THE ROUTLEDGE ANTHOLOGY OF WOMEN'S THEATRE THEORY AND DRAMATIC CRITICISM

Edited by Catherine Burroughs and J. Ellen Gainor

The Routledge Anthology of Women's Theatre Theory and Dramatic Criticism

The Routledge Anthology of Women's Theatre Theory and Dramatic Criticism is the first wide-ranging anthology of theatre theory and dramatic criticism by women writers.

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The Routledge Anthology of Women's Theatre Theory and Dramatic Criticism is an important intervention into the fields of Theatre and Performance Studies, Literary Studies, and Cultural History, while adding new dimensions to Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies.

Catherine Burroughs is Professor Emerita of English at Wells College, Courtesy Professor of Performing and Media Arts at Cornell University, and a member of Actors' Equity Association.

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INTRODUCTION

Catherine Burroughs and J. Ellen Gainor

In her essay on the legendary British actress Ellen Terry (1847–1928), Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) acknowledges the ephemerality of stage artists' work: "What remains is at best only a wavering, insubstantial phantom—a verbal life on the lips of the living" ("Ellen Terry" 67). Recounting Terry's understanding of this truth, Woolf explains that Terry "tried […] to describe what she remembered" of her fellow artists' performances, particularly those of Henry Irving (1838–1905), with whom she had acted for decades. But, Woolf continues,

> [i]t was in vain. [Terry] dropped her pen in despair. 'Oh God, that I were a writer!' she cried. 'Surely a *writer* could not string words together about Henry Irving's Hamlet and say *nothing, nothing.*' It never struck her, humble as she was, and obsessed by her lack of book learning, that she was, among other things, a writer.
>
> (67–68)

Woolf further argues that "whatever [Terry] took up became in her warm, sensitive grasp a tool. [. . .] [W]ords peeled off, some broken, some suspended in mid-air, but all far more expressive than the tappings of the professional typewriter" (68). Analyzing the epistolary exchanges between Terry and the playwright and critic Bernard Shaw (1856–1950),[1] Woolf summarizes their dialogue on Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*: "But what suggestions has the brilliant critic [Shaw] to make about Imogen?[2] None apparently that she [Terry] has not already thought for herself. She is as close and critical a student of Shakespeare as he is" (71). And yet, Woolf implies, we do not adequately recall Terry as such, ironically perhaps because she was so gifted in so many ways that she "def[ied] our attempts to name" her manifold accomplishments (72).

Woolf—who had herself struggled to secure the designation of "critic"[3]—could have been ruminating on any number of the women and woman-identified critics and theoreticians whose works are represented in *The Routledge Anthology of Women's Theatre Theory and Dramatic Criticism*. The historical oversight or willful undervaluing of women's significant contributions to theatre theory and dramatic criticism remains one of the singular lapses in the discipline. Precisely because, from antiquity to recent time, men's writing has largely comprised and thus defined what constitutes this theory and criticism, the notion of what may be recognized as such has long remained unquestioned. As recently as 2020, for example, Tilden Russell, in the Introduction to his edited collection of dance theory, claimed that there were

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"no women theorists before the twentieth century, *a situation endemic in all the arts*" (xxiii, emphasis added). Our collection proves otherwise.

Historically, anthologies of dramatic theory and criticism, such as Bernard Dukore's canonical *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski* (1974), or Daniel Gerould's *Theatre/Theory/Theatre: The Major Critical Texts from Aristotle and Zeami to Soyinka and Havel* (2000), contained few, if any entries by women. More recently, Glenn Odom notes that "only four female theorists are included" in his *World Theories of Theatre* (2017). Stating that this choice is "indicative of the fact that there are not many women […] working in the field of theatre theory," he acknowledges that "there is a rapidly expanding, although still small, pool of world female playwrights and theatre practitioners gaining international prominence," even though "very few of these explicitly theorize their work in writing" (210). By including Australia's Mayrose Casey, Argentian Griselda Gambaro, India's Poile Sengupta, and New Zealander Roma Potiki, Odom importantly signals an expanding perspective, at the same time that he appears to hold fast to the assumption of a universally shared concept of what constitutes "theory." By comparison, Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker's edited volume, *A Poetics of Modernity: Indian Theatre Theory, 1850 to the Present* (2019), is a remarkable, award-winning project that includes a number of female authors and brings to a global readership "theoretically significant writing on theatre from nine Indian languages" (all translated to English) "that articulate[s] the wide-ranging theoretical positions underlying the complex of drama—theatre—performance practices in the modern period" (xxxiii-xxxiv). Projects such as Dharwadker's unequivocally show that there is a vast body of theoretical and critical writing on global performance traditions that we must continue to identify and make available for a broad readership.

While Marvin Carlson's important *Theories of the Theatre* (1984) introduces some women writers into a revised historical narrative—as does Mark Fortier's *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction* (1997, 2002, 2016)—there remain few published locations for women's writing on the theatre per se. Volumes such as S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies' *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents* (1996) that provide such theory and criticism are perforce limited in their historical scope. Revelatory studies such as Gay Gibson Cima's *Early American Women Critics: Performance, Religion, Race* (2006) significantly expand our historical understanding but do not provide the writings themselves. In the Introduction to *Women Critics 1660–1820* (1995), the Folger Collective on Early Women Critics explains that "nearly all anthologies and histories of criticism exclude early women, and nearly all anthologies and histories of early women's writings exclude criticism" (xiii). We would add that writing about drama and performance by women is conspicuously under-represented in both.

These editors additionally note that their volume includes excerpts from forty-one of "the nearly one hundred women we have identified who were producing criticism between 1660 and 1800" (xiii). The Folger Collective further details that its anthology explores

> writings in a wide spectrum of genres. Some of the criticism presented in this collection is embedded in plays, novels, and poems. Other selections take the form of dialogues between fictional characters rather than emerging directly from the authorial voice. Still others are confined to the private vehicles of letters and diaries.
>
> (xv)

In other words, these scholars remind us that we must reconsider our understanding of the forms and locations of theory and criticism if we are to develop not only a fuller sense of such writing but also its broader cultural and political significance. Ann Thompson's and Sasha Roberts' invaluable anthology, *Women Reading Shakespeare, 1660–1900* (1997), for example, demonstrates the extent to which their included authors "use their writing on Shakespeare to raise issues of particular concern to women [...], such as women's education, women's role in public life, and power relations between the sexes in society and in marriage" (5).

The Routledge Anthology of Women's Theatre Theory and Dramatic Criticism brings together relevant and illustrative examples of women's writing that are drawn from wide-ranging cultural and historical traditions. The contents are arranged chronologically by date of composition if known (or approximated) or, if published, by date of publication. By pairing primary documents with scholarly framing essays that contextualize these works, we offer readers materials that gesture toward, but cannot possibly encompass, the wealth of theoretical and critical writing by women on drama, theatre, and performance. We readily acknowledge that, as with any such recuperative project, we cannot possibly embrace the full range of these materials historically or geographically or include as fully diverse a group of authors as must be recognized. Our contents reflect only a sampling of this robust and compelling legacy. We also note that the balance of the contents skews toward Anglo-American traditions. While the collection includes some important examples of women's writing in translation, drawn from other global traditions, we profoundly hope that the anthology will prompt new or renewed attention to an even more expansive body of works by women and woman-identified authors worldwide.

This project began in 2018 as a Working Group session of the American Society for Theatre Research, building on a related, earlier session that had been organized by Penny Farfan and Katherine E. Kelly. In organizing our session, we posed three core questions: 1) How does the women's writing speak to our understanding of drama and performance, broadly conceived? 2) How does the women's writing engage with, or prompt us to reconsider, extant understandings of dramatic theory and criticism? 3) How does the women's writing contribute to, or help us to revise, extant understandings of drama and performance in relation to history and culture? The participants in our session—many of whom are included here—as well as those who have since joined this project have all focused their analyses in response to those core concerns.

These foundational questions, undergirding their introductory essays, help us to appreciate the array of forms of writing and perspectives on theatre and performance embedded in the primary documents. Letters convey private responses to specific texts or performances or reveal aspects of the collaborative creative process. Scrapbooks and other memorabilia document artistic work within amateur theatrical communities as well as fandom. Manifestos and published criticism argue forcefully for women's status in the theatre and women's experience in a male-dominated profession. Interviews and speeches include invaluable and distinctive glimpses of women's theatrical engagements. Play excerpts instantiate dramaturgy as theory, and dramaturgy as criticism. Not surprisingly, a number of English female critics are responding to Shakespeare, while prefaces, no matter when or where written, situate the author's plays in their theatrical and cultural contexts. Occasional essays speak to theatre and politics, or aesthetics, or feminism, or other related concerns.

Taken together, the contents of this anthology represent the rich and varied critical and theoretical voices of women whose informed perspectives on the stage and on drama merit our serious attention.

This collection has four primary goals: 1) to introduce women's long history of producing theatre theory and dramatic criticism; 2) to demonstrate the variety of ways that women writers have responded to theatre and performance and have challenged—and are still challenging—traditional, male-authored theories and practices of theatre, performance, drama, and criticism; 3) to make available actual documents that women theatre theorists, practitioners, and critics produced so that users have readier access to them for instructional, creative, and scholarly purposes; and 4) to participate in the ongoing process of expanding our historical, theoretical, critical, and aesthetic understanding of theatre and performance through the strategic introduction of women's writing into established narratives of theatre theory and dramatic criticism.

The collection underscores the simple fact that women have a long history of producing theory and criticism, although it may not have always been apparent as such, nor has it been embraced within the discipline's traditional narratives, for now well-established reasons: women authors may have used alternative genres, sometimes without a public aim, to express themselves, including letters, diaries, marginalia, prefaces, epilogues, scrapbooks, or other creative forms. Women have at times published work anonymously or pseudonymously, or have published work outside of mainstream outlets, if indeed publication has even been possible. And, of course, women's writing, even when accessible, has traditionally been ignored, undervalued, or misrepresented by the dominant culture.

