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“A creature that did bear the shape of man”: hybridity and gender in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Measure for Measure*

Manon Turban

1 The title of Thomas Andrew’s 1604 poem *The Unmasking of a Feminine Machiavel* encapsulates some of the anxieties which women inspired in the early modern period.[1] Claiming that a woman will be unmasked, that her true identity will be revealed in the poem, the title shows that women were first regarded as duplicitous creatures, who successfully hid their evil nature beneath their comely appearances.[2] Then, calling this woman a “Feminine Machiavel,” the poet suggests that the immoral manipulations which the Italian philosopher prescribed in *The Prince* (1532) are transposed from the realm of politics into the sphere of love and, therefore, that it is in her romantic and sexual interactions with men that this woman proves particularly deceitful and dangerous.[3]

2 Intimated in the title, the evil of the “Feminine Machiavel,” and more generally of women, is then obsessively stressed throughout the poem thanks to the enumeration of references to women renowned for their wickedness such as the incestuous Myrrha who tricked her father into her own bed or the bewitching Calypso who detained Odysseus on her island for several years.[4] The hybrid silhouettes of mermaids, the half-fish half-woman creatures, of Scylla, the nymph with barking dogs’ heads around her hips, and of Medusa, a Gorgon whose head is crowned with writhing serpents, also appear among the female figures this poem borrows from classical antiquity to draw a dreadful portrait of femininity. That the three creatures should be conjured up for that same purpose can come as a surprise given the diversity and unique significance of the mythological contexts in which they emerged.[5] And yet, despite these notable

differences, the early modern period often used all three creatures to serve the same metaphorical ends: highlight men’s perilous and troubled relationships with women. Thus, fusing beautiful and alluring human parts with repelling animal bodies, their hybrid shapes often laid bare the contradictory emotions of both attraction and disgust which women could inspire.[6] What’s more, their mythological characterisation as dangerous female figures may explain why they were often turned into epitomes of the threats women supposedly posed. The literal petrification which Gorgons’ lethal gazes caused in classical myths thus became a metaphorical representation of the perilous stasis in which a man could lose himself if he became too engrossed in the contemplation of a woman’s beauty and too absorbed by the promise of bodily pleasures that it bore.[7] Mermaids also stressed this risk of abandoning oneself to idleness, as Laetitia Sansonetti showed in her analysis of Guyon’s encounter with such creatures in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*: “Les Sirènes [...] sont dangereuses non seulement parce qu’elles menacent de détourner Guyon du droit chemin, mais aussi et surtout parce qu’elles l’invitent à arrêter sa course et à sombrer dans la paresse.”[8] Disclosing, like Gorgons, the risk of indulging in the idleness of romantic and sexual relationships with women, mermaids’ seductive power nevertheless relied not on sight like the other mythological hybrids but on hearing. This specificity, which originated from the classical myths in which they appeared,[9] led to the emergence of a singular metaphorical use for mermaids as they were recurrently conjured up to highlight the dangers that lie behind women’s enchanting but dishonest vows. In the conclusion to his chapter on “Sirens,” Geffrey Whitney thus warns his male readership that: “Such Mermaids live, that promise only joys: / But he that yields, at length himself destroys.” [10]

3 While Gorgons and mermaids stressed the dangers of letting oneself be seduced by a woman’s beauty or words, Scylla denoted lust as is shown by the following passage from George Sandys’s 1632 *Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Englished, Mythologiz’d, and Represented in Figures*:

> Scylla represents a Virgin; who [...] once polluted with the sorceries of Circe, that is, having rendred her maiden honour to bee deflowred by bewitching pleasure, she is transformed into an horrid monster. And not so only, but endeavours to shipwracke others (such is the envy of infamous women) upon those ruining rocks, and make them share in the same calamities.[11]

Here, Scylla’s monstrous transformation dramatizes the physical and moral corruption caused by women’s lust. Not only does the virgin see her body irrevocably blemished because of her licentiousness, but she also imperils the morality of the men that she tries to seduce.[12] Scylla’s monstrous dogs’ heads also sustained this metaphorical association of the hybrid with women’s lust as, suggestively sprouting from her hips, they portrayed female genitals as a ravenous, never satisfied organ, always seeking to devour men’s flesh.[13]

4 Keeping men in idleness, deceiving them with flattering words and promises or trying to corrupt them to sate their boundless sexual appetites, women were therefore depicted as particularly dangerous creatures when they took on the shapes of these three hybrids.

5 In the light of this metaphorical use, it can come as a surprise that Scylla, a mermaid and a Gorgon should be used to respectively describe Shylock, Angelo and Antony, the three male protagonists of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Measure for Measure*.[14] While paying attention to the specificities of each play and of

each of the male characters under study, this paper will show how this innovative treatment of the female hybrids, unusually associated with men, blurs the early modern distinctions between women and men and thus lays bare the precariousness of the male/female categories.

