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In this thesis, I use modern concepts of feminism, gender performativity, and psychoanalysis as a means to understand female characters and authors of Renaissance England in a new way. In my first article, I analyze various texts and performances of Queen Elizabeth I, as well as texts of Renaissance female authors who are now slowly entering our modern canon — notably, Aemilia Lanyer. The second article is a feminist investigation of Britomart from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. In both pieces, I argue that these women (historical and fictional) broaden the definition of queer, and ultimately of feminism, as a whole. The goal of this thesis is to utilize published and visual records of early modern women writers and fictional characters, and apply a theoretical lens to such texts, in order to analyze these texts in a multi-faceted, contemporary fashion and to establish new modes of thought within the discourse of gender performativity, feminisms and psychoanalytical theory.

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Intersections of New Historicism and Contemporary Theory in Renaissance Literature

by

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Erin R. Harrington, Author

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Introduction

For the purposes of my thesis, I use modern concepts of feminism, gender performativity, and psychoanalysis as a means to understand female characters and authors of Renaissance England in a new way. In my first article, I analyze various texts of the well- known, anti-misogynist "querelles des femmes" pamphlets, as well as texts of Renaissance female authors who are now slowly entering our modern canon (perhaps most notably, Aemilia Lanyer). The second article is a feminist investigation of Britomart from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene.* My purpose is not to adhere strictly to a historical approach (or even a theoretical approach, for that matter) in an attempt to make an argument about the early modern period itself. Instead, the goal of these pieces is to utilize published and visual records of early modern women writers and fictional characters, and apply a theoretical lens to such texts in order to analyze these texts in a multi-faceted, contemporary fashion and to establish new modes of thought within the discourse of gender performativity, feminisms and psychoanalytical theory. Inevitably, such an analysis will reveal as much about our contemporary anxieties and preoccupations as it does about those of the Renaissance.

New Historicists, such as Louis Montrose and Susan Frye, have done a thorough job of providing a historical context for the analysis of Queen Elizabeth's "texts" and Renaissance literature, on the whole. Montrose, for example, explores what he calls the "Elizabethan imaginary" and lays out the ways in which Queen Elizabeth's kingdom perceived her.[1] Likewise, Frye, in her *Elizabeth I: The competition for Representation*, provides a historical explanation for how Queen Elizabeth could be perceived as "feminist" in a modern sense.[2] However, in the world of literary criticism, not as much attention has been paid to the importance of using *modern theories* as a lens for analysis of Renaissance texts. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to the way in which the *gender performances* of female Renaissance authors, Queen Elizabeth, and Britomart can be read as queer, and thus, feminist acts — without requiring the application of historically accurate contexts. Having said this, the endeavors of historicists and theorists *both* contribute to a deeper analysis of any text; my work will simply be giving a larger voice to the importance of incorporating modern theoretical (rather than historical) analysis to the interpretation

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[1] In *The Subject of Elizabeth*, Montrose defines the Elizabethan imaginary as "the collective corpus of images, tropes and other verbal and iconic resources that provided a growing and changing matrix for the varied and sharply contested process of royal representation" (3).

[2] In *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation*, Frye argues that Elizabeth's (male) kingdom often sought to stabilize its own gendered identities by confining the queen within the cultural construction of the feminine as passive and weak (viii). According to Frye, Elizabeth actively fought against this through her rhetoric and the public image she created for herself.

of any Renaissance text.

Any approach to literature will be inherently biased by contemporary ontological concepts and social mores. Even the titles of my pieces imply a contemporary bias: gender, self-fashioning, and phallocentrism are, as far as we know, modern concepts. But despite my inevitable anachronistic endeavor, literary criticism and theory clearly benefit from looking to the past in order to discover something new about the present. Likewise, from a New Historicist perspective, the cultures in which these texts were written were very different from ours, and the ignorance of that context can lead us to overlook some of the more exciting moments happening in a text. For example, As Michel Foucault, Stephen Orgel, and others have explained, in the 16th century, sexual culture (in particular) was markedly different from our own: "Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence, and things were done without too much concealment; one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit … it was a period when bodies made a display of themselves" (Foucault 1-2) and (Orgel 59). In light of Orgel's and Foucault's argument, the Renaissance texts that I analyze may have sexual and performative subtexts quite different from those a more modern reader is accustomed to. This knowledge, in turn, may also affect the way we read the connotations of more modern texts and discourses. Knowing this historical context, reading pieces of Renaissance literature as being sexually suggestive or concerned with performativity then becomes a credible mode of analysis.

However, a strict adherence to the sanctity of history underscores the inevitability of the fact that one can never truly *know everything* about History. As Joan Copjec explains in her introduction to *Supposing the Subject,* "The strong belief driving our information age — that everything can be/is recorded, that nothing exists outside this historical register," problematizes our dedication to history as authority (viii). Any historical moment will be necessarily connected to previous and future historical moments, and we cannot logically isolate one specific historical moment from another and call it a "complete fact." As Copjec succinctly puts it: "For the incomplete — and permanently so — accessibility of any moment to itself, its partial absence from itself, forbids historicism's motivating premise: that the past must be understood in its own terms. This is a simple impossibility: *no historical moment can be comprehended in its own terms...*" (ix, her emphasis). In other words, no historical era can be fully aware of itself as a "cultural moment," just as no individual mind is fully accessible to itself at any given moment. British early modern citizens, for example, would not have the ability to analyze their performative moments as definitively "queer" — even if queer were a concept in the 17th century. Rather, historical moments such as these can be analyzed within the context of other connecting historical moments — and this analysis will inevitably be subjective to some extent. I believe Copjec's argument expands to a more broad understanding of our historical analysis of literature. In other words, despite our best attempts to remain objective when analyzing a literary period, we will always impose our own biases on

our analysis, and historical moments can never be comprehended *solely* in their own terms.

To borrow from the scientific realm of analysis: correlation does not equal causation. As many New Historicists would likely agree, we cannot conclude, for instance, that Queen Elizabeth's rhetoric, which was charged with images of warrior prowess and kingship, directly encouraged proto-feminist or queer modes of thought. Rather, we can make more general observations of a literary period, attempt to find patterns in the literature through close reading, and ultimately make an accessible or appealing argument, based on contemporary theoretical insights, while remaining sensitive to the inevitably contemporary quality of such analyses. More specifically, we can analyze Queen Elizabeth's rhetoric and public displays of gender through close-reading and applied gender theory and thus interpret her work in a unique and illuminating way. Therefore, both New Historicism and modern theory are helpful for illuminating important moments in a text. And in fact, both approaches can be used *together* in order to create a more robust analysis of a text.

When applying a theoretical analysis of a Renaissance text, for instance, it is important to know that the "public space" in early modern England exhibited a different morphology from the "public space" of today (Foucoult, 1). Margaret Hunt explains in the afterword of *Queering the Renaissance* that constructing an identity was quite difficult for anyone who was not an upper class male:

> One fact that is well established is that the rise of concepts of identity was so irrevocably tied to being

> male [and] above the servant class...that passing the concept to anyone else would have been an oxymoron...None of these people [i.e. women and the lower class] had a legitimate 'public' voice" (Hunt 364).

Thus, female figures in the early modern era, historical and literary alike, often thwarted this convention, and used the public sphere in order to "perform" their own gender identities in a highly patriarchal culture. As I will explain further in my articles, for these women (historical and literary), and for Queen Elizabeth herself, there were only so many public venues that could be used for self-fashioning and gender performance, and thus for the intentional, or unintentional, subversion of the heteronormative and patriarchal myth of a binary gender system (and in fact, the same is the case for patriarchal cultures today). Historically, the gender binary system often implies that the female gender is a "flawed" form of the male gender. As in any patriarchal society, the members of such society are left with the option of being male, or distinctly "not male." As Luce Irigaray explains in *This Sex Which Is Not One,* woman "resists all adequate definition. Further, she has no 'proper' name. And her sexual organ, which is not *one* organ, is counted as *none*" (Irigaray, 26). As Judith Butler elaborates in her *Gender Trouble*, paraphrasing the insights of Jacques Lacan: "Within a language pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language, women constitute the *unrepresentable.*" (Butler 14). By attempting to represent their own personal gender through various modes of performance, these textual and historical female figures, which are the subjects of my analysis, can be seen as (perhaps unintentionally) challenging patriarchy's cultural and linguistic persistence of the

unrepresentable woman.

As is the case in most patriarchal societies, early modern men often thrust their own interpretations of “femininity” into the public sphere. We can see these patriarchal interpretations within the misogynist rhetoric of the time.[3]The only option women had for challenging these public misogynist constructions was to participate actively in public displays and interpretations of their own personal “queer” identities. According to Butler, if an individual performs an identity that is culturally “unintelligible,” this action has the potential to subvert steadfast cultural rules:

> The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between “feminine” and “masculine,” where these are understood as expressive attributes of male and female. The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist” (23-24).

Butler argues that the masculinist concept of a stringent gender binary represses identities of those which choose to adhere to neither fully feminine, nor fully masculine. The performances of Queen Elizabeth, Amelia Lanyer, Jane Anger and Britomart's challenge cultural standards of what is “masculine” and what is “feminine.” [4] Female conduct literature and misogynist texts of the Renaissance often

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[3]As I explain later in this introduction, female conduct literature, misogynist pamphlets and other discourse (written by men) was highly concerned with what characterizes a “good” woman.

[4] It is important for my readers to understand that my work is primarily concerned with representations of *women* (historical and fictional) rather than *all* characters gendered female. As I explain in my first article, gender was viewed as much more malleable in the early modern period than it is today, which often heightened the anxiety toward cross-dressed women. Men therefore could be described as effeminate if their behavior fell into these categories from the conduct literature mentioned above. For the sake of focus, I will not be investigating the full scope of “femininity” displayed in these texts.

cite women as "good," "gracious," "chaste," "humble," "loyal," "sweet," and "modest," yet also "changeable," "inconstant," and "voracious"[5] Probably the most well-known of the *querelle* misogynist polemicists was Joseph Swetnam, whose pamphlet, *The Arraignment of Lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant women or the vanity of them . . .* argued that a truly good woman would rather kill herself than live with the shame of being raped: "Lucretia, for the love and loyalty that she bore to her husband, being unkindly abused [raped] by an unchaste lecher against her will, she presently slew herself in the presence of many rather than she would offer her body again to her husband, being but one time defiled" (Swetnam, 15). Conversely, men are often described in conduct literature as "bold" "impudent" "excellent" and able to "wear" and "use weapons" (*Hic-Mulier*, 7). The texts that I chose to analyze in my articles are particularly good examples of the ways in which these aforementioned masculinist standards are challenged. The actions of the female authors and characters in these texts thwart the idea that masculine men are one way while women (or effeminate men) are another, and thus, what a culture once perceived as "fact" can be put into question. Understanding the cultural context of the Renaissance perception of masculine and feminine thus allows me to explore the ways in which women (historical and literary)

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[5] Swetnam proclaims: "And so amongst many women there are some good, as that gracious and glorious Queen of all womenkind, the Virgin Mary....What won her honor but an humble mind and her pains and love unto our Savior, Christ? Sarah is commended for the earnest love that she bore to her husband, not only for calling him Lord, but for many other qualities; also Susanna, for her chastity and for creeping on her knees to please her husband (Swetnam, 15). Similarly, Phillip Stubbes write in his "Anatomie of abuses": "...So do you discover unto men all things that are fit for them to understand from you (as bashfulness in your cheek, chastity in your eyes, ... sweetness in your conversation, and severe modesty ...)" (*Hic Mulier* 271-272).

thwart these perceptions.

For both of my articles, however, in addition to having a historical awareness of Renaissance culture, it will be equally important for readers to understand how contemporary theories can be applied to these Renaissance texts and cultural contexts. It will be particularly important for my readers to understand Freud 's theory of the “fetish” and how it connects to gender obfuscating practices. According to Freud, the fetish is a psychological process of both denial and acceptance of the “castrated penis” or — “otherness.” The vagina, which the male can only see as an absence or “lack” (i.e. “not he” figure) is something to be repressed or disavowed. The mother's missing penis must then be either replaced or disavowed: “Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its substitute, as it were, and now inherits the interest that was formerly directed to its predecessor... What other men have to woo and make exertions for can be had by the fetishist with no trouble at all” (163). Either the boy must accept the law of the father, (i.e. the castrator) or he must preserve his mother's penis from being lost, developing a fetish by disavowing the absence of the mother’s penis through an erotic focus on a substitute appendage (e.g. feet) or extension (e.g. hair). Lacan takes this theory further by suggesting that the missing phallus can be symbolic, rather than a literal or sexualized phallus. In light of this idea, a female character such as Britomart or Queen Elizabeth — who wear armor and brandish swords — can be viewed as a threat to patriarchy. These “queer” performances can be seen as representative of fetish theory's “phallic mother.” The phallic mother always threatens

castration: whereas the fetish is safe, the woman with an actual penis-replacement is a threat. The symbolic phallus of a cross-dressed female warrior's sword, for example, incubates anxiety for the male gazer because a woman should not have a penis.[6] In essence, if a woman has a vagina *or* if she has phallus (symbolic or otherwise) the public presence of the "not he" gender will create an uncanny experience for any "he" within any patriarchal space (literary or otherwise).

For the purposes of my articles, I will be using Lacan's fetish theory specifically as a framework for my analysis because it assists in my feminist exploration of a text. In Freud's world of psychoanalysis, a woman is "lacking" an actual penis, and therefore *should* always be perceived in terms of absence. Conversely, Lacan argues that psychoanalysis can deconstruct symbolic manifestations of the penis (i.e. phallus) and therefore women *are inevitably* analyzed in terms of absence. Lacan moves fetish theory away from biological determinism and penises to a symbolic analysis of the phallus as signifier of privilege. Lacan would agree that a society's insistence on imagining the vagina as representative of "absence" reveals the misogynist biases of that culture. If a society places signification of power and privilege unto the phallus, we can make conclusions about the phallocentric norms within that (historical *and* literary) culture. Once the patriarchal world has been established, feminism and/or gender performance theory naturally follow as modes of

[6] In my first article, I also discuss how Queen Elizabeth's masculine gender performances and warrior garb, specifically, had the potential to create masculine anxiety within her own kingdom.

analysis.

Both of my articles will also be using queer and gender theory as analytical frameworks. For my analysis, rather than defining "queer" as a necessarily sexualized mode of analysis, I will be utilizing Butler's definition of queer performance. Butler defines queer performance as actions which deconstruct the "frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality" (180). I would argue that early modern English women and literary characters such as Britomart who dressed or performed as men, or "queer" beings, challenged gender norms of the time by illuminating what Butler refers to as the *tenuous reality* of gender. As I argue in my articles, the queer identities that Queen Elizabeth, Aemilia Lanyer, and Britomart create help to build upon the definition of feminism and queer literature.