Precisely because women's theoretical and critical writings may not always resemble established conventions for these forms, our volume presents examples of female-authored theories of theatre, playwriting, acting, etc., that can be read directly in dialogue with, and at times in opposition to, the male critical tradition that has heretofore defined the field. Perhaps most importantly, the collection makes available the actual documents (in full or excerpted for length) that women theatre theorists, practitioners, and critics generated. Since many of these documents reside in archives, or in lesser-known or less-accessible publications, this volume makes them more available so that readers can not only discover this expanded concept of a theoretical and critical tradition but also have materials with which to teach, study, and create. We offer here a more expansive picture so that the works of luminaries in our field, as well as isolated, period- or locale-specific examples of women's writing are, perhaps newly, perceived as part of much longer and more diverse traditions. In short, we believe that women's theatre theory and dramatic criticism invaluably reflect the different kinds of texts, stylistic approaches, modes of analysis, and perspectives on culture that can truly expand our understanding not only of the arts and artistic processes but also of the broader social and political arenas from which artistry emerges and to which it speaks.

Notes

1 See St. John, ed., *Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence.*
2 Imogen is the central female character in *Cymbeline.*
3 See Woolf, "Professions for Women" in her *Selected Essays.*

Suggestions for Further Reading

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1 FIVE MEDIEVAL WOMEN

St. Perpetua (c. 185–203), Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Hadewijch (c. 1200–c. 1250), Katherine Sutton (d. 1376), Margery Kempe (c. 1373–1438)

Andrew Galloway

Introduction

Few medieval women are generally considered to have produced dramatic works, much less theatrical commentary and criticism as we define those categories. The best-known exceptions are rare, though they are far from minor figures. One is the tenth-century nun, Hrotsvit of Gandersheim (c. 935–c. 1002), whose Latin plays—broadly based on the Roman playwright Terence's character types and plots but refashioned into stories displaying the sanctity of martyred, holy women—may or may not have been acted. Hrotsvit's commentary is presented separately in this volume. The only other generally noted exception across the long span from late imperial Rome through the later seventeenth century is the remarkable twelfth-century abbess and visionary Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), whose *Ordo Virtutum* or "Play of the Virtues" is often picked out as the first "morality play."

It would seem that little more can be said about women's drama and dramatic thought and commentary in the Middle Ages. But if "public drama," in the sense of secular, acted entertainment before general audiences, was not typical or dignified for women in England before the Restoration of 1660, and only somewhat earlier in other European regions, there is plenty of evidence of earlier women's dramatic creativity and imagination in other forms and genres. More germane to this volume, often the women's realizations of those quasi-dramatic genres are accompanied by penetrating critical reflections on the meanings and purposes of the results. Hildegard's "Play of the Virtues," for example, is far from the only visionary dialogue written by her or other women that is cast in more or less explicitly dramatized terms, and other visionary narratives by Hildegard and others not only feature highly dramatic scenes—and might even have been physically dramatized as Hildegard's works show—but also often include the writers' remarks on the meanings of those visions' details. This suggests we should broaden our generic categories in order to appreciate a fuller archive of women's dramatic imagination and commentary in early Western culture.

Any broadening, to be sure, requires adjustments in what we are seeking, in determining what theatre and theatrical commentary are. It is true that medieval visionary dialogues, for example, are often implicitly or explicitly in competition with productions or procedures defined as "spectacle." The earliest selection here presents a direct instance of such competition against public spectacle, in this case the late-imperial Roman spectacle of public execution. This is from the remarkable

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autobiographical *Passion* of St. Perpetua (c. 185–203), an otherwise unknown young North African convert to Christianity who was killed by beasts in the Carthaginian Coliseum around the year 203, along with other recalcitrant Christians under Emperor Severus. Perpetua's first-person, vision-laden account of her final days is vivid enough, and its Latin (which changes in style after her account) is demotic or "vulgar" enough, to justify the claim (made by whoever originally preserved it) that it came directly "from her hand." Her running commentary on the meaning of events and visions shows how, for Perpetua, both the waking experience of being imprisoned by the Romans and her visionary versions of what the spectacle of her death really means, offer a competing kind of "spectacle." She focuses on vivid details from which she unpacks the cosmic meanings of her conflict, but also poignantly human moments, cast no less vividly as dramatic action. She includes, for instance, the Romans authorities' brutal separation of her nursing infant when they cast her into prison (she finds it miraculous that her breasts, though swollen, did not hurt or drip, unlike the breasts of a fellow martyr, Felicity, another young mother), and her narrative includes a vivid scene of her father's pleadings that she recant Christianity while she is preparing to resist the similar demands by the Roman imperial official, who then sentences her to death and has her father beaten for his interference. The narrative includes her pitying thought about her father's "wretched old age" while she rejoices with the other Christians as they march off the judicial platform to the prison below the arena.

This is intrinsically theatrical, as law cases always are, but climaxing Perpetua's counter-spectacle are the visions she receives of her execution while imprisoned. Here, her revision of the upcoming execution elaborately rescripts the Roman version of public execution, complete with careful attention to audience, costume, movements, and dialogue. In a vision the night before she is executed, she enters the arena to face not beasts but an "Egyptian" fighter, an agon supervised by a mysterious and enormous man with purple robe and elaborate footgear, who offers her a bough of golden apples if she wins (perhaps a strange Vergilian allusion thrown back at the pagan world she scorns [*Aeneid* 6.124–50]). In this vision, not just clothing but gender identity is malleable: when Perpetua's assistants strip her of her clothing to oil her down, she "became a man," who can then viciously defeat the Egyptian in hand-to-hand, then foot-to-body, combat. Her realization upon awakening of what her execution means is the final step of her reinterpretation of the Roman event: this will not be a typically entertaining Roman execution of a subversive, but a major struggle with the devil himself, a fight she feels she has already won by her unwavering commitment.

Although Perpetua's narrative is not included in anthologies of medieval drama, responses to it have often registered its theatricality. Augustine of Hippo, the influential fourth-century theologian and commentator, remarked about the *Passion of St. Perpetua*, "Quid hoc spectaculo suavius?" ("what sweeter spectacle could there be?" [col. 1281; my trans.]). So too, when the modern church historian Marina Warner muses on Perpetua's narrative, whose effects Warner recalls from having it read aloud to her by the nuns who educated Warner herself, Warner thinks of the potential for dramatic tragedy it demonstrates. For Warner, the *Passion* not only evokes "the image of Perpetua standing in the arena under the battering African sun on the blood-soaked sand with the crowd howling for sport and the grilles behind which the wild beasts paced and snarled, unlocked and ready to be lifted," but also Greek and Shakespearean tragedy (354–6).

If the visionary mode was one way for early Christian and medieval women to recuperate "spectacle" for their own purposes, another way was liturgy, veering into "liturgical drama," a term often used by modern scholars to accommodate the unpredictable capacity of medieval liturgy to expand into reenactments of sacred history (often greatly expanded from the Bible, in accord with the elaborations of sacred history found in all manner of medieval Christian writings). In some medieval Christian views, the often elaborate liturgy commemorating the Crucifixion could be seen as dramatic "tragedy," as Honorius Augustodunensis declared in the twelfth century (Kelly, 80–2). By the twelfth century, both secular and religious Latin dramas were widely available, some of them produced for, if not by, "mixed" audiences of men and women (the Latin *Bridegroom* [ed. Dronke, 3–21] and the Anglo-Norman *Play of Adam* [ed. Fitzgerald and Sebastian, 23–56], are notable examples). The line between "liturgy" and "drama" was inevitably and constantly blurred. But if very few women, perhaps even only Hrotsvit, entered that blurry zone from the side of "drama," a number of them occupied that liminal terrain from the side of "liturgy." Most productive was Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179).

Many of Hildegard's copious writings for her convent can be called at once visionary, liturgical, and dramatic, and it was in the originality of her fusion of these genres that she most risked criticism for violating medieval Christian norms, especially those presenting women, and certainly lavishly performing women, as dangerous beings. No less scandalous was taking pleasure in the beauty of expensive costumes and women's unbound hair. Hildegard flatly ignored such views and attitudes. It is no surprise, therefore, that another woman, the twelfth-century abbess Tengswich of Andernach, expressed dismay at Hildegard's productions, in a silky but venomous letter that we are fortunate has survived. Hildegard's and Tengswich's exchange offers unparalleled evidence both for how Hildegard disposed her liturgical drama and how, in defending her work, Hildegard viewed every detail of such pious performances. Her reply to Tengswich takes stock of the dramatic and quintessentially feminine nature of the liturgical and visionary dramas that she created for the elite nuns whom she educated and fostered.

If for Tengswich, Hildegard's selection and dressing of beautiful virgins for religious dance and song in elegant clothing, with embroidered crowns and hair unbound, was a blatant transgression against Christianity's embrace of the poor and the Fathers' rejection of sensual theatricality, for Hildegard, such displays of feminine beauty were permitted to virgins. For those are exempt, she argues, from the rules of modesty imposed on married women. Tengswich's attack led Hildegard to her clearest set of statements about casting, staging, and the Edenic state that both signify: in her convent, a display of the innate beauty of femininity was fully permitted, to a degree hard to find equaled elsewhere in the Middle Ages or indeed many periods. As Barbara Newman notes, "every nun [...] became a figure of the unique virgin bride and remembrance of Eve in the garden—in short, an epiphany of the original *feminea forma*" (222). Virginity for Hildegard was not the suppression of femininity but its fulfillment. As for the social elitism that Tengswich criticized, Hildegard retorted that mixing poor with rich nuns would only bring out envy in the poor, and arrogance in the rich. Here, her dramatic and aesthetic tastes might seem to shape her morality rather than the reverse, yet it might be fairer to see her morality as infused with an artistic and aesthetic celebration of divine and natural creation, epitomized by her signature use of the word for "greening."

Hildegard thus reveals that she conceives of her convent as a kind of permanent stage, suited to her careful casting, staging, and constant control of mood and meaning. She is able to assert this thanks to her exceptionally authoritative style, both in her visionary or liturgical productions and in her commentary sprinkled throughout those productions, as well as in her letters. Enabled by nearly biblically prophetic self-confidence, Hildegard's many Latin dialogues, visions, and letters blithely offered many novel syntheses between song, poetry, dance, and worship. This governs her well-known *Ordo Virtutum* (ed. Dronke, 147–84) as it does all her other quasi-dramatic visionary dialogues, some of which include more of her running explication and commentary than does the *Ordo Virtutum.* A large set of such visions and concurrent commentary is found in her *Scivias* (a title based on *Scito Vias Domini*, "know the ways of the Lord"), whose visions move vividly and surreally through sacred history, especially the Fall of Adam and Eve, Lucifer's fall, and the Incarnation: all events, as Newman says, that "in the seer's eye […] were three acts of one drama" (89). A selection from the finale of *Scivias* is chosen here because that features Hildegard's (or rather the Living Light's) commentary, which both before and after the dialogue discusses the details of the vision of the travails and triumph of a "Penitent Soul in a Body." Allegorical as that drama is, it is notable that for Hildegard, the "body" and its beauties are never forgotten, however much this might distress more dour contemporaries.

