaker readings” that may importantly attempt to repair or revise some of the concepts that have been deconstructed through strong theory. Sedgwick categorizes as “paranoid” those theories that function within a “hermeneutics of suspicion”: theories that focus on unveiling construction and exposing the systems of representation *as an end in itself*. Sedgwick uses the term “paranoid” because the psychological term describes the effort to ward off surprise through preemptive exposure: “paranoia requires that bad news be always already known” (130). Paranoid reading “places its faith in *exposure*” and seeks to offer extensive exposure theories that denaturalize or demystify cultural constructions (130, italics original).¹²

¹¹ As Halperin remarks in *Saint Foucault* on the limitations of Foucault’s analysis in *100 Years*, “Foucault’s [work] is admittedly schematic; it also contains a number of elementary scholarly errors. For those reasons, it has proved vulnerable to attack from specialists: Foucault bashing now seems to have become, since the man’s death in 1984, the favorite indoor sport of a host of lesser intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic” (6).

¹² As an example, Sedgwick invokes Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, citing “Butler’s repeated and scouringly thorough demonstrations in *Gender Trouble* that there can have been no

What Sedgwick calls into question is not the value of this kind of hermeneutic but rather the idea that such theory preempts further inquiry, “As though to make something visible as a problem were, if not a mere hop, skip, and a jump away from getting it solved, at least self-evidently a step in that direction” (139). She describes the dominance of strong theory, saying

In a world where no one need be delusional to find evidence of systematic oppression, to theorize out of anything *but* a paranoid critical stance has come to seem naïve, pious, or complaisant. I myself have no wish to return to the use of ‘paranoid’ as a pathologizing diagnosis, but it seems to me a great loss when paranoid inquiry comes to seem entirely coextensive with critical theoretical inquiry rather than being viewed as one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds.

(126)

Sedgwick suggests that there is still value in what she calls “reparative readings,” which are “the position from which it is possible in turn to use one’s own resources to assemble or ‘repair’ the murderous part-objects into something like a whole—though, I would emphasize, *not necessarily like any preexisting whole*” (128, italics original). It is precisely this kind of deconstruction to which my project responds in my contribution to the historiography of female sexuality; if we accept Sedgwick’s call for the coexistence of critical approaches, Foucault’s initial assertion that sexual identity as we know it did

moment prior to the imposition of the totalizing Law of gender difference; hence her unrelenting vigilance for traces in other theorists’ writing of nostalgia for such an impossible prior moment. No time could be too early for one’s having-already-known, for its having-already-been-inevitable, that something bad would happen. And no loss could be too far in the future to be preemptively discounted” (131).

not exist prior to the 18th century is an invitation to reparatively consider whether there may have been *other* kinds of sexual categories and sexualities.

Those other categories of female erotic possibilities may be very different from the categories many scholars are beginning to identify in terms of the history of male sexuality. It must be acknowledged that what is largely missing from all of the early and influential accounts of “the history of sexuality” is practically any mention of *female* sexuality and sexual identity. Work on female homoeroticism throughout history poses additional interpretive challenges, and scholarship about female homosexuality has remained limited, even as the field of queer Renaissance studies has expanded remarkably. In part, this may be because it is more difficult to find evidence of recognized same-sex female desire than of male same-sex desire in Renaissance popular thought and literature: when women do appear to desire each other in Renaissance texts, there are frequently complicating factors, such as disguise, that prohibit us from encountering female characters who explicitly desire other female characters. By contrast, it is not unusual to encounter obvious male homoeroticism and references to male homosexual acts. Additionally, there were few female writers, and therefore the portrayal of eroticism between women frequently involves additional questions of voyeurism, male fantasy, and projections of male sexuality onto female characters.¹³

¹³ There were, of course, some published women writers during the time period I work with in this project, and considerably more women writers throughout the later part of the 17th century; moreover, in *Desiring Women Writing*, Jonathan Goldberg develops a thoughtful discussion of modern efforts to incorporate “lost” women authors into the canon, and he points out that many women writers were well-known during the times when they were writing. He says, “the recovery of women authors from the early modern period in many instances means nothing more than the inclusion of writers that were once canonical” (9). Because a priority of this project was to consider comparatively early figurations of sexual taxonomies and to consider the role of fantasy in shaping early

Still, the more stifling challenge when it comes to considering women within the history of homosexuality is that scholarship on *male* homosexuality frequently claims to describe “homosexuality” more broadly, as implied by the very titles of this scholarship: *A History of Sexuality*, *Homosexuality in Early Modern Drama*, and *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* are all entirely or primarily focused on male homosexuality.

Scholarship on male homoeroticism has been important and ultimately helpful to scholars interested in female homoeroticism, but the implication that the history of female sexuality is automatically included in work done on male homosexuality is not helpful. In the best of cases, some scholars on male homoeroticism have offered thoughtful explanations for the exclusion of women from their projects. Bredbeck gracefully calls for a separatist approach to historicizing sexuality; he acknowledges that it may be that case that

to privilege the separatist position that I am here adopting also mimetically reinscribes the man/woman dichotomy by presupposing that it is a binary that governs sexual orientation. My response is simply that *not* to privilege a separatist position is also to mimetically reinscribe homophobia, which is at its basic level a belief that sexual orientation alone removes the subject from ‘nature,’ ‘society,’ and other totalizing schemes. (25)

His explanation is a good one; sexual tendencies do not remove individuals from other influences and other histories. Moreover, though I believe that perhaps the future of

modern understandings of sexual tendencies, my choice of texts in this project does not include female authors. In future interrogations of the development of the category of penetrating women, I would like to consider whether and how women authors represented penetrating women.

queer politics can work across gender, a mutual “queer” history disregards the fact that women’s experiences in the Renaissance were vastly different from those of men, and thus understandings of their sexuality cannot be studied in the same way. However, while I agree with Bredbeck that a female sexuality history is best studied separately, other work on (male) homoeroticism has acknowledged the absence of women only briefly if at all, and often such acknowledgements have been damagingly dismissive of female homoeroticism and homosexuality. For instance, Bray quite reasonably states that “Female homosexuality was rarely linked in popular thought with male sexuality” (17), but he immediately and unnecessarily adds, “if indeed it [female homosexuality] was recognized at all” before concluding that “its history is best understood as part of the developing recognition of a specifically female sexuality” (17). In his chapter on the homosexuality associated with male sorcerers, his only mention of female sorcerers is to casually state that “the female [sorcerer’s] debauchery is entirely heterosexual” (22). One wonders why a critic who openly acknowledges his lack of research in the area of female homoeroticism feels compelled to insinuate that female homosexuality was not recognized at all—and to declare that any complex category of female representation was “entirely heterosexual.” The off-hand references to women’s sexuality are careless at best. Bray’s index listing is more adamant: anyone interested will find that “lesbianism: not recognized” is covered on page 17 alone. Bray’s 1995 Afterword, which credits the significant research contributions of various scholars, makes no mention of the historical work on female sexuality that developed after his first edition.

More hearteningly, some scholars’ responses to their initial neglect of female sexuality have offered significant insight into the project of historicizing female

sexuality. Halperin's analysis of female homosexuality in *How to Do the History of Sexuality*, a thorough full-chapter response to scholars who had criticized the strict emphasis on male sexuality in his earlier scholarship, not only observes that histories of male and female sexuality must be performed separately but also contributes important insight into the implications of the differences between historical understandings of male and female sexuality. In his chapter called "The First Homosexuality?" he writes,

To see the historical dimensions of the social construction of same-sex relations among women, we need a new optic that will reveal specific historical variations in a phenomenon that necessarily exists in a constant and inescapable relation to the institutionalized structures of male dominance. [...] [I]t is this constant and inescapable coexistence with a social structure that varies relatively little, both historically and culturally, which endows female same-sex eroticism with a greater degree of continuity, of thematic consistency, over time and space, making each historical instance both different and the same, both old and new. Histories of lesbianism need to reckon with this quite specific dimension of lesbian existence, which has potentially far-reaching implications for how we understand the different temporalities of female and male homosexuality. It is also the threat that love between women can pose to monopolies of male authority that lends plausibility to the hypothesis that a notion of female-female eroticism may have been consolidated relatively early in Europe, even before similar notions emerged that could apply to all forms of male homoeroticism. Perhaps lesbianism was the first

homoeroticism to be conceptualized categorically as such. Perhaps, in that sense, lesbianism should be seen, historically, as the first homosexuality.

(79)

Halperin's analysis, though more exploratory than firmly rooted in evidence, makes sense. I do not take his assertion as a given, but his analysis that the consistent attention to female sexuality within a patriarchal system concerned with maintaining a "monopoly" on authority may have created more consistent and defined categories of female eroticism resonates with my own observations in this project. I find that there is a great deal of consistency in early modern representations of women who are imagined to be capable of or prone to erotic contact with other women, suggesting that perhaps we can identify an early conceptual category of female homosexuality in the Renaissance.

Still, the suggestion that people in the Renaissance may have understood sexual behaviors and desires to fall into more consistent and recognizable categories of sexual identity requires consideration of identity categories more broadly, and of the parameters within which people can understand themselves. Foucault's *History of Sexuality Volume II: The Use of Pleasure* focuses on this question. In *Volume II*, Foucault modifies the *Volume I* thesis in ways that allow greater room for exploration of when sexual desire may have become an aspect of self-understanding and of cultural norming and naming. Of the modern concept "sexuality," Foucault writes,

The term itself did not appear until the beginning of the nineteenth century, a fact that should be neither underestimated nor overinterpreted. It does point to something other than a simple recasting of vocabulary, but obviously does not mark the sudden emergence of that to which

“sexuality” refers. The use of the word was established in connection with other phenomena: the development of diverse fields of knowledge [...]; the establishment of a set of rules and norms—in part traditional, in part new—which found support in religious, judicial, pedagogical, and medical institutions; and changes in the way individuals were led to assign meaning and value to their conduct, their duties, their pleasures, their feelings and sensations, their dreams. In short, it was a matter of seeing how an “experience” came to be constituted in modern Western societies, an experience that caused individuals to recognize themselves as subjects of a “sexuality,” which was accessible to very diverse fields of knowledge and linked to a system of rules and constraints. (4)

Foucault’s revision of his *Volume I* assertions invites further and more open inquiry into the process through which western culture developed the notion of the “desiring subject.” Foucault defines the genesis of his project in *The Use of Pleasure* as a history attempting to analyze the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen. [...] Thus, in order to understand how the modern individual could experience himself as a subject of a “sexuality,” it was essential first to determine how, for centuries, Western man had been brought to recognize himself as a subject of desire. (5-6)

The Use of Pleasure, then, blurs the historical boundary Foucault had earlier created by quite reasonably pointing out that the emergence of a discourse of sexuality was unlikely to have been entirely divorced from the discourses preceding it.

Although much of Foucault's analysis of antiquity is not particularly helpful here, his introduction of the idea of the "desiring subject" as a precedent to sexuality is a useful entry into thinking about the proto-sexualities that may have existed in the past.¹⁴ Within the history of the desiring subject and the subject's development of self-awareness, self-formation, and self-control, which Foucault also refers to as "self-practice" or "arts of existence," Foucault identifies two kinds of moral systems: Code-oriented systems and ethics-oriented systems. Code-oriented systems of control function by identifying behaviors and acts that are either acceptable or unacceptable and by punishing those acts that lie outside cultural acceptance. By contrast, ethics-oriented systems function by defining an ethical code that individuals use to delimit, control, and construct their senses of themselves. Ethics-oriented moral systems primarily emphasize

forms of subjectivation and the practices of the self. In this case, the system of codes and rules of behavior may be rather rudimentary. Their exact observance may be relatively unimportant, at least compared with what is required of the individual in the relationship he has with himself, in his different actions, thoughts, and feelings as he endeavors to form himself as an ethical subject. Here the emphasis is on the forms of relations with the self, on the methods and techniques by which he works

¹⁴ In general, many people have criticized the historical accuracy of his interpretation of classical attitudes to pleasure and sexuality; Halperin addresses this, saying, "to the best of my knowledge, I was the only professional classicist in North America to give *L'usage de Plaisirs* a favorable review" (7).

them out, on the exercises by which he makes of himself an object to be known, and on the practices that enable him to transform his own mode of being. (30)

Foucault emphasizes that the Christian desiring subject thought differently from the ancients about his self-control: Christian moral and sexual behaviors were governed by “a set of acts that are carefully specified in their form and their conditions” and “the ethical subject was to be characterized not so much by the perfect rule of the self by the self [...], as by self-renunciation and a purity whose model was to be sought in virginity” (92). However, Foucault also points out that post-Reformation societies, with their increased focus on individual relationships with God (along with the decreased investment in celibacy), also moved away from the code-oriented moral experiences of the Middle Ages. Thus, Foucault’s analysis of the ethics-oriented systems he interprets in antiquity are relevant to analyses of Renaissance culture, which valued self-control and self-formulation and saw a multiplication of discourses on how outward appearances and acts relate to inward experiences, intentions, and self-sameness. This concept of the Renaissance cultivation of self-sameness is the argument of Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, for instance. Given the Renaissance emphasis on “arts of existence” (to use Foucault’s terminology) and “self-fashioning” (to use Greenblatt’s), it is logical to interrogate the ways that such attention to self-practice in the Renaissance would have resulted to further definition of what Foucault calls the “desiring subject” within the longer historiography of sexuality. For that reason, Foucault’s theory corresponds with the premises of my approach, and in particular, I rely on his

demarcation of different ways of historicizing sexual behaviors and sexual morals. He says,

A history of “moral behaviors” would study the extent to which actions of certain individuals or groups are consistent with the rules and values that are prescribed for them by various agencies. A history of “codes” would analyze the different systems of rules and values that are operative in a given society or group, the forms they take in their multifariousness, their divergences and their contradictions. And finally, a history of the way in which individuals are urged to constitute themselves as subjects of moral conduct would be concerned with the models proposed for setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the decipherment of the self by oneself, for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object. This last is what might be called a history of “ethics” and “ascetics,” understood as a history of the forms of moral subjectivation and of the practices of self that are meant to ensure it. (29)

This final category, which I would term a history of identity, is what interests me here, and it separates my project from other work recently produced in the field of female homoeroticism in the Renaissance. As scholarship on female homoeroticism has moved past the question of whether women in the Renaissance engaged in sexual activities with each other and toward the question of how those sexual activities were understood, the primary focus has been on analyzing how people responded to knowledge of female homosexual interactions.

My work in this project responds to other still unanswered questions, then, not of *whether* women had sexual contact with each other, or even of what people thought of women who did engage sexually with other women, but of what kinds of frameworks dictated the way that erotic relationships between women were imagined in literary texts—and of what concepts were affiliated in Renaissance imaginations with the idea of female homoeroticism. Whereas the sexual behaviors of individuals would have simply existed (as they do now) and may have generated a variety of responses, literary texts that construct the possibility of erotic relationships between women are a crucial resource for the historiography of sexuality because they allow us to analyze what kind of imagined behaviors and scenarios may have functioned as the starting points for fantasies (and nightmares) of female-female sexual acts. As Denise Walen asks,

what can these numerous and often contradictory constructions reveal about the lived experience of women who loved and sexually desired other women in early modern England? Ultimately, it becomes a self-defeating question. The emphasis must shift from a sociological or psychological investigation to an analysis of dramatic convention and dramaturgical strategy. These plays do not reveal or explain a fact of the erotic lives of early modern English women; rather, they illuminate the cultural perceptions surrounding female homoeroticism as expressed in dramatic form. (3)

I would add that the imagined erotic activities of women represented in literature not only illuminate, but also contribute to the construction of perceptions of female homoeroticism. And even though analyzing cultural perceptions cannot necessarily help

us know about “lived experience,” the literary accounts of female homoeroticism may have participated in constructing the frame through which early modern women would have been able to understand or explain their desires for other women. By this, I do not mean to suggest that subjects *only* understand themselves through the narratives others give them, but that cultural assumptions and categories are one important avenue through which individuals develop an understanding not only of what they desire, but also of how their desires fit them into pre-constructed groupings of people.

Based upon the observations I describe at the beginning of this chapter about the frequent correlation between representations of cross-dressing and those of female homoeroticism, this dissertation makes two primary claims about Renaissance understandings of female homosexuality. First, I argue that female homosexual activity frequently becomes imaginable through representations of female cross-dressing. As I have suggested and will explore at greater length, one reason for this correlation is the penetrative symbolism of male clothing, and Renaissance understandings of bodies as transformable through clothing. Additionally, I argue that female cross-dressing and the female homoerotic possibilities it produced were frequently celebrated, enjoyed, and idealized in popular texts. However, the second claim I make is that the homoerotic possibilities invited by portrayals of female cross-dressing and female masculinity (a term I will define at length) are not as easily assimilated into heterosexual structures as they have been understood to be. Female cross-dressing and female homoeroticism are linked to (and understood to be alternately a cause and effect for) female characters’ resistance to or aversion to potentially procreative sexual encounters. Even in texts, such as *The Faerie Queene*, that profess a procreative imperative, female homoeroticism

becomes an insurmountable diversion from heterosexual storylines. For certain characters, diversion away from heterosexual encounters is the dominant impulse; in other words, we cannot consider these women as driven by homosexual desire. Rather, many Renaissance texts represent characters whose primary drive is an aversion to heterosexual union and who are therefore diverted towards violence and homo- and autoerotic encounters that replace heterosexual ones; it is the idea of these women as impenetrable to procreative sexuality that frequently creates other erotic possibilities. This is a crucial idea because this combination of tendencies—towards desire for other women (or for other non-procreative sexual possibilities) plus aversion to procreative sexual encounters—can be understood as a kind of identity category. Based upon this, I argue that female homoeroticism was often represented within a more narrow epistemological framework and with a higher degree of consistency than has previously been acknowledged; certain visible markers—cross-dressing, for instance, and other masculine qualities such as swordsmanship and even adeptness in speech—make some women more likely sources for fantasies of homoerotic encounters than others, and these homoerotic fantasies are difficult for the texts to ultimately dismiss. In many cases homoerotic possibilities (and occasionally autoeroticism—which, I argue, is frequently related to homoerotic possibilities) replace heterosexual possibilities.

As I have suggested, I rely on the idea of taxonomical categories in order to describe the kind of consistency I identify in these texts. In particular, Wittgenstein's analysis of resemblance is helpful for the kind of taxonomy of female erotic tendencies I propose in this project, as Wittgenstein addresses the nature of conceptual categories

more generally. He analyzes that within a category of things that may be grouped together,

these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all—but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. [...] Consider for example the proceedings that we call ‘games.’ I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don’t say, ‘There must be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’—but *look and see* whether there is something that is common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. [...] And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. (28)

The category of penetrating women that I expand here is aptly described by the “blurred edges” that Wittgenstein observes to be characteristic of most conceptual categories and certainly of current understandings of sexual identity categories as well. Still, the general consistency of impenetrability and tendencies toward penetration fit into a kind of category of resemblances that may help us understand how people in the Renaissance would have understood female sexuality.

This idea of a taxonomy is also helpful for understanding how real women may have understood their lived erotic experiences with other women. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler draws on Foucault’s *Use of Pleasure* in order to consider more

thoroughly how, and within what kind of framework, a subject can recognize and account for itself. *Giving an Account of Oneself* expands on the notions of gender in *Gender Trouble* to consider more broadly the ways that subjecthood is a narrative that can only be told within available cultural norms. She argues, “the very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making” (21). Norms do not establish the acceptable, then; they also establish the recognizable. As Foucault explains it, cultural truths create the “order” within which a subject delimits its self-practices, and, Butler expands, within which one gives one’s account—and within which one’s account can be recognized. Butler explains “recognition” through the following comparison:

When we ask what makes recognition [of myself as a subject] possible, we find that it cannot merely be the other who is able to know and to recognize me as possessing a special talent or capacity, since that other will also have to rely, if only implicitly, upon certain criteria to establish what will and will not be recognizable about the self to anyone, a framework for seeing and judging who I am as well. In this sense, the other confers recognition—and we have yet to know precisely in what that consists—primarily by virtue of special internal capacities to discern who I may be, to read my face. If my face is readable at all, it becomes so only by entering into a visual frame that conditions its readability. If some can “read” me when others cannot, is it only because those who read me have internal talents that others lack? Or is it that a certain practice of reading becomes possible in relation to certain frames and images that over time

produce what we call “capacity”? For instance, if one is to respond ethically to a human face, there must first be a frame for the human, one that can include any number of variations as ready instance. But given how contested the visual representation of the “human” is, it would appear that our capacity to respond to a face as a human face is conditioned and mediated by frames of reference that are variably humanizing and dehumanizing. (29)

What I find particularly helpful about Butler’s concept of the “recognizable” is that in many ways it isolates certain questions that, I believe, matter most in the historicizing of sexual behaviors: the question of what people recognized when they saw certain acts or behaviors. My analysis of penetrating women focuses on discovering and analyzing what Renaissance culture constructed as its available framework for *recognizing* female homoerotic desires and tendencies, and my conclusion is that there was, indeed, a basic framework for such recognition.

In arguing that representations of female homosexual fantasies in the Renaissance tend to share many traits, my project breaks with the dominant argument of most other work on female homoeroticism to date and proposes a different taxonomic breakdown. After the earliest scholarship, which focused on whether female homosexual activity existed during the Renaissance and generally argued that any representations of female homoeroticism were inherently subversive and anti-patriarchal,¹⁵ later work has focused on the more interesting question of how people responded to and perceived same-sex activity and relationships. Within this development of a history of female homosexuality,

¹⁵ For instance, Faderman sees all female intimacy as hidden resistance to compulsory heterosexuality.

scholarship has generally also moved away from looking at homoeroticism only as resistance to patriarchy. More recent works have focused on the ways that female homoeroticism also sometimes functioned as a visible and sanctioned part of patriarchal society. Such scholarship follows Sedgwick's influential call for a universalizing view of queerness throughout Western history, as opposed to the minoritizing view that sees homosexuality only as affecting gay-identified individuals and that reads representations of homoeroticism as inherently closeted and oppressed. In particular, Valerie Traub, Denise Walen, Harriet Andreadis, and Kathryn Schwarz have opened considerable new terrain for historicizing female homoeroticism by demonstrating that in many cases, female homoeroticism functioned as *part* of a patriarchal logic or as a tolerated and even celebrated extramarital alternative for women.

Still, what separates my analysis from theirs is that for the most part, these scholars focus their analyses around the division between "tolerated" (and even enjoyed) female homoeroticism and "intolerable" female homoeroticism. Andreadis argues that Renaissance England permitted limited knowledge (and perhaps practice) of female homosexual acts among restricted elite circles, but that the 17th century saw an "unnaming" of female same-sex practices with the increase in literacy. Thus, she creates a distinction between tolerated upper-class female homoeroticism and homosexual acts, and untolerated similar behavior by members of the lower class. Traub, taking Alan Bray's analysis of tolerated and untolerated sodomy as a model, argues that two models of female eroticism existed during the Renaissance: passionate friendship and tribadry. While idealized friendships between women were an encouraged form of erotic relationships between women, Traub argues that tribadry emerged into Renaissance

thought in part because of the rediscovery of the clitoris as a site of female pleasure; tribades were understood either to have enlarged clitorises, capable of penetrating other women, or to use prosthetic devices for this. Traub argues that the tribade became a central source of Renaissance anxiety about threatening and excessive female passion. Walen comes to a similar conclusion in her exhaustive survey of over 70 texts representing female homoerotic possibilities. She draws on numerous examples to identify trends in the representations of erotic possibilities for women, and she ultimately defines them in discrete categories:

Paying particular attention to the ways in which English playwrights constructed and represented female homoeroticism in their texts, this book analyzes the taxonomy—from predatory to utopian—which these early modern writers used to represent desire. Playwrights placed female characters in erotic situations with other female characters in: (1) playful erotic scenarios of mistaken identity, (2) in anxious moments of erotic intrigue, (3) in predatory situations, and (4) in enthusiastic, utopian representations of romantic love. (2)

In her explanation of the categories, she argues that in general, although playful suggestions of female homoeroticism in literary texts were tolerated and enjoyed, explicit references to sex acts between women were usually condemned (especially in cases where women penetrated one another). Finally, Schwarz's analysis of Amazons and homosocial Amazon societies shows that such figures were imagined as threateningly and excessively sexual (like Traub's tribades and Walen's "predatory" lesbians), but that they also served a patriarchal purpose; conquering Amazons became a Renaissance trope

that temporarily destabilized male authority but allowed for the ultimate justification of patriarchal culture through the triumph over matriarchies.

My analysis of the category of penetrating women, who are frequently imagined into various homoerotic situations, does not create such a division between sexual possibilities that would be categorized as either tolerable or intolerable. In fact, the different texts I analyze all respond with differing degrees of excitement and trepidation to the prospect of female-female erotic contact, whether such acts involve penetration or not; the texts I analyze often idealize female homoeroticism and represent the possibility of sexual activity as sexually exciting. Focusing on penetrative figures who are consistently imagined as sharing the specific tendencies toward penetration and impenetrability, my chapters ultimately follow an arc that reflects the varying responses, from pleasure to anxiety, that such female homoerotic possibilities produce: I begin by analyzing the extreme voyeuristic pleasure that Moll Frith elicits in *The Roaring Girl*, I move on to a reading of the open-ended intellectual inquiry that characterizes the representation of *The Faerie Queene's* Britomart, and I end with an exploration of the overwhelming patriarchal fears that multiply in response to penetrating women in Shakespeare. Thus, my taxonomical grouping re-categorizes Renaissance portrayals of female homoeroticism by suggesting that even penetrative acts between women, and even women who are inassimilable into patriarchal projects, cannot be regarded only as threatening.

An additional factor for considering sexual history, as I have mentioned briefly, is that we cannot know historically when friendship becomes “erotic friendship” or whether—as diGangi points out—acts that we consider sexual (kissing, caressing) can be

considered sexual or erotic in a Renaissance context. Scholars have to develop their own explanations of what constitutes an erotic or sexual relationship and how we can tell when one is there; these explanations so far are unsatisfyingly vague—though perhaps necessarily so. For instance, Walen defines eroticism in this way:

Female homoerotics in literature exist in the liminal space of subplots and subtexts, in marginal narrative spaces of latent characterizations and repressed situations. English playwrights seem most comfortable relegating female homoeroticism to minor references, vestigial characters, and constrained expressions. In early modern drama, female homoerotics emerge surreptitiously from the subtext by means of innuendo, disguise, misconception, and allusion. Moreover, when it does appear, homoerotic desire deliberately goes unfulfilled. Same-sex desire is, as Terry Castle indicates, a spectral image haunting the heterosexual narrative, whose presence is more often denied than acknowledged. (5)

Lacking from this definition is an explanation of what “homoerotics” look like and how we can tell they are there. It explains primarily what eroticism is not: visible, explicit, central. But how can we tell if something is “erotic,” if, as DiGangi points out, acts coded as erotic now may not have been considered so then? Limiting ourselves to explicit descriptions of sexual activity is highly restrictive, while reading female intimacy and homosociality as inherently erotic ignores the physical and sensual aspects of erotic relationships that make them different from many friendships. It is difficult to find the middle ground between ignoring hints of eroticism outside sexual activity and seeing everything (and thus nothing) as erotic.

I do not claim to solve this problem entirely. However, my approach in this project is to focus on the physical and sensual aspects of relationships between women by considering not only what happens between women, but also what is *imagined* as happening between women. I focus on the way that fantasy—characters’ own fantasies, characters’ fantasies about each other, and what seem to be authorial fantasies—involves physical erotic possibilities even when it is not clear that they actually occur. Analyzing sexual fantasies—men’s and women’s—about erotic acts between women provides important insight into the ways that female homosexual activity and homoeroticism were conceived and categorized. I believe that this analysis relates to a question central to Valerie Traub’s “Desire and the Difference it Makes.” She suggests that “whatever the actual practice of women historically, in terms of critical discourse, female homoeroticism must be thought into existence” (96). My project, then, responds to the question of *how* lesbianism can be thought into existence—and by whom. It is the latter question (by whom?) that answers the former (how?) in this project: in addition to imagining what happens behind closed doors, as many critics have done, I believe we should pay attention to what Renaissance authors and characters imagine behind these same closed doors, and what behavioral and visible markers lead them to these conclusions. Fantasy is an especially helpful vehicle for analyzing female sexuality because, unlike scholarship that focuses on court cases or on the erotic desires of individual women writers, focusing on fantasy provides more than just evidence that people did think about female homosexuality; examining how and when fantasies of female homoeroticism appear in literary texts also permits us to identify trends in the kinds behaviors that tended to provoke those fantasies.

Because my inquiry is prompted by my observation that fantasies of female-female erotic contact proliferate in Renaissance texts in relationship to representations of female masculinity, my project interrogates the way that same-sex acts between women are frequently imagined through visible deviations in gender norms. More precisely, the penetrative women I analyze are perceived as masculine by other characters—in other words, these characters are not only cross-dressed but also adept in activities that define early modern masculinity, in particular swordsmanship. Their masculinity and their clothing relate to assumptions or questions about their capacity to be sexually penetrative as well. In order to consider why this may have been the case, I draw on Ann Rosalind Jones's and Peter Stallybrass's work on the materiality of clothing in the Renaissance as evidence for the importance of re-examining critical resistance to the idea of female cross-dressing as a vehicle for popular understandings of female homoeroticism. While it is important to resist seeing women in men's clothing as modern equivalents to "butch" lesbians, the texts I analyze in my chapters suggest that the same concepts of penetration that were important to Renaissance understandings of sexual activity were also symbolically represented in clothing. By this, I mean that if discourses on sexuality frequently focused more on the question of active (or penetrating) versus passive (or penetrated) bodies than on the genders of the participants, then the penetrative symbolism of male clothing (for instance, codpieces that emphasize virility) and weaponry (for instance, swords, spears, and daggers) is a visible representation of active or penetrative sexuality generally understood to be male.

My work is informed by a history of criticism on cross-dressing, though such criticism has generally focused only occasionally on the question of women in men's

clothing. Scholarship on identity and clothing and, more specifically, on the boy actor, reveals important Renaissance beliefs in the power of clothing to transform people and construct gender. In her 1994 book *Men in Women's Clothing*, Laura Levine observes in anti-theatrical tracts an “unmanageable anxiety that there is no such thing as a masculine self” (24); Levine shows that Renaissance debates about cross-dressing on the stage are based upon unstable concepts of gender that depend largely on removable markers, such as clothing. She argues that gender became the focus amidst broader Renaissance anxieties that identity was performative; examining anti-theatricalist claims that theater “effeminizes” the mind of spectators and might even turn the cross-dressed boys into women, she theorizes that concerns about theater’s potential to destabilize gender stem from a broader epistemology in which the self itself was seen as pliable. Marjorie Garber similarly reads the appearance of cross-dressed figures as symptomatic of other or larger uncertainties in a text. Garber argues that now and throughout history (though I find Garber’s suggestion that cross-dressing has performed a similar role throughout history problematic),

one of the most consistent and effective functions of the transvestite in culture is to indicate the place of what I call “category crisis,” disrupting and calling attention to cultural, social, or aesthetic dissonances[...] By “category crisis,” I mean a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another[...]. [T]he apparently spontaneous or unexpected presence of a transvestite figure in a text (whether fiction or history, verbal or visual, imagistic or “real”) that does

not seem, thematically, to be primarily concerned with gender difference or blurred gender indicates a *category crisis somewhere else*, an irresolvable conflict or epistemological crux that destabilizes comfortable binarity, and displaces the resulting discomfort onto a figure that already inhabits, indeed incarnates, the margin. (16-7)

This resonates with Levine's reading of specific reactions to cross-dressing in the Renaissance; she argues that the anti-theatricalists' specific preoccupation with clothing's power to transform is in some ways also a reassurance that *keeping* male clothing will stave off essential "monstrous androgyny" (24). Focusing on the power of clothing to transform, then, also presents a solution to category crisis: just stay in the right clothing. Levine insightfully observes the fundamental assumptions in anti-theatricalist concerns about cross-dressing:

The spectator will automatically replicate what he has seen on the stage[...] What this presupposes is that magical idea that watching inevitably leads to 'doing'. [...] But [anti-theatrical texts also suggest] the more radical idea that watching leads inevitably to "being"—to assuming the identity of the actor. The play is dangerous precisely because the spectator becomes a replica of the actor. [...] By imitating certain things, one becomes the thing one is imitating. (13)

In *Materials of Memory*, Jones and Stallybrass support this idea that clothing cannot be divorced from Renaissance understandings of identity, and they point to clothing as a "material memory": clothing is important not merely as an indicator of one's gender, class status, or profession, but also as a component in *shaping* those differences. In terms

of male cross-dressing on the stage, Jones and Stallybrass highlight anti-theatricalists' frequent concern that boy actors in women's clothing might arouse sexual desire in male audience members. Jones and Stallybrass elaborate on how cross-dressing threatened gender binaries:

The actor is both boy and woman, and he/she embodies the fact that sexual fixations are not the product of any categorical fixity of gender. Indeed, all attempts to fix gender are necessarily prosthetic; that is, they suggest the attempt to supply an imagined deficiency by the exchange of male clothes for female clothes or of female clothes for male clothes; by displacement from male to female space or from female to male space; by the replacement of male with female tasks or of female with male tasks. But all elaborations of the prosthesis which will supply the "deficiency" can secure no essence. On the contrary, they suggest that gender itself is a fetish, the production of an identity through the fixation on specific parts.

(217)

If Renaissance definitions of gender are performative, stabilized only through outward show and (as anti-theatricals feared) transformed through the removal of male clothing, those performances of masculinity are also displays of penetrative sexuality. The symbolism of male clothing through "fixation on specific parts" specifically supplies prosthetics that perform stiffness, erectness, hardness, penetration, and impenetrability. Swords and spears, important elements in the performance of masculinity, are also metonyms for male genitals, and it is generally better and more masculine for them to be raised than dropped. Similarly, armor and shields both protect and *illustrate* protection

from penetration. Codpieces draw attention to the location of the real penis but also replace it. According to Garber, “The codpiece is the thinking man’s (or woman’s) bauble, the ultimate detachable part [...], a sign of what might—or might not be ‘under there’” (*Vested Interests* 122); she adds, “‘Cod’ means both scrotum or testicles, and hoax, fool, pretence or mock. The anxiety about male artifactuality is summed up, as it were, in a nutshell” (125). The way that the male body and idealized masculine sexual dominance is represented and exaggerated in clothing is important, and as recent scholarship has shown, a man lacking this apparel—or a man in women’s clothing—risks actually transforming into a woman. This risk depends in part upon his failure to illustrate penetrative tendencies or upon his tendency to reveal his penetrability. Clothing can transform a body from being imagined as penetrative and phallic to being fantasized as penetrable—from erect to loose and open.

This is the Renaissance fantasy and fear of what happens to a cross-dressed man; however, fewer studies have analyzed the effects of male clothing on women. In a culture that defined gender prosthetically, what are the implications when a woman dons the male prosthetics symbolically represented in male attire? Work on female cross-dressing has not thoroughly considered this question. Stephen Orgel offers an impressively nuanced inquiry into Renaissance gender and cross-dressing in *Impersonations*; in the face of scholarship that views stage cross-dressing primarily in terms of anxieties about masculine identity, Orgel points to details that disrupt the myth of a Renaissance theater invested only in regulating women and preserving masculinity. He points out that women sometimes did appear on private stages (the stigma against women onstage was, he argues, specifically class-based—women who were actresses *by*

profession were considered promiscuous), and that we do not know whether they appeared on the public stage regularly prior to the Renaissance but that there are examples of them doing so occasionally. His detail-laden chronology forces us to question our assumptions about the Renaissance stage. Additionally, he reminds us that English women had considerably more freedom in the audience than their continental counterparts. He rejects the notion that the stage represents male fantasies alone:

The fact of the large female audience must have had important consequences for the development of English popular drama. It meant the success of any play was significantly dependent on the receptiveness of women; and this in turn means that theatrical representations—whether of women or men or anything else—also depended for their success to a significant degree on the receptiveness of women. When we see dramatic depictions of women in Elizabethan drama that we consider degrading, it has become common to explain the fact by declaring them to be male fantasies, and to point to the exclusively male stage to account for them. But this cannot be correct: theaters were viable only insofar as they satisfied their audiences. The depictions must at the very least represent *cultural* fantasies, and women are implicated in them as well as men. (11)

That cultural fantasy of gender was fluid; “the interchangeability of the sexes is, on both the fictive and the material level, an assumption of this theater. [...] Gender disguises in this theater are represented as all but impenetrable” (18), Orgel writes. He compares modern cross-dressing humor (citing films) with Renaissance cross-dressing, revealing a crucial epistemological difference: “For us [...] the whole point of cross-dressing in *Some*

Like It Hot and *Tootsie* is precisely for the audience to see through the impersonation, though the characters cannot. Ours is a theater of the named, known, and (most important for the purposes of this argument) gendered actors. [...] Sex for us is the bottom line, the ultimate truth of gender” (19). Not so for the Renaissance, where “even the distinction of the sexes could be blurred” (19), and “male and female were versions of the same unitary species” (20). Here, Orgel’s analysis coincides with those of Jones and Stallybrass and Levine: the Renaissance stage represents gender as ultimately unstable, which produces anxiety—and, Orgel adds, fantasy.

Unlike most writers on Renaissance cross-dressing, though, Orgel moves on to consider women who dress as men in plays and in other literature in their own right. He also creates a helpful distinction between boys who dress as women who dress as boys (for instance, most of Shakespeare’s women who dress as pages) and masculine women, pointing out that the different kinds of cross-dressing seem to serve different purposes and fantasies. Boys and women were frequently substituted for each other on the stage—both boys and women function in opposition to and as erotic objects for men, in part because “homoerotic pederasty was a strong element in the erotic life of Renaissance England” (103). Additionally, as Leah Marcus explains, “sixteenth century women were commonly regarded, like boys, as immature men” (60); such a spectrum helps to explain Renaissance pederasty and the appeal of cross-dressed boy actors. Garber offers an analysis of the erotic effects of the interchangeability of boys and women in her reading of *The Merchant of Venice*, pointing out that Italian prostitutes and courtesans frequently wore male clothing underneath female clothing; “Some Venetian man—like some Englishmen—kept both male lovers and female courtesans; not only were pants for

women fashionable, but so was anal intercourse”; the courtesan was most attractive when she was “hiding beneath her skirt male breeches, capable of being sexually entered from the rear as well as from the front, as a ‘boy’ and as a woman” (*Vested Interests* 87-8).

What Garber suggests is that understandings of gender were mixed with understandings of sexual positions and sexual roles—women and male youths were both penetrated, but in different places. Men penetrated them.¹⁶ Renaissance texts demonstrate a clear pleasure in representing largely non-threatening cross-dressed female figures; Orgel helpfully defines such figures and the separate set of anxieties they may produce or resolve:

We have seen that cross-dressing that does not represent but is represented in so much Renaissance drama, the transvestitism of Viola, Rosalind, Portia, and Nerissa, expresses a wide variety of patriarchal anxieties, and that these have more to do with the authority of the father within the family structure, with issues relating to inheritance, the transfer of property and the contracting of alliances, than with gender and sexuality.
(109)

Still, he adds, “the charge that women have usurped the place of men, or the fear that they will do so, is so commonplace as to constitute a moral topos in the period” (108), and anxieties about women’s threat to masculinity are represented more specifically through the *masculine* women than through the cross-dressed romantic boy-heroine. Boys and

¹⁶ I do not mean to imply that these positions were consistent in practice or that these positions even represent the dominant erotic fantasies in early modern texts. But *explanations* of positions are frequently framed in terms of these gendered figurations: a man can “play the woman” in an erotic scenario, for instance, and women can be taken “as boys.”

men performed different roles; Garber points out that “boy” is not strictly a title that refers to age—it can also refer to a servant or slave. “In other words,” Garber concludes, “‘boy’ functions as a term of domination, a term to designate an inferior, to create a distinction between or among men—of any age” (89). Given this difference between boys and men, it makes sense that women who are specifically described as mannish or masculine would provoke different anxieties and fantasies than women described as boyish.

Masculine women are simultaneously idealized and problematic; Orgel defines characters like Britomart—or even Jacobean representations of Elizabeth I in armor—as “variously represented, sometimes (like Bradamant or Britomart) in male disguise, sometimes (like Jonson’s queens [in *The Masque of Queenes*]) overtly female, but in military personae that declared their mastery of the male role as well” (112). This concept of a category of women and female characters who represent the “mastery of the male role” is central to my own work in this dissertation. However, I do not believe Orgel goes far enough to explain the erotic fascination these women garnered in the cultural imagination. After reminding us that Renaissance audiences included women and relied on their responsiveness, Orgel explains masculine women as attractive—but to men, in a homoerotic way: “If masculine attire on women had really been found generally repellent, it would not have been stylish, and we must conclude that there were Renaissance men who (like many modern men) enjoyed finding themselves in the women they admired” (118). He goes on to offer a similarly interesting but disappointing analysis of Moll Frith, the subject of my second chapter, claiming this transvestite

celebrity as highly attractive *to men* in a homoerotic way and as an ideal and “eminently marriageable” figure (153).

Orgel’s attention to masculine women at all is an important step in the right direction, but his final focus on whether men would have desired to *have* them (because they “found themselves” in them) once again reduces women and female masculinity to occasions for only male homoeroticism. This is clearly one element in the play of desire masculine women may have evoked, but male homoerotic attraction to women in drag does not fully acknowledge the array of erotic responses—responses, as I will argue, that are even illustrated in texts—to masculine women. Reducing the attractiveness of masculine women to a question of male attraction to men ignores the responses of female audience members altogether, and it does not take into full consideration the variety of erotic experiences that might excite an audience.

Traub, though not focused on masculine women, criticizes scholarship that reads female characters strictly for the boy underneath, ignoring the more complex effects of cross-dressing. In “Desire and the Difference it Makes,” an article that has had an enormous impact on this project, she advocates specificity and relentless attention to all varieties of portrayals of what she calls “erotic difference” in Renaissance texts: “difference in/of sexuality which since the late nineteenth century has been coded as ‘homosexual’” (82). She writes, “to conflate male-male interactions with male-female encounters reduces the complexity of homoerotic identifications, styles and roles—in Shakespeare’s time and in ours” (83). She advocates a new conceptualization of “desire” and “eroticism.” Besides encouraging a more complex understanding of the connections between gender and sexuality, Traub also calls for a more complex understanding of

desire itself. To explain this, she uses a contemporary example of watching an erotic scene in a movie to explain the way that our experience of desire relies on an interplay of identification and separation, of pleasure in watching and in participating, and often an attraction to sameness as well as difference. Traub writes,

Psychoanalysis reduces sexuality to one variable—object choice (whether ‘latent’ or manifest)—which is presumed to flow directly from gender identity. The contradiction at the heart of this problem, as well as the alternatives posed by [this reduction] [...] can be better understood by imagining oneself in the following voyeuristic scene: when viewing a love scene on a movie screen, you experience pleasure by watching an interplay of power and erotic desire. [...] But whether you are aroused by watching a woman’s body or a man’s, two women together or two men, a woman with a man, or any combination imaginable, the mere fact of your excitement does not explain what is happening on the dual level of identification and erotic desire. That is, is your arousal dependent upon a process of identification with or desire for an eroticized object? To state it simplistically, do you *want* or do you *want to be* one of the images on the screen? Which one? Can you tell? Does your identification and/or desire shift during the interaction? (89)

Drawing on this notion, Traub has made valuable contributions to the history of female desire in its own right, and I engage her work on the erotics of being and having (and watching) in my work on masculine women.

Along with this fluid notion of desire, what I hope to make evident throughout my discussion of the prosthetic nature of masculinity in these texts is that when I speak of “female masculinity,” I do not mean to suggest either category as stable or essential. It is true that I rely on the former term, “female,” throughout this project, describing as “women” those characters who are called so in texts—even when the “female” character would have been played by a boy actor or when, as is the case in *The Faerie Queene*, the text inconsistently employs masculine and feminine pronouns to reference the “female” character. My treatment of “female masculinity” and the representation of the relationship between sex, gender, desire, and identity ultimately endorses Butler’s ground-breaking conclusion that not only gender but even biological sex is a social construction. In *Gender Trouble*, she questions, “what is a sex, anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal...?” (9). Given this uncertainty, she favors the idea of “having” or “becoming” a sex rather than “being” one; Butler describes the spectrum of “intelligible genders” as

those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the specters of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the ‘expression’ or ‘effect’ of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice. (23)

My analysis of my case studies reveals this process of constructing continuity and coherence, as characters discuss and create arguments about how the “masculine woman’s” defiance of culturally defined gender norms can be understood in a way that is somehow causally related to her biological sex and her erotic desires. Such interrogation exposes, rather than naturalizes, the constructedness of gender and of biological sex, as characters demonstrate genuine uncertainty about what makes maleness when the “parts” that supposedly define it are imagined as entirely mobile, what makes masculinity when it is obviously adoptable by women, and how erotic practices fit into the circulating definitions. The “logic of lesbianism” I describe is not meant to imply that desire *is* logical or that it springs from essential foundational categories of sex and gender; the logic is constructed within these texts to create coherence, though often more for purposes of pleasure than of regulation, and the way that the texts present the process does more to reveal constructedness than to hide it.

My second chapter focuses on Mary Frith, the real-life pickpocket celebrity who is fictionalized as Moll Cutpurse in Middleton’s and Dekker’s play *The Roaring Girl*. My analysis of Moll establishes several of the basic premises of the “penetrating woman.” Although Moll is not part of the love story that forms the ostensible plot of the comedy, Moll functions as the imaginative center of the play; the other characters’ attentions and energies are devoted to discussing Moll, speculating about Moll, and trying to intellectually “penetrate” Moll’s differentness. Moll, who cross-dresses but does not disguise herself as a man, is described as “masculine” by the other characters, and this specifically prompts considerable excitement about her biological sex and her erotic desires and capabilities. Male characters are at once attracted to and envious of Moll, and

at the same time they wonder whether she can become sexually involved with other women. Moll's own erotic desires remain unclear, but her self-identifications alternate between a kind of proto-feminism and what appears to be a more basic aversion to sexual contact with men. In this way, she upsets previous scholarly assertions that female masculinity would have been associated in the Renaissance with excess female sexuality—primarily with heterosexual excess.¹⁷ Moll is defined by sexual restraint and impenetrability, even while she generates erotic fascination. Overall, I argue that Moll illustrates what Valerie Traub has termed “erotic difference”: “difference in/of sexuality which since the late nineteenth century has been coded as ‘homosexual’” (“Desire” 82). Moll is not a homosexual-before-the-fact, nor are her erotic desires explicit or consistently directed toward other women; however, her performance of masculinity in the play is the foundation upon which other characters construct a discourse about her, attempting to name her erotic otherness and to understand how the way she looks and behaves might relate to the erotic acts she would or wouldn't perform. In this way, Moll is not just a masculine woman but also an example of the kind of penetrating woman whose behavior and appearance triggers a logic of lesbianism even in the absence of any knowledge of her actual erotic practices.

¹⁷ This explanation of female masculinity in the early modern period has become somewhat standard in much of the scholarship on female masculinity in the Renaissance; the idea that female masculinity was associated with (hetero)sexual excess is illustrated, for instance, Simon Shepherd's *Amazons and Warrior Women* (1981), where Shepherd notes that a masculine woman “not only impinges on the male but is said to display the typical failing of sexual looseness. [...] [In masculine women,] traditional female sexuality [is understood to have] become ‘manly’ or aggressive” (69). As I discuss Chapter II and Chapter IV, the imagined connection between female masculinity and sexual looseness does not represent the full array of fantasies that develop about the erotic activities (or lack of activities) for masculine women.

My chapter on *The Faerie Queene* expands on the ideas of penetration and impenetrability that become central in the representation of Moll Frith, and I focus more closely on the specific aspects of Britomart's armor and weaponry that facilitate erotic speculation. I analyze the complicated function of armor for the Britomart plotline: armor is the metaphorical representation Britomart's chastity, but her armor also contributes to possibilities of other kinds of erotic encounters. Britomart is ostensibly introduced into the poem with the procreative imperative to marry Artegall and produce English royalty, but I argue that in fact, our attention is continually drawn to the ways that Britomart is diverted away from her heteroerotic future and toward other erotic encounters that are varied and frequently not procreative. The primary representations of Britomart place her in female homoerotic and homosocial episodes, and the text finally presents any union between Artegall and Britomart as difficult to achieve. The constant deferral of Britomart's marriage, and the fact that it is never shown within the poem, is representative of the ontological challenge that Britomart presents: although she differs from Moll Frith in many ways, Britomart is like Moll in that her text does not seem to know how to make this armored, penetrative female character finally penetrable in marriage. The convergence of chastity (a concept I pursue in both chapters) and penetrative masculine armor likens Britomart to Moll and creates similar erotic possibilities and narrative heterosexual deferrals. Specifically, this chapter expands on the representation of aversion in *The Faerie Queene* and the way that Britomart's deferred endings are related to her efforts to redirect heteroerotic possibilities toward auto- and homoerotic ones.

Chapter IV focuses on Shakespeare's representations of Joan la Pucelle and Queen Margaret in the *Henry VI* plays and on the conquered Amazons Emilia and Hippolyta in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Although this chapter deals with fewer explicit fantasies of female-female erotic contact, I argue that a logic of female homoeroticism functions in the same way as it does in the earlier chapters, though much more negatively, in Shakespeare's representations of women who are more prone toward martial penetration than they are open to heterosexual encounters. I draw on Phyllis Rackin's idea of Shakespeare's female "anti-historians," which are women who upset patriarchal projects by refusing to participate in reproducing legitimate male heirs or in heroifying the actions men rely on to define masculinity. I expand on Rackin's definition of "anti-historians" by arguing that the women in the *Henry VI* plays function threateningly alongside the blatant male homosociality by posing a nightmarish matriarchal alternative and by denaturalizing the connection between masculinity and biological maleness. The plays also repeatedly invoke syllogistic aphorisms about the logic of heterosexuality and gender norms, but these logical premises seem to be presented only to be conclusively disproven. By destroying the characters' explanations of heterosexual imperatives and by regularly proving the failure of gender norms to attach to biological sex, the plays develop an alternative logic of lesbianism and female self-sufficiency. This development occurs primarily through a lens of male homosociality and homoeroticism, and female homosociality remains a peripheral concern. The plays are preoccupied with a concern that women can replace or erase masculinity, and the question of what women might do with one another remains a vague, if omnipresent, threat in the *Henry VI* plays. Female-female erotic possibilities are more

explicitly explored in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, where any possibility of heterosociality is entirely dismissed.