6 First, I will study how, through his association with Scylla, Shylock turns the monster’s mutilating dogs’ heads into a masculine attribute and thus sheds light on the more general reversal of genders at work in the play. Then, I will show how Angelo’s depiction as the son of a mermaid highlights his deceitfulness, a supposedly feminine trait, and destabilises his very biological identity as a man. Finally, I will explore how Cleopatra stresses the gender fluidity of her couple as the anxiety which Antony inspires in her is voiced thanks to the conjuring up of a Gorgon and other horrifying representations of femininity.

7 In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock takes the monstrous shape of Scylla when, addressing Jessica, Lancelet explains that her filiation will prevent her from reaching the Christian paradise: “You are damned both by father and mother; thus when I shun Scylla, your father, I fall into Charybdis, your mother” (3.5.13-15).[15] Possibly already represented onstage as a man of grotesque shape,[16] Shylock is made even more ridiculous here as he metaphorically destabilises both the species and gender divides by being compared with a female hybrid whose own hybridity transgresses the distinctions between living creatures.[17] Even though it is only mentioned in passing and said in jest, this association is echoed in the rest of the comedy as Shylock conjures up the female hybrid’s monstrous figure through a network of metaphors and his actions onstage.

8 The scourge of sailors, Scylla first appeared in the shape of a many-headed monster in Homer’s *Odyssey*.[18] She was then progressively anthropomorphised in later classical texts that depicted her as a hybrid creature with the trunk and head of a woman and the lower body of an animal.[19] Sometimes represented with the tail of a snake, sometimes with that of a fish, the monster’s most recognisable trait is that dogs’ or wolves’ heads sprout from her hips. Characteristic of Scylla, canids are also recurrently conjured up by the Christian community of *The Merchant of Venice* to animalise and single out Shylock. Called a “cut-throat dog” (1.3.105), “a cur” (1.3.121), “the dog Jew” (2.8.14), “the most impenetrable cur” (3.3.18), a “wolf” (4.1.73), an “inexecrable dog” (4.1.128), a “currish spirit” (4.1.132), a “currish Jew” (4.1.290), Shylock in turn echoes these insults as he tells Antonio: “you [...] foot me as you spurn a stranger cur” (1.3.111-112), or asks him “hath a dog money? Is it possible / A cur can lend three thousand ducats?” (1.3.115-116).

9 Shylock’s desire to be given a “pound of [Antonio’s] flesh cut off and taken / In what part of [his] body pleaseth [him]” (1.3.142-144) is also remarkably expressed through the character’s depiction of himself as a bloodthirsty, aggressive dog. As he fantasises the revenge he will exact on Antonio, Shylock pictures himself as a hound thrusting its claws in the hind legs of its prey: “If I catch him once upon the hip, / I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him” (1.3.40-41). Such associations of his desire for vengeance and his metaphorical canine identity are sustained throughout the play as the character warns the merchant: “since I am a dog, beware of my fangs” (3.3.7), as the image of the hound catching its prey surfaces again when Shylock, about to mutilate Antonio, maliciously tells him: “I have you on the hip” (4.1.332) and, finally, as Graziano describes his monstrous desire to maim the merchant’s body as: “wolvish, bloody, starved and ravenous” (4.1.138).

10 If to call someone a dog is a common insult in Shakespeare's plays,[20] the multiple associations of Shylock with the animal appear as more than mere ways to verbally abuse the character since they echo Lancelet's comic depiction of the usurer as Scylla. Indeed, "wolvish, bloody, starved and ravenous," Shylock's canine desire to mutilate Antonio calls to mind the dreadful image of the voracious dogs' heads tearing the flesh of men in what a contemporary described as "the continual provocation of the devouring Scylla."[21] Not only does the network of metaphors depicting Shylock's desire as the appetite of a dog reinforce his association with the female monster, but the character also nearly actualises the dangerous potential of Scylla's canine heads on the Elizabethan stage as, whetting his knife, he is about to cut the body of Antonio in Act IV.[22] In *The Merchant of Venice*, the destruction which men's bodies undergo after they encounter Scylla is therefore metaphorically displaced in and nearly enacted by the male character.

11 Sustained throughout the play by Shylock's words and actions, the association of Shylock with Scylla blurs the usurer's gender, the mythological monster being almost exclusively described as female and used as a metaphor for women's lust. Such blurring echoes the anti-Semitic discourses of the time, it being common in the early modern period to describe Jews as men and women who transgressed the gender and sexual divide. As Ania Loomba thus explained: "racial difference was imagined in terms of an inversion or distortion of 'normal' gender roles and sexual behaviour – Jewish men were said to menstruate."[23] Fuelling some early modern anti-Semitic prejudices, the blurring of the gender divide allowed by Shylock's association with Scylla nevertheless goes beyond discourses on Otherness in *The Merchant of Venice*. That one of the early modern epitomes of women's lust should become a masculine attribute is indeed not surprising in a play which playfully challenges this trite representation of women's sexuality by making insatiable sexual appetites a characteristic of the male – rather than the female – sex.[24] Lancelet's lamenting: "Alas, fifteen wives is nothing! Eleven widows and nine maids is a simple coming in for one man" (2.2.145-146) is but one of the many examples of this reversal found in the play. Another instance of this shift also appears in the character's words as he imagines a dialogue between himself and his conscience: "'My honest friend Lancelet, being an honest man's son,' or rather, 'an honest woman's son' – for indeed my father did something smack, something grow to; he had a kind of taste" (2.2.12-15). Placing the honour of his lineage in his mother rather than in his libidinous father, a remarkable counterpoint to the doubt which usually loomed over women's honesty, Lancelet once more describes lust as an inherent trait of the sexuality of men, and not of women.[25]

