



Shakespeareer

A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare

MADHAVI MENON, EDITOR

Shakespeare

SERIES



*Edited by Michèle Aina Barale,
Jonathan Goldberg, Michael Moon,
and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick*

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*A Queer Companion to
the Complete Works of Shakespeare*

Edited by MADHAVI MENON

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Queer Shakes

MADHAVI MENON

When I first decided to title the introduction to this volume “Queer Shakes,” a friend pointed out that “Queer Shakes sounds a bit like a libertine’s pathology.” He offered, by way of example, the following sentence: “After decades of too many cocks and too many cocktails, Wilde was afflicted with the Queer Shakes.” I found this sense of affliction fortuitous: it positions *Shakespeare* as a germ infecting the ways in which we do queer business. While Shakespeare scholarship has for years been flirting with queer theory, the relationship between the two is less reciprocal than we might expect, and queer theory rarely resorts to Shakespeare as a ground for its formulation. The reason for this one-sided relationship is twofold. First, in its institutionalized avatar, queer theory takes as its ambit a historical period after 1800; since Shakespeare died in 1616, his texts are not generally understood to be proper subjects of queer theory as we know it today. And second, the reason this historical date of, or around, 1800 is important is that it is believed to mark the institutionalization of homosexuality and heterosexuality. Despite its suspicion of institutional constraints, then, queer theory has set up two strong institutional boundaries of its own, accepting as its proper domain a historical period in which queerness comes to be understood as homosexuality. The convergence of these two boundaries—the one temporal and the other identitarian—ensures that a queered Shakespeare is never a queer Shakespeare. Instead, it allows us to fix the place of Shakespeare and queer theory both in themselves and in relation to each other and gives us able-bodied monoliths instead of libertines with the queer shakes.

Oddly, this fixed Shakespeare conjured by an institutional queer theory resembles nothing so much as the canonical figure we have inherited as the privileged signifier of the literary and the human. Deemed by the cult of canonicity to be “not of an age but for all time,” Shakespeare has enjoyed the kind of status that no other author has inside or outside the academy; this is



why Derek Jarman remarked ruefully, after his *Tempest* failed in the United States, that in America “messing with Will Shakespeare is not allowed.”¹ But privilege is not all that it appears to be, and being canonized also deprives a text of agency, containing what is potentially too disturbing to be contained. It is in this way that queer theory’s refusal to engage Shakespeare as queer becomes indistinguishable from the far from queer worship of the canonizers. The conservative impulse to venerate Shakespeare stems from the same source as the desire to ignore his queerness. Both involve circumscribing him as untouchable: if we mount him, it can only be behind glass. While the canonizers make him “our” author who transcends time, the queer theorists use him to confirm who we are *not* by placing him squarely in his “own” historical moment. Either way, Shakespeare is not allowed to unsettle our sense of ourselves. Indeed, if canonizing Shakespeare protects our idea of ourselves, then not engaging the canonical Shakespeare allows that protection to continue unimpeded. Thus, even as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s engagement with the Sonnets was an early example of queer theory’s interaction with Shakespeare, it has become increasingly impossible to cross the temporal boundaries within which the institutionalized version of queer theory has bound itself. It is only by allowing Shakespeare to break out of the boundaries within which he has been confined, though, that we take away from him the burden of being the “inventor” of the human and the privileged signifier of the literary. Equally, by reading the textual Shakespearean body as queer, we interrupt and disrupt queer theory as we know it today, expanding the parameters within which it has confined itself. For this to happen, it is not enough simply for Shakespeare to be queered: queer theory, too, needs to be Shaken.²

There are thus two assumptions that we need to rethink to formulate the possibility of Shakesqueer. The first is the idea that queerness has a historical start date. The second is that queerness is a synonym for embodied homosexuality.

In his challenge to the first assumption—the limits of chronological thinking—Slavoj Žižek famously proposed *Richard II* as a text that “proves beyond any doubt that Shakespeare had read Lacan.”³ The queerness of this statement depends on a number of confusions: a temporal confusion that positions the twentieth-century psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan as temporally prior to the sixteenth-century playwright William Shakespeare; a causal confusion that posits cause as supposed effect—Shakespeare has read Lacan rather than Lacan has read Shakespeare; and an epistemological confusion that “proves beyond any doubt” the problematic nature of proof itself. These unexpected



moments of dislocation are the characteristic features of a Shakesqueer that does not abide by the law of chronology and that insists, in a major academic Shake-up, on redrawing, if not collapsing, the temporal divide between the sixteenth century, when Shakespeare lived and wrote, and the twentieth century, when queer theory was first formulated as such. This insistence is also characteristic of an academic theory that is not dutiful, good, or proper and that refuses to buy into the “institutional domestication of queer thinking.”⁴

Such a refusal has serious ramifications for the institutional structures within which we do our work. After all, a challenge to chronology is also a challenge to periodicity. Where and what would we be if we were not modernists or medievalists or eighteenth centuryists? Hitching queer theory to Shakespeare forces us to consider the posts we currently occupy: if ideas can be brought together over the centuries, then what is the locus standi of the centuries themselves? What would we be if we had to dislocate who we are and what we do—if we had to, that is, queer ourselves? Currently, the understanding of scholarly “expertise” is located squarely in the realm of historical specificity rather than methodological modes of reading and thought; it is considered more legitimate to speak of queerness in texts and bodies after the nineteenth century, no matter whether one reads these texts and bodies as psychoanalytic, Marxist, deconstructive, or feminist, critics. *How* one reads has become less important than the historical period within which one reads. And so, even as “Queer Theorist” has recently begun to be advertised as an academic position in its own right, the disciplinary straightness of the position is amply demonstrated in the descriptions that accompany the advertisements. Inevitably, they ask for the queer theorist to be “located” in nineteenth-century or twentieth-century literature. Such an insistence on location chronologically orients the very theory that seeks to be disorienting. If Shakespeare were to be considered queer, that would change the ways in which we advertise our jobs, undertake our dissertations, theorize queerness, and carve out our identities.

Shakesqueer thus reformats the historical date we currently attach to the idea of the queer. And since this grafting of queerness onto time pivots crucially on the so-called emergence of the gay body, *Shakesqueer* also asks us to reevaluate the relationship between queerness and homosexuality. Most studies deemed legitimately queer focus on post-nineteenth-century literature and cultures, after “the homosexual” is understood to be in the domain of public legibility. Thus, no matter how great their variety, and how dazzling their intelligence, queer studies of the Renaissance tend to wrap themselves



in an armature of apology for their work because they are scared to term as “queer” a time “before” the homosexual. Here are two random, though typical, examples of such apology: “Were there homosexuals in early modern Europe? Did men who had sex with each other in this period regard their behaviour as determining their identity?”⁵ And again: “We all know that there were no early modern heterosexuals, homosexuals, lesbians, gays, or bisexuals. There were also no early modern queers.”⁶ The difficulty for *Shakespeare* rests precisely in the coils of this thorny question: if no homosexuals existed in the Renaissance, then did queerness? Thus formulated, the query collapses homosexuality and queerness so that the queer is grounded in specific bodies and acts. Homosexuality and its historical placement become synonymous with the queer. In such a schema, the acceptable face of Shakespearean queerness becomes the project of locating characters in the poems and the plays—Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* and Viola in *Twelfth Night*, for example—and suggesting that they might be proto-homosexuals.⁷

But *Shakespeare* does not accept as its basis the identification of queerness with specific bodily practices. Instead, this volume asks whether we are still able to read *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night* as queer texts without also assuming that they are either homosexual or proto-homosexual documents. This disorienting experience—when we queer texts that have no gays in them—takes queerness away from its primary affiliation with the body and expands the reach of queerness beyond and through the body to a host of other possible and disturbing configurations. Even as queerness is informed by its historical association with sexual irregularities, it cannot be reduced to or located in their embodiment. Indeed, one reason Shakespeare is a prime candidate for the expansion of queer theory is that queerness as homosexuality deems him to be such an unlikely candidate. If we extend queerness beyond the body, then Shakespeare—as Virgil before him and Milton after—is as queer as, say, Elizabeth Bishop and Derek Jarman. He is not a post-nineteenth-century homosexual, and he never comes out as gay—or, rather, we cannot tell, and that is what makes him so queer.

So Who or What Is Queer?

In my description for a Modern Language Association (MLA) roundtable on *Shakespeare* in December 2007, I provided the following rationale: “Intervening in an academic culture in which queerness is largely considered a post-nineteenth-century phenomenon, *Shakespeare* insists on destabilizing that



chronological certainty. Shakespeareans have often arrived at queerness, but this panel suggests it is time also for queerness to come to Shakespeare. Shakesqueer will intervene critically in both Shakespeare studies and queer theory, highlighting not only the many ways in which Shakespeare can be queered, but also the many ways in which Shakespeare can contribute to the process and assumptions of queering itself.” After the session, there was time for only one question, and it was the following: “While it is clear that queer theory can help us read Shakespeare in ways that change our understanding of Shakespeare’s texts, is it possible for Shakespeare’s texts to help us formulate and animate queer theory? Is the relationship between ‘Shakes’ and ‘queer’ an equal one, or are we simply dignifying Shakespeare by assuming he has as much to offer queer theory as queer theory has to offer him?” As formulated, the question goes to the very heart of this project: can Shakespeare be regarded as a queer theorist, or is he always the object on which queer theory acts in a one-sided relationship?