My final chapter is a coda on John Lyly's *Gallathea*, a play I analyze and subsequently use as a platform to consider how the idea of penetrating tendencies might have colored early modern understandings of the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I. In this chapter, I analyze Lyly's representation of female homoeroticism and specifically the way that Lyly relies on wordplay to construct a logic of female-female desire and heteroerotic aversion. I argue that such linguistic figurations may be helpful for considering how the idea of penetrating women might be applied to an expanded set of cross-dressed female characters, possibly even in some cases where the character's penetrative apparel is not a central focus of the texts in which she appears. Additionally, I argue that Lyly's reliance on a sex change at that end of the play in order to render female-female love legitimate and socially productive seems to represent a kind of fantasy about Elizabeth I and the possibility of homoerotic love. I suggest that fantasizing homoerotic possibilities for Elizabeth I would have been a likely early modern response to the queen, based on the fantasies that develop about the penetrating women I analyze throughout the project.

In the case studies I analyze, it is clear that female masculinity and penetrative tendencies in women were fascinating to Renaissance audiences, and that cross-dressed female figures (particularly armored ones) provide fertile ground for sexual fantasies of all kinds, including frequent images or intimations of erotic relationships between women. Representations of armored female bodies and of women with swords provoke a variety of fantasies, including same-sex possibilities that generally are not represented in

texts without this kind of impenetrable, penetrative apparel, and these fantasies cannot be equated with anxieties or fears. My comparison of these different representations constructs a versatile, important taxonomy of Renaissance assumptions about female erotic tendencies and illustrates that such assumptions were more consistent and intellectually expansive than has previously been acknowledged. Recognizing these elements can help us to tell a history of sexuality that more accurately represents the specifics of constructions of female sexuality, and it can help us to better understand the definitions of sexuality we have inherited.

CHAPTER II

FEMALE MASCULINITY AND EROTIC FANTASY IN *THE ROARING GIRL*

The anonymous editor of a text called “The Life and Death of M^{rs} Mary Frith, Alias Mal Cutpurse” which purports to include the “Diary” of the cross-dressing celebrity pickpocket Mary Frith, spends a great deal of time speculating about the origins of Frith’s tendencies towards masculinity and criminality.¹⁸ The editor’s 1662 introduction to “Mal Cutpurse’s Diary” is a remarkably ambiguous and contradictory account of the early modern celebrity who largely gained fame because she flaunted her male clothing and her life of crime, and the editor’s speculations frequently take on a curiously modern tone, as the editor searches for a causal relationship that would link Frith’s childhood with her subsequent habitual cross-dressing and her later refusal to marry. The editor’s impulse to connect Frith’s public transgressions—cross-dressing and law-breaking—with less visible transgressions and differences, such as gender dysphoria and erotic difference, make this text a helpful entry into my exploration of female masculinity and taxonomies of sexual difference in this project. The editor of “The Life and Death” muses that “I do not find, that any remarkable things happened at her nativity” and highlights the fact that Moll grew up with tender parents (an especially tender mother, “according to the tenderness of that sex”), receiving a strict and diligent education (8-9). Despite this upbringing, Frith showed a “boisterous and masculine spirit [...] [which] became praedominant above all breeding and instruction” (9). The editor at first identifies the

¹⁸ “The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith,” which Anthony Dawson refers to as a “pseudo-diary,” is an unverified two-part 1662 document that begins with an introduction by the anonymous editor and then presents the “Diary.” Mary Frith was most likely born between 1586-9 and died in 1659 (*Counterfeit Ladies*).

death of Frith's parents as the event that led to her life of crime and cross-dressing, "leaving her to the swing and sway of her unruly temper and disposition" (9). Not satisfied with this explanation, however, the editor goes on to argue that actually the uncle who brought Frith up may have been to blame for her deviance, as he had "a whimsy" of refusing to take tithes, and "it seems it ran in a blood, each of the family had his particular freak, and so had our Mary" (10). After this, the editor's explanation backtracks once again to concede that "neither the derivations of the same blood, the assimilation and resemblance of parts, can conform the mind and the faculties thereof, or indue it with like qualities"—therefore, the best explanation for Frith's behavior is that Mercury was "in the house of Venus at her nativity" (10).

Throughout the introductory comments, the editor also speculates on Frith's resistance to relationships with men.¹⁹ At one point, the editor assigns Frith's natural unattractiveness to men as the motivation for her masculine behavior: "No doubt Mals [Moll's] converse with herself [...] informed her of her defects; and that she was not made for the pleasure of Man; and therefore since she could not be honoured with him she would be honoured by him in that garb and manner of raiment" (13). A page later, the editor contradicts this idea that Frith's clothing was a kind of compensation for her unattractiveness, claiming that Frith's clothes were actually "a fit Covering, not any disguise of her," and that Frith never desired to marry: she quite simply "never had the

¹⁹ Citing Mark Eccles' 1985 article on Moll, Stephen Orgel points out that in reality, according to a 1621 court record of a lawsuit against Frith, Mary Frith did have one unsuccessful marriage. Orgel argues that her decision to hide the marriage from public knowledge relates to her generally careful preservation of her public persona (*Impersonations*).

green sickness” (14).²⁰ The editor additionally goes on to surmise that Frith’s reluctance to marry and become dependent on men may have had to do with some bad financial experiences she had with men during her adult life. Then, leaving the question of Frith’s masculine tendencies and her love life finally alone, the editor concludes the introduction by claiming that Frith’s behavior was an amalgamation of

the inordinacies and unruliness of her mind; not to be guided by either the reservedness and modesty of her own Sex, or the more imperious command of the other; she resolved to set up in a neutral or Hermaphrodite way of Profession[...] [F]emale subtlety in the wily Arts and ruses of that sex; and the manly resolution [...] so blended and mixed together, that it was hard to say whether she were more cunning, or more impudent. (17)

The editor’s commentary may be arresting, or even occasionally humorous, to a modern audience because of its surprising similarity to the questions many modern gay and lesbian people endure—for instance, the editor’s relentless interrogation of female masculinity and the rejection of heterosexual romance may sound familiar: was she born that way? Would she have been different with strong parenting? Is this due to low self-esteem? Did she have a bad experience with men?²¹ However, there are marked

²⁰ Green sickness, also called the “virgin’s disease,” is a 16th-century medical term to describe the onset of various maladies that might strike a young woman of marriageable age if she remains a virgin; the sickness was “physical and emotional” and manifested in melancholy, shortness of breath, paleness, lack of appetites, and more (Paster 89-90). Gail Kern Paster offers a fascinating explanation of the disease in *Humoring the Body*; as she explains, the cure for green sickness is marriage and sexual activity.

²¹ In fact, the familiarity of such interrogations to modern readers seems to be the impetus for Ellen Galford’s 1985 lesbian novel *Moll Cutpurse: Her True History*. The book, narrated by a character called Bridget, who is Moll’s lover in novel, is an imaginative

differences between this text and what we might expect in a modern one on the same subject: perhaps most notably to modern readers, the editor never mentions the possibility that Frith was simply more attracted to women (and the second narrator in the “Life and Death,” who claims to be Frith herself, never mentions this possibility in her subsequent “Diary”). The text demonstrates an interrogation of gender and erotic tendencies that is at once familiar and quite obviously historically distant and foreign.

There are numerous factors that make this text an interesting introductory case for my analysis of early modern sexual taxonomies. The editorial remarks in the “Life and Death” vacillate between questions of the body, of gendered behavior, and of sexual relationships, weaving connections between all of these elements in complementary and contradictory ways. For instance, it is interesting in a text such as this that the invocation of hermaphroditism comes not in the early explanation of Frith’s biology, but in the explanation of her professional behavior, where it is portrayed as a choice (Frith “resolved to set up in a neutral or hermaphroditic way of profession”). There is no discussion of biological sex at all in the initial description of Frith’s masculine tendencies. Additionally, her clothing is apparently natural to her (“a fit Covering”), while her romantic resistance is alternately described as a choice and as a kind of natural repulsion. Thus, this text is a revealing example of the way that understandings of biological sex, of gender, of sex acts, and of sexual tendencies interacted in a complex manner in the early modern imagination, particularly when the subject in question was

retelling of “The Life and Death,” which is necessary because in “The Life and Death” (according to Bridget) the “catchpenny scribe seems to leer and laugh at [Moll]” (12). In the novel, Bridget swears that “Moll never wrote a diary in her life” and promises to tell “Roaring Moll’s true story” (12).

identified, as Frith was, as a “masculine woman.”²² The 17th-century editor’s explicit inquiry into Frith’s difference relates to my own subsequent reading of Middleton’s and Dekker’s representation of Mary Frith (Moll) in *The Roaring Girl*; in the play, Moll’s public transgressions prompt observers to wonder about her potential for erotic transgressions.²³ This coincidence of visible differences in gender performance and resulting fantasies of erotic difference is an example of the logic of lesbianism I propose in this dissertation. In both “The Life and Death” and *The Roaring Girl*, there is a clear connection between Moll/Frith’s successful performance in male social roles and the questions that develop about what kinds of roles Moll/Frith can and will perform erotically. And in *The Roaring Girl*, the phallic symbolism of male clothing becomes the dominant connecting force between Moll’s cross-dressing and the erotic fantasies that her masculine dress and behavior provoke.

As I have discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, there are considerable methodological challenges to approaching a figure like Moll/Frith, and it is not easy to determine the exact nature of the connections the texts make between female masculinity and fantasies of erotic difference. Still, in the case of Moll/Frith certain kinds of behaviors prompt assumptions—or at least questions—about associated sexual tendencies or possibilities. As I will argue, there is more consistency in the kinds of fantasies evoked

²² As I suggest in the introduction, my use of the term “masculine” is directly prompted by the text’s own description of Moll as “masculine.” Throughout this chapter, I use the term “masculine” to refer to traits that the texts and Renaissance culture more broadly considered to be defining characteristics of masculinity—although, as I argue, the texts make it clear that the actual connection between maleness and masculinity is tenuous.

²³ I will continue to refer to “Moll” as the character and “Frith” as the actual celebrity figure; additionally, the play also involves another character called Mary Fitzallard, and I will refer to her as such.

by female masculinity than has previously been acknowledged. In *The Roaring Girl*, the reason that we gain insight into what characters think about Moll is that she prompts continual discussion of sexuality in the play. Not merely an object of desire or repulsion, Moll becomes what Foucault refers to in *The History of Sexuality Volume I* as an object of “discursive production” (12): her erotic choices are separated from the realm of her own private preferences and activities and are “put into discourse” by the other characters, who know nothing about her sexual life but who are eager to talk about it because they are fascinated by her general deviance in the public arena (12). This “discourse of sexuality” does not culminate in the explicit naming or categorizing of Moll’s erotic tendencies; however, the characters’ discussions about Moll do demonstrate many of the traits that Foucault describes in his analysis of the way sexual activity was put into discourse and the way that such a discourse ultimately functioned to group individuals into categories. Foucault identifies such a discourse beginning in the 16th century, but he argues that sexual identity categories did not exist prior to the 18th century.

In particular, Foucault says that in the modern discourse of sexuality, the pleasure of sexual activity is partially replaced by the pleasure of *talking about* sexual activities, of naming them and ordering them; he calls this “the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure” (11). Literary representations of Moll/Frith emerged just before and during a historical period that saw a broader “putting into discourse” of questions about gender and sexual roles. Mary Frith became a celebrity at around the time that the pamphlets on “Hic Mulier” (“The Masculine Woman”) and a rebuttal pamphlet, “Haec Vir” (“The Feminine Man”), were published—perhaps in part prompted by Frith’s popularity, and certainly by

a concern about what the pamphleteers describe as a rise in “masculine” behaviors for women. Although the pamphlets were not published until 1620 (more than a decade after Middleton’s and Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl* was written—and also after the texts I consider in my subsequent chapters), the pamphlets demonstrate that the late Renaissance saw an active discourse about the relationship among sex, gender, and desire—even though the different textual representations of that relationship do not reflect clear shared beliefs or categories. “Hic Mulier” focuses on cataloguing the problems with the women of the writer’s generation:

For since the days of Adam, women were never so masculine: Masculine in their genders and whole generations, from the Mother to the youngest daughter; Masculine in number, from one to multitudes; Masculine in Case, even from the head to the foot; Masculine in Mood, for bold speech to impudent action; and Masculine in Tense, for without redress they were, are, and will be still most Masculine, most mankind, and most monstrous.

The anonymous pamphleteer moves through a series of concerns about this new masculine trend: the writer begins by assuming that female masculinity is imitative of male behaviors and therefore deceitful, immodest, and unnatural. Additionally, though, the text raises the concern that women’s adoptions of the robes of masculinity (such as a “broad-brimmed and wanton feather,” a French doublet, short hair, or a sword) may also result in changes to bodies and brains: masculine women

will be manlike not only from head to waist, but to the very foot and in every condition: man in body by attire, man in behavior by rude

complement, man in nature by aptness to anger, man in action by pursuing revenge, man in wearing weapons, man in using weapons, and, in brief, so much man in all things that they are neither men nor women, but just good for nothing.

By the end of the pamphlet, the writer terms masculine women “these new Hermaphrodites,” demonstrating an epistemological slippage between what is initially described as impropriety of dress or behavior and the subsequent implication that gendered behaviors are related to (caused by or the cause of) differences in what modern readers might consider “biological” sex.

Such a slippage between gender performance and “biological sex” is in keeping with the kind of early modern attitude toward sex and gender that Thomas Laqueur describes in *Making Sex*. Laqueur documents historical changes in understandings of biology, specifically changes in understandings of the differences between men and women; he argues that the Renaissance belief in a Galenic one-sex anatomical model created an understanding of the body that was more fluid and changeable than modern notions.²⁴ Laqueur suggests that before the 18th century,

sex, or the body, must be understood as the epi-phenomenon, while *gender*, what we would take to be a cultural category, was primary or “real.” Gender—man and woman—mattered a great deal and was part of

²⁴ In the Galenic anatomical model, which informed Renaissance notions of the body, women’s reproductive organs were understood to be inverted male genitals, which, due to lack of heat, failed to develop into fully expressed male sexual organs; however, as I mention in the introduction, considerable heat later in life could transform a woman into a man. As Laqueur explains, the idea of men and women as anatomical opposites was a much later invention, one in which the difference between men and women “could be demonstrated not just in visible bodies, but in [the body’s] microscopic building blocks” (6). Early modern anatomy defined biological sexual difference much less concretely.

the order of things [...]; At the very least, what we call sex and gender were in the 'one-sex model' explicitly bound up in a circle of meanings from which escape to a supposed biological substrate—the strategy of the Enlightenment—was impossible. In the world of one sex, it was precisely when talk seemed to be most directly about the biology of two sexes that it was most embedded in the politics of gender, in culture. To be a man or a woman was to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to *be* organically one or the other of two incommensurable sexes.

(8)

“Hic Mulier” illustrates this epistemology in which men and women are primarily defined through their performances of separate social roles, and in which “women” who are not feminine become “so much man in all things that they are neither men nor women.” The pamphlet demonstrates the importance of gender performance in maintaining a division between the sexes. At the same time, the pamphlet demonstrates considerably anxiety about the instability of its construction of gender difference; if gender is more “real” than sex, as Laqueur argues, female masculinity still does not simply make women into men. The discord between gender performance and biological sex is a source of considerable concern for the pamphleteer.

The writer of “Hic Mulier” also addresses the issue of the masculine woman’s erotic tendencies, asserting that masculine women have “cast off the ornaments of your sexes to put on the garments of Shame.” The writer assumes that this shameful giving up of bodily propriety through immodest dress will result in other acts of bodily impropriety, such as prostitution. However, in the response pamphlet, “Haec Vir,” there seems to be a

different assumption about the erotic choices that masculine dress will provoke. “Haec-Vir” is written as a dialogue between characters called Hic Mulier and Haec Vir; in it, Hic Mulier defends herself against Haec Vir’s accusations, and one thing she protests is Haec Vir’s criticism “that [I] am not dumb when wantons court me, as if, Asslike, I were ready for all burdens.” Here, the character Hic Mulier seems to be saying that one concern about masculine women is that they are *not* docile in the face of men’s advances, and that instead masculine women rebuff men’s sexual advances, unwilling to take on the “burdens” (the physical weight of men during intercourse, or perhaps the unwanted pregnancies that might result) that acquiescing would entail. The pamphlets, along with “The Life and Death,” offer a glimpse into developing assumptions about gender and sexual tendencies, which seem to be based upon profound interest in and uncertainty about the relationship between gender deviance and erotic possibility, in which *The Roaring Girl* also participates.

Written earlier, Middleton’s and Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl* participates in the same interrogations of gender and erotic inclinations that drive “The Life and Death” and the pamphlets. First performed at the Fortune Theater in 1608, when the real Mary Frith had become a London celebrity, the characters in the play become deeply invested in trying to understand gender, sexual difference, and erotic tendencies through the play’s representation of Moll, the titular “roaring girl.”²⁵ In the play, as in “The Life and

²⁵ According to Giddens’s editorial note, a roaring girl was “a riotous girl, whose characteristics until this age have not been seen. The term ‘roaring girl’ follows that of ‘roaring boy,’ a type of boisterous masculinity emerging late in Elizabeth’s reign” (391). Although comparatively little seems to have been written about roaring boys, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “roaring” as a 17th-century term for “behaving or living in a rowdy, boisterous, or unruly manner.” A “roaring boy” is defined as “a man or boy given to or characterized by noisy, riotous, or drunken behaviour... Common in the 17th and

Death,” Moll dresses in men’s clothing and is vocal in her rejection of heterosexual relationships, and other characters find difficulty as well as pleasure in imagining how the observable differences in her gender performance and dress might relate to private erotic and sexual differences. They immediately identify Moll as a masculine woman, which provokes complicated reactions to Moll throughout the play, as male characters alternately identify with, desire, desire to understand, and desire to be Moll. Moll’s masculine behavior and her refusal to marry are such a profound source of fascination that more of the play focuses on the other characters’ fantasies about Moll than on the central comedic love plot that Moll is introduced to solve. The characters’ discussions of Moll focus on taxonomizing her and her erotic potential based upon her violation of gender norms. In this way, despite the fact that the play does not represent Moll in any actual erotic encounters, the play constructs the kind of logic of lesbianism I discuss in the introduction, in which characters assume erotic tendencies based upon visible and behavioral traits.

My reading of Moll/Frith’s effect on the editor of “The Life and Death,” the other characters in *The Roaring Girl*, and, possibly, on Renaissance audiences more broadly, is similar to the effect that Valerie Traub has described in her analysis of female characters such as Rosalind and Viola, played by boy actors, who cross-dress in Shakespeare’s comedies. Traub argues that “the boy actor works, in specific Shakespearean comedies, as the basis upon which homoeroticism can be safely explored—working for both actors and audiences as an expression of non-hegemonic desire within the confines of

early 18th centuries, often as a stock character in drama.” The *OED* identifies the term “roaring girl” as coming from Middleton’s and Dekker’s play and defines a roaring girl as “the female counterpart of a roaring boy; a noisy, bawdy, or riotous woman or girl, esp. one who takes on a masculine role.”

conventional, comedic spaces” (*Desire and Anxiety* 118). The idea of a “safe” vehicle for homoeroticism appears to be less at issue in *The Roaring Girl*, for the play exuberantly explores varieties of eroticism with little anxiety or inhibition. However, Traub identifies the way that the layered sex and gender ambiguity of the doubly cross-dressed boy actor multiplies erotic possibilities in these texts featuring female characters who don male attire. Traub describes this as a circulating effect: cross-dressing functions as a vehicle for the circulation of erotic possibilities, to the point that the heteroerotic, monogamist imperatives of comedy are damaged by the obvious presence of erotic alternatives that may be more attractive. Moll has this kind of circulating provocative effect in *The Roaring Girl*, providing a body through which characters can imagine the erotic possibilities that most excite them.

Precisely what the characters imagine about Moll is varied. However, although Moll generates a variety of erotic responses and hypotheses from other characters, it is consistently the case that characters’ reactions to Moll center on figuring out some kind of relationship between her masculine clothing and the body underneath—and what the body underneath can do. The specific fantasies different characters generate about Moll seem to correlate with each character’s own fears, desires, or needs—even though by the end of the play, the characters’ projections onto Moll contrast with the narrower set of erotic possibilities Moll sees for herself.

Sebastian Wengrave is the first character to describe Moll, and he does so when he reveals his plan to pretend to be in love with “Mad Moll” Cutpurse so that his father, out of shock, will be more amenable to Sebastian’s real desire to marry Mary Fitzallard without losing his inheritance. Marriage-minded Sebastian sees masculine Moll as an

impossible object of heteroerotic desire; his entire plan for achieving the marriage he wants relies on the idea that Moll is not the kind of woman a man should marry. As he explains to Mary Fitzallard,

[...] There's a wench
Called Moll, mad Moll, or Merry Moll, a creature
So strange in quality, a whole city takes
Note of her name and person. All that affection
I owe to thee, on her in counterfeit passion
I spend to mad my father. He believes
I dote upon this roaring girl, and grieves
As it becomes a father for a son
That could be so bewitched [...]. (I.91-106)

Sebastian's description establishes Moll as deviant and undesirable, though largely harmless; his plan to pretend to give the love he "owes" to Mary in "counterfeit passion" to Moll shows his understanding of the masculine woman as someone that no one would really imagine marrying. This perception is reinforced when he describes his father grieving "as it becomes a father for a son that could be so bewitched": to Sebastian, Moll is simply outside of the patriarchal system that Sebastian hopes to enter through his own marriage. He assumes anyone would see the idea of courting Moll as a joke, and he presents her as an uncontrollable, unattractive, unfeminine, unmarriageable foil to the real object of his desire, Mary Fitzallard.

Throughout the opening scenes, other characters continue to characterize Moll through rumors and gossip prior to her actual arrival on stage; this build-up is evidence of

the way that Moll is represented as a source of shared community interest, existing in the popular imagination as an object of anxiety, fascination, and excitement. As Sebastian has predicted, his father, Sir Alexander Wengrave, is unhappy about the idea of Sebastian marrying Moll. Sir Wengrave's response to Moll exposes anxiety about Moll's gender and about the ambiguity of her biological sex. Even before he has met Moll, Sir Wengrave repeats what a friend has told him about Moll, in terms that construct Moll as threatening to gender binaries. He has heard Moll described as "a creature" that

[...] nature hath brought forth
To mock the sex of woman. It is a thing
One knows not how to name, her birth began
Ere she was all made. 'Tis woman more than man,
Man more than woman, and (which to none can hap)
The sun gives her two shadows to one shape. (II.127-131)

The contradictions in Sir Wengrave's description reveal his concerns about Moll's failure to fit into the gender categories he understands; he evokes Moll as a kind of inexplicable being whose origins cannot be satisfactorily explained in any consistent way. His suggestion that "nature" created Moll "to mock the sex of women" is seemingly unrelated to the more biological explanation that "her birth began/ Ere she was all made." The latter explanation is in keeping with Renaissance anatomy, which held that female genitals were inverted male genitals and that women were underdeveloped men; however, the line also puns on "maid" (Moll was born "ere she was all [maid]"), which would reverse the process by implying that Moll was born before she was fully *female*. Sir Wengrave's inverted use of comparatives in the next lines ("woman more than man, /

Man more than woman”) reinforces the impossibility of “naming” Moll and represents her as an impossibility. Sir Wengrave’s anxiety about Moll is similar to the pamphleteer’s concern about gender deviation in “Hic Mulier”: there, masculine women are “so much man in all things that they are neither men nor women, but just good for nothing.” Similarly, for Sir Wengrave, Moll’s masculine behaviors make her liminal in a way that Sir Wengrave finds impossible to categorize or define, which frustrates him. Sir Wengrave’s description also reinforces Sebastian’s assumption that Moll is inassimilable into the marital economy, and Sir Wengrave adds to this the idea that Moll is also more generally inassimilable into society: she is monstrous, abnormal, dangerous, and threatening.

However, these early descriptions contrast noticeably with the way that Moll actually develops once we meet her, and it quickly becomes clear Moll generates other fears and fantasies for other characters. She intercepts the young gallants Goshawk, Greenwit, and Laxton in the marketplace where they are shopping for tobacco, and they vie for her attention and advice, offering her “a pipe of good tobacco” and apparently admiring her expertise (III.164).²⁶ Laxton is particularly taken with Moll; Laxton has thus far demonstrated little interest in women in the play and has in fact been leading on Mistress Gallipot in order to get her money to buy clothing for himself. Upon seeing

²⁶ Critical responses to Moll’s late appearance in the play are mixed; Jane Baston has argued that the introduction of Moll as deviant and monstrous early in the play makes her eventual entrance “something of an anticlimax” (327). Baston goes on to interpret the male characters’ sexual fantasies about Moll as part of the way that “Moll’s deviance is reinvented in [the play] in order to be contained, enervated, and eventually incorporated into the prevailing social apparatuses” (319). On the other hand, Adrienne Eastwood interprets Moll as “an emblem of female independence” who “comes across as an almost heroic figure” to an audience by proving that she is not the monstrosity described in earlier scenes and by critiquing other characters’ expectations of women (18).

Moll, he immediately declares, in an aside, his attraction and his intention of trying to seduce Moll. His interest in Moll increases when he discusses her with Mistress Gallipot, who says, “Some will not stick to say she’s a man, and some both man and woman” (III.189-90); this excites Laxton, who exclaims, “That were excellent: she might first cuckold the husband and then make him do as much for the wife!” (190-1). Laxton moves easily from his initial attraction to Moll to the apparently equally pleasing possibility that Moll may be hermaphroditic, and he happily entertains the erotic possibilities opened in his mind by such biological ambiguity. This attraction seems to be evidence of Laxton’s own complex erotic fantasies, as he continues to be interested in the non-heteronormative possibilities Moll presents. His response also reveals an attempt to create some kind of logic about the relationships among Moll’s sex, gender, and erotic tendencies: Laxton’s assumption about a person who is “both man and woman” is that a hermaphrodite “might” be capable of and/or amenable to sexual interactions with both sexes, but he does not specify precisely why he assumes this expansion of Moll’s erotic potential. In other words, Laxton does not indicate whether he thinks Moll would be more *willing* to have sex with the husband and the wife if she were biologically male and female, or whether he thinks that Moll would only be *able* to engage sexually with men and women if she were a hermaphrodite—or even whether he is focused more on the question of what constitutes “cuckolding,” perhaps assuming that same-sex erotic activities that do not involve phallic vaginal penetration do not count as “cuckolding.”²⁷

The scene launches multiple questions about Moll’s body, her gender deviance, and the

²⁷ As I suggest in the introduction, this is the question in Brantôme’s 16th-century discussion of female-female sexual activity: Brantôme ponders whether two women sleeping together pose a cuckolding threat to their husbands.

possibility of erotic deviance, but the play appears to be uninterested in answering these questions; we are never given a clear idea of why Moll behaves in a fashion that is generally more masculine than any of the other characters, of whether Moll actually *is* a hermaphrodite or male as Mistress Gallipot suggests, of whether she desires men or women—or of precisely how these questions are related.

Finally defining what Moll *is*, in terms of biological sex, gender, or any kind of sexual identity category is not a project the play definitively undertakes. However, Laxton and Mistress Gallipot demonstrate considerable pleasure in discussing what Moll is; they enjoy putting her into discourse and attempting to discover the truth about her. In addition to its complicated representation of gender and sexual possibilities, the play also offers a complicated construction of desire, and one clear pleasure avenue that Moll provides is the “pleasure of analysis” Foucault describes. However, the way that characters specifically respond to Moll involves a variety of different kinds of desire and pleasure in addition to the pleasure of talking about her. Throughout the play, Moll evokes aggression, envy, admiration, curiosity, sympathy, and desire from the other characters—and usually some combination of these feelings at the same time. As I have mentioned, all the young gallants seem to admire and want to be *like* Moll, but in Laxton’s case, he also fantasizes about her and then attempts to seduce her—to be *with* her. Laxton’s desire is thus invoked both by his identification with her and by her difference. This is evident by his words when he first sees her:

Heart, I would give but too much money to be nibbling with that wench.
Life, sh’ has the spirit of four great parishes, and a voice that will drown
all the City. Methinks a brave captain might get all his soldiers on her,

and ne'er be beholding to a company of Milk End milksops, if he could come on and come off quick enough. Such a Moll were a marrowbone before an Italian: he would cry *bona-roba* til his ribs were nothing but bone. I'll lay hard siege on her—money is that aquafortis that eats into many a maidenhead. Where the walls are flesh and blood, I'll ever pierce through with a golden auger. (III.169-178)

This precedes the cuckolding conversation, and Laxton's initial response shows how his desire is aroused not only by seeing Moll, but also by a more complicated process of identification, admiration, and even elements of voyeurism that come out more explicitly in his later excitement about the idea of Moll sleeping with both husband and wife. Here, Laxton offers multiple explanations of what excites him about Moll. It's clear, for instance, that one element in his attraction is Moll's masculine behaviors. He appreciates her spiritedness and her loudness, her "voice that will drown all the city"; in other words, the kind of "bold speech" that bothers the writer of "Hic Mulier" is a turn-on for Laxton. One implication here and elsewhere seems to be that Laxton's lack of masculinity (as evidenced in his very name—"Lacks stones") makes him attracted to Moll's successful masculine performance. Still, he imagines Moll's masculinity within a reproductive sexual relationship when he suggests that her masculinity will be beneficial for the production of masculine heirs. This does not lessen the homoerotic implications of Laxton's desire: he wants Moll for her masculinity, and his fantasy of reproduction remains contained with a homoerotic fantasy of masculine sexual activity begetting an army of masculine men. The fact that Laxton imagines Moll with an army captain and then as the object of admiration for Italian men adds a layer of voyeuristic pleasure at

thinking about Moll with other men—and, later of course, with other women. In terms of the actual acts Laxton imagines, his erotic euphemisms are difficult to tie down. His first suggestion that he would like to be “nibbling” with Moll is open for interpretation, it would seem, but there is an obvious possibility of oral sex—his subsequent reference to the way that money “eats into many a maidenhead” reinforces this reading. His later assertion that “where the walls are flesh and blood” he will “pierce through with a golden auger” ostensibly suggests vaginal penetration of Moll, but that statement also comes across as a boastful defense of Laxton’s penetrating capacities, so that the line can be read as “where[ever] the walls are flesh and blood,” Laxton will penetrate them. In this reading, there would be no part of the body Laxton *doesn’t* imagine penetrating.

Laxton’s fertile erotic imagination contrasts with Moll’s complete lack of interest in the possibility of a sexual relationship with Laxton or with any of the other men; however, Laxton’s response to Moll illustrates the way that Moll functions as the kind of vehicle of “circulating desires” that Traub describes. It shows how Moll activates the imaginations of others—even (especially) when such imagined sexual acts contradict the narrower set of acts Moll seems to imagine for herself.

While Laxton primarily responds to Moll with excitement and curiosity, taking pleasure in analyzing Moll and imagining the erotic possibilities that might result from her transgressions, Sir Wengrave continues to respond to her with animosity, attempting to regulate Moll’s transgressions through fantasies of enforcing gender norms onto her and even of raping her. For instance, early in the play, when he first learns that Sebastian is courting Moll, Sir Wengrave commands his man Trapdoor to “Hunt her forth,/ Cast out a line of silver hooks/ To catch her to thy company. Deep spendings/ May draw her

that's most chaste to a man's bosom. [...] They say sometimes/ She goes in breeches— follow her as her man" (II.217-224), to which Trapdoor responds, "And when her breeches are off, she shall follow me!" (II. 225). Sir Wengrave's plan demonstrates his faith in the idea that Moll can be ruled if the heterosexual desires he assumes all women have can be manipulated; Trapdoor echoes this, joking that once Moll is out of men's clothing and instead *with* a man, she will become appropriately docile. However, the plan proves unsuccessful. As is the case with Laxton's failed courtship, Moll is not at all vulnerable to seduction by Trapdoor, and the fact that the play lays out Sir Wengrave's assumptions about her erotic inclinations only to disprove them draws attention to the way that Moll regularly resists the male characters' advances and fails to play the part they imagine her playing in their fantasies.

Once the plot fails, Sir Wengrave redoubles his efforts to get Moll out of the way, and the way he explains his new plan blurs the idea of punishing Moll with the idea of forcing Moll to submit to him sexually. He and Trapdoor decide to plant a valuable watch in a room so they can catch Moll stealing it and have her imprisoned. Sir Wengrave imagines that "What she leaves,/ Thou shalt come closely in and filch away,/ And all the weight upon her back I'll lay" (VIII.21-3). Trapdoor complicates the sexual implications of putting "the weight upon her back" (placing the blame on her), though, by saying "You cannot assure that, sir[...] Being a stout girl, perhaps she'll desire pressing,/ Then all the weight must lie upon her belly"; Trapdoor's joke puns on another kind of physical punishment (pressing), turning the question of legal punishment into a question of sexual positions. The men apparently relish all these possibilities—getting Moll in trouble, putting weight on Moll's back, or "pressing" her—and the pleasurable prospect

of having Moll punished merges with their pleasure in imagining Moll in a forced sexual situation. Sir Wengrave seems to be able to alleviate his anxieties about the way Moll threatens gender norms and his own family's future by imagining sexual violence against her. Their jokes acknowledge the problem that they do not know what kinds of sexual acts can be performed with Moll, and their satisfaction seems to come from the idea that even if they cannot force Moll to behave or dress in the way they want her to, Moll can be punished if she is forced to be sexually passive. Sir Wengrave's response reinforces this when he says, "Belly or back, I care not, so I've one" (VIII.24-8). With this pun on the word "won," he indicates that punishing Moll legally or sexually represents a larger concept of "putting her in her place"; even if she won't behave in the way he wants her to, he will "win" if she is forced to be penetrated, even if her body proves not to be female, and even though neither he nor Trapdoor know where on the body Moll is to be penetrated. Sir Wengrave's attempts to understand and punish Moll reveal an epistemological response that differs greatly from Laxton's, largely because Sir Wengrave is deeply concerned about maintaining the hierarchies he understands even when it is clear that the things he encounters do not fit into them. His various formulations of the connections between sex, gender, desire, and sexual acts at once replicate the play's general interrogation of the relationship between these things while also demonstrating the failure of the causal explanations he proposes.

Sir Wengrave's response to Moll is revelatory because of its relationship to the general circulation of parts throughout the play. The play illustrates the failure of masculinity to be attached to biological maleness; even the male characters' names alert us to this right away (as I have mentioned, Laxton puns on the idea of lacking testicles,

and Sir Beauteous Ganymede would have been a recognizable reference to male attraction to men for Renaissance audiences).²⁸ The play continually brings up men's failure to be masculine, in stark contrast to Moll's complete sufficiency at being masculine. For example, while Laxton is repeatedly portrayed as a man who cannot "stand," Moll wears a codpiece that is noticeably stiff: Moll orders new breeches from the Tailor while she is in town, and they settle on the new fashion of breeches, which the Tailor promises will "stand full and round" (IV.81). The Tailor then describes Moll's previous pair—presumably the pair she is wearing onstage—as too "stiff between the legs" (IV.83). As Marjorie Garber points out, what Moll is asking the tailor for is "not only [...] a pair of breeches, but, in effect, for a phallus, one that will stand round and full (if somewhat stiffly) between the legs" ("The Logic of a Transvestite" 223-4). Garber draws on Moll's ability to perform what Laxton cannot in order to argue that in the play, the anxiety about women "is not so much based upon women's emancipatory struggle as upon the sexual inadequacies of men" (221). Garber claims that "*The Roaring Girl* is a play about the circulation of parts, about women with penises and testicles and men who lack them" (223). I agree with Garber that the "parts" in the play are distributed among the characters in a way that causes anxiety about masculinity, but to read the play as strictly about masculinity and anxiety erases the erotic inquiry attached to gender and genitalia in this play and also ignores the pleasure that often accompanies this inquiry. If the play is about male sexual inadequacy, it is also about the sexual fantasies generated in

²⁸ In Ovidian myth, Ganymede is a beautiful boy whom Jove brings home, and Jove's affection for the boy makes Jove's wife Juno jealous. In early modern literature, a reference to Ganymede would have carried recognizable homoerotic undertones; as Mario diGangi puts it, the representation of Ganymede "evokes an effeminate boy who might attract an adult man's fancy" (37).

the context of this male impotency and female impenetrability. While Sir Wengrave's reaction to Moll is hostile, and both he and Laxton desire to penetrate Moll's masculine clothing, to understand her, to put her in her place (sexually or epistemologically), there is clearly also pleasure associated with this circulation of parts, with the possibility that the desired penetration of Moll will be relentlessly deferred.

And what is notable about Moll, and upsets the notion that female gender deviance was associated with sexual excess, is that she continually resists all of these attempts at male penetration. If Laxton's fantasies of Moll include, among other things, "piercing through" her "flesh and blood" with his "golden auger," as he fantasizes in the passage I analyze above, Moll does not reciprocate; even though Moll provokes multiplying erotic fantasies, she is not represented as herself being prone to sexual excess or even to sexual contact. Moll's own accounts of herself give little away. She is adamant in her refusal to marry, and the explicit reason she gives for this refusal is based on a kind of proto-feminist identification with other women. At the end of the play, when someone asks Moll, "When wilt marry?," Moll explains her views on the way that marriage affects women by answering that she will marry "when you shall hear [...]Woman manned but never pandered,[...] / [and] Vessels older ere they're broached" (XI.218-26). This speech, along with Moll's ability in the end of the play to avoid both marriage *and* chastisement, has led Marjorie Garber and Stephen Orgel to claim Moll as a figure of female strength, who resists marriage entirely because of its oppressiveness to all women. Garber primarily focuses on Moll's activist potential, arguing that, "By looking backward at Moll's place in 'history,' contemporary readers can look forward to their own struggles with sex-gender inequalities" (230). Orgel finds Moll to be not only

adept at navigating patriarchal structures without getting in trouble, but also assimilable into patriarchal structures: “though Moll denies any interest in marriage, the play considers her eminently marriageable, and not merely to the likes of Laxton [...]. Moll is acknowledged to be an attractive and powerful figure, both onstage and off it” (*Impersonations* 153). While I agree with the idea that Moll is appealing, I take issue with both Garber’s and Orgel’s assumptions that Moll presents only political challenges to marriage.

Actually, her proto-feminist speech conflicts with other implied reasons for Moll’s avoidance of marriage elsewhere in the play. Here it is important to consider the impact of the play’s continual association of Moll with phallic prosthetics and symbols such as codpieces, pipes, swords, and her lute. The prosthetics do not contradict Moll’s proto-feminist potential (the phallic associations do not make her male), but Moll’s possession of these phallic masculine accessories is related to the play’s construction of Moll as impenetrable to male advances—even though, as in “The Life and Death,” the causal relationship between Moll’s masculinity and Moll’s avoidance of sexual contact with men is unclear. Whether her masculinity is a cause or a result of her resistance to heterosexual contact, Moll relies on cross-dressing and masculine prosthetics as a way of guarding herself against heterosexual advances. One important scene that shows this function is when Laxton arranges what he hopes will be his romantic encounter with Moll. When Laxton asks to arrange a meeting with her, Moll asks what he wants to do with her, and he tells her, “Nothing but be merry and lie together” (III.255). They subsequently meet at Gray’s Inn Fields, but when Laxton invites her into his carriage, Moll will not go into it with him. Misunderstanding her resistance as eagerness, Laxton

wonders whether Moll wants to undress right on the field, and he asks her, “What wilt thou untruss a point, Moll?” (V.57). Here the stage direction indicates that Moll “puts off her cloak and draws [her sword],” and she says, “Yes, here’s a point/ That I untruss, ‘t has but one tag. Twill serve, though,/ To tie up a rogue’s tongue” (V.57-59). The scene illustrates a contrast between the receptive undressed body Laxton expects (whether he assumes that body to be male, female, or both) and the impenetrability Moll maintains at this erotic opportunity. When Laxton asks Moll if she will undress “a point,” he is ostensibly asking if she will undress immediately; however, Laxton’s question and Moll’s response also rely on a pun on the word “point,” which was an early modern word for sword and also a euphemism for “penis.” Thus Laxton’s question has a playful double entendre that can also be read as an inquiry about what specific body will be revealed when Moll undresses. Moll’s response (“here’s a point/ That I untruss”) more blatantly plays with the phallic implications of Moll revealing her sword, framing it as “undressing” her sword. Moll relies on the penetrative power of her sword in order to keep herself impenetrable to the sexual encounter with Laxton, and the scene imagines female masculinity as something that directly contrasts with heteroerotic possibility.

The kinds of amorphous desire Laxton has had for Moll, where circulating parts and circulating erotic possibilities have been the foundation of his excitement, is flatly rejected by Moll, who makes it clear that she will not be penetrated and that she has no interest in sleeping with him. She chastises him at length for his assuming “each woman thy fond flexible whore” (V.68), and demands to know “What durst move you, sir,/ To think me whorish?” (V.83-4). Moll accurately portrays the way that Laxton has assumed, based on her propensities for “sport” and merriment, that she will be erotically

adventurous with him as well, and she rejects his notion of her erotic excess. The speech she makes to him rings of her general pro-female attitude, but her arguments in defense of women are delivered with anti-male sentiments that demonstrate an aversion to men as much as a championship of women. Moll says, “In thee I defy all men, their worst hates/ And their best flatteries, all their golden witchcrafts [...]” (87-88); her argument against men who think all women are loose transforms into a more permanent declaration against heteroerotic contact for herself.

However, despite this refusal to become a part of the play’s erotic economy, Moll remains definitively the most interesting and titillating character in the play, as evidenced by the other characters’ reactions and also the play’s final reminder to the audience that the *real* Mary Frith would be appearing on the same stage a week later. Given this, we might surmise that Moll’s impenetrability does not just categorize her as other and set her aside—rather, her impenetrability is central to her appeal. Talking about Moll, analyzing Moll, and fantasizing about Moll are the driving forces of the play (much more than the lethargic marriage plot). In fact, Moll’s masculinity and the new erotic possibilities it evokes even rub off on the previously feminine Mary Fitzallard, who has to dress as a page as part of Sebastian’s plan. Sebastian kisses cross-dressed Mary Fitzallard, and Moll observes, “How strange this shows, one man to kiss another” (VIII.46); Sebastian responds, “Methinks a woman’s lip tastes well in a doublet. [...] As some have conceit their drink tastes better/ In an outlandish cup than in their own,/ So methinks every kiss she gives me now/ In this strange form is worth a pair of two” (VIII.48-57). Moll’s violation of gender binaries and heteronormativity infects even the once-heteronormative couple, circulating homoerotic possibilities beyond the ones that directly involve her.

Moll's visible differences, and the characters' attempts to name and place those differences, are the elements of the play that excite the other characters and, presumably, excite the audience as well.

However, none of these attempts at penetration—whether physical or epistemological—are successful. Moll disrupts comedic closure by resisting opening herself to marriage, and while previous scholarship about her has analyzed the play's tolerance of her in the end, this summation understates the play's treatment of Moll's erotic inassimilability: in fact, her impenetrability is the driving force and most reliable source of pleasure of the play. In this way, the play develops a surprisingly positive representation of female aversion, which is an aspect of sexuality that is seldom discussed. Moll's resistance to heterosexual contact has dual functions. First, it is a source of arousal and pleasure for a character like Laxton, who desires Moll, but who also seems to enjoy her resistance to him. Additionally, though, in a play where the generation of erotic fantasy and the representation of erotic desire are central, Moll's insistence that she does not desire men and that she will not "yield" to male advances is especially noticeable. If erotic desires are circulated by Moll, her own more restrictive definition of her participation in this fluid erotic economy constructs her as a more consistent erotic subject than the other characters, and this self-sameness is defined primarily in terms of aversion.

Finally, it is important that Moll is constructed not only as resistant to being penetrated, but also as a person inclined towards penetration herself—and though Moll's penetrating tendencies initially develop primarily in the representation of her clothing and weaponry, Moll also imagines her penetrative exterior would transfer into erotic

situations. For instance, Moll considers how she would use a real phallus (or perhaps a prosthetic) in scene three; she remarks upon the way that the gallants “put not their courtship home enough to a wench—‘tis impossible to know what woman is thoroughly honest because she’s ne’er thoroughly tried” (III.290-2). She then claims in an aside, “I’ll try one spear against your chastity, Mistress Tiltyard, though it prove too short by the burr” (311-12). In other words, Moll imagines testing Mistress Tiltyard’s chastity but notes that she does not have the biological means to do so—what she has is a “burr,” which according to the editorial notes should be interpreted as “a broad iron ring on a tilting spear. Moll suggests that she has only a burr (vagina) when a lance (penis) is needed to test chastity” (Giddens 398). The line is not phrased in the conditional, however; we might expect Moll to claim that she *would* try to test Mistress Tiltyard’s chastity *but will not* because she does not have the biological means. Instead, Moll states that she *will* try her “spear” on Mistress Tiltyard “though” (“even though?” “even if?”) the device she uses is “too short.” Moll’s acknowledgement that she lacks a penis, then, does not stop her from imagining that she can still interact erotically with another woman, and the fact that she references testing chastity with a “spear” suggests that what she imagines for herself erotically is related to the phallic prosthetics she wears.²⁹ Moll’s

²⁹ In these lines, it is difficult to know whether this is an indication that Moll wants to test Mistress Tiltyard’s chastity just because the men are doing an inadequate job of it or if Moll also desires Mistress Tiltyard. One thing that is peculiar is that at this point Mistress Tiltyard has not said anything for almost 200 lines; the stage directions do not indicate that she has left the stage, but the conversation that Moll listens to before she delivers this aside is between Goshawk and Mistress *Openwork*, as they are discussing *Openwork*’s alleged affairs. It would make much more sense, in terms of this staging, for Moll to talk about testing Mistress *Openwork*’s chastity. But Mistress *Openwork* has recently kicked Moll out of her shop and had an argument with her. By contrast, when Moll arrives in the feather shop, she says to Jack Dapper, “Save you. How does Mistress Tiltyard?” (193); her question is never answered, and the women never exchange lines on

cross-dressing in the play becomes a vehicle for different characters to imagine a variety of erotic possibilities, and here Moll shows that she also understands there to be a relationship between her clothing and her erotic inclinations. What Moll imagines for herself throughout the play is surprisingly consistent: Moll is declaredly against sexual contact with men, and Moll imagines herself as the one who will do the penetrating, both martially and erotically. She mocks men who attempt to seduce her or other women by challenging their ability to do so and suggests that she would be more successful. Immediately after the “burr” comment, Trapdoor enters and offers to do Moll “service”; Moll demands, “What parts are there in you for a gentlewoman’s service?” Trapdoor answers, “Of two kinds, right worshipful: movable and immovable. Movable to run errands and immovable to stand when you have occasion to use me” (III.324-7). Trapdoor’s bawdy response relies on a biological differentiation between his “movable” parts and the “immovable” part that can “stand” to service his mistress. However, Moll’s consideration of Mistress Tiltyard in the lines directly before this indicates that immovable parts are not the only ones that can stand and be used: a woman with movable parts may be as successful at standing and using those parts as Trapdoor, whose parts are never used in the play.

Moll’s description of testing Mistress Tiltyard’s chastity suggests that Moll imagines some kind of sexual difference for herself based upon the penetrative prosthetics of her masculine apparel; she does not imagine herself as being open to any and all erotic possibilities in the way Laxton imagines her. This idea that Moll sees her

stage. So it is interesting that Moll chooses to think about testing the chastity of Mistress Tiltyard, whom she seems to like, when mentioning Mistress Tiltyard here seems like a non sequitur.

erotic possibilities as different and restricted recurs when Moll agrees to help Sebastian in his plot to marry Mary and explains her own attitude toward marriage:

I have no humour to marry. I love to lie o'both sides o'th'bed myself and again o'th'other side. A wife, you know, ought to be obedient, but I fear I am too headstrong to obey, therefore I'll ne'ever go about it. [...] I have the head now of myself, and am man enough for a woman: marriage is but a chopping and changing, where a maiden loses one head and has a worse i'th' place. (IV.35-42)

Moll invokes concepts of biology, gender, and desire in this explanation of her aversion to marriage and to sharing a bed with a husband. She does not like the idea of being controlled by a husband, which fits with the reading of a proto-feminist Moll, and her assertion that she likes to lie “o’both sides o’th’ bed” suggests that Moll likes to occupy both male and female social roles. But she also puns on the idea of losing her “head” and having a worse “head”; the most likely reading of this line is that Moll does not want to give up her virginity in order to be ruled by a husband, but the word “head” is also often a Renaissance pun for “penis,” which presents the possibility that Moll does not want to give up her “head” for a worse one. Her understanding of marriage as an unappealing “chopping and changing” suggests that Moll wants to keep the part she has, and the fact that Moll specifically locates her refusal to marry by referring to marriage as sharing a bed demonstrates again that Moll’s objection to marriage is not only due to her investment in female freedom. Moll’s representation of her resistance marriage as a preference for occupying both sides of the bed suggests that she understands herself to be incompatible with the sexual aspects of marriage as well.