Other elegantly described and quasi-dramatic visions by women can be easily found across the next several centuries, both within convents and among the twelfth- and thirteenth-centuries' newer religious orders. Visions were particularly cultivated by beguines, lay women who adopted their own "order," often wrote in the vernacular, and lived with little male supervision in their own communities, especially in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Low Countries. A mid-thirteenth century Dutch writer, Hadewijch (c. 1200–c. 1250), is among the most brilliant of such beguine visionaries. Of her life little is known other than what is available from the sacred love poems, prose visions, and letters that survive, all in Middle Dutch; it seems she had an early divine revelation, followed by some later exile, or perhaps flight from authorities. We do not know her dates of birth or death. But we can see that all of her works are intricate and intensely elegant combinations of mode and media. English-language criticism of Hadewijch has lagged behind Dutch scholarship, which has been more thorough, for example, in showing Hadewijch's uses of music in her lyric poetry (Grijp).

Although the performative nature of Hadewijch's poetry is widely acknowledged, no scholarship, apparently, has addressed her visions' dramatic implications, much less how the strands of commentary within the visions reveal Hadewijch's thinking about the quasi-dramatic scenes she narrates. The vision chosen here presents a youthful, personal, yet highly theatrical encounter with God himself, as the object of the nineteen-year old woman's obsessive love. She yearns, as she explains, to understand why and how the Lord gives to and takes from those who love him. Her vision answers this longing. In that vision, she encounters a gigantic figure ensconced on a monumentally high throne below an all-encompassing royal crown, with a face that somehow displays "all the faces and all the forms that have ever been and will ever be." Seeing him, Hadewijch slips into a wordless union, lasting one half hour, as she notes. Even ecstasy is precisely situated in the space and time that the vision unfolds. In the vision, she is conveyed from scene to scene "in a spirit" (the phrase is as odd

in Middle Dutch as modern English), a comment that establishes some containment of her special experiences, much like what drama achieves with theatrical space. Ultimately, she comments on the larger meaning of her experiences in terms of the "exile" from God to which she must awaken. As her reflections and commentary on the vision make clear, the experience is a rite of passage that looks both backward and forward to the end of what will be the long sorrows of life. It is about change, and it changes her. During the vision the nineteen-year-old grows older.

Though we can identify the women writers of many religious visions with their drama and their commentary, usually we can only assume that they contributed some liturgy as well. The only liturgy anywhere in the Middle Ages that we know to have been at least significantly shaped by a woman was at Barking Abbey outside London, in the late fourteenth century, during Chaucer's life and near his setting. Katherine Sutton (d. 1376), abbess of Barking from 1358–76, is said by the Barking *Ordinale* to have revamped the traditional Easter drama in a number of ways in order to revive the "torpor" of modern congregations. Easter drama is often seen as the most important medieval basis for other kinds of drama, with its long-established rituals of the Deposition, the Elevation, and the Visit to the Sepulcher by three Marys, usually monks or priests dressed as the women, seeking the crucified Jesus and learning he is not in the cave where his body had been deposited but has risen, as an angel tells them (richly documented in Young, *Drama* 1:249–410, although he disposes the evidence too neatly into progressive "stages"). So traditional is this general form that it is hard to know how much to credit Sutton with, given the institutional bases of all liturgical drama, not to mention the hints that earlier liturgy at Barking was a bit too vivid to suit the authorities.[1] But given the explicit statement in the abbey's *Ordinale* concerning Sutton's major adjustment of the timing of the Easter liturgical drama, and the explicit statement that changes by Sutton and Sutton alone are described in what follows, Sutton was surely a major influence on the Barking production, and both its internal explanations and the drama's unusual features themselves part of her contribution to dramatic criticism.

The work includes musical invention (several of the songs are not known elsewhere [Ogden, 149]) and vivid stage business, including the rare touch of pouring water and wine on the effigy of the crucified Jesus in her version of the Deposition, before wrapping it in fine clothing, as a corpse would be tended. Thereupon a priest was to carry another cross to the doors of the sepulcher in which the whole convent of nuns has been hidden and from which, at his pounding on the door, they then flee, representing the souls of the patriarchs and prophets released by Jesus's harrowing of hell. Sutton, who surely added the touch of representing the Marys by nuns rather than male clerics, was likely also responsible for granting more individuation than usual to the Marys; as Anne Yardley notes, each is given "an opportunity to sing individually—to personify these three women as three distinct personalities and not as the undifferentiated Marys" commonly found in Easter *Visitations* (Yardley, 251). Sutton's desire, as the *Ordinale* says, to dispel "torpor" and reawaken devotion in her jaded London audience can also be understood as a wish to involve women more directly in the most sacred scenes of liturgical drama, while the text of her liturgical drama explains throughout the historical meanings that each of the actions possess.

The apex of this production's emphasis on women's authority is the inclusion of the abbess herself confessing and absolving the nuns who are about to play the three Marys. It is important to emphasize that this expression of spiritual authority

is remarkable: women, even abbesses, could neither confess nor absolve others. As Dunbar Ogden observes, "the Abbess takes unto herself sacred powers reserved for the male clergy" (146; Young, *Drama* I:381–85). Making this part of the dramatic action constitutes an implicit yet bold assertion of the convent's and Sutton's own authority. This might be seen as *merely* "dramatic," the climax of a fanciful production that Sutton has created, with a kind of Puck-like power over the church's clerical and secular audience alike. But it is also a powerful reassertion of the power of women and women's ideas in the drama of the medieval church, and a sign, if any more were needed, that such capabilities could readily be extended to wider dramatic and even institutional realms.

A later medieval English woman visionary, much better known now than any of these other figures, left visions widely recognized as proto-"dramatic": Margery Kempe (c. 1373–1438), the daughter of a well-placed bourgeois family of East Anglia. In contrast to Hildegard's widespread medieval notoriety, however, Margery's *Book*, with its single surviving copy perhaps written by one of her sons,[2] was probably little known in its time, and entirely unknown to scholars until 1936.[3] Yet Margery's visions are emphatically public events, often taking place *in* public, whenever she begins her characteristic wailing, as at the sight of babies who recall to her the baby Jesus. Her visions are equally dramatic. As well as multiple bedroom conversations with Jesus, she describes scenes that in their vivid enactments of the Incarnation and Holy Family might easily be joined with more officially staged plays of "salvation history" in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century cycle plays that were common in Margery's East Anglia. As the historian Clarissa Atkinson remarks, late-medieval English drama parallels Margery's visionary imagination, including her "easy familiarity with the Holy Family and the saints" in a mode "entirely characteristic of the style and attitudes of medieval playwrights" (96). Scattered evidence survives of minor or peripheral roles that late-medieval and early Modern women sometimes held in producing civic drama or other festivities (Stokes); it seems clear that Margery would have wanted a far more decisive degree of dramaturgical control than anything her culture offered. Her *Book* is not itself that drama but the guide to the drama that was her life, on which the voices that fill her *Book*, both human and divine, comment continually.

Just as Hadewijch's desire to understand God's gifts and punishments is the question that led to her vision, so the vision described by Margery that is selected here is the product of a thought-experiment: Margery asks Jesus what she should think about. This framing of her subsequent vision is thus a commentary on the kind of visionary drama she wants to answer to her questions, and focuses on her creative responses, just as the scene from sacred history that then unfolds places her at its center. In all her narratives and her dramatic visions, Margery, however modestly called simply "the creature," is the central protagonist. In the vision here she is allowed to hold the baby Jesus, as if cast in the role of godparent, however ironic or hubristic we might see that role in this instance. All of Margery's visions show some degree of experimental theatre: her visions are all answers to her open-minded desire to contact and revive and even be part of sacred history in her own time. Equally dramatic are the waking scenes she recounts, such as the dialogue she records between herself and Archbishop Thomas Arundel, known for his scourge of heretics (whom some accused Margery of following). Arundel is eventually convinced by Margery to give official sanction to her wearing of a white gown, as a kind of novel "virginal nun."

This reclothing of herself, recasting herself everywhere she went, was evidently pivotal in her self-redefinition, a "growing ability to assert authority over her self and to trust the strength of her private experience of the nature of the divine," as Lynn Staley puts it (3). Since we have no other writing by her than the *Book*, a pioneering instance of English autobiography, we cannot trace her intellectual development more precisely. But it is clear that she charts not only a path to salvation but also increasing self-confidence in her anomalous psychological and literary experimentation. Margery's life is an open-ended dramatic experiment, its only truly fixed element the quasi-bourgeois marriage she will ultimately consummate with Jesus at her death.

St. Perpetua

Excerpt from **Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis,** *Chaps. 6, 10*[4] *(c. 203)*

[VI] On the next day while we were eating we were suddenly snatched to go to our hearing. And we came to the forum. A rumor swiftly ran through neighboring areas, and an immense crowd gathered. And we climbed up to the platform. The others were interrogated and professed their faith. My turn came. And my father appeared with my son and plucked me off the steps, saying, "Offer the sacrifice![5] Pity your baby!" And Hilarianus, the imperial administrator, who had just been promoted to issue capital judgments there after the death of proconsul Minucius Timinianus, said, "Spare the white hairs of your father, spare your infant son. Make the sacrifice on behalf of the emperors' health!" And I answered, "I won't do it." Hilarianus asked, "Are you Christian?" And I responded: "I am Christian." And since my father was standing there pulling me away, he was ordered by Hilarianus to be ejected, and he was beaten by a stick. And I mourned the blow to my father, as if I had been struck. Thus I mourned for my father's wretched old age. Then [Hilarianus] pronounces sentence on us all and condemns us to the beasts. And joyous, we descended down into the prison[…].

