Articulāte

Volume 5 Article 4

2000

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Marry Ann T. Davis
Denison University

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Recommended Citation

Davis, Marry Ann T. (2000) "Dangerous Play: Lesbianism in *As You Like It* and the Making of a Feminist Shakespeare," *Articulāte*: Vol. 5 , Article 4.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/articulate/vol5/iss1/4

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DANGEROUS PLAY: LESBIANISM IN *AS YOU LIKE IT* AND THE MAKING OF A FEMINIST SHAKESPEARE

BY MARY ANN T. DAVIS '00

Shakespeare and Feminist Criticism, by Philip C. Kolin, erases any doubts that feminism has greatly shifted and widened the reading of the Shakespearean canon. In this comprehensive bibliography, Kolin surveys four hundred and thirty-nine items from 1975 through its publication in 1988. However, only thirty-eight of the books and articles listed in the subject index touch upon the specifics of "sexuality (female)," and thirteen of these items are repeated under "sexuality (male)" (Thompson 2). In addition, there are only nine sources under "homosexuality" and eleven under "homoeroticism," four of which are shared, with no male/female designations. Thompson shrewdly notes that male critics, especially in regard to female sexuality, ignore when "Shakespeare's women speak," in fact preferring them to remain silent. Certainly, since 1988 scholarship analyzing the portrayal femaof le sexuality in Shakespeare's plays has greatly increased. Yet to this day, serious discussion of *female* homoeroticism, let alone homosexuality in general, within the Shakespearean canon is limited to a select few scholars.

Shakespeare's *As You like It* comes under prime focus in such discussions because of its passionate "friendships" and artful, sexy language—all combined with the main heroine's, Rosalind's, prancing around in drag. Because this play ends in the conventional gang marriages attributed to romantic comedies, where Rosalind doffs "her masculine attire along with the saucy games of youth" and agrees to marriage (Howard 49), scholars take the view that Shakespeare is showing how the conventional sexuality and gender roles always succeed. Even Valerie Traub, for all of her groundbreaking work on female sexuality and homoeroticism in Shakespeare, brushes off the hints of stronger female homoeroticism quite easily: "In Shakespeare's plays, an originary, prior homoerotic desire is crossed, abandoned, betrayed; correlatively, a heterosexual desire is produced and inserted into the narrative in order to create a formal, 'natural' mechanism of closure" ("(In)Significance" 73). In this paper, I will argue that Shakespeare cannot and should not be boxed in so easily. Utilizing the established lens of conscious female homoeroticism in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare's inordinate boundary-pushing in portraying lesbianism as the paramount of female sexuality, reveals his atypical, yet present, feminism, in an age when women were denied eroticism of any sort.

Naming the Danger

It should be quickly noted that the term *lesbian* did not exist in Elizabethan England. Today's society tends to regard the sexual orientation of a person as an inherent part of a complete identity. For both women and men in Shakespeare's time—but moreso for women because even explicit heterosexual sex for them was taboo—choice of sexuality was not an option. Paul Hammond notes that such rigidity can create problems for modern scholars because "homoerotic desire is rarely made articulate unambiguously" in works from this period. Most utilize the same language as "passionate friendships" (225). Part of the challenge for scholars, then, is to recognize varying intensities of desire. In speaking directly of *As You Like It*, I will use the term *homoerotic* in delineating persons or interactions as more passionate and sexual than "conventional" or in comparison with other "friendships." Thus a necessary erotic aura can be conveyed, with the avoidance of the modern trappings of *lesbian*.

Mary Ann T. Davis is a senior transfer student from Lousiville, Kentucky. After her graduation in December of 2000, she plans to pursue graduate degrees in Creative Writing, adopt a cat before buying a kitchen table, and learn how to cook anything with cilantro.

However, the term *lesbian* cannot nor should not be entirely avoided—the main thrust of this paper is that Shakespeare, in his play *As You Like It*, supports *lesbian* relationships. As an operational definition, the use of *lesbian* in this paper will refer to a relationship between two women which embodies both erotic and friendship aspects. It sounds strikingly similar to *homoerotic*, with the additional characteristic of genuine *love* and respect to balance the eroticism, creating a full romantic relationship. Because the term *relationship* refers to two people equally and willingly involved ("requited" might be another nice term to employ here), the use of *lesbian* in this paper with refer to two women equally and willingly involved in an erotic and loving relationship.

A final delineation of the analysis employed here narrows the type of homoerotic desire present. As with most plays that involve disguise plots (the politically correct way of saying "cross-dressing"), homoerotic implications stem from two sources in the play: the all-male cast employed during Renaissance England and the text of the play itself. Because this analysis will focus on the *female* homoeroticism of the play, it must necessarily limit itself to a textual focus. The obvious erotic dance between a boy-actor playing a woman disguised as man (which on the surface is simply a boy actor) flirting with and courting a man, eliminates any possible focus on female homoeroticism. Thus the text will guide the analysis, in which enough desire circulates, whether or not disguised.

