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Why shees like a play : gender, performance, and subversion in early modern drama

Stephannie Suzanne Gearhart
Lehigh University

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Gearhart,
Stephannie S.

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Early Modern
Drama

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“Why shees like a play”: Gender, Performance, and Subversion in Early Modern Drama

by

Stephannie Suzanne Gearhart

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Graduate Coordinator

Chairperson of Department

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ABSTRACT

In my paper I examine the possibility of considering early modern drama as a feminized art form by proposing that plays were treated as were women of the period. I demonstrate how both plays and women experienced censorship and regulation of their language; that both were perceived by their society to require male control and were urged to contain themselves in various ways. Women and drama were also thought of in economic terms and were bought, sold, and traded among men. They were often constructed by groups of men, though here male authority lessens, and women and plays begin to experience a sort of freedom from patriarchal control. Ultimately, by using performance theory, I suggest that as plays and gender are performed the woman and the drama experience a kind of freedom and discover a sense of worth. Because of the nature of performance, the female and the drama cannot be reproduced or completely regulated; rather both are able in part to elude patriarchal demands and expectations.

“Why shees like a play”: Gender, Performance and Subversion in Early Modern Drama

“A woman when there be roses in her cheekes, Cherries on her lippes, Ciuet in her breath, luory in her teeth, Lyllyes in her hand, and Lickorish in her heart, why shees like a play. If new, very good company, but if stale, like old *Ieronimo*: goe by go by.”

*Westward Ho*¹

“the word irkes me”---“a Play”

Ben Jonson²

“Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds.”

Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”³

“[M]en [in the Renaissance] love women precisely *as representations*...”

Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*⁴

Birdlime tells Mistress Justiniano in Dekker’s *Westward Ho* to “Strike whilst the iron is hot”⁵; to waste her youth and beauty would be disastrous because if she does, she will no longer be desirable but will grow “stale, like old *Ieronimo*.” This correlation between a woman’s beauty and her age and/or vitality is not a new one; similar advice is found in other texts of the seventeenth century⁶. What is fascinating about this analogy is the relationship between the female and drama; “shees like a play” suggests that a woman may have similar qualities to a theatrical production: she might be in or out of favor with the public or she may be “new [and] very good company” or “stale.” By viewing women as play-like Birdlime may be able to warn her gender against the fickleness of men; however, her connection between the female and drama reveals more about plays than she perhaps intended.

Using Birdlime’s comment as a starting point, I would like to examine the possibility of viewing city comedy as a feminized art form; if “shees like a play,” I want to determine if a play is also like a woman. By this I mean that I will propose some ways in which city comedy is treated as women of the period were; that authors and audiences alike believed that the drama needed to be controlled, regulated, and assembled in accordance with men’s standards.

Although these features of city comedy that I will be discussing may be characteristic, at least to

some degree, of other dramatic genres in the period (e.g. tragedy or history) as well, I think that concentrating on city comedy works particularly well because, more than any other genre at this time, city comedy focuses on pre and post-marital life (rather than tragedies or histories, for example, which focus primarily on monarchs and wars) and so is closely associated with females in the early modern period: The woman's existence was so concentrated on married life that "[w]omen of the...early modern period can really only be examined in terms of their relationship to the marriage paradigm."⁷ The content of these plays focuses on marriage and post-marital life; they are grounded in a primarily feminine subject matter, and so I think that comparing city comedy to women, rather than using other dramatic genres to explore this analogy, is most appropriate here.⁸

Furthermore, I would like to think about what possibilities this comparison of the female to drama offers to women of the period. At first, the analogy may appear to do nothing more than to reinforce socially inscribed gender roles; but I will be suggesting that it is through the performance of these plays that normative female behavior is challenged and women may have an opportunity to begin to "elude [the] regulation and control"⁹ to which they were so often subjected.

"Men [in the Renaissance] love[d] women precisely *as representations*."¹⁰ These representations were found in many places in the City and were most prominent, of course, as the boy actor in female attire took the stage and when men donned women's clothing during skimmingtons.¹¹ When women were represented by men, they were not unified, wholly developed individuals; rather they were constructed piece by piece; built according to the male's understanding of what it meant to be female.

One way in which women were constructed was by providing them with an understanding of their anatomy according to the “research” of male scientists and doctors. In Helkiah Crooke’s popular anatomy book, *Microcosmographia, A Description of the Body of Man* (1615), an explanation of the male and female bodies was detailed, complete with a picture of two nudes on the cover page, where, as Karen Newman observes, the female is post-Fall, sexual and embarrassed; the male is pre-Fall, spiritual and open.¹² What are revealed in Crooke’s book as biological differences are, in actuality, social differences; the social norms of the period were conflated with anatomy. This conflation in the early modern period is quite common, and for decades, the woman was managed socially through her body. This ideology of appropriate feminine behavior found its way into several genres in the period—sermons, plays, prayers—and when it appeared in print, as it did in Crooke’s *Microcosmographia*, women often had to rely on their husbands to read these “scientific” findings to them, for most women of the period were illiterate.¹³ Through these texts, written by men and read to them by men, women learned how to behave properly as wives. One of the tenets of readings like Crooke’s was that women were to obey their husbands with all of their body parts.¹⁴ If a woman disobeyed her husband, a particular area of her body (e.g. genitals, mouth) was often blamed for her rebellion. By anatomizing the female like this, one could manage and control her body’s uses rather easily; her morality could be evaluated quickly.

Not only were women’s body parts subject to reduction and anatomization of this kind, women’s bodily fluids were easily reducible as well; all of the female body’s excretions (sweat, tears, milk, urine, menses) were conceptualized as “the same essential substance,”¹⁵ and seen as “shameful token[s] of uncontrol.”¹⁶ As Gail Kern Paster points out in “Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy,” the woman was considered to be the weaker sex because she was the leakier sex, and the discourse of the period aided in reaffirming this belief. Most

importantly, this anatomization was related to the “question of self-control or, more precisely, the representation of a particular kind of uncontrol as a function of gender.”¹⁷ As a result, men controlled women’s leakiness through what Paster calls a discourse of shame; this leakiness and language of disapproval and humiliation leaked onto the stage where women were often seen needing to urinate frequently (as did Win in Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*) and uncontrollably (as did the women at the christening in Middleton’s *Chaste Maid*). My focus here is not so much on these literal representations of the leaky uncontrollable woman, however, but is based on this premise of the woman as unable to control herself and the male’s desire to control and regulate her. Like this hunger for authority over the female, in city comedy we see an overwhelming desire for control over the play expressed by the authorities, audiences, and playwrights. The comedy, like the woman, has the potential to be proper and likable only if managed by men.