The play constructs an imagined connection between Moll's masculine appearance and behaviors (and, more specifically, the penetrative symbolism of her clothing) and Moll's erotic tendencies within the play. As in "The Life and Death," the causal relationship is unclear: while female masculinity is a *vehicle* for prompting fantasies of erotic difference, there is no indication that it is the *reason* for her erotic difference, or vice versa. Moll's desires are usually expressed in terms of her gender difference. Just as Laxton's desires for Moll seem to involve conflicting and complementary feelings of wanting to *be* Moll and wanting to *have* her (as well as other fantasies that do not easily fit into either of these categories), Moll's feelings about women seem to involve these same ideas. She identifies with women and has strong opinions about the freedom that should be granted to herself and to other women, but she also imagines *having* other women, and the *having* fantasies seem to be prompted or facilitated by the penetrative symbolism of Moll's cross-dressing. The play's construction of female masculinity in this way participates in what I consider to be an early modern logic of lesbianism: Moll is never explicitly represented in any actual erotic encounters, and yet the play offers fantasized instances of female-female sexual possibility that are based upon assumptions about the way a penetrating woman would be able to or desire to behave erotically

In the final scene of the play, Moll's penetrative tendencies are imaginatively inscribed onto Moll's body; the play's epilogue offers one final penetrative image that invites further erotic possibilities. Moll claims credit for her role in Sebastian's plot by stating "Thank me for't, / I'd a forefinger in't" (XI.171-2). The gloss for this explains that Moll had "a part in" the outcome of the play (Giddens 410); but given the preceding puns

on anatomy in the play, it is reasonable to read the “forefinger” as similar to another kind of important circulating “part” with which the play has been preoccupied up until now. In these final lines, the play reminds us that Moll’s penetrative potential is not limited to swords, producing an additional possibility of digital penetration. It is perhaps relevant that the real Mary Frith gained notoriety not only for masculine dress, but also for pickpocketing, and in the “Life and Death,” the diary’s narrator describes her dexterity as the primary reason for her entrée into that masculine profession. In these final lines of the play, Moll’s power, agency, and sexual difference, which throughout the rest of the play have been represented symbolically in phallic external objects, symbols, and clothing, are transferred back onto her own body. The addition of the forefinger to Moll’s penetrative qualities leaves the audience with multiplied erotic possibilities for Moll.

Although *The Roaring Girl* does not fully imagine a figure that can be equated with modern lesbianism, the hints, jokes, and fantasies about Moll point to persistent assumptions about Moll’s erotic tendencies that are based upon the interplay of characters’ understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality. Both of the literary treatments of Moll/Frith I have examined in this chapter demonstrate considerable interest in describing with consistency the way that Moll/Frith *is*; the editor of “The Life and Death” and the characters in *The Roaring Girl* demonstrate a maintained belief that Moll/Frith’s gender deviance—the only observable fact upon which any of them can begin their analysis of her—*must* relate to other truths about her body and her erotic preferences or abilities. Their unanimous certainty that Moll/Frith’s masculinity is causally connected to the erotic acts in which she can or will engage demonstrates a stronger effort at

understanding and categorizing female sexual tendencies than has been previously observed in the Renaissance.

These efforts to categorize and to understand Moll are at center of the play, and the representation of Moll's effect on the imagination in this way resembles the kind of taxonomizing discourses about sexual tendencies that Foucault observes much later in history. Foucault argues that "nearly one hundred and fifty years have gone into the making of a complex machinery for producing true discourses on sex. [...] It is this deployment that enables something called 'sexuality' to embody the truth of sex and its pleasures" (68). For Foucault, the creation of a discourse focused on revealing the "truth" of sexuality has been the by-product of the sexual sciences (*scientia sexualis*, which he argues became a kind of *ars erotica*) of the 19th and 20th centuries. Foucault credits/blames the *scientia sexualis* with the invention of sexual "identity": the idea that sexual acts are the product of a deeper self-same truth that can be unveiled through confession or scientific observation. However, *The Roaring Girl* and the "Life and Death," though written in the 17th century, seem to assume a similar epistemological foundation. Foucault explains that as a result of the *scientia sexualis*, "sexuality was being defined 'by nature': a domain susceptible to pathological processes, and hence one calling for therapeutic or normalizing interventions; a field of meanings to decipher; and an obscure speech (*parole*) that had to be ferreted out and listened to" (68). The Victorian era, he argues, "put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it. Not only did it speak of sex and compel everyone to do so; it also set out to formulate a uniform truth about it" (71). Within his thesis about modern discourse on sexuality, Foucault urges that we must focus on understanding these

discourse mechanisms, “insofar as they produce knowledge, multiply discourse, induce pleasure, and generate power; we must investigate the conditions of their emergence and operation, and try to discover how the related facts of interdiction or concealment are distributed with respect to them” (73).

Literary representations of Moll/Frith revolve around the mechanisms that Foucault describes in the modern discourses of sexuality. Of modern society, he says: “We have at least invented a different kind of pleasure: pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing that truth, of discovering and exposing it, the fascination of seeing it and telling it, or captivating and capturing other by it, of confiding it in secret, of luring it out into the open—the specific pleasure of the true discourse on pleasure” (71). These seem to be precisely the pleasures that Moll/Frith offers: “The Life and Death” *and The Roaring Girl* are almost entirely devoted to discovering and exposing Moll, wondering about her and telling about her, capturing her forcibly (as Sir Wengrave imagines doing), and even forcing her to expose herself (as Laxton tries to do at their meeting in the field). The pleasures of the comedy *are* the “pleasures of analysis” that Foucault describes (71).

Curiously, though, Moll is *more* exciting because she remains unknowable and inassimilable. Foucault writes that “the deployment of sexuality has its reason for being, not in reproducing itself, but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensible way” (107). However, in these texts featuring Moll/Frith, penetration remains intellectual, and the pleasure of the attempt is satisfying enough that the play does not find it necessary either to define finally what Moll is or to indicate that

she will be physically penetrated. Thus, in contrast to the modern discourses on sexuality that Foucault describes, controlling Moll/Frith does not seem to be an important objective. This suggests that early modern sexual groupings may have functioned differently from later sexual organizations developed in scientific discourses; while naming and punishing Moll is Sir Wengrave's objective, talking about Moll's erotic possibilities and attempting to understand them is not inherently regulatory or negative.

Moreover, because it relies on highly fluid definitions of sex, gender, and desire, the discourse that develops around Moll/Frith, though it draws connections between gender performance and erotic tendencies, is not the same as later models, such as inversion or transexuality, that developed in the 20th century. In many ways, the characters' interrogation of the relationship between these concepts enacts what Butler describes as an oppressive process of creating coherence and enforcing order, as I discuss in the Introduction; however, the process of seeking out causal relationships between Moll's sex, gender, and erotic tendencies is not as regulatory as one might expect, nor does it maintain a faith in essential categories of sex and gender: although the characters are interested in the idea of maleness and femaleness and how such physical categories relate to gender, desire, and sexual activity, they do not privilege any one of these concepts as more true or reliable than any of the others. Thus, although they clearly think these concepts are related, they cannot seem to pin any one concept down as foundational or essential, and for this reason the attempt to build stable logical connections does not work. Laxton, for instance, is able to accept the idea that Moll can be both male *and* female, and he seems to be as interested in homoerotic possibilities as in heteroerotic ones.

Butler argues that compulsory heterosexuality—which is frequently the focus of comedy in the Renaissance—is the regulatory imperative that requires the construction of gender binaries; however, what we see in this play is a more slippery understanding of the relationship between biological sex, gender, and desire. Butler writes of contemporary understandings that

desire is [believed to be] heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. The internal coherence of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality. This conception of gender presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire. (*Gender Trouble* 30-1)

This idea that desire is heterosexual does not appear to be a belief shared by early moderns. In *The Roaring Girl* and also in “The Life and Death,” we see the construction of a logic about the connection between Moll’s gender and her desire, which at first glance may appear to be based upon the same assumptions Butler describes here: that desire is heterosexual and therefore Moll’s masculinity might make her attracted to women and not attracted to men. However, in actuality, the sexual logic that develops to explain Moll/Frith remains highly related to prosthetics and focused on exterior truths: although Moll/Frith provokes an investment in the pleasures of revealing and exposing truth, discussions of Moll/Frith’s gender and desire rely largely on a logic of prosthetics that does not concern itself greatly with the question of whether Moll might really experience herself as a male in a woman’s body, with “male” erotic desires that can be

exercised through her female body because of her inherent “maleness” (as later discourses would explain it).

My analysis endorses the kind of differentiation and specificity that Traub calls for in “Desire and the Difference it Makes.” Traub argues for a closer inspection of the way that sex, gender, and desire are represented in early modern texts, stating,

Feminists need to theorize more accurately the specific relations between gender and sexuality, beginning by questioning the assumptions that this relationship is isomorphic and historically constant. For the purposes of dissecting this relationship, we must be willing to place sexuality at the centre, rather than on the implied periphery[...] To assume that gender *predicates* eroticism is to ignore the contradictions that have historically existed between these two inextricably related yet independent systems.

Gender is not equal to sexuality. (84)

The Roaring Girl deals repeatedly with the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality in a fashion that responds well to Traub’s approach. The play constantly combines and then separates the very concepts that Traub urges scholars to consider: the characters are initially concerned with how Moll’s biological sex relates to her masculine gender behavior; later, confusion (and fascination) about Moll tempts Laxton to wonder how her gender behavior and her questionable biological sex relate to her sexual behavior.

Moreover, “The Life and Death” begins with the fact of Frith’s resistance to marriage and works from there to identify how this observation about Frith’s erotic tendencies might relate to or even explain her masculinity. Overall, then, the texts reveal a fascination with Moll/Frith’s public displays of masculinity—her successful adoptions

of such masculinity-proving acts as sword-fighting and pickpocketing—but there is no assumption that the erotic possibilities they imagine for her must be related to any essential feelings or experiences of masculinity. The texts do not reveal a faith in biological sex as a deep truth or as an ultimate start-point or end-point for meaning, nor do these texts treat gender as essentially meaningful. The idea that Moll/Frith could account for herself as a man trapped in a woman’s body does not appear in these texts; rather, her phallic prosthetics and masculine behaviors are as likely to create her penetrating tendencies from the outside in as they are to result from an essential and internal experience of masculine identity or homoerotic desire.

Understandings of gender in these texts about Moll/Frith do not convey any confidence that masculinity is inherent or can be interior experience: masculinity circulates, “parts” circulate, and this triggers a logic by which desire and erotic acts can circulate as well. The reactions to Moll/Frith represented in these texts suggest that one reason for Renaissance fascination with her (and perhaps with other penetrating women as well) is because such a figure provides an exciting imaginative playground for an often pleasurable process of interrogation of possibilities of erotic difference when other differences are visible.

This example is helpful for defining the penetrating tendencies and the logic of lesbianism that I see in a variety of early modern texts. Contrary to what has been described in other histories of early modern sexuality, I read early modern texts as displaying an immense interest in causality when it comes to explaining women’s erotic tendencies (the acts in which people think they might engage and the acts in which people think they could not or would not engage). Fantasies about female erotic

experience develop out of ostensibly logic-based inquiry and not out of concepts of gender essentialism or of inherent erotic desires. In other words, assumptions about erotic tendencies develop within a system of logic-based questions, such as: If a woman wears penetrative clothing, will she also be erotically penetrative? If a woman dresses as a man, will she become one? These causal questions do not present sex, gender performance, or desire as inherently stable categories, but rather present all of the concepts as potentially transformable by the others. The fantasies and logics often work from the outside in, to consider how the adoption of the symbols and prosthetics of masculinity may relate not only to what a woman in masculine attire can *do* but also what she might *want to* or *not want to* do. In this way, the superficial penetrating symbolism of masculine apparel provokes a discourse about the relationship between sex, gender, desire, and aversion; at the core of this discourse is an assumption that gender deviance will result in or be the result of consistent erotic tendencies and aversions. What these literary representations of Mary Frith suggest, then, is that early moderns may have believed female erotic tendencies to be more consistent and more firmly connected to other aspects of women's visible and behavioral traits than has previously acknowledged. Such consistency in beliefs about masculine women's erotic tendencies constitutes an important early modern erotic classification.

CHAPTER III

BRITOMART'S DIVERSIONS

In my previous chapter, I suggest that women who are figured as penetrative and impenetrable in early modern texts are at the center of considerable erotic inquiry, ultimately prompting erotic fantasies that work through questions about the relationships between biological sex, gender, and erotic tendencies. The fantasies do not stem from an epistemology of biological essentialism in which biological sex, gendered behaviors, or heterosexual desire are assumed to be natural and stable; rather, the penetrative symbolism of male clothing, which is recognizably detachable and prosthetic within these texts, prompts curiosity about erotic possibilities and erotic desire.

In order to expand my analysis of this category of penetrating women, I move now to examine Edmund Spenser's representation of the penetrating, impenetrable character Britomart in *The Faerie Queene*. Britomart appears in a text that is already deeply preoccupied with the question of penetration: in Spenser's poem, different knights represent different virtues throughout the books, and the question of how individual experiences of penetrating desires and emotions can be reconciled with the knights' abilities to perform their quests and develop as autonomous, self-same embodiments of virtue remains one of the most difficult problems in the poem. This tension between virtue and vulnerability, as I will discuss, has been well observed in Spenser scholarship.

Britomart, like the other knights, struggles to fulfill her quest in *The Faerie Queene*. Britomart is Spenser's allegorical representation of Chastity, and she is told early on that she will eventually marry the Knight of Justice, Artegall, and produce royal heirs. Britomart has to reconcile these erotic and reproductive imperatives—which

require her to become emotionally and erotically vulnerable, transitioning from a state of virginity toward one of marital chastity—with her impulse to remain closed off to men and self-sufficient. However, there are additional layers to the poem’s representation of this penetrating female knight that have not been thoroughly explored in scholarship on the poem. Although all the knights work to find a functional balance between emotional vulnerability and martial strength,³⁰ the representation of Britomart also extensively explores the erotic implications of female penetrativeness and female impenetrability. As I discuss, armor was an established Renaissance metaphor for chastity. In this chapter, I argue that although the armor of chastity Britomart wears is ostensibly meant to preserve her body for marriage and heterosexual consummation, and although Britomart’s armor is specifically the protection she takes on as she embarks on her quest to find her future husband while still remaining chaste, the threat that Britomart may be self-sufficient and martially superior to men provokes fantasies of auoteroticism and homoeroticism that compete with her stated heterosexual quest. In the poem, the physical manifestation of chastity through the penetrative symbolism of Britomart’s knightly armor inspires fantasies of her erotic impenetrability and also of penetrative erotic alternatives for her. Additionally, Britomart’s own apparent fantasies and impulses continually divert her adventures away from heterosexual union and towards auto- and homoerotic alternatives.

As in the previous chapter on Moll Frith, my goal is not to claim a Renaissance character into a modern category of sexuality. However, Britomart exhibits tendencies

³⁰ Although I refer to martial strength in contrast to experiences of desire and emotional response, I do not mean to suggest that the knights’ quests are strictly martial in a larger sense. The knights’ quests are allegorically figured as martial quests that require them to “fight” various “enemies,” but these martial projects are of course ultimately metaphors for the threats to virtue that the knights must face.

toward intimate relationships with women and frequently seems to be averse to the possibility of heterosexuality in a way that largely fits with the taxonomical grouping of penetrating women I have proposed thus far. *The Faerie Queene* labors to define heterosexual relationships as one of many categories of relationships, different from familial relationships and from friendship. Few of the characters privilege heterosexual relationships over other bonds, though, and for Britomart especially, heterosexuality specifically competes with autoerotic and homoerotic possibilities. I argue in this chapter that Britomart's armor and weapons, while metonymical representations of her chastity, become the imaginative vehicle through which Britomart's reproductive quest is ultimately deferred and replaced by non-heteroerotic alternatives.

Because my analysis of *The Faerie Queene*, like many before it, must reckon with the poem's endlessly complex figurations of the various ideas I analyze in this chapter and find a way to rein in this uncontainable text, I have divided the chapter into three separate sections. Each section primarily works through a different part of my argument; although ideas are not neatly contained in the given sections, my hope is that these markers can help my reader by indicating moments when new aspects of the argument are added. The first section focuses on impenetrability. In it, I look at the poem's construction of the dangers of emotional vulnerability, and I consider how this construction relates to the poem's simultaneous reliance on armor as a metaphor for chastity, which is allegorically figured as erotic impenetrability. The second section builds on this argument to examine the erotic fantasies that develop as a result of Britomart's emotional/erotic impenetrability and her martial penetrativeness. The final section argues that the erotic diversions present throughout Britomart's narrative

culminate in violent female-female penetrations that ultimately take the place of Britomart's marriage.

I. Impenetrability

It might seem surprising to talk about the erotic impenetrability of a character whose defined quest in the text is marriage; however, it will be less surprising that my discussion of penetrating tendencies leads me to Spenser's poem. As I have mentioned, the relationship between erotic/emotional vulnerability and the fulfillment of martial imperatives is central to the poem, and not just in Britomart's story. Throughout Books I and II, and after Britomart's arrival in Book III, the poem figures emotional vulnerability and romantic/erotic desire as penetrating experiences that threaten quests and immobilize the knights. There is an overarching concern in the poem with whether and how characters can open themselves to others while still maintaining autonomy, exercising self-control, and fulfilling their duties to the Faerie Queene. Jeffrey Dolven explains this as a product of the ongoing tension between romance narrative and personification allegory throughout the poem. He argues that when we take the characters as allegorical personifications, the risk of self-loss through empathy is quite real:

[...] compassion is a peculiar vulnerability of the Spenserian character. Human solidarity has everything to do with the ability to convince ourselves we feel the same things. We regard a spectacle of suffering together, and are touched with the same pity; we argue with one another, and share feelings of strained love and anger. At least we like to think so. Within a strict system of personification allegory, however—a system invoked, if never fully realized, by Spenser's poem—that sense of feeling-

with is a threat to identity. If Anger storms into a room, followed somewhat later by scuffling Regret, we have a little allegory of the costs of losing your temper. But Anger cannot feel regret, nor can Regret feel anger, without the risk that the system of argument they inhabit together will lapse into incoherence. There is a structural prohibition against such commonalities. It is not strictly enforced, for Spenser's poem does not altogether play by its own rules, but the undersong of loneliness derives not least from the burden of these laws. (155)

Dolven's analysis is helpful for understanding one reason that emotional vulnerability is repeatedly linked with self-loss in the poem; as he explains, the knights exist both as characters and as allegorical representations. As allegories, their very purpose for being is threatened by the possibility of empathetic response.

As Dolven observes in this passage, though, "the poem does not always play by its own rules"; the poem is at once a personification allegory in which the characters statically represent the virtues Spenser sets out to explore, in the way that Dolven describes above, and also a romance in which the characters function as learning, changing people. As Dolven points out, this duality is an aspect of the poem that makes it relentlessly challenging to interpret. Still, the loss of self that can result from empathy and emotional vulnerability threatens the characters' chivalric projects as well. If the allegorical problem of empathy is the destruction of the allegory, being emotional penetrated is threatening to the knights in other places because such vulnerability directly contrasts with their ability to be martially penetrative. This contrast is evident in the very language of the poem, as emotional and romantic experiences are figured in martial

terms: for instance, love is figured as a “wound” or as “yielding” throughout the different books of the poem; similarly, things that induce emotion or sympathy are described as “thrilling” or “piercing.” This Petrarchan idea of love as a wound was of course not Spenser’s creation; the trope figures heavily throughout Renaissance poetry, and I will analyze Lyly’s use of the metaphor in my Coda on *Gallathea* as well. Still, Spenser’s figuration of emotional and erotic experiences as penetrating forces is at the center of *The Faerie Queene*’s exploration of self-fashioning; emotional vulnerability exists in tension with characters’ abilities to remain active in their quests.

Joseph Parry analyzes the way that emotional vulnerability and erotic desire conflict with martial ability for Scudamour in Book III. Parry argues that Spenser’s representation of this kind of self-conflict is deliberately Petrarchan, as Petrarch’s poetry is characterized by the conflict between desire for the beloved and an understanding that fulfillment of that desire threatens immortal existence. But Parry points out that Spenser’s representation of the immobilized lover is also a critique of Petrarchan figurations of love, and specifically the way that the lover’s fear of self-loss (for Petrarch, the loss of the relationship with God; for Spenser, the more general fear of losing autonomy or compromising personal quests or virtues) that would result from giving in to love and erotic desire creates self-reflexive stasis. “In fact,” Parry argues, “the most pressing danger that Petrarchan love poses [is that] [...] chaste, confused lovers (and poets), buffeted by the conflicted, self-reflexive energies of desire, imprison themselves in solitary, anxious self-consciousness” (24). In Parry’s explanation, love and desire threaten either to make one lose oneself completely or to make one entirely introspective to a similar point of immobility. The books figure various responses to the threat posed

by the penetrative experience of love: for instance, Scudamour is regularly immobilized by it, while Marinell attempts to avoid women completely in order to avoid this kind of wounding. Paridell, the opposite extreme, avoids the dangers of love by engaging in erotic acts without experiencing any kind of emotional attachment.

It is not only romantic love that must be managed or deferred in order for the knights to remain mobile, active, and honorable. The books imply that *all* emotional investment and experiences of empathy can produce the kind of immobility that Parry describes in the Petrarchan conceits. For example, in Book I, Arthur must overcome the penetrating effects of pity in order to act on behalf of the Redcrosse knight. Arthur finds Redcrosse imprisoned in the dark in Duessa's castle, and Redcrosse issues "piteous plaints," asking for death. Arthur is momentarily frozen by his emotional response to Redcrosse: "Which when that Champion heard, with percing point/ Of pittie deare his hart was thrilled sore,/ And trembling horreur ran through every ioynt,/ For ruth of gentle knight so fowle forlore:/ Which shaking off, he rent that yron dore,/ With furious force, and indignation fell" (I.viii.39). The stanza constructs emotional response as a penetrating experience, and the "percing point of pittie deare" as inherently counter to Arthur's quest; in order for Arthur to be able to "entre in" and rescue Redcrosse, he cannot let pity enter into his heart. He has to "shake off" his sympathy for Redcrosse in order to *act* on behalf of Redcrosse. What this establishes is that the reconciliation of emotional vulnerability with the other projects required of the knights is relentlessly difficult, and often unfulfilled.

The characters frequently respond to this incompatibility with violence, turning their fear of being penetrated by desire, beauty, or pity into aggressive offensive

penetration, often destroying the very people or things that evoke emotional response. Stephen Greenblatt has analyzed this aspect of the poem in his reading of Book II, where Guyon destroys the Bower of Bliss. In his postcolonial reading of the poem, which emphasizes Spenser's role in the violent suppression of Ireland, Greenblatt argues that *The Faerie Queene* illustrates a desire for release that must continually be deferred or renounced. For Greenblatt, this is part of the way civility is maintained and constructed through renunciation in the poem: release and pleasure are coupled with incivility and wildness, and therefore pleasure tempts characters not only to lose control, but to become the uncivil others they are attempting to regulate. As evidence, Greenblatt points out that even though Guyon supposedly destroys "excessive" pleasure and eroticism in the Bower of Bliss, the poem illustrates the considerable difficulty of differentiating between temperate (purposeful, moderate, enlightening, self-enhancing, useful) and excessive pleasure. According to Greenblatt, the only way to avoid the dangers of pleasure and desire, which threaten to destroy the civilized gentlemen, is by "pitiless destruction" and "constant vigilance and unrelenting pressure, exercised not only upon the wild Irish but upon the civilizing English as well" (187); Greenblatt argues that "In tearing down what both appealed to them and sickened them, they strengthened their power to resist dangerous longings, to repress antisocial impulses, to conquer the powerful desire for release" (183). Greenblatt's analysis helpfully explains the way that penetrative violence functions in the poem as a form of protection against emotional vulnerability. Overwhelmingly, the poem exists within an epistemology where the possibility of the emotional penetration that accompanies strong feelings like love or erotic desire is difficult to accept and make functional with other projects of self-fashioning and self-

constancy. In the face of this threat, as Greenblatt observes, characters often compensate for vulnerability with violence, fighting emotional penetration with martial penetrativeness.

In many ways, the poem's representation of Britomart fits into this epistemology in similar ways to the representations of the other knights, as I will demonstrate in this chapter: her experiences of desire are traumatic and painful; she frequently responds to moments of emotional vulnerability with violence toward others; and she seems to long for erotic and emotional fulfillment, while fearing that such fulfillment will lead to self-loss. Still, there are ways that the representation of a female knight within this framework also introduces specific complexities and tensions that result in different diversions, deferrals, and fantasies. It is of course true that *The Faerie Queene* generally presents complicated relationships between men and women—and resists showing successful marital relationships in particular. However *why* heterosexual love and unions are so difficult in the poem is the contested subject of much significant Spenser scholarship. One obstacle to marriage is anxiety about the impact of emotional vulnerability on martial ability. Additionally, Harry Berger has interpreted the various books of the text as a sustained education for the characters in learning to love other people well. Berger describes this education in terms of the difficulty of reconciling the individual with society, which he sees as a primary project of *The Faerie Queene*. In his reading, the overall structure of the books is progressive:

Spenser carries this development of self-consciousness and control through a series of phases, articulated by the major divisions of Books III, IV, and V.

To move from Chastity to Friendship and Justice is to move from problems of

concord within the self to problems of concord with others. Ideally, the development is founded on chastity, in which one keeps oneself from reducing other selves to mere objects of appetite or, conversely, in which one restrains the tendency utterly to escape from or to surrender to others in order to relieve the painful tensions caused by fear or desire. Chastity should lead to and be fulfilled by that equilibrium of separate selves Aristotle called friendship, which in turn cannot be properly maintained without the help of justice. Justice tempers one's attitude toward others so that their otherness—their differentness, independence, or even natural hostility—may be properly acknowledged and accepted. (35)

He specifies that “the most complex form of love is that which is fulfilled and symbolized by marriage—not simply love of friends, not simply attraction between male and female, not an affair of souls without bodies or of bodies without souls, but the richer and more difficult love between masculine and feminine *persons*” (34). Within his reading, it is logical for marriages to be delayed because the characters cannot achieve this “more difficult” union until they have worked to develop their own self-sameness, and to get along with friends and with family.

Although I agree with Berger that this kind of reconciliation is complicated, it is difficult to accept his notion that the books ultimately reveal a path to successful marital relationships; one obvious problem is that few of the central couples actually get married. I believe, counter to Berger, that the books of *The Faerie Queene* do not show the reader the ultimate value of marriage between a man and a woman—in fact, the books increasingly show marriage unions to be not only difficult, but also undesirable. For

Britomart, Books III through V illustrate an education—usually unsuccessful—that teaches her to face the fact that she must love (a complicated term to define in the poem, as I will discuss) the other sex and overcome what seems to be instinctive aversion to heterosexual relationships. Jonathan Goldberg’s *Endlesse Worke*, which focuses on the repeated deferrals in the text, notes the perpetual deferrals of marriage. He argues that *The Faerie Queene* continually disappoints our expectations by resisting conclusions, happy endings, and moments of unambiguous clarity and learning—and, he argues that this is what appeals to readers about the text: “those failed pleasures *are* the pleasures of this text” (3). This contradicts Berger’s interpretation that good marriages between equals are the goal of the book, and it helpfully encourages us to consider why these deferrals could be considered pleasurable. In the “freeplay” (to use Goldberg’s description) or “serious play” (to use Berger’s) or “imaginative groundplot” (to use A.C. Hamilton’s) of *The Faerie Queene*, what are the pleasures alternative to endings and marriage, and how does the text encourage us to fantasize these pleasures?

The poem’s representation of Britomart, as I have suggested, fixates on the erotic implications of Britomart’s impenetrability, and her martial identity evokes fantasies of non-heteroerotic alternative pleasures. Even though in theory, Britomart has to make herself erotically penetrable in order to fulfill her quest to establish a procreative relationship with Artegall, this proves to be difficult. In understanding Britomart’s erotic development, it is helpful to think of Britomart as both an allegorical representation of chastity and also a character undergoing a learning process; as Dolven points out, the characters are sometimes static representations, but they also undergo *bildung*, becoming more the traits they are supposed to represent. Thus, although Britomart can be

understood as a representation of chastity, she also has to undergo quests that teach her to be chaste, and the obstacles to her chaste marital ending usually come in the form of homo- and autoerotic erotic deferrals.

There are reasons to read Britomart's presence as a representation of chastity as curious; it is not actually clear what Britomart is doing in *The Faerie Queene* at all. Book I represents ideal chastity in Una, and representations of perfect female chastity continue to multiply throughout all the books; in fact, many of these women are represented as *the most* chaste—more chaste perhaps than Britomart, who is supposed to be chastity itself. The other chaste women in *The Faerie Queene* embody chastity differently, and they protect their chastity differently. While most of the female characters struggle to defend themselves from rape and other male advances, Britomart is the Knight of Chastity who defends chastity more broadly—her own and others'. She is a complicated combination of chastity itself and the thing that protects and allows chastity to be. This circular understanding of chastity (as self-protective and simultaneously needing protection) actually represents a standard Renaissance paradox, which Nancy Miller has analyzed in Juan Luis Vives' influential *Instruction of a Christen Woman*, the conduct book for women commissioned by Catharine of Aragon for Mary Tudor. Miller points out that Vives mystifies chastity through two contradictory metaphors: chastity as an economic treasure that needs to be protected, and chastity as the armor that (circularly) protects women's chastity. In the latter martial metaphor, a chaste woman "must arm herself with 'holy chastity,' the quality that allows her a measure of divine protection against the 'darts' of evil lust" (Miller 140, citing Vives). The unchaste woman, who lacks this armor, is paradoxically *actively* responsible for the way that being looked at threatens her

“treasure”—“the visible maid penetrates the mind of the gazer, ‘like a sword’” (Miller, citing Vives, 139). By contrast, chastity veils a woman in shamefastedness—according to Miller, this “companion virtue works with chastity’s armor, protecting the woman’s virtue by veiling the body and replacing the woman’s physical image with an image of the purity of her chaste mind” (140).

In Book I, Una’s chastity is frequently represented by and protected by her veil. The veil is introduced as soon as we meet Una: “A lovely lady rode him fair beside,
Upon a lowly Asse more white then snow,/ Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide/
Under a vele, that wimpled was full low [...]/ So pure an innocent, as that same lamb,
She was in life and every virtuous lore[...].” (I.i.4-5). Una’s veil is a physical manifestation of one of Vives’ metaphors for chastity. He writes:

The inseparable companions of chastity are a sense of propriety and modest behavior. Chastity (pudicitia) seems to be derived from shame (pudor), so that one who has no sense of shame cannot be chaste. Chastity is a kind of veil placed over our face, for when nature and reason covered the corrupt body and the sinful flesh because of the shame caused by the first sin but left the face open and free of the coverings that we wear, they did not deny its cloak, namely, shame. With this covering it could gain human approval so that no one could see it without recognizing that great virtue lay under that covering, and there was none who did esteem one so clothed or hate one who was without it. (113)

Vives’ veil is metaphorical—a woman need not actually cover herself, and in fact Vives condemns the covering of the face with make-up and the licentiousness that comes with

wearing masks at balls. By this logic, it should be unnecessary for Una to wear a veil to preserve her chastity, and it is indeed the case that being veiled and being unveiled tend to perform the same function for Una. Una's physical veil demonstrates her modesty, but it generally functions in concord with the non-physical veil of shamefastedness underneath it—taking off the veil usually has the effect of preserving her by revealing the kind of non-physical veil of virtuousness that Vives describes. For instance, Una unveils and thereby protects herself in Canto III; thinking she is alone, “From her faire head her fillet she undight,/ And laid her stole aside” (I.iii.4). Exposing her true beauty saves her from a physical attack:

It fortun'd out of the thickest wood
A ramping Lyon rushed suddainly,
Hunting full greedie after salvage blood;
Soone as the royall virgin he did spy,
With gaping mouth at her ran greedily,
To have attonce devour'd her tender corse:
But to the pray when as he drew more ny,
His bloudie rage asswaged with remorse,
And with the sight amazd, forgot his furious forse.

In stead thereof he kist her wearie feet,
And lickt her lilly hands with fawning tong,
As her her wronged innocence did weet.
O how can beautie maister the most strong,

And simple truth subdue avenging wrong?
Whose yielded pride and proud submission,
Still dreading death, when she marked long,
Her hart gan melt in great compassion,
And drizzling tears did shed for pure affection. (I.iii.5-6)

The Lyon's "force" is "subdued," and he "yields" to Una, then, because her unveiled face reveals her innocent, true beauty, which "maisters" him. The Lyon subsequently devotes himself to being "a strong gard/ Of her chast person" (I.iii.9). Una's face, then, has functioned as a successful protector of her self and her chastity in two ways: the truth visible in her unveiled visage deters the Lyon's attack, and it also gains her an actual protector who will help protect her chastity later.

Still, Una's veil and her natural veil of shamefastedness do not always have the chastity-preserving capacity that they should. For one thing, veils can serve to entice as well as protect. Similarly, Una's exposed beauty can be more arousing than chastening; for instance Sansloy is not deterred by her face in the way that the lion is, perhaps because, being human, he is less closely allied with the natural laws of chastity that the Lion automatically observes. Sansloy pulls off Una's veil and becomes more excited: "By her garment catching hold,/ Her from her palfrey pluckt, her visage to behold/ [...]But he was stout, and lust did now inflame/ His corage more" (I.iii.40-1). Clearly Una's chastity in the book does not have the unlimited to protect her that Vives suggests. In his description of ultimate virginity, Vives describes Mary thus:

They say that the Blessed Virgin was of such modesty and composure in her actions and in her whole body that if any lascivious look were directed

at her, that loathsome fire would immediately be extinguished like a live coal that has fallen into the water, or as some radiating force of continence and temperance held in check the perverse desires of those who looked at her and converted their feelings to her own nature. (127)

Una's face sometimes inspires imitation of her goodness, but it is not fail-proof and she frequently needs outside help to preserve her chastity. The image of ideal beauty and chastity we see in Book I, then, is not entirely stable, but Una's chastity does remain intact. Like Florimell's and Amoret's, Una's chastity is defensive: it tries to guard itself, but true beauty is occasionally unable to deter lust.

Given this fallibility in the chastity veil, it is not entirely surprising that Spenser should offer further examples of chastity. It is perhaps necessary that Una's vulnerable and penetrable veil of shamefastness should harden into a more protective shield in order for the Knight of Chastity to consistently defend herself. The precariousness of the other women's chastity points to the need for a good suit of chastity armor for Britomart. What is strange, though, is that Vives' martial metaphor only really describes chastity as a kind of shield: it protects and guards. By contrast, Britomart's armor is primarily represented through her magic spear, and she is more likely to penetrate the people she encounters than to simply protect herself from them; Britomart's spear functions as a more complex emotional/erotic representation than Una's veil or the shield Vives imagines. And although most of the women who appear after Book I are not dressed as Britomart is, Britomart seems to be representative of the more martial atmosphere of the later books, where reconciling a couple is not as simple as lifting a veil; the later books increase the antagonism between men and women, ultimately giving up on heterosexual

union almost entirely even as the books try to define an ideal marriage. The poem does not just present two different metaphors for chastity (the veil and armor), then; it *progresses* towards the martial and overwhelmingly replaces heterosexual union with eroticized violence. In the case of Britomart specifically, the armor becomes the vehicle that usually draws her away from Artegall.

Whether she guards herself as protection from rape and her own fallibility, or whether, as I argue later, she guards herself from the heterosexual union she is not sure she wants, Britomart's embodiment of chastity as a kind of martial guard becomes more and more difficult to reconcile with the generative plot we know she has to live out. The poem's explicit focus on her marriage to Artegall is complicated by her own allegorical mission to be the Knight of Chastity.³¹ Moreover, the poem does not actually make it clear what her mission *is*. While Redcrosse has to rescue Una's parents, Guyon has to stop Acrasia, and Artegall has to save Irena, Britomart is not called as clearly on a specific quest, and we do not know what the Knight of Chastity is required to do—is she supposed to be chaste? To help others be chaste? Or to marry Artegall? The Book III Proem explains that the book will be about chastity, but this explanation primarily focuses on the problem of how chastity can be represented through art as effectively as Elizabeth represents it in her own person; in fact, the Proem does not mention Britomart

³¹ My reading here is in contrast to Sheila Cavanaugh's argument in *Wanton Eyes and Chaste Desires*; Cavanaugh argues that Britomart's version armor shelters her and makes her an unrealistic model of chastity—she states that “Britomart's disguise, as well as the company of her nurse, helps distance her from the traumatic chases endured by other women. Britomart's function within the marital economy is too important for her to become mixed up in the troubles facing other virtuous women” (106). Cavanaugh sees Britomart as separate from the other women in the book because of her cross-dressing, assuming that Britomart's role as the Knight of Chastity is to become a chaste wife, and not to protect her own and other women's chastity from the violence of heterosexual union. I understand Britomart's progress toward marital chastity to be much less smooth.

by name, and the narrator encourages Elizabeth to choose the representation of chastity that most pleases her—“either Gloriana let her chuse,/ Or in Belphoebe fashioned to bee;/ In th’one her rule, in th’other her chastitee” (III.proem.5).³² Thus, the proem does little to define Britomart’s purpose, instead drawing our attention to the multiple representations of chastity we have already seen in the poem.

Spenser’s letter to Raleigh, which introduces the poem, offers a more clear assertion that Britomart is supposed to represent chastity, but Britomart’s mission remains murky here, too—in fact, she seems to appear only to intrude upon a mission meant for Scudamour. Spenser lists her amongst the “patrones” of the twelve virtues, saying “The third of Britomartis is a lady knight, in whome I picture Chastitie” (16). As background to the different books in the poem, Spenser’s letter describes the Faerie Queene’s festival, where new knights are called on quests each day. After Redcrosse is called to help Una on Day One and Guyon is called to stop Acrasia on Day Two, Spenser describes the third mission as Scudamour’s:

The third day there came in, a Groome who complained before the Faerie Queene, that a vile Enchanter called Busirane had in hand a most faire Lady called Amoretta, whom he kept in more grievous torment, because she would not yield him the pleasure of her body. Whereupon Sir Scudamour the lover of that Lady presently tooke on him that adventure.

³² Susan Frye notes the absence of Britomart from the proem as well; she argues that the focus on Elizabeth in the proem is an indication that Book III “plays against the reader’s familiarity with court-defined chastity” and works to construct a distinction between Elizabeth’s sovereign, “unapproachable” virtue and the virtue that Britomart maintains against male assault. Frye attests that the poem’s “treatment of heterosexual union is at times the most violent of the texts I have encountered” (49), and thus Britomart’s struggles are necessarily contrasted with the Queen’s virtue.

But being unable to performe it by reason of the hard Enchantments,
after long sorrow, in the end met with Britomartis, who succoured him,
and reskewed his love.

But by this occasion hereof, many other adventures are intermedled, but
rather as Accidents, then intendments. As the love of Britomart, the
overthrow of Marinell, the misery of Florimell, the vertuousnes of
Belphoebe, the lasciviousnes of Hellenora, and many the like. (18)

While this gives us only a limited explanation of Britomart's quest—and while in many ways this backstory does not correlate with the way events unfold in Book III—Spenser's own account indicates that Britomart's primary quest is to take over for Scudamour and rescue Amoret, and “the love of Britomart” (whether towards Artegall or someone else) is an accident, tangent, or subplot.

Still, many critics have assumed that her purpose in the book is marriage, and many have considered her a failure. For instance, Berger acknowledges that Britomart is successful in fighting on behalf of other women, but he understands Book III as Britomart's “primitive,” “precourtship” stage of self-discovery; during this phase, Britomart erroneously imitates women of antiquity and because of this, she is “too masculine in behavior and too misanthropic in feeling” (95). However, in the “later phases” of her development she becomes more feminine and successful. Assuming that Britomart's primary prerogative is marriage, Berger assumes that the more complex figurations of her chastity represent failures in this project. Goldberg also sees Britomart as a failure in Book III:

Britomart disappears [after Book III], merging into a surrogate; she reappears four cantos later, after Book III has passed through its symbolic center, the Garden of Adonis, and after Britomart has been repeatedly replaced by surrogates—Florimell, Belphoebe, Amoret, and Hellenore. When she once again becomes the protagonist, she journeys on but fails to reach her goal. Finally, the new ending doubles her frustration with Amoret's and thereby robs Britomart's rescue of Amoret of its conclusive force; nonetheless, this episode represents a fitting end to a career that has been consistently eroded by the very structures of narration in Book III. Although we may finish the book in expectation of a happy ending, the new conclusion must focus our attention on all the signs that the narrative has been offering that urge the readers to give up these expectations: the disappearance of the heroine, her failure to be present at the center of the book, her insubstantial victory, her repeated wounds. (4)

In order to consider her victory “insubstantial,” it is necessary to define what a victory would be for the Knight of Chastity; Goldberg does not offer such a definition. He implies that Britomart triumphs partially in the original by helping Amoret get married, but fails by not finding and marrying Artegall herself, and that she only triumphs insubstantially by rescuing Amoret from Busirane in the second edition—even though Scudamour seems to consider this a difficult task.³³ While it is not part of my project to rescue Britomart from accusations of failure, it is relevant to consider why numerous

³³ Spenser published two different editions or installments of *The Faerie Queene*; the first (in 1590) included only Books I-III, while the second (in 1596) re-published Book III with revised final cantos and added Books IV-VI. Spenser planned Books VII-XII but never completed them.

critics read Britomart as a failure without, apparently, feeling it necessary to explain how we know what Britomart's quest is supposed to be, not simply as Artegall's future wife, but as the poem's allegorical representation of chastity. Critical belief in Britomart's failure demonstrates the way that she is introduced in an explicitly heterosexual marriage storyline that seems, for whatever reason, to exist only in contrast to her actual adventures and erotic encounters.

It is true that seeking Artegall is what prompts Britomart to leave home, which in part justifies critics' claims that the marriage is her quest. However, like the other knights whose journeys are divided into sub-quests (for instance, several knights have the long-term mission of serving the Faerie Queene, a mission that leads to their actual finite quests in the different books), Britomart has to perform smaller quests along the way. The tasks she undertakes are consistently the ones that other male knights cannot perform. In a sense, Britomart's quest is to be a substitute for knights who are not as potent as she is: she draws her spear to protect Redcrosse at Malecasta's castle, she penetrates Busirane's castle when Scudamour cannot, and she battles Radigund in the place of Artegall. Her self-sufficiency and her similarity to the male knights is as if ultimately in conflict with her imperative to find Artegall and submit herself to him; as Cavanaugh, Berger, and Goldberg point out, Britomart is able to perform all the other knights' tasks successfully, but she does not fulfill her mission to marry Artegall because such a union is continually deferred or displaced.

II. Erotic Diversions

Regardless of what Britomart's actual quest is in *The Faerie Queene*, it is not entirely clear how Britomart feels about finding and marrying Artegall. This is the case

even early in Book III, when she sees Artegall's face in her father's magic mirror. If she is indeed in love with Artegall, her experience of that love is painful and traumatic, but it is not entirely justifiable to read Britomart's continual feelings of aversion and fear about marrying Artegall as simply her chaste response to her strong feelings of attraction, as Berger suggests we should. Lauren Silberman has read the separate books of *The Faerie Queene* as "in fundamental ways essays[...], attempts at examining a given subject [...]. Each individual book proceeds from a different set of intellectual assumptions in an effort to explore a different intellectual problem" (3). In categorizing the separate epistemologies of the books, Silberman argues that in contrast to Book I, which figures "the typological evocation of revealed truth" through struggles with falsehood—"the illusion received through the senses"—Book III presents knowledge as unstable, temporary, and subject to the senses. Silberman describes the epistemology of Book III as one "of learned ignorance, which de-emphasizes origins and focuses on the growth of knowledge [...] [and] treats knowledge as an evolutionary process" (21). Although Silberman reads the starting point of this knowledge journey—the thing that is sure from the beginning—as Britomart's desire for Artegall, I draw on her explanation of the book's epistemology in another way. The mirror scene, in which Britomart first sees Artegall's face, does not definitively reveal Britomart's desire for Artegall—rather, it reveals her desire to desire Artegall. It is true that in Book III Canto II, the tale of the magic mirror is framed as a love story. The argument refers to "The wondrous myrrhour, by which she/ in love with him did fall," and the narrator prefaces the flashback by explaining, "By straunge occasion she did him behold,/ And much more straungely gan to love his sight,/ As it in bookes hath written beene of old" (III.ii.18). Still, Britomart's

experience of seeing Artegall's face in the mirror, and her subsequent acceptance that she is in love with him, is not what we might expect.

The mirror Britomart finds in her father's closet shows "What ever thing was in the world contaynd,/ Betwixt the lowest earth and hevens hight,/ So that it to the looker appertaynd" (III.ii.19); interpreting things that appear in the mirror is thus open-ended. The mirror may reveal the looker's secret desires, or it may simply reveal things that do or will affect the viewer (Hamilton glosses "so that" and "provided that"); it may also distort things "so that" they *seem* to appertain (whether or not they really do). In the case of Britomart's father, the mirror is a defensive tool, revealing enemies so that "never foes his kingdome might invade" (III.ii.21); Britomart's mirror-vision eventually puts her in a similarly militant defensive position against a different kind of invasion. At first, though, Britomart is indifferent to the "manly face" that appears in the mirror: "The Damzell well did vew his Personage,/ And liked well, ne further fastned not,/ But went her way: ne her unguilty age/ Did weene, unwares, that her unlucky lot/ Lay hidden in the bottome of the pot" (III.ii.24, 26). In other words, Britomart is initially unperturbed by the face, and she has no idea that her destiny is "hidden" there. The reference "her unlucky lot" fits with the poem's construction of love's difficulties; Britomart will go on to have considerable difficulty facing and actualizing her destiny. However, the idea that Artegall is "her unlucky lot" seems not only an apt description of her difficulty in finding Artegall, but also of her difficulty accepting that marriage and motherhood are her destiny. When she first sees the face, Britomart is indifferent to marriage—she views marriage as an eventual obligation. Britomart expects to be married—"Not that she lusted after any one;/ For she was pure from blame of sinfull blot,/ Yet wist her life at laste must lincke in

that same knot” (III.ii.23). Britomart’s “unguiltiness” and purity are appropriate for a chaste young woman—Vives believes that a woman shouldn’t fall in love until she has been told who her husband will be.

What is odd about Britomart is that in the time that follows her mirror-vision, she becomes ill, troubled by the “faire image” of Artegall in the way that a Petrarchan virgin should be—but she also becomes convinced that the image she saw was of a shadow or perhaps of herself. This is despite the fact that in her initial vision she recognizes Artegall as a man and that she apparently knows the “virtues rare” of her father’s mirror (III.ii.22). Eventually, Britomart becomes so distressed and melancholy that her nursemaid Glauce convinces her to share “the secret of her hart” (III.ii.34). Glauce promises that she will help Britomart either overcome her love or find a way to fulfill it. Britomart explains that she thinks the love she feels is impossible:

For no no usual fire, no usual rage
Yt is, O Nourse, which on my life doth feed,
And sucks the blood, which from my hart doth bleed.
But since thy faithful zeale lets me not hyde
My crime, (if crime it be) I will it reed.
Nor Prince, nor pere it is, whose love hath grynde
My noble brest of late, and launched this wound wyde. (III.ii.37)

Britomart says that her love is for “the shape or semblant of a knight” (III.ii.38). Glauce tells Britomart that her love cannot be that bad, saying, “Of much more uncouth thing I was affrayd;/ Of filthie lust, contrary unto kind” (III.ii.40); Glauce gives examples of “uncouth” loves by reminding Britomart of Ovidian instances of incest and bestiality.

But Britomart is not comforted, arguing that “Yet they did possesse their horrible intent:/ Short end of sorrowes they therby did finde;/ So was their fortune good, though wicked were their minde” (III.ii.43). Britomart compares her love to Narcissus’s, “Who having viewed in fountaine shere/ His face, was with the love thereof beguyld;/ I fonder love a shade, the body far exyld” (III.ii.44). The reference to Narcissus is important; on one level, it suggests that Britomart thinks her beloved does not exist, which would support the idea that Britomart’s quest begins with the need to find Artegall. But the reference to Narcissus also suggests that Britomart thinks the face she sees in the mirror is her own; her description that the mirror image was “the shape or semblant of a knight” supports this, as it is Britomart who will take on the shape and semblance of a knight. Britomart’s response to the mirror image evolves into a complicated web of substitutions, in which Britomart imagines self-love in the place of heteroerotic love, and then subsequently makes herself into the image of the knight she sets out to seek. Britomart’s description of her fear in these passages suggests that her biggest fear is that she has desires that cannot be fulfilled (even though, as Glauce tells her and as she already knows, the mirror supposedly reveals the face of a real person). The references to illicit or impossible erotic scenarios throughout this canto foreshadow the way that Britomart’s journey toward heteroerotic chastity will continue to be diverted by non-procreative, non-heteroerotic alternatives. Though ostensibly in love with Artegall, then, Britomart develops a complicated fantasy in which her love is re-directed.

This scene represents an example of the kind of erotic transference that continues to divert Britomart throughout many later episodes: recognizing that she must eventually marry, and perhaps recognizing that she is in love with (or destined to marry) the man she

saw in the mirror, Britomart becomes inexplicably obsessed with the idea that her feelings are impossible or illicit. The poem establishes Britomart's primary response to heterosexual relationships as aversion, and it prompts Glauce to wonder, "why make ye such Monster of your mynde?" (III.ii.40). It is unclear why Britomart makes these "monsters"; Britomart may respond in this way because she is frightened by her desire for Artgeall, because she is frightened by the idea that marriage to Artegall is her destiny, or because the poem is unable to fully imagine her desires as heteroerotic. Regardless, Britomart has to be told that what she is experiencing is love and the desire for marriage and children. It is Merlin who informs her of her destiny in no uncertain terms, and it is Merlin who constructs this narrative of a love story. He tells her,

It was not, Britomart, thy wandring eye,
Glauncing unwares in charmed looking glas,
But the streight course of heavenly destiny,
Led with eternall providence, that has
Guyded thy glaunce, to bring his will to pas:
Ne is thy fate, ne is thy fortune ill,
To love the prowest knight, that ever was.
Therefore submit thy wayes unto his will,
And doe by all dew meanes thy destiny fulfill. (III.iii.24)

Merlin's reference to "the streight course" of destiny rings hollow in a poem that *constantly* wanders, and his claim that Artegall is "the prowest knight, that ever was" seems similarly exaggerated when we compare him to Britomart. Britomart attempts to follow Merlin's instructions to "submit" when she disguises herself and goes to find

Artegall. Thus, her epistemological journey does not begin—as Silberman claims—when she “puts on armor as a pragmatic means of achieving her desire” (21). Her epistemological journey begins when she realizes what she is supposed to desire: an heir-generating marriage to Artgall. Merlin’s revelation conflicts with her experience with the mirror and the things she fantasizes she sees. Britomart’s primary fear when she thinks she sees herself in the mirror is that self-love (and other “monstrous loves”) cannot be satisfied—at this point she envies even the scenarios of bestiality that Glauce describes to her because she imagines that they are at least possible to consummate.