The definition of "queer" evolves and changes as literary theorists contribute new ideas to the discourse; there is not one definitive definition of "queer," just as there is not one definitive definition of "feminism." Theorists such as Mair Rigby and Diana Fuss tend to use "queerness" as a lens for analyzing *sexuality* rather than *gender*, whereas Butler and Carla Freccero often utilize "queer" as an indefinable apparatus of subversive acts — of sexuality *and/or* gender. As Freccero explains:

> Over the past decade and a half, this term, as taken up by political movements and by the academy, has undergone myriad transformations … it is a term that, here, does have something to do with a critique of literary critical and historical presumptions of sexual and gender (hetero)normativity, in cultural contexts and in textual subjectivities. (5)

Freccero and Butler both acknowledge queer theory as having something to do with sexualities, but they both acknowledge the equal importance of analyzing queerness as a *performance*, often having nothing to do with sexuality. The queer gender performances of Queen Elizabeth and female Renaissance authors Aemilia Lanyer and Jane Anger, for example, allow us to see the ways in which the definition of queer can be re-envisioned in unexpected ways. As far as we know, these female figures were not queer in their *sexuality*, but rather queer in their *identities*. And in fact, given what we know about Renaissance sexual culture, the concept of a queer *sexuality* would be invalid because, as I mentioned previously, the concepts of heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality did not exist. While queerness is likely a modern concept that these women were unaware of, we can analyze the texts that they occupy as a way of opening queer theory up to Renaissance literature. In addition, we can open up and broaden the *definition* of queer, thus contributing to modern, queer discourse.

My project is motivated not only by a desire to open up characters and female-authored texts to new, more modern interpretations, but also to open up the texts for more modern, feminist readers, specifically. In other words, a (somewhat unexpected) feminist reading of these texts opens up the perhaps otherwise inaccessible texts to a more modern audience. Such modern readers may find that these interpretations make more appealing what could otherwise be formidable works of Renaissance allegory and allusion. My first article focuses on historical female authors, and as such is more

focused on an equal combination of historical and theoretical analysis. I argue that because it is impossible to determine authorial intent in any text, gender performance theory allows us to analyze these authors' *performances* and the various ways in which they can be *interpreted* by readers. My second article, however, focuses on a fictional poem — Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene.* Again, while it is impossible to brand Spenser's *intentions* as sexist, we can use psychoanalysis to determine the patriarchal quality of the literary world in which Britomart occupies. Once a patriarchal universe is established, it only makes sense that Britomart would need to perform a masculine, phallic (and therefore, queer) gender in order to be powerful. Judith Butler's concept of gender performance then, can be applied as a means to develop new ways of thinking about the functions of queer gender performances, specifically.

In my first article, I use various female-authored texts[7] as a means of defending the importance of feminism's multiple interpretive frameworks. When applying Butler's performative framework and Hélène Cixous' essentialist framework to the same texts, we can discover different Truths about these texts. For example, performance theory allows a reader to analyze the queer quality of Queen Elizabeth's rhetoric, while Cixous' concept of "feminine writing" allows me to deconstruct the female-gendered voices created in these texts. I explore various forms of gender performance that Renaissance women engaged in, and the ways in which the

[7] I define "texts" as not only books, but also speeches, pamphlets and rhetoric.

performances allowed access to, the public sphere — a realm often inaccessible to women in any patriarchal system.

In my second article, I will use psychoanalysis (fetish theory, specifically) as a way of lifting the veil on the misogynist universe in which Britomart resides. The fact that Britomart must have a symbolic phallus — and a magical phallus, no less — to win her battles illuminates the patriarchal nature of Britomart's world. Once the fallacy of phallocentrism has been revealed in Spenser's Faery world, it then allows me to use feminisms and gender performance theory in the second section to analyze Britomart as more than merely an allegory for chastity. I will demonstrate the ways in which, although this poem was written in the late 1500's, a modern analysis of the text opens it up to a modern audience, and thus allows us to learn more about our own contemporary theoretical discourse, in addition to Spenser's fictional world.

"The Heart and Stomach of a King": Female Self-Fashioning and Gender Performance in the Public Spaces of Renaissance England

"*I have set down unto you (which are of mine owne Sex) the subtil dealings of untrue meaning men: not that you should contemne al men, but to the end that you may take heed of the false hearts of al...And therefore thinke well of as many as you may, love them that you have cause, heare every thing that they say, (& affoord them noddes which make themselves noddies) but beleeve very little therof or nothing at all, and hate all those, who shall speake any thing in the dispraise or to the dishonor of our sex*" — Jane Anger, *Protection for Women* (1589)

The options women had for gender performance in the early modern period were mainly of the literary, rhetorical, and sartorial persuasion (and still are today, as Judith Butler attests). In other words, if a woman wished to construct the public perception of her gender, she could either (1) *write* her gender — an act that was mostly limited to women of higher, literate social stations; (2) *speak* her gender through the use of public speeches and displays; or (3) *wear* the gender which she wished to create for herself sartorially. Given the unequal access of information inherent to any patriarchal culture, it is important to note that a *sartorial,* cross-dressed gender performance is the most public and accessible method within this given

historical context.[8] These options are by no means mutually exclusive, and in fact, for Queen Elizabeth herself, these modes of gender performance are sometimes necessarily intertwined. For the purposes of this article, I will analyze these various public performances and deconstruct the ways in which feminisms, queer theory and gender performance theory can contribute to new interpretations of these performances, while also contributing new modes of thought to the theoretical discourse.

In my article, I choose the term “Feminisms” rather than the singular “Feminism” because Feminist theory consists of multiple interpretive frameworks. Feminisms have undergone a long history of development and (re)analyses, starting with the beginnings of “gynocriticism," moving into essentialist "French feminism" and (for the purposes of my project) ending with Butler's discourse and performativity theories. Gynocriticism merely called for a women's standpoint epistemology and a celebration of women writers, while later feminisms began examining how women writers can break into, and deconstruct, the patriarchal discourse. I am defining “French Feminism” as Hélène Cixous' post-1968 combination of deconstruction and reinterpretations of Simone de Beauvoir, in addition to the work of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva (of the latter half of the 20th Century). The reason that my project ends with Butler's feminism is that many later feminisms, including the large body of current feminist work on Renaissance literature, investigate issues that do not

[8] Even though Sumptuary laws technically defined cross-dressing as illegal, historical records show us that women violated these Sumptuary laws even Queen Elizabeth herself (allegedly) engaged in sartorial gender performances.

necessarily intersect with my work.

In contrast to my project, current feminist work on Renaissance literature is often concerned with analyzing discourse of power within the literature and "rewriting" the literature from a feminist perspective (Goldberg 1-3). For example, Valerie Traub, in her "Desire and the Difference It Makes" and "The (In)Signifigance of 'Lesbian' Desire in Early Modern England," she contends that a "rewriting" or "reinterpreting" of female-female erotic possibilities in various Renaissance texts challenges heterosexist assumptions of some feminist discourse (Goldberg 3). Similarly, Dorothy Stephens argues in "Into Other Arms: Amoret's Evasion" that re-reading female-female relationships in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* can contribute new interpretations to the text, and thus to feminist theory itself: "while some of the poem's voices attempt to circumscribe or constrict relationships among women, other narrative voices seem on the point of acknowledging that these socially marginal alliances provide the poem with a kind of energy found nowhere else" (204 Goldberg). As I've argued earlier in my thesis, without these feminist and historical modes of analysis, we would lose the opportunity to analyze these Renaissance texts in energetic and interesting ways.

Additionally, much of the feminist work today that centers on Renaissance literature is interested in a historical approach to analyzing the function of power within the discourse, in order to build on feminist and queer theory. As Margaret Hunt explains in the afterword of *Queering the Renaissance*:

> For Renaissance and early modern scholars the enterprise might be summarized as follows: to chart the emergence of modern Western social/political systems in a way that acknowledges the intermingling of normative notions of gender and sexuality with the preoccupations of power at every step along the way (Goldberg, 365).

While the work of Renaissance feminists, such as Traub, Stephens and Hunt, is certainly important for feminist and queer theory, their worthy endeavors do not necessarily contribute to my project. In my thesis, I will not not be investigating the function of masculinist power in Renaissance texts, nor will I analyze female-female relationships and the role that desire might play in a feminist "re-reading" of Renaissance texts. Instead, I will be using the feminist work of Hélène Cixous and Judith Butler for my analytical framework.

For my thesis, I am primarily interested in the branches of Cixous' and Butler's feminisms, specifically because they are both sensitive to the ideas of performativity. Despite their theoretical intersections, however, both theorists have different insights to offer to my readings of these female Renaissance texts. Cixous' feminism of the 1970's is more essentialist and interested in bodily sexuality than Butler's materialist explorations of various modes of performativity. Both approaches can be used to illuminate Renaissance authors' queer identities in unique ways; similarly, these Renaissance "texts" allow us to explore the distinctions between, and limitations of, various feminisms.

While we can interpret their public performance, it is impossible to know these women's *authorial intent* with their public displays of gender. One cannot argue that,

for example, Queen Elizabeth, was consciously challenging patriarchy and heteronormativity when she proclaimed: “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a king of England too” (quoted in Marcus et al., 326). In this quote, Queen Elizabeth is claiming a dual bodied identity — she is specifically making a claim for her other *kingly* body, in addition to her female body. This dual-bodied rhetoric certainly challenges the historical conventions of the kingly dual-bodied rhetoric (a rhetoric which previously had nothing to do with gender). However, Queen Elizabeth could not know what “patriarchy” and “heteronormativity” are because — as far as we know — they are modern concepts. Likewise, when Jane Anger writes, “GOD making woman of mans fleshe, that she might bee purer then he, doth evidently showe, how far we women are more excellent then men,” (Anger) we cannot conclude that her intentions were to create a feminist uprising against patriarchy. After all, “feminism” in its contemporary sense, did not exist in the Renaissance. Some New Historicists, however, would argue for the possibility of deciphering a woman’s Feminist intentions. As New Historicist Louis Montrose explains, for instance, Elizabeth was “as much the creature of the Elizabethan image as she was its creator” and that she was far from a feminist (3). According to Montrose, Elizabeth was not fully in control of her identity — her male audience also contributed to her identity through the use of texts and various types of rhetoric and interpretation. New Historicist Susan Frye, on the other hand, argues that Queen Elizabeth was the feminist figure that most general audiences envision today

(viii). Thus, Frye's argument encourages us to question when concepts of feminism actually begin appearing in literature. However, in my opinion, this disagreement in the New Historicist discourse focuses too heavily on trying to *prove* Queen Elizabeth's personal authorial intentions. Even if it were possible, attempting to decipher the authorial intent of Queen Elizabeth, or any of these other female authors, would not significantly contribute to contemporary theoretical discourse — it would merely tell us the personal motivations of individual authors. Alternatively, deconstructing these writers' gender performances as a means to build on the theoretical discourse can contribute to literary criticism on a grander scale than can personal authorial motivation. Furthermore, one can analyze, from a contemporary theoretical perspective, the ways in which these works can be read as gender performances and (intentional or unintentional) subversions of current and historical gender expectations, thus making these otherwise complicated Renaissance texts more accessible to a contemporary audience.

In the first section of this article, "Writing Gender in Renaissance England," I will analyze the works of Aemilia Lanyer — A published female writer who, as I will explain, performed nontraditional "female" and "queer" identities within her texts. I chose to analyze select texts of Aemilia Lanyer's work because she was interested specifically in ideas of representation and female subjecthood (Clarke xxxi). I use Hélène Cixous' concept of "feminine writing" and Judith Butler's concept of queer gender performance to deconstruct the various levels of performance in these texts,

and to investigate the intersections and limitations of such theories. In this section, I argue that the genders that these women perform as authors (and/or that they create for their characters) do not adhere to masculinist stereotypes of the Renaissance patriarchy, and therefore, are "queer" gender performances. These queer performances allow the reader to expand on the question: what is "queer"?

I proceed to analyze Queen Elizabeth's rhetorical performances in the second section: "Speaking Gender in Renaissance England." Queen Elizabeth's queer gender performances within her speeches and letters are nuanced and complicated. I argue that, in line with feminist theories of Simone DeBeauvoir and Hélène Cixous, for example, the queen is not a "feminist" figure in the sense that she helps her audience to understand "womanhood." However, she is a queer (and ultimately feminist) figure in the sense that her performances expand on the simplistic notion of a gender binary.

In my third section, "Wearing Gender in Renaissance England," I am particularly interested in the most accessible option Renaissance women had for gender performance — cross-dressing. An history of the literature suggests that masculine anxiety was most concerned with this form of gender performance, partially due to the early modern misconceptions of human anatomy and thus, fixation on, the sexually transformative potential of clothing. Queen Elizabeth also engaged in a sartorial creation of a queer gender, and although various elements of her performances adhered to patriarchal standards, her sartorial challenge of the masculinist dichotomy of difference still contributes to the dismantling of patriarchal

modes of thought.

I will explore the anti-misogynist writings of "querelles des femmes" writers Jane Anger and Rachel Speght in my final section. While the majority of my argument relies on the fallacy of authorial intent as a mode of critique, I argue that the female authors are unique in that they create a feminized voice with the specific intent of challenging misogynist Renaissance texts. My analysis of Queen Elizabeth's and Aemilia Lanyer's queer texts relies on gender performance theory as a means of analyzing authorial *performance*, rather than intent. However, in my last section "Renaissance Female Texts: Direct, Subversive Responses to Misogyny" I argue that while it is impossible to determine the true intent of the authors, it is certainly possible to determine the intent of the "feminized" voice which these authors have created. These feminized voices are in direct opposition to the patriarchal apparatus, and of all the female performances which I analyze in this article, they are the voices that are arguably *intentionally* antithetical to masculinist, misogynist discourse.

The ultimate goal of this project is to evaluate the various forms of gender performance that Renaissance women engaged in, and the ways in which the performances allowed access to the public sphere, a realm often inaccessible to women in any patriarchal system. This access ultimately provides these women with agency, while their "queer" gender performances simultaneously expose the falsehoods of Renaissance patriarchy. In turn, assessing these gender performances also contribute to new modes of thinking about queer theory and gender theory, and

open up somewhat inaccessible historical texts to a more contemporary audience. I will first turn to perhaps the most obvious form of female authorship and performance: writing.

Writing Gender in Renaissance England

Female Renaissance writers are of particular interest to my project because of the ways in which language and writing reveal truths about dominant cultural discourses. A limiting linguistic signification within a culture leads to limited opportunities for representation. Of course, every society inevitably has its own linguistic limitations and (a range of accessible to mostly inaccessible) codes which are enforced within a system. A public sphere will always consist of performances and symbolism, and psychoanalysis tells us that it is for these reasons that the "symbolic order" emerges as an apparatus of power. Butler explains Lacan's concept of the symbolic order and the way in which it can help us to deconstruct patriarchal systems:

> According to Lacan, the paternal law structures all linguistic signification, termed 'the symbolic,' and so becomes a universal organizing principle of culture itself. This law creates the possibility of meaningful language and, hence, meaningful experience ... The 'subject' who emerges as a consequence of this repression becomes a bearer or proponent of this repressive law. This language, in turn, structures the world by suppressing multiple meanings...and instating univocal and discrete meanings in their place. (Butler, 101)

Butler highlights why this issue may be of particular importance to female figures: "Women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity.

