ACCENTS ON SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality

UNFINISHED BUSINESS IN CULTURAL MATERIALISM

ALAN SINFIELD

Praise for *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality*:

'If there were a version of Desert Island Discs for literary criticism, this book would top the list of things I would want with me to read again and again for its clarity of purpose, its generosity of spirit, the brilliance of its insights, and its ability to engage seamlessly and resonantly with current scholarship, contemporary politics, historical dynamics, and the meanings of Shakespeare.'

Lena Cowen Orlin, University of Maryland, USA, and Executive Director of the Shakespeare Association of America

'Alan Sinfield has been one of the most thoughtful and provocative writers on early modern culture for the last two decades and his critical power is evident throughout this book.'

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'This book is important and engaging. I found myself captivated and energized from start to finish – a response that I predict many other readers will have.'

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'This is a very good, provocative and engaging book. Among Alan Sinfield's great strengths as a critic are his lucidity as a writer, and the clarity with which he lays bare critical presumptions, articulates his own positions, and engages texts with theory, and vice versa.'

Kate Chedgzoy, University of Newcastle, UK

ACCENTS ON SHAKESPEARE

General editor: TERENCE HAWKES

Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality

Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality is a powerful reassessment of cultural materialism as a way of understanding the intersections of textuality, history, culture and politics by one of the founding figures of this critical movement. Alan Sinfield examines cultural materialism both as a body of ongoing argument, and as it informs particular works by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, especially in relation to sexuality in early-modern England and queer theory.

The book has several interlocking preoccupations:

- theories of textuality and reading
- authority in Shakespearean plays and in the organization of literary culture today
- the sex/gender system in that period and the application of queer theory in history.

These preoccupations are explored in and around a range of works by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Throughout the book Sinfield re-presents cultural materialism, framing it not as a set of propositions, as has often been done, but as a cluster of unresolved problems. His brilliant, lucid and committed readings demonstrate that the 'unfinished business' of cultural materialism – and Sinfield's work in particular – will long continue to produce new questions and challenges for the field of Renaissance Studies.

Alan Sinfield is Professor of English at the University of Sussex. He has published or edited eighteen books in the fields of Shakespeare and sexuality, lesbian and gay studies, modern theatre, and post-1945 politics and culture. These publications include *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, edited with Jonathan Dollimore (1985, 2nd edn, 1994) and *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (1992) and *Cultural Politics—Queer Reading* (1994, 2nd edn, 2005), books which established cultural materialism in the field of literary studies. His most recent publications include *British Culture of the Postwar*, edited with Alistair Davies (2000) and *On Sexuality and Power* (Columbia University Press, 2004).

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General editor: TERENCE HAWKES

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Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality

Unfinished business in cultural materialism

ALAN SINFIELD

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For Vincent

Contents

Acknowledgements xi

1 Unfinished Business: Problems in Cultural Materialism 1

2 Pastoral, *As You Like It*, and the Ideology of Literary History 31

3 *Poetaster*, the Author, and the Perils of Cultural Production 40

4 How to Read *The Merchant of Venice* Without Being Heterosexist 53

5 Intertextuality and the Limits of Queer Reading in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* 68

6 Effeminacy, Friendship and the Hero in Marlowe and Shakespeare 86

7 Near Misses: Ganymedes and Page boys 112

8 Sex and the Lyric: Sidney, Barnfield, Marlowe 134

9 What Happens in Shakespeare's Sonnets 162

10 Rape and Rights: *Measure for Measure* and the limits of cultural imperialism 181

11 Unfinished Business II 197

Bibliography 205
Index 220

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1
Unfinished Business
Problems in cultural materialism

My friend and colleague Andrew Hadfield alleges in 2003 that cultural materialism has become 'ever more ossified, predictable and institutionalized'. There comes a time, he adds, when a theory 'ceases to be radical and even properly theoretical, because it has become hegemonic and inscribed within the academic culture at large'.[1] Concurrently, Nick Groom, reviewing a new edition of my book *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, wonders whether there is life left in cultural materialism. It is time to 'raise the question, whither Marxist literary theory?' (Groom 2005). Yet there is little agreement about what should happen instead. Hadfield's idea is that we would do better history, and better politics, through a more localized kind of historical study, attending more closely to 'the sorts of issues which characterized political discussion' in the period, rather than importing modern constructs (2003: 465). Jonathan Bate is on a different tack. He declares on a BBC radio talk-show:

> The old sort of Marxist and feminist criticism, that's all gone, it belongs to the last century. The next big thing is going to be people beginning to ask questions about whether we can actually find out what goes on in the brain, physically, when we respond aesthetically to a work of art . . . Whether the brain is doing something different responding to a Shakespeare sonnet as opposed to a rhyme on a Christmas card.
>
> (Bate 2005)

If this seems mechanistic, reductive and trivial, Ewan Fernie promises a rescue from an unlikely quarter: spirituality. He asks 'whether radical materialism might not be regenerated by rethinking spirituality'–understood as 'the transcendence of given material conditions' (Fernie 2005: 10, 22; I discuss spirituality in Chapter 11). For Marxism, however, the task is not to transcend material conditions, but to change them. Faced with such

desperate alternatives, cultural materialism may reiterate with some confidence its claim to be a rational and principled endeavour, connecting textuality, history and politics, in a world where people have purposes and culture has consequences.

Hadfield's charge is that cultural materialism is not, now, 'a sophisticated philosophy that requires significant new thought to lead others to see the world in a different way' (2003: 464). Up to a point this is plainly true: cultural materialism has lost its novelty. Indeed, it can draw upon an excellent body of scholarly and committed work which has transformed the opportunities for ongoing study. The evidence that I have seen is paradoxical, though. Students around the world write to tell me how illuminating they have found aspects of cultural materialism: so, on the one hand, they have encountered this work; on the other hand, it was not already conveniently available to them and came as a surprise. Anyway, if cultural materialism appears less new, that does not make it less true. The demand that students be in fashion is part of the problem, not part of the solution.

When I published *The Language of Tennyson's 'In Memoriam'*, in 1971, I aspired to track down the sources of poetic achievement through the methods of structural linguistics and new criticism (Sinfield 1971). At University College London, where I had been studying, these adjacent (but scarcely cognizant) disciplines were represented by the inspiring figures of Randolph Quirk and Winifred Nowottny.[2] I arranged to be supervised by a brilliant young scholar-critic, Isobel Armstrong. I was a formalist and a structuralist: I believed that poetic language was characterized by a high structural density, and wanted to show how this worked. While historical knowledge might be helpful, I believed it marginal to the poetic experience. Yet, while the goal was to display the excellence of Tennyson's poetic language, I was aware of a sense that the sources of its power must be tracked down, even explained, lest they bewitch us. Meanwhile, I thought of myself as politicized–I had been a youthful spear-carrier in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Anti-Apartheid movement, and in demonstrations against the Vietnam War. But the relation between politics and literature was, for me, oblique. I supposed (in what was in effect a Frankfurt School move) that literature, by gesturing towards a superior realm, offered an implicit critique of contemporary human affairs and an incitement to transform them. But later, in the 1980s, in the decade of Reagan and Thatcher, was that enough?

When I wrote about Tennyson again, in *Alfred Tennyson* (1986), I had become keen to display poetic writing as implicated in the events of its time (Sinfield 1986). In this new work, lyric poetry is related to current conceptions of its nature and value, and to wider economic, social and political conditions. History is important not just because it helps to make

sense of poems written centuries ago, but because it is in history that men and women conceive and accomplish their futures. People make their own history, but not in conditions of their own choosing, Marx said. Tennyson was often moved by social struggles, but not always on the side of equality, peace, justice and progress. Pointing this out might serve to protect the reader from the seductive power of poetry. Of course, Tennyson is entitled to his point of view: but the commentator is, in turn, entitled to question it. How else could the poetry be taken seriously–really seriously?

Between these two periods of work on Tennyson came the impact in university English of literary theory and cultural studies. My intention was to reframe Tennyson in the conceptual matrix afforded by Marxist, deconstructive and feminist criticism, in terms set by a broad left politics committed to the analysis of formations of class, gender and race. This politics points to regimes of dominance and subordination, both in abstract ideologies and in the sufferings and triumphs of individuals (historical and fictional) whose lives witness to the need for social transformation.

The historical context of a writer's work is not just that into which his or her texts were initially launched. Writing is mediated to readers through apparatuses of education, publishing and the media. These apparatuses are characterized by hierarchy: the culture of some people is afforded state and commercial support, and that of others is derogated, to the point where people may become demoralized and, hence, acquiescent in social structures that are neither just nor to their advantage. The idea of 'the literary' is, itself, a construct which we have devised as a way of making what our culture regards as necessary discriminations. Tennyson liked to claim bardic authority for his verse, in the manner of the early Romantic poets, but he was obliged to deal with a burgeoning mass market for poetry. In the twentieth century the dominant schools of poetry defined it quite differently–as a relatively private and exclusive medium; Tennyson's popularity and liking for grand themes became signs of compromise and pomposity. Such changes indicate that our current idea of the literary is by no means universal, and also that it is not easy for the writer or reader to resist critical orthodoxies.

Subjecting literary texts to political assessment is more provocative when it involves Shakespeare studies–which in the early 1980s were also in an unusually excitable condition because of the development of new historicism in the United States. In 1985, Jonathan Dollimore and I sought to crystallize this moment in a collection of essays: *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (2nd edn, Dollimore and Sinfield 1994). The term 'materialism' was invoked in opposition to 'idealism', which supposed that literary writing might transcend its conditions of production. Analyses

of plays with an eye to their political implications in terms of class, race and gender accompanied essays on Shakespeare in education, theatre and television, and in the work of the Marxist dramatist Bertolt Brecht. Chapters by prominent US critics (Stephen Greenblatt, Leonard Tennenhouse) prompted debate about how cultural materialism might relate to new historicism.[3] Raymond Williams, the Marxist critic from whom the phrase 'cultural materialism' was taken, contributed an afterword.

Once in circulation, cultural materialists of course cannot control the meanings of their term. A conference called 'Material London c.1600' (at the Folger Shakespeare Library in 1995) promised an opportunity for reviewing aspects of cultural materialist practice (see Orlin 2000). However, the abbreviation to an epithet–'material London'–was signalling a shift in the concept of the material in English studies, to a more anthropological focus. I discern an evolution in four stages: (1) Raymond Williams in the 1970s says 'culture is material', thus locating his kind of work in the region of expressions such as 'historical materialism', i.e. as a kind of Marxism; (2) some of us build on this, producing cultural materialism and, in some measure, cultural studies and new historicism; (3) that work is then open to two serious questions (it is open also to non-serious questions, such as: Hey, is someone doubting the truth and wisdom of Shakespeare?). The first serious question is: Is this cultural work really political, in the sense that historical materialism aspires to be political? Lately, people are less interested in this, in many cases because they still find it difficult to combine political debate and professional demands.

The other serious question is: Is this work really material, in the sense of getting properly into the historical actuality?–these new historicists and cultural materialists don't really know any history, they've just picked up bits and bobs from Natalie Zemon Davis and Christopher Hill. Now, this is quite a clever charge because, in a concurrent movement, history gets to be recognized as infinitely elusive anyway. So we could *never* do enough history. (4) There are then two alternatives. One, stage 4a, is a falling back on literary history (at least we have competence there; I attack this alternative in the next chapter). Stage 4b pays attention to clothes, pots and pans, needles and pins, and to books and manuscripts *as material objects*. They are, after all, *stuff*, they are *made of* material, we can touch them. The outcome is a kind of textual anthropology, no longer focused on literature or even on writing, benefiting from the skills of deconstructionist analysis. Valuable work has been done at all these four stages, but eventually the political edge is blunted.

Political Shakespeare did not make Shakespeare political, of course: he was always that. Notwithstanding, the argument that the plays may not wholly transcend material conditions still incites a breadth and depth of opposition

that serves only to demonstrate just how tightly, and how intricately, the idea of Shakespeare is bound into contemporary ideologies. He is a cultural icon, through which many aspects of social interaction are processed, both progressive and reactionary. The latter has seemed more influential. Charles, Prince of Wales, retains on his website, as one of half a dozen speeches on education, his bemused outburst on Shakespeare, education and ethnicity, delivered at Stratford on Shakespeare's birthday in April 1991:

> Shakespeare's message is the universal, timeless one, yet clad in the garments of his time. He is not just our poet, but the world's. Yet his roots are ours, his language is ours, his culture ours–brought up in this gentle Warwickshire countryside, educated at the Grammar School in Stratford, baptized and buried in the local parish church.
>
> (Wales 1991)

This is a very particular, limited and coercive notion of who 'we' are. In the 1990s, fluency with Shakespeare was routinely invoked as a test of true Englishness–a means of disqualifying people of foreign extraction from belonging. It was supposed that any discussion of the operations of bardolotry was aimed at unseating Shakespeare. Really, though, we were trying to make him more interesting and, paradoxically, more challenging (more strange, less contained).

The circumstances that rendered it imperative, in the last decades of the twentieth century, to address together literary, cultural and political concerns have not ameliorated. On the contrary, the aspirations of the political system have become more frightening, as it is proposed to enforce 'democracy' around the globe. Aesthetics, personal ethics and even spirituality may have become fashionable, and doubtless have their places, but it is hardly the moment to abandon the goal of political responsibility in literary and cultural studies. This project is ambitious but not absurdly grandiose. Change in the social organization is registered and effected partly through cultural contest, in which rival formulations strive to substantiate claims to superior explanatory power. The negotiations among these discourses contribute, in minute and indirect ways, to the maintenance and challenging of ideologies.

The main aims of this book are to reassess cultural materialism as a way of understanding textuality, history and culture, both as a body of ongoing argument, and as it informs particular works by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and especially in relation to the sex/gender system in early-modern England. A common complaint is that cultural materialism, and new historicism also, have encountered problems. That is indeed so; in

fact, the entire idea, from the first, was to examine problems that had already become evident in extant Marxist approaches, as well as in traditional literary history and literary criticism. John Drakakis (2001) in a stimulating essay corrals the issues under three headings: agency, reading, and dissidence. In this chapter I reinflect these topics under the headings: agency and the dominant ideology, the author, readers, and interventions, adding gender and sexuality; also, I point toward later chapters. The aim is to reassess the unsettled and unsettling issues in cultural materialism. Indeed, they are issues that ought to figure in any serious thinking about culture, textuality and history. For cultural materialism is distinguished not by the degree to which it is problematic, but by its eagerness to take up problems, rather than suppress them. It has never aspired to become a movement, or a programme; yet it is not content to be a formula for processing literary texts. It is an array of interlinked preoccupations, involving history, ideology, culture, textuality and political struggle.

Some of these chapters were written before this collection was designed. Yet they fit together (though not always in a linear way) because they draw upon a continuing, indeed insistent, engagement with a cluster of theoretical and historical concerns. These include: (1) concepts and practices of textuality and reading; (2) the political location of Shakespearean plays and the organization of literary culture today; (3) the operations of state power in the early-modern period and the scope for dissidence; (4) the sex/gender system in that period and the application of queer theory in history. These preoccupations are explored in and around a range of works by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The selection of texts and themes is governed by their contribution to theoretical and historical questions. There is a movement through the chapters, from matters of critical procedure and state authority to issues in gender and sexuality, but the topics interlock throughout. I do not intend to trawl through the positive things that have been said about cultural materialism; my focus is on prominent commentators who have pointed to particular problems, in ways that seem to me to show that there is intellectual, imaginative and political life still in these topics. They are unfinished business.

Agency and the dominant ideology

For Hadfield, the main problem with cultural materialism is an insistence on a 'dominant-subordinate model' which 'tends to fix political positions as "pro" or "anti" the establishment when they may not so easily fit into this binary model' (2003: 462). This may be an awkward tendency in some commentaries; in fact, a key task in cultural materialism has been to develop an adequately complex framework of social, and hence textual,

interaction. The contribution of Raymond Williams has been crucial, precisely because he argued, following Antonio Gramsci, that hegemony is not unitary: while there is a *dominant culture*–'the central, effective and dominant systems of meanings and values, which are not merely abstract but which are organized and lived'–its dominance depends on continuous processes of adjustment, reinterpretation, dilution (Williams, R. 1980: 37–8). We should expect the co-occurrence of subordinate, residual, emergent, alternative, and oppositional cultural forces alongside the dominant, in varying relations of incorporation, negotiation, and resistance. The dominant may tolerate, repress, or incorporate subordinate formations, but that will be a continuous, urgent, and often strenuous project. This framework improves on Foucault's expectation of an even, staged development, whereby one model characterizes an epoch and is then superseded by another.

Hadfield takes *republicanism* as a political issue in early-modern England which is not easily apprehended through the idea of a dominant ideology. Now, it is not always straightforward to apply Williams' terms, but they do seem quite helpful in this case. It is possible (though it may be impertinent) to add a cultural materialist inflection to Hadfield's work on the history of political theory. In the reign of Henry VIII, absolutism is dominant and republicanism is emergent, discovered in some Protestant doctrine and a classical past (in which, for a while, republicanism was dominant). Elizabeth I and James I (despite the absolutist pretensions of the latter) rule in negotiation with the aristocracy and gentry. In the mid-seventeenth century the attempt of Charles I to reassert absolutism comes to grief, as republicanism becomes dominant (but not, of course, exclusive). This unstable situation gives way to an emergent parliamentary oligarchy, in the wake of the revolution of 1688. In France, absolutism remains dominant for another hundred years; republicanism is eventually the more assured (see Anderson 1974). Commentators have castigated cultural materialists for a supposed obsession with E.M.W. Tillyard's prominent attempt to demonstrate a hierarchical 'world picture' in Elizabethan England and Shakespeare's plays. Tillyard's mistake is, precisely, to assert that there was only one ideology in circulation: the world picture is a conservative creed, propagated to shore up absolutist principles and to counter emergent ideas–not just of republicanism, but of equality and democracy.

Hadfield's contention is that, if we look carefully at contemporary political discourses, Shakespeare will be revealed as 'a highly politicized and radical thinker, interested in republicanism' (2003: 465). This may be an appealing prospect, but the cultural materialist will be wary of claiming Shakespeare too easily for a progressive stance. *Titus Andronicus* is a limit case, because it is evidently about forms of government, while being saturated

with grotesque violence and corruption. Hadfield is not daunted: for him 'Shakespeare's early works present a case for limited monarchy and a mixed constitution' (p. 476). The problem with this reading of *Titus* is that the situation is not one of warrior leaders imposing their rule: both the patricians and the citizens make reactionary, anti-republican, decisions at every opportunity. Under the sway of his brother, they cede governance to Titus–a violent warlord of no political judgement–despite his bloody and superstitious murder of a prisoner of war. Another point at which the tribunes and senators have opportunity to exercise political responsibility is when two of Titus's sons are falsely accused of murder. Without any evident process of law, the boys are executed. There is no sign, among the people or the ruling elite, of where an idea of political amelioration might take hold. Finally, the citizens are reported as endorsing a new emperor, Titus's remaining son. He sounds more reasonable, but he was prime advocate of the killing of the prisoner in the opening scene, and punishments imposed arbitrarily by him include burying alive and devouring by beasts. Hadfield extracts an optimistic, if paradoxical, conclusion: 'the people want to elect Titus at first, but may well be happier when they are directed to accept Lucius at the end of the play'. Maybe, but I don't see any sign here of 'a balanced and mixed constitution' (p. 474).

Fortunately, emergent progressive thought in the early-modern period does not depend on contributions by Shakespeare. Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (1592), for instance, is more promising. Hieronimo insists on appealing to the king for justice, despite being warned off and driven into madness (Kyd 1967). It is a cultural materialist project to assess the opportunities in early-modern England for the development of a critical intelligentsia. Where, in Elizabethan and Jacobean society (still widely named and famed for its monarchs) were the likely sources and conditions of intellectual and cultural dissidence? Was writing that we now call literary a mere effect of the cultural apparatus, embedded already in an embryonic 'history of literature'? How was Philip Sidney, or Ben Jonson, enabled to struggle with the hegemonic ideology? (I discuss these questions particularly in Chapter 3, as they inform Jonson's *Poetaster*.) If it is right to focus on the power of ideology, what is the scope for human agency?

When cultural materialism began to take hold, in the 1970s, such questions were scarcely on the agenda. Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) drew upon social and political theorists (Weber, Tawney, Engels, Marx, Mannheim, Durkheim) and attributed the rise of the novel to an emergent reading public. J.W. Lever in *The Tragedy of State* prioritized social and political factors, placing Jacobean tragedy 'as a product of the intellectual ferment and spiritual upheaval which preceded the first great European revolution' (Lever 1971: vii). These scholars did not make explicit their

Marxist theoretical assumptions, however. The exception was L.C. Knights, in his great book, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, published initially in 1937. Knights acknowledged an uncertainty about how to relate the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange to the lived experience of human agency (for instance, in the production of stage plays). 'Methods of production and cultural superstructure may be related in the world of abstract dialectic, but no one . . . has yet established the relation in terms of fact and experience.' To proceed at all, one must invoke a particular time and place, but this leads to 'a bewildering complexity supervening upon the simplicity of the dialectical formation'. Yet the undertaking is necessary, Knights insists; maybe '"the materialist interpretation of history" has not yet been pushed far enough' (1962: 15–16).

In the climate of intellectual timidity that enveloped literary studies in the Cold War, these were uncomfortable topics. Knights, Lever and Watt were admired and quoted but not much emulated. To conservative commentators from the 1950s to the 1970s, it seemed that the early moderns had reason to be proud of their state and its primary institutions: they thought of Gloriana, the foundation of overseas empire, the great chain of being, the promulgation of a gentlemanly compromise in religion; all personified by, transmitted through, and accessible to a formal study of Shakespeare. This was, of course, a conservative vision, in which disturbance of established hierarchy was bad (women were destined for marriage, the lower orders were normally submissive, foreigners were devious and silly, God was on our side). If a text appeared to resist an appropriate reading, it could always be declared 'ironic' or the voice of a 'persona', in the manner patented by American new critics. In the 1980s, conventional critics were surprised and baffled when they learned that cultural materialists were revisiting the Marxist problems, exploring how literary writers, and even Shakespeare, might be brought into conversations about history, textuality, ideology, and the practical organization of education and culture in the cultural apparatus.

Knights sought to preserve the autonomy of the literary artist by organizing *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* into separate sections: 'The Background' and 'The Dramatists'. Yet the balance is uneasy, for instance, when he writes: '*Sejanus*, like the other greater plays, is the product of a unique vision; but in stressing the uniqueness one has to avoid any suggestion of the idiosyncratic' (p. 156). Uniqueness bespeaks artistic autonomy, but it must not become idiosyncratic: that would destroy the representative status of the text, and hence the balance between the individual and the system. It was necessary to review the idea that the relation between culture and the economy might usefully be addressed as one of passive reflection. The ultimate issues are *agency* and *determination*–the extent to

which culture has to be seen as subject to social and economic conditions. Williams flagged the problem as (economic) base and (cultural) superstructure, and moved on from that by rephrasing determination as a matter of *pressures and limits*, rather than compulsion (Williams, R. 1980).

The issue is not just theoretical; it is difficult to see how political activity can be organized if there is no space for human agency. If we come to consciousness within an interpretation of the world and oneself that is already embedded in language–gesture, even–how are we to engender a critical analysis? In *Faultlines*, my aim was to theorize the sources of dissidence, and my conclusion was that they arise out of the conflict and contradiction (the faultlines) which the dominant, itself, produces. 'The inter-involvement of resistance and control is systemic: it derives from the way language and culture get articulated . . . Any position supposes its intrinsic *op*-position. All stories comprise within themselves the ghosts of the alternative stories they are trying to exclude' (Sinfield 1992: 47).

I remain convinced that it is helpful to speak of a *dominant ideology*. We might prefer to call it 'hegemonic', insofar as that expression wards off the idea of a top-down imposition of a singular doctrine, pointing rather toward the construction of a power bloc out of diverse elements, through negotiation and collaboration. That is in fact the kind of ideological manoeuvring that I envisage as characterizing the dominant, both within itself and in tension with other formations. It is a cluster of expectations, maintained through multiple channels, rather than a conspiracy of the ruling elite. As Steven Mullaney puts it, culture is to be seen not as singular or static, but as 'an ongoing production, negotiation, and determination of social meanings and social selves' (1988: xi). Mullaney contributes to this work by balancing the familiar sense of the drama as referring, and ultimately deferring, to the Court (and hence as tending to invoke centralized authority), with an awareness of its marginal (and potentially dissident) location in the suburbs. Basically, this recognition of ideological disjunction is optimistic about human potential, even in the face of massive discouragements: we have to found collective action in the opportunities that the system affords.

I retain the term 'dominant' because I would not want to weaken the sense of how powerful an ideology may become, precisely because of its tentacular (rather than massive and static) mode of transmission. How else are we to explain how people can be persuaded to kill and be killed in the name of beliefs that are neither true, nor in their interest?

The author

In Jonson's play *Poetaster* (1601–2), Ovid affirms his belief that poetry will immortalize him. His father thinks he should attend to his legal studies:

> Your name shall live indeed, sir, you say true! But how infamously, how scorned and contemned in the eyes and ears of the best and gravest Romans . . . Are these the hopeful courses wherewith I have so long flattered my expectation from thee? Verses! Poetry! Ovid, whom I thought to see the pleader, become Ovid the playmaker?
>
> (Jonson 1995: I.i.1–9)

Father and son both have a concept of the author, though they do not agree as to what it is.

Brian Vickers attacks theorists who try to undermine the autonomy of the author in the early-modern period. Unlike many commentators in this vein, Vickers gives a fair account of Michel Foucault's seminal essay, 'What Is an Author?'[4] He disputes, effectively, Foucault's claim that authorial 'ownership' of literary texts was established only in the eighteenth century, with the development of copyright. The importance of Foucault's argument, however, is wider: in its insistence that the author is a social arrangement, rather than a natural, unquestionable source and ratification of the literary: we should attend to the *author function*. To be sure, the individual writes, but the designation 'author' is bestowed only upon some. It is a social construct, not very different, after all, from 'the king' or 'the parson'. It is inseparable from the ways texts are processed (marketed, reviewed, drawn into the education system), and from the kinds of attention that are given to them (looking for personal progression, for instance, and allegedly 'universal' themes). Foucault encourages us to think about the procedures through which *textual authority* is conferred in the cultural apparatus.

Vickers' main argument is that Foucault's history is wrong. He shows conclusively that classical Greece and Rome did have a concept of the author. He adduces the emphasis on plagiarism: you must have a concept of intellectual property to allege that someone has stolen it. I find an element of paradox here. At first it seemed that Vickers was going merely to affirm that since we have books we must have authors. But mainly he demonstrates, as a cultural materialist would aspire to do, that the concept of the author was available–in circulation in that social context: 'Authors, patrons, books, booksellers, libraries–all existed in antiquity' (Vickers 2002: 510). Ultimately, though, there is a difference of political and theoretical principle. Foucauldian and cultural materialist thought about the author dwells upon cultural systems rather than individual genius. Consider Prime Minister Tony Blair's slogan, 'Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime.' Trying, typically, to have it both ways, the first clause undertakes to penalize criminals, whereas the second promises action on poverty and deprivation. The first assumes the culpability of the criminal person, the second finds explanations in the social setting. Notoriously, Margaret

Thatcher declared that there is no such thing as society, just individuals and families. Cultural materialism looks for structural, social determinants, rather than individual properties. Compare Lever: 'In Jacobean tragedy it is not primarily the conduct of the individual, but of the society which assails him, that stands condemned' (Lever 1971: 12). Thus, in *Macbeth*, a cultural materialist might be interested in structural correlations among members of the ruling elite of Scotland, rather than Macbeth's distinctive wickedness.

Early-modern writers, Vickers observes, had (as in other crucial respects) the classical concept as a model. Famously, Spenser, and Milton after him, imitated Virgil's progress through the literary genres, from pastoral to epic. There is ample evidence of annoyance over plagiarism in both the Roman and the early-modern periods. Vickers mentions instances in two of the plays discussed elsewhere in this book. In *Epicene*, Sir John Daw is accused of taking ideas from to Seneca and Plutarch. Ironically, it is Daw who utters a Jonsonian (and Foucauldian) discrimination: 'Why, every man that writes in verse is not a poet' (Jonson 2003: II.iii. 106). In *Poetaster*, Crispinus is accused: 'Why! The ditty's all borrowed! 'Tis Horace's: hang him plagiary!' (IV.iii.96–7). Surely early-modern people did have an idea of an author function, though doubtless it was organized in different ways in earlier and later centuries.

Poetaster is an intriguing play; one that has been glibly assimilated into a traditional literary-historical framework. Critics suppose that Jonson must be on the side of Caesar Augustus, because he is the most powerful male and is regarded as having given his name to a golden age of literature. In the spirit of Tillyard, traditionally-minded commentators take it for granted that the dominant ideology, promoted by the tyrannical, pyramidal state, must correspond to the perceptions and aspirations of literary authors. I show in Chapter 3 ('*Poetaster*, the Author, and the Perils of Cultural Production') that Shakespeare's contemporaries were as capable as ourselves of discerning tyrannical rule, and as clever as people in other totalitarian regimes at insinuating their critique. In *Poetaster*, Jonson's alignment is with the cautious and sceptical Horace; not with Caesar, or even Virgil.

The task, beyond Vickers' contribution, is to map more carefully the operations of the author function in early-modern England, considering the differences from Augustan Rome, as well as the points of likeness. For a start, the situation is transformed by printing and urbanization, which facilitate the development of a market economy and a public for writing. You could buy a theatre ticket at the door, or a pamphlet from a stall outside. You could buy ballads, playtexts and sermons. Such moves toward a diversity of intellectual opportunities made it more difficult for the state, or the ruling elite, to control expression. The Civil War was fought out in

pamphlets, as well as on the battleground. At the same time, at least two further kinds of author may be envisaged. He might be a bright young man who hoped to gain the patronage of a wealthy person, leading either to financial support, or to employment as secretary, teacher or curate. Or he might be a gentleman or lady who, by allowing their verses to circulate in manuscript, might pursue the arts and learning, while presenting themselves as witty, cultured and sophisticated.

The boundaries between these variants on the author function were as important as the continuities. 'Why,' Dauphine exclaims in Jonson's *Epicene*, 'would not you live by your verses, Sir John?' 'No,' Clerimont responds, ''twere pity he should. A knight live by his verses? He did not make 'em to that end, I hope.' It would be disreputable for a knight to earn his living. To keep the debate going, Dauphine invokes Sir Philip Sidney: 'And yet the noble Sidney lives by his, and the noble family not ashamed.' Dauphine means no contradiction: Sidney didn't write for money, but he lives through his works. Anyway, he was bold enough to acknowledge his practice, 'but Sir John Daw has more caution: he'll not hinder his own rising i' the state so much!' (II.iii.110–17). Quite what a gentleman was permitted to do, and not to do, was a matter for intricate social judgement. We might regard the author who goes into print and hopes to live by his writing as emergent, while the gentleman amateur is residual.

Prominent new historicists and cultural materialists, for the most part, have set aside Foucault's dating of authorial authority to the eighteenth century, though Margreta de Grazia has shown, quite specifically, that changes in the editing and presentation of Shakespeare in the late eighteenth century both signal and advance the idea of Shakespeare as an individual subject with a personal biography (de Grazia 1991). More commonly, it is held that the modern author function was emerging in the early-modern period. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, Richard Burt and Joseph Loewenstein, without depending on Foucault's author essay or putting a date on the effective advent of the author, argue that Jonson contributed in a complex way to the construction of the domain of authorship in the period.[5] In the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair* Jonson tries to repudiate (what he sees as) the vulgar role of theatre writer, associating himself, analogically, with the monarch. However, he pursues this project through market-oriented imagery of contract (with the audience). In his poem, 'To Penshurst', the king and the poet are the two privileged visitors. Of course, such an analogy is forced; Jonson strives to write it into truth.

It is axiomatic in cultural materialism that the topics to which a culture obsessively returns (for instance, in the early-modern period, God and marriage) are those about which it is most uncertain and insecure. The ubiquitous complaints about plagiarism indicate that intellectual property

was *not* respected, or not as much as some would like. Perhaps a casual attitude to borrowing derived from the reverence in which classical culture was held, such that it seemed almost a collective possession. As so often, we are looking at an uneven development, a faultline, where some people thought it was all right to take images and lines as they came to hand. Probably they did not regard it as dishonest; they may have thought they honoured their source by using it. For it is plain, even in the best authors of the period, that they were far more bound to, and reliant on, genre and convention than has seemed proper among writers from the romantic and modernist periods. The love sonnet, the city comedy, the tragicomedy, the encomium, the epithalamium, the divine meditation: they all offer reassurance of the familiar, as much as the challenge of the new. We tend to value most the most distinctive of the early-modern writers, but even they tend to treat their sources as if they were in a shared entitlement. This has been thoroughly illustrated by scholars as diverse as Maurice Evans and Gary Waller.[6] Spenser borrowed episodes from Ariosto and Tasso in *The Faerie Queene*, and in his sonnets adapted motifs from Petrarch, Tasso and Desportes. Annotators of Shakespeare's plays discover innumerable echoes of other writers. Vickers labours to distinguish Shakespeare's part in *Henry VIII* and *Two Noble Kinsmen* from John Fletcher's, and doubtless he succeeds: there are stylistic differences. But what is really remarkable is the extent to which early-modern theatre writers are similar.

Readers

These days it will be widely agreed that the Antonio characters in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night* are in love with Bassanio and Sebastian respectively. Their love objects are both of a higher social class and rather full of themselves; while they return the love of their Antonios, it is not with such an overwhelming passion. Interestingly, this is the scenario also of Shakespeare's sonnets. The main tendency in the plot of the two plays is to get all the good characters into marriageable pairs, so that they can join in a symmetrical procession around the stage and take their final bows together. The Antonios, it seems, are left out. No one is queer bashing; they just don't fit.

Now suppose, as a gay critic, I point out that Portia and Olivia maintain extensive households, in which all manner of kin and friends might be accommodated in varying degrees of intimacy and dependency (Jessica and Lorenzo and Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, for instance). I might add that there is no authoritative stage direction governing how characters will leave the stage. Suppose I declare that Bassanio should exit hand in hand with both Portia and Antonio, and that Sebastian should be flanked by

both Olivia and Antonio. The idea is, in fact, quite fertile: consider why such an arrangement is more likely to suit Olivia (who loves the still-impossible Cesario and has only a forced and formal marriage with Sebastian) than Portia (who has been contriving actively to exclude Antonio from her marriage). Notwithstanding, I actually do know, from my acquaintance with texts by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and with the arguments and assumptions of present-day scholars and critics, that my gay reading is–not exactly wrong, but, say–particular. It may be a good gay reading, but by so much as it is that, it falls outside dominant expectations. I know I am *reading against the grain*.

Terry Eagleton offers a striking instance in his essay on *Macbeth*:

> To any unprejudiced reader–which would seem to exclude Shakespeare himself, his contemporary audiences and almost all literary critics–it is surely clear that positive value in *Macbeth* lies with the three witches. The witches are the heroines of the piece, however little the play itself recognizes the fact, and however much the critics may have set out to defame them.
>
> (1986: 1–2)

Shakespeare has the wrong reading, and so do his contemporaries, literary critics, and the play itself. Can this be so? Of course not, Eagleton is writing provokingly, against the grain. Again: in 'Rape and Rights' (Chapter 10), I subject *Measure for Measure* to a reading informed by ideas that today we associate with Amnesty International and human rights. Thus I seek to break the insulation of the old story from current concerns and to expose its reactionary assumptions. Sometimes I intend such readings to be *playful*: seeking to undermine customary expectations by unusual juxtapositions or utopian speculations. For instance, I question the relationship between Barnardine and a friar at the end of *Measure for Measure*. Traditional critics may object to my handling of the text; they may say that I should suppress my concerns and adjust myself to the dominant reading, appreciating what is really in the text, rather than interposing my partial interests. This I regard as an oppressive demand (see Sinfield 2005). Thinking seriously about Isabella and Amnesty, or playfully about Barnardine and sexual dissidence, enables me to say things about them that might otherwise be hard to reach.

Some poststructuralist and deconstructionist critics, meanwhile, may object to my reading because it depends on a belief that the text may yield more- and less-plausible meanings. They will be inclined to hold that there is no way of docketing variant readings; they are all swept along in an ephemeral tide of textuality. I believe that usually we can discern a cluster

of dominant readings of a text, that there are also subordinate, alternative and oppositional readings, and that their ideological and social significance may be traced.

Roland Barthes' essay 'The Death of the Author' is a principal source for the idea that the dissemination of literary (and other) texts is so fluid and indeterminate that it is hard to posit anything at all about them. 'We now know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' (Barthes 1977: 146). If this is the case, there seems little scope for discussion of the political implications of a text in a social context. We can hardly discover one ideology to be dominant over another if everything is free-floating; we can scarcely discuss the insertion of a particular text if the author function is not recognized. (Foucault's 'What Is an Author?' is often assimilated to Barthes' theme of authorial demise, but actually it is designed to amend it by asserting the continuing importance of the author function.) Barthes concludes that textual power has passed to the reader, but he or she cannot confer an organizing principle: 'this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted' (p. 148). The reader does not control his or her own reaction. He or she is unlocated; beyond history and politics.

Out of a reported exchange between F.R. Leavis and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Terence Hawkes develops a semiotic principle:

> That is, that to the uninvolved, alienated eye, no text offers values or meanings that exist as essential features of itself. Shakespeare's plays are not essentially this or essentially that, or essentially anything . . . Like the words of which they are composed, the plays have no essential meanings. It is *we* who mean, *by* them.
>
> (1992: 76)

This position is disputed by traditionalists. Graham Bradshaw complains: 'for Hawkes all readings are partial, so who is to say whether some are better or worse than others?' (1993: 18). Vickers objects to literary theorists who 'deny that writers could ever have had a realizable intention' (2002: 521).

In my view, a literary writer has an *intention* in the same way as anybody who puts forth an utterance. To be sure, he or she may not have formulated the intention to himself or herself, and we cannot be certain what it is; it is unlikely to be undivided, or to be heard in quite the same way by different auditors, and we may need special knowledge. But that is how

language works: when we encounter a text, of any kind, we use our experience of reading and writing to make the best and most appropriate sense we can. Literary and dramatic texts may be very complicated, but we may have the advantage of discussing them with friends, and of reading commentaries which may supply helpful information and ideas. Provided that the terms of assessment are exposed to inspection, it should be possible to argue, *comparatively at least*, that one play is more dissident, oppositional or radical than another. In Chapter 5 of this book, partly as an experiment in reading, I compare *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I conclude that the later play is reminding us of something radical that the earlier play is ready to forget. Critics working in a deconstructive-intertextual mode of criticism may argue that the radical potential of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* may be read back into *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I argue that it is better if we allow the juxtaposing of the two plays to draw attention to the boundaries of each.

Cultural materialists understand that 'the text' is not a stable entity that can simply be invoked to establish this or that authoritative reading. They know that the conditions through which a Shakespearean play reached a audience or readership in his lifetime were both haphazard and constrained. Today the conditions are different but no more reliable. Even so, cultural materialists want to comment on (for instance) the relations between King James and monarchs in Jacobean plays, and for this they are going to quote from diverse documents, noting connections and disjunctions. These operations do not need to suppose that the text is autonomous, or has a unified effect. On the contrary, cultural materialists are inclined to regard the text and its context as a site of struggle–riven with conflict and contradiction, sustaining alternative as well as oppositional elements, and emergent elements alongside the dominant ideology.

In practice, deconstructionist critics often make extrapolations from texts, but they hope to cover themselves through initial or intermittent denials. Alternatively, they may make the indeterminacy and evanescence of the text the theme of their essay: the text is read as exemplifying its own collapse as coherent venture. This becomes as predictable as the expectation in postwar new criticism that every reading will demonstrate the ultimate unity of text and experience. In fact, traditionalists and poststructuralists may share a transcendent idea of literature; it is because the literary author's accomplishment is so refined that his intentions are assumed to extend beyond the reach of common mortals.

All too often, in both traditional and poststructuralist criticism, offering a reading involves manipulating the text so that its truth and wisdom become apparent, seeming thereby to ratify the truth and wisdom of the reader. There is no evident gap between the text and the interpreter. The

aim is to produce a comforting sense that we are all on the same side. Cultural materialists, also, may find a positive correlation between a text and their own commitments. For instance, Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy* (1989) locates crucial modern concerns in certain plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In other cases the cultural materialist will want to critique the ideological tendency of a text. Some commentators have complained of this flexibility.[7] But why not? It depends what text it is and what aspect you are interested in. If you want to think about gender politics in *King Lear*, you might find the play conservative. If you are concerned with God and atheism, you might find it radical.

The status of alternative readings is one of the unresolved problems in cultural materialism. Isobel Armstrong objects:

> in order to pin Tennyson to political and religious positions, Sinfield has to eliminate the possibility of ambiguity in poetic language. Or when confronted with two contending meanings he has to opt for one as being 'really' the intended meaning.
>
> (1993: 9)

This may be so. But the task, still, which we might turn back on Armstrong, is to accommodate ambiguity without everything becoming so ironic, double-edged, multivalent or protean that political concerns become unsustainable.

The idea of reading against the grain is refined in the work of the Marxist literary theorist, Pierre Macherey in his book *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966, translated in 1978). Macherey credits the author with an intended, and complex, ideology, while making it available to political analysis:

> We know that a writer never reflects mechanically or rigorously the ideology which he represents, even if his sole intention is to represent it: perhaps because no ideology is sufficiently consistent to survive the test of figuration. And otherwise, his work would not be read. The writer always reveals or writes from a certain *position* (which is not simply a subjective viewpoint) in relation to his ideological climate.
>
> (1978: 195)

The writer is not above ideology, but nor is she or he contained by it. Closure is always inadequate; no text can subsume within its project all the potential significance that it must release in pursuance of that project. It is a technical point, almost: every inside is defined by its outside. Without gaps, silences, and absences–that which the text is not–the text would not exist.

The goal, then, is to discover the relation of the text to the conditions of its existence; to production and consumption, to ideology, to history. This, Macherey insists, will not be

> a question of introducing a historical explanation which is stuck onto the work from outside. On the contrary, we must show a sort of splitting within the work: this division is *its* unconscious, in so far as it possesses one–the unconscious which is history, the play of history beyond its edges, encroaching on those edges: this is why it is possible to trace the path which leads from the haunted work to that which haunts it.
>
> (p. 94)

The text points towards its own history, its own constructedness. This theory allows the manifest reading of the text to coexist with alternative and oppositional readings; the one is the shadow of the other. 'Thus what we are obliged to call *the reverse of the work* begins to take shape: the conditions of its possibility which enable us to read it against the grain [*au rebours*] of its intended meaning.'[8]

There are unsatisfactory aspects in Macherey's formulation. In particular, he supposes at this date (though not later; see Macherey and Balibar 1978) that such an 'unconscious' is the special property of the literary text, whereas I regard it as a property of all texts. Also, Macherey allows the inference that it will be fairly easy to supply 'history' as a given body of knowledge. Of course, it is not so straightforward; history also is a cultural apparatus. However, these awkwardnesses need not detract from the main insights. History, or rather histories, are required for understanding the text; the text itself generates those histories, as it were in its unconscious, even in the processes through which it disavows them. Thus literary texts may be explored not just in their relations with each other, but in their relations with the world. I attempt to apply this approach elsewhere in this book.

Macherey does not propose a method for deciding which is the 'intended meaning' and which is the 'reverse'; which reading runs with the grain, and which is the reader's purposeful intervention. Commentators have challenged a tendency in cultural materialism to suppose that a right-wing or conservative reading is manifest and dominant, whereas the alternative reading is unearthed by the skilful critic, who may congratulate himself or herself on preventing the author from getting away with a reactionary representation. Bradshaw objects that when Dollimore and I discover in *Henry V* the strategies and anxieties of power, this is not offered as 'tribute to the play's exploratory and analytical intelligence'; rather, it is assumed that 'Shakespeare did not mean to reveal these things, and in a more

ominous sense meant not to' (Bradshaw 1993: 104). Again, Scott Wilson reviews Paul Brown's account of *The Tempest*, which presents that play as attempting a containment of recalcitrant factors in the colonial situation, but failing to secure that outcome. Finally, the play discloses that which it seeks to obscure, then: but perhaps, Wilson observes, that was Shakespeare's cunning and transgressive goal all along.[9] In practice, the cultural materialist reader deduces which is the intended meaning in the same way as any other decoding of language: from the weighting of elements in the text and from his or her knowledge of the circumstances in which it has been produced and circulated. Thomas Cartelli tracks the course of *The Tempest* in colonialist contexts, and concludes that key factors in the balance of sympathies and respect at the end of the play make it 'not only complicit in the history of its successive misreadings, but responsible in some measure for the development of the ways in which it is read' (Cartelli 1999: 104).

Moving beyond this argument, I now believe that it may be a mistake to regard the grain (always) as a property of the text. In practice, what Macherey calls the intended meaning is very often the meaning that is consecrated *in the hegemonic critical tradition*, which has claimed the text for its ideology. A reading against the grain is differentiated from an alternative or oppositional reading position by its tone of self-conscious refusal. It may not be persuasive (at least in the current state of the discipline), but that doesn't matter. The point is not to replace one reading with another, but to expose the conditions of reading. The aim is to dislocate and disturb, laying bare the implicit ideological assumptions of established practices. Beyond the principles of careful reading which he enunciates, Macherey stands for a suspicious reading of literary (and other) texts. He rejects the formalist notion of the critic's task: helping the text into thematic coherence by overlooking its awkward moments, or using some avoidance strategy (such as declaring them 'ironic'). At this point the cultural materialist foregoes some of the pleasure of the entranced reader, gaining instead political responsibility and the pleasure of a more comprehensive appreciation.

A new version of purposefully dissident reading is cultivated in queer theory: *queering the text*. As Vincent Quinn points out, it is futile to complain that Eve Sedgwick '*imposes* her readings on Austen and James: that's what "queering" a text is about' (Quinn 2000). Sedgwick means explicitly to resist heteronormative assumptions: refusing marginalization, she invites her readers to imagine that they live in a world where queerness rules. Quinn replies that queer reading need not always be loose reading; historical and textual responsibility is still possible and effective. A project for cultural materialism, still, is to acknowledge that its readings may be partial, novel and strenuously pursued (as indeed, every one else's may be) without accepting that this must entail an abdication of authority.

Interventions

'The crucial theoretical break,' Williams wrote in 1977–and it was a break for him too, which made it additionally significant–'is the recognition of "literature" as a specializing social and historical category' (1977: 53). In *Marxism and Literature* Williams presents a history of literature that is not a sequential linking of texts already-agreed to be literary, but a history of *the concept literature*, showing it to be the product of economic, social, and political changes running through from the eighteenth century.

For Kiernan Ryan, there is bad faith here. He notes 'more than a touch of disingenuousness in critiques of the canon which are parasitic upon its appeal, and which only enhance the authority of the books they depose, even as they feed off the cultural frisson they provoke' (1996: xviii). Evidently it is true that many of the texts that get to be canonical have a complexity of both language and cultural implication that makes them available for both literary and cultural study. Even so, for new historicists and cultural materialists, those texts look more interesting when set alongside other writing from their period. Furthermore, many materialists do study other kinds of text and other periods–our own included. They read theatre, film and television. They have cultivated alternative canons, in fields from lesbian and gay studies to Caribbean women's fiction. The present study places Shakespeare among plays that have not been much considered hitherto. Yet Shakespeare is, simply, the most provocative point at which to break in to (or is it 'out of'?) the system.

A sense of Shakespeare as a point of intervention in contemporary debates is at odds, at least potentially, with the commitment of cultural materialists to history as the place where culture is produced. Hawkes argues that any aspiration to uncover a historical sense of Shakespeare is self-deceiving: we cannot avoid viewing history from the present. To Hawkes, *presentism* is an opportunity, rather than a problem:

> Its project is scrupulously to seek out salient aspects of the present as a crucial trigger for its investigations. Reversing, to some degree, the stratagems of new historicism, it deliberately begins with the material present and allows that to set its interrogative agenda. Perhaps this simply makes overt what covertly happens anyway.
>
> (2002: 22)

Hawkes makes his point specifically in opposition to David Kastan, whom he accuses of attempting the recovery 'of a lost purity, of a final arrival at truth-revealing origins, of the Restoration at last of the genuine monarchy of genius, even of a more fundamental confrontation, no longer in a glass,

darkly, but now face to face' (p. 2). Kastan does seem to invite Hawkes's rhetoric when he writes of making 'sure that what we hear are [Shakespeare's] concerns rather than the projections of our own', and of wanting 'to restore his works to the specific imaginative and material circumstances in which they were written and engaged' (Kastan 1999: 16–17).

Cultural materialists are situated ambivalently here, wanting the best of both worlds. They believe in historical study, and share a historicist opposition to any notion of Shakespeare as universal and timeless. It is for this reason that I place plays by other dramatists alongside those of Shakespeare in this book. The texts construct an early-modern ideological field for each other (in particular, Chapters 7 and 8 set up the possibilities for a study of Shakespeare's sonnets). Yet, as Kastan says, cultural materialists have made self-interested readings *through* historical analysis–'significant more as records of our present needs and anxieties than as reconstructions of those of Shakespeare's time' (p. 17). Cultural materialists may indeed allow current interests to set an agenda for literary, historical and cultural study. In later chapters of this book I focus on questions of dissident sexuality–because they are a site of ongoing political agitation, and because they concern me as a gay man. However, I intend an attentiveness to historically located formations of same-gender liaisons, even if (perhaps specially if) I am reading against the grain. The idea that historical engagement might discompose the present is tendered also by Catherine Belsey, who regards her study of the early-modern family as historicizing and denaturalizing present-day western familial ideology (Belsey 1999: xiv, 19).

Insistence upon a wide sweep of political and cultural address lays cultural materialism open to challenges that other kinds of literary study need not meet. Armstrong believes that the sceptical attitude of cultural materialists to the organization of culture in welfare-capitalism amounts to a refusal to acknowledge the viability of some radical work, particularly in state-subsidized theatre.[10] What happened, I believe, was a sudden dislodging of leftists from the consensus politics of the 1945 post-war settlement, including the prospects for cultural renewal. While the Labour governments of Clement Attlee and Harold Wilson had not delivered on the promises of fairness and shared provision that were made to win the war, they had allowed the inference that there might be mechanisms that could be exploited by socialists. While some radicals, appealing perhaps to George Orwell's *1984*, distrusted the state, a more common, consensual assumption was that *the state* might be roused to protect people from the irresponsible impositions of *capital*. So the subsidization of thoughtful culture might counter the blandishments of commercial advertising. The confusions of the 1970s, leading to the election of Margaret Thatcher in

1979 and the resurgence of market economics, showed that the state was the primary institution of capitalism, and likely to tolerate only marginal reforms. This was true in respect of culture and the arts, as much as in health-care, education, and the alleviation of poverty. Furthermore, research showed that the middle classes, as in other domains, were best positioned to benefit from state funding.

These perceptions prompted an implicit elision of the modern state of Nixon, Reagan and Thatcher with that of the gross and grotesque monarchs of the Renaissance stage, together with a more suspicious attitude toward purportedly radical institutions, such as the Royal Shakespeare Company. 'I am a radical and I could not work in the theatre if I were not,' director Peter Hall declared, complacently attributing to Shakespeare an attachment to Tillyard's 'world picture' and a determination to maintain existing kinds of order at all cost (quoted in Sinfield 1994a: 183–4).

The cultural materialist policy on the funding of culture should in fact be to attempt strategic intervention wherever possible: *there is no one, privileged site of radicalism.* The new London Globe Theatre was greeted with suspicion by materialists, as founded in impenetrable delusions about the opportunity to discover the true bard.[11] The management has proved in some ways inventive, however (Silverstone 2005). Of course there has been valuable work in the public sector; I have written admiringly about subsidized theatre work by Michael Bogdanov, Charles Marowitz, Howard Barker, Arnold Wesker, Ian McDiarmid, Edward Bond, Trevor Griffiths, Gay Sweatshop, Cheek by Jowl, Split Britches and Neil Bartlett. The problem is familiar: how to know who is using whom–whether radical work is infiltrating, or being co-opted by the system. A further risk with dependence on state subsidy is that it may leave you high and dry when you push too hard, or when circumstances change. These issues play out comparably in the funding of universities (public sector institutions in Britain). Today academic work is generated increasingly in terms set by pre-packaged formulae, either of funding bodies or of publishers. The former grope for measurable criteria of research quality. The latter find it more profitable, or perhaps just more convenient, to reprint edited highlights of the interventions of a generation ago, rather than promote new work. Ironically enough, it is market forces that have facilitated new kinds of study. Cultural materialism, new historicism, queer, lesbian and gay studies, and theory in general have gained ground because of student–market–demand. That is what Williams means by *asymmetry*: state institutions may be in certain respects out of step with market forces for a while at least, despite sharing an overall agenda (Williams, R. 1981: 98–107).

What few commentators seem to have anticipated is the extent to which the idea of quality culture can survive commodification. I had thought that the *aura* of art and literature depend on their *transcending market forces* (Sinfield 2004a). In practice, I now observe, they have always been implicated in a paradoxical celebration of conspicuous consumption, with the wealthy collector looking over the shoulder of the artist in his garret. The summons to Hollywood screen-writing and composing has long been a mark of success, along with playing Las Vegas and royalty. It is widely assumed that prize-winners, best-sellers, and costly productions will probably be works of quality, while alternative modes of performance and distribution are treated at best patronisingly. Meanwhile, postmodern intellectuals have admired popularly-oriented appropriations of Shakespearean texts, such as Bob Carlton's rock-and-roll stage show *Return to the Forbidden Planet* (1993; based on *The Tempest* and a science fiction movie), and Baz Luhrmann's film *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet* (1996). Richard Burt finds the cultural critic in danger of becoming 'the poseur who goes slumming in trashy popular culture' (Burt 1998: 17).

There is plenty of opportunity. One of the initial ideas in cultural materialism was that Shakespearean texts should be treated more variously and with less respect. This one week, in November 2005, I have beamed into my house Macbeth as a head chef who wants to take over the restaurant (with the witches as garbage collectors) and Othello reconceived as a high-school basket-ball star. I can view Al Pacino making a movie about making a movie about Richard III. In more classic vein, there is Mark Rylance as Richard II (filmed in 2003 from a production at the Globe Theatre) and James Mason as Brutus (in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar* of 1953). Also in this week there is the first of a four-part television documentary about the bard's life. On radio there is a performance of *Much Ado About Nothing*, and there are readings each day from Shakespeare's sources. A new service is announced, supplying brief plots of the plays as text messages for mobile phones, and the BBC opens a website encouraging school students to submit their own *sixty-second interpretation* of Shakespeare on film or audio (a scene or a whole play, classic or modern). If I was prepared to travel the British Isles, in this month of November I could catch (in varying degrees of textual fidelity) one *Comedy of Errors*, two *Hamlet*s, four *Macbeths*, one *Merchant*, one *Midsummer Night's Dream*, two *Much Ado*s, one *Richard II*, two *Romeo and Juliet*s, one *Thomas More* and three *Twelfth Night*s.[12]

How to position themselves in relation to competing formulations of literary and cultural value is a persisting issue for cultural materialists. Yet it is worth articulating a radical reading of (say) *Measure for Measure*; otherwise sexism and misogyny will go by default. This may seem a pompous

ambition–the idea that another cultural materialist essay will change the world, or even just Shakespeare. Yet ideology functions not, in the main, through spectacular breaks, but by processes of steady drip, in which no one can be sure that his or her efforts will not tilt a local balance, in one direction or another. Hence, in part, our paradoxical attention to Shakespeare, who has been accepted as central despite and because of his entanglement in conservative ideologies, both of his time and of ours.