“[L]anguage is an index of identity”¹⁸ and men of the period use it in order to assert their individuality and to promote their fatherly authority. As Newman points out, Kate in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* uses language to voice her protest and demonstrate her individuality while Bianca’s silence reaffirms her compliance to patriarchal demands. In the play, Kate is reprimanded because of her use of language; that the “taming” occurs and was accepted by audiences is not surprising because of the widespread anxiety in the period over women rebelling through the use of language. The woman becomes the spectacle to be admired and desired if she conforms to patriarchal demands, that is if she uses language sparingly (or, as I might suggest as a modification to Newman’s reading, in ways that reaffirm her subordination); she is censored and regulated, however, if she tries to elude those demands verbally.¹⁹

In Ben Jonson's *Epicoene* Morose, who confesses that "[a]ll discourses but [his] own afflict [him]"²⁰ (2.1.4-5), wishes that no one would speak to him (even his servant must "[a]nswer [Morose] not but with [a] leg" (2.1.16)), but especially desires the silence of females and seeks to use Epicoene only for her reproductive parts.²¹ It is a miracle when a silent woman is found for the old man; Morose cannot believe that Epicoene does not "tak[e] pleasure in [her] tongue, which is a woman's chiefest pleasure" (2.5.39-40); and Truewit is shocked that a mute female exists:

Truewit: ...Can [Morose] endure no noise, and will venture on a wife?

Clermont: Yes. Why, thou art a stranger, it seems, to his best trick yet. He has employed a fellow this half year all over England to hearken him out a dumb woman, be she of any form or any quality, so she be able to bear children. Her silence is dowry enough, he says.

Truewit: But I trust to God he has found none. (1.2.19-26)

In this passage we see the connection between women and talkativeness, and although the quiet woman is desired, we see the expectation that no woman could be silent because of the "biological" flaws that plague her. Also, related to the anatomization of the woman is the understanding that she is useful only for her ability "to bear children." When the mute woman is discovered, she is declared to be the perfect spouse, silent, which means obedient and sexually faithful, as well as a vessel for reproduction; she is the model woman.

Once Epicoene begins to use language, however, she becomes "a Penthesilea, a Semiramis" (3.4.51-2) and a torment to Morose. At Morose's disbelief that she can speak, Epicoene proclaims:

...[W]hy, did you think you had married a statue? Or a motion only? One of the French puppets with the eyes turned with a wire? Or some innocent out of the hospital, that would stand with her hands thus, and a plaice-mouth, and look upon you?...I'll have none of this coacted, unnatural dumbness in my house, in a family where I govern. (3.4.34-50)

Through her use of language, Epicoene asserts control ("in a family where I govern") and individuality ("did you think you had married a statue?") as Kate does in most of her speeches

in *Taming of the Shrew*. “Talk in women... is dangerous because it is perceived as a usurpation of multiple forms of authority, a threat to order and male sovereignty... to a desired hegemonic male sexuality.”²² The anxiety over women’s acquisition of language is allayed in Jonson’s play as by the end we discover that Epicoene is not the woman we assumed her to be, but she is a boy wearing a peruke and a dress. The revelation that she was really a he allows the audience—perhaps primarily the male viewers—to be relieved that no woman could really be so dominant; that this is only an act.²³ The ladies who supported Mistress Epicoene, including the verbose and demanding Mistress Otter, are silenced at the end, and their language and power is taken away upon Dauphine’s monumental revelation: “Madams, you are mute upon this new metamorphosis!” (5.4.227-8).

Just as the collegiates and Mistress Otter are quieted at the close of *Epicoene*, plays of the period were often silenced as well. Jonson was notorious for having his drama censored, and his collaboration with Chapman and Marston, *Eastward Ho*, landed him in jail because it was perceived to be offensive.²⁴ Sir James Murray, a Scottish courtier, noticed the play and commented that Jonson had written “something against the Scots in a play Eastward hoe.”²⁵ Because of its anti-Scottish humor, Jonson and Chapman were “hurried to bondage and fetters...the report was that they should then had their ears cutt and noses.”²⁶ Jonson, who had been jailed previously for the controversial *Isle of Dogs*, wrote letters from prison that expressed his anxiety over the censorship situation. Most interestingly, Jonson was not disturbed about being in jail (for he had experienced incarceration several times in his life for other reasons), but was angered that it was a play that had put him there. Just as Morose was furious because his wife spoke, irritating the old man and making him look foolish, so was the playwright with his art: “the word irkes mee”---“a Play,” writes Jonson.²⁷

Plays caused trouble for several individuals of the period and because drama was so closely regulated, “the theatre and other pastimes [that] were licensed...in the early seventeenth century...became the subject of particular cultural and political conflicts.”²⁸ For example, on 24 April 1624, when Francis Wambus and his players arrived in Norwich and advertised that they would soon be performing “an excellent new Comedy called the Spanish Contract By the Princesse servants/ vivat Rex,” they met with considerable resistance from local authorities. Even though Wambus presented the town’s Mayor with a license authorizing the company to perform the play, the Mayor countered with a letter from the Privy Council that denounced “the lawless liberty taken up and practised in all parts of the kingdom by...vagrant and licentious rabble”; the Mayor asserted that he would not “suffer any Companies of players, tumblers or the like sort of person to act any plays or to shew any exercise of feats and devices within that city or the liberty of the same.” In spite of the Mayor’s authority, Wambus refused to accede and announced that “he would play in this City & would lay in prison here this Tweluemonth but he would try whether the kings command or the Counsellis be the greater.” Wambus appeared in court soon after and “did accuse Mr Maior to his face that he contemned the kings authority” and so was subsequently committed to prison. Later that year, Wambus was released and he and his players returned to the town with a letter from Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, ordering recompense for the wrongful imprisonment of Wambus. The court did not agree that Wambus had been treated unfairly and held that he was jailed for his own misconduct.²⁹

As is revealed in the Wambus story, authorities were often at loggerheads over how, when, and which plays to license. This attempt to regulate plays was, although at times seemingly arbitrary, also very powerful; men had control over what was and was not performed. Not only did authorities seek to censor and regulate city comedy, but audiences desired control over them as well. If spectators favored a comedy, it would play for a considerable amount of

time: if they did not enjoy it, however, the play would close quickly, as did Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Ironically, *The Knight* is a play about audience control: Nell and George are the spectators who interrupt the play *The London Merchant* because they want to see another, more romantic story enacted. The couple disturbs the play after only four lines and requests first that the name be changed to *The Grocer's Honor* and then to *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.³⁰ After this, George and Nell have their servant, Rafe, put in the play and, for the remainder of the drama, tell Rafe where to go, what to do, and who to love.