Desire in the Open

Celia. No, thy words are too precious to be cast away upon curs; throw some of them at me; come, lame me with reasons. (I.iii.4-6)

I think that Shakespeare loved Rosalind . . . [She] was at least the fourth woman he had dressed as a man in his work, and as Virginia Woolf said, his was the prototype of the androgynous mind. His males are inadequate, his women dominant whether generous or wicked. —John Ward

Most of the scholarship regarding female homoeroticism in *As You Like It* focuses on the large chunk of the play spent in the Forest of Arden, where the banished Duke Senior resides with his loyal followers. Rosalind's cross-dressing is the obvious reason for the focus, as well as the strong erotic language used throughout, between men and women, men and men and women and women. Truly, *As You Like It* divides easily into two parts, which I will dub the Pre-Forest and Forest sections. Scholars, though right in analyzing the raw eroticism, both homo- and hetero-, which occurs in the Forest, overlook some of the prime and telling female homoerotic scenes in the play when skipping over Act One.

Pre-Forest Celia and Rosalind are introduced and defined together, move through the everyday life of the court never out of arm's reach. The fame of Celia and Rosalind's affection precedes their entrance into the play, with Charles the Wrestler's descriptions of their attachment within the first scene of the first act:

> . . . . the Duke's daughter her cousin so
> loves her, being ever from their cradles bred together,
> that she would have followed her exile, or have died to
> stay behind her. She is at the court, and no less beloved
> of her uncle than his own daughter, and never two
> ladies loved as they do. (I.i.100-105)

The strength of language here is evident. Oliver, with whom Charles speaks, asked simply if the Duke's daughter, Rosalind, was banished with her father. A simple *yes* or *no* might have sufficed, except in the case of these two girls, whose love is known across the dukedom. Though this passage could serve as one of Hammond's "passionate friendships," the vivid image of death due to separation reveal an intense emotion playing between the two young women.

When Celia and Rosalind first enter the play in the following scene, their rapport is confirmed and solidified. Their exchange is a romantic and petulant banter, as Celia draws resistant Rosalind out of her dishumor—it is the kind of interchange reminiscent of two young lovers, one trying to comfort the other, and offering up his/her world in the process:

> Rosalind. . . . . Unless you
> could teach me to forget a banished father, you must not
> learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure.

> Celia. Herein I see thou lov'st me not with the full weight that I love thee. . . . .
>
> You know my father hath no child but I, nor none is like to have; and truly, when he dies, thou shalt be his heir; for what he hath taken away from thy father perforce, I will render thee again in affection. By mine honor, I will, and when I break that oath, let me turn monster. Therefore my sweet Rose, my dear Rose, be merry. (I.ii.3-21)

It is doubtful that a female friend would promise such gifts to another female friend—especially the gifts of inheritance. Women of higher station in Elizabethan England did not have their own estates from which to give freely. Men who married into the family took over the inheriting rights from the women. That Celia is promising her inheritance to Rosalind, links the two in a bond similar to marriage. It should also not be overlooked that Celia chose the word *heir* in reference to Rosalind, instead of *heiress*, implying a certain bending of gender into the role of son-in-law. The language in this section takes the image of "passionate friend" one step deeper, equating Rosalind very subtly with the role of son-in-law and all his (or her) conjugal rights.

Once Rosalind has abandoned her cloudy mood, she proposes that the two devise some sport to amuse themselves. Interestingly enough, the sport the ladies end up "playing" is a discussion of the roles of women, which is offered so familiarly that it appears Celia and Rosalind have encountered this ground before:

> Rosalind. What shall our sport be then?
> Celia. Let us sit and mock the good housewife Fortune from her wheel, that her gifts may henceforth be bestowed equally.
> Rosalind. I would we could do so, for her benefits are mightily misplaced, and the bountiful blind woman doth most mistake in her gifts to women. (I.ii.28-34)

Celia proposes, as sport, to mock Fortune for the misappropriation of equality, and does so by naming Fortune a "good housewife," which simultaneously ridicules the roles of women. Rosalind agrees with Celia, in turn scoffing at Fortune by terming her "blind" because she mistakes that women like the roles they are given.

Why this feminist shift in the middle of a homoerotic love proposal between Celia and Rosalind? If Celia and Rosalind are content to be with one another in a singular lesbian relationship, in which no men are present and Rosalind becomes the *heir*, then they must be content and willing to give up their roles as dutiful housewives. In fact, it seems that their desire *not* to conform to the social roles set aside by Fortune might spur them more readily into a monogamous relationship with one another, given that homoeroticism and friendship exists in the first place. This is not to say that all lesbian relationships happen because women are tired of men and the roles to which they are relegated in heterosexual relationships. Yet it seems Shakespeare's problematization of the roles of women in the midst of a romantic and erotic interaction between Celia and Rosalind cannot be viewed as entirely separate.