12 In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare thus playfully destabilises the early modern male/female categories as men prove to be the lustful sex. In such context, the transposition of Scylla's dogs' heads, that is of one epitomes of women's sexual promiscuity, into a masculine attribute appears as the most blatant and extreme instance of this reversal in the depiction of each sex's sexuality. In *Measure for Measure*, the distinctions between men and women are also blurred as Angelo is feminised because of his ungodly desire for Isabella. This feminisation is highlighted and strengthened as the stern deputy is then metaphorically turned into the son of mermaid, a connection which challenges not only his gender but also his very male physiology.

13 In *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England,* Mervin James explores the emergence of a new code of honour for men that was based on intellect, learning and virtue and not only on military feats, descent or pedigree.[26] With the birth of this perception of male honour, new virtues became crucial to the definition of manhood and "boys also learnt that it was the Christian virtues of piety and charity which would earn nobility."[27] If bravery and physical strength could be shown on the battlefield or jousting grounds, the administration of justice or the implementation of the law became ways to assert these new qualities. Thus:

> Duty in civil government [appeared] as the alternative to military service as a way to win honour [...] The wrangles and disputes that occurred in the localities as gentry sought, and sometimes fought for, positions on the bench, reflect the importance of gaining honour in this way.[28]

14 When, at the beginning of *Measure for Measure*, Angelo is charged by the Duke to take care of the city in his absence, he is thus given a chance to assert his manhood. But the stern deputy fails in this endeavour by progressively trading piety for vice, charity for cruelty and chastity for lust. Unable to assert the virtues that were crucial to the construction of manhood in the early modern period, Angelo even grows feminine while in office. His feminisation derives from his transgressive desire for a woman, Isabella, a desire which overwhelms him as he himself confesses: "This virtuous maid / subdues me quite" (2.2.188-189). At the time when Shakespeare wrote his plays, indeed, "strong heterosexual passion was not a sign of manliness, but could make one effeminate."[29] Men who were "subdued" by their attraction to a woman were deemed to be feminised because of their failure to prevail upon bestial impulses, a lack of control that was thought to be characteristic of women,[30] and because it was more generally held that "lust effeminates, mak[ing] men incapable of manly pursuits."[31]

15 Feminised because of his uncontrollable lust, Angelo also destabilises the gender divide as he proves to share women's supposedly inherent duplicity.[32] Indeed, as Isabella laments, the deputy displays the same ability to hide his evil behind a mask of righteousness:

> ISABELLA. This outward-sainted deputy,
> Whose settled visage and deliberate word
> Nips youth i'th' head, and follies doth enew
> As falcon doth the fowl, is yet a devil. (*Measure for Measure*, 3.1.88-91)

In the play, Angelo's duplicity is expressed thanks to gendered representations of the vice, which helps feminise the character even more. His very name "Angelo" and his evil deeds echo the dichotomy that structured female identity as well as the fears that this dichotomy meant to alleviate. In Shakespeare's time, indeed, "women [were] imagined either as angels or whores as a psychological defence against the uncomfortable suspicion that underneath, the angel *is* a whore".[33] Concealing his licentiousness behind his pious appearance and his name, Angelo thus revives this gendered representation of duplicity as inherent to women's nature.

16 Another female figure conjured up in the play also makes the gender of the character uncertain as it yet again associates him with women's deceitfulness. In act III, Lucio indeed turns the Duke's substitute into the son of a mermaid as he declares that: "some report a sea-maid spawned him [Angelo]" (3.1.353). Suggesting that Angelo's outward moral rigidity is inhuman, and thus necessarily the fruit of unnatural breeding, Lucio's remark helps blur Angelo's gender as it reminds the spectator that the deputy proves as gifted as mermaids, and women in general, in the art of deception. Like his

monstrous mother, he uses enchanting but dishonest words – like the promise he makes to Isabella to free her brother if she agrees to share his bed – to lure his victims into his dangerous arms.

17 Blurring his gender, Lucio also playfully feminises Angelo through this association, as fish are used as metaphors for the female genitals in *Measure for Measure*.[34] When the clown describes the illegal sexual interaction between Claudio and Juliet, he indeed says that the young man is accused of “groping for trouts in a peculiar river” (1.2.82). The connection which this remark establishes between the aquatic world and the female genitals thus sheds new light on Angelo’s hybridity. His metaphorical fish part is, in the context of the play, rather female than male. Questioned through the metaphors developed in *Measure for Measure*, Angelo’s biological sex is also doubted as the physical characteristics of fish make his male physiology uncertain.