Within a language that rests on univocal signification, the female sex constitutes the unconstrainable and undesignatable. In this sense, women are the sex which is not 'one,' but multiple." (Butler 14). When they create new meanings and resist univocal codes of communication, then, female writers of any time period have the opportunity to contribute to, and simultaneously break down, the paternal symbolic law.

In the early 1970's, Hélène Cixous in particular was interested in the ways in which woman writers could contribute new meanings to this discourse. French feminist Hélène Cixous argues for the idea of "feminine" writing, or "Écriture féminine," and believes such writing can challenge the patriarchal order (Cixous 4-5). Similar to Judith Butler's thoughts on the trap of assuming binary sexual difference, Cixous analyzes the ways in which woman becomes represented as Other, and sexual difference creates and maintains hierarchical power structures (Sarup, 110). In her famous essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" she theorizes that writing can take on a bisexuality which does away with literary sexual differentiation:

> It will usually be said, thus disposing of sexual difference: either that all writing, to the extent that it materializes, is feminine; or, inversely – but it comes to the same thing – that the act of writing is equivalent to masculine masturbation (and so the woman who writes cuts herself out a paper penis); or that writing is bisexual, hence neuter, which again does away with differentiation (11).

The use of "neuter" implies that a "bisexual" writing lacks authority or potency. Cixous, being an essentialist in her approach within "The Laugh of The Medusa,"

finds value in a writer claiming an identity based in sexuality and differentiation.[9] Similar to Butler, I would argue that this emphasis on "masculine" writing or "feminine" writing further reifies the patriarchal misconception of the dichotomy of difference. Cixous chooses to use the term "bisexual" to describe writing which is neither "male" nor "female," but I believe a more accurate term would be "dual-gendered," or "queer"; an attempt to decipher an author's sexuality is an attempt (in vain) to decipher the author's *internal* experience. Sexuality is not merely displayed bodily, it also exhibits itself internally within an individual, while gender performance, conversely is displayed externally. The tools that we have as readers involve *interpretation* of *performances,* and we should frame our analysis as such. Based on my own analysis, queer writing is powerful, not impotent. According to Cixous, writing thus serves as a privileged space in which women can contribute the feminine voice to the symbolic order — however, this performance merely contributes to a misogynist system in which women are "different" from men. Queer writing, in contrast, creates a privileged space in which women writers can challenge gendered and sexual binaries. While I disagree with most of Cixous' opinions on "bisexual" writing, I do find her concept of writing as a "gendered" performance to be essential for my own analysis.

In this section, I will apply Cixous' and Butler's contemporary theories to the Renaissance works of Aemilia Lanyer in order to identify the "queer" and thus

[9] One may argue that Cixous' concept of gendered writing is irrelevant, given that Renaissance writing was inherently male. However, I would argue that Cixous' concept of gendered writing allows us to explore the few Renaissance texts we have that can not necessarily be categorized as inherently male.

feminist, quality of their work — in the sense that she creates dual-gendered or queer-gendered texts. I chose to work with the feminisms of Butler's *Gender Trouble* and Cixous' “Laugh of the Medusa” because they are some of the original feminist texts primarily concerned with issues of performativity and representation. I will use these performances as a means to sort out the differences between the feminist theories of Butler, Cixous (and myself) and contribute to the discourse accordingly. Again, it is impossible to take a historical approach by trying to determine their “sexuality” (although Cixous would likely disagree). Instead, we can use close reading of their texts to try to determine the queer *gender* identities they were creating and performing within the public sphere of published work. The “reality” of these authors' genders are inscribed within their texts; their writing becomes a performance of subversion. As Butler elaborates:

> That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 180).

When these writers perform a queer gender, or interpret gender in a non-binary fashion, they reveal hidden power structures of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality: the myth of *either* “masculine” *or* “feminine” is revealed.

Aemilia Lanyer's work, while not exactly “feminist,” can be described as proto-feminist, or perhaps the beginnings of feminist writing. The only published work

we now have of Lanyer's is her book of poems: *Salve Deus Rex Judeaorum* (1611). The book begins with her dedicatory poems and then moves into the title poem itself, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum. Salve Deus* serves as a reinterpretation of various stories from the bible, and a particularly unique retelling of Christ's crucifixion. Danielle Clarke argues that Lanyer's work is not feminist specifically because: "*Salve Deus* does not address questions such as power, nor does it analyze patriarchy; rather it is a poem interested in creating a means whereby women can have access to Christ" (xxxi). In some respects, Clarke is correct: Lanyer is not feminist in a traditional sense. However, I will argue that her queer characters and interpretations of the bible render her work feminist in a Butlerian sense. Little is known about her personal life — aside from her pregnancy out of wedlock and subsequently rushed, arranged marriage to a lower class musician (Clarke, xv). But, perhaps this lack of historical knowledge adds to the ease of interpreting her work from a purely theoretical perspective. In one section of Salve Deus, *Eves Apologie in Defense of Women* (1611), the narrator argues that men are more at fault for forsaking Christ, than Eve is for being tricked by the devil. Eve should not be condemned for her naivete: "The undiscerning Ignorance perceav'd/ No guile, or craft that was by him intended;/ For had she knowne, of what we were bereav'd/To his request she had not condiscended" (769-771). Of Adam's culpability, she adds: "For he was Lord and King of all the earth/Before poore *Eve* had either life or breath" (783-784). It was quite bold of Lanyer to essentially rewrite the standardized patriarchal interpretation of the bible.

However, these interpretations still help to reify the myth of the gender binary. These interpretations do not suggest that “woman” is performed, but rather they suggest that sex is ordained by God. But, as first wave feminist Simone De Beauvoir explains in her *Second Sex*: “one is not born a woman, but becomes one” (142) In other words, sex is factic, but gender acquired. Although “Eve's Apologie” does not deal with the concept of gender as acquired, she does help to build on DeBeauvoir's claim when she creates a queer Jesus figure in *Salve Deus.*

In *Salve Deus,* Lanyer creates a non-masculine Jesus with qualities imitative of the “feminine” — in other words, the character of Jesus becomes queer. In her address *To all vertuous Ladies in generall,* Lanyer urges women to “let all [their] roabes be purple scarlet white” in the image of Christ (15-16). One would expect Jesus to be described as “courageous” or “strong,” but Lanyer proclaims that Jesus showed “virtue, patience, grace, love, and piety”: all attributes most often attributed to women during this time period (256). Lanyer also explains the crucial role that she feels women play in Jesus' life:

> As also in respect it pleased our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, without the assistance of man... from the time of his conception, till the houre of his death, to be begotten of a woman, borne of a woman, nourished of a woman, obedient to a woman ... after his resurrection appeared first to a woman, sent a woman to declare his most glorious resurrection to the rest of his Disciples (229).

Lanyer's narrative highlights Jesus' obedience to women (a trait not often assigned to men in any patriarchal culture). Furthermore, according to Lanyer's interpretation of

the bible, when Jesus is resurrected, he chose to speak the good news through women rather than his male apostles. Lanyer also takes this conflation of women and Jesus a step further, by essentially *writing* Jesus into the role of victimized and eroticized subject. Lanyer begins to oddly eroticize Jesus' vulnerability in her description of him hanging on the cross:

> His joynts dis-joynted, and his legges hang downe,
> His alabaster breast, his bloody side,
> His members torne, and on his head a Crowne...
> While they his holy garments do divide:
>   His bowells drie, his heart full fraught with griefe
> (262, lines 1160-1167)

While hanging on the cross, his vulnerability is mostly articulated through the decreasing condition of his appendages and organs. Although his breast is still “alabaster” and beautiful, his bowels, in particular, seem to no longer function. In an age when female organs were thought to be “inferior” to men, it is relevant that Jesus' organs are specifically described as deteriorating, and thus inferior in nature — similar to the “lacking” organs of women. Essentially, his body is in a defenseless state while he is penetrated and attached to the cross. Jesus — a powerful representation of God in male human form — has become a victim. Jesus is further eroticized (rather than victimized) when Lanyer depicts his appearance through the use of a blazon, in the style of Petrarch:

> That unto Snowe we may his face compare
> His cheeks like skarlet, and his eyes so bright,
> As purest doves that in the rivers are...
> His head is likened to the finest gold,
> His curled lockes so beauteous to behold...

> His lips like skarlet threeds, yet much more sweet...
> Ah! give me leave (good lady) now to leave
> This taske of Beauty which I tooke in hand...
> Your constant soule doth lodge betweene her brests,
> This sweet of sweets, in which all glory rests.
> (263-264, lines 1307-1344)

Jesus is described as “pure” and “beauteous” with a “snowy face,” “bright cheeks,” and “sweet lips”: descriptions which some may argue are images of piety, but even today, are often used to sexualize women. In a somewhat odd turn, Lanyer then addresses her benefactor, the Countess of Cumberland, whose “brests” are where “glory” and Jesus’ “soul” rest. Not only is Jesus submitted to an eroticism suited for the male gaze, but a woman that Lanyer presumably admires is exposed to this brand of eroticism as well. The erotic nature of this blazon is obvious — from a contemporary standpoint, at least, both Jesus and Lanyer’s benefactor have become eroticized, and thus according to feminist analysis, feminized. To submit Jesus to “the male gaze” and suggest that he is anything other than male most certainly challenged patriarchal norms of the day.

Lanyer also makes the argument that Christianity destroys social and gender hierarchies by framing it as an equalizer: “Thus may you [women] flie from dull and sensuall earth,... your blessed souls may live without all feare,/Beeing immortal, subject to no death:/But in the eyes of heaven so highly placed,/That others by your virtues may be graced” (64-70). In other words, everyone is at a high status when they ascend to heaven. In the same vein, Lanyer frames both women and men as equal in their sins (men being perhaps even greater sinners) and therefore men and women

should be regarded as equals in this sense. She explains to her male readers: “You came not in the world without our paine,/Make that a barre against your crueltie;/ Your fault being greater, why should you disdaine/Our beeing your equals, free from tyranny?” (lines 826-830). Later on in the poem, she also describes Jesus as in glorious poverty and notes his crown of thorns rather than an expensive diadem (254). In Lanyer's eyes, Christianity can eliminate both gender systems and class hierarchies. Although Lanyer stayed within the framework of religious female humility and virtue, her restructuring of Jesus' gender and her assertion of authority as an author and interpreter of the Bible was certainly a subtle re-working of gender expectations within the Jacobean culture (whether she intended it or not). As a disenfranchised female within a patriarchal society, it would make sense for Lanyer to turn to religion and the Bible as a means of establishing her own authority. Her impulse to unite women by speaking for all females speaks to Cixous's and Lacan's contemporary ideas about the forms of writing that disturb the notion of individual subjectivity as unified and stable — in a way asserting that we are all Other. Lanyer used writing to explore these notions of self centuries before Cixous or Lacan ever could.

However, there were other Renaissance women who used more than just writing as a means to explore gender performance and notions of selfhood. In this next section, I will explore the ways in which speeches and rhetoric, particularly of Queen Elizabeth, can contribute to a Renaissance woman's queer gender-fashioning.

Speaking Gender in Renaissance England

In early modern England, Queen Elizabeth practiced various modes of self-fashioning in order to assert her own authority and challenge those who were eager to re-establish a patriarchal status quo that did not accept a female monarch. Queen Elizabeth created a rhetoric in which she identified as neither fully female, nor fully male. This performance could be seen as "feminist" — at least according to Butler's definition of feminism: "Representation will be shown to make sense for feminism only when the subject of 'women' is nowhere presumed." (Butler, p. 9). Queen Elizabeth, in this sense, refuted the idea of "women" or "men," because she identified as both female, and a King. Her performances can be viewed as subversive because they were repetitive, *active* performances of gender. Butler elaborates: "If gender is not tied to sex, either causally or expressively, then gender is a kind of action that can potentially proliferate beyond the binary limits imposed by the apparent binary of sex" (143). When gender no longer becomes a noun, but rather an action, it becomes both *performative* and open to *interpretation.*

Elizabeth I performed speeches and wrote letters that created images of both a motherly virgin and a domineering king. She made many of the expected misogynist moves, so to speak, in her writing and speeches: denigrating her sex and making it clear she relies on the feedback and guidance of the men who surround her. For example in her Latin Oration at Cambridge (1564), Queen Elizabeth cites the

importance of “feminine modesty” and degrades herself as an outsider to this “gathering of most learned men” (Marcus et al. 87). By highlighting her “feminine” gender, she is not speaking only of her intellectual inferiority, but also her inevitable female inferiority. Similarly, in Queen Elizabeth's Latin Oration at Oxford (1566) she highlights her role as a queen and remarks that she is “uncultivated” in her letters and that “I who know myself best easily recognize that I am worthy of no praise at all” (Marcus et al. 91). Furthermore, the records we have of Queen Elizabeth's many drafts of speeches and letters show that her various male advisors contributed to the editing and/or censoring of parts of her work (Marcus et al. xii-xiii). In this way, she most certainly contributed to the patriarchal discourse of the time. Similarly, her dual-bodied rhetoric (in some respects) helped reify patriarchal misconceptions of the gender binary because her rhetoric claimed the body of both a male and female, thus emphasizing the importance of the difference between men and women.

Queen Elizabeth's dual-bodied rhetoric can be analyzed from a contemporary theoretical standpoint, as well as from a New Historicist standpoint. The dual-bodied rhetoric had centuries of monarchical precedent behind it (Grund 16). It was traditionally used by kings to demonstrate that they are both the embodiment of a monarch and an embodiment of God, and Elizabeth I adopted this as well: “Tudor apologists emphasized that Elizabeth ruled not only according to nature but also according to the grace of God... According to orthodox politico-religious dogma, the monarch was una persona, duae naturae; anointed by God, the Christian prince

parallels as a gemina persona, the two-natured Christ" (Grund 16). Queen Elizabeth, of course added a twist to her interpretation of the dual bodied rhetoric — she incorporated an aspect of gender into her dual bodied rhetoric. I argue that both the performances she creates within her rhetoric, and her unique interpretation of the dual bodied rhetoric, can be defined as "queer." As such, I will analyze the language she uses in her rhetoric, as well as the ways in which she reinterprets the traditional dual bodied rhetoric of the monarchy.