The question assumes both that Shakespeare is not a queer theorist and that queer theory can be recognized as an entity in and of itself. We who know queer theory know what it can do, and we who know Shakespeare are not certain how an alliance with Shakespeare can add to its many theoretical riches. Shakespeare can be queered because the project proves so irresistible, but the theoretical traffic cannot move in both directions, because queerness—here conflated with homosexuality—is a post-nineteenth-century phenomenon. Clearly, if the panel had been about queer Whitman or queer Woolf or queer Jarman, the question of equality and reciprocity would not have emerged, because the assumption is that both partners in the relationship are working with the same vocabulary. Shakespeare, unfortunately for him, lies beyond the pale of acceptable chronology, so to extend queerness to him is to play fast and loose with academic credibility.⁸

I want to address these legitimate concerns by asking a slightly different question: Where does queer theory come from? If we can be fairly sure that it does not come from Shakespeare—or any other author and text before the nineteenth century—then from where does it emerge? Which texts generate queer theory? Can we have a queer theory that strays from the path of periodization? If my experience with putting together this volume is anything to go by, then the answer to that last question is “no.” In a significant phenomenon that may be termed “Shakesfear,” many of the queer theorists I approached said—in the nicest possible way—that even though they loved the sound of the project, they could not do it because it was scary to write something



about Shakespeare. People confessed to ignorance of Shakespeare, to having failed exams on Shakespeare, to fear of the Bard, to hesitation about what for them lay so manifestly beyond their abilities. This phenomenon puzzled me extremely, not because I thought everyone would say yes to the project, but because it suggested the fact that Shakespeare does not generally count as queer, and so writing on Shakesqueer seemed to be a turn away from queer business as usual, a turn away from queer theory. Even though I had assured them in emails soliciting their participation that “the goal [of the volume] is to gather the most provocative queer theorists together to engage whatever issues interest them by way of reference, in each case, to a specific Shakespeare text,” the very idea of an intersection between the queer work of “now” and the Shakespeare of “then” was sufficient to give people pause. Again, this is not to say that Shakesfear is not a legitimate phenomenon and that people should not be scared of the very thing they are expected to revere, but as with the question from the MLA roundtable, this is a phenomenon whose fears are extremely instructive for the project of *Shakesqueer*. It assumes that while it is worthwhile to queer Shakespeare, the reciprocal movement—Shaking queer theory—is simply an alien concept.

What is this queer theory that is nervous about being Shaken, and where does it come from? To what and to whom does it belong? Even though Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue that “it is not useful to consider queer theory a thing,”⁹ that is precisely what we do. We further conclude that this thing has a referent that can be explained. Several answers are offered to the question of what constitutes the queerness theorized by queer theory, and here are two random examples. For the first commentator, “Queer designates a range of acts, identities, propensities, affectivities, and sentiments which fissure heteronormativity.”¹⁰ For the second commentator, queer refers to “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.”¹¹ But surely this “open mesh of possibilities,” Sedgwick’s resonant description of the term “queer,” necessitates an openness not only to sexual and gendered possibilities, but also to chronological, national, racial, philosophical, and animal choices; to texts and ideas that address questions of sameness across times, the non-coincidence of the same with itself, and the vexed relation between sameness and difference?

In addition to widening the horizon of queer possibility, then, we need to leach the term of a certain sentimentality that has become attached to it, in



which “queer” automatically means “good.” In the academy, queer theorists are often accused of being hip and fashionable simply for the sake of it, and worse, of not having a coherent object for our analysis. Our defensive comeback is to assure our detractors that what we do is good and right and will go a long way in enabling a brave new world; even better, we assure them that queerness is a clear and recognizable thing worthy of our attention. But the characteristic of queer theory that makes it at once attractive to theorists and vulnerable to critics is that it can never define the queer. Rather than attaching to specific times and authors, queerness allows us to encounter the violence of specificity itself by being excluded from its ambit. Lest we conclude from this that queerness can mean anything at any time and in any place, let me hasten to add that queerness cannot “mean” in any final sense of that word. If queerness can be defined, then it is no longer queer—it strays away from its anti-normative stance to become the institutionalized norm. Queerness is not a category but the confusion engendered by and despite categorization.¹² Queer theory deals with an excess that renders undefinable the very thing it might have been brought in to define. Queerness “is,” inasmuch as it can be said to “be” anything, nothing that can fully be contained in a volume of essays or an orgy of leather.¹³ It recognizes the absurdity of limits and interrupts the ways in which we live our lives and write our texts, but it cannot be contained by how we live and what we write.

One might ask at this point how queer theory is different, say, from post-structural thought in general, and deconstruction in particular? And what is the relation between queerness and sexuality if the term “queer” is being expanded so far beyond embodied desire? Both of these questions respond to a possible lack of boundaries with a desire for the assertion of boundaries. It is all very well to say that queer theory recognizes the absurdity of limits, but really, where *does* one draw the line?

As this volume makes clear, that line is very difficult to draw. Queerness is bodily and that which challenges the limits of what we understand as the body. It expands its ambit to include discussions of the universe, animals, and rationality. While sexual desire sometimes lurks in the background or looms in the foreground, it is not always recognizable as desire. For instance, a play on language might be as sexual as a kiss, or a tussle with authority can become as intense as sex. In keeping with its challenge to temporal and identitarian boundaries, then, this volume also suggests that queerness is everywhere. It cannot be confined to what we think of as same-sex sexuality. Indeed, queerness here might not be recognizable as adult same-sex desire, but equally it



provides more arenas within which to get one's kicks. It expands the ambit of the sexual rather than being restricted by it. Such an expansion is very much in keeping with our lived experiences of desire and sexuality. Do any of us really stay within the boundaries that a particular terminology delimits? Do we not—even the most high-minded of us—stray in our desires? *Shakespeare* treats the straying of desire as crucial to queerness and follows its thread to the very unraveling.

The unraveling of what appears to be a tight-knit concept is very much the legacy of deconstruction. With its suspicion of absolutes and its conviction that the center cannot hold, deconstruction, especially in its de Manian and Derridean forms, insists on the fragility, and therefore the malleability, of texts and all the life forms associated with texts, especially the human. But while this expansion of the text to humans, and then animals, is the legacy of the later Derrida, queer theory has always been invested in humans and animals. If anything, deconstruction moved to where queer theory has always already been: the intersection between life and death, text and pleasure, sex and politics, human and animal. In an essay on irony in *Aesthetic Ideology*, Paul de Man gestures toward the presence of the sexual in philosophy, only to reject that imbrication as being, surely, unthinkable:

There is in the middle of [Friedrich Schlegel's short novel] *Lucinde* a short chapter called "Eine Reflexion," which reads like a philosophical treatise or argument, but it doesn't take a very perverse mind, only a slightly perverse one, to see that what is actually being described is not a philosophical argument at all but is—well, how shall I put it?—a reflection on the very physical questions involved in sexual intercourse. Discourse which seems to be purely philosophical can be read in a double code, and what it really is describing is something which we do not generally consider worthy of philosophical discourse, at least not in those terms—sexuality is worthy of it, but what is being described is not sexuality, it's something much more specific.

It's not just that there is a philosophical code and then another code describing sexual activities. These codes are radically incompatible with each other. They interrupt, they disrupt, each other in such a fundamental way that this very possibility of disruption represents a threat to all assumptions one has about what a text should be.¹⁴

Returning to the same passage later, de Man asserts: "You are [at one moment] writing a splendid and coherent philosophical argument but, lo and



behold, you are describing sexual intercourse.”¹⁵ Deconstruction’s brilliance lies in its ability to see that every text is interrupted from within, that coherence is a projection and not a truth. Indeed, de Man here has a strong hunch that this particular disruption may threaten all assumptions within which we read, write, and live. But even as de Man seems surprised by this *particular* eruption, queer theory would not be surprised in the least; indeed, it sees sex and desire and sexuality where others may not. At one level, this difference marks the difference between deconstruction and queer theory. While deconstruction at first primarily challenged philosophy’s claim to transcendence, queer theory has always been interested in the larger lived realities of desire. But it also points to the interrelatedness of, and therefore the lack of absolute difference between, deconstruction and queer theory. Often based on an analysis of language and the insufficiency of terms to embody what they claim to represent, queer theory has insisted on the contaminating effects that desire can exert on ideas of purity. De Man’s point in this passage, after all, is that the language of philosophy is, fascinatingly and disturbingly, *infected* by the language of sex.

The same mutuality can be said to mark queer theory’s relation to Marxism in their joint investigation into structures of power; to feminism in their exploration of gender; to critical race theory in their consideration of interwoven social, legal, and cultural tales; and to postcolonialism in their analysis of hybridity, temporality, and mimicry, to name only a few. In this sense, queer theory may be considered a hybrid, an amalgamation of several different theories and texts that thwarts our desire to pin down its essence. It is in conversation with other theories, but equally, these conversations change the shape of what queer theory “is.” Indeed, it would be counterproductive for queer theory to insist on its inviolable grounding in homosexual bodies and desires because this would attribute fixed contours to those bodies and desires. As with the relation between institutionalized queer theory and Shakespeare, this insistence would be inseparable from the homophobic belief in the transparent legibility of the homosexual body and the ease with which it may be punished. To the question, “What does a homosexual look like?” queer theory’s answer is, “I do not know.” Equally, to the question, “What is queer theory?,” the answer is, “All things that militate against the obvious, the settled, and the understood—in other words, nothing that may be fully or finally grasped.” Queer theory *returns* us to the question of desire. But its strength lies in being able to re-turn almost anything to that question while continuing to retain it as a question rather than an answer.