Her quest as she imagines it, then, is to find an object for her love. According to Merlin, the object is Artgall, but this is not Britomart’s primary concern. The education she is supposed to receive is that she has one single erotic/sexual destiny, but her experiences introduce her to other kinds of desire and fulfillment that compete with this imperative. Britomart cannot be said to follow Merlin’s “streight course”; instead, she goes to find Artgall by dressing as the image she saw and proving herself a better knight than he is. By this, I mean that Britomart’s adventures as a cross-dressed knight repeatedly initiate when Britomart has to substitute for male knights who cannot complete their missions. These instances of Britomart playing other knights’ roles prompt further occasions for erotic transference and substitution. In fact, even to say that Britomart goes to find Artgall is erroneous, as Glauce can only convince Britomart to go by telling her stories of “many wemen valorous/ Which have full many feats adventurous/ Performd, in paragone of proudest men” (III.iii.54)—Glauce’s stories are so inspiring to Britomart “that great desire/ Of warlike armes in her forthwith they tynd,/ And generous stout courage did inspyre” (III.iii.57). Britomart’s epistemological journey

is supposed to be a journey towards accepting Merlin's truth as her own truth, but it continually grows in other directions, never actually coming to fruition.

The erotic alternatives that circulate in the mirror episode are repeated and expanded elsewhere in the poem. For instance, Britomart seems to seek autoerotic release after the Redcrosse knight describes Artegall to her; at this point, she has not met Artegall, and so she relies on other characters to describe him. Redcrosse describes Artegall's valor for Britomart, and as she travels afterward, she tries to imagine Artegall based on Redcrosse's portrayal. She

Grew pensive through that amorous discourse,
By which the Redcrosse knight did earst display
Her lovers shape, and chevalrous aray;
A thousand thoughts she fashiond in her mind,
And in her feigning fancie did pourtray
Him such, as fittest she for love could find,
Wise, warlike, personable, courteous, and kind. (III.iv.5)

As in the mirror scene, Britomart's concept of Artegall is subject to a series of translations over which she has no power: just as the mirror ambiguously showed the things "so that they appertain" to her, and as Merlin interpreted her feelings for her, now Redcross's "display" of "her lovers shape, and chivalrous array" leaves Britomart with only an ambiguous representation of her future husband. The primary action of the stanza is that Britomart "grew pensive," which is also ambiguous: perhaps she grows preoccupied with the pleasure of thinking about the amorous possibilities that presented themselves as she listened to Redcrosse, or perhaps she grows anxious after Redcrosse's

“amorous discourse,” in which Redcrosse praised the man Britomart knows she is destined to marry. Either way, her direct response is to “fashion in her mind” the imagined person “as fittest she for love could find”; once again the person she imagines she would most desire is similar to herself, for it is Britomart who is the most “wise, warlike, personable, curteous, and kind” in the book (certainly the most “kind” to herself). That Britomart satisfies her “feigning fancie” by imagining a self-sufficient erotic scenario is reinforced in the next stanza: “With such selfe-pleasing thoughts her wound she fed,/ And thought so to beguile her grievous smart[.]” (III.iv.6). The language the poem uses to describe Britomart’s attempt to alleviate her yearning alone through “selfe-pleasing” thoughts is almost masturbatory; Britomart tries to trick her desire—which is either a real desire for Artegall specifically or, as suggested in the mirror scene, a desire for *an object* towards which she can direct her erotic feelings—by feeding her “wound” through her own fantasy.

Eve Sedgwick has written at length about the importance of representations of autoeroticism for queer scholarship; as Sedgwick has pointed out, although “self-pleasing” is now generally considered a step or supplement in the development of “normal” sexuality, autoeroticism has its own important history within the history of sexuality. Sedgwick points out that before categories of sexual identity became focused on hetero/homo distinctions in the 20th century, autoeroticism—the idea of self-absorption, of self-love, of an addiction to “self-abuse”—was an important early category of sexual tendencies. Analyzing Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, Sedgwick says, “One sexual identity that did exist as such in Austen’s time, already bringing a specific genital practice into dense compaction with issues of consciousness, truth, pedagogy, and

confession, was that of the onanist[...] . It is of more than chronological import if the (lost) identity of the masturbator was the proto-form of modern sexual identity itself' (*Tendencies* 116-8). Its history is different from, but important for disrupting, the history of hetero/homosexual tensions:

[Onanism] is unlike heterosexuality, whose history is difficult to construct because it masquerades so readily as History itself; it is unlike homosexuality, for centuries the crimen nefandum or 'love that dare not speak its name,' the compilation of whose history requires acculturation in a rhetoric of the most pointed preterition. Because it escapes both the narrative of reproduction and (when practiced solo) even the creation of any interpersonal trace, it seems to have an affinity with amnesia, repetition or the repetition compulsion, and ahistorical or history-rupturing rhetorics of sublimity. [...] [It is] a practice which, itself relatively traceless, may seem distinctively to threaten the orders of propriety and property. And seen in the context of hierarchically oppressive relations between genders and between sexualities, masturbation can seem to offer—not least as an analogy to writing—a reservoir of potentially utopian metaphors and energies for independence, self-possession, and a rapture that may owe relatively little to political or interpersonal abjection.

(111)

Although Sedgwick places the development of the onanist, as an identity category, much later than the Renaissance, her description of the way the onanist was represented in the Victorian period is actually similar to the representation of Britomart in this section of the

book; restless, dissatisfied, unable to focus, distraught, and ashamed, the autoerotic girl develops in “the idleness and isolation of an improperly supervised youth” (122).

Sedgwick’s analysis of Mariane is remarkably applicable to Britomart as well; she notes, “the self-sufficiency in Marianne is radiantly attractive to almost everyone, female and male, who views her” (120). However, if Marianne represents 19th-century fears about the masturbating girl, as Sedgwick argues, Britomart does not; if in Marianne, autoeroticism “signifies an excess of sexuality,” and “[her] autoeroticism is not defined in opposition to her alloerotic bonds, whether with men or with women” (120), Britomart’s autoerotic fantasies—like her homoerotic diversions—stem from something other than sexual excess. Britomart is the Knight of Chastity, who is continually praised for her virtue—even directly before the “self-pleasing” stanzas, the narrator describes Britomart in superlative terms, noting that other brave warrior women throughout history “cannot with noble Britomart compare,/ As well for glory of great valiaunce,/ As for pure chastitie and vertue rare” (III.iv.3). For Britomart, auto- and homoerotic encounters are represented in direct contrast with heteroerotic consummation, not in terms of sexual excess. Here, presented with the idea of her future husband, Britomart imagines him as a kind of mirror image and tries to resolve her desire alone. Her attempt fails:

But her smart was much more grievous bred,
And the deepe wound more deepe engorged her hart,
That nought but death her dolour mote depart.
So forth she rode without repose or rest,
Searching all lands and each remotest part,
Following the guidance of her blinded guest [(love)],

Till that to the sea-coast at length she her addrest. (III.iv.6)

Reaching the beach, still searching for relief, Britomart apostrophizes to the “God of winds” to “At last blow up some gentle gale of ease” (III.iv.10). Glauce tries to calm Britomart and “give her good reliefe” by reminding her not of Artegall but of “hope of those, which Merlin had her told/ Should of her name and nation be chiefe,/ And fetch their being from the sacred mould/ Of her immortal wombe” (III.iv.11). Ignoring these supposedly comforting assurances that she will be the mother of rulers, though, Britomart is immediately distracted by an approaching figure, and she finds relief through penetrative violence. The poem is explicit about the way that Britomart’s erotic yearning is transformed into violence: spying the stranger,

Her dolour soone she ceast, and on her dight

Her helmet, to her Courser mounting light:

Her former sorrow into suddein wrath,

Both coosen passions of distroubled spright,

Converting, forth she beates the dustie path;

Love and despight attonce her courage kindled hath. (III.iv.12)

Rage and desire are “coosen passions,” and thus this Canto demonstrates two ways that Britomart deals with experiencing sexual arousal: by enjoying it privately (“self-pleasing”) or by expressing it with her sword or spear. Marinell encourages Britomart to “retyre” and avoid the fight, but she is “ythrilled with deepe disdain of his proud threat” and draws her “sharpe spear.” Marinell “stroke her full on the brest,” but Britomart wins the battle when “she againe him in the shield did smite/ With so fierce furie and great puissance,/ That through his threesquare scuchin percing quite,/ And through his mayled

hauberque by mischaunce/ The wicked steele through his left side did glaunce” (III.iv.16); piercing Marinell and expending her agitated energy through fighting relieves Britomart of her “dolour.” She leaves the coast; as she goes, she sees piles of jewels, but she ignores them “for all was in her powre” (III.iv.18). This final description (“all was in her powre”) reinforces the idea that what Britomart finds through her violent attack on Marinell is autonomy and self-sufficiency—which competes with the possibility of being emotionally vulnerable. Fighting Marinell, she ensures her own power over herself and others, and fighting Marinell allows her to ignore the “smart” of her unfulfilled desire.

The episode merges two concepts of self-sufficiency that continue to dominate the poem’s representation of Britomart. Faced with the lack of Artegall, whom she has been told will alleviate the need she experiences for an object of desire, Britomart diverts her energy away from finding Artegall and instead chooses either to fulfill the desire alone or to expend it in another non-procreative fashion. That this canto frames Britomart’s violent—potentially life-threatening—fight with Marinell with Glauce’s reminder that Britomart is *supposed* to be on a quest to procreate places Britomart’s erotic options in direct competition with each other. Armor and fighting, though nominally the *vehicle* for Britomart to reach her procreative potential with Artegall, actually replace and threaten that potential. Britomart is most attracted to self-pleasing, to violence, and even to death—“the deepe wound more deepe engorged her hart,/ That nought but death her dolour mote depart” (III.iv.6). The poem’s construction of Britomart’s erotic diversion is largely based on a fantasy of self-sufficiency, which ultimately follows a queer course, not a straight one. Prone to imagining herself as the ideal lover for herself, and martially competent enough to expend sexual energy by penetrating other knights with her sword

in lieu of ensuring her marriage, the poem imagines more and more erotic possibilities for Britomart, none of which involve procreative sexuality.

Elsewhere in the poem, Britomart's self-sufficiency is in competition with heteroerotic union because Britomart's "mastery of the male role" (to return to Orgel's category of militant women that I reference in the Introduction) places her into homoerotic relationships. In fact, the first time we see Britomart in an explicitly erotic situation is in Malecasta's castle; this episode begins, like most others involving Britomart, with Britomart taking over a mission for a less successful knight. Here, Britomart stumbles upon Redcrosse at the gates of Malecasta's castle. Redcrosse refuses to swear allegiance to Malecasta, and the castle's six guards are all fighting him. Although he is holding his own, he has "lost much bloud, through many a wound" (III.i.21). Britomart, "rushing through the thickest presse," subdues the knights with her spear and chastises their chivalric failings, defending Redcrosse's allegiance to Una:

Certes (said she) then bene ye sixe to blame,
To weene your wrong by force to justifie:
For knight to leave his ladie were great shame,
That faithfull is, and better were to die.
All losse is lesse, and lesse the infamie,
Then losse of love to him, that loves but one;
Ne may love be compeld by maisterie;
For soone as maisterie comes, sweet love anone
Taketh his nimble wings, and soone away is gone. (III.i.25)

Britomart's martial success and her compelling speech demonstrate that she exceeds the other knights in skill and in virtue. After Britomart rescues Redcrosse and reminds the knights of the value of constancy, she chooses to enter the castle rather than continuing immediately on her way. Before she attacks the knights, Britomart learns that Malecasta is "a Ladie faire" who forces travelers to remain in her service forever, forgoing their former loves unless they can win a battle. Britomart asks, "But what reward had he that overcame [in the fight]?" and the response is, "He should advaunced be to high regard,/ (Said they) and have our ladies love for his reward" (III.i.27). When the knights subsequently surrender to Britomart, they tell her,

For thy faire Sir, yours be the Damozell,
Which by her owne law to your lot doth light,
And we your liege men faith unto you plight.
So underneath her feet their swords they mard,
And after her besought, well as they might,
To enter in, and reape the dew reward:
She graunted, and then in they all together far'd. (III.i.30)

Given that Britomart knows Malecasta's bargain, it is a little surprising that Britomart agrees to enter the Castle of Bad Chastity in order to meet the woman she has apparently won; Britomart is in a martially superior position and presumably does not have to accept her "dew reward" unless she chooses to. More surprisingly, even though Britomart is aware that she has won Malecasta, she acts as though she is ignorant of Malecasta's subsequent romantic advances.

Britomart's relationship with Malecasta is mediated by a logic of self-recognition and empathy that resembles her autoerotic fantasy in the mirror scene, but this time seeing herself in another woman is what makes her closer to Malecasta, ostensibly tricking her into not seeing Malecasta's desire for her. Malecasta,

All ignoraunt of her contrary sex,
(For she her weend a fresh and lusty knight)
She greatly gan enamoured to wex,
And with vaine thoughts her falsed fancy vex:
Her fickle hart conceived hasty fire,
Like sparks of fire, which fall in sclender flex,
That shortly brent into extreme desire,
And ransackt all her veins with passion entire. (III.i.47)

“Contrary sex” is interesting word choice, since presumably Malecasta is ignorant that Britomart's sex *isn't* contrary to her own. Still, what concerns the narrator most is not the contrariness or sameness of Malecasta's object choice, but rather the *kind* of love—“For this was not to love, but lust inclind;/ For love does always bring forth bounteous deeds,/ And in each gentle hart desire of honour breeds” (III.i.49). Britomart sees neither love nor lust, but the explanation suggests that this is because she chooses not to see them. Malecasta “did rove at her with crafty glance/ Of her false eyes, that at her hart did ayme,/ And told her meaning in her countenance;/ But Britomart dissembled it with ignorance./[...] And aye between the cups, she did prepare/ Way to her love, and secret darts did throw;/ But Britomart would not such guilfull message know” (III.i.51). This passage indicates that Britomart sees the clear messages Malecasta is sending but “would

not” acknowledge—to Malecasta and also perhaps to herself—that she knows. When Malecasta “discovered her desire/ With sighes and sobs, and plaints, and piteous grieffe,” Britomart’s recognition of her own difficult love experience makes her believe that Malecasta’s love is virtuous: “Full easie was for her to have believe,/ Who by self-feeling of her feeble sex,/ And by long triall of the inward grieffe,/ Wherewith imperious love her hart did vexe,/ Could judge what paines so loving harts perplexe” (III.i.53-54). Self-recognition—“self-feeling”—does not ignite identical feelings in Britomart, but it keeps her from leaving the Castle of Bad Chastity; on an allegorical level, then, Britomart’s chastity is threatened by seeing her own desire in Malecasta.

This is further supported by the fact that although Britomart rarely makes the mistake of disarming as other knights do, that evening Britomart goes to bed without her armor and without her spear. Because Britomart’s armor is one facet of her chastity, the description of Britomart *finally* taking it off—after refusing to all day—signals that Britomart’s chastity may be at risk, or at least more vulnerable, at bedtime that night, which indeed proves to be the case. Malecasta manages to creep into the bedroom, approaches Britomart’s bed, and “with her soft hand/ She softly felt, if any member moved” (III.i.60); unwary Britomart keeps sleeping. When she finally wakes, Britomart realizes she has been off her guard, and she leaps out of bed to grab her sword. Hearing the commotion, the other knights come in and witness “the warlike Mayd/ All in her snow-white smocke, with locks unbownd,/ Threatning the point of her avenging blade”; the knights chastise Britomart’s aggression, and Gardante attacks her, “And fell intent against the virgin sheene:/ The mortal steele stayd not, till it was seene/ To gore her side, yet was the wound not deepe,/ But lightly rased her soft silken skin,/ That drops of purple

bloud thereout did weepe,/ Which did her lily smock with staines of vermeil steepe” (III.i.65). The image of Britomart “unbownd” and undressed is an anomaly; Britomart is usually on the offensive, and her vulnerability in this scene implies that Britomart’s failure to be on the defensive around Malecasta threatens her chastity. This is further enforced by the wounding, which is figured specifically as an attack on the “virgin sheene”; that the wound stains her “snow-white smocke” indicates that her purity has been stained.

The Malecasta episode hints at homoerotic desire but remains ambiguous. Denise Walen analyzes Britomart’s relationship with Malecasta briefly in *Constructions of Female Homeroticism in Early Modern Drama*; her interpretation is that because Britomart does not reveal her true sex to Malecasta, “Britomart therefore puts in place a comic episode that unfolds in her bedchamber and that quickly transforms into a violent confrontation in which she is wounded. The text suggests that homoerotic flirtation jeopardizes social order” (36). Although parts of the scene can be read as humorous, I don’t agree that it makes sense to read the episode as strictly comic. Moreover, Walen’s argument that “homoerotic flirtation” is being punished does not take into account the allegorical implications of Britomart’s wound: if the Knight of Chastity is wounded, it makes sense to understand Britomart’s error in the Castle of Bad Chastity as an error in chastity. If her chastity—her virginity, but also the chasteness of her desires—had been intact, she would not have been wounded. Allegorically, the fact that Britomart finds herself undressed and in bed with Bad Chastity (Malecasta) implies that Britomart is somehow open to the encounter, and this is further supported by the fact that the scene where Malecasta enters Britomart’s bed is one of the few times we see Britomart without

her armor; she has let her metaphorical guard down. It is particularly interesting that it is Gardante who wounds Britomart. Malecasta has six knights, who each represent the rungs in the ladder of lechery; Gardante represents the first step, which is looking. This suggests that what causes Britomart to be wounded is specifically an error in vision or seeing; perhaps we are meant to understand that Britomart's failure to see Malecasta's feelings is what put her into a compromising position. However, the reference to Gardante could mean other things. It may also serve to remind us of Britomart's previous experience with the mirror vision, where Britomart's ability to see seemed to be affected by what she wanted or didn't want to see. In this case, it could be that Britomart is wounded because she deliberately ignores the fact that Malecasta desires her, or even because through her empathy and identification, she sees Malecasta in a way that is unchaste. The evidence in support of this latter reading is that Gardante represents lecherous gazing; if the fact that Gardante wounds Britomart indeed indicates that Britomart has erred on this first rung, it would suggest that Britomart may have been attracted to Malecasta, allowing her face to replace Artegall's. However, if homoerotic flirtation and homoerotic desire do occur, I do not agree with Walen that the poem is cautioning against homoerotic flirtation; the canto is primarily concerned about the nature of Malecasta's lust. The canto suggests that beautiful women are tempting—even to other beautiful women—and Britomart's chastity is at risk if she allows herself to be unguarded in the presence of a lusty woman. The canto's primary caution against Malecasta is against lusty, unvirtuous love, "For love always bring forth bounteous deeds,/ And in each gentle hart desire of honour breeds" (III.i.49).

The poem actually goes on to idealize homoerotic flirtation. Soon after escaping Malecasta's lust, Britomart will go on to rescue Amoret; the love that she develops for Amoret is of this virtuous variety that "brings forth bounteous deeds," and Britomart's relationship with Amoret threatens to displace her union with Artegall entirely. Her male disguise and, more importantly, her masculinity and chivalry, are so appealing and provocative of other, more exciting, possibilities that the poem seems to become more interested in the diversions resulting from her martiality than in the professed goal of her adventure (the union with Artegall). Britomart's armor is difficult to unimagine; the poem becomes ambiguous about the erotic possibilities for the body underneath. On top of this, Britomart's chivalric success exceeds that of the other knights, and as the books continue, her chivalry is primarily imagined through her service to other ladies and not, as seems to be the case in the beginning, through her constancy and chastity. Her love for and devotion to Amoret are superior to the love other knights show their ladies; it is idealized to that point that it becomes difficult for the poem to return Britomart and Amoret to their destined spouses.

Once again, Britomart's entrée into Amoret's storyline occurs when she encounters a distraught knight stalled in his own mission, this time Scudamour. Scudamour is established as a picture of impotence: Britomart discovers "A knight all wallowed/ Upon the grassy ground, and by him neare/ His haberion, his helmet, and his speare;/ A little off, his shield was rudely throwne" (III.xi.7). He explains that his lady, Amoret, is being held in a dungeon until she submits to love Lord Busirane, which rouses Britomart to action, "For nothing so much pittie doth implore," she tells Scudamour, "As gentle Ladies helplesse miserie" (III.xi.18). Even though Britomart finds the story of

Amoret's imprisonment emotionally penetrating, though, the canto contrasts Britomart's efficient strength with Scudamour's inability to perform and even directly points out the role reversal; as Scudamour languishes, begging Britomart to "let me dye," Britomart gathers Scudamour's arms, "which he had vowed to disprofesse" (III.xi.19-20), and tries to get him to take them up again. Amazed, Scudamour asks, "What couldst thou more,/ If she were thine, and thou as I am now?" (III.xi.19); the question of what more Britomart can do in lieu of Scudamour lingers throughout the following book, when she finds herself alone with Amoret.

The canto also contrasts Britomart's chivalric martiality with Scudamour's aimless aggressiveness, presenting Britomart as the more successful swordsman and knight. Once the two have decided to rescue Amoret, Britomart easily passes through the castle gate:

Her ample shield she threw before her face,
And her swords point, directing forward right,
Assayld the flame, the which eftsoones gave place,
And did it selfe divide with equal space,
That through she passed; as a thunder bolt
Perceth the yielding ayre, and doth displace
The soring clouds into sad showres ymolt;
So to her yold the flames, and did their force revolt. (III.xi.25)

The penetrative imagery of Britomart piercing, "as a thunder bolt," with her "point" (a frequent phallic euphemism in Renaissance texts), through the "yielding" flame is suggestive of sexual intercourse, and it is one of the poem's more positive sexual

suggestions: Britomart is a successful swordswoman not only because she holds it right—“directing forward right” the “point”—but also because she wins the submission of the flames, and thus her piercing of the castle gate is framed as being interestingly consensual. Scudamour fails at this:

[...] Whenas Scudamour saw [Britomart] past the fire,
Safe and untoucht, he likewise gan assay,
With greedy will, and envious desire,
And bad the stubborne flames to yield him way:
But cruell Mulciber would not obey
His threatfull pride, and with imperious sway
Him forst (maulgre) his fierceness to relent,
And back retire, all scorcht and pitifully brent. (III.xi.26)

His failure is due to his aggressive forcefulness; he pushes through with “Greedy will and envious desire,” which creates an image of martial and erotic force that is overly violent. In contrast to Britomart, Scudamour cannot win over the flames, and they do not yield to him. This keeps him from accompanying Britomart in the rescue, suggesting that Scudamour cannot rescue Amoret because he is too like the forceful villain who has her imprisoned.

Scudamour’s clumsily violent attempt on the castle gate echoes the language of his similarly unseductive and aggressive wooing of Amoret. There, Scudamour’s acquisition of Amoret is forceful and traumatic for her, even by his own account. He relates the story later on, and he begins by professing that “since the day that first with deadly wound/ My heart was launcht, and learned to have loved,/ I never joyed houre, but

still with care was moved” (IV.x.1). The idea that love is painful rather than fulfilling coincides with the poem’s general portrayal of love as an experience that endangers characters and creates difficulty. Scudamour’s specific experience of love is often made difficult by his aggressiveness and lack of concern for the feelings of his beloved. After forcing his way through the gates and into Venus’s temple, where Amoret lives with her adopted mother Venus, Scudamour wins the “shield of Love” (IV.x.8), which earns him the right to Amoret. Scudamour interprets the images on his shield much in the same way he interprets love: according to Scudamour, his shield portrays “Cupid with his killing bow/ And cruell shafts” (IV.x.55). This reinforces the idea of love as a painful wound, as Scudamour professes at the beginning, but it also reveals Scudamour’s particular understanding of love as a violent martial conquest.

With the shield in hand, Scudamour moves on through Venus’s Edenic garden and through a “thousand payres” of lovers who live there. The lovers offer examples of positive, consensual love; there are those who “sport/ Their spotlesse pleasures” together or those “who on chast vertue grounded their desire,/ Farre from all fraud, or fayned blandishment;/ Which in their spirits kindling zealous fire,/ Brave thoughts and noble deeds did evermore aspire” (IV.x.27); Scudamour is moved by the sight of all the lovers, but he seems to resist thinking about it. Instead, he shakes off his feeling and hurries on to gain Amoret, recounting that “all those sights, and all that else I saw,/ Might not my steps withhold, but that forthright/ Unto that purposd place I did me draw” (IV.x.29).

In order to gain access to “the inmost temple,” Scudamour also has to pass Love and Hate; the half-brothers stand with their mother Concord, who “them forced hand to joyne in hand” (IV.x.32). The joining of Love and Hate is the central example that

Berger uses to analyze the poem's focus on *Discordia concors*, or the joining of opposites. For Berger, the poem explores "the discord between the order of the macrocosm and the order perceived by the microcosm (psyche), and on the interior discords which cause or result from this disrelation" (34); the joining of Love and Hate in Venus's temple, then, participates in a larger exploration of the need to find concord between opposites, or between the self and others, and thus the joining of Love and Hate here can be understood as a metaphor for the kind of self-sacrifice that will be necessary for Scudamour to marry Amoret. At the same time, the forced union of Love and Hate here seems to be open for misinterpretation, and it foreshadows Scudamour's problematic understanding of love, wherein female consent is ignored. Based on his subsequent actions, Scudamour perhaps misunderstands Concord's enactment of *Discordia concors* to mean that even when love seems to be non-consensual, a couple should be "forced hand to joyne in hand."

Once in the inner temple, Scudamour has a second moment of hesitation when he sees Amoret sitting happily in Womanhood's lap, but he rallies and decides to take her anyway. He recounts,

[...] my hart gan throb,
And wade in doubt, what best were to be donne:
For sacrilege me seem'd the Church to rob,
And folly seem'd to leave the thing undone,
Which with so strong attempt I had begonne.
Tho shaking off all doubt and shameful feare,
Which Ladies love I heard had never wonne

Mongst men of worth, I to her stepped neare,
And the lilly hand her labor'd up to reare. (IV.x.53)

The stanza effectively illustrates Scudamour's problematic understanding of love and marriage. Like Arthur in Book I, Scudamour pauses in the face of an emotionally moving spectacle, but decides on "shaking off all doubt" and pursuing action. His explanation that he wants to avoid "shameful feare" because fear "Ladies love I heard had never wonne" is curious; it suggests that Scudamour's resistance to pity is a learned behavior, that he is enacting the role he thinks a lover should play. In some ways, this renders Scudamour's romantic ineptitude sympathetic, even as it highlights the way that Scudamour's actions are driven by his own will, and not by any concern for mutual happiness. Scudamour's explanation of his thought process is flawed; he says that "sacrilege me seem'd the Church to rob,/ And folly seem'd to leave the thing undone." Presumably, sacrilege is worse than folly, but Scudamour decides it is more important to keep going on a mission that he recognizes may be cruel or even sacrilegious than it is to pause and reflect on what he is doing. This hard-headed hastiness is characteristic of Scudamour, and it seems to keep him from considering how the desires of others might fit into his acquisition of his own desires.

One of Venus's matrons comments on Scudamour's unnecessarily aggressive technique; she gives him "sharpe rebuke, for being over bold/ Saying it was to knight unseemely shame,/ Upon a recluse virgin to lay hold" (IV.x.54). In response, Scudamour displays the shield and asserts his right, all the while keeping a grip on Amoret's hand—he "for no intreatie would forgoe so glorious spoyle" (IV.x.55). Then, strangely deducing that Venus "favor[ed] my pretence," Scudamour is "emboldened with more

confidence” and “In presence of them all forth led her thence,/ All looking on and like astonisht staring” (IV.x.56). Scudamour marches Amoret out of Venus’s garden, ignoring her “tender teeres,” asserting that “for nought,/ That ever she to me could say or doe,/ Could she her wished freedome from me woove” (IV.x.57).

The fact that Amoret is represented as physically inaccessible both in Venus’s temple and in Busirane’s dungeon, places Scudamour’s attempt to woo her in Venus’s garden in parallel with Britomart’s attempt to rescue her from the dungeon. Scudamour’s representation of his own boldness and his conscious decisions to ignore Amoret’s feelings contrasts with Britomart’s more careful acquisition of Amoret. This is evident in the repetition of the word “bold” in both episodes; in Venus’s temple, Scudamour is criticized for being “over bold,” and then he is “emboldened” to take Amoret. By contrast, Britomart waits patiently and watches in Busirane’s castle before she attempts to retrieve Amoret. While there, Britomart reads the various inscriptions on the wall that tell her, “*Be bold, be bold, and everywhere be bold,*” but she also notices one inscription that cautions, “be not too bold” (III.xi.54). Although she “wist not what it might intend,” Britomart pays attention to it, and her successful patience and restraint suggest that she already possesses a more appropriate idea of force than Scudamour. And while Scudamour carries off miserable Amoret only to lose her again shortly afterward, Britomart is able to rescue Amoret from violent male imprisonment and construct an intimate relationship with her.

At issue for the various Amoret-lovers throughout the poem is the winning of Amoret’s love in return. Scudamour fails to win her love when he takes her by force from Venus’s temple, and Busirane is holding her captive in order to make her be in love

with him; Scudamour attests that “by torture he would her constraine/ Love to conceive in her disdainful brest” (III.xi.17). Scudamour and Busirane are doubles of each other, both of them able to physically retain Amoret and unable to make her yield herself willingly. The image of cruel Cupid that Scudamour later describes on his shield is foreshadowed through the tapestries and the masque that Britomart sees in Busirane’s castle, where Death’s heart is “transfixed with a deadly dart” by Cupid, who “rejoiced in his cruell mind” to see the pain he has caused. The similarity between this and Scudamour’s “Cupid with his killing bow/ And cruell shafts” suggests that even though Scudamour’s violent acquisition of Amoret ends in marriage, it is not that different from the way that Busirane holds Amoret against her will in an attempt to make her love him. Both instances rely on a Petrarchan idea that love itself is violent and painful, but there is a curious slippage between Cupid’s violent penetration of people’s hearts, and Scudamour’s and Busirane’s violent attempts to penetrate Amoret. If love is painful, it seems to be more painful for women. For instance, Busirane tries to charm Amoret by writing “strange characters” with the blood that is “dreadfully dropping from her dying hart,/ Seeming transfixed with a cruell dart,/ And all perforce to make her him to love” (III.xii.31). It is Busirane who has put the dart in Amoret’s “dying heart,” not Cupid, and like Scudamour, Busirane seems to interpret the idea that love is painful as license to use force to acquire women. In this way, even ostensibly mutual heterosexual relationships, like love and marriage, are presented in terms that are similar to rape.

After describing Busirane torturing Amoret, the narrator asks, “Ah who can love the worker of her smart?” (III.xii.31); this is posed at the moment when Amoret refuses Busirane, and so the answer to the question right now seems to be that Amoret cannot

love a person who hurts her. Still, the question is difficult to answer given that throughout the poem, mostly people *only* love the workers of their smarts. People receive physical and emotional wounds from the people they love the most. At this moment, the poem seems to hover around the implications of its construction of love as inherently violent, and of lovers as the causes of each other's pain. After presenting Scudamour, who takes his wife by force, and Busirane, who really attempts to do exactly the same thing, the narrator dwells on the very real problems with defining love as something that one gives in exchange for violence. What the poem shows in Amoret's narrative is that heteroerotic union is adversarial, forceful, painful, and largely unappealing, at least to women. The 1590 edition of the poem goes on to unify Scudamour and Amoret right away; however, the 1596 edition does not, and it seems to linger over this question of how Amoret can love the men who cause her pain. The alternative to Scudamour and Busirane, who force Amoret but cannot win her consent, seems to be Britomart.

As the poem explores this adversarial version of heterosexual relationships in the later books, Britomart increasingly plays the man's role with other women. By this, I mean that Britomart not only replaces knights who cannot wield a sword adequately, but she also becomes the only knight who wins a lady's love unambiguously. Dorothy Stephens's 1994 analysis of the poem considers the way the relationship between Britomart and Amoret represents one of the most positive couplings in the poem. In "Into Other Arms: Amoret's Evasion," she arrives at a convincing queer reading of this relationship by considering how the poem's representation of courtly logic applies when two women are involved. Focusing primarily on Amoret, Stephens observes what she calls a "cultural paradox" in the expectations upon women throughout the poem: the

paradox is “the notion that every man of miscellaneous goodness who saves a woman from torture ‘right well deserves as his duefull meed,/ Her love, her service, and her utmost wealth’” (200). As Stephens notes, this paradox that good women should be willing to reward their champions (which they cannot always do and still remain good, chaste women) explains Amoret’s initial discomfort at first with Britomart:

His will she feard; for him she surely thought
To be a man, such as indeed he seemed,
And much the more, by that he lately wrought,
When her from deadly thraldome he redeemed,
For which no service she too much esteemed,
Yet dread of shame, and doubt of fowle dishonor
Made her not yeeld so much, as due she deemed. (IV.i.6-8)

What Amoret feels is “due” to the knight honorable enough to save her from Busirane will render Amoret dishonorable. Stephens draws on this paradox to explore the erotic possibilities it presents between women:

[I]f women’s unavoidable inconstancy exposes them to lustful and otherwise demanding men, it also may expose them to other women. This possibility often generates anxiety in Renaissance texts, bound up as it is with the suspicion that women’s friendships may supply goods and services over and above those supplied by husbands and lovers. Without registering much anxiety at this point, Spenser’s text heads directly toward this question of what one woman renders another. (200)

While Stephens's approach is different from my own because she focuses on Amoret's evasion of a system in which she cannot win, rather than on Britomart's various diversions, Stephens' premise synchronizes with my own reading. The courtly logic that tells Amoret to yield to men who do her service also implies that service to ladies is linked with sexual potency; wielding a sword effectively is what allows knights to penetrate the private spaces where women are kept and to obtain the women. That Britomart is the knight most successful at this is confusing. Stephens understands Britomart's and Amoret's relationship as a kind of resolution of the paradox: the fantasy that the poem develops of an ideal relationship between the women allows Amoret to be both chaste and obliging. But I would add that the pairing also creates another paradox: it is only when Amoret no longer fears "his will"—only when Amoret learns that Britomart is female with no lusty will threatening her chastity—that Amoret finally *does* yield to someone. The lack of "will" on Britomart's part is what makes Amoret willing. Stephens's paradox is resolved when both characters are female, but the Britomart paradox—that the most martially successful knight should also be successful in bed—is only highlighted by the relationship the two women develop. Thinking the relationship to be heterosexual, Amoret is initially frightened of Britomart; once she realizes that Britomart is female, though, she finds herself in the ideal relationship. If consummation has to be deferred until men can gain women's wills (as Amoret's relationships with Scudamour and Busirane suggest), the later books imply that consummation between men and women has to be deferred indefinitely. But if, conversely, a woman's consent is what predicts a sexual relationship, the fact that Amoret will yield only to Britomart deserves closer attention.

It should be noted that the logic of *The Faerie Queene* is unlike Shakespearean female cross-dressing, where women find each other attractive *until* they realize the truth. For instance, learning that “Cesario” is really Viola or that “Ganymede” is really Rosalind is what finally sends Olivia and Phebe into the arms of men—this is not so in *The Faerie Queene*. Amoret does not recognize feminine traits in Britomart prior to finding out that she is really female, and she is not attracted to Britomart prior to that discovery. But once Amoret realizes that Britomart is female, she is able to let her guard down—as is Britomart. Unlike Olivia and Phebe, Amoret is pleased to find that the man whom she thought loved her is actually a woman. Directly after the revelation, we see Britomart in bed with a woman for the second time, but this time there is a kind of release not accomplished with Malecasta. The description is vague and suggestive:

And eke fayre Amoret now freed from feare,
More franke affection did to her afford,
And to her bed, which she was wont forbear,
Now freely drew, and found right safe assurance there.
Where all the night they of their loves did treat,
And hard adventures twixt themselves alone,
That each the other gan with passion great,
And grietful pittie privately bemone. (IV.i.15)

Stephens has remarked on the erotic nature of the language here, noting that

the double entendres of ‘passion,’ ‘bemone,’ and ‘hard adventures’ reinforces one’s initial sense that the phrase ‘their loves’ not only points outward to two male objects but encloses a more private exchange

between the two women. [...] It is wonderfully puzzling that the one happy bed scene in the whole poem appears here. [...] While the text declares literally that each of the women longs to complete herself in her absent mate, the subtext at least momentarily believes in the self-sufficiency of their interactions with each other. (202)

I agree with her interpretation of the language. Why Amoret's newfound comfort with Britomart leads her immediately to the bedroom is unclear, and the pleasure they find in "treating" of "their loves" seems to exceed the pleasure they find when their ostensible "loves" are actually present, if "loves" in this stanza indeed refers to the male "beloveds." Rather than demonstrating the women's self-sufficiency, though, this scene seems to *replace* the self-sufficiency Britomart has demonstrated earlier, creating a new avenue of pleasure and release. The image of Amoret and Britomart treating "their loves" together recalls the language of Britomart previously trying to relieve her desire alone. In Book III, Britomart attempts to alleviate her fear that there *is* no object for her desire (that the image she saw was herself, or a shadow) with "selfe-pleasing thoughts" to feed her own "wound." Now, the women can recognize their similar "loves"—whatever or whomever those may be—and once they know about each other's lack, they have no trouble making each other feel better.

This is also the first time Amoret is in bed with anyone; Scudamour and Amoret never actually manage to consummate their marriage. We learn explicitly that Busirane captures Amoret before this can happen, and the reason Busirane is able to take her is because Scudamour fails to be on the offense:

For that same vile Enchauntour Busyran,

The very self same day that she was wedded,
Amidst the bridale feast, whilest every man
Surcharg'd with wine, were heedlesse and ill hedded,
All bent to mirth before the bride was bedded,
Brought in that mask of love which late was shown:
And there the Ladie ill of friends bestedded,
By way of sport, as oft in maskes is knowen,
Conveyed quite away to living wight unknowen. (IV.i.3)

The implication is that Scudamour's intoxication makes him unable both to raise his sword and to protect his wife. Additionally, the fact that the stanza emphasizes that this happens before "the bride was bedded" suggests that intoxication leads to erotic impotency, or at least that male homosocial merriment competes with the marital consummation we might expect. By contrast, Britomart and Amoret do consummate some kind of mutual pleasure in bed together—and they spend time in bed together a lot.

After we see them enjoying each other in the passage above, the poem keeps directing us to consider what Amoret and Britomart do in bed. In the same canto, Scudamour learns that Britomart has succeeded in rescuing Amoret, and Duessa and Ate describe the relationship between the two women (though all of them assume Britomart to be male). Duessa actually understands the problem of Amoret's consent that eludes Scudamour; she counsels him,

Why do ye strive for Ladies love so sore,
Whose chiefe desire is love and friendly aid
Mongst gentle Knights to nourish evermore?

Ne be ye wroth Sir Scudamour therefore,
That she your love list love another knight,
Ne do your selfe dislike a whit the more;
For love is free, and led with selfe delight,
Ne will enforced be with maisterdome or might. (IV.i.46)

Despite her general duplicitousness, Duessa's advice that love shouldn't be "enforced" addresses fairly accurately the problems Scudamour has had in pursuing Amoret.

Duessa's portrayal of the situation is generally true, too: Amoret does love Britomart and travels with her happily and willingly. Ate, less kindly though no less accurately, mocks Scudamour and the vanquished Blandamour, saying,

Both foolish knights, I can but laugh at both
That strive and storme with stirre outrageous,
For her that each of you alike doth loth,
And loves another, with whom now she goth
In lovely wise, and sleepes, and sports, and playes;
Whilist both you here with many cursed oth,
Sweare she is yours, and stirre up bloudie frayes,
To win a willow bough, whiles other weares the bayes. (IV.i.47)

Scudamour challenges Ate's portrayal, but she continues relentlessly:

Fond knight (sayd she) the thing that with this eye
I saw, why should I doubt to tell the same? [...]
I saw (quoth she) a stranger knight, whose name
I wote not well, but in his shield he beares

(That well I wote) the heads of many broken speares.

I saw him have your Amoret at will,

I saw him kisse, I saw him her ambrace,

I saw him sleepe with her all night his fill,

All manie nights, and manie by in place,

That present were to testifie the case. (Iv.i.48-49)

Like Duessa's, the description Ate gives is honest, if ambiguous; without ignoring the fact that Ate is "the mother of debate,/ and all dissention" (IV.i.19), we know that Britomart and Amoret really *are* sporting, playing, kissing, embracing, and sleeping together in some capacity. So despite the fact that Glauce "woxe afeard/ Of outrage for the words, which she heard say,/ Albee untrue she wist them by assay" (IV.i.50), in actuality we don't know which part of the description—or of the erotic implications of the description—really is untrue. For Glauce, the margin between truth and untruth seems to lie in the definitive lack of reproductive sex possible between Britomart and Amoret. But then what *is* "the thing that with this eye" Ate saw? Is she lying—did she not see anything? Did she not see "a thing"? Or did she see *something*—just not the thing that Glauce knows Britomart lacks? The wordchoice—"thing"—is curious, when Ate actually describes multiple events ("things") she saw. It invites us to consider the erotic possibilities, given that the things Ate saw (Britomart and Amoret in bed together) are true. What does it mean to "Sleepe with her all night his fill"? And what does it mean to have "Amoret at will"? Regardless of what Ate really saw (if anything), all of the characters—and readers—at this moment are imagining the possibility or impossibility of

Britomart and Amoret having sex. There is nothing in the description that requires us to laugh off the account as a mistake and move on; the lengthiness and specificity of Ate's story (the kissing, the embracing) encourage us to linger on the image of two women in bed together.

III. Substitutions

Like most characters in *The Faerie Queene*, Britomart and Amoret will eventually part ways. Still, the dissolution of the relationship is hardly an unequivocal enforcement of heterosexuality. As the Amoret-Scudamour reunion continues to be deferred indefinitely, Britomart encounters Artegall in a confusing intersection of identification, domination, jealousy, and competition that does not resolve or erase the homoerotic and autoerotic tendencies we see elsewhere in her history. Their first meetings and the episodes that proceed them in fact reinforce the homoerotic and autoerotic alternatives that have previously distracted and diverted Britomart's energies.

Britomart's final appearances in *The Faerie Queene* culminate in a series of fights between Britomart and Artegall, Artegall and the Amazon Radigund, and finally Britomart and Radigund. The dominant reading of the battles is that they represent Britomart's acceptance of her marriage to Artegall and her ability to sacrifice herself—even to kill parts of herself—for Artegall's sake.³⁴ While I do not contest that in many ways this does seem to be the allegorical effect of the battles, there are still aspects of these final episodes that require us to recognize that Britomart's tendencies to transfer or

³⁴ For instance, this is Berger's interpretation of how Britomart develops her ability to move on from her "primitive" masculine phase; similarly, Simon Shepherd argues that Britomart's fight with Radigund is necessary because "Her civilizing partnership with Artegall cannot be operative until Amazons are destroyed" (17), and Britomart's fight with Radigund proves that Britomart is not like Radigund.

divert her heteroerotic destiny have not disappeared. Even as the poem begins to represent Britomart's and Artegall's movement toward each other, the poem seems to encounter difficulties in finally letting go of the other erotic fantasies, and new fantasies multiply in the series of climactic substitutions and transfers in the battles.

Britomart's first fight with Artegall occurs at the tournament where Britomart beats the other knights and wins False Florimell, only to reject her and choose Amoret. The fight at the tournament reinforces Britomart's martial potency in language that reminds us of the connection between martial penetrativeness and penetrative sexuality. Their battle is described thus:

He [Britomart] at his entrance charg'd his powerfull speare
At Artegall, in midst of his pryde,
And there smote him on his Umbriere
So sore, that tumbling backe, he down did slyde
Over his horses taile above a stride;
Whence little lust he had to rise again. (IV.iv.44)

The other knights all run at Britomart,

But all of them likewise dismounted were,
Ne certes wonder; for no power of man
Could bide the force of that enchanted speare,
The which the famous Britomart did beare;
With which she wondrous deeds of armes atchieved,
And overthrew, what ever came her neare,
That all those stranger knights full sore aggrieved,

And that late weaker band of challengers relieved. (IV.iv.46)

There are numerous aspects of the tournament that blur martial with sexual prowess here. First, the tournament is about winning access to the most beautiful woman—though it quickly devolves into a kind of team-based free-for-all, where knights intercede on each others' behalf to try to defeat whichever knight appears to be winning, as is the case in the above passage when all the knights attack Britomart to keep her from winning.

Britomart's forcefulness with her spear wins her the battle and permission to take the most beautiful woman, which angers Artegall. But the image of Britomart's "powerfull speare" defeating Artegall to such an extent that "little lust he had to rise again" relies on sexual rhetoric, too; having "lust" to rise again seems more appropriate language for an erotic situation than a battle. Not only is the purpose of the fight erotic, as knights are rewarded with an erotic partner, but the description of the fight itself is eroticized, where knights are driven by a "lust" for penetrative violence; in both cases Britomart shows herself superior. Even though Britomart's "enchanted speare" is presumably enchanted because it protects chastity (or *is* chastity), the fact that "no power of man/ Could bide the force" of it has complicated consequences. It is effective in keeping men away—which chastity armor should be able to do—but here it keeps the wrong man away, and in a fashion that places Artegall and Britomart in competition for the same woman. There are two separate martial metaphors at work as Britomart and Artegall meet: Britomart's armor still represents and protects her chastity, but in the tournament for the lady, martial success is equated with sexual success—and the eroticization of battle similarly implies that superior force (martial and sexual) is generally penetrative. The separate logics of the canto render Britomart both chastely impenetrable and simultaneously sexual in ways

that are at once exciting—it is pleasurable to read their encounters, and Britomart certainly continues to be idealized—and also irreconcilable with procreative sexual possibilities.

The second battle between Britomart and Artegall promises to function as a resolution to the problematic erotic and martial power dynamics that develop between them in their earlier battle at the tournament, when they are unable to recognize each other as the beloveds they are meant to be. However, the conclusion it offers is only temporary. After Britomart beats the other knights at the tournament, Artegall, still thinking Britomart to be a male knight, is upset and decides to attack her; as he tells Scudamour, “He [Britomart] in an open tourney lately held,/ Fro me the honour of that game did reare;/ For having me all wearie earst down feld,/ The fairest Ladie reft, and ever since withheld” (IV.vi.6). This reinforces the strange dynamic wherein Britomart and Artegall are placed in competition for the same woman. Scudamour is also pursuing Britomart because he believes Ate’s tale that Britomart is sleeping with Amoret; the two knights decide to attack Britomart together, with Scudamour going first. Britomart arrives and easily unhorses Scudamour. Once Scudamour fails, it is Artegall’s turn to attack Britomart. Artegall is intent on proving himself a better match to this “stranger knight” this time around, and their second battle in many ways suggests that their martial energies can be successfully transferred into the emotional/erotic fulfillment we have been promised. Although Britomart quickly unhorses Artegall, he energetically continues to fight on foot; he, picking up

his direful deadly blade,

Did leape at her, as doth an eager hound

Thrust to an Hynde within some covert glade,
 Whom without peril he cannot invade.
 With such fell greediness he her assayled,
 That though she mounted were, yet he her made
 To give him ground, (so much his force prevailed)
 And shun his mightie strokes, gainst which no armes availed. (IV.vi.12)

The stanza illustrates Artegall's martial potency, and simultaneously produces recognizably Petrarchan tropes. The depiction of Britomart as "an Hynde" that Artegall is hunting echoes Wyatt's translation of Petrarch, offering a new image of Britomart as Artegall's "deer"/"dear," and suggesting that the battle represents the emotional/erotic "wounding" that we know is supposed to take place between Artegall and Britomart.

This kind of Petrarchan wounding proves to be what happens to Artegall in the stanzas that immediately follow. Britomart reciprocates Artegall's forceful violence, this time not only overcoming him temporarily, but also wounding him:

[...] she him forced backward to retreat,
 And yeeld unto her weapon way to pas:
 Whoe raging rigous neither steele nor bras
 Could stay, but to the tender flesh it went,
 And pour'd the purple bloud forth on the gras;
 That all his mayle yriv'd, and plates yrent,
 Shew'd all his bodie bare unto the cruell dent. (IV.vi.15)

This depiction re-establishes Britomart's penetrative tendencies; Artegall lowers his weapon and goes slack as he "yeeld[s] unto her weapon way to pass," while Britomart

inserts her weapon into Artegall's "bodie bare," so that the "tender flesh" gives way and he bleeds. The description is erotic, and it reverses heteronormative penetrative roles, as it is masculine Britomart who penetrates Artegall's naked body. At the same time, Artegall's yielding and nakedness here carry out the Petrarchan trope that female erotic power "wounds" the lover, which has been foreshadowed by the image of the Hynde. The fact that Britomart not only overcomes Artegall but also wounds him (as she did not in the Tournament) can be understood as allegorically demonstrating their movement toward recognizing each other and opening themselves to each other emotionally.

Whereas previously Artegall had been angered by Britomart's imperviousness to his martial advances, here the battle results in Artegall's physical vulnerability, and this quickly transforms into emotional vulnerability and the recognition of Britomart. After he is wounded, Artegall redoubles his efforts to defeat Britomart; this time, his strikes her helmet and finally reveals her face. Although he has the martial advantage, Artegall is immediately overcome by Britomart's beauty, and he ceases his attack on her. When the helmet falls, "With that her angels face, unseene afore,/ Like to that ruddie morne appeard in sight,/ Deawed in silver drops, through sweating sore,/ But somewhat redder, then beseem'd aright,/ Through toylesome heate and labour of their fight" (IV.vi.19). Britomart's beauty transforms Artegall's martial aggression into the submission of a Petrarchan lover, but it does so in a way that is surprisingly realistic and anti-Petrarchan. The emphasis on "sweating," "heate," and "labour," at the moment when Artegall first sees Britomart is in keeping with the poem's representation of love and erotic contact as violent or painful; here, though, the fact that Artegall loves Britomart anyway seems to demonstrate a promisingly realistic variety of love, wherein Artegall recognizes and

accepts Britomart even when she is imperfect. The bodily description perhaps foreshadows Britomart's procreative destiny, reminding us that their future together holds not only love but also the physical realities of Britomart losing her virginity and bearing children.