18 In the early modern period, one of the theories which explained the differences between men and women had it that the female and male sexes were distinguished, not by anatomical singularities, but by different degrees of dryness and of heat. According to the prevailing humoral theory:

> The human body was thought to be made up of four humours – blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile – and it was their relative heat or moistness which determined maleness and femaleness. Men had a propensity to be hot and dry; women cold and moist. Men and women were anatomically the same, it was just because women were colder that their penis and scrotum were inverted inside their bodies as the uterus and womb.[35]

19 In the light of this Galenic theory taken up by early modern physicians,[36] Angelo’s hybrid body becomes problematic as his aquatic nature renders it wet rather than dry, a metaphorical wetness which Lucio playfully stresses as, after associating Angelo with a mermaid, he connects him with other aquatic creatures: “stockfishes” (3.1.354).[37] Indeed, these animals were reputed for being particularly hard to dry out as it took a sound beating of them to release water from their bodies. The 1567 definition given by John Maplet, an English naturalist, hints at this practice as he describes the fish as: “a muddy stockfish [...] which never will be sod, unless she hath good store of stripes and be beaten with Rod.”[38] Beside the slapstick humour which the image of the cudgelled fish generates, Lucio’s words thus playfully reinforce Angelo’s femininity, as his aquatic filiation makes his body particularly moist and therefore, rather female. Not only is Angelo not dry, like other men, but his hybridity also renders his bodily fluids so cold that: “when he makes water, his urine is congealed ice” (3.1.355). Questioning his male physiology, the associations of Angelo with a mermaid and other aquatic creatures propel the character into a state of sexual indeterminacy in Lucio’s speech, an indeterminacy which is highlighted by the conclusion that the deputy is “a motion generative” (3.1.356), a man who cannot use his male genitals,[39] and “an ungenitured agent” (3.1.409-410). This last remark puts the finishing touches to the character’s sexual indeterminacy as it turns him into a strange hermaphrodite who, rather than being doubly enabled sexually, is deprived in both guises.[40]

20 In the span of four lines, the stern deputy’s gender and sex are playfully blurred through his association with a mermaid, depicting his duplicity as feminine, and the other aquatic analogies which this association spurs, rendering his male physiology uncertain. Lucio’s insult thus highlights and reinforces the feminisation first triggered by Angelo’s incapacity to control his ungodly desire for Isabella. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, lust also results in the blurring of the gender divide as the Roman soldier becomes

effeminate in his relationship with the Egyptian queen: displaying unmanly attachment to Cleopatra, he also swaps gender roles in order to explore the erotic potential of such reversals.[41] This blurring is stressed as Antony start conjuring up Gorgons and other nightmarish representations of femininity.

21 In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the gender divide is destabilised by the eponymous couple as is best summed up in Octavius Caesar’s claim that Antony “is not more manlike / Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy / More womanly than he” (1.4.5-7). Publicly displayed, the couple’s gender fluidity is also central to its intimate relationship as is revealed by the anecdote Cleopatra recounts in act II:

> CLEOPATRA. I drunk him to his bed,
> Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
> I wore his sword Philippan. (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.5.21-23)

22 Putting her woman’s clothes on her male lover and carrying his sword, an unambiguously phallic symbol, Cleopatra shows that the couple’s gender fluidity takes on an erotic dimension, that she and her lover relish the blurring of the male/female divide in the private space of their bedroom. The erotic potential of this destabilisation of categories already surfaced, earlier on in this scene, as the Egyptian queen pictured Antony in every fish she caught:

> CLEOPATRA. My bended hook shall pierce
> Their slimy jaws, and as I draw them up,
> I’ll think them every one an Antony
> And say, ‘Aha! You’re caught!’ (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.5.12-15)

Again, sexual attributes are reversed here as Cleopatra endows herself with a hook which becomes, like the sword, a phallic object capable of penetrating the skin of her lover. And yet, the disruption of the gender divide which Cleopatra sexually enjoys in men proves perilous as the scene unfolds.

23 When the messenger brings her news of Antony’s wedding, the Egyptian queen tells him: “Thou shouldst come like a fury crowned with snakes, / Not like a formal man” (2.5.41-42). While Antony’s male-to-female transvestism was pleasant and even sexually arousing to Cleopatra, the feminine attributes which the Egyptian queen invites the male messenger to put on are now monstrous and threatening as they belong to the mythological furies. Like the other female hybrids that the early modern period inherited from classical antiquity, furies appear as particularly dreadful creatures. Described as the goddesses of vengeance, they relentlessly torment their victims whom they eventually drive mad. Ending humans’ lives tragically, the terror which furies inspire also derives from their dreadful hybrid bodies: winged, furies are often “crowned with snakes,” a representation which Cleopatra takes up here.[42]

24 The association of these monstrous female hybrids with the male messenger flags an important change: the blurring of the gender divide which Cleopatra sexually enjoyed is progressively turning into a source of anxiety as men start conjuring up nightmarish representations of femininity. This shift is confirmed as Antony takes the terrifying shape of yet another female hybrid later in this scene. As she is about to leave the stage, Cleopatra indeed reckons that: “Though [Antony] be painted one way like a Gorgon, / The other way’s a Mars” (2.5.117-118).

