

“A natural perspective, that is and that is not!”

Complicating Logics of Gender in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night*

by

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*To the memory of my mother,*

Suzanne Wildenradt



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### Abstract

In the social terrain of early modern England, a rigid hierarchy separated men from women. However, alongside this two-gender system was a Galenic one-sex model of the human body that presided in the period's medical discourse, which represented sexual difference as a continuum rather than a binary. As I discuss in Chapter One, an examination of the metaphors surrounding bodily fluids in *Macbeth* reveals a tension between these two ideas of gender. A similar tension can be found in *Twelfth Night*: Viola's cross-dressing and the paths of desire depicted in the play simultaneously present and challenge patriarchal, heteronormative logic.

Ultimately, this work pays off by contributing to the post-structuralist project of confronting problematic norms. In America today, those fighting for equal treatment on the bases of gender and sexuality struggle to reconcile the demands of an identitarian political system with the nuanced, ever-changing nature of human reality. In order to effectively challenge oppressive paradigms, post-structuralist movements need new models for thinking about facets of the human experience. Marjorie Garber addresses this need by presenting the three-dimensional model of the Möbius strip to represent sexuality. I conclude my thesis with a discussion of how Shakespeare's imagery and the dynamic between the one-sex and two-gender systems of his time provide useful analogies to Garber's Möbius strip.

**Key words:** gender, androgyny, post-structuralism, queer studies, bisexuality, one-sex model, cross-dressing



## CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Androgynous Fluids of <i>Macbeth</i>	7
Chapter Two: Elusive Objects of Desire in <i>Twelfth Night</i>	21
Chapter Three: Adding a Twist	33
Conclusion	41
Works Consulted	43



## Introduction

“...it is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly... [s]ome collaboration has to take place in the mind before the act of creation can be accomplished....

...Shakespeare was androgynous...”

–Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

*A Room of One's Own* traces the musings of fictional Mary Seton, a woman determined to find truth about the history of Women and Fiction. Sifting through shelves in the library, she finds book after book written by men accounting for women's banality and inferiority. In response, she develops an argument that asserts that women must celebrate their differences from men, a stance that forms the basis of many feminist movements.<sup>1</sup> But by the end of her saga Mary concludes that every person's mind has manly *and* womanly aspects in it, and that in order to create a truly great piece of writing one must allow these parts to collaborate, achieving what she describes as an androgynous “unity of mind” (101).

Many of the characters in Shakespeare's work reflect the androgyny that Woolf celebrates at the end of *A Room*. He depicts male characters who are indeed *man-womanly*, and through the recurring motif of the cross-dressed female character he alludes to a mixing of masculine and feminine aspects. These characters complicate the two-gender logic that governs the worlds of his plays and structured the society in which he lived. Associating men with reason and strength and women with weakness and emotional flightiness, the social order of early

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of the relationship between a theory of androgyny and feminist movements, see *Vice Versa*, 214-8.

modern England relegated men and women to separate social spheres and asserted that men must protect and contain the subordinate group.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, alongside this logic of separation was a Galenic one-sex model based on a humoral understanding of the human body that presided in the medical discourse of early modern England. According to this model, every body carries a unique combination of four humors—black bile, yellow bile, blood and phlegm—and the balance of these humors yields an individual's temperament and sexual makeup. Hotter, drier humors dominate in men, pushing their sexual organs outside of their bodies and yielding their rational, assertive dispositions. In contrast, women's bodies contain cooler, wetter humoral balances that lead to internal reproductive organs and lustful, mercurial propensities.<sup>3</sup>

While the one-sex model of the body reflected patriarchal thought in that it viewed the male body as standard and the female body as an imperfect or incomplete version, it ideologically challenged two-gender logic by destabilizing the line separating men from women. According to Galenic theory, sexual difference is a continuum rather than a binary, and an equal balance of male and female elements produces a hermaphroditic body that does not correspond to either gender category. Additionally, this theory saw bodies as fluid and changeable, holding that boys pass through "effeminate" stages during adolescence before reaching their final sexes and corresponding genders (Greenblatt 78). These beliefs contributed to masculine anxiety: in order to maintain their status in the patriarchal social and political structures, men had to continuously assert their maleness while suppressing their female impulses (Foyster 55).

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<sup>2</sup> See Howard, 418-429, and Foyster, especially chapter 1, for discussions of this two-gender system.

<sup>3</sup> See Laqueur for a detailed discussion of the one-sex model.