The most revealing scene of the play in reference to the homoeroticism between Celia and Rosalind occurs when Duke Frederick banishes Rosalind from his dukedom. Once the women hear the edict, they both employ different tactics to change the mind of the Duke. Rosalind is first, standing up immediately for herself in the world of men, her tongue quicksilver with response:

> Rosalind. Yet your mistrust cannot make me a traitor.
> Tell me whereon the likelihood depends.
> Duke Frederick. Thou art thy father's daughter, there's
> enough.
> Rosalind. So was I when your Highness took his duke
> dom;
> So was I when your Highness banished him.
> Treason is not inherited, my lord,
> Or if we did derive if from our friends,
> What's that to me? My father was no traitor.
> Then, good my liege, mistake me not so much
> To think my poverty is treacherous. (I.iii.52-61)

Rosalind knows where she stands. Her awareness comes through sharply at this point, as well as her feminism, in standing up for herself and her rights. She is no "good housewife" that sits back and watches Fortune play her games. Celia, on the other hand, tries another tactic, appealing to the pathos of her father by enumerating on the duration and depth of the relationship between Rosalind and herself:

> Celia. . . . .

> I was too young at that time to value her,
> But now I know her. If she be traitor,
> Why, so am I. We still have slept together,
>
> Rose at an instant, learned, played, eat together;
> And wheresoe'er we went, like Juno's swans,
> Still we went coupled and inseparable. (I.iii.67-72)

The homoeroticism of Celia's word choice cannot be ignored. She says Rosalind and herself "still" sleep together, meaning that in their early adulthood they continue to share the same bed. The Oxford English Dictionary reveals "played," in addition to the common meaning, to signify "to sport amorously, to have sexual intercourse"; and "coupled" of course carries the surface and normative sexual, as well as romantic, connotations. Mario Digangi clarifies the mention of "Juno's swans," naming Juno as the "patron goddess of female sexuality" ("Queering" 275). However, he makes note that swans are typically the birds of Venus. Regardless of who made the mix-up, Celia or Shakespeare, the coupling of the two most sexualized goddesses in mythology hints at female homoeroticism between Celia in Rosalind in a very subtle manner. In addition, Rosalind again provides the awareness of women's roles that seem to go hand-in-hand with the discussion of female homoeroticism.

That critics and scholars have, for the most part, overlooked the more blatantly homoerotic language of the play for the stereotypical homoeroticism embodied in the cross-dressing of Rosalind as she romps through the Forest of Arden, shouldn't be entirely surprising. Valerie Traub, in her essay "The (In)Significance of 'Lesbian' Desire in Early Modern England," states that a female character who embodies the gender roles accorded her, "who did *not* cross-dress, who did *not* wear swords, . . . and whose gendered 'femininity' belied the possibility of 'unnatural' behaviors," for such characters, "desire may have been allowed to flow rather more freely" (77). Critics and scholars do not delve into the erotic language between Celia and Rosalind because Celia *is* so feminine. She's not the one waging serious "sport" on the roles of women, standing up to her guardian and leader, and assuming the garb of a man quite eagerly. Thus scholars relegate Celia's words and the romantic banter between Rosalind and herself to the level of "passionate friendship." Rosalind's sexuality and freedom, because of their license and abnormality, are sent to the Forest—a magical place where everything is "righted" and every desire forgiven.

Wolves in the Woods

Orlando. Where do you dwell, pretty youth?
Rosalind. With this shepherdess, my sister; here in the skirts of the forest, like fringe upon a petticoat. (III.ii.317-319)

I'd always suspected that there's a much more dangerous play in As You Like It, *a subversive play, one that challenges notions of gender, that asks questions of our "male" and "female" natures.—Actress Juliet Stevenson (qtd. in Hobby 136)*

Though John Ward rejects the idea of female homoeroticism in *As You Like It*—"even if we see . . . some degree of phallic envy in Rosalind, and some lesbianism in Celia, it is hardly more than latent" (39)—he contradicts himself by dubbing the sexuality that courses through the scenes spent in the Forest of Arden as "comic" (5). Most of the sexuality in the Forest is heterosexual, or is working toward the re-establishment of the heterosexual norm. It seems, then, that the fantasy-aspect of the Forest serves two main purposes: to allow the more obvious qualities of female homoeroticism, mainly cross-dressing and the privileges this allows, full expression; and to bring out the comedic and unrealistic wham-bam heterosexualizing toward which the play moves in the last scene.