Queen Elizabeth eloquently moved from one gender mode to another, seemingly in an attempt to pander to her kingdom and stifle any potential uprising of patriarchal masculine anxiety — but these rhetorical moves likely contributed to an anxious masculinity as well (Breitenberg 145-146). In the queen's first speech before Parliament, she explained that her choice to remain an unmarried virgin was for the good of the kingdom — she had not yet found a desirable suitor (Marcus et al., 57). But to ensure that no men fear her to be unchaste in nature (an undesired quality in women), she promised that "In the end this shall be for me sufficient: that a marble stone shall declare that a queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin" (58). Various speeches to Parliament thereafter follow this rhetoric of a chaste virgin queen choosing what is best for her kingdom. In Queen Elizabeth's answer to the Commons' petition that she marry (1563), she declared that her unconventional choice to be unmarried was God's will (70). In this speech, she also identifies as a woman and admits "fear" and "bashfulness" — "a thing appropriate to [her] sex" (70). Conversely,

she describes her position as within a princely seat and kingly throne — a position which “boldeneth [her] to say somewhat in this matter” (70). While identifying with stereotypical feminine traits, she also subverts those traits with her kingly boldness. She continues building this dual-gendered, and thus queer, rhetoric by ensuring her motherly ability to provide “safety” and “care” to her kingdom: “Shall you never have any a more mother than I mean to be unto you all” (71-72). This dual-gendered performance of both mother and King presents itself in various other speeches to parliament, including her 1567 speech dissolving Parliament. While Queen Elizabeth's dual-bodied rhetoric certainly supported the patriarchal construct of the dichotomy of difference, her argument that she is *both* male and female served to contradict the status quo of the time. By claiming both a male and female gender, she essentially creates her *own* gender that posses both masculine and feminine qualities. Butler explores further possibilities of gender performance, stating that there are not simply two genders to perform, but rather that there are a variety of both queer and normative genders to be performed *bodily*:

> The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it showed that what we take to be an 'internal' feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts.
> (Butler, xv)

Queen Elizabeth's repetitive, rhetorical acts of a queer gender instilled a sense of something other than merely a gender *binary* — her performances questioned the

notion that an individual is either male or female, but never both. It is because of Queen Elizabeth's unique position as a female monarch, capable of instilling a dual-bodied rhetoric, that she is able to construct a queer gender that simultaneously reaffirms and challenges the concept of a gender binary.

One of Queen Elizabeth's most well-known speeches, during the battle of the Spanish Armada at Tilbury, is rife with the Queen's gender performance: “I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of virtue in your field. I know that already for your forwardness you have deserved rewards and crowns, and I assure you in the word of a prince you shall not fail of them ... we shall shortly have a famous victory over these enemies of my God and of my kingdom” (Marcus, et. al. 326). Elizabeth refers to herself as having traditionally male occupations: general, judge, and prince. In addition, within a culture where a woman was an object to be desired and owned, Queen Elizabeth boldly proclaims ownership of *her* kingdom. The idea that a woman could *own* something, let alone an *entire kingdom* was virtually unheard of in such a kingdom: women were meant to be owned. Whether she consciously chose to thwart patriarchy by claiming ownership of her kingdom is impossible to determine. Nevertheless, her dual-gendered rhetoric promoted the (albeit temporary) acceptance of a woman as king and owner of the British realm. The concept of “woman as king” was contradictory to the formulaic gender binary within her kingdom. However, as I will explain in this section, Queen Elizabeth's simultaneous adherence to conceptual gender hierarchies, and subversion of the gender binary allows her to maintain the

stability of her tenuous position as a *female* ruler of England.

Perhaps a more notable example of Queen Elizabeth's gender performance and self-fashioning is the ever-famous quotation from that same speech: “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a king of England too” (Marcus et al., 326). Queen Elizabeth's intentions are clear within this quotation — she uses powerful rhetoric to create a complex male/female identity in an attempt to win over her patriarchal kingdom. She conventionally attributes weakness and feebleness to the materiality of being an embodied woman, but implies strength and bravery to be internal attributes of a male king. It is likely not a coincidence that Queen Elizabeth calls her body “female,” but specifically identifies her internal organs as “male.”

The Renaissance scientific understanding of anatomy was very different from our own. The other “not he” sex (i.e. women) are imperfect or incomplete men with inferior organs: their testes never properly fell out of their abdomen (Orgel, 20). This lack of scientific knowledge led to a complicated understanding of gender; a male/female dichotomy was created in which females were considered the “lacking” sex. As Barbara Maria Stafford explains further in her *Body Criticism,* even women’s exterior physiology was historically viewed as inferior to men: “Women, even during the Age of Reason, were still identified with the Virgilian tag, ‘various and changeable,’ as inconstant as the wind, as malleable as wax, as dancing as water” (21). Certainly, this sentiment further complicates the legitimacy of Queen Elizabeth’s own

self-fashioning — in the eyes of her kingdom, she was female in body, and thus more malleable and unpredictable. To identify as a King (internally) created a more stable, and perhaps less frightening, public perception of the Queen. The incorrect concept of female anatomy as "inferior" only further validated misogyny within that culture. According to feminist theorist Luce Irigaray, contemporary western society and discourse *still* maintains this inaccurate understanding of sex and gender: "the culture of the West is mono-sexual; the status of women is that of 'lesser men,' inferior or defective men" (Sarup, 117). In my opinion, Queen Elizabeth's word choices reflect a deliberate effort to develop a queer performance in which her internal organs are *not* inferior, thus further validating her legitimacy as a powerful monarch.

This dual-gendered rhetoric allows her to maintain the stereotypical attributes of her womanhood, yet still provide credibility to her status as a King, thus promoting the fidelity of her knights and kingdom. On the one hand, by using both "feminine" and "masculine" grammar, Queen Elizabeth merely reinforces the concept of a gender binary. On the other hand, challenging the notion that only a man can have "masculine" characteristics helps to dismantle gendered institutions of thought within the Renaissance. Queen Elizabeth is not a "feminist" figure in the sense that she helps her audience to understand "womanhood," however, she is a queer (and ultimately feminist) figure in the sense that her performances break down gender binaries. These performances, however, were specifically unique to Queen Elizabeth's own situation. The dual-bodied monarchical framework and Queen Elizabeth's unique position of

power allowed her to create a gender performance that no one else could emulate. There were various other historical and authorial female figures, though, whose own unique performances also challenged the category of "woman." As Butler explains: "Feminist critique ought to understand how the category of "women," the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought" (Butler 5). A stringently limited sense of "feminism" does not help to understand and breakdown the structures of a patriarchal authority — it merely identifies the inevitable results of such a patriarchy. Reading Queen Elizabeth's rhetorical performances, and other Renaissance female texts, as "queer," helps the reader to analyze that work (and feminism itself) in a new way.

Wearing Gender in Renaissance England

Although sex and gender seemed highly visible in the public spaces of Jacobean and Elizabethan England, not all groups celebrated this highly public display. Many members of Queen Elizabeth's and King James' kingdoms were disturbed by vivid displays of sexuality and non-traditional representations of gender — particularly Puritan anti-theatricalists. These Puritan polemicists — Phillip Stubbes and John Rainolds being some of the most outspoken pamphleteers — often appeared scared of the transformative potential of clothing. In Phillip Stubbes's most well-known piece, "The Anatomie of Abuses," he argues that women who dress like men wish to change their sex and, if they could, they would *become* men:

> Though this be a kinde of attire appropriate onely to man, yet they blush not to wear it, and if they could as well chaunge their sex, and put on the kinde of man, as they can weare apparel assigned onely to man, I think they would as verely become men indeed, as now they degenerat from godly, sober women in wearing this wanton lewd kinde of attire, proper onely to man. (73-74)

According to Stubbes, there is a kind of clothing that is only appropriate for men, and a kind that is only appropriate for women; there are godly, ordained rules of apparel that humans must follow. Stubbes views this "incorrect" attire as not only "lewd" and "wanton," but also dangerous because of its transformative nature; without Sumptuary laws and Puritan polemicists, any individual could use clothing as a means to dress above his or her place in the gender/class hierarchy. These misogynists used their writings in an attempt to (re)write gender, according to their opinions on how gender should be perceived in Elizabethan England. Laura Levine eloquently explains the line of logic that most anti-theatricalists followed:

> The model of self implicitly held by anti-theatricalists is profoundly contradictory, for, according to its logic, the self is both inherently monstrous and inherently nothing at all...In this way, the fantasy of effeminization which came to dominate anti-theatrical tracts became a repository for a profound contradiction in the way a certain segment of the English Renaissance saw the self. (12)

Other polemical literature that defamed cross-dressing found danger too in the act of *women* cross-dressing as men, for the same reason Levine identifies: a woman dressed as a man is both monstrous and simultaneously nothing at all. The cross-dressed female confuses male spectators because the gendered material appearance is

confusing: she is no longer female, but at the same time cannot be male. For if she were interpreted as male, she would be an insult and a threat to the cultural standards of masculinity that patriarchy had created; a woman's “masculine” gender performance would reveal her performance to be just as dependent on signifiers as femininity is.

Haec-Vir and *Hic Mulier* also deal specifically with the fear of females cross-dressing as males. The pamphlet first appeared in 1620 and the author's identity is unknown.[10] Just as anti-theatricalists took a materialistic approach to their understanding of cross-dressing, the author of *Hic Mulier* also sensed danger in the transformative power of clothing. In Renaissance England, clothing was used as a means to not only determine gender, but also to determine class and economic standing (Garber 21). Regulations on clothing, called Sumptuary laws, were put into place, and those disobeying such class-based and sexist sartorial rules were liable to prosecution (Garber 35). In the Renaissance, clothes had the power to proclaim to the world who you were and what your standing was. It is feasible, then, that when the author refers to specific colors and styles of clothing that improper women have used and denounces these styles as “base” and “barbarous,” he is indeed fearful of the transformative power of such clothing, and the ways in which audiences may interpret these women's “barbarous” performances.

10 *Hic Mulier* and *Haec-Vir*, introduction

The author of this pamphlet also often refers to cross-dressing as a "disease" — as if the act is some sort of inevitable punishment to the wearer, and it is something that needs to be "cured." His language, which includes phrases like "grossest baseness of all baseness" and "monstrousness in your deformities in apparel," is accusatory and severe — and, not surprisingly, reminiscent of Levine's "woman as uncanny and monstrous" discourse. His fear-instilling rhetoric goes beyond severity into borderline hysteria when he suggests in the end that these cross-dressing women will suffer in hell merely because of an outfit choice:

> Let therefore the powerful Statute of apparell but lift vp his Battle-Ax and crush the offenders in pieces, so as eueryone may bee knowne by the true badge of their blood, or Fortune: and then these Chymera's of deformitie will be sent back to hell, and there burne to Cynders in the flames of their owne malice (C2).

Perhaps in the early modern period, his accusations may not have seemed as severe or hyperbolic to readers, but surely any rhetorical analysis of this passage would suggest that the author intends to encourage his audience to be as fearful as he is.

Additionally, there are echoes of our contemporary "blame the victim" culture in much of the conduct literature and misogynist discourse of the time. As I mention in my introduction, Swetnam's "The Arraignment of Lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant women" champions the fictional Lucretia — because any woman who allows herself to be violated should kill herself, rather than "offer[ing] her body again to her husband, being but one time defiled" (Swetnam 10). Stubbes, too, engages in a similar

rhetoric in his “Anatomie of Abuses,” warning men that “wanton” women will seduce them into committing adultery, and that even godly men have been tricked by this type of “heathen” woman (95). The conduct literature of the time warns that women should only display that which is passive and “feminine”; any performance other than that of a “humble” female would challenge these authors’ preconceived notions of what woman should be.

The fearful rhetoric of *Hic Mulier* is a good indication that the author himself is fearful of cross-dressed women, their swords, and their lascivious and sharp tongues. This author describes “bad” women as being talkative, boisterous, and fearless of making a spectacle of themselves. According to this document, the ideal woman is “modest,” “true,” “ever virtuous” and “chaste.” This author (or at least, the author's “voice”) would likely characterize female rhetoricians and authors — such as Queen Elizabeth, Aemilia Lanyer and Jane Anger — as subversive and dangerous women who loudly displayed their performances in the public arena. One can only assume the virtuousness that the author speaks of is in direct proportion to the degree of the ideal woman’s silence.

Haec-Vir serves as a direct response to these fears of the cross-dressed female and the performatively “not feminine” female. The characters of *Hic-Mulier* and *Haec-Vir* have a debate of sorts, and the Man-Woman defends herself against the effeminate man's accusations about the immorality of cross-dressing women. As New Historicist Mark Breitenberg highlights in his *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern*

England:

> Clearly, the speaker in *Haec Vir* is addressing exactly what lies at the heart of the masculine anxiety of *Hic Mulier*: that women who cross-dress at least symbolically appropriate the traditionally male prerogative of self-representation and self-determination by, quite literally, fashioning themselves. (168)

It is impossible to know whether the author of *Hic Mulier* represented the voice of the majority in Jacobean England, or whether he simply represented a noisy minority. Because the first publisher of these pamphlets chose to publish them as a set, it is highly likely that people in early modern England had multiple perspectives on the issues of cross-dressing and subversive gender performances. In her "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England," Jean Howard asserts that there were indeed a plurality of discourses about gender in the Renaissance (Howard, 422). This plurality of discourses suggests that early modern England was highly aware of the performative potential of gender, and on a certain level, the queer gender performances of women such as Queen Elizabeth could be interpreted as even more subversive than the queer gender performances of today.

Elizabeth used not only written and spoken rhetoric to create this androgynous, or *engendered,* self-representation — she also used clothing. Many artistic representations we have of Queen Elizabeth show her dressed in what we would consider unusual attire: warrior armor, masculine accessories and head gear, and various other pieces of non-dress apparel. This representation of a female warrior, however, was not an unusual Renaissance portrait style. During the Jacobean period,

for example, many female characters of Queen Anne's theatrical maskes dressed as warriors. Regardless of the popularity of this style, this does not impede our ability as modern readers to analyze Queen Elizabeth's own queer, sartorial performances.

Many historians and experts suggest that during her Spanish Armada speech, Elizabeth I rode in on a horse, dressed in the masculine, knightly garb. While there is documentation of Queen Elizabeth dressed in male warrior attire during this speech, there are conflicting accounts suggesting that she was not dressed in armor (Marcus, 325). Leah Marcus explains, however, that there can be little doubt that the speech itself was delivered (325). Nevertheless, the fact that the story of the armor has been propagated throughout history suggests at the very least, an early modern societal awareness of Queen Elizabeth's uniquely dual public projections of gender.

In some sense, it would be impossible for Queen Elizabeth or these other female authors to completely remove themselves from the constraints of patriarchy. However, if a real (or imagined) Elizabethan female was able to distance herself from the conventional female expectations even slightly, she had much more opportunity for self-empowerment. If a woman was able to postpone her marriage to a man, she prolonged her opportunity for fashioning her own identity (Yalom 121). If Elizabeth I were ever to marry, she would no longer be active and autonomous. Hence, her decision to be chaste (a patriarchal standard) yet unmarried (most certainly an untraditional choice for a woman of her time period) shaped her queer, non-heteronormative identity. I would argue that the sheer act of breaking from societal

norms even slightly at a time when patriarchal expectations were rigorous, suggests a reclamation of agency for all of these female authors and cross-dressers. There were some female authors, however, who blatantly subverted the constraints of male patriarchy: the "querulous des femmes" authors who wrote texts in direct response to misogynist, polemical literature. In the next section, I will discuss the ways in which a close-reading of some of these authors' texts contribute new ideas to feminist and queer theory — particularly the concept of "female-gendered voices." These texts perhaps most closely resemble our modern concept of feminist literature.