Gender and sexuality

Cultural materialism is committed to the recovery of subordinated voices; yet they can be discerned only through the frosted screen of textuality. It will be alert to oppressive representations in terms of class, gender, race and ethnicity and sexual orientation, seeking to head off reactionary readings and to foreground progressive potential. Gertrude in *Hamlet* is not usually regarded as a problematic figure, but in fact she illustrates a subtle male bias–in what she does not say.

Hamlet demands, insistently, that the Queen should not continue in sexual relations with Claudius:

> Confess yourself to heaven,
> Repent what's past, avoid what is to come;
> And do not spread the compost on the weeds
> To make them ranker.
>
> (Shakespeare 1982: III.iv.151–4)

What she must *not* do is

> Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed,
> Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,
> And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,
> Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers,
> Make you to ravel all this matter out.
>
> (III.iv.184–8)

We do not see Gertrude revealing to the King what Hamlet has said to her, but does she allow Claudius to make love to her? He appeals to her in the ensuing scenes, in which the death of Polonius is investigated and Hamlet ordered to England. 'O Gertrude, come away'; 'Come, Gertrude'; 'O come away' (IV.i.28, 38, 44). Is he insisting because she is so complicit with his desires, or because she is showing reluctance? Does she respond supportively, or shrink away (perhaps she has a headache)? Claudius

appeals for her support over the madness of Ophelia: 'O Gertrude, Gertrude'; 'O my dear Gertrude' (IV.v.73, 77); the text gives her no reply. When Laertes arrives with riotous supporters, she tries to protect the King; as she says, he is not responsible for the death of Polonius. She reports the death of Ophelia to Laertes, not to her husband. 'Let's follow, Gertrude,' he exhorts (IV.vii.190). In the last scene there is still ample opportunity to resolve the question of Gertrude's attitude to the King, but there is no indication, one way or the other, in the dialogue or the stage directions.

Now, I am not trying to return to modern realism. All characters in plays are textual devices, and there is no ultimate, essential personhood, on the stage or in the world. Notwithstanding, Shakespearean plays do create *character effects*, however partial. It is possible to discern a continuous or developing imprint of interiority in the personae. The principals do indicate a sense of themselves as continuous selves–as creatures set in time, able to look forward in self-prediction, and backward in self-correction. They display a sense of the persons around them as similarly constituted, and this is confirmed, in turn, by the reactions of those others. In this sense, they are characters. The scandal of Gertrude, then, is that the Shakespearean text is interested in what she is thinking and feeling only when she is in dialogue with Hamlet. Her interiority–the state of her sex life and her eternal soul–is significant only while it intersects with the concerns of the male lead. Of course, in performance the behaviour of Gertrude has to be settled; the actor and director will decide.

The situation is actually even more unstable. The lines I adduce here appear in the second quarto and the first folio, and are normally accepted by editors. In the first quarto of *Hamlet* the Queen swears more specifically: 'I will conceal, consent, and do my best, / What stratagem soe'er thou shalt devise.' In further conversation with Horatio she resolves to deceive the King: 'But I will soothe and please him for a time, / For murderous minds are always jealous' (Shakespeare 1992: 82, 88–9). The first quarto shows, probably, that early-modern actors were able to envisage narrative and dialogue for the Queen; the second quarto shows that they did not need to bother. This is not to say that the first quarto necessarily works better, however. By making the Queen abandon the King so explicitly, it raises a question (perhaps always implicit) about how she became so devoted to him in the first place. Women working in the theatre will interpret their part so as to accomplish a complex and satisfying presence on the stage. Notwithstanding, I maintain that major female components in the dramatis personae, as the playtexts have been received, rarely offer the opportunities that the male performers have. Catherine Belsey astutely remarks an instability 'in the utterances attributed to women: they speak with equal conviction from incompatible subject-positions,

displaying a discontinuity of being'. Indeed, this 'inconstancy' may be marked down as 'characteristically feminine' (Belsey 1985: 149).

Feminist materialist theory is *not an offshoot*: it was largely an independent assessment by female intellectuals of a productive framework through which to address the historical subordination of women in the context of capitalist ideology and socialist aspirations. This is instanced in the first wave of work by critics such as Linda Woodbridge, Kathleen McLuskie, Mary Beth Rose, Jean Howard, Lisa Jardine, Cora Kaplan, Ann Rosalind Jones, Valerie Traub, and contributors to the collections of essays, *The Matter of Difference* and *Feminist Criticism and Social Change*.[13] Cultural materialism is the outcome of a cross-fertilization with materialist feminism. Discussions of gender in Shakespearean plays extend materialist concerns, in particular the agency of the female subject, and her scope for dissident perceptions and behaviours in the sex/gender system, as she experiences both ideological pressure and physical restraint.

Shakespearean texts present unfinished business in all the fields cultural materialists have addressed. Of the various social formations about which we would like to know more, *dissident sexualities* have afforded intriguing topics for further work. Study of the historical and political import of sexuality and its scope in the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries has of course been a much wider phenomenon than cultural materialism. It has attracted Freudians, feminists, deconstructionists, historicists and general readers, and theatre companies have found it productive. It relates to changes in the social, legal and political landscape in Europe and North America in the 1990s. The status of sexual dissidence, historically, as a submerged discourse, leaves it especially in need of further archival work and has incited an important wave of cultural theory: *queer theory*. As with women's studies and post-colonial studies, the recovery of neglected lesbian and gay lives inspires a body of theory and politics that affords ample, complex and provocative resonances for political activism at the present time. The agitation among conservative critics when the words 'gay' and 'Shakespeare' are used in the same sentence, however warily, is exactly like reactions to politics and the bard. I demonstrate this at the end of Chapter 9, taking it as confirmation that I am on the right lines.

Again, the agenda has been set by Foucault. He suggests that the idea of *the homosexual* develops in the latter part of the nineteenth century, as part of a wider invocation of sex as a way of extending policing of the system into the psyches of individual human subjects (Foucault 1978). This theory is set out in my Chapter 4 ('How to Read *The Merchant Of Venice* Without Being Heterosexist'), along with evidence from historical enquiry by Alan Bray. How far these ideas are correct is disputed. Can they account for Richard Barnfield's *Affectionate Shepherd*?

If it be sin to love a sweet-fac'd boy,
(Whose amber locks trust up in golden trammels
Dangle adown his lovely cheeks with joy,
When pearl and flowers his fair hair enamels)
If it be sin to love a lovely lad;
Oh then sin I, for whom my soul is sad.
(Barnfield 1990a: lines 7–12)

Is not this a manifesto? Bray tries to explain it away as a literary exercise (Bray 1988: 60–1).

The problem is partly that Foucault looks for history falling into epochs, characterized by distinct modes of thought; change occurs through a sequence of large-scale epistemological shifts. Compare the emphasis, earlier in this chapter, on emergent, residual and subordinate cultures. Indications elsewhere in Europe are that same-gender passion might have flourished in subcultures in sophisticated urban environments where local conditions were propitious. In fifteenth-century Florence, Michael Rocke shows, sodomy was widely practised and there was a special legal apparatus for penalizing it. But little loss of social standing occurred so long as there was an adolescent and a man, and the former was the insertee. Neither partner was reckoned to be female and no one is reported as cross-dressing; yet the boys were quite often spoken of as wives (Rocke 1996: 148–91). Rocke regards this behaviour as a response to the inaccessibility of young women, rather than a focused subculture. In Baldesar Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, a group of young men are casually labelled *cinaedos*, meaning sodomites.[14]

A same-gender coterie could have flourished at or very near the court of Queen Elizabeth, around the Earl of Southampton perhaps, even though a concept of the homosexual was still neither coherent nor generally known. It could also have flourished around the theatres. Mary Bly has examined the Whitefriars company of boys, who performed successfully for nine months in 1607–8. The shareholders were amateur playwrights, and the plays were packed with sexual puns, spoken by romantic heroines. Bly sees here an appeal to a particular audience: puns invoke an intimacy of shared understanding, an interpretive community. 'They do inscribe a place within early modern culture in which homoerotic double talk is both erotic and celebratory, funny and profitable' (Bly 2000: 5). Such instances may alert us to a potential for quite *local* variations upon queer themes. The need for secrecy plainly inhibited the formation of communities founded in dissident sexuality but, by the same token, a custom of concealment may have gained space for unorthodox alternatives.

I explore some of this potential anew in Chapters 6–9, alongside theoretical concerns focused on gender and power, queer performance, and the

validity of covert reading. Here reading against the grain, queering the text, is hardly the mode: the explicit same-gender awareness in these texts is remarkable. The scope for gender disturbance (the threat of effeminacy and the difficulty in stabilizing friendship) is assessed in Chapter 6, in plays by Lyly and Beaumont and Fletcher as well as Shakespeare and Marlowe. Chapter 7, 'Near Misses', is about the sexualization of page boys in a range of plays: if this society had no concept of the homosexual, it certainly recognized the Ganymede. Casual references in diverse plays suggest that the page, or other youthful minion, contributed to the erotic system of the household and the playhouse. The scope of the love lyric is explored in Chapter 8: an investigation of sexual punning in Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* finds the sonneteer overriding the lady's rejections; Richard Barnfield applies love conventions to a same-gender liaison; and Marlowe locates further potential in Ovid, inviting the thought that differences of power may coexist with elements of fantasy, playfulness and fulfilment. Chapter 9 attempts a new account of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, including a new reading of the pivotal sonnet 20 ('A woman's face, with Nature's own hand painted / Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion'; Shakespeare 2001). At various points in these chapters, poetic and dramatic texts appear to undermine the hegemony of the heteronormative couple. These are intriguing parts of the unfinished business of cultural materialism.

It may be noticed that I am experimenting with the term 'same-gender passion', to cover more or less the ground of the current term, 'same-sex passion' (cf. Sinfield 1994b: 11). 'This is not because I wish, in any way, to diminish the role of sexuality, but because 'same-gender' seems to me, on reflection, to be more accurate. The sameness that is relished by metropolitan lesbian and gay people today, and by their approximate forbears and comparable formations around the world–the sameness that is still legislated against and widely stigmatized–is *sameness of gender*. Two (or more) males; two (or more) females, together in fantasy or in practice. 'Same-sex' derives from 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual', and retains the confusions in those primordial terms; if it means anything, it might be same sexual preferences or activities (two tops, two fetishists, two sado-masochists). Sex–the sexual–is to be understood as a quality and practice of fantasy, feeling and interaction, focused in the genitals and other erogenous zones. It may be imagined or experienced by same-gender or cross-gender couples; they may *have sex*.

The key reactionary manoeuvre in the founding of academic literary history and literary criticism in the twentieth century was the fencing off of some of the most vibrant texts in our societies from cross-fertilization with the most pressing current preoccupations. Literature and politics were

defined as mutually exclusive. History was narrowed to literary history. A goal of cultural materialism is to restore literary writing to the immediate social and political engagement that has previously and elsewhere been taken for granted, for instance, in the early-modern theatre. I can respect an argument that cultural materialism is not going to work. What is surely difficult to justify is that so many talented and dedicated students and colleagues should spend their lives on narrow conceptions of literary history and literary criticism.

Taking Shakespearean politics seriously is likely to involve a mixed judgement. If republicanism is to be implicitly endorsed through a connection with Shakespeare, and vice versa, then a cultural materialist may ask whether a limited monarchy and a careful widening of participation are truly progressive. He or she may note that they are often considered sufficient for client states overseas, racked with warfare, debt, AIDS, and other pressures of globalization. Such suffering, indeed, may be seen as one consequence of imperialist policies deployed through a largely republican world system, which leads to Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. The cultural materialist may wish to foreground the dangerous tendencies of contemporary republics such as the United States–their potential for narrowing into oligarchy, their dependence on big business, their need to mystify their peoples with religious and social fantasies, their readiness to withhold civil rights from citizens and human rights from humans, their reluctance to confine their operations within their frontiers, and their capacity to draft in client states.

Attempts at making literary and cultural work politically responsible are subject to coercive taunts of puritanism and political correctness. Jean Howard observes that ‘the professionalization of academic work’ makes ‘the expression of certain passions and commitments seem naive’, whereas critics who are comfortable within the dominant system ‘can appear to be above ideology and above unseemly commitments’; they are just talking sense (Howard 1994: 19–20). The dominant ideology, in a single sweep, naturalizes its own commitments and marginalizes others. If the professional code makes it hard to maintain the seriousness of our work, that makes it more important to persist.

2
Pastoral, *As You Like It*, and the Ideology of Literary History

At the start of the previous chapter I wrote sceptically of current critical movements–old historicism, spirituality, neurological determinism. Leafing through publishers' catalogues, the most common approach in the literature sections is literary history. This manifests a falling away from the broad ambitions of new historicism and cultural materialism; ambitions that expanded the kind of text that may operate as context, and undermined the priority of 'literature'. In literary history the acceptable context is other literary texts, allowing the advantages of historical location while preserving the transcendence of literature as a category. Here I discuss two problems with literary history, and how a cultural materialist might prefer to deal with them. The first is that it tends to take 'literature' for granted.

Both the principles that govern what is accepted as literature and decisions on particular texts are largely determined by powerful gatekeepers–publishers, reviewers, universities, examination boards, tourist boards, purveyors of national heritage. Individual critics may be influential if they gain institutional support. T.S. Eliot was able briefly to assert a literary tradition that includes Virgil, Dante and Goethe while ignoring most novels and almost everything written in the United States (Eliot 1962: 110–14). And will Harold Bloom be successful in his proclamation of a canon innocent of feminist writers? 'Even if one passionately agreed with the crusade against male human beings urged by Doris Lessing and Alice Walker, their rhetoric of exclusion gives no pleasure,' he declares (1995: 324).

Literary criticism is inclined to overlook the control of gatekeepers, preferring to suppose that *literature* identifies itself through its self-evident quality. Literary history tends to collude in this practice: its concern is either with the placing of texts that have already been identified, or with developing the category of the literary in line with customary criteria. This history claims to record the literary, but actually it is one way of fostering and asserting it. For it is part of the ideology of literature that while, inevitably, it occurs in history, it is not bound by the historical.

Indeed, the critic's task is to discern the transcendence of the texts that are to be allowed as literary.

E.M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* makes no bones about this:

> We are to visualize the English novelists not as floating down that stream which bears all its sons away unless they are careful, but as seated together in a room, a circular room, a sort of British Museum reading-room–all writing their novels simultaneously . . . History develops, Art stands still.
>
> (1974: 5, 13)

For Eliot, in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', it is 'the historical sense' that compels a man to write 'with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order' (1963: 23). Today, in the dominant ideology, the timelessness of literature seems no more than common sense: good poetry may (or may not) be written at any time; Shakespeare is great because his plays speak as forcefully today as they did in 1600.

As a kind of historian, the literary historian might seem to be committed to the registering of change, but s/he may still suppose that literature is basically timeless. For Alastair Fowler in his *History of English Literature,* the 'constant question' is 'How have the proportions between the various elements of literature changed?' (1987: vii). The elements appear to be constant, only the proportions vary. I want to explore the practices of literary history through an instance: the pastoral genre.

History and the timelessness of pastoral

Pastoral has been apprehended through literary-historical analysis, but it has often been esteemed for its representation of an allegedly trans-historical experience. 'The human creature's universal remembrance of a better time finds its chief expression in the myth of the golden age,' Peter Marinelli reports in his tidy summary for the first Critical Idiom series (1971: 15). Pastoral expresses a natural desire for simplicity and innocence, a golden age, a world of leisure, song and love.

For Marinelli, the spirit of pastoral is a constant. If disagreeables about property and sex trouble Virgil's *Eclogues*, Marinelli finds them 'resolved by the pastoral atmosphere itself' (p. 42). If Renaissance pastoral, such as Sidney's *Arcadia*, introduces tyrannical rulers and foolish locals, never mind: 'There is a spirituality, therefore, in Arcadian life that co-exists with coarseness and unuplifted crudity by which it remains untouched' (p. 61). Stanley Fish also

credits pastoral with trans-historical relevance. Noting that Theocritus already was removed from the scene he evoked, Fish draws a generic principle: 'What this means is that everyone who writes in the genre does so with a sense of belatedness, of having missed the beauty and equanimity of a form of life that can be invoked only after the fact of its passing' (1995: 7). Terry Gifford in the New Critical Idiom series takes a very wide definition of pastoral and a mainly instrumental view of its practice. Nonetheless, an implicit universal core may be discerned in his account of the traditional genre: 'For the reader or audience, this literary device involved some form of retreat and return, the fundamental pastoral movement' (1999: 1).

Pastoral, it would seem, is eternal; it scarcely needs history. Yet it has a great deal. It begins with some of the oldest writing in the western tradition (Theocritus); then we jump to another time and place with Virgil. Next, often via a forced reading of his fourth eclogue, we skip on into the Christian era, where shepherds may symbolize Jesus himself. Then Wordsworth, in opposition to the received mode, tries to write about real shepherds; yet that too may be regarded as kind of pastoral. Finally, we may be offered the pastoral of childhood, which coincides conveniently with the rural in *Cider with Rosie* (Laurie Lee) and *How Green Was My Valley* (Richard Llewellyn).

Of course, writers such as Spenser, Milton and Pope were highly conscious that they were drawing upon and extending the mode of their predecessors; I am not saying that literary historians have no basis for their sense of genre. What I mean to expose is their commitment to isolating an abiding essence of pastoral, despite and because of the diversity of its historical contexts. Laurence Lerner in *The Uses of Nostalgia* puts directly the claim for timelessness: 'The Golden Age, where pastoral takes place, . . . lies outside history: it is a dream, based perhaps on childhood, perhaps . . . on the dream alone.' Lerner concludes: 'Every generation is equidistant from Arcadia' (1972: 245–6).

Even commentators who extol the variety of pastoral writing generally posit a continuous core:

> What can be described and, at least in terms of coverage, with some neutrality, is what pastoral since Virgil can do and has always done; or rather, to put the agency back where it belongs–how writers, artists, and intellectuals of all persuasions have *used* pastoral for a range of functions and intentions that [Virgil's] *Eclogues* first articulated.
>
> (Patterson 1988: 7)

> The pastoral expresses attitudes as well as situations and in this regard has generally served two similar but distinguishable purposes. The

> first, which is the one most commonly associated with it, is to express an ideal or supposed ideal of life . . . The other main function is to offer a model of all human life, distanced, estranged, and clarified through the literary artificing.
>
> (Ettin 1984: 30)

The project, for these commentators, is to recognize historical sequence, but also the transcendence of that sequence; since, without such transcendence, the text is ultimately neither literary nor pastoral. Literary history is, centrally, the management of historical difference, in the interest of preserving the ultimate notional simultaneity of literary texts, and, beyond that, asserting that 'man' is essentially the same, however he tries to influence his situation.

The way to control this problem in the application of literary history is to write histories that are not immanent; that are not limited by the essentialist assumptions and expectations that collect around the category of the literary. Fowler, while tracing 'changes in kinds and forms', says that 'sometimes these have social or economic causes; but more often they are developments internal to literature' (1987: vii). My case is that the literary, itself, has to come under investigation.

It is reassuring to find that William Empson argued likewise in *Some Versions of Pastoral*, back in 1935. For Empson, 'literature is a social process, and also an attempt to reconcile the conflicts of an individual in whom those of society will be mirrored' (1968: 19). Thus he seeks to mediate between prevailing Marxist and humanist concepts of literature. Stressing the social and stylistic gap between the pastoral poet and the shepherds about whom he sings, Empson reads pastoral as a mechanism through which writers of a higher class flatter themselves, their patrons and their readers by patronizing people of a lower class (pp. 13–14). This effect is probably inevitable, once you allow that the artist is distinguished by his special sensitivity; it is the faultline upon which the aspiration for a 'proletarian literature' founders.

Thus, Empson uses pastoral not to support the idea of literary transcendence but to reflect on the conditions in which writing occurs in a class society. It is from this perspective that he is prepared to credit pastoral with something beyond history, 'a permanent truth about the aesthetic situation': this is that pastoral helps us to see that 'the artist never is at one with any public' (p. 14). This structural distance in the creative process might be offered as the deprivation which pastoral mourns, but Empson is unsentimental about it. His book will show how 'the same trick of thought, taking very different forms, is followed through a historical series' (p. 23).

Empson's hard look at the mechanisms of pastoral points us in the right direction (which is why most commentators on pastoral have found them-

selves able to do little with it). A couple of caveats. I do believe that we need the intrinsic skills of the literary historian; the way forward will be through an eclectic combining of diverse approaches. And I do recognize that many people have arrived at a compatible analysis without feeling obliged to abjure literary history; Jonathan Arac has pointed this out to me, and his own work is a case in point.[1] My critique concerns the viability of literary history *as such*.

Reading hierarchy in *As You Like It*

A second problem concerns the way literary history tends to efface other kinds of history. It is generally agreed that *As You Like It* is pastoral; often this speech is taken as the keynote:

> They say he [the exiled Duke Senior] is already in the Forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him; and there they live like the old Robin Hood of England. They say many young gentlemen flock to him every day, and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world.
>
> (Shakespeare 1975a: I.i.114–19)

The golden world of Robin Hood and his merry men offers a happy fantasy of equality, justice and self-sufficiency in a natural setting.

Paul Alpers, in his book *What Is Pastoral?*, prefers to emphasize the first speech of the banished Duke Senior. He asks his 'co-mates and brothers in exile' to agree that this life is 'more sweet / Than that of painted pomp', and that these woods are 'More free from peril than the envious court' (II.i.1–4). The Duke concludes:

> And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
> Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
> Sermons in stones, and good in everything.
>
> (II.i.15–17)

Alpers' point is that it is not 'idyllic nature', but 'a way of life' that marks the scene as pastoral. There is 'a felt obviousness in values and a shared sense of life' (Alpers 1996: 73). Whichever of these speeches we take as the keynote, the inference is that pastoral evokes a carefree life in which accumulation of wealth is unnecessary and hierarchy is unimportant. Gifford, similarly, perceives 'a court in exile based upon alternative values', values that 'can heal and transform' (1999: 86).

Yet neither the golden world nor the shared values account, altogether, for what we see. The forest people in *As You Like It* do not, actually, 'fleet

the time carelessly'. They have hierarchy, property and money, and give little serious thought to living without them. Orlando, despite his sturdy independence, would rather subject himself to his brother's malice than take to the roads without money; he has no intention of becoming a beggar or a thief. Luckily, he has old Adam's savings and service, so he can travel in the style of a gentleman. And it is lucky that Celia and Rosalind are able to bring with them jewels and wealth, for although the shepherd Corin would like to be hospitable, he is a landless labourer and his master is of a 'churlish disposition' (II.iv.78). The master is ready to sell the flock, land and cottage over Corin's head, though, so Celia and Rosalind can use their money to make themselves secure. Such concerns are anticipated by Virgil in his first and ninth eclogues but airbrushed out of most accounts of pastoral.

Orlando is surprised to find hospitality in the forest–he had expected to fight for resources. Even so, he does not encounter the golden-world, egalitarian spirit of Robin Hood. Rather, it is a traditional regime of *noblesse oblige*–Duke Senior and the other outlaws have food to spare because they have been enjoying the aristocratic sport of killing deer. Orlando evokes such a regime when Adam chips in his life-savings: the 'good old man' displays 'The constant service of the antique world, / When service sweat for duty, not for meed' (II.iii.56–58). This older system may be preferable to a free market in labour, 'Where none will sweat but for promotion' (II.iii.60). But those who serve sweat in either case.

Duke Frederick, the usurper, thinks at first that the outlaws can safely be left to themselves. He has their lands and revenues; when Orlando escapes he seizes his wealth. But soon men of worth are joining Duke Senior by the day, and Frederick has to send an army. For the outlaw band are not outside the state system; they are a government in waiting.

The forest does not represent an alternative, golden-world model of social organization, therefore, but an occasion for a miraculous change of heart in bad apples among the ruling elite–who remain, as a body, the only plausible government. The happy ending is not defined by the spirit of pastoral, but by the return of the exiles to their property and status in the proportions that they held before: Duke Senior invites them to share the good of his returned fortune 'According to the measure of their states' (V.iv.174). Better still, felicitous marriages will produce rich alliances.

It would take me too far from my main theme if I were to sketch with more precision how power relations obtrude into *As You Like It*. A good deal of this work has been done, following Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1975)–a founding text for cultural materialists. 'It is not easy to forget,' Williams says–though the point has in actuality been widely disregarded–'that Sidney's *Arcadia*, which gives a continuing title to English neo-pastoral, was written in a park which had been made by enclosing a whole village

and evicting the tenants.'[2] Louis Montrose, in one essay on *As You Like It* (1983), shows how the pastoral mode negotiates the changing class composition of early-modern society; he argues that pastoral obfuscates the contradiction between aristocratic privilege and concurrent religious assertions of common humanity. In another essay Montrose (1981) explores ways in which the love-comedy of the play is embedded in structures which aspired to contain women and reproduction within current patriarchal conventions. Richard Wilson, in his fine book *Will Power*, shows how we may glimpse through the court's opportunist sojourn in the forest an oblique version of the long-running conflict between central control and local resistance. The forests were at the margins of the state–uncultivated waste lands, or woodland reserved by the crown for hunting (the game the courtiers are killing probably belongs to the duke). The people living there were unregulated commoners and squatters, hardly accessible to the law. However, their ancient ways were under threat from entrepreneurs who wanted to enclose the land for pasture, take the wood for building and burning, extract the minerals for farming and for industry in more favoured regions (Wilson, R. 1993). What these analyses enable us to see is that pastoral is not just a literary genre, but an ideology implicated in the power structure. And this, it seems to me, is more important and more interesting than a purportedly universal yearning for a golden world.

To be sure, literary historians do not imagine that *As You Like It* simply celebrates pastoral. Lerner finds an 'anti-pastoral' undercurrent–'a balance between the play's official self and its undercurrents'. However, the play remains pastoral 'on the deepest level' (Lerner 1972: 23). Alpers too remarks discordances, but he believes that '*As You Like It* can end both conventionally and satisfactorily, because the play throughout is attentive to the motives and powers of pastoral convention.' It 'continually moves to attune what is discordant or dissonant, thus taking up a pastoral endeavor' (Alpers 1996: 130, 132). Gifford sees 'economic realities' in Arden; it is 'a borderland space'. Finally, though, 'the repeated word "measure" endorses the notion of balance and harmony which dominates the return' (Gifford 1999: 84, 88). Renato Poggioli in *The Oaten Flute* notes that for Corin not to grant hospitality to Rosalind and Celia 'is unique in the whole bucolic tradition. This episode shows that there are Arcadias where man may be as churlish as the wind' (Poggioli 1975: 38). Poggioli's observation might point us towards the power hierarchy in the forest, but he doesn't pursue the topic. Like pastoral itself, literary history, trapped in its own conditions of operation, tries to hold us within the experience of the forest, rather than addressing the determinants that make the forest what it is.

Unlike most of the other commentators I have discussed, Poggioli does mention same-gender themes in pastoral, though dismissively (p. 15). Ettin

gives a page to sexualities, suggesting that pastoral 'expresses the conventionally "feminine" part of the human temperament' and hence 'has been taken to be a minor genre appropriate for the young writer' (1984: 149). The capacity of literary history to suppress such an embarrassing factor may illustrate conclusively its triviality as an intellectual discipline.

I do accept that *As You Like It* explores a version of the pastoral convention and that Elizabethans would have appreciated this. It is a comedy, and has a happy ending (along with that touch of so-called realism–the recalcitrance of Jacques–which humanistic criticism apprehends as a peculiar wisdom). Alpers contrasts Duke Senior with two other exiled rulers. In *King Lear* a monarch and his supporters are expelled onto the heath and siblings fall out, and the issue is fighting and death; in *The Tempest* comparable threats are contained within an ultimately benign framework and resolved by magic. These are the modes of tragedy and romance. Because *As You Like It* is a pastoral–this is Alpers' point–we are to apprehend Duke Senior differently from Lear, and also from Prospero (who 'remains a monarch even in exile'). The pastoral spirit encourages us to accept that the bad duke and the bad brother may be miraculously converted when they reach the margins of the wood (Alpers 1996: 73). The power structure is not a problem.

Unlike Alpers, I do not feel obliged to confine my account within the spirit of pastoral. I want to activate the sense in which Duke Senior *is* like Lear and Prospero. Reading partly against the grain, partly with an unaccustomed emphasis, I want to foreground aspects of the politics of the text that might otherwise be masked. I want to get the text to disclose its gaps and silences, in the way proposed by Pierre Macherey and discussed in my opening chapter. It is not just a matter of doing *more* history, but of *reading in* histories which the text seems scarcely to recognize, and may be contriving actively to disavow. The questions I have been asking about power and hierarchy in *As You Like It* are prompted by the very processes through which ideas of 'Robin Hood', 'the golden world', and 'good in everything' are propounded. The ideology which tends to mystify power may be made to display its operations. Despite Rosalind's interventions in the marriage prospects of the court and forest people, she herself remains her father's to 'bestow' (V.iv.7), and when she stops belonging to him Orlando will 'have her' (V.iv.9). The freedoms she has briefly exercised point up her anticipated return to convention. Pastoral closure depends on customary notions of the woman's submission in marriage, and cannot but allow us to glimpse oppressive gender hierarchies. Again, the servant Adam may figure the 'The constant service of the antique world', yet, in an astounding piece of bardic neglect, the 'good old man' simply disappears from the play when Orlando finds someone more amusing to talk

with (II.iii.56–7). Chekhov makes a similar incident a piercing comment on aristocratic selfishness, when the aged servant is forgotten by the family at the end of *The Cherry Orchard*.

Always candid in confronting an opposition, Lerner does see that pastoral, and nature poetry in general, might prompt some consideration of 'political economy'. But he will not pursue that, he says: it would be 'too vast, and too far from poetry to be feasible or useful' (Lerner 1972: 40). Empson, while acknowledging that works of art 'carry an implication about the society they were written for', denies that he is 'trying to say anything about the politics and economics' (Empson 1968: 20, 22). I reply that it is true that we cannot address such matters with professional rigour; at the same time, however, it is politically and morally indefensible to ignore their importance. Ambitious though it is, exploration of the intersection between literary and other texts, and the political, economic and social histories that they invoke, is a task for cultural materialists. So literary history gives way to cultural history.

Recently Marshall Brown has put together a collection of essays, *The Uses of Literary History*. In his Preface, Brown observes that history generally, as a mode of apprehension, is dominant in our cultures. So 'why *literary* history?' he asks himself. 'Because the real needs a counterweight if we are to enjoy it,' he replies. 'History looms too large–too large to be seen or felt in itself. Human expressions [art and literature, he means] do not so much make history as make history human' (Brown, M. 1995: vii). In other words, literary history embodies a nostalgic wish to retreat from history and the world, into a simpler state of cultural awareness, in which the individual literary text may be imagined as self-sufficient; and a sequence of such texts may be offered as a free-standing tradition. Literary history yearns for a world before history, theory and politics. It is a version of pastoral.

3
Poetaster, the Author, and the Perils of Cultural Production

Old poets and new critics

Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* (performed by the Children of Queen Elizabeth's Chapel at Blackfriars in 1601) promises rewarding opportunities for materialists of all kinds, in its barbed exploration of current cultural preoccupations through the literary scene of Augustan Rome. At its notorious climax, Crispinus, a writer who has offended the establishment, is made to vomit into a bowl his fustian words–'turgidous', 'oblatrant', 'furibund', 'prorumped' – culminating in 'Snarling gusts', 'quaking custard' and 'obstupefact'.[1] Language here–the ultimate raw material of culture–seems material enough. But what happens to Crispinus is relevant also in a cultural materialist sense: this purgation is inflicted by the literary and political establishment. It is proposed by Horace, urged by Virgil, and enforced by Caesar:

> O be his Aesculapius, gentle Horace;
> You shall have leave, and he shall be your patient.
> Virgil, use your authority, command him forth.
>
> (V.iii.390–2)

Cultural and state authority link arms; culture is material because it is determined in the networks of power that license and restrain ideological production. *Poetaster* opens up the role of the literary intellectual in the state, both in early-modern England and in aspects of the formation of literary studies today.

Crispinus is by no means the only writer to face punishment, or the threat of it, in *Poetaster*. Initially, when the scene opens to discover Ovid in his study, speaking in lofty terms of poetry, it is reasonable to suppose that he is a figure for the proper poet–as against the 'petty poet' of the title. Algernon Charles Swinburne complained that this was the obvious reading; the old Mermaid edition actually supplies 'Ben Jonson' in editorial parentheses after Ovid's name in the Dramatis Personae.[2] Ovid is criticized

by his father, first on the grounds that stage plays corrupt young gentry (he replies that he does not write for the theatre), then because poetry is an unprofitable occupation–even Homer was poor. But none of this seems to constitute a strong case against Ovid, and the gulling of his father by the flamboyant Captain Tucca doesn't seem calculated to increase our respect for Ovid Senior. When Ovid reveals to Tibullus that his 'Corinna' is in fact the emperor's daughter Julia, this may seem dangerous, but hardly disgraceful.

In Act II Crispinus appears, among what David Riggs terms 'a circle of sleazy urban social climbers'; plainly, he *is* a petty poet (Riggs 1989: 75). In Act III, Crispinus pesters Horace, who evidently is the figure closest to Jonson, and a plot is laid–a play maligning Horace. In Act IV, Ovid runs into trouble. Together with Julia, the poets Tibullus and Gallus, Tucca, Crispinus and the middle-class people they have picked up, Ovid stages an irreverent banquet of the gods, with the goal of enacting comprehensive adultery. The banquet is reported to Caesar by the magistrate Lupus, who hears of it from the players. Caesar is so enraged that he offers to kill his daughter; Maecenas and Horace intervene. However, they cannot dissuade Caesar from banishing Ovid from the court. Without goodness, Caesar says, bounty would be wasted. Poets are not privileged:

> This shows their knowledge is mere ignorance,
> Their far-fetched dignity of soul a fancy,
> And all their square pretext of gravity
> A mere vainglory.
>
> (IV.vi.69–72)

For modern critics, this is the crux of the play: to us, Ovid is undoubtedly a true poet; how far may his banishment be justified?

Commentators have wanted to suppose that Caesar is right. After all, in the last part of the play he endorses Horace, and especially Virgil, so perhaps he is the wise 'Augustan' ruler who (like us) appreciates poetry. Jonathan Bate supposes that Jonson's 'ideal for the function of poetry is the Augustanism of Virgil' (1993: 169). Anne Barton holds that Ovid defiles his poetry by failing as a man:

> In the end he must be exiled from the court while Horace and Virgil take their places on either side of Caesar as counsellors and friends . . . Ovid's clandestine passion for Caesar's daughter Julia annihilates him both personally and as a poet. Moreover, it leads him to defile his own high calling . . . Ovid distorts the proper function of art when he devises a blasphemous banquet of the gods.
>
> (1984: 82)

This seems a bit austere; it was only a party. But the big problem with such a reading is that Horace himself says Ovid's offence is trivial. 'Was this the treason, this the dangerous plot[?]' Horace demands of Lupus:

> Hadst thou no other project to increase
> Thy grace with Caesar, but this wolfish train,
> To prey upon the life of innocent mirth
> And harmless pleasures, bred of noble wit?
>
> (IV.viii.8–13)

Caesar and Horace are at odds–and the issue is not incidental. It is focused, specifically, on the relations between poetry and state power.

Howard Erskine-Hill's attempt to confront this difficulty is not very convincing: 'Horace may be right to defend his friends in this way, but Augustus may at the same time be right to punish Ovid and Julia.'[3] Such a compromise may be adequate for most of us, but Erskine-Hill raises the stakes. He wants to attribute to Jonson *Augustinianism*, which he glosses as 'the Christian Humanist view' of Caesar. This view 'is prepared to accept the evidence of the Augustan poets and to identify the rule of Augustus with a flourishing of the arts' (1983: 109). For this elevated project, it doesn't seem good enough to dismiss Horace's stated judgment–on the banishing of Ovid and the proper scope for poetry–as biased by personal friendship.

The 'Augustinian' combining of imperial and cultural authority evidently constitutes an ideal condition for Erskine-Hill; Augustus 'would not be content with easy propaganda alone, but with that most effective of propaganda: the vision that is instinct in deeply felt, carefully worked and lasting art,' he declares (p. 16). From a cultural materialist perspective, however, an ideal unity of ideology and the state is hardly to be desired or attained. First, the goal, surely, is not to have tyrants getting authoritative advice–improbably enough, from poets–on whether to kill or banish people, but to develop in any community fair and reasonable political structures for dealing with attempts to change its cultural boundaries. Second, ideal unities can only be ideological manipulations; as I have argued, a dominant formation, inevitably, produces conflicts and contradictions–'faultlines'–within itself, even in the processes through which it strives to sustain itself (Sinfield 1992).

Erskine-Hill says he believes in 'the principle of truth as the end of scholarship'; he has 'no interest in the production of subjective myth in the guise of criticism'–unlike some unspecified others (p. xiii). Erskine-Hill does have a position, though. He attributes a modern belief in the universality of art both to the Roman emperor and to early-modern representations of him, and allows that to legitimate an undemocratic political structure. He is

drawing Jonson into a complicity that is surprisingly consonant with the late-lamented Elizabethan world picture: an ideology convenient to state power is credited to the writer, admired as the wisdom of the ages, and confirmed as the voice of humanity. So we have this interesting situation: while cultural materialists are anxious about whether cultural producers can ever escape ideological complicity with the state, senior colleagues in English (Erskine-Hill, Barton, Bate) are looking for an ideal collaboration of writer and ruler.

A dangerous age

In my view, Norbert H. Platz was on the right track in his 1973 article on *Poetaster*: 'Ovid is not banished because he is a bad man,' Platz says, 'but because he has fallen victim to an informant who seeks advancement at Court' (1973: 17). Malignant informing is signalled as a preoccupation at the start of the play, when Envy threatens to blast the audience's pleasures

> With wrestings, comments, applications,
> Spy-like suggestions, privy whisperings,
> And thousand such promoting sleights as these.
> (Induction, 24–6)

The Prologue enters armed, for

> 'tis a dangerous age,
> Wherein who writes had need present his scenes
> Forty-fold proof against the conjuring means
> Of base detractors and illiterate apes.
> (Induction, 67–70)

Ovid is banished because the emperor is influenced by these people. However, Platz believes that the second part of *Poetaster* presents a different, more 'Augustinian' idea of Caesar:

> Whereas in the earlier part of the play the Prince is the type of monarch whom Jonson as a poet actually had to cope with, at the end he becomes the ideal centre of a utopian realm, a kind of wishful projection into the future.

Platz does not try to fix up this split; he says Caesar exhibits 'a break in characterization' (p. 19–20). That is not intrinsically unlikely; not expecting texts to manifest an ideal continuity is a key step in a cultural materialist

analysis. However, I think the emperor's tyrannical tendencies are apparent throughout.

Informers were crucial to the regime in Jonson's England; he knew well several who had contributed to the suppression of the recent Essex rebellion (see Cain 1995: 40–4). We should envision Jonson working over a complexly challenging body of historical material, only too aware that it was highly pertinent to his circumstances and that, in the hothouse of the London political elite, a step too far would incur the wrath of the state. Even if he did mean, in some measure, to celebrate state power, the material he was re-presenting *could not but* yield more complex readings. However, I think we may go further, and attribute to *Poetaster* a project more demanding than Augustinianism. By establishing Virgil as the writer who figures the unity of the state and cultural production, Jonson gains space to suggest a different, emergent possibility: Horace as the voice of a critical authorial function.

Caesar's view, propounded at the start of Act V, is that poesy is justified when it contributes to the legitimation of the state:

> She can so mould Rome and her monuments
> Within the liquid marble of her lines
> That they shall stand fresh and miraculous,
> Even when they mix with innovating dust.
> In her sweet streams shall our brave Roman spirits
> Chase and swim after death with their choice deeds
> Shining on their white shoulders; and therein
> Shall Tiber and our famous rivers fall
> With such attraction, that th' ambitious line
> Of the round world shall to her centre shrink
> To hear their music. And for these high parts
> Caesar shall reverence the Pierian arts.
>
> (V.i.21–32)

Cultural achievement is inseparable, for Caesar, from the state and imperial domination.

In fact, Caesar is interested in only one poem, Virgil's *Aeneid*. In a scene which anticipates Lear's demand for his daughters' love, Horace, Gallus and Tibullus are required by Caesar to say what they think of Virgil. In this instance, no one is so foolish as to step out of line. Caesar is pleased:

> This one consent, in all your dooms of him,
> And mutual loves of all your several merits,
> Argues a truth of merit in you all.
>
> (V.i.139–41)

They have merit when they agree with Caesar. Caesar honours Virgil by making him take a higher chair, but Virgil does not imagine that Caesar relinquishes any authority thereby: 'Great Caesar hath his will: I will ascend' (V.ii.48).

By just so much as this oppressive imperial programme tries to squeeze out the critical authorial voice, by just that much such a voice is needed. Horace is actually seen to correct Caesar on one matter: he repudiates the emperor's supposition that as the poorest he is 'likeliest to envy or to detract' (V.i.78). In response, Caesar thanks him for his 'free and wholesome sharpness, / Which pleaseth Caesar more than servile fawns' (V.i.94–5). However, Horace was hardly confronting imperial power, and the perils of 'free and wholesome sharpness' are quickly indicated. Virgil's reading from the *Aeneid* is interrupted by another intrusion from Lupus and his friends: Horace has to defend himself against a charge that he has authored a lampoon hostile to Caesar. Fortunately there is an explanation: the emblem which Lupus says is an eagle, signifying Augustinian rapacity, lacks its interpretive verse. When Horace supplies this, the eagle may be seen as a vulture–'*Thus oft the base and ravenous multitude / Survive to share the spoils of fortitude*' (V.iii.76–7). This leads to the punishment of those who brought the charge, culminating in Crispinus' vomiting of words.

Virgil declares that Caesar's punishments are right, but takes opportunity to justify the Horatian critical voice:

> 'Tis not the wholesome sharp morality
> Or modest anger of a satiric spirit
> That hurts or wounds the body of a state,
> But the sinister application
> Of the malicious ignorant and base
> Interpreter, who will distort and strain
> The general scope and purpose of an author
> To his particular and private spleen.
>
> (V.iii.132–9)

This politic speech effaces what actually makes malicious interpretations so crucial: the regime of state terror that depends upon a system of informers and arbitrary penalties. Horace's self-defence allows us to see this:

> A just man cannot fear, thou foolish tribune,
> Not though the malice of traducing tongues,
> The open vastness of a tyrant's ear,
> The senseless rigour of the wrested laws,
> Or the red eyes of strained authority,

Should, in a point, meet all to take his life.
His innocence is armour 'gainst all these.

(V.iii.57–63)

According to this speech, the life of the satirist is threatened when several things 'in a point, meet all', and only one of them is to do with his fellow citizens–'the malice of traducing tongues'. The others are to do with the state–'The open vastness of a tyrant's ear', 'The senseless rigour of the wrested laws', 'the red eyes of strained authority'. It is tyrannical state power that sustains the system–'worldly tyranny', Julia calls it (IV.x.58). This insight informs also Jonson's *Sejanus* (1603); and compare my discussion of *Measure for Measure* in Chapter 10. Punishing the little men only extends the terror. That is why it was important for Horace to deny that as the poorest he is 'likeliest to envy or to detract' (V.i.78); he cannot afford to become linked in the imperial mind with the lower orders upon whom blame is displaced and punishment heaped.

What is an author?

Poetaster seems thoroughly to illustrate Foucault's kind of analysis in 'What Is an Author?' where it is suggested that the author emerged as a distinct role when he 'became subject to punishment and to the extent that his discourse was considered transgressive' (Foucault 1977: 124). Foucault is still sometimes accused of proclaiming 'the death of the author'–for instance, by Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon* (1995: 39, 60). Foucault's argument, however, is that the figure of the author is very much alive, and performing a range of material functions within our culture, particularly in respect of the (perceived) ownership of writing. (See pp. 10–14 above.)

Chaucer, Langland, Gower and Skelton manifest aspects of the author function as we recognize it today, but plainly printing, the development of London, and the commercial organization of theatre, occurring together, made early-modern England one place where modern ideas of the relations between writers and texts got constituted. Jonson's publication of his collected works is generally acknowledged to be a landmark; Jonathan Haynes adduces also the War of the Theatres, of which *Poetaster* was a part: by its end, 'the contemporary London setting, the audience, and the figure of the playwright had all been newly defined and were newly visible to one another' (Haynes 1992: 89). Of course, as Richard Helgerson notes, Roman ideas and Jonson's were by no means the same (1983: 2–3). The usefulness of classical models resided, precisely, in the interpretive gap that challenged Jonson and his audience to make sense of their own developing reality in newly emergent material conditions.

For the emergence of the author should not be supposed to occur without conflict or contradiction; in fact, *Poetaster* should be read as a complex intervention in a confused situation. Recent studies of Jonson's authorship dwell upon his self-validation, his dependence on social hierarchy and the state, his ultimate complicity in the system. This is almost the Jonson of Barton and Erskine-Hill, in less favourable phraseology; I am thinking of important work by Don Wayne, Richard Helgerson, Jonathan Goldberg, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White.[4] I began looking at *Poetaster* in this frame of mind. However, the play is dedicated to the man who interceded on its behalf with 'the greatest Justice of this kingdom', so evidently it was not received as altogether complicit with the state; its concluding 'Apologetical Dialogue' was banned; and, as Richard Burt points out, it quotes courageously from work by Marlowe and Marston that had been called in and burned in 1599 (Burt 1993: 6). Some time after the 1602 Quarto, Jonson strengthened the concept of the satirist in the text by adding Act III, scene v, which translates Horace's Book II, Satire 1. What I now see is Jonson taking up the challenge, in his context, of authorizing the Horatian writer as a critical voice.

As Jonson's play shows very well, the concept of the writer is not just an idea. Its emergence supposes an opportunity in the prevailing institutional structure. As Stallybrass and White say, the idea of the author 'was only locatable, "groundable," through its symbolic relation to existing hierarchies, existing languages, symbols and practices of high and low' (Stallybrass and White 1986: 74–5). In fact, we may distinguish four *locations*: state servant, court or gentry amateur, writer under patronal protection, and writer in the market. The pattern would look rather different if it were elaborated to include the scope for women writers, but since Jonson doesn't broach that I will not attempt it here. *Poetaster*, in effect, assesses these four locations. I have dwelt upon Jonson's wariness about the writer in the service of the state. The court or gentry amateur is represented by Ovid, a younger son who disdains 'gold or titles' and proclaims 'the high raptures of a happy Muse, / Born on the wings of her immortal thought' (I.ii.252, 244–5). Also there are Gallus and Tibullus, but the play shows little interest in them. Horace is not of this provenance; he is the poorest of the writers, he says. In 'To Penshurst', what is striking is how little Jonson's poem says about that most famous amateur, Sir Philip Sidney: he is mentioned only by way of a catalogue of trees in the park–'That taller tree, which of a nut was set, / At his great birth, where all the Muses met' (Jonson 1954: 77). Jonson cannot *be* the Sidneys because he wants to be *paid by* them.

For while Horace is seen, uneasily, in the service of the state, his preferred location is the writer under patronal protection. He declares the house of Maecenas, his patron, a detraction-free zone:

> That place is not in Rome, I dare affirm,
> More pure, or free from such low, common evils.
> There's no man grieved, that this is thought more rich,
> Or this more learned; each man hath his place,
> And to his merit, his reward of grace,
> Which with a mutual love they all embrace.
>
> (III.i.250–5)

In Rome, as Jonson represents it, this is a magical space. What is perhaps disappointing is that, probably because the topic was so sensitive, no gap is allowed to appear between Horace and Maecenas. This lack of friction, indeed of event, weakens the patron as a presence in the play. It is implausible as well: Helgerson and Tom Cain note the importance of patrons to Jonson, and how systematically he fell out with them.[5]

The market, here as elsewhere, is rejected by Jonson insofar as it supports what he regards as the trivializing pressures of the public playhouses. He distinguishes on the one hand Histrio's theatre company, which is amply responsive to vulgar taste (they 'have as much ribaldry in our plays as can be, as you would wish, captain'), and on the other theatres where they do 'humours, revels and satires that gird and fart at the time'–Jonson's more ambitious and critical type of theatre. 'They are on the other side of Tiber' (III.iv.194–8). Yet *Poetaster* is itself a market product; like many of Jonson's plays, it communicates the excitement of writing for the popular London theatre. Jonson's pitch is that he transcends its intrigues–'His mind it is above their injuries,' the Prologue says (Induction, 89). But it is not so. As much as any of Jonson's work, *Poetaster* keeps falling back–vividly and intriguingly–into the market vulgarity from which it purports to separate itself. As Riggs puts it, Jonson's version of himself as the English Horace, with Dekker and Marston as mere hacks, 'was so successful that one tends to overlook the basic similarities between the poet and the poetasters' (Riggs 1989: 78). If Crispinus' language is crude, so is Jonson's device of making him vomit it up on stage; or looking at it the other way round, Jonson's device shows as much inventive exuberance as the marvellous verbal excesses of Crispinus.

While these four locations offer material groundings for an author function, none of them, of itself, quite specifies a space for a critical stance. That would require not only location, but distanciation; not only identification, but a perspective upon that identification. For, as Louis Montrose observes:

> The possibility of social and political agency cannot be based upon the illusion that consciousness is a condition somehow beyond ideology.

> However, the very process of subjectively *living* the confrontations or contradictions *within* or *among* ideological formations may make it possible for us to experience facets of our own subjection at shifting internal distances–to read, as in a refracted light, one fragment of our ideological inscription by means of another.
>
> (1996: 16)

Distanciation comes with liminality; if Philip Sidney, say, achieved a critical perspective upon aspects of his society, it was at the junctures between his (likely) allegiances to the throne, the administration, the higher gentry, and militant Protestantism. Yet these liminal locations would still not produce the critical stance as an authorial function; that would come with an awareness of the writer *as writer*.

At this point, Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of ideological production as *doubly determined* is valuable. It suggests that we should expect texts to be responsive not only to the interests they (ostensibly) serve, but also to the interests of those who produce them.[6] Sidney, therefore, would manifest the concerns not only of his diverse socio-political allegiances, but also of *the writer as such*, as a distinct social category. This is likely to occur when, as in early-modern England, the idea of the writer is, itself, provisional and riven by unstable boundaries. As the different concepts of the author jostle together (and Jonson, like Shakespeare, occupied three of the four locations), the writer as such is able to emerge. And as this figure produces a distance between the writer and the circumstance of writing, a critical authorial function becomes locatable.

In a complementary movement, writing comes under pressure: it is promoted and restrained by the state, solicited and rejected in the market. For the courtier, it is a sign of accomplishment but also of triviality; for the writer under patronage it is a chance for fame or poverty. Above all, writing becomes subject to state vigilance. The accusation founded on Horace's unfinished emblem is a close call. An eagle (Caesar) might look like a vulture (the multitude), and either might plausibly be represented as feeding on the carcass of an ass. And which did Horace mean? It is entirely plausible that he designed a satire on imperial exploitation, and saves himself with a quick-witted reinterpretation. In support of the latter view, we may notice that his claim that the ass represents 'the spoils of fortitude' (V.iii.76) seems strained; it would be more sensible if it were the people, preyed upon by the emperor. Nor is there any suggestion that Maecenas can protect Horace, any more than he could protect Ovid. Under such pressures, early-modern writers were well placed to apprehend power relations, and the precariousness of that apprehension, in turn, reinscribes the distance that produces a critical authorial function. The Horatian critique of Augustan tyranny is developed not out of Erskine-Hill's 'vision that is

instinct in deeply felt, carefully worked and lasting art' (1983: 16) but from Horace's material experience of the perils of the critical writer's location.

Two further considerations. First, none of this means that writers were prevented from aligning their ideological concerns with, or submerging them in, those of a social grouping (though a cultural materialist would expect to discern faultlines in any such project). As Jonson's anatomy suggests, diverse kinds of relation were possible. But the conditions were there for writers to find themselves at points of relative, writerly, autonomy. Second, it must be said that there is no disrespect in *Poetaster* toward the writer of the *Aeneid*; on the contrary, Virgil is made to endorse the Horatian stance, perhaps recognizing it as the necessary complement to his own. But what should we expect? Today a writer can live in London and be only occasionally aware of the system and panoply of government. Jonson's London was not only smaller, and its elite more integrated; there was less reticence about surveillance, conspicuous consumption and other mechanisms of power. There were all those people staggering around branded and flogged, with their noses slit, joints wracked, hands, tongues and ears cut off. Of course it was sensible to align yourself as a writer in the service of the state if you got the chance.

The wrong poet?

I have chosen to discuss *Poetaster* because it enables me to reinflect some important discussions about the material role of the author. It opens up another question: sexuality. As I remark elsewhere in this book, prestigious classical writing was planting non-Christian models of same-gender passion in early-modern Europe. Virgil's second *Eclogue* is about the love of Corydon for Alexis, and Augustus was accused of prostituting himself to Julius Caesar and to the Governor-General of Spain. Horace, Bruce R. Smith remarks, 'writes about sexual desire between males with a matter-of-factness that avoids romanticizing that desire no less than it refuses to be embarrassed by it' (1991: 228). The only trouble, Horace says, is that love gets in the way of writing:

> O Pettius, no more do I delight as formerly to write my verses, for I am stricken with the heavy dart of Love, yea of Love who seeks to kindle me beyond all others with passion for tender boys and maids.

Here, in Epode II:11, it is passion for a boy:

> Affection for Lyciscus now enthralls me, for Lyciscus, who claims in tenderness to outdo any woman, and from whom no friends' frank

> counsels or stern reproaches have power to set me free, but only another flame, either for some fair maid or slender youth, with long hair gathered in a knot.
>
> (Horace 1934: Epode II:11)

Eva Cantarella terms this 'a recurrent theme in the output of this poet, who likes to present himself as easy meat for *mille puellarum mille puerorum*: a thousand tormented loves both for young girls and for young boys' (1992: 140).

To be sure, neither Horace nor the other reputable characters in *Poetaster* talk about same-gender relations; indeed, in contradistinction to the low-life characters, Horace and Virgil should perhaps be seen as exercising a wise discretion. My point is not that Jonson has specially chosen a bisexual to represent his preferred poetic voice, but that invoking the classical world brings sexuality closer to the top of the agenda. The treatment of same-gender passion in this play is notably casual. When Tucca's pages perform well, Histrio offers to hire them. 'No, you mangonising slave, I will not part from 'em. You'll sell 'em for engles, you' (III.iv.277–8). Tucca wants a convincing performance from his page at the banquet of the gods:

> Sirrah, boy; catamite! Look you play Ganymede well now, you slave. Do not spill your nectar; carry your cup even: so. You should have rubbed your face with whites of eggs, you rascal, . . . or ha' steeped your lips in wine, till you made 'em so plump, that Juno might have been jealous of 'em. [*To Chloe*] Punk, kiss me punk!
>
> (IV.v.65–72)

Cain, editing the Revels edition, inserts '[*To Chloe*]' before the last sentence–before 'Punk, kiss me punk!'–so that Tucca will be kissing Chloe, not the page (which actually seems to follow better). It hardly matters who gets the kiss though, since the juxtaposition is likely anyway to enhance awareness that Chloe also is a boy actor and hence subject (in the terms proposed by the play) to treatment as a theatre ingle.

Even so, we should remark that the Roman poet who carried a torch, quite distinctively, for *cross-gender passion*–approximately, heterosexuality–was Ovid. The *Amores* focus on relations between the lover and his mistress, with scarcely an aside about same-gender relations. The speaker in the *Ars Amatoria* declares: 'I hate a union that exhausts not both: / To fondle boys it's this that makes me loth' (Ovid 1962: II, 683–4). This is remarkable because it is Ovid who is banished in *Poetaster*. Have not Jonson, then, and the emperor, banished the 'wrong' poet–the heterosexual? The answer, which I pursue in later chapters, is that unlicensed

cross-gender relations were regarded as more dangerous than private, same-gender liaisons. When he consorts with Augustus' daughter in the banquet of the gods, Ovid challenges the material power of fathers and husbands at its ultimate patriarchal reference point, Caesar. That is the unpardonable offence.