[X] On the day before we are to fight [the beasts in the arena], I see this in a vision. Pomponius the deacon came to the prison door and knocked loudly. And I went out to him and opened it to him. He had dressed in an unbelted white robe and elaborate sandals. And he said to me, "Perpetua, we are expecting you. Come." And he held me by the hand, and we went through a difficult and winding place. Finally we arrived, heavily breathing, at the amphitheater, and he led me into the central arena and said to me, "Don't be afraid; I am here with you and I will work with you." And he departed. And I see a huge and thundering crowd; and since I knew I was condemned to the beasts, I marveled that beasts weren't sent out to me. And instead an Egyptian came out, foul in appearance, with his helpers, to battle with me. And elegant youths arrived, my helpers and assistants. And they undressed me. And I became male. And my supporters began to rub me down with oil, in the way they are accustomed to in arena struggles; and on the other side I see the Egyptian rolling in the dust. And then came out a certain man, unbelted, of extraordinary size, so that he could even exceed the top of the amphitheater, on his breast wearing a robe that was purple with two stripes in the middle, and elaborate sandals made from gold and silver, carrying a rod like a lance, and a leafy tree branch with golden apples on it. And he commanded silence and said, "The Egyptian, if he should conquer this

woman, let him kill her with a sword; if she should conquer him, let her take this branch." And he departed. And we closed on one another and began to land blows; he wanted to seize me by the feet, but I stomped on his face. And I was raised up in the air and I began to stomp him as if not standing on the ground. But when I saw a pause occurring, I joined my hands together to put my fingers into my fingers and I grabbed his head, and he fell on his face and I stomped his head. And the people began to roar and my supporters to chant psalms, and I went to the gladiator-trainer and took the branch. And he kissed me and said to me, "Daughter, peace be with you." And I went with celebration to the port of Sanavivaria ["Salvation and Life"]. And I woke up. And I realized that I was about to fight not against beasts, but against the devil, but I knew victory would be mine. Up to this point I proceeded [in my writing] until the day before my reward; but if someone else would like, may he write the deed [*actum*] of the reward itself.

Hildegard of Bingen

Excerpt from Letters to and from Mistress Tengswich (c. 1148–1150)[6]

To Hildegard, mistress of the brides of Christ, T[engswich], mistress of the nuns of Andernach, [sends greetings,] with the highest hopes of uniting with her someday in heaven.[7]

The soaring fame of your sanctity, flying far and wide, has resounded in our ears with extraordinary and astounding things, commending to us in our insignificance the excellence of your sublime religion and singular way of life. For we have learned by the witness of many that a great many heavenly secrets, difficult for mortal understanding, are revealed to you for writing through angels' divinities, ordained for you to carry out not by human planning but by God himself teaching.

But another thing, unheard of in customs, has also reached us: namely, that your virgins stand in the church for singing on feast days with their hair unbound, and for ornamentation using white silk veils reaching the surface of the ground, wearing crowns on their heads woven with gold, embroidered with crosses on both sides and the back, and in the front with a lamb's figure elegantly inserted. Further, that their fingers are adorned with gold rings—although the first shepherd of the Church in his Epistle forbad such things, admonishing by saying, "not with plaited hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly attire" [1 Timothy 2:9]. Moreover—seeming to us no less astounding among these other things—only women who are elegant and noble in kind are taken into your convent while ignoble and less wealthy ones your convent utterly rejects.

Wherefore, stupefied, we were stunned by the uncertainty of great doubt, when we silently pondered that the Lord chose paupers and small fishermen into his original Church, and that the blessed Peter later said to peoples converted to the faith, "in truth, I perceive that God is no acceptor of persons" [Acts 10:34; cp. Romans 2:11], remembering too the Apostle's words to the Corinthians: "not many mighty, not many noble, but God hath chosen the contemptible and the ignoble things of this world" [1 Corinthians 1:26–28]. Indeed, intently scrutinizing as far as we can all things established by the Fathers—to which it is fully proper for all spirituals to conform—we find nothing like this. So great a novelty in your practices, o venerable bride of Christ, exceeds incomparably the capability of our insignificance, striking us with no little wonder.

Therefore we such small womanly creatures, deeply rejoicing with you in your success, with all due love but desiring nonetheless to understand more clearly something about this matter, found it pleasing to send to your sanctity this little letter, humbly and devoutly praying that your dignity would not disdain to write us back soon, to indicate by whose authority such religious practices might be defended.

Farewell; may you remember us in your prayers.

[Reply:] Hildegard, to the Congregation of Nuns [at Andernach]:

The Living Light says: let a woman lie hidden in her little room so she might keep her great modesty, since the serpent has infused in her the great dangers of horrible lust.

How? A woman's beauty glowed and radiated in her first root in which was formed this thing [her womb] in which every creature lies hidden. How? In two ways: namely, by her expert creation by the finger of God, and by her supreme beauty.

How wondrous you are, woman, who have established your foundation in the sun and overcome the world! Wherefore spoke the apostle Paul, who flew into the highest and was silent on earth, so he did not reveal what was hidden: woman, who falls subject to the male power of her husband, conjoined to him in his first rib, ought to preserve her great modesty, so she ought not give or reveal the fame of her own vessel [womb] to a man under a strange place, who is not tied to her [cp. 1 Thessalonians 4:4]. And let her do this according to the word the earth's dominator spoke, in mockery of the devil: "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" [Matthew 19:6].

Hear this: the earth exudes grass's greenery until winter conquers it. And the winter takes away the beauty of that flower and covers over its flower's greenery; it cannot conceal itself as if it had never dried up, because winter has taken [the flower] away. Therefore a woman ought not elevate herself or ornament her hair or raise herself by any point of a crown or any gold except by her spouse's will, according to which it will have pleased him in proper measure.

These things, however, do not pertain to a virgin. For she stands in purity and the integrity of the beauty of paradise, and will never seem dried up but always remain in the full greenery of the flowering staff. The virgin does not cover her hair's greenery by precept; instead, she covers herself by choice, through the highest humility, as a human being hides the beauty of the soul, so the rapacious one does not ravish it through pride.

Virgins are joined together in the inviolability of the Holy Spirit and the dawn of virginity. Wherefore it is proper for them to proceed to the highest priest as a sacrifice dedicated to God.

Wherefore it is proper, through dispensation, and through revelation in the mystical breath of the finger of God, that a virgin put on white clothing, the clear sign of a marriage to Christ, since by tightly woven integrity her mind will be strengthened, considering indeed who he is to whom she is conjoined, as is written: "Having this name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads" [Revelations 14:1], and "These follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" [Revelations 14:4].

For God has the scrutiny of one who scrutinizes every person [cp. Psalm 7:10], such that a lesser rank does not climb above a higher, just as Satan and the first man wanted to fly higher than they were placed. What man will gather together his entire herd of livestock into one stable, namely, cattle, asses, sheep, and goats, in such a way that they do not distinguish themselves?

Therefore let there be discretion even in this, so a diverse public, gathered into one flock, are not destroyed by the pride of elevation and the humiliation of diversity, and especially so that honorable manners are not destroyed when they rip each other apart by hatred, when a higher order overbears a lower one and a lower one ascends above a higher one. God distinguishes peoples on earth just as he does in heaven, discerning angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, cherubim, and seraphim. All these are loved by God, but do not have equal names. Pride loves princes and nobles in their personhood of elevation, and hates them when they kill Pride. It is written: “God does not cast off the mighty, since He himself is mighty” [Job 36:5]. But He himself does not love persons, but the works that have the flavor of him, just as the Son of God says: “my food is to do the will” of my Father [John 4:34].

Where there is humility, there Christ is always taking his meal.

And therefore it is necessary that those men should be aspied who desire vain honor more than humility because they see that *those* things are higher than *those*. Let the sickly sheep be ejected, so that the whole herd is not contaminated. God pours understanding into people so that their name is not blotted [from the book of life; Revelations 3:5]. For it is good for a man not to grab hold of a mountain that he cannot move but to reside in the valley, gradually learning what he can seize [cp. Matthew 17:20].

These words are from the Living Light, not man. Who hears, let him see, and let him believe from where they come.

Excerpt from **Scivias**, *“Symphony of the Blessed” (1141–1151)*[8]

Then I saw the most brilliant sky, in which I heard various kinds of music with all the aforesaid meanings in a miraculous manner, with praises of the joyous higher citizens strenuously persevering in the way of truth, laments of those joyous ones calling [other] people back to those praises, and the exhortations of Virtues for the salvation of people whom diabolical traps assail[…]. And the sound, like the voice of a multitude, symphonizing in harmony in praise of the celestial ranks, spoke:

[…]
PENITANT SOUL IN A BODY:
Oh you army of the Queen,
And oh you white lilies of her, with crimson roses,
Take heed of me,
Because I, a pilgrim, am exiled from you;
And help me that I might be able to rise in the blood of the Son of God.
[…]

VIRTUES TO THE PENITANT SOUL IN A BODY:
We wish to bring you back,
And we do not want to desert you;
And the whole celestial army rejoices over you.
So it is fitting for us to resound in symphony.
[…]

THE DEVIL'S TEMPTATION TO THE SAME PENITANT SOUL:
Who are you, and where have you come from?
You embraced me,
And I led you forth;
But now you confound me, in turning back!
I will throw you down by my attack.

PENITANT SOUL AGAINST THE DEVIL:
I recognized that all your ways are evil,
And so I fled from you;
And now, oh impostor, I fight against you.
[…]

VICTORY:
Rejoice, oh comrades,
Because the ancient serpent is bound.

VIRTUES:
Praise to you, Christ, King of the angels!
Oh God, who are you
Who had this great counsel in yourself,
Which destroyed the hellish drink,
Among publicans and sinners,
Who now shine in celestial goodness?
Wherefore praise to you, oh King!
[…]

These voices were like the voice of a multitude, when a multitude lifts its voices on high. And their sound passed through me, so that without any obstacle or delay I understood them. And I heard a voice from the shining sky speaking to me: […]

> Thus, oh human, you see "the most brilliant sky," designating the brightness of the joy of the heavenly citizens, in which you heard "various kinds of music with all the aforesaid meanings in a miraculous manner: with praises of the joyous higher citizens strenuously persevering in the way of truth, laments of those joyous ones calling people back to those praises"; for, as the air encloses and sustains the things under the heavens, so the wonders of God, as you heard in the things demonstrated to you, a sweet and delightful symphony expresses with joy the wonders of the elect living in the heavenly city, persisting in their sweet devotion to God; but it laments the wavering of those the ancient serpent is trying to destroy, whom nonetheless divine power vigorously leads to the company of the blessed joys, proffering them the mysteries unknown to human minds inclined to the world; and "in the exhortation of the virtues exhorting themselves to the salvation of the people whom diabolical traps are assailing. But those virtues defeat his snares, so that the faithful at last through repentance proceed out of their sins and into heaven." For there, virtues in the minds of the faithful resist the vices by which the Devil fatigues them; but when those virtues overcome him with the mightiest strength, people, fallen into sins, turn back to penance by God's will, when they will scrutinize and bewail their former deeds,

> and consider and sing their future ones[…]. Thus the words symbolize the body, but the symphonizing manifests the spirit; since celestial harmony denotes divinity, and the Word manifests the humanity of the Son of God.