It is often argued that the term “desire”—inflected as it is by psychoanalysis—itself has a historical starting date and therefore limits the ambit of queer theory. Thus, to speak of desire in relation to Shakespeare is not only anachronistic, but also universalizing. Scholarship has already addressed this very question (see, for instance, Valeria Finucci’s and Regina M. Schwartz’s collection *Desire in the Renaissance*), but what makes it persist as a question is our continued fascination with mapping sexuality onto chronology. While terms such as “power,” “domination,” “subversion,” “class,” and “race,” to name only a few, repeatedly have been transported into chronological realms in which they did not originally exist, the desire to historically police “desire” has been more fierce. Ironically, this desire to police desire is the very thing against which queerness militates, even as it has become the very thing that marks the institutionalization of queer theory.

What are the consequences of policing the one term that is arguably most resistant to the law? Even more urgent, what are the implications for the field when *queer theory* itself polices the range of its subject? I want to join these two paragraphs. For one, accepting that texts before the nineteenth century can be queer would be tantamount to accepting that queer theorists have existed for a longer time than we have thus far been willing to accept, that Shakespeare as much as Sedgwick is a queer theorist. Since it is not a matter of self-aware terminology—after all, Freud did not call himself a queer theorist, but several strands of queer theory openly acknowledge their Freudian genealogy—this expansion is potentially endless and underscores the fact that period studies should not be considered part of queer studies. One is not queer by acts and chronologies alone. One cannot be queer while insisting on barricading queerness. One cannot be queer and not be Shaken.

Thus, if it is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a literary reputation must be in want of some queering, then that queering itself is in need of being queered. To think of Shakespeare as a queer theorist involves throwing into doubt all our pieties about his universality, and his invention of the human. As Lee Edelman has taught us to see, Shakespeare the humanist—who produces order out of chaos—also evinces the antihuman cacophony of voices that is the shadow or *sinthome* within the humanist project. Indeed, what we understand by “Shakespeare” needs to be shaken up rather than being taken for granted. Is “Shakespeare” the author of his works? The effect generated by those works? The body of literature independent of an author? A fragmented set of texts put together hastily by sycophantic editors? A pseudonym for a cabal of impoverished writers? None of

the above? If queer theory is the theory of no one thing, then Shakespeare is the not-single author of a set of diversely fragmented texts. One of the reasons queer theory is reluctant to extend its reach backward in time is that it is—understandably—wary of entering into systems of literary and cultural production that seem so alien from our own. But equally, reading Shakespeare as a queer theorist disrupts what we think we understand as *our* systems of literary and cultural production—it expands the definitions within which we think. Shakesqueer throws into doubt not only our relation to queerness, but also the very idea of Shakespeare, rhyming him out of the sublime by letting him chime with the queer. Even as queer theory brings all of its force to bear on questions of desire, power, and sexuality, it also needs to dispense with a historical trajectory that distinguishes between unified, self-identical humanity, on the one hand, and chaotic medieval fluidity, on the other. If Shakespeare were to be considered a queer theorist, then not only would he not look like anything we might expect, but he would equally change the way that we look (in both senses of the term). My proposal for a queer Shakes thus is nothing less than a proposal to dissolve the boundaries between the two entities—not so they can indulge in free love while seeking the meaning of the universe, but precisely to undermine the monolithic nature of the *universe* as we think we understand it today. Shakesqueer ruthlessly destroys the very idea of a singular identity—his and our own—that has thus far kept Shakespeare away from the queer party.

Shakesqueer

Allowing Shakespeare to attend the queer party may seem like the ultimate capitulation. Not only has Shakespeare been credited with the invention of the human, but he is now also being crowned the Queen of queer theory. There is some truth to the fact that Shakespeare is frequently brought in as the crutch to support any and every point of view—he has even been invoked to justify the abolition of the death tax in the United States.¹⁶ But such a formulation—“allowing Shakespeare to attend the queer party”—also suggests that his attendance is something about which we have a choice. I want to argue, *au contraire*, that Shakespeare has always already been Shakesqueer; that queer theory as we know it today is already Shakespearean, and the time has arrived for us to acknowledge that fact.

In claiming that Shakespeare is a queer theorist, and that Shaking queer theory is a phenomenon whose time has come, I do not mean to suggest that

we need Shakespeare to legitimate queer theory. Rather, I intend my claims to be far more radical. First, Shakespeare is queer even though neither he nor a single one of his characters is historically homosexual.¹⁷ And second, Shakespeare is already embedded within a queer theory that nonetheless exorcises Shakespeare by distancing itself from him institutionally. To adduce only two examples of this claim, Rene Girard's theorization of homosocial triangulation, which forms the basis of Sedgwick's hugely influential—indeed, foundational—queer text, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, derives its energy from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. Sedgwick's book also begins with a famous essay on Shakespeare's sonnets.¹⁸ To cite a more recent occurrence, Elizabeth Freeman's introduction to a special double issue of *GLQ* on "Queer Temporalities," begins with an invocation and analysis of Hamlet's pronouncement that "the time is out of joint."¹⁹ Shakespeare is a specter haunting queer theory—our ideas of normativity and desire owe a debt to Shakespearean ideas and language that we have been strangely unwilling to pay. Instead, we banish him to the realm of the pre-queer, where he is sometimes considered worthy as an object of queer theoretical attention but is rarely recognized as having provided, to a significant extent, the very vocabulary for that theory. Indeed, the invocation of "Shakespeare" by queer theory is always a contradictory call. On the one hand, it is the hyper-canonical Shakespeare that queer theory sees as the opposite of queerness. In this scenario, asserting Shakespeare's queerness is tantamount to making Shakespeare the transcendent signifier of all things, including the queer. On the other hand, the demonization of Shakespeare's hyper-canonicity disavows the ways in which queer theory is and always has been informed, enabled, and identified by its Shakespearean cadences.

Shakespeare is a queer theorist, then, not because he has written essays with the word "queer" in the title, but because his work already inhabits the queer theory we occupy today. It also challenges many of the limits beyond which queer theory currently refuses to stray. Reading Shakespeare as queer rather than queered challenges the rule of chronology and identity that has thus far kept his poems and plays from exercising queer agency. To look at some concepts that deeply inform current queer theory in a Shakespearean light, therefore, is to challenge the monolithic conception of Shakespeare that is the legacy of the canonical, as well as to examine the chronological and identitarian blind spots that prevent queer theory from being Shaken. I want to pay attention to three particular areas to which Shakespeare's texts and queer the-

ory insistently return: language, identity, and temporality. All of them allow us to reconsider the parameters within which we contain queer theory today.



Language

Queer theory has an ambivalent relationship to language.²⁰ On the one hand, given its deconstructive lineage, queer theory is deeply invested in the shape of words, but on the other hand, given its activist component, queer theory has at times ignored the shape of words and focused on their content. Early queer theorizations of language have included, most importantly, the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose analyses are indebted to a structuralist understanding of language and its discontents, while working also with J. L. Austin's theorization of performative language. This investment in the shaping power of language—that “bodies forth / The forms of things unknown”²¹—later routed itself through a psychoanalytic framework in which Freudian and Lacanian theories provided the ground for thinking about how language creates, and not merely represents, bodies and desires. As Theseus's quote makes clear, Shakespeare is invested in the link between linguistic and bodily registers. In his essays in *Homographesis*, Lee Edelman teases out the peculiar strictures of legibility under which gay bodies are placed. Gayness is considered that which can be *read* (on the body), but equally, the anxiety about homosexuality often pivots on the fear that it might prove to be *unreadable*, thus throwing into disarray the relation between legibility and identity. The identifications created by language—whether by descriptive terminology or derisive slurs—have been crucial in theorizing queer theory's relation to desire. Like bodies and objects, words too have *orientations*, and the orientation of desire, as Sara Ahmed has teased out that term, brings together queer theory's geopolitical dimensions and its textual interests.

While projects of queering Shakespeare have focused fruitfully on plot details, generic problems, and sexual disguise, the question of language has tended to be contained in both historical and political terms. Studies of Shakespearean language often deal with the “early modern” meanings of words that render them queer, sometimes in contradiction to our own current definitions. As important as such historical contextualization no doubt is, the queerness of Shakespeare's language lies in much more than the meanings of words or in their cultural specificity. It lies in their very texture and sound, in the Os that Joel Fineman follows in his analysis of desire in *Othello*, and the “R”s that Jonathan Goldberg excavates in the relationship between Romeo

and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare uses, for instance—in frequently but always with devastating effect—the metrical foot called the trochee, a combination of one stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one; it is the opposite of the iamb, which, with its combination of one unstressed and stressed syllable, is supposedly the language of everyday speech. The trochee is not everyday speech—it is the odd one out, the uncommon one, the queer one. The word “ho / mo” is a trochee. If divided into two syllables, then so is the word “que / er.” The trochee is a metrical foot that literally goes nowhere: Rather than rising to greater heights, it falls off with its unstressed syllable. It trails off instead of punctuating, inverting the teleological imperative of progress that has shaped so much heterosexuality. Precisely because it is used so furtively in Shakespeare, its deployment stands out as a queer event that “bodies forth / The forms of things unknown.”

One such event, staged by arguably the most famous spouters of the trochee in English literature, involves the Weird Sisters as they brew their poisonous potion:

Second Witch: Fillet of a fenny snake
 In the cauldron boil and bake;
 Eye of newt, and toe of frog,
 Wool of bat, and tongue of dog. . . .
All: Double, double toil and trouble;
 Fire burn and cauldron bubble. (*Macbeth*, 4.1.12–15, 20–21)

The perfect trochees in these lines achieve the intended incantatory effect as the Weird Sisters prepare the brew from which Macbeth will be shown his future. Described by them as a “deed without a name” (4.1.49), this activity is queer in the very etymological sense of being “strange, odd, [and] peculiar.”²² The weirdness of the Weird Sisters derives from their semantic closeness to the queer, since weird means “strange, unusual, . . . odd.”²³ The Queer Sisters perform a deed without a name from which spouts double toil and trouble. The hags, who are indeterminately male and female—“You should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so” (1.3.45–7), says Banquo when he first meets the witches—speak a queer language that makes them queer, otherworldly outcasts doomed to doom the straightforward order of things in Duncan’s Scotland.