4
How to Read *The Merchant of Venice* Without Being Heterosexist

It has been recognized for a long time that *The Merchant of Venice* is experienced as insulting by Jewish people, who constitute a minority in Western Europe and North America. So powerful, though, is the reputation of Shakespeare's all-embracing 'humanity' that this scandal has often been set aside. Nevertheless, in 1994, a newspaper article entitled 'Shylock, Unacceptable Face of Shakespeare?' described how directors were acknowledging that the text requires radical alterations before it can be produced in good faith (Lister 1994). David Thacker at the Royal Shakespeare Company was changing some of Shylock's most famous lines and moving scenes around. And Jude Kelly at the West Yorkshire Playhouse was presenting a Portia ready to embrace racist attitudes in her determination to be worthy of her father and a Jessica weeping inconsolably as she laments her loss of her Jewish heritage.

For some commentators, it is a sign of the deterioration of our cultures that minority out-groups should feel entitled to challenge the authority of Shakespeare. Christopher Booker, writing in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1992, complained bitterly about an English Shakespeare Company production of the *Merchant* set in 1930s Italy, with Shylock as a suave, sophisticated modern Jewish businessman confronted by fascists. 'In other words,' Booker writes, 'the producer had given up on any distasteful (but Shakespearian) idea of presenting Shylock as an archetypal cringing old miser. He really had to be more sympathetic than the "Christians."' To Booker (1992), this was 'bleatings about racism', whereas 'Shakespeare so wonderfully evokes something infinitely more real and profound . . . a cosmic view of human nature which is just as true now as it was in his own day'.

The problem is not limited to Jewish people. The Prince of Morocco is made to begin by apologizing for his colour–'Mislike me not for my complexion,' he pleads, taking it for granted that Portia will be prejudiced (Shakespeare 1959: II.i.1). And he is right, for already she has declared her

distaste: 'if he have the condition of a saint, and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive me than wive me' (I.ii.123–5); and after Morocco has bet on the wrong casket she concludes: 'Let all of his complexion choose me so' (II.vii.79). And how might gay men regard the handling of Antonio's love for Bassanio, or the traffic in boys that involves Launcelot, the disguised Jessica, the disguised Nerissa and the disguised Portia?

The question of principle is how readers not situated squarely in the mainstream of western culture today may relate to such a powerful cultural icon as Shakespeare. In a notable formulation, Kathleen McLuskie points out that the pattern of 'good' and 'bad' daughters in *King Lear* offers no point of entry to the ideas about women that a feminist criticism might want to develop; such criticism 'is restricted to exposing its own exclusion from the text'.[1] This challenge has caused some discomfort: must exclusion from Shakespeare be added to the other disadvantages that women experience in our societies? But it has not, I think, been successfully answered. In this chapter I pursue the question as it strikes a gay man.

Antonio vs Portia

As W.H. Auden suggested in an essay in *The Dyer's Hand*, the *The Merchant of Venice* makes best sense if we regard Antonio as in love with Bassanio.[2] In the opening scene their friends hint broadly at it. Then, as soon as Bassanio arrives, the others know they should leave the two men together– 'We leave you now with better company . . . My Lord Bassanio, since you have found Antonio / We two will leave you' (I.i.59, 69–70). Only Gratiano is slow to go, being too foolish to realize that he is intruding (I.i.73–118). As soon as he departs, the tone and direction of the dialogue switch from formal banter to intimacy, and the cause of Antonio's sadness emerges:

> Well, tell me now what lady is the same
> To whom you swore a secret pilgrimage–
> That you to-day promis'd to tell me of?
>
> (I.i.119–21)

Bassanio moves quickly to reassure his friend and to ask his help: 'to you, Antonio / I owe the most in money and in love' (I.i.130–1). The mercenary nature of Bassanio's courtship, which troubles mainstream commentators who are looking for a 'good' heterosexual relationship, is Antonio's reassurance. It allows him to believe that Bassanio will continue to value their love, and gives him a crucial role as banker of the enterprise.

Whether Antonio's love is what we call sexual is a question which, this chapter will show, is hard to frame, let alone answer. But certainly his feelings are intense. When Bassanio leaves for Belmont, as Salerio describes it, he offers to 'make some speed / Of his return.' 'Do not so,' Antonio replies:

> And even there (his eye being big with tears),
> Turning his face, he put his hand behind him,
> And with affection wondrous sensible
> He wrung Bassanio's hand, and so they parted.
> (II.viii.37–8, 46–9)

The intensity, it seems, is not altogether equal. As Auden observes in his poem 'The More Loving One', the language of love celebrates mutuality but it is unusual for two people's loves to match precisely: 'If equal affection cannot be, / Let the more loving one be me' (Auden 1969: 282). Antonio the merchant, like Antonio in *Twelfth Night* and the Shakespeare of the sonnets, devotes himself to a relatively casual, pampered younger man of a higher social class.

In fact, Antonio in the *Merchant* seems to welcome the chance to sacrifice himself: 'pray God Bassanio come / To see me pay his debt, and then I care not' (III.iii.35–6). *Then* Bassanio would have to devote himself to Antonio: 'You cannot better be employ'd, Bassanio, / Than to live still and write mine epitaph.' (IV.i.117–18). As Keith Geary observes, Antonio's desperate bond with Shylock is his way of holding on to Bassanio (Geary 1984); when Portia saves Antonio's life, Lawrence W. Hyman remarks, she is preventing what would have been a spectacular case of the 'greater love' referred to in the Bible (John 15:13), when a man lays down his life for his friend (Hyman 1970: 112).

That theme of amatory sacrifice contributes to an air of homoerotic excess, especially in the idea of being bound and inviting physical violation. When Bassanio introduces Antonio to Portia as the man 'To whom I am so infinitely bound,' she responds: 'You should in all sense be much bound to him, / For (as I hear) he was much bound for you' (V.i.135–7). At the start, Antonio lays open his entire self to Bassanio:

> be assur'd
> My purse, my person, my extremest means
> Lie all unlock'd to your occasions.
> (I.i.137–9)

Transferring this credit–'person' included–to Shylock's bond makes it more physical, more dangerous, and more erotic:

> let the forfeit
> Be nominated for an equal pound
> Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
> In what part of your body pleaseth me.
>
> (I.iii.144–7)

In the court, eventually, it is his breast that Antonio is required to bear to the knife, but in a context where apparent boys may be disguised girls and Portia's suitors have to renounce marriage altogether if they choose the wrong casket, Shylock's penalty sounds like castration. Indeed, Antonio offers himself to the knife as 'a tainted wether of the flock'; that is, a castrated ram (IV.i.114).

The seriousness of the love between Antonio and Bassanio is manifest, above all, in Portia's determination to contest it. Simply, she is at a disadvantage because of her father's casket device, and wants to ensure that her husband really is committed to her. The key critical move, which Hyman and Geary make, is to reject the sentimental notion of Portia as an innocent, virtuous, 'Victorian' heroine. Harry Berger regards her 'noble' speeches as manipulations: 'Against Antonio's failure to get himself crucified, we can place Portia's divine power of mercifixion; she never rains but she pours.' Finally, she mercifies Antonio by giving him back his ships (Berger 1981: 161–2).

Antonio's peril moves Bassanio to declare a preference for him over Portia:

> Antonio, I am married to a wife
> Which is as dear to me as life itself,
> But life itself, my wife, and all the world,
> I would lose all, ay sacrifice them all
> Here to this devil, to deliver you.

Portia, standing by as young doctor, is not best pleased: 'Your wife would give you little thanks for that / If she were by to hear you make the offer' (IV.i.278–5). It is to contest Antonio's status as lover that Portia, in her role of young doctor, demands of Bassanio the ring which she had given him in her role of wife. Antonio, unaware that he is falling for a device, takes the opportunity to claim a priority in Bassanio's love:

> My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring,
> Let his deservings and my love withal
> Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandement.
>
> (IV.i.445–7)

The last act of the play is Portia's assertion of her right to Bassanio. Her strategy is purposefully heterosexist: in disallowing Antonio's sacrifice as a plausible reason for parting with the ring, she disallows the entire seriousness of male love. She is as off-hand with Antonio as she can be with a guest:

> Sir, you are very welcome to our house:
> It must appear in other ways than words,
> Therefore I scant this breathing courtesy.
>
> (V.i.139–41)

She will not even admit Antonio's relevance: 'I am th'unhappy subject of these quarrels,' he observes; 'Sir, grieve not you,–you are welcome not withstanding,' she abruptly replies (V.i.238–9). Once more, self-sacrifice seems to be Antonio's best chance of staying in the game, so he binds himself in a different project: *not* to commit his body again to Bassanio in a way that will claim a status that challenges Portia:

> I once did lend my body for his wealth,
> Which but for him that had your husband's ring
> Had quite miscarried. I dare be bound again,
> My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord
> Will never more break faith advisedly.
>
> (V.i.249–53)

Portia seizes brutally on the reminiscence of the earlier bond: 'Then you shall be his surety' (V.i.254). Antonio's submission is what she has been waiting for. Now she restores Bassanio's status as husband by revealing that she has the ring after all, and Antonio's viability as merchant–and his ability to return to his trade in Venice–by giving him letters that she has been withholding.

A gay reader might think: well, never mind; Bassanio wasn't worth it, and with his wealth restored, Antonio will easily find another impecunious upper-class friend to sacrifice himself to. But, for most audiences and readers, the air of 'happy ending' suggests that Bassanio's movement towards heterosexual relations is in the necessary, the right direction (like Shylock's punishment, perhaps). As Coppélia Kahn (1985) reads the play, 'In Shakespeare's psychology, men first seek to mirror themselves in a homoerotic attachment . . . then to confirm themselves through difference, in a bond with the opposite sex–the marital bond.' And Janet Adelman, in a substantial analysis of 'Male Bonding in Shakespeare's Comedies', finds that 'We do not move directly from family bonds to marriage without an intervening period in which our friendships with same-sex friends help us

to establish our identities' (1985: 75). To heterosexually identified readers this might not seem an exceptional thought, but for the gay man it is a slap in the face of a very familiar kind. 'You can have these passions', it says, 'but they are not sufficient, they should be a stage on the way to something else. So don't push it.'

To be sure, Kahn points out that 'it takes a strong, shrewd woman like Portia to combat the continuing appeal of such ties between men' (p. 107). And Adelman remarks the tendency towards casuistical 'magical restitutions' and the persistence of 'tensions that comedy cannot resolve' (p. 80). So hetero-patriarchy is not secured without difficulty or loss. Nonetheless, when Adelman writes 'We do not move directly . . . to marriage', the gay man may ask, 'Who are "We"'? And when Kahn says 'men first seek to mirror themselves in a homoerotic attachment', the gay man may wonder whether he is being positioned as not-man, or just forgotten altogether. If Antonio is excluded from the good life at the end of the *Merchant*, so the gay man is excluded from the play's address. The fault does not lie with Kahn and Adelman (though in the light of recent work in Lesbian and Gay Studies they might want to formulate their thoughts rather differently). They have picked up well enough the mood and tendency of the play, most readers and audiences would agree. It is the Shakespearean text that is reconfirming the marginalization of an already marginalized group.

Property and sodomy

In practice, there are (at least) three routes, or reading strategies, through the *Merchant* for out-groups. One involves pointing out the mechanisms of exclusion in our cultures–how the circulation of Shakespearean texts may reinforce the privilege of some groups and the subordination of others. I have just been trying to do this. Another (broached in Chapter 1) is to read the play against the grain. This might be a matter of making the Venetians so unpleasant, and Shylock so heroic in his refusal to compromise, that audience members predisposed toward an oppositional stance might feel, not a humane sympathy for Shylock, but a fantasy wish that he might actually succeed in his revenge. I have suggested that something like this was achieved when Ian McDiarmid played Shylock at Stratford-upon Avon in 1984, directed by John Caird (Sinfield 1992: 300–1). A third reading strategy, which I now pursue, involves exploring the ideological structures in the playtexts–of class, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality–that facilitate these exclusions. These structures will not be the same as the ones we experience today, but they may throw light upon our circumstances and stimulate critical awareness of how our life-possibilities are constructed.

In the *Merchant*, the emphasis on the idea of being bound displays quite openly the way ideological structures work. Through an intricate network of enticements, obligations and interdictions–in terms of wealth, family, gender, patronage and law–this culture sorts out who is to control property and other human relations. Portia, Jessica and Launcelot are bound as daughters and sons; Bassanio, Morocco and Arragon as suitors; Antonio and Bassanio as friends; Gratiano as friend or dependant, Nerissa as dependant or servant, and Launcelot as servant; Antonio, Shylock and even the Duke are bound by the law; and the Venetians, Shylock rather effectively remarks, have no intention of freeing their slaves (IV.i.90–8).

Within limits, these bonds may be negotiable: the Duke may commission a doctor to devise a way round the law, friendships may be redefined, servants may get new masters, women and men may contract marriages. Jessica can even get away from her father, though only because he is very unpopular and Lorenzo has very powerful friends; they 'seal love's bonds new-made' (II.vi.6). Otherwise, trying to move very far out of your place is severely punished, as Shylock finds. It is so obvious that this framework of ideology and coercion is operating to the advantage of the rich over the poor, the established over the impotent, men over women and insiders over outsiders, that directors have been able to slant productions of the *Merchant* against the dominant reading, making Bassanio cynical, Portia manipulative, and the Venetians arrogant and racist.

The roles of same-gender passion in this framework should not be taken for granted. For us today, Eve Sedgwick shows in her book *Between Men*, homosexuality polices the entire boundaries of gender and social organization. Above all, it exerts 'leverage over the channels of bonding between all pairs of men.' Male–male relations, and hence male–female relations, are held in place by fear of homosexuality–by fear of crossing that 'invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line' between being 'a man's man' and being 'interested in men' (Sedgwick 1985: 88–9). We do not know what the limits of our sexual potential are, but we do believe that they are likely to be disturbing and disruptive; that is how our cultures position sexuality. Fear even of thinking homosexually serves to hold it all in place. So one thing footballers must *not* be when they embrace is sexually excited; the other thing they mustn't be is in love. But you can never be quite sure; hence the virulence of homophobia.

If this analysis makes sense in Western societies today, and I believe it does, we should not assume it for other times and places. As Sedgwick observes, ancient Greek cultures were different (p.4). In our societies whether you are gay or not has become crucial–the more so since lesbians and gay men have been asserting themselves. An intriguing thought, therefore, is that in early-modern England same-gender relations *were not terribly*

important. In *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, homoeroticism is part of the fun of the wooing ('Ganymede', the name taken by Rosalind, was standard for a male same-gender love-object); but it wouldn't be fun if such scenarios were freighted with the anxieties that people experience today. In Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*, Ovid Senior expostulates: 'What! Shall I have my son a stager now? An engle for players? A gull, a rook, a shot-clog to make suppers, and be laughed at?' (Jonson 1995: I.ii.15–17). It is taken for granted that boys are sexual partners (engles) for players; it is only one of the demeaning futures that await young Ovid if he takes to the stage. Crispinus is required to swear at the end that he will not again malign Horace, 'thereby to endear yourself the more to any player, engle, or guilty gull in your company' (V.iii.580–1). The engle is one of those who will be on site. Moralists who complained about theatre and sexual licence took it for granted that boys are sexually attractive.

'Sodomy' was the term which most nearly approaches what in England was called, until recently, 'gross indecency'; it was condemned almost universally in legal and religious discourses, and the penalty upon conviction was death. Perhaps because of this extreme situation, very few cases are recorded. In the twentieth century, staking out a gay cruising space was a sure-fire way for a police force to improve its rate of convictions. But in the Home Counties through the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I–sixty-eight years–only six men are recorded as having been indicted for sodomy. Only one was convicted, and that was for an offence involving a 5-year-old boy (Bray 1988: 38–42, 70–80).

In his book *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England*, Bruce R. Smith shows that while legal and religious edicts against sodomy were plain, paintings and fictive texts sometimes indicate a more positive attitude. This derived mainly from the huge prestige, in artistic and intellectual discourses, of ancient Greek and Roman culture where same-gender passion is taken for granted (Smith 1991). Smith locates six 'cultural scenarios': heroic friendship, men and boys (mainly in pastoral and educational contexts), playful androgyny (mainly in romances and festivals), transvestism (mainly in satirical contexts), master–servant relations, and an emergent homosexual subjectivity (in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*). Within those scenarios, it seems, men did not necessarily connect their practices with the monstrous crime of sodomy–partly, perhaps, because that was virtually unthinkable. As Jonathan Goldberg emphasizes, the goal of analysis is 'to see what the category [sodomy] enabled and disenabled, and to negotiate the complex terrains, the mutual implications of prohibition and production' (1992: 20). The point is hardly who did what with whom, but the contexts in which anxieties about sodomy might be activated. So whether the friendships of men such as Antonio and Bassanio should be regarded

as involving a homoerotic element is not just a matter of what people did in private hundreds of years ago; it is a matter of definition within a sex/ gender system that we only partly comprehend.

Stephen Orgel asks: 'Why, then, if boys in women's dress are so threatening, did the English maintain a transvestite theatre?' That is, given the complaints that boy actors incite lascivious thoughts in men and women spectators, why were not women performers employed–as they were in Spain and Italy? Orgel's answer is that boys were used because they were less dangerous; they were erotic, but that was less threatening than the eroticism of women. So this culture 'did not display a morbid fear of homoeroticism as such . . . Anxiety about the fidelity of women, on the other hand, does seem to have been strikingly prevalent' (Orgel 1996: 35–6). Leontes and Polixenes lived guiltlessly together, we are told in *The Winter's Tale*, until they met the women who were to be their wives (Shakespeare 1963: I.ii.69–74). The main faultlines ran through cross-gender relations.

Because women may bear children, relations between women and men affected the regulation of lineage, alliance and property, and hence offered profound potential disruptions to the social order and the male psyche. Same-gender passion was dangerous if, as in the instance of Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, it was allowed to interfere with other responsibilities. Otherwise, it was not incompatible with marriage and perhaps preferable to cross-gender infidelity. The preoccupation, in writing of this period, is with women disturbing the system–resisting arranged marriages, running off with the wrong man, not bearing (male) children, committing adultery, inciting incestuous desires, producing illegitimate offspring, becoming widows and exercising the power of that position. In comedies things turn out happily, in tragedies sadly. But, one way or the other, Shakespearean plays, as much as the rest of the culture, are obsessively concerned with dangers that derive from women.

'We'll play with them the first boy for a thousand ducats,' Gratiano exclaims in the *Merchant*, betting on whether Nerissa or Portia will bear the first boy-child (III.ii.213–14). As Orgel remarks, patriarchy does not oppress only women; a patriarch is not just a man, he is the head of a family or tribe who rules by paternal right.[3] To be sure, women are exchanged in the interest of property relations in Shakespearean plays, as in the society that produced them. But the lives of young, lower-class and outsider men are determined as well. In the *Merchant*, as everywhere in the period, we see a traffic in boys who, because they are less significant, are moved around the employment-patronage system more fluently than women. Class exploitation was almost unchallenged; everyone–men as much as women–had someone to defer to, usually in the household where

they had to live. The most likely supposition is that, just as cross-gender relations took place all the time–Launcelot is accused, in passing, of getting a woman with child (III.v.35–6)–same-gender passion also was widely indulged.

Traffic in boys occurs quite casually in the *Merchant*. Launcelot is a likely lad. He manages to square it with his conscience to leave his master, Shylock, but it is unclear where he will go (II.ii.1–30). He runs into his father, who indentured Launcelot to Shylock and is bringing a present for the master to strengthen the bond. Launcelot persuades him to divert the gift to Bassanio, who is providing 'rare new liveries' for the expedition to Belmont (II.ii.104–5). The father attempts to interest Bassanio in the boy, but it transpires that Shylock has already traded him: 'Shylock thy master spoke with me this day, / And hath preferr'd thee' (II.ii.138–9). Nor is Launcelot the only young man Bassanio picks up in this scene: Gratiano presents his own suit and gets a ticket to Belmont conditional upon good behaviour. And when Jessica assumes the guise of a boy, the appearance is of another privileged young man, Lorenzo, taking a boy into his service and giving him new livery: 'Descend, for you must be my torch-bearer . . . Even in the lovely garnish of a boy' (II.vi.40, 45). When the young doctor claims Portia's ring from Bassanio for services rendered, therefore, a pattern is confirmed.

My point is not that the dreadful truth of the *Merchant* is here uncovered: it is really about traffic in boys. Rather, that such traffic is casual, ubiquitous and hardly remarkable. It becomes significant in its resonances for the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio because Portia, subject to her father's will, has reason to feel insecure about the affections of her stranger-husband.

Friendly relations

Heroic friendship is one of Smith's six 'cultural scenarios' for same-gender relations. In his (1990) essay, 'Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England', Alan Bray explores the scope of the 'friend'. Even as marriage was involved in alliances of property and influence, male friendship informed, through complex obligations, networks of extended family, companions, clients, suitors and those influential in high places. Claudio in *Measure for Measure* explains why he and Juliet have not made public their marriage vows:

> This we came not to
> Only for propagation of a dower
> Remaining in the coffer of her friends,

From whom we thought it meet to hide our love
Till time had made them for us.
(Shakespeare 1965: I.ii.138–42)

On the one hand, it is from friends that one anticipates a dowry; on the other, they must be handled sensitively. Compare the combination of love and instrumentality in the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio: the early-modern sense of 'friend' covered a broad spectrum.

While the entirely respectable concept of the friend was supposed to have nothing to do with the officially abhorred concept of the sodomite, in practice they tended to overlap. Friends shared beds, they embraced and kissed; such intimacies reinforced the network of obligations and their public performance would often be part of the effect. So the proper signs of friendship could be the same as those of same-gender passion. In instances where accusations of sodomy were aroused, very likely it was because of some hostility towards one or both parties, rather than because their behaviour was altogether different from that of others who were not so accused.

The fact that the text of the *Merchant* gives no plain indication that the love between Antonio and Bassanio is informed by erotic passion does not mean that such passion was inconceivable, then; it may well mean that it didn't require particular presentation as a significant category. What is notable, though, is that Portia has no hesitation in envisaging a sexual relationship between Bassanio and the young doctor. 'I'll have that doctor for my bedfellow,' she declares, affirming an equivalence (V.i.33). She develops the idea:

Let not that doctor e'er come near my house–
Since he hath got the jewel that I loved,
And that which you did swear to keep for me.
(V.i.223–5)

The marriage of Bassanio and Portia is unconsummated and 'jewel' is often genital in Shakespearean writing: the young doctor has had the sexual attentions which were promised to Portia. 'Ring', of course, has a similar range, as when Gratiano says he will 'fear no other thing / So sore, as keeping safe Nerissa's ring.'[4] Portia's response to Bassanio (allegedly) sleeping with the young doctor is that she will do the same:

I will become as liberal as you,
I'll not deny him anything I have,
No, not my body nor my husband's bed.
(V.i.226–8)

Notice also that Portia does not express disgust, or even surprise, that her husband might have shared his bed with a young doctor. Her point is that Bassanio has given to another something that he had pledged to her. Nor does she disparage Antonio (as she does Morocco). Shylock, for the social cohesion of Venice, has to be killed, beggared, expelled, converted, or any combination of those penalties. Same-gender passion doesn't matter nearly so much; Antonio has only to be relegated to a subordinate position.

Bray attributes the instability in friendly relations to a decline in the open-handed 'housekeeping' of the great house. Maintaining retinues such as Bassanio recruits–young men who look promising and relatives who have a claim–was becoming anachronistic. So the social and economic form of service and friendship decayed, but it remained as a cultural form, as a way of speaking. The consequent unevenness, Bray suggests, allowed the line between the intimacies of friendship and sodomy to become blurred (Bray 1990). Don Wayne, in his study of Ben Jonson's poem 'To Penshurst' and the country-house genre, relates the decline of the great house to the emergence of a more purposeful aristocracy of 'new men' who 'constituted an agrarian capitalist class with strong links to the trading community'; and to the emergence, also, of 'an ideology in which the nuclear, conjugal family is represented as the institutional foundation of morality and social order'. We associate that development with the later consolidation of 'bourgeois ideology', but 'images and values we tend to identify as middle class had already begun to appear in the transformation of the aristocracy's own self-image' (Wayne, D.E. 1984: 23–5).

The Merchant of Venice makes excellent sense within such a framework. Portia's lavish estate at Belmont is presented as a fairy-tale place; in Venetian reality Bassanio, an aristocrat who already cultivates friends among the merchant class, has to raise money in the market in order to put up a decent show. At the same time, Portia's centring of the matrimonial couple and concomitant hostility towards male friendship manifests an attitude that was to be located as 'bourgeois'. This faultline was not to be resolved rapidly; Portia is ahead of her time. Through the second half of the seventeenth century, Bray and Randolph Trumbach show, the aggressively manly, aristocratic rake, though reproved by the churches and emergent middle-class morality and in violation of the law, would feel able to indulge himself with a woman, a young man, or both (Trumbach 1987, 1989).

If I have begun to map the ideological field in which same-gender passion occurred in early-modern England and some of its points of intersection in the *Merchant*, I am not trying to 'reduce' Shakespeare to an effect of history and structure. I do not suppose that he thought the same as everyone else–or, indeed, that *anyone* thought the same as everyone else. First, diverse paths may be discerned in the period through the relations

between sexual and 'platonic', and same-gender and cross-gender passions. These matters were uncertain, unresolved, contested–that is why they made good topics for plays, satires, sermons, and so on. Second, playtexts do not have to be clear-cut. As I argue elsewhere in this book, we should envisage them as working across an ideological terrain, opening out unresolved faultlines, inviting spectators to explore imaginatively the different possibilities. Anyway, readers and audiences do not have to respect closures; they are at liberty to credit and dwell upon the adventurous middle part of a text, as against a tidy conclusion. As Valerie Traub remarks, whether these early comedies are found to instantiate dissidence or containment is a matter of 'crediting *either* the expense of dramatic energy *or* comedic closure' (1992: 120).

Generally, though, there is a pattern: the erotic potential of same-gender love is allowed a certain scope, but (in the Shakespearean version) has to be set aside. The young men in *Love's Labour's Lost* try to maintain a fraternity but the women draw them away. In *Romeo and Juliet* Mercutio has to die to clear the ground for Romeo and Juliet's grand passion. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick has to agree to kill Claudio at his fiancée's demand. *As You Like It* fantasizes a harmonious male community in the forest and intensifies it in the wooing of Orlando and Ganymede, but finally Rosalind leads everyone but Jacques back into the old system. Yet there are ambiguities as well. In the epilogue to *As You Like It*, the Rosalind/Ganymede boy-actor reopens the flirting: 'If I were a woman, I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me, complexions that liked me, and breaths that I defied not' (Shakespeare 1975a: V.iv.214–17). And Orsino in *Twelfth Night* leaves the stage with Viola still dressed as Cesario because, he says, her female attire has not yet been located. Even Bassanio can fantasize: 'Sweet doctor,' he says to Portia when she has revealed all, 'you shall be my bedfellow,–/ When I am absent then lie with my wife' (V.i.285).

And why not? Was it necessary to choose? Although the old, open-handed housekeeping was in decline, the upper-class household was not focused on the marital couple in the manner of today. Portia welcomes diverse people to Belmont; Gratiano and Nerissa for instance, whose mimic-marriage reflects the power of the household. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* starts with the disruption of friendship by love for a woman, but ends with a miraculous reunion in which they will all live together: 'our day of marriage shall be yours, / One feast, one house, one mutual happiness' (Shakespeare 2004: V.iv.170–1). In a discussion of *Twelfth Night*, I have suggested that Sebastian's marriage to a stranger heiress need not significantly affect Antonio's relationship with him (Sinfield 1992: 73). They might all live together in Olivia's house (as Sir Toby does); she may well prefer to spend her time with Maria and Viola (who will surely tire of

Orsino) rather than with the naive, swashbuckling husband whom she has mistakenly married. So Antonio need not appear at the end of *Twelfth Night* as the defeated and melancholy outsider that critics have supposed; a director, reading only partly against the grain, might show him delighted with his boyfriend's lucky break.

This kind of ending might be made to work in the *Merchant*. R.F. Hill suggests it, and Auden reports a 1905 production which had Antonio and Bassanio enter the house together.[5] However, Portia plays a harder game than Rosalind and Viola. She doesn't disguise herself, as they do, to evade hetero-patriarchal pressures, but to test and limit her husband. When disguised as a boy she does not play androgynous games with other characters or the audience (Geary 1984: 58). Antonio is invited into the house only on her terms.

Overall in these plays, Traub concludes, the fear 'is not of homoeroticism *per se*; homoerotic pleasure is explored and sustained *until* it collapses into fear of erotic exclusivity and its corollary: non-reproductive sexuality'–a theme, of course, of the sonnets (1992: 123). The role of marriage and child-(son-)bearing in the transmission of property and authority is made to take priority. If (like me) you are inclined to regard this as a failure of nerve, it is interesting that the *Merchant*, itself, offers a comment on boldness and timidity. 'Who chooseth me, must give and hazard all he hath'–that is the motto on the lead casket (II.ix.21). Bassanio picks the right casket and Portia endorses the choice but, as Auden points out, it is Shylock and Antonio who commit themselves entirely and risk everything; and in the world of this play there are penalties for doing that (Auden, 1963: 235).

Subcultures and Shakespeare

Traub notes a reading of *Twelfth Night* that assumes Olivia to be punished 'comically but unmistakably' for her same-gender passion for Viola. But 'to whom is desire between women funny?' Traub asks (1992: 93). This was my initial topic in this chapter: must Shakespeare, for out-groups such as Jews, feminists, lesbians, gays and Blacks, be a way of re-experiencing, their marginalization? I have been trying to exemplify elements in a critical practice for dissident readers. Mainstream commentators on the *Merchant* (whether they intend to or not) tend to confirm the relegation of same-gender passion. Lesbians and gay men may use the play: (1) to think about alternative economies of sex/gender; (2) to think about problematic aspects of our own subcultures. But (the question is always put): Is it Shakespeare? Well, he is said to speak to all sorts and conditions, so if gay men say 'OK, this is how he speaks to us'–that, surely, is our business.

With regard to the first of these uses, the *Merchant* allows us to explore a social arrangement in which the place of same-gender passion was different from that we are used to. Despite and because of the formal legal situation, I have shown, it appears not to have attracted very much attention; it was partly compatible with marriage, and was partly supported by legitimate institutions of friendship, patronage and service. It is not that Shakespeare was a sexual radical, therefore. Rather, the early-modern organization of sex and gender boundaries was different from ours, and the ordinary currency of that culture is replete with erotic interactions that strike strange chords today. Shakespeare may speak with distinct force to gay men and lesbians, simply because he didn't think he had to sort out sexuality in modern terms. For approximately the same reasons, these plays may stimulate radical ideas about race, nation, gender, and class.

As for using the *Merchant* as a way of addressing problems in gay subculture, the bonds of class, age, gender and race exhibited in the play have distinct resonances for us. The traffic in boys may help us to think about power structures in our class and generational interactions. And while an obvious perspective on the play is resentment at Portia's manipulation of Antonio and Bassanio, we may bear in mind that Portia too is oppressed in hetero-patriarchy, and try to work towards a sex/gender regime in which women and men would not be bound to compete. Above all, plainly, Antonio is the character most hostile to Shylock. It is he who has spat on him, spurned him and called him dog, and he means to do it again (I.iii.121–6). At the trial it is he who imposes the most offensive requirement–that Shylock convert to Christianity (V.i.382–3). Seymour Kleinberg offers a modern interpretation of Antonio's racism:

> Antonio hates Shylock not because he is a more fervent Christian than others, but because he recognizes his own alter ego in this despised Jew who, because he is a heretic, can never belong to the state . . . He hates himself in Shylock: the homosexual self that Antonio has come to identify symbolically as the Jew.[6]

Gay people today are no more immune to racism than other people, and transferring our stigma onto others is one of the modes of self-oppression that tempts any subordinated group. And what if one were Jewish (and/)or Black, as well as gay? One text through which these issues circulate in our culture is *The Merchant of Venice*, and it is one place where we may address them.

5
Intertextuality and the Limits of Queer Reading in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*

Intertextuality

Deconstruction, appealing to the insights of Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, and Michael Riffaterre, has sought to show that all boundaries are, at best, provisional, at worst, false and deluding. The act of reading 'plunges us into a network of textual relations', Graham Allen expounds; 'Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations' (2000: 1). The study of an author's 'sources' may be rejuvenated by ideas of 'intertextuality'. Stephen J. Lynch avers: 'The old notion of particular and distinct sources has given way to new notions of boundless and heterogeneous intertextuality.' Indeed, 'the sources themselves can be examined as products of intertextuality– endlessly complex, multilayered fields of interpretation that Shakespeare refashioned and reconfigured into alternative fields of interpretation' (Lynch 1998: 1).

Kathryn Schwarz makes a valuable historical study of ideas and images of the Amazon in early-modern representation. However, she appeals also to the Derridean principle of the *supplement*:

> The multiplication of statements of desire [in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*] opens those statements to interpretation: if the rhetoric of female homoeroticism sounds just like that of heteroeroticism, language, like masculinity, becomes portable, flexible in the ways that it defines and refers. A transition into heteroeroticism implies a possible transition out.

Any ascribed reading is reversible, then. 'Like Derrida's supplement, stories about Amazons both support and undermine the agendas that produce them, offering a mirror image that might turn into an entirely different picture' (Schwarz 2000: 220, 157).

The problem with deconstructive criticism is that it is excessively indeterminate: there is always a supplement–and a supplement to the supplement. So intertextuality draws us closer than we might have expected to 1950s new criticism, in which (as I remarked in Chapter 1) writing that appeared to resist an appropriate reading could always be declared 'ironic', the voice of a persona, or the consequence of an unreliable narrator. Thus a text may be demonstrated to mean ever more fully, comprising even that which it is not, and affording no resistance. Whereas new criticism tended to discover one theme–the unity of text and experience–deconstruction tends to prove, over and over, the indeterminacy of text and experience.

Louis Montrose has made *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a site for major advances in the theory and the practice of a historicized and politicized criticism. He defines the critical task as 'to (re)construct an intertextual field of representations, resonances, and pressures that constitutes an ideological matrix from which–and against which–Shakespeare shaped the mythopoeia of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'. This distinction between the play and its matrix aspires to control the traffic between text and context. However, at other points Montrose allows a relatively unconfined slippage, almost in the manner of a deconstructionist. For example, he finds that 'the dominance of patriarchy' in the play 'is vulnerable to destabilization by numerous instances of dramatic contradiction and intertextual irony' (Montrose 1996: 146, 121). This move enables Montrose to posit a more disturbing and radical *Midsummer Night's Dream* than I shall seek to disclose.

A promising way to test these ideas is to address *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595–96) alongside *The Two Noble Kinsmen* by Shakespeare and John Fletcher (1612–13). In both plays there is an interruption to the nuptials of Theseus and Hippolyta. In both, further disruptions occur in the affections of marriageable young people; these become the main matters to be resolved by Theseus. Both plays feature festive presentations by lower-class people.[1]

My goal is to use the later play to supply aspects of the ideological environment of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, highlighting thereby the alternatives selected by each text as it actualizes different parts of their shared field of possibilities. I intend a provocative, rather than a systematic procedure; *The Two Noble Kinsmen* will be used as a lever, not as an authority. In the process, it should prove possible to clarify some of the theoretical questions that I have raised.

Hippolyta's silence

The interruption at the start of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a typical instance of an endemic crisis in patriarchy: Hermia wants to marry a different man from the one that her father has chosen for her. I have described the passing

of the young woman from the authority of her father to that of her husband as a 'faultline' moment in early-modern gender ideology (Sinfield 1992: 42–7). Marriage was the institution through which property arrangements were made and inheritance secured, but it was supposed also to be a fulfilling personal relationship. It was held that the people being married should act in obedience to their parents, but also that they should love each other. Lawrence Stone observes that dutiful children experienced 'an impossible conflict of role models. They had to try to reconcile the often incompatible demands for obedience to parental wishes on the one hand and expectations of affection in marriage on the other' (1977: 137). The faultline in official doctrine afforded one distinct point at which a woman such as Hermia (or Katherina, Juliet, Desdemona or Cordelia) might throw the system into crisis. The resolution of this disturbance–albeit by magical intervention–enables commentators to see in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a fresh affirmation of marriage. It is often supposed that it was written to celebrate an actual union.

The interruption to Theseus' nuptials in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is more macabre, though it again concerns the status of marriage. Three lamenting queens importune him: Creon has not allowed them to bury the remains of their defeated husbands. He is undermining the seemliness of patriarchal, warrior relations.

The representation of Hippolyta in this scene foregrounds the potential of women together. To be sure, she has lost the fight with Theseus and is hoping, rather anxiously, to build a good marriage with him. Nonetheless, her status as a great Amazon warrior is established and celebrated. The Second Queen apostrophizes her in heroic terms:

> Most dreaded Amazonian, that hast slain
> The scythe-tusked boar; that with thy arm, as strong
> As it is white, wast near to make the male
> To thy sex captive, but that this thy lord,
> Born to uphold creation in that honour
> First nature styled it in, shrunk thee into
> The bound thou wast o'erflowing, at once subduing
> Thy force and thy affection.
>
> (Fletcher and Shakespeare 1997: I.i.78–85)

Hippolyta came close to defeating Theseus, the Second Queen is saying; and although it is finally natural that the man should win (Theseus is standing by), in the case of Hippolyta this is at the expense of a remarkable phenomenon. Even now, although Hippolyta may kneel in supplication before Theseus, on behalf of the Three Queens and their unburied husbands, it must be for only a moment:

But touch the ground for us no longer time
Than a dove's motion, when the head's plucked off.
Tell him, if he i'th'blood-sized field lay swollen,
Showing the sun his teeth, grinning at the moon,
What you would do.

(I.i.97–101)

Hippolyta, perhaps energized by the gruesome imagery, replies that she would as soon join the military expedition against Creon as the enterprise upon which she is currently embarked (that is, marriage). She threatens to defer consummation with Theseus.

If Hippolyta is largely subdued by Theseus, her sister Emilia remains thoroughly woman-centred; 'What woman I may stead that is distressed / Does bind me to her,' she reassures the Third Queen (I.i.36–7). She threatens, if their pleas are ignored, never to take a husband. During the ensuing action Emilia maintains an independent stance in the face of (what we would call) harassment by Theseus. When Arcite impresses the court at a wrestling match, Theseus says Emilia might be wise to let him become her master rather than her servant. 'I hope, too wise for that, sir,' she retorts (II.v.64). When Palamon and Arcite joust to win her, Theseus demands that she make herself available as the trophy: 'You are the treasure and must needs be by / To give the service pay' (V.iii.31–2). She refuses.[2]

Placing the fuller evocation of female independence in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* alongside *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may help us to think about Hippolyta's attitude to her marriage in the earlier play. As some directors have noticed (Philip C. McGuire discusses their work), she has little to say in the opening scene, and what she does say scarcely indicates harmony (McGuire 1985: Chapter 1). Theseus' first words are about how he can't wait for them to get to bed; Hippolyta's reply is that it will be quite soon enough: 'Four days will quickly steep themselves in night; / Four nights will quickly dream away the time' (Shakespeare 1979: I.i.7–8). Mysteriously, she invokes the moon, an image of chastity. After this initial speech, Hippolyta has *nothing at all to say* in the opening scene; is she perhaps dismayed by Theseus' bullying of Hermia? He doesn't consult her about the lovers' dilemma; he takes no further notice of her until he is ready to leave: 'Come, my Hippolyta; what cheer, my love?' (I.i.122). His question suggests that she is not conspicuously happy. However, she is given no voice in which to announce her recalcitrance.

Hippolyta does speak in Acts IV and V, but her contributions consist largely of irritable attempts to contradict or compete with Theseus. She caps his hunt with a report of another occasion, with better hounds and graced by Hercules and Cadmus. She opposes his wish to see the Mechanicals' play, and leads the mockery of the performance. Even her

famous speech about how the dream of the night 'grows to something of great constancy' (V.i.26) occurs as a refutation of Theseus' assertion that lunatics, lovers and poets are all the same.

Attending to *The Two Noble Kinsmen* may encourage a less complacent reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It draws attention to the energies that were suppressed through enforced marriage, helping us to interpret the muted and captious expression to which Hippolyta is reduced. This reading does not displace the idea of the earlier play as a marriage celebration, but by enlarging the ideological environment it does undermine its apparently natural supremacy. However, in other aspects, a comparison with *The Two Noble Kinsmen* reveals *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to be the less radical play. By 'radical', for the purposes of this chapter, I mean prompting a critique of patriarchy–displaying its oppressiveness and its inability to accommodate a range of humane relations, and exploring the scope for dissident interpersonal intensities.

Same-gender bonding

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen* Theseus concedes the Queens' case and goes to fight Creon, leaving his bride and the conduct of the wedding feast to his friend, Pirithous. What is striking here is how quickly the assumptions of hetero-patriarchy unravel. As soon as Theseus is out of sight the women begin to doubt the inevitability of cross-gender relations. Emilia remarks of Pirithous, as he leaves to join Theseus' army, 'How his longing / Follows his friend!' (I.iii.27–8). The two men have shared many dangers, Hippolyta admits:

> Their knot of love,
> Tied, weaved, entangled, with so true, so long,
> And with a finger of so deep a cunning,
> May be outworn, never undone.
>
> (I.iii.41–4)

'Their knot of love' sounds remarkably like wedlock (see Onions 1958: 123). Indeed, in Plutarch's *Lives*, Pirithous, fascinated by the report of Theseus, goes to fight him, but on meeting they become sworn brothers; this is very like the battlefield betrothal of Theseus and Hippolyta. But Theseus surely prefers Hippolyta, Emilia reassures her sister, though in notably oblique phrasing: 'Doubtless, / There is a best and reason has no manners / To say it is not you' (I.iii.47–9).

Emilia is moved to compare her friendship with Flavina, who died. They were young, innocent, and their feelings were reciprocal–without the tensions that evidently characterize cross-gender relations:

> The flower that I would pluck
> And put between my breasts (then but beginning
> To swell about the blossom), oh, she would long
> Till she had such another, and commit it
> To the like innocent cradle, where phoenix-like
> They died in perfume.
>
> (I.iii.66–71)

It shows, Emilia declares, 'That the true love 'tween maid and maid may be / More than in sex dividual' (lines 81–2). Were she persuadable, Hippolyta admits, Emilia would 'Have said enough to shake me from the arm / Of the all-noble Theseus'; but she is confident that she rather than Pirithous holds the high throne in her husband's heart (I.iii.91–6). However, Emilia sticks to her position: 'I am not / Against your faith, yet I continue mine' (lines 96–7).

Reading as a gay man, I welcome these intimations of same-gender relationships. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* appears less radical by comparison. The thought that women might live together, outside wedlock, is in the play, but in mainly negative contexts. Theseus threatens Hermia with it as the punishment for resistance to her father's will: 'For aye to be in shady cloister mew'd, / To live a barren sister all your life' (I.i.71–2). He calls it 'a vow of single life' (line 121)–not counting other women as company. Helena speaks movingly of the erstwhile feeling between Hermia and herself:

> So we grew together,
> Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
> But yet an union in partition,
> Two lovely berries moulded on one stem.
>
> (III.ii.208–11)

Valerie Traub and Patricia Parker have remarked the intensity here.[3] Conversely, these are anxious moments for conservative criticism. C.L. Barber, for instance: 'before the scramble is over, the two girls have broken the double-cherry bond, to fight each other without reserve for her man. So they move from the loyalties of one stage of life to those of another' (Barber 1972: 130). It was just a passing phase then.

In fact, the intimacies between the girls are invoked reproachfully, in the light of Hermia's disruption of Helena's current cross-gender ambitions. Under competitive pressure they can be repudiated: 'She was a vixen when she went to school,' Helena asserts (III.ii.324). Hermia mentions how she and Helena would lie upon 'faint primrose beds' together, but in the context of making an assignation with Lysander (I.i.215). Helena protests to Demetrius: 'Your wrongs do set a scandal on my sex. / We cannot fight

for love, as men may do' (II.i.240–1). She has forgotten that Hippolyta did just that, albeit unsuccessfully.

The deconstructive-intertextual move at this point is to allow the later play to bleed back into the earlier, sanctioning a queer reading of it, crediting it with positive-disconcerting lesbian feeling. I think, rather, that *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is reminding us of something radical that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is ready to forget. Traub makes a similar comparison when she contends that *Twelfth Night* closes down the homoerotic play which is released in *As You Like It* (1992: 122–44).

The boys in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are also implicated in same-gender eroticism. Act II scene ii finds Palamon and Arcite in prison together. Palamon laments the change in their circumstances. Never again will they, 'like twins of honour', exercise in arms (II.ii.18). And, heaviest, Arcite adds, they will never marry and have 'The sweet embraces of a loving wife' (line 30); they will have no issue. 'This is all our world. / We shall know nothing here but one another' (lines 40–1).

Yet there are consolations, they quickly remark. ''Tis a main goodness, cousin, that our fortunes / Were twined together,' Palamon allows (lines 63–4). Arcite agrees:

> And here being thus together,
> We are an endless mine to one another;
> We are one another's wife, ever begetting
> New births of love; we are father, friends, acquaintance,
> We are, in one another, families;
> I am your heir and you are mine.
>
> (lines 78–83)

After all, if they were at liberty a wife might part them, or business. Nothing can spoil their friendship till death. This is disconcertingly like King James's letter to George Villiers at Christmas 1623: 'And so God bless you, my sweet child and wife, and grant that ye may ever be a comfort to your dear dad and husband' (see Smith 1991: 14).

There is no equivalent to such adventurous and substantial sentiments in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

It is too good to be true. Perhaps Palamon and Arcite have frightened themselves with the boldness of their rhetoric. I think of the nervous disclaimer invoked by Michael in Mart Crowley's classic gay play, *The Boys in the Band*, mocking the furtive gay man who has revealed himself: he calls it the 'Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night syndrome' (Crowley 1970: 25). Palamon and Arcite seize upon a glimpse of Emilia, walking in the garden below, as opportunity to reclaim their cross-gender credentials. Ironically, she is talking

still, now with her waiting woman, about the superiority of relations between women. Boys might love themselves, like Narcissus; they might be hard-hearted. 'They could not be to one so fair,' the woman replies, flirtatiously; she would not (II.ii.123). They agree to lie down together:

WOMAN. I could lie down, I am sure.
EMILIA. And take one with you?
WOMAN. That's as we bargain, madam.
EMILIA. Well, agree then.
(II.ii.152–3; see Abrams 1985)

It is in this context of erotic female bonding that the two boys set eyes upon Emilia. First Palamon and then Arcite declares his passion for her, and they fall immediately into bitter recriminations. It does seem that Palamon sees her first, and first asserts his love, and we may infer that this prompts Arcite, producing a rivalrous triangle. Bruce Smith observes: 'Only when Palamon tells him point-blank, "You shall not love at all," does Arcite become defiant and proclaim himself the enemy of his friend' (Smith 1991: 71). 'Who shall deny me?' Arcite demands. Palamon is incited by the challenge:

> I that first saw her, I that took possession
> First with mine eye of all those beauties in her
> Revealed to mankind! If thou lovest her,
> Or entertain'st a hope to blast my wishes,
> Thou art a traitor, Arcite, and a fellow
> False as thy title to her.
>
> (II.ii.169–74)

This is not a replacement of male bonding by cross-gender passion, but its continuation in other terms. Observe the total failure of either man to broach the question of Emilia's wishes: she is a minor player in their game. As the play continues, they devote far more attention to fighting each other than to wooing her. When it appears that Theseus will condemn them both to death, Palamon's plea is:

> Let's die together, at one instant, Duke.
> Only a little let him fall before me,
> That I may tell my soul, he shall not have her.
>
> (III.vi.177–9)

'Thou dost love her because thou know'st I love her,' says the poet of Shakespeare's sonnets (Shakespeare 2001: sonnet 42).

Eve Sedgwick in *Between Men* develops René Girard's idea of a triangular pattern wherein male pursuit is motivated less by the qualities of the woman than by the fact that another male has chosen her; 'the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved' (Sedgwick 1985: 21). Male bonding contributed crucially to the ties of heroism, loyalty and self-sacrifice that underpin a warrior culture; it was invaluable still in early-modern England, as part of the glue for the networks of alliance, kinship and patronage through which business was conducted (see Bray 1990). It was an element in the system through which patriarchy organized itself. Yet, as *The Two Noble Kinsmen* illustrates, male rivalry could be strikingly dysfunctional.

Traces of this potential disturbance in patriarchy are less marked in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* than might be expected. Though Demetrius and Lysander switch the objects of their devotion arbitrarily, they pay only occasional attention to each other.

Lovely boys

The intensity of same-gender bonding between both women and men in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* prompts some questions about sexuality. What is extraordinary in the dialogue of both the women and the men is the lack of guardedness–when Emilia says she and Flavina wanted to put the same flowers in their cleavages; when Arcite says he and Palamon are 'one another's wife, ever begetting / New births of love.' Catherine Belsey remarks how same-gender and cross-gender relations are spoken of in equivalent terms in Palamon's last words:

> Oh, cousin!
> That we should things desire, which do cost us
> The loss of our desire! That nought could buy
> Dear love, but loss of dear love!
>
> (V.iv.109–12)

'Here heterosexual passion and homosocial friendship are defined in exactly the same terms: both are dear love; both are desire,' Belsey observes (1992: 53).

Such unembarrassed expressions restate the question I broach elsewhere in this book: either same-gender passion is so remote from the minds of these people as to be off the map of potential human experience, or it is so commonplace as to be unremarkable. As Sedgwick observes, the dominant assumption in our societies is that the line between the homosexual and the homosocial must be rigorously policed. However, this is not

necessarily the case in all societies. In any male-dominated society, Sedgwick adds, there will be a special relationship between male bonding and the structures of patriarchal power. But in diverse historical contexts this relationship 'may take the form of ideological homophobia, ideological homosexuality, or some highly conflicted but intensively structured combination of the two' (Sedgwick 1985: 25). The intriguing thought, therefore, which I broached in the previous chapter, is that in early-modern England male same-gender relations *were not terribly important.*[4] Traub (2002) makes a comparable case for erotic desire between women. After all, in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* homoeroticism is part of the fun of the wooing; but it wouldn't be fun if such scenarios were freighted with the anxieties that gay and bisexual people often experience today. Same-gender commitments attract the attention of Theseus when they are taken to extremes–in the form of Amazon commitment, and the excessive bonding and crazy rivalry of Palamon and Arcite.

If *The Two Noble Kinsmen* suggests a significant context of companionable same-gender passion, the implications in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may be felt most prominently not among the boys and girls, but in the devotion of Titania to a votaress of her order, and the desire of Oberon for the son. Titania's speech is evocative:

> Full often hath she gossip'd by my side;
> And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
> Marking th'embarked traders on the flood:
> When we have laugh'd to see the sails conceive
> And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind;
> Which she (her womb then rich with my young squire),
> Would imitate, and sail upon the land
> To fetch me trifles, and return again
> As from a voyage rich with merchandise.
>
> (II.i.125–34)

The father is scarcely needed in this marvellous pregnancy, the women are self-sufficient. For this commitment Titania has forsworn the bed of Oberon (this was the threat of Hippolyta to Theseus in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*), turning her fairy train into a feminized community–such as is evoked by the figures of Hippolyta and Emilia and held over Hermia as a punishment by Theseus. The chastising of this affront to patriarchy is the comic project of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The emblem of Oberon's power is his seizing the boy for himself.

How old is this lad? Is he old enough to be sexy? Montrose supposes that he might be at the age–around 7 years old–where he would be expected to

move from infancy, dominated by women, to youth (Montrose 1996: 126–7; 149–50). This would situate Titania's dissidence as an attempt to interfere with patriarchal sequence by prolonging the boy's period within the feminized sphere of childhood. However, if he is rather older, a knight perhaps, a sexual intensity on the part of both Titania and Oberon becomes plausible:

> And jealous Oberon would have the child
> Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild:
> But she perforce withholds the loved boy,
> Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy.
>
> (II.i.24–7)

Only acute sexual infatuation, it seems to me, may plausibly move these great fairies to jeopardize the entire creation.

Other mentions of the boy do not clarify his age. Since he never appears, it may slide around, depending on the local relevance (like the age of Hamlet). Oberon calls him 'a little changeling boy' and says he wants him for a 'henchman' (II.i.120–1). Titania calls him 'the child' and 'my young squire' (II.i.122, 131). Puck calls him Oberon's 'attendant' and a 'lovely boy' (II.i.21–2); 'lovely boy' is the expression used in sonnet 126, the last of those addressed to the youth: 'O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power / Dost hold Time's fickle glass' (Shakespeare 2001).

Margot Hendricks describes a performance–a 'camp rendering'–in which the Indian boy appeared in his early twenties, wearing a gold lamé loincloth; in the accompanying photograph he looks pampered and sulky. Hendricks reads him as 'a rich oriental "trifle" accessible to the gaze of predominantly white audiences' (1996: 37–8). Nonetheless, she doesn't credit Oberon or Titania with such licentious appreciation of the boy. She writes of him as a child, and reads Oberon's motive as 'the manifestation of a perceived prerogative to claim possession' (p.53). It may indeed be that; Oberon may be asserting a *droit de seigneur*.

When lesbians and gay men started to talk about same-gender passion in the early-modern period, every instance seemed a triumph for gay liberation. However, not all treatments are progressive. Gayle Rubin (1975) has shown how women are used as exchangeable property through which the bonds of men with men are secured in patriarchy. Also, everywhere in the early-modern period, we see a casual traffic in boys who, because they are less significant, are moved around the employment-patronage system more fluently than women. Patriarchy determined the lives of young, lower-class and outsider men, as well as women. I remarked in Chapter 4 how in *The Merchant of Venice* Bassanio gives new liveries to Launcelot and Gratiano for the expedition to Belmont; Jessica appears as Lorenzo's page, 'Even in the

lovely garnish of a boy' (Shakespeare 1959: II.vi.45); the young doctor (Portia) claims Portia's ring from Bassanio for services rendered.

As Hendricks remarks, Titania's reference to 'th'embarked traders on the flood' and 'a voyage rich with merchandise' invites awareness of European exploitation of the Indias of spice and mine (Hendricks 1996: 53). The Indian boy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is being traded between Titania and Oberon, neither of whom consults his preferences. Initially he is forcibly detained by Titania, then he is passed abruptly to Oberon:

> I then did ask of her her changeling child;
> Which straight she gave me, and her fairy sent
> To bear him to my bower in fairy land.
>
> (IV.i.58–60)

They are not going hunting, then; surely this is ominously intimate; a bower of bliss! 'The mightiest kings have had their minions' (Marlowe 1971b: I.iv.390). Perhaps the boy will enjoy the attentions of the king of the fairies, but we don't know.

Oberon, apparently, is within his rights. It is Titania who has transgressed and must be punished. Like the Duchess of Malfi, she has chosen her partner from outside the permitted range. If she insists on challenging Oberon's privilege, then her beau must be the monstrous Bottom–who, like the boy, she swathes in flowers. A cross-class choice by women appears more dangerous for patriarchal culture than same-gender passion among boys and men. Oberon's seizing of the boy is a victory for patriarchy, not a challenge to it.

Reading Theseus against the grain

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a resolution of the main conflict is always available: with two boys, two girls and heteronormative ideology, we know that something will be fixed up. As it transpires, Oberon makes a genial outcome easy for Theseus. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, conversely, the situation appears impossible, and Theseus plainly makes it worse. His sadistic adjudication, which is not in Chaucer's version of the story, has a predictably distressing outcome for all parties. Such a violent and ridiculous closure surely brings Theseus and his system into discredit (see Shannon 2002). 'Is this winning?' Emilia asks (V.iii.138). Patriarchy discloses its faultlines; it fails to match the intuitions of the most humane characters.