Hadewijch

Excerpt from **Visions**[9] *(c. 1250)*

It was on a feast of the Epiphany. I was turning nineteen, as someone told me that day. Then I wished to go to our Lord, and in those days I was in longing, and in exceedingly strong desire, to understand how God takes and gives to persons who, lost in him and taken up in fulfillment, are conformed to his will in every circumstance. On this day I was again strongly moved in love because of my longing. And then I was taken up in a spirit [*in enen gheeste*] and conveyed to where a huge, awe-inspiring place was shown me, and in this mighty place stood a seat. And he who sat on it was invisible and incomprehensible in the dignity of rule he wielded from that height. To be seated in such a place is incomprehensible to both heavenly and earthly beings. Above that high seat, in this high place, I saw a crown that was above all diadems. It embraced all things in its width and nothing existed outside the crown. And an angel came, with a glowing censer glowing red-hot with fiery smoke. He knelt before the highest part of the seat, above which the crown hung, and he paid him honor and said:

> Oh unknown Power and almighty great Lord, receive honor and dignity from this girl who resorts to you in your secret place, which is unknown to all who do not send you such a kindled offering with such sharp arrows as she sends you with her new burning youth. For she has now ended her nineteenth year, as is said. And it is she, Lord, who comes to seek you in the spirit—who you are, whom men do not understand. For that unknown life, which you have aroused in her with your burning charity, has led her to this place. Now reveal to her that you have drawn her here, and transport her wholly within yourself.

And then I heard a terrible voice speaking to me and—unheard of—speaking to me with imagery [*bi enen ghelikenesse*] and said: “See who I am!”

And I saw him whom I sought. And his face revealed itself with such clarity that I recognized in it all the faces and forms that existed and ever shall exist, from which he received honor and service in all right. I saw why each one must receive his part, in doom and in blessing, and by what each one must be set in his position; and by what ways of being some persons wander from him and return back to him again, finer and more beautiful than they were before; why still others seem always wandering and never came back, and they remained standing entirely still and almost devoid of consolation at all times; and others have remained in their place since childhood, have known themselves at their worth, and have held out to the end. I recognized all these beings there in that face.

In his right hand I saw the gifts of his blessing; and I saw in his hand heaven in its vastness opened, and all those who will be with him there eternally. In his left hand I saw the sword of the fearful stroke, with which he strikes down everyone to death. In this hand I saw hell and all its eternal company. I saw his greatness oppressed under all, I saw his smallness exalted above all. I saw his hiddenness embracing and

flowing through all things. I saw his breadth enclosed in all. I heard his reasoned understanding, and perceived all reason with reason. I saw in his breast the entire fulfillment of his nature in love. In everything else I saw, I could understand it in the spirit [*in de geest*].

But then wonder seized me because of all the riches I had seen in him, and through this wonder I came out of the spirit in which I had seen all that I sought. And as in this situation in all this rich comprehension I recognized my awe-inspiring love, my unspeakably sweet beloved, I fell out of the spirit, from myself and all I had seen in him, and, wholly lost, fell upon the breast, the fulfillment of his nature, which is love. There I remained engulfed and lost, without any comprehension of other knowledge, or sight, or spiritual understanding, except to be one with him and to have fulfillment of this union. I remained in this less than half an hour [cp. Revelations 8.1].

Then I was called back again in a spirit, and again I recognized and understood all reasoning as before. And once again it was said to me by him:

> From now on you shall never more condemn or bless anyone except as I wish; and you shall give everyone his due according to his worth. This is what I am, in fulfillment and in knowledge, and in entrancement for those who wish to content me according to my will. I direct you to live in conformity with my divinity and my humanity, back in the cruel world, where you must taste every kind of death, until you return here in the full name of my fulfillment, in which you are baptized in my depths.

And with this I returned, woeful, to myself.

Katherine Sutton, Abbess of Barking Abbey

Excerpt from the Barking Ordinale and Customary[10] *(c.1375)*

[Deposition of the Cross][11]

Meanwhile while the left-hand chorus have sung this antiphon, let the abbess first adore the Cross in memory, namely, seeking the five graces of Christ's five wounds; and when she will have come to the Cross with her whole body prostrate, let her kiss the feet, hands, and right side of the Crucifix with reverence and devoutness, praying that the Holy Spirit shall inspire her heart, with the rest of the sisters then imitating her in the pattern of these things […] When the Holy Cross has been adored, let the priests, elevating the Cross from its place [in the sepulcher], begin the antiphon, "Above all the trees […]" and with the chorus then following let them sing together the whole thing, led by the female cantor. Let them convey the Cross to the great altar, and there, in the guise of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, putting the Image down from the wood, let them wash the wounds of the Crucifix with wine and water […] And when they have placed it reverently in the aforesaid place, splendidly adorned with a golden-threaded pillow of tapestries and bright linens, let the priest close the sepulcher and begin the responsory, "The Lord being buried […]" […] And then let the abbess offer a candle that shall burn continually before the sepulcher, not extinguished until the Image, which will have been taken up from the sepulcher with candles and incense and procession on Easter night after matins, be replaced in its spot […].

Concerning Easter Festivities:

Let the glorious solemnity of the Lord's resurrection principally be celebrated.

First let two bells be rung, and not cease until the entire convent of the chorus shall enter. Then, after two peals each between fifteen Psalms, let the last peal be sounded […]

Note that according to ancient church custom, the Lord's resurrection was celebrated before Matins, and before any striking of bells on Easter day; and since[12] the mass of people in those days seemed to grow cold in devotion, and with human torpor greatly increasing, the revered lady, Lady Katherine Sutton, then serving in the role of their pastoral care and desiring to extirpate entirely the said torpor and, to rouse all the more the devotion of the faithful for such a renowned celebration, established with the unanimous consent of her sisters that the celebration of the Lord's resurrection would be made immediately after the third responsory of Matins on Easter day, and the proceedings were established in this manner.

First let the Lady Abbess go with the entire convent and certain priests and clerks dressed in copes with every priest and clerk carrying a palm and an unlit candle in his hand; let them enter the chapel of St. Mary Magdalene, figuring the souls of the holy fathers descending to hell before the coming of Christ; and let them shut themselves into the aforesaid chapel. Then, after the officiating priest should arrive, let them approach the aforesaid chapel dressed in alba and cope, with two deacons—one bringing a cross with the Lord's banner hanging from the top, the other carrying a censer in his hand, and with other priests and clerks with two boys carrying candles—at the door of the aforesaid chapel, beginning three times this antiphon, "Raise your gates […]" –which priest shall indeed represent the person of Christ about to descend to those below and rip away the doors of hell. And let the aforesaid antiphon begin each time in a louder voice, which each time the clergy repeats, and at each beginning let the priest beat with the cross at the aforesaid door, figuring the breaking of the gates of hell, and at the third blow let the door open. Then let him enter with his ministers. Meanwhile, let a certain priest, remaining in the chapel, begin the antiphon "From the gates of hell […]," which the female cantor with the entire convent should take up. "O Lord, rescue […]" … Then let all exit the chapel, that is, from the Limbo of the Fathers […] in procession through the middle of the chorus to the sepulcher each carrying a palm and a candle designating a victory seized over the enemy, followed by the Lady Abbess, the prioress, and with the entire convent just as before. And when the officiating priest will have come to the sepulcher let him cense it and enter the sepulcher, beginning the verse "He rises […]" then let the female canter join in with "Christ from the tomb […]" and meanwhile let him carry out the body of the Lord [the Host] from the sepulcher, beginning the antiphon, "Christ rising […]" before the altar with his face turned to the people, holding the Lord's body enclosed in crystal in his hands […]. And let them proceed in procession to the altar of the Holy Trinity in solemn arrangement, namely with censers and candles […] and this procession signifies how Christ proceeded after his resurrection in Galilea with his disciples following.

With these things finished, let three sisters chosen in advance by the abbess come forth and, taking off their black clothing in the chapel of the Blessed Mary Magdalene, let them be clothed in shining surplices, with white veils placed over their heads by the lady abbess. Thus prepared, therefore, and holding silver vessels

in their hands, let them say their confession [*dicant Confiteor*] to the abbess, and, having been absolved by her, let them stand in an established place with candles. Then let the one who pretends to serve as Mary Magdalene sing this verse, “At one time of God […].” This finished, let the second, who imitates Mary Jacobi, respond with the second verse, “Drawing near, therefore, alone […],” the third Mary in turn taking the role of Salome: “I am allowed to go with you […].” After going to the choir, let them sing with tearful and submissive voice these verses together: “Alas the hearts within us […].” Then let the Maries, exiting the choir, say together, “Alas who has rolled away […].” When they will have come to the sepulcher, let a clerk dressed in a white stole be seated before the sepulcher serving in the role [*imago*] of the angel who rolled the stone away from the tomb and sat on it, and let him say to them, “Whom do you seek in the sepulcher, o companions of Christ?” Let the women reply, “We seek Jesus of Nazareth.” Let the angel follow with “He is not here; he has risen.” And when he will have said “come, and see,” let them enter the sepulcher and kiss the place where the Crucifix had been placed. Let Mary Magdalene take the sudary that had covered his head and take it with her. Then let another clerk in the form of another angel sitting in the sepulcher say to the Magdalene, “Woman, why are you weeping?” Let her follow that with “Because they have taken away my lord.” Then let the two angels singing together say to the women, “Why are you seeking the living among the dead […]?” Then let them, still doubting the resurrection of the Lord, weeping say to one another, “Alas, misery […].” Thereafter let Mary Magdalene sighing sing, “I sigh for you […].” Then on the left side of the altar let the Person [of Christ] appear, saying to her, “Woman, why do you weep, whom do you seek?” But let her, thinking him a gardener, respond, “Lord, if you have carried him away […].” Let the Person add, “*Maria*.” Then let her, recognizing him, prostrate herself at his feet saying “*Raboni*.” But let the Person withdrawing himself say “Touch me not […].” When the Person will have disappeared, let Mary communicate her joy to her companions, with a happy voice, singing these verses, “Rejoice and be happy […].” These things finished, let the Person on the right side of the altar encounter the women all together saying, “Greetings, do not fear […]” Then let them, prostrating themselves on the ground, grasp his feet and kiss them. This done, let them sing in succession these verses, Mary Magdalene beginning, “Jesus, the Nazarene […].” Once these verses are completed, then let the Maries standing on the steps before the altar, turning themselves to the people, sing these verses, “Alleluia, the Lord has risen from the sepulcher […],” with the choir responding to them. With these things finished, let the priests and clerks, in figuration of the disciples of Christ, proceed forward, saying, “O people hard-hearted […].” Then let one of them approach and say to Mary Magdalene, “Tell us, Maria […].”[13] Let her then respond, “Sepulcher of Christ […]”; “Angelic witnesses […]”; with her finger let her point out the place where the angel was sitting and offer to them the sudary to kiss, adding this verse, “Christ has risen, our hope […]. “Then let the disciples and the choir add these final verses, “It is to be believed […]” and “We know Christ […].” Afterward let Magdalene begin “Christ rising,” with clergy and choir singing with her as well.