25 Yet again, the destabilisation of the male/female categories appears perilous here as Cleopatra’s femininized lover is now associated with the dangerous figure of Gorgons, the classical monsters with writhing snakes on their heads and petrifying gazes who –

as mentioned earlier – were recurrently conjured up to warn men of the dangers they exposed themselves to if they interacted with women. Because of this dangerous femininity associated with Antony, the mention of the Roman god of war appears as the queen's attempt to reassert her lover's gender at a time when manhood was often built and asserted through the display of bravery and strength on the battlefield.[43] But even this paragon of virility cannot quite crush Antony's femininity. Describing her lover from two distinct points of view, each revealing a different picture as in an anamorphic painting, Cleopatra points out that Antony's virile appearance is only a matter of perspective. Though hidden, a monstrous Gorgon always lurks beneath the outward look of a Mars.

26 Thus, the dread which Antony inspires in Cleopatra is voiced thanks to his being associated with a monstrous female hybrid. Casting a dark light on gender ambiguity, the nightmarish images of femininity that the Roman inspires in his lover also surface in this scene in the comparison of Egypt with a "cistern for scaled snakes" (2.5.96), which Cleopatra conjures up in her mad jealousy. This comparison indeed echoes Othello's grim description of Desdemona's womb, when he believes that his wife is unfaithful. Calling it a "cistern for foul toads / To knot and gender in" (4.2.60-61), the Venetian general turns the organ into a closed space where amphibians monstrously proliferate as a way to express his anxious lack of control over his wife's sexuality. Echoing Othello's distressing depiction, Cleopatra's vision of Egypt as a "cistern for scaled snakes" also destabilises the gender and species divide as in her mad rage she conjures up, yet again, a monstrous representation of women's sexuality, borrowed this time from an earlier Shakespearean tragedy.

27 Shylock, Angelo and Antony all display behaviours which endanger the societies they live in. While Antony and Angelo threaten marriage, as they respectively abandon their wife and betrothed, Shylock, a usurer, disrupts the economic order since:

> In Early Modern England what is most often figured as endangering the economic order in general and the patronage system in particular is not gift-giving but usury [...] a debauched paying that knows no limit.[44]

28 What makes Shylock even more problematic is that usury was often associated with sexual practices that were considered as transgressive in the early modern period. Indeed: "Both usury and sodomy were thought to couple like with like: in usury, money breeds with itself; in sodomy, one sex copulates with itself."[45] Relying on the sexual practices that were associated with usury, Shylock's transgressive character can also be understood in spatial terms for Jews were often described as doomed to wander about as a punishment for their "lack of compassion to Jesus on the day of the Crucifixion."[46] Antony too can be described as spatially transgressive as, leaving the European shores to live in Egypt, a land considered as exotic in the early modern period, the Roman could fit John Gillies's description of Shakespearean "voyagers": "Voyagers [...] tend to be creatures of hubris in the original Greek sense of 'overflowing' their bounds, then the exotic geographies that define them will tend to function as paradigm of their transgressiveness."[47]

29 Threatening the societies in which they live because of their disrespect for marriage, their dangerous economic practices and wandering, Shylock, Angelo and Antony thus provide fertile ground for the exploration of another kind of violation: that of the early modern male/female categories. Their respective associations with three female hybrids used as metaphors of women's evil both highlight and strengthen the blurring

of the gender divide which is more generally staged in the three plays. In *The Merchant of Venice*, indeed, Shylock’s comparison with Scylla becomes the most extreme example of how female lust is turned into a male characteristic; in *Measure for Measure*, Angelo’s feminisation, which is triggered by his incapacity to control his ungodly desire for Isabella, is reinforced by his association with a mermaid; in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the gender fluidity which characterise the eponymous couple is stressed as Cleopatra recognises the silhouette of a dangerous Gorgon in her male lover. In each play, these associations thus allow the precariousness of the male/female categories to stand out as they turn the criteria used to define femininity – lust, duplicity and dangerous sexuality – into male traits.

30 Such laying bare of the porousness of the gender divide reveals that some of the early modern distinctions between men and women were regarded as mere social constructs, an idea which Elizabethan and Jacobean drama often played with. One of the most telling examples of this dramatic grasping of the question may be *Loves Cure, Or the Martial Maid*, a 1624 play in which John Fletcher dramatizes the struggle of a brother and a sister, respectively brought up as a woman and a man, to live within the gender associated with their biological sex. Shakespeare’s take on this debate has been widely explored in the contexts of the female-to-male cross-dressing often staged in his comedies. Tackling a different and seldom noted phenomenon, namely the metaphorical association of mythological female hybrids with male characters, this article thus intended to add another possible perspective to Shakespeare’s exploration of the artificiality of some of the early modern distinctions between men and women.