Indeed, Shakespeare seems to reserve his trochees for weird characters and fairies. The other great exponent of the trochee in Shakespeare is Puck,

also known as Robin Goodfellow, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The only character in the Shakespearean corpus to have a simultaneous double name (Viola / Cesario in *Twelfth Night* comes close, but her name changes depending on the clothes he wears, so it is never simultaneous), Puck / Robin is the general factotum and troublemaker in the play. As Oberon's right-hand man, Puck is sent to gather the Flower of Love with which to sow concord among the four Athenian lovers; predictably, he sows discord instead. Less predictable, however, is his language, which is frequently trochaic:

Puck: Through the forest have I gone,
But Athenian found I none. . . .
Night and silence! who is here?
Weeds of Athens he doth wear.

(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.2.66–67, 70–71)

This fairy's talk is not only punctuated with a queer metrical footprint; it also wanders about without being able to settle on the object of its choice. Like the queer in person, the queer here is difficult to locate in language. Since Puck only speaks frequently, and not exclusively, in trochees, is he queer? His sporadic, odd meter certainly points in that direction, but even more, its language suggests that queerness cannot easily identify bodies or be identified *as* a body. Puck / Robin looks for a body and finds the wrong one. Meanwhile, the fairies do not know whether to call him Puck or Robin. For Puck, as for the Weird Sisters, queerness is largely traced in and as a verbal outline, even as the words themselves can only offer us the specter of its shadow.

Identity

The potentially infinite multiplication of identity—Puck is both Puck and Robin, the witches in *Macbeth* mysteriously expand from women to men—makes the trochee move assiduously away from a notion of stable identity. Long the keyword in queer theory, “identity” allows for an easy conflation between homosexuality and queerness. It identifies bodies that then go on to bolster the very idea of identity. However, queer theory has moved away from an exclusive interest in embodiment toward questions about the limits of ethical, ethnic, human, and psychic integrity. The queer self presumably anchored by the gay body is no longer predominant in theorizations of queerness. This means, however, less a replacement of the gay body than a shift in emphasis from sex acts to more wide-ranging issues of non-normativity and

non-coincidence. Such a movement can be traced from the work of Michel Foucault—sometimes considered the main voice of and in queer theory—to that of Judith Butler and, more recently, José Esteban Muñoz.

For Foucault, the gay body is a created rather than a given body. To this extent, he is in agreement with those who rely on language and psychoanalysis to gain access to bodies and desires. However, for Foucault psychoanalysis is one of the major discourses by means of which homosexuality is created and then demonized. Interestingly, even as Foucault largely ignores language, this does not mean he focuses exclusively on the body. Indeed, he insists, in works such as *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* and *Madness and Civilization*, that there is no such thing as a body that is not the effect of discourse. For him, desires are never given. They are only created differently at different historical moments using different cultural and political mechanisms. In *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, Butler picks up on this argument to insist that the delineation of what counts as the “natural” body should never be taken for granted. Equally, Butler insists that the ways in which our bodies are circumscribed have significant consequences for how we live and are perceived in the world. Butler’s work focuses on the body but attempts also to retheorize what we mean by the bodily, emphasizing always the role of psychic and social performativity in the creation of bodily identity. The field of performance studies has developed this observation while thinking about sexual and ethnic bodily identity, notably in the work of Muñoz (*Disidentifications*), which has expanded the field of queer theory to include considerations of race and queers of color. His work explores the schism between a seemingly wholesome, natural norm and the copies that set themselves against it, thereby splitting apart also what we think of as the norm.

Like Foucault’s, Butler’s, and Muñoz’s characters, the Shakespearean self is never identical with its self. Shakespearean protagonists have money, horses, kingdoms, power, and even children, but selves they never have, and this is what renders queer even their most earnest quests for selfhood. Thus, the deposed Richard II, when asked whether he is “contented to resign the crown,” speaks to this queer idea of a self that seems always out of reach of itself:

Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be;
 Therefore no, no, for I resign to thee. (*Richard II*, 4.1.201–2)

The *Tragedy of King Richard the Second* does not lie primarily in the fact that he has lost his kingdom, but that he does not have a self. Critics have argued that



Richard's self is so closely tied to his kingdom that the loss of the latter signifies as the loss of the former. But if that is the case, then it is puzzling that Richard seems to care so little for his kingdom—unless, of course, that means he cares so little for himself. No stirring speeches of patriotic fervor are assigned to this king, nor is he depicted as having a plan for his future as monarch. Rather, his self remains oddly nebulous, associated most fully with his male favorites, Bushy, Bagot, and Green, whose murders seem to hurt Richard more deeply than even the loss of his crown. Richard's assertion that he "must nothing be" does not amount to a cancellation of the self, however, so much as a puzzlement with the very concept of selfhood. A play with two nominated kings—Richard II and Henry IV—in its text, *Richard II* insists on thinking through the relation among names, bodies, and identities. It also asks about the politics of reproduction, making clear that the king who loses the crown has no offspring, while the king who gains the crown has both an heir and a spare. Richard is placed outside the reproductive mainstream even as he is divested of royalty. The living embodiment of the trochee, Richard starts out strong but does not swell to royal and reproductive heights. Instead, he resigns himself to resigning his self, and the text unravels any sense of a fixed identity in relation to power. This unraveling becomes the play's queer disidentification.

Neither king nor villain by the end of his play, Richard in his lack of identity comes to resemble Coriolanus, another center of power who struts about in an eponymous play before being destroyed. Indeed, the most significant feature of *Coriolanus* is that Coriolanus does not occupy his title for long. He begins the drama under a different name—Caius Martius—and is later named Coriolanus when he defeats Corioles in battle against Rome. He is then stripped of his title when he becomes an ally of Corioles against Rome. At various points in the text, then, before and after becoming Coriolanus, Coriolanus is out of step with himself. For instance, in Act 4 Scene 5 of the play, when the now-banished Roman warrior seeks refuge with his former enemy, the latter repeatedly asks him who he is:

Aufidius: Whence com'st thou? What wouldst thou? Thy name?

Why speak'st not? Speak, man. What's thy name?

Coriolanus [*unmuffling his head*]: If, Tullus,

Not yet thou know'st me, and seeing me dost not

Think me for the man I am, necessity

Commands me name myself.



Aufidius: What is thy name?

Coriolanus: A name unmusical to the Volscians' ears
And harsh in sound to thine.

Aufidius: Say, what's thy name?

Thou hast a grim appearance. . . .

What's thy name?

Coriolanus: Prepare thy brow to frown. Know'st thou me yet?

Aufidius: I know thee not. Thy name?

Coriolanus. My name is Caius Martius. . . .

My surname Coriolanus. . . .

Only that name remains. (*Coriolanus*, 4.5.52–59, 61–64, 67, 72)

Coriolanus wants his name to be self-evident, but Aufidius underscores that it is not. Despite the “unmuffl[ing] of [Coriolanus’s] head,” Aufidius steadfastly refuses to recognize the enemy until his name is spoken between them. This elaborate dance around the name of Coriolanus emphasizes its hollowness—Coriolanus promises to deliver it several times and fails each time until the end. When he finally owns up to his name, it is only with the recognition that the name by which he is known in the present is already in the past, while what was once his future—the surname of Coriolanus—is the only thing that remains in his present. Despite the confusion surrounding his name, and the shame and anger that he feels about it, Coriolanus nonetheless wants “Coriolanus” to be filled with self-evident meaning; he wants to be thought of as “the man I am.” But Aufidius demands to know his visitor’s name six times in the space of eight lines, an insistence that hysterically draws attention to itself. The name of Coriolanus is at stake in this conversation, yet it is a thing without any face value, which is why it goes unattributed even when Coriolanus unmuffles his face. At the start of the play, then, there is a name without a man, and at the end of the play, a man without a name. The very name of Coriolanus, deriving as it does from Corioles (pronounced cor-eye-o-lees) accords an exaggerated sense of importance to the diminutive “i.” But *Coriolanus* arrives before its hero, and Coriolanus runs out of time before the end of his text. The time of the title is not coincident with the identity of its hero, and arguably, this is the play’s tragedy in real time.



Temporality

The challenge to identity thus seems crucially to be a question of time. If *Coriolanus* articulates a tragedy of time, then it also asks us to think of queerness as a phenomenon out of time. *Shakespeare* is an instance of this lack of temporal propriety. After all, even as we speak of the ways in which Shakespeare theorizes queer language, and queers identity, we need to grapple with the fact that he never uses the word “queer” in his texts. Are we, therefore, retrospectively exporting current queer terminology back to Shakespeare? This would seem to be the gist of the question posed at the MLA panel that asked how Shakespeare could possibly formulate or affect queer theory except as a subject of queer theory’s ministrations. The obverse side of this question may be: Is it Shakespeare who has initiated these terms—fairly, weird—that we, oblivious of their etiology, now use as queer terms? Is Shakespeare the precursor of the languages and sensibilities we inhabit today? Is he the recipient or antecedent of queer theory? Both versions of this question depend on a chain of causality between two objects presumed to be fixed in their own sphere; equally, both versions presume that Shakespeare and queerness are somehow separated in time. But if our formulations of queerness depend crucially on things being out of joint, unhinged rather than straight, then why should we not theorize our relation to time? What if we were to dispense with a model of temporal linearity that translates also into causal linearity? What if time itself were to be queered?