The lower-class subplot seems comparably exploitative (see Helms 1990). The Jailer has marriage plans for his Daughter, but she becomes obsessed with the imprisoned Palamon, though she knows 'To marry him is hopeless; / To be his whore is witless' (II.iv.4–5). She becomes desperate, releases

Palamon, and runs mad when he does not respond with love. This is scarcely Palamon's fault; he has his own craving, and does get a pardon for Jailer and Daughter and contribute to her dower. Notwithstanding, he is the beneficiary of her passion. As Lois Potter points out, the notorious instance of escape and abandonment is another discreditable exploit of Theseus, his use of Ariadne.[5] The Daughter is victim to her own infatuation, as she strives to filter her personal needs through a patriarchal system that holds her of no account. The remedy is cunning, cynical and effective: she is persuaded to believe that the suitor selected by her father *is Palamon*–to the point where he may take her maidenhead. She is deluded, pathetic: it is a kind of rape. Such a bizarre and arbitrary outcome shadows the tendency of the main plot: to expose the ideology of heteropatriarchy by representing extreme cases. Meanwhile a schoolmaster and five lustful countrymen are preparing a priapic celebration for Theseus and Hippolyta as they go hunting: a bawdy morris dance features 'The Bavian with long tail and eke long tool' (III.v.131). Of course, this harks back to the Mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but the new version is efficient and direct, and lacks their naive, if demeaning, charm.

In the deconstructive-intertextual mode of criticism, such a reading–foregrounding violence and exploitation–may be carried back into the earlier play. In fact, some of the best commentators on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have argued that, here also, the destructive violence of patriarchy is exposed. For Montrose, 'the play articulates and disseminates fragments of those socially active heterodox discourses that the politically dominant discourse seeks, with only limited success, to appropriate, repudiate, or suppress' (Montrose 1996: 144). For Parker, in a brilliant analysis, the 'harmonious ending' is 'ironized'. Disturbances radiating out from the 'misjoinings and botched constructions' of the Mechanicals make possible 'a doubled perspective on the professedly natural order of this ending, an estrangement that allows such closure to be viewed as the naturalized righting that enables the very conjunctions on which rule and governance depend' (Parker 1996a: 107, 114).

Laura Levine, in a powerful essay, names Theseus' taking of Hippolyta a rape; his call for festivities is designed to disguise the fact:

> Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword,
> And won thy love doing thee injuries;
> But I will wed thee in another key,
> With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling.
>
> (I.i.16–19)

However, Levine finds, theatrical display only confirms 'what Theseus wants to dismiss, the reality of sexual violence' (1996b: 216). The problem

with this argument is the assumption that Theseus must want to assuage his guilt. After all, in a violently male-oriented society, vaunting is at least as likely; his call for pomp, triumph and revelling doesn't sound like a man withdrawing into apologetic myths. Nor does Theseus' treatment of Hermia suggest any relaxation of patriarchal domination. 'To you your father should be as a god,' he tells her (I.i.47).

What I am trying to do, in resistance to the open-ended deconstructive mode of criticism, is maintain a sense of the ideological limits of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The alternatives which this play is *not choosing* lurk at the boundaries of the text, but they do not *become* the text. I agree with Montrose that the play 'may try to impose symbolic closure upon the heterodoxy to which it also gives voice, but that closure can be neither total nor final'. I argue similarly in *Faultlines*: no text can secure its own reception.[6] Notwithstanding, there are two main reasons for resisting the idea that the literary text may be able endlessly to incorporate anything that we might think about it.

First, it seems intuitively wrong and practically unhelpful to declare (in effect) that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are ultimately the same. Indeed, it is plain that for most readers and audiences *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is appropriately concluded when Puck has all the lovers paired off heterosexually, and Titania and Hippolyta have capitulated to (what I regard as) the bullying of Oberon and Theseus.

> Jack shall have Jill;
> Nought shall go ill;
> The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well.
> (III.ii.461–3)

The disturbances in language and narrative perpetrated by the Mechanicals invite amusement rather than anxiety; after all, they are lower class and deferential to a fault. There are, in this conventional reading, aberrant motifs and difficulties, but they are overcome by lyrical language, cunning plotting and imaginative mythology. Notions of fairies, magic, the blessing of the bridal bed, and happily-ever-after, throw over it all a charming veil of dream and enchantment. Plainly the play will bear that construction. It is entirely open to the reader, or the theatre director, to collude in the notion that love and marriage will turn out all right, so long as we do as we are told and don't ask too many questions.

Second, crediting the text even with its own negations forecloses on the space from within which one might comment on its political tendency. If *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may be interpreted as comprising every dissident nuance which the assiduous critic may uncover, then its conservative slant

cannot be challenged; it is neither more nor less radical than any other text. I want to maintain a sense of ideological limits, so as to make apparent the choices, within the available ideological field, that constitute each play. Finally, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* draws attention to ideological limits which the earlier play accepts. The juxtaposing of the two texts reveals the boundaries of each; while it will display, inevitably, the porosity of those boundaries, it will also discover their effectiveness.

Up to a point, to be sure, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* helps to supply a contextual knowledge of what *A Midsummer Night's Dream* might be; it stimulates awareness of marginal factors within the earlier play, enabling a more problematic vision of its scope. For instance, I would argue that the idea of Hippolyta's recalcitrance, prompted in part by *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, can be substantiated in the text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; it can work in the theatre. In other aspects, however, juxtaposing the two plays reveals that, within a complicated and largely shared cultural and political force-field, they are actualizing different ranges of ideological potential. As Jonathan Dollimore declares, 'there is a limit to which the text can be said to incorporate those aspects of its historical moment of which it never speaks'. Beyond that point, the warped and debased kind of utterance allowed to the marginal becomes, itself, an insult. 'Looking for evidence of resistance we find rather further evidence of exploitation' (Dollimore 1994: 85–6).

Myself, I find the patriarchal figures in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* oppressive, and the same-gender relations to be the most vigorous and moving parts. If I were directing the play, I'd have Hippolyta led on in a cage, like the emperor Bajazeth defeated by Tamburlaine, and Oberon in bed with the lovely boy. To get what I regard as a happy ending I would show the boys and girls successfully resisting the effects of Oberon's drugs, and producing some more interesting interpersonal combinations. However, it is hard to see Theseus and Oberon permitting that. Perhaps the more effective move would be to disclose the tragedy in the conventional ending. This would involve presenting the boys and girls as manifestly brainwashed and infantilized by Puck's manipulations of their minds and bodies into cross-gender pairings. Or, indeed, they could be lobotomized–reduced to the condition of the besotted Bottom. The effect, as Oberon describes it, is rather like that. His herb, crushed into their eyes, will

> take from thence all error with his might,
> And make his eyeballs roll with wonted sight.
> When they next wake, all this derision
> Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision.
>
> (III.ii.368–71)

Puck could be shown putting electrodes on to their heads; they would lose their vigour and engagement with life, and sink into marriage as into a stupor. Sustaining patriarchy is too expensive when it means tailoring passion to patriarchal ideology. Emilia's question, when Arcite has gained her at the cost of the life of his friend, is apposite here: 'Is this winning?'

However, I am aware that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is designed to deny, rather than accommodate such ideas. Indeed, Puck encourages audience members also to respond like zombies, imagining that they have but slumbered and dreamt (V.i.410–14). If I assert my own reading, I accept that it will be *against the grain*. This concept (which I discussed in Chapter 1) is important because it allows me to distinguish what I believe the play to be about, and how I might like it to be. By being self-consciously inventive I can play like a deconstructionist, but without having to forsake the evidence of scholarship, reading experience, and common sense. 'Reading against the grain' is, of course, the project proposed by Walter Benjamin. It occurs in the section of *Illuminations* where he declares: 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism': it is because 'cultural treasures' are always coopted by the ruling elite that a historical materialist will regard it 'as his task to brush history against the grain' (Benjamin 1973: 258–9).

To be interesting, a reading against the grain will invoke diverse nuances in the text, but it will recognize nonetheless that the text has an ideological project, to which other inferences will always be marginal. How do we know what the grain is? In the same way that we conduct any interpretation of language: by referring to our knowledge of norms and expectations as we have operated them hitherto in our life experience, picking up cues as to genre, register, subculture, tradition, and other such conventions, and watching out for irony, pastiche, jokes and mistakes. Of course, this is not a reliable procedure. But on this the deconstructionists are right: language isn't going to afford a reliable procedure. If we were to wait until we had achieved an unambiguous utterance, we would starve to death.

Beyond the couple

A notion that appears fixed for most commentators on these plays is that it is good when people get into couples–lately even same-gender couples. Yet there is perhaps some less orthodox prompting in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The Prologue alludes to its complicated origins: new plays are like maidens on their bridal night, and this one is well vouched for because Chaucer was the father (*The Knight's Tale* is the source for the play). The husbands, then, are Fletcher and Shakespeare–both of them. Fortunately, unlike the boys

and girls in our two plays, they can engage themselves with the same love object (the same play) without falling into violent dispute. The Prologue speaks with undivided voice; there may be another way of resolving the love triangle.

Arcite did claim, initially, that he and Palamon loved Emilia differently– one as a goddess, the other as a woman. 'So both may love' (II.ii.166). Indeed, the three lovers might have maintained all their attachments, same- and cross-gender, in a *ménage à trois*. Emilia lights upon this possibility. She is doing her best to think creatively, to find a non-violent (non-patriarchal) solution. She tries to prefer one boy to the other, to 'end their strife' (IV.ii.3), but they are both excellent. Another possibility: 'Were they metamorphosed / Both into one!' (V.iii.84–5). Her most radical idea is that she might have both:

> What a mere child is Fancy,
> That, having two fair gauds of equal sweetness,
> Cannot distinguish, but must cry for both!
>
> (IV.ii.52–4)

However, this is forbidden; it would complicate the transmission of property. 'They cannot both enjoy you,' Theseus instructs Emilia (III.vi.275).

Well, they could. As Jeffrey Masten has astutely remarked, the collaboration of Fletcher and Shakespeare echoes that of Fletcher and Francis Beaumont. They did not only write together. According to John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*, until Beaumont married an heiress in 1613 (about the date of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*), he and Fletcher 'lived together on the Bank side, not far from the Play-house, both bachelors; lay together–from Sir James Hales etc.; had one wench in the house between them, which they did so admire; the same clothes and cloak, &c., between them.'[7] It doesn't matter whether or not they did this: it was plausible to report that they did. 'You must love one of them,' Theseus asserts again. 'I had rather both; / So neither for my sake should fall untimely,' Emilia replies (IV.ii.68–9). So every man or woman may have his or her Jack *and* his or her Jill. Of course, it won't be easy. The writer of the sonnets is as jealous as Oberon when his lovely boy sleeps with his mistress.

If the *ménage à trois* were readily available as an option, half the plots of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre would collapse. Yet we have diverse hints already. Achilles, Patroclus and Polyxena; Portia, Bassanio and Antonio; Rosalind, Orlando and Celia; Romeo, Juliet and Mercutio; Claudius, Gertrude and – Hamlet? Why stop at three? A foursome is proposed at the end of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: 'One feast, one house, one mutual happiness' (Shakespeare 2004: V.iv.171). Consider Orsino, Olivia, Viola,

Sebastian and Antonio. If this seems far-fetched, that is an index of the extent to which we imbibe patriarchy with our Shakespeare. Reading against the grain may produce, not a more elaborate realisation of the most favoured Shakespearean texts, but a critical perspective upon their ideological assumptions and, indeed, upon our own.

6
Effeminacy, Friendship and the Hero in Marlowe and Shakespeare

Heroic love

This chapter examines early-modern masculinities from a cultural materialist point of view. The emphasis is not on ideal norms to which the individual may aspire, but on positions in a social and political system that situates individuals in ways that tend to maintain prevailing power relations, both locally and at large. Textual instances are apprehended neither as documentary evidence of how people lived nor as myth or fantasy, but as contested representations through which early-modern society sought to explore its most troubling insights. The processes of desire were uneven and risky and, pursued under pressure, might be threatening to the psyche and, at least in the drama, to life.

Marlowe's Tamburlaine, at the height of his achievement in *Tamburlaine Part One* (1587), finds himself moved by Zenocrate's sympathy for her father, the Soldan, and attributes this to her heavenly beauty. This rapture, he admits, might expose him to an accusation of *effeminacy*:

> But how unseemly is it for my sex,
> My discipline of arms and chivalry,
> My nature, and the terror of my name,
> To harbour thoughts effeminate and faint!

However, this is not a danger, Tamburlaine avers, because his appreciation of beauty is heroic:

> Save only that in beauty's just applause,
> With whose instinct the soul of man is touch'd,
> And every warrior that is rapt with love
> Of fame, of valour, and of victory,
> Must needs have beauty beat on his conceits.
>
> (Marlowe 1971d: V.i.174–82)

In fact, Tamburlaine's recognition of the feminine occurs immediately after he has killed the Virgins of Damascus and during the slaughter of the remainder of the people, so he is scarcely succumbing to thoughts effeminate and faint. Anyway, he needs the Soldan to legitimize his marriage. However, effeminacy is not banished. In *Tamburlaine Part Two* the hero murders his effeminate son, because he wants to stay home with his mother instead of conquering all the world and getting killed.

Alexander the Great wards off imputations of effeminacy in John Lyly's first play *Campaspe* (1583). Alexander has fallen in love with the captive, Campaspe; perhaps this is softening his military resolve. Hephestion, his comrade, fears so; in a long speech he denounces shameful effeminacy:

> Is the warlike sound of drum and trump turned to the soft noise of lyre and lute, the neighing of barbed steeds, whose loudness filled the air with terror and whose breaths dimmed the sun with smoke, converted to delicate tunes and amorous glances?
>
> (Lyly 1991: II.ii.40–5)

Hephestion waxes misogynistic (could he be jealous?). Alexander replies that kings have huge emotions; their 'passions and thoughts do as far exceed others in extremity as their callings do in majesty' (II.ii.94–5). Notwithstanding, on seeing that Campaspe and the painter Apelles are in love, Alexander relinquishes his claim, sets up their marriage, and embarks on new conquests. 'It were a shame Alexander should desire to command the world if he could not command himself,' he avers (V.iv.168–9). There are two positions from which Alexander may eschew effeminacy: loving heroically, and subordinating personal emotions to military conquest. The play opts for the latter, while failing to make the former appear very compelling. As Mary Beth Rose points out, Alexander is given no scene with Campaspe; it is with Hephestion that he engages, seriously and at length (Rose, M.B. 1988: 26). Today we might think of Hephestion as (something like) Alexander's boyfriend; but if their relationship is queer, it is not effeminate.

Innumerable discussions of same-gender passion are vitiated by a failure to distinguish gender identity (*desire-to-be*) and sexual object choice (*desire-for*). The former is about who you believe yourself to be (for instance, in respect of your gender); the latter is about the persons with whom you want to have sexual relations (for instance, their gender). The one is often taken as a signal of the other. In particular, male same-gender preference is deduced from (what are perceived as) effeminate manners, and same-gender passion is organized into a heteronormative framework wherein one partner is gendered masculine and the other feminine. This produces

an inadequate model of male same-gender passion generally, and fails to address the emphasis placed in early-modern culture on gender-anomaly. The effeminacy which Tamburlaine and Alexander seek to eschew may be queer, but it is not homosexual. Alan Bray confirms that the male who engaged in same-gender liaisons was not distinctively effeminate: transvestism was not a sign of same-gender passion, but 'a vice in its own right' (Bray 1988: 88). However, Bray does not pursue this insight.

Up to the time of the Oscar Wilde trials (1895) it is unwise to interpret effeminacy *as defining of*, or *as a signal of*, same-gender passion. It might be attached to diverse social groups (anarchists, aesthetes and Jews, for instance); it was taken by the puritanical and purposeful middle classes as characteristic of an immoral and useless aristocracy. Effeminate leisure-class men might well be involved in same-gender practices as part of a general dissoluteness, but their effeminacy was mainly a function of their class and immorality. It is the Wilde trials, more than anything else, that transform the entire, vaguely disconcerting nexus of effeminacy, leisured idleness, immorality, luxury, insouciance, decadence and aestheticism into a brilliantly precise figure: the queer (Sinfield 1994b).

The importance of marking a separation between desire-to-be and desire-for, *and the precariousness* of that demarcation, is a leading theme in queer theory. Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick's goal, she says, has been 'to demonstrate that modern, homophobic constructions of male heterosexuality have a conceptual dependence on a distinction between men's *identification* (with men) and their *desire* (for women), a distinction whose factitiousness is latent where not patent' (1991: 62). Judith Butler also speaks to this topic: 'The heterosexual logic that requires that identification and desire be mutually exclusive is one of the most reductive of heterosexism's psychological instruments: if one identifies *as* a given gender, one must desire a different gender' (1993: 239). Commentators, inspired by an increasing assertiveness among transgender people, have sought to unravel the history and specificity of dissident gender identification.

In early-modern England, manliness generally meant hanging out with other males and fighting. 'Shall we at last conclude effeminate peace?' one of the warlords demands in *Henry VI Part I* (Shakespeare 1962: V.iv.107). Effeminacy mostly meant being emotional, spending too much time in the domestic space, and being excessively devoted to women; that is what was troubling Tamburlaine and Hephestion. Eristus in Lyly's *Midas* (1589) is accused of having an 'effeminate mind': his 'eyes are stitch'd on Celia's face and thoughts gyv'd to her beauty' (Lyly 1969b: II.i.64–5). To be manly was of course to go with women, but in a way that did not forfeit mastery. In Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671), Samson's explanation of his subjection to Dalila is: 'foul effeminacy held me yoked / Her bondslave'

(Milton 1969: lines 410–11). Shakespeare's Romeo declares himself effeminate–not in respect of his love for Mercutio, another male, but because of his passion for Juliet. Her beauty 'hath made me effeminate', he says.[1] Had Romeo been swayed more strongly by his love for his friend, that would have been manly. Aeneas is effeminate in Marlowe's *Dido Queen of Carthage* (1587), when he neglects imperial responsibilities for a woman. His comrade Achates exhorts:

> Banish that ticing dame from forth your mouth,
> And follow your foreseeing stars in all;
> This is no life for men-at-arms to live,
> Where dalliance doth consume a soldier's strength,
> And wanton motions of alluring eyes
> Effeminate our minds inur'd to war.
>
> (Marlowe 1971a: IV.iii.31–6)

Philip Sidney in *Arcadia* has Musidorus harangue Pyrocles about his love and his resolve to impersonate an Amazon:

> And this effeminate love of a woman doth so womanize a man that, if you yield to it, it will not only make you a famous Amazon, but a launder, a distaff-spinner, or whatsoever other vile occupations their idle heads can imagine and their weak hands perform.[2]

The misogyny comes with the theme, especially where one of the lads is leaving the male pack for a girl. Yet Musidorus is not entirely dismissive: it is Hercules who became a launder and a spinner; Musidorus himself is soon smitten by love.

Unorthodox gender identity seems to have upset early-modern people more than same-gender passion, probably because it was more apparent, and also because it might threaten reproductive potential and the allegedly natural authority of the male. Hence the attention to mannish women, for instance in Thomas Dekker's and Thomas Middleton's bold play, *The Roaring Girl*. The task for the male, then, was to claim manliness by repudiating effeminacy. This might be achieved by forming loving but sensible and ultimately dominating relations with women, and confirmatory associations with other males. Both these processes risked slipping into emotional excess and illicit object choice. The outcome might be adulterous liaisons with women, disrupting the even transmission of property, and self-destructive liaisons with other males. Through object choice–mastering a woman or a boy–a man might assert himself. In some contexts these preferences appear more or less equivalent, so long as the man is in charge (sexually, financially,

socially, through age). At other points engaging sexually with a boy is to be exposed to mockery (I pursue these issues in the next chapter).

Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* is a provocative instance because everyone knew that if transgressive sexuality was to be found anywhere, it was in the Trojan War story of Achilles and Patroclus. 'Your great love to me', Patroclus calls it (Shakespeare 1998: III.iii.223). This knowledge is activated when Thersites accuses Patroclus of being Achilles' 'male varlet', 'his masculine whore' (V.i.15–17). Bruce Smith suggests that Achilles is, simply, 'too important to patriarchal polity to be ostracized as a sodomite' (Smith 1995: 434). Patroclus is also sexually interested in women; he kisses Cressida enthusiastically, and Thersites says he is eager to hear of promising whores (IV.v.28–35; V.ii.199–200).

In any event, the same-gender love between Achilles and Patroclus is not the problem, not the source of effeminacy. Although Patroclus has 'little stomach to the war', he has been urging Achilles to fight. 'Sweet, rouse yourself,' he exhorts him (III.iii.222, 224). He warns Achilles that he risks being interpreted as effeminate: 'A woman impudent and mannish grown / Is not more loathed than an effeminate man / In time of action' (III.iii.219–21). The impediment, actually, is Achilles' *cross-gender* commitment–his devotion to Hector's sister, Polyxena; unmanly behaviour is attending to women at the expense of heroic valour. That is how the effeminate Paris caused the war, and he is despised for his uxorious devotion; he is besotted on his sweet delights, Priam says (II.ii.143). He is not fighting because he is detained by Helen: 'I would fain have armed today, but my Nell would not have it so' (III.i.130–1). Even after all the scheming of Ulysses, Achilles holds off from battle because of Polyxena. It is the death of Patroclus that finally moves him to fight.

For a Freudian critic, such as Deborah A. Hooker, Achilles' commitment to Polyxena 'is obviously not his prime motivation for withdrawing from the warfare', and his 'pleasure in Patroclus' is 'effeminate'.[3] Her judgement depends on clumsy modern stereotypes, supposing that all homosexuals are by definition effeminate and unsuitable for the military. To be sure, the play might be staged that way, but in this instance reading *with* the historical grain–a reading that defers to the text and its contexts–is the more challenging to many modern readers.

At the same time, although the immediate reason for the war is the seizure of Helen, it is evident that these warriors are interested mainly in each other; they indulge in a feast of desire-to-be. They compose typical homosocial triangles (see Chapter 5 for Eve Sedgwick's development of René Girard's idea of a triangular pattern, wherein male pursuit is motivated less by the qualities of the woman than by the fact that another male has chosen her). Hector embraces Ajax with enthusiasm, while dismissing

the appeals of his wife and sister. He challenges the Greeks to joust for their ladies, but his intent is to flush out Achilles, Ulysses says (I.iii.322–4). Achilles responds by confessing to a surprising desire:

> a woman's longing
> An appetite that I am sick withal,
> To see great Hector in his weeds of peace,
> To talk with him, and to behold his visage
> Even to my full of view.
>
> (III.iii.239–43)

This is a feminizing component in Achilles' desire, and it is acknowledged as a sickness. It arises not out of the explicit liaisons with Patroclus and Polyxena, however, but through an *excess* of manly, warrior rivalry. The available justification for this is the one offered by Tamburlaine and Alexander: great men will have great emotions. Perhaps it is significant that Achilles is invested in brother and sister, jointly (Hector and Polyxena). It is not, I think, that they are equivalent alternatives for the expression of personal sexualities, but rather that two warrior cultures are opposed, and there are appropriate ways of dealing with male and female opposites. (You convert the men into blood brothers or kill them, marry the women or rape them.) There is always instability when desire-to-be lurches into desire-for.

A key word in *Troilus and Cressida* is emulation (and emulate and emulous). Establishing your gender identity by emulation was thought desirable, so long as the admired figure was socially appropriate. This desire-to-be had no necessary implications for sexual object choice; it was compatible with marriage. Yet any emotion may become damaging if pursued to excess. Emulate has two meanings: to equal (the idealistic and affirmative meaning), and to strive jealously for superiority (the envious, selfish, disruptive meaning).[4] When Achilles says he wants to see Hector unarmed it is legitimate rivalry. Later on, Achilles meets Hector unarmed on the battlefield and takes the opportunity to eliminate the competition.

Manly same-gender devotion may betray an excess that hints at both effeminacy and dissident sexuality. Desire-to-be leaks into desire-for. Consider Exeter's report of the behaviour of the Duke of York at the point of death at Agincourt in *Henry V*:

> So did he turn, and over Suffolk's neck
> He threw his wounded arm, and kissed his lips,
> And so, espoused to death, with blood he sealed
> A testament of noble-ending love.
>
> (Shakespeare 1995b: IV.vi.24–7)

At Agincourt, even, a feminine excess may threaten. To what or to whom is York 'espoused'? If it is death, that is safe enough. If it is Suffolk, there is a risk that one of the heroes is feminized. Indeed, Exeter has been moved by their passion to womanish tears: 'all my mother came into my eyes.' 'I blame you not,' says the King; he too is tearful. The upshot is Henry's most violent and irrational action: his order to kill all the prisoners (IV.vi.33–7). Masculinity is restored, but in a desperate way.[5] Note, though, that the problem is the effeminizing emotion, not a sense that York and Suffolk were behaving badly.

There is something excessive in Mercutio's desire for Romeo. He is trying a bit too hard, all the way through, to get his attention. 'Speak but one rhyme and I am satisfied' (II.i.9). He is right to be anxious: Romeo is trying to leave the gang. Mercutio responds with a coarse, laddish view of sex. 'If love be rough with you, be rough with love; / Prick love for pricking and you beat love down' (I.iv.27–8). He is preoccupied with Romeo's sexual prowess: 'in his mistress' name / I conjure only but to raise up him' (II.i.28–9). As Romeo embarks on his quest for Juliet, Mercutio is framing such liaisons as rotten fruit; he goes home to bed cold and alone (II.i.34–40). Next morning he is out again, looking for Romeo, fearing already that love has weakened him for fighting. 'And is he a man to encounter Tybalt?' (II.iv.16–17). Frustrated by Romeo's commitment, not just to another person (Rosaline he thinks, actually Juliet) but to another kind of life, Mercutio restores a shared masculinity by forcing Romeo to fight, but at the cost of their lives.

Just good friends

Male bonding contributed crucially to the ties of heroism, loyalty and self-sacrifice that are required in a warrior culture; it was invaluable still in early-modern England, as part of the glue for the networks of alliance, kinship and patronage through which business was conducted. It contributed to the mechanisms through which marriages were arranged. It also sanctioned misogyny, however, and might conflict with marriage. These factors were organized around the idea of *the friend*. This concept occupied two clusters of meaning. One is 'that network of influential patrons, of their clients and suitors and friends at court' (Bray 1990: 3). Such a network was indispensable for the conduct of family and business affairs (largely the same thing). Confirmation of one's status with a patron might be manifest through physical intimacy, including embracing and sleeping together. Something we call 'queer' might have occurred, because feeling between the two subjects was intense; or one of them was the more powerful and able to ask, say, for a helping hand; or they both just wanted a bit of fun.

Bray has written about this indeterminacy, observing that the signs of friendship were not entirely distinct from the signs of sodomy. He notes 'the unwelcome difficulty the Elizabethans had in drawing a dividing line between those gestures of closeness among men that they desired so much and those they feared' (Bray 1990: 14). In his more recent book, Bray seems to withdraw from the idea that sexual congress might eventuate sometimes, ordinarily, in such contexts (Bray 2003).

The other cluster of meaning invokes the friend as ideal figure, deriving from Cicero and Seneca, and powerfully incorporated into early-modern culture through commentary by Michel de Montaigne, Sir Thomas Elyot, Francis Bacon, and Sir Thomas Browne. In this formation, friendship should have nothing to do with self-interest. 'Seneca saith that very friendship is induced neither with hope nor reward,' Elyot quotes (1962: 149). He holds that friendship may be founded only in virtue, and that friends should be *equal*–of similar degree, age, and even temperament. 'Verily [friendship] is a blessed and stable connection of sundry wills, makings of two persons one in having and suffering. And therefore a friend is properly named of philosophers the other I' (p. 134).

In practice, the two kinds of friendship overlapped: to put it briefly, the exalted rhetoric of the ideal friend might provide a pretext for more calculated contacts. There was a persistent faultline between the ideal mutuality that enveloped the idea of friendship, and the actuality of self-interest. The poet in Shakespeare's sonnets finds himself suspended between relations of patronage and love (see Chapter 9). Lorna Hutson summarizes: 'the cultural instrumentality of friendship–its power to control the transference of wealth and honour–has not been replaced but *displaced* into a new affective medium' (1994: 64).

In his essay, 'Of Friendship', Bacon begins with an estimation of friendship as defining humanity: 'whosoever in the frame of his nature and affections is unfit for friendship, he taketh it of the beast, and not from humanity'. This elevated idea notwithstanding, Bacon moves rapidly to a more instrumental view (with a true friend you may share all your feelings); then to the more awkward theme of royal favourites. Princes 'raise some persons to be as it were companions and almost equal to themselves, which many times sorteth to inconvenience' (Bacon 1968: 80–1). We may think of the inconvenience around Edward II and Sejanus (discussed later in this chapter). Yet, Bacon continues, princes, and not only the 'weak and passionate' ones, have sought the support of a friend, even though equality is impossible in a regal context. They 'have oftentimes joined to themselves some of their servants, whom both themselves have called *friends*, . . . using the word which is received between private men' (p. 81). The monarch can only have a favourite, a minion (Shannon 2002: Chapter 4).

Even so, Bacon contrives a positive outcome to this essay: a higher instrumentalism, in which the friend shares in joys and sorrows, supplies good counsel, and secures one's interests even beyond death. Elsewhere he is pessimistic about even the private potential of the ideal friend. 'There is little friendship in the world,' he concludes in another essay ('Of Followers and Friends') and 'least of all between equals, which was wont to be magnified' (1968: 147). We may sense here a personal disappointment. Bacon may have hoped to meet the ideal friend, but found more opportunity with social inferiors–who could sometimes cause 'inconvenience'.

Whether friendship should be prized above marriage was a standard debating topic. Following Cicero, the friend was envisaged as an equal, the wife as a subordinate. Sexual relations were for the latter, since they were understood as power relations. It was because friendship aspired to be *equal* (however complicated in practice) that it could not (they believed) be *sexy*. As among the middle and upper classes in the early and mid twentieth century, sex was something a man did with his inferiors. In particular, he didn't practise his more disreputable desires (sado-masochism, same-gender, transvestism) with people of his own class. That's what sex workers were for.

The most prominent faultline, I have remarked, opens up around the contrary injunctions that faced young people: to marry for love, or in accord with the wishes of parents. At such a point, contradictory authorizations are competing for the allegiance of the person, allowing space for individual triumphs and disasters. Adjacent to this is the juncture at which a man was expected to negotiate the competing demands of marriage and male bonding (Jardine 1996: Chapter 7). We have seen this already in *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, as well as *Campaspe*. In Henry Porter's play, *The Two Angry Women of Abington* (1599), Master Barnes has been entertaining his neighbour, Master Gourney, with their spouses and offspring. Gourney calls it 'friendly courtesy' and 'near-dwelling amity'; Barnes speaks of 'neighbour-amity' as 'a jewel of high-reckoned worth', adding that he esteems 'amity, familiar neighbourhood / The cousin-german unto wedded love'. Gourney agrees that there is an alliance between them, that both spring from the heart: 'jewels of amity and gems of love' (Porter n.d.: I.i.). Their wives are suspicious and jealous, however, and only after extensive slapstick manoeuvres are marriage and friendship reconciled.

From a heteronormative, Freudian perspective, it may seem that moving from same-gender engagements to marriage is a merely natural progression, from adolescent to adult; I have quoted Coppélia Kahn and Janet Adelman to that effect (p. 57–8 above). Diverse texts indicate that male bonding could not so easily be accommodated. Indeed, the misogyny of early-modern society, so far from abating in recognition of the crucial role

women must play in continuing the family line, was intensified by male resentment at such necessary enthrallment to the female and the married state. Hamlet, for instance, repudiates Ophelia and excoriates Gertrude, while prizing Horatio for his rejection of feminine interference. Since Hamlet's soul 'was mistress of her choice', she has preferred Horatio, who is not

> a pipe for Fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
> That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
> In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
> As I do thee.
>
> (Shakespeare 1982: III.ii.63, 70–4)

What is rotten in the state of Denmark? The persistent answer is: female sexuality (Rose, J. 1985). 'Frailty, thy name is woman,' Hamlet asserts, even before he gets the message from the Ghost (I.ii.146). Actually, little of the rottenness derives from the women; rather, they are pretexts in the attempts of the men to gain advantage and control within a corrupt political elite. Diverse social disturbances are displaced onto gender and sexuality, obscuring the contradictions and injustices in the social and political system. What is sad in *Hamlet* is the etiolation of friendship in the face of inequality. Horatio introduces himself as 'your poor servant ever', but Hamlet responds: 'Sir, my good friend' (I.ii.162–3). However, they never escape hierarchy; Horatio can hardly speak to the Prince without being spoken to first. Compare Prince Hal in *Henry IV Part II*, where he laments, to Poins, that he has no more suitable friend than the insensitive Poins (Shakespeare 1966: II.ii.32–65).

Proteus and Valentine are friends in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentleman of Verona*. This does not stop Proteus from becoming infatuated with Valentine's beloved, Silvia, and pursuing her to the point of rape. 'In love / Who respects friend?' he demands. 'All men but Proteus,' Silvia rejoins (Shakespeare 2004: V.iv.53–4). Proteus' treachery and brutality are exposed; Valentine upbraids him; Proteus repents and asks for forgiveness; Valentine accepts this and promptly *yields up Silvia to his friend*: 'And that my love may appear plain and free'–his love for Proteus, that is–'All that was mine in Silvia I give thee' (V.iv.82–3). Such, it appears, is the action of a true friend. And Silvia? She is given nothing to say when Valentine hands her over to Proteus; she doesn't speak again in the play. First (as with Gertrude in *Hamlet*), her feelings just aren't important enough, in the imaginative structure of the story, to claim space in a crowded dénouement. Second, as for instance with Olivia at the end of *Twelfth Night*, anything

Silvia might plausibly be given to say would undermine fatally the play's aspiration towards closure.

Critics and directors have struggled to show that Shakespeare didn't really mean Valentine to give his beloved to his friend, or only in folly, irony, or jest.[6] However, in this instance the manifest reading, in all its strangeness, is more provocative than a reading against the grain could be. Indeed, the theme occurs in various places–in Elyot's exemplary tale of Titus and Gisippus, and in James Shirley's play *The Traitor* (1631). As I read these narratives, they are not recommending that, in real life, one concede one's fiancée to one's friend; apart from anything else, that would lay one open to legal and corporeal action by her kin. These are fables, bizarre and violent enactments of an ideological faultline. There may, however, be progressive potential in the idea that the four lovers in *Two Gentlemen* may keep house together: 'One feast, one house, one mutual happiness' (V.iv.171; see p. 84 above).

The language of ideal friendship strives continually to match the degree of union that is proposed without falling into same-gender passion. The ideal friend might find that his love took on a sexual intensity. Some of the most prominent accounts are not afraid to approach the borderline with same-gender passion. Montaigne in his essay 'Of Friendship' (in John Florio's translation of 1603) compares love of women and of a friend. The former is more fervent and sharp, but subject to fits and starts; the latter 'a constant and settled heat, all pleasure and smoothness, that hath no pricking and stinging in it, which the more it is in lustful love, the more it is but a raging and mad desire'. Montaigne assumes that love of women is of the lustful type. This type may occur also between friends, though in a damaging manner: 'As soon as it creepeth into the terms of friendship, that is to say, in the agreement of wills, it languisheth and vanisheth away; enjoying doth lose it, as having a corporal end, and subject to sacietie [satiety]' (Montaigne 1965: 198). Lustful love, by attaining satisfaction, destroys itself.

Plainly, Montaigne's exaltation of friendship is founded in his low estimation of women. (Patricia Parker (1996b) points out that he advocates, but does not sustain, a manly style of writing.) Suppose, indeed, two males could love physically: they would be 'more complete and full'. Suppose, Montaigne speculates:

> such a genuine and voluntary acquaintance might be contracted, where not only minds had this entire jouissance, but also bodies, a share of the alliance, and where a man might wholly be engaged: it is certain, that friendship would thereby be more complete and full: but this sex could never yet by any example attain unto it, and it is by ancient schools rejected thence. And this other Greek licence is justly

> abhorred by our customs, which notwithstanding, because according to use it had so necessary a disparity of ages, and difference of offices between lovers, did no more sufficiently answer the perfect union and agreement, which here we require.
>
> (p. 199)

The Greek model, Montaigne avers, is not only abhorred. It would not suit sixteenth-century friendship because it entailed age difference, and hence not 'the perfect union and agreement' which true friendship requires. Yet there might be possibilities. If the fury of love lighted upon a base-minded boy, he would merely seek material rewards; but the generous-minded would aspire to a more lasting spiritual beauty. This kind of loving might produce such defenders of equity and liberty as the tyrannicides, Aristogiton and Harmodius (though they were condemned by some as sodomites) (Schachter 2001: 11). Such love might end in friendship (pp. 200–1). After all, he asks, quoting Cicero: 'what love is this of friendship? why doth no man love either a deformed young man, or a beautiful old man?' (p. 199). Montaigne is reluctant entirely to relinquish some potential for physical love between friends.

Orthodoxy, Sir Thomas Browne observes in *Religio Medici* (1642), requires that the love of parents, wife and children comes first. He begs to differ: 'I never yet cast a true affection on a woman; but I have loved my friend as I do virtue, my soul, my God.' Friendship is an enigma, 'wherein two so become one, as they both become two' (this passage gives the title to Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations*):

> When I am from him, I am dead till I be with him; when I am with him, I am not satisfied, but would still be nearer him. United souls are not satisfied with embraces, but desire to be truly each other; which being impossible, their desires are infinite, and must proceed without a possibility of satisfaction.
>
> (Browne 1892: 103–4)

How might two friends be truly each other, *beyond embracing*? What would *satisfaction*, without which we must proceed, be like? Browne is saying that friends cannot do what husbands and wives do. Sodomy (or should we say sexual love?) is shadowing friendship.

For the combative Caius Martius Coriolanus, friendship occupies a zone of peace, sharing and nostalgia:

> O world, thy slippery turns! Friends now fast sworn,
> Whose double bosoms seem to wear one heart,

> Whose hours, whose bed, whose mean and exercise
> Are still together, who twin, as 'twere, in love
> Unseparable, shall within this hour,
> On a dissension of a doit, break out
> To bitterest enmity.
>
> (Shakespeare 1976: IV.iv.12–18)

Notice the range of friendly activities: how casually the sharing of beds is included, in the midst of so much intense feeling.

Changes

Heroic insistence on polarized gender identities supports an essentialist notion of gender as established in an ineluctable male/female dichotomy, requiring only determination to assert. At the same time, we have seen gender instability around the noblest of heroes and friends, and nervousness about male effeminacy and women out of place. Evidently some mobility within the sex/gender system is both possible and inevitable. Such anxieties are compatible with a strand in early-modern gender theory, which has been shown to derive from Galen and Aristotle. In brief, it was held that women and men were not essentially different biologically; rather, women were taken to be incomplete versions of men. This is often called the one-sex model. It was said that hermaphroditic bodies could move from the female towards the male, but not the other way: because nature tends towards perfection.[7] However, the emphasis on effeminacy bespeaks an anxiety that the male might slide back (as it was held) into the female. The evidence for the one-sex model has been disputed by scholars such as Janet Adelman, Patricia Parker and Belinda Johnston.[8] It may be that both views are right. The error is to assume that only one model of gender may circulate in one epoch. I have argued that such an epochal approach derives from Foucault, whereas Raymond Williams encourages us to envisage the co-occurrence of subordinate, residual, emergent, alternative, and oppositional cultural forces alongside the dominant, in varying relations of incorporation, negotiation, and resistance. In *The Roaring Girl* (1611), Sir Alexander uses the one-sex model to explain Moll: 'her birth began / Ere she was all made' (Middleton and Dekker 1997: I.ii.129–30). But the play respects her cross-dressing as a bid for independence. In this section I discuss two plays that bear playfully on the question of how gender identity may be relinquished and regained.

In *Love's Cure* (1605) by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, to save them from family feuding, Alvarez and Eugenia have disguised their offspring Clara and Lucio as the other gender. Now they are thoroughly

socialized into it. Eugenia summarizes: 'as she appears / Altered by custom, more than woman, he, / Transformed by his soft life, is less than man' (Beaumont and Fletcher 1992: I.iii.411–13). Lucio is effeminate–preoccupied with laundry and horrified by fighting. Bobadilla, a witty knave in his household, questions: 'was there ever such an hermaphrodite heard of? Would any wench living that should hear and see what I do, be wrought to believe that the best of a man lies under this petticoat and that a codpiece were far fitter here than a pinned-placket?' (I.ii.136–40). Despite his genital equipment, Lucio has the gender identity into which he has been reared. 'Oh custom, what hast thou made of him?' Bobadilla exclaims (I.ii.177). Clara, meanwhile, has become a successful warrior, with 'rough manners, custom having changed, / Though not thy sex, the softness of thy nature,' her father observes (I.iii.261–2). He exclaims: 'can strong habitual custom / Work with such magic on the mind and manners / In spite of sex and nature?' (II.ii.765–7). Now there is no longer need for disguise, so Alvarez and Eugenia set about reconverting their children. How easily will Lucio and Clara negotiate their 'new' genders?

Lucio is uncomfortable in his new accoutrements of sword, boots and spurs:

> Lord, how my head aches, with this roguish hat;
> This masculine attire is most uneasy;
> I am bound up in it: I had rather walk
> In folio again, loose, like a woman.
>
> (II.ii.643–6)

Clara is told that women don't carry swords; 'nature hath given you a sheath only, to signify women are to put up men's weapons, not to draw them' (II.ii.714–16). Yet she finds that her martial prowess is still needed on occasion. Why is it so important to change these youngsters? Partly because *Love's Cure* presents the correction of such an anomaly as a restoration of nature; partly because people start falling in love with them; and partly because suitable marriages have to be arranged.

Eventually they experience transformative circumstances. Lucio is called on to defend his father (note that this, not getting a girlfriend, is the critical sign, though he does that as well); Clara finds herself drawn passionately to Vitelli. Fundamentally, they revert to their 'natural' genders. Yet we have seen gender to be customary and malleable; they *change* gender, as well as reverting to it. Lucio discovers a new, gentle courtesy: he makes an equal friend of a defeated enemy and moderates the violence of the two families (as Romeo wanted to do). This transformative potential is less marked with Clara. She also adapts ideas of friendship–she

initially impressed Vitelli in her warrior disguise: 'Were this man a friend, / How would he win me?' Vitelli asks himself (I.iii.386–7); they may look forward to begetting 'a brave race' (IV.ii.1596–7). However, Vitelli has the last speech of the play, which aims to achieve closure at the expense of any innovation Clara might have represented.

> Behold the power of love; lo nature lost
> By custom irrecoverably, past the hope
> Of friends restoring, love hath here retrieved
> To her own habit, made her blush to see
> Her so long monstrous metamorphosis.
> May strange affairs never have worse success.
>
> (V.iii.2262–7)

Yet the play maintains an active ingredient of gender anomaly (see Dollimore 1991: 300–6). It inspires a revolt of the women in the last act, whereby they prevent a fight to the death between Vitelli and Alvarez by threatening to kill themselves.

In John Lyly's *Gallathea*, performed before the Queen by the Children of Paul's in 1584–85, Gallathea and Phyllida have been disguised as boys by their fathers because Neptune demands that a chaste and beautiful virgin be sacrificed to him. When Gallathea and Phyllida meet at the start of Act II they are highly self-conscious about their assumed gender identities. 'Use will make it easy,' Phyllida's father promises (Lyly 1969a: I.iii.23). 'But whist, here cometh a lad,' says Gallathea–encountering Phyllida: 'I will learn of him how to behave myself' (II.i.11–12). As in *Love's Cure*, gender is to be learned. This is but the first of a sequence of episodes in which sexual curiosity and (perceived) gender identity are tangled together. For it quickly transpires that Gallathea is pleased at Phyllida's being a boy not only because she might learn gender language from him, but because she is attracted to him (desire-to-be/desire-for). Phyllida, likewise, is attracted to Gallathea. Each of them laments that she cannot pursue her passion for the other because of her own disguise: because she looks like a boy, she cannot explore the appeal of this other (apparent) boy.

Actually, of course, both of them are girls, and they begin to suspect this. Phyllida probes for the truth about Gallathea: 'It is pity that Nature framed you not a woman, having a face so fair, so lovely a countenance, so modest a behaviour' (III.ii.1–2). Gallathea's response is teasing, evasive and bold: 'I would not wish to be a woman, unless it were because thou art a man' (III.ii.7–8). The supposition here is heteronormative: in order for love to work properly there has to be a boy and a girl. However, this assumption is contradicted by the dawning awareness that in fact they are both girls

and, whatever the dominant gender ideology says, they are in love. Still they do not draw back. The scene ends with Phyllida's intriguing proposal: 'Come, let us into the grove and make much one of another, that cannot tell what to think one of another' (III.ii.55–6). I believe we don't know precisely what 'make much one of another' means. They consider loving as brothers, but that would not be intense enough. Anticipating *As You Like It*, Phyllida proposes that one of them pretend to be a girl: 'Seeing we are both boys, and both lovers, that our affection may have some show, and seem as it were love, let me call thee mistress' (IV.iv.15–17).

The charming passion between the girls in *Gallathea* is of a piece with their escape from the wider framework of the plot, in which Neptune's demands illustrate the brutal penalties that may attend a flouting of patriarchal authority. It is a play about virginity versus rape, and monsters doing things to young women (see Jankowski 1996). These matters have to be managed if the play is to reach a comedic conclusion. They come to a head when the monster declines to assault the proffered virgin because she is not the fairest. Venus and Diana do a deal with Neptune and he remits the sacrifice. 'Neptune should have been entreated,' he says, 'not cozened' (IV.iii.8–9). Patriarchy should be negotiated, it cannot be evaded. The trickery of the fathers' disguisings is exposed, to the distress of the girls. The goddess Diana assumes the love affair must be cancelled: 'you must leave these fond, fond affections. Nature will have it so, necessity must' (V.iii.125–6). It is 'An idle choice, strange and foolish,' Neptune declares, 'to imagine a constant faith where there can be no cause of affection' (V.iii.131–3). But Venus has another plan: one of the girls must be metamorphosed to a boy. After all, she adds, that's what she did in the case of Iphis and Ianthes (V.iii.146). The appeal to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* licenses an exploration of emotions that were supposed to be taboo in Protestant England. The only complaint is from the fathers, who want to maintain patriarchal control. Compare Lyly's *Sappho and Phao* (1584), where the unacceptable love is between a princess and a poor young ferryman: again, Venus steps in to eliminate the problem.

True love, in *Gallathea*, still prefers a male and a female. According to the system, their desire-for (each other) has flourished within an impermissible desire-to-be (the same gender). Note, though, that it doesn't matter which of them is to be changed–neither of the girls is more boyish than the other. Venus' manoeuvre is so blatant that it highlights the evidence that two girls may love each other. Valerie Traub develops Cupid's remark: he will 'so confound their loves in their own sex that they shall dote in their desires, delight in their affections, and practise only impossibilities' (II.ii.7–9). Lesbian love, Traub points out, was conventionally supposed to be an *amor impossibilis*: without the phallus, what would women do?[9] The love between the two girls in Lyly's sprightly play is not represented as impossible,

though its full achievement requires a metamorphosis; a more flexible notion of love is needed.

As often before, I think of Nancy K. Miller's essay, 'Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities'. Miller ponders how women writers are accused of falling prey to *implausibilities* in their fiction. They are said to manifest sensibility, sensitivity, extravagance–'code words for feminine in our culture'–at the expense of verisimilitude (Miller, N.K. 1986: 357). However, such 'improbable' plots may be regarded as comments on the stories available to women: the wish of women for power over their lives cannot be plausibly framed. Happy endings manifest 'the extravagant wish for a story that would turn out differently' (p. 352). A happy ending for two girls in love may be a fantasy, but that doesn't make it less important.

Gallathea strikes me as a more radical play than *Love's Cure*. Its gender-anomalous characters are sympathetic and not subject to mockery. As in many other plays, they develop an attachment to someone of the 'wrong' sex; unusually, they maintain it beyond the point of discovery. Nor are they the only females to fall in love with girls in the play. Diana's nymphs, incited mischievously by Cupid, abandon their commitment to chastity and fall for Gallathea and Phyllida. The epilogue urges ladies to yield to love, but it doesn't specify cross-gender. As far as I can see, these two plays do not resolve the question of the one-sex model. What is striking is the degree of malleability that they disclose, in both gender identity and sexual object choice.

Also, there are some real boys in *Gallathea*. Rafe, Robin and Dick–brothers–are shipwrecked; they too are victims of Neptune. While the social order depends critically on the exchange of women, the lives of young, lower-class and outsider men are regulated as well. The play shows the boys' attempts, in the wood like the girls, to find a satisfactory master. There is a role in the main action for these boys, eventually at the end of the play: Venus employs them as minstrels at the marriage. At this point we might be particularly aware that the actors performing before us are a boy company–the Children of St Paul's–and that they are subject, like Rafe, Robin and Dick, to the whims of their masters. These masters, formally, are the managers of the company, but in another sense, of course, the boys are performing for the audience: *the people watching are the masters*. For them, these boys are both at their command and (as actors on a stage) untouchable. Of course, the audience 'knows' that in these plays both the boys and the girls are played by boys. So audience members may watch the love of two boys, if that is the way their fancy takes them, or enjoy the indeterminacy which allows spectators to hover between alternative perceptions. They may also be thrilled (men and women) by the manly presence of Tamburlaine and Alexander. But some element of sexual

dissidence seems particularly likely to enter the awareness of audience members when an exchange of gender occurs within the action of the play. I say more about this in the next chapter.

The men and the boys

For the adult male, the female is not the only defining other: also there is *the boy*. Troilus's beardless youth, strongly stressed, allows him to make a fool of himself over a girl; he will learn better. Already he knows it is 'womanish' not to be on the battlefield (I.i.103). Romeo's youthfulness accounts for his love-lorn, inconstant condition (Friar Laurence calls him young man and 'young waverer'; II.iii.63, 85). In a man, boyishness enacts another back-sliding; an unseemly inability to maintain a manly self-assurance. Often it occurs as an insult. Tybalt, picking a fight, calls Romeo 'Boy' and 'Thou wretched boy' (III.i.65, 132). Thersites labels Patroclus 'boy' (V.i.14). The King in *All's Well that Ends Well*, angry and resentful at being crossed, calls Bertram 'Proud, scornful boy'; Capulet dubs Tybalt 'goodman boy' in comparable circumstances.[10]

The *boy* accusation appears often in conjunction with effeminacy. To some extent these are overlapping categories: from the viewpoint of the masterful male they are both inferiors. It is axiomatic that a hegemonic concept, such as maleness, finds its exemplifications where it will, and boosts itself by marginalizing and repudiating its others. Indeed, femininity may appear more acceptable in the guise of a boy. Lorenzo seems not to be disappointed when, in *The Merchant of Venice*, his fiancée cross-dresses: 'Descend, for you must be my torch-bearer . . . Even in the lovely garnish of a boy' (Shakespeare 1959: II.vi.40, 45). As Eve Sedgwick puts it: 'the status of women, and the whole question of arrangements between genders, is deeply and inescapably inscribed in the structure even of relationships that seem to exclude women–even in male homosocial/ homosexual relationships' (1985: 25).

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony and Octavius compete over which of them will make charges of effeminacy and boyishness stick to the other. The Romans are scathing about the effect on Antony's manliness of his devotion to Cleopatra:

> This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes
> The lamps of night in revel; is not more manlike
> Than Cleopatra, nor the Queen of Ptolemy
> More womanly than he; hardly gave audience, or
> Vouchsafed to think he had partners.
> (Shakespeare 1995a: I.iv.4–8)

While Antony is dominating an empire, none of their charges really matters; to the contrary, his devil-may-care attitude signals his stature. He can dress up in Cleopatra's clothes and she can wear his sword, and there is no threat to his masculinity (II.v.22–3). A real man can do whatever he chooses; after all, Hercules, the demi-god with whom Antony is identified, dressed up as a woman when enslaved to Omphale. But when Antony allows Cleopatra to determine the conduct of the war, and begins to lose, these feminizing practices seem to indicate his weakness and dependency. The desertion of Enobarbus signals the point at which Antony has stretched heroic comradeship too far.

Octavius declares Antony should be chided 'As we rate boys' (I.iv.31). This is not as inappropriate as might be supposed: to match himself with Cleopatra, Antony finds himself recalling and reasserting his youthful prowess (see Little 2000: 120). 'There's sap in't yet!' he exclaims (III.xiii.197); he hails the morning 'like the spirit of a youth / That means to be of note' (IV.v.26–7). His grey hair does not represent his capacities:

> What, girl! Though grey
> Do something mingle with our younger brown, yet have we
> A brain that nourishes our nerves and can
> Get goal for goal of youth.
>
> (IV.viii.19–22)

Octavius, meanwhile, is reviled for his youthful inadequacy. He is first mentioned by Cleopatra as 'the scarce-bearded Caesar' (I.i.22); to Antony, he is 'the boy Caesar' (III.xiii.17). 'He calls me boy,' Octavius complains, 'and chides as he had power / To beat me out of Egypt' (IV.i.1–2). Octavius, in turn, excoriates Antony as 'the old ruffian' and interprets his challenge to heroic personal combat as a sign of weakness (IV.i.4). When Cleopatra flees the sea battle, Octavius' relative youth cannot be denied, and it makes Cleopatra's untrustworthiness appear worse: she has 'sold me to this novice'; 'To the young Roman boy she hath sold me' (IV.12.14, 48). Octavius' best move, eventually, is to shed his boyhood by claiming manly equivalence with Antony ('Our equalness'; 'my mate in empire, / Friend and companion'; V.i.48, 43–4).

An air of boyishness signals the prowess of another warrior, Caius Martius Coriolanus. He started fighting for his country when he was a stripling and sported an 'Amazonian chin' with which 'he drove / The bristled lips before him.' He was of an age to 'act the woman in the scene' but 'prov'd best man i'th'field' (Shakespeare 1976: II.ii.87, 91–7). We hear of his son rehearsing for manliness by tearing a butterfly to pieces: 'Oh, I warrant how he mammocked it!' (I.iii.65).

The heroic virtues of Caius Martius are necessary to fight off the Volsci; he is like the demi-god, Hercules (IV.vi.100). But this is becoming a residual factor in the Roman *polis*. It is possible to make peace; Menenius' image of the state as like a body, hierarchical though it is, plants the idea of the city and its environs working in harmony (I.i.95–162). When Martius is away it almost happens: Rome 'Sits safe and still without him' (IV.vi.37). What Rome needs is civil society: laws, institutions, customs, rights, officers, appointments and responsibilities, and ways of engineering change. Martius comes to grief because he cannot respect that. He cannot learn from Machiavelli that the impetuousness that serves the prince well in one circumstance may be disastrous in another, and that the qualities required to come to power are often different from those required to maintain it (Machiavelli 1961: 131–2). The custom of appealing to the citizens in order to secure the consulship induces in Martius a fear of decline into boyishness and femininity:

> Away my disposition, and possess me
> Some harlot's spirit! My throat of war be turn'd,
> Which choired with my drum, into a pipe
> Small as a eunuch, or the virgin voice
> That babies lull asleep!
>
> (III.ii.111–15)

As with Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, ready for the knife, there is a sexual connotation of display and submission; a touch of St Sebastian, perhaps.

Martius surely will have little trouble repudiating effeminacy. Yet his emulousness makes him vulnerable; he becomes enthralled–effeminized–by Aufidius: 'And were I anything but what I am, / I would wish me only he' (I.i.250–1). The imaging of his encounters with other warriors is strange and suggestive. When he celebrates the achievement of his friend and comrade Cominius, he compares their embrace to his honeymoon night:

> Oh! let me clip ye
> In arms as sound as when I woo'd; in heart
> As merry as when our nuptial day was done,
> And tapers burn'd to bedward.
>
> (I.vi.29–32)

Notice, though, that Cominius is equivalent to the wife. They embrace as comrades, but Martius cannot resist positioning Cominius as the subordinate–the female–in the encounter. 'Flower of warriors,' Cominius responds,

ineffectually but unmistakably trying to turn back on Martius some of the femininity (flower meaning brightest and best, but also blossom; I.vi.32).