In the first two chapters of this thesis, I explore how Shakespeare's plays reflect the tension between a strict two-gender logic and the fluid one-sex model. A close reading of *Macbeth* reveals how this tension is produced through the two conflicting constructions of manhood depicted in the play. The political order of *Macbeth* is centered on a masculine warrior culture that encourages men to shed blood in order to rise up in society's ranks. This system constructs manhood in gendered terms, as it repeatedly contrasts masculine strength with feminine weakness. However, the language of the play simultaneously evokes a second idea of manhood that harmonizes with a notion of humanity as a whole and undermines the two-gender logic of the play.

*Twelfth Night*, a festive comedy that revolves around sexual attraction and desire, similarly reflects two contrasting logics of gender. While the play's heteronormative setup and resolution uphold a traditional, two-gender logic, Orsino and Olivia's paths of desire—in particular, their shared attraction to the ambiguously sexed Cesario—suggest that sexuality does not conform to two-gender norms.

The interplay of gender logics that Shakespeare presents in *Twelfth Night* and *Macbeth* can facilitate ongoing discussions about gender and sexuality in America. Despite many ideological changes that have occurred between the early modern era and today, there are similarities between the time periods that endow them with the ability to illuminate aspects of each other.<sup>4</sup> Most profound is the struggle between hegemonic ordering systems that relentlessly work to separate and define and undercurrents that defy and resist such categorization. This tension was particularly heightened in early modern England, as social, economic, and scientific

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<sup>4</sup> One of these changes is the eighteenth century shift from a Galenic one-sex model of the body to the modern two-sex model. See Laqueur, chapter 1.

developments undermined traditional structures of order, forcing people to reconsider the beliefs that they previously took for granted.<sup>5</sup>

The changes that people lived through in early modern England are analogous to ongoing developments in America. During the twentieth century, political and intellectual movements challenged the binary logic central to patriarchal thought. Early feminists worked to elevate the political and social statuses of women by challenging the belief that women are inferior to men, and their progress fueled post-structuralist movements such as queer theory and radical feminism, which confronted the logic of gender difference altogether.

In spite of much progress, contrasting motives and ideological disagreements have repeatedly hindered feminists and LGBT activists in their projects of undermining normativity. One central point of contention is the negotiation between identity politics—the struggle of groups to be recognized and validated by society—and the rarely acknowledged reality that humans will always defy classification. New models for thinking about facets of the human experience—specifically gender and sexuality—are vital for progressive movements to advance in the fight against oppressive norms.

Marjorie Garber addresses this need by presenting the Möbius strip as a model for thinking about bisexuality, which embodies a conception of space that “incorporates the concepts of ‘one,’ ‘two’ and ‘three’ (two apparent “sides,” illusionistically; one continuous surface, and a third dimension in space)” (*Vice Versa* 30). Deftly mobilizing and rounding out two-dimensional models of sexuality, such as the *homo-/hetero-* binary and the Kinsey scale, the Möbius strip demonstrates the multiple, ever-changing nature of desire. I propose that a model like this can be used to represent the whole of human sexuality as well as other components of human identity,

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of some of these developments, see Mullaney’s preface.



and can help pave the way towards a liberation from the bounds of hegemonic paradigms. I conclude my thesis with a discussion as to how the imagery in Shakespeare's plays and the dynamic between the one-sex and two-gender systems of early modern England contribute usefully to this project.



## Chapter 1: The Androgynous Fluids of *Macbeth*

In the first act of *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth accuses her husband of weakness and cowardice when he goes back on his intent to murder the king. In response to her biting words, Macbeth exclaims, “Prithee, Peace. / I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none” (1.7.45–7).<sup>6</sup> Asserting that his unwillingness to kill for power does not compromise his masculinity, Macbeth declares that if he were to exceed the bounds of social duty he would not gain status but rather lose his humanity and be rendered “none.” This scene presents a tension between two different ideas about what constitutes a man, which, as Jarold Ramsey notes, correspond to two “concentric fields of significance: a code of manliness, the special virtues of the male gender... and... an ethos based on what best distinguishes the race itself, irrespective of gender” (286). While the former perspective is preoccupied with the social differences between men and women, the latter looks beyond these differences to the constituent aspects of humanity as a whole.

Our first glimpse into *Macbeth* depicts a political system that is centered on manly strength and violence. The play opens to a conversation between soldiers on a battlefield, in which a captain describes to the king how Macbeth,

...with his brandished steel

Which smoked with bloody execution,

Like valour's minion

Carved out his passage...

[and]...

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<sup>6</sup> All of my citations of Shakespeare’s plays are from the Norton Anthology, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

...unseamed [the rebel Macdonald] from the nave to th' chops  
 And fixed his head upon our battlements. (1.2.17–23)

This report is vivid with violent imagery. Macbeth's sword, which is steaming with his victim's blood, enables him to "[carve] out his passage" and "[unseam]" his enemy. Evoking a violent sexual encounter, this language conflates the battlefield with the body of Macdonald and suggests that Macbeth is not only slicing open, but also entering and making his way through his enemy's body. In addition to contrasting the active, impenetrable Macbeth with his enemy, who is being penetrated and acted upon, this language suggests a disruption of boundaries, as that which ought to be outside Macdonald's body—Macbeth—has entered it.