Indeed, it has been. Perhaps the most exciting development in queer theory in the past few years has been a consideration of temporality in relation to issues of reproduction, lineage, power, and ethnicity. Annamarie Jagose thinks through the question of sequence in relation to lesbian desire; Elizabeth Freeman focuses on the relation between queer temporalities and histories; and Judith Halberstam has done powerful work on uncovering the normalizing routine of the biological “clock” or the teleological time line that normal lives are meant to follow.²⁴ This trend in queer theory has proved to be one of the most promising developments in the field, even as it has insufficiently questioned the parameters of its own constitution. Queer theory has done tremendous work in thinking through what constitutes heteronormativity in terms of time and, increasingly, in addressing the specter of homonormativity in which homosexuality models itself along the lines of heterosexuality to be more acceptable. However, studies of what makes queerness normative also need to take into consideration the question of periodization

and the ways in which the academy organizes itself and its studies. We need to push Carolyn Dinshaw's "queer historical impulse . . . toward making connections across time" and Carla Freccero's violently slashed juxtapositions to grapple with institutionalized queer theory's chronological Bantustans.²⁵

Shakespearean texts not only theorize the relation between temporality and desire (for instance, in the Sonnets). They also think through the question of chronological periodization. In *Pericles*, for instance, the text imports a fourteenth-century poet into a seventeenth-century play simultaneously to open up the boundaries of the chronological and the sexual:

To sing a song that old was sung,
 From ashes ancient Gower is come, . . .

If you, born in these latter times,
 When wit's more ripe, accept my rimes . . .
 I life would wish, and that I might
 Waste it for you like taper-light. (*Pericles*, 1.1–2, 11–12, 15–16)

Gower, the medieval poet who has come before, now comes after to pander to an audience described as having riper wits than his original audience had. These riper wits would appreciate Gower more than his own period did, which makes him wish he had been brought back to life in "these latter times"—which, of course, he has. This riddling play between *then* and *now* blurs distinctions premised on chronology alone and places this blurring in the service of a play plagued with riddles and seething with sexual deviance. Twisting time opens up the text to a host of non-normative configurations. Not only does Gower present a play about sexual deviance, but the text also seems unable to remain within generic bounds. It begins as a romance, then doubles as a tragedy, only then to triple as a comedy. Although *Pericles* is not even regarded conventionally as a "problem play," the question of time becomes a question of genre becomes a question of organization becomes a question of deviance becomes a question of the norm becomes a question of desire. *Pericles* consists of one long metonymic slide, and every twist in its tale has to do with non-normativity; every seemingly acceptable end to a romantic tale is riddled through with incest and violence.

Indeed, the very anti-category of "problem play" qualifies Shakespeare to be the Queen of the Queers. He famously deviates from chronological history in the history plays, but he also dispenses with temporal linearity in other texts, several of which posit a relation between before and after only to



show us the pleasures of upsetting the two fixed poles as fixed poles. One such play is *All's Well That Ends Well*, in which the very title presumes a temporality leading to a happy ending. The climax is meant retrospectively to justify and extol its precursor events, implying a parallelism that makes story and conclusion balance each other—except that the two, story and conclusion, as well as the two parts of the title, do not balance each other. Indeed, the end of the play, in which an uneasy Bertram is blackmailed into accepting his relationship with Helena, has made many critics term this a problem play. Far from justifying the difficulties in the text, then, the end only compounds them. And the title, which seems at first the image of harmony and perfection, betrays its queer underbelly even before we start reading the play. If “All’s Well” is meant to balance and be balanced by “Ends Well,” then what do we do with the queer excess that attaches to the first part of that equation? “All Is Well” has one syllable more than its counterpart in “Ends Well,” even as this extra syllable is truncated to fit a punctuation mark—an apostrophe that stands in for the missing letter. But is this apostrophe in the title a missing letter or an anal fistula? I ask this perhaps surprising question because the play suggests in its very opening scene that it is the latter: The king is close to death because of an excess, an extra syllable, that threatens the balance of his health. This excessive growth is simultaneously an abscess, identified as an incurable fistula in a privy place that will determine the future of the kingdom even though it will never be fully visible. It threatens the well-being promised by the “All’s Well” of the title and has to be cured for things to end well. This cure, however, can never be full or final. Even as Helena heals the king early in the text, the fistula’s deathlike effects, calling into question the play’s investment in reproductive heterosexuality, linger in a tale in which anality, temporality, virginity, and deception are closely and claustrophobically intertwined. In the title itself, this anal fistula lingers as the apostrophe—contained but irrevocably infectious, present only as a potent absence.

This cankerous apostrophe forces us to reformulate the relation between Shakespeare and queerness. Does Shakespeare theorize language and identity and temporality? Do these theorizations count as queer, or is queerness a retrospective attribute we give to Shakespeare? If queer theory rigorously addresses the question of non-coincidence—between a name and a body, between a body and desire, between gender and sexuality, between title and text, between a norm and itself—can this queerness extend also to thinking about and acknowledging its own debt to Shakespeare, to thinking about the non-coincidence of canon and text, time and identity? These are questions

that necessitate a complete overhaul of the ways in which we think. They also are all questions that Shakespeare asks repeatedly. If queer theory chafes against containment by and in the norm, then Shakespeare provides another norm to resist—his own non-acknowledgment as queer. The attraction of Shakesqueer is that it gives queer theory the Shakes and forever disrupts its containment in the period after the nineteenth century. It also disrupts the conflation between queerness and homosexuality. Instead, it insists on thinking through the Shakespearean texts of queerness—those that have explicitly informed queer theorization and those that haunt queer theory spectrally by informing our ideas of the normative and the deviant. We have spent so much time keeping different times and desires distinct from each other that we forget the deeply unsettling characteristics of queerness. If we are not prepared to be shaken in our theoretical convictions, then we are not queer. If we are not thrown into doubt by queerness’s propensity to turn up in the most unexpected places and at the most surprising times, then we are not Shakespearean. If queerness is to be a line of inquiry, a horizon of impossibility that stretches forward and backward and sideways, then it is also an idea that refuses to settle into any single orthodoxy, be it authorial or theoretical. No matter how embarrassing, debilitating, and unwieldy it might be, then; no matter how much a sign of the libertine and the rake; no matter where it has been acquired, and no matter how painful and impossible the symptoms; it is time for us to own and enjoy our Queer Shakes, allowing it, as Hamlet says, “to horribly . . . shake our disposition / With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls” (*Hamlet*, 1.4.36–37).

Queer Designs

Queer theory is not the theory of anything in particular, and has no precise bibliographic shape.—Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner

Shakesqueer seems such an institutionally inexplicable phenomenon that its listing in the November 2007 issue of *PMLA* was extremely instructive.²⁶ The roundtable did not appear in the section under panels on “Shakespeare”; nor was it visible under “Drama” or “Medieval and Renaissance.” Rather, we were assigned to panels on “Literary Criticism and Theory,” presumably because the roundtable had been sponsored by the Division of Gay Studies. It seemed as if now that we were “Theory,” we had ceased to be “Shakespeare.”



As for the aegis under which we appeared, *Shakespeareer* was the first session dealing with pre-nineteenth-century literature that the Division of Gay Studies in the MLA had sponsored. Indeed, a quick search revealed that only a single pre-nineteenth-century paper—dealing with the Castlehaven scandal—had made it to any of the sessions sponsored by the division over the past ten years. This is not to suggest that the *PMLA* needs to update its classificatory scheme or that the Division of Gay Studies has been remiss in its intellectual efforts. It is to underscore that the neologism of *Shakespeareer* seems comprehensible only in one category or another. While *Shakespeareer* could possibly be (mis)taken for “Shakespeare”—it looks the same and has the same number of syllables—that “mistake” ultimately seems impossible to accommodate, and so *Shakespeareer* is removed from the list of panels on the Bard. *Shakespeareer* departs from what we understand as the Shakespearean.

Organizing the contents of *Shakespeareer* thus poses a double challenge. The volume needs to be recognizable as a text on Shakespeare, but it also needs to be estranged from what we think we understand as Shakespearean. Most editions of Shakespeare’s complete works are organized chronologically according to date of textual composition. The Oxford edition, on which the influential *Norton Shakespeare* is based, is organized according to this principle. By anchoring texts in fixed dates, however, such chronological ordering repeats the methodological problems against which *Shakespeareer* works even as it replaces the older mode of organization, familiar from the printing of the First Folio in 1623, of grouping texts by genre. The *Norton Shakespeare* in fact provides two tables of contents, one organized according to conjectured date of composition and the other more conventionally by genre, within which texts are arranged according to date of composition. The *Riverside Shakespeare* edition follows this latter mode of chronological organization and provides only a single table of contents. (In its categorization by genre, the First Folio does not list its texts by chronological date of composition.)

In contrast, *Shakespeareer* prints essays according to the alphabetical order of the play or poem. As such, *All Is True* (*Henry VIII*) appears first on the list, even though it would be the penultimate play if we adhered to date of composition. *The Winter’s Tale*, which generally appears as the sixth play from the end of the table of contents, appears here as the last essay.²⁷ Such an arrangement allows for an unconventional juxtaposition of texts—the late *Tempest* is close to the early *Titus Andronicus*, while the comic *Much Ado about Nothing* abuts the tragic *Othello*. Our most common preconceived modes of organization—chronology and genre—are turned inside out in this volume, even as *Shakes-*

queer remains confined by the ordering of the English alphabet.²⁸ An interesting offshoot of this alphabetical organization by title is that Shakespeare's history plays now appear in their "proper" chronological position: The *Henry IV* cycle precedes the *Henry VI* cycle, even though it was written after it. The table of contents in this instance has the bizarre effect of straightening out Shakespeare's queer ordering of history.