The purpose of Rosalind's disguise as a man has often been relegated to 1) the need for protection from potential harm or recognition or 2) the desire to move through the male sphere without hindrance, thus gleaning the benefits of that world (Ward 23). Christina Luckyj offers up the alternative view that cross-dressing allows for "masquerade, parody, and caricature," quoting Judith Butler to solidify her argument: "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself" (222-223). Thus, Rosalind's cross-dressing serves as a parody to reveal the artificiality of the gender she imitates. I offer the view that perhaps Shakespeare knew the homoerotic connotations behind cross-dressing. His audience at the time certainly was aware of the section in Leviticus which forbids men dressing like women and women dressing like men; how this law filtered down through the centuries tied to the Sodom and Gomorrah story (Smith 147). If cross-dressing in *As You Like It* is a parody of the opposite gender, it could just as easily be another characteristic of female homoeroticism. Regardless, either use of cross-dressing has the potential to disturb the audience. Thus the purpose of the Forest comes through—to give these delicate issues a fantastical place to reside where disbelief can be suspended.

Erotic excitement builds in Rosalind at the prospect of Orlando's inhabiting the same forest she is. When mysterious sonnets are discovered carved into trees, and Celia seems to know who the perpetrator is, Rosalind's language reaches a female homoerotic peak as she demands from Celia the name of the author:

> Rosalind. .... One inch of delay more is a South Sea of discovery. I prithee tell me who is it quickly, and speak apace. I would thou couldst stammer, that thou mightst pour this concealed man out of thy mouth as wine comes out of a narrow-mouthed bottle; either too much at once, or none at all. I prithee take the cork out of thy mouth, that I may drink thy tidings. (III.ii.185-193)

The female homoeroticism here seems out of place, especially considering the subject of which Rosalind is begging knowledge. Paired with Rosalind's love for Orlando and the magical atmosphere of the Forest, female homoeroticism shifts from focus, thus helping Shakespeare to appease his audience's conventional ideas. This scene, above all, shows an increase of female eroticism across the board as a significant move toward a feminist Shakespeare.

If the wooing scenes in the Forest are viewed as perhaps parodying men through Rosalind's cross-dressing or simply embodying the fantastical surroundings, then each interaction between Orlando and Rosalind/Ganymede can be seen as the "comic sexuality" mentioned earlier by Ward. Indeed , the language matching these scenes does not lend much credibility to Orlando's technique. Take, for example, the sonnets carved into the trees—the obvious rhymes and elaborate despair character a doggerel sense onto them:

> Orlando. ....
> O Rosalind! these trees shall be my books,
>   And in their barks my thoughts I'll character,
> That every eye which in this forest looks
>   Shall see thy virtue witnessed everywhere.
> Run, run Orlando, carve on every tree
> The fair, the chaste, the unexpressive she. (III.iii.5-10)

The rhymed lines continue until Rosalind/Ganymede meets Orlando and convinces him to be cured of his affection for Rosalind. In pretending to be a man who's pretending to be a woman, the woman being herself, Rosalind reveals her complete control over the situation. Control over sexual and romantic situations is exactly what Elizabethan women did *not* have. Yet Rosalind, because of her situation in the Forest and her assumed male-ness, is allowed a complete discussion female roles and sexuality, and a complete parody of male roles and the heterosexual normative. Her feminism comes through explicitly:

> Rosalind. .... Make the doors upon a woman's wit, and it will out at the casement; shut that, and 'twill out at the key hole; stop that, 'twill fly with the smoke out at the chimney. (IV.i.148-151)

Celia states after this lesson: "You have simply misused our sex in your love-prate" (IV.i.185-186). It seems more likely, however, that Rosalind is not naming the women's wit shrewish, but that she is simply saying that women will not be quieted, if what they have to say is necessary. Therefore, Rosalind continues in her parody and control of men, remaining ambiguously outside of the heterosexual relationship, but completely embodying her female sexuality. It is not until she faints after hearing of Orlando's fight with the lioness, that the strings of convention begin to tighten around her.

Desire, Closed

Rosalind. And I for no woman. (V.ii.83, 88)

[The conventional marriage ending] remains one of Shakespeare's most enduring legacies, not because he created (or even believed) the idea but because he dramatized it as the perfect comic conclusion. —Diana Henderson

When Rosalind faints, thus revealing her "feminine tendencies" and ushering in the downfall of the independent and sexual woman, one of Celia's last lines in the entire play is: "Why, how now, Ganymede, sweet Ganymede!" (IV.iii.158). The tone and rhythm of this line mirrors previous "sweet Rose" and "sweet coz" and closes out Celia just as she began. When the audience next hears of her, she is heavily engaged to Oliver and the attraction is hot—of which there is no mention, or evidence from Celia, in the text. Celia's homoerotic desires have been neatly cinched into patriarchal order without a peep from the character, as will happen with Rosalind once she settles the myriad of little plots she has created. Mario Digangi suggests that "Rosalind's unbelievably hyperbolic account of Celia's attraction to Oliver suggests how ideologically motivated is the play's need to match her with a marriageable partner" ("Queering" 284). I would hasten to add that this ideological need fuels the entire conclusion of the play and explains the artificiality many critics notice about the ending in general. Elaine Hobby furthers this view by dubbing the conventional ending as "exactly that: a convention, a masque or a mask" (139). What's underneath this mask may be exactly what Shakespeare meant to say.