This masculine violence is continued when, in response to the "fresh assault" of the Norwegian troops, Macbeth and Banquo "...doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe. / Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds..." (1.2.33, 38–9). Alongside the repetition of "doubly redoubled," which conveys an excess of destruction, the image of the soldiers "bath[ing] in reeking wounds" further suggests a violation of the boundary that separates inside from outside. From one perspective, Macbeth and Banquo have literally entered their enemies' bodies and are "bath[ing]" in their wounds. Alternatively, "wounds" can act as a metonymy for all of the blood that has escaped from their victims' bodies, suggesting that this blood is in such excess that the soldiers are able to "bathe" in it. Both readings convey a disturbance of the boundary marking the body's limits.

After hearing the captain's report, Duncan dismisses him, saying, "So well thy words become thee as thy wounds: / They smack of honour both" (1.2.43–4). Reading the soldier's wounds as a reflection of his worth, Duncan expresses a system of valuation characteristic to a warrior culture that exalts masculine strength and violence. The juxtaposition of his words with

the description of Macbeth and Banquo “bath[ing]” in the “reeking wounds” of their enemies demonstrates a contradiction inherent to this warrior culture: while wounds, or a leakage of bodily fluids, reflect weakness in one context, in another they signify strength. This paradox slightly unravels the tightness of the logic of the masculine warrior culture shown, as it demonstrates how, in this realm, symbols do not correlate neatly to a single meaning.

Another paradox within the political system of *Macbeth* comes to light when Duncan speaks to Macbeth and Banquo after the battle. His words convey a social ideal of a community centered on balance and nourishment, which opposes the destructive, masculine culture previously depicted. Expressing his gratitude to Macbeth for his heroic performance, Duncan says, “Welcome hither. / I have begun to plant thee, and will labour / To make thee full of growing” (1.4.27–9). Here, Duncan uses agricultural imagery to describe his relationship to Macbeth: like a farmer plants a seed into the earth and toils to make it grow, Duncan is planting Macbeth into the political system of Scotland and investing time and work to aid his social growth. In this metaphor, the word “labour” suggests the man’s work of husbandry, which is centered on the care and cultivation of crops and animals—work that facilitates the continuous cycle of life. Furthermore, Duncan’s language suggests the paternal side of human sexual reproduction, as the image of planting suggests the father’s work of planting seed into the mother’s womb. This metaphor is made more complex in its allusion to maternal reproductive work: the suggestion of “labour[ing]” connotes the womb’s work of childbirth, and Duncan thereby implies that he himself is the womb giving birth to Macbeth. This notion of maternity plays out in the idea of “full[ness] of growing,” which associates Macbeth with the image of a pregnant mother, suggesting that Duncan is not just invested in Macbeth’s own life, but in the soldier’s capacity to yield and nourish future generations. By describing his work as a patriarch

using the terms of both maternal and paternal labor and applying the same imagery to Macbeth, Duncan reflects an ethos that transcends divisions of gender—an androgynous ethos that displays the human race as a unified entity sharing in a cycle of life and reproduction.

Duncan continues to use language that suggests growth and nourishment when he says, “My plenteous joys, / Wanton in fulness, seek to hide themselves / In drops of sorrow” (1.4.33–5). He calls his joys “plenteous” as if describing the results of a bountiful harvest—the harvest that he has “labour[ed]” to produce. Then, again using the maternal image of “full[ness],” Duncan describes his joys as being so pregnant with life that they exceed the limits of his body and take on the form of tears. In light of the agricultural imagery, these tears can be read as the water that nourishes the soil, fertilizing the seeds within it. Duncan then moves beyond imagery of growth and nourishment by evoking human emotions, suggesting that if it weren’t for his emotional capacity he would not be able to produce fertilizing tears with which to water the ground. Making use of the ambiguity of tears as a signifier of both joy and sorrow, Duncan highlights the complex, interwoven nature of human emotions.