In Beaumont and Fletcher's mockery of overbearing audiences of the period, we see that the controlling, demanding spectator was not so uncommon; that the playwrights would compose a piece devoted entirely to this subject and that *The Knight* never gained popularity with the crowd gives us reason to believe that spectators did indeed want to control plays in the period. In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Peggy Phelan discusses the power of spectators, even those who are not as vocal as George and Nell:

In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault argues that "The agency of domination does not reside in the... [the performer] (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens..." [Foucault] is describing the power-knowledge fulcrum which sustains the Roman Catholic confessional, but as with most of Foucault's work, it resonates in other areas as well.

As a description of the power relationships operative in many forms of performance Foucault's observation suggests the degree to which the silent spectator dominates and controls the exchange (As Dustin Hoffman made so clear in *Tootsie*, the performer is always in the female position in relation to power.) Women and the performers, more often than not, are "scripted" to "sell" or "confess" something to someone who is in the position to buy or forgive.³¹

Here we see that those who are watching a performance are in a position of power; they have the ability to express what they like, dislike, want, and want to reject as did the seventeenth century audiences who made *The Knight* a failure by refusing to pay to see it and as George and Nell did, albeit vocally, in Beaumont and Fletcher's comedy.

Thinking of city comedy as female, then, we see that this need for regulation is expressed by authorities in the forms of censorship and licensing and by audiences who believe that it is their right to control, whether verbally or not, the drama. The problematic issue at this point is, I think, the female spectator. How do we explain that a woman desires control over a feminized art? Why, in other words, would a female continue to desire her own repression? Nell, for example, becomes the more demanding character in *The Knight* as drama progresses and the couple manipulates the play more and more successfully. Why would Nell seek to control her own gender on patriarchal terms?

The answer to this question is twofold, I think, and one of the solutions to this conundrum is addressed by Stephen Orgel's suggestion that "In [the early modern period], acting like a man [in some instances] is clearly better than acting like a woman."³² This, as I suggested above, may be the motivation for Kate's speech supporting the submission of women. Also, women were often advised to desire the kind of control that men had to offer; as mentioned earlier, the woman is the post-lapsarian being, the imperfect, incomplete human who is in need of male assistance. Nell, then, imposes this control onto the female comedy because she believes that she (the play) needs it.

Along with this "need" for male control, the female is often advised to try, as best she can, to control herself. In Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, for instance, Win tries to contain her bodily fluids but cannot hold out any longer and finally admits to Littlewit: "Yes, John, but I know not what to do...For a thing I am ashamed to tell you, i' faith, and 'tis too far to go home" (34.112-115). That Win has to urinate is embarrassing to her (as Paster suggests above), but to admit that she can no longer contain herself is even worse.

City comedy, like the woman, attempts to contain itself as well; the drama is designed by men to be controlled and continent; all of the action is tightly packed and arranged in order

to present an amusing and coherent comedy. *The Alchemist*³³ is perhaps the best example of the containment of plot: the entire play, except for one scene, is enacted within the confines of Lovewit's house over the period of only one day. Also, no matter who or what comes along, Face, Subtle, and Dol manage the situation quickly and efficiently. Not until the end of the play, when the neighbors suggest that something strange has been occurring while the master was away, does the trio's scheme leak out into the city. Jeremy, however, is able to explain away all of the suspicions and allows Lovewit to win the day by providing him with a wealthy widow and giving him all of the riches Jeremy has procured while Lovewit was absent. Lovewit gains control of all that had been coming in and out of his house for the first four acts and vows to be "ruled by [his servant] in anything" (5.5.145) because Lovewit knows that Jeremy is a success at containing things, a valuable quality in a servant, a woman, and a play.

"It is important to remember...no matter what our particular interest in women in this period might be, that the position of women must be seen against a social and political paradigm that was distinctly patriarchal."³⁴ This patriarchal political paradigm that Theodora Jankowski refers to in *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* includes the idea of women as property; they were often seen as chattel traded between men in order to cement male-male relationships. Women were, at every stage of their lives and at every level of society, ruled by men; they were passed from their father's rule to their husband's rule. The commodification of the female was perhaps most apparent in the transaction between a father and a husband: It was the father's duty to see that his daughter remained a virgin until marriage so that her future spouse would not be receiving "damaged goods" on the wedding night.³⁵

Although Renaissance women usually were the property of one man at a time, the ownership of the plays of the period was more widely dispersed among groups of men. When most playwrights finished a drama, they looked for an acting company that was interested in

buying the script. Once purchased by a company, that group of actors was able to alter the play in any way they saw fit;³⁶ the playwright no longer assumed any rights to his play. Instead, he was paid for his work (creating the play) and required to abandon it when it came time for acting (performance). Most dramatists did not find this practice objectionable, as we in the 20th century might, but rather continued to sell their creations and allow audiences and actors to handle them after the exchange. This relationship between the playwright, his play, and the acting companies is akin to the relationship between fathers, daughters, and husbands. As mentioned above, the woman was often traded from one man to another. Once a father had finished raising his daughter, he, like the playwright, passed her off to her husband, who, since her father was gone, would, like the acting companies, then have full reign over her and could alter her to his own liking.

The economic exchange of the script-woman from the playwright-father to the acting company-son-in-law supports my original claim that the patriarchy (sometimes individual men, sometimes groups of men) treated plays as they did women. As she is traded, the script-woman is not only controlled by men, but she is also written and rewritten by them too. And, as plays began to be published, it seems that their author's original intent—that is that they were to be performed—is stripped from them when they are limited to the page. Most playwrights, however, were not interested in publication, but rather in profit and, many, like John Marston, even in their performance. In his forward to *The Malcontent*, in fact, Marston apologizes for publication and notes the importance of performance: "Onely one thing afflicts me, to thinke that Scaenes invented, meerey to be spoken, should be inforcively published to be read." Still, though some, like Marston, understand the significance of performance of their woman-scripts, they cannot help but see them be published: Marston explains, "If any shall wonder why I print a Comedie, whose life rests much in the Actors voice, Let such know, that it cannot avoide

publishing: let it therefore stand with good excuse, that I have been my owne setter out.”³⁷ Here Marston, worried about others (i.e. acting troupes) who might print his play incorrectly, decides to control the publication of it himself, though the “life” of the play “rests much in the Actors voice.” Whether or not Marston is sincere in his apologies for printing is an issue that cannot be determined. Because some of his contemporaries used similar “excuses” for publishing, however, we see that rather than trust that the play’s value is really in its performance, the playwrights preferred to exercise control over her at the printer’s.