In these stanzas, Britomart's unveiling (or rather, unhelmeting) also functions in exactly the way Vives believes it should: although the armor represented and protected her chastity, her exposed beauty causes Scudamour to "worship her" (as the forest animals did Una earlier on), and her "modest countenance," "so goodly grave, and full of princely aw" also provokes chaste desire in Artegall, whose "ranging fancie did refraine,/ And looser thoughts to lawfull bounds did withdraw" (IV.vi.33). Based on Artegall's response to Britomart, then, this meeting seems to resolve the various tensions that have previously kept Britomart from being able to face her procreative destiny. We are reminded that the martial encounters between Britomart and Artegall will transform into emotional/erotic encounters, and that Britomart's armor is in fact a representation of her chastity, which can continue to exist in a marital context, even without the physical manifestation of male attire.

Britomart is emotionally wounded by Artegall as well, though the description is comparatively understated. After Artegall submits to Britomart's beauty, he removes his own helmet, and this second unveiling produces a moment of recognition for Britomart:

When Britomart with sharpe avisefull eye
Beheld the lovely face of Artegall,
Tempred with sternesse and stout majestie,
She gan eftsoones it to her mind to call,

To be the same which in her fathers hall
Long since in that enchanted glass she saw.
Therewith her wrathfull courage gan appall,
And haughtie spirits meekely to adaw,
That her enchanted hand she down gan softe withdraw. (IV.vi.26)

Britomart's recognition of Artegall reminds us that the two faces are very similar, as the revelation of Artegall's "lovely" face and "sterne" aspect are like the unveiling of Britomart's "angels face." Artegall's sternness is also like Britomart's graveness. However, this time Britomart does not think she is looking at herself; the description of Britomart's response to Artegall is similar to Artegall's submission to Britomart, and the fact that Britomart recognizes Artegall as the man in the mirror suggests that their likeness will ensure their future union rather than resulting in the kinds of autoerotic digressions that Britomart has previously pursued. The double unveilings seem to redirect auto- and homoerotic desire finally toward the heteroerotic union.

Britomart is never physically wounded by Artegall; however, there is a brief description of Britomart's love wound, which she recognizes but attempts to hide. Such unwillingness to acknowledge her feelings is in keeping with the kind of emotional defensiveness Britomart displays elsewhere. After the battle, Artegall "did lay/
Continuall siege unto her gentle hart,/ Which being whylome launcht with lovely dart,/ More eath was new impression to receive,/ How ever she her paynd with womanish art/
To hide her wound, that none might it perceive:/ Vaine is the art that seekes it selfe for to deceive" (IV.vi.40). However, Artegall persists, and eventually Britomart "yielded her consent/ To be his love, and take him for her Lord,/ Till they with marriage meet might

finish that accord” (IV.vi.41). Although the marriage does not take place, at this moment Britomart’s penetrative tendencies seem to have been made vulnerable, opening her to heterosexual union.

Glauce’s interpretation of the scene explicitly defines the unveiling as a resolution that can erase the previous fears of homoeroticism. As soon as Britomart’s femaleness has been revealed when Artegall knocks off her helmet, Glauce tells everyone:

Ye gentle Knights, whom fortune here hath brought,
To be spectators of this uncouth fit,
Which secret fate hath in this Ladie wrought,
Against the course of kind, ne mervaile nought,
Ne thenceforth feare the thing that hethertoo
Hath troubled both your mindes with idle thought,
Fearing least she your loves away should woo,
Feared in vaine, sith meanes ye see there wants theretoo. (IV.iv.30)

Glauce synthesizes that this episode functions as a conclusion to all the erotic uncertainty that surrounded Britomart throughout her earlier adventures. On one level, it is easy to understand how this battle functions to bring together the lovers, predicting their happiness, and resolving many of the competing desires and attachments that have attracted Britomart before, as Glauce explicitly states here.

However, even as this battle establishes resolution, some aspects of this canto resist the kind of simple erasure of erotic alternatives that Glauce tries to assert. It is curious, for instance, that Britomart is never physically wounded by Artegall, even though he is wounded by her. More importantly, the idea of a simple romantic/erotic

union for Britomart and Artegall, like any effort at simplification in the poem, is not successful: although Britomart “yields her consent” to eventually marry Artegall, the marriage never takes place, and instead the promised marriage is ultimately replaced by two more battles between Artegall and the Amazon Radigund, and finally between Radigund and Britomart. The subsequent battles contain numerous similarities to the beloveds’ battle, and the reworking of the martial encounters creates a strange series of substitutions that upset the moment of resolution we see in Book IV. This battle between Britomart and Artegall exercises a Petrarchan fantasy that the poem cannot maintain, and the fact of the impossibility of fully erasing erotic alternatives for Britomart is perhaps already evident in Glauce’s optimistically simple conclusions. Glauce’s explanation relies on a logic of heteroeroticism and biological essentialism that has generally been untrue throughout the poem and that will be continue to be challenged again when Britomart and Artegall part ways. Glauce’s reduction of erotic potential to a biological imperative when she explains that Britomart *can’t* woo away other women contradicts the way that biological sex has failed to explain or categorize gender and erotic impulses everywhere else in *The Faerie Queene*. Britomart clearly does not lack means to “woo” away ladies, as this is something she does successfully with Malecasta and Amoret. As for biological maleness or other “meanes” of sexual penetration, the poem is unclear about who possesses them. Coming as it does after the battle in which Britomart has penetrated the “tender fleshe” of Artegall’s “body bare,” Glauce’s simplification that women lack the “means” to do anything together that is worth worrying about is unconvincing. Thus, “the thing that hetherto/ heth troubled” the minds of Artegall and Scudamour is actually just as uncertain as ever. Maybe Britomart does have some

“thing” that is a means to develop a fully satisfying erotic relationship with Amoret after all, the preceding image of Britomart piercing Artegall reminds us that penetration is not the exclusive property of male bodies. Although this canto creates a temporary resolution, the resolution is unstable and ultimately proves unsustainable.

Soon after they decide to marry, Britomart and Artegall part ways; Artegall has to continue on his quest to rescue the lady Irena, while Britomart once again decides to help Scudamour recover Amoret. As Artegall continues his quest, he is almost immediately sidetracked when he encounters the group of tyrannical Amazons, led by Radigund, who have captured the knight Sir Turpine. Artegall learns that it is Radigund’s practice to subdue knights in battle and then “she doth them of warlike armes despoile,/ And cloth in woman’s weedes: And then with threat/ Doth them compel to worke, to earne their meat,/ To spin, to card, to sew to wash, to wring” (V.iv.30). Although he successfully rescues Sir Turpine, Artegall is horrified by Radigund’s humiliation of the knights and feels compelled to vanquish her and her Amazon followers in order to end this kind of gender inversion. He travels to Radigund’s kingdom, Radigone, and after Artegall attacks the Amazons with the help of other knights, Radigund challenges Artegall to a one-on-one battle.

Their battle is almost a direct re-enactment of Artegall’s battle with Britomart. The purpose of this duplicate battle is unclear, but Dolven argues that repetition in *The Faerie Queene* is important to notice because it signals some kind of error or failure in understanding; according to Dolven, repeated quests or challenges for the knights are “precisely the sign of the failure to learn” (141). Even though the narrator offers no indication of why the repetition is necessary, in this battle and the next one, the repetition

is palpable. Radigund uses almost exactly the same moves as Britomart has used earlier. At first, Radigund flies at Artegall with all her energy, and she manages to wound him. The wounding is described in terms that are similar to Britomart's earlier wounding of Artegall. In the earlier fight, Britomart "pour'd the purple blood forth on the gras"; here, Radigund charges at Artegall, "That glauncing downe his thigh, the purple blood forth drew" (V.v.9). As in the fight with Britomart, however, Artegall gains the upper hand after he is wounded, and he manages to destroy Radigund's shield. Then, Artegall strikes Radigund on her helmet, knocking her unconscious; he approaches her to remove the helmet, "Thinking at once both head and helmet to have raced" (V.v.11). What he finds underneath the helmet forces him into submission:

But when he discovered had her face,
He saw his senses straunge astonishment,
A miracle of natures goodly grace,
In her faire visage voide of ornament,
But bathed in blood and sweat together ment;
Which in the rudeness of that evill plight,
Bewrayed the signes of features excellent[...] (V.v.12)

The specific effect of Radigund's bloody, sweaty beauty is as disarming to Artegall as Britomart's has been, and their faces are described in nearly identical terms. Although Radigund awakens and continues her attack on Artegall, he submits to her; "So was he overcome, not overcome,/ But to her yielded of his own accord" (V.v.17). The similarities between the battles are striking, but the results of the battles are different. Artegall's choice to submit to Britomart in the previous battle seems to function to lessen

the feminizing effect of his earlier loss in the tournament, when he submitted to Britomart because she was martially superior; the recasting of Artegall as a Petrarchan servant to Britomart alleviates the problematic suggestion that Britomart can force her husband into submission against his will. In this encounter with Radigund, though, the emasculating implications of losing a battle to a penetrative woman are represented at length. After he yields to Radigund, Artegall is forced to play the woman's part in Radigund's Amazonian matriarchy. The disarming of Artegall is described in terms that remind us of the importance of the symbolism of masculinity represented in knightly attire:

Then tooke the Amazon this noble knight,
Left to her will by his owne willful blame,
And caused him to be disarmed quight,
Of all the ornaments of knightly name,
With which whylome he gotten had great fame:
In stead whereof she made him to be dight
In womans weedes, that is to manhood shames,
And put before his lap a napron white,
In stead of Curiets and bases fit for fight.

[...] she causd his warlike armes
Be hang'd on high, that mote his shame bewray;
And broke his sword, for feare of further harmes [...]. (V.v.20-21)

This representation of Artegall's shame and loss of masculine identity due to his loss of armor reveals a highly prosthetic gender logic. Here, Artegall's "great fame" is

apparently lost completely when he is without the “ornaments” that earned him his “knightly name.” Of course Artegall’s battle successes could not have been achieved without the “warlike armes” that Radigund takes away, but the suggestion in these stanzas that Artegall’s masculine success is strictly a product of the external parts he has used to achieve it constructs a definition of masculinity that bears no connection to biological maleness. This upsets Glauce’s assertion that Britomart’s biology defines her completely, and it re-opens the problems that seemed to be solved when Britomart and Artegall recognized each other and assumed the appropriate roles.

Despite her martial success, Radigund is nonetheless emotionally vulnerable and falls in love with Artegall once she has dressed him in women’s clothing and forced him into her service. Radigund’s tyranny, coupled with the sexual aggressiveness she displays in pursuing Artegall, establishes Radigund as a monstrous foil to Britomart, perhaps emphasizing the parallels between the women in order to show that this is not the version of female masculinity Britomart represents. Still, if the poem establishes Radigund as a foil to Britomart, it is not always easy to see how the two martial women are different, and the Radigund episodes re-raise many of the fantasies of erotic/gender difference that Britomart has previously generated. Radigund is presumably supposed to represent a version of female masculinity that is opposite to Britomart’s, as Radigund is sexually aggressive, and she aggressively subverts gender hierarchies not only by taking on armor, but also by forcing the male knights into feminizing submission. However, even these differences do not make Radigund and Britomart as opposite as they might seem. For one thing, as Katherine Schwarz points out, the opposite extremes the women represent may stem from related anxieties. Schwarz argues that

The convergence of Britomart and Radigund might reflect a larger concern with extremes: stories about martial women accommodate both militant chastity and sexual excess, hinting at a connection between them. If Britomart is like chaste Penthesilea, and Radigund is like the sexually ravenous Amazons of the new world, they are somewhat like one another; both sexual excess and sexual resistance oppose the utilitarian middle ground of ordered sexuality. Yet it is the move onto that middle ground that most directly threatens Artegall. Once and nearly twice defeated by Britomart in battle, unmanned by the penetration of her armor, he postpones his happy ending only to reenact it. In his encounter with Radigund he loses another fight to female masculinity, and domestic bliss produces its own mirror image: Artegall leaves a mistress behind only to be put in the place of one, dressed in women's clothing and set to spin.

(Tough Love 153)

Although Schwarz's analysis emphasizes Artegall's resistance to heterosexual union, the comparison of Britomart's chastity to Radigund's excessive sexuality also centers on their shared resistance to marital union; even though they are seemingly opposites, Britomart's difficulty facing marriage and Radigund's uncontrollable sexuality both represent alternatives to procreative sexuality, which becomes even more clear when they battle each other.

Another element that supports the idea that Radigund and Britomart are similarly threatening is that Radigund's tyranny over Artegall is framed within a book that repeatedly cautions against the tyranny of women over the men who love them. The

descriptions of this kind of power seem to describe both the cruel tyranny of Radigund and also the effeminizing effect of Britomart. The argument of Canto VI, in which Britomart arrives to save Artegall, describes the universal threat of women's power over men:

Some men, I wote, will deeme in Artegall
Great weaknesse, and report of him much ill,
For yielding so himselfe a wretched thrall,
To th'insolent commaund of womens will;
That all his former praise doth fowly spill.
But he the man, that say or doe so dare,
Be well advis'd, that he stand stedfast still:
For never yet was wight so well aware,
But he at first or last was trapt in womens snare. (VI. Introduction)

The kind of universally dangerous "womens snare" most obviously refers to Radigund's entrapment of Artegall here, and yet the canto that will follow Britomart's rescue of Artegall offers an almost identical warning about beauty and the love of women more generally, this time in reference to Britomart: "Nought under heaven so strongly doth allure/ The sence of man, and all his minde possesse,/ As beauties lovely baite, that doth procure/ Great warriours oft their rigour to repressse,/ And mighty hands forget their manlinesse [...]/ Such wondrous power hath womens faire aspect,/ To captive men, and make them all the worlds reject" (V.viii.1-2). The description of Britomart's "powre" over Artegall is indistinguishable from that of Radigund's tyranny; the representation of beauty's "allure" and "baite" as something that enervates men parallels the way that

Radigund is able to render Artegall powerless, and the metaphor that love “retains” men and keeps them “captive” could just as easily describe the Radigund episode. In this way, even though Britomart arrives to fight Radigund in order to save Artegall, the poem also indicates that the disordering threat Radigund poses is posed by Britomart as well.

Britomart is prompted to travel to Radigone by jealousy. Hearing that Artegall is imprisoned by a society of women, Britomart is anxious “Least some new love had him from her possesst” (V.vi.4). Her fear that Artegall might have transferred his devotion prompts a series of interactions that rely on transferences and substitutions, beginning with the vision Britomart has before she arrives in Radigone. On her way, Britomart stops at the Temple of Isis and falls asleep at the goddess’s feet and experiences “a wondrous vision, which did close implie,/ The course of all her fortune and posteritie” (V.vii.12); strangely, even though Britomart has already met Artegall and agreed to marry him, the dream vision is similar to the earlier mirror scene, in which Britomart sees “What ever thing was in the world contaynd,/ Betwixt the lowest earth and heavens hight,/ So that it to the looker appertained” (III.ii.19). The Isis vision uses similarly ambiguous language: the vision “did close implie” Britomart’s future, which might mean that it reveals Britomart’s destiny, but it might also mean that it reveals something *like* Britomart’s future (“close” to it) or that it suggests (“implies,” which Hamilton footnotes as “expresses” or “contains”) a future that isn’t entirely accurate. Whatever the meaning of the line, the dream once again presents a confusing erotic scenario for Britomart, and she has to turn to others to interpret it; according to Dolven’s reading, this repetition of Britomart interpreting her future means that there is something she is still failing to understand or confront.

In the dream, Britomart's "straight course" to Artegall is transformed into a fantasy of bestiality, which is one of the forms of monstrous eroticism that Britomart fears in the mirror scene. In the vision, Britomart first sees herself praying to Isis, but her prayer robes and mitre transform into royal robes and a crown; then, "in the midst of her felicity" a tempest develops, blowing fire around the temple. This environmental disturbance awakens a crocodile that has previously lain motionless at Isis's feet. The crocodile,

[...] gaping greedy wide, did straight devoure
Both flames and tempest: with which growen great,
And swolne with pride of his owne peerelesse power,
He gan to threaten her likewise to eat;
But that the Goddess with her rod him backe did beate.

After Isis beats the Crocodile into submission,

Tho turning all his pride to humblesse meeke,
Him self before her feete he lowly threw,
Which she accepting, he so neare her drew,
That of his game she soone enwombed grew,
And forth did bring a Lion of great might;
That shortly did all other beasts subdue. (V.vii.16)

The dream is unsurprisingly confusing to Britomart, and "With that she waked, full of fearefull fright,/ And doubtfully dismayd through that so uncouth sight" (V.vii.16). The dream seems to represent a regression for Britomart, who supposedly has already seen Artegall, recognized him, and accepted her marriage to him. Here, though, Britomart

once again imagines procreative sexuality through erotic diversion, and the specific elements of the crocodile's relationship with Britomart can be read as revealing some of her anxieties about her relationship with Artegall. The crocodile is initially aggressive and threatens to consume the environment and Britomart herself; Isis has to mediate Britomart's fear of the Crocodile by beating him into "humblesse meeke," at which point the dream develops into a fantasy of procreation without sexual contact. Even though Britomart seems ready to give up her martial identity when she agrees to marry Artegall, this dream suggests that she continues to fear the way that she will be consumed by Artegall, and the only way she can accept the relationship with him is after he is beaten into "lowly" submission. This is a peculiar image of male submission, when we consider that Artegall's simultaneous conflict with Radigund is deeply concerned with women's power over men. Britomart's dream of Artegall lying meekly below her once again likens Britomart to Radigund. Compared to the mirror scene, the Isis vision offers a similar instance of erotic diversion, and here Britomart's understanding of her procreative future is represented through a submissive animal that can impregnate her without devouring her or sexually penetrating her.

Her fear and anxiety after having the dream are similar to the melancholy she experiences earlier when she thinks she is in love with herself or that there is no object for her desire. Isis's priests notice Britomart's depression, and eventually one of them convinces Britomart to talk about the dream. Upon hearing her explanation, the priest explains to Britomart that even though she is in disguise as a knight, she cannot hide her "royall blood," and that the gods see her and her future : "They do thy lineage, and thy Lordly brood;/ They do thy sire, lamenting sore for thee;/ They do thy love, forlorne in

womens thraldome see” (V.vii.21). Just as Merlin has done before, the priest explains to Britomart that her dream foreshadows her marriage, “For that same Crocodile doth represent/ The righteous Knight, that is thy faithfull lover” (V.vii.22), and the priest emphasizes that what Britomart has learned from the dream is that she needs to make Artegall her king. He explains that Artegall will protect Britomart from her “many foes,” and “Then shalt thou take him to thy loved fere,/ And joyne in equal portion of thy realme:/ And afterwards a sonne to him shalt beare,/ That lion-like shall shew his power extreame” (V.vii.23). Although Britomart is greatly relieved to have her monstrous dream explained, the priest’s explanation does not entirely erase the strangeness of Britomart’s vision. Britomart is already aware of this future, so it is strange that she once again experiences this kind of fantasized erotic transference—where sexual contact is specifically removed from the procreative process, and where male aggression is transformed into submission. Additionally, the priest’s explanation that Britomart needs to make Artegall her equal so he can protect her is especially surprising when at this moment it is Britomart who has to rescue Artegall.

Britomart’s climactic battle with Radigund offers a violent release for the anxieties that have plagued Britomart. When the women meet on the battle field, the fight is bodily, bloody, emotional, and uncontrolled. Both women are on the offensive, more intent on penetrating each other’s armor than on shielding themselves from blows. The physical vulnerability of their bodies is described as follows:

[...] Ne either sought the others strokes to shun,
But through great fury both their skill forgot,
And praticanke use in arms: ne spared not

Their dainty parts, which nature had created

So faire and tender, without staine or spot,

For other uses, then they them translated;

Which now they hackt and hewd, as if such use they hated. (V.vii.29)

The fight is urgent and aggressive, but there is also a surprising transformation of the women's animosity in the stanza. We might expect the "fury" that overwhelms the women in the second line to refer to their hatred for each other—both in love with the same man, both trying to win the battle in order to win him—but by the end of the stanza, it is "as if" the hatred is actually directed towards nature's intended "use" of their dainty female parts.³⁵ Although the precise location of these dainty parts and the "other uses" for which nature created them are unspecified, we can reasonably imagine these terms to refer to a range of possible meaning: the "dainty parts" may refer to women's bodies in general, and the "other uses" may be abstract things like tenderness and embraces. Given the preoccupation with Britomart's role as a future mother in the dream vision that precedes the fight, though, it makes more sense that the "dainty parts" are specifically reproductive, and that the "other uses" for which nature had created their bodies refer to nursing, childbirth, and possibly procreative sex. The stanza implies that the women's investment in fighting each other contrasts with heterosexual sexuality and the

³⁵ This is in contrast to Tracey Sedinger's interpretation of the episode. In "Women's Friendship and the Refusal of Lesbian Desire in *The Faerie Queene*," Sedinger reads the battle between Britomart and Radigund as Britomart's final rejection of female relationships. She writes: "Britomart's friendships become enmity, her identification abjections, such that her career as the embodiment of chaste desire ends with her 'hacking' and 'hewing' Radigund's 'dainty parts,' a synechdoche for femininity itself" (2). But given the emphasis on "uses," I disagree with Sedinger's equation of "dainty parts" with "femininity"; Britomart's violence seems to be directed more at the imperative of how she is supposed to *use* her parts than it is at the parts themselves (or, as Sedinger claims overall, at female homoeroticism).

heterosexual family, at least momentarily—even though Britomart’s love for Artegall is the stated reason for the fight.

In the previous two battles I have analyzed, Artegall bleeds, but neither Radigund nor Britomart is wounded by Artegall. Here, the women prove to be martial equals, and they both receive wounds. Their blood gushes, flows, and mixes on the battlefield:

Full fiercely layde the Amazon about,
And dealt her blowes unmercifully sore:
Which Britomart withstood with courage stout,
And them repaide againe with double more.
So long they fought, that all the grassie flore
Was fild with bloud, which from their sides did flow,
And gushed through their armes, that all in gore
They trode, and on the ground their lives did strow,
Like fruitless seede, of which untimely death should grow. (V.vii.31)

In the battle, violence between the women threatens, and potentially replaces, procreative sexuality. Here, the wounds are fantasized not only as life-threatening, but also as specifically non-procreative. The blood and life-force filling the field is “like fruitlesse seede,” and it is unclear whether this is because the women would die young, or if this particular mixing of fluids on the battlefield is in some ways a non-productive and non-procreative expenditure, sapping the women’s energy, emotions, and fluids in a way that threatens the “untimely death” not just of themselves, but also of the generations they are meant to bear.

It is important to note that because this canto is the last time we see Britomart, the battle narratively replaces her marriage to Artegall. Rather than seeing their marriage, we see Britomart fight on behalf of Artegall, ostensibly sacrificing herself—even killing off a part of herself—for him, but in a description that also suggests that the part of herself Britomart is willing to sacrifice is the procreative future. The fact that this fight substitutes for the marriage we never see directs us to consider its erotic implications. Even though we know that Britomart will eventually have children with Artegall somehow, the poem replaces their marital consummation with an alternative union in which Britomart wounds and is wounded by a woman who looks remarkably like Britomart herself; their mutual wounding threatens procreative possibilities, and the description of the fruitlessness of women expending their fluids together can be read as an erotic image, particularly given the fact that early moderns believed women ejaculated semen.³⁶ This substitution of a battle for marriage re-invokes the homo- and autoerotic possibilities that seemed to have been erased when Artegall submitted to Britomart. Additionally, Britomart and Radigund are described as animals during their fight, which serves as a reminder of the animal marriage in Britomart's dream vision. They attack each other "As when a Tygre and a Lionesse/ Are met at spoyling of some hungry pray,/ Both challenge it with equall greedinesse" (V.vii.30). The stanza goes on to allude to the way a Tygre and Lionesse would fight over prey, which we might understand to reference Britomart's and Radigund's rivalry over Artegall; however, because Britomart has just imagined her marriage as an animal encounter, the animal metaphor here draws

³⁶ The idea that women ejaculated semen was part of the Renaissance understanding of anatomy in which women's genitals were inverted (underdeveloped) male genitals. For more on this see Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex*.

attention to the fact that Britomart's and Radigund's interaction substitutes for the marriage. Moreover, the reference reminds us of the bestial eroticism in Britomart's dream vision, once again suggesting that Britomart's erotic tendencies have and may continue to turn away from the heteroerotic ones that she has continual difficulty confronting.

Britomart ultimately overcomes Radigund; unlike Artegall, Britomart does not make the mistake of looking at Radigund's face before killing her. Britomart "with one stroke both head and helmet cleft" (V.vii.34), thus destroying the tyrannical queen and liberating Radigone from the gender upheavals Radigund had enforced. Even the re-establishment of patriarchy in Radigone does not happen in a way that definitively ensures Britomart's and Artegall's marital success. Although Britomart rescues Artegall from one dominating woman, she herself is ultimately represented in very similar terms, and the emasculating threat that Britomart poses is only furthered by the fact that she has to rescue Artegall from Radigund. Ironically, it is Britomart and not Artegall who re-establishes the subservience of women to men in Radigone, and it is Britomart who establishes justice (which is Artegall's job). After the battle,

[...] they afterwards remained,
Him to refresh, and her late wounds to heale:
During which space she there as princes rained,
And changing all that forme of common weale,
The liberty of women did repeale,
Which they had long usurpt; and them restoring
To mens subjection, did true Justice deale:

That all they as a Goddess her adoring,

Her wisdom did admire, and hearkned to her loring. (V.vii.42)

In her power, she also makes them “swear fealty to Artegall” (V.vii.43). This enforcement of hierarchy could be read as a lesson for Britomart about her own proper place—teaching the kingdom to swear fealty to Artegall may represent the lesson she herself has to learn. However, the fact that Britomart remains in control (“as Princes”) also reinforces her self-sufficiency; what she tells the people about female subservience is in opposition to the fact that the people worship her. Britomart effectively replaces Radigund as the “Prince,” and Artegall is entirely unnecessary for any of this to happen. The conclusion of the episode problematizes the priest’s interpretation of the dream vision, raising doubts about why, how, and whether she will eventually marry Artegall and agree to let him reign over her and protect her. Here as elsewhere, Britomart’s stated future is difficult to reconcile with her actual encounters and adventures.

In the sequence of battles, the poem’s revisions, reworkings, substitutions, and circulations unsettle the first battle’s hints that Britomart’s impenetrable armor and her penetrating tendencies will go away once she is “wounded” by love. The subsequent battles present instead an instance of tyrannical, emasculating female power, and then an episode of female-female penetration through eroticized violence in the final battle. The effect of the multiplying battles is marital delay and what seems to be intellectual uncertainty about the ongoing implications of Britomart’s earlier difficulty confronting marriage and progressing toward Artegall. If Dolven is right that repetition represents some kind of block or failure, the specific revisions of Britomart’s and Artegall’s battle seem to concentrate on the difficulty of making Britomart into a wife for Artegall when

the gender instability that has led her to him is precisely what also leads her away from him.

The failure of heteroerotic progress at the end of Britomart's presence in the poem demonstrates that even though Britomart is explicitly represented in armor in order to serve a heterosexual, procreative purpose, the poem's fantasies about female penetrativeness cannot be easily contained. The different examples of erotic diversions throughout the poem illustrate an intellectual interrogation of female masculinity: the early parts of Britomart's adventures focus on the erotic implications of chastity, dwelling on the question of how impenetrability can fit into heterosexual love stories and procreative relationships. As it idealizes chastity, the poem also exposes the way that its own definitions of chastity exist in tension with its definitions of heteroerotic love, for if superlative chastity is metaphorically represented through impenetrable armor, then the Petrarchan wounding that needs to take place will inherently damage chastity as well. The poem does not offer a solution to this problem of impenetrability, and instead Britomart's adventures lead her to explore her confusion about her heteroerotic destiny by experimenting with different forms of release and fulfillment, through "self-pleasing" thoughts, by "treating" her love with Amoret, and finally by the self-killing catharsis represented in the battle with Radigund.

Britomart fits into a taxonomical grouping of penetrating women because, while she is not explicitly presented as being averse to sexual contact with men in the way that Moll Frith is, the relationships and encounters that delay Britomart on her "streight course" to marital chastity reveal similar assumptions to those expressed directly in *The Roaring Girl*. *The Faerie Queene's* representation of Britomart relies on an

epistemology in which female impenetrability—which, in *The Faerie Queene* is both a physical and also an emotional concept—and female masculinity are associated with the impossibility of heterosexual union and the possibility of non-heteroerotic alternatives. Armored and armed, Britomart provokes fantasies of autoerotic and homoerotic diversions that ultimately take the place of her marriage.

CHAPTER IV

SHAKESPEAREAN MATRIARCHIES:

PENETRATING WOMEN AND THE FAILURE OF HETEROSEXUALITY IN

HENRY VI AND THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN

In many ways, the previous two chapters are about pleasure and curiosity. The representations of Moll Frith and Britomart suggest that female masculinity functioned as a source of erotic interest and intrigue in these early modern texts. For Middleton and Dekker, the explorations of the erotic alternatives that may be associated with penetrating women are highly pleasurable, and fantasies of female-female sexual possibilities are more exciting than threatening. For Spenser, Britomart's erotic otherness is a source of endless intellectual inquiry, and although they derail her marriage, Britomart's masculinity and heteroerotic aversion are not maliciously or even especially anxiously portrayed by Spenser. The two examples share a surprisingly positive attitude toward women who play men's roles.

Shakespeare's treatment of female masculinity is considerably different, as Shakespeare doesn't celebrate female martiality, female masculinity, or female homoeroticism in the way that the other authors in this project do. Shakespeare's representations of women who perform acts and behaviors that men rely on to define masculinity expose his characters' extreme anxiety about the implications of such disruptions of gender categories. My analysis of Shakespeare begins with a recognition that much of his canon—and particularly plays that depict war and English patriarchal history, which will be the primary focus of my study here—fixates on masculinity, on patriarchy, on male homosocial intimacy, and on male homoeroticism. As Bruce Smith

puts it in *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England*, Shakespeare plays exist within “a dramatic universe in which the male protagonists find their identities, not in romantic love or in philosophical ideals, but in their relationships with each other” (57); in Shakespeare’s war plays especially, male characters rely on homosocial systems of both bonding and battle to solidify their understandings of themselves as men. Thus, Shakespeare’s anxious representations of masculine women seem to be related to the plays’ precarious definitions of masculinity in general, as I will discuss at length in this chapter. In the *Henry VI* tetralogy and in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which are the plays I discuss in this chapter, confronting female masculinity is necessarily related to the examination of male masculinity, and this forces the characters to recognize, often painfully, that masculinity is not a reliable indicator of difference or an essential feature of maleness.³⁷ In fact, the presence of masculine women is associated with the disordering of patriarchal culture and the possibility of its complete destruction.³⁸ In this

³⁷ As in my previous chapters, I rely on the term “masculine” to describe those acts, behaviors, and values that Renaissance culture used to define men’s successful fulfillment of societal expectations. This is necessarily a fluid definition, and so in my previous chapters I have also relied upon the texts in question to indicate what female masculinity means within each text. For instance, in *The Roaring Girl*, a city comedy, Moll is masculine because she cross-dresses and is identified as acting like a man, but also because when she meets the gallants in the marketplace, she smokes and buys clothes that the other men admire. In *The Faerie Queene*, which explicitly sets out “to fashion a gentle-man,” Britomart is masculine because she wears the armor the other knights do, but also because she embodies the traits that the poem defines as those that the English gentleman should possess: for instance, self-sameness, valor, and martial prowess. In both chapters, the adoption of masculine traits by characters who are categorized as female upsets the texts’ definitions of masculinity.

³⁸ Here, my argument counters that in Headlam Wells’s recent book *Shakespeare on Masculinity*. Wells argues that Shakespeare’s interpretation of the heroic ideal is a political move, often used to critique the failings of the current government. Within that framework, he proposes to examine Shakespeare’s representation of masculinity and heroics, stating that his project is about heroes—“That is to say, it is about men. There are, of course, heroines in the plays, and some of them die tragically. But they are not

way, Shakespeare's masculine women enact the kind of "category crisis" that Marjorie Garber observes in cross-dressing more generally. In Garber's analysis, as I have previously discussed, cross-dressers destroy hierarchies and boundaries because they reveal the limitations of such distinctions—they reveal "an irresolvable conflict or epistemological crux that destabilizes comfortable binarity, and displaces the resulting discomfort onto a figure that already inhabits, indeed incarnates, the margin" (*Vested Interests* 16). In the Shakespeare plays I analyze here, female masculinity has an unsettling effect on the male characters, who are deeply invested in reserving the performance of masculinity for themselves.

In the first part of this chapter, I analyze Shakespeare's *Henry VI* tetralogy and argue that Shakespeare's representations of female masculinity evoke nightmarish fantasies of failed patriarchy and the destabilization of male-centered social systems. More specifically, though, these Shakespearean fantasies do not just involve the possibility that women may be able to play men's parts as well as men or alongside men; by fulfilling men's parts, masculine women threaten to erase men completely or to make them entirely irrelevant. This idea of irrelevance is particularly imagined through the masculine women's lack of interest in heterosexual erotic contact; playing men's social parts and demonstrating no interest in male biological "parts" either, the women aggravate male characters' fears that they may not matter.

heroic in the sense in which Henry V or Macbeth or Coriolanus are heroes, or in which it sometimes seems that Hamlet would like to be heroic. For the Renaissance the heroic ideal is essentially masculine. The qualities it evokes—courage, physical strength, prowess in battle, manly honor, defiance of fortune—may be summed up in a word whose Latin root means "a man. [...] Heroes in Shakespeare are, by definition, men" (2).

This fear of not mattering relates to Butler's description of identity categories, which I rely on in my introductory chapter to describe the role of cultural taxonomies of sexuality in determining individuals' accounts of their own sexual tendencies. Butler's idea of accounting for oneself is also helpful for discussing gender here: Butler suggests that identity categories are "the very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others" (21). By occupying the roles through which men in the plays understand themselves, Shakespeare's masculine women do not simply rival men—they threaten to render men unintelligible. Eventually, this fear that women may be able to replace or erase men generates an associated wide-scale fantasy/fear of female self-sustenance and female homosociality. Within the imagined world of women comes an imagined lesbian erotics, in which women do not find men erotically desirable and, ultimately, find sexual satisfaction with each other.

The argument I make is layered, and it relies on pulling together seemingly fragmented and often contradictory representations of masculine women. My first section on Joan la Pucelle begins by building on my analysis of the *Faerie Queene* with a continued examination of aversion and impenetrability. I analyze the way that characters compulsively sexualize Joan's martial encounters in the play, and I argue that male characters' projection of heterosexual excess onto Joan contrasts with her demonstrated lack of interest in erotic contact with men. The representation of Joan suggests that female masculinity threatens male identity, and the fact that the characters attempt to alleviate this threat by imagining Joan as hypersexual is surprising. This section suggests that the characters would prefer a woman driven by heterosexual desire to a woman who has no need for men at all. This assertion in some ways contradicts the dominant

feminist understandings of Renaissance attitudes toward female sexuality; previous analyses of male fears of female sexuality have focused pervasively on patriarchal concerns about adultery and promiscuity.³⁹ In this section and the subsequent one, I argue that the *Henry VI* plays imply that failures of female heterosexuality may actually be *more* frightening than the idea of female promiscuity.

My second section on Margaret builds on the idea that female failures of heterosexuality produce male nightmares of failed patriarchy and the replacement of men by women. In fact, I argue that the characters respond to Margaret by attempting to defer to logics of heteronormativity and heteroeroticism that would reduce the threat Margaret poses to their masculine identities; however, these heteronormative logics are subsequently destroyed when Margaret disproves the characters' attempts to connect femaleness to femininity and to heterosexuality. This destruction is part of an extensive nightmarish representation of female power, wherein Margaret at first threatens Henry's kingship through promiscuity, but subsequently seems to reject heterosexual bonds altogether as she is progressively imagined as replacing Henry. Margaret's erasure of Henry culminates in a queer description of Henry as an effeminate queen to Margaret, who is herself imagined as a potent Amazonian queen. My reading of Margaret also expands the category of penetrating women because although Margaret does not cross-dress, I make the case that Margaret represents a similar type of penetrating female masculinity to the cross-dressed masculine women I analyze elsewhere. Margaret

³⁹ This is one of the primary anxieties about masculine women that Phyllis Rackin identifies, as I will discuss in my section on Joan la Pucelle. In "Historical Difference/Sexual Difference," she asserts that "masculine women were regarded as whores" (43).

appears in the plays just as Joan disappears, and I argue that the martial penetrating threat Joan poses is imaginatively transferred from Joan's sword to Margaret's tongue.

My final section on *The Two Noble Kinsmen* draws on my analyses in the earlier two sections to analyze instances of lesbian erotics that develop in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s representation of the Amazon princess Emilia. I argue that this late play exists in a world similar to that of the *Henry VI* tetralogy. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* literalizes the tension between patriarchy and matriarchy that lurks in the background of the *Henry VI* plays, as *The Two Noble Kinsmen* begins with a conquered Amazon society that is being forcibly reconciled through marriage with their Athenian conquerors. I use the term "matriarchy" in this chapter to refer to a range of fantasies, not all of which are restricted to the idea of female government of men or of matrilineal descent; sometimes, I use "matriarchy" to refer to fantasies of women-led, all-female societies, though I note when this is the case. I find the term helpful because just as Renaissance patriarchal systems necessarily relate to other aspects of male homosociality and male-centric logics, the idea of a matriarchal system carries associated fears of female homosociality and of a world that revolves around women. Such an assessment of patriarchal systems is rooted in Eve Sedgwick's analysis in *Between Men*; she relies on Heidi Hartmann's definition of patriarchy as "relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (Hartmann, qtd. in *Between* 3). As Sedgwick points out, these relations between men involve elements of homosocial bonding as well as what she defines as "homosocial desire"—"the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (1). *The Two Noble Kinsmen* represents a similar

matriarchal continuum, and it draws attention to it by developing an exaggerated backdrop of the incompatibility between the Greek male characters and the Amazonian women. The play highlights male homosociality and homoeroticism amongst the Greek characters in a way that draws attention to the female characters' lack of heteroerotic interest—the women cannot match the men's enthusiasm for men. This play, however, more thoroughly considers the erotic fallout of the competing systems of male homosociality and female homosociality. Whereas the *Henry VI* plays primarily consider masculine women's lack of heterosexual participation, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* extensively examines parallel societies in which men desire men and women desire women.

Together, I use these readings to show that even though Shakespeare's attitude toward penetrating women is markedly different from those of the other authors in this project, his representations of masculine women nonetheless ultimately evoke similar erotic fantasies to those I have presented in the previous chapters. Shakespeare's representations of female masculinity and penetrating erotic alternatives fit into the taxonomical grouping of penetrating women I have constructed thus far, though this happens in a more fragmented fashion. Here, it is perhaps helpful to reiterate Wittgenstein's explanation of how taxonomies work, which I reference in the beginning of this project. Wittgenstein defines a taxonomical category as a grouping in which traits are shared or associated, but not always definitely causal or clearly exclusive to the group: Wittgenstein explains this variance within individual members of a taxonomical group by saying that "if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. [...] And the result

of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail” (28). What I have proposed in the previous chapters is that women who habitually adopt masculine apparel are imagined as occupying a different erotic category: a category of women who are more likely to penetrate (sometimes other women) than to be penetrable. Joan, Margaret, and Emilia are represented as similarly impenetrable throughout the *Henry VI* plays and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Their refusal to be feminine in the way the male characters want them to—by being pliable, submissive, quiet, open, and also heteroerotically driven—prompts the fantasy/fear of female heteroerotic aversion within which Shakespeare explores female homoerotic possibilities.

I. Joan la Pucelle’s Insufficient Heterosexual Desire

Henry VI, Part I is framed by the threat of women’s words and the failure of men’s swords. This idea of tongues connects to central concerns in many of Shakespeare’s plays: the plays demonstrate a recurrent interest in the force of language versus the force of arms. Characters pair and compare the strengths of swords and words constantly, and the question of which has a greater power to penetrate is a major political question throughout much of the Shakespearean canon. At the beginning of the *Henry VI* tetralogy, the invocation of women’s dangerous persuasiveness through rhetoric foreshadows the plays’ concern that women may be able to insert themselves into the patriarchal system and thereby destroy it. Before we even encounter Joan or Margaret, Winchester figures Gloucester’s wife Eleanor as persuasive and dominating in a way that threatens to inhibit Gloucester’s judgment; Winchester warns Gloucester, “Thy wife is proud; she holdeth thee in awe/ More than God or religious churchmen may” (*1 Henry VI*

I.i.39-40).⁴⁰ Since the audience has presumably already seen *2 Henry VI*, as it was likely written first, the warning about Eleanor also serves as a reminder of Eleanor's destructive capacities. Following this reference to Eleanor's overbearingness, the Dukes construct an image of England emasculated. Gloucester describes the king in his minority as "an effeminate prince" (I.i.35), while Bedford laments the martial failures of England without its former king:

Instead of gold, we'll offer up our arms [in prayer],
Since arms avail not; now that Henry's dead,
Posterity, await for wretched years,
When at their mothers' moisten eyes babes shall suck,
Our isle be made a nourish of salt tears,
And none but women left to wail the dead. (I.i.46-51)

This strange image of a country rendered all-female by male martial failures recasts women as the people who will suffer from national tragedy—and not, as Winchester first suggests, as the causers of it. But both Dukes contrast male martial success with an alternative scenario of a country led by and filled with women that foreshadows the play's venomous representation of the Catholic warrior saint Joan of Arc and the subsequent representation of Margaret of Anjou. With male power and national identity imagined as a fragile, threatened guard against a world where women can control men—or potentially live without them—the play enters into a complicated and contradictory representation of what happens when women do wield swords or other means of penetrating the patriarchy.

⁴⁰ All quotations in this chapter are from the Arden Shakespeare editions.

In many ways, my reading of the tetralogy agrees with Phyllis Rackin's description of Shakespearean women as "anti-historians" in the history plays. Rackin argues that male characters in Shakespeare's histories are invested in the creation of historical narratives in a way that draws attention to the plays' history-making processes; as Rackin points out, "Characters repeatedly allude to history, past and future, and define their actions as attempts to inscribe their names in the historical record" (329). Characters work to represent male heroism and create an English historiography in the face of what Rackin describes as a growing Renaissance ambivalence towards history as truth. Within this context, "The protagonists [...], conceived both as subjects and as writers of history, were inevitably male. The women who do appear are typically defined as opponents and subverters of the historical and historiographic enterprise" (329). Rackin argues that the women in the histories challenge "the logocentric, masculine historical record" by refusing to "ratify the masculine version of the past" (330); women may do this by mocking male self-aggrandizement or by belittling martial feats. At the center of this "anti-historicism," though, Rackin suggests that one of the main ways female "anti-historians" disrupt history is through sexual promiscuity: "An adulterous woman at any point can make a mockery of the entire story, and for that reason women are inevitably threatening to the historiographic enterprise" (337). However, while my own reading of the plays accords with Rackin's argument that women are problematic in the project of patriarchal history, the female characters' sexual promiscuity does not seem to be the only or even the primary threat in these plays. While adultery is certainly a central anxiety in the plays I examine here, another fear, as evidenced in the opening scene of *Henry VI*, is that men may be entirely irrelevant; throughout the rest of the plays,

as I will argue, the characters frequently fantasize female promiscuity and female sexual excess as the primary threats they face, but they do so in ways that suggest a need to replace their greater fear that women may have *no* need for men.

Like Moll Frith in Chapter II, Joan la Pucelle cannot seem to do anything without other characters sexualizing her behavior; Joan's martial persona and masculinity become provocative sources of erotic speculation for the other characters. For instance Charles the Dauphin of France immediately desires Joan when he sees her fight, and later on, the English characters regularly imagine that Joan is involved with Charles or that they can divert their own martial encounters with her toward sexual ones. Still, Joan is a queer case. To say that Joan is imagined as embodying any specific erotic possibility would be to ignore the fact that there is very little that is consistent in the representation of Joan. As Nancy Gutierrez has observed, "She is, at various times in the play, a divinely commissioned peasant girl who dons soldier's garb for the glory of God's mother, a glorified camp follower, a master orator in defense of her country, a conjuring witch, and an abject traitor" (183). And despite the sexualizing rhetoric that continues to surround her throughout the play, we have no idea whether Joan is a virgin or a whore, a saint or a witch. What is certain is that other characters' concerns about her martial success become redirected toward her sexuality, and that there is no place for Joan in England.

Joan's martial performances are immediately linked to questions of gender performance and erotic performance when she meets Charles. She tells him, "My courage try by combat, if thou dar'st,/ And thou shalt find that I exceed my sex./ Resolve on this; thou shalt be fortunate,/ If thou receive me for thy warlike mate" (I.ii.89-92). Charles finds this attractive, and he quickly equates her martial power with a kind of

Petrarchan power to control men. He challenges, "In single combat thou shalt buckle with me;/ And if thou vanquishest, thy words are true;/ Otherwise I renounce all confidence" (I.ii.95-97). As soon as Joan does win the fight, Charles figures himself as the victim of love more than of her sword, and he tells her, "Impatiently I burn with thy desire./ My heart and hands thou hast at once subdued./ Excellent Pucelle if thy name be so,/ Let me thy servant, and not thy sovereign be" (I.iii.87-90). Still, Joan defers to her chastity and asserts, "I must not yield to any rites of love,/ For my profession's sacred from above:/ When I have chased all thy foes from hence,/ Then will I think upon a recompense" (I.ii.113-116). Charles's reaction to Joan introduces the complex erotic effect she will have throughout the play. Joan's representation of herself as "exceeding" her sex sparks in other characters the assumption that her gender deviance is related to sexual excess. However, this assumption contradicts Joan's own assertion in the dialogue, which is that her position as a knight erases the possibility of engaging in "rites of love"; this suggests that the "excess" she describes is not sexual excess. Joan's declaration that she exceeds her sex is curious; it is unclear what it means to "exceed" a sex. Does it make her more of a woman or more of a man? Her description implies that her unfeminine behaviors exceed the boundaries of what is defined as being female, but whether this makes her like a man, or whether it means that she is something new entirely remains undefined at this point.

The scene also highlights the tension between Joan's anti-sexual self-presentation and the other characters' sexualization of her. Charles finds Joan's martial performance erotically exciting in much the same way that Laxton experiences Moll's masculinity as a catalyst for imagined erotic scenarios. Charles's erotic response to Joan presents an array

of homo- and heteroerotic figurations: Charles is aroused by Joan's masculinity, which could be understood as a male homoerotic response in which Charles reveals the attractiveness of men to each other, and particularly in martial settings. In this reading, female masculinity permits Charles to act on the male homoerotic values already built into the French army; this reading is supported by the idea that Charles seems to find fighting with Joan to be an erotic activity. Charles's declaration of his submission to Joan also suggests a more complex erotic dynamic wherein Charles finds gender reversal exciting and is attracted to the idea of role-reversal. Despite the complexity of Charles's erotic response, though, his transference of Joan's power from a martial context toward an erotic one functions in some ways as a way to reduce or explain the threat of her masculinity. Charles's representation of himself as a submissive lover can be read as a justification of the fact that in actuality, he has no choice but to submit to her because she is better with her sword. Put another way, he explains his impotent sword in terms of his sexual potency or sexual susceptibility; by framing martial submission as erotic submission, he implies that Joan's victory is not due to her ability to perform masculine acts, but that it is, rather, an appropriately feminine erotic victory. Through his Petrarchan response, he transfers attention from the masculine symbolism of Joan's successful sword towards the biological fact of his maleness, as evidenced by his arousal. Gutierrez presents a similar reading of the scene, arguing that although Charles gives up his military power to Joan, "this apparent transference of power is undercut by the very Petrarchan discourse used by the Dauphin" (88).

Charles's eroticization of Joan's power foreshadows the reaction that men will continue to have towards Joan, which is an impulse to refigure her power with a sword as

erotic power or, as is often the case with the English soldiers in the play, to re-imagine battles with Joan as sexual encounters. In all of these scenarios, the fact that Joan is actually a threatening peer in the war seemingly cannot be confronted directly by the male characters. As Kathryn Schwarz points out in “Stealing the Breech,” their difficulty in accepting Joan as an opponent makes sense: Joan disrupts patriarchal social systems and renders definitions of masculinity empty by fighting. Schwarz argues that Joan is eternally dislocated for this reason:

Joan’s threat to the male homosocial systems of the play rests on this dislocation; her identity as a woman is not socializable, and her martial performance threatens to make conventions of masculinity inscrutable as well. Battling each other, men affirm what masculinity is; battling Joan, whose doubleness is relentlessly legible, they have difficulty knowing what it means. When Bedford asks, “A maid? And be so martial?” he points to the fact that Joan’s martial acts do not constitute a transvestite disguise plot; there is no moment of redeeming revelation and refeminization, for the female body is always visibly the referent of masculine acts. [...] Joan’s presence unravels the naturalized connection between masculinity and men. (150)

Put another way, Joan’s martial performance makes her a menacing, penetrative figure, endangering the things men in the play value most highly: she wields a sword that both literally threatens to penetrate male bodies (to kill men, reinforcing their fear of an all-female England) and also allows her to penetrate and participate in homosocial systems, thereby disrupting the systems. If men prove themselves men by fighting other men and

if they create their legacies of masculinity and heroism by defending king and country, the insertion of a woman into martial affairs reduces the characters' ability to claim such activities as part of masculine identity. By entering into the exclusively male sphere and by playing men's parts, Joan threatens to dismantle the patriarchy by rendering masculinity meaningless.

Joan's successful usurpation of French masculinity is evident after she forces the English to retreat in Act I; Alençon declares, "All France will be replete with mirth and joy/ When they shall hear how we have play'd the men," but Charles corrects him: "Tis Joan, not we, by whom the day is won" (I.vi.15-17). Joan, then, has "played the man" both by overcoming the Englishmen and by doing it better than the French men could. To an English audience, the threat Joan poses to masculine identity is tempered by her foreignness: perhaps the audience is allowed to laugh when Alençon and Charles indicate that Joan is more of a man than they are, since in this scene Joan only explicitly emasculates the *French* men. However, it is the English who have been conquered by Joan, and the English characters seem to feel the need to contain her. Their responses to her suggest considerable concern, anger, and disdain. As Leah Marcus puts it, "It is as though, in *I Henry VI*, despising female dominance is a necessary part of being male, English, and 'Protestant'" (76). Concerned as they are about masculinity and the erasure of patriarchy, the English male characters seemingly recognize the threat Joan poses to male social systems more broadly; and like Charles, who converts Joan's martiality into a romantic narrative, the English attempt to re-cast Joan's martially penetrative tendencies as sexually penetrative tendencies, which they apparently understand to be less problematic and threatening.