Duncan’s language stands in stark contrast to the words of Lady Macbeth in the following scene. After she learns about the Weird Sisters’ prophecy that her husband will become king, she muses about him, saying, “Yet do I fear thy nature. / It is too full o’th’ milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way” (1.5.14–6). Using the metaphor of a mother’s milk to describe Macbeth’s innate compassion, Lady Macbeth articulates her fear that this quality will prevent him from pursuing his own interest. In contrast to Duncan, who regards it as his duty to sustain the lives of others, Lady Macbeth sees the nurturing quality of her husband as a hindrance to him. She goes on to say of Macbeth, “Hie thee hither, / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear....” suggesting that she will replace his “milk of ... kindness” with the contents of

her body (1.5.23–4).<sup>7</sup> Her following speech sheds light onto the nature of the substance that she intends to transfer; she exclaims,

Come, you spirits  
 That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
 And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
 Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood,  
 Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,  
 That no compunctious visitings of nature  
 Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
 Th'effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,  
 And take my milk for gall... (1.5.38–46)

With these words, Lady Macbeth commands ambiguous spirits to “unsex” her and then tells them to fill her to the brim with “cruelty” as if this quality were a fluid—the antithesis of the compassion embodied in Duncan’s tears of sorrow and Macbeth’s milky kindness. Then, imagining that her capacity for remorse resides in a specific part of her body, Lady Macbeth calls upon spirits to thicken her blood and “stop up th’access and passage” to this place so that no “compunctious visitings” will “keep peace between” her desires and her achievement of them.<sup>8</sup> Just as she views her husband’s kindness as an impediment, stopping him from achieving the “nearest way,” Lady Macbeth regards her own capacity to feel sorrow as a hindrance to her achievement of her aim. When she goes on to tell the spirits to remove her woman’s milk and

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<sup>7</sup> “Spirits” was used in early modern scientific discourse to refer to substances that circulated in the blood. See “spirit, n.”

<sup>8</sup> Galen’s humoral theory about the relationship between the body and the mental/emotional aspects of an individual influenced Western thinking. Unlike Plato’s belief that the psyche is separate and exists prior to the body, Galen held that the human is fully embodied, and that one’s personality and experiences are linked to the physical self (Keller, 36-40).

replace it with gall, or the bitter substance of the liver, Lady Macbeth suggests that gall is an aspect of the liquid cruelty with which she desires to be filled. By associating this liquid with her breast milk, Lady Macbeth implies that in “pour[ing]” her “spirits” into her husband’s ear she is bringing Macbeth to her breast in a grotesque reconstruction of a maternal nursing scene.<sup>9</sup>

The distorted nursery scene that Lady Macbeth alludes to is fully realized in the image she later creates for her husband when he tells her that he is no longer going to go through with his plan to murder Duncan. She says darkly,

...I have given suck, and know  
 How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me.  
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
 Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums  
 And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn  
 As you have done to this. (1.7.54–59)

In the scene she describes, Lady Macbeth performs the maternal labor of a new mother, nourishing her infant with the milk of her breasts. Just as Duncan reacted to the successes of his soldiers—his “plenteous joys”—with “drops of sorrow,” Lady Macbeth’s work is tied up with emotions: while performing it she feels “tender” love for her infant. However, Lady Macbeth flips this image of fertility and compassion on its head when she declares that if she had sworn to do something as horrifying as that which Macbeth has sworn to do in murdering Duncan, she would not hesitate to cut off her child’s access to nourishment and “[dash] [its] brains out” in order to carry out her word. With these words, Lady Macbeth equates the bond between subject

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<sup>9</sup> Janet Adelman argues that this gall is witches milk, and uses this to link Lady Macbeth to the Weird Sisters. She also suggests that Lady Macbeth’s words can be read as a command to the spirits, or witches to “take my milk *as* gall,” indicating that the spirits are nursing her breast (135).



and king to that which links a mother to her child and insists that such human bonds will not obstruct the fulfillment of her and Macbeth's ambitions. Furthermore, the destruction she evokes in promising to "[dash] the brains out" of her infant reflects the violence of the battle scene at the play's beginning. Just as Macbeth was responsible for opening up the bodies of his enemies and releasing blood from their wounds, Lady Macbeth is breaking through her infant's skull and expelling its contents.

After conjuring up this ominous image, Lady Macbeth assures her husband that they will be able to get away with Duncan's murder, telling him she will "with wine and wassail so convince" the king's chamberlains

That memory, the warder of the brain,  
 Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason  
 A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep  
 Their drenchèd natures lie as in a death,  
 What cannot you and I perform upon  
 Th'unguarded Duncan? (1.7.64–70)

Lady Macbeth's language compromises the shield-like function of the officers. After describing the memory as the protective "warder" of the brain, she transforms those of the officers into "fume[s]," or gasses—substances that can easily be passed through. She similarly declares that after she has her way with them, their rational components will be mere "limbeck[s]," or instruments used to transmit fluids from one vessel to another. By reconstructing these parts of the men, Lady Macbeth penetrates their psychological barriers and subsequently renders Duncan completely "unguarded" and vulnerable to her murderous intent. Evoking Macbeth's penetration of soldiers on the battlefield, this image masculinizes Lady Macbeth.

After listening to his