So yes, indeed—Shakespeare had to "mute" even Rosalind at the end of the play (Ward 51). But because his strong female characters are quieted (even Celia was strong in her love for Rosalind) does not mean that Shakespeare was promoting the rigidity of the patriarchy. It is a conventional mask Shakespeare attaches to the play, a mask ideologically fueled by the expectations of his *audience*. As each main character declares his or her love in Act V, scene two, Rosalind's thrice repetition of "And I for no woman" rings empty and dismal. However, Ward reminds us of Foucault, who spoke of how sexuality can be raised "into existence by the very act of the articulation of its suppression" (41). Now with each repetition, the audience remembers that Rosalind used to be "for women," and that her ambiguous, decidely homoerotic role is suppressed at the end of *As You Like It* into the "normal" gender roles which were expected and desired by the Elizabethans.

Shakespeare does not let his audience's return to convention remain final. An epilogue is given by a de-trousered Rosalind—or, as the audience is acutely aware of at the moment, a boy actor in drag. This character thus proceeds to mix up all of the patriarchal rules just established, not rules within the play, but within the audience. Juliet Dusinberre elaborates on this effect: "*As You like It*, far from creating closure, ends by releasing into the auditorium an eroticism constantly open to revision" (21). But not simply a general eroticism, but an erotically charged message to women that roles and boundaries are meant to be transcended—though they may not carry away such a detailed message, the female homoeroticism and feminism represented in the play will hopefully linger.

Shakespeare Was Not a Tease: Conclusion

Our sense of body is driven less by physical fact than by our needs in speaking about it. —Thomas Laqueur, (qtd. in Quilligan 209)

Perhaps the theater really is the place to re-inhabit subject positions that seem evacuated by theory, because it creates a space of danger without quite the same consequences, a space of play and potential. —Jill Dolan

Valerie Traub is absolutely correct about the movement of homoerotic desire in Shakespeare's romantic comedies—what is frustrating, and all too common among scholars, is that they don't pursue the "why" behind what they have identified. What was Shakespeare doing by showing female homoerotic desire and then tapering it off? At what point does the "tapering off" begin and what might fuel this masking of female homoeroticism? Convention has answered most of these questions. Shakespeare, because his living was made in the theater, was consistently, even painfully, aware of his audience. He knew where viewers would be the most likely to accept the homoerotic language between women, and where to couch more blatant images of female homoeroticism. This is not to say that Shakespeare, by using heterosexual relationships as slight parody and cushion to convey female homoeroticism, advocated single-sex relationships only. John Ward reminded us earlier of Woolf's observation of Shakespeare as the epitome of the "androgynous mind," meaning Shakespeare was simply observing and highlighting the different types of relationships surrounding him. In *As You Like It* particularly, Shakespeare conveys female homoeroticism on two parallel levels. One aspect is presented through the romantic interactions between Celia and Rosalind *before* they escape to the Forest of Arden; the second aspect concerns the more obvious and prosecutable forms, such as cross-dressing and some overt homoerotic language, all while romping through the Forest. Shakespeare does not let Rosalind and Celia stay together—however, he manages to create, through the romantic and erotic levels of this play, a vivid, if subtle, picture of lesbianism. In comparison with the slightly goofy and foolish heterosexual escapades in the Forest; in a comparison of the language between the two types of relationships presented; and in the strong characters of Rosalind and Celia, Shakespeare portrays lesbianism as ideal.

Thus to deem Shakespeare as anti-feminist would be similar to terming Aphra Behn and Katherine Philips anti-feminists because they couched their delicate gender and sexuality issues in figurative language and changed pronouns (Stiebel 162). Behn and Philips were not anti-feminist, they simply recognized better ways to reach their audience, rather than isolating them by pushing boundaries too far. Shakespeare has always pushed the boundaries—we should give him credit for knowing when to stop, and knowing that subtlety can go much farther than blatancy. Through the female homoerotics levels in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare establishes lesbianism as ideal in comparison to heterosexuality. Shakespeare reveals himself as sympathetic to a variety of women's issues, and thus feminist in his intentions.

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THE INADEQUACY OF POSTMODERN LOVE: AN ANALYSIS OF MARY GAITSKILL'S *BECAUSE THEY WANTED TO*

BY ANGELICA K. LEMKE '00

Jean-François Lyotard, one of the leading thinkers of postmodernism, has made the following statement concerning aesthetics:

> A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work.(407)

In this paper, I would like to argue that Mary Gaitskill's *Because They Wanted To* reformulates that statement as the following:

> A postmodern lover is in the position of a philosopher: the relationship s/he creates is not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and it cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the love affair.