As a kind of exception to the rule, or perhaps just a more extreme case, Ben Jonson became one of the most possessive authors in the period because, instead of relinquishing his relationship with his plays after he had written them, or even printing with the “excuse” that his plays could not “avoide publishing,” he shamelessly admitted his desire to control them. Jonson, in fact, spent much of his career attempting to regulate how his plays were read and who read them. In preparation for the printing of his *Workes*, he began compiling his plays as early as 1609³⁸ and he continued to perfect them as late as December 1615.³⁹ Jonson printed his plays on his terms; printing was the “decisive event in Jonson’s lifelong struggle to establish control over his own writing.”⁴⁰ Because the discrepancies of the handwritten manuscript were eradicated with the advent of the printing press, Jonson felt confident that his “daughters” would be handled properly as they were prepared to be sold to their future husband-readers.⁴¹ Jonson’s desire to maintain control over his plays worked to some extent, although his playwrighting career finally ended in two angry “Ode[s] to Himself” where he condemned playwrighting and the theatre using, interestingly, female imagery: “Leave things so prostitute”⁴² and “Make not thyself a page/ To that strumpet, the stage,”⁴³ he advised himself.⁴⁴

The female needed the ownership and guidance the male could offer her because she was the weaker sex; she was, after all, leakier and more prone to sexual promiscuity due to her “biological” flaws. The woman’s anatomical understanding of herself came from men, as mentioned above, and so did her sense of origin; how she became what she was was explained to her by male theories of the sexes. Interestingly, male theories that constructed female anatomy were in opposition—one suggested that she was less perfect than her male counterpart; that she was undeveloped and her reproductive organs were like the mole’s eyes, perfectly formed but completely useless, vestigial⁴⁵; the other theory, while emphasizing the difference of the female, upheld her difference as necessary; she was the one who could reproduce and so her uterus, though not a “perfect” penis, was indeed important and, in fact, essential to the survival of the species and in the maintenance of familial heritage.

Although understanding women’s bodies in two opposing ways may appear strange or unnerving to our culture, during the Renaissance it was not uncommon that opposing explanations of life’s mysteries operated simultaneously, without overt conflict. For example, although new developments in science suggested that the earth revolved around the sun, the understanding of the earth as the center of the universe was still a popular and widespread belief. And it was not so much that people were not aware of the latest scientific findings, but rather this was a culture that could hold two very different beliefs at the same time and not feel as if they must choose between a “false” one and a “true” one.⁴⁶ Likewise, in the spirit of the Renaissance, I will attempt to work with both of these views of female anatomy to demonstrate how women and plays, while devalued, were also offered an opportunity to be simultaneously revalued.⁴⁷

Woman, on one hand, was the incomplete, imperfect male from her origin; she was not regarded as a fully developed individual nor as a unified person. Men composed the woman by anatomizing her and by providing her with their own sense of her origin. She was further conceived as imperfect and potentially incomplete because men thought of her as pieced together. In *Epicoeone*, Captain Otter expresses the ideology of woman as constructed when describing his wife:

A most vile face! And yet she spends me forty pound a year in mercury and hogs' bones. All her teeth were made i' the Blackfriars, both her eyebrows i' the Strand, and her hair in Silver Street. Every part o' the town owns a piece of her...She takes herself asunder still when she goes to bed, into some twenty boxes, and about next day noon is put together again, like a great German clock....(5.2.83-90)

If men could create a woman by piecing her together like this, they could also create a play by piecing it together. In the period, joint authorship was not uncommon; many plays were “built” by groups of playwrights. “In a scholarly field dominated by the singular figure of Shakespeare, it is easily forgotten that collaboration was the Renaissance English theatre’s dominant mode of textual production...nearly two-thirds of the plays ...reflect the participation of more than one writer.”⁴⁸ As women of the period were not unified because they were made of too many components from “[e]very part o’ the town,” plays too were sometimes not unified and coherent when several authors collaborated. Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Knight*, as mentioned earlier, is a metadrama, a play about making a play; it is the most accurate example of “collaboration [as] a dispersal of author/ity, rather than a simple doubling of it.”⁴⁹ As the citizen and his wife attempt to create their part of the play, the quest-romance, and the players strive to carry out their part of the play, the city-comedy, “[t]his odd juxtaposition of genres...becomes increasingly complex”⁵⁰; author/ity split between two factions causes the play(s) to become nearly disastrous, especially when the two plots encounter each other and the unsuspecting Rafe gets beaten (2.1.300-310). When the authors of city comedy came together to

contribute to the play, they discovered that “two heads [were] different than one.”⁵¹ As men assembled to create from parts the womanly city comedy, their authority over her was not doubled but was dispersed. Similarly, I am suggesting that male power over the female lessened as they joined forces to control her, and in the presence of more male author/ity, the woman-play began to discover her freedom.

Just as the woman-play detects her freedom as male author/ity is dispersed, she also experiences it as she escapes men’s system of labels. In the early modern period, women were offered three lifestyles: virgin, wife, or widow.⁵² Marriage was seen as the most desirable of the three choices and was promoted in the discourse and laws of the period: unmarried women, for example, were considered to be dangerous and/or undesirable and were forced into service so as not to be without guidance. If females did not fit one of the three categories, they were not accepted by mainstream society. Perhaps it was the anxiety over the economic changes of the period that caused Londoners to feel uneasy about other changes, especially changes in women’s position in their community. Any deviation from these categories, then, (e.g. unchasteness) resulted in prompt and public punishments ranging from beating and cucking to ducking and carting.⁵³

“On stage, [however], women are frequently represented transgressing conventional societal roles, but not necessarily punished for doing so.”⁵⁴ Moll in Middleton’s *The Roaring Girl*, for instance, is permitted to drink, smoke, and socialize with men; she dresses as a man and enjoys the freedoms prohibited to women of the period. Moll played the viol between her legs and proclaimed that she prefers to lie “o’ both sides o’ the bed”⁵⁵ (2.1.39) and would never get married. Moll was not beaten or carted through town; instead she was adored by audiences and characters alike, which suggests that “[d]rama stands in a liminal position...its generic conventions and rhetorical tropes problematize its representations of femininity.”⁵⁶