The strategies for relegating Joan to a sexual threat take diverse forms, and different characters imagine a variety of erotic substitutions for Joan's violence. Early on, they begin to figure Joan as a whore, whose martial activities are motivated by her relationship with Charles. This possibility seems to have the dual effect of diminishing Joan's role as a knight and also emasculating Charles: they imagine Joan as Charles's concubine and disparage Charles's decision to give up his own sword in favor of hers. For instance, in Act Two, after the English have mounted a successful counterattack on the French, Talbot notes the absence of Joan, saying: "I muse we met not with the Dauphin's Grace,/ His new-come champion, virtuous Joan of Aire,/ Nor any of his false confederates" (II.ii.19-21). In response, Bedford speculates, "'Tis thought, Lord Talbot, when the fight began,/ Rous'd on the sudden from their drowsy beds,/ They did amongst the troops of armed men/ Leap o'er the walls for refuge in the field" (22-25). Burgundy furthers the account with this strangely unfounded elaboration: "Myself, as far as I would well discern/ For smoke and dusky vapours of the night,/ Am sure I scar'd the Dauphin and his trull,/ When arm in arm they both came swiftly running,/ Like to a pair of turtle-doves/ That could not live asunder day or night" (26-31). Their explanation of Joan's absence goes into seemingly unnecessary and unsupported detail, specifically locating Joan in a "drowsy bed" (it is unclear whether hers is supposed to be the same as Charles's) at the time of the attack; specifying her as Charles's "trull"; and recasting Joan and Charles as inseparable lovers—not viable adversaries to the English. In actuality, the previous scene shows us Joan and Charles in a heated argument about military strategy at the moment of the English attack, so Burgundy's sexualized account of them as "turtle-doves" contrasts directly with what we see of them; the juxtaposition draws attention to

the gap between what Joan actually does in the play (she fights, she strategizes, she kills people) and the characters' representation of her as a seductress who saps male energy sexually rather than mortally and who poses an emasculating threat only to those who fall under her erotic control. Bedford disparages Charles, saying "How much he wrongs his fame,/ Despairing of his own arm's fortitude,/ To join with witches and the help of hell" (II.i.16-18). Falling for Joan, listening to Joan, and sleeping with Joan, according to the English, are the things that allow Joan to disrupt masculinity—not the fact that she can apparently do everything men can do, often better than they can.

Besides imaging Joan in bed with Charles, the English also imaginatively convert their own confrontations with Joan into sexual encounters. In Act Three, Joan makes fun of ailing Bedford, and Talbot angrily tells her, "Foul fiend of France, and hag of all despite,/ Encompass'd with thy lustful paramours,/ Becomes it thee to taunt his valiant age/ And twit with cowardice a man half dead?/ Damsel, I'll have a bout with you again,/ Or else let Talbot perish with his shame" (III.ii.52-57). Talbot's challenge to Joan, that he will "have a bout," is a sexual pun that she picks up on, retorting "Are ye so hot?" (58). The wordplay—along with Talbot's description of Joan's battle comrades as "lustful paramours"—not only sexualizes Joan once again, but it also rhetorically replaces fighting Joan with a kind of imagined sexual contest. Talbot uses the sexual language as a threat to Joan, suggesting perhaps that he thinks a sexual encounter with Joan would be a satisfying punishment for her. Joan's mocking response implies not only that she gets the pun, but also that she understands the attempt to sexualize her and the way that such an attempt undermines her. She throws the pun back at Talbot ("Are ye so hot?"), suggesting that it is Talbot who is weakened by the proposed sexual encounter,

not she. Talbot's response is telling: he stubbornly refuses to talk to Joan anymore and ignores her while he challenges the other soldiers' masculinity. He diverts the scene by stating "I'll speak not to that railing Hecate,/ But unto thee, Alençon, and the rest;/ Will ye, like soldiers, come and fight it out? [...] Base muleteers of France!/ Like peasant foot-boys do they keep the walls,/ And dare not take up arms like gentlemen" (III.v.64-70). The scene marks a sharp divide between the way Talbot is able to confront Joan's martiality and the way he views martiality otherwise; Joan *at arms* with men is re-imagined as Joan in men's arms, but Talbot's subsequent logic to the other French soldiers is that raising arms is what makes men men. The fact that he must explicitly separate Joan from his taunt to the French soldiers—that they should be "like soldiers" and "take up arms like gentlemen"—highlights his unstable equation of masculinity with martiality and with maleness. At the same time, Talbot speaks in simile (raising arms *like* gentlemen, not raising arms *to prove themselves* gentlemen), which reminds us of the ambiguous space between *seeming like* and *being*. On one hand, this suggests, maybe Joan *seems* to be a gentlemen, too (with the reassuring possibility that she *isn't*); but Talbot's logic only ever permits *seeming*, even when one *is* a [gentle]man. And so the threat Joan poses is reinforced through Talbot's attempt to separate her from definitions of masculinity. Seeming masculine, what Joan *is* remains inaccessible and constantly changeable. But if, as Talbot suggests, masculinity is only defined by the performances of masculine deeds, Joan is just as masculine as the other French soldiers and as the English soldiers as well.

Similar ambiguity about the connection between Joan's masculinity and maleness surfaces in one of Burgundy's jokes. After Bedford muses, "A maid! And be so

martial!” (II.1.21), Burgundy answers, “Pray God she prove not masculine ere long,/ If underneath the standard of the French/ She carry armor as she hath begun” (II.i.22-24). The lines can be interpreted in different ways. The lines ostensibly concern themselves with whether Joan might really be a man: in other words, Joan might “prove masculine” (she might be male) if underneath the “standard of the French” (her uniform) she carries other “armor” (if underneath her armor she has genitals). Marcus analyzes the line by saying that it represents a fear of sex change: “If Joan persists in her violation of accepted sex roles, she may eventually turn male, perhaps through the same magic that allows her to triumph over men, or perhaps through some obscure physiological mechanism” (68). But there is a sexual pun as well: The Arden Shakespeare glosses a bawdy innuendo in which “prove not masculine” would mean “do not show the effect of relations with men” (37), in which case “proving masculine” would be bearing a child as the result of sexual contact. In this sexualized play on words, for Joan to “carry armor” underneath the “standard of the French” would be to have sex with a soldier, not to be one herself; the Norton glosses these lines as implying that she “bears the weight of an armed man” (491), and the Arden glosses “standard” as “penis” (37). What is remarkable here is that, as in the previous example with Talbot, the characters’ observations about Joan’s masculinity are quickly converted into a fantasized scenario where Joan is not actually masculine, but rather trying to find a way to *sleep with* men. The possibility that Joan *is* male underneath her clothing, or even the possibility that she is simply a biological female who is masculine, becomes strangely interchangeable in these lines—erased, even—by the possibility that she is sleeping with men.

It might seem, based on these examples, that the play reinforces previous analyses of female masculinity in the Renaissance by suggesting that Joan's cross-dressing and gender deviance (as she puts it, "I exceed my sex") were understood to be related to heterosexual excess. And indeed, it is true that the characters who make these jokes about Joan repeatedly want or need it to be the case that Joan's transgressions are prompted by or related to the desirability of men. But the logic that Joan's martial tendencies stem from heterosexual excess is troubled by the fact that Joan declares herself to be a virgin—and there is little evidence to contradict her declaration until late in the play, when she attempts to save her life by declaring herself the whore everyone thought she was (as I will discuss shortly). Moreover, and more importantly, the characters' wishful explanation that Joan is driven by a desire *for* men stands in stark contrast to Joan's willfulness: whatever her initial motive might be for becoming a soldier (and we do not see her until she is before the king), Joan in the play concentrates her energies on military strategy and is hardly distracted by desire when she encounters men on the battlefield. Whether or not Joan is sexually involved with anyone—and there is no evidence that she is—sexual desire does not drive her. The fact that the characters have to imagine Joan's heterosexual desire into being, where there is no evidence of it, implies that Joan's sexuality is insufficient by their standards, rather than excessive. They seem to enjoy hating their sexualized version of Joan, finding it easy to mock and belittle her; meanwhile, the idea of a masculine Joan who is not attracted to men at all is difficult for the characters to confront.

The characters replace Joan's lack of desire with imagined hyper-sexual desires. Charles's early impulse to sexualize Joan's martial aggression foreshadows this, and

throughout the play, Joan's apparent impenetrability—both on the battlefield and in her claims to virginity—evokes fantasies of her being *constantly* penetrated. Charles does not carry his own fantasies to this extent (and in his sexual fantasy, he does not identify himself as the penetrating party), but his initial desire seems to be heightened by Joan's refusal. Although this paradox that chastity may evoke desire is not a new one, the English knights' experience of a similar concept is more surprising, as they begin to embrace contradictory descriptions of Joan almost haphazardly. For them, Joan's declared impenetrability prompts preoccupation with penetrating her and an almost manic belief in her sexual promiscuity.

This belief is evidenced in the puns the English enjoy using to describe Joan. For instance, before Talbot meets Joan, he learns from a messenger that “The Dauphin, with one Joan le Pucelle join'd,/ A holy prophetess new risen up,/ Is come with a great power to raise the siege” (I.iv.99-102); Talbot responds, “Puzell or pucelle, Dolphin or dog-fish,/ Your hearts I'll stamp out with my horse's heels” (I.iv.106-107). His implication is that he will beat them no matter who they are, but his declaration relies on a pun between the word “pucelle,” which is French for virgin and which was also used in English to refer to “any girl, a maid” (*OED*), and the English word “puzzel,” which was slang for “a drab, a harlot, a courtesan” (*OED*). Talbot relies on this strange equation of opposites (virgin and harlot) in a way that seems to imply that there *is* no difference between a virgin and a slut, or that such a difference does not matter. This is reinforced by other characters' similar punning. When Talbot attacks the French, they blame Joan for their failure, and the Bastard of France sarcastically accuses, “Tut! holy Joan was his defensive guard” (II.i.49). The Arden glosses “holy” by suggesting that it is “probably with a

quibble” (38), and the Norton edition of the play suggests that the Bastard’s sneering description of “holy” Joan here is “a reference to her sexual availability: ‘hole’ was slang for vagina” (492). Whether or not this is the intended pun right here—and it seems plausible—the triple meaning of “holy” seems to influence the play’s representation of Joan more broadly. At once “holy” (divinely favored), “wholly” (intact), and “holey” (permeable, leaky, a slut), Joan cannot possibly be all three, but the characters’ careless equation of Joan’s chastity (wholeness, holiness) with hyper-sexuality (holey-ness) and her divine inspiration with witchcraft seems to reflect a deliberate effort to ignore Joan’s representation of herself; they reduce the threat she poses to male masculinity and patriarchal systems through their refusal to see the difference between a pucelle and a puzzel. All women, it would seem, are the same as each other. By denying the importance of Joan’s impenetrability, both sexual and martial, they reduce the impact she has on English masculine identity.

Still, these efforts to eroticize Joan are precarious: the characters are engaged in a slippery and unstable attempt to separate the material from the symbolic by attempting to assert that Joan cannot really be masculine without a male body. Ignoring the fact that Joan embodies every definition of masculinity, they try to reduce her to a biological imperative (sex and childbirth) that they find less threatening. The implication is that a woman who takes on the phallic accessories of masculinity in battle still lacks something that allows her to fully disturb their equation of masculinity with maleness. But the fact that Joan does perform masculine acts threatens the gender binary the characters attempt to protect—and by threatening this binary, she threatens established order more broadly, too. Schwarz’s reading of the play explains this well; she explains that female

masculinity is constructed in such a way that it de-essentializes gender and also other patriarchal organizing principles. She writes that “the essentializing rhetoric that surrounds Joan both mirrors and parodies the play’s various representations of essential connections between maleness and masculinity, between kingship or heroism and authority” (145). This association in the play between gender hierarchy and the idea of hierarchy and order on a larger scale suggests that by pulling down gender binaries, masculine women threatens to pull down everything else, too; this fear continues to be explored in the subsequent plays.

It is Joan, though, who ultimately pulls herself down in *1 Henry VI*. After deconstructing heteronormative gender logic throughout the play and defying characters’ assertions of the heterosexual imperatives that ought to accompany her female body, Joan eventually attempts to save her own life by trying to re-enter the gender framework she has disturbed. At the end of the play, Joan first attempts to avoid death by telling her captors that “Joan of Aire hath been/ A virgin from her tender infancy” (V.iv.50); however, when this does not secure her release, she tries a different tactic. Joan tells them, “I am with child” (V.iv.62). The men mock the hypocrisy of these competing claims and demand to know who the father is. Joan first claims that it was Alençon, but when her captors claim to hate Alençon, Joan says that instead it was “Reignier, King of Naples” (V.iv.78). I agree with Schwarz’s reading of the episode, which explains Joan’s final pleas as an attempt to fit herself into the patriarchal system in order to win mercy: Schwarz explains that Joan’s declaration of her pregnancy

is a belated and doomed attempt to enter into the system of male bonds in conventionally feminine terms, to literally embody the condition that

connects men to one another; and if her captors do not value the Dauphin's child, Joan is willing to change her story through the invention of a series of fathers until her body performs an acceptable role. But as the play makes clear, the attempt to re-write this particular body as doing socially conventional work cannot succeed. [...] Her last desperate claim, and the death that follows, have been read as feminization, putting her body back into a recognizable social place; yet I think that this ending demonstrates more explicitly than any other element of Joan's story that for her such a place does not exist. (150)

Joan's contradictory confessions also do little to prove that she has been as sexually promiscuous as the characters have previously claimed. Her final effort to save her own life by claiming she is pregnant is an effort at self-preservation and does not seem to be a real confession of her sexual activity. Joan's claim of a pregnancy does not prove her sexuality—in fact, the need to invent a fake pregnancy highlights the fact that she is not pregnant, and the string of imaginary fathers she lists allows us to wonder whether she has actually slept with any of them. Despite the fact that Joan declares herself the whore they hoped she would be, she does not appear to be driven by a desire for men at any point in the play. She apparently rejects Charles's advances, as there is no explicit evidence in the play that they are sleeping together, despite what the English say, and she remains emotionally independent in a way that Charles does not.⁴¹ That Joan tries to save

⁴¹ Carole Levin comes to a similar conclusion in *Shakespeare's Foreign Worlds*. Levin looks at the history of "pleading the belly" (of avoiding capital punishment by claiming to be pregnant) in the Renaissance, and she uses Joan as a case study. Levin points out that Joan's final claim to pregnancy is questionable, as is the possibility that Joan has been sexually active at all. Levin observes, "one might wonder if Joan is indeed

herself by representing herself as hypersexual even suggests that she knows that the English would prefer a hypersexual Joan to the impenetrable Joan they have actually encountered; the sexualization of Joan in this final scene, then, stands in contrast to the fact that whether or not she is a virgin, there is no reason to believe that Joan's masculinity has been related to her desire for men or to any kind of excess of heterosexual desire.

As Joan constructs an apparently false history of heterosexual activity, her final attempt to sexualize herself also farcically reminds us of the figure with whom Joan associates herself: the Virgin Mary. Joan explains her strength as coming from Mary early in the play when she tells Charles, "Christ's mother helps me, or I were too weak" (I.ii.106); later, Joan's claim to divine power is debunked in the scene when we see that Joan is actually in communication with demons.⁴² Joan's final claims to be a virgin *and* pregnant within the space of only a few lines seem to point us to Mary and the virgin birth again, if parodically. The final reference to the miraculous story of a woman giving birth without having sexual intercourse seems to align with many of the anxieties about female masculinity, female self-sufficiency, and the possibility of an all-female world that begin the play. According to Ruben Espinosa, the Renaissance saw increasingly ambivalent attitudes toward the Virgin Mary, in part due to Protestant anxieties about Mary's centrality in the Catholic Church, but also due to a discomfort with the idea of a

pregnant. [...] Although Joan and Charles do enter together in Act II, scene I, when they flee Rouen, there is no explicit evidence that Joan has taken any lovers, much less that she is pregnant" (30).

⁴² Joan's association with Mary in the play is interesting and, according to Ruben Espinosa, "historically inaccurate since Joan of Arc was said to have heard voices from Saint Michael, Saint Gabriel, Saint Catherine, and Saint Margaret" (48).

female whom Espinosa identifies as a source of purely female power.⁴³ It is easy to see how Mary might figure centrally in anxieties about male impotence. In *1 Henry VI*, the idea of a Virgin birth seems to represent the worst case scenario for the English, who have relentlessly attempted to justify Joan's performances of masculine feats by asserting that she is still controlled by a desire for men—that men are still necessary to Joan and that therefore Joan is in some way still contained within heteronormative hierarchies. A woman who can give birth without the help of a male body at all seems to play on the English characters' fear of the possibility that even heterosexual imperatives may be destructible.

The final image of Mary—though seemingly invoked at this point as the antithesis of duplicitous Joan—serves as a reminder that even though Joan is killed, the disordering effect she has had on English patriarchal projects and on logics of heteronormativity has not been contained. Joan's refusal to adhere to categories of gendered behavior, and the characters' failure to explain such "excess" in terms of heterosexual desire, still threatens male systems of power. Joan is a woman whom men mistakenly—though perhaps, on some level, intentionally—identify as driven by a desire *for* men. Joan's penetrative potential highlights the way that female masculinity—female penetration of male

⁴³ Espinosa frames this gender anxiety in terms of religious anxiety, arguing that although the Protestant Reformation in part stemmed from a fear of impotence due to being controlled by Rome, Protestant England was still riddled with anxieties of impotence: "In Post-Reformation England, no one felt adequately 'Christian,' and thus the feeling of impotence persisted. As a symbol of the old faith, the Virgin Mary was ensnared in that cultural anxiety" (39). Espinosa ultimately argues that the play uses Joan "as a means of scrutinizing England's post-Reformation anxieties about its religious and gendered identity" (38). He argues that although the representation of Joan is largely negative, she also has the effect of invoking nostalgia for an older "collective faith" (38). Joan functions as "an efficacious figure in the organization of community" (38), around whom the French rally and unify, while the English systems of belief are destroyed or emptied of meaning.

systems, in part through the literal penetrativeness of her sword—destabilizes male homosocial systems because it severs masculinity from maleness and because it cannot be explained heteroerotically in the way the men want it to be. If Joan's masculinity could be explained in terms of her heterosexual desire, she at least would participate in a system where men retained an important role through maleness, if not masculinity. But we do not need to take Joan's claims to virginity at face value in order to recognize that she relentlessly challenges the male characters' representations of her as being at all desirous of them. The idea that she does not desire men appears to be one of the most threatening aspects about her because she presents the frightening possibility of female self-sufficiency and the realization of the matriarchy that begins the play.

II. England's Two Queens: Margaret and Matriarchal Nightmares

As the *Henry VI* plays progress, anxieties about female masculinity do not die with Joan la Pucelle. At first, Henry's future wife, the French Margaret of Anjou, represents herself as the feminine opposite to martial Joan, but Margaret quickly transforms into a reincarnation of Joan. The plays' representations of Margaret reinforce the anxieties about masculine women that the characters experience with Joan. Margaret becomes queen and threatens male identity and English patriarchy from within. At first, the primary threat Margaret poses seems to be her promiscuity, but this aspect of her character disappears as the plays shift to focus on the ways that she threatens patriarchy by replacing men. As with Joan, Margaret is most threatening when Margaret seems to have no need for men at all. Ultimately, Margaret actualizes the fears of female self-rule and female rule over men that the characters attempt to contain in their responses to Joan.

At almost the exact same time that the threat Joan poses is being ostensibly erased and contained, Margaret appears onstage for the first time. In many ways, Margaret's very arrival in the plays echoes Joan's and foreshadows Margaret's destructive effect. Suffolk—already in love with Margaret at this point himself—argues for her marriage to Henry, saying “Her valiant courage and undaunted spirit,/ More than in women commonly is seen,/ Will answer our hope in issue of a king” (V.v.70-73). The invocation of Margaret's courage as exceeding womanliness directly recalls Joan's self-description: “My courage try by combat, if thou dar'st,/ And thou shalt find that I exceed my sex” (I.ii.89-90). Suffolk has the same reaction to Margaret that the male characters previously had to Joan: he hopes that her masculine traits—here, “valiant courage and undaunted spirit,” which Suffolk claims are anomalous traits for women—can be channeled into a heteroerotic context. However, whereas characters simply attempted to sexualize Joan, Suffolk imagines that Margaret can participate more helpfully in the regeneration of the patriarchy. He assumes that Margaret's masculinity can pass through her and thereby find its appropriate home on the male body of a son who will be king; he does not, at this point, imagine that Margaret will want to take over the kingship herself.

Schwarz offers a helpful analysis of the similarities between Joan and Margaret. The conclusion she draws is that Joan and Margaret are two sides of an Amazonian threat: whereas Joan is an outsider who is openly masculine even in appearance and is explicitly described as an Amazon, Margaret becomes a kind of domesticated Amazonian threat, who similarly disrupts male hierarchies, but who does so without overtly disrupting visible conventions of femininity. In other words, Schwarz argues that the threat women pose in the plays is not restricted to women who openly defy gender

norms; of Margaret, she writes, “Chastity makes her a wife, sexuality makes her a queen, maternity makes her the mother of a prince, and, in *3 Henry VI*, martiality will make her an effective king” (157). I agree with Schwarz’s pairing of the two women; indeed, the moment when the English think they have triumphed over Joan is the moment when French Margaret becomes English and successfully moves into the center of the monarchy. However, I would like to complicate Schwarz’s analysis that “sexuality makes her queen.” For although Margaret’s acceptance of a heterosexual marriage arranged by Suffolk does make her queen and a mother, and although Margaret briefly becomes sexually involved with Suffolk, she is similar to Joan in that her own interests remain primarily political, dynastic, and self-serving rather than directly sexual—even while other characters eroticize her.

At first, the other characters do not seem to recognize any similarities between Margaret and Joan, and Margaret is introduced through an explicit logic of heteronormativity and heteroeroticism that would equate her biological sex with gendered behaviors and with heterosexual imperatives—even though later, such reasoning will fail entirely. When Suffolk first meets with Margaret and attempts to get her to agree to marry Henry, Suffolk himself is momentarily overtaken by Margaret’s beauty. Surprised by his response, he rallies himself by reasoning in an aside, “She’s beautiful, and therefore to be woo’d;/ She is a woman, therefore to be won” (V.iii.78-79). In other words, through this logic he tries to overcome the paralyzing effect that Margaret has on him by reminding himself of her biological femaleness and of the roles he believes should accompany that: in Suffolk’s syllogism, beauty makes Margaret an appropriate object of male desire, and the fact that she is female means that she should be open to his

advances. Starting from what he takes to be the fact of her femaleness, Suffolk builds his assumptions about the associated behaviors and desires that ought to accompany such a body. By laying bare this heteronormative logic, the play interestingly simplifies a patriarchal epistemology that has been implied, but not explicitly stated, in *1 Henry VI*'s representation of Joan as well. The idea that femaleness reduces women to a specific social/erotic role is a fantasy that the characters have attempted to enforce repeatedly; the idea that women should be "won" conflates martial and erotic rhetoric in a similar fashion to what we have seen in *The Faerie Queene*. If "winning" a woman's hand in marriage means that she is "won," Suffolk's logic implies that the heterosexualization of women keeps them out of competition with men.

However, throughout *2 Henry VI*, the play begins to debunk Suffolk's logic about Margaret, and Suffolk's heteronormative assumptions are fully gone by *3 Henry VI*. After marrying Henry, Margaret is represented as progressively more masculine and penetrating, and as this happens, Margaret seemingly loses interest in men as erotic partners. At first, when she appears in *1 Henry VI*, Margaret threatens the patriarchy primarily through her excess extramarital sexuality, as she engages in an affair with Suffolk. She becomes the kind of "anti-historian" Rackin describes by openly mocking Henry's legacy, thus refuting his attempts at writing himself into history, and by potentially adulterating the royal bloodline through her relationship with Suffolk. What is strange, though, is that when Suffolk dies, the question of Margaret's extramarital sexuality never comes up again; the plays shift from focusing on Margaret's heterosexual transgressions to a complete preoccupation with her defiance of standards of femininity and with the threat she poses to Henry's sovereignty, as Margaret becomes more adamant

in pursuing her own agenda. Once Margaret is Queen of England, characters begin to comment on the inappropriateness of her insertion into political affairs. For instance, Dame Eleanor observes Margaret's political dominance by saying that Margaret is "in this place most master [though she will] wear no breeches" (*2 Henry I*.iii.146).

Margaret's political power increases substantially after Suffolk dies, to the point that in *3 Henry VI*, Henry is asked not to participate in the wars Margaret is waging to save his monarchy—Clifford explains this to Henry saying, "The Queen hath best successes when you are absent" (II.ii.74). This idea that Margaret can perform instead of Henry suggests an incompatibility between male masculinity and female masculinity. Soon Margaret is leading the English army, and far from being "won" romantically or martially, Margaret becomes unrestrainedly independent.

Margaret wields the most power at the moment when she seems to have effectively annihilated the Yorkist threat by capturing Richard Duke of York; at this moment, in the beginning of *3 Henry*, York offers a kind of reversal of the logical assessment Suffolk originally invoked for Margaret, this time highlighting her overwhelming failure to adhere to standards of femininity. York reasons,

'Tis beauty that doth oft make women proud;

But, God he knows, thy share thereof is small.

'Tis virtue that doth make them most admir'd;

The contrary doth make thee wonder'd at.

'Tis government that makes them seem divine;

The want thereof makes thee abominable.

Thou art as opposite to every good

As the Antipodes are unto us,
Or as the south to Septentrion.
O tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide!
How couldst thou drain the life-blood of the child,
To bid the father wipe his eyes withal,
And yet be seen to bear a woman's face?
Women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible;
Thou stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless. (I.iv.128-141)

The description of Margaret's military potency and her impenetrable heart are reminiscent of the terms used in descriptions of other masculine women, echoing representations of Britomart's emotional impenetrability and Moll's gender deviance. In this passage, York works Suffolk's earlier syllogistic logic in the opposite direction; where Suffolk had predicted Margaret's receptivity based upon femaleness, York questions her femaleness after witnessing her un-feminine behaviors, and in particular his assessment hinges on what he reads as an excess of physical and emotional closedness and hardness—she is “stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless,” instead of “soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible.” Instead of reinforcing the gender binaries they refer to, however, both York's and Suffolk's logics call attention to the way that Margaret, like Joan before her, defies the gender essentialism other characters propose. When York insultingly explains to Margaret that she is not any of the things that women “are,” he reveals the instability of his own constructions of gender, highlighting what has been demonstrated in the representations of women throughout the plays: biological sex does not correspond

to any consistent behavioral traits for women or for men. Women may be hard and potent, while men may be soft and ineffectual.

As Margaret demolishes characters' gender ideologies, she also expands the penetrative potential represented in Joan's sword and functions as a catalyst for the figurative and literal circulation of parts in the plays. Even before Margaret develops into a martial threat, she is represented as having penetrative potential in her body already—specifically, in her tongue. The representation of Margaret's tongue is like that of Joan's sword. Margaret's tongue threatens to disrupt male social systems, and it also threatens to immobilize men's own tongues, rendering them—literally—unable to account for themselves. In fact, Margaret is aware of the dangers of a strong tongue: in the Quarto version, when she first meets the king, she tells him, “Th'excessive love I bear unto your grace/ Forbids me to be lavish of my tongue,/ Least I should speak more then beseemes a woman:/ Let this suffice: my blisse is in your liking,/ And nothing can make poor Margaret miserable,/ Unless the frown of mightie England's King” (*2 Henry* I.i.24-31).⁴⁴ Margaret's assertion that she will observe codes of female conduct by not being “lavish of [her] tongue” suggests that excess speech is unfeminine and would somehow contrast with her professed submission to Henry; she understands excess speech as disruptive of gender binaries. Margaret's construction of her tongue as a potentially disorderly organ

⁴⁴ The Folio version does not mention the tongue specifically, and instead Margaret presents herself submissively by acknowledging the boldness of speaking to the king at all and by downplaying her own intelligence: “The mutual conference that my mind hath had/ By day, by night, walking, and in my dreams,/ In courtly company, or at my beads,/ With you mine alderliest sovereign,/ Makes me the bolder to salute my king/ With ruder terms, such as my wit affords[...].” (I.i.25-30). As this is one reference among many to Margaret's tongue, I find the Quarto version an illustrative example. For a new assessment of the Quarto/Folio history of *2 Henry* and *3 Henry*, see Roger Warren's “The Quarto and Folio Texts of *2 Henry VI: A Reconsideration*”; Warren argues that there is little evidence to suggest the unreliability of the Quarto.

supports Carla Mazzio's analysis in "Sins of the Tongue." Mazzio explains that early moderns understood the tongue to be inherently subversive and disruptive of established hierarchies. Mazzio argues that the tongue's perceived subversiveness was in part due to its liminality as an organ: she explains that

Early modern fantasies about the tongue often suggest a nervousness about its apparent agency. This is, in part, because of the deconstructive potential of the member. As the one organ that can move in and out of the body, its symbolic position in a range of discourses lies on the threshold between the framed and unframed, between the space of the self and the space of the other. (55-6)

In addition to being an organ that could literally cross boundaries, Mazzio argues that the tongue was also understood as being capable of acting independently from the rest of the body. In this way, the tongue was "imagined to be a potentially autonomous and separate part of the self, a member that is always already dismembered" (55). The idea that the tongue could rebel against its owner functioned as a microcosm for the idea that the tongue was an organ of rebellion more generally: Mazzio observes that "Fantasies of the tongue's mobility were explicitly linked to disturbances of social and political order" (57). This is evident in Margaret's promise to control her tongue, and also in the scene with York that I cite above. As York disparages Margaret's failed femininity, he also locates Margaret's potency and transgressiveness specifically onto her tongue when he describes her as a "She-wolf of France, but worse than wolves of France,/ Whose tongue more poisons than the adder's tooth! / How ill-beseeming is it in thy sex/

To triumph like an Amazonian trull/ Upon their woes whom fortune captivates!”
(I.iv.111-115). York identifies Margaret’s tongue as the organ that allows her to participate in and threaten the political realm. The tongue subverts established categories, making Margaret into a masculine female monstrosity—a “woman’s hide” with a “tiger’s heart” inside; a “she-wolf,” but one that’s even worse than wolves; and finally a pitiless “Amazonian trull.”

York’s description of Margaret’s gender deviance shows that he is only able to comprehend such a violation of hierarchy by comparing Margaret to animals or to foreign Amazons. In her analysis of the same lines, Schwarz observes that the representation of Margaret as “Amazonian” (as opposed to as “an Amazon”) suggests that

if she marks the space beyond the margins of Englishness, maleness, and a natural condition of power, she does so from so far inside the structures defining those terms that it is not clear where an English male aristocratic hero can safely go. In both her political and her familial roles, Margaret occupies heterosocial hierarchies, demonstrating their vulnerability to revision from within. (101)

Interestingly, even as Margaret demonstrates the destruction of the very concept of femininity that York uses to describe her, York figures female masculinity as something other than simply an inverted hierarchy: He does not figure Margaret as being *male* because she upsets gender hierarchies, even though this is what we might expect based on the previous syllogistic logic. Suffolk claims, “She is a woman, and therefore to be won,” and York similarly says that “Women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible.” Given that Margaret is *not* “won” and she is not what women “are,” the obvious conclusion

might be that she is therefore a man. However, York does not describe her as having a *man's* heart wrapped in a woman's hide; her masculine behaviors make York imagine her as existing outside of human culture entirely. His description of Margaret as an "Amazonian trull" seems like an attempt to maintain that Margaret's masculinity can still be fit into his gender hierarchy—masculine women are simply excessively heteroerotic, as we have seen characters try to insist with Joan. However, the reference to Amazons also introduces the idea that female masculinity may tear down heteronormative hierarchies entirely, allowing for women to not only conquer or rule men, but for women to live apart from men and do without them. Female masculinity upsets hierarchies to their very core, resulting in fantasies of entirely new social systems.

Besides being a penetrating organ, Margaret's tongue is also represented as immobilizing men's tongues. For instance, when Suffolk meets Margaret, he finds himself in a similar Petrarchan trance to the one Charles the Dauphin describes upon encountering Joan. Suffolk specifically finds that Margaret "Confounds the tongue and makes the senses rough" (V.iii.71). This is the point when Suffolk has to rouse himself by reminding himself that because Margaret is a woman, she is "therefore to be won." Ultimately, though, this immobilizing effect is linked to the failure of heteroeroticism later in the plays' representations of Margaret. With Suffolk, Margaret's potency competes with male potency: the intersection of rhetorical impotence (Suffolk's tongue is "counfounded") and Suffolk's attempt to rally himself by invoking a rhetoric of masculine potency (women must be "won" by men, whether through martial, sexual, or even rhetorical force) suggests that there is a connection between the tongue's potency

and sexual potency. Similarly, Margaret's rhetorical and martial successes increasingly displace Henry's ability to command with his words or his sword.

After Henry cedes his succession to York in a moment of political impasse, when he refuses to raise his sword or to make a rhetorical appeal for his kingship, Margaret steps in to lead the army in defense of Henry's claim to the throne. Margaret is the one the soldiers listen to, and she makes it clear that Henry is not a necessary figure in the fight for the kingship. She also reinforces his failures by pointing out what he should have done, stressing his masculine inadequacy. Henry tries to sneak away when he sees her angrily approaching, but she catches him, and he protests, "Pardon me, Margaret; pardon me, sweet son: / The Earl of Warwick and the Duke enforc'd me" (*3 Henry* I.i.235-236). Margaret scathingly replies,

Enforc'd thee? Art thou king, and wilt be enforc'd?

I shame to hear thee speak. Ah! timorous wretch,

Thou hast undone thyself, thy son, and me;

And given unto the house of York such head

As thou shalt reign but by their sufferance [...].

[...]Had I been there, which am a silly woman,

The soldiers should have toss'd me on their pikes

Before I would have granted to that act. (I.i.237-252)

Margaret's criticism of Henry fixates on questions of potency, framing Henry's failure as one of submission—which, she points out, should be a feminine trait. But she also once again disrupts this gender logic by claiming that she herself would not have been

“enforc’d.” In this scene, Margaret recognizes and asserts that she would be a better king than her husband is, and she makes the decision to pursue her son’s crown on her own.

At this moment when Margaret decides to replace Henry, she also openly silences him and explicitly severs their sexual relationship. She tells him, “But thou prefer’st thy life before thine honour:/ And seeing thou dost, I here divorce myself/ Both from thy table, Henry, and thy bed” (I.i.253-255). She then tells Prince Edward, “Come, son, let’s away./ Our army is ready—we’ll after them”; Henry begs, “Stay, gentle Margaret, and hear me speak,” but she cuts him short, telling him, “Thou hast spoke too much already; get thee gone” (I.i.262-265). Margaret is no longer the adulterous threat to the monarchy she initially was because she has excised entirely the intermediating dependency on heteroerotic relationships. In this scene she draws attention to her entire adequacy to do the jobs men do, and she replaces Henry—this is evidenced by her reference to “our army” and by her assertion of her own right to divorce herself from Henry. Margaret’s explicitness about divorcing herself from Henry and from Henry’s bed at the moment when she makes the decision to take the place of Henry, seems to fulfill the destruction of heteronormative syllogism.

Her penetrating tendencies are inextricably linked to the way she reduces male characters’—specifically Henry’s—penetrative potential. At her most threatening moments, Margaret is a woman who empties womanhood of definition, a wife who demolishes her husband’s claims to masculinity through control or sexual contact, and a queen who erases the need for a king. Her sufficiency in the play is inversely related to the king’s sufficiency, as her increasing self-government either highlights or causes the king’s governmental failures. The characters blame Margaret for Henry’s inability to

keep his throne: Edward of York tells Margaret, “Hadst thou been meek, our title still had slept;/ And we, in pity of the gentle King,/ Had slipp’d our claim until another age” (II.iii.160-62). The characters create a direct contrast between Margaret’s strength and the King’s, as though they understand Margaret’s strength to come his, with her sapping his energies through her refusal to be the meek one. In his dying moments, Clifford similarly describes Henry as weak, and Clifford returns to the matriarchal image that introduced Henry’s kingship. Clifford laments,

[...] Henry, hadst thou sway’d as kings should do,

Or as thy father, and his father did,

Giving no ground unto the house of York,

They never then had sprung like summer flies;

I, and ten thousand in this luckless realm

Had left no mourning widows for our death [...]. (*3 Henry VI* II.vi.14-19)

Clifford’s reference to an England reduced to mourning widows recalls the Dukes’ concerns at the beginning of Henry’s reign in *I Henry VI*, when they feared that his martial reticence would lose them France and leave “none but women left to wail the dead.” As the Dukes had feared, matriarchy—female rule and the replacement of male power by female power, first imagined embodied in Eleanor, then in Joan, and finally in Margaret—is both the cause and result of men’s inability to monopolize masculinity and to prove the patriarchy effective and impenetrable. Within this representation, the threat of female excess sexuality, or the idea that women are driven by a desire for heterosexual satisfaction, is repeatedly invoked only to be demolished. These plays move away from the initial, ostensible threat of female adultery and promiscuity in a way that exposes the

greater nightmare of female self-sufficiency and male impotency. By the end of Henry's rule, Margaret actualizes the fantasy-fear of matriarchy on every front, by not needing men erotically (as evidenced from her abstinence from Henry), by having a castrating effect on men, and by herself embodying every definition of masculinity. As the men at the beginning of *I Henry VI* had feared, Henry becomes entirely irrelevant to his own patriarchy, even negating his own legacy by disinheriting his son of the crown. He erases himself from history, becoming himself an "anti-historian" in the way Rackin describes women to be.

Henry's impotency and emasculation are part of the fears of erasure and an all-female nation that begin the tetralogy. Margaret's failed femininity is associated with a failure of heterosexual possibility and with an imagined parallel universe of female rule, which is imagined—as in the beginning—as a world in which *only* women exist. Men's fears that the illegibility of masculinity will lead to the erasure of men entirely are embodied in one of the final images of Henry. As Margaret becomes increasingly "Amazonian," Henry is imagined as also becoming female. This is illustrated near the end of Henry's life; Warwick explains to Henry that Margaret will fight for England and that Henry will be kept in protection while she does so. Warwick describes Henry's protection by saying, "My sovereign, with the loving citizens,/ Like to his island girt in with the ocean,/ Or modest Dian circled with her nymphs,/ Shall rest in London till we come to him" (*3 Henry IV*.viii.19-22). The description presents Henry as entirely emasculated, even though Diana—as Schwarz points out—is fully capable of fighting; this Diana is "more modest than martial" (102). Moreover, the description imagines the feminine king/queen circled by a loving all-female community, even though in reality,

the king will be left in London presumably among all the male and female citizens. The idea of Henry as Diana doubles the matriarchal possibilities already invoked at this point, as one Amazonian queen goes out to protect another, less powerful, queen and her nymphs. In Warwick's rendering of Henry as Diana, England is imagined as an all-female land ruled by a strange butch-femme female-female couple, one feminine and one masculine, but both women. This imagined marriage between Diana and her Amazonian wife suggests that the disturbance of gender hierarchies and heteronormativity does not result in reversal of gender roles; rather, the destruction of patriarchal hierarchies leads to the destruction of patriarchy entirely, allowing for its replacement by female government, female homosociality, and female homoeroticism.

III. Between Women: Female Homosocial Desire in *Two Noble Kinsmen*

The Two Noble Kinsmen exists in a similar play world to that of the *Henry VI* plays. Indeed, the failure of heteroeroticism that is so thoroughly explored in the *Henry VI* plays seems to function as the very premise of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which Shakespeare wrote in collaboration with John Fletcher, is based on Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," and it takes place after the Athenian king Theseus has conquered the Amazon community led by Hippolyta.⁴⁵ Set as it is in a world where women and men are accustomed to living separately from each other and where they are literally foreign adversaries to each other, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* figures heterosexual relationships as inherently violent and unappealing even from its opening scenes. Within

⁴⁵ The introduction in the *Arden Complete Works of Shakespeare* explains that "The mode of collaboration is uncertain but scenes in which Shakespeare's hand is most evident are mainly in the first and last acts (1.1-5; 2.1, 3[?]; 3.1-2; 4.3 (?); 5.1, 3-4), leaving to Fletcher the bulk of the central action and all of the sub-plot of the jailer's daughter" (1241). The *Norton Shakespeare* offers a similar synthesis, adding that Shakespeare "perhaps" wrote 2.3 and attributing 5.5-6 to Shakespeare as well.

this representation of adversarial heterosocial relationships, the play interrogates the possibility of female homosociality and female homoeroticism in its all-female Amazonian society; this continuum between homosocial bonding and homoerotic attraction is what Sedgwick terms “homosocial desire,” as I discuss at the beginning of this chapter. In this section, I argue that *The Two Noble Kinsmen* imagines female-female intimacy in its female warrior culture as a corollary to male-male intimacy in the Greek soldier culture. The logic of lesbianism that develops, then, seems to be based upon a fantasy of parallel systems, where masculine women, who govern themselves and fight for themselves, in exactly the way the Greek men do, are imagined as experiencing parallel homosocial desire as well.

The failure of heterosexuality and the appeal of male homosociality and homoeroticism in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* have been well observed in scholarship on the play. For instance, Smith argues that the play is one of many in Shakespeare’s canon that focuses on the eroticism of male friendships, and Smith argues that this play exceeds the earlier plays in this regard:

The very last play Shakespeare wrote for the stage, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* reenacts the plot of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, but with a much sharper sense of the sexual and emotional complexities that are entangled in the earlier comedy’s simplicities. Palamon and Arcite are no less devoted to one another than Valentine and Proteus; [...] This time, however, the two friends’ speeches pulse with sexual innuendo. [...] What we see in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, as in many of Shakespeare’s earlier comedies, is the social and psychological “necessity” of marriage that

Berowne points out in *Love's Labors Lost* [...]. On the issue of male bonding versus marriage Shakespeare finished his career, not with one of the reconciliations that are the common theme of his other late plays, but with a fresh recognition of the impasse between the two. (70)

Smith's assessment of the way that the kinsmen's relationship competes with marriage and heteroerotic possibilities is in keeping with my own reading of the play. Indeed, as I will discuss at greater length, not only does the relationship between Palamon and Arcite recall earlier intimate friendships in the comedies, but I would add that in many ways *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is also an obvious relative of Shakespeare's homoerotic portrayals of male relationships in his war plays.⁴⁶ For instance, one can see elements of *Coriolanus* in the play's erotic portrayal of martial one-up-manship and in the way that describing a noble enemy in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* often becomes more exciting than—and is often compared to—a sexual encounter with a woman.⁴⁷ In the play's representation of male friendships and male martial rivalries, then, male homoeroticism and mutual praise are a

⁴⁶ Smith specifically identifies *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* as plays where male martial relationships are eroticized and where erotic war relationships compete with heteroerotic bonds. In *Homoerotic Space*, Stephen Guy-Bray identifies Shakespeare's war plays as examples of "homoerotic space," which Guy-Bray defines as genres where homoeroticism is built into or encoded in the very parameters of the fictionalized world, so that homoerotic relationships can be safely represented.

⁴⁷ For instance, in *Coriolanus*, the pleasures of war are frequently compared to—and imagined as surpassing—erotic pleasures with women, as when Aufidius describes meeting his enemy Coriolanus in battle by saying, "I lov'd the maid I married; never man/ Sigh'd truer breath; but that I see thee here,/ Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart/ Than when I first my wedded mistress saw/ Bestride my threshold" (IV.v.116-121). Smith points to these lines as evidence that it was a standard Renaissance trope "to contrast the strength of male friendship and the weakness of erotic love between male and female" (35).

dominating force of the play, to the point that the romantic plots are almost obscured by the men's orgiastic appreciation of male beauty and power.

What makes the play unique is that it sets this homoerotic soldier culture against the ruins of the conquered Amazon society of Hippolyta and Emilia; patriarchy and matriarchy literally compete with each other. At first glance, this war of the sexes, built into the setting of the play, seems to hold romantic potential like that of *Much Ado About Nothing*, where adversarial heterosocial sparring can develop into happy romantic relationships. So when we hear Emilia threaten Theseus at the beginning of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* by saying that if Theseus doesn't help the widows, "from henceforth I'll not dare/ To ask you anything nor be so hardy/ Ever to take a husband" (I.i.203-4), we might reasonably expect this sentiment to contrast with a later erotic reversal that would lead to her marriage. What is queer is that this is not the case: Emilia's aversion to marriage never transforms into desire or love for men. In the play, the exaggerated male-male admiration sets into relief the women's persistently unenthusiastic response to the male body and to marriage. As in *The Roaring Girl*, *The Faerie Queene* and in the *Henry VI* plays, the possibility of heterosexual union and reproductive sexuality seems to compete with a strong disinclination towards them, here on the part of men as well as women. This failure of heteroerotic desire in both directions creates the space for the play to imagine a female homosocial, homoerotic community for the Amazons as well as for the Athenian soldiers. In this way, female homosocial desire is imagined in the shadow of the play's representation of male homosociality and male homoeroticism.

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the interaction between male homoeroticism and women's resistance to erotic contact with men can easily be observed in the different

characters' reactions to the titular noble kinsmen. The former best friends Palamon and Arcite are Theban cousins whose lives Theseus saves when he conquers Thebes; Theseus subsequently holds them as prisoners. While imprisoned in a tower, Palamon and Arcite see the Amazon Emilia and both fall in love with her. They resolve that they must duel to the death in order to determine which of them can marry her; once Emilia learns of this, she resists choosing one of them as a husband, remaining entirely unable to differentiate between the kinsmen or to detect whether she is in love with either one. The male characters' enthusiasm for each other, and Emilia's contrasting ambivalence toward Palamon and Arcite, are rendered almost comically clear in the scene preceding Palamon's and Arcite's duel. Learning that the kinsmen are approaching, Theseus inexplicably asks the messenger to describe the young men: "Pray speak,/ You that have seen them, what they are" (IV.ii.71-2), he commands, despite the fact that everyone present has already seen Palamon and Alcite for themselves. The messenger obligingly—enthusiastically—describes the wonders of the men's bodies for fully 40 lines (prompted, on occasion, by Theseus's and his friend Pirithous's requests for further description). At this point, Emilia feels the explanation has been sufficient and wonders, "Must these men die too?" (IV.ii.112); but Pirithous interrupts Emilia's attempt to move on with the story, commencing a superfluous second round of praise by saying, "When he speaks, his tongue/ sounds like a trumpet" (IV.ii.113). The three men then re-engage in praise of the kinsmen that last another 30 lines. Theseus concludes by declaring, "Now, as I have a soul, I long to see 'em" (IV.ii.143); then he redirects his excitement by promising Hippolyta (who has been silent during the description of the kinsmen), "Lady, you shall see men fight now" (IV.ii.144). The implications of Theseus's redirection of

the voyeuristic pleasure of looking at Palamon and Arcite are multiple. Emilia, the nominal objective of the duel, remains entirely uninterested in the fight and hardly speaks a word, as does Hippolyta. Meanwhile, Theseus seems unable to fathom the possibility that the men are more excited about male beauty and valor than the women are (that anyone could be less than excited about watching such specimens of manhood), though it is clearly the case that Emilia and Hippolyta cannot match Theseus's own enthusiasm. Theseus's line to Hippolyta highlights the fact that the kinsmen's battle primarily excites the other men, and it also demonstrates Theseus's aggressive relationship with Hippolyta: "you shall see men fight now" (not "these men") can be read as an assertion of male superiority toward the conquered Amazon women: i.e., "you who think women can fight shall now see how it's really done." Given this, the male homoeroticism in the scene takes on an added element of enforced dominance—the male descriptions of male beauty seem in part to be designed to convince the women of the desirability of men. In this way, the Greek homosocial/homoerotic culture fits Sedgwick's definition of "homosocial desire": for Theseus and the others, male bonding and male homoerotic desire exist on the kind of continuum that Sedgwick describes, and they also function as a way of maintaining male domination over women. Still, neither Hippolyta nor Emilia is ever sufficiently impressed. Thus, *Two Noble Kinsmen* proposes a problematic playscape similar to that in *Henry VI* plays, where male homosocial systems highlight the failure of the female heteroeroticism on which they rely.

Theseus's aggressive attempt to prove the superiority of male masculinity to Hippolyta also represents the kind of "domestication fantasy" that Schwarz describes in *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance*. Schwarz argues that

Renaissance representations of Amazons play out patriarchal fantasies wherein gender norms are first destabilized but ultimately reestablished through the domestication of the Amazons and their integration into patriarchal society. Amazons challenge gendered systems of meaning by refusing to be ruled by men, by doing the things men do, and by living without men; Simon Shepherd explains that Amazons' "refusal of obedience is at the core of Elizabethan distress" about them. He goes on to summarize standard early modern anxieties about Amazons: "What is clearly most disturbing is their hostility to men. This is the detail most obsessively elaborated. These women are not committed to the ideal of the family and yet at the same time they are capable of surviving and governing themselves. In almost every possible way they are hateful to Elizabethan and Jacobean patriarchal concepts" (14). By challenging gender systems through their occupation of male social roles, Amazons function in much the same way as the penetrating women I have described. Schwarz explains that by "Demonstrating that women and men might be performatively interchangeable, Amazons at once substantiate the signifiers of masculinity and threaten to replace the bodies to which they are attached" (38).

However, Schwarz expands Shepherd's analysis by pointing out that the frequent representations of "Amazon encounters" in Renaissance literature—encounters between Amazons and the outside world, in which men almost always conquer the Amazons—also rely on the idea that Amazons can be conquered and domesticated in a way that ultimately plays out a fantasy of proven gender difference and patriarchal superiority. Theseus's domestication of Hippolyta functions in precisely this way, as we can see in the scenes above; for Theseus, bringing Hippolyta home and forcing her to acknowledge

that men are better at masculine things seems to be a pleasurable way for him to justify male homosocial activities. However, the play's representation of this kind of domestication fantasy is exaggerated, which has the effect of exposing Theseus's attempts to privilege male masculinity as just that—a fantasy. Even as Theseus asserts male dominance by bringing Hippolyta home, the play continues to draw attention to the fact that the Amazons are not fully domesticated; they resist integrating into the Athenian patriarchy and continue to disturb heteronormativity.