This volume also includes essays on "nonexistent" plays such as *Cardenio* and *Love's Labour's Won*. Both of these texts are grouped under a section on "Lost Plays" in the table of contents arranged according to genre in the *Norton Shakespeare*; both receive a one-page historical introduction and brief plot summary from the editors. The *Riverside Shakespeare* mentions neither text. Including these "lost" plays in *Shakespeare* seems particularly fitting, not just for the sake of capaciousness (although had we pursued this directive faithfully, we might also have included an essay on *Edward III*), but also to highlight the idea on which this volume is based: that the object of queerness is not always known or recognizable or identifiable. In addition to having separate essays for both of these "Lost Plays," *Shakespeare* has separated "A Lover's Complaint" from its frequent association with the Sonnets and elevated "The Phoenix and Turtle" from the pool generally described as "Various Poems." Thus, forty-six Shakespearean texts are featured in *Shakespeare*, in contrast to forty-four in the Norton edition (this number includes three versions of *King Lear*) and forty-seven in the Riverside edition (including the now discredited "Funeral Elegy," the miscellany of verses called "The Passionate Pilgrim," and *The Reign of King Edward the Third*, not generally included under Shakespeare's name). The number of essays in *Shakespeare*, however, exceeds the number of Shakespearean texts because it features three essays on the Sonnets. When it comes to queerness, more is more, and nothing quite adds up.

In keeping with the volume's emphasis on Shaking queerness, most of the contributors to *Shakespeare* self-identify as queer theorists rather than as Shakespearean and Renaissance scholars. A quick count reveals that of the volume's forty-eight contributors, exactly two-thirds, or thirty-two contributors, work in periods other than the Renaissance, while sixteen consider their work as being based primarily in Renaissance literature, both English and continental. All scholars have been absolved from the responsibility of providing an overview of literature already published on their texts; interested readers may refer to the bibliography at the end of the volume for such details. The focus in this volume is on exploring what is odd, eccentric, and unexpected in the canonical Shakespeare, but equally, not to reveal a queerness



that can be limned or known in advance. Given the eclectic cast of its contributors—the volume features at least three generations of scholars—*Shakespeare* showcases varied ideas on queerness, engaging not just sexual identities, but also race, temporality, performance, adaptation, and psychoanalysis. Non-Renaissance scholars have been asked not to sound “Shakespearean,” and Renaissance scholars have been told not to feel constrained by considerations that might otherwise matter in a straightforward collection on Shakespeare. The point of this volume is not to provide queer “readings” of Shakespeare texts. It is, instead, to bring queerness into varied engagements with those texts without chronological or conceptual privilege. *Shakespeare* is neither exclusively Shakespearean nor recognizably queer: It will make neither camp happy, but in the process, it may make the camp happy. The variety generated by the punning fecundity of *Shakespeare* both earns this volume an invitation to the queer party and allows it to throw that party wide open, not just to any one age, but for all time.

Notes

1. Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, 206.

2. Even as many forays into queer waters have been pioneered by scholars of medieval and Renaissance studies—one might think of Burger and Kruger, *Queering the Middle Ages*; Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*; Fradenburg and Freccero, *Premodern Sexualities*; and Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*—and even as they have sought to scrutinize both sides of the relationship between premodernity and queerness, this has nonetheless not dented the ways in which we do queer theory. The assumption still very much is that queer theory is a “thing” that we can export back to premodern texts; the commensurate move to export premodern texts out to our present moment is always accompanied with great skepticism, as is the attempt to push open the boundaries of nominations like the premodern, early modern, and postmodern.

3. Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 9. In a different context, Žižek glosses King Richard’s line as:

This apparently confused reply to Henry’s request relies on a complex reasoning, based on a brilliant exercise in what Lacan called *lalangue* (a neologism which some translate as “language”: language as the space of illicit pleasures that defy any normativity: the chaotic multitude of homonymies, word-plays, “irregular” metaphoric links and resonances). It plays with three different ways to write (and understand) what we pronounce as “Ay, no; no, ay.” Richard’s words can be read simply as a redoubled refusal, accompanied with the exclamatory “ay.” Or, if we understand “ay” as “I,” they can also be read as a refusal, but this time based on a denial of the very existence of the I, a con-



densed form of “I (say) no (because there is) no I to do it.” This same point can be made also in the third reading, which understands it as (a homophony of) “I know no I”: “You want me to do it, but since you want me to be nothing, to totally undo myself, who am I to do it? In such a situation, there is no I to do it, to give you the crown.” (Slavoj Žižek, “Troubles with the Real: Lacan as a Viewer of *Alien*,” available online at <http://www.lacan.com/zizalien.htm>).

Marjorie Garber’s early and fabulous book, *Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers*, makes a similar move in relation to the Freudian understanding of the uncanny and the uncanniness with which Shakespeare surfaces in the texts of modern and postmodern theory.

4. Butler, “Against Proper Objects,” 21.
5. Betteridge, *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe*, I, quoted in Stanivukovic, “Between Men in Early Modern England,” 233.
6. Jankowski, “Pure Resistance,” 218.
7. See, e.g., Traub, “The Homoerotics of Shakespearean Comedy.”
8. I must add that the question, as articulated at the MLA panel, was neither hostile nor dismissive. If anything, it challenged us to articulate the assumptions on which a queer Shakespeare rested, and for that challenge I am grateful.
9. Berlant and Warner, “What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?,” 343.
10. O’Rourke, “Introduction,” xxvi.
11. Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 25.
12. I owe the latter formulation to the insightful Asma Barlas.
13. It is useful here to consider Jacques Derrida’s account of the dangers posed by the supplement. “Why is the surrogate or supplement dangerous? It is not, so to speak, dangerous in itself, in that aspect of it that can present itself as a thing, as a being-present. In that case it would be reassuring. But here, the supplement is not, is not a being (*on*). It is nevertheless not a simple nonbeing (*me on*) either. Its slidings slip it out of the simple alternative presence / absence. That is the danger”: Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 109.
14. De Man, “The Concept of Irony,” 169.
15. *Ibid.*, 181.
16. *Congressional Record*, June 9, 2000, available online at <http://wais.access.gpo.gov> (accessed August 2001).
17. This part of the argument forms the basis for several queer studies of the Renaissance, including those by Stephen Orgel (*Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England*, 1996), Bruce R. Smith (*Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England*, 1995), and Valerie Traub (*The Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 2002), among others.
18. Sedgwick, *Between Men*.
19. Freeman, “Queer Temporalities,” 159.
20. After all, like many words, “queer” has multiple grammatical positions. It can be a verb, “to queer”; an adjective, “a queer fish”; and a noun, “Is there a queer in this text?” The word straddles registers of grammar in the same way that Shake-



speare converts “boy” in *Antony and Cleopatra* from being only a noun (the young of one particular gender) to also being a verb (Cleopatra complains that a Roman child actor will boy—with a pun on “buoy”—her greatness on stage).

21. A *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in Greenblatt et al., *The Norton Shakespeare*, 5.1.14–15. Citation in parentheses are to this edition.

22. Simpson and Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “queer.”

23. *Ibid.*, s.v. “weird.”

24. Jagose, *Inconsequence*; Freeman, “Queer Temporalities”; Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*.

25. Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 1; Freccero, *Queer / Early / Modern*.

26. The quotation in this section’s epigraph is from Berlant and Warner, “What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?,” 344.

27. The *Arden Shakespeare Complete Works* (1998), in one volume, is the only edition I know of that houses its entries alphabetically by title. But this alphabetical ordering also gives in to some generic impulse: First the poems are listed without being separated as poems, then the list continues with the plays from the beginning of the alphabet.

28. Jeffrey Masten provides some suggestions for alternative configurations of tables of contents. “You could print the essays alphabetically by play title, but provide (à la Oxford and Norton) multiple tables of contents, according to different modes of organization: alphabetical by first word, alphabetical by last word (hysteron proteron), alphabetical by essay author, according to date of essay composition”: Masten, private correspondence, August 2008.

All Is True (Henry VIII)

The Unbearable Sex of Henry VIII

STEVEN BRUHM

If I see a man that is Hot, Hairy, high-coloured, with a black thick curled head of haire, great veines, & a big voice, I dare be bold to say, that that man hath a hot and dry Liver, and his Generative parts are also of the same Temper; & that consequently he is inclined to lustfull desires.

—James Ferrand, *Erotomania*, 170

Hot, hairy, and big. Were it not for the archaic language and suspicion of “lustfull desires,” this passage from James Ferrand’s treatise *Erotomania* (1645) could come from hairyboyz.com or any website devoted to “bears”—those chubby, bearded, and hirsute gay men who constitute a significant modern subculture. Nor was Ferrand the only premodern writer to figure an erotic—or is it a pornographic?—of pogonotrophy. Clement of Alexandria had argued that God adorned man “with a beard like a lion, making him tough, with a hairy chest, for such is the emblem of strength and empire.”¹ Marcus Ulmus contended in 1603 that “Nature gave to mankind a Beard, that it might remaine as an Index in the Face, of the Masculine generative faculty.”² In a similar vein, John Bulwer argued in *Anthropometamorphosis* (1654) that “shaving the chin is justly to be accounted a note of Effeminacy.”³ Indeed, according to Will Fisher, the clean-shaven man in early modern England “quite literally becomes ‘lesse man’ or even a ‘woman,’”⁴ a prejudice Fisher finds in Phillip Massinger’s play *The Guardian* (1658). Massinger suggests that a husband without a beard is worse than an adulterer because the former risks being considered sodomitical; lacking facial hair, he was supposed incapable of sexual regeneration.⁵ And in the opinion of Johan Valerian (1533), the shaven face ranks its holder among “chyl dren” and “gelded men”⁶—that is, the smooth, shaved, barely adolescent twink that is the current front-runner of gay desire.