Moll did, however, make some people a bit unnerved: Mistress Openwork, a wife of one of the merchants who enjoyed Moll's company, was discontent with her husband's choice of acquaintances because she feared that because of her assumed male dress, Moll might also be enjoying men's sexual freedom. Like the woman who escapes labels, *The Knight* also eludes generic classification; it combines comedy, tragedy, and romantic action in one play, *The Knight* deconstructs generic labels and demonstrates how artificial such classifications are. Moll and *The Knight* both demonstrate the extent to which performance is important to women and plays. Moll draws attention to gender as performance: she dons male clothing and takes on male characteristics, while the other characters and the audience know that they are supposed to understand that underneath her male garb is indeed a woman.⁵⁷ Because of this discrepancy, Moll (and even the actor playing Moll) demonstrates just how easy it is to "become" a "man" or a "woman" by acting and dressing in the required manner. As Stephen Orgel explains, "Clothes make the woman, clothes make the man: the costume is of the essence."⁵⁸ This is particularly threatening to the society that, as Orgel suggests, relies on understanding women as imperfect men because as attention is drawn to the artificiality of gender,

...the danger points will be those at which women reveal that they have an independent essence, an existence that is not...under male control, a power and authority that either challenges male authority, or more dangerously, that is not simply a version or parody of maleness, but is specifically female.⁵⁹

Likewise, *The Knight* is a metadrama and so draws attention to its own performance and the constructedness of performance. Rafe has memorized his genres and with the appropriate monologue can move in and out of scenes as he is directed to; the servant demonstrates that there is nothing "natural" about plays just as cross-dressers suggest that gender can be "put on." Although Moll and *The Knight* had their enemies (Openwork and the audiences), they also demonstrated that it was possible to challenge societal expectations and get away with it.

When men came together to construct women, they agreed on the methods they would employ to control her. In the early modern period, men used biological explanations to give the woman an origin, an imperfect anatomy, and an incomplete body so that they might be in a position of power. Males exerted similar kinds of discipline over city comedy as they did over women: They tried to overpower her, they pieced her together, and they attempted to own and regulate her. What male playwrights, audiences, and authorities failed to see, however, was that as they came together to exert their author/ity over her that male author/ity did not grow exponentially but it dissipated. By watching plays and by examining themselves in relation to those plays, women could learn that gender was constructed and not something biological as men so often insisted it was. By watching city comedy, women learned that both gender and plays required performance; that through this performance the woman-play could begin to challenge patriarchal control.

City comedy offered a glimpse at London life, including the differences in gender that were so prevalent in 17th century England. Women saw that gender was constructed as they watched boys dressing up as female characters on the Renaissance stage. The biological reasons for difference were only secondary to more superficial differences like clothes: Epicoene transformed from a woman to a man with the removal of a peruke; Moll and Mary become men with the help of hose and doublets. Gender identity was found not in the anatomical realm, as men had suggested, but in the sartorial world and required mostly the science of performance.

The performance of gender on the stage and in life is a complex series of actions; there is no one woman (nor is there one man for that matter), but through the acts that one commits, an individual is able to approximate normative male or female behavior. Judith Butler explains:

...Simone de Beauvoir claims, "one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman..." In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed: rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time---an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.⁶⁰

The "stylized repetition of acts" makes a boy become Epicoene and Moll become a man as the two characters use their bodies to create their gendered selves. As on the stage, the woman, in her daily life, repeats these acts and so is called woman; the "constituting acts not only...constitut[e] the identity" of the female, but they also "constitute that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of *belief*."⁶¹ It is no surprise that the social construction of the female in the early modern period became explained biologically because "[t]he authors of gender become entranced by their fictions' own fictions whereby the construction compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness."⁶² In actuality, however, like the city comedy, women's gender was really an elaborate (social) performance.

Butler talks about gender as performative; it is an act because it has been rehearsed, but she also allows for, to borrow Greenblatt's term, improvisation. Each "actor/ress" is given a "script" and is expected to act as it instructs them; however, each individual interprets that "script" in a unique way and has some personal freedoms within the limits of his/her gender construct:

The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations...Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.⁶³

Gender should be thought of as "neither true nor false neither real nor apparent,"⁶⁴ Butler explains. This disbelief in the authenticity of gender roles is difficult to achieve because, Butler suggests, as we perform our genders "correctly" and are not punished for betraying our gender's expectations, we are reassured that there is, after all, a sort of essentialism in gender identity

even though there is not. Gender should be recognized as “what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure”⁶⁵; gender is not natural and any mistaken reading of it as such keeps us from noticing subversive performances of it.

When men in the early modern period viewed gender as essential and biological, they were restricting the female’s ability to challenge patriarchal authority. When we recognize that, as Butler suggests, gender is a “series of stylized acts,” then we see that there is no biological absolutism and therefore there is no inherent flaw in female origin or anatomy as men wished women to believe. In this sense, then, because gender is performance it seems to be subversive because it frees women from believing that they are naturally inferior to men. However, we must remember that just as men were scripting plays, men were also scripting the female and so this aspect of performance, rather than freeing her completely from feeling helpless or flawed, limits the woman-play because she is still primarily performing on men’s terms.

Reading city comedy as female allows us to recognize the ideology behind the treatment of women in the early modern period. We can see the anatomization of the woman, the desire to control and censor her, and the ways in which she was pieced together. We understand that performance of the woman-play requires a “script” and a “series of stylized acts.” Reading city comedy as female seems to reinforce socially inscribed gender roles: women-plays need to be controlled and regulated and pieced together by men, who will gladly write the scripts for both. However, I would like to suggest that viewing city comedy as female is more subversive than this; that these traits women and drama share are what was apparent to the patriarchy who attempted to control and regulate both. What the men of the early modern period neglected to see was something that we notice in the 20th century, perhaps only because we are faced with a plethora of technological advances, but that they did not: performance is intangible and ever-elusive.