In this collection, Gaitskill depicts relationships that adhere strictly to the postmodern aesthetic of uncertainty and contingency, but what results is not a postmodernism which "believes in excess, in gaudiness, and in 'bad taste' mixtures of qualities...[and] cheerfully mixes bits and pieces...which jostle on a surface which seems happy to be nothing *but* surface" (Barry 84-85). Rather, the "postmodern interactions" of the characters destroy the possibility of satisfying, lasting relationships, and unfailingly leave the characters lonely and further bewildered. Focusing chiefly on the stories "Tiny, Smiling Daddy," "Orchid" and "The Blanket," I will highlight the postmodern aspects of Gaitskill's characters and the ways in which these qualities undermine the happiness and love each character seeks.

"Tiny, Smiling Daddy"

The loneliness of the main character of "Tiny, Smiling Daddy," Stew, is apparent at the very outset of the story; he dreams that the people he has lost have returned to love him, but it is only a dream and is interrupted by the too-loud answering machine (11). In this first paragraph of the first story, the contemporary, mechanical, *postmodern* world has already disrupted his (momentary and unreal) happiness. The remainder of the tale will allow him to be not just disrupted, but rather *corrupted* by postmodernism.

As Stew sorts his memories of his estranged daughter, Kitty, a pattern in the way he relates to her quickly emerges; his memories highlight the importance of language. He recalls their shared "nose hair" joke (12-13), overheard insults to his wife (14), his wife always having "something bad to say about Kitty," (15) and the cruel words he spoke when Kitty tells him she's lesbian (24). Their relationship is very much characterized by the words which pass between them, words which would traditionally be supposed to signify something outside of themselves. In the postmodern world of surfaces, however, this need not be the case:

> It is...a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double...Never again will the real have to be produced. (Baudrillard 414)

The "real" in this case is the real Kitty, the real human being who is covered over by the signs which Stew has allowed to come between himself and his daughter. The distance only grows, such that the language which masquerades as

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Angelica K. Lemke is a senior English and philosophy major. She is currently a co-editor of Episteme, *Denison's national undergraduate philosophy journal. After graduating in December, she plans to sleep for several weeks before finding gainful employment until she can resume her literary and philosophic exploits in the world of academia. She has no plans to reconnect with reality later in life.*

a father-daughter relationship cannot even exist as verbal exchange, but instead must be found in a letter, the words on Kitty's t-shirt (both 17), or the magazine article on which the story hinges.

What is perhaps most interesting about the article which Kitty writes is that she seems unconcerned with whether her father ever reads the work. The endless codification of their relationship, her father's unwillingness to see past a single aspect of his daughter[1] has reached a point where the relationship itself no longer exists, but only the signs which have been produced by it. Nietzsche describes the danger in over-codification as follows:

> But this inwardness also carries with it a celebrated danger: the content itself, of which it is assumed that it cannot be seen from without, may occasionally evaporate; from without, however, neither its former presence nor its disappearance will be apparent at all…[O]ur interior is too feeble and disorganized to produce an outward effect. (81)

The desire which Kitty expresses for "real communication" (19) can never be fulfilled, as her own decision not to tell her father about the article illustrates. The "ghastly talk-show language" (20) of the article is not addressed to him at all, but to a public which examines and interprets the signs each of them now produce *ad infinitum*. The "real" no longer exists. As Barry paraphrases Baudrillard, "the sign disguises the fact that there is no corresponding reality underneath" (88). Postmodern communication has failed to supply what was needed in this relationship.

"Orchid"

In "Orchid," the characters do not have the luxury of a "real" from which their relationship can grow; that is to say, they are never afforded the kind of intimate relationship that Stew and Kitty, as father and daughter, presumably lost. Margot and Patrick begin their relationship at the surface level. As such, they are truly postmodern, rather than characters who evolve into a postmodern state. Unfortunately for the hearts of these characters, "what we see is *all we get*" (Barry 89, my emphasis).

At the outset of the story, Margot gives a description of Patrick which is concerned solely with his physical appearance, then and now. His early work as an actor also informs the reader very early that Patrick may very well be concealing a self other than the one which emerges on the surface. All of Patrick's romantic endeavors seem to be based on his attractive physicality[2]:

> "People get fixated on Patrick," said Dolores. "When he was in high school he actually had a female fan club. It was embarrassing. He encourages stuff like that because it flatters him, but in another way, he knows it's not about him at all. I think he's pretty lonely, actually." (72-73)

Even as Margot and Patrick begin to develop a close friendship, Margot is unable or unwilling to see below the surface:

> Patrick said, "It's just that I feel so invisible. I just feel so invisible."
>
> Margot blinked and stared at him. His bright-orange shirt was open to his exquisite collarbones. His long, subtle hands looked hypersensitive against his cheap coffee cup. He was outrageously fine and fair. "What do you mean?" she said. "What on earth do you mean?"
>
> She didn't remember his answer or even if he had one. (65)