NOTES

1. Thomas Andrew, *The Unmasking of a Feminine Machiavel*, London, Simon Stafford, 1604, STC (2nd ed.) 584.

2. The depiction of women as inherently duplicitous was common in the early modern period as Akiko Kusunoki shows in *Gender and Representations of the Female Subject in Early Modern England: Creating Their Own Meaning*: “Male authors in the period also deal with the gap between female appearance and female feelings [...] They usually represent it as a sign of female duplicity, which was conventionally regarded as a characteristic feature of femininity” (Palgrave Shakespeare Studies, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 97).

3. The idea that women used deception in their intimate relationships with men was also widespread at the time as is shown by its being recurrently stressed in Shakespeare’s plays. In *Othello*, for instance, Iago claims that Desdemona pretended to be afraid of the eponymous character to keep her desire for him hidden from her father: “She did deceive her father, marrying you; / And when she seem’d to shake and fear your looks, / She loved them most” (William Shakespeare, *Othello*, 3.3.204-206. All Shakespeare references are to *The Norton Shakespeare: Third Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus and Gordon McMullan, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2016).

4. Thomas Andrew, *op. cit.*, Sig. C4v.

5. For more information on these female hybrids in classical myths, see Pierre Grimal, *Dictionnaire de la mythologie grecque et romaine*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1982.
6. In "Woman as Other: Medusa and Basilisk in Early Modern French Literature", Nancy M. Frelick thus explains that: "Associated with radical alterity [...] the woman whose gaze stuns the lover in the *innamoramento* is sometimes presented as a Medusa or basilisk. Embodying both desire and dread, such emblems of animality or serpentine otherness can serve both to reflect the alienation of the desiring subject and to mirror his ambivalence" ("Woman as Other: Medusa and Basilisk in Early Modern French Literature", *French Forum*, 43.2 (Fall 2018), 285-300, p. 285). Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani sees the same contradictory emotions in the metaphorical treatment of Medusa and Scylla: "À la fois agent et patient de la métamorphose, belle devenue horrible sans cesser d'être belle, plus belle encore d'être horrible, Méduse est ce beau monstre qui séduit comme Scylle" ("La séduction du monstre : Méduse, Hermaphrodite, chimères et monstres fantasques", in *La beauté et ses monstres dans l'Europe Baroque 16ème - 18ème siècles [actes du colloque, Paris, Université de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 28-30 septembre 2000]*, ed. Line Cottegnies, Tony Gheeraert and Gisèle Venet, Paris, Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 2003, p. 93-112, p. 98). As for mermaids, the mixed emotional response which they elicit from men is unambiguously voiced in Geoffrey Whitney's chapter on sirens: "The face, [Ulysses] lik'de, the nether parte did loathe" (*A Choice of Emblemes, and other Devises, For the Moste parte gathered out of sundrie writers, Englished and Moralized*, Leyden, Francis Raphelengius, 1586, STC (2nd ed.) 25438, p. 10).
7. Abraham Fraunce's *The third part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yuychurch Entituled, Amintas dale* provides a good example of this: "Medusa herself notes lustful beauty and voluptuousness, turning men into stones; as making the greedy gazers thereon senseless and amazed" (*The third part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Yuychurch Entituled, Amintas dale. Wherein are the most conceited tales of the pagan gods in English hexameters together with their auncient descriptions and philosophicall explications*, London, Thomas Orwyn, 1592, STC (2nd ed.) 11339, p. 29).
8. Laetitia Sansonetti, "Représentations du désir dans la poésie narrative élisabéthaine [*Venus and Adonis*, *Hero and Leander*, *The Faerie Queene II* et *III*] : de la figure à la fiction", PhD diss., Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3, 2011, p. 113.
9. In "Représentations du désir dans la poésie narrative élisabéthaine", Laetitia Sansonetti showed how Homer's *Odyssey* describes this oral power as relying on both the content of what is uttered and the harmonious, musical way in which this content is delivered (*Ibid.*, p. 356).
10. Geffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes, and other Devises, For the Moste parte gathered out of sundrie writers, Englished and Moralized*, Leyden, Francis Raphelengius, 1586, STC (2nd ed.) 25438, p. 10. In this chapter, Whitney uses the terms "sirens" and "mermaids" as equivalents, which the illustration, representing mermaids, also shows. The two mythological figures were however originally quite different. Indeed, while mermaids were depicted as aquatic hybrids, sirens often appeared as half-bird and half-woman and therefore as terrestrial monsters. See Estelle Folest, "Shakespeare et la voix", Littératures, Université de la Sorbonne nouvelle - Paris III, 2009, p. 173, accessible online at : https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00485954, last accessed 18 March 2019.
11. George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphoses, Englished, Mythologiz'd, and Represented in Figures*, ed. Karl K. Hulley and Stanley T. Vandersall, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1970, p. 645.
12. It is worth noting that another Scylla, who betrayed her father because of her love for Minos, also points out the dangers of female lust in the period, as Golding's epistle to his translation of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* indicates: "The storie of the daughter of king Nisus setteth out / What wicked lust drives folk unto to bring their wills about" (Ovid, *Shakespeare's Ovid Being Arthur Golding's Translation of the Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding, London, William Henry Denham, 1904, p. 4, l.169-170).
13. This connection drawn between the female sexual organ and Scylla's monstrous dogs' heads clearly appears in Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Amores*, as Shakespeare's contemporary depicts the monstrous hybrid's canine jaws as directly coming out of her womb: "Scyllaes wombe mad