In the same way Aufidius, greeting Martius, seizes the male role for himself: 'Let me twine / Mine arms about that body,' he demands, combining bondage and embrace. He will contest 'As hotly and as nobly with thy love / As ever in ambitious strength I did / Contend against thy valour' (IV.v.107–14). In Aufidius' aggressively feminizing rhetoric, love and fighting are not opposites, they are continuous and complementary:

> Know thou first,
> I lov'd the maid I married; never man
> Sigh'd truer breath; but that I see thee here,
> Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart
> Than when I first my wedded mistress saw
> Bestride my threshold.
>
> (IV.v.114–19)

The energy in this manoeuvre should alert Martius to Aufidius' deep-set enmity. The Volscian has nightly dreams: 'We have been down together in my sleep, / Unbuckling helms, fisting each other's throat' (IV.v.125–6). For Aufidius, gender and sexuality are at stake, not just victory.

There is a tendency at other points to position Martius as female to Aufidius' male. It is suggested that Aufidius might take advantage of Martius' dispute with Rome like a wife falling out with her husband (IV.iii.31–3). Aufidius' servingman accuses Martius of meddling with his master, provoking the reply that this would be more honest than meddling with his mistress (IV.v.47–9). The servant observes that Aufidius is celebrating Martius at a banquet in a way that 'makes a mistress of him' (IV.v.200). I believe Martius is vulnerable to this manipulation because he is the younger man. However, Martius is charismatic and seductive when he chooses to be, and the eventual outcome is that Aufidius feels himself demoted, 'till at the last / I seem'd his follower, not partner' (V.vi.38–9). He becomes ready to defeat Martius by any means. 'Mine emulation / Hath not that honour in't it had' (I.x.12–13). Warrior bonding offers itself as man-to-man mutual appreciation, but cannot free itself from a temptation to subordinate the other in the figure of the female.

When I wrote first about the embraces of Martius and Aufidius, I took them as an indication that what we perceive as queerness was unexceptional in that context (Sinfield 1994b: 27–30). This is to misread gender identity as object choice, however. I now see that these warriors are deriving their masculinity from identification with other significant males. If, at a certain pitch, this involves imagery of same-gender object choice,

that is acceptable to the warrior, so long he is able to establish primacy by imputing femininity to his rival. The warrior has nothing to gain from disinterested peace and love. He depends on rape and pillage to incentivize his soldiers. When Aufidius compares Martius to his wedded mistress, he doesn't mean that he wants to make love to him; he may mean that he wants to rape him.

The key Roman institution is the family, which nurtures and exalts the hero, while sponsoring such civilized harmony as may be achieved. The ultimate link between warfare and sexuality is rape and slaughter, the customary fate of the women in the defeated party. 'If you'll stand fast, we'll beat them to their wives,' Martius promises his men (I.iv.41). So Henry V warns the men of Harfleur that his soldiers will 'Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters' (III.iii.35); 'We have beat them to their beds,' Antony exclaims (IV.viii.19). Cominius says he loves Rome

> with a respect more tender,
> More holy and profound, than mine own life,
> My dear wife's estimate, her womb's increase
> And treasure of my loins.
>
> (III.iii.112–15)

Country has to come before family because it is the wives and children who will be raped and murdered if the men allow Rome to be overrun. Fighting and family are inseparable. Volumnia compares them as indicators of manliness: 'If my son were my husband I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour, than in the embracements of his bed, where he would show most love' (I.iii.2–5). It is deeply perverse, therefore, when Martius finds himself leading an army against Rome. A Volscian guard asks how Menenius and the Romans, having dismissed Martius, their shield, are going to deter his revenge with 'the easy groans of old women, the virginal palms of your daughters, or with the palsied intercession of such a decayed dotant as you seem to be' (V.ii.41–4). These people cannot defend themselves.

In surrendering to his mother's pleas Martius becomes vulnerable to imputations of effeminacy and boyishness. Warrior culture recognizes no alternative: you either fight or you are a victim. Martius admits that he risks becoming 'of a woman's tenderness' (V.iii.129). To make his treachery seem justified, Aufidius needs to disqualify his rival: 'Thou boy of tears', he calls him (V.vi.101). The change that produces this taunt is not that Coriolanus has become a homosexual, but that he has submitted to his mother, like a boy or a girl. In the terms that I develop in the next chapter, this shifts his relations with men out of the heroic friendship model and

into the Ganymede model. Boy signals class as well as age; most demeaningly, it signals sexual submission.

Heroism and gender take on further variations in Marlowe's *Edward II*. The relation between the king and Gaveston offers a classic instance of the difficulty described by Bacon: the attempt to elevate the favourite, or minion, to the status of friend. This compels a negotiation of gender identities. Contrary to some feminist critics (such as Lisa Jardine and Jean Howard) and some gay critics (such as Stephen Orgel and Simon Shepherd), Jonathan Goldberg finds in *Edward II* a refusal of the thought that same-gender relations are merely distorted versions of conventional gender difference. Marlowe's play is distinctive in presenting same-gender partners *not as in some sense women*. This argument 'allows for difference–sexual difference, gender difference–and allows for ways of conceiving sexual relations and gender construction that cannot be reduced to the normative structure of male/female relations under the modern regimes of heterosexuality'.[11] Thus Marlowe, and Goldberg, shake off any idea that same-gender passion will be accompanied by gender anomaly.

Goldberg's position is awkward, however, because of Gaveston's idea that he will swim from France like Leander (who was visiting his female lover), and Gaveston's expectation that he will please the King by staging masques, including:

> Sometime a lovely boy in Dian's shape,
> With hair that gilds the water as it glides,
> Crownets of pearl about his naked arms,
> And in his sportful hands an olive tree
> To hide those parts which men delight to see.
>
> (Marlowe 1971b: I.i.7–9, 60–9)

This is a spectacular piece of writing, but the assumption that the delightful boy will be in the shape of Diana, together with a subsequent image of Diana and Acteon, gives a cross-gender slant to Gaveston's vision of Edward and himself. Again, Gaveston promises: 'Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad' (I.i.57). Edward later compares his passion to the lovers of the sequestered Danäe (II.ii.52–6). Goldberg's reply is that Gaveston's lines represent the way same-gender passion was currently conceived, but not the practice of the two men. 'Neither Gaveston nor Edward wears dresses. The familiar linking of boy and woman is disarmed, summoned up to be put aside' (Goldberg 1992: 115) The alternative model, in the play, is manifest in dialogue in an egalitarian register, as in the King's initial summons to Gaveston: 'My father is deceas'd, come Gaveston, / And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend' (I.i.1–2).

Goldberg's argument is exciting; it may encompass the aspirations of the two young men but, as we have seen, it was not easy to combine friendship and sexual passion. Edward often calls Gaveston 'friend', but he also calls him 'minion' (I.iv.30). 'The mightiest kings have had their minions,' Mortimer Senior allows, including Alexander, Hercules and Achilles (I.iv.390–3). However, Edward doesn't want a favourite, he wants a friend. His love for Gaveston claims equality of status, while his political responsibility requires manifest differentiation of their positions (see Clarke 2002). In my view, the feminizing imagery in the play, manifest also in protests at Gaveston's sumptuous attire (I.iv.405–18), cannot be set aside. Correspondingly, the eroticization of male bonding is not exclusive to Marlowe. It is found also in *Coriolanus*, *Romeo and Juliet* and Shakespeare's sonnets, though perhaps never without an anxious residue of dissident gender. Marlowe's representation seems to alternate between the model of emulous warrior or friend, and the model of master and minion (Smith 1991: 209–23).

Rather than securely gendering the relationship, perhaps, imputations of (what was regarded as) femininity wander through the text of *Edward II*, attaching themselves here and there–while the Queen changes, arbitrarily, from woman-as-victim to woman-as-vixen. Something more systematic may be occurring, though. Marlowe seems to have hit upon a further kind of same-gender liaison: one based on class. This became a common model in the twentieth century, when the gentleman and his bit of rough–very likely a soldier or a sailor–cultivated a liaison founded in an uneven balance of class and gender. The gentleman exercised wealth and authority from within a general imputation of upper-class effeminacy, while the other man or boy claimed the erotic prestige of a lower-class butch persona. This fits with the emphasis placed by the Barons on Gaveston's lowly origins:

> Uncle, his wanton humour grieves not me,
> But this I scorn, that one so basely born
> Should by his sovereign's favour grow so pert.
>
> (I.iv.401–3)

This complaint is sometimes invoked as evidence that class hierarchy rather than same-gender passion is the issue in *Edward II* (perhaps forming part of a Foucauldian argument about the unavailability of a concept of the homosexual). It may be, rather, that the Barons' objection is not to class rather than sex, but to (what is intuited as) *class power as sexual power* (see Sinfield 2004b: Chapter 7). A similar pattern may be inferred in Jonson's *Sejanus* (1603), where the Emperor Tiberius is said to leave governance to his catamite:

> He is, with all his craft, become the ward
> To his own vassal, a stale catamite,
> Whom he, upon our low and suffering necks,
> Hath raised from excrement to side [match] the gods.
>
> (Jonson 1965: IV.403–6)

Sejanus is said to have begun his career as a serving boy, prostituting his body, 'the noted pathic of the time' (I.212–16). Now he is 'The partner of the empire . . . Reared equal with Tiberius' (I.218–19). The minion is not necessarily a Ganymede; we have to envisage an older, tougher, more skilful presence in the state; powerful and therefore sexy; maximally objectionable to traditional authority.

The placing of class difference within the relationship of Edward and Gaveston, rather than between the Barons and Gaveston, accounts for an uncertainty in the play as to who is the sexually and emotionally dominant partner. (In the sources, they are about the same age: Edward acceded to the throne in his 23rd year.) Goldberg might argue that neither of them is. I believe that the question is initially open, but that Edward is finally effeminated (as the term was used)–not by his homosexuality (as we might call it)–but by his excessive dependence on Gaveston. 'The King is lovesick for his minion,' Mortimer sneers (I.iv.87). The Queen frames their relations through a familiar scenario, but stresses her husband's dependency:

> Like frantic Juno will I fill the earth
> With ghastly murmur of my sighs and cries;
> For never doted Jove on Ganymede
> So much as he on cursed Gaveston.
>
> (I.iv.178–81)

My next chapter begins with the cohabitation of Jove, Juno and Ganymede; I have discussed already how far we might intuit from some of these plays a potential for more ambitious households. In fact, Edward's Queen does try to accommodate Gaveston, but he wants only 'some nook or corner left / To frolic with my dearest Gaveston' (I.iv.72–3). Whatever his sex/gender role in respect of his lover, Edward renders himself effeminate through his failure in manly competence. The mode of his death confirms him in the position of the woman, and of the boy.

Yet it should not be presumed, as critics have, somewhat self-righteously, that the hot spit thrust up the anus of the king is 'poetic justice', the natural fate of the effeminate sodomite. One of the more wretched and gruesome events in Shakespeare's *Henry VI Part Two* is the secret murder of

the good Duke Humphrey of Gloucester. The manner of this is not specified in the play, but in Shakespeare's source, the *Chronicle* of Edward Hall, we read: 'some iudged him to be strangled: some affirm that a hot spit was put in at his fundament: others write that he was stifled or smouldered [suffocated] between two featherbeds' (Hall, E. 1809: 209). There is nothing about Humphrey to provoke the imputation of sodomite; the idea, simply, was a mode of death that would be excruciating, humiliating, and invisible. What is disclosed is not the guilt of the victim, but the sadistic deployment of torture, rape and murder among the ruling elite.

7
Near Misses
Ganymedes and Page boys

Service

When we say that early-modern England did not have gay men, what does that mean? What we do *not* find is a dawning awareness in early adolescence that an individual has a distinct, shameful sexual interest which he must fight against and then accept, probably with the support of a like-minded subcultural network. We don't find the early-modern young man having awkward relations with girls, or anguished suspicion and revelations in his family, or losing his job if exposed. No one suggests that it is risky to have a strong mother and a weak or absent father; no one tries to change their preference through therapy or religion. No correlation is implied between sexual preference and sensitivity to art and letters.

Yet various episodes in early-modern plays and other writings indicate distinct patterns and expectations that were evidently familiar in that context. Marlowe's *Dido Queen of Carthage* (1587) opens with Jupiter dandling Ganymede on his knee: 'Come, gentle Ganymede, and play with me; / I love thee well, say Juno what she will' (Marlowe 1971a: I.i.1–2). So Juno, the wife, can be negotiated. The boy knows how to bargain with his affections:

> I would have a jewel for mine ear,
> And a fine brooch to put in my hat,
> And then I'll hug with you an hundred times.
>
> (I.i.46–8)

Venus, who wants Jupiter to support her efforts to get Aeneas to Rome, interprets the scene:

> Ay, this is it: you can sit toying there,
> And playing with that female wanton boy,
> Whiles my Aeneas wanders on the sea
> And rests a prey to every billow's pride.
>
> (I.i.50–3)

As we have seen in earlier chapters, the problem is the imperial business, rather than the boy himself (though he can be troublesome). Jupiter agrees to sort out Aeneas' mission and exits–with Ganymede. Notice that while Jupiter and Juno are at odds, they are not thinking of separating–and certainly not because of Ganymede. Jove can have both; it is a pattern we will see repeated.

Such classical models helped to authorize local versions; Ganymede translates, approximately, into the early-modern page boy. In John Marston's play *The Malcontent* (1604), Malevole scoffs at Ferrado: 'Yaugh, God o'man, what dost thou there? Duke's Ganymede, Juno's jealous of thy long stockings. Shadow of a woman, what wouldst, weasel? Thou lamb o' court, what dost thou bleat for? Ah, you smooth-chinned catamite!' (Marston 1967: I.ii.5–9).

The husband–wife–boyfriend triad occurs in a surprising place: in *The Witch of Edmonton* by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, John Ford and others (1621). This play is often admired today for its sophisticated representation of witchcraft as an uneven combination of social construction and self-fashioning: Mother Sawyer takes on the identity that is offered by her persecutors (McLuskie 1989: Chapter 3). The bigamy plot is also very interesting. Young Frank Thorney loves Winnifride and has secretly married her to legitimize her child, with the connivance of Sir Arthur Clarington, who seeks to cover up his own affair with Winnifride. Meanwhile Frank's father, Old Thorney, insists that his son marry Susan Carter, the daughter of a rich yeoman. The love-making of Frank and Susan doesn't go well; she blames herself–perhaps she is too hesitant, or has been too forward. He tries to explain, but she misunderstands, thinking he refers to a second wife after her death, rather than bigamy.

Frank decides to flee with Winnifride, *whom he disguises as a page boy*. But first he wants to take leave of Susan, affording opportunity for Susan and Winnifride to meet–with Susan believing Winnifride to be the 'lad' he appears to be (Rowley *et al.* 1986: III.ii.53). She tries to work out the boy's status in their affairs: both Frank and he were preferred by Sir Arthur:

> That title, methinks, should make you almost fellows,
> Or at the least much more than a servant,
> And I am sure he will respect you so.
>
> (III.ii.59–61)

She is making terms with the boy, setting out the conditions on which he may join the household. He will be nearly an equal, but not quite: he will be rewarded financially for good service. In anticipation, she gives him a jewel:

A pretty wanton label for thine ear,
And I would have it hang there, still to whisper
These words to thee, 'Thou hast my jewel with thee.'
It is but earnest of a larger bounty.

(III.ii.66–9)

Marlowe's Ganymede wanted a jewel for his ear (quoted above). It bespeaks both flirtation and subordination. Susan sums up:

Thou mayst be servant, friend and wife to him.
A good wife is them all. A friend can play
The wife and servant's part, and shift enough,
No less the servant can the friend and wife.

(III.ii.73–6)

The roles are virtually interchangeable, she says, so there is room for everyone; the friend can even be the wife. To be sure, this programme seems highly optimistic; a recipe for endless role manoeuvring. But it's not a problem in principle, Susan avers. Just a matter of goodwill and discretion:

'Tis all but sweet society, good counsel,
Interchanged loves, yes, and counsel-keeping.

(III.ii.77–8)

Winnifride agrees, and promises to watch out for any infidelity (to the marriage) on Frank's part. Such a compromise might occur today–the wife and the boyfriend sharing the house–though most people would regard it as unstable and ambitious. It is all a desperate throw on Susan's part: she intuits that Frank intends to leave her.

I have discussed whether Antonio might be invited into the household in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*, acknowledging that such a reading may be against the grain. In *The Witch of Edmonton* we see it represented. I mark this not just to extend the menu of interpersonal possibilities within the early-modern sex/gender system, but to gain more leverage on the political work that same-gender relations may be doing. In *The Witch of Edmonton* the intolerable crime, which lacerates the social fabric and leads Frank to desperation and death, is bigamy. Meanwhile, throughout, Young Banks, the Clown, amiably calls the dog (Mother Sawyer's familiar) 'ningle', that is, catamite.

There are no textual indications that Shakespeare's Antonios, or the men discussed in Chapter 6 (Alexander, Mercutio, Achilles, Patroclus, Bacon, Browne, Montaigne, Aufidius, Jupiter) display distinctive physical or mental

characteristics that would lead anyone to suspect that they might prefer their own sex. Specifically, they manifest no signs of unorthodox gendering. What was recognizable was Ganymede, and his contemporary domestic equivalent, the page boy. He is not much of an individual, but he is quite a prominent social function.[1] Every gentleman had his boy; for what was there better for a youngster to do, as a way of gaining lodging, status in the community, and an education? There were few to care how far his duties might extend; or those of serving boys and apprentices in lower-class families. Casual references in the plays suggest that the page, or other youthful minion, was understood as contributing to the erotic system of the household. Thomas Middleton in *More Dissemblers Besides Women* (1619) shows the page boy (actually the discarded mistress of the scheming Lactantio) propositioned by an older servant, Dondolo. He resents the boy for refusing 'to suffer me to come to bed to him', and for not swimming naked with the other boys: 'I could never get that little monkey yet / To put off his breeches' (Middleton 1964: III.i.84, 95–6). The Cardinal likes him too– 'The prettiest servant / That ever man was bless'd with! 'tis so meek, / So good and gentle' (I.ii.151–3).

The gullible Sir Bounteous Progress, in Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters* (1604–6), is keen to impress Lord Owemuch. He asks him to take his grandson as a page: 'Shall I be bold with your honour to prefer this aforesaid Ganymede to hold a plate under your lordship's cup?' Owemuch, mockingly, extends the sexual implication: 'I'll reserve a place for him nearest to my secrets'–meaning private parts (as when Hamlet says Guildenstern is 'In the secret parts of Fortune').[2] Sir Bounteous chooses to believe that Owemuch means well: 'I understand your good lordship, you'll make him your secretary' (I.i.142–3). That would not make the boy any safer, however. As Alan Stewart has shown, the secretary's access to the master's private closet might involve a suspect degree of intimacy (Stewart 1997: 170–87).

Indeed, the page may be closer to the master than the wife. The French princess disguises herself as a page to accompany Guy to the wars in Thomas Heywood's *The Four Prentices of London* (1592–94). As a page, she actually obtains the more intimate access to Guy: 'My love and lord, that honoured me a woman, / Loves me a youth.'

> And now I have learnt to be a perfect page,
> He will have none to truss his points but me,
> At board to wait upon his cup but me:
> To bear his target in the field, but me:
> Nay, many a thing, which makes me blush to speak,
> He will have none to lie with him but me.
> I dream and dream, and things come in my mind.

Lying with the master is thrilling in ways that cannot be spoken. The princess, conversely, is 'barred and kept from love's satiety': like Tantalus, she can see the apples but cannot reach them (Heywood 1964: 205).

Alan Bray focuses on the household as a likely location for same-gender intimacies–as for other kinds of illicit sexuality. Servants were normally unmarried, shared beds, and had little other recourse for sexual expression. The master had considerable power over the others in the household. Bray finds considerable evidence 'of homosexual as well as heterosexual relationships being common between masters and servants, to the extent that this seems to have been a widespread institution' (Bray 1988: 44–51). It was not the kind of thing that would much bother the courts, unless there was scandal; magistrates were far more concerned about births of illegitimate children who might become a charge on the poor rate. In his essay on friendship Bray reports the decline of an ethos of service, leaving *the language* of obligation and responsibility alongside a frustrating experience. In a nutshell, gifts become bribes (Bray 1990).

Such a decline in the institution of the page is posited in *The New Inn* by Ben Jonson (1629). The Host is running an out-of-town resort, and his son, Frank–termed repeatedly a pretty boy–is in demand. Lovel, a gentleman, wants him for a page (such as he once was himself). The Host angrily rejects the proposal: 'Trust me, I had rather / Take a fair halter, wash my hands, and hang him / Myself, make a clean riddance of him' (Jonson 1984: I.iii.36–8). Lovel protests that the page is a fine, traditional way

> Of breeding up our youth in letters, arms,
> Fair mien, discourses, civil exercise,
> And all the blazon of a gentleman.
>
> (I.iii.44–6)

That was once so, the Host concedes. But today the boy learns to carry messages to women, to mount the chambermaid, to visit brothels, to gamble, cheat and steal. 'These are the arts / Or seven liberal sciences / Of pagery, or rather paganism' (I.iii.81–3). Sodomy is not mentioned, though it might be assumed to be part of the package of vices; as I will show in a moment, the ensuing action gives young Frank plenty of same-gender engagement.

The New Inn perhaps makes reference to the tone of the court under James I. Richard Dutton quotes Sir John Oglander's commonplace book on King James: he 'loved young men, his favourites, better than women, loving them beyond the love of men to women. I never yet saw any fond husband make so much or so great dalliance over his beautiful spouse as I have seen King James over his favourites, especially Buckingham.'[3] Corroboration

may be inferred from Thomas Carew's masque, *Coelum Britannicum*, written for the court of Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria in 1634. Carew's personae announce a general clean-up of court morals, including this:

> Ganymede is forbidden the bedchamber, and must only minister in public. The gods must keep no pages, nor grooms of their chamber under the age of twenty-five, and those provided of a competent stock of beard. Pan may not pipe, nor Proteus juggle, but by especial permission . . . In brief, the whole state of the hierarchy suffers a total reformation, especially in the point of reciprocation of conjugal affection.
>
> (Carew 1964: lines 250–5, 260–2)

Ganymede is comprehensively renounced.

These instances generally bear out my contention, that same-gender liaisons were relatively unimportant in the sex/gender system of early-modern England. However, we do see signs of humour, disapproval and envy, alongside opportunities for unorthodox sexual feelings. It is a pattern that may still accrue at the margins of acceptable sexual practice in our own times. The household Ganymede is the occasion for knowing looks, pointed remarks, gossip, rumour and opprobrium. 'Pretty boy' is a term of admiration and abuse.

Performing theory

When asked why he cross-dressed as a boy (which, actually, he did not), Veramour in *The Honest Man's Fortune*, attributed to John Fletcher, Nathan Field and Philip Massinger (1613), replies: 'I took example by two or three plays.' Snap in Fletcher's *Night Walker* (1611) borrows his false beard through his 'acquaintance with / The Players' boys'.[4]

The stage was the obvious place to delve into the mysteries of boys and their disguises, because the position of boy actors was very like that of other serving boys. Boys in adult companies actually were apprenticed to guilds (mainly for legitimation and protection); boys in children's companies were indentured in a system designed to supply choristers to the royal chapel.[5] When boys perform Ganymedes and page boys, therefore, they are rehearsing a version of their actual social position. In George Chapman's *May-Day* (1601–2) the disreputable Captain Quintiliano, always on the look-out for money, seeks to recruit the presumed page, Lionello:

> Afore heaven, 'tis a sweet-faced-child, methinks he should show well in woman's attire.

> 'And he took her by the lily-white hand,
> And he laid her upon a bed.'
> I'll help thee to three crowns a week for him, and she can act well.
> Hast ever practised, my pretty Ganymede?
> (Chapman 1961: III.iii.228–33)

Quintiliano moves seamlessly from youth and sweetness to effeminacy, from there to the bedroom, linking professional stage performance, female identification, and eventual success as a Ganymede. Lionello, who is actually the cross-dressed Theagine, is not keen.

The playing of female parts by boys invites an analysis in terms of *queer theory* and *performance*. Judith Butler argues that all gender is 'performative–that is, constituting the identity it is purporting to be' (1990: 25). We do not act out the gender that we are; we become gendered persons through actions. This approach is compatible with the Foucauldian emphasis on social construction, discussed in my opening chapter. Drag, then, may afford a disconcerting self-awareness, exposing the constructedness of the sex/gender system, making it difficult to rest content with orthodox assumptions, and opening the way for more adventurous identities and activities. This idea is a special version of the theory developed by the Russian Formalists and Bertolt Brecht: since the most powerful strategy of ideology is to make its dispositions appear natural, the project of a radical theatre must be to *de*naturalize, mainly by disrupting any prospect of realistic stage illusion. The text implements an *internal distantiation*, inviting the reader to take a perspective on his or her experience. Gender norms are intensely naturalized in our culture; boys acting girls may promote confusion and illustrate that gender roles are imitated and learned. *Love's Cure* by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher and *Gallathea* by John Lyly, discussed in the previous chapter, are about this. Marjorie Garber holds that the boy actor has a profoundly radical potential: he 'is a provoker of category crises, a destabilizer of binarisms, a transgressor of boundaries'.[6]

A sense of performance seems most likely when the actor actually alludes to the fact that he is cross-dressing. *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* instance this. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Julia is disguised as a boy, Sebastian, so that she may serve Proteus, with whom she is in love. Silvia, whom Proteus is treacherously courting through Sebastian, asks Sebastian about Julia (that is, herself). They are about the same physique, Sebastian says, because he wore Julia's gown when he was recruited as a cross-dressing actor in a pageant, 'to play the woman's part'. This role now appears to have been apposite, Sebastian adds, for it was the lament of Ariadne at the desertion of Theseus; 'Which I so lively acted with my tears / That my poor mistress, moved therewithal, / Wept bitterly' (Shakespeare

2004: IV.iv.158, 167–9). Julia weeps because, in anticipation, Ariadne's fate corresponds to her own. Sebastian weeps because it is in his part, but also because actually he is Julia. At this point an audience might reflect that the nonce actor, Sebastian, is situated very like the professional performer, who is playing the distressed Julia/Sebastian. The difference is that while Julia is supposed to be a girl, she is being represented in the theatre by a boy. The substitutions become vertiginous, for Silvia is now moved, sympathetically, to tears at Julia's story: 'I weep myself to think upon thy words' (IV.iv.173). She too is played by a boy, and the two actors have been performing an erotically charged scene together. Indeed, Proteus also has found himself drawn toward Sebastian, despite his abandonment of Julia (now Sebastian): he has taken him into his service because he likes his face and demeanour (IV.iv.65). Anyone may be attracted to anyone. Further, Julia retains her male clothing at the end of the *Two Gentlemen*, William Carroll points out (like Viola in *Twelfth Night*) (Carroll 2004: 54). So the symmetrical but strenuous coupling that reasserts heteronormativity at the close is undermined by the on-stage appearance of three boys and one girl.

The contrivedness of gender identity is evident when the actor is seen in preparation. Julia in *The Two Gentlemen* wants for her disguise 'such weeds / As may beseem some well-reputed page', but she doesn't want to cut her hair or wear a codpiece (II.vii.42–58). The questions for an audience are about how far a girl must go to pass as a boy; how far s/he will get with an empty codpiece. In the Induction to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* the Lord is confident that his page will achieve an effective impersonation of a lady, but he gives extensive instructions. The boy may not have 'a woman's gift / To rain a shower of commanded tears', but 'An onion will do well for such a shift' (Shakespeare 1981: Induction i.122–4).

Imogen in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (1608–10) disguises herself as a singing boy, Fidele, and is warned that she must forget to be a woman. She must cultivate 'a waggish courage, / Ready in gibes, quick-answer'd, saucy, and as quarrelsome as the weasel' (Shakespeare 1969: III.iv.159–61). However, Fidele is not much like that. He becomes sickly and weak, enabling his inexperienced brothers to position him as feminine. While the boys hunt, Fidele must be housewife to them; a weak boy invites positioning as a girl. In Chapman's *May-Day* the page Lionello (actually Theagine) is required by his master to impersonate a woman: 'Come, Lionel, let me see how naturally thou canst play the woman.' 'Better than you think for,' Lionello replies (IV.ii.243–5). Within the action of the play he *is* a woman. For the audience, he is both.

Traditional critics used to say that cross-dressing was no more than a conventional expedient–both as a way of forming an acting company and as a way of sustaining a plot. Theatre-goers were supposed to become inured

to the discrepancy. In a sense this is right. The doubly cross-dressed page became a familiar motif, not in spite of its erotic potential, but because of it (see Smith 1992: 137–46). Impersonation became almost a rite of passage–for the testing of genuine lovers and the humiliation of scapegraces. *May-Day* succumbs to an epidemic of cross-dressing; it seems to be a way of getting a quick buzz around risky dealings. Chapman contrives a sequence of embarrassing gender errors, from casual kissing to intimate groping. The bed is the reality check, but what is disclosed, as well, is how easily one might find oneself in bed with a person of the wrong parts; or, what an insecure idea gender is. Quintiliano sees in the street 'a wench in man's attire' but doesn't recognize her as his own wife (IV.iii.123–4). *May-Day*, in unusual and somewhat sinister fashion, links all this fun to sodomy. Much of the action, including the access to lovers, is set explicitly at the 'backsides' of the houses–the outbuildings and the privy. The relation of this situation to sodomy is explicit when Lodovico exclaims: 'I would I had kissed almost your father's backside, so I had never known it' (that is, if he might never have been at the backside of the house; IV.ii.169–70).

It is plain that these plays are likely to have produced an enhanced awareness of dissident sexualities. But how audiences felt about this is hard to know. This uncertainty is reflected in the diversity of views among modern critics. As Stephen Orgel has perspicaciously observed, we do know of one group who thought boy actors sexually disturbing: the people who wrote pamphlets condemning them (Orgel 1996: 26–30). Laura Levine demonstrates that theatre was widely perceived as an effeminizing practice, and hence both sexy and disgraceful (Levine 1996a). For Lisa Jardine there is pleasure for the privileged male: cross-dressed figures 'are sexually enticing *qua* transvestied boys', performing 'for a male audience's appreciation' (Jardine 1989: 29, 31). Jean Howard, however, asks whether women too 'might have been empowered, and not simply victimized, by their novel position within the theatre' (Howard 1994: 78). (Olivia in *Twelfth Night* prefers a boy (Sinfield 1992: 66–73).) Valerie Traub believes that such intricate liaisons might engage 'woman's desire for woman' (Traub 1992: 107–8). Catherine Belsey asks who is seduced by the 'pretty dimpled boys' on Cleopatra's barge and in innumerable paintings: perhaps desire is organized in less specific ways than we have supposed (Belsey 1996: 48).

In practice we must assume that there was a range of responses within the theatre; even the one person might have different responses if she or he sees the play twice. John Russell Brown concludes: 'While some members of the audience might keep the real young man present in their minds as they viewed him imitating a woman, many others would have had no desire and, usually, no need to do so' (Brown, J.R. 2001: 179). Today it is

widely agreed that boy actors were a prominent and distinctive feature of this theatre, but whether this or that social group was thrilled, disgusted, amused, or just rather bored, remains obscure.

Michael Shapiro gives a valuable assessment of these rival theories. He envisages theatrical productions as 'fields of play'–'arenas in which spectators could test or try on imaginary roles or respond to hypothetical situations without having to bear responsibilities for their choices' (Shapiro 1994: 6). This I claim as a cultural materialist approach. The performance is a representation in time and space where interlocking and conflicting forms of life may be explored. As Raymond Williams puts it, 'The "persons" are "created" to show that people are "like this" and their relations "like this"': by appealing to a known model, the text tends to confirm the validity of that model. However, Williams adds, literary writing, like other cultural practices, can break towards new understanding. There can be 'new articulations, new formations of "character" and "relationship"' (Williams, R. 1977: 209).

In effect, we are looking at a version of the subversion/containment debate that preoccupied new historicism in its early phases–how far early-modern theatre texts may be thought to have been challenging prevailing modes of power, and how far they enact a rebellion that is contained, even provoked in order to be contained, by the power elite. We might attribute a conservative tendency to cross-dressing that tends towards reassurance, by inviting the audience in on the joke at the beginning, or by ensuring that everyone is restored to their proper gender by the end of the play. However, more adventurous spirits might be disappointed or provoked by an over-tidy closure and inclined to value the complications and disturbances in the middle part of the action. The writer may impose an ultimate closure on the themes of the text, but the reader is at liberty to mistrust or disregard it. It is axiomatic in cultural materialism that no text can control the terms of its reception.

The most perplexing instance of self-referentiality is Cleopatra's utterance: 'and I shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I'th' posture of a whore' (Shakespeare 1995a: V.ii.218–20). This speech has troubled and excited commentators. As I observed in the previous chapter, Antony and Octavius dispute over age and experience, effeminacy and boyishness. Suddenly Cleopatra is able to stake her own claim, invoking and repudiating the image of the boy actor. Femininity and boyishness coincide, personifying the gender identities and erotic opportunities that have enthralled and tantalized the characters. Whether this enacts an audacious triumph of womanhood, or a teasing breakdown of theatrical allusion, is disputed. Poststructuralist critics have believed that this is one of the moments at which illusion collapses and the sex/gender system is

revealed as an ideological expedient. Peter Stallybrass remarks the asp being applied to Cleopatra's breast: one might have thought that the dramatist would have wished to avoid reference to the body of the actor. The outcome is 'a radical oscillation between a sense of the absolute difference of the boy from his role and the total absorption of the boy into the role'. A cultural fantasy is set in play, one that veers back and forth between an undoing of difference (whereby it is unsignalled), and a fixation upon difference (whereby its markers are paraded, fetishistically, through prosthetic devices). Such a moment 'conjures up an eroticism which depends upon the total absorption of male into female, female into male' (Jones and Stallybrass 2000: 215).

Janet Adelman disputes such arguments because they efface the female, and cancel the possibility that Shakespeare might produce 'a theater allied with female generativity'; for 'if Shakespeare is not representing women, then certain traditional feminist concerns become irrelevant' (Adelman 1999: 24, 40). She observes also that it is hard to see how thinking about a boy actor at that moment in *Antony and Cleopatra* could contribute to a satisfying conclusion to the tragedy. Adelman interprets Cleopatra's speech as the work of a dramatist who (in this play) has invested in femininity:

> Only a playwright supremely confident in his boy actor's capacity to play a woman convincingly could risk these lines: they work only if we simultaneously see the boy actor speaking them and see the 'real' woman who does not want to be play-acted parodically by some squeaking boy actor. Cleopatra is so sure of the power of her femininity that she can dismiss the underlying actor's body as a poor imitation of her.
>
> (p. 24)

Phyllis Rackin, who was one of the first critics to assess the complications of cross-dressed actors, argues that an audience must be led by the squeaking boy to question 'the disparity between the dramatic spectacle and the reality it has attempted to represent', but that this may make the ensuing performance more impressive and realistic. After all, Cleopatra has been theatrical all the way through; now she prepares for her suicide– 'a new show that displays her virtuosity as a performer and that of the boy actor who played her part'; 'Her sex, like her showmanship, is not erased in this final scene but sublimated' (Rackin 2005: 84, 90–1). These readings are all plausible, indeed in their own terms compelling.

The fallacy in queer literary theory, as with other formalist theories of denaturalisation through distantiation, resides in the aspiration to identify the one, true form for productive writing-and-reading experience. This aspiration has held considerable appeal in left-wing literary and cultural criticism. It

influences the theory of Pierre Macherey (discussed in Chapter 1). However, where the formalist locates distantiation as a property of the text, Macherey advocates a reading practice that looks for the unconscious of the text. What cannot be sustained is a general statement about whether theatrical cross-dressing was radical and transgressive, or heteronormative and conformist. What we may hypothesize is that the anxieties and opportunities in these stories speak to a wide and developed range of fantasies of innocence and agency, attachment and loss, exploitation and dependency.

Desires

What, then, are the lineaments of attachment between master and page? There is some potential for the formation and confirmation of gender identity (desire-to-be). Boys become men; men were once boys. Freud's view of this as a kind of narcissism is fairly uncontentious. We might regard the master's feeling for the Ganymede or page boy as indicating an attachment to his former self, or to an idealized version of his former self. Conversely, the boy might experience an anticipation of his own adulthood.[7] He might take his master as a role model. Bellario in *Philaster* (1608–10) complains to his moody master:

> Oh, what boy is he
> Can be content to live to be a man
> That sees the best of men thus passionate,
> Thus without reason?
> (Beaumont and Fletcher 1975: III.i.256–9)

Bellario wants his role model to be impressive. For the man, the liaison may afford an easy opportunity to throw his weight about. The boy may be presented as like a dog or a toy, to be shown off to friends. 'How lik'st thou my boy?' asks Fastidius Brisk in Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599) (Jonson n.d.: II.i.3). His page is named Cinedo, which is Latin for a sodomite. Again: 'How dost like him? Art not rapt, art not tickled now?' exclaims Tucca in Jonson's *Poetaster* (1601–2) (Jonson 1995: III.iv.274). The boy is expected to act as an extension of his master–faithful, devoted and anticipating his wishes. He must throw his best efforts into the master's projects, however arcane; his pert inventiveness pleases.

Lurcher in *The Night Walker* rejects Snap when he presents himself as 'A pretty boy, but of too mild a breeding, / Too tender and too bashful a behaviour' (I.ii.14–15). The Boy transforms himself to order; their language is laced with sexual subtext:

LURCHER. I love a bold and secure confidence,
An impudence that one may trust; this boy now
Had I instructed him had been a jewel,
A treasure for my use . . .
BOY. Do you love such boys, sir?'
LURCHER. . . . I would keep thee
And cherish thee, hadst thou any active quality;
BOY. . . . Would you have your boy, sir,
Read in these moral mischiefs? . . .
Then take me, sir, and cherish me and love me;
You have me what you would: believe me sir
I can do anything for your advantage,
I guess at what you mean; I can lie naturally,
As easily as I can sleep, sir, and securely.

(I.ii.19–46)

The page has to resist the sexual advances of other men, but not, I think, of his master. Snap is sharp enough to look after himself, though. He proves a main player in the intricate plot, and is revealed eventually as Lurcher's sister, contriving to ameliorate the effects of his dishonesty.

The page may prove not merely loyal, but jealous and possessive. Veramour in *The Honest Man's Fortune* weeps at the prospect of leaving his suddenly impoverished master, Montaigne:

Every day
(My Lord) I tarry with you, I'll account
A day of blessing to me; for I shall
Have so much less time left me of my life
When I am from you.

(I.i.400–4)

The boy reiterates his commitment in intimate terms: 'And when you are weary, I will lay me down / That in my bosom you may rest your head.' Montaigne exclaims: 'Oh what a scoff might men of women make, / If they did but know this boy?' (IV.i.57–8, 63–4). In other words, a woman could hardly match Veramour in devotion. When a woman, Charlotte (in fact Montaigne's betrothed) appears, Veramour becomes agitated and misogynistic: 'Pray do you leave my master, and me; we were very merry before you came, he does not covet women's company.' 'The boy is jealous,' Charlotte observes (IV.i.134–5, 139).

A boy may be weak and tearful; this probably means he is a girl in disguise. Girls may be enterprising in the guise of the page, however, as

in *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*.[8] Philaster found Bellario weeping by a fountain; 'The trustiest, loving'st, and the gentlest boy / That ever master kept' (I.ii.140–1). Philaster comments: 'The love of boys unto their lords is strange. / I have read wonders of it' (II.i.57–8). Bellario turns out to be a girl. As Michael Shapiro observes, it was not easy for an audience to tell whether a young male actor was playing a shy boy or a woman pretending to be a boy (1994: 188).

The master may be correspondingly engaged with his page. When he has reason to believe that Bellario has been sleeping with his betrothed, Arethusa, it is the boy who receives Philaster's anger: 'I will take thy life, for I do hate thee' (III.i.242). Orsino in *Twelfth Night* turns vicious when he believes Cesario, whom he 'tender[s] dearly' has preferred Olivia: 'Come, boy, with me; my thoughts are ripe in mischief: / I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love' (Shakespeare 1975b: V.i.124, 127–8). Lucius in *Cymbeline* is bitter when Fidele does not reciprocate his care: 'The boy disdains me, / He leaves me, scorns me: briefly die their joys / That place them on the truth of girls and boys' (V.v.105–7; note the gender equivalence).

The intricate intensity in these relations suggests that we are in the realm of same-gender passion. The page is available as a sexual object choice, and may find his own satisfaction in the liaison. The master and page bond has crossed the barrier between desire-to-be, which might afford a responsible way to socialize a new generation of gentry. It is situated, often, in desire-for, where it is freighted with intimate needs and damaged initiatives, while influencing the fate of families, and indeed dynasties. It is a faultline story; that is why early-modern people produced and watched plays about it.

A common assumption about male same-gender desire in the twentieth century was that boys were being substituted for girls, either because this was convenient in a particular social setting, or because the man's desire was blocked or contorted in some way, inhibiting him from making an orthodox object choice. Freud contributes to these assumptions in his comment on same-gender passion among the ancient Greeks: he asserts that their love of boys is really about love of women:

> what they look for in their sexual object are in fact feminine mental traits . . . What excited a man's love was not the *masculine* character of a boy, but his physical resemblance to a woman as well as his feminine mental qualities–his shyness, his modesty and his need for instruction and assistance.
>
> (Freud 1977: 56)

So gender hierarchy is maintained after all, so long as you go along with the Victorian notion of what 'a woman' is like. Foucault reads the Greeks quite differently:

> it was the juvenile body with its peculiar charm that was regularly suggested as the 'right object' of pleasure. And it would be a mistake to think that its traits were valued because of what they shared with feminine beauty. They were appreciated in themselves or in their juxtaposition with the signs and guarantees of a developing virility.
>
> (Foucault 1986: 200)

In the early-modern period there is warrant for both opinions. Often boys are compared to women, or said to be effeminate. Venus in *Queen of Carthage* complains of 'That female wanton boy'; 'Shadow of a woman', Malevole labels Ferrado in *The Malcontent*. Gloucester in *Henry VI Part I* accuses the Bishop of Winchester of favouring 'an effeminate prince / Whom like a school-boy you may overawe' (Shakespeare 1962: I.i.35–6). But the identification of boy and woman is not infallible; sometimes it is offered to be denied, though that does not banish it. A pragmatic overlap occurs because both boys and women are situated as social inferiors, occupying a similar structural position. What we have, repeatedly, is a nexus of substitutions, conflations and reversals, with an intriguing thrill lurking in an awareness of levels and stages of knowledge, and in moments of change between one state and another. Being a man means taking the 'active' or inserter role in sexual practice; any receptor is regarded as passive, inferior (see Sinfield 2004b).

In satirical writings particularly, with their explicit links to Roman culture, the boy is often seen as an object choice in his own right, though linked, as it were like a corollary, with the female. Consider John Donne's epigram:

> Thou call'st me effeminate, for I love women's joys;
> I call not thee manly, though thou follow boys.
>
> (Donne 1985: 133)

Observe *the equivalence* in syntax and couplet; they both involve loss of manly control. These are two choices that a man might make. A comparable pattern informs other satirical writing. Marston's third satire evokes a fantastical youth who has a hired Ganymede at his heels and then is found in bed, lovesick and writing sonnets to his mistress (Marston 1961: III.31–3, 55–66). Jonson's epigram 'On Sir Voluptuous Beast' has the eponymous knight instructing his wife:

> In the past pleasures of his sensual life,
> Telling the motions of each petticoat,
> And how his Ganymede mov'd, and how his goat.
>
> (Jonson 1954: 16: Epigram 25)

Michael Drayton's foolish Moon-Calf walks the city with 'the familiar butterfly', his page. He applies himself next to his whore; gambles, gourmandizes and dresses in finery; 'Yet more than these, naught doth him so delight, / As doth his smooth-chin'd, plump-thigh'd, catamite' (Drayton 1961: 173–4). Bray observes a remarkable consistency: 'the sodomite is a young man-about-town, with his mistress on one arm and his "catamite" on the other; he is indolent, extravagant and debauched' (1988: 34). Boys represent an alternative to women in their own right. Lisa Jardine remarks: 'erotic attention–an attention bound up with sexual availability and historically specific forms of economic dependency–is focused upon boys and women in the *same* way'. She adds: 'dependency might be a socially defining category more symbolically compelling than gender' (Jardine 1996: 66, 70). I think this is right: sexual desire responds to hierarchy. In Jonson's *Sejanus* (1603) the Emperor Tiberius is said to take up both boys and girls (Jonson: 1965: IV.392). The Duke in George Chapman's *The Gentleman Usher* (1602) has both a mistress and a minion. Guyon in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, as he enters the Bower of Bliss, encounters 'many fair ladies, and lascivious boys' (Spenser 1912a: II.xii.72). The Fool in *King Lear* warns against trusting 'a boy's love or a whore's oath' (Shakespeare 1997: III.vi.19).

Near misses

The plots of most of these plays move toward *closure through exposure*, situated, typically, at the moment at which the body meets the bed. In the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew* the page raises the stakes when s/he complains that s/he has been cast out from the bed of her supposed husband, and he responds: 'Madam, undress you and come now to bed' (Induction, ii.116–18). For the cultural materialist, what is revealed is a crisis in gender and representation; a precarious regime in which humour and anxiety may flourish, alongside repression and experiment. The exposure of the boy becomes the exposure also of lust and folly; he is a nemesis to the cocksure.

Charlotte in *The Honest Man's Fortune* wonders if Veramour might be a woman: 'I do most dangerously suspect this boy to be a wench; art thou not one? Come hither, let me feel thee' (IV.i.113–14). Veramour, cheekily, offers to do the same for her. Meanwhile the knavish courtier, Laverdure, is drawn passionately to Veramour, persuading himself that the page is 'a disguised whore' (III.iii.197): so common have these tricks of impersonation become, it appears! He calls Veramour a pretty boy, promises him the bravest clothes, the lightest duties and lodging in his arms: 'I mean thou shouldest lie with me' (III.iii.217). 'Lie with you? I had rather lie with

my lady's monkey,' the boy replies; ''twas never a good world since our French lords learned of the Neopolitans to make their pages their bedfellows' (III.iii.218–20). Irked by Laverdure's harassment, the page declares that he is indeed a woman. 'A woman? how happy am I?' Laverdure enthuses. 'Now we may lawfully come together without fear of hanging' (IV.i.280–1). This is one of the most surprising moments in these intriguing plays. Laverdure expresses a true androgyny: he loves form and features, and the ambivalence of sexuality. He doesn't mind about genitals. Traub finds a similar moment in *As You Like It*: Phebe's speech about her attraction to the feminine qualities of Rosalind/Ganymede ('There was a pretty redness in his lip'). 'Could this be merely an indication of her preferred erotic style (that is, having a small, lithe lover), and having no reference to object choice (a female)?'[9]

Laverdure shall have her/him, Veramour suddenly promises, so long as no gentleman is present with a better claim. Evidently the boy is plotting something. Veramour presents himself at the end of the play as a woman about to marry Laverdure. Montaigne objects–it's his page, he should know, they've shared a bed: 'It may be so, and yet we have lain together, / But by my troth I never found her lady' (V.iv.235–6). The master has knowledge enough to support belief, but not enough to get it right. So why was he not informed? Veramour's reply reveals him to be a complete constructionist, taking his sense of his own gender from the ascription of another:

> Indeed sir, I knew it not my self,
> Until this gentleman [Laverdure] opened my dull eyes,
> And by persuasion made me see it.
>
> (V.iv.241–3)

But Veramour is teasing them all. Indeed, by this point, many members of the audience may be wondering which is the truth. The only way to tell, if hands and face are not enough, is from the body. They rummage under Veramour's clothes: it's a boy. 'A blind man by the hand / Could have discovered the ring from the stone' (the vagina from the testicle; V.iv.257–8). Othello's demand for 'ocular proof' seems comparatively modest (Shakespeare 2002: III.iii.363).

The joke is at Laverdure's expense; he professes himself 'much ashamed' and is forgiven (V.iv.266). The boy's extreme attachment to his master is acceptable, however. Male on male relations may be allowed, even with a touch of the feminine in a pretty boy, and even in a context of bodies and beds. Yet this may not be all. In a manuscript text of *The Honest Man's Fortune* there is some further dialogue. Veramour explains how he was

harassed into humouring Laverdure, who is asked by Montaigne, mockingly, 'how do you like your masculine lady?' Laverdure replies, obscurely: 'So well, that if it please you to change, / I shall be much thankful.' I think 'change' means exchange partners, for the Lady Lamira exclaims: 'O keep your first choice' (Fletcher *et al.* 1996: 110). Jokingly, she gives him permission to revert to his initial boy-love. Further, bear in mind that it was as a boy that Laverdure first liked Veramour; 'if it please you to change' may be addressed to him–an invitation to resume his male attire. For Montaigne is to marry Charlotte, and Veramour is promoted in his service, so the visible front of patriarchy is secure. There is no reason why Laverdure should not resume his suit to the boy.

This pattern, whereby union between a boy and a man is proposed but not accomplished, appears in various plays. It didn't actually happen; but it might have done, without a last minute intervention. Finally, in *Philaster* the King wants Bellario tortured to reveal whether he has been Arethusa's lover. It is a brutal moment of exposure: 'Sirs, strip that boy' (V.v.81). Bellario is obliged to uncover herself. She is a woman: therefore Arethusa must be innocent (no one is interested in whether they might have been a lesbian couple). Bellario explains to Philaster that she conceived a passion for him: 'Alas, I found it love, / Yet far from lust; for could I but have liv'd / In presence of you, I had had my end' (V.v.177–9). So she dressed as a boy and put herself in Philaster's way, hoping to stay with him for ever. The King, intending to make amends, promises Bellario a husband; in the first quarto she accepts. In more authoritative texts, however, she says she wants not to marry but to serve the princess. This is asking a lot of Arethusa: she is to accept into her household a woman who has admitted to a passionate love for her husband. She declares:

> I, Philaster,
> Cannot be jealous, though you had a lady
> Dress'd like a page to serve you, nor will I
> Suspect her living here.
>
> (V.v.199–202)

This blunt disavowal of jealousy and suspicion sets them firmly on the agenda; it recalls intimations of unorthodox families in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *The Witch of Edmonton*; it is, of course, problematic. Whatever Bellario says about the innocence of her love for Philaster, her devotion has to be extreme to explain her passionate behaviour. And observe the reason she gives for her disguise: 'My birth no match for you, I was past hope / Of having you' (V.v.183–4). She is not claiming an asexual kind of love. Like *Twelfth Night*, *Philaster* closes without Bellario dressing as the girl

he claims to be. The play does not untangle the nexus of page, maiden and master. Rather, it allows an unaccounted-for, free-floating desire to attach itself here and there in the text.

Clerimont's Boy in *Epicene* (1609) is welcome among the ladies and the gentlemen alike–both 'under a man' and 'above a man', according to his master.[10] Observe the opening stage direction: Clerimont '*comes out making himself ready, [followed by]* Boy.' Surely he has just got out of bed? Clerimont's friend Truewit sizes up the situation at once: 'Why, here's the man that can melt away his time and never feels it! What between his mistress abroad and his ingle at home, high fare, soft lodging, fine clothes, and his fiddle, he thinks the hours ha' no wings or the day no post-horse' (I.i.22–6; melting is often sexual). The purpose of this scene is to establish the scope of gentlemanly sexual opportunism; the Boy has little more to do. The main action is initiated by Dauphine, who recruits a noisy wife for his reclusive uncle, Morose, in order to prevent Morose from disinheriting him. He arranges with Cutbeard, the barber, to tender him Epicene, who seems to say very little indeed. On marrying, Morose finds it entirely otherwise. In the hope of escaping wedlock he is persuaded to admit to frigidity, to consent to a physical examination (this proves unnecessary), and to accept that his wife is not only noisy but adulterous. Dauphine releases Morose eventually, taking off Epicene's wig: 'you have married a boy: a gentleman's son that I have brought up this half year at my great charges' (V.iv.199–200). Everyone is surprised; even Truewit had called Epicene 'lady-bride' and 'noble wench' (IV.iv.168–9).

This queer action is supported by a cast of gender-dissident characters. The women have formed themselves into a collegium, arrogating 'most masculine or rather hermaphroditical authority' (I.i.79–80). They live apart from their husbands, entertain a plurality of lovers, and have ways of avoiding child-bearing. Epicene joins them; they are severally likened to Amazons. There is Tom Otter, a captain by land and by sea, who is commanded by his wife at home and called an *animal amphibium*–a creature of two natures (both man and woman; I.i.25–9). The foolish Sir John Daw has been hosting Epicene and writing sonnets to her. He is seconded by Sir Amorous La-Foole, a beau, precious mannikin, and lady chaser. Their effeminacy offers no signal about their sexual object choice; they address women, but fail to attract any partners at all. They are inveigled into claiming that they have slept with Epicene, and are confused and humiliated to learn that he is a boy. Even so, it is their failure to attain masculine gender that is at fault, rather than their sexual object choice.

As typically in Jonson, true gentlemen dominate the plot, but in this instance they don't need to marry to secure their income (compare *Bartholomew Fair*); they are not distracted from boys. Jean Howard shows

the effect to be misogynistic (Howard 1994: 105–11). Morose is presented as deserving punishment (though this need not go without saying–it is all noise that upsets him, not just women; we might see him as victimized for a nervous disability). But Clerimont and his Boy are not criticized. Also, one might wonder about Dauphine's relation to Epicene during the six months he has lodged with him as 'my entire friend' (II.iv.42). Richard Dutton raises the thought; indeed, Epicene and Clerimont's page could be played by the same actor (2003: 7). Mario diGangi uses this instance to expound the Foucauldian proposition, that a sodomite was a generally disorderly person, rather than a man of certain sexual preferences. He observes:

> Even though Morose *has not* had sex with Epicoene, his disorderly marriage to the transvestite boy marks him as a sodomite. Conversely, homosexual sex does not guarantee a sodomitical effect. Even if Dauphine *has* had sex with Epicoene, he is not marked as a sodomite. Sexual or not, Dauphine's relationship with Epicoene is orderly because of its economic outcome–reestablishing his proper inheritance–and its maintenance of social hierarchy–Epicoene's faithful subordination to Dauphine.
>
> (diGangi 1997: 74)

I think the problem arises not with the boy as such, but with the gender disarray. For the means by which Dauphine's inheritance is secured is not sustainable: in a context where women are repudiating their 'natural' roles, or are actually displaced by boys, it avoids the female.

Jonson plays further variations on these themes in *The New Inn*. Despite his criticism of dishonest and disreputable behaviour around pages (quoted above), the Host happily commits Frank to a scheme of the rich and merry Lady Frampul to disguise him as a girl, so as to ridicule the shallow and lustful Lord Beaufort. 'I tender him to your service,' says the Host (Jonson 1984: II.ii.31). Beaufort is much taken with Frank. When Lovel and Frampul engage in a Court of Love game which allows them two hours kissing and lovemaking, Frank and Beaufort accept the same conditions. The audience see them kissing passionately; this seems to be the most uncompromising, vigorous and extensive on-stage sexual expression between two males in these plays (III.ii.82, 154, 245). The lovers are required to make speeches about love. Lovel invokes Aristophanes' fable in Plato's *Symposium* which, notoriously, places same-gender and cross-gender passion on equal footing. Beaufort, lustfully, calls for 'a banquet o' sense, like that of Ovid' (III.ii.125). The Host gives Frank to Beaufort: 'Away with her, my lord, but marry her first' (IV.iv.239). He does so, though in an

irregular manner; Beaufort calls for their bed to be made up and reaches the point of stripping off his clothes.