If “shees like a play” and, as I suggest, a play is like her, it is important to remember that women and plays require performance: plays are acted on the stage and women, as Butler explains, act as their gender instructs them. Although, as mentioned above, the performer is in a feminine position while “the silent spectator [often] dominates and controls the exchange,” there is also a kind of power in performing, one that provides women and plays with a positive kind of ephemerality and allows them to escape the constraints used by the patriarchy to contain them:

Performance implicates the real through the presence of living bodies. In performance art spectatorship there is an element of consumption: there are no left-overs, the gazing spectator must try to take everything in. Without a copy, live performance plunges into visibility—in a maniacally charged present—and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control...performance art is vulnerable to charges of valuelessness and emptiness. Performance indicates the possibility of revaluing that emptiness; this potential revaluation gives performance art its distinctive oppositional edge.⁶⁶

Through the performance of city comedy and the performance of her gender, the woman-play gives her spectators the show that they desire, but it is through her performance that she has the ability to escape them by presenting the audience with something that they cannot fully reproduce, regulate, or control. Once her performance “disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility,” the woman-play has achieved a modicum of freedom as she leaves no “left-overs” and so begins to elude male—whether playwrights’, actors’, or publishers’—control.

The awareness, or perhaps more accurately, anxiety, in the period over the ability to perform was notable, as mentioned above. Mainly, the concerns were that it is difficult to determine what is “genuine” or “real” if the performance is convincing; also, the performance lies outside of viewer’s control: the viewer becomes distressed because he/she cannot predict what may come next, but can only watch as the performer acts. In *Amanda, or the Reformed Whore* by Thomas Cranley, we see that the narrator is cognizant of the ways a woman who frequents playhouses can remake herself daily and so leave behind the woman she was only

hours earlier: "Thither thou comest, in several forms and shapes, To make thee still a stranger to the place...And by thy habit so to change thy face. / At this time plain; tomorrow all in lace" (8-12).⁶⁷ The narrator is unable to alter the woman's behavior in any way; he can only explain the situation, and when doing so, he attributes power to the woman: "Thus, Proteus-like strange shapes thou ventrest on, / And changest hue, with the Chameleon" (27-8).

Similarly, when a play is performed, it takes on a new shape each time the curtain rises. Whoever has seen more than one production during the run of a play knows that, though the lines (generally) remain the same, the performance seen on opening night will differ markedly from the one given on Sunday afternoon. The play, like the woman, has this "Proteus-like" ability through her performance, and when Cranley talks about the woman, he could just as easily have been describing the play itself: "More changeable and wavering than the moon, / And with thy wanton looks, attracting to thee, / The amorous spectators for to woo thee" (5-7).⁶⁸

This intangible quality of avoiding control through performance that the woman-play possesses is, as Phelan explains, "vulnerable to charges of valuelessness and emptiness." As described above, men of the early modern period often understood the woman this way: she was sometimes "emptiness" because her male organs were turned inward and sometimes "valuelessness" as her uterus and ovaries were like a mole's eyes, perfectly formed but useless. Plays were also viewed this way; some thought of them as less serious than poetry or prose, for example. When Jonson was preparing to publish his dramatic works he received some rather cold responses:

Pray tell me *Ben*, where doth the mystery lurke,
What others call a play you call a worke.⁶⁹

In this nasty epigram we see that the author thinks little of plays as he mocks Jonson for calling his first publication that included his drama *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson*. The epigram writer may be chiding Jonson for his pompousness, but it is important to note that the writer

also realizes something about plays that Jonson does not: plays are, as Marston suggests above, performance based.

When Jonson decided to publish his *Workes*, he was doing it for several reasons: he wished to be viewed as a “serious” poet, he perhaps desired to be a “major literary celebrity of his age” and the first poet laureate⁷⁰ and, most importantly, he wished to attain the authorial control that escaped him on the stage. When Jonson could watch over the printing of his work, he could correct and revise as he saw fit, something he could not do in the theatre:

The publication of *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* later that year [in 1616] was the decisive event in Jonson’s lifelong struggle to establish control over his own writing. The printing press...invested the literary enterprise with a new aura of permanence. It did away with the vagaries of gloss, commentary, and idiosyncratic scribes, all of which were the hallmarks of the manuscript tradition, and made possible a standardized, uniform book. The discrepancy between handwritten copy and printed text was particularly telling in the case of plays, since the author’s manuscript became the property of the actors, who freely altered it to suit their own preferences. By collecting and editing his work, Jonson created an “authorized” text that could be shared again and again with an educated readership.⁷¹

That Jonson desired control over his work is not surprising given his personality; that he wanted control specifically over his plays is rather interesting because by editing them scrupulously he thought that he could “rescue” them from the “valuelessness” and “emptiness” and wrongful interpretation that drama was vulnerable to in performance. What Jonson did not realize, however, was that “performance [itself] offers the possibility of revaluing this emptiness” and so performance has a “distinctive oppositional edge.” Printing what was to be performed could not recapture the distinctly unique and powerful art that Jonson set out to create:

Writing, an activity which relies on the reproduction of the Same (the three letters *cat* will repeatedly signify the four-legged furry animal with whiskers) for the production of meaning, can broach the frame of performance but cannot mimic an art that is nonreproductive. The mimicry of speech and writing, the strange process by which we put words in each other’s mouth’s and others’ words in our own, relies on a circulatory economy in which equivalencies are assumed and reestablished. Performance refuses this system of exchange and resists the circulatory economy fundamental to it. Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward. Writing necessarily cancels the “tracelessness” inaugurated within this performative promise.

Performance's independence from mass reproduction, technologically, economically, and linguistically, is its greatest strength.⁷²

In Jonson's mind, his desire to capture performance on the page and control her was fulfilled when *Workes* was published. He believed he could gain control over the woman-play by regulating and manipulating her; he thought he might save her from those qualities that she, in performance, already possessed. The power in performance is, ironically enough, "nonreproductive" and is not in the realm of the visible. This "nonreproductive" power is something that eludes male control. This is why, I might suggest, the men of *Epicoene* are most upset with the collegiates: the women regulate their own bodies with "those excellent receipts [sic]...to keep [them]selves from bearing children" (4.3.51-2) in a world where men desire control over the female body. Having the ability to halt reproduction, whether by performance or by "excellent receipts," is threatening to a culture invested in so many patriarchal assumptions, especially when a woman's worth was indeed found in her ability to bear children. Once she rejects this role of reproducer, she deviates from the norm, becomes a threat, and loses her value in society.