raging doges conceales” (Ovid, *Ovid’s Elegies three books*, trans. Christopher Marlowe, London, 1603, STC (2nd ed.) 18931, Sig. Fv). For more information on Scylla’s dogs heads and their interpretation as a dangerous female organ, see Sarah Alison Miller, “Monstrous Sexuality: Variations on the Vagina Dentata”, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle, Ashgate Research Companion, Abingdon, Routledge, 2017, p. 311-328.

14. This appears even more surprising considering the paucity of instances in which they appear as male or are metaphorically used about men. Among the few examples of this unusual depiction, Samuel Purchas’s mention of mermen can be noted: “The Mermen, or men of the Sea... are like men, of a good stature, but their eyes are very hollow” (London, William Stansby, 1625, STC (2nd ed.) 20509, p. 1315). As for Gorgons, Richard Brathwaite uses them to criticize men who are excessively concerned with fashion: “How Gorgon-like he goes, / His crispled hair, his fixing of his eye” (*A Strappado for the Diuell. Epigrams and Satyres alluding to the time, with diuers measures of no lesse Delight*, London, I. Beale, 1615, STC (2nd ed.) 3588, p. 108). Unlike the other two hybrids, Scylla seems to have been mostly described as female in the early modern period even though the monster sometimes appeared as male in classical antiquity as Florian Stilp explains: “Entre 420 et 380, les monnaies de Cumes montrent au revers tantôt la Scylla anthropomorphisée, tantôt un être marin masculin” (“Scylla l’ambivalente”, *Revue archéologique*, 51.1, 2011, p. 3-26, p. 8, accessible online at: https://www.cairn.info/revue-archeologique-2011-1-page-3.htm, last accessed 18 March 2019).

15. I chose “Lancelet” rather than the more traditional “Lancelot” because it is the spelling that is used in *The Norton Shakespeare: Third Edition*.

16. In “‘Looking Jewish’ on the Early Modern Stage”, Peter Breek indeed explains that Jews were probably represented as having protruding noses or/and wearing unusual clothes (in *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson, Studies in performance and early modern drama, Abingdon, Routledge, 2011, p. 55-71).

17. As will be shown later in this article, Scylla’s lower body is indeed composed of both terrestrial and aquatic animal parts.

18. Florian Stilp, *op. cit.*, p. 1-2.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 3-4.

20. See Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, *Shakespeare’s Insults: A Pragmatic Dictionary*, Arden Shakespeare Dictionaries, London, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016, p. 153-158.

21. Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia: The strife of loue in a dreame*, London, Abell Jeffes, John Charlewood and Eliot's Court Press, 1592, STC (2nd ed.) 5577, p. 94.

22. As is shown by Bassanio’s question: “why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly?” (4.1.121)

23. Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 7. It is also worth noting that it fuels other prejudices held against Jews. The canine desire of Shylock to cut Antonio’s flesh thus revives the assumption that that they indulged in cannibalism, as Ladan Niayesh showed in *Aux frontières de l’humain : Figures du cannibalisme dans le théâtre anglaise de la Renaissance*, Bibliothèque de la Renaissance, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2009, p. 83-114. Such metaphorical association also helps characterise him more generally by hinting at his pathological relationship with money as Scylla’s companion monster, Charybdis, sometimes denoted avarice. This appears for instance in Erasmus’s *De utraque verborum ac rerum copia* as is shown by the following passage: “if you should be treating the incurable cupidity of a miser, you would rightly adapt the fable of Charybdis” (*De utraque verborum ac rerum copia*, trans. and intro. Donald B. King and H. David Rix, Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1963, p. 90).

24. The idea that women’s sexual appetite was insatiable is explicitly voiced in *Othello*, as Karen Newman shows in *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* when she argues that

Desdemona’s “responses to [Othello’s] tales are perceived as voracious: she ‘devours’ his speech with a ‘greedy ear,’ a conflation of the oral and aural; and [Othello’s] language betrays a masculine fear of a cultural femininity envisioned as a greedy insatiable mouth, always seeking increase” (*Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama*, Women in Culture and Society, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 87).

25. In this context, Venice provides an original setting for this kind of gender reversals as the city was often allegorised as a woman of loose morals in the period, as was noted by John Gillies: “Venice [was represented] as the whore of Babylon, the universal courtesan whose legs were perpetually open” (in *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 140). Given this representation, however, Venice allows the gender reversal staged in *The Merchant of Venice* to appear even more blatant to the spectator as it creates a sharp contrast with the conventional depiction of the city and of women’s sexuality.