Eventually, to general hilarity, the Host intervenes: Beaufort and Frank cannot be married because Frank is a boy. Yet that's wrong too: there is a further surprise, this time for the audience as well. Frank is a girl after all, sold to the Host as male by her mother because he would rear her well if he thought her a boy. Now Beaufort repudiates the marriage because Frank is lower class; but is happy when it transpires that she is nobly born after all. He'd rather have a boy than a lower-class girl. In fact, everyone turns out to be well born, so they can marry appropriately. These closing manoeuvres tend to neutralize any disturbance an audience might have experienced: Beaufort's address was actually to a girl, in fact he can make a legitimate marriage. Even so, we may infer that it might be acceptable to audiences in 1629 for a man to kiss and pet a boy sensually and go through a form of marriage with him, so long as they don't quite get to bed. Beaufort is mocked because he is under a misapprehension, not because he is disgusting. *The New Inn* was not a popular play (though that may be due to the random agglomeration of lower-class villains and eccentrics). The most transgressive sexual practice (judging by the response it provokes) is that of Nick Stuff, a lady's tailor, and Pinnacia, his wife. First, he is dominated thoroughly by her. Crucially, their turn-on is to make vigorous love with her dressed in the clothes commissioned by a lady, before delivering them. True, the chambermaid Prudence is dressed up to be queen of the revels, but that situation is carefully controlled. The Stuffs are an intolerable affront: they are beaten out of the New Inn. Gendered cross-dressing may be amusing, but class is too fragile to mess with, especially in its ratification through clothes, where the bourgeois body impinges so closely on the aristocratic body.

The conclusion to which this chapter draws is that representations of page boys and girls work in divergent ways. They are largely tangential to the securing of property, and thereby a safe repository for necessary arrangements of plot and character, and also for themes of manhood, service, morality, protection, tradition, household, and performance. At the same time, they also offer opportunities for members of an audience to explore same-gender sexual ideas and sensations.

The boy in these plays never quite strips; the exception is the puppet actors in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, and they are discovered to be sexless. But some plays come close to it. In Middleton's *More Dissemblers Besides Women*, the page is discovered to be pregnant when his dancing master, exasperated by the boy's refusal to dance with his legs apart, threatens to pull down his hose to punish him. When the pregnancy is revealed, the dancing master is shaken into a radical, new sense of the potential of the sex/gender system:

> A midwife? by this light, the boy's with child!
> A miracle! some woman is the father.
> The world's turn'd upside down: sure if men breed,
> Women must get; one never could do both yet.
>
> (Middleton 1964: V.i.24–7)

But it's all sorted out by the end of the play.

8
Sex and the Lyric
Sidney, Barnfield, Marlowe

Sexual puns in *Astrophil and Stella*

If same-gender practice was something that anyone might do, it bulked far larger in the imaginations of some writers than others. Katrina Bachinger has made a case that the love of Philip Sidney's life was Hubert Languet, the Burgundian diplomat, who sought to guide his early career; even Stella should be read as a stand-in for Languet (Bachinger 1994). (This would be the earliest instance of Proustian closeted gender substitution.) I see Languet as the more devoted one, in the manner of the Poet and the Boy in Shakespeare's sonnets, and Antonio and Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*. Fulke Greville, Sidney's schoolfellow, also seems to have been in love with him, but we have no evidence of requital.

True, the two young princes in the *Arcadia*, Musidorus and Pyrocles, are great friends, but are focused on the princesses whom they might reasonably expect to court and marry. The interruption of this process derives from the monarch's refusal to manage patriarchal authority responsibly. Wooing does cause Pyrocles to pass as an Amazon, Zelmane, and this leads to amusing gender confusions. However, these episodes tend to affirm the inevitability of cross-gender outcomes. The most interesting moment is when Philoclea, who has fallen in love with Zelmane, ponders the onset of what she regards initially as 'poisonous heats', before setting aside 'all vain examinations of why and how' and giving herself over wholly to love (Sidney 1977: 242, 244). In fact, though, Zelmane is Pyrocles and nothing is untoward. This chapter moves from Sidney's sonnets to poems by Richard Barnfield and Marlowe. The idea is to indicate the scope of sexual expression in early-modern poetry through a few striking instances.

Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, wrote love sonnets partly as a way of intervening at the court of Henry VIII. They played a dangerous game, in a context where intimate passions were more than usually mixed up with state policy. The main tradition was less momentous and various: it derived from the thwarted and renounced loves of Dante

and Petrarch. Rapidly the sonnet lady became characterized as *not available*; above all, she was not available for sex, which she had to reserve for marriage. Edmund Spenser sidesteps this constraint by addressing his *Amoretti* (1594) to the woman he expects to marry; thus he cuts the knot, losing thereby a good deal of the tension. Generally, the emphasis on chastity and self-restraint was confirmed by the use of these poems to flatter female patrons. When Mary, Countess of Pembroke, employed Samuel Daniel and encouraged him to address sonnets to Delia, she wasn't expecting him to come on to her; nor was Ann Goodyere, daughter of the head of household, likely to become the mistress of Michael Drayton when he dedicated his *Idea* sonnets to her. In most sonnet sequences, the impossibility of desire is axiomatic. What, for a want of a better term, we call 'love poetry' is largely about systemic frustration. The corollary was another tendency, deriving from Ovid (of whom more in a moment), in which the resisting lady is subject to gleeful manipulation and perhaps assault.

The Elizabethan vogue for sonnets followed the printing in 1591 of Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* (a sequence of 108 sonnets and 11 interspersed songs, written perhaps in 1581–82; Sidney died in 1586). Already the Petrarchan writer is conscious of the difficulty of figuring authenticity in such a well-worn tradition: Astrophil inveighs against other sonneteers:

> You that poor Petrarch's long deceased woes,
> With new-born sighs and denizen'd wit do sing,
> You take wrong ways: those far-fet helps be such
> As do bewray a want of inward touch.
> (Sidney 1967: sonnet 15)

In fact, there is nothing surprising about Astrophil's stance here: such a repudiation of convention was already part of the convention. The main opportunity for novelty was address to a boy, as Richard Barnfield and Shakespeare were to demonstrate.

Whatever his followers made of it, it is widely accepted that Sidney's sequence is neither an exercise in Petrarchan tropes nor an incidental compliment to Lady Penelope Rich (who is apparently referred to at least three times). Something more ambitious is attempted. A narrative may be discerned, in which Astrophil becomes an over-importunate and discreditable wooer, seeking to manipulate Stella and provoking only her refusal. There are two plausible frameworks for such a narrative. In one, we are to read in the manner of a *lyric*: Sidney's verses depict how he feels about Lady Rich at the time (routed through literary and social pressures), and his engagement in this passion is so great that he exposes even dishonourable aspects of it. In a second framework, the poems may be read as

dramatic, with Astrophil designed to incite a reader's disapproval. A kind of reader-response theory may be invoked, such as is proposed by Stanley Fish in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, whereby the reader's (fallen) sympathies with Satan are engaged in order to be corrected (Fish 1967). Lady Rich, then, either represents the object of Sidney's lyric passion, or is his collaborator in a dramatic and salutary game.[1] I was drawn to the latter viewpoint when I began thinking about Sidney (Sinfield 1978, 1980), but today (as I argue in Chapter 1) I do not believe that it is plausible to declare the one true meaning of such a text. If there were some such originary intention, the text could not secure it; the history of criticism shows plainly that different readings can be sustained. It is not that the writer cannot have an intention, or even that we may not, loosely, discover that intention in the text; but as soon as people begin to read the text, it is *recontextualized* in the terms which they, inevitably supply.

More recent commentators, building on the occasions when Stella is quoted or speaks, emphasize her interactive role and independent stance.[2] Her person may be glimpsed through Astrophil's rhetoric; one might appeal, once more, to a Machereyan theory of gaps and silences. Stella's response may be audible through Astrophil's attempt to control her through an assertive narrative.

Katherine Duncan-Jones discerns a pattern which disrupts the customary respect for the chastity of the sonnet lady. Starting from the *Triumph* performed before the Queen in 1581, she remarks:

> The sequence of violent sexual assault followed by painful retreat, self-reproach and repentance is close to the heart of Sidney's imaginative writings. Pyrocles and Musidorus [in the *Arcadia*] both make assaults on the objects of their desire, and are ultimately compelled to acknowledge their errors. Astrophil kisses Stella while she is asleep.
>
> (Duncan-Jones 1991: 206–7)

This pattern is indeed evident in Astrophil's (represented) behaviour, though he displays disbelief, persistence, and recrimination, more than repentance. The kiss is taken in the Second Song; in the ensuing sonnet he makes light of it ('Sweet, it was saucy Love, not humble I') and takes her anger as a provocation ('That Anger's self I needs must kiss again'; 73). He insists that the kiss is merely a beginning: 'Poor hope's first wealth, hostage of promis'd weal, / Breakfast of love' (79). This refusal to take Stella's protests seriously is in the cynical and aggressive manner of the lover in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*: 'Though she give them not, yet take the kisses she does not give. Perhaps she will struggle at first, and cry "You villain!" yet she will wish to be beaten in the struggle.' The next stage is sexual intercourse:

'He who has taken kisses, if he take not the rest beside, will deserve to lose even what was granted' (Ovid 1962: I, 665–6). Astrophil's Second Song ends: 'Fool! More fool for no more taking.'

Adroitly, Astrophil turns rejection into hope. When Stella insists on chaste love, he refuses to hear the distinction. His exaggerated expectations lead to a more explicit dispute and rejection in the Fourth Song. They are alone, the house is asleep, now is their chance. In the penultimate stanza she has to fend him off physically:

> Sweet alas, why strive you thus?
> Concord better fitteth us;
> Leave to Mars the force of hands,
> Your power in your beauty stands:
> Take me to thee, and thee to me.
> 'No, no, no, no, my dear, let be.'

Stella's refrain of negatives provokes bitter recriminations in the Fifth Song. Compare the opinion of the cynical and atheistic Cecropia in the *New Arcadia*: '"No" is no negative in a woman's mouth. My son, believe me, a woman speaking of women. A lover's modesty among us is much more praised than liked' (Sidney 1977: 533). The Eighth Song is a dialogue, allowing a reader to hear for herself or himself Stella's position, unambiguously. She wants a chaste love; she never said otherwise.

What I did not foresee, when I began work on this book on authority and sexuality, is the extent to which it would be about both those concepts, together: so many of the texts are about men forcing women to do things they don't want to do. In *Titus Andronicus* the rape of Lavinia is selected as the Goths' vengeance against the Andronici. Rape is the motor of the action in *Troilus and Cressida*; the abuse of Cressida echoes the initial seizure of Helen. It is specified as the fate of the defeated in *Coriolanus*, *Henry V* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. In *Measure for Measure* and 'Upon Appleton House' (discussed in Chapter 10) and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, reluctant women are forced back into marriage. These oppressions afford the impetus also for such genial cross-dressed comedies as *Gallathea*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I discuss male violence in Marlowe's Ovidian poetry later in this chapter. The ubiquity and the effacement of rape are demonstrated by Stephanie Jed, Bruce Smith and Barbara Baines.[3] It evidently constitutes a powerful fantasy, enabling a sensationalist presentation and a voyeuristic reading. Like excess of romantic devotion, forcible seizure is a disorderly irruption in the sex/gender system. The difference is that, while romantic devotion promises to undermine the system (inciting youngsters to challenge patriarchal decisions),

rape reinscribes the dominant ideology into personal relations, by making blatant the compulsion upon which, in the last analysis, the sex/gender system depends. Nor are these two disturbances reliably separable: consider Proteus in *The Two Gentleman of Verona* and Angelo in *Measure for Measure*: the romantic devotee becomes the rapist. Astrophil is another instance.

My objective here is to use an elucidation of sexual punning in *Astophil and Stella*, not to assert another reading (though one inevitably slides back towards that, as a manner of speaking); but to broaden our sense of the kind of liaison the Elizabethan love lyric might encode. There are implications for the kind of writing a man of Sidney's class and literary aspirations might attempt, undermining over-simple contrasts between romantic and sexual, Elizabethan and metaphysical, lyric and dramatic, and gentlemanly and popular poetry. I attempt to show that the lexical and social circumstances which these poems imply invite some readers at least to hear *double entendres* that propose and are proposed by the organization of the text. The outcome will be available for comparison with the queerer writing of Barnfield and Marlowe, and will help to set the terms for a discussion of Shakespeare's sonnets (in Chapter 9).

Verbal dexterity is central and entirely self-conscious in Astrophil's approach. Repeatedly, he quibbles on meanings of *love* to evade the incompatibility between his wishes and Stella's. In 25 he founds an elaborate argument on the Platonic notion that 'Virtue, if it once met with our eyes, / Strange flames of love it in our souls would raise.' That may be true of abstract love, but Astrophil concludes:

> It is most true, for since I her did see,
> Virtue's great beauty in that face I prove,
> And find th'effect, for I do burn in love.

The personal love that burns is sensual: this is a sham reconciliation with Platonism–aggravated by the use of the technical language of logic ('prove', 'effect'). Any use of terms such as *cause* and *proof* signals that Astrophil is about to be patently illogical. He exploits the rules of grammar when Stella twice–emphatically–says 'No': in grammar, he avers, 'two negatives affirm' (63). In 61 Stella gives an articulated response to Astrophil's persistent importunings. A true lover will heed his mistress' wishes:

> Now since her chaste mind hates this love in me,
> With chasten'd mind, I straight must show that she
> Shall quickly me from what she hates remove.
> Oh Doctor Cupid, thou for me reply,

> Driv'n else to grant by angel's sophistry,
> That I love not, without I leave to love.

In fact, the 'sophistry' is Astrophil's, and he compounds it by imputing it to Stella, as his riddling concluding line refuses her distinction between chaste and unchaste love.

Two blatant sexual puns are usually recognized in *Astrophil and Stella*. One is at the end of 68 where Astrophil, observing Stella's goodness and her wish to make him virtuous, remarks:

> Oh think I then, what paradise of joy
> It is, so fair a Virtue to enjoy.

The pun on *enjoy* actually affords three meanings: how splendid it must be to be so good; how splendid it would be to have sexual intercourse with such a virtuous person; and how gratifying it must be for you to be able to gain satisfaction by insisting on your honour (while I am suffering). The gap between these meanings is also the gap between the two principals; a reading which respects Stella's idea of the relationship is opposed by a reading that asserts Astrophil's seduction narrative, while a third meaning expresses his discontent at the break between the other two.

Another manifest pun informs sonnet 76. Stella's approach is like a beautiful dawn, after a night 'Benighted in cold woe; but now appears my day, / The only light of joy, the only warmth of love.' In the sestet this benign image is roughly reoriented by an allusion to male arousal:

> But lo, while I do speak, it groweth noon with me,
> Her flamy glist'ring lights increase with time and place;
> My heart cries Ah, it burns; mine eyes now dazzl'd be:
> No wind, no shade can cool, what help then in my case,
> But with short breath, long looks, staid feet and walking head,
> Pray that my sun go down with meeker beams to bed.

Astrophil is speaking about sexual excitement and fulfilment, as Barnaby Barnes knew when he imitated the sonnet: initially 'The moonlight of her Chastity reproved me' but then 'Her morning's blush' followed, and now it is practically mid-day. He asks her eyes to approve his aroused state, 'Still smiling at my [sun] dial, next eleven!'[4] By locating Stella in terms of a benign dawn, then overriding that with a sexual pun, Astrophil recognizes Stella's preference for a sweet and noble liaison and incorporates it into his scenario of lust and indecency. She is repositioned in his narrative, while facetiousness obscures the actual distance between them.

It has often been supposed that Astrophil discovers a powerful sexual component in his love for Stella somewhere about the middle of the sequence. Many critics consider 71 crucial: after appearing to praise Stella's virtue and beauty for thirteen lines he abruptly declares: '"But ah," Desire still cries, "give me some food."' Making a break here, or at 52 ('A strife is grown between Virtue and Love') allows the romantic idea that Astrophil starts out a noble lover, but is waylaid into sexual passion. Sexual punning occurs much earlier in the sequence, however, indicating that Astrophil is bent on sexual conquest from the start. At the end of an even earlier sonnet, number 9, Astrophil is praising Stella's eyes:

> Of touch they are that without touch doth touch,
> Which Cupid's self from Beauty's mine did draw:
> Of touch they are, and poor I am their straw.

Stella's eyes are made of glossy black stone (touch) and they affect (touch) Astrophil without physical contact (touch). But the intensity of punning is saying something more. Touch may be tinder or touch-paper, and Astrophil is the kindling straw, susceptible to a combustible response. Compare this from Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* (1598):

> Indeed, beauty stands a woman in no stead, unless it procure her touching. But, sister, whether it touch you or no, it touches your beauties; and, I am sure, they will abide the touch; an' they do not, a plague of all ceruse, say I: and it touches me too in part, though not in the—[sc. (w)hole].
>
> (Jonson 1972, folio version: IV.vi.100–5)

Astrophil's pun draws together his erotic awareness of Stella's beauty, her aloof reserve, and the inflammatory response she arouses in him. The combination, which will prove ruinous for Astrophil, is there from the start.

Sonnet 18, 'With what sharp checks I in myself am shent', is one of several early in the sequence which stage a debate between will or sense and virtue or reason (see 4, 5, 10, 14, 21, 25). In 18, Astrophil undergoes Reason's audit. He is wasting his talents; further, he is

> Unable quite to pay even Nature's rent,
> Which unto it by birthright I do owe:
> And which is worse, no good excuse can show,
> But that my wealth I have most idly spent.

Nature's rent is the getting of children, and Astrophil is unable to pay his way because his desire is fixed on an unavailable woman. The Boy in Shakespeare's early sonnets is also withholding himself, though for a different reason:

> Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend
> Upon thyself thy beauty's legacy?
> (Shakespeare 2001: sonnet 4)

Spend, in both poems, means to expend sexually, to discharge seminally. Eric Partridge and E.A.M. Colman offer sexual glosses for all the terms in this image cluster.[5] *Rent* is 'sexual dues'; Astrophil's *wealth* ('semen') is *idly spent*, perhaps in nocturnal emissions–as again in the last lines of the sonnet:

> I see my course to lose my self doth bend:
> I see and yet no greater sorrow take,
> Than that I lose no more for Stella's sake.

He would be happy to *lose* more–in a more intimate relation with Stella. Two discourses clash: a financial one, subject to reason and purpose; and a passionate one, in which the greater expenditure (*loss*) would be the greater achievement.

One point at which we might expect Astrophil to think of sex is in relation to Stella's husband. In 24, he compares Lord Rich to misers whose acquisitions bring them little pleasure; at least they are wise enough to shut their wealth away, 'As sacred things, far from all danger's show.' The sestet, at first sight, simply reiterates Astrophil's high estimation of Stella, but purposeful punning indicates that he means to displace her husband:

> But that rich fool who by blind Fortune's lot
> The richest gem of love and life enjoys,
> And can with foul abuse such beauties blot;
> Let him, depriv'd of sweet but unfelt joys,
> (Exil'd for aye from those high treasures, which
> He knows not) grow in only folly rich.

Lord Rich at present *enjoys* (sexually) the *rich gem*, the *high treasures*; but he is too gross to appreciate them; the 'foul abuse', ironically enough, must be adultery. He is to 'grow in folly' by becoming a cuckold; his neglect of his lady is going to facilitate this. The sonnet works on two levels. In part, it is an attack on the crudeness of Lord Rich, against which is set Astrophil's more refined appreciation of Stella as very precious. At the same time, in the sexual

puns and the joke of the last line, Astrophil emerges as coarse and materialistic, unable to reconcile idealistic and physical elements in his passion.

The sun figures sexual intensity in 22 (as in 76):

> In highest way of heav'n the Sun did ride,
> Progressing then from fair twins' golden place:
> Having no scarf of clouds before his face,
> But shining forth of heat in his chief pride.

Riding and noontide heat were and are common images for sexual intercourse; nonetheless, a reader may notice nothing special until we come to the fourth line quoted. There the sun is in full heat of sexual ardour and ready to assault any passing female. Compare Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece*:

> While lust is in his pride no exclamation
> Can curb his heat or rein his rash desire,
> Till, like a jade, self-will himself doth tire.
> (Shakespeare 1960: lines 705–7)

The sun in 22 has an assignation:

> When some fair ladies, by hard promise tied,
> On horseback met him in his furious race,
> Yet each prepar'd with fan's well-shading grace
> From that foe's wounds their tender skins to hide.

The ladies are ready for sexual advances, but apparently they wish (coyly perhaps) to preserve themselves from *wounds* of penetration. But not Stella:

> Stella alone with face unarmed march'd,
> Either to do like him which open shone,
> Or careless of the wealth because her own.

She is unperturbed by the sun's audacious behaviour. We may recognize the sexual innuendo in *open* and *careless* from an instance such as John Donne's Holy Sonnet XVIII:

> And let mine amorous soul court thy mild dove,
> Who is most true, and pleasing to thee, then
> When she'is embraced and open to most men.[6]

Stella emerges nonetheless inviolate:

> Yet were the hid and meaner beauties parch'd,
> Her daintiest bare went free; the cause was this,
> The Sun, which others burn'd, did her but kiss.

Partridge and Colman draw attention to *Troilus and Cressida*: 'The Grecian dames are sunburnt, and not worth / The splinter of a lance'; 'A burning devil take them!'[7] The insinuation is that the other ladies contracted a venereal disease from their unprotected encounter with the sun. (Kim Hall (1995: 92–107) has discussed the perils of sunburn, as they were perceived in the period, involving one in shameful blackness.) Despite her open stance and her fair hair and complexion (8, 13, 21), Stella withholds herself; Astrophil is daunted (as elsewhere in the sequence) by her beauty and virtue. Yet this respectful attitude on his part is qualified by a sense that he is writing himself into the role of the sun, ready to exploit female vulnerability.

The *doubles entendres* I have adduced point mostly to Astrophil's determination to engineer into physical terms a liaison which Stella wants to be Platonic. Through the pun he can insinuate his own narrative, in the face of her protestations. Her personhood is demeaned by the entire strategy of innuendo and manipulation. This is not attractive; Thomas Roche, Jr. finds such punning unappealing ('I think we would have to agree that one reader's pun is another's poison') (1987: 119). *Astrophil and Stella* offers it as a vital resource in the repertoire of illicit passion, however.

There is less punning in the middle and later sonnets, when Astrophil's project is out in the open. The Tenth Song works through euphemism rather than the pun. It finds Astrophil alone, following on from the rejection of Song Eight and a period of separation (87, 88, 89, 91, 92). He asks when he will next see Stella, and wonders whether he may experience *beauty's treasure*, *high joys* and *pleasure* (lines 9, 11, 12); we have learnt to recognize Astrophil's lexicon of desire. In the meantime he sends Thought to accost her, telling it to treat her with the highest degree of intimacy–a degree which in person she has never allowed:

> There unseen thou mayst be bold
> Those fair wonders to behold
> Which in them my hopes do carry.
> Thought, see thou no place forbear,
> Enter bravely everywhere,
> Seize on all to her belonging.
>
> (16–21)

Thought is to take the liberties that Astrophil longs for; he is undressing Stella in his head. He will kiss her passionately, and that's not all:

Think of my most princely power,
When I blessed shall devour
With my greedy lickerous senses
Beauty, music, sweetness, love,
While she doth against me prove
Her strong darts but weak defenses.

Think, think of those dallyings,
When with dove-like murmurings,
With glad moaning passed anguish,
We change eyes, and heart for heart,
Each to other do impart,
Joying till joy make us languish.

(31–42)

Perhaps this partly means that they will have great pleasure in each other's company, but the glad moaning and joy followed by languishing connote sexual intercourse.

It is all too much, in the last stanza, for Astrophil:

Oh my thought, my thoughts' surcease,
Thy delights my woes increase,
My life melts with too much thinking.
Think no more, but die in me,
Till thou shalt revived be
At her lips, my nectar drinking.

(43–8)

Though at one level this final stanza means that Astrophil is unbearably unhappy, it is also describing a sexual release. To *melt* is to experience an orgasm. That is what it means in the *Old Arcadia* when Basilius spends the night enthusiastically with his wife, Gynecia, thinking her to be Cleophila, a fiction Gynecia is obliged to maintain: he 'did melt in as much gladness as she was oppressed with diverse ungrateful burdens' (Sidney 1973: 227). To *die* is of course the same thing. Astrophil's thought has been so successful in its visit to Stella that he is unable to contain himself: *die in me* denotes a solitary orgasm. There is a close analogy, perhaps even a source, in an erotic sonnet by Jean-Antoine de Baïf, one of the French Pléiade poets: 'O doux plaisir plein de doux pensement.' Here embracing and the uniting of soul with soul and body with body provoke the exclamation, 'O douce vie! ô doux trepassement!', as souls and bodies flow together ('Mon ame alors de grand'joye troublee / De moy dans toy

cherche d'aller emblee'). The poet becomes a lifeless mass ('masse mort'), but then her kiss returns his soul and restores his body ('Puis vient ta bouche en ma bouche la rendre, / Me ranîmant tous mes membres perclus').[8]

Astrophil imagines just such a scene, demonstrating both his great longing for Stella and his readiness to use the thought of her for solitary sexual stimulation. In the ensuing sonnet 93 he apologizes for vexing Stella: presumably she feels insulted. He gets to penetrate her only in thought. For the modern reader the sequence is a small masterpiece, in which the convergence and discrepancy of conventional discourses construct the enticements and rejections of illicit, if not dissident sexual love.

The affectionate shepherd

In a bold move, Astrophil repudiates the 'rhubarb words' of a friend who says he has plunged his 'well-form'd soul even in the mire / Of sinful thoughts, which do in ruin end':

> If that be sin which in fix'd hearts doth breed
> A loathing of all loose unchastity,
> Then love is sin, and let me sinful be.
> (14)

As usual, there is a quibble: Astrophil loathes *loose* unchastity, not his own adulterous aspirations. A similarly strenuous assertion occurs at the opening of Richard Barnfield's *Affectionate Shepherd* (1594), except that the theme is the complaint of Daphnis for the love of Ganymede:

> If it be sin to love a sweet-fac'd boy,
> (Whose amber locks trust up in golden trammels
> Dangle adown his lovely cheeks with joy,
> When pearl and flowers his fair hair enamels)
> If it be sin to love a lovely lad;
> Oh then sin I, for whom my soul is sad.
> (Barnfield 1990a, lines 7–12)

As with Astrophil, it is not Platonic love that introduces a discourse of sin and repentance.

If the unrequited passion of Astrophil is formulated through Petrarch and his propensity to use force is informed by Ovid, pastoral overlaps with both of these while contributing a further inflection. The rise of city culture around the Mediterranean produced a genre that fantasized about the

simple life of the shepherd, while enveloping that theme with melancholy, figured partly through unrequited love. Because pastoral had been, initially, a Graeco-Roman genre, it placed the poet's love for a boy even-handedly alongside cross-gender relations.

It used to be alleged that Barnfield couldn't have been committed to same-gender passion because a will dated 1627 showed him to have had a wife and children. So, of course, did Oscar Wilde; but, anyway, Andrew Worrall has shown that this was probably the will of the poet's father. The poet died in 1620 or 1626, apparently a bachelor estranged from his family (Worrall 2001). Daphnis' wooing is purposefully erotic:

> I began to rue th'unhappy sight
> Of that fair boy that had my heart entangled;
> Cursing the time, the place, the sense, the sin;
> I came, I saw, I view'd, I slipped in.
>
> (I.3–6)

Does Daphnis slip into love, or (perhaps just in fantasy) into Ganymede?

The stated problem is not the gendering of the love, but Ganymede's lack of interest. He has embraced Gwendolyn (taken by some to be Penelope Rich, to whom the poem is dedicated; it was a small world). Daphnis turns on his seductive powers; this stanza surely promises fellatio followed by sodomy:

> Then shouldst thou suck my sweet and my fair flower
> That now is ripe, and full of honey-berries:
> Then would I lead thee to my pleasant bower
> Filled full of grapes, of mulberries, and cherries;
> Then shouldst thou be my wasp or else my bee,
> I would thy hive, and thou my honey be.
>
> (I.97–102)

'Honey-semen brought to the hive-orifice,' George Klawitter glosses.[9] There are another hundred lines, more vaguely in this vein.

> And every morn by dawning of the day,
> When Phoebus riseth with a blushing face,
> Silvanus' chapel-clerks shall chant a lay,
> And play thee hunt's up in thy resting place:
> My coote [cottage] thy chamber, my bosom thy bed;
> Shall be appointed for thy sleepy head.
>
> (I.109–14)

Phoebus does well to blush when, like Daphnis and Ganymede, he rises. Silvanus was a woodland deity; he is nominated elsewhere as a lover of Cyparissus, one of Ovid's metamorphosed beautiful youths.[10] 'Hunt's up' is a call to awaken hunters, but the last two lines envisage staying indoors–in fact, in bed. On the Second Day Daphnis offers Ganymede his pet nightingale:

> Her shalt thou have, and all I have beside;
> If thou wilt be my boy, or else my bride.
>
> (II.77–8)

Properly speaking, 'bride' means 'spouse', a partner of either gender. This is how it appears in Josua Sylvester's translation of Guillaume de Saluste, Sieur du Bartas: 'Sweet daughter dear, Osiris be thy guide, / And loving Isis bless thee and thy bride' (Sylvester 1979: II.iv.2, lines 785–6). (Du Bartas is not a figure to whom one would look for sexual dissidence; Bray 1988: 22–3.) But in the context of *The Affectionate Shepherd*, 'my bride' is a bold expression for a male partner.

I have picked out components that represent the sexual wooing in Barnfield's poem. They are set alongside a fable about Cupid and Death, a vilification of Gwendolyn, a demand that Ganymede cut his hair (both–inconsistently–for decency and better to display his beauty), a homily against pride, an argument that black is to be preferred to white, and a recommendation that Ganymede choose an honest woman for his wife and be faithful to her. It is a strange concoction (narrative organization is not Barnfield's strength); it makes the choice of love object seem just another odd feature, not so remarkable.

It was remarked, however: Barnfield's next publication, *Cynthia: With Certain Sonnets, and the Legend of Cassandra* (1595), opens with a disclaimer:

> Some there were, that did interpret *The Affectionate Shepherd* otherwise than (in truth) I meant, touching the subject thereof, to wit, the love of a shepherd to a boy; a fault the which I will not excuse, because I never made. Only this, I will unshadow my conceit: being nothing else but an imitation of Virgil, in the Second Eclogue of Alexis.
>
> (Barnfield 1990b: 115–16)

If Virgil's poem is not about the love of a shepherd for a boy, it is hard to know what else it might be; Barnfield could have chosen another poem to imitate. The Second Eclogue is a key text in the pastoral tradition. Corydon woos Alexis extravagantly with promises of gifts, unsuccessfully; he will find another lover.

Barnfield's disavowal is of course reminiscent of the justification of Spenser's January eclogue in *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579). There is just one relevant stanza:

> It is not *Hobbinol*, wherefore I plaine,
> Albee my love he seeke with dayly suit:
> His clownish gifts and curtsies I disdaine,
> His kiddes, his cracknelles, and his early fruit.
> Ah, foolish *Hobbinol*, thy gifts bene vayne:
> *Colin* them gives to *Rosalind* againe.
>
> (Spenser 1912b: 'Januarye', 55–60)

Hobbinol is invoked only to be dismissed, but this glimpse is enough to trigger an anxiety in 'E.K.', who registers in his 'Gloss' 'some savour of disorderly love, which the learned call *pæderastice*: but it is gathered beside his meaning'. After all, Platonic love, such as Socrates felt for Alcibiades, is 'much to be allowed and liked of'; so why the disclaimer? In practice, it is difficult to separate out ideal and sensual love in the sayings of Socrates. E.K. presses on regardless: 'And so is *pæderastice* much to be preferred before *gynerastice*, that is, the love which enflameth men with lust toward womankind'–there is some equivalence, then–'but yet let no man think that herein I stand with Lucian or his devilish disciple Unico Aretino, in defence of execrable and horrible sins of forbidden and unlawful fleshliness' (Spenser 1912b: 422–3). It is hard to work out just where E.K. does stand. Colin, after all, prefers women. The sequence of enticement, refusal and disavowal is reminiscent of Montaigne's and Browne's arguments about friendship (Chapter 6). 'Even as E.K. rules out a reading, he rules it into the textual economies' of the poem, Jonathan Goldberg observes.[11]

His disowning not withstanding, in the same volume–between two poems about women (Cynthia and Cassandra)–Barnfield prints twenty 'Certain Sonnets' from Daphnis to Ganymede. There is little pretence of an elevated Platonism here. An argument between virtue and love is close to Astrophil's, with a fall into irrational passion, itemized adoration of the body of the beloved and specially the eyes, the prospect of an illicit kiss, the pain of absence, the false solace of night-time fantasy. This, I have shown, is a discourse of sexual importunity. Further, the invocation of gods and boys from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book X, and tropes and phrases found also in Marlowe and Shakespeare, fashion for Daphnis and Ganymede a culture in which same-gender passion is familiar. (Several commentators have noted connections between Barnfield and Shakespeare.)[12] Indeed, Daphnis has had his passionate admirers, he says in *The Affectionate Shepherd*:

'Why do thy coral lips disdain to kiss, / And suck that sweet, which many have desired?' (II.103–4).

Along with this male-on-male eroticism goes a familiar anxiety: when Ganymede is swimming, Daphnis worries not that he might lose him to Neptune (compare *Hero and Leander*), nor to Apollo or Silvanus, but to the water nymph Thetis (VII). Here is anticipated a theme of Shakespeare's sonnets: the danger that the Boy will default to same-gender relations. Sonnet XI marks the disparity between friendly and passionate love:

> Sighing, and sadly sitting by my Love,
> He ask'd the cause of my heart's sorrowing,
> Conjuring me by heaven's eternal King
> To tell the cause which me so much did move.
> Compell'd: (quoth I) to thee will I confess,
> Love is the cause; and only love it is
> That doth deprive me of my heavenly bliss.
> Love is the pain that doth my heart oppress.
> And what is she (quoth he) whom thou do'st love?
> Look in this glass (quoth I), there shalt thou see
> The perfect form of my felicity.
> When, thinking that it would strange magic prove,
> He open'd it: and taking off the cover,
> He straight perceiv'd himself to be my Lover.

This is what we would today call a *coming out* episode. What is poignant is that Ganymede is concerned, but not enough to anticipate Daphnis' reply. Virgil's eclogues not withstanding, same-gender passion is unexpected. It is a kind of 'strange magic'. When Daphnis proclaims 'But all the world at my love stands amazed' (XVIII), he partly means that Ganymede has innumerable admirers. But he is saying also that most people think little of, or are disconcerted by, the love of boys. While the treatment of boy-love here and in the plays discussed in Chapter 7 ('Near Misses') is surprisingly casual, it is not unmarked. As in later times, we may suppose, the acknowledgements and disavowals of sin are not mere gestures, they correspond to deep personal trauma.

In sonnet XVII, comparisons of Ganymede to Adonis and Apollo license pagan sensual appreciation:

> His love-enticing delicate soft limbs,
> Are rarely fram'd t'entrap poor gazing eyes:
> ....
> His lips ripe strawberries in nectar wet,
> His mouth a hive, his tongue a honeycomb.

XVII concludes: 'Oh how can such a body, sin-procuring, / Be slow to love, and quick to hate, enduring?' The offence is located, not in the mind of the desiring lover, but in the 'sin-procuring' body of the loved one. But how can Daphnis expect Ganymede to return his love when he himself denounces his body as provoking sin–the more beautiful, the more sinful? Barnfield's excitement is always brittle, a touch desperate and, of course, steeped in rejection. Bruce Smith concludes: 'In their rhetorical teasing and relentless sexual punning, there is something pornographic about Barnfield's poems' (1991: 112). 'If it be sin . . . ' Daphnis began, and he has not reassured himself. The sonnets are followed by a recantation, 'An Ode': Daphnis did love Ganymede, 'But yet (alas) I was deceiv'd . . . For since then I saw a lass' (Barnfield 1990b: 133). Today we call this 'going straight.' Barnfield is not the poet to kick free of Christian moralism. More likely, it is Marlowe.

Marlowe and Ovid

Christopher Marlowe was probably a student at Cambridge when he chose to translate the love elegies of Ovid: the *Amores*. By allowing them to circulate, Marlowe made a typically controversial intervention in current ideas about sex, gender, love, marriage, and power. Smart young gentlemen at the universities and the Inns of Court in the 1590s acclaimed the elegies for their relaxed, sophisticated, and illuminating approach to love and sexuality. The authorities responded differently, however. When ten of the poems were printed in 1599, bound up with the satiric *Epigrams* of Sir John Davies, they were called in by the bishops to be burnt. This was six years after Marlowe's violent death in 1593.

Ovid, too, was controversial in his lifetime (43 BC–17 AD). The Emperor Caesar Augustus (Octavius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*) banished him from Rome in 8 AD for unidentified misdeeds. The story is told by Ben Jonson in his play *Poetaster* (1601–2), where Ovid's offences are disrespect toward the gods and sleeping with the emperor's daughter (see Chapter 3). These offences, in fact, correlate with the two aspects of classical culture that embarrassed Elizabethan Christianity: the representation of the gods, who were multiple and often written of slightingly; and ideas about sexuality, which were far more casual about sex outside marriage, including same-gender liaisons.

There was no prospect of banishing Ovid and the classics from early-modern England, however; their writing was so fluent and confident that it could not but impress. Translations, such as Marlowe's, were a major resource through which Elizabethans sought to deepen and broaden their culture. Some strove to contain Ovid's influence by strenuous interpretation. Arthur Golding's translation of the *Metamorphoses* was published with a

moralizing epistle in 1567. For instance, the passionately erotic merging of Salmacis and her beloved Hermaphroditus (of whom more shortly) is said, by Golding, to demonstrate that idleness is the nurse of voluptuousness, making men effeminate and weak.[13]

The three books of poems that make up the *Amores* are, rather loosely, about the poet's wooing of Corinna (some of them are written to her, others are about their situation). Although Corinna is not a consistent character and the narrative is not continuous, we do get a set of interlocking ideas and attitudes, amounting to a model of intimate relations; a scenario, we might say. The lover, his mistress, the husband, the slave girl, and the eunuch are, we shall see, offered as particular figures in particular situations.

The poet opens with the standard theme of innumerable poems and songs of courtship, a vow of everlasting fidelity:

> I love but one, and her I love change never,
> If men have faith, I'll live with thee for ever.
> The years that fatal destiny shall give
> I'll live with thee, and die, ere thou shalt grieve.
>
> (1:3, 15–18)[14]

This ideal is maintained by the poet through to the end. Yet Corinna suddenly complicates the scenario: the poet reports that an old bawd has been teaching her the tricks of a call girl (1:8), and now she has asked him for payment (1:10). The poet wants to view sexual love as something they share–'the pleasure / Which man and woman reap in equal measure'–and promises to eternize Corinna by his art (1:10, 35–6, 60). But she regards the liaison as a mercenary opportunity.

To work out what is happening here we need to know something about the Roman sex/gender system. Marriage was scarcely regulated by the state; women had considerable independence in choice of a partner, and in the household; divorce was not difficult to obtain. In 18 BC, when Ovid was 25, Augustus introduced laws making adultery a crime, and penalizing celibacy and childless marriages (see Southern 1998: 144–50). At the same time, historians detect in Ovid's time a new emphasis on the personal relationship between husband and wife. Though passionate sexuality might be thought out of place in marriage, reciprocal commitment was commended (Foucault 1988: 71–80, 145–85). This picture is drawn from notably high-minded texts, which may explain why it is at odds with the Ovidian image of the husband as suspicious, tyrannical, foolish, and deserving to be betrayed.

This unstable mixture of fidelity and exploitation, liberty and restraint, may begin to account for the co-presence of the idealism that inspires the poet, and the cynicism that allows Corinna to ask for money. The further

factor is slavery: Roman expansion overseas led to the accumulation of innumerable slaves. Accomplished freed women, attached only loosely to the social system, found opportunities as high-class courtesans; meanwhile many tied slaves afforded scope for bribed or enforced sex. Female and male slaves, including eunuchs, figure continually in the *Amores*–tempting and resisting the lovers, spying and informing on them, passing messages and opening doors. When he is obliged to deny Corinna's accusation that he has seduced her maid, the poet pretends to resent the idea that he might desire a slave: 'With Venus' game who will a servant grace? / Or any back made rough with stripes embrace?' (2:7, 21–2). Would he make love with a slave who has been flogged by his mistress? It transpires in the next elegy that the answer is Yes. Indeed, if the maid refuses to accommodate him again, the poet threatens to procure her punishment by betraying the liaison to Corinna. Marlowe replanted this scenario of violence, deceit, and exaltation in Elizabethan England–which was, as we shall see in a moment, partly similar and partly different.

Ovid places his commitment to love and poetry in an incessant standoff with the expectations of society and the state for a man of his class. He intended to sing of military matters, he says at the beginning, but Cupid compels him to deal with love (1:1). He is accused of being idle, refusing the responsibilities of warfare and the law. He responds with a dissident love ethic and an alternative system of rewards. He seeks eternal fame: 'To verse let kings give place, and kingly shows' (1:15, 33). That is why Corinna should not expect payment: 'So likewise we will through the world be rung, / And with my name shall thine be always sung' (1:3, 25–6). Corinna is not persuaded. Later on in the sequence she prefers a soldier, and the wealth he has gained by fighting. The poet is not just disappointed, he is baffled and repulsed by the disjunction in values: 'Canst touch that hand wherewith someone lie dead? / Ah whither is thy breast's soft nature fled?' (3:7, 17–18). He is back where he was, singing outside the door, while Corinna seems unconcerned about her new suitor's murderous complicity with the state.

The poet's assertion of alternative values is undermined by his inability to forsake the imagery of military conquest. It suits so well the scenario of tormented love: whatever the outcome, someone is defeated and humiliated–the lover, the mistress, the husband, the slave. The poet is led in triumph by Cupid:

> Lo, I confess, I am thy captive I,
> And hold my conquer'd hands for thee to tie.
> What need'st thou war? I sue to thee for grace;
> With arms to conquer armless men is base.
>
> (1:2, 19–22)

Correspondingly, when Corinna accepts him, it is a conquest, paralleling infamous rapes in mythology (2:12). The poet means to eternize his art, but mediates into personal life the violence and exploitation of the warfare state. It is because of these internal contradictions, we may suppose, that the poet's dissident love ethic doesn't work. Corinna asks for money and prefers a soldier because she is not persuaded that poetry offers a viable alternative currency.

In his moments of highest aspiration, the poet looks for love to transform society. At other times, perhaps, he is saying something else. Despite his repudiation of the warfare state, he seems aware that sexual passion is involved with power. He complains that being in love with two women doubles the grief, but really he enjoys the challenge. 'He's happy who love's mutual skirmish slays, / And to the gods for that death Ovid prays' (2:10, 29–30). Passion thrives on power; the most intimate and sexy incidents involve an element of violence. He beats his mistress, and in return offers himself for punishment: 'Bind fast my hands, they have deserved chains' (1:7, 1). Danger is stimulating. When the poet, Corinna, and her husband are at a banquet, he urges her to operate an elaborate system of signals, so that they can enjoy their intimacy even in the husband's presence (1:4).

In the most celebrated elegy, on Corinna coming to bed, power-play is titillating. The poet sets an idyllic bedroom scene, with light twinkling through the shutters as in a leafy wood. Corinna's show of resistance is thrilling:

> I snatch'd her gown; being thin, the harm [concealment] was small,
> Yet striv'd she to be cover'd therewithall,
> And striving thus as one that would be cast [overcome],
> Betray'd herself, and yielded at the last.
>
> (1:5, 13–16)

Though the thin gown scarcely impedes the poet's view, it is sexy to snatch it, so that she can surrender. As well as a representation of the sex/gender system, Ovid and Marlowe supply an awareness of its fantasy structure and its potential to excite. 'Jove send me more such afternoons as this' (1:5, 26). As Werner von Koppenfels (1994) observes, this is a key poem for the balance of exploitation and eroticism in the poetry of Ovid and Marlowe.

It should be no surprise that the Ovidian scenario spoke so effectively to Elizabethans. They did not have slaves or eunuchs (generally speaking), or perpetual warfare but, like the Romans, they had arbitrary arrest, torture, and public executions. Both states employed informers and spies (Marlowe, for instance). The Elizabethan government was less autocratic; its limited and frail parliamentary system was more like that which had been

overthrown in Rome when Augustus established the empire. In both societies some women were demanding to be taken seriously, and there were moves to make marriage more of a personal and loving relation. In both there was scandal, satire, and legislation about (supposed) sexual immorality. Marlowe's contemporaries had a religion that absorbed emotional commitment and encouraged the development of a conscience.

These inexact correspondences allowed Elizabethans to recognize much of the scenario of the *Amores*, while finding also compelling representations of thoughts and images that they might otherwise have only dreamt of. The Petrarchan tradition prizes chaste worship; the *Amores* depict passion unconfined, and noble aspirations tangled in with lust and selfishness. The exploitative, commercial and flippant aspects of Ovid's elegies were unsurprising in ancient Rome, whereas in Tudor England they offered new ways of thinking about sexual expression. Elizabethans found in them a vision of love and, in the same breath, a recipe for abuse. What is so striking about Marlowe is the rapidity with which he assimilated all this. In *Hero and Leander* he finds further potential in Ovid, and a more confident and individual voice.

Hero and Leander

The main source for *Hero and Leander*, which Marlowe wrote probably in the year of his death, is Musaeus' popular fifth-century Greek version of the story, but the main influence is Ovid.[15] As in the *Amores*, the young man is the wooer; the impediment, rather than a husband, is Hero's vow to be Venus' nun. The idealism of love at first sight and 'equal balance' is again offered (1, 176; 2, 32), alongside an element of manipulation in Leander's approach. Both Corinna's lover and Leander's lover thrive on resistance, as a proud horse becomes more spirited when it is reined in.[16]

What is much diminished in *Hero and Leander* is the language of conquest. The gods contribute an air of 'heady riot, incest, rapes' (1, 144), but the current deities are not hostile. Cupid is disruptive, but not in a vaunting way. Hero and Leander dwell in a picturesque world of beautiful humans, capricious mythological personages, and animated natural elements, in which love is fun. The ambiance is quite different from George Chapman's moralizing continuation of the story, which is sometimes published with it. Marlowe's poem takes its tone from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: a sequence of stories featuring transformations which come about mainly as ways of rescuing or punishing nymphs, maidens, and boys who have attracted the lascivious attentions of gods and heroes. The manner is part folk-lore, part cautionary tale, part fairy tale. The overall impression is of human and divine beings as shape-changing, mobile, and fleeting; unable to stabilize even the individual body.

Hero and Leander do not appear in the *Metamorphoses*, but in Marlowe's poem their characters are strangely inconstant (subject to metamorphosis), especially around gender roles. Leander is an eager suitor; yet he doesn't know what to do with Hero when he gets her into bed. His ignorance about manly behaviour belies any notion that it is simply natural for a boy to want genital intercourse with a girl. Hero is confused in another way: she wants to defend her honour, but takes the initiative by allowing Leander to know her thoughts: '"Were I the saint he worships, I would hear him"' (1, 179). Again: '"Come thither,"' she says, after a sequence of incitements and discouragements: 'As she spake this, her tongue tripp'd, / For unawares "Come thither" from her slipp'd' (1, 357–58). Is this the first Freudian slip in English poetry?

The naivety of Leander and the forwardness of Hero amount to a transposition of conventional gender roles. Indeed, Leander is taken for a girl by some of his admirers. 'Some swore he was a maid in man's attire, / For in his looks were all that men desire' (1, 82–3). The narration colludes with the feminization of Leander by portraying his physical appearance as fully as Hero's. Indeed, more so; Gregory Bredbeck remarks: 'Hero is all clothing and words, but Leander is a *presence* to be dealt with' (1991: 112).

> I could tell ye
> How smooth his breast was, and how white his belly,
> And whose immortal fingers did imprint
> That heavenly path with many a curious dint,
> That runs along his back.
>
> (1, 65–9)

Yet other observers know Leander to be a man and urge him on to 'amorous play' (1, 88). In a long and dogged speech he tries to talk Hero into compliance, using aggressive arguments such as were attributed to the old bawd in the *Amores* (brass shines with handling, good clothes ask to be worn, houses keep better when they are occupied; 1:8, 51–2; 1, 231–40).

Marlowe's ambivalent gendering of Leander prompts two scenarios. One involves his relations with Hero. As in the *Amores*, Marlowe broaches the entrancing thought that an equal love may transcend worldly conditions:

> Sweet are the kisses, the embracements sweet
> When like desires and affections meet,
> For from the earth to heaven is Cupid rais'd,
> When fancy is in equal balance peis'd [weighed].
>
> (2, 29–32)

The main impediment to this exalted, symmetrical vision is male dominance. In *Hero and Leander* Marlowe evades this by merging the two youngsters into an ideal androgyny. Hero, when she is most decisive in her approach to Leander, is compared to Salmacis:

> Therefore unto him hastily she goes,
> And, like light Salmacis, her body throws
> Upon his bosom.
>
> (2, 45–7)

In the *Metamorphoses*, Salmacis is the Ovidian nymph who entwines her body with that of the reluctant Hermaphroditus, to the extent that they merge into an androgynous figure:

> as they lay together, their bodies were united and from being two persons they became one. As when a gardener grafts a branch on to a tree, and sees the two unite as they grow, and come to maturity together, so when their limbs met in that clinging embrace the nymph and the boy were no longer two, but a single form, possessed of a dual nature, which could not be called male or female, but seemed to be at once both and neither.
>
> (Ovid 1955: 104)

In this fantasmatic amalgamation, gender difference is rejected. It is at this point that Leander proves himself most spectacularly uninterested in genital sex:

> And as a brother with his sister toyed,
> Supposing nothing else was to be done,
> Now he her favour and good will had won.
> But know you not that creatures wanting sense
> By nature have a mutual appetence . . . ?
>
> (2, 52–6)

Animals are drawn spontaneously to mate, but not Leander; he only 'suspected / Some amorous rites or other were neglected' (2, 63–4). It is Hero accidentally rubbing against him that awakens his desire.

Despite his naivety, Leander's eventual congress with Hero reverts to imagery of conquest and rape:

> Love is not full of pity (as men say)
> But deaf and cruel where he means to prey.

Even as a bird, which in our hands we wring,
Forth plungeth, and oft flutters with her wing,
She trembling strove.

(2, 287–91)

This violent image is tempered by more slapstick, as Leander fumbles his way into Hero's bed, and by her acquiescence ('In such wars women use but half their strength'; 2, 296). But in the scenario of Hero and Leander gender assertion triumphs eventually over androgynous harmony.

A second scenario concerns Leander's relations with the sea god, Neptune. Because he is girlish, we are told, men perceive him as a sex object. Bredbeck compares Michael Drayton's *Endymion and Phoebe* (1595):

And Jove oft-times bent to lascivious sport,
And coming where Endymion did resort,
Hath courted him, inflamed with desire,
Thinking some nymph was cloth'd in boy's attire.[17]

In *Dido Queen of Carthage*, Venus complains that Jupiter is toying with his cupbearer, Ganymede, 'that female wanton boy', instead of attending to the founding of Rome (Marlowe 1971a: I.i.51).

Neptune takes Leander initially for Ganymede: 'The lusty god embrac'd him, call'd him love, / And swore he never should return to Jove' (2, 167–8). Neptune's lovemaking uses delightfully the idea of the waves lapping through and around the swimming body:

He watch'd his arms, and as they open'd wide
At every stroke, betwixt them would he slide
And steal a kiss, and then run out and dance,
And as he turn'd, cast many a lustful glance,
And threw him gaudy toys to please his eye,
And dive into the water, and there pry
Upon his breast, his thighs, and every limb,
And up again, and close beside him swim,
And talk of love.

(2, 183–91)

Leander's response is characteristically naïve: '"You are deceiv'd, I am no woman, I"' (2, 192). But it is not a female that Neptune wants, but a female wanton boy–which Leander is for some of the time. Leander extricates himself only when Neptune goes to find gifts for him. Compare Corinna's demand for payment in elegy 1:10: inequality may encourage a

mercenary attitude. Ovid's friend Tibullus comments: 'Unfortunately our age has grown used to some miserable practices–/ Nowadays a tender young boy will expect a present' (Tibullus 1972: 1:4: 57–8). Ganymede bargains with Jupiter in *Dido*:

> I would have a jewel for mine ear,
> And a fine brooch to put in my hat,
> And then I'll hug with you an hundred times.
>
> (I.i.46–8)

We should observe that Marlowe's two scenarios for Leander–his relations with Hero and with Neptune–may not be regarded as embodying a progressive politics today (see Goldberg 1992: 105–43). We may prefer to believe that cross-gender sex can be fun and non-genital without being ridiculous; that a boy can be attractive when he is masculine, feminine, or neither in particular; and that power disparity in a relationship need not mean that everything comes down to money.

Ovid is remarkable for his lack of interest in same-gender love–unlike other poets of his time–Virgil, Catullus, Horace, Tibullus–for whom the loves of women and boys appear equally exciting and equally acceptable. However, this is true only so long as the man retains his dignity and command. If same-gender passion was far more legitimate in Rome than it has generally been in the Christian centuries, that was true only of the 'active' partner. To subject oneself to another male was deeply shaming. In this context, we may wonder at the representation of Cupid as a conquering young man in the *Amores*, and in other classical and Renaissance writing. Why was it through imagined submission to a tyrannical master that impressionable youths were supposed to approach manly sexual love? The poet of the *Amores* surrenders to Cupid:

> I, lately caught, will have a new-made wound,
> And captive-like be manacled and bound;
> Good Meaning, Shame, and such as seek love's wrack
> Shall follow thee, their hands tied at their back.
>
> (1:2, 29–32)

Perhaps this illustrates that, while manliness may appear to be about impressing women, it is asserted through measuring up to other men. Actually, Cupid is not always imperious. In *Hero and Leander*, he is an infant, as befits the more playful tone of that poem. At one point in the *Amores* he appears surprisingly accessible: opposing Corinna's attempt to charge for her favours, the poet declares: 'Love is a naked boy, his years sans stain, /

And hath no clothes, but open doth remain' (1:10, 15–16). This version of Cupid is submissive, rather than dominating. Perhaps the conventional categories, active/passive, were not as invariably distinct as the prevailing ideology of gender suggested. There were rumours that both Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar had taken the passive role with men at some time.[18]

In an interesting analysis of the ten Marlovian elegies published initially in 1599, Ian Frederick Moulton argues that these poems spoke to an Elizabethan anxiety about effeminate weakness in men–which could mean a man devoting himself too blindly to women, as well as assuming a passive role with men. Opponents of love poetry, such as Stephen Gosson (*The Schoole of Abuse*, 1579) and Philip Stubbes (*The Anatomie of Abuses*, 1583) blamed it for effeminate weakness, undermining manhood and the state. Moulton sees a narrative pattern in which love is 'a fall into impotence and powerlessness, a loss of manly strength, and even of identity' (Moulton 1998: 82). The culmination of this theme is elegy 3:6, where the poet finds himself unwontedly impotent: despite his mistress' efforts, he droops like a wilting rose (3:6, 66). I traced just such an anxiety in Chapter 6.

As I have often remarked, same-gender passions were not as foreign to Elizabethans as might be supposed. What is striking in *Hero and Leander* is how casually same-gender passion is mentioned. 'For in his looks were all that men desire' (1, 84), the narrator remarks of Leander, as though it were taken for granted that men desire boys. Even the most reluctant men may be attracted; Hippolytus, for instance, who resisted the advances of his stepmother, Phaedra, would have been enamoured of Leander's beauty (1, 77–8). At the same time, the poem has a manifest air of exuberant Ovidian knowingness: these affairs were still illicit. Still, it was relations between men and women that affected the regulation of lineage, alliance and property, and hence might profoundly disrupt the social order and the male psyche. Same-gender passion became threatening if, as in the instance of Marlowe's *Edward II*, it was allowed to interfere with other responsibilities.