Theatricality, performance, and the concern with reproduction are issues that extend into contemporary culture as well. One related example is recalled by Phelan in her "Playing Dead in Stone, or When Is a Rose Not a Rose?"⁷³ In 1989, when the remains of the Rose Theatre were unearthed in London while excavating for a commercial job, an intense struggle over the remains ensued for several months. Ultimately, after several interesting performances from both anti-Rose and pro-Rose factions, in 1993 the theatre was left buried under an office building because, Phelan suggests, the Rose was like a body that was "flagrantly unproductive, a 'disused mine'."⁷⁴ Although the theatre did remain inaccessible to the public for some time, on 14 April 1999 the exhibition of the remains was opened. Still, as Phelan suggests, because "national myth...cannot tolerate...unproductive remains...,[and so they]

must be buried, repressed, and/or converted into (tourist) capital and reproductive knowledge,”⁷⁵ the Rose suffered all of this: buried and repressed from 1989-99; converted into capital—it is, after all, £3 for adults, £2.50 for students and pensioners, and £2 for children of 5-15 for a glimpse of the remains—and reproductive knowledge as from it springs some understanding of the past, of what some think is the “truth” of Renaissance theatre, for future generations.

The Rose was a building, not a performance; now it is not even a theatre but rather some partial remains. Still, by regulating, selling, and forcing her to become reproductive, some believe this is the only way that we, in the 20th century, can understand and perhaps better regulate the knowledge of 17th century performances. Manipulated as was the woman-play, the Rose demonstrates that, like the 17th century woman-play whose power was grounded in her performance, many do not understand that the performances housed in the Rose were and are of more value than the stones that today lie in London.

Like Phelan, who suggests in *Unmarked* that her discussion of performance “attempts to find a theory of value for that which is not ‘really’ there...,” here I have worked to find a place and a value for performance and for women—two entities that were, and sometimes still are, considered to be “not ‘really’ there”—within the framework of city comedy. Thinking of performance and women in similar terms will perhaps allow us to reconsider the treatment of women, plays, theatres, and performances from the 17th century to the present.

Where, then, does this leave our woman-play? She endures male regulations and is given an inferior origin and anatomical abnormalities; has her speech controlled; and is refused unity as she is pieced her together. The culture, steeped in patriarchal assumptions, keeps her

contained through physical and linguistic means; but she, as performance, rejects the system of exchange that words place upon her; she revels in the fact that she can provide “an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward.” Although she cannot completely escape the demands placed upon her, she begins to understand that a modicum of freedom is indeed possible as she performs. Many women in the period did in fact make use of performance in order to avoid the restrictions placed on them by their society.⁷⁶ How did women learn to do this successfully? How did they become, at least in part, agents in a world where they were restricted mainly to a life of subservience and regulations? It was the play that held, as it were, “the mirror up to nature” and demonstrated to both men and women that control over performance, regulation of this powerful intangible thing, was practically impossible.⁷⁷ Still, the desire to control remained strong, though it was soon clear that women could not always be controlled. Similarly, the society supposed that plays required discipline as well, though drama too proved as difficult to label, regulate, and control as the woman. But because she can “cancel the ‘tracelessness’ inaugurated within [her] performative promise,” the woman-play, has the ability to recognize her potential power, value, and self-regulatory control when she recognizes that performance is indeed her “independence from mass reproduction...and... [so] is [her] greatest strength.”

Notes

¹ Thomas Dekker, *Westward Ho, The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers. Vol. II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 342.

² David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 124.

³ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Modern Drama: Plays/Criticism/Theory*, ed. W.B. Worthen, (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995) 1105.

⁴ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988) 93.

⁵ Dekker, 342.

⁶ See, for example, Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" and Herrick's "To The Virgins."

⁷ Theodora A. Jankowski, *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama*, (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1992) 24.

⁸ Though I have restricted my work here to city comedy exclusively, I would like to see this project become a lengthier piece that explores the connection between women and other dramatic genres as well. By doing this, and even perhaps extending the study to Restoration comedy, I would include, in my examination, female authors in order to see if they conform to the same standards and practice similar habits as do male dramatists.

⁹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 148.

¹⁰ Greenblatt, 93.

¹¹ See Karen Newman's account of a skimmington in *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1991) 35-6.

¹² Ibid. 3.

¹³ Ibid. 7.

¹⁴ Ibid. 9.

¹⁵ Gail Kern Paster, "Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy," *Renaissance Drama* 18 (1987): 50. See also her explanation of the proverb: "Let her cry, she'll piss the less" (50).

¹⁶ Ibid. 54.

¹⁷ Ibid. 44.

¹⁸ Newman, 39.

¹⁹ Newman, 35-50.

²⁰ Ben Jonson, *Epicoene or The Silent Woman*, ed. R.V. Holdsworth (London: A&C Black, 1993). Unless otherwise stated, all citations of *Epicoene* are from this edition.

²¹ See Jonson, 19-23.

²² Newman, 134.

²³ As I mention below, this “layering” of gender becomes rather complex as here we think about a boy actor playing a boy dressing up like a woman. What I mean in this example is that, normally, an audience suspends its disbelief when, for example, it sees a man acting the part of Lady MacBeth. The audience understands all of Lady MacBeth’s actions to be those of a woman and are perhaps unnerved that a woman might be so cruel, so demanding, so masculine. However, as the audience sees that Jonson’s play calls attention to the fact that Epicoene is part of a joke—a man playing a woman in order to fool Morose—the belief that this is a “real” woman, like Lady MacBeth, is exploded. Because they understand that this is just a male playing (perhaps exaggerating?) female behavior, the audience’s fears are quelled in part when they see that no woman has pulled off such a trick, rather it was a man directing this “play.” At the same time, however, what makes this play interesting in terms of gender is that there is a certain amount of attention drawn to the constructedness of gender, as in an issue I address below, that allows the audience to see, simultaneously, just how easy it is to “be” a woman or a man.

²⁴ Riggs, 122-3.

²⁵ Ibid. 124.

²⁶ Ibid. 124.

²⁷ Ibid. 124.

²⁸ Richard Burt, “‘Licensed By Authority’: Ben Jonson and the Politics of Early Stuart Theatre,” *ELH* 3 (1987): 530.

²⁹ Ibid. 529-30.

³⁰ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, ed. Michael Hattaway (London: A&C Black, 1998) 11-17. Unless otherwise stated, all citations of *The Knight* are from this edition, which, interestingly, only gives Beaumont credit for this play, although Masten, in *Textual Intercourse* below, makes it quite clear that *The Knight* was written by both men.

³¹ Phelan, 163.

³² Stephen Orgel, “The Subtexts of *The Roaring Girl*,” *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) 24.

³³ Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist, Three Comedies: Volpone, The Alchemist, Bartholomew Fair*, ed. Michael Jamieson (London: Penguin Books, 1966). Unless otherwise stated, all citations of *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair* are from this edition.

³⁴ Jankowski, 23.