These things thus finished, let the hymn “O God we praise thee […]” [*Te Deum laudamus*] be sung, with the priest beginning; meanwhile, with the aforesaid priests putting back on their proper clothing in the chapel, let them approach the sepulcher

with candles in order to pray, passing through the choir, and let them thus make there a brief prayer. Then let them return to their stations until the abbess orders them to exit for rest.

Margery Kempe

Excerpt from The Book of Margery Kempe[14] *(c.1430)*

Another day this creatur schuld geve hir [*give herself*] to medytacyon, as sche was bodyn [*bid to*] befor, and sche lay stylle, nowt knowyng what sche mygth best thynke. Than sche seyd [*said*] to ower [*our*] Lord Jhesu Crist, "Jhesu, what schal I thynke?" Ower Lord Jhesu answeryd to hir mende [*mind*], "Dowtyr, thynke on my modyr [*my mother*], for sche is cause of alle the grace that thow [*thou*] hast." And than anoon sche saw Seynt Anne gret [*great*] wyth chylde, and than sche preyd [*prayed*] Seynt Anne to be hir mayden and hir servawnt. And anon ower Lady was born, and than sche besyde hir to take the chyld to hir [*herself*] and kepe it tyl [*until*] it wer twelve yer of age wyth good mete [*food*] and drynke, wyth fayr [*fair*] whyte clothys and whyte kerchys [*diapers*]. And than sche seyd to the blyssed chyld, "Lady, ye schal be the modyr [*mother*] of God." The blyssed chyld answeryd and seyd, "I wold I wer [*I wish I were*] worthy to be the handmayden of hir that [*she who*] schuld conseive the sone of God." The creatur seyd, "I pray yow, Lady, yyf [*if*] that grace falle yow, forsake not [*don't forget*] my servyse." The blysful chyld passyd awey [*departed*] for a certeyn tyme, the creatur being stylle in contemplacyon, and sythen cam ageyn [*returned*] and seyd, "Dowtyr, now am I bekome [*I have become*] the modyr of God."

And than the creatur [*creature: MK herself*] fel down on hir kneys wyth gret reverens [*reverence*] and gret wepyng and seyd, "I am not worthy, Lady, to do yow servyse." "Yys, [*Yes*] dowtyr," sche seyde, "folwe thow me, thi servyse lykyth me [*your service pleases me*] wel." Than went sche forth wyth owyr Lady and wyth Josep, beryng wyth hir a potel of pyment and spycys therto [*container of sweetened and spiced wine*]. Than went thei forth to Elysabeth, Seynt John Baptystys modir [*the mother of St. John the Baptist*], and, whan thei mettyn [*they met*] togyder, eythyr [*both*] of hem [*them*] worshepyd other [*the other*], and so thei wonyd togedyr [*lived together*] wyth gret grace and gladnesse twelve wokys [*weeks*]. And than Seynt John was bor [*was born*], and owyr Lady toke hym up fro the erthe wyth al maner reverens and gaf [*gave*] hym to hys moder, seyng of [*saying about*] hym that he schuld [*would*] be an holy man, and blyssed hym. Sythen [*then*] thei toke her leve [*took their leave*] eythyr of other [*each from the other*] wyth compassyf terys. And than the creatur fel down on kneys to Seynt Elysabeth and preyd hir sche wold [*would*] prey for hir to owyr Lady that sche mygth do hir servyse and plesawns [*do her service and pleasure*]. "Dowtyr, me semyth" [*Daughter, it seems to me*], seyd Elysabeth, "Thu dost ryght wel thi dever" [*you are doing your duty very well*].

And than went the creatur forth wyth owyr [*our*] Lady to Bedlem [*Bethlehem*] and purchasyd hir herborwe [*paid for her lodging*] every nyght wyth gret reverens, and owyr Lady was receyved wyth glad cher [*warm hospitality*]. Also sche beggyd [*got by begging for*] owyr Lady fayr whyte clothys and kerchys [*diapers*] for to swathyn [*swaddle*] in hir sone [*her son in*] whan he wer born, and, whan Jhesu was born sche ordeyned beddyng for owyr Lady to lyg in [*lie*] wyth hir blyssed sone. And sythen [*then*] sche beggyd mete [*food*] for owyr Lady and hir blyssyd chyld. Aftyrward sche swathyd [*swaddled*] hym wyth byttyr teerys [*bitter tears*] of compassyon, havyng mend [*having

mind, i.e., taking thought] of the scharp [*painful*] deth that he schuld [*would have to*] suffyr for the lofe [*love*] of synful men, seyng to hym, "Lord, I schal fare fayr wyth yow [*I will treat you well*]; I schal not byndyn yow soor [*bind you too tightly*]. I pray yow beth not dysplesyd wyth me."

Please see the Works Cited for further information on the sources used in this essay.

Notes

1 See Santha Bhattacharji, "Sutton, Katherine."
2 See Sebastian Sobecki, "The writing of this tretys."
3 See Carolyn Dinshaw, "Margery Kempe."
4 Translation by Andrew Galloway from van Beek, ed., pp. 16–26.
5 That is, a sacrifice to the official Roman gods on behalf of the emperor, as the exchange makes clear.
6 Translation by Andrew Galloway from *Hildegardis Bingensis Epistolarium*, ed. Van Acker, pp. 125–30.
7 The author of this letter identifies herself (with pointed modesty) only as "T," but we (like Hildegard) know from her abbey that she is the abbess Tengswich. Mother Tengswich's reasons for writing are explained in her letter. Their entire exchange is presented here; no other letters between Tengswich and Hildegard survive.
8 Translation by Andrew Galloway from *Hildegardis Scivias*, ed. Führkötter, pp. 614–15, 627–29, 631. The excerpt is from Part III, vision 13.
9 Translation by Andrew Galloway from *Het Visioenenboek*, ed. Vekeman, pp. 81–89. The excerpt is from the Sixth Vision.
10 Translation by Andrew Galloway from Tolhurst, ed., 1.99–100, 106–8.
11 The Christian services for Easter, established as commemorating Jesus's Crucifixion and Resurrection (and marking the arrival of spring), are elaborate and ancient, and from the tenth century onward offered opportunity for even more elaborate "Easter drama," whose participation in and distinctions from any other kind of drama are matters of long and ongoing discussion. By the early Christian centuries were established annual ceremonies based on episodes in the gospels presenting Jesus's Crucifixion, his Descent or Deposition (taking down his body from the Cross), and, on Easter morning, his Elevation (the resurrection and ascent into heaven). Key features of these occur at the Elevation, including dramatizing the search of the three Marys for Jesus's body only to encounter an angel at his tomb who tells them that he is not there but has arisen, a dialogue loosely based on the synoptic gospel accounts of Matthew 28:5–10, Mark 16:5–7, and Luke 24:4–6, though none of those has dramatic dialogue. The Deposition enacted in a church involved taking down the crucifix and placing it, suitably tended and mourned, in a special "sepulcher" (often an elaborated engraved stone feature inside a medieval church altar area, with a small recess to receive the Crucifix, but here clearly a much larger internal structure), to be brought out and "resurrected" in the Elevation. For some of Sutton's innovations in the typical versions of this liturgy, see the essay discussing these materials.
12 "Quoniam" for "quam" in Tolhurst's edition of the *Ordinale*, a medieval or the modern editor's error.
13 "Dic" for "dixit" in Tolhurst's edition of the *Ordinale*, a medieval or the modern editor's error.
14 From Staley, ed., 32–33; glosses by Andrew Galloway

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2 HROTSVIT OF GANDERSHEIM (c. 935–c. 1002)

Andrew Galloway

Introduction

Hrotsvit[1] (c. 935–c. 1002) is the first named woman playwright, the first named woman to write epic, and the first named woman to comment directly on drama; from our contemporary perspective, she seems to tower above an otherwise almost impenetrable mist. "O rare bird in Saxony!" exclaimed the sixteenth-century monk Heinrich Bodo, following the nationalizing treatment of her by the German Humanist scholar, Conrad Celtis, who discovered and then printed the fullest still-surviving copy of her works (which he had cut apart and reordered) in 1501 (Bodarwé 336; Berschin 27–29).[2] Much of what we know about Hrotsvit is derived from her own works, especially her handful of prefaces and addresses to her readers, but other clues open her world further. Hrotsvit was a nun in Gandesheim, a monastery founded in Saxony in 856 but occupied only after its abbey church was completed in 880. By Hrotsvit's time, Gandesheim had become one of the richest and most privileged religious houses in Saxony, a brilliant center of education and exchange with neighboring abbeys and the royal court. During most of Hrotsvit's life, Gerberga II was Gandersheim's abbess. Gerberga II was the niece of Otto the Great (912–73), who fashioned himself as the ruler of a revived Roman Empire (later called the Holy Roman Empire to distinguish it from the long-collapsed pagan Roman Empire of the ancient world, the setting for so many of Hrotsvit's plays).[3]

Hrotsvit wrote at Gerberga's request a Latin verse history of the *Deeds of Otto the Great,* as well as verse narratives of saints' lives with addresses to Gerberga. Hrotsvit's six plays are grouped and introduced with the Preface, translated here, along with a slyly deferential letter to certain "learned men" to whom she dedicates the drama. These, with other poetic narratives and verse prayers, survive in the single tenth-century manuscript in elegant Carolingian Latin and Carolingian script that Celtis discovered and printed. The mere fact that a named woman from her period was so learned a playwright and poet has sometimes seemed reason enough to value Hrotsvit. But scholars have found further reasons to ponder the complexities of her views of virginity, gender, political power, and intellectual authority, and have frequently considered where her plays might fit in dramatic history—if they do at all. Whether Hrosvit's plays were acted or even recited with any degree of mimetic impersonation continues to be debated.[4]

The Preface's consideration of the "insane" mores of pagan drama, identified with the Roman comic dramatist Terence (c. 195–c. 158 BCE), casts a large literary-historical and world-historical frame around these issues. Hrotsvit's plays are all historical dramas

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that show the defeat of brutal pagan imperial males by chaste and captive but spiritually powerful Christian women—and in one case a young virgin man. This may reflect how burdensome reproductive sexuality was, especially for women, carrying family-linking and heir-producing importance in Ottonian (like much medieval) culture.