For the contemporary bear lover, though, the happy hunting grounds that



extend to the Lone Star Bar find a particularly rich den in early modernism. After a centuries-long chaetophobia inspired by the early Christian conviction that body hair was the mark of the Beast on fallen man, the fur flew back onto the faces of the sixteenth-century man. In English culture, the papa of these bears is Henry VIII, as shown most readily in Hans Holbein's famous portrait of him of 1540 (figure 1). Here Henry's face offers immediate satisfaction to the beard lover, both for what is there and for what is to come. Thanks to Henry's introduction of the beard to the English court, English Renaissance portraiture from Holbein on would be dominated by bearded figures. Bearded and bearish: The corpulent body in Holbein's canvas at least whets the appetite for the hairy chest that is metonymically suggested by the ermine draping over the king's shoulders and down across his nipples. The sashes under the belly, the sweep of the costume toward the remarkably genital knot of the belt, the right arm directing our gaze down across the stomach to the left hand placed tantalizingly on the hilt of a dagger—all of this leads viewers so inclined to fantasize about how long that dagger really is and what it might prick. With a remarkable and pointed clarity, the filigree of Henry's *costume* images his actual bodily *flesh*, a Henry stripped bare to become Henry the bear (figure 2).

Such a perverse reading of His Majesty's magisterial body is not beside the point in early modern figurations of Henry. Shakespeare opens *Henry VIII* with the spectacle of not one but two big, burly, kingly bodies on display. Moreover, Shakespeare gives them an erotic dynamism that the Holbein portrait can only hint at. The Duke of Norfolk begins the play by describing to Buckingham the famous summit at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in which Henry meets the equally large (and equally hirsute) King Francis I:

I was then present, saw them salute on horseback,
Beheld them when they lighted, how they clung
In their embracement as they grew together,
Which had they, what four throned ones could have weighed
Such a compounded one?
 . . . Men might say
Till this time pomp was single, but now married
To one above itself.⁷

This is the play's first spectacle of huge bodies growing together, melding or "marrying" into an undifferentiated one—the first, but certainly not the only. During Anne Boleyn's coronation in Act 4, we read that



FIGURE 1. Henry VIII, in the manner of Hans Holbein, circa 1540



FIGURE 2. Photographed by Wayne Brereton; modified by Sue Healy

Great-bellied women,
 That had not half a week to go, like rams
 In the old time of war, would shake the press,
 And make 'em reel before 'em. No man living
 Could say "This is my wife" there, all were woven
 So strangely in one piece. (4.1.78–83)

And at the baptism of the baby Elizabeth, we have the crowds turning the court into a version of Paris Garden ("a park for bear- and bull-baiting") to catch sight of the child, as if "some strange Indian with a great tool [has] come to court" (5.3.32–33). "Bless me," cries the Porter, "what a fry of fornication is at the door! On my Christian conscience, this one christening will beget a thousand. Here will be father, godfather, and all together" (5.3.33–36). If the great bellies of Act 4 vie for space with the great tool of Act 5, the effect is merely to embroider on the play's indulgence in swollen bodies entering strangely into one piece—women like phallic rams, great tools and great bellies producing many papas. Papas, and *Papa Bears*, for while the marriage of pomp and circumference at the Valley of the Cloth of Gold does not mention hair, we know it is covered in the stuff: Francis was one of the first European heads of state to sport a beard (figure 3), in defiance of medieval Christian practice, and Henry, in imitation (in identification? in desire?) of Francis, quickly followed suit, bringing the hirsute home to England. In this sense Shakespeare's play opens with something of a girth-and-mirth orgy, where "two kings" become "but one" (1.1.28–32) to beget a thousand beards across the English landscape.

If the invocation of two beefy, hairy men embracing each other into oneness makes my bear-loving imagination run wild, it also brings it up short. I remember, of course, that Henry VIII is the story of a man who marries six different women to produce a kingly heir, and that two of these women end up on the chopping block. When Henry VIII wants someone to give head, he does not have my sort in mind. Moreover, I remember that the gropefest at the Valley of the Cloth of Gold failed to produce any stable and meaningful allegiance between its two monarchs; this particular love story was doomed to failure. But it is precisely these two "failures" to produce a future that cement for me the necessity of reading Henry within the discourses of queer temporality and corporality. Henry's large, fecund body, his beard figuring the seminal overflow of his generative parts,⁸ his lustful desires, the sexual and political prowess that adheres to his regal body all figure impotence and cas-



FIGURE 3. Francois Clouet, Francis I, circa 1520

tration, an inability to live up to the normative promises that Henry's body makes. How then might *Henry VIII* bear up under a sustained queer reading of its bearishness? How might those simultaneous signifiers of phallic excess and phallic failure help us to read an unregenerate queerness in Shakespeare's play? Let us begin again, with another bearish characteristic: fatness.

In an essay on fat children, ghosts, and animals, Kathryn Bond Stockton teaches us how to read for "sideways growth"—that is, how queer bodily contours and queer bodily acts often register a refusal to grow "up" (into normalcy, singularity, legibility) while nevertheless insisting on growing "out," "around," or "across" sites of meaning.⁹ Contemporary society, she contends, does not yet know what to do with the fat body other than to incorporate it into a pathologizing discourse of unsuccessful human development. Queers would do well, she suggests, to consider how sideways growth can figure a refusal of the strictures of normative development. Cast in other

terms (those of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari), sideways growth may signal the signifiatory excesses of the rhizomic body, one that does not or will not align itself with the dictates of Oedipal health—that is, the imperative to grow *up*, straight and tall, with all the rights and normalcy pertaining thereto. While Stockton’s preferred site for analysis of this anti-Oedipal, sideways growth is the fat child and the dog-loving lesbian, I suggest we consider the *ursine* as well. Given that the first English law prohibiting sodomy took effect under the reign of Henry VIII, and that it named as a crime the “abhomynable vice of buggery commyttid with mankynde or beaste,”¹⁰ let us consider how mankind as beast—as bear—refuses to keep *Henry VIII* straight.

The list of male bodies that grow sideways in *Henry VIII* is as imposing as the bodies themselves. There is Henry of course, and his symbiotic Francis; but there is also Cardinal Wolsey, that “keech” (suet, “hunk of fat”; 1.1.55) with “unbounded stomach” (4.2.34) who “can, with his very bulk, / Take up the rays o’ th’ beneficial sun, / And keep it from the earth” (1.1.55–57); and from whose “ambitious finger” “No man’s pie is freed” (1.1.52–53). Sexually speaking, the pie that receives Wolsey’s ambitious finger is doubtless female, but his clean-shaven face, in obedience to a century of papal dictates, telegraphs a celibacy bordering on the catamitic or the gelded. And if a fat *hairless* body is not condemning enough, let us fantasize hair onto it, as Buckingham and Norfolk do, to complete his moral degradation. Wolsey is a “fox, / Or wolf, or both,” says Buckingham (1.1.158–59), animal hair acting as metaphor for bestial, degraded behavior. What is most interesting for my purposes, though, is how Wolsey’s courtly ambitions also get figured in terms of sideways growth: not just a horizontal bear body for our Wolsey, but also a sideways *political* growth that bespeaks lack of proper allegiance to the Oedipal, filial, class-based inheritance that constituted Tudor aristocratic propriety. Norfolk’s chief complaint about Wolsey is that his power, in addition to being pernicious, is undeserved by someone of his class. This “keech” is, after all, the son of a butcher, and

There’s in him stuff that puts him to these ends [political ambitions].

For being not propped by ancestry, whose grace

Chalks successors their way . . .

[he] gives us note

The force of his own merit makes his way—

A gift that heaven gives for him which buys

A place next to the King. (1.1.58–66)



Not a proper Oedipal lineage propped by ancestry, then, but a sideways acquisition. The gifts of his own merit place Wolsey next to (not beneath) the king. Little wonder, then, that Wolsey should figure his undoing in terms of physical shrinkage and deflation. He has “ventured, / Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders, / . . . far beyond my depth” (3.2.359–62) and just as his “greatness is a-ripening, [Fortune] nips his root, / And then he falls” (3.2.358–59). But it is not Fortune that nips this boy’s root, it is Papa Bear. *Henry* breaks the wanton Wolsey’s bladder, removing a “load,” a “burden / Too heavy” from the cardinal’s shoulders (3.2.384–86). A grandeur gained sideways has been too much for Wolsey’s king to bear.

This anti-Oedipal charge bears weight elsewhere in *Henry VIII*. As Wolsey levels against his successor, Thomas Cranmer, the accusation that Cranmer has not risen to his position of power so much as he “hath crawled into the favor of the King” (3.2.104), we get a sense of the potbelly calling the kettle black. And according to the (possibly fallacious) testimony brought against the Duke of Buckingham, such sideways acquisition may also characterize Buckingham’s pretensions to the throne should Henry “without issue die” (1.2.135). But perhaps the most notable sideways growth, the most anti-Oedipal position in the play, belongs to Henry himself. In a passage that would make psychoanalytic readers of *Hamlet* green with envy, Henry decries his almost-but-not-quite Oedipal union with Katherine, the princess “dowager, / Sometimes our brother’s wife” (2.4.177–78). “My conscience first received a tenderness, / Scruple, and prick,” the king tells Wolsey, when the Bishop of Bayonne wonders whether Henry’s daughter, Mary, is the legitimate offspring of a man married to his brother’s wife (2.4.167–68). Is Henry properly a father (and Mary his direct, vertical descendent), or is he more like an uncle, constituted by a sideways relationship to his own brother’s wife?