³⁵ Ibid. 24.

³⁶ See Riggs’s description below.

³⁷ Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1981) 135-6.

³⁸ Riggs, 221.

³⁹ Ibid. 226.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 221.

⁴¹ For example, Jonson's title page of *Every Man Out of His Humour* reads, "The Comicall Satyre of EVERYMAN OUT OF HIS HUMOUR, as it was first composed by the AUTHOR B.I. containing more then hath been publikely spoken or acte[d]. With the severall Character of every person" when other plays at the time were usually published "as acted by" or "as played by" a particular company (Barish 136-7).

⁴² Ben Jonson, "An Ode to Himselfe," *The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson*, ed. William Hunter (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963) 160.

⁴³ Ben Jonson, "ODE TO HIMSELFE," *The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson*, ed. William Hunter (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963) 388.

⁴⁴ Again, thinking ahead to how I might develop this piece further, I would like to see how I might read the woman as text and how this reading, in terms of Jonson and his contemporaries, affects my proposal here about women, performance, and publication.

⁴⁵ Galenic medicine maintained that the female was but an undeveloped male; her internal reproductive organs were nothing more than the male organs turned inward:

Turn outward the woman's [reproductive organs], turn inward, so to speak, and fold double the man's [reproductive organs], and you find them the same in both in every respect... In fact... you could not find a single male part left over that had not simply changed its positions: for the parts that are inside in woman are outside in man.
(Greenblatt 80)

This similarity between the sexes seems as if it would be an equalizing force; if men and women had the same reproductive organs only in slightly different configurations, they must be equal. However, Galen goes on to explain that the "exact homology implies a difference that derives from the female's being colder, and hence less perfect, than the male. This defect keeps the female genitals from being born" (80). Galen provides an interesting metaphor in order to make this inequality strikingly clear:

You can see something like this in the eyes of the mole, which have vitreous and crystalline humors and the tunics that surround these... and they have these just as much as animals do that make use of their eyes. The mole's eyes, however, do not open, nor do they project but are left there imperfect and remain like the eyes of other animals when these are still in the uterus. (80).

⁴⁶ For example, often in John Donne's poetry, he uses both views of the universe, depending on which one better suits the situation. Another example of this ability for opposing sides to exist and be valued simultaneously is in Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*. See especially the discussion in Book Three regarding women.

⁴⁷ For more on the conflicting ideologies of the age, see Stephen Orgel's *Impersonations* where he notes that the Renaissance is full of "contradictions... [and] to undertake to resolve them will misrepresent the system" (123).

⁴⁸ Jeffery Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, authorship, and sexualities in Renaissance drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 14.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 19.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 23.

⁵¹ Ibid. 19.

⁵² See Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*—the exchange between the Duke and Mariana (5.1.171-180)—for an example of this point.

⁵³ Jankowski, 37-9.

⁵⁴ Newman, 31.

⁵⁵ Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, *The Roaring Girl*.

⁵⁶ Newman, 31.

⁵⁷ This “layering” of gender here becomes rather difficult, I think, when we consider that there is a male playing a female who dresses and acts like a male. For more on cross dressing see Orgel's *Impersonations*.

⁵⁸ Orgel, *Impersonations*, 104.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 63.

⁶⁰ Butler, 1097.

⁶¹ Ibid. 1098.

⁶² Ibid. 1099.

⁶³ Ibid. 1102.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 1103.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 1105.

⁶⁶ Phelan, 148.

⁶⁷ Thomas Cranley, *Amanda, or the Reformed Whore* (1635) from *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents*. Eds. S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1996) 165-6.

⁶⁸ Cranley also conflates the woman and the play when he suggests that “The play once ended...” (29). Here he seems to mean the play on the stage that the woman is viewing, though it might also be argued that he could mean the woman's “play” (performance) that he describes earlier.

⁶⁹ Riggs, 228.

⁷⁰ Riggs, 221.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Phelan, 149.

⁷³ Peggy Phelan, "Playing Dead in Stone, or, When Is a Rose Not a Rose?" from *Performance and Cultural Politics*. Ed. Elin Diamond (London: Routledge, 1996) 65-88.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 34.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 34.

⁷⁶ See Orgel's *Impersonations* for several examples of these instances.

⁷⁷ This idea that a woman performs and so is dangerous is not a new one, though what I've done here is to consider how the play instructs both male and female viewers that performance is powerful not only because one can assume different identities, but also because performance itself is intangible, uncontrollable. In Jean E. Howard's *The Stage and Social Struggle*, she, when discussing the female spectator as not only the object of the gaze but as a gazer herself, says that perhaps there was not only "a fear *for* women, but a fear *of* woman..."(79). This is, in part, what I am suggesting here: in my analogy the woman's gaze on the play was as feared (or should have been as feared) as the male gaze upon the woman.

Also, that women (and even men) might learn how to behave in certain ways after viewing theatrical performances is mentioned in antitheatrical pamphlets of the period. For example, in "A third blast of retrait from plaies and Theaters, showing the abhominacion of them in the time present" (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972), Anthony Munday is concerned that going to plays does indeed provide an "education" for viewers that is rather dangerous because it can lead to subversive behavior:

...[S]ome [women] by taking pittie on the deceitful teares of the stage louers, haue bene mououed by their complaint to rue on their secret frends, whome they haue thought to haue tasted like torment; some hauing noted the ensamples how maidens restrained from the marriage of those whome their frends haue misliked, haue there learned a policie to preuent their parents, by stealing them awaie; some seeing by ensample of the stage plaier one carried with too much liking of an other mans wife, hauing noted by what practise she hath bene assailed and ouertaken, haue not failed to put the like in effect in earnest, that was afore shouen in [j]est... [The viewers] are growen so perfect scholers by long continuance at this schoole, that there is almost no worde spoken, but they can make matter of it to serue their turne. They can so surelie discover the conceits of the minde, and so cunninglie handle themselues; & are growen so subtile in working their matters, that neither the [j]elosie of [*J*]uno, who suspecteth al things...nor the watchfulnes of *Argoes* with his hundred eies espie. (97-9)

About the Author

Stephannie Suzanne Gearhart was born in Akron, Ohio on 28 September 1976 to Otto A. Gearhart, Jr. and Rita Ann Gearhart. She attended Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio where she received a B.A. in English and graduated Summa Cum Laude with University Honors and Honors in English in 1998. Currently, Stephannie is finishing her M.A. in English at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania where she teaches composition and will be starting her Ph.D. in May 2000.

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