26. Mervin James, *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England*, Past and Present Publications, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 375-376.

27. Elizabeth A. Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage*, Women and Men in History, London, Longman, 1999, p. 36.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

29. Merry Wiesner-Hanks, “Gender Theory and the Study of Early-Modern Europe”, in *Practices of Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Megan Cassidy-Welch and Peter Sherlock, Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies, Turnhout, Brepols Publishers, 2008, p. 7-24, p. 20. Wiesner-Hanks adds that: “strong same-sex attachments, on the other hand, were often regarded as signs of virility, as long as they were accompanied by actions judged honourably masculine, such as effective military leadership, and not accompanied by actions judged feminine, such as emotional outbursts” (p. 20).

30. Elizabeth A. Foyster, *op. cit.*, p. 29: “Male reason was contrasted with the ‘weaker vessel’s susceptibility to passion, lust and temptation.”

31. Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s Englan*d, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 25.

32. See footnote 2.

33. Valerie Traub, “Jewels, Statues, and Corpses: Containment of Female Erotic Power in Shakespeare’s Plays”, in *Shakespeare and Gender*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Sean Keilen, Shakespeare, the Critical Complex, New York, Garland Publishing Inc., 1999, p. 89-112, p. 92 (emphasis in the original text).

34. Water was more generally the element associated with women in the early modern period. See Kathleen P. Long, *Hermaphrodites in Renaissance Europe*, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World, Abingdon, Routledge, 2016, p. 18.

35. Elizabeth A. Foyster, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

36. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 106.

37. It is important to add here that Angelo’s association with a mermaid and not a siren is crucial as while mermaids were depicted as aquatic hybrids, sirens often appeared as half-bird and half-woman and therefore as terrestrial monsters.

38. John Maplet, *A greene forest, or A naturall historie vvherein may bee seene first the most sufferaigne vertues in all the whole kinde of stones & mettals: next of plants, as of herbes, trees, [and] shrubs, lastly of brute beastes, foules, fishes, creeping wormes [and] serpents, and that alphabetically: so that a table shall not neede*, London, Henry Denham, STC (2nd ed.) 17296, 1567, p. 104-105.

39. The marginal annotation in *The Norton Shakespeare: Third Edition* indicates that “a motion generative” is indeed “an impotent puppet.”

40. In our edition, the gloss on “an ungenitured agent” is indeed: “a sexless deputy.”

41. The blurring of the gender divide in the context of the romantic relationship between the eponymous characters also stems from the play's many implicit references to the story of Hercules and Omphale. On this topic, see William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. David Bevington, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 9-12.
42. This representation of the Furies as "snakey-haired, pustulant, snaggle-toothed monsters" emerged in Aeschylus's plays as Sarah Iles Johnston explains in *Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999, p. 250.
43. See for instance Palamon's words to Arcite in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*: "I have seen you move in such a place which well / Might justify your manhood; you were called / A good knight and a bold" (3.1.63-65).
44. Jody Greene, "'You Must Eat Men': The Sodomistic Economy of Renaissance Patronage", in *Shakespeare and Gender*, *op. cit.*, p. 229-265, p. 236.
45. Eliza Greenstadt, "Strange Insertions in *The Merchant of Venice*", in *Queer Shakespeare: Desire and Sexuality*, ed. Goran Stanivukovic, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017, p. 200-201.
46. Rachel E. Hile, *Spenserian Satire: A Tradition of Indirection*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017, p. 63.
47. John Gillies, *op. cit*, p. 3.

ABSTRACTS

Scylla, a mermaid and a Gorgon, three hybrids inherited from classical antiquity, are respectively associated with Shylock, Angelo and Antony in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Measure for Measure*. The association of these creatures with the three male characters is quite innovative since they were mostly depicted as female and often conjured up to draw a nightmarish portrait of femininity and of its dangers in the early modern period. This paper therefore aims to show how the metaphorical hybridity of the Shakespearean characters not only blurs the species divide but also the gender divide in order to lay bare the precariousness of the early modern male/female categories.

Scylla, une sirène et une gorgone, trois hybrides hérités de l'Antiquité, sont respectivement associées à Shylock, Angelo et Antoine dans *The Merchant of Venice*, *Antony and Cleopatra* et *Measure for Measure* de Shakespeare. L'association de ces créatures aux trois personnages masculins est novatrice dès lors qu'elles étaient majoritairement dépeintes comme de sexe féminin et souvent mobilisées pour donner une représentation cauchemardesque de la féminité et de ses dangers dans l'Angleterre de la première modernité. Cet article entend ainsi montrer comment l'hybridité métaphorique des personnages shakespeariens déstabilise non seulement les distinctions entre les espèces, mais aussi les distinctions entre les genres afin d'interroger les catégories masculin/féminin telles qu'elles étaient définies dans la société anglaise des XVIe et XVIIe siècles.

INDEX

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