Hrotsvit speaks of herself "blushing" as she depicts pagan lusts, but her identification of herself as "Clamor Validus" (Strong Cry) introduces her bodily presence in another, more pointed way. In one sense, the phrase is a simple (though not the only possible) Latin version of her Saxon name: *hrot* ('cry') plus *svit* ('strong'), as Jacob Grimm was first to mention in 1898 (ix). But as many have since suggested, this also seems an allusion to John the Baptist as the "voice of one crying [*vox clamantis*] in the desert" (Mark 1:3), and perhaps even to the prayers of Christ Himself, in Hebrews 5:7, where, while still "in the flesh," he is said to have offered up supplications to God "with a strong cry" (Berschin, "Hrotsvit" 23, n. 2)

Those possible implications are bold enough claims to her authority and freedom. But scholars seem not to have considered a further, somewhat less Christian possibility informing the phrase. The most widely used treatise on rhetoric and public speaking from pagan Antiquity, *Ad Herennium* (c. 80 BCE), falsely attributed to Cicero and used in rhetorical education for a millennium, discusses an orator's proper voicing and enunciation, including when to use *clamor*, usually translated as "full voicing." Assuming throughout that only a man can be a public orator, the unidentified author declares that a man should carefully choose when he ought to rise to *clamor*, whereas a woman's voice is "ignoble" because it too often stays in that range: "sharp exclamation injures the voice and likewise jars the hearer, for it has about it something ignoble, suited rather to feminine outcry than to manly dignity in speaking" (Caplan 3.12.22).

Especially in the context of a (self-)introduction, Hrotsvit's positive use of that phrase seems uncannily similar to the disparagement of women's "outcry" by the pagan author of the *Ad Herennium*. The point is certainly clear in the plays themselves, where pious women verbally demolish their brutal (and often impotently clamorous) male assailants. Hrotsvit's chaste female interlocutors, like Hrotsvit herself as her Preface presents her, demonstrate an abundance of ways for evading or reinterpreting St. Paul's stern dictum, "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man; but to be in silence" (1 Timothy 2:12).

Yet evasion and reinterpretation are not insurgency. As the unstable modesty yet boldness in the Preface makes clear, Hrotsvit can be seen either ultimately to uphold a male hierarchy of husbands, emperors, then God,[5] or, equally, to question all authority—except God's (Brown 262). Either way, the plays like the Preface show women in dialogue with men of authority, in various literary and political modes, overtly and by implication. Even her comments against Terence in the Preface merely parallel the ancient playwright's defenses in his own prologues against certain critics of how he used his sources.[6]

Hrotsvit's achievement is unexpected in so many ways that scholars continue to try to understand just how rare she was. That question is particularly pressing in regard to how unusual her idea of "drama" was, whatever it was. Her considerations of Terence do not directly help us there, as Terence was evidently read then, rather than performed. Fully impersonated (or "dramatized") liturgical drama had not yet appeared in tenth-century Germany, and secular Latin drama did not widely emerge until the twelfth century. At most we can say that Hrotsvit follows the basic early medieval definition of "drama" as "dialogue."[7]

There is no question that Hrotsvit's ways of "imitating" Terence were highly creative, taking "imitation" in the sense of interpretation and elaboration, as was often the case in medieval theories of translation.[8] Roman theatricality was a fact of political life at court at the height of Hrotsvit's productive years during the Ottonian empire, which continued Charlemagne's invocations of Roman imperial culture shaped, like Hrotsvit's drama, into a solemnly Christianized form. Gandesheim's church boasted a grand western extension (*Westwerk*) including a special gallery overlooking the nave, which was designed for the king to partake in the monastery's religious ceremonies (Bernhardt 153). Might Emperor Otto and his son Otto II have witnessed from there Hrotsvit's wittily pious rebukes of the kinds of Romanized theatricality to which the imperial court was accustomed?

Hrotsvit of Gandersheim

"Preface to the Dramas"[9] *(c. 1000)*

Catholics can be found aplenty whose actions we cannot entirely expurgate: who, because of the beauty of more elegant discourse, prefer the vanity of pagan texts to the value [*utilitas*] of sacred scripture. There are even some who, though they adhere to the sacred text and spurn the things of gentiles,[10] often take pleasure in the fictions of Terence,[11] and while delighted by the sweetness of the discourse are stained by ideas of unspeakable crimes. Wherefore I, the Strong Cry of Gandersheim [*Clamor Validus Gandeshemensis*], have not refrained from imitating him in speaking since others worship him in reading—except that, using the same genre in which the foul unchaste actions of lascivious women are recited, I celebrate the laudable chastity of sacred virgins, as far as my feeble intellect's ability.[12]

Not infrequently, however, it shames me, infusing deep blushes, that, since this kind of writing demands the detestable illicit madness of lovers and their evilly sweet discourse together, I have conceived in my mind and inscribed with my quill things not meant to be accommodated to our hearing. Yet if, in my blushing, I should fail to do these things or to fulfill my plan, I would also fail to expound the praise of innocents, as far as my full ability. For the quicker that some turn out to be in illicitly flattering the insane, the higher the glory of the divine Helper and the more glorious the victory of those triumphing, especially when feminine weakness conquers and masculine strength is overthrown.[13]

As for myself, I do not doubt some will object that the value of my writing is lower by far, and more constrained by far, indeed utterly unlike the statements of him whom I meant to imitate. I grant it. Yet I declare to such doubters that I cannot be convicted by that law, as if I had aberrantly wanted to be made similar to those who, greater in learning, far outstripped my artlessness. Nor am I of such boastfulness that I would presume to compare myself even to the least disciple of [pagan] authorities. This alone do I seek: that, although not at all suitably capable, with bowed devoutness of mind I might render back to the Giver the ingenuity I have been granted.

Wherefore I am not so great a lover of myself that, in order to avoid the censure of Christ, Who creates strength and virtue among the holy wherever He will provide the capability, I would cease preaching. I will rejoice, however, if my devoutness pleases anyone. But if, either because of my lowliness or because of the flawed folksiness of my speech, this pleases no one, I would nonetheless take pleasure in what I have done

[*or* what I have made: *feci*]. For while I cultivate the vileness of my own labor—using linked heroic strophes [*heroico ligatam strophio*] in other little works of my feeblemindedness, and here knitted-up dramatic exchanges [*dramatica vinctam serie*]—I evade the pernicious pleasures of the gentiles.

Please see the Works Cited for further information on the sources used in this essay.

Notes

1 Also identified in modern discussions as Hrosvitha, Hroswitha, Hrosvit, Hrotsvitha, Rosvita, and Roswitha. Even this element of her life and work is controversial. The poet twice records her own name in the nominative (subject) case as "Hrotsvit," thus that form is used here as in most current scholarship. The other forms that scholars have used are based on various other assumptions about the Old Saxon forms of her name.
2 All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
3 See Wailes and Brown, "Hrotsvit and her World" and Berschin.
4 See, for example, Zeydel; Zampelli; Wailes 122–23.
5 See McMillin.
6 See Newman.
7 See Wilson, 55–86.
8 See Copeland.
9 Translated and annotated by Andrew Galloway
10 That is, pagans of Greek and Roman Antiquity.
11 Ancient author (c. 195–158 BCE) of six comedies. Unlike any other ancient drama, Terence's works were widely known and quoted in the Christian Middle Ages, though not as widely as Hrotsvit claims.
12 Gestures of intellectual and literary modesty are common among medieval Christian authors; Hrotsvit's learning and brilliance are abundantly clear, including in the rhetorical elegance by which she proclaims her ineptness.
13 That is, the better some speakers (and writers) are at deluding those whose rational capabilities can be deranged by sinful passions, the greater the triumph is when divinely inspired innocent women prevail over such brutal men. This difficult sentence manages to imply both the triumph of Hrotsvit's pious Christian women over their pagan tormenters and seducers, and also Hrotsvit's literary triumph over Terrence's sinfully seductive plots and non-Christian world-view.

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3 MARGARET LUCAS CAVENDISH (c.1623–1673)

Sujata Iyengar and Mikaela Warner

Introduction

Margaret Lucas Cavendish (c.1623–1673), Duchess of Newcastle, the first English woman playwright openly to publish under her own name, wrote twenty plays during England's Interregnum and Restoration. The Duchess was known for her wide generic scope; she published drama, poetry, orations, letters, natural philosophy, and science fiction. An ardent Royalist who served at the court of Queen Henrietta Maria and who in 1645 married the much-older William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle over her friends' (and the Queen's) objections, Cavendish has been long and unfairly reviled as an eccentric egotist whose lack of education, according to Virginia Woolf, perverted and spoiled her natural talents (*A Room of One's Own* 60–61). Her plays were dismissed for centuries as "closet dramas," unplayable and unwatchable. It was not until the 1990s that Gweno Williams began producing student productions of the plays and not until July 2018 that the first ever professional production of a play by Cavendish, her *Unnatural Tragedy*, was performed at the White Bear Theatre in London, directed by Graham Watts.