The play never attempts to hide the fact that marriage is compulsory and undesirable to women—and even, for the most part, to men, though they appear to require it as part of the process of conquering the Amazons. From the beginning, Hippolyta explains her marriage to Theseus as a necessity, and Theseus's competitive attitude to marriage reinforces this. The play begins with a proposed delay to the marriage between Theseus and Hippolyta.⁴⁸ Theseus is bringing Hippolyta to the wedding festivities, when they are stopped by three widows who beg for Hippolyta's and Emilia's help in gaining them Theseus's permission to bury their husbands, who have died in war. Although Emilia and Hippolyta are sympathetic to the other women, Theseus is impatient to perform his marriage to Hippolyta, which he describes in

⁴⁸ *A Midsummer Night's Dream* contains a similar premise of a delayed marriage between the same Amazon queen and Theseus. Although I do not discuss the representation of Hippolyta in that play here, I believe that such an analysis would be relevant to understanding the category of penetrating women, despite the fact that Hippolyta and her Amazonian affiliations are somewhat more peripheral in *Midsummer* than in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Philippa Berry offers an interesting reading of the competition between homosocial and heterosocial bonds in that play; Berry compares Hippolyta to Titania and argues that in both cases the play punishes female-female relationships through enforced heterosexual submission.

comparison to the feats of battle in which he has previously engaged. He says, “forth and levy/ Our worthiest instruments, whilst we dispatch/ This grand act of our life, this daring deed/ Of fate in wedlock. [...] This service whereto I am going,/ Greater than any war; it more imports me/ Than all the actions that I have foregone,/ Or futurely can cope” (I.i.161-173). His description of marriage as a “daring deed” suggests that marriage is akin to a martial contest, more the result of force and conflict than of attraction and union. He understands marriage as a conquering act. This is reinforced by Hippolyta’s depiction of her agreement to the marriage, which she refers to as “yielding”: she reminds Theseus that despite her considerable strength, “in which you swore I went beyond all women,/ Almost all men[...] yet I yielded, Theseus” (III.vi.203-205). Hippolyta’s explanation of her marriage as the result of giving in is similar to Theseus’s description of his marriage as a kind of martial feat, as both of them frame marriage as a union in which one party triumphs and the other loses.

Interestingly, this representation of the initial scene with the widows is a departure from the source material. In Chaucer’s “Knight’s Tale,” Theseus conquers the Amazons and “wedded the queene Ypolita” *before* he brings Hippolyta home with him (l.10); when the newlyweds are approached by widows wishing to bury their husbands in Chaucer’s version, Theseus is the only one who responds to them, and he does so with pity. In Chaucer, Theseus “thoughte that his herte would breke,/ Whan he saugh hem so pitous and so maat,/ That whilom weren in so greet estaat;/ And in his armes he hem alle hente [...]” (ll.96-99). In Shakespeare’s and Fletcher’s version, the widows’ pleas are directed at the other women, and Theseus sees helping the widows as an obstacle to achieving his marriage to Hippolyta. The fact that *The Two Noble Kinsmen* delays the

marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta—and specifically delays it by representing Hippolyta’s emotional response to other women—functions to construct heterosexual union as a more difficult and contentious process, a process that specifically competes with homosocial bonds.

Meanwhile, Emilia’s apathy towards her suitors is impossible to ignore, and she never ceases to see marriage as an unattractive necessity. Once Palamon and Arcite realize their shared love for Emilia in the tower, the kinsmen vow to fight each other for her. Subsequently, Arcite is released from prison and banished, and Palamon escapes; the men stay in Athens to plan their duel, but Theseus discovers them and threatens to punish them with death. However, the kinsmen beg Theseus to allow them to battle to the death for Emilia instead of being executed. Emilia witnesses all of this but says nothing while the kinsmen expose their feelings for her. It is Theseus who prompts Emilia’s involvement in the love triangle by pretending to pursue capital punishment for the kinsmen. He says, “None here speak for ‘em,/ For, ere the sun set, both shall sleep for ever” (III.vi.183-4). Hippolyta urges Emilia to step in, and Emilia does so by imagining herself empowered by a kind of chorus of women: “Help me, dear sister; in a deed so virtuous,/ The powers of all women will be with us” (III.vi.193-4). Together, the sisters (along with Pirithous, who consistently takes an active role in advocating for the handsome kinsmen) ask Theseus to take mercy on Palamon’s and Arcite’s lives. But Theseus asks Emilia, “Say I felt/ Compassion to ‘em both, how would you place it?” Emilia responds, “Upon their lives. But with their banishments” (III.vi.212-214). Emilia’s initial reluctance to speak on behalf of the kinsmen, and her subsequent suggestion that the men should be banished (rather than suggesting, as Theseus seems to

prompt her to, that she will choose one of the men as a husband) indicates that she does not harbor romantic feelings for either Palamon or Arcite. Theseus isn't satisfied with her failure to reciprocate the men's feelings, and he tells her, "You are a right woman, sister: you have pity/ But want the understanding where to use it./ If you desire their lives, invent a way/ Safer than banishment" (III.vi.215-6). Emilia still resists guessing the solution that Theseus aims at, and instead she suggests that Theseus should "Swear 'em never more/ To make me their contention, or to know me,/ To tread upon thy dukedom, and to be,/ Wherever they shall travel, ever strangers/ To one another" (III.vi.252-56). But Theseus and the kinsmen are not satisfied with Emilia's proposal that the kinsmen be separately banished, and Theseus asks her explicitly if she will choose one to be her husband; she insists that she cannot choose between them, and Theseus proposes a challenge to the men, asking Emilia if she will then accept the winner as her husband. "I must, sir," she yields, "Else both miscarry" (III.vi.300-1).

The forced nature of marriage for Emilia is clear in the scene, and the word "must" is repeated throughout the play by Emilia and Theseus when it comes to the proposed marriage between her and one of the kinsmen. Until the end of the play, she also remains entirely unable to make a choice about whether she would rather marry Palamon or Arcite, even though Theseus tells her, "Now, my fair sister,/ You must love one of them" (IV.ii.67-8). When Emilia does not want to go witness the fight between Palamon and Arcite, Theseus asserts, "O, she must. [...] You must be present:/ You are the victor's meed, the prize and garland/ To crown the question's title. [...] You must be there" (V.iii.11-18). Theseus's imperatives (Emilia "must") draw attention to Emilia's resistance to the romantic plot that is being forced upon her. Theseus's lines also point

out Emilia's inability to differentiate between the kinsmen. When she hears that Palamon is winning the tournament and believes she will marry him, Emilia offers an unenthusiastic "Then he has won./ T'was ever likely./ He looked all grace and success" (V.iii.68-70), but when Arcite gains an advantage, she says, "I did think/ Good Palamon would miscarry, yet I knew not/ Why I did think so" (V.iii.100-2). Her estimates of which knight will win her are contradictory and vague, revealing her lack of preference for either and her general lack of interest in marriage at all. Set in comparison to the male characters' erotic appreciation of each other, Emilia's reserve comes across as the same kind of heteroerotic aversion represented in *The Roaring Girl* and *The Faerie Queene*. Emilia is presented with a choice between two men whom the other men agree are highly desirable, and her inability to muster even the slightest enthusiasm constructs her as heteroerotically closed off.

Meanwhile, Emilia's relationships with other women suggest that she prefers female-female intimacy to the marriage that Theseus forces upon her. To reconcile herself to the union she "must" accept, Emilia recurrently imagines her actions and feelings as validated by and important for other women. In the beginning of the play, Emilia's allegiance to women presents itself in terms of honor and empathy. When the three widows request help to bury their husbands, both Emilia and Hippolyta are moved; Emilia tells them, "What woman I may stead that is distressed/ Does bind me to her" (I.i.36-7). The representation of Emilia's female-centric worldview is expanded when she is faced with marriage. It seems that Emilia cannot encounter men without also imagining them through their relationships to women. For instance, when Pirithous and Theseus press the women to echo their own praises of Arcite, Emilia says, "Believe,/ His

mother was a wondrous handsome woman;/ His face, methinks, goes that way” (II.v.19-21). This reveals Emilia’s general tendency to see men as sons of mothers, rather than as the inherently ideal creatures Theseus repeatedly describes them as. Similarly, when Emilia asks Theseus to save Palamon and Arcite, she invokes women:

O, Duke Theseus,
The goodly mothers that have groaned for these
And all the longing maids that ever loved,
If your vow stand, shall curse me and my beauty,
And in their funeral songs for these two cousins
Despise my cruelty and cry woe worth me,
Till I am nothing but the scorn of women.

For heaven’s sake, save their lives and banish ‘em. (III.vi.244-51)

Here again she thinks of Palamon and Arcite as the products and objects of women’s labor, and her concern is that women will scorn her if she allows the men to die for their love for her—though even so, she does not imagine her own marriage as the appropriate course of action, and she prefers banishment to marriage. Later, once she recognizes that she “must” marry, she continues to think of men through their relationships to women. When the knights arrive to end their disagreement through the tournament, Emilia laments,

Would I might end it first!
What sins have I committed, chaste Diana,
That my unspotted youth must now be soiled
With blood of princes, and my chastity

Be made the altar where the lives of lovers—
Two greater and two better never yet
Made mothers joy—must be the sacrifice
To my unhappy beauty? (IV.ii.57-64)

Emilia's sorrow over the loss of the men's lives merges with sorrow over her own lost virginity in these lines, and she frames her chastity in terms of her participation in an all-female community, here through her invocation of Diana. Even though she is sorry for what will happen to the kinsmen, however, Emilia remains unable to "end it" by choosing one of the men as her husband, which reinforces the idea that she lacks the kind of heteroerotic attraction that might help her to differentiate. Moreover, her sorrow about her role in the kinsmen's fate is primarily due to her empathy for other women, not to direct sadness about the idea of the men dying. She praises the kinsmen by saying that they "made mothers joy," and her lamentation in these lines is that her commitment to chastity will lead to the sacrifice of these men who so pleased their mothers. Here, as in the previous examples, Emilia reveals an understanding of the world that is guided by a preoccupation with the impact of her actions on other women, to the point that she seems only able to respond emotionally to men when she imagines them as being associated with other women; in this way, the play suggests that the homosocial preoccupations of the Amazon matriarchy are similar to those of the Greek patriarchy.

In fact, just as Emilia confronts heterosexual union by imagining other women between her and the men, Arcite and Palamon also mediate heteroerotic experiences through homoerotic references. Before Palamon and Arcite see Emilia, they have actually happily accepted their future alone together in the tower, with Arcite saying,

“here being thus together,/ We are an endless mine to one another;/ We are one another’s wife, ever begetting/ New births of love” (II.ii.78-81). Their mutual appreciation is transformed from contentment with each other into excitement about fighting each other once they both see Emilia from the tower and fall into identical love with her; but the intercession of a woman between them does not change their sustained investment in their relationship. After they both claim her as their beloved, Palamon wishes, “O, that now, that now/ Thy false self and thy friend had but this fortune:/ To be one hour at liberty and grasp/ Our good swords in our hands!” (II.ii.209-12), and their conception of fighting takes on the same homosocial and homoerotic tones as their previous “marriage” in the tower. Palamon tells Arcite, “Arcite, thou art so brave an enemy/ That no man but thy cousin’s fit to kill thee./ I am well and lusty; choose thy arms” (III.vi.42-44), and later, “I would have nothing hurt thee but my sword—/ A bruise would be dishonour” (87-88). The kinsmen’s aggressive attitude toward each other is similar to the intimate friendship they share before they see Emilia; even as enemies, they seem to be possessive and admiring of each other, yearning for contact with each other. This variety of homoeroticism is in keeping with Sedgwick’s definition of “homosocial desire,” which is not “a particular affective state or emotion, but [...] the affective social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred” (2).

Based on the kinsmen’s shared fixation on each others’ bodies, and a particular propensity to eroticize penetrating each other martially, it is perhaps unsurprising that the way Palamon imagines Emilia erotically relies on his excitement about her masculine traits. Watching Emilia in the garden, Palamon says in an aside, “Were I at liberty I would do things/ Of such a virtuous greatness that this lady,/ This blushing virgin, should

take manhood to her/ And seek to ravish me” (II.ii.260-3). His erotic fantasy of Emilia engages the kinds of detachable parts that circulate in the *Henry VI* plays, which has the effect of figuring Amazonian Emilia as possessing the means to be sexually penetrative, and also of clarifying that although Palamon falls for Emilia, his erotic tendencies remain mediated by a homoerotic framework. In this way, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* seems to rely on homoerotic energy to move through Chaucer’s love story. Every experience of apparently heteroerotic desire for the play’s main characters is mediated by homoerotic logic. It is as though the characters can only bring themselves to the unions the audience expects by imagining themselves being watched by members of the same sex.

In addition to preferring female homosocial bonds, the women in the play also eroticize each other in much the same way that the men do. At the beginning of the play, the widows who come to plead with Theseus express their admiration for Hippolyta in terms that draw attention to their appreciation of her beauty and her martiality; their praise of her exceeds any praise the men have for women in the play. One widow asks for Hippolyta’s help, describing her as, “Honoured Hippolyta,/ Most dreaded Amazon, that hast slain/ The scythe-tucked boar; that with thy arm, as strong/ As it is white, wast near to make the male/ To thy sex captive” (I.i.77-81). When Theseus proposes to delay giving the widows an answer until after he conquers his wedding, the widows fear that Hippolyta’s sexual abilities will make him forget everything else. One widow offers an elaborate description of Hippolyta’s sexual impact:

Our suit shall be neglected when her arms,
Able to lock Jove from a synod, shall
By warranting moonlight corslet thee! Oh, when

Her twinning cherries shall their sweetness fall
Upon thy taste-full lips, what wilt thou think
Of rotten kings or blubbered queens? What care
For what thou feel'st not, what thou feel'st being able
To make Mars spur his drum? Oh, if thou couch
But one night with her, every hour in't will
Take hostage of thee for a hundred and
Thou shalt remember nothing more than what
That banquet bids thee to. (I.i.174-186)

The widow's extensive description of Hippolyta's desirability stands in contrast to anything that men have to say about women's bodies in this play, though it is similar to the way the male characters talk about Palamon and Arcite. The description of Hippolyta's lips as "twinning cherries," which will have the power to make Theseus forget his political obligations, seems to represent a reversal of the kind of domesticating process Theseus imagines: the widow's fear of the influence Hippolyta will have on Theseus—that couching "but one night with her" will make him forget the widow's request and everything else—shows that the widow believes that Hippolyta's erotic power is so extreme that Theseus will be overpowered by her. This belief is reinforced by the idea that the widow thinks Theseus will become a "hostage" to Hippolyta. Still, it seems to be primarily the widow herself who notices the impact of Hippolyta's beauty; as the widow describes her fear of the effect Hippolyta will have on Theseus, the widow constructs a lingering depiction of Hippolyta's body that parallels Petrarchan heterosexual tropes. The fact that this description of the female body comes from another

woman suggests that just as men enjoy watching each other, women are the ones who notice female beauty. The widow's blazon of Hippolyta's "twinning cherries" and her later description of Hippolyta as a "banquet" constructs an erotic dynamic in which the female body is identified as consumable and appealing, but only to other women. The widow's representation of Hippolyta thus suggests a similar kind of "homosocial desire" to the homosocial/homoerotic dynamics that exist between men in the play.

The widow's eroticization of Hippolyta is replicated in Emilia's representations of her relationships with women. Emilia remains impenetrable to marriage, and her declared aversion to men and to marriage seems to stem from her preference for emotional and erotic fulfillment by other women. The moment in the play when Emilia describes her idea of the most positive intimate relationship is when she recalls her childhood friend Flavina, claiming that their friendship was more intense than that of Theseus and Pirithous, who, according to Hippolyta, share a "knot of love,/ Tied, weaved, entangled, with so true, so long,/ And with a finger of so deep a cunning,/ May be outworn, never undone" (I.iii.41-44). Emilia counters,

I was acquainted
Once with a time when I enjoyed a playfellow;
You were at wars when she the grave enriched,
Who made too proud the bed—took leave o'th'moon
(Which then looked pale at parting) when our count
Was each eleven.

Hippolyta, who appears to have heard of this before, guesses, "'Twas Flavina." Emilia goes on,

Yes.

You talk of Pirithous' and Theseus' love.

Theirs has more ground, is more maturely seasoned,
More buckled with strong judgement, and their needs

The one of th' other may be said to water

Their intertangled roots of love—but I

And she I sigh and spoke of were things innocent,

Loved for we did and like elements

That know not what nor why, yet do effect

Rare issues by their operance; our souls

Did so to one another. What she liked

Was then of me approved; what not, condemned—

No more arraignment. The flower that I would pluck

And put between my breasts (then but beginning

To swell about the blossom), oh, she would long

Till she had such another, and commit it

To the like innocent cradle, where, phoenix-like

They died in perfume. [...]

This rehearsal,

Which, fury-innocent wots well, comes in

Like old importment's bastard, has this end:

That the true love 'tween maid and maid may be

More than in sex dividual. (I.iii.49-82)

Emilia's memory of her relationship with Flavina contrasts with her generally unemotional and unimpassioned descriptions of the kinsmen. She describes her intimate friendship with Flavina as an erotically charged experience of the soul and the body, which she explicitly identifies as deeper and more meaningful than heterosexual relationships when she says that "the true love 'tween maid and maid may be/ More than in sex dividual." Her assertion that the love between her and Flavina was as strong as that between Theseus and Pirithous functions to construct a parallel homosocial system: as the men prioritize male-male relationships and attempt to make the women validate patriarchal imperatives, Emilia asserts that women also experience deep bonds with each other, which are superior to their bonds with men. Her explicit comparison of female intimacy to the less satisfying alternative of marriage draws our attention to both the emotional and physical aspects of her friendship with Flavina. Although they "Were things innocent," Emilia specifically locates their friendship at the beginning of puberty, fixating on both girls' developing breasts. Emilia does not specify what it is that their "operance" was a "rehearsal" for, but her comparison of their union with marriage, along with the reference to their "swelling" bodies, her use of the word "sigh" when she refers to Flavina, and her description of the grave as a "bed," all suggest that the girls' relationship involved some kind of sexual intimacy and erotic play. This is especially the case because Emilia defines innocence in the passage more as a lack of awareness about sexuality than as a lack of sexual feelings; in fact, she indicates that their lack of consciousness about what they were doing and why they were doing it is precisely what permitted them to "effect/ Rare issues." Her language here is suggestive of mutual erotic satisfaction, rendered innocent perhaps because they did not know about sex. Hippolyta

notices Emilia's passion and responds, "You're out of breath!/ And this high-speeded pace is but to say/ That you shall never, like the maid Flavina,/ Love any that's called man" (I.iii.82-85). Even remembering her love for Flavina stirs a strong physical response from Emilia, and, as Hippolyta reinforces, the strength of Emilia's feelings cannot be matched in a heterosexual relationship—even by the end of the play.

The female-female homoeroticism represented in Emilia's recollection of her youthful friendship with Flavina does not seem to have disappeared even once Emilia is brought to Greece. In fact, there seems to be a possibility that Emilia still finds erotic satisfaction with other women. While Palamon and Arcite are watching from the tower and falling in love with her, Emilia is walking in the garden with her maid. The two women stroll in a flower garden, and Emilia picks a flower and learns from her maid that it is a narcissus; Emilia muses, "That was a fair boy, certain, but a fool/ To love himself. Were not maids enough?" (II.ii.120-1). Although her assertion that Narcissus was foolish to not love women may seem to promote heteroeroticism in a broad sense, the line also reveals what she has expressed elsewhere—that she thinks relationships with women *are* enough, and even superior to those with men. Emilia and her maid banter about Narcissus and romantic relationships more generally and flowers, and Emilia cautions her maid, "Men are mad things" (II.ii.126); soon, Emilia tires, and they have the following exchange:

EMILIA: Let's walk in.

Keep these flowers. [...]

I am wondrous merry-hearted; I could laugh now.

WOMAN: I could lie down, I am sure.

EMILIA: And take one with you?

WOMAN: That's as we bargain, madam.

EMILIA: Well, agree then. (II.ii.149-153)

Their curious playful exchange references bringing in the flowers (“take one [flower] with you,” perhaps) but also puns on the proposition of a sexual encounter: “laugh and lie down” was a card game,⁴⁹ but Emilia’s suggestion that her maid “take one” with her puns on the possibility of taking a lover along to “lie down.” Still, neither the maid nor Emilia seems to imagine the lover being a man; the maid’s coy suggestion that she and Emilia will have to bargain about whether the maid has a bedfellow implies that Emilia would be that bedmate. Emilia subsequently agrees, and the women accompany each other inside. Even though we do not get to follow the women inside, their banter suggests that the possibility that some kind of homoerotic encounter awaits them—or at least encourages us to imagine so—and this possibility seems especially likely given Emilia’s previous description of her fulfilling relationship with Flavina.

These instances of female homoerotic possibilities seem to represent the kind of matriarchal self-sufficiency that the characters work to avoid in the *Henry VI* plays. While the Greek soldiers in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* try to lay claim to masculinity and power by forcing the Amazons into the Athenian patriarchy, the women maintain their primary bonds with each other, largely ignoring the male characters and avoiding erotic contact with them, apparently preferring the company of their own sex. However, whereas the *Henry VI* plays imagine this kind of female self-sufficiency as a nightmare scenario, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* seems to construct it resignedly, as though the

⁴⁹ The *Norton Shakespeare* assumes that the Maid alludes to the card game, while the *Arden Shakespeare* indicates that the phrase would have been a “proverb.”

incompatibility between men and women is so unavoidable that it must simply be tolerated. The play does not match the texts I have discussed in the previous two chapters in terms of its enjoyment in representing female-female relationships, but by the end, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* remains permissive of female homoeroticism and homosociality. Here, my reading of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* counters Theodora Jankowski's containment thesis about the play: in her analysis of the queerness of virginity, Jankowski places Emilia into the category of "queerer" virgins who question the patriarchy but end up participating in it (as opposed to the "queerest" virgins, who repudiate marriage). Jankowski argues that the play "appears to control threatening woman-woman desire by thrusting Emilia into a sea of emotional indeterminacy regarding which (if either?) of the cousins she does prefer, which she would be ready to accept" (152). She goes on to argue that the play contains Emilia by making her marry the more masculine of the suitors: "Obviously the threat of woman-woman eroticism must be strong if it must be recuperated so strongly" (152), and she adds, "Seemingly, though, no matter what the transgression or its strength, the willingness to marry serves to effectively control the queerness of the virgin characters" (153). I agree with Jankowski that the presence of female-female desire is strong in the play, but in my own reading, the play seems finally uninvested in containing these women who so obviously do not desire their future husbands; this is reinforced by the fact that neither Emilia nor Hippolyta are actually married in the course of the play.

Moreover, it is not clear that Emilia is marrying the more "masculine" of the men; she is originally supposed to marry the man who wins the battle, which would presumably make the victor the more masculine man, but Arcite dies after he wins the

tournament. The manner of his death is interesting: as Pirithous describes it, Arcite was riding on his horse when the horse became disobedient and started trying to “disroot his rider” (V.iv.75). The horse kicks and bucks, but to no avail. Arcite “kept him ‘tween his legs, [while] —on his [the horse’s] hind hooves/ on end he stands” (V.iv.76-77). Arcite’s attempt to stay on the horse while the horse rebels proves to be what kills Arcite. As the horse rears higher, Arcite clings to the horse; however, “His victor’s wreath/ Even then fell off his head” (V.iv.79-80), and he eventually topples backward, as does the horse, who “becomes the rider’s load” (V.iv.82). Arcite is crushed by the weight of the horse and dies shortly afterward, leaving Emilia to Palamon after all—which, as I have indicated, has little emotional effect on Emilia. The idea that Arcite dies—and loses Emilia—because of his attempt to keep an unwilling horse specifically “‘tween his legs” could be a subtle criticism of the project of compulsory heterosexuality in which Arcite has participated. Emilia, like the horse, is resistant to ending up between men’s legs. The fact that Emilia does not marry Arcite suggests that the play is not as invested in containing Emilia as Jankowski argues—and it even suggests that the play may be sympathetic to Emilia’s unhappiness about being forced to marry.

In fact, Emilia’s marriage to Palamon instead of Arcite hints at the possibility that female homoerotic interactions may still be permitted to some extent, even after her marriage. In contrast to Arcite, who prays to Mars before the tournament, Palamon spends his time before the battle praying to Venus. In his prayer, Palamon declares his submission to female power and to the power of love in an appropriately Petrarchan fashion, but he also specifically emphasizes his respect for women and women’s privacy. He begins by invoking Venus as the “sovereign queen of secrets” (V.i.77), and he goes

on to explain that he is not like other men who seduce women and brag about it. In fact he says that he confronts such men: “[I] have hotly asked them/ If they had mothers—I had one, a woman,/ And women ‘twere they wronged” (V.i.104-107). This female-centric worldview contrasts with his earlier masculinist rhetoric in the tower with Arcite, and it is similar to the way Emilia thinks about women. Additionally, Palamon specifically defines himself as having no interest in finding or sharing women’s secrets. In his prayer, he tells the story of a fourteen-year-old bride who married an old man and bore a child; Palamon adds, “and I/ believed it was his, for she swore it was—/ And who would not believe her? [...] Yea, him I do not love that tells close offices/ The foulest way nor names concealments in/ The boldest language” (V.i.116-49-56). Palamon’s investment in believing women’s words (even when, as seems to be the case with the young bride, he knows the woman is lying) and in not naming women’s “concealments” suggests that Palamon understands functional marriage to be the result of not asking questions or seeking answers. The fact that in the end it is Palamon who will marry Emilia suggests that the play endorses his view. After establishing heterosexual union as the difficult and largely undesirable meeting between two parties who seem, in this play, to each prefer the company of their own sex, Palamon’s promise to respect women’s privacy indicates that the unification of the Amazons with the Greeks will not erase homoerotic tendencies.

Ultimately, the logic of lesbianism that develops in *the Two Noble Kinsmen* is the result of a somewhat different intellectual process than the logics I have described in the previous chapters. In the previous chapters, I have argued that penetrating women evoke non-procreative erotic fantasies at moments when the penetrative symbolism of their

male apparel prompts inquiry about whether they would be similarly erotically penetrative. In the plays in this chapter, characters initially respond to female masculinity with aggressive fantasies of heterosexual dominance. Characters first react to female masculinity by attempting to naturalize a logic of *heteroeroticism*: for instance, they try to assert Joan's and Margaret's heterosexuality and femininity by pointing to their female bodies. However, this is a project that fails. Joan and Margaret denaturalize heteronormative logics through their disturbance of gender binaries and their resistance to heterosexual relationships. The imagined outcome of this seems to be that if masculine women play men's parts, they may be capable of taking men's parts away and destroying patriarchal systems entirely; women may simply play *all* parts, erasing men or rendering them entirely impotent and unimportant.

The instances of female-female homoeroticism *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are connected to the logical inquiries about heteronormativity and gender binaries that develop in the *Henry VI* plays. The *Henry VI* plays work from female masculinity toward (or sometimes aggressively against) a fantasy/fear that masculine women may be heteroerotically averse. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* seems to begin with the failure of heteroeroticism that the *Henry VI* plays explore earlier. The Amazon women resist heterosexual unions, and the play establishes a world where men and women seem to be brought together only through force. In comparison with the *Henry VI* plays, which continually hint at the possibility of matriarchy at moments when men fail to perform as men should, *Two Noble Kinsmen* more fully represents what a matriarchal system of homosocial desire would look like. As men occupy themselves with each other, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* represents female-female friendships and bonds as a competing

homosocial system. As we see in the final section, the all-female community is ultimately associated with the idea that women—like the men in the play—may not only prefer the company of members of their own sex, but that they may also find homoerotic fulfillment with them. In this way, the plays construct a logic of lesbianism where the disordering of definitions of masculinity and femininity is associated with the impossibility of heterosexual desire and, ultimately, with the replacement of heterosexual relationships by homosocial, homoerotic ones.

CHAPTER V

CODA: BECOMING:

HOMOEROTIC PLAY FROM *GALLATHEA* TO ELIZABETH I

PHYLLIDA: How shall I be disguised?

MELEBEUS: In man's apparel.

PHYLLIDA: It will neither become my body nor my mind.

-*Gallathea*

My case studies in the previous chapters have suggested that Renaissance understandings of female sexuality existed within an ostensibly logic-based field of inquiry about the relationships between gender performance, biological sex, erotic aversion, and erotic desire; the texts I have examined here interrogate causal connections between these elements, and the sequence and nature of those causal connections is represented in a variety of shifting ways. This variation seems to occur because the epistemology is highly prosthetic and based upon an assumption that the exchange of “parts” (social parts and physical parts) is likely to relate to changes in erotic possibility. The circulating parts in these texts lead to fantasies of erotic circulation and transference, but the logic of how these things fit together is itself circular: in *The Roaring Girl*, for instance, gender deviance provokes fantasies of erotic deviance, but at other moments, erotic deviance is also imagined as the *cause* of gender deviance; meanwhile, Britomart's preservation of her chastity is metaphorically represented as armor, but her impenetrable armor is also the vehicle through which the poem imagines non-procreative erotic possibilities. In my chapter on Shakespeare, matriarchy and female masculinity are imagined as both the cause and the effect of male effeminacy, and female success in masculine roles is imagined as being politically, socially, and erotically incompatible

with patriarchal imperatives; there, female aversion to heterosexuality is imagined as both a cause and an effect of female homosociality and homoeroticism.

The circulating nature of speculation about penetrating women is important to emphasize because it demonstrates that although early modern assumptions about gender deviance and homoerotic possibilities may *seem* similar to later categories of sexuality, in fact early modern figurations do not prioritize sex, gender, or desire as an essentially stable concept—all of these concepts seem to have been equally transformable in the early modern imagination.⁵⁰ The logical premises of how gender, sex, and sexual tendencies relate to one another is highly inconsistent and often reversed or revised, exposing extreme uncertainty about the relationship between external signifiers of sex and sexuality, such as clothing and other prosthetics, and more internal experiences, such as aversion and desire. Certain consistent assumptions do, however, animate these texts: that there *is* a relationship between erotic desire and gender performance is a consistent assumption, even though precisely how that relationship functions remains elusive

⁵⁰ With this assertion, I do not intend to over-state the consistency of modern western gender/sexuality categories; indeed, there is considerable slippage in the causal logics that exist in contemporary assumptions about homoeroticism as well. However, as I discuss in my chapter on Moll Frith, one of the dominant ways of understanding sexuality in the twentieth century has been based upon the idea that, as Judith Butler puts it, “desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. The internal coherence of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality. This conception of gender presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire” (*Gender Trouble* 30-1). In other words, Butler argues that modern understandings of homosexuality proceed from an assumption that desire is *naturally* heterosexual, and that if someone’s desire is homosexual, the person must be essentially the other gender—in which case desire is still defined as heterosexual to some extent. These ideas of inversion or of transgender identity do not seem to have been as centrally stable in the early modern representations I discuss here; rather, sex, gender, and desire are variously essentialized and de-essentialized in ways that reveal less confidence in the stability or naturalness of any of these categories.

throughout these textual explorations. Additionally, the cultures depicted in these texts seem to assume that masculine women are generally difficult to re-assimilate into procreative heteroerotic narratives, even when women's penetrating tendencies are figured as attractive and desirable. Thus, the taxonomy I have proposed exists within a relatively stable conceptual framework, even while the entries in that taxonomy reveal individual differences and the kind of "criss-crossing" that Wittgenstein describes.

In this final chapter, I offer one additional reading that adds to the logical spectrum proposed in the previous chapters and suggests further possibilities for the kinds of characters and even real people who might fit within this taxonomy of penetrating women. I describe this reading as a "Coda" to my project because in many ways the ideas in this chapter are experimental, designed to offer a premise for how the concepts of penetrating women and a logic of lesbianism might be helpful for analyzing characters who less overtly occupy the roles I have described. In this Coda, I argue that John Lyly's *Gallathea* reveals an understanding of penetrating tendencies similar to those in the texts I have described in the previous chapters, but that it does so from a slightly different epistemological perspective. The play associates cross-dressing with heteroerotic aversion and with homoerotic sexual possibilities in the way the texts in the previous chapter do, but *Gallathea* primarily imagines female masculinity (or really, as I argue in the end, "female maleness") as the definitive *consequence* of homoerotic desire, which the play figures as a more stable, natural phenomenon. Moreover, the play devotes considerably more attention to questions of biological sex and homoeroticism than it does to gender, which makes the characters in this text different from the other "masculine" women. This final text is helpful for more fully representing the possible figurations of

the early modern logic of lesbianism and for considering how the ideas of penetrating women might develop even for characters who are less explicitly penetrative in their apparel.

Additionally, I draw on my analysis of the play's representation of female homoeroticism in order to consider early modern logics about Queen Elizabeth I. I argue that the play offers multiple representations of Elizabeth in its portrayals of various beautiful young virgins. The fantasies of homoeroticism that develop between the virginal characters in the play seem to stem from ideas of about chastity and the possibility of bodily change that are also dominant features in rhetoric about Queen Elizabeth, and in this way the play suggests that early modern responses to the Virgin Queen included homoerotic fantasies that can be described in terms of ideas about female masculinity and penetrating tendencies.

Lyly's fanciful *Gallathea*, a court entertainment performed for the Virgin Queen herself, engages in an unapologetically artificial fantasy of circulating parts and desires.⁵¹ First printed in 1592 (but presumably performed earlier), *Gallathea* is set in Lincolnshire, but it also features the Roman gods Neptune, Venus, Diana, and Cupid.⁵² In the central plot of the play, Neptune requires the people of Lincolnshire to sacrifice their fairest virgin; as a result, the two fair young virgins Gallathea and Phyllida dress as boys to avoid being sacrificed. While cross-dressed, they fall in love with each other, and at the end of the play Venus decides to turn one of them (we never find out which one) into a

⁵¹ According to Anne Lancashire's introductory essay to the *Regents Renaissance* edition, the play was recorded as being performed before Elizabeth I on January 1, 1587/88.

⁵² Lancashire argues that the play was written "no later than 1585 and no earlier than 1583" (xiv).

boy permanently so that they can marry each other. With its inclusion of classical gods as characters and divine intervention as a plot device, the play calls attention to the supernatural elements that drive the erotic and physical circulations: by the end, desire has been redistributed by Cupid, while Venus redistributes genitals in order to permit the legitimate fulfillment of homoerotic attraction as heterosexual marriage.

Still, while this attention to artifice isolates and works through questions of sex, gender, and desire in a concentrated fashion, I do not think it would be reasonable to dismiss Lyly's representation of female homoerotic desire because it is so explicitly transformed into a heterosexual relationship at the play's conclusion. Rather, *Gallathea's* seemingly straightforward story of the straightening out of homoerotic desire sustains the logic of lesbianism I have described in previous chapters. *Gallathea* offers a new figuration of how chastity/aversion relates to homoerotic desire and to biological sex; moreover, the representation of the relationship between inward experiences of homoerotic desire and outward transformations relies on consistent wordplay linking appearance and desire. The play demonstrates a direct, if complicated, understanding that clothing is the vehicle that enables the expression of female homoerotic desire, while this homoeroticism is itself represented as natural, reasonable, and even to be expected. Moreover, in the face of recent criticism on the play, I argue that *Gallathea* does not regulate female sexuality by enforcing marriage and procreative relationships onto the virgin-loving virgins; rather, the question at issue for *Gallathea* is not how female-female desire can be contained, but how female homosociality and homoeroticism can be made possible and self-sustaining. The fact that the play draws attention to artifice and that the

sex-change solution is fantastical does not render the marriage of the two virgins uncomplicated or undesirable in the play.

It is easy to understand why Lyly's generally flat characters and seemingly arbitrary plot devices may be unattractive to modern readers, but Lyly's ornate use of language—a style now called “euphuism” after Lyly's romance *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*—became highly popular during the time he was writing, creating a vogue for poetic elaborateness and complex grammatical structures in other literature and even in the speech habits of courtiers and, eventually, the general populace.⁵³ Although *Gallathea* has garnered comparatively little critical attention, the play's emphasis on artifice is part of an intellectual approach that actively invites closer consideration of the problems it presents. The ornate linguistic style of Lyly's plays directs our attention to language that specifically echoes or complicates the play's intellectual content.

Euphuism is characterized by a

principle of tension and balance; syllables, words, and clauses are balanced one against the other, paralleled and opposed, in sound and sense, through alliteration (simple and traverse), assonance and consonance, repetition, inversion, and verbal and intellectual antithesis.

The general effect is one of debate and analysis; the movement is choppy

⁵³ In “‘To Parley Euphuism’: Fashioning English as a Linguistic Fad,” Leah Guenther tracks the rise and fall in popularity of euphuism in England. She describes the popularity of euphuism by saying, “Not only did noble women and patrician men clamor to buy and read Lyly's successful prose romance, they also worked diligently to mould their speech according to ‘Euphuism’ [...]. Before long, Euphuism was deemed not only stylish but also a necessary part of the Elizabethan courtier's verbal attire” (24). Guenther explains that the popularity of euphuism spread to “the tongues of the masses” during the 1580's before waning in the 1590's and 1600's, at which point “the predictable scorn that accompanies all passing trends soon emerged” (25).

and static. The style thus reflects the debates, balances, similarities and contrasts, which are Lyly's subject matter. It is a highly artificial and rhetorical style. (Lancashire xxx)

Despite the fact that the play is heavy-handedly a philosophical and rhetorical exercise, its distillation of ideas and language should not be misinterpreted as representing a simplistic ideology. Anne Lancashire describes Lyly's style by pointing out that in Lyly's court entertainments, "intellectual (not visual and aural) content is all-important; debates and wit are emphasized" (xix). She elaborates this by saying,

the drama stems, not from character or plot, but from moral debate: characters are important not as human individuals but as fixed representations of different moral points of view (hence their emblematic names), and the plots are artificially designed to place these points of view in a balanced tension, one against another. Thus the dramatic conflict is primarily intellectual, and emotional only insofar as the dialogue defines and exposes for us human emotional psychology. (xxiv)

What makes *Gallathea* an interesting object of study in this project, then, is that Lyly's emphasis on debate and intellectual exploration over character development or any degree of realism creates a purified playscape that isolates the kinds of discussions of eroticism that exist more amorously or peripherally in the texts I examine in the previous chapters. In *Gallathea*, Lyly constructs a debate about desire, gender, and bodies that cannot be solved, and the instability in the play's interrogation of these concepts is reinforced through wordplay that ultimately exposes similar slippage in the English language itself. The artificiality of plot and rhetoric, then, relentlessly calls our attention

to the artificiality of gender, of social norms, and of language in a way that is helpful for further considering Renaissance understandings of gender performance and erotic tendencies.

However, if intellectual inquiry and the exploration of isolated philosophical questions are the driving forces of *Gallathea*, critics have not generally agreed about what specific question the play explores. For instance, Lancashire understands the debate between Venus and Diana that is dramatized within the play to be the debate of the play itself. She argues that “*Gallathea* is centered on a debate familiar to the court of Elizabeth: which is better, love or chastity?” (xxiv); in response, she claims that the play creates a distinction between love (Venus) and lust (Cupid), offering an argument about “the physical inevitability of love” and also the capacity of love to deceive. Lancashire concludes that the “arbitrary happy ending is Lyly’s final ironic comment on love, self-deception, and reality. Given man’s physical nature, and his capacity for self-deception, harmony and happiness will come to him only by chance” (xxvi). On the other hand, Christopher Wixson reads the play differently, understanding it as a commentary on various class and gender transgressions, with an overall regulatory prerogative: “The primary image of divine authority in *Gallathea* is Neptune, and the play works to legitimate him as a ruler and devalue the unnatural defiance of patriarchal and monarchical authority” (245). Although these varying opinions about the play’s central debate are not irreconcilable (as it is not necessarily the case that *Gallathea* centers around only one intellectual debate), the differences of opinion even over what the play is about are an indicator of the play’s complexity.

Still, in order to determine what questions the play is asking, it is important to consider the events that catalyze the action of the play; doing so challenges Lancashire's interpretation of the play as an argument for the power of love and Wixson's claim that the play is invested in patriarchal generation. This is because Lancashire's and Wixson's analyses do not fully address the problematic representations of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality that begin the play. In fact, the play begins with and maintains an image of patriarchal authority and heterosexual union that is literally monstrous and highly undesirable. The dilemma at the center of the play, as Gallathea's father Tityrus describes it, is that as recompense for previous irreligious practices, Neptune requires "that at every five years' day the fairest and chastest virgin in all the country should be brought unto this tree, and here being bound, whom neither parentage shall excuse for honor nor virtue for integrity, is left for a peace offering unto Neptune" (I.i.42-46). This central trope of virgin sacrifice already calls our attention to the fact that women in this play are lost to patriarchal imperatives. Moreover, after the fairest virgin is left for the sacrifice, Neptune sends in the monster Agar to take the virgin, and the characters imagine this virgin sacrifice as not only a death but also a rape. Tityrus justifies his plan to dress Gallathea as a boy by telling her, "I think it better to use unlawful means, your honor preserved, than intolerable grief, both life and honor hazarded" (I.i.63-5), indicating that he imagines Agar will not only kill Gallathea, but also take her virginity. The less beautiful virgin Hebe, who is later volunteered as the sacrifice once the more beautiful virgins have disguised themselves, echoes this assumption that the sacrifice of the virgins is also a kind of sexual sacrifice when she prepares herself for her own sacrifice (which never takes place); she says, "Come Agar,

thou insatiable monster of maidens' blood and devourer of beauties' bowels, glut thyself till thou surfeit, and let my life end thine. Tear these tender joints with thy greedy jaws, these yellow locks with thy black feet, this fair face with thy foul teeth. Why abatest thou thy wonted swiftness? I am fair, I am a virgin, I am ready" (V.ii.50-6). Hebe's description is overtly sexual, and she seems to imagine being eaten by the monster as a violent erotic experience as well. Her portrayal of the virgin sacrifice explicitly focuses on the monster consuming the parts of the body that figure in Petrarchan blazons, and she contrasts virgin beauty with the monster's antithetical ugliness. As she imagines the monster tearing her "tender joints" with his "greedy jaws," her "yellow locks" with his "black feet," and her "fair face" with his "foul teeth," she constructs an erotic dynamic wherein the sacrificial virgin is destroyed in a kind of sexualized attack in which consummation (the taking away of virginity) is the same as being consumed; virginity is lost, it would seem, through the complete loss of the virgin herself. The goriness of Agar devouring virgins/virginity is the play's dominant image of patriarchal control and of heterosexual union, and it emphasizes not only the pain and bloodiness of the loss of the virgins/virginity, but also a power dynamic wherein male greediness and aggressiveness consumes beautiful virginal bodies, destroying them.

This negative representation of heterosexual sex presents a similar world to that depicted in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, where the violence and undesirability of heteroerotic union is presented as a given. However, whereas *The Two Noble Kinsmen* focuses on male homoeroticism and introduces female-female relationships as the other, lesser half of the equation, *Gallathea* devotes its attention almost exclusively to female beauty and to the desirability of women. This is evident in Neptune's demand that the

citizens sacrifice the “fairest” virgin; moreover, the fact that both Gallathea’s and Phyllida’s fathers assume their daughters to be the fairest—assumptions that are never corrected—emphasizes the surplus of female beauty in Lincolnshire. This excess is subsequently described at length by Gallathea and Phyllida when they meet and fall in love with each other, and it is reiterated by Diana’s beautiful nymphs, who also fall in love with the human virgins. By contrast, male bodies are never described in the play, and although there are three young male apprentices in one of the sub-plots, the boys’ sub-plot never intersects with the stories of Gallathea and Phyllida or of Diana and her nymphs. The play creates a female monopoly over beauty and erotic desire and desirability.

Alongside the idealization of female beauty, the play considers problems of chastity that would have been familiar to Renaissance audiences. This virgin-sacrifice plot literalizes the problem of virginity that the play continues to explore: in the Agar plot, the virgins are the most precious and most desirable figures in the play, but if the virgin maintains her virginity, she will ultimately be destroyed by Agar. The Agar conundrum presents a material representation of the problem of chastity with which Renaissance writers regularly engaged. If virginity is what makes a woman (or man, in Shakespeare’s sonnets) desirable, how can the desired object be enjoyed without being destroyed? And if the desirable virgin *never* becomes sexually available, how can the virgin avoid the self-killing failure to reproduce? The virgin-sacrifice premise of *Gallathea* is one layer within the play’s treatment of female impenetrability as at once highly desirable and also self-killing, threatening the nation through the failure of procreation. This was of course not a hypothetical question at the time Lyly wrote

Gallathea for the court, as England had no heir apparent and feared a violent fight over succession due to Elizabeth's refusal to marry and bear children. The question the play poses, then, is how women can avoid the kind of monstrous heterosexual encounter represented by Agar and still find an avenue for self-replication.

It should be emphasized that Agar is not the only negative representation of patriarchy in the play. Neptune orders the sacrifices, and the fact that he recants his order by the end of the play seems to counter Wixson's claim that the play is invested in legitimizing Neptune's rule. Besides the supernatural male characters, the human male characters generally reinforce the questionable ethics and unattractiveness represented in the male god and monster. *Gallathea* and *Phyllida* both criticize their fathers for the disingenuous cross-dressing plot, preferring to face death bravely rather than to hide and allow another woman to be sacrificed. And although the fathers' cross-dressing plots might be excused as being the result of fatherly affection, the play also devotes seemingly unnecessary attention to the problematic relationships between the fathers and daughters. Most notably, when each father tries to expose the other's deceptions by proving that the other has a fair living daughter who should be sacrificed, Tityrus questions the intimacy between *Phyllida* and her father *Melebeus*: "Did not I see, and very lately see, your daughter in your arms, whenas you gave her infinite kisses with affection I fear me more than fatherly?" (IV.i.37-39). Tityrus's objective is to reveal that *Phyllida* is alive, so this addition of the "more than fatherly" kisses serves no purpose besides introducing another instance of repellent heteroerotic interaction. *Melebeus* hardly lessens the incestuous implications of Tityrus's claim when he continues to pretend that *Phyllida* is dead: "Did you ever see me kiss my daughter? You are deceived, it was my wife. And if you

thought so young a piece unfit for so old a person, and therefore imagined it to be my child, not my spouse, you must know that silver hairs delight in golden locks, and the old fancies crave young nurses, and frosty years must be thawed by youthful fires” (IV.i.50-56). Melebeus’s defense of May-December relationships constructs him as a standard antagonist to comedic projects of age-appropriate companionate marriages; moreover, though, as Melebeus describes in detail the mixing of silver locks with golden ones and the “fires” that the young woman lights in him, the audience is aware that the young woman he describes actually *is* his daughter Phyllida, which invites the audience to imagine virginal Phyllida in the incestuous embrace of her aging father.

This attention to incest and old men being sexually attracted to young women reinforces the strain of monstrous sexuality in the Agar plot, constructing a society where heteroerotic contact is understood to be incestuous and non-mutual, and where the sacrifice of young women to patriarchal appetites is the antithesis of comedy. The unattractiveness of extreme opposites (age and youth, monster and virgins) is a trope that Laurie Shannon analyzes as a foundation for her argument about Renaissance homonormativity in “Nature’s Bias.” Shannon suggests that Renaissance appreciation of “appropriate” matches made people averse to “mixed marriages” or to the “conjoining of unlikes,” which included “those mixing age and youth” (183-4). Lyly’s initial examples of heteroerotic unions emphasize extreme examples of the “conjoining of unlikes.” Given this emphasis, we might still expect that the women in the play would prefer the play’s non-threatening younger men. However, the presence of these young men is contained within a plotline where the comically unintelligent brothers Rafe, Robin, and Dick seek employment through a series of apprenticeships, never even meeting the young

women. The play's representation of the young apprentices is markedly different from the representation of the young women, as the women exist in an economy of eroticism and desire, while the young men are never described physically and the question of marriage and erotic attraction is surprisingly absent.

My analysis here directly contradicts Christian Billing's 2008 reading of the play in *Masculinity, Corporality, and the English Stage 1580-1635*. Billing emphatically declares that the play not only explores male homoeroticism through the presence of the boy actor (a claim I do not contest; certainly the boy actor participates in an erotic effect on the audience that is multivalent), but he also asserts that "Because *Gallathea* is a performance text written for the transvestite theatre, it is clear that erotic affection centres exclusively upon the adolescent male form" (63). As I discuss in the introduction, this move to focus *entirely* on the boy actor and erase the explicit narrative of women from the stage altogether is hugely problematic and, more importantly, ignores more complicated Renaissance attitudes toward performance, clothing, gender, and imagination. In *Gallathea* specifically, Billing argues that the apprenticeship storyline is one example among many in the play's representation of man-boy pederasty as the ideal erotic relationship. Such an argument seems to ignore the violence and grotesqueness of the play's representation of any erotic relationships involving older men. Moreover, if the play is "exclusively" invested in idealizing adolescent male beauty, it would make sense for Phyllida and Gallathea to be represented in similar terms to Rafe, Dick, and Robin (all of them, after all, were played by boy actors, as the play was performed by a boys' company); additionally, if the attraction Phyllida and Gallathea feel for each other is based upon the attractiveness of the boy actor, erotic desire should transfer fluidly

amongst *all* the boy actors, including Rafe, Dick, and Robin. However, the play constructs a stark division between the apprentices, who are not represented as being attractive, desirable, or intelligent, and the multitude of young female virgins, to whom the play devotes all its erotic attention. The male homoerotic implications of the play are significant, but this does not erase the female homoeroticism that explicitly dominates the text, especially as the women's attraction to each other is articulated in terms of female beauty and female-female desire.