In Bruce Smith's reading, *Hero and Leander* amounts to an opportunity for a lustful male reader to fantasize. The protagonists' experience is inconclusive and frustrating; the desire between the reader and the characters is more important. Noting that the story appears unfinished, Smith wonders: 'Did Marlowe lose interest because there were no more opportunities for homoerotic titillation?' (Smith 1991: 132–6) This is well observed, but perhaps rather austerely framed. It does seem likely that Marlowe composed the part of the story that engaged his imagination, and that the writing is designed to implicate the reader by arousing his or her sexual interest. But this is not unusual in literature and art; many of the great classical paintings may be regarded as soft pornography for the upper

classes. *Hero and Leander* invites the thought that differences of power (despite aspects of *Astrophil and Stella* and the *Amores*) may coexist with elements of fantasy, playfulness and fulfilment. Engaging with such a depiction may lead the reader into unaccustomed identifications. When Neptune accosts the swimming boy, for instance, do you see yourself as Leander, Neptune, Hero, the waves, the narrator, or none of these?

Seductions

In fact, seduction is what Marlowe's poetry is all about. 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love' ('Come live with me, and be my love') was first printed in 1599 as a poem of four stanzas, in the collection *The Passionate Pilgrim*. The six-stanza version usually printed today appeared in another collection, *England's Helicon*, in 1600. In a simple verse movement, the poem evokes a charming rural scene of 'valleys, groves, hills and fields, / Woods, or steepy mountain'; the beloved will lie on 'beds of roses', and be showered with 'a thousand fragrant posies'. The simplicity is only at first sight, however. There is another classical model here–pastoral: nature and the rural scene are viewed through a lens of urban refinement, knowingness, and artificiality. The birds will sing madrigals (generally a rather elaborate kind of composition); slippers will be fitted 'With buckles of the purest gold'; a rustic belt will fasten 'With coral clasps and amber studs'. Pastoral is city poets cultivating a fantasy about the country, in which labour is effaced and sexual desire is unencumbered by social pressures.

Pastoral also points us, once more, toward the classical ethos in sexuality–in which the love object was as likely to be a boy as a girl (in the pastoral poetry of Virgil and Theocritus, pre-eminently). In Virgil's Second Eclogue, the shepherd Corydon offers gifts to a boy, Alexis. The addressee of Marlowe's shepherd may be of either gender (Hero wears a 'kirtle' (1, 15), but it was also a man's tunic). Further, it is not entirely fanciful to imagine the passionate shepherd's song as the seductive tale Neptune begins to tell in *Hero and Leander*–'How that a shepherd, sitting in a vale, / Play'd with a boy so fair and kind' (2, 194–5). Notice that the second line there is shorter than in the rest of *Hero and Leander*; in fact, the same length as the lines of 'The Passionate Shepherd.' Look at them together:

> Play'd with a boy so fair and kind.
> Come live with me, and be my love.

There is another familiar theme in 'The Passionate Shepherd': the split between two kinds of love. One posits an ideal, symmetrical passion, which may be figured as androgynous–beyond gender difference. The poem's

amiable manner, and the indeterminacy of gender in the love object perhaps suggest this motif. However, another kind of love expects girls and boys to be available for the erotic attentions of older, wealthier, and more experienced men. 'The Passionate Shepherd', while surely a delightful lyric, is all about the speaker's promised offerings. 'And if these pleasures may thee move, / Come live with me, and be my love.' As Neptune put it, ''Tis wisdom to give much, a gift prevails, / When deep persuading oratory fails' (2, 225–6).

Finally, 'The Passionate Shepherd' cannot be pinned down to one scenario; it is available for diverse readings in diverse circumstances. Explicit appropriations followed soon upon its publication. In Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, the Turkish slave Ithamore appropriates the opening line for his wooing of the courtesan, Bellamira (Marlowe 1971c: IV.ii.93). The poem is used comically in Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*, where a Welsh parson sings it, jumbled incongruously with a Psalm, to keep up his spirits as he waits to fight a duel (Shakespeare 1971: III.i.16–29). In an anonymous play, *Choice, Chance and Change*, Arnofilo invites Tidero to live with him since he is without heirs; Tidero backs away–'Why how now? Do you take me for a woman, that you come upon me with a ballad, of Come live with me and be my Love?' (quoted in Norton 2001: 127–8). Poets wrote imitations and additional stanzas; John Donne penned an exuberant version transposed into the imagery of fishing: 'The Bait'. Sir Walter Raleigh penned a sceptical reply for Marlowe's addressee:

> But could youth last, and love still breed,
> Had joys no date, nor age no need,
> Then these delights my mind might move,
> To live with thee, and be thy love.
>
> (Macdonald 1962: 193–5)

These are Shakespearean themes.

9
What Happens in Shakespeare's Sonnets

Prosecution Counsel I believe you have written an article to show that Shakespeare's sonnets were suggestive of unnatural vice?

Oscar Wilde On the contrary I have written an article to show that they are not. I objected to such a perversion being put upon Shakespeare.[1]

The jury agreed, eventually, with the prosecution. A lot might hang on how one interprets Shakespeare's sonnets.

When in disgrace

I disagree with Wilde's theory, that Mr W.H. was a boy actor. It affords no reason why the Boy should be urged to procreate, and does not account for the class hierarchy between the Boy and the Poet. Some commentators have regarded the language of master and slave in the poems as metaphoric– the kind of things lovers say (see Pequigney 1985). Although some references to the Poet's enslavement are indeed hyperbolic ('Being your slave, what should I do but tend / Upon the hours and times of your desire?' 57), many incidental remarks indicate that the Boy is of a notably higher class than the Poet. Actually, Wilde's own situation is more interesting than he was prepared to say in court. He was himself a poet and self-conscious about his age, and he did contrive liaisons with lower-class boys (the equivalent of actors in *Mr W.H.*). His special passion, however, was for a young man of higher class who repeatedly disappointed him (Lord Alfred Douglas).

My belief is that the sonnets inscribe a patronage relation that goes wrong. This is compatible with an evident preoccupation in other Shakespearean texts–*Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, the *Henry IV* plays, *Venus and Adonis* perhaps: the older and lower-class man is in love with an aristocrat who only partly returns his affections. Stephen Greenblatt suggests that Shakespeare may have been employed, and perhaps inspired, to urge marriage and procreation upon a reluctant Earl of Southampton (2004:

226–32). Katherine Duncan-Jones agrees that Southampton was a likely candidate for a same-gender liaison, but observes that the Earl of Pembroke (who was catching the eye of King James) also was reluctant to marry (2001: 79–87). She sees Shakespeare, like Wilde, as attracted by class hierarchy. For my purposes the significant point is the kind of relationship that is presented, not the historical persons (if there were any).

Let me say what kind of text we have here. Some of the sonnets have an addressee; others seem to be meditations, and may or may not have been shared with another person. Often the poems gesture toward unspoken actions; they include some *interaction* between the parties, and this depends on at least some of the sonnets being shown to the Boy. They need not all have been addressed to the same persons–in 31 the Poet says he is projecting on to the Boy 'all love's loving parts, / And all those friends which I thought burièd.'

The formalistic wish to discover a narrative coherence, sonnet by sonnet, seems to me misapplied. I don't believe there is a continuous story here, or that one might be obtained by reading the sonnets in a different order. There is a cluster of preoccupations which amount to an *ongoing scenario*, whose repetitions may be presumed to refer to a habitual kind of liaison. For instance, the references to a rival poet, intermittently between sonnets 78 and 86, do not yield a coherent episode. Rather, these sonnets display a recurring feature of this kind of liaison. If you tell your prized patron that you are going to make him immortal through your verse, you are vulnerable to other poets attempting the same thing:

> So oft have I invoked thee for my muse
> And found such fair assistance in my verse
> As every alien pen hath got my use
> And under thee their poesy disperse.
>
> (78)

Notice how the language here ('fair assistance') hovers between personal inspiration and financial reward. Similarly with the Boy taking up with the Poet's Woman: this occupational hazard appears in two groups of sonnets (40–2 and 133–5), in quite different tones. The treacherous friend is a motif in several plays (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Othello*, *Henry IV*, *Winter's Tale*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*).

These preoccupations, these scenarios, might have occurred in various contexts in Shakespeare's experience (not necessarily his first-hand experience), but they are also generic and structural. Again, the Poet's sense of his own relative ageing is one of the consequences of taking up with a younger partner. Rather than narrating these themes, the sonnets weave

their way through and around them, experimenting with alternative postures, responses and outcomes, sometimes in linked pairs or groups; sometimes in a perfunctory way, sometimes profoundly. There are several farewell poems (36, 87, 126). This said, it is possible, and quite common, to read sonnets 1–36 in one sweep, and I do that (see Seymour-Smith 1976: 38).

A particular interest for me, as for so many commentators with various agendas, is what kinds or degrees of sexual connection we may deduce. The studies earlier in this book indicate that the Poet and the Boy might, quite plausibly, be read as having (what we think of as) a sexual liaison; and they might, also plausibly, not. The third possibility is that the liaison depicted is sexually charged, but not consummated, or perhaps only occasionally, or in a relatively limited form–there are things two males might do together that are not penetrative intercourse. This third possibility, in my view, is likely. Like the sexual puns in *Astrophil and Stella*, discussed in the previous chapter, the renowned intensity of sexual punning in some of Shakespeare's sonnets may lead a reader to infer an oblique, submerged or blocked desire. Famously, William Empson, introducing his seven types of ambiguity, instanced sonnet 73 and the idea that the 'Bare ruined choirs' call to mind 'the cold and Narcissistic charm suggested by choir-boys', adding that this 'suits well with Shakespeare's feeling for the object of the Sonnets' (Empson 1961: xvi, 2–3).

To be sure, there is a danger of over-reading. In some criticism of poetry from this period every occurrence of the word 'die' is alleged to be sexual. I have tried to ratify my own readings by checking them with a clutch of modern editions,[2] and to look for sustained sexual imagery, not just the odd word. John Barrell in a carefully theorized reading of sonnet 29, explores the conditions of meaning.

> When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state,
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
> And look upon myself and curse my fate,
> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
> Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
> With what I most enjoy contented least;
> Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
> Like to the lark at break of day arising
> From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
> For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
> That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Barrell recognizes in 29 a discourse that figures both poetry and love as *ideal and transcendental*. But he draws out another cluster of expressions as well: bootless cries, rich in hope, friends, art, scope, love. Together, these expressions co-operate and cohere to establish a concurrent discourse of *patronage*.[3] In the Machereyan terms broached elsewhere in this book, one discourse is the not-said of the other; Barrell thinks of the bright and dull sides of a coin. For, of course, there is a connection. The masking of patronage as love is designed to obscure the underlying financial relations. This might contribute to the dignity of both parties: they are in collusion. The patron needs to believe in his own generosity and sophistication, and the poet needs to believe in the integrity of his art.

I would add that there is also in sonnet 29 a third discourse, of *sexual passion*. It is signalled by a language more intense than that of either transcendence or patronage; a language of extremity and excess. In the first quatrain there is an overload of disgrace–weeping, out-cast, bootless, cursing. In the second, the poet's personal attributes are lamented–by no means just the talents that might win him patronage. In the third quatrain extremes of self-abnegation and delight are trumpeted. As these features hang together, they imply an unstated distress, something not accounted for in the discourses of patronage and transcendent love.

The couplet attributes a positive influence to the Boy in respect of all three discourses:

> For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
> That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

The Boy's 'sweet love' might restore both a transcendent and a patronage relation: on both counts, the Poet conceives of his state as wealthy. He would not exchange it with that of kings; the Boy is generous with both resources and personal reassurance. The discourse of emotional extremity licenses a third reading: 'then I scorn to change the way I relate to (my status with) monarchs' (in effect, with the Boy). The adducing of the monarch summons up his notorious associate, the minion. 'The mightiest kings have had their minions,' Mortimer Senior allows in Marlowe's *Edward II*, including Alexander, Hercules and Achilles.[4] 'Minion' is usually an offensive term, though (like 'mistress') it may encode an exhilarating liaison. The Boy is the ground of the Poet's disgrace in a sexualized liaison, but also the consolation for the Poet's subservient role. Notice 'remembered' ('thy sweet love remembered'): the Poet is not entirely sure how far the relation is still current.

Something of this is anticipated in 25, which is partly about the minion: 'Let those who are in favour with their stars / Of public honour and proud

titles boast.' The poet is barred from such open triumph, but positions himself by comparing the manifest minion:

> Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread
> But as the marigold at the sun's eye;
> And in themselves their pride lies burièd,
> For at a frown they in their glory die.

Despite their apparent stature, their pride is humbled and vulnerable ('pride' may mean sexual arousal, as in *Astrophil and Stella*) (see Booth, 1977: 175, and p. 142 above). The couplet proclaims self-assurance, though perhaps with an air of excess and anxiety: 'Then happy I, that love and am beloved / Where I may not remove nor be removed.' A secret love cannot be dislodged by public pressure. It transpires, later on, that this is not so. The inability to establish a public presence is a lack on which the liaison founders:

> I may not evermore acknowledge thee,
> Lest my bewailèd guilt should do thee shame;
> Nor thou with public kindness honor me
> Unless thou take that honor from thy name.
>
> (36)

The unavailability of social ratification, as in modern gay liaisons until recently, makes it hard to keep a sense of proportion and individual worth.

Lisa Jardine hears in 29 two discourses, one of sexual passion and one of patronage: 'Although the tone of this sonnet suggests the kind of intensity of feeling which we associate with courtship of a woman, what is at issue here is an attempt to gain the attention of, and enter a relationship of trust with (in other words, the courtship of) a male patron' (Jardine 1996: 117). (Notice that heteronormative 'we': for myself, I associate intensity of courtship with gay relationships.) Jardine sees here a decline of older mores, in which service could be taken for granted; by the 1580s male intimacy had to be sought and won. Upon 'homosocial bonding,' it appears, 'the smooth and effective running of the households of noblemen depended' (p.117). This argument is astute, but in my view not quite right for sonnet 29. The language of ideal love would be sufficient for the communication of the aspirations of patronage; the discourse of passionate intimacy, in the terms offered in sonnet 29, encodes confusion, frustration and bitterness. There is no sign of the Poet performing a useful service, or being taken into the Boy's (presumptively noble) household; the liaison is in fact marginal and dysfunctional. Jardine believes Shakespeare's sonnets are evidence of social

decay–'a far cry from the steady commitment of the feudal retainer' (p.118). I think they present a patronage connection that gets out of hand.

The master mistress

The Poet's initial project–persuading the Boy to produce offspring–is surprisingly intimate and sexualized. Sonnet 4 is read by Stephen Booth and Duncan-Jones[5] as a complaint that the Boy is masturbating instead of using his semen to reproduce himself:

> Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend
> Upon thyself thy beauty's legacy?
> . . . .
> For, having traffic with thyself alone,
> Thou of thyself thy sweet self dost deceive.
>
> (4)

I have discussed similar imagery in *Astrophil and Stella* (p. 140–1). The Boy commits 'murd'rous shame' on himself (sonnet 9). More effectively than with Time's pencil or the Poet's pen, the Boy must be 'drawn by [his] own sweet skill' (16); in bed, that is; so Booth (1977: 159) and Kerrigan (p.194). Observe that the Poet's commendations of procreation involve hardly any reference to the pleasures of marriage and cross-gender intercourse. He envisages an instrumental and rather coarse role for the woman: 'For where is she so fair whose uneared womb / Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?' (3). In sonnet 6, she is spoken of as 'some vial' for the Boy's treasure. Lovemaking with her is figured as a kind of usury and agricultural management. In 16 the Poet tells how 'many maiden gardens, yet unset, / With virtuous wish would bear your living flowers.' Any woman will do, so long as she is virtuous, even if the Poet and the Boy are cynical. Commentators find the ideology informing this interaction unattractive.[6]

The Poet's strategy seems to rebound: appeals to the Boy's beauty make him more self-absorbed. But perhaps the Poet's motives are mixed: perhaps he is himself drawn by the Boy's beauty. In sonnet 10 the Poet, almost casually, shifts the argument away from the Boy and his putative offspring, and toward the Boy and the Poet: 'Make thee another self *for love of me*' (my emphasis). In 13 he introduces endearments: 'love' and 'dear my love'. Sonnet 15 offers a new idea: there is an alternative to breeding with a woman. The Boy may fend off Time through the Poet's verse: 'And, all in war with Time for love of you, / As he takes from you, I engraft you new.' The Poet offers eternity, not through cross-gender procreation, but by a male-to-male process of taking and implanting a cutting so that the

Boy's youthful beauty may be revived on the Poet's old stem. And this is underwritten by 'love of you'.

Once uttered, the idea of immortality through poetry, accomplished through the Poet's love, is not repudiated. Sonnet 16 reverts to the effectiveness of child-bearing, but the Poet's 'pupil pen' is learning fast. Why not have both, sonnet 17 concludes: 'But were some child of yours alive that time, / You should live twice–in it and in my rhyme'? Sonnet 18 ('Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?') sounds definitive:

> Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade
> When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
> So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
> So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

In 19 the Poet challenges Time: 'My love shall in my verse ever live young.'

What is happening when a man tells a younger man that he is 'contracted to [his] own bright eyes' (1); that he is 'The lovely gaze [thing gazed upon] where every eye doth dwell' (5) and his 'mother's glass' (mirror; 3); that he is 'Music to hear' (8), has a 'sweet form' (13) and is 'more lovely' (18)? How is the Boy likely to feel when told he is 'beauty's pattern to succeeding men' (19)? The Poet is engendering a hothouse atmosphere, in which he can appeal to the Boy's narcissism, sensuality and misogyny, as much as his appreciation of poetry and interest in eternity. He can promise and withdraw, tease and exult, insinuate and accuse. He can be crudely assertive and indecently punning–raising, we may envisage, flattered blushes. He is feeling his way–trying a new slant, and then, if it doesn't work, another emphasis. (We might compare the intense conversations between Ganymede and Orlando in *As You Like It*, and Cesario and Orsino in *Twelfth Night*; Angelo and Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, perhaps.) But it cannot be all the Poet's manipulation; presumably he has reason to believe that such approaches will not be unacceptable. The Boy must have a reputation for same-gender interests. After all, lack of enthusiasm for cross-gender activities is the occasion for the verse. Hence the Poet's lack of interest, from the start, in cross-gender love-making: there is no attempt to recommend its delights, just the crude and instrumental argument about breeding, and the appeal to vanity.

The relation is still within a framework of patronage, but the tone and themes are those of a seduction scenario. As Greenblatt suggests, 'Something happened to the poet, the sonnets imply, when he undertook to persuade the beautiful youth to marry: he became aware that he was longing for the youth himself.'[7] The Poet is creating an interpersonal context in which sexual passion may grow and flourish.

Sonnet 20 marks a shift, provoking an unprecedented outburst. Something has happened.

> A woman's face, with Nature's own hand painted,
> Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion;
> A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
> With shifting change, as is false women's fashion;
> An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
> Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
> A man in hue all hues in his controlling,
> Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.
> And for a woman wert thou first created,
> Till Nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
> And by addition me of thee defeated
> By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
> But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,
> Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure.

The Poet has been suggesting that the Boy's attractions are feminine since the start, when he nominated him 'beauty's rose'. Now he launches on a sustained comparison between the Boy and female stereotypes. His face is painted by Nature, whereas women are notorious for the use of cosmetics; he has a gentle heart but not female inconstancy. The sentiment overruns the quatrain, leading into a praise of the Boy's attractions: he 'steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth'. Emphatically: Nature created the Boy 'for a woman' (that is, as a woman or for the pleasure of a woman), but with one addition–the male sex organ. She 'pricked [him] out for women's pleasure'.

The critical contention here is over what the Poet means when he says this 'addition me of thee defeated / By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.' There are those who believe that all male same-gender lovers delight, exclusively, in partners who are manly and have large penises, and therefore the Poet must be disavowing same-gender attraction. This is false; consider the Ganymedes and page boys featured in Chapter 7. Martin Seymour-Smith finds in sonnet 20 'the type of homosexual emotion in which a man is physically admired as a woman rather [than] as a man: in other words, his masculinity is a frustrating, even a "defeating" factor' (1976: 27). Gregory Woods locates in classical culture three male types: Narcissus, Apollo, and Heracles. Narcissus, an adolescent, 'may be endowed with an indefatigable penis, but is chiefly admired for the delightful promise of his backside. Shakespeare is not interested in his boyfriend's penis (sonnet 20)' (Woods 1987: 9). The Poet regards the Boy, as the first half of the sonnet shows, as a kind of improved woman. It is evident, then, what the Poet is renouncing

in the last line: women may have intercourse, semen and offspring with the Boy. The Poet is retaining 'love'; what this might mean remains to be seen.

The immediate question is, what has provoked this abrupt new direction? Why is it suddenly necessary for the Poet to clarify, so emphatically, his relation to the Boy's gender in general and his penis in particular? Like a number of the sonnets, 20 surely presupposes what we might think of as off-stage action. For instance, when sonnet 40 begins: 'Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all', a reader has to deduce that this is in response to the Boy associating with the Poet's Woman. Compare Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, where the reader has to infer that Astrophil has stolen a kiss.

The reason why the Poet has to refuse the Boy's penis is that it has been offered to him. The relations in 20 fall into place when we entertain the thought that the Boy has responded to the intimate and sexualized atmosphere that the Poet has created by propositioning him–*as receptor*. And this is not what the Poet meant at all. He may have believed that age seniority and a more masculine affect make him 'top' in any close encounter. Hence his insistence on the Boy's femininity. The Boy has the advantage of class superiority, however, and assumes that *he* will be 'top'. The expression 'master mistress' encodes this confusion: the Boy aspires to be master; the Poet wants him as 'mistress'.

After decades of collaboration and occasional sexual experimentation together, Esther Newton and Shirley Walton realized that the reason they had never really got off together was that, despite appearances, they both were tops. They call for 'a more precise vocabulary to take us out of Victorian romanticism in sexual matters and toward a new understanding of women's sexual diversity and possibility'.[8] The categories Newton and Walton discover are:

> sexual preference (from which gender you usually select your partners);
> erotic identity (how you image yourself);
> erotic role (who you want to be in bed);
> and erotic acts (what you like to do in bed).

The Poet and the Boy are compatible on the first count (and they both like sleeping with women as well); on the second, the Boy seems generally content to endure the Poet's assumption that his seniority entitles him to the status of mentor, handing out intimate lectures on morals and lifestyle. On the other two categories, they seem poorly matched. However feminine the Boy may appear, however deferential the Poet, they are both tops. It need not be assumed, however, that a poor fit in power hierarchies will diminish the intensity of the liaison; it may enhance it. The Poet is not repudiating boy-love–the surrounding sonnets make that clear–but an

undesired erotic role in it. He doesn't want women (he appears to despise them), but the Boy without the prick.

Whether or not the ensuing interaction should be regarded as sexual, in some recognizable sense, cannot securely be decided. But the sonnets surely envisage, for a while at least, an intimate and intricate liaison, such as is very often expressed through physical love-making. Sonnets 27 and 28 find the Poet losing sleep, despite being 'Weary with toil' (27)–signalling both class difference (the Poet has to work) and a more intense longing than might be expected in a patronage relation. The sexual language of treasure, pleasure and financial manipulation that was deployed in a procreative discourse in 2, 4 and 6 is applied to relations between the two males in several sonnets.

So are you to my thoughts as food to life,
Or as sweet-seasoned showers are to the ground;
And for the peace of you I hold such strife
As 'twixt a miser and his wealth is found:
Now proud as an enjoyer, and anon
Doubting the filching age will steal his treasure;
Now counting best to be with you alone,
Then bettered that the world may see my pleasure;
Sometime all full with feasting on your sight,
And by and by clean starvèd for a look,
Possessing or pursuing no delight
Save what is had or must from you be took.
Thus do I pine and surfeit day by day,
Or gluttoning on all, or all away.

(75)

The emotional extremity here suggests sexual passion, through the persistent imagery of surfeit and gluttony. Joseph Pequigney writes of lines 'charged with libidinal intensity'.[9] Booth highlights the sexual meanings of 'proud' and 'enjoyer'. He and Duncan-Jones point up the anticipation of 129, 'Mad in pursuit and in possession so; / Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme.' The very syntax of sexual passion is applicable to either gender.[10]

Sonnets 109–11 find the Poet apologizing for an act of infidelity which appears to be sexual (as with sonnet 20, it is necessary to infer some off-stage action). Sonnet 109 opens with a distinction between the Poet's heart and–presumably–his body (I quote the first and third quatrains):

O, never say that I was false of heart,
Though absence seemed my flame to qualify;
As easy might I from my self depart

As from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie.
. . .
Never believe, though in my nature reigned
All frailties that besiege all kinds of blood,
That it could so preposterously be stained
To leave for nothing all thy sum of good.

'All kinds of blood' might mean 'all dispositions', as some editors say. But, in context with 'flame' ('passion') and 'All frailties', 'blood' means 'passion', 'appetite'.[11] Notice that the unnatural and perverse ('preposterous') here would be, not some unort.hodox sexual practice (though 'preposterous' might mean that), but allowing a stain that might threaten the liaison with the Boy (Booth 1977: 352–3).

The nature of the Poet's offence becomes clearer in sonnet 110:

Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
Made old offenses of affections new.

He has repeated the old offense of infidelity with new love affairs:

Most true it is that I have looked on truth
Askance and strangely; but, by all above,
These blenches gave my heart another youth,
And worse essays proved thee my best of love.

These swervings or deviations ('blenches') made the Poet feel young at heart (by giving him another youth); yet these experiments with others have proved that the Boy is his best lover.

Now all is done, have what shall have no end:
Mine appetite I never more will grind
On newer proof, to try an older friend,
A god in love, to whom I am confined.
    Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,
    Even to thy pure and most most loving breast.

The Poet will confine his appetite; he will never again use a new lover to test his older love.[12] In such poems we are not looking for subtle puns that may insinuate glimpses of sexual engagement. Sonnet 110 tells, directly, of an episode in a passionate but uneven love affair.

What is clear, in any event, is that the relationship is only intermittently successful. The Poet's attempted resolution is to resume the discourse of intense but ideal love through the language of friendship. Despite the intricate social positioning negotiated in 25 and 29, his pitch, eventually, is that the Boy is his *friend*:

> But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
> All losses are restored and sorrows end.
>
> (30)

He writes of 'friends which [he] thought burièd', and imagines the Boy thinking of him as 'my friend' (31, 32). Many commentators adopt the term 'friend', rather coyly I think, as if it were a simple and safe (not too sexy); but actually it is problematic (see pp. 92–8). The Poet strives to position the Boy and himself as friends, in the manner propounded by Cicero and Seneca, incorporated into early-modern culture through commentary by Michel de Montaigne, Sir Thomas Elyot and Sir Francis Bacon, and alluded to in plays such as *Two Gentlemen* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*. However, in this formation, friendship should be equal and mutual, having nothing to do with self-interest. 'Seneca saith that very friendship is induced neither with hope nor reward,' Elyot quotes (1962: 149). He holds that friendship may be founded only in virtue, and that friends must be *equal*–of similar degree, age, and even temperament. So friendship is not compatible with patronage. In practice, there was a persistent faultline between the ideal mutuality that enveloped the idea of friendship, and the actuality, in very many instances, of class difference and self-interest (Poisson 1976). 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediment' (116) is justly admired as a noble evocation of equality in love relations, but in the sonnets it is hardly more than an aspiration.

Hence the Poet's unease, as he strives to establish the idea of the friend. A good deal of the anxiety about age difference is to do with a sense that equality would be better. 'My glass shall not persuade me I am old / So long as youth and thou are of one date,' he alleges (22). Duncan-Jones expounds: 'Because the poet's heart is lodged inside his friend, he adopts his friend's beauty as his own *seemly raiment*' (1997: 154). 'How can I then be elder than thou art?' The age gap appears to have closed. In 32 ('If thou survive my well-contented day'), the Poet supposes that he will die before the Boy, and consequently his poems will be 'outstripped by every pen'. He calls upon the Boy to value them, nonetheless, for his love, and to imagine what he might have written, had he lived. Again, the Poet and the Boy appear to catch up with each other. Yet the age gap between them is ineluctable and, finally, moving:

This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.
(73)

Conversely, the liaison founded in age difference is vulnerable to the boy growing up. Hence the Poet's attempts to reassure the Boy that his beauty remains unrivalled ('To me, fair friend, you never can be old'; 104).

Lilies that fester

In sonnet 33, 'Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day,' the Poet embarks on a pattern of anticipation, manipulation and reproach which affords the dominant tone for the rest of the sequence. Booth writes well on this, reading 35 as 'a variation of Shakespeare's habits of damning with fulsome praise (as in 87.1) and of making flattering accusations (as in 33)'. The first quatrain is presented as a loving effort to relieve the Boy's sense of guilt, but lack of conviction makes it more an advertisement for the Poet's benevolence. The middle part of the sonnet, Booth continues, 'develops a competition in guilt', as the Poet is drawn into dishonesty and self-division by his love for the Boy. By the end of the poem the Boy is placed 'under a new guilt–the guilt of being beneficiary of the speaker's ostentatious sacrifice'.

The immediate outcome is a frank redefinition of the liaison in sonnet 36:

Let me confess that we two must be twain
Although our undivided loves are one:
So shall those blots that do with me remain,
Without thy help by me be borne alone.

Commentators disagree about the 'blots' in line 2. Duncan-Jones sees a continuation of the theme of the Poet taking the Boy's faults upon himself; Kerrigan suggests they are the 'disgrace' of 29, or the 'stain' of 33, inherited from the Boy; for Pequigney the blots are a public scandal, whereas 33 and 34 are a private matter. I see sonnet 36 as concluding a sweep through the first section of the sequence, because it makes acknowledgement of the faultlines, the competing discourses, that have structured the preceding sonnets and hindered and confused the Poet's progress. He maintains the ideal of transcendent mutual love, but accepts that class difference makes it impossibly demanding. The pressures of erotic role, absence, and rival lovers lead to frustration and reproaches. Optimistic and evasive articulations do not work. The 'blots', then, are all the impediments they have experienced: their patronage roles, class hierarchy, sexual mismatch, separation, absence, reputation; the temptation to infidelity and jealous

recriminations, and to manipulation and reproach masquerading as forgiveness and praise; the disgrace of being the minion and the impossibility of being the friend. Whichever of them committed these deeds, the Poet is to take them upon himself alone:

> I may not evermore acknowledge thee,
> Lest my bewailèd guilt should do thee shame;
> Nor thou with public kindness honour me
> Unless thou take that honour from thy name.
> But do not so; I love thee in such sort
> As, thou being mine, mine is thy good report.
>
> (36)

Thus, somewhat like Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* when he offers his pound of flesh, the Poet retains an imaginary stake in the relationship by removing himself from it.

Readers have tended to suppose that the appearance on the scene of the Poet's Woman must oblige the three persons to choose where their true inclinations lie. However, we should bear in mind the image, discussed in Chapter 7, of the 'young man-about-town, with his mistress on one arm and his "catamite" on the other' (Bray 1988: 34). The Poet's experience is less exuberant when (we may infer) the Boy allows the Woman to seduce him. The Poet's inclination is again to make extravagant gestures of self-sacrifice, while cultivating a sarcastic or mocking edge to his voice: 'Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all' (40; notice that he has had plenty). He declines to regard the situation seriously; he terms it 'Those pretty wrongs that liberty commits / When I am sometime absent from thy heart' (41). With an air of bravado, he reapplies the language of love and friendship to a casual, riddling, Astrophil-style consolation: 'But here's the joy: my friend and I are one; / Sweet flattery! then she loves but me alone' (42). The imagery of usury, with which he cajoled the Boy in the procreation sonnets, returns to haunt the Poet: now the Woman is 'Thou usurer that put'st forth all to use' (134).

The further question about the Woman concerns what's in it for the Boy, who has hitherto shown indifference, at best, to cross-gender relations. In 40 it is suggested that there is something perverse here: 'But yet be blamed if thou this self deceivest / By willful taste of what thyself refusest.' The Boy's behaviour may be understood as a continuation of their disagreement about who should be on top. The Poet casually positions the boy as feminine from time to time (in 53, he offers both Adonis and Helen as comparisons; in 93, he likens himself to 'a deceivèd husband'). By taking the Poet's 'seat' (the Woman; 41) the Boy acquires some of his masculinity.

Sonnet 42 states the idea clearly: 'Thou dost love her because thou know'st I love her.' In 134, the Boy is said to have 'learned but surety-like to write for me'–standing in for the Poet–and to have become bound himself.[13] As in *Troilus and Cressida* and *Coriolanus*, male emulation proves disruptive (p.91 above).

Once again, we are on the territory of Girard and Sedgwick, and the perception that the rivalry of two males for the same female is central in the sex/gender system (pp. 76 and 90–1 above). The Poet states frequently, to the Woman as well as the Boy, that the Boy would be the more important loss. This line of thought culminates in 144: 'Two loves I have, of comfort and despair.' Certainly it may be said that the Woman is being used in a game played by the males. But then, we might see the Boy as a pawn in the game of the grown-up couple, like the Indian Boy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (pp. 78–9 above). As I have shown, boys figure, albeit informally, in the early-modern sex/gender economy. Possession of them (whatever that means) is a sign of manliness, class attainment and erotic opportunity (see chapter 7).

Increasingly, the Poet's situation provokes him to disillusionment, bitterness and resentment, as he comes to see that the Boy's beauty is linked, inexorably, to his narcissism. 'How like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow / If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show!' (93); 'For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds; / Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds' (94); 'Some say thy fault is youth, some wantonness; / Some say thy grace is youth and gentle sport' (96). Sonnet 87 brings matters to a head:

> Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing,
> And like enough thou know'st thy estimate.
> The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
> My bonds in thee are all determinate.
> For how do I hold thee but by thy granting,
> And for that riches where is my deserving?
> The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,
> And so my patent back again is swerving.
> Thyself thou gav'st, thine own worth then not knowing,
> Or me, to whom thou gav'st it, else mistaking;
> So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
> Comes home again, on better judgment making.
>   Thus have I had thee as a dream doth flatter,
>   In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.

'Too dear for my possessing' sums up the Poet's predicament: the Boy is disproportionately precious, and too expensive (up-market), for sexual

possession especially. 'The charter of thy worth' is both literal (confirming the Boy's status) and metaphoric (his personal entitlement); it releases him from obligations to the Poet. For the Poet can have no claim to 'hold' the Boy, he is so inadequate. It has all been a mistake, a consequence of the Boy's inexperience.

Booth (p. 291) and Duncan-Jones (p. 284) hear a sexual meaning in 'Thus have I had thee as a dream doth flatter,' comparing 129: 'Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme . . . Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.' The line means *either* that the Poet has had the Boy but it has all been like a dream, *or* that he has not had the Boy, except in his dreams. Both readings amount to desire and frustration. 'In sleep a king' *either* refers back to 'I' in line 13 (in sleep the Poet has felt powerful), *or* refers back to 'thee' in line 13 (in the Poet's dreams the Boy has behaved royally, i.e. been loving and generous). Both readings reinscribe hierarchy (regal authority is either delusory or confirmed), and thereby summon up the unmentionable other of the monarch: the minion.

126 is the last of the poems addressed to the Boy (it consists of twelve couplets). The sequence began with the demand that he outwit Time by breeding; now three years have passed (see 104) and he seems able to defy Time. He has grown in beauty as he has aged, making his lover(s) appear to wither.

> O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power
> Dost hold Time's fickle glass, his sickle hour;
> Who hast by waning grown, and therein show'st
> Thy lovers withering as thy sweet self grow'st.

Modern orthography may specify 'lovers' as plural or singular (lover's), depending on how many lovers the Boy has had. Booth makes this an opportunity to discuss the embarrassment commentators have had with the use of 'lover' in the sonnets. To be sure, it may mean 'friend', that is, not a sexual partner (even Ingram and Redpath mention this, citing the Arden edition of 1931).[14] Anyway, I have shown, 'friend' is itself an unsteady concept, both in its class implications and in a lurking aspiration toward some fuller consummation. As Booth observes, the Boy is addressed, manifestly, in language that more often bespeaks cross-gender passion: these terms 'appear in contexts that carefully, constantly, and ostentatiously echo the manner, diction, and concerns of love poems about sexual relationships between men and women'. The sonnets display 'a dynamic and witty conflation of both meanings, which constantly and unsuccessfully strain to separate from one another' (1977: 432). Basically, I would say, *friend* is the Poet's fall-back position when he is disappointed in his aspiration to be the *lover*.

Sonnet 126 continues: if Nature, who has domination over decay and ruin, holds the Boy back from change, it is for her own advantage: she wants to display her power over Time. She is personified as a mistress, detaining the Boy for sexual purposes; compare *Venus and Adonis*. The female, once more, is selfish and ultimately ineffectual; it is Nature, we may recall, who is said to have painted the Boy's face and made the doting penile addition in 20. However disconnected the Poet and the Boy, they can always bond as males against the female. So to the remainder of 126:

> If Nature, sovereign mistress over wrack,
> As thou goest onwards, still will pluck thee back,
> She keeps thee to this purpose, that her skill
> May Time disgrace and wretched minutes kill.
> Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!
> She may detain, but not still keep, her treasure;
> Her audit, though delayed, answered must be,
> And her quietus is to render thee.
> { }
> { }

(The brackets are thus in the quarto.) At last in the sequence the minion is named–not as the Poet, dependent on the beautiful aristocrat, as is hinted in 25, 29 and 87, but as the Boy, figured now as the corrupt darling of Nature. The Poet projects his indignity onto the Boy. But Nature is unreliable, she may not keep her sexual conquest ('treasure') in the face of Time, any more than the Poet could. She must settle her account with Time eventually by sacrificing the Boy, even as the Poet also must surrender him to change and mortality, despite his initial promises to preserve him. For recent sonnets display the Poet as somewhat defensive about the quality of his commitment, to writing and to love. 'O truant muse, what shall be thy amends[?]' (101); 'No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change' (123). Perhaps Pequigney is right: the empty brackets at the end of 126 are where the avowal of love so often appears, and the Poet is no longer able to make it (1985: 207). The subsequent sonnets focus on the Woman.

Jonathan Goldberg and Margreta de Grazia have argued that the Poet's liaison with the Woman is the transgressive part. 'For it is of course the case that the threatening sexuality that the dark lady represents–outside marriage and promiscuous and dangerous to the homosocial order–is closer to sodomy than almost anything suggested in the poems to the young man,' Goldberg remarks (1994: 225). De Grazia observes that it would be considered reasonable for the poet to mark the fairness of the aristocratic house and lineage: 'From fairest creatures we desire increase' (1). It is

validation of the darkness of the Woman, in cross-gender passion, that is shocking, because it imperils social rank (de Grazia 1994). That sounds right, but the sexiness of the procreation sonnets and the emphasis on effeminacy may tip that theme into something else. Briefly, a young man was supposed to be fair, but not to the point where he became positioned as womanish (master mistress). Also, while it would certainly be unsuitable for the Poet and the dark Woman to marry, or be seen together socially, she seems suitable for a mistress. So long as this is acknowledged as an illicit affair, there is little threat to class or heteronormativity.

If there is something radical here (and many commentators have believed that there is), it is in the entire scenario–the Boy, the Poet and the Woman, their class, age and gender differences, and their diverse fantasy needs. For fantasy, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis observe in a key formulation, 'is not the object of desire, but its setting'. This means that the subject may locate him- or herself at more than one point in a scenario. A seduction fantasy, for instance, 'is a scenario with multiple entries, in which nothing shows whether the subject will be immediately located as *daughter*; it can as well be fixed as *father*, or even in the term *seduces*' (Laplanche and Pontalis 1986: 26 and 22–3; their emphases). The scope for a three-way interaction, inviting dissident identifications and disrupting the normative family, has emerged as a theme of this book. Desire-for alternates, overlaps, and tangles with desire-to-be.

In the late 1990s, the topic hit the media: 'Shakespeare Was Straight.' This was the headline over Jonathan Bate's response to the new Arden edition of the sonnets. They are merely conventional exercises, Bate declared. Pleasingly, he compared the professional situations of the sonnets' editor, Katherine Duncan-Jones, a senior fellow of Somerville College, Oxford, with an imagined student from the programme in Sexual Dissidence and Cultural Change which I helped to found: 'some denim-clad graduate of the University of Sussex's degree course in what is known as Queer Theory' (Bate 1997). Again: February 2005 was dubbed by a teachers' support group: 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender History Month' (following the Black History Month observed in many schools). The scheme gained government backing, but the *People* newspaper (16 January 2005) fulminated against the inclusion of Shakespeare and Florence Nightingale. They offered a new selection of titles as The Best of ShakesQueer: All's Well that Bends Well, A Mid-Bummer Night's Dream, Homeo and Juliet, Troilus and Cross-dresser, A Mincer's Tale, Titus Androgynous, Macho Ado about Nothing, The Two Nice Boys of Verona.

The reply to Bate and the *People* is that Shakespeare could indeed not have been gay, because lesbian and gay identities are modern developments: the early-modern organization of sex and gender boundaries, simply, was

different from ours. However, that may not stem the panic, because, by the same token, he couldn't have been straight either. In practice, his plays are pervaded with erotic interactions that strike chords for lesbians and gay men today. Friendships are conducted with a passion that would now be considered suspicious; language of sexual flirtation is used between males and between females; the social organization gives support, as well as stigma, to same-gender liaisons; and all the parts may, legitimately, be played by boys. (I grant that this may not, immediately, be good news for women.) None of this tells us anything about Shakespeare's sexuality, supposing he may be said to have possessed such an item. We may infer that he was very interested in complicated same-gender liaisons; but then, the same may be said of Marlowe, Jonson, Middleton, and Beaumont and Fletcher. It is not that Shakespeare was a sexual radical, then, marvellously anticipating progressive modern ideas; but the ordinary currency of his theatre and society may be sexy for us.

10
Rape and Rights
Measure for Measure and the limits of cultural imperialism

Pleasures of domination

In Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* the state is asserting itself. Two familiar distractions are being applied by the ruling elite. One is military enterprise abroad: 'If the Duke, with the other dukes, come not to composition with the King of Hungary, why then all the dukes fall upon the King' (Shakespeare 1965: I.ii.1–3). Another is a witch-hunt for alleged dissidents at home. Declaring that he is construed by the people as having been lax, the Duke thinks it better to absent himself and let his deputies put the laws into effect. In a further tyrannical-paranoid move, he disguises himself as a friar so he can spy on his deputies, and recruits a shady network of holy brothers.

Some bawds and their clients are harassed, but the system starts to bite when upper-class people are involved. The attempt to rescue Claudio leads to Angelo's attempt to exploit Isabella. Claudio begs for her help:

> Implore her, in my voice, that she make friends
> To the strict deputy: bid herself assay him.
> I have great hope in that. For in her youth
> There is a prone and speechless dialect
> Such as move men.
>
> (I.ii.167–74)

This last thought proves all too true. Angelo is moved sexually by Isabella. 'She speaks, and 'tis such sense / That my sense breeds with it' (II.ii.142–3). He offers to save Claudio if Isabella sleeps with him. When she refuses he becomes brutal:

> I have begun,
> And now I give my sensual race the rein:
> Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite;
> Lay by all nicety and prolixious blushes

> That banish what they sue for. Redeem thy brother
> By yielding up thy body to my will;
> Or else he must not only die the death,
> But thy unkindness shall his death draw out
> To ling'ring sufferance. Answer me tomorrow,
> Or, by the affection that now guides me most,
> I'll prove a tyrant to him.
>
> (II.iv.158–68)

We may discern here the misogyny of the rapist, who desires to spoil the pure, to violate, to hurt and degrade.

In 2001, Amnesty International published a powerful booklet about prisoners who are being detained and ill-treated because of their gender and orientation: *Crimes of Hate, Conspiracy of Silence*. This is one of the cases:

> In 1997, Katya Ivanova, a lesbian living in Moscow in the Russian Federation, went to the local police station to lodge a complaint against neighbours who had assaulted and threatened her. She showed the officer dealing with her complaint the notes her neighbours had pushed under her door containing threats and homophobic abuse. As soon as he saw these, the officer began to sexually harass her . . . 'He threatened that my neighbours might kill me, but that he would be able to help me. Then he told me that the only way he would help me is if I slept with him. When I attempted to resist him, he grabbed me and threw me on the table. He beat me in the face and raped me, right there in his office.' In the next few months she was summoned on a number of occasions by the same officer . . .
>
> (Amnesty International 2001: 23)

Measure for Measure, I mean to show, helps us to see some things about this kind of assault; others it obscures.

In both instances the woman has indicated that she rejects marriage and prefers to live in community with women. Of course, nuns are not the same as lesbians. However, we are told that Isabella's intimate relationship hitherto has been with Juliet–her 'cousin'–'Adoptedly, as schoolmaids change their names / By vain though apt affection' (I.iv.46–8). In her introduction to *Breaking Silence: Lesbian Nuns on Convent Sexuality*, Rosemary Curb observes some apt analogies between the two situations:

> groups of nuns or Lesbians are often mistaken for one another today, since we often travel in female packs oblivious to male attentions or needs . . . both nuns and Lesbians are emotionally inaccessible to male

> coercion . . . a male-defined culture which moralizes about 'sins of the flesh' and the pollution and evil of women's carnal desires sees both nuns and Lesbians as 'unnatural' but at opposite poles on a scale of virtue.
>
> (Curb and Manahan 1985: xx)

It is that oblivion to 'male attentions or needs' that informs Isabella's inability to comprehend what Angelo is proposing, whereas Claudio, the Provost and Lucio understand very well.

The Reformation had already linked convents with sexual licence; indeed, the idea precedes the Reformation (see Chedgzoy 2000). It is found subsequently in Andrew Marvell's poem 'Upon Appleton House', which he wrote while employed as tutor to the daughter of the Parliamentary general Fairfax, in 1650–52. The house (the poem says) had been built as a nunnery, and had drawn in a young local lady, Isabel Thwaites, who was currently wooed by Fairfax's ancestor. 'And oft she spent the summer suns / Discoursing with the subtle nuns' (Marvell 1963: lines 93–4). The nuns live innocently, they claim, though they retain unspecified pleasures: 'Nor is our order yet so nice / Delight to banish as a vice' (169–70). Their devotions are strangely eroticized:

> Our orient breaths perfumed are
> With incense of incessant prayer;
> And holy-water of our tears
> Most strangely our complexion clears.
>
> (109–12)

Household tasks are suggestively worded, hinting at sexual matters. The processing of fruit produces 'uncorrupting oil: / And that which perish'd while we pull, / Is thus preserved clear and full' (174–6). They have arts for 'handling nature's finest parts' and preparing pastes 'for curious tastes'. 'What need is here of Man?' (178, 182–3). The women sleep together while remaining ideally chaste and ready for a divine call:

> Each night among us to your side
> Appoint a fresh and virgin bride;
> Whom if Our Lord at midnight find,
> Yet neither should be left behind.
> Where you may lie as chaste in bed
> As pearls together billeted.
> All night embracing arm in arm
> Like crystal pure with cotton warm.
>
> (185–92)

These appeals are successful: 'The nun's smooth tongue has sucked her in' (200). Emma Donoghue terms it 'a spiritual cunnilingus' (1993: 225).

Elsewhere in Marvell (particularly in his poem 'The Garden'), a weird, erotic excess of natural and exotic imagery evokes a desiring, but innocent, mystical or prelapsarian state. It appears, for a moment, that this might be available to Miss Thwaites and her sisters. But Fairfax is not to be fooled: 'I know what fruit their gardens yield, / When they it think by night concealed' (219–20). His arguments proving ineffective, he gets a court injunction, enabling him to assail the house and seize Miss Thwaites. The nuns are challenging patriarchy in their idolatry; their resistance can only be mock-heroic, as they brandish futilely their beads, holy-water brush and wooden saints. The action slips into another genre: Fairfax becomes a romance hero (like Guyon in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*), and the cloister is destroyed–'as when th'enchantment ends / The castle vanishes or rends' (269–70). Miss Thwaites is found 'weeping at the altar', not conspicuously eager to leave; but 'the glad youth away her bears' (264–5). If moral outrage is not central here, it is because, as James Holstun points out, the issue is ultimately (once more) the transfer of property. The heirs of Fairfax and Thwaites gained the house at the Dissolution of the Monasteries (Holstun 1987: 850).

Shakespeare's Isabella finds, like Katya in Russia, that refusal of conventional relations with men incites the desire of the officer. Angelo uses her admission of female frailty to challenge her bid for gender autonomy:

> I do arrest your words. Be that you are,
> That is, a woman; if you be more, you're none.
> If you be one–as you are well express'd
> By all external warrants–show it now,
> By putting on the destin'd livery.
>
> (II.iv.133–7)

The badge of the female is sexual subjection to men. The other characters also assume this. The woman who seeks asylum in a female institution is to be forcibly repatriated. This urge to put the dissident woman back in her place is found repeatedly in the Amnesty reports. Norah was arrested in Uganda:

> Nasty remarks were made that I should just be punished for denying men what is rightfully theirs, and that who do I think I am to do what the president feels to be wrong. They even suggested that they should show me what I am missing by taking turns on me.
>
> (Amnesty International 2001: 2)

In Russia, again, investigators raped Irina–'to teach her a lesson', they said, and to 'reorient' her sexual identity (Amnesty International 2001: 42).

Crimes of Hate detects a special virulence in the treatment of lesbians and gay men:

> As a 1997 report by the Southern Poverty Law Center in the USA commented: 'When gays and lesbians are attacked it's particularly vicious . . . They aren't just punched. They're punched and kicked. They're beat and spit on. They're tied up and dragged behind cars. It's almost as if the attacker is trying to rub out the gay person's entire identity'.
>
> (Amnesty International 2001: 47)

We may think of the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming, or of the assaults by police on cross-gendered women in Leslie Feinberg's autobiographical novel, *Stone Butch Blues*.[1] It might be supposed that this fervour occurs because the sexual dissident is ineluctably alien. I think, however, that lesbians and gay men are specially victimized because they *cannot* be filtered out from the social organization and, in particular, the penal system.

Typically, the subject of torture is perceived by his or her persecutors as other. Often he or she belongs to a different race, region or religion; or political commitment positions him or her as beyond the orbit of civil society, and hence as not entitled to the usual protections. But lesbians and gay men cannot be cordoned off. They rarely have gay parents; they are produced from within the family, the community, the state. Consider the consequences of the Holocaust: there are few Jews in central Europe, but there are many homosexuals. This is because it needs Jews to produce Jews, whereas homosexuals are born into straight communities. This pattern, whereby the deviant is a swerving away from the dominant, rather than being its antithesis, has been described as a 'perverse dynamic' by Jonathan Dollimore: 'The perverse dynamic signifies that fearful interconnectedness whereby the antithetical inheres within, and is partly produced by, what it opposes' (1991: 33).

This implication of sexual dissidents and their host community is particularly intense in reports of interrogations and prison brutality. Time and again, the assaults of police and guards on lesbians and gay men documented in *Crimes of Hate* display a blatant sexual aspect. 'If that's what you want, I'll give it to you,' guards told Luciano Rodriguez Linares in prison in Mexico, as they held him down and inserted a finger into his anus; police in Chicago rammed a baton into the rectum of Frederick Mason; police in Venezuala forced transgender people to perform sexual acts in return for release (Amnesty International 2001: 30, 21, 27). It is

plain to us that the torturer, in such cases, is himself involved in sexual acts. He may tell himself initially that he is imposing just and even corrective punishments; he may believe that he is upholding public decency. However, at some level of awareness he is likely to know that he, himself, is implicated in the deviant sexuality that he abhors. It is because of this complicity that the sexual dissident must be not just punished, but destroyed; because of what he tells the torturers, not about subversives, but about themselves. Despite his bargain to reprieve Claudio in return for Isabella's compliance, Angelo orders his immediate execution.

Correspondingly, a prominent scenario in gay male pornography and chat lines dwells upon police and military uniforms, punishment, bondage and assault. Some gay men entertain fantasy investments in the scenes of their own humiliation; indeed, it is the humiliation that they desire. Of course, heterosexuals do this as well. But the concern of many gay men with the machismo that despises and threatens them is germane, Leo Bersani has argued, to 'the logic of homosexual desire.' This logic 'includes the potential for a loving identification with the gay man's enemies'. The dominant definitions of masculinity, which the gay man must resist because they are the ground of his oppression, are 'in part constitutive of male homosexual desire' (Bersani 1988: 208–9). This is not to say that the gay male enjoys being assaulted, but that he may have difficulty maintaining a conceptual barrier between consensual and non-consensual activity; he may experience guilt at his own *imagined complicity* with rape.

This may apply to some heterosexual women as well: patriarchal ideology encourages them to feel responsible for male assaults. Freud in his hypotheses on masochism suggests that feminine masochism does not require explanation: it is merely an exaggerated version of women's subjugation in the sexual act. The male masochist, on the other hand, is feminized: he is placed in 'a characteristically female situation . . . being castrated, or copulated with, or giving birth to a baby'.[2] Compare Isabella's sudden linkage of sexual intercourse, punishment and death, when Angelo asks whether she would endure rape to save her brother:

> Th'impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
> And strip myself to death as to a bed
> That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield
> My body up to shame.
>
> (II.iv.101–4)

What Angelo presents as an extension of natural feminine submission, Isabella regards as equivalent to assault. Nonetheless, her attempt to separate physical punishment and sexual violence is unsuccessful: her erotic

language reconnects them. When pressed to argue for the life of Angelo, she accepts (perversely, we might think) a degree of responsibility: 'I partly think / A due sincerity govern'd his deeds, / Till he did look on me' (V.i.443–5).

If violence is not an aberration in desire but, often, integral to it, and the good guys are involved in similar fantasy scenarios to the bad guys, it is not surprising that Amnesty has had an uphill task in its campaigns over the detainment, ill treatment, torture and execution of political prisoners. Of course, we know that sadistic individuals will get themselves into positions where they can exercise their desires, but that is generally seen as incidental. Where the sexuality and gender of the victimized person are the political issue, however, the torturer's notional complicity with his victim is a revealing, perhaps immobilizing complication. The central Amnesty strategy has been to shame governments into releasing political prisoners by writing letters to them. This method rests on a broadly Enlightenment, humanistic understanding, in which the state acts from a rational estimate of its own interests: it licenses or tolerates torture and inhumane treatment because they seem likely to secure its continuing domination. The letters are designed to interrupt this process by creating exposure and shame. However, some states, as we shall see, hold that the shame resides with the sexual dissident, that punishment is proper, and that the zeal of the torturer is justified. Advice of a continuity between the offender and the state functionary is hardly welcome to any of the parties involved, including perhaps Amnesty (which resisted the inclusion of sexual expression as a political issue and a human right until 1991). It becomes difficult to maintain a humanistic ethic in a situation so tangled.

Pleasures of the text

It may appear, thus far, that I am following the standard procedure of literary criticism, specially where Shakespeare is concerned. I take a theme of importance to me today, and discover, with only a little pressured reading, that it has been anticipated by the Bard. Thereby resistance to the oppression of lesbians and gay men may seem to be a universal imperative, and Shakespeare's authority is enhanced as well. However, if *Measure for Measure* helps us to see more clearly some aspects of the situation of people who are persecuted on account of gender and sexual orientation, it also has troubling aspects.

Shakespeare did not invent the story of Isabella and Angelo; it was circulating, in various versions, in sixteenth-century Europe. Basically, a woman appeals to a magistrate for the life of her condemned husband; the

magistrate exploits her sexually and, despite his promise, takes the life of the husband. The woman appeals to the ruler of the land, who decrees that the magistrate must marry the widow, to restore her honour, and must then be executed (see Lever 1965: xxxv–lv). The leading motifs, evidently, concern the importance of integrity in office, the frailty of fidelity in women, and the ultimate trustworthiness of the ruling elite.