But Cavendish's drama is eminently playable: the short, episodic scenes for which she felt bound to apologize to her Neoclassical peers translate into lively running action on a modern "black box" stage, and present-day audiences instantly grasp the underlying feminist logic that unites each play's different plot strands and characters. Marta Straznicky (67–90), Lara Dodds (162–3), and Anne Shaver (1–20) independently observe that it is unreasonable to dismiss Cavendish's drama as "closet" theatre given that the public theatres were closed throughout the Interregnum; moreover, argues Straznicky, to write drama at all constitutes a veiled "political act" at this time, in particular during the Cavendishes' exile on the Continent (90). Dodds suggests that Cavendish is above all concerned with female self-actualization, despite her extensive disclaimers and frequent use of the modesty *topos* (10–13). Cavendish juxtaposes vignettes or interludes to question whether it can even be possible for a woman to become a fully realized human being under the system of patriarchy, primogeniture, and patronage. As an aristocrat, she paradoxically valued the privileges that her rank afforded her, even as she critiqued the sexism of that milieu.

In her "Sociable Letters," in her science fiction novel *The Blazing World*, in the many "Prefaces" she added to her published plays, and in her "Oration on Plays and Players," Cavendish laid out a consistent theory of what theatre should do for society, how writers should construct plays for the theatre, and how actors should be trained best to embody them. Cavendish anticipated a Keatsian "negative capability" (Keats 42;

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Fitzmaurice 29–46) in attributing to Shakespeare the ability to enter the minds, speech, and bodies of his characters, rather than blaming him for failing to adhere to the Neoclassical "Unities" in vogue at her time ("Sociable Letter" 123).[1]

We here reproduce excerpts from some of Cavendish's own extensive writing about the theatre. Hoping to make this text as accessible as possible to general readers without losing the distinctive "flavor" of Cavendish's prose, we have modernized spelling and typography, including giving the names of authors and literary characters in their more modern and familiar forms, for example "Shakespeare" instead of "Shakespear"; "Beatrice" instead of "Betrice." We have also, where appropriate, broken her long texts into paragraphs, and silently emended obvious printers' errors, consulting modern editions (Bowerbank and Mendelson; Shaver) alongside digital facsimiles of the early printed texts. We have, however, tried to maintain Cavendish's original grammar and punctuation, including her idiosyncratic word divisions and use of upper-case for emphasis, and her omission of possessive apostrophes ("my self" or "my Self" where we would now write "myself"; "Plutarchs story" where we would now write "Plutarch's story," for example).

We have likewise kept Cavendish's characteristic address to her "Noble Readers" in her *Prefaces*, "Noble Citizens" in her *Orations*, and fictive female friend, "Madam," in her *Sociable Letters*. We have removed, however, her usual concluding initials, "M.N." (for "Margaret Newcastle"). In editing Cavendish's prose, we are aware we risk becoming the "Pedantical Scholastical persons" she derides in Preface 5; we encourage interested readers to turn to Anne Shaver's reprinting of all the prefaces in their entirety in Appendix A of her edition of Cavendish's plays, for the full benefit of the Duchess's epic catalogues and sly irony.

Margaret Lucas Cavendish

Excerpt from "An Oration Concerning Plays and Players," Orations of Diverse Sorts, Accommodated to Diverse Places *(1662)*

Noble Citizens,

Here is a Company of Players […] but […] you Mis-spend your Time, and […] your Money, unless the Players were better Actors, and their Plays better Plays; for as their Plays have no Wit in them, so the Actors have no Grace, nor Becoming Behavior in their Actions; for what is Constraint, is Misbecoming, as being not Natural, and whatsoever is Unnatural, is Deformed: but pray, Mistake me not, as believing, I am an Enemy to Plays or Players, for I am an Enemy only to Foolish Plays, and Ill Actors, but for Good Plays well Acted, I am so far from being an Enemy to them, as I think there is nothing so Profitable for Youth, both to Increase their Understanding, and to Fashion their Behavior; and for those that have Spare time, they cannot pass it more Pleasingly; therefore let me Advise you, that are Magistrates of this City, to set up a Company of Players at the Common charge, and to Maintain some Excellent Poet, to make Good Plays, and certainly you will be no Losers in so doing, but Gainers, being the Best and Readiest way of Education for your Children: for the Poet will inform them both of the World, and the Natures and Humors of Mankind, an Easier and Delightfuller way, than the School-men; and the Actors will shew them to Behave themselves more Gracefully and Becomingly, than their Dancing-Masters.

Thus they will Learn more both for their Bodies and Minds of the Poet and Players, than of their Tutors and Governors, or by Studying or Travelling, which is Expensive, Laborious, and Dangerous, whereas the other is Easy, Delightful, Safe, and Profitable. Also one thing more I must advise you, that you provide a Practick[2] Judicious man, to Instruct the Players to Act well; for as they must have a Poet, to make their Plays, so they must have a Tutor to teach them to Act those Plays, unless the Poet will take the pains to teach them himself, as to Humor the Passions, and to Express the Humors Naturally, and not to Act after the French Fashion, with High strained Voices, Constrained Motions, Violent Actions, and such Transportation, as is neither Graceful, Becoming, nor Natural; but they must make Love Soberly, Implore Favor Humbly, Complain Seriously, Lament Sadly, and not Affectedly, Fantastically, Constraintly, Ragingly, Furiously, and the like; all which in my Opinion they do Senselessly, Foolishly, and Madly; for all Feignings must be done as Naturally as may be, that they may seem as Real Truths.

Excerpt from Preface 3[3], **Plays** *(1662)*

Noble Readers,

Although I expect my Plays will be found fault with, by reason I have not […made…] all the Actors to meet at the latter end upon the Stage in a flock together; likewise, that I have not made my Comedies of one days actions or passages; yet I have adventured to publish them to the World. But to plead in my Plays behalf, first, I do not perceive any reason why that the several persons presented should be all of an acquaintance, or that there is a necessity to have them of one Fraternity, or to have a relation to each other, or linked in alliance as one Family; when as Plays are to present the general Follies […] Vices, Humors, […] Fashions, Customs […] of the whole World of Mankind, as in several persons; also particular Follies […] and the like, in particular persons; also the Sympathy and Antipathy of Dispositions […] of several persons; also the particular Virtues and Graces in several persons, and […] in particular persons, and all these Varieties to be drawn at the latter end into one piece, as into one Company, which in my opinion shows neither Usual, Probable, nor Natural.

For since the World is wide and populated, and their various actions dispersed, and spread about by each particular, and Plays are to present them severally, I perceive no reason they should force them together in the last Act, as in one Community, […] in this I have not followed the steps of precedent Poets, for in my opinion, I think it as well, if not better, if a Play ends but with two persons, or one person upon the Stage; besides, I would have my Plays to be like the Natural course of all things in the World […] so my Scenes, some last longer than othersome, and some are ended when others are begun; likewise some of my Scenes have no acquaintance or relation to the rest of the Scenes, although in one and the same Play, which is the reason many of my Plays will not end as other Plays do, especially Comedies […].

Likewise my Plays may be Condemned, because they follow not the Antient[4] Custom, as the learned says, […] which is, that all Comedies should be so ordered and composed, as nothing should be presented therein, but what may be naturally, or usually practiced or Acted in the World in the compass of one day; truly in my opinion those Comedies would be very flat and dull, and neither

profitable nor pleasant […] I do not perceive a necessity that Comedies should be so closely packed or thrust up together; for if Comedies are either to delight, or to profit, or to both, they must follow no other rule or example, but to put them into Scenes and Acts, and to order their several discourses in a Comedy, so as Physicians do their Cordials, wherein they mix many several Ingredients together into one Electuary, as sharp, bitter, salt, and sweet, and mix them so, as they are both pleasing to the Taste, and comfortable to the Stomach; so Poets should order the several Humors, Passions, Customs, Manners, Fashions, and practice of Mankind, as to intermix them so, as to be both delightful to the Mind and Senses, and profitable to the Life […].

[A]lso Poets should do as Physicians or Apothecaries, which put not only several sorts, but several kinds of Drugs into one Medicine […] so Poets both in their Comedies and Tragedies, must, or at leastwise may, represent several Nations, Governments, People […] Fashions […] Natures, Fortunes […] Actions, in one Play; as also several times of Ages to one person if occasion requires, as from Childhood to Manhood in one Play; for Poets are to describe in Plays the several Ages […] Actions, Fortunes, […] and Humors in Nature, and the several Customs, Manners, Fashions and Speeches of men: thus Plays are to present the natural dispositions and practices of Mankind; also they are to point at Vanity, laugh at Follies, disgrace Baseness, and persecute Vice; likewise they are to extol Virtue, and to honor Merit, and to praise the Graces, all which makes a Poet Divine, their works edifying to the Mind or Soul, profitable to the Life, delightful to the Senses, and recreative to Time […] and I do not despair, although but a Poetress, but that my works may be some ways or other serviceable to my Readers, which if they be, my time in writing them is not lost, nor my Muse unprofitable.

Excerpt from Preface 5, **Plays** *(1662)*

Noble Readers,

I Know there are many Scholastical and Pedantical persons that will condemn my writings, because I do not keep strictly to the Masculine and Feminine Genders, as they call them as for example, a Lock and a Key, the one is the Masculine Gender, the other the Feminine Gender, so Love is the Masculine Gender, Hate the Feminine Gender, and the Furies are shes, and the Graces are shes, the Virtues are shes, and the seven deadly Sins are shes, which I am sorry for; but I know no reason but that I may as well make them Hes for my use, as others did Shes, or Shes as others did Hes.

But some will say, if I did do so, there would be no forms or rules of Speech to be understood by; I answer, that we may as well understand the meaning or sense of a Speaker or Writer by the names of Love or Hate, as by the names of he or she, and better: for the division of Masculine and Feminine Genders doth confound a Scholar more, and takes up more time to learn them, than they have time to spend; besides, where one doth rightly understand the difference, a hundred, nay a thousand do not, and yet they are understood, and to be understood is the end of all Speakers and Writers; so that if my writings be understood, I desire no more; and as for the niceties of Rules, Forms, and Terms […] if any dislike my writings for want of those Rules, Forms, and Terms, let them not read them, for I had rather my writings should be unread than be read by such Pedantical Scholastical persons.