The play depicts a cast of male characters who are at worst tyrannical or monstrous and at best inept; against this depiction, *Gallathea* figures chastity and female homosociality as the only attractive possibilities within a violent patriarchy that literally devours virginity. The women have a choice between giving up their virginity in order to make themselves unavailable for sacrifice, or sacrificing themselves to Agar for the maintenance of the patriarchy: neither option is at all desirable. Still, this failure of heteroerotic desire and its relationship to the play's representations of female homosociality and female homoeroticism is imagined in various ways in *Gallathea*, due to the multiplication of representations of female virgins. Lyly's entertainment for Elizabeth's court is not content to represent just one virtuous virgin whom we might understand to be metaphorically linked to Elizabeth. Instead, female virgins multiply in the play, which again reminds the audience of the very real 16th-century political problem of how these idealized Elizabeth-like women can ultimately continue to regenerate; in the case of Elizabeth, as I will discuss, concerns about succession made this issue of procreation one of utmost concern. In *Gallathea*, after constructing patriarchal

reproduction as highly unattractive, the play works to imagine ways of bypassing heteroerotic encounters in what becomes a fantasy of auto/homoerotic reproduction.

Within this reproductive economy, resistance to heterosexual possibilities is represented both as refusal and as aversion. Scholarship has largely interpreted chastity as virtuous self-denial or as a political choice in the play, understanding Elizabeth to be represented primarily through militantly chaste Diana. This interpretation is logical, as Elizabeth styled herself as a Diana figure, and Lyly's *Edymion* features Cynthia as a central, idealized representation of Elizabeth. Still, Elizabeth's identification with Diana involved more complex erotic figurations than are contained within the representation of Diana in the play. Lancashire straightforwardly analyzes chastity in the play by saying that Diana is both a compliment to and critique of the Virgin Queen:

Lyly upholds the moral strength of Elizabeth and the desirability to the virgin state. But Lyly subtly combines, with the compliment to Elizabeth, gentle criticism of her attitude towards love and marriage. Diana defeats Cupid (traditionally, mere lust), but achieves only a draw with Venus (true love, fulfilled); 'beauty is a fair mark to hit' (V.iii.84), and Diana cannot keep her nymphs from love. Our sympathies lie equally with the two goddesses; love and chastity are equally admirable; and for ordinary mortals, who do not have Elizabeth's divine strength, the former is inevitable and right. There may even be a light mockery of Elizabeth in Lyly's presentation of Diana raging against love; her speeches become somewhat shrewish, a bit shrill. (xxii)

There is some truth to this summary of Diana's regulation of the nymphs, but the idea that aversion to marriage and to heteroerotic interactions with men in the play takes "divine strength" does not take into account the complete failure of any of the women to fall in love with men by the end of the play.

Theodora Jankowski offers a similar interpretation of how chastity is maintained in the play. Jankowski asserts that the virgins in *Gallathea* can be considered "queer" because they don't participate in reproductive sexuality, and her argument about how erotic difference functions is primarily framed in terms of political resistance. Jankowski suggests that virginity is a choice women make to take themselves out of the sexual economy. "Such women," she argues, "by resisting men, are not only rejecting the sexual economy but are essentially opting out of the patriarchy" (6). Opting out of *Gallathea's* patriarchy would be understandable; it is not good to women, and the women would be sensible to resist it. However, chastity is not always represented as a choice—or as a difficult thing to maintain—in *Gallathea*: for most of the women, it is very easy to reject the heteroerotic encounters available to them.

It is true that Diana's enforcement of chastity onto her nymphs constructs chastity as a value held through the regulation of oneself and of others; however, limiting our understanding of the play's exploration of Elizabeth, of chastity, and of fulfilled desire to the play's representation of Diana ignores the much more complicated exploration of chastity and desire in the nymphs' attraction to Phyllida and Gallathea, and in Phyllida's and Gallathea's attraction to each other. As Philipa Berry points out, Renaissance understandings of Diana involved complex anxieties about chastity and female homosociality. In her description of the way that Renaissance representations of the

Petrarchan beloved reveal and alleviate anxieties about the implications of female chastity, Berry argues,

The aggressiveness sometimes attributed to the female beloved of the love discourses seems to have been partly inspired by the fear of an active female sexuality, which might elude the control and manipulation of the masculine subject. That this fantasy was closely connected with the disturbing possibility of women taking narcissistic, and possibly even homosexual, pleasure in a female body is suggested by the recurrence of the figure of the goddess Diana in these discourses, whose association with close-knit communities of women from which men were usually excluded is stressed in so many of her myths. (8)

These other varieties of Diana fantasies—of female homosocial separatism and of female sexual desire that excludes men—also appear in *Gallathea*, but they are dispersed amongst the various virgins in the play.

In contrast to the homosociality that Diana maintains almost militarily, the homoerotic elements of Gallathea's and Phyllida's relationship develop in a different way, not as an explicit avoidance of patriarchy, but as an attraction that surprises both of them because they have never fallen in love before. At the outset of the play, Gallathea and Phyllida have happily maintained their chastity. However, once they are both cross-dressed, they meet each other as boys in the forest and develop an instantaneous mutual attraction. Interestingly, though, the play does not present male attire as a successful disguise for either virgin; although cross-dressing enables the women to meet, the disguise plot is almost comically obvious, with each virgin nearly immediately guessing

that the other is really female. When Phyllida first sees Gallathea, she describes Gallathea as “a pretty boy and fair. He might well have been a woman; but because he is not, I am glad I am, for now under the color of their coat I shall decipher the follies of their kind” (II.i.19-21). Both women notice the “fairness” of the other (which is of course the trait that has forced them both to go into disguise), and both adopt a plan to learn how to behave as a boy by watching the other; Diana then invites the virgins to join her and her nymphs in the forest, and both Phyllida and Gallathea agree because they have already fallen in love and want to spend more time with each other. The next time we see them together, they engage in a play of riddles that easily exposes them to each other as women, which, judging by the questions they choose to ask each other, they seem to have already known. Their exchange proceeds as follows:

PHYLLIDA: It is pity that nature framed you not as a woman, having a face so fair, so lovely a countenance, so modest a behavior. [...] I say tis pity you are not a woman.

GALLATHEA: I would not wish to be a woman, unless it were because thou art a man.

PHYLLIDA: Nay, I do not wish thee to be a woman, for then I should not love thee, for I have sworn never to love a woman.

GALLATHEA: A strange humour in so pretty a youth, and according to mine, for myself will never love a woman. [...]

PHYLLIDA: Suppose I were a virgin (I blush in supposing myself one), and that under the habit of a boy were the person of a maid: if I should utter my affection with sighs, manifest my sweet love by my salt tears, and

prove my loyalty unspotted and my griefs intolerable, would not then that fair face pity this true heart?

GALLATHEA: Admit that I were as you would have me suppose that you are, and that I should with entreaties, prayers, oaths, bribes, and whatever can be invented in love, desire your favor, would you not yield?

PHYLLIDA: Tush, you come with “admit.”

GALLATHEA: And you with “suppose.”

PHYLLIDA [aside]: What doubtful speeches be these! I fear he is as I am, a maiden.

GALLATHEA [aside]: What dread riseth in my mind! I fear the boy to be as I am, a maiden. (III.ii.1-32)

Their exchange, while ostensibly permitted by the heteroerotic deceit of the disguise, relies on layers of homoerotic possibilities that emphasize the erotic energy of sameness in the scene. Valerie Traub has pointed out the importance of Gallathea’s and Phyllida’s “linguistic symmetry” throughout the play, and this exchange is an excellent example of the way that the virgins’ flirtation is represented as mirroring (*Renaissance* 328). Here, the women do not seem to be communicating so much as repeating each other: they both declare that they would only desire to be the other sex in order to be able to be with each other, they both declare that they have “sworn” not to love women, they pose the same exact questions to each other without ever answering the questions, they both accuse the other of evading the question, and then they both reveal in the exact same terms that they think the other is “as I am, a maiden.” The symmetry of the dialogue reinforces the fact that it presents strictly homoerotic possibilities: either two boys are in love, or two girls,

or two boy actors. Gallathea and Phyllida imitate each other and are attracted to the feminine features in each other that are the same as their own features. Their attraction increases through rhetorical exchanges that highlight sameness as arousing.

Although female-female desire is enabled through the guise of heteroerotic desire that cross-dressing permits (each virgin ostensibly believing the other to be a member of the opposite sex), the actual desire Gallathea and Phyllida experience is not represented as being causally related to their clothing. Desire circulates, as well as clothing and eventually body parts, but why this circulation occurs defies explanation. Traub offers a helpful interpretation of the desire in the play in her introduction to *The Renaissance of Lesbianism*, a chapter that takes its title (“Practicing Impossibilities”) from a line in *Gallathea*. When Cupid decides to defy Diana by shooting his arrow at her nymphs so they will also fall in love with Gallathea and Phyllida (who are already in love with each other without Cupid’s help), he tells Neptune, “I will make their pains my pastimes, and so confound their loves in their own sex that they shall dote on their desires, delight in their affections, and practice only impossibilities” (II.ii.6-9). Traub uses the line as a central concept for her argument in *Renaissance*:

Drawing on a long heritage of female-female relations as *amoris impossibilis*, Lyly’s plays reproduce social orthodoxy: the prospect of women pursuing a loving and erotic life together simply cannot be. At the same time, by gesturing toward the enactment of erotic passion for one’s own sex, by mining a tension between what can and cannot *be practiced*, *Gallathea* helps to make the impossible intelligible and the unintelligible possible. (6)

In other words, Traub understands the play as presenting a distinction between heteroerotic *practice* (which was recognizably possible) and homoerotic desire (which was recognized as existing, but which was also in some ways unintelligible in terms of practice). Traub's interpretation reinforces my claim that the play is invested not in straightening out female homoeroticism but in finding a way such desires can be practiced—and, more importantly, made procreative and self-sustaining. Traub asserts that *Gallathea* is

thoroughly and frankly homoerotic in plot, structure, and character [...]. Lyly makes it clear that to practice impossibilities is first, possible, and second, a matter of loving another who looks, behaves, and feels amazingly, if perplexingly, like the self. To practice impossibilities means to experience and confront the attraction of a love caused and defined by similarity rather than difference. (327)

What is helpful about Traub's analysis is that she makes it clear that the cross-dressing, and even what Lancashire calls the "arbitrary" solution at the end of the play, do not serve to legitimize or naturalize heteronormativity. The play clearly associates cross-dressing with homoerotic desire, but it also does not present the desires between women as imitating heteroerotic patterns or, indeed, as anything other than homoerotic.

The play's interrogation of the relationship between bodies and clothing focuses more on questions of penetration and bodily transformation than on questions of gender performance. Whereas the other texts I have examined in this project consider how female masculinity, represented by and imagined through the penetrative symbolism of cross-dressing, might relate to penetrating erotic tendencies, *Gallathea* and *Phyllida* are

not described as masculine women. Although they both initially claim that they will learn how to behave as boys, they seem to dismiss this goal once they become enamored with each other and instead spend all their time riddling and flirting together; the play is not interested in the performative aspects of their disguises, and Gallathea and Phyllida do not perform masculine acts beyond adopting men's clothing. Still, while this difference might seem to exclude *Gallathea's* virgins from the category of penetrating women, the play is nonetheless deeply preoccupied with questions of penetration, of penetrating tendencies and female erotic impenetrability, and of erotic difference, and, ultimately, with the question of how penetrative exteriors can be transformed so that erotic possibilities *can* be practiced.

This interest in penetration is demonstrated throughout the Diana plot. The hunter goddess and her nymphs frequently explain their chaste community by contrasting their own penetrating tendencies with their erotic/emotional impenetrability. For instance, when Cupid encounters one of the nymphs in the forest, he asks her whether any of the nymphs are in love. She responds that love is “a foolish thing” and asserts, “I will follow Diana in the chase, whose virgins are all chaste, delighting in the bow that wounds the swift hart in the forest, not fearing the bow that strikes the soft heart in the chamber” (I.i.23-26). Cupid hears this as a challenge and plots, “I will practice awhile in these woods, and play such pranks with their arrows they shall be wounded themselves with their own eyes” (I.i.33-35). Once Cupid does shoot his arrows at the nymphs, causing them to fall in love with Gallathea and Phyllida, the nymphs continue to express the experience of being in love as an experience of being penetrated; the nymph Ramia wonders, “Can there be no heart so chaste but love can wound, nor vows so holy but

affection can violate?” (III.i.70-1). In these exchanges, the nymphs create a distinction between those who penetrate and those who are penetrated, expressing chastity as both impenetrability and also a tendency toward penetration. The descriptions rely on wordplay to create this differentiation: the nymph pairs being “chaste” with the activity of “chasing,” preferring to “wound the swift hart” than to have her own “soft heart” struck, and Cupid maintains her meaning by imagining turning her arrow back upon her. Lyly’s representation of love as “wounding” is of course not his own invention; as I have discussed, the idea of emotional impenetrability is also an important idea in *The Faerie Queene*, and the trope of falling in love as being hunted figured in Petrarchan poetry and in courtly lyrics—for instance, the hart/heart pun figures in Wyatt’s and Surrey’s translations of Petrarch. Still, while the tropes of the wounding, chaste maiden and of love as a wound are not original to Lyly, *Gallathea* more aggressively continues to work through the question of how metaphorical “wounding” becomes sexual “wounding” as well—particularly when heterosexual contact has been represented in the play as literally wounding, possibly mortally. In this way, the Diana plot centralizes the problem of female impenetrability and of what erotic possibilities exist for women who are declaredly lifelong virgins whose intimate relationships are with other women.

In addition to figuring love itself as penetration in the Diana plot, the play confronts the problem of how figurative penetration of desire can transform into literal procreative penetration for Gallathea and Phyllida, who receive love’s wounds from each other immediately. Whereas the Diana plot focuses on the question of whether penetrating tendencies can be reversed—of whether the nymph’s tendencies to penetrate with their own arrows can be turned upon them, allowing them to open themselves to

love and sexuality—the Gallathea plot works on this problem of how the impenetrability of chastity can be made erotically penetrable in a different way. After constructing female homoerotic desire as an attractive and likely possibility that is enabled (but not created) by cross-dressing, the Gallathea plot focuses on the possibility that cross-dressing can also enable the transformation of the body underneath, fantasizing a simple solution to the complex and “impossible” desires that circulate throughout the play.

It is important to notice that what the play works to make possible is the socially productive practice of homoerotic desire—not homoerotic desire itself or even homoerotic pleasure, both of which are fully possible without any change to the women’s bodies. Although the play represents female homoerotic desire as “practicing impossibilities,” the “impossibility” of homoerotic relationships has more to do with the fulfillment of reproductive imperatives than with the fulfillment of sexual desire. Here my argument aligns once again with Traub’s reading of the play. As she puts it, the fact that the play ultimately assumes sex changes can solve the “impossibilities” that arise in the play

suggests that from the perspective of romance, the problem posed by the *amor impossibilis* is less desire itself than the intractability of the physical body and the body’s social function as a legible marker of gender within the patriarchal organization of reproduction. If the body could be brought in accord with the *social* dictates of Nature, then all would be well. The solution of sex transformation mandates neither the eradication of desire nor its redirection toward a different object, but a change in the desiring subject’s body. Even as it concedes to a system of eroticism linked to

gendered binaries, it performs, if unwittingly, an implicit disarticulation of the body from desire. (*Renaissance* 288)

In other words, the logic of homoerotic desire that the play presents ultimately proposes that when desire is homoerotic, bodily transformation can make that desire socially productive; but this does not explain homoerotic desire as being the product of bodily transformation, nor does it even suggest that heterosexual union fulfills any needs besides the needs of society.

In fact, after the mirroring scene I describe above, in which Phyllida and Gallathea each suspect the other to be “as I am, a maiden,” both are already in love, and the scene ends with Phyllida suggesting to Gallathea, “Come, let us into the grove and make much of one another, that cannot tell what to think one of another” (III.iii.55-6). It would be difficult to read this line without acknowledging the erotic overtones, and this is surprising because both women think their desires are “impossible” and homoerotic. However, this scene suggests that homoerotic *pleasure* is entirely possible. If anything, Gallathea’s and Phyllida’s riddling banter serves as a kind of rhetorical foreplay of the variety that Stephen Greenblatt describes in *Shakespearean Negotiations*; their banter predicts their decision to go “make much of each other” immediately afterward. Drawing on Renaissance stories of sexual transformation that results from the heat of friction (warming women’s genitals so that they develop into male genitals, in accordance with Galenic anatomical theory), Greenblatt argues that dramatic banter can be understood as a similar kind of “friction” in Shakespearean drama. He explains,

This promethean heat, which is, as we have seen, the crucial practical agent of sexuality in the Renaissance, would seem to be precisely what is

excluded from theatrical presentation—it takes place internally, out of sight, in the privileged intimacy of the body. But sexual heat, we recall, is not different in kind from all other heat, including that produced by the imagination. Shakespeare realized that if sexual chafing could not be presented literally onstage, it could be represented figuratively: friction could be fictionalized, chafing chastened and hence made fit for the stage, by transforming it into the witty, erotically charged sparring that is the heart of the lovers' experience. [...] Dallying with words is the principal Shakespearean presentation of erotic heat. (89-90)

Gallathea's and Phyllida's verbal banter functions in exactly this way, though they do not engage in the kind of sparring (which might suggest contradictions, teasing, or difference) that Greenblatt sees in Shakespeare's plays. Gallathea and Phyllida create a specifically symmetrical energy through what can be described as almost a kind of mutual stroking, as each responds in kind to the sentiments of the other. Phyllida's and Gallathea's fast-paced exchange of almost identical lines creates erotic friction that does not go unfulfilled. If anything, it seems to warm them up, so to speak, so that they are ready to go "make much of each other" offstage. This representation of verbal friction that is specifically based upon sameness and reciprocal exchange makes it easy to imagine an erotically fulfilling encounter offstage for the two virgins that imitates this kind of stroking or rubbing. Thus, the Gallathea/Phyllida plot acknowledges that the virgins can be emotionally "wounded" by each other in a metaphorical sense, as each easily succumbs to the other's beauty and falls irreversibly in love, and even that they can find erotic pleasure with each other; what the play pursues is the problem of how two

female bodies can perform the physical sexual wounding required for the maintenance of the threatened patriarchy with which the play begins.

Thus, although the sex-change at the ending of the play may seem like an arbitrary or comically convenient solution, the fantasy that cross-dressing will result in bodily transformation actually responds to a problem that the play works to solve from the very beginning—and the sex-change solution is foreshadowed throughout Gallathea's and Phyllida's descriptions of cross-dressing. Of course, the bodily transformation would have been predictable to the audience because of *Gallathea*'s loose basis on the Iphis story in Ovid.⁵⁴ But there are additional ways that the play identifies bodily transformation as the solution to the “impossibilities.” If transformation is predicted by heat, as Greenblatt argues, the verbal exchanges between the women and their subsequent “making much” could predict the possibility of genital transformation. Moreover, the virgins also repeatedly describe cross-dressing with a lexicon that suggests the possibility of transformation to reconcile exteriors with interiors, emphasizing a set of words whose meanings expose the expectation that appearances and interiors should match—and that metamorphosis is the likely solution when this is not the case. Through wordplay, Lyly constructs a logic of homoeroticism based upon the virgins' gender-defying exteriors.

The first instance of this kind of wordplay occurs in the passage that begins this chapter, when Phyllida responds to her father's suggestion that she disguise herself.

⁵⁴ In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Iphis is an unwanted daughter whose mother secretly raises her as a boy. When Iphis is old enough to marry, her father arranges a marriage to Ianthe; Iphis is in love with Ianthe and (in Golding's Renaissance translation) “loves whereof shee thinkes shee may not bee/ Partaker, and the selfe same thing augmenteth still her flame. Herself a Mayden with a Mayd (right straugne) in love became” (IX.853). Iphis's mother prays to Isis, and Isis solves the problem by turning Iphis into a boy; the marriage takes place, and the episode ends as Iphis “Did take Ianthee too his wyfe, and so her love enjoy”(IX.937).

After Melebeus tells Phyllida to dress “In man’s apparel,” Phyllida protests, “It will neither become my body nor my mind” (I.iii.15-16). The joke, of course, is that male apparel *will* become her body (or possibly Gallathea’s) when Venus suggests bodily metamorphosis as a solution to match the virgins’ desires with the societal need for penetrative, procreative sexual relationships. Phyllida’s line draws attention to the dual meanings of the word “become.” As a transitive verb, which Phyllida employs here, the word indicates appropriateness or suitability. Samuel Johnson’s 18th-century dictionary, which uses examples from Spenser, Shakespeare, and other Renaissance texts to explain word definitions, defines this form of the verb “to become” as follows: “1. Applied to persons, to appear in a manner suitable to something. [...] 2. Applied to things to be suitable to the person; to befit; to be congruous to the appearance, or character, or circumstance, in such a manner, as to add grace; to be graceful.”⁵⁵ The participle adjective “Becoming” is similarly defined as “That pleases by an elegant propriety; graceful.” These definitions of “become” describe a continuity between the appearance or behavior of something and the appearance or behavior that is anticipated or desired. Something is “becoming” if it performs in a way that is expected based upon its appearance or social position. On the other hand, the intransitive verb “to become” is “1. To enter into some state or condition, by a change from some other.” The second meaning describes the final sex change: although Phyllida protests that male attire does

⁵⁵ Given that all of the words I look at in this section are still in modern usage to some extent, I include several of Johnson’s poetic definitions in part because his definitions, written in closer historical proximity to the time of *Gallathea* than those of the *OED*, are interesting and invested in literary usage. More importantly, though, Johnson’s definitions highlight the overlaps between the different words I am comparing here and specifically emphasize questions of appearance and transformation. The *OED* offers very similar, if less aesthetically compelling, definitions of these particular words.

not “become” her body or mind, in the end Gallathea’s or Phyllida’s body *will* “become” male. This wordplay replicates the kind of circular logical inquiry in which the play is invested. The play generally presents the causal relationships between cross-dressing, desire, and transformation confusingly; it is not clear whether it is desire that transforms based on changes in appearance, or whether bodies will transform to match the desires. Lyly’s playful use of “becoming” highlights this very circularity, drawing attention to the assumption that “unbecoming” attire (attire that does not match the body underneath) may cause the body to “become” what the attire presents.

The virgins employ a number of other words that also describe both appearance and the transformation of appearance. In addition to “becoming,” Phyllida and Gallathea repeatedly use variants of other words that highlight this kind of linguistic ambiguity. For instance, when they first meet each other, they have the following exchange:

GALLATHEA: Blush, Gallathea, that must frame thy affection fit for thy habit, and therefore be thought immodest because thou art unfortunate. Thy tender years cannot dissemble this deceit, nor thy sex bear it. O, would the gods had made me as I seem to be, or that I might safely be what I seem not! [...]

PHYLLIDA: I neither like my gait nor my garments, the one untoward, the other unfit, both unseemly. [...]

GALLATHEA: It is a pretty boy and a fair. He might well have been a woman; but because he is not, I am glad I am, for now under the follies of my coat I shall discover the follies of their kind. (II.i.1-22)

There are a host of words here, which the virgins will continue to use, that reinforce the play's interrogation of appearance and transformation. Gallathea's use of the word "fit" serves a function similar to "becoming." Gallathea laments the fact that she must transform her behavior to "fit" her clothing. She uses "fit" as a verb, which Johnson defines as "1. To accommodate to anything; to suit one thing to another. 2. To accommodate a person to any thing, as, the tailor *fits* his customer. 3. To be adapted to; to suit anything." In other words, then, Gallathea plans to accommodate herself to "suit" her clothing (her clothing being her "suit," of course). On the other hand, in the following line, Phyllida uses the adjective "unfit" to describe her own clothing and/or her behavior, employing the word to connote the failure to be "Convenient; meet; proper right" (Johnson). The use of "fit" as both a verb and an adjective demonstrates the way that neither clothing nor the person underneath is assumed to be more essentially stable than the other; if clothing is "unfit," the person can "fit" herself to the clothing, and thus the wordplay in the scene creates a slippery epistemology where clothing can be transformed to "fit" or "become" the person, but the person can also "fit" herself to the clothing, "becoming" the new identity that was represented through the clothing. The same playfulness is present in the use of "habit," which can mean "dress; accoutrement; garment," but also "custom; inveterate use"—or, as "Habitude," "The power of doing any thing acquired by frequent repetition" (Johnson). The frequent wearing of a specific "habit," then, can transform the "habits" or even the very nature of the person underneath. In addition, "untoward" (which seems here to mean "inappropriate") also plays with the meaning of "toward" as a description of directional movement, which we might easily read as an additional reference to transformation—but transformation

against the grain. Finally, the verb “seem” and the adjective “seemly” (which Johnson respectively defines as “To appear; to make a show; to have semblance. [...] To have the appearance of truth” and “decent; becoming; proper; fit”) once again create a slippage between the possibility of a person disguising herself and a disguise transforming the person. The circular definitions of all these words—“become,” “fit,” “habit,” “toward,” and “seem”—are similar to the instability in Lyly’s presentation of the relationships between chastity, heteroerotic aversion, homoerotic desire, and biological sex, which are presented interdependently but not as definitively causally related.

The lines above also play with words that pair desire and sameness. In this way, the scene reinforces on a rhetorical level the kind of “Renaissance homonormativity” that Shannon describes. Shannon argues that early modern epistemology understood attraction to be primarily driven by affinity, equality, and similarity, and thus there existed “an almost philosophical preference for likeness or a structure of thinking based on resemblance. Homoeroticism instances this norm, so while the ‘-eroticism’ may, sometimes, be transgressive, the ‘homo-’ prefix itself describes something commonplace and normal, affirming the proverbial rule that like seeks like” (192). This preference for sameness, illustrated throughout Gallathea’s and Phyllida’s courtship, is further enforced through the virgins’ word choices in this scene: for instance, Phyllida uses the word “like” here to indicate preference (she does not “like” her clothing), but the word also describes similarity (she does not “like” her clothing because she is not “like” her clothing). The scene not only suggests that “like seeks like,” as Shannon argues: it playfully reminds us that like *likes* like. Relatedly, the word “kind” is here used to describe a taxonomy or category (members of a group are of a kind), but the play also

plays with the word's other meaning of "kind" as "nice" or "compassionate." The dual meanings of "like" and "kind" present homosocial sympathy (being "kind" to those who are part of one's "kind") and homoerotic desire ("liking" what is "like" oneself) as logical or predictable, based upon etymologically coinciding words.

Ultimately, Lyly's emphasis on the plethora of words with these kinds of dual meanings replicates through wordplay the kinds of erotic play with which the play also toys. By focusing on language as an avenue for exposing circular assumptions about the relationship between clothing and behavior, between transgressions in appearance and transformations in bodies, and between desire and identification, the play indicates that its presentation of homoerotic desire is not restricted to the courtly stage. These scenes suggest that circulations of desire, of body parts, and of appearances are written into the very circularity of word definitions.

This is one way that *Gallathea* suggests further uses for the model of penetrating women and the logic of lesbianism I have pursued in this project: while the earlier chapters explore imagined erotic tendencies that are prompted by penetrative clothing, this analysis of *Gallathea* indicates that perhaps assumptions about the connection between female cross-dressing and female homoeroticism can also be accessed through analysis of this kind of wordplay as well. *Gallathea* imagines female homoeroticism and the possibility of women penetrating women through a more abstract rhetorical practice than through the invocation of phallic symbolism. The Gallathea/Phyllida plot focuses on the reconciliation of exteriors with interiors and vice versa; largely bypassing questions of gender and masculinity, *Gallathea* nevertheless relies on the idea of

transformative cross-dressing to consider how same-sex attraction can be enabled and fulfilled.

Gallathea's heavily layered and deeply complex representation of female chastity and female homoeroticism, climaxing in the fantasy of the marriage of two virgins, also has important implications for understanding Renaissance attitudes and assumptions about the Virgin Queen herself. In this way, reading *Gallathea* permits the consideration not only of how fictional women's erotic tendencies were imagined, but also of how the category of penetrating women might have colored early modern understandings of real women—and how penetrating tendencies might have figured in real women's accounts of themselves. As I have suggested, early criticism of *Gallathea* understood Elizabeth to be represented through Diana, within an overall representation of the monarch's chastity that was at once flattering and also subtly encouraging of procreative endeavors. However, given the multiplication of idealized virgin characters in the play, it is unreasonable to assume that the play's attitudes toward Elizabeth are necessarily contained within its representation of powerful, chaste Diana. *Gallathea* and *Phyllida*, both of whom are chaste, noble, and superlatively beautiful, might reasonably be read as flattering reflections of Elizabeth as well, and thus their marriage to each other suggests that the idea of a female-female erotic relationship for the Queen may have been one way early moderns thought about Elizabeth's lifelong refusal to marry.

In fact, Shannon presents a helpful historical avenue for considering the play's more complicated representation of Elizabeth and her chastity. Shannon analyzes an instance, recorded in the *Calendar of State Papers*, wherein Elizabeth imagined (seriously or not) that marriage with another woman would be a pleasant or convenient

choice for herself. According to a 1564 letter from Guzman de Silva of Spain to King Philip, Elizabeth asked de Silva about King Philip's health and then asked "afterwards about the Princess [Juana], saying how much she should like to see her, and how well so young a widow and a maiden would get on together, and what a pleasant life they could lead. She [Elizabeth] being the elder would be the husband, and her Highness, the wife. She dwelt upon this for a time, talking now in Italian, which she speaks well" (cited from Shannon 195). Carole Levin, who also refers to the episode in *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, analyzes the letter by saying that "We are not meant to take this request seriously. [...] I do not believe [the idea of a female partner] would have seriously occurred to [Elizabeth] either politically or personally" (133). However, Shannon points out that actually the idea of female-female marriage most likely would have occurred to the Queen, if whimsically. Shannon draws on the letter to show how the preference for similarity existed as a standard, normalized trope. "What is clear," Shannon analyzes, is that female marriage presented so logical (if not practical) a solution to her [Elizabeth's] dilemma that she cannot have failed to think of it, as this story shows; what is more stunning about the fantasy is its apparent utterability in such a context and the completely unvexed account of it de Silva provides. Elizabeth's (I'll presume) hypothetical, then, draws on existing logical preferences for resemblance; the historical circumstances of her female sovereignty played into available discourses disfavoring mixtures or hybrids in this regard. (196)

I agree with Shannon's assessment that the recorded conversation reveals clearly how logical female-female marriage would have seemed to the Renaissance imagination.

Elizabeth's marriage fantasy involves the kind of logic of lesbianism I have observed in the previous chapters of this project, in which female same-sex encounters are facilitated by or imagined through concepts of female masculinity and penetrating tendencies. Here, the idea that Elizabeth would be the "husband" should not be dismissed as a heteronormative rhetorical production in an otherwise homonormative account, nor should it be understood as evidence of Elizabeth's complete acquiescence to heteroerotic imperatives. If we entertain the idea that there existed a logic of lesbianism wherein female masculinity resulted in fantasies of female-female erotic possibility, Elizabeth's depiction of herself playing the man's part (*having* a man's part) in an erotic/romantic scenario is in keeping with the kingly persona she cultivated throughout her reign, as I will discuss. Elizabeth's description of how pleasant it would be to have a young wife indeed suggests that Elizabeth "cannot have failed to think of" female marriage as a solution to her predicament of maintaining her kingly autonomy and sovereignty without giving up the possibility of romantic/erotic companionship altogether.

Similarly, I believe the fictional representation of female-female marriage in *Gallathea* further shows that *other* people cannot have failed to imagine that the queen might be more appropriately matched to a wife than to a husband. Indeed, Levin identifies a 1560 letter from the French ambassador Sir Nicholas Throckmorton to Robert Dudley that presents a similar fantasy to the one in *Gallathea*. Throckmorton discusses the recent death of Mary Stuart's husband and the political problems presented by the Scottish Queen's presence in England. Based on this, Throckmorton muses:

Me-thinketh it were to be wished of all wyse men and her Majestie's good subjects, that the one of these two Quenes of the ile of Brittain were

transformed into the shape of a man, to make so happie a marriage, as
therbie ther might be an unitie of the hole ile and their appendances.

Whosoever is conversant in storyes, shall well perceave estats hath by no
one thing growen so greate, and lastyd in their greatnes, as by marriages,
which have united countries that do confyne together. (Wright 58)

Throckmorton's idea develops out of a concern that is similar to one of the main concerns in *Gallathea*: namely, how can a woman who refuses to marry nonetheless fulfill the national projects that are enhanced through marriages? Because Elizabeth was not only a woman but also a queen, the question has added weight, and Throckmorton's suggestion of a female-female marriage is additionally imagined as serving the national function of unifying England and Scotland. What Throckmorton's letter shows is that regardless of what Elizabeth's real sexual behaviors included, fantasies about Elizabeth would have included female-female homoerotic possibilities—and this recorded fantasy from one court official to another most likely represents one of the tamer examples of this kind of fantasy.

This is not to suggest that early moderns all assumed Elizabeth wanted to or did have sexual relationships with other women. Rumors about Elizabeth, and specifically her sexual life, were rampant during her reign, and according to Levin, these rumors primarily represent an anxious and somewhat angry response to the uncomfortable idea of a female monarch. Many of the documented rumors about Elizabeth involve stories of sexual affairs with men in her court—most notably, Robert Dudley—and of hidden pregnancies and illegitimate children. However, the vicious rumors of Elizabeth's unvirtuous escapades do not represent the full array of attitudes toward Elizabeth or of

speculations about her continuing commitment to remain unmarried. As Levin points out, many rumors also focused on *whether* Elizabeth could have sexual intercourse with men; people wondered “whether she had a physical deformity that kept her from consummating a physical relationship” (70). This suggests a popular discourse that involved more complex questions than that of whether Elizabeth was a virgin or a whore (depending on one’s political leanings). Based on Lyly’s play, on the de Silva account of Elizabeth’s own erotic imaginings, and on Throckmorton’s suggestion to Dudley, I believe that Elizabeth’s continuing chastity and the challenges she posed to gender norms would likely have also prompted similar fantasies of female-female homoeroticism for the early modern English population more broadly.

Elizabeth’s public self-fashioning of course famously relied upon a dual persona of Elizabeth as a virginal Petrarchan beloved and as a fully capable, self-sufficient, self-sovereign “king.” Elizabeth drew on the idea of the king’s “two bodies” in a way that helped her to justify her right to rule; as Levin puts it, the idea of the king’s two bodies was

current in the later Middle Ages and the lawyers and theologians gave it new meaning in the reign of Elizabeth. The idea grew out of the difficulty of separating the body politic from the person of the monarch. While individual kings died, the crown survived. With a woman on the throne, the importance of separating the individual sovereign from the ideal of king became more difficult and more crucial. (122)

To resolve anxieties about female rule, Elizabeth represented herself at once as a chaste, ideally feminine woman and also as a powerful military leader, in which cases she

“placed herself beyond traditional gender expectations by calling herself king” (Levin 1). In this way, she presented herself as both an erotically impenetrable object of desire and as a martially penetrative king.

Given this image of an impenetrable/penetrating queen/king, the kind of cultural slippage between the erotic and martial figurations that I have analyzed in *The Roaring Girl*, *The Faerie Queene*, and some of Shakespeare’s plays, should come as no surprise. The courtly cult of Elizabeth, which the queen manipulated for various political purposes, constructed Elizabeth as an unattainable beloved; as Berry puts it, “When her unmarried state began to be accepted and even idealized in courtly literature, some fifteen years after her accession, it was as the unattainable *object* of masculine desire that Elizabeth was represented, in an assimilation of Petrarchan and Neoplatonic attitudes” (62). Elizabeth’s portrayal of herself as a Petrarchan object maintained a focus on her erotic potential, even as it stemmed from the idea that her commitment to chastity *defied* the possibility that she would become erotically involved with any suitor. Still, Traub emphasizes that Elizabeth’s virginity and the fact that she styled herself as an *object* of desire, who would not reciprocate heterosexual desire, should not be understood as evidence that Elizabeth did not also construct herself as an erotic subject. In fact, Traub argues that Elizabeth’s iconography repeatedly hints at erotic pleasures to be found without men. Traub says that

images of Elizabeth perform feminine modesty while also calling attention to erotic potential[...]. Representations of the Queen reveal the investment in female erotic pleasure endorsed by the medical regime, even as they hint at the autonomous pleasures a virginal (and exceptionally

powerful) woman might enjoy. [...] Elizabeth's self-presentation as an object and subject of erotic interest occurred not in contrast to the image of chaste virgin, but in terms of it. (*Renaissance* 125-6)

This likens the Queen to the other titillating virgins I have described elsewhere in this project—women who not only provoke desire in others, but who also specifically provoke a pleasurable voyeuristic desire to know more about what kind of erotic activities alternative to heterosexual contact such women might enjoy. Precisely what “autonomous pleasures” people imagined Elizabeth enjoying seem to have been related not only to her chastity but also to her kingly other body.

At the same time as the Queen represented her physical body as erotically impenetrable, the Queen also emphasized to Parliament and to her subjects that she was entirely sufficient to perform kingly duties; her construction of her “body politic” was carefully and deliberately consistent, as Janel Mueller explains, and it particularly emphasized military potency. Based on analysis of Elizabeth's political speeches, Mueller argues that as Elizabeth's reign progressed (and particularly after England's success over the Spanish Armada), Elizabeth figured herself as increasingly successful militarily, emphasizing her masculinity and presenting her femaleness as “virtual.”

Mueller argues that

Elizabeth's successive public self-accountings seek to dispel the assumption that God's will for her obliges her as queen to actualize the roles of wife and mother. She holds that her feminine gender should remain virtual—that is, there is no imperative for her to marry and bear an

heir to the throne or otherwise specify the line of succession—as her
Parliaments [...] strongly urged her to do. (224)

Mueller offers a compelling argument that Elizabeth deliberately fostered her masculine reputation in order to downplay politicians' and citizens' expectations about the biological imperatives of a female body. Leah Marcus offers a similar assessment in *Puzzling Shakespeare*; Marcus argues that Elizabeth represented herself as alternately a virgin queen, and prince, and a king for various political purposes but always to maintain her political autonomy in the face of those who wished she would marry. Marcus argues that her declared commitment to virginity “allow[ed] her to preserve her independence while simultaneously tapping into the emotional power behind the images of wife and mother through fictionalized representations of herself” (53). Additionally, Marcus adds that Elizabeth's occasional representation of herself as a “prince” during the middle of her reign functioned to alleviate succession concerns in a different way. The term “Prince” was “a generic term for a monarch, [but] its more specific use was for a male heir apparent” (60); Marcus argues that, in order to calm a country yearning for a male successor, Elizabeth relied on the term in order to construct *herself* as the longed-for heir; through her use of the term “prince,” “Elizabeth embodied—or tried to embody—her own succession” (61). This idea of a fantasy of the self-replication of a woman who represented herself as being at once king and queen—and therefore internally “whole”—is echoed in Lyly's play.

All of these accounts suggest that Elizabeth constructed her gender strategically and employed different figurations for different circumstances. However, although the Queen's two bodies have been understood to represent Elizabeth's two separate gendered

self-representations—at once the epitome of female perfection in her mortal body and also, separately, capable of masculine strength in her political body—in reality these two representations fit together organically, almost predictably within the Renaissance epistemology I have described throughout this project. Elizabeth’s mortal body and her body politic come together under taxonomical criteria similar to those of the other penetrating women in this project, as Elizabeth emphasized both her impenetrability and her capacity to penetrate. Traub touches briefly on the connection between Elizabeth’s virginity and her military projects, though this is not an idea she pursues: she points out that in Elizabeth there is a “metaphoric coherence of the impenetrable virgin and inviolable nation” (129). Such an observation is important for understanding how Elizabeth’s virginity and her martial masculinity fit together: if she fashioned herself as erotically impenetrable in order to represent an “inviolable” England (both as a metaphorical “representation” of England and as a political “representative” of England), it makes sense that Elizabeth also figured herself as militarily penetrative. England could not remain inviolable without also being penetrative in its military endeavors. In this way, Elizabeth’s two bodies may have been easier for her subjects to understand than has previously been acknowledged—particularly if they were primed, as my case studies have suggested, to expect martial penetrative tendencies to be associated with erotic impenetrability.

And as is the case with other figurations of erotic impenetrability and female masculinity, the Virgin Queen seems to have prompted fantasies of female homoerotic possibility in ways that specifically fixate on circulating parts and female-female penetration. Elizabeth’s fantasy of being “husband” to the young widowed Princess

Juana is similar to Throckmorton's wish that Elizabeth or Mary could simply be turned into a man, thus creating a politically convenient marriage; both rely on an assumption similar to Lyly's fantasy of a female-female marriage, in which one partner can simply be superficially endowed with the necessary penetrating part in order to facilitate societal regeneration without forcing the heteroerotic contact toward which the women in the play are generally disinclined and without altering the character of the transformed subject. Lyly's fantasy of female homoerotic union and the fantasies of same-sex marriages for Elizabeth demonstrate a kind of yearning for national prosperity that is imagined to be possible through the procreative erotic acts between two women. Still, these fantasies of sex-changes should not be understood as yearnings for heteronormative relationships: the representations of female-female marriage in the play and in the historical accounts seemingly focus more on a wish for the possibility of female-female procreativity than on a wish that the women were men. Indeed, in *Gallathea*, the play's investment in the ideal of female-female love is evident even in its refusal to depict the final sex-change, for, as Traub puts it, "So intent is this play on celebrating similitude that the endowment of physical difference necessitated by patriarchal marriage—the phallus—is deferred beyond the dramatic frame" (*Renaissance* 328).

Overall, *Gallathea*'s multiplication of Elizabeth-fantasies suggests that Elizabeth's erotic potential existed actively in the Renaissance imagination; fantasies about Elizabeth's erotic activities exist along the logical spectrum I have expressed throughout this project, where various formulations of aversion, chastity, impenetrability, penetrativeness, self-sufficiency, and homoerotic desire develop in complicated, often contradictory, ways due to an early modern understanding that all of these elements were

connected and could potentially inform or transform the expression of the others. The analyses of *Gallathea* and of fantasies about Elizabeth in this chapter contribute to the project of understanding the early modern category of penetrating women and the logic of lesbianism that I propose in this project by demonstrating nuances and by filling out the logical spectrum that I have developed in the other chapters.

The taxonomical grouping of penetrating women that I have suggested in this project involves an array of attitudes toward and explanations of female masculinity and the erotic tendencies that came to be associated with it. Lyly's fanciful, idealized representation of female homoeroticism adds to the spectrum of attitudes toward penetrating women that I have analyzed in my different chapters. Middleton's and Dekker's exploration of Moll Frith is invested in erotic pleasure and the arousing voyeuristic possibilities of female masculinity. Similarly positive but considerably more serious, Spenser's treatment of Britomart's penetrating tendencies is exploratory and intellectually curious; it is less invested in arousing readers, perhaps, than it is in pursuing, without solving, the erotic diversions of a masculine woman and in allowing itself to be compelled by the power invested in such a figure. By contrast, Shakespeare's attitude toward matriarchal possibilities ranges from extreme anxiety in the *Henry VI* plays to a kind of resignation to the ultimate impossibility of heteroerotic desire in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Adding *Gallathea's* yearning for female homoeroticism to these case studies demonstrates the diversity of responses toward the idea of penetrating women, indicating that such figures cannot be consistently defined as subversive or subverted, as threatening or benign, as idealized or vilified. This taxonomy is not

consistently positive or negative, but rather functions in a variety of ways for different authors, across genres, and over decades.

Moreover, the representation of female homoeroticism I analyze in this Coda expands my account of how the logic of lesbianism functioned in the early modern imagination. The category of penetrating women I have described involves a variety of complex but related assumptions about the relationship between erotic tendencies and other aspects of identity. The texts I have examined here offer different explanations of how this relationship works in terms of causality, but all of the texts maintain that there *is* a logical explanation for the relationships they represent between sex, gender performance, and erotic desire or aversion. Literary representations of Moll Frith, for instance, suggest that gender deviance alternately causes or is caused by heteroerotic aversion, but also that biological difference and gender difference may be the cause or the result of non-heteroerotic sexual alternatives, including homoerotic possibilities. Here, the reversibility of these explanations is evidence of early modern uncertainty about the stability of these interdependent concepts, but the belief in the interdependence of sex, gender, and erotic possibilities remains stable. The other texts in this project also propose different, sometimes contradictory explanations of this interdependence and causality. In *The Faerie Queene*, Britomart's heteroerotic desire is ostensibly what prompts her to cross-dress, but throughout the poem her masculinity, penetrating tendencies, and impenetrability keep her from her heteroerotic destiny and lead her toward autoerotic and homoerotic alternatives. In the *Henry VI* plays, Shakespeare's representations of female masculinity suggest an added possibility that male failures at masculinity are either the cause or the result of female masculinity, and female masculinity is associated with the

impossibility of heterosexual desire. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* assumes that female masculinity is not only associated with the impossibility of heteroeroticism but also that female masculinity is related to female homoerotic desire.

Such variety in terms of the causal explanations of gender difference and erotic difference demonstrates that early moderns possessed fluid understandings of sex, gender, and desire. The variations in the ways the different texts represent connections between these concepts are an important feature of the category of penetrating women that I have proposed because these variations show that people in the Renaissance understood female sexuality to be complex. Still, these examples represent an important consistency in early modern organizations of female erotic behaviors in relation to non-erotic traits. Such consistent associations between erotic and non-erotic traits amount to a taxonomy of female erotic behaviors—something like an identity category—far earlier than recent historians have imagined to be the case. As I discuss in this project, the term “taxonomy” describes groupings of individuals into categories based upon the belief that they possess similar traits, even though the presence and expression of the traits may vary, and even though, as Wittgenstein points out, there may be “overlapping and criss-crossing” of traits between individuals in a taxonomical category (28). As my examples show, early modern texts repeatedly associate female masculinity with heteroerotic aversion and with female homoeroticism, despite the fact that they do not unequivocally identify one of these phenomena as the cause of the others. The texts’ sustained interest in and curiosity about female behaviors and the relationship between those behaviors and erotic tendencies suggests that early moderns were invested in understanding, grouping, and explaining female sexuality.

Lyly's play demonstrates more explicitly than the other texts the prosthetic and transferable nature of gender and biological sex. The play works from the inside out in a more emphatic way than the texts I analyze in the previous chapters: in *Gallathea*, desire and aversion generally precede and dictate external transformation. Gallathea's and Phyllida's erotic aversion/impenetrability is what forces them into male clothing, and their homoerotic desire is what subsequently prompts what can perhaps be best described as "female maleness." I suggest this term because, by the end of the play, we still are presented with two women and have to imagine that Venus will attach a penis to one at some future point. Moreover, the play presents this "maleness" just as superficially and uninterestedly as it presents the male disguises the women wore earlier. Gallathea's or Phyllida's "maleness" is in this way similar to the kinds of prosthetics associated with the masculine women in the other chapters; by this, I mean that female appropriation of male "parts" is presented here as entirely possible, suggesting that masculinity and maleness are merely prosthetic constructs that can be as easily wielded by women as by men. If anything, then, desire and aversion are more stable categories in *Gallathea* than are biological sex or gender. The play's final fantasy—that the solution to "unbecoming" attire and desire is simply to "become" the appropriate body—offers an additional, more explicit logical figuration in which female homoerotic desire can enable biological transformation. Still, while *Gallathea* reveals the constructedness of sex and gender, the play nonetheless maintains an assumption similar to that in the other texts, which is that "unbecoming" gender behaviors are related to "unbecoming" desires. *Gallathea* is inquisitive about the relationship between female gender performance and female erotic

tendencies, and, like the other texts I examine in this project, *Gallathea* works to understand how female homoerotic desire becomes possible.

In these ways, the case studies in this project present a variety of figurations within an early modern epistemology that assumes connections between women's gender performances and women's erotic tendencies. Despite the specific differences in causal logics that the various texts present, the texts are driven by similar ideas about gender and erotic possibility. In the chapters of this project, I have argued that masculine women are represented as penetrative because of their adoption of male clothing, accessories, and weaponry. Masculine women's possession of penetrative or phallic accessories is imagined to be related to a preference for penetrating more generally: these penetrating women are imagined as being likely to penetrate in erotic contexts as well, which is associated with fantasies of female autoeroticism and female homoeroticism. The women are also imagined as being unlikely to be erotically penetrated, and, in the texts I analyze here, this impenetrability is often represented as entailing aversion to heterosexual contact. These assumptions about penetrating women demonstrate that in early modern portrayals of women, the circulation of social parts was imaginatively associated with the circulation of erotic parts and of biological parts. In this way, female masculinity and female homoerotic desire were understood within the complicated logical framework that I have described as an early modern logic of lesbianism. Within this framework, concepts of gender behavior, chastity, heteroerotic aversion, homoerotic desire, and biological difference were imagined and re-imagined as variously interconnected in a series of circulating causal relationships.

The assumption of causality and the grouping of erotic tendencies with other traits in these texts is important for understanding early modern beliefs about sexual tendencies. In the texts I have examined here, speculation about women's erotic behavior is directly related to the presence of other behavioral traits and visible signifiers. This relationship suggests that early moderns understood female sexuality to be more connected to other aspects of female identity and self-presentation than has previously been presumed: the Foucauldian hypothesis that sexual acts were largely divorced from cultural understandings of identity prior to the 18th century fails to account for the early modern categorizations of female eroticism I have described here. In fact, the women I examine in this project are represented with surprisingly consistent erotic desires and aversions. Moreover, the texts I have examined are invested in identifying and exposing the visible and behavioral markers that might be associated with such erotic tendencies and, similarly, in representing the erotic tendencies that might be associated with specific markers.

In this way, the early modern imagination seems to have understood female masculinity within a broader set of cultural assumptions about the relationship between erotic tendencies and other, more visible, preferences and tendencies. The consistency of these assumptions and the grouping of erotic traits with other aspects of identity constitute a classification of female erotic behaviors that is akin to and perhaps a predecessor of modern ideas about sexual identity. The varieties of literary representations I have analyzed here demonstrate a consistent, yet internally fluid, taxonomical category within which writers could and did represent and explain varieties of female homoerotic desire. In this way, my analyses of these characters indicate that

early moderns thought about female sexual possibilities extensively and often cohesively; indeed, the penetrating women in this project reflect an early modern taxonomy in which erotic desire and aversion are organized around consistent behavioral traits. These textual representations of penetrating, impenetrable women evoke a logic of lesbianism that functions as a central focus of desire and animosity, of pleasure and anxiety, and, most of all, of intellectual and imaginative stimulation for early modern writers.

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