The function of such tales is to facilitate debates about key topics in that society. By placing this or that particular inflection upon a story, authors offer diverse implicit propositions about how the world goes, and how it should go. Giraldi Cinthio in his *Hecatommithi* (1565) changed the ending by making the woman plead successfully for the life of the magistrate. Thereby, Lever comments in his edition of the play, 'Through the heroine's love and the emperor's virtue, mercy was combined with justice, and marriage instead of blood-retaliation made amends' (1965: xxxix). Shakespeare in *Measure for Measure* adopts this more civilized version.

But is it enough? The play is still premised on the unquestioned assumption that sexual offenders will be whipped and executed; much of it is set on death row. Pompey is given, by the 'good' Provost, the alternatives of serving as assistant to the hangman or 'your full time of imprisonment, and your deliverance with an unpitied whipping' (IV.ii.10–12). Another practice cultivated by the Provost, 'very oft', is taunting Barnardine with a mock execution, though he has only recently been condemned (IV.ii.148–50; we don't know what his offence is). In other plays brutal punishments are mentioned quite casually. At the end of *Henry IV Part II*, where we see Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet being taken to be whipped to inaugurate the new reign. At the end of *Othello*, where Lodovico orders 'the censure of this hellish villain', Iago: 'The time, the place, the torture: O, enforce it!' (Shakespeare 2002: V.ii.367–8). There is no place here for a debate about whether torture can be justified; in context, it seems only right. Similarly, when Henry V orders the summary execution of Cambridge, Scroop and Grey: the king's sense of personal outrage stands in for legal process. These are the practices that Amnesty condemns when they are perpetrated by the Taliban and the United States.

Measure for Measure, repeatedly, evades the implementation of these cruel, but not unusual, punishments by a cunning process of doubling. At each major point of conflict, a substitute character appears who can fulfil the demands of the story without distressing thematic consequences. The play begins with the Duke's doubling of himself: Angelo is to be the severe deputy while he himself is exonerated from state violence. Escalus, in turn, waives the punishments prescribed by Angelo. Another woman, Mariana, is found to fulfil Angelo's sexual demands instead of Isabella. Then the execution of Claudio is avoided by sending to Angelo the head of another

prisoner, Ragozine, who has died of natural causes. Thus Isabella retains her purity and Angelo, his fatal purposes having been thwarted, need not be executed. Angelo can marry Mariana, and Isabella is available for the Duke's proposition that she abandon the sisterhood and marry him. Compare the deployment of the twins in *Twelfth Night*: the threat that Orsino may love a boy and Olivia may love a girl–both of them Viola–is evaded by the arrival of Viola's twin, Sebastian. Now there is a conventionally appropriate partner for everyone, except perhaps Antonio.

Thus Shakespeare's version of these stories appears more humane: no one has to be whipped or killed. Yet, thanks to the substitutions, this has been accomplished without any challenge to the system. Because Isabella is split into two–the woman who refuses Angelo's demand and the woman who accedes–the rape is smoothed over, rather than confronted. At each point the incoherence and oppressiveness of state ideology are made to disappear. The Duke's devices rescue not just individual characters, but the reputation and stability of the state and the penal system in particular.

Act V is designed for suspense; also, it is a sustained demonstration of how difficult it is to confront a dictatorial regime. As Angelo forecast, his word is believed rather than that of citizens. However, like the ruler in other versions of the story, the Duke is there finally to expose Angelo as a double and restore faith in the system. Yet (and this is surely disconcerting) to gain his ends the Duke himself uses the full battery of dictatorial processes–arbitrary manipulation of the constitution, cooption of other institutions (the Church), undercover surveillance, entrapment by an *agent provocateur* (in the Duke's exchanges with Lucio), impersonation (of a friar), abuse of confidence and suborning of witnesses; all under the shadow of corporal and capital punishment. The answer to the problems produced by tyrannical rule, it appears, is a strong ruler and an elaborate state espionage apparatus.

To my mind, the Duke's rule is made more sinister by the delight he takes in his contrivances. He tells Isabella:

> I do make myself believe that you may most uprighteously do a poor wronged lady a merited benefit; redeem your brother from the angry law; do no stain to your own gracious person; and much please the absent Duke, if peradventure he shall ever return to have hearing of this business.
>
> (III.i.198–204)

The gleeful tone here is unsettling; the Duke is gaining too much enjoyment from his manipulations (Redmond 2000). And he has other ways of

exerting power over women and other subordinates; consider the browbeating of Claudio with the worthlessness of his life (III.i.5–41), and his withholding of the truth from Isabella 'To make her heavenly comforts of despair' (IV.iii.109). Nor does the text suggest that he undergoes any corrective process of self-knowledge.

It might be pleasant to suppose that Shakespeare has observed all this, with the intuitive political and ethical insight of the poetic and dramatic genius, and is displaying it to incite in an audience suspicion of the ruling elite and of the system that sustains it. Kiernan Ryan posits something like this in the brief moment of Barnardine's resistance. Barnardine thwarts the Duke's devices by refusing to double for Claudio. The answer: another split. Barnardine need not be executed because Ragozine's body is available. Ryan finds something further in Barnardine, namely

> the outward sign of the play's inward drive to clear a space within which a superior conception of justice can secretly flourish. I say 'secretly,' because the play's visionary displacement of the Viennese regime is mainly achieved by subliminal means, by the structural manipulation of perspective and supposition rather than by overt assertion.
>
> (Ryan 2002: 140)

Now, I am not against subliminal readings. In effect, this is the critical practice theorized by Pierre Macherey, and still necessary, as I argued in Chapter 1, for a sophisticated approach to reading and textuality. Reading for the gaps and silences may disclose the unconscious of the text. Even so, I do not find in Barnardine a sufficient prompt for Ryan's 'superior conception of justice'.

As I read *Measure for Measure*, it is the other way around. The doublings appear to offer a humane path to a just system, but the 'subliminal means' which effect the pleasure of the text require the reader to go along with the Duke's manipulations, underlying values, and eventual achievement. To enjoy the play, other than in a self-consciously perverse manner, you have to be pleased that Isabella is not raped and that Claudio is not executed. Therefore you have to allow, with whatever reservations, the Duke's devices (see McLuskie 1994: 97). The contrivances of the Duke are coterminous with the organization and closure of the play. This is what reading is: picking up the coded signals of the text as they develop, and entering into the complicated sequence of anticipation, frustration and resolution. If there is a progressive moment in this play, it is to do with Ragozine (deceased), for his substitution serves no further purpose: the text seems to draw attention to its own evasions.

That the doublings, generally, are evasions is evident if we think again about the Amnesty reports. In real life there are no substitutes, there is just the one independent woman, and she is raped; just the one victimized brother, and he is executed; just the one magistrate, and no effective appeal. If *Measure for Measure* offers a humane gloss upon some of the stories that preceded it, it still fails to meet the standards of justice and rule that we demand today. The other choice, of course, is to read the play against the grain–as in fact I am doing–pointing up the embarrassments in the theme and evasions in the plot.

Human rights and civil rights

I have derived notable insights from reading *Measure for Measure*. However, if this play can help us to highlight certain kinds of wisdom and understanding, by the same token it may promote reactionary ideas. But can the Bard be on the wrong side when it comes to torture, rape and murder? This is the pivot of my essay: if even Shakespeare cannot underpin universal truth and justice, how can we hope to ground a universal concept of human rights, upon which Amnesty may depend?

The rhetoric of rights currently affords a lever for some lesbians and gay men. The European Convention on Human Rights was incorporated into UK law by the Human Rights Act 1998, and a decision of the Court of Human Rights suggests that the anti-discrimination Article 14 may be applied to sexual orientation.[3] Nonetheless, we know very well that the 'rights' gay people would now claim have not been recognized universally throughout history, and are not recognized throughout the world today. As Jeffrey Weeks succinctly puts it,

> Rights do not exist in nature. They are products of social relations and of changing historical circumstances and balance of forces, so the claim for rights is always in terms of some rights rather than others . . . By arguing for a more extended definition of rights, we are actually changing the definition of what can be regarded as a right.
>
> (1995: 119)

Claiming that your preference is a right is like quoting Shakespeare: it is a strategic way of adding emphasis to a position. Anti-choice campaigners speak of a 'right to life'; their opponents of a 'right to choose'; the anti-gay legislation, Section 28, was promoted by a Parents Rights Group. Again, a Department of Education and Science circular (11/87) about instruction about sexuality in schools declares: 'It must also be recognised that for

many people, including members of religious faiths, homosexual practice is not morally acceptable' (Thomson 1993: 228). One person's right not to be disturbed drowns out another's self-assertion. When ACT UP demonstrated at the Roman Catholic service of Cardinal O'Connor in New York, it was complained that they had 'denied Catholic parishioners their freedom of religion' (Crimp 1990: 138). When President Sam Nujoma of Namibia describes gay men as 'unnatural' and contrary to the will of God (*Gay Times*, May 2001, p. 62), or President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe brands gays 'less than human' (Amnesty International 2001: 4), gay people reply that their practices are natural and human to them. However, we are merely swapping truth claims. Mugabe declares:

> If we accept homosexuality as a right, as is being argued by the association of sodomists and sexual peverts, what moral fibre shall our society ever have to deny organised drug addicts, or even those given to bestiality, the rights they might claim and allege they possess under the rubrics of individual freedom and human rights?
>
> (Quoted in Spurlin 2001: 196)

It is easy to fault Mugabe's generosity, but not his logic.

As with other features I have discussed, the drawing of gender and sexual orientation into the orbit of human rights may provoke some rethinking of Amnesty's principles. While torture may be regarded as unacceptable on any terms, intervening in the sex/gender systems of other cultures necessarily involves disputing, not just the laws and not just the abuses, but the mores of those cultures. This is acknowledged in *Crimes of Hate*:

> Whereas most governments either deny practising human rights violations or portray them as rare aberrations, the repression that LGBT people face is often openly and passionately defended in the name of culture, religion, morality or public health, and facilitated by specific legal provisions.
>
> (Amnesty International 2001: 4)

An endemic problem for the rights activist intervening overseas is that anything he or she does is open to the construction that it is an imperialist intrusion.

It is indeed arrogant to take it for granted that metropolitan ways of doing things are superior, let alone more natural or more human. We should not expect to find the gradual emergence, step by step, of something like our present-day array of lesbian, bisexual, gay, transvestite, transsexual and transgendered relations, as if other peoples should be

developing in a metropolitan direction (on the analogue of supposedly 'developing nations'). In fact, concepts of gender and sexuality are contested *within* metropolitan societies. Repressive laws on sexuality in the Caribbean derive from British colonial rule; male homosexuality was legalized in England and Wales only thirty-eight years ago, and not in all contexts; sodomy remains illegal in some states of the USA.

Alain Badiou, repudiating the idea of a universal human subject, regards human rights as a humanitarian-individualist preoccupation that is substituted for political analysis and practice in the wake of the collapse of revolutionary Marxism. He excoriates the International Tribunal of Human Rights as 'clearly prepared to arrest and try, in the name of "human rights," anyone, anywhere, who attempts to contest the New World Order of which NATO (i.e. the United States) is the armed guard' (Badiou 2001: lv). Badiou develops this argument with the former Yugoslavia in view; it seems overwhelming in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq. There is no prospect of indicting the US government for offences committed in Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, and against the civilian population generally. Discourses of human rights involve a splitting of the supposed universal subject, Badiou observes. 'On the side of the victims, the haggard animal exposed on television screens. On the side of the benefactors, conscience and the imperative to intervene' (pp. 12–13). There are two further consequences. First, an 'ethical "consensus" is founded on the recognition of Evil', making it more difficult to envisage uniting around 'a positive idea of the Good'. Second, we are inhibited from 'thinking the singularities of situations as such', although 'we are always dealing with a political situation, one that calls for a political thought-practice, one that is peopled by its own authentic actors' (pp. 13–14).

Yet, whatever may be said about theoretical principles and actual diversity, effective fellow-feeling demands that metropolitan lesbians and gay men, and all people of good will and good judgement, affirm and support persecuted sexual dissidents everywhere. The answer, I think, is a close attention to *local self-understandings*; wherever possible, protests should build on local campaigns. Paul EeNam Park Hagland proposes a backward glance: 'Contemporary LGBTs in Asia and elsewhere could inscribe themselves into the textuality of their premodern cultures, asserting the "authenticity" of their identities by appropriating images of prestige in the traditional culture' (Hagland 1997: 375).

My approach may be formalized through an appeal to civil, rather than human rights. For while 'civil rights' may involve an appeal to a utopian notion of the ideal *cives*, the term may more sensibly refer to the rights that citizens customarily enjoy within a given society. The rights for which lesbian and gay people struggle, then, are the same rights as everyone else

in that society. To be sure, in some places nobody's rights may be very extensive or secure, but at least they will be locally acknowledged.

Working through a concept of civil rights does not produce a simple answer to ultimate questions about good and evil. Also, as I have pointed out elsewhere, there are problems with this model. One is that it lets the sex/gender system off the hook, fostering the inference that an out-group needs concessions rather than the mainstream needing correction. Another is that it influences sexual dissidents to conceive themselves in accord with the opportunities that the rights agenda appears to offer (Sinfield 1998: 18–26). However, gay men and lesbians in Britain have campaigned effectively in terms of civil rights for an equal age of consent. Perhaps human rights is a necessary strategic construct, underlying our sense of ourselves *as human*, but one that should be comprehended as an abstract postulate. It may then be given content and specificity in particular civil contexts, such as a religion, a constitution, a supreme court, a campaign. Civil rights in a given country may be regarded as a particular embodiment of human rights–one that may form a basis for contest and change.

The leading issue for lesbian and gay activists in many metropolitan countries at the present time is framed as a civil rights matter: partnership rights–the opportunity to register gay relationships such that they may attract some of the social reassurance, and tax and property benefits that are accorded to married people (Stonewall 2001). This campaign has had a large measure of success, though 'gay marriage' has also aroused considerable hostility (it is blamed for the second electoral victory of George W. Bush). Partnership doesn't mean, however, that gay people all want to be sucked into a sense that an approximation to conventional marriage is best for everyone. Compare, once more, *Measure for Measure*. At the start of the play, the characters are cultivating various kinds of sex-lives, with little regard to the state and its premium on wedlock. Angelo and Lucio are avoiding marrying women to whom they have been promised–the former because he prides himself on his chaste righteousness, the latter because he wants to play the field. The Duke is a celibate ('Believe not that the dribbling dart of love / Can pierce a complete bosom'; I.iii.2–3). Juliet and Claudio have consummated their affair without waiting for marriage (though their spousal promises relieve them of the stigma of adultery). Isabella is joining an order of women. Mistress Overdone is a widow who has had her fill of marriage after doing it nine times–'Overdone by the last' (II.i.199). Only Mariana, an outcast, actually wants to get married. Only Elbow, the foolish constable, appears to be married happily.

By the end of the play, matrimony has become compulsory, on almost any terms. Angelo and Lucio are married against their wishes; how these couples are supposed to get along is not considered. Lucio names his fate

in the punitive idiom of the play: 'Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, / Whipping, and hanging' (V.i.520–1). The Duke reverses the doubling device to the point where he, as the 'good' magistrate, can demand of Isabella the sexual compliance which she refused to Angelo. Overall, these marriages reaffirm the assumptions, which Angelo made initially, that the state should regulate sexual expression, by either devious or directly coercive means, and that women should make themselves available to men. On marriage, *Measure for Measure* cannot meet the criteria of the *Crimes of Hate* booklet: 'Forcing women and girls into marriage or other relationships involving repeated non-consensual sex is not only discriminatory, it can amount to torture and sexual slavery' (Amnesty International 2001: 43).

The demand for marriage at the end of *Measure for Measure* is accompanied by no revocation of Angelo's initial edict, that 'All houses in the suburbs of Vienna must be plucked down', except those for which 'a wise burgher put in' (I.ii.89, 92). In modern cities with an established gay scene, the corollary of compulsory marriage is the civic clean-up. As gays become more visible, affluent and central, their neighbourhoods and public spaces become potentially valuable. The civic clean-up, designed to raise property values and enhance tourist potential, becomes a persistent threat to gay subcultural resources. When a gay club in Moscow was raided in 1997, locals believed it was part of a 'cleansing' of the city in preparation for its 850th anniversary celebrations: 'Everyone who is different gets thrown into the category of people who must be removed from the city' (*Gay Times*, October 1997, p. 58). Authorities in Rome shut down gay venues in 1998 because the intention to host EuroPride in 2000 was perceived as conflicting with the Christian jubilee (whether undercover friars were involved is not recorded).[4] Even in Amsterdam, traditional gay locations become subject to policing and closure (Hekma 2004).

The most prominent recent instance is the shutting down of gay and lesbian facilities in New York by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in the late 1990s. This, Michael Warner explains, has destroyed 'a diverse, publicly accessible sexual culture' which had enabled gay men 'to find each other, to construct a sense of a shared world, to carve out spaces of our own in a homophobic world, and, since 1983, to cultivate a collective ethos of safer sex' (2000: 90). While gay men want the private consolations of civil partnership rights, many of them do not want to forego traditions of public cruising and accessible off-street cultural resources.

Gay people are subject to something like the attempts of the Duke and Angelo in *Measure for Measure* to reorient the sex/gender system of the city from above, by manipulation and compulsion. Angelo's brief encounter with dissident subcultures of the city produces the wish that they should all

be whipped (II.i.135); his substitute, Escalus, adjusts the punishment (but, once again, not the system). We might look to Angelo's other double, the Duke, for an affirmation of the civil rights of Mistress Overdo and her establishment. However, they fall under the denunciation of the Duke in the guise of friar: 'I have seen corruption boil and bubble / Till it o'errun the stew' (V.i.316–17). The only person excused wedlock, finally, is Barnardine. Intriguingly, he is placed in the pastoral care of a friar: 'Friar, advise him; / I leave him to your hand' (V.i.483–4). What is the Friar to do with his *hand*? Is this a hint for the ceremonial exit, with the characters paired off, hand in hand (including Isabella and the Duke, or not)? And what is the mode of this handling? Does the Friar have Barnadine's hand twisted up behind his back, figuring a renewal of personal and ideological control, as he works on Barnardine's 'stubborn soul' (V.i.478)? Or are their hands clasped affectionately together, like a same-gender couple, in an unexpected survival of dissident potential?

11
Unfinished Business II

The business, of course, remains unfinished. However persuasive one tries to be, one knows that speech and writing never close an issue; they always provoke a new stage, or a repetition of an older stage. Every story leaves out something; this thought can be derived, once more, from Macherey. From real-world issues such as the political potential of Shakespeare in our time, through to the reading of Shakespeare's sonnet 20 and Jonson's *Epicene*, other studies are being written at this moment. By way of conclusion I remark a new attempt to develop cultural materialism, and assess once more what it might mean to read as a cultural materialist.

The latest venture to locate its project in terms of cultural materialism is a surprising one: *Spiritual Shakespeares*. This is the title of a collection of essays edited by Ewan Fernie. The spiritual is defined as 'the experience or knowledge of what is other and is ultimate, and the sense of identity and "mission" that may arise from or be vested in that experience' (Fernie 2005: 8) The aim, according to Fernie, is to supply to cultural materialists a way to 'reinvigorate and strengthen politically progressive materialist criticism,' through 'a more positive leap into a revolutionary alternative' (pp.3, 10).

The idea is that spirituality has been ignored in recent decades by critics who have been unable to cope with so much profundity. I doubt that this is so. Rather, the problem is that Shakespeare seems ready to dole out the spiritual in quite perfunctory ways. Consider the sudden 'conversion' of Oliver in *As You Like It*. Fernie has no qualms. Oliver's 'old self is completely alien to him. He has been reborn. . . . Oliver's spirituality is not deferred but achieved absolutely'; it is a 'Pauline moment' (pp.15–16). If we mistrust such sudden and irrational transformations when they occur in fundamentalist religions today, should we be showing respect just because they appear in Shakespeare? Anyway, what does Oliver's conversion amount to? Shortly afterwards he experiences another miracle: he wants to marry

Celia, whom he believes to be a shepherdess, and 'live and die a shepherd' (Shakespeare 1975a: V.ii.12). But no! She is royal and wealthy, so he is restored to his 'land and love and great allies' (V.iv.188). These might all be termed religious matters; Oliver's spirituality is instanced, successively, as personal reformation, the simple life, married love, and flowing with the social order (when it is to his advantage). Plainly it is being used to get through awkward bits of plot. Perhaps the spiritual is not actually one of Shakespeare's strengths.

This must surely be one of the least propitious moments in history at which to get thoughtful academics to make a positive investment in religion. President George W. Bush declares: 'I'm driven with a mission from God. God would tell me, "George, go and fight those terrorists in Afghanistan." And I did, and then God would tell me, "George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq," and I did' (Cornwell 2005). Compare Fernie's 'sense of identity and "mission" that may arise from or be vested in that experience' (p.8). This quest for spiritual assurance admits to no institutional, formal, or even comradely allegiance. Insight is always individual, as if a personal vision could make sense of the world in a way that has not already been tried.

Wise people who have read this book in draft have queried how far it succeeds in a key project broached in Chapter 1: the development of a cultural materialist reading practice. Why is it that some texts get direct elucidation, others are expounded in a tone of irony or disapproval, and others again are subject to an implausibly tendentious re-reading?

The fact is, cultural materialism does not claim one true mode of reading. Its commitment to history ratifies interpretations that are historically responsible (for instance drawing on contextual materials to establish the plausibility of a reading). At the same time, it is that underlying historical commitment that makes the manifestly unhistorical, self-consciously impertinent interpretation effective (if it is). The choice of reading modes *is strategic*: it is governed by what seems likely to disclose the political potential of the text. In some cases an appreciative account may support the argument. In other cases a point may be better made through a stated or implied critique of the stance (stated or implied) of the text. Or a reading against the grain may stir up argument. For the ultimate allegiance of the cultural materialist is not to the text as such—not to literature—but to the political project.

This remains the offence of cultural materialists: they break with the dominant, *affirmative habit* of literary criticism. In this mode, the critic will indulge in whatever strenuous reading is necessary to get the Shakespearean text onto his or her side. If the critic believes in spirituality, then Shakespeare must be discovered as doing the same; indeed, he does it in a

superlative version—suddenly he is the most spiritual writer ever. John J. Joughin promises, in *Spiritual Shakespeares*: 'insofar as it constitutes a site of reincarnation and continual renewal, the revelationary capacity of Shakespeare's stage is not just bound to a cult of mourning, but also invites a singular encounter with singularity, a messianic apprehension of blissful new beginnings' (Joughin 2005: 133).

The self-conscious strategems of cultural materialism blow the whistle on the affirmative habit. Reading against the grain, in particular, is a transparent device, designed to provoke thought rather than concurrence. Cultural materialism is controversial not because it subdues the text to a political project, but because it allows it to be seen that critics have always done that. The affirmative habit is the main difference between myself and Andrew Hadfield on republicanism (with which I opened this book). I agree that republics are probably better than tyrannies (though republics may be tyrannical). But Shakespeare cannot be just 'interested in republicanism,' he must be 'a highly politicized and radical thinker' (Hadfield 2003: 465).

Stephen Greenblatt was widely rebuked when he wrote, of early-modern culture, 'There is subversion, no end of subversion, only not for us' (Greenblatt 1994: 45). He was thought to be denying the possibility of literary efficacy and political change. What was actually intolerable is that Greenblatt was drawing attention to the affirmative habit. For the generation that grew up through the 1960s, this meant, not the Elizabethan World Picture, but looking for signs of mistrust of authority. We like to see dominant Elizabethan ideologies undermined, especially by encounters with Native Americans, who are thereby incorporated (a hundred and fifty years too late for them) into the ongoing story of 'America.' It is pleasing for most of us to welcome signs of atheism (such as Greenblatt was discovering) in the world of Shakespeare. The danger, in such reading, is complacency and empty gesturing, about both the politics and the texts. What threatens our secularized profession, meanwhile, is religion. In this light, we might conclude that spiritualities are the real challenge today—the site upon which we will make tangible advances in political understanding and commitment. Alternatively, we may conclude that some of the ancient battles between reason and superstition have not yet been won.

This is not to say that there is something wrong with Shakespeare; he is a great theatre writer who lived four hundred years ago. But the texts linked to his name must be open to question, as possibly not entirely wise, exemplary, or right. They *may* appear enmeshed in a rebarbative ideology, complicit with the attempts of the ruling elite to exert social control, or merely (in the theatre conditions of the time) confused. Maybe not; but the

question must be available for discussion. We cannot have a serious and engaged culture with such a large no-go area at the centre. At a time when established freedoms of speech and the person are being denied as part of the so-called war on terror, the arts and humanities may witness to the rewards of open debate.

Notes

Chapter 1

1 Hadfield (2003: 461, 464). These ideas are partly reworked in Hadfield (2005).
2 Quirk (1962); Nowottny (1962).
3 I do not mean to reopen this question here. See Dollimore (1989); Wilson and Dutton (1992); Wilson, S. (1995); Ryan (1996); and Brannigan (1998).
4 Vickers (2002: Appendix 2). See Foucault (1977).
5 Stallybrass and White (1986); Loewenstein (2002); Burt (1993).
6 Evans (1967); Waller (1993). See Masten (1997).
7 So Bradshaw: cultural materialists sometimes present 'a suppressed, subversive Shakespeare,' at other times 'a repressively authoritarian Shakespeare' (1993: 28); and Richard Levin: 'the political valence of critical readings is not inherent in them but depends on how they are used in specific contexts' (2003: 189–90).
8 Macherey (1978: 230). For the French, see Macherey (1966: 255). Further on Macherey, see Haslett (2000: 70–5); Badminton (2002).
9 Wilson, S. (1995: 10), referring to Brown, P. (1994).
10 Armstrong (1989, 2000: 13–15). Armstrong refers particularly to Sinfield (1994a).
11 See Drakakis (1988); Holderness (2001: Chapter 5).
12 Information from *Radio Times*, the British Shakespeare Association newsletter, and broadcast announcements.
13 Woodbridge (1984); McLuskie (1994); Rose, M.B. (1988); Howard (1994); Jardine (1989); Kaplan (1986); Jones (1990); Traub (1992); Wayne, V. (1991); Newton and Rosenfelt (1985).
14 Castiglione (1967: 168). George Bull translates as 'satyrs', but this is a euphemism, the meaning is 'sodomites'. For a valuable overview, see Hammond (2002).

Chapter 2

1 Arac (1995). See also Perkins (1992).
2 R. Williams (1975: 33). See also Turner (1979).

Chapter 3

1 Jonson (1995, V.iii.488, 492, 502, 513, 515).
2 Jonson (n.d.: I, 264). On Swinburne, see Maus (1984: 91).

3 Erskine-Hill (1983: 114). In similar vein, see Maus (1984: 91), and Cain (1995: 17–23).
4 See D. E Wayne (1990); Helgerson (1993); Goldberg (1983); Stallybrass and White (1986). But cf. Burt (1993) and Loewenstein (2002).
5 Helgerson (1983: 165–6); Cain (1995: 283–4).
6 Bourdieu (1977: 116). See Sinfield (1992: Chapter 4).

Chapter 4

1 McLuskie (1994: 97). For a reply to her critics, see McLuskie (1989: 224–9). See also Dollimore (1990: 471–93).
2 Auden (1963). See Midgley (1960).
3 Orgel (1996: 13–15). See Newman (1987).
4 V.i.306–7; see Partridge (1968: 128, 175).
5 Hill (1975); Auden (1963: 233).
6 Kleinberg (1985: 120). Anti-Semitism and homophobia are linked in Fiedler (1974) and Mayer (1982).

Chapter 5

1 Generally, commentators have made only brief comparisons between the two plays. See Schwarz (2000: 236–8); Montrose (1996: 130); Traub (2002: 67, 171–2, 329–30). But see Wickham (1980).
2 Emilia's role is stressed in McMullan (1998); Shannon (2002: Chapter 3); Traub (2002: 172–5).
3 Traub (2002: 57–8, 64–5, 171–2, 329); Parker (1996a: 101–3).
4 See Orgel (1996: 35–6); Smith (1991: chapter 2); Burg (1985).
5 Lois Potter, in Fletcher and Shakespeare (1997: Introduction: 48–9).
6 Montrose (1996: 144); Sinfield (1992: 38–51).
7 Aubrey (1898: I: 96); Masten (1997: 59–62).

Chapter 6

1 Shakespeare (1980). See Appelbaum (1997).
2 Sidney (1973: 20; 1977: 134).
3 Hooker (1989: 914). Gary Spear makes the case that all the characters are effeminate: Spear (1993).
4 Onions (1958: 68). See *Troilus*, I.iii.134; II.ii.212; II.iii.70; II.iii.227; III.iii.157; III.iii.190; IV.1.30; IV.v.124.
5 See Smith (1991: 59). I write on gendering in *Henry V* in Sinfield (1992: 127–36).
6 See Carroll (2004: 92–5, 106–7). On *The Two Gentleman of Verona* and Montaigne, see Masten (1997: 32–49).
7 See Maclean (1980), Laqueur (1990).
8 See Adelman (1999), Parker (1993), Johnston (2005).
9 Traub (2002: 5–6, 327–9). See Miller, C. (1996: 84–90).
10 Shakespeare (1967: II.iii.151); Shakespeare (1980: I.v.76).
11 Goldberg (1992: 129 and Chapter 4). See Wilson, R. (1999) for Goldberg's argument (pp. 83–94) and comment (pp. 12–18).

Chapter 7

1 See Saslow (1986); Orgel (1996); Brown, S. (1990); Shapiro (1994); Franceschina (1997: Chapters 2 and 3).
2 Middleton (1965: II.i.128–30; II.i.140–41). See *Hamlet* (Shakespeare (1982) II.ii.235). On secrets as private parts, see Partridge (1968: 179–80); Colman (1974: 213); Williams, G. (1994: vol. 3: 1212–13).
3 Sir John Oglander, quoted in Dutton (2003: 78). See Goldberg (1989: 136–46); Smith (1991: 14); Norton (1992: 20–6); Orgel (1996: 41–2).
4 Fletcher *et al*. (1996: V.iv.239); Fletcher (1996: IV.i.109–10).
5 See Orgel (1996: 65–70); Jones and Stallybrass (2000: Chapter 7).
6 Garber (1992: 89–90). See also Zimmerman (1992).
7 Freud (1984b: 84). See Sinfield (2004b: Chapter 20).
8 Of course, a great deal more might be said about these two plays; our best scholars and critics have discussed their intricacies. Their work informs this chapter, I do not need to do it again.
9 Shakespeare (1975a: III.v.120); Traub (1992: 108).
10 Jonson (2003: I.i.9–10). The editor, Richard Dutton, prefers this title spelling, rather than *Epicoene*, for a modernized edition.

Chapter 8

1 For discussions along these lines, see Lanham (1972); Scanlon (1976); Roche (1987); Hull (1996).
2 Fienberg (1985); Hulse (1986). Cf Jones and Stallybrass (1984).
3 Jed (1988); Smith (1995); Baines (2003).
4 Barnes (1964: sonnet 23). Cf. *Romeo and Juliet*: Shakespeare (1980: II.iv.11–12).
5 Partridge (1968); Colman (1974).
6 Donne (1985: 446). See Williams, G. (1994: vol. 2: 973–4).
7 Shakespeare (1998: I.iii.282–3; V.ii.202–3). See Partridge (1968: 194); Colman (1974: 186).
8 Kanters and Nadeau (1967: vol. 2: 170). Sidney must have known de Baïf's work on quantitative metres.
9 Barnfield (1990a: 208): gloss by Klawitter. See Partridge (1968: 1220); Colman (1974: 61, 199); Williams, G. (1994: vol. 2: 675–6).
10 Cyparissus is called 'Silvanus' joy' in Barnfield (1990b: 126). In Marlowe's Hero and Leander, Silvanus is said to be weeping for the lovely boy turned into a cypress tree: Marlowe (1968: 1, 154).
11 Goldberg (1992: 66). See Prescott (2001).
12 See Hammond (2002: 72–84); Duncan-Jones (2001: 136–7). In particular, Shakespeare's key sonnet 20 bears some resemblance to Barnfield's sonnet X.
13 Ovid (1965: 408). See Lyne (2001: 27–79).
14 The translated elegies, and other poems by Marlowe, are quoted from Marlowe (1968). The *Amores* are cited by book and poem, or book, poem and line. *Hero and Leander* is cited by book and line.
15 See Gill (1987: 177–86), Baines (2003: 101–19).
16 *Amores* 3:4, 13–16; *Hero and Leander* 1. 231–40.
17 Bredbeck (1991: 109–10); Michael Drayton, *Endymion and Phoebe*: *Idea's Latmus*, in Reese (1968: 161).
18 Cantarella (1992: 155–64). The role of Cupid is broached in Belsey (1996).

Chapter 9

1. Hyde (1948: 130). They refer to *The Portrait of Mr W.H.* (1889).
2. Booth (1977); Ingram and Redpath (1964); Kerrigan (1986); Duncan-Jones (1997); Orgel (2001). Hereafter, I refer to these editions by the editor's name. I quote from Orgel's Penguin edition.
3. Barrell (1988: Chapter 1). The patronage relation is established in Marotti (1982, 1990).
4. Marlowe (1971b: I.iv.390–3). See Shannon (2002: Chapter 4); and pp. 108–11 above.
5. Booth (1977: 142–3); Duncan-Jones (1997: 118). Kerrigan comments: 'Some readers find in *traffic with thyself* a hint of masturbation; but the innuendo can be nothing more' (1986: 177).
6. See Herman (1999); Traub (1999); Innes (1997).
7. Greenblatt (2004: 239). See Crosman (1990).
8. Newton and Walton (1984: 250). See Sinfield (2004b: Chapter 3).
9. Pequigney (1985: 47). See Hammond (2002: 62–72).
10. Booth (1977: 263); Duncan-Jones (1997: 260). Booth (1977: 177–8 and 263) suspects sexual puns on 'all' and 'all away' (line 14).
11. Orgel (2001: 112); Duncan-Jones (1997: 328); Ingram and Redpath (1964: 252).
12. In the account of 110, I draw upon Orgel (2001: 113); Duncan-Jones (1997: 330); and Ingram and Redpath (1964: 254).
13. Booth (1977: 193). This interpretation is not unlike Harry Berger's view of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*: see Berger (1981), and above, p. 56.
14. Duncan-Jones (1997: 182); Kerrigan (1986: 220): Pequigney (1985: 111–12).
15. Orgel (2001: 138) and Kerrigan (1986: 364) take up the suggestion that the Poet has used the Boy as a go-between, but that seems unlikely to me. Rather, the Boy learned to act on behalf of the Poet. See Booth (1977: 464).
16. Booth (1977: 431–2); Ingram and Redpath (1964: 289), citing C.K. Pooler. See Hammond (2002: 18–21).

Chapter 10

1. Kaufman (2001); Feinberg (1993).
2. Freud (1984a: 416). See Silverman (1992: 188–91).
3. *Mendoza v. Ghaidan* (2002). See further *Gay Times*, April 2001, p. 54; Stonewall 2001: 15–17.
4. Gay Times, April 1998, p. 61. For comparable incidents in Bulgaria, China and Egypt, see *Gay Times*, September 1996, p. 58; May 1997, p. 61; July 2001, p. 69.

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Index

absolutism 7
Abu Ghraib 30, 193
acting companies 23, 28, 40, 46, 48, 53, 61, 102, 117
`active' and `passive' 126, 158–9, 170
address 160–1, 163
Adelman, J. 57–8, 94, 98, 122
Aeneid 44–5, 50
Affectionate Shepherd, The 27–8, 145–7
affirmative reading 17, 91, 198–9
against the grain 15–22 29, 38, 58, 66, 83–5, 90, 96, 114, 191, 198–9
agency 6, 8–10, 27, 48–9, 123
All's Well that Ends Well 103
Allen, G. 68
Alpers, P. 35–8
Amnesty International 15, 182, 184–8, 191–2, 195
Amores 51, 150–5, 158, 160
Amoretti 135
androgyny 60, 66, 128, 156–7, 161
Antony and Cleopatra 103–4, 107, 121, 122, 137, 150
Arac, J. 35
Arcadia 32, 33, 36, 89, 134, 136–7, 144
Aristotle 98
Armstrong, I. 2, 18, 22
Ars Amatoria 51, 136
As You Like It 35–8, 60, 65, 74, 77, 101, 118, 125, 128, 168, 197
Astrophil and Stella 29, 134–45, 148, 160, 164, 166–7, 170
Aubrey, J. 84
Auden, W.H. 54–5, 66
author 6, 11–19, 45–50, 68
author function 11–113, 16, 46–8
Augustus, Augustinianism 12, 40–52, 104, 150–1, 154, 159

Bachinger, K. 134
Bacon, F. 93–4, 108, 114, 173
Badiou, A. 193
Baines, B. 137
Barber, C.L. 73
Barnfield, R. 27–8, 29, 138, 145–50
Barrell, J. 164–5
Barthes, R. 16, 68
Bartholomew Fair 13, 130, 132
Barton, A. 41, 43, 47
Bate, J. 1, 41, 43, 179
Beaumont, F. 29, 84, 98–100, 118, 123, 180
Belsey, C. 22, 26–7, 76, 120
Benjamin, W. 83
Berger, H. 56
Bersani, L. 186
bigamy 113–14
Bloom, H. 31 46
Bly, M. 28
Booker, C. 53
Booth, S. 166, 167, 171–2, 174, 177
Bourdieu, P. 49
boy actors 51, 61, 102, 117–88, 120–2, 162
boys 50–1, 54, 60–2, 67, 74–5, 77–9, 100–2, 104–9, 163–80
Bradshaw, G. 16, 19–20
Bray, A. 27–8, 60, 62, 64, 76, 88, 92–3, 116, 127, 147, 175
Brecht, B. 4, 118
Bredbeck, G. 155, 157
Brown, J. R. 120–1
Brown, M. 20, 39

Browne, Sir T. 93, 97, 114, 148
Burt, R. 13, 24, 47
Bush, G. W. 194, 198
Butler, J. 88, 118

Cain, T. 44, 48, 51
Campaspe 87, 94
capital 22–3, 27, 64
Carew, T. 117
Carroll, W. 119
Cartelli, T. 20
Castiglione, B. 28
catamite 51, 109, 110, 113, 114, 127, 175
Chapman, G. 117–18, 119–20, 127, 154
character 26–7, 43, 121, 151, 155, 188, 189, 196
Chaucer, G. 46, 79, 83
Chedgzoy, K. 183
Chekhov, A. 39
Choice, Chance and Change 161
Cicero 93–4, 97, 173
Cinthio, G. 188
civil rights 30, 193, 194, 196
class 3, 4, 14, 23, 25, 34, 37, 41, 55, 57, 58, 61, 64, 65, 67, 69, 78, 79, 81, 88, 94, 102, 108–10, 115, 132, 138, 152, 159–60, 162–3, 170–1, 173, 174, 176–7, 179, 181
classical Greece and Rome 7, 11–14, 40–1, 46, 50–1, 113, 125–6, 146, 150, 152, 158, 159, 160, 169
Cleopatra 103, 104, 120, 121, 122
colonial 20, 27, 193
Comedy of Errors 24
Coriolanus 97–8, 104–8, 109, 137, 176
critical authorial voice 44–50
cross-dressing 28, 98, 103, 118–23, 132, 137
cross-gender relations 29, 51–2, 61–2, 65, 72–4, 75–6, 82, 84, 90, 102, 108, 131, 134, 146, 158, 167–8, 175, 177, 179, 185
Crowley, M. 74
cultural icon 5, 54
cultural materialism 1–9, 1–13, 17–30, 31, 36, 39, 40–3, 50, 86, 121, 127, 197–9
Curb, R. 182–3
Cymbeline 119, 125
Cynthia. With Certain Sonnets 147

Dante 31, 134
Davis, N.Z. 4
de Baïf, J-A. 144
deconstruction 3–4, 15–17, 68–9, 74, 80–83
de Grazia, M. 13, 178–9
Dekker, T. 48, 89, 98, 113
Derrida, J. 68
desire-for 87–8, 91, 100–1, 125, 179
desire-to-be 87–8, 100–01, 125, 179
Dido Queen of Carthage 89, 112–13, 126, 157–8
diGangi, M. 131
dissidence 6, 8, 10, 17, 20, 40–50, 65–6, 72, 78, 81, 196
Dollimore, J. 3, 18, 19, 82, 100, 185
dominant ideology 3, 7, 10–12, 15–19, 30–2, 98, 101, 138, 174, 185–6, 198–9
Donne, J. 126, 142, 161
Donoghue, E. 184
Drakakis, J. 6
Drayton, M. 127, 135, 157
du Bartas, G. de S. 147
Duchess of Malfi 79
Duncan-Jones, K. 136, 163, 167, 171, 173–4, 177, 179
Dutton, R. 116, 131

Eagleton, T. 15
Edward II 61, 93, 108–11, 159, 165
effeminacy 29, 86–100, 103–10, 118, 121, 126, 130, 151, 159, 179
Eliot, T. S. 31–2
Elizabeth I, Queen 7, 28, 60
Elizabethan World Picture 7, 43, 199
Elyot, Sir T. 93, 96, 173
emergent ideology 7–8, 13, 17, 28, 44, 46, 60, 64, 98
Empson, W. 34, 39, 164
Endymion and Phoebe 157
Epicene 12–13, 130–1
Erskine-Hill, H. 42–3, 47, 49
ethnicity 5, 25, 58
Ettin, A. 34, 37–8
Evans, M. 14
Every Man in His Humour 140
Every Man Out of His Humour 123

Faerie Queene, The 14, 127, 184

faultlines 10, 14, 34, 42, 50, 61, 64–5, 70, 79, 81, 93–4, 96, 125, 173–4
female 26–9, 59, 65, 68, 71, 75, 91, 95, 98, 101–12, 118, 122, 126, 128, 131, 135, 142–3, 156–7, 169, 176, 178, 183–4, 186
feminism 1, 3, 27, 31, 54, 66, 108, 122
Fernie, E. 1, 197–8
Field, N. 117, 127–9
Fish, S. 32–3, 136
Fletcher, J. 14, 29, 69–84, 99–100, 117, 118, 127–9
Ford, J. 113
Forster, E. M. 32
Foucault, M. 7, 11, 13, 16, 27–8, 46, 98, 109, 118, 125–6, 131, 151
Four Prentices of London 115
Fowler, A. 32, 34
Freud, S., Freudians 27, 90, 94, 123, 125, 155, 186
friends, friendship 14, 29, 41–2, 54–67, 72–6, 89, 92–100, 105, 116, 123, 130–1, 148–9, 163–80

Galen, 98
Gallathea 100–2, 118, 137
Ganymede 29, 51, 60, 65, 108, 110, 112–18, 123, 126, 128, 145–50, 157–8, 168
Garber, M. 118
gays 14–15, 21–3, 27–9, 54, 57–60, 66–7, 73–4, 77–8, 108, 112, 166, 179–80, 185–7, 191–5
Geary, K. 55–6, 66
Gentleman Usher, *The* 127
Gifford, T. 33, 35, 37
gifts, 62, 116, 147–8, 157, 160–1
Girard, R. 76, 90, 176
Globe Theatre 23, 24
Goldberg, J. 47, 60, 108–10, 148, 158, 178
golden world 12, 32, 35–8
Golding, A. 150
Gramsci, A. 7
Greenblatt, S. 4, 162, 168, 199
Groom, N. 1
Guantánamo Bay 30

Hadfield, A. 1–2, 6–8, 199
Hagland, Paul EeNam Park 193
Hall, E. 111
Hall, K. 143
Hall, P. 23
Hamlet 25–6 78, 84, 95, 115
Hawkes, T. 16, 21–2
Haynes, J. 46
Helgerson, R. 46–8
Hendricks, M. 78–9
Henry IV plays 95, 162, 163
Henry IV Part Two 95, 188
Henry V 19, 91–2, 107, 137, 188
Henry VI Part Two 110
Henry VI Part One 88, 126
Henry VIII, King 7, 134
Henry VIII 14
Hero and Leander 148, 154–60
Heywood, T. 115
Hill, C. 4
Hill, R. F. 66
history 1–11, 16, 19, 20–1, 28–64, 83, 88, 136, 179, 191, 198
Holstun, J. 184
Honest Man's Fortune, *The* 117, 124, 127–9
Hooker, D. 90
Horace 12, 40, 41–51, 60, 158
household 14, 29, 61, 64–5, 99, 110, 113–17, 129, 132, 135, 151, 166, 183
Howard, J. 27, 30, 108, 120, 130–1
human rights 15, 30, 191–4
Hutson, L. 93
Hyman, L. 55–6

imperialism 30, 42–49, 89, 113, 192
intention 3, 16–18, 36, 59, 136, 195
internal distanciation 48, 118, 122–3
intertextual 17, 68–9, 74, 80
intervention, 6, 19, 21, 23, 150, 192–3

James VI and I, King 7, 17, 60, 74, 116, 163
Jardine, L. 27, 94, 108, 120, 127, 166
Jew of Malta, *The* 161
Jews 53, 66–7, 88, 185
Johnston, B. 98
Jones, A. R. 27, 122, 167
Jonson, B. 8–13, 40–51, 60, 64, 109–10, 116, 123, 126–7, 130–2, 140, 150, 180

Joughin, J. 199
Julius Caesar 24, 150

Kahn, C. 57–8, 94
Kaplan, C. 27
Kastan, D. 21–2
Kelly, J. 53
Kerrigan, J. 167, 174
King Lear 18, 38, 54, 127
Klawitter, G. 146
Kleinberg, S. 67
Knights, L.C. 9
Kristeva, J. 68
Kyd, T. 8

Laplanche, J. 179
Lerner, L. 33, 37, 39
lesbians 21, 23, 27, 29, 58–9, 66–7, 74, 78, 101, 129, 179–80, 182–7, 191–4
Lever, J. W. 8–9, 12, 188
Levine, L. 80, 120
literary, the 1–40, 81, 121–3, 135, 138, 159, 187, 198–9
literary history 30–33, 35, 37, 39
Loewenstein, J. 13
Love's Cure 98–100, 102, 118
Luhrmann, B. 24
Lyly, J. 29, 87-8, 100–2, 118
Lynch, S. 68

Macbeth 12, 15, 24
Macherey, P. 18–20, 38, 123, 136, 165, 190, 197
Machiavelli, N. 105
Mad World, My Masters, A 115
Malcontent, The 113, 126
male bonding 59, 75–7, 92–4, 106, 109, 166
Marinelli, P. 32
market, the 3, 11–13, 23–4, 36, 47–9, 64
Marlowe, C. 29, 47, 61, 79, 86, 89, 108–11, 112, 114, 134, 137–8, 148, 150–61, 165, 180
marriage 9, 13, 15, 38, 56–72, 79–83, 87, 91–4, 102, 114, 131–7, 150–1, 154, 162, 167, 173, 178, 182, 188, 194–5
Marston, J. 47–8, 113, 126
Marvell, A. 183–4
Marx, K., Marxism 1, 3, 4, 6, 8–9, 18, 21, 34, 193
masculinity 68, 86–111, 125, 129–30, 158, 169–70, 175, 186
Massinger, P. 117
master 29, 36, 59–62, 71, 88–9, 102–3, 109, 115–16, 119, 123–5, 128, 130–2, 158, 162, 169–70, 179
May-Day 117–18, 119–20
McGuire, P. 71
McLuskie, K. 27, 54, 113, 190
Measure for Measure 15, 24, 46, 62, 137–8, 168, 181–96
ménage à trois 14–15, 65–6, 84–5, 112–14, 129, 175–6
Merchant of Venice 14, 24, 27, 53–67, 78, 94, 103, 105, 114, 134, 162, 175
Merry Wives of Windsor 161
Metamorphoses 101, 147–8, 150, 154–6
Midas 88
Middleton, T. 89, 98, 115, 132, 133, 180
Midsummer Night's Dream, A 17, 24, 68–83, 94, 137, 176
Miller, N. 102
Milton, J. 12, 33, 88–9, 136
minion 29, 93, 108–10, 115, 127, 165–6, 175–8
misogyny 24, 87, 89, 92, 94, 124, 131, 168, 182
Montaigne, M. de 93, 96–7, 114, 148, 173
Montrose, L. 37, 48–9, 69, 77–8, 80–1
More Dissemblers Besides Women 115, 132
Moulton, I. 159
Much Ado About Nothing 24, 65
Mugabe, R. 192
Mullaney, S. 10

Narcissus 75, 123, 168–9, 176
nature 11, 22, 30, 32, 35, 39, 53, 70, 80, 89, 94, 98–101, 110, 118, 122, 131, 140–1, 155, 160, 169, 172, 178, 184, 187, 189, 191–2
new criticism 2, 4, 9, 17, 69
new historicism 3–5, 21, 23, 31, 121
New Inn, The 116, 131–2
Newton, E. 170
Night Walker, The 117, 123
Nowottny, W. 2
nuns 182–4

Oglander, Sir J. 116
one-sex model 98, 102
Orgel, S. 61, 108, 120
Orlin, L. 4
Orwell, G. 22
Othello 24, 128, 163, 188
Ovid 10–11, 29, 40–52, 60, 101, 131, 135–7, 145, 147–8, 150–8

page boys 29, 51, 78, 113–33 169
Parker, P. 73, 80, 96, 98
partnership rights 194–5
'Passionate Shepherd to his Love, The' 160
pastoral 12, 32–9, 60, 145–7, 160
patriarchy 37, 52, 58, 61, 66–7, 69–72, 76–85, 90, 101, 129, 134, 137, 184, 186
patronage 11, 13, 34, 48–9, 59, 61, 67, 76, 78, 92–3, 135, 162–174
Pequigney, J. 162, 171, 174, 178
performance theory 118, 121
perverse dynamic 185
Petrarch 14, 135, 145
Philaster 123, 125, 129–30
Plato, platonism 65, 131, 138, 143–5, 148,
Platz, N. 43
Plutarch 12, 72
Poetaster 8, 10, 12, 40–52, 60, 123, 150
Poggioli, R. 37
politics 1–49, 69, 80–2, 86, 95, 109, 114, 158, 185–7, 190, 193–9
Pontalis, J.B. 179
Porter, H. 94
Potter, L. 80
presentism 21
prison 8, 74, 92, 182–9
property 11, 13, 19–20, 32, 36, 59, 61–2, 66, 70, 78, 84, 89, 123, 132, 159, 184, 194–5

queer, queer theory 6, 14, 20, 23, 27–9, 74, 87–8, 92, 118, 122, 130, 138, 179
Quinn, V. 20
Quirk, R. 2

race 3–4, 25, 53, 58, 67, 100, 142, 181, 185
Rackin, P. 122
Raleigh, Sir W. 161
rape 80, 91, 95, 101, 107, 111, 136–8, 156, 182, 186, 189–91
Rape of Lucrece 142
reader, the 3, 15–19, 81, 118, 121, 136, 159–60, 170, 190
reading 6, 8–9, 15–22, 38, 58–9, 68–9, 72–4, 83, 90, 122–3
Redmond, M. 190
Religio Medici 97
republican 7, 30, 199
residual ideology 7, 13, 28, 98, 105
Rich, Lady P. 135–6, 141, 146
Richard II 24
Richard III 24
Riffaterre, M. 68
Riggs, D. 41, 48
Roaring Girl, The 89, 98
Roche, T. 143
Rocke, M. 28
Romeo and Juliet 24, 65, 84, 89, 92, 99, 103, 109
Rose, J. 95
Rose, M.B. 27, 87
Rowley, W. 113–14
ruling elite 8, 10, 12, 36, 83, 111, 181, 188, 190, 199
Ryan, K. 21, 190

same–gender 22, 28–9, 37, 50–2, 59–67, 73–9, 82–3, 87–96, 106–17, 125, 131, 146–50, 158–9, 163, 168–9, 180, 196
same-sex 29, 57
Samson Agonistes 88
Sappho and Phao 101
Schwarz, K. 68
Sedgwick, E.K. 20, 59, 76–7, 88, 90, 103, 176
seduction 3, 106, 120, 139, 146, 152, 160–1, 168, 175, 179
Sejanus 9, 46, 93, 109–10, 127
Seneca 12, 93, 173
sexual passion 76, 109, 140, 153, 165–6, 168, 171
sexual dissidence 15, 22, 27–8, 88, 91, 102–3, 109, 120, 130, 145–7, 152–3, 179, 181, 184–7, 193–4
Seymour-Smith, M. 164, 169
Shakespeare, W. *see* titles of plays and poems; sonnets

Shapiro, M. 121, 125
Shepheardes Calender, The 147
Shepherd, S 27, 108
Shirley, J. 96, 170
Sidney, P. 8, 13, 29, 32, 36, 47, 49, 89, 134–45, 170
Sinfield, A. 2–3, 10, 15, 18, 24, 65, 88, 106, 109, 136
slavery 51, 95, 151–2, 161–2
Smith, B. R. 50, 60, 62, 74, 75, 90, 109, 120, 137, 150, 159
sodomy 28, 60, 63, 90, 97, 110–11, 116, 123, 127, 131
sonnets (Shakespeare) 1, 14, 22, 29, 55, 60, 66, 75, 78, 84, 93, 109, 134, 138, 141, 149, 162–79
Spanish Tragedy, The 8
Spenser, E. 12, 14, 33, 127, 135, 147–8, 184
spirituality 1, 5, 31–2, 197–8
Stallybrass, P. 13, 47, 122
state, the 12–13, 22–3, 36–7, 40–50, 67, 95, 105, 110, 151–2, 159, 181, 185, 187, 189, 194–5
Stewart, A. 115
Stone, L. 70, 185
supplement 68–9
Surrey, Earl of 134

Tamburlaine Part One, 86
Tamburlaine Part Two, 87
Taming of the Shrew, The 119, 127
Tempest, The 20, 24, 38
Tennenhouse, L. 4
Tennyson, A. 2–3, 18
textuality, 2, 4–6, 9, 11, 15–17, 20, 25–6, 68–9, 74, 80, 82, 86, 136, 148, 190, 193, 198
Thacker, D. 53
Thatcher, M. 2, 11–12, 22–3
Theocritus 33, 160
theory 1, 3, 6, 18–20, 23, 27, 39, 69, 88, 118, 122–3, 136, 179
Tibullus 41, 44, 47, 158
Tillyard, E. M. W. 7, 12, 23
Titus Andronicus 7, 137
torture 111, 129, 153, 185–8, 191–2, 195
'To Penshurst' 13, 47, 64
Traitor, The 96
transgression 20, 46, 79, 90, 118, 123, 132, 178
transvestism 60–1, 88, 94, 120, 131, 192
Traub, V. 27, 65, 66, 73, 74, 77, 101, 120, 128
Troilus and Cressida 90–1, 91, 103, 137, 143, 176, 179
Twelfth Night 14, 24, 55, 60, 65–6, 74, 77, 95, 114, 118, 119, 120, 125, 129, 162, 168, 189
Two Angry Women of Abington 94
Two Gentlemen of Verona, The 65, 84, 96, 118–19, 137–8, 163, 173
Two Noble Kinsmen, The 14, 17, 69–84, 94, 129, 137, 163, 173
tyrants, tyranny 12, 32, 42, 44, 46, 49, 151, 158, 181–2, 189, 198–9

unconscious of the text 123, 190
'Upon Appleton House' 137, 183–4

Venus and Adonis 162, 178
Vickers, B. 11–12, 14, 16
Virgil 12, 31–3, 36, 40–51, 147, 149, 158, 160
von Koppenfels, W. 153

Wales, Charles Prince of 5
Waller, G. 14
Walton, S. 170
Warner, M. 195
warrior culture 8, 70, 76, 86, 91–2, 99–100, 104, 107, 109
Watt, I. 8–9
Wayne, D. 47, 64
Weeks, J. 191
whipping 186, 188–9, 195–6
White, A. 13, 47
Wilde, O. 88, 146, 162–3
Williams, R. 4, 7, 10, 21, 23, 36–7, 98, 121
Wilson, R. 37
Wilson, S. 20
Winter's Tale, The 61, 163
Witch of Edmonton, The 113–14, 129
Woodbridge, L. 27
Woods, G. 169
Worrall, A. 146
Wyatt, Sir T. 134

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