Margot keeps Patrick at a distance, both physically and emotionally. In fact, all of the physical exchanges in the story are momentary, transient, like the way in which Patrick's attention would "sometimes touch his sister, quickly, like a traveling drop of light" (62). This is illustrated most fully by Margot's reaction to Patrick's invitation to sex. Though he propositions her without much tact (76-77), she is still aware that he is "looking at her all the way from the bottom and, even more, inviting her to look in" (75). Patrick desires a relationship that goes beyond the surface, beyond physical attraction and polite conversation, but Margot stays "outside his blankets" (75) when she first approaches him, and quickly retreats when Patrick asks her to join him beneath the blanket; that is, she refuses to

allow the relationship to take on a more significant level. At the same time, she is hurt by Patrick's own inept attempt to sound casual, the statement that he "could take [sex with Margot] or leave it" (77) because it trivializes the act, makes it insignificant, relegated to the surface.

Like Patrick, Margot also allows her other romantic endeavors to be overwhelmed by surface concerns. When Patrick observes her uncertain happiness in her relationship with Chiquita, she responds with a comment about Chiquita's nipples rather than her personality or the depth of feeling between them. The swiftly following end of this relationship comes as no surprise. Margot's emphasis on the surface, her lack of concern with the interior lives of her lovers leads her to inevitably lose them. Roberta, who has just left her when she is reunited with Patrick, leaves Margot because of her disgust with her superficiality. She mocks Margot's affinity for "bright little things on her walls and furniture" (71), for merely aesthetic pleasures, and condemns Margot as a stereotype (74), rather than a fully unique, multi-dimensional human being.

A postmodern approach to romance has failed to satisfy Margot's needs. Even when reunited with equally superficial Patrick, they are unable to break through the surface to a full relationship, but are equally unhappy to remain so distant from each other:

> He was trying to show himself to her, to explain something. He didn't have the means, but he was trying, silently, with his eyes. And she was trying too. It was as if they were signaling each other from different planets, too far away to read the signals but just able to register that a signal was being sent. They sat and looked at each other, their youth and beauty gone, their selves more bare and at the same time more hidden.(87)

Like the characters of "Tiny, Smiling Daddy," Patrick and Margot have found themselves overcome by signification, by surface relationships, so much so that they are "too far away to read the signals." With the exterior buffer of their beauty gone, they are "more bare," but because their inner selves have remained uncultivated, have continually retreated in favor of a world of surfaces, they are also "more hidden." A lifetime of postmodern romance has left them unable to enjoy romance on any level.

At the same time as it critiques a postmodern approach to love, "Orchid" explains the appeal of such a perspective through one of Margot's clients. The woman explains her desire to look like a supermodel by praising the simplicity and superficiality they literally embody:

> "I mean, I know the models themselves aren't like that. They probably have the same stupid, ugly problems I do. It's more the world as they represent it. Without any fucking awful complexity. Without any of this filthy shit."
>
> *****
>
> After this session…[Margot] went to the rest room, where two other social workers were talking about a woman who'd been in earlier, trying to have her daughter committed. "I don't know about the kid," said one, "but I'd sure like to put Mrs. Bitch away." Margot…for some reason thought again of Patrick. (66-67)

The world of images is free of "filthy shit," of the difficulties and emotional traumas of relationships that extend beyond the surface. When Margot is faced with the cruelties of her fellow social workers, her inclination is to think of Patrick, of superficial, aesthetically pleasing Patrick. Her client also craves the solace of a pretty, problem-free world, the kind of world which she can see in photographs of supermodels. She, however, recognizes the falsity of this world. This surface-bound aspect of postmodern relationships has aesthetic appeal, as in a photograph, but is not to be mistaken for the way life is actually lived. Rather than the happy play of images that appears to characterize postmodern art, these characters experience a disconnected, unfulfilling lack of emotion in their romances.

"The Blanket"

Gaitskill's collection, however, does not condemn contemporary society to the inadequacy of postmodern love, but presents, in "The Blanket," a couple that, though they begin their relationship with a postmodern outlook, are able to break through the world of over-codification and surfaces to a relationship with real emotional depth.