This respite shook

The bosom of my conscience, entered me,

Yea, with a spitting power, and made to tremble

The region of my breast. (2.4.178–81)

Let us leave aside the entering, pricking, and spitting, the shaking bosoms and trembling breasts, to focus instead on what gets accomplished by this entrance into Henry’s already capacious and sensitive body (at least according to the logics of Shakespeare’s history play). From this anti-Oedipal union comes not only a crisis of sexual subjectivity but also a new marriage, the birth of Elizabeth I, the reformation of Catholicism’s hold over the English

monarchy, and the eventual establishment of the Church of England. That is quite a growth to come from the failure of reproduction—or, rather, from a reproduction that fails to authorize itself as legitimate.

Reading for bears in *Henry VIII*—that is, reading for masculine sexuality that refuses the ideological stabilizing of futurity—is ultimately to read for the ways in which sideways growth thwarts the normalizing fictions of heterosexual reproduction, the way it disfigures the Oedipal linearity of family power. Such lack of linearity takes us, richly and paradoxically, to the play's end, where the birth of Elizabeth I replicates the circular—or is it circumferential?—patterns I have been locating in the body of the bear. In the economy of the Tudor court, Elizabeth is both blessing and curse, an heir who should have been a boy and a virgin who should have been a mother. Yet while she is a female in name, she seems to be a male metonymically. At the moment of Elizabeth's birth, the old lady perversely announces to a panting father that Anne has been delivered

of a lovely boy. The God of heaven
Both now and ever bless her! 'Tis a girl
Promises boys hereafter. Sir, your queen
Desires your visitation, and to be
Acquainted with this stranger. 'Tis as like you
As cherry is to cherry. (5.1.165–70)

Elizabeth signifies as girl only to the degree that she promises boys, a reproductive futurity that empowers the court's masculine and misogynistic qualities, to be sure, but that also re-produces the same-sex economies of desire with which the play opened. Given the play's emphasis on sideways growth around or beyond the strictures of the Oedipal, it is not for nothing that the promise of boys hereafter is precisely the promise that Jacobean audience members at the time of the play's debut would have recognized not to have been honored. It is not for nothing that Elizabeth as metonymic boy is also Elizabeth as *metaphoric* boy, being as like to her father as cherry is to cherry. And it is not for nothing that her own succession, predicted metaphorically in Cranmer's famous speech of Elizabeth as a "maiden phoenix" who will "create another heir" out of her own ashes (5.4.40–41), produced no heirs at all. Rather, she proceeded by way of horizontal accommodation in the appointment of James I to the throne. (Plenty of boys hereafter in James's court perhaps, but not necessarily of the type Cranmer was forecasting.) What a delight, then, that *Henry VIII* stands as the last of Shakespeare's history



plays, since it not only dramatizes so profoundly how the story of this history reproduces the failure to reproduce but, in so doing, produces multiple other histories of queer cathexes, narcissistic pleasures, anti-linear interventions that must be read alongside, but are not equal to, its tyrannies and violence.

It is not for nothing, finally, that “bear” is a homograph—and, indeed, the first example of the trope to appear, innocently but fortuitously, in Lee Edelman’s discussion of “homographesis.” The homograph, we remember, is that singular signifier that collects different and unrelated meanings to it according to its different etymological histories.¹¹ In this sense, it goes to the heart of queer inscription, as it allegorizes the inscription of the queer: Given that the queer body must be read not just for its difference but for its difference masquerading as sameness, Edelman argues, normative masculinity must always

perform its self-evidence, must represent its own difference from the derivative and artificial “masculinity” of the gay man. The homosexual, in such a social context, is made to bear the stigma of writing or textuality as *his identity*, as the very expression of his anatomy, by a masculinist culture eager to preserve the authority of its own self-identity through the institution of a homographesis whose logic of legibility, of graphic difference, would deny the common “masculinity,” the common signifying relation to maleness, of gay men and straight men alike.¹²

Henry VIII does not as a rule set masculine men against feminine men (the starting point for Edelman in his discussion of the twelfth-century sodomite as effeminate), but that is precisely my point. In a queerly anachronistic reading, Shakespeare’s play exploits the homograph of the bear as it plays the sexualized body type (Old English *bera*: “a heavily-built, thick-furred plantigrade quadruped”) against the imperatives to carry or support and to produce or give birth to (Old High German *ber-an*). Given the unstoppable play of expansion and explosion in *Henry VIII*, of hetero-sexed bodily demarcations that insistently turn back onto (or into) the erotic registers of sameness, and of a reproductive futurity rendered unbearable by the bear’s bodily excesses, *Henry VIII* might well offer us ways to reconfigure the contemporary bear as the masculinity that is not one, but that nevertheless troubles the structures of the two.

Exit pursued by a bear. (The Winter’s Tale, 3.3.57)

Notes

1. Reynolds, *Beards*, 8.
2. Fisher, “The Renaissance Beard,” 174.
3. *Ibid.*, 179.
4. *Ibid.*, 168.
5. *Ibid.*, 177.
6. *Ibid.*, 179.
7. *All Is True (Henry VIII)*, in Greenblatt et al., *The Norton Shakespeare*, 1.1.9–21. Citations in parentheses are to this edition.
8. Fisher, “The Renaissance Beard,” 174.
9. Stockton, “Growing Sideways, or Versions of the Queer Child,” 279.
10. Goldberg, *Sodometries*, 3.
11. Edelman, *Homographesis*, 13.
12. *Ibid.*, 12.

All's Well That Ends Well

Or, Is Marriage Always Already Heterosexual?

JULIE CRAWFORD

I propose in this essay that the dominant formal claims we make about Shakespearean comedies—that they plot a heterosexual love story (that is also the guiding logic for social order) and that they end in marriage—are intimately caught up with the formal and teleological expectations, the dominant storylines, we have about sexuality and its workings.¹ This formalism, whether based in psychoanalytic theories (the Oedipal drama) or anthropological ones (the traffic in women) structures much criticism of Shakespearean comedy. To take two key examples, critics frequently insist, even in the face of contradictory evidence, that the fulfillment of desire in heterosexual marriage is comedy's dominant telos, and that homoeroticism registers in the plays primarily in its (adolescent) passing or foreclosure in the face of marriage.² These readings are informed by, and conceptually map onto, the dominant structures—the lifecycle narratives—through which modern critics understand human sexuality. Both sexuality and comedy may have pleasures of various kinds along the way, that is, but they both end in heterosexuality.

Elsewhere I asked something I believe is only seemingly counterintuitive. What if marriage in the early modern period was not the end of homosocial structures and homoerotic desires but, instead, an enabling condition for their continuation?³ Marriage in the period, and in Shakespeare's comedies, is as much about the suturing and reconfiguring of economies, households, and relationships as it is about a putatively heterosexual and dyadic culmination. In two kinds of relationships in which I am particularly interested, those between childhood friends and those between attending gentlewomen and their mistresses, women often retain their bonds with each other *through* marriage. This multiplying and complicatedly *systemic* and *contingent* (as opposed to teleological) notion of marriage is particularly true, as I will show, in *All's Well That Ends Well*, and the play thus encourages us to question the generic and sexual stories we think we know.

With Judith Butler's work on kinship in mind, I also want to reconsider how we read the complex familial and erotic nominations that both begin and characterize *All's Well* (son as husband, and, later, among many others, mistress as mother and virgin as bride). In querying the putative heterosexuality of kinship, Butler revisits the assumption that the incest taboo not only precludes illicit, but necessarily delimits and structures *licit* forms of sociality and sexuality. "From the presumption that one cannot—or ought not to—choose one's closest family members as one's lovers and marital partners," she writes, "it does not follow that the bonds of kinship that *are* possible assume any particular form."⁴ An "invariant social organization of sexuality," she suggests, does not necessarily follow from prohibitive law. If we suspend our belief in universal and transcendent formalizations of sexuality, the hybrid nominations of *All's Well* allow us to see a broader range of kinship relations and affective bonds than those we can conceive under formal models of the "sex / gender system." These bonds are structured less by the law of the father or the traffic in women than by affective and economic interdependence in both the material and social senses. They are also gestured at by a language that cannot quite define them but nonetheless registers their existence and meaningfulness. More specifically, the familial-like nominations and complex structures of desire and affiliation that accumulate and transform as the play progresses—relations that simply cannot be articulated according to formally normative structures of incest taboo-driven heterosexuality—give us a hint of the possibilities the play imagines in these semi-articulated and formally unaccounted-for bonds that are so central to its plot. The relationships between the Countess of Roussillon and Helen, and, in the second half of the play, between Helen, the Widow, and her virgin daughter Diana are certainly formed in full consciousness of the incest taboo and via marriage, but those structures neither produce nor conclude the relationships' configurations in any programmatic or teleological sense. Kinship is not always already heterosexual, in other words, and marriage is rarely the end of anything.⁵

The Story We Think We Know, Part I: Helena and Bertram

My reading of *All's Well That Ends Well* begins with a reconsideration of the (generic and sexual) way we read its marriage plot.⁶ When the play's main character, Helen, weeps at the beginning of the play, she claims it's because "there is no living, none, / If Bertram be away."⁷ This line and the next, "Twere all one / That I should love a bright particular star / And think to wed