Renaissance Female Texts: Direct, Subversive Responses to Misogyny

The false concepts of "monstrous" (Levine, 12) and "undesignatable" (Butler, 14) characteristics of the female sex easily led to masculine anxiety, especially where women are involved; this anxiety may ultimately lead to sexism or misogyny. In response to such inevitable misogyny in the Renaissance, there were pamphlets circulating in early modern England that served as direct responses to various anti-cross-dressing and anti-female works. Some of these pamphlets were most definitely written by women; others were *presumably* written by women, but at the very least were clearly intended to be *performances* of a female-gendered voice. These pamphlets were categorized as part of the "querelle des femmes" texts of the early modern period, many of which were direct responses to anxious Puritan men such as John Rainolds and Phillip Stubbes. These women suggested that men were

preposterous for being so afraid of gender ambiguity and the female sex. The "querelle des femmes" texts served as gender-fashioning through written rhetoric, rather than clothing. Just as Queen Elizabeth turned to gender performance to recreate her identity, these women turned to narrative gender performance to create their public identities and to challenge preconceived notions of what is "female" and what is "male."

Most of the discourse of the time *about* women was dripping with anxiety. Breitenberg illuminates the reader on the standard discourse concerning the early modern woman:

> Virtually all of the conduct books, marriage guides and treatises about chastity, jealousy, and the dangers of desire written in this period share an interest in fashioning an identity for women that, in turn, supports a construction of masculine identity. The strategy of this discourse is to inscribe a language of gender difference as if it were natural. (168)

In essence, these male authors were using their authorship in an attempt to fashion the gender and sexual identity of all woman, rather than allowing women to speak for themselves— which ultimately is a patriarchal act. Patriarchy emerges as an authoritarian apparatus when it has the power to dictate the status quo (through rhetoric and modes of discourse and behavior). If a man has the authority to define "woman," such an action serves as a disciplinary norming of the status quo, and thus perpetuates stereotypes of what is "woman." The "querelles des femmes" texts, however, were pieces of early modern female discourse that were not written *about* women, but instead were truly written *for* women. I can only assume that the anxious

discourse of the early modern patriarchy was not merely about the “immorality” of cross-dressing and gender-fashioning, but also had to do with the anxiety provoked in masculine authors by subversive self-fashioning and queer gender performances of authors such as Queen Elizabeth and Aemilia Lanyer. Breitenberg and many of the “querelles des femmes” writers would agree with this assumption; queer and “not feminine” performances create anxiety because these performances actively challenge preconceived notions of power structures. Butler elaborates in *Gender Trouble*:

> Women can never “be,” according to this ontology of substances, precisely because they are the relation of difference, the excluded, by which the domain marks itself off. Women are also a "difference" that cannot be understood as the simple negation or "Other" of the always-already-masculine subject... they are neither a subject nor its Other, but a difference from the economy of binary opposition, itself a ruse for a monologic elaboration of the masculine. (25)

If women can no longer be excluded or marginalized as a mere “difference,” then patriarchy cannot thrive as an apparatus of power.

Jane Anger was one of the few “querelles des femmes” authors that historians agree is most likely female, and her true name is unknown.[11] Historians fortunately still have Anger's *Protection for Women* (1589) to include as part of the slowly developing canon of early modern English female works. Anger argues against the specific claims in the now-missing *Boke his Surfeyt in Love,* but much of her response can be applied to the majority of the sexist, anti-transvestic literature of the time: “I

[11] *The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works,* ix

would that ancient writers would as well have busied their heads about deciphering the deceits of their own sex as they have about setting down *our* follies."[12] Part of Anger's end goal was to establish that men and women are not that different in their sins (and if anything, men's "ills" are worse than women's). If only God is truly good, then gender hierarchies of legitimacy are false and we are all sinners in the eyes of God:

> I must yeeld that in that respect we are il, & affirm that men are no better, seeing we are so necessarie unto them. It is most certain, that if we be il, they are worse: for Malum malo additum efficit malum peius: & they that use il worse then it shold be, are worse then the il. And therefore if they wil correct Magnificat, they must first learn the signification therof (Anger C1v).

Anger's insistence that men are no better than women — and that, if anything, the exact opposite is true — challenges the language of difference inherent to any successful patriarchal structure. Breitenberg elaborates on Anger's statement: "As Anger suggests, the misogynistic depictions of women in the "querelles des femmes" debate are projections of what men fear most about themselves — the purpose being to construct gender and sex differences in order to maintain the basis of masculine superiority." (Breitenberg, 31). Just as Butler highlights the construction of difference inherent to any patriarchal system, Anger and Breitenberg illuminate the importance of a discourse of difference. Anger argues that in fact, because women and men are essentially all sinners in the eyes of God, they should conduct themselves in the same

[12] Jane Anger, *Protection for Women* from *The Early Modern Englishwoman,* C1r*,* my emphasis.

manner. For example, men have the responsibility to be modest and honest, just as women do:

> Every honest man ought to shun that which detracteth both health and safety from his owne person, and strive to bridle his slanderous tongue. Then must he be modest, & shew his modestie by his vertuous and civil behaviours: and not display his beastlines through his wicked and filthy wordes. For lying lips and deceitful tongues are abhominable before God... What Nature hath made, Art cannot marre (Anger B4v).

Anger highlights the hypocrisy and the blasphemy within these misogynist texts: an accusation of woman as imperfect creations is a challenge to God's authority. Any man's attack on women, therefore, is a lascivious and abominable act in the eyes of God. Whether or not Anger truly believed this is impossible to determine; however, Anger most certainly created a rhetorically savvy performance of her authority as an author (whether or not she is female becomes irrelevant if her argument and identity as a “queer” author is sound). There were, of course, “querelles des femmes” writers who historians have definitively identified as female (notably, Rachel Speght). Speght’s writings then, contain another layer of complexity in that her work is both definitively written by a woman, and contains a female-gendered voice.

Rachel Speght also engaged in Anger’s rhetorical technique of using religious literature as an appeal to credibility. Speght responds to Joseph Swetnam's misogynist pamphlet *The Araignment of Lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant woman* (1615) with a pamphlet of her own — *A Mouzell for Melastomus: Or an Apologeticall Answere to that Irreligious and Illiterate pamphlet made by Io. Sw. and by him Intituled*, The

Arraignment of Women (1617). Speght does not hesitate to challenge Swetnam's authority as a male author by highlighting his ignorance and hypocrisy (starting with the very title of her text). Speght proceeds to cite the Bible to support her argument by citing Proverb 26.5: "*A[n]swer a foole according to his foolishness, lest he be wise in his owne conceit."* Speght does not hesitate to identify his false construction of "man" versus "woman" as foolish:

> *Speake not euill one of another:* and then had you not seemed so like the Serpent *Porphirus,* as now you doo, which, though full of deadly poyson, yet being toothlesse, hurteth none so much as himselfe. For you hauing gone beyond the limits not of *Humanitie* alone, but of Christianitie, haue done greater harme vnto your owne soule, then vnto women, as may plainely appeare. First, in dishonoring of God by palpable blasphemy ... Secondly, it appeares by your disparaging of, and opprobrious speeches against that excellent worke of Gods hands, which in his great loue he perfected for the comfort of man (Speght, 2).

Speght too, interprets the biblical description of the creation of Eve to be a moment in which a more perfect being is made. Speght challenges Swetnam's misogyny as being "unchristian" and "inhuman." The unique biblical interpretations of these women can be interpreted as "queer" in that they challenge the status quo of masculine superiority. These queer and subversive texts can most certainly be identified as feminist — even in a modern sense.

The ideas of theorists like Judith Butler and Hélène Cixous support the idea that female authors such as Queen Elizabeth, Rachel Speght, and Aemilia Lanyer challenged patriarchal and heteronormative standards — simply by creating and

speaking non-traditional, queer genders (whether these genders are personal identities, or textual identities). While these women may not have been intentionally challenging patriarchy, a contemporary analysis suggests that these texts can expand our thinking today about gender and power structures. A contemporary theoretical analysis of these texts and performances, rather than a purely historical analysis, also opens up these texts to a more modern, feminist audience. Additionally, using a theoretical framework to explore these texts also helps to validate the legitimacy of Feminism's multiple interpretive frameworks; my analysis shows that both the essentialist concept of the "Écriture féminine" and the performative element of queer theory can assist in the feminist interpretation of Renaissance texts. Furthermore, we can expand on the contemporary concept of "queerness" by identifying the ways in which these early modern women might be categorized as queer. We can use this analysis to expand on the idea of what gender is. As Butler suggests: "Gender [can] be a kind of cultural/corporeal action that requires a new vocabulary that institutes and proliferates present participles of various kinds, resignifiable and expansive categories that resist both the binary and substantializing grammatical restrictions on gender" (143). While some feminists may argue that feminism can only be defined as that which explores the "feminine," a close reading of these female author's "texts" allows us to envision feminism in a new way.

Phallocentric *Faerie Queene*: Reading Britomart as a Feminist, Queer Character

"Faire Lady she him seemd, like Lady drest,/But fairest knight aliue, when armed was her brest" (The Faerie Queene, III.2.4.8-9*)*

Using modern theory as an analytical mode for historical literature can allow us to see an old text in a new way; it can, likewise, allow us to explore that same modern theory in a new light, and build on our understanding of knowledge discourses. In his *Anxious Masculinity* (1996)*,* Mark Breitenberg makes a case for psychoanalytical readings of historical literary periods: "One cannot discount psychoanalytical readings merely on the basis that the period under study precedes the analytical model, or because the affective bonds analyzed by psychoanalysis may not have been as prominent as they have become since" (Breitenberg15). Breitenberg argues that modern psychoanalytical readings of Renaissance texts "encourages a much more varied account of masculine subjectivity" (15). In my opinion, any approach to literary analysis (even a purely historical one) will be inherently flawed in some manner, but we should still apply such analysis in order to understand a concept (e.g. masculine or feminine subjectivity) in new ways or to open up any text to a broader audience. The point of literary analysis is not to have a "correct" or "true" evaluation of *facts* but rather to explore the *Truths* of a text through motivated argument and critical thinking. A theoretical lens can allow a reader to engage in this exploration and build upon the corpus of theoretical knowledge. The goal of my

project is to use contemporary theories as a means of exploring Spenser's *Faerie Queene* from the perspective of a contemporary, feminist audience.

Most feminists today would consider Britomart, a knight in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), to be a feminist, or at the very least a proto-feminist, character. Britomart takes on quite an assertive role in the story: she bravely dons male warrior attire and engages in a quest to rescue her future husband from his captors. Historically, the binary system inherent to patriarchy often implies that the female gender is a "flawed" form of the male gender. As in any patriarchal society, the members of such society are left with the option of being male, or distinctly "not male." As Judith Butler explains in *Gender Trouble* (1990)*:* "Women are the 'sex' which is not 'one.' Within a language pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language, women constitute the *unrepresentable*" (Butler 14). According to gender performance theory, by attempting to represent her own personal gender through sartorial and rhetorical modes of performance, Britomart's "queer" performance can be seen as, perhaps unintentionally, challenging patriarchy's cultural and linguistic misconceived notion of the *unrepresentable* woman. The fact that the author of this poem is male admittedly complicates the queer and feminist nature of Britomart's character. However, although Spenser probably did not intend for her to be a proto-feminist character, it is nonetheless helpful to the theoretical discourse to read her in this way because it allows for a broader, more exciting interpretation of the text. In other words, a (somewhat unexpected) feminist reading of the text opens up the

perhaps otherwise inaccessible text to a more modern audience.

My project is motivated not only by a desire to open up a character to new, more modern interpretations, but also to open up the poem for more modern, feminist readers, specifically. Such modern readers may find that these interpretations make more appealing what could otherwise be a formidable work of Renaissance allegory and allusion. Modern concepts of analysis — including feminism, gender theory, and psychoanalysis — help today's readers to analyze the patriarchal culture in which Spenser's poem was written, as well as the patriarchal, fictional world in which Britomart performs her identity. Specifically, these theories assist the reader in interpreting the ways in which Britomart moves from *unrepresentable* woman to performatively queer, and thus feminist, character. Applying psychoanalysis, feminism and performance theory as alternative, modern analytical lenses (as opposed to solely analyzing Britomart from a historical perspective) adds to the complexity of various characters within the poem. As I will explain in the following sections, psychoanalysis allows us to see the various ways that male characters negatively react to Britomart once they learn she is female; feminist theory illuminates the means by which female characters such as Britomart can be analyzed as unconventionally feminist; and gender performance theory allows the reader to understand Britomart as more than merely allegory — she becomes a queer, and ultimately feminist, character. In my opinion, New Historicist readings of Spenser may overlook, or explain away, some of the more interesting aspects of the text.

Book III's Castle Joyous episode, for example, easily lends itself to a feminist and psychoanalytical reading. Toward the beginning of Britomart's story, she approaches the Castle Joyous to find a single knight, Redcrosse, defending himself against a group of six guards. As I will mention later in this article, Britomart uses her battle prowess and magical phallus—her enchanted sword—to defeat these guards, thus allowing Britomart and Redcrosse entrance into the castle. Later that night, while Britomart is sleeping in this castle, its mistress Malecasta sneaks into Britomart's bed to obtain what she (according to psychoanalysis), as a woman, *lacks*: a phallus.[13] Britomart is struck with surprise: "She lightly lept out of her filed bed/And to her weapon ran, in minde to gride [pierce]/ The loathed leachour..." (III.1.62.2-4). To regain the power in the situation, Britomart runs to her sword — which on a literal level is an instinctual response to defend oneself. However, a close reading reveals that the passage includes interesting imagery of "penetration" and phallocentric behavior, and perhaps Britomart's reliance on her sword is more than just an instinct for defense. The narrator explains that Britomart runs to her sword with the intention of piercing, or penetrating, a woman. Malecasta discovers Britomart's true sex and shouts for her guards:

> Where when confusedly they came, they fownd
> Their lady lying on the senceless grownd

[13] For this article, the particular brand of psychoanalysis that I will be working from is that of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. In Freud's realm of psychoanalysis, a woman is "lacking" an actual penis, and therefore *should* always be perceived in terms of absence. Conversely, Lacan argues that psychoanalysis can deconstruct symbolic manifestations of the penis (i.e. phallus) and therefore women *are inevitably* analyzed in terms of absence.

> On the other, they saw the warlike Mayd
> All on her snow-white smocke, with locks unbownd
> threatening the point of her avenging blade
> That with so troublous terrour they were all dismayde
> (III.1.63.4-9).

In the previous battle scene with the guards—when Britomart's sex is not revealed—she is described as "mighty" and the male guards are quick to cede their swords to such a skilled knight. In contrast, when Britomart's true sex is discovered, she is described as “unbound,” “avenging” and a “troublous terrour”—terms generally associated with extreme fear, rather than admiration. The guards are “dismayed” that a woman with “unbound,” flowing locks of hair is holding a “pointed” sword. A woman who should be performing a gender of *absence* is performing a confusing knightly gender, and is penetrating opponents with a magic, phallic weapon. In other words, they are described as honored to be in the presence of a mighty warrior when they think she is male, and conversely are described as frightened by her when they realize she's a woman. From a psychoanalytical perspective, these guards are not “good” fetishists — they do not defer to Britomart's magical sword as a safe penis replacement, and instead, they are terrified of her.

Malecasta's knight, Gardante, successfully defeats Britomart with an arrow, even though he was unable to defeat Britomart when she was dressed as a man and attempting to gain entrance to the castle (III. 1. 65). While it is only logical that any person (male or female) would be more vulnerable to attack without armor on, it is surely not a coincidence that for the first time in the poem, the male guards are

described as being terrified of Britomart, and she is wounded by a male knight only when she is no longer protected by her male, knightly garb. The narrator's descriptions imply that the characters react to Britomart differently when they realize she's a woman: she is no longer a "knight," but rather "a warlike maid"; she is no longer "mighty," but rather a "troublous terrour," and unpredictably threatening. If Britomart can no longer perform a magical, masculine gender, she can no longer be a powerful "man": a knight who previously disarmed a large band of guards (including Gardante) in one fell swoop, is now taken down by a single shot from Gardante's bow and arrow. We can use psychoanalysis, then, to try to understand the male characters' reactions and the degree to which Britomart is living in a fictional world filled with anxious masculinity.

A purely historical analysis, conversely, might approach the aforementioned scene quite differently, and tell us that Britomart is first and foremost an allegorical figure for chastity, and her purpose as such is to uphold the standards of Elizabethan patriarchy. [14] However, if we take a feminist and psychoanalytical perspective while analyzing the text, as above, Britomart becomes a multi-faceted subject that illuminates new ways of thinking about feminism, gender performance, and

[14] In his "Britomart: The Embodiment of True Love" (1934), Charles Lemmi was one of the first more modern literary critics who became interested in Spenser's introductory claim that Britomart serves as an allegory of chastity. Many decades later, in 2005, Joseph Parry's "Petrarch's Mourning, Spenser's Scudamore, and Britomart's Gift of Death" analyzes the historical use of Petrarchan poetic allegory in *The Faerie Queene*. However, a more contemporary audience may not be interested in 14th century Italian love poems and allegory — and many contemporary audiences (and probably in some instances, Literature students studying contemporary fiction) are not aware of who Petrarch is. Additionally, in secular societies, chastity is no longer a highly valued virtue that men can "own," thus making Lemmi's argument anachronistic, or at the very least, limiting, for a contemporary audience.

psychoanalytical theory. Furthermore, although Britomart is almost certainly intended to be heterosexual, such theoretical approaches to Spenser's *Faerie Queene* allows the reader to see “queer” as more than merely a sexuality; Britomart reifies the ways in which “queer performance” can be viewed as any performance that challenges the patriarchal, heteronormative status quo —similar to Butler's theoretical explorations of queer gender performances. An analysis of Britomart's queer, non-heteronormative performance thus illuminates the ways in which tenants of feminism and psychoanalysis can be redefined, or re-envisioned.

In opposition to Butler's ideas about subversive, queer gender performances, though, some waves of feminism insist that *subversive acts* —such as Britomart's sartorial challenges to the masculinist, gender binary — have nothing to do with feminist acts. The beginnings of feminism — gynocriticism — merely called for a women's standpoint epistemology and a celebration of women writers, while the french feminists eventually adopted the "Écriture féminine," or the “language of women” (as distinct from masculine language) (Clough 62). Eventually, however, these “Western” feminisms began to receive criticism for being exclusionary. As Clough explains: “This feminist project is itself part of Western rationalism and its privileging of white, propertied, heterosexual masculinity. It is for this reason that this project, as it comes to its ends, is referred to as white, middle-class feminism” (Clough 82). I would add to Clough's statement that these feminisms are also hetero-centric — or at the very least, uninterested in analyzing the repressive systems of

heteronormativity. It was later (i.e. in the 1970's and 80's) that theorists such as Cixous and Butler began to analyze the ways in which the institutionalization of sexualities and genders reinforce patriarchal stereotypes. It is from this vein of feminist analysis of the history of gender that my project stems from. Using this vein of analysis, Britomart's performances of masculinity and violence — especially during battle scenes where she forces men to give up their "phalluses" — complicate the simplified gender binary of masculinist discourse.

For the narrator who knows of Britomart's true identity, Britomart's gender performance, which is not fully "feminine" nor fully "masculine," challenges patriarchal concepts of a male/female dichotomous hierarchy. However, her status as a "feminist" character is problematized when one considers the fact that Britomart will eventually abandon her male attire and prepare for a life of motherhood — once she rescues her soon-to-be husband. Britomart's queer Elizabethan gender performance thus allows us to view gender and feminist theory in a new fashion; there is not simply one mode of feminism in which feminists can never use the oppressive tools of patriarchy for subversive acts. Instead, any mode of performance that challenges hetero-normative expectations can be read as queer *and* feminist; According to Butler, any *queer* performative act has the potential of being simultaneously a *feminist* act. In short, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* allows the reader to see the ways in which (specifically, Butler's) gender performance theory is tied to theories of various feminisms. Britomart's unconventional gender performance throughout the poem

demonstrably aligns with the ideas of feminist Judith Butler and psychoanalytical theorist Jacques Lacan — and much of my argument will deal with this alignment of theories.

In the following sections, I will explore the ways in which psychoanalysis, gender performance theory, and feminism can all intersect to illuminate unique and complex analyses of characters in *The Faerie Queene*. I will use psychoanalysis (fetish theory, specifically) as a way of unveiling the misogynist universe in which Britomart resides. The fact that Britomart must have a symbolic phallus — and a magical phallus, no less — to win her battles illuminates the patriarchal nature of Britomart's world. Once the fallacy of phallocentrism has been revealed in Spenser's Faery world, it then allows me to use feminisms and gender performance theory in the second section to analyze Britomart as more than merely an allegory for chastity. I will demonstrate the ways in which, although this poem was written in the late 1500's, a modern analysis of the text opens it up to a modern, feminist audience, and thus allows us to investigate the degree to which Britomart is a feminist character. Moreover, Britomart's phallic performance encourages a modern audience to envision queer as more than merely a sexual identity, but also as a performative *action*.

Using Psychoanalysis to Analyze Patriarchy in *The Faerie Queene,* Book III

Spenser's poem acknowledges the potential for a woman to be superior — *The Faerie Queene* is dedicated to Queen Elizabeth after all, and the powerful character of

Britomart is likely modeled after Queen Elizabeth's mighty prowess. However, just as Queen Elizabeth had to turn to masculinist modes of gender performance to prove her power, Britomart too only has agency and power because she is performing the very type of masculine gender that patriarchy dictates is superior.[15] Likewise, Britomart must not only perform a masculine gender to defeat her foes, but she must also "perform" magic within her weapons and armor: "For death sate on the point of that enchaunted speare" (III.1.9.9) Thus, the reader assumes that were it not for her performance of masculinity and magic, Britomart would not win. In this way, although Spenser praises the might of women such as Queen Elizabeth and Britomart, his choice to make Britomart powerful only through her appropriation of a magical phallus reveals something about the narrator's own prejudices. Furthermore, the response of the poem's male characters to Britomart's phallic sword reveals something about these characters' masculine anxieties and—assuming that *The Faerie Queene* was widely accepted, popular poetry—the anxieties inherent to Spenser's patriarchal culture. In this section, I will analyze the phallic quality of Britomart's sword, and the ways in which psychoanalysis, and fetish theory specifically, can help the reader to understand *why* Britomart chooses to perform a phallic gender. This, in turn, lifts the veil, so to speak, on the false, patriarchal discourse within the *Faerie Queene.*

In his *Feminine Sexuality* (1985), Lacan argues that a linguistic and symbolic

[15] As I mention in my previous article, Queen Elizabeth practiced various modes of self-fashioning in order to assert her own authority, and challenge those who were eager to re-establish a patriarchal status quo that did not accept a female monarch. Similar to Britomart, Queen Elizabeth created a rhetoric in which she identified as neither fully female, nor fully male.

approach to fetish theory is useful in part because it serves as a reflection on the fallacy of male supremacy and privilege within that particular patriarchal society: “It is also the precondition in analysis for the subject's happiness: and to disguise this gap by relying on the virtue of the 'genital' to resolve it through the maturation of tenderness (that is by a recourse to the Other solely as reality), however piously intended, is none the less a fraud” (Lacan, 81). According to Lacan, utilizing actual genitalia as a means to psychoanalyze the discourse of power is inaccurate and problematic—what is more accurate, however, is the gauging of structures of power through analyzing *symbolic* ownership of “genitalia” (81). For Lacan, genitalia has moved into the realm of signifier and signified: with this in mind, Britomart's symbolic power can be read through language and through actions. Within the realm of the symbolic then, Britomart's phallus (perhaps inaccurately) becomes the signifier of power, and we can use such signification as a means of pinpointing power structures between the sexes:

> But simply by keeping to the function of the phallus, we can pinpoint the structures which will govern the relations between the sexes. Let us say that these relations will revolve around a being and a having which, because they refer to a signifier, the phallus, have the contradictory effect of on the one hand lending reality to the subject in that signifier, and on the other making unreal the relations to be signified. (Lacan, 84)

Similarly, Breitenberg argues that, within the realm of the symbolic, masculine anxiety itself can serve as a signifier of “cultural tensions and contradictions,” a way to “pinpoint” inherent power structures in that symbolic system (i.e. the symbolic system

of the Renaissance) (3). In other words, psychoanalysis can be utilized to signify a patriarchal anxiety for the loss of “masculinity” (i.e. castration), and furthermore, this anxiety inherent in the characters can also be read as a signifier of larger cultural tensions and contradictions within the symbolic systems of the text and the historical time period in which it was written. For example, fetish theory's investment in the idea of simultaneously acknowledging and disavowing the uncomfortable “other” aligns with the masculine anxiety within the patriarchy of the Elizabethan era toward emasculation. Using Lacan's and Breitenberg's understandings of the phallus, I would argue that Britomart's phallus becomes a signifier of sexism and male anxiety in early modern England. In various scenes of the *Faerie Queene,* male characters respond with fear and anxiety when they realize that the owner of the magical, super-phallus is owned by a woman. Fetish theory indirectly suggests, several centuries after *The Faerie Queene* was written, that the male characters often become confused because a woman who should be “lacking” a phallus has been able to defeat them. Britomart's phallic performance thus challenges their preconceived, patriarchal notions. Using Lacan's fetish theory as a theoretical framework for analysis, Britomart can be interpreted as a “feminist” character in an otherwise patriarchal society.

Ironically enough, though, in the realm of literary theory, psychoanalysis and feminism are often at odds with one another. The inherent phallocentrism of psychoanalysis naturally encourages resistant responses from theorists such as Germaine Greer and Luce Irigaray. However, in Elizabeth Grosz's *Jacques Lacan: A*

Feminist Introduction, she explains the ways in which feminist analysis owes a debt to Lacan's musings on the symbolic:

> As Lacan recognized, the symbolic order is not simply an abstract or external system of signification whose phallic status is *purely* discursive. The symbolic is the field within which our lives and social experiences are located. Unless the symbolic order is conceived as a system where the father and the penis are not the only possible signifiers of social power and linguistic norms (even if they are dominant ones here, today), feminism is no better off with Lacan than without him (Grosz, 145).

In other words, Lacan analyzes the power of phallic signification within the symbolic order of our lives and social experiences. Just as Grosz describes, patriarchal culture creates a symbolic order "where the father and the penis are ... the *only* possible signifiers of social power and linguistic norms" (145, my emphasis). Lacan is not claiming that we *should* analyze subjects and characters from a phallocentric viewpoint, but rather that patriarchy has resigned all analysis of the symbolic to a phallocentric "presence or lack" (i.e. phallus or no phallus) dichotomy. Lacan moved fetish theory away from biological determinism and penises to a symbolic analysis of the phallus as signifier of privilege. Lacan would agree that a society's insistence on imagining the vagina as representative of "absence" reveals the misogynist biases of that culture. Using Lacan's premise, I would argue that if a society places signification of power and privilege unto the symbolic phallus, we can make conclusions about the phallocentric norms within that (historical *and* literary) culture. Fetish theory allows us to avoid our impulses to determine Spenser's authorial intent: rather than trying to

identify Spenser as sexist, we can analyze the sexist *quality* of the literary world that Spenser created. If the symbolic system within *The Faerie Queene* relies on the phallus as a signifier of power and privilege, we can then accurately determine the patriarchal quality of Spenser's Faery World. We must first use fetish theory and psychoanalysis, then, as a means to discern the patriarchal (or non-patriarchal) quality of Britomart's fictional environment, if we wish to qualify Spenser's Britomart as a "feminist" character. In this section of my article, I will keep this element of fetish theory in mind as I analyze the moments of misogyny inherent to the text.

A primary example of applying psychoanalytical theory as a means to deconstruct misogyny can be demonstrated in Canto III of Book III—when the reader discovers that Britomart's sole purpose in her adventure is to rescue her future husband and bear the children that will continue the noble Briton line. She visits Merlin and he prophesies that: "The man whom heavens have ordayned to bee/The spouse of Britomart is Arthegall...Long time ye both in armes shall beare great sway/Till thy wombes burden thee from them do call..." (III. 3. 26-28.1-2, 5-6). Merlin then adorns her with the great Queen Angela's armor, and Britomart begins her quest. From the very beginning of Britomart's quest, then, she is indebted to what Freud and Lacan call "the law of the father" (Freud 126-127); Britomart plays the role of the "dutiful daughter" by willfully leaving her father's possession in order to enthusiastically submit herself to her husband's possession (a husband whom she has never met, but only seen in Merlin's magic mirror). According to Freud, in so doing she has resolved

her oedipal complex by reverting to “normal” castrated passivity (Freud 126-127). Britomart will be a man's possession, and will not posses a penis, nor a phallus. What complicates Britomart's “castrated” female character is the assertive (and occasionally violent) way in which she submits to this life-sentence of “passivity”—often brandishing her own symbolic penis as a means of defeating other men. In order to rescue her future husband, Artegall, Britomart cross-dresses as a knight and this gender performance is what many feminists, and Butler in particular, would consider a subversive act against hetero-normative standards of patriarchy.

Similarly, in Book III Canto II of *The Faerie Queene,* Britomart regales her audience with a (possibly fictional) story about her childhood that demonstrates the *tenuous reality* of gender, and the ways in which psychoanalysis reveals the masculine anxiety inherent in the text. Britomart tells Redcrosse a story about her “boyish” childhood; she claims she has tried to deny her female gender from a young age, and has always performed a more “masculine” gender than that usually expected of a female:

> I have been trained up in warlike stowre
> To tossen speare and shield, and to affrap
> The warlike ryder to his most mishap;
> Sithemce [since then] I lothed had my life to lead,
> As Ladies wont, in pleasures wonton lap
> To finger the fine needle and nyce thread;
> Me lever [rather] were with point of foemans speare be dead
> (III. 2. 6.2-9).

The sexual imagery in this passage is clear: ladies engage in “pleasures” in their “wonton” laps from fingering fine phallic figures, while Britomart prefers to display

the point of much larger "speare(s)." Britomart chooses to abandon wonton womanly pleasures in order to regale people of her own phallus. While Britomart's story may be simply that—a fictional performance in front of other knights—it is still an important passage because it informs the reader of the non-feminine gender identity that she is attempting to create within the text. In other words, Britomart has captivated her audience with her performance of a not stereotypically feminine, but rather, queer gender. She is building the credibility of her phallus (i.e. her authority and power). Furthermore, the phallic symbolism that Britomart is creating in her own story tells the reader what Britomart must possess in order to maintain agency within the social order —manhood. Psychoanalytic theory can help the reader to further understand the impetus behind Britomart's performance of manhood (i.e. her phallic sword). The reader can better understand why Britomart would choose such a gender performance; in a patriarchal world, a woman who wishes to have ultimate authority over men must perform a masculine gender. Britomart's performance appeases misogynists because she feels it necessary to perform a "masculine" gender (rather than feminine gender) in order to assert power over others. Yet at the same time, she subverts misogynist power structures: if a woman can perform "manhood," then men can no longer define themselves by what women *are no*t—thus, potentially creating masculine anxiety.

In the Elizabethan era, cross-dressing in particular created such masculine anxiety, and therefore challenged the normalized patriarchy of the time (Breitenberg, 21). As Breitenberg points out: "If women can wear men's clothing, how can men

know who *they* are?" (21). If the task of misogynist writers of conduct literature is to establish what women *should* be (which is different from what men should be), a performance that challenges these proclamations highlights the falsely constructed dichotomy of gender difference. Even characters gendered male in Spenser's poem seem to create a dichotomy of difference as a means of determining what they are *not.* Butler elaborates on this dichotomy of difference inherent in any patriarchy:

> Women can never "be," according to this ontology of substances, precisely because they are the relation of difference, the excluded, by which the domain marks itself off. Women are also a "difference" that cannot be understood as the simple negation or "Other" of the always-already-masculine subject... they are neither a subject nor its Other, but a difference from the economy of binary opposition, itself a ruse for a monologic elaboration of the masculine. (25)

Feminist and gender theorists such as Simone DeBeauvoir and Butler explain that in any patriarchal culture, any gender that does not reflect the traditional, heterosexual masculine expectations are perceived as "not he" or a *marked* gender (DeBeauvoir, xiii; Butler, 14). Therefore, both the "traditional" female that adheres to patriarchal standards and the subversive, cross-dressed and/or visibly sexual female are simultaneously unimportant and uncanny — characteristics conducive to male anxiety in any patriarchal society. Psychoanalysis tells us more about this masculine anxiety: in the Castle Joyous episode previously discussed, Malecasta's male guards become "dismayed" (or punningly, "dis-maid") precisely because their identity as successful male warriors is challenged when they realize that Britomart, a female warrior, took ownership of their "phalluses"; Gardante is quick to bring the power back in balance

by penetrating Britomart with an arrow. The fallacy of the dichotomy of difference then becomes restored through his act of penetration.

Lacan's approach to fetish theory, specifically, can be used as an especially helpful tool to interpret Britomart's interactions with patriarchy because her phallus is symbolic and written on the page of Spenser's text. It is repeatedly described as a "pointed" and "sharp" weapon that mostly "thrusts" at and penetrates its victims. A close reading of a scene from Book III reveals the especially "penetrative" nature of Britomart's phallus:

> And her swords point directing forward right,
> Assayld the flame, the which eftsoones gaue place,
> And did it selfe diuide with equall space,
> That through she passed; as a thunder bolt
> Perceth the yielding ayre, and doth displace
> (III.11.25.3-7).

Britomart's phallus has the power to penetrate and separate fire and air. It is compared to a somewhat phallic element of nature—a thunder bolt—often representative of masculine power in literature (i.e. Zeus's thunderbolt). Because fictional characters are linguistically created and not biological beings, Freud's approach to understanding power regimes would not appropriately help to analyze the character of Britomart. I argue instead that, in light of Lacan's interpretation of fetish theory, Britomart can be perceived not only as an allegory for chastity, but also as a reflection of the patriarchy within the world of *The Faerie Queene;* this fictional world makes the historically misogynist mistake of categorizing women as "lacking" or "inferior." Therefore, keeping Lacan's theory of the symbolic in mind, the only way that Britomart can

penetrate this fiery ring is by compensating for her "lack" with a symbolic, magical phallus. Thus, Spenser's text can be identified as a patriarchal, fictional world functioning within the order of the symbolic.

Keeping this idea of the symbolic and patriarchal *Faerie Queene* in mind, in the following section, I will explore the ways in which gender theory and feminism can serve as a legitimate approach for analyzing Britomart's performances. Ultimately, gender theory and psychoanalysis tell us that Britomart's symbolic, subversive performances can be categorized as a (somewhat untraditional) mode of feminism.

Using Gender Performance Theory and Feminism to Analyze Spenser's Britomart

Judith Butler was one of the first literary theorists to tackle the concept of "gender performance," and these theories expanded the notion of "feminism" and normative patriarchal practices. The gender binary inherent to patriarchy tells us that there are only two genders, and gender is necessarily determined by biological sex. In her *Gender Trouble,* Butler argues that this binary is a false construction, partially constructed as a means of reifying patriarchal expectations of gender hierarchies. Butler explored the possibilities of gender performance, stating that there are not simply two genders to perform, but rather that there are a variety of queer and normative genders to be performed *bodily.* She explains that gender can be manufactured and performed, and is not necessarily internal:

> The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured

> through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it showed that what we take to be an 'internal' feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts (Butler, xv).

Butler argues that gender is actually manufactured and performable, rather than internal. With this transformative potential of gender in mind, Britomart's performances become more complicated within the context of a symbolic, patriarchal world. Britomart does not always perform an undeniable "masculine" gender, nor an undeniable "feminine" gender, but rather some unique mix of the two (or sometimes neither). Male characters in the poem often become confused and afraid when Britomart removes her armor and they realize that she is biologically female[16]—but they are confused precisely because she has performed a "knightly" or "aggressive" gender, which would not seem associated with the feminine. Britomart's performance of a phallus-possessing knight can thus be analyzed not only from the perspective of fetish theory, but also from the perspective of gender theory. Britomart engages in what Butler would call a queer gender performance, and this queer performance subverts the patriarchal world which (as I indicated in my previous section) psychoanalysis has framed for us.

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[16] As I mentioned earlier in my article, Malecasta's guards become frightened when they discover Britomart's biological identity: "In the previous battle scene with the guards — when Britomart's sex is not revealed — she is described as "mighty" and the male guards are quick to cede their swords to such a skilled knight. In contrast, when Britomart's true sex is discovered, she is described as "unbound," "avenging" and a "troublous terrour" — terms generally associated with extreme fear, rather than admiration." Later in this article, I will also cite further examples of men becoming weak and/or afraid when they discover Britomart's true sex. For instance, the evil magician Busirane is described as becoming intimidated, presumably allowing Britomart's magic phallus to defeat his own. Furthermore, the narrator himself chooses adjectives of fear and confusion whenever he describes moments of biological revelation.

Britomart does not actively analyze patriarchal norms, nor does she explore the definition of “woman”—as feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Simone DeBeauvoir would insist a feminist (or feminist reading) must do. According to Irigaray and DeBeauvoir, Britomart would therefore not be considered a *consciously* feminist character; nevertheless, her gender performance breaks down the “male” and “marked female” hierarchy of patriarchy. As DeBeauvoir states:

> First we must ask: “what is a woman?” ... in speaking of certain women, connoisseurs declare that they are not women, although they are equipped with a uterus like the rest … every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity (DeBeauvoir, xiii).

According to DeBeauvoir, femininity is an imagined social construct which further propagates misconceived patriarchal notions of a binary sexuality. Judith Butler argues that one can perform a feminine identity, but “woman,” in fact, does not exist. Furthermore, any type of *queer* gender performance, specifically, can help to breakdown the constrictions of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality:

> That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality (180).

According to this logic, Britomart's ability to perform a masculine identity breaks the

notion of a "true masculinity or femininity" or of "an essential sex." The "concealed performative character" of gender thus becomes revealed thanks to Britomart's own gender performance. Additionally, according to Butler, any act which does not align with the false "masculine *or* feminine" binary can be read as *queer*.

As stated in my overarching introduction to both of my articles, the Renaissance's understanding of gender was different from our own—most likely spurred, at least in part, by the lack of scientific understanding about anatomical sex. A lack of scientific biological information in the Renaissance seemed to cause two reactions: the first being that a lack of knowledge about anatomy led to a further reliance on gender performance as a means to determine status, and the second being that the incorrect concept of female anatomy as "inferior" only further validated misogyny within that culture. As Jean Howard elaborates in her "Crossdressing, the Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England" (1988), this ignorance placed extra societal pressure on women:

> In the Renaissance, gender differences may not always or necessarily have been built upon a self-evident notion of biological sexual difference as was to be true in the nineteenth century. This simply means that gender difference and hierarchy had to be produced and secured through ideological interpellation when possible, through force when necessary on other grounds. If women were not invariably depicted as anatomically different from men in an essential way, they could still be seen as different merely by virtue of their lack of masculine perfection (Howard 423).

This lack of scientific knowledge led to a complicated understanding of gender; a male/female dichotomy was created in which females were considered the "lacking"

sex. According to feminist Luce Irigaray, contemporary western society and discourse still maintains this inaccurate understanding of sex and gender: “The culture of the West is mono-sexual; the status of women is that of 'lesser men,' inferior or defective men” (Sarup 117). Because gender hierarchy and difference are produced and performed by any given society, cross-dressing holds a unique position in that society. For a character like Britomart to be cross-dressed as a warrior and performing the male gender, she immediately increases her status in the gender hierarchy: she is now equal to other men. The early modern British culture prescribed the phallus as a representation of privilege and power (almost exclusively rewarded to men in that era). When Britomart takes up a sword—which can be read as a physical or symbolic phallus—she implicitly takes on the symbolic power and privilege awarded to the owner of such a phallus.

When we are introduced to Britomart in Book III of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, she is first described as a figure of Chastity: “That fairest vertue, farre above the rest” (III.Introduction.1.2). We soon discover that she is on a quest to rescue her future husband, Artegall—who she has never met—while dressed in the garb of a male warrior. Throughout the poem, she often equals or surpasses the battle prowess of male knights that she encounters along the way, and even rescues damsels in distress when men do not have the capacity to save them. When Britomart encounters a knight named Redcrosse trying to enter Castle Joyeous, for example, the knights guarding the castle threaten to harm him, and Britomart steps in to defend him: “with

that her mortall speare/ She mightily aventred [thrust] towards one/ And down him smot, ere well aware he weare/ Then to the next she rode, and downe the next did beare...” (III.1. 28.6-9). Britomart's “speare” has the power to thrust and smite weaker knights. Her symbolic phallus has the power to penetrate and kill men, and also allows her to be described by the narrator as “mighty.” The sword is described as its own entity, much as a phallus might be, and is described as something which “stands” and “pierces.”[17]

Dressed as a knight, Britomart is invincible against these powerful men. All of the soldiers surrender, and I would argue, eventually cede to her more powerful phallus as they place their “swords” beneath her feet:

> 'Too well we see,' said they, 'and prove too well
> Our faulty weaknesse, and your matchlesse might'…
> So underneath her feet their swords they mard ...
> (III. 1. 30.1-6).

These men view her as not only an equal match, but as their mighty (supposedly male) superior. Britomart's phallus has won this battle. Britomart's act of cross-dressing in this situation allows her to be a feminist character because she has subverted patriarchal standards of hetero-normativity; she is able to perform a masculine gender of her own construction, and the male characters interpret Britomart's performance as she intends.

[17]When Britomart is in Merlin's armory, “there stood a mighty speare” (III.3.60). Moreover, Britomart's sword is described as a “point” or as “sharp” multiple times in Book III, Cantos I, II, and XI and Book V, Canto V. It is also described multiple times as “powerful” or “mighty” in Book III, Cantos I and III

When we are first introduced to the character of Britomart, her biological sex is disguised by her knightly costume, and yet her gender performance can still be interpreted as "feminist" in this first scene. She engages herself for battle with Guyon (III. 1. 6) and “they bene ymet … both their points arriued” (III. 1. 6.1). Both of their pointed spears meet, but unfortunately for Guyon, Britomart's phallus is the victor as her “secret power unseene, that speare enchaunted was … layd [Guyon] on the greene” (III. 1. 7.8-9). Guyon becomes enraged and shamed when he is thrown to the ground from the force of Britomart's spear, but he does not yet know that a woman has defeated him. Guyon is ashamed for being defeated—when shame is typically an emotion only reserved for women within patriarchal cultures; on some level, the gender roles have been reversed.[18] The narrator of the poem expects that had Guyon known the true identity of the victor, he would have been even more ashamed: “But weenedst thou what wight[19] thee overthrew/ Much greater grief and shamefuller regret/ For thy hard fortune then thou wouldst renew/ That of a single damzell thou wert met” (III. 1. 8.1-4). Britomart's pointy, phallic sword is not supposed to beat Guyon's because she is a woman. However, because of Britomart's own battle skills and the magic in her sword (as I mention earlier in my article, the magic in Britomart's

[18] There are myriad moments in Renaissance texts in which men are shamed, and I would argue (from both a historical and theoretical perspective) that these moments therefore render *all* of these male characters temporarily effeminate.

[19] According to the OED, “wight” has a few different connotations: (1) “a living being or creature” and (2) “Strong and courageous, esp. in warfare; having or showing prowess; valiant, doughty, brave, bold, ‘stout’.” Perhaps it was Spenser's intention to create double meaning; Britomart is a living being, and also shows battle prowess.

armor and weaponry is, in and of itself, a type of “performance”), she is unconquerable. And according to the narrator, performance in battle is what dictates a knight's “manly might.” After Britomart defeats Guyon, he acknowledges her victory and they reconcile, according to a knightly code of honor. As the narrator explains, during these "antique times":

> ...The sword was seruant vnto right;
> When not for malice and contentious crimes,
> But all for praise, and proofe of manly might,
> The martiall brood accustomed to fight. (III.1.13)

Following this doctrine, Britomart has proven that she displays the most manly might, and Guyon must concede to Britomart's superiority. On a symbolic level, the gender stereotypes have momentarily shifted: the woman is an aggressive manly warrior, while the male is powerless and inferior. To an extent, Freud and the narrator are right: Guyon *should* fear “castration” if he realizes that Britomart is a woman—but not for the reason that they might predict. It is neither the Law of the Father nor Britomart's sexuality that Guyon must fear; it is rather her battle prowess and magic phallic sword that will make Guyon powerless. Through the power of magic and gender performance, a *woman* unexpectedly possesses a victorious phallus.

Britomart further engages in a queer and feminist performance in Canto XI of Book III, when she stumbles upon a young man sprawled on the ground and weeping. The reader soon discovers the young man's name is Scudamore, and his beloved Amoret is imprisoned in the house of Busirane: “My Lady and my love is cruelly pend/...Whilest deadly torments do her chast brest rend,/ And the sharpe steele doth rive her heart in tway” (III. 11.11.1-4). The enigmatic magician Busirane has imprisoned Amoret around his powerful pillar: “And her small wast girt round with yron bands,/ Vnto a brasen pillour, by the which she stands” (III.12.30.8-9).[20] The magician repeatedly pierces at her breast in an invasive attempt to literally steal her heart: “A thousand charmes he formerly did proue;Yet thousand charmes could not her stedfast heart remoue” (III.12.31.8-9). Scudamore has become emasculated because only Busirane's magical “pen” can penetrate Amoret. However, Britomart's magical sword is even more powerful than Busirane's. When she eventually enters his lair, Britomart begins to attack: “The stout Damzell to him leaping light,/ His cursed hand withheld, and maistered his might” (III.12.32.8-9). Britomart has become the

20 The OED defines “brasen” as: (1) “Referring to the strength rather than the actual material of brass; hence, strong as brass” and (2) “Hardened in effrontery; shameless.” Using this double-meaning of “brasen,” when Britomart destroys Busirane's pillar, his “shamelessness” has been destroyed, thus Britomart's performance emasculates Busirane.

master — presumably because of her magical gender performance. In fact, Britomart's magic must be more powerful, because she is able to force Busirane to reverse his own magic: "And rising vp, [Busirane] gan streight to ouerlooke,/ Those cursed leaues, his charmes backe to reuerse" (III.12.36.1-2). Using gender performance theory as a foundation for this close-reading, Britomart's gender performance thus serves as a subversion of a patriarchal character within a patriarchal faery world. It is not only Busirane, however, who is mastered by Britomart.

When Scudamore and Britomart first approach the castle to rescue Amoret — even before Britomart has encountered the evil magician Busirane — Britomart uses her armor and weaponry to break through the surrounding fiery protective ring: "Therewith resolved to prove her utmost might/ Her ample shield she threw before her face,/ and her swords point directing forward right,/assayled the flame... that through she passed …" (III 11. 25.1-6). Britomart is resolved to prove her "might" and her shield is "ample," while Scudamore is described earlier as "sad" and wallowing. Scudamore's "greedy will" and "envious desire" (sexual traits generally associated with women in the early modern period)[21] prevent him from penetrating the flames (III 11. 25). Britomart is able to use her phallic sword to penetrate the fiery ring, a feat that Scudamore could not accomplish. The transformative power of Britomart's armor simultaneously empowers her, while emasculating Scudamore. He reverts to bizarre, childish behavior when he realizes he does not have the same abilities as Britomart:

[21] As displayed in much of the conduct literature of the time and elaborated in Orgel's *Impersonations*, p. 63.

> With huge impatience he inly swelt,
> More for great sorrow, that he could not pas,
> Then for the burning torment, which he felt,
> That with fell woodnesse he effierced was,
> And wilfully him throwing on the gras,
> Did beat and bounse his head and brest full sore.
> (III.11.27.1-6)

Essentially, Scudamore has a “temper tantrum” and his emotions consume him. The phallic imagery continues as Britomart is able to *penetrate* through the *opening* of the castle: “The whiles the Championesse now entred has/ The vtmost rowme, and past the formest dore,/ The vtmost rowme, abounding with all precious store” (III.11.27.7-9). Her performance allows her to be manly enough to penetrate things that Scudamore can not. In a sense, this merely perpetuates patriarchy, but it also challenges preconceived notions of the gender binary.

My close-reading of this text, based in psychoanalytical and gender theory, demonstrates the ways in which modern theory can open up a historical text to a more modern audience. Although we cannot say that, historically, Britomart and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* are feminist, we can use psychoanalysis to determine the presence of the law of the symbolic within a patriarchal text. Britomart's gender performances function within the context of a symbolic and patriarchal world, and any gender performance of Britomart's that challenges these set rules of patriarchy, then, can be read as "feminist." There are however, moments in the text that do not neatly align with feminist or psychoanalytical analysis. In this next section, I will demonstrate the ways in which the performances of Britomart and her future husband Artegall,

problematize the theories of psychoanalysis and gender performance.

Using *The Faerie Queene* to Expand Psychoanalysis, Gender Theory and Feminism

In this section, I will explore the ways in which some gender performances challenge the ideas of fetish theory and gender theory. Not all of the male characters' responses to Britomart's gender performance in *The Faerie Queene* adhere as neatly to the theories of Freud and Lacan or Garber and Butler as those discussed in the previous section; in fact, Artegall's eventual reactions to Britomart *challenge* the doctrines of phallocentric psychoanalysis, specifically.

When Britomart first encounters Artegall, the representation of the gender roles of both characters is multi-faceted. For example, there are multiple scenes in *The Faerie Queene* in which the gender roles of Britomart and Artegall become reversed, the most obvious being that when Britomart comes to rescue him from the Amazons, she is cross-dressed as a male warrior, and Artegall is cross-dressed as a woman:

> She [Britomart] for that yron prison did enquire,
> In which her wretched loue [Artegall] was captiue layd...
> Where when she saw that lothly vncouth sight,
> Of men disguiz'd in womanishe attire,
> Her heart gan grudge, for very deepe despight
> Of so vnmanly maske, in misery midsight (V.7.37.2-9)

Artegall is imprisoned in womanish attire and is described as "wretched," "loathly" and in "misery." According to the narrator, Artegall's feminine appearance has made him weak. Artegall is not happy with his forced feminine gender performance — a sentiment which is understandable in a patriarchal world. Despite Artegall's

discontent, the gender performances of Britomart and Artegall have certainly "switched" in this scene, thus bucking heteronormative, masculinist standards. In fact, Judith Butler would likely argue that *all* of Britomart's and Artegall's interactions with one another could be coded as non-heteronormative gender performances. Artegall is biologically male and yet performs a confusing feminine gender, while Britomart is biologically female, yet performs a masculine, knightly gender. In this sense, neither character "is" or "has" the phallus, but rather both characters perform a gender that can be described neither as "masculine" nor "feminine" but rather — queer. These queer performances, then, challenge the conventions of phallocentrism.

Even before they meet in battle in Book IV, Britomart's and Artegall's sartorial gender performances are "reversed," so to speak. In his "The Queen's Two Bodies: Britomart and Spenser's Faerie Queene, Book III," G.R. Grund observes that Britomart wears the shield of a lion (III.1.4) while Artegall bears the "ermilin" shield (III.2.25.8-9): "Lion and ermine, the two great emblems of Elizabethan empire and the Queen's chastity – seem curiously worn by the wrong people. Britomart and Artegall, to put the matter another way, need to exchange shields" (Grund 17). In this way, the reader receives subtle hints in the beginning of the poem to expect unusual reversals between the two characters. While it is impossible to argue authorial intent, I contend that the performance of these two shields represents two distinctly different genders (at least in terms of the appearance of the characters on the shield), and Spenser highlighted this difference in the text. Britomart's lion is boldly passing through a

golden field, while Artegall's little ermine is in a beautiful blue field and has “faire” powdered skin. In the beginning of Britomart's tale, while in the Castle Joyous, Malecasta is described as wearing a robe that also bears an Ermine: “Her with a scarlot mantle couered,/That was with gold and Ermines *faire* enueloped” (III.1.59.8-9, my emphasis). As I mentioned earlier in my article, Malecasta serves as a representation of the Renaissance definition of “feminine”: unpredictable, with a voracious sexuality. Notably, she is wearing this ermine decorated robe during her plot to sneak into Britomart's bed (and presumably have sex with Britomart — who she thinks is a man). Therefore, through the use of imagery, the narrator makes a subtle comparison between the feminized descriptions of Malecasta, *female* Britomart, and Artegall's effeminate shield. This seems to suggest that Artegall's identity is in some sense, *not male.*

Artegall's non-masculine gender performances are unusual compared to most other male characters in the story. When Britomart encounters Scudamore and rescues his beloved Amoret, Scudamore's performance of gender would not be described as stereotypically “masculine”; however, Scudamore does not realize that Britomart is female when he is behaving this way, and thus (according to Freud and Lacan) does not yet have need for fear of castration (symbolic or otherwise). What marks Artegall as unique is that he does eventually realize that Britomart is a woman, and yet he still does not perform a stereotypically masculine gender, nor does he react with anxiety of castration — he instead falls in love with her.

Artegall's unusual reaction to discovering Britomart's true sex feminizes his character and complicates fetish theory's understanding of patriarchal systems. When Britomart and Artegall engage in battle for the third time (Britomart having won both previous battles) Artegall strikes a powerful blow that reveals Britomart's face:

> The wicked stroke vpon her helmet chaunst,
> And with the force, which in it selfe it bore,
> Her ventayle shard away, and thence forth glaunst
> A downe in vaine, ne harm'd her any more.
> (IV.6.16.1-4)

Upon seeing Britomart's face, Artegall decides not to harm Britomart. I would argue that because Artegall is controlled by his desire for Britomart, this loss of control further "feminizes" him. In the context of early modern English culture, having no control over one's sexual desire was characterized as a feminine trait. As Orgel states in his *Impersonations*: "The Renaissance fantasy about women's sexuality is that it is voracious, uncontrollable, capable of enslaving and exhausting men" (63). Britomart does not stop fighting, and for a moment, Artegall regains his wits and attempts to re-engage in battle. However, his reverence for her beauty renders him powerless:

> His powrelesse arme benumbd with secret feare
> From his reuengefull purpose shronke abacke,
> And cruell sword out of his fingers slacke
> Fell downe to ground, as if the steele had sence,
> And felt some ruth, or sence his hand did lacke,
> Or both of them did thinke, obedience
> To doe to so diuine a beauties excellence.
> (IV.6.15.2-8)

Similar to many male characters in the story who discover Britomart's true sex, Artegall is here described as having "fear" and his phallic sword, as if having a mind

of its own, falls to the ground. Britomart leaves Artegall "powerless" and "numb." Unlike the other male characters, however, Artegall resolves to be obedient to her beauty, and his feelings of fear are a result of his infatuation with her. In other words, there is no underlying psychological implication that Artegall fears his phallus will be overpowered by Britomart's confusing "presence" of a phallus. However, because he has given in to his passions rather than maintaining focus in this battle, he has temporarily adopted a stereotypically feminine trait. Perhaps Artegall does not actually take on the role of "female" in this battle; nevertheless, he certainly is *feminized*. Interestingly, when Artegall discovers that a woman has defeated him, he does not react with shame or dismay as many other male characters in the poem do, he instead reacts with reverence:

> And he himselfe long gazing thereupon,
> At last fell humbly downe vpon his knee,
> And of his wonder made religion,
> Weening some heauenly goddesse he did see.
> (IV.6.22.1-4)

Artegall does not seem to be disturbed by the presence and power of Britomart's phallic sword, and instead, his wonder of Britomart becomes his religion, so to speak. Freud and Lacan would likely characterize Artegall as a true fetishist — he sees her symbolic phallus in combination wither her female sex, and this discovery puts him in awe of Britomart.

However, this certainly contradicts Freud's and Lacan's assessment of the *standard* patriarchal response to the authority of the phallus, and the absence of the

vagina. Perhaps because both Britomart's and Artegall's gender performances are switching from masculine to feminine throughout the scene, performance theory can tell us more about the characters in this moment than can psychoanalysis; the two characters seem to have entered a “gender-neutral” space of sorts. The narrator describes the characters as “sometimes pursuing and sometimes pursued” and so it seems they both take on the role of masculine hunter and vulnerable prey during their battle (IV.6.18.2). But perhaps, we can also use psychoanalysis to indicate that (in this moment, at least) Britomart and Artegall are not functioning within a patriarchal environment. The symbolic order within this moment is arguably a system where the father and the penis *are not* the only possible signifiers of social power. Britomart's *feminine* performance becomes powerful enough to literally force Artegall to his knees in surrender and awe — when Britomart's feminine performances in previous cantos of the poem usually inspired fear in men, and led them to fight more aggressively.

On her part, after Britomart discovers that she is fighting her husband-to-be, she decides to stop fighting. Her passion, too, has gotten the best of her:

> Soone as she heard the name of *Artegall*,
> Her hart did leape, and all her hart-strings tremble,
> For sudden ioy, and secret feare withall,
> And all her vitall powres with motion nimble,
> To succour it, themselues gan there assemble,
> That by the swift recourse of flushing blood....
> And fayned still her former angry mood,
> Thinking to hide the depth by troubling of the flood
> (IV.6.22.1-9)

Upon discovering her enemy's true identity, Britomart's heart "leaps" and "trembles."

It is Britomart's turn to now feel a "secret fear." Her blood begins "flushing" and she has to force herself to feign a masculine, aggressive "mood." One could suggest that at the end of this battle, both genders have returned to their respective roles; Britomart has let her passion for Artegall control her. In congruence with the personality of a noble knight, Britomart adheres to her social duty — but, her "fayning of an angry mood" implies a performance of sorts, that could perhaps still be read as queer. Throughout Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Britomart faces moments both submissively castrating and phallically defiant — this challenges Freud's and Lacan's understanding of the phallic discourse of power. Furthermore, Britomart's urges for marriage and procreation adhere to patriarchal modes of discourse, yet (perhaps unintentionally) she also subverts to patriarchy.

Similarly, my own analysis of the poem both subverts and adheres to standards of patriarchy. Feminism aims to eliminate phallocentric modes of discourse, and so by using this phallocentric mode of analysis, on a certain level, my analysis still gives credibility to the patriarchal apparatus of power. However, Elizabeth Grosz and various other theorists have argued that it is sometimes necessary to use the tools and institutions of any oppressor in order to deconstruct such a power structure.[22] As Clough explains, regardless of the methods used, analyzing the realm of the symbolic

[22] *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* by Elizabeth Grosz, p.145 and *Feminist thought: desire, power, and academic discourse* by Patricia Clough, p. 154. Additionally, in her essay, "The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House" Audre Lorde argues that the tools of the oppressor: "may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde, 110). Likewise, while my work may not bring about genuine feminist change, using phallocentric tools of analysis will, at the very least, allow us to analyze the inner workings of such an oppressive apparatus.

phallus helps to expose the falsities of such a symbolic order: "If the symbolic order is supposedly structured around the phallus as the privileged, transcendental signifier, which is revealed instead to be an imaginary effect, then the symbolic order is shown to be dependent on a distinction from the imaginary that is itself imaginary" (Clough 154). One can utilize patriarchal discourse as a means of *deconstructing* patriarchy — thus, such literary analysis can still be considered a *type* of feminism.

A non-patriarchal institution will no longer require phallic discourse, and thus would make my work, and the work of contemporary psychoanalysts, a moot point. In order to invalidate patriarchy, Irigaray tells us that women must be involved in the making of cultural and political reality (Sarup 121). In a way, Britomart contributed to the cultural reality within her fictional world, and within the historical Elizabethan world. However, as Madan Sarup sagely warns: "Whatever equality means, it does not mean becoming like men" (116). Irigaray and other feminists argue for a state of *entre-femmes*: a sociality among and between women that is a necessary condition for the creation of female identity and subjectivity (Sarup 116). While Spenser likely did not intend it, his character of Britomart serves as a proto-feminist and queer figure: a starting point for the *entre-femmes* and the inevitable analysis of the complex power structures of the oppressive patriarchal apparatus.

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