The relationship between Valerie and Michael begins at the surface level; they role play during sex. Though Valerie seems to be placing the relationship at an emotional distance very consciously with this suggestion, Michael is immediately aware of what the role-playing surface might signify, what might lie underneath the games: "Under the cheesy assurance of it, he felt her vulnerability, hidden and palpitant" (90). Her fear of true emotional involvement, we learn later, stems from her past experience as a victim of rape; it is easy to understand her desire to keep sexual relationships at a distance, to avoid emotional penetration in a way that she could not avoid physical penetration, but her involvement with Michael disrupts the delicate balance of her surface world. Her work as an illustrator, a creator of signs, stalls because of his presence:

> When Michael appeared she had just started a jacket for a novel by a well-known hack, which required that she draw prowling leopards. It should've been an easy job, but she could not bring her sensory apparatus to bear on the leopards. She would draw for minutes and then spend nearly an hour pacing around, listening to overblown love music...The kitchen table became littered with partial leopards. (91)

Like the leopards, Valerie is unable to "bring her sensory apparatus to bear" on the project of codifying her new lover. They try out many "partial leopards," many fantasized relationships that are simple in their symbolism, but each is abandoned, left behind for a new fantasy.

The fantasies, in fact, seem to be the kind of eclectic play that is found so desirable in postmodernism as an artwork and clearly have a charm and delight for the couple. However, when elements of real life are introduced into their fantasies, when real-life experiences are reduced to one-dimension, the delight quickly turns to fear and pain:

> They went back to the apartment and had sex while imagining a heartless scene between Michael and the Seattle girl he'd rejected. About halfway through the fantasy, Valerie stopped being a bystander and became the poor girl. She pleaded with him to fuck her, but when he did, she felt a terrible rush of emotional pain that shocked her into tears. Mistaking her shudders for excitement, he became too rough, and she cried out for him to stop. They separated and Valerie turned on her side, just in time to see Michael's expression of impersonal cruelty devolve into confusion and injury. (94)

When the possibility of "impersonal cruelty" in the life outside of their fantasies, when the real world becomes one of mere surface, the relationship between Valerie and Michael cannot succeed. Valerie immediately begins to push him away, asking to be alone for several days and then, when Michael wants to see her, calling a hiatus to their sexual activity, the activity which they have now used to trivialize true human interaction.

When Valerie tells Michael about her rape, she does so in a manner that keeps with their playful, merely surface interaction up to that point, but immediately regrets doing so. She says, "Sometimes I tell people really awful stuff like it's a joke. I don't know why. I'm trying not to do that anymore" (96). This aversion to making real life superficial is felt by Michael:

> When she'd said, "I'm trying not to do that anymore," it had provoked a storm of monstrous pathos in him. It was the kind of pathos that felt so good he wanted to make it go on forever. It shocked him that someone had hit her, but following close upon the shock was an overwhelming tenderness that made the shock seem like an insignificant segue. (97)

However, Michael has not fully grasped the

distinction between the real and unreal that Valerie must hold onto, as his subsequent attempt to play out a rape fantasy demonstrates. Valerie, understandably shaken and frightened by the experience which, for her, is very much about real life, though Michael thinks of it as mere play, struggles to pull him out of the postmodern game that has been their relationship thus far:

> "What do you think? You spoiled, stupid, ignorant little shit! I tell you I don't want to fuck, I tell you about being raped and you set up a rape fantasy? What's wrong with you!"
>
> "I was just doing what we do all the time."
>
> "It's not the same!...You were disrespecting me...For real."
>
> Her small voice and her words hinted at the wonderful pathos that had so gripped him. (99)

The depth of feeling that Michael senses in her voice, that he wants to experience for himself, cannot be achieved in a play of surfaces, but must be found in the "real" which postmodernism covers over and denies. In the final scene, Michael's transformation is complete. When he truly wants to "[c]ome under the covers" (101), to go beneath the surface of Valerie's life only when she offers him that chance, he has abandoned the postmodern approach altogether by recognizing a difference between surface and what lies underneath and seeing the need to approach that underlying reality, that complex organism known as a human being differently from the world of surface images.The strength of this relationship far outweighs those discussed earlier. Michael and Valerie may be able to forge a solid love together.

Conclusion

Though "the postmodern condition" may foster a healthy playground for the arts, it is, like an actual playground, full of cruelty toward the heart. Though *Because They Wanted To* has been written in a time period which is increasingly referred to as "the postmodern era," it laments, rather than celebrates, this condition. As one of the "eternal verities" that postmodernism would have us reject, love is endangered and often lost if we are to approach it without depth. To love postmodernly, then, is to love badly, if to love at all. The terrible pain of Stew, Kitty, Margot and Patrick leaves us yearning, like Michael for "the wonderful pathos" which lies beneath the surface.

Notes

1. In fact, his view is bound by a single word, "lesbian," which he uses four times in less than four pages to describe his daughter (13-16), even saying, "Then he would remember that she was a lesbian...making it impossible for him to see her. Then she would just be Kitty again."

2. In keeping with the postmodern spirit, Patrick's appeal cannot be fully classified by gender; Margot consistently characterizes him as being boyishly feminine. See 60, 75, 76, as well as Donald's comment on 77 which shows the contrast between Margot and Patrick's unclassifiable relationship and a world view which maintains strictly defined catagories, such as heterosexual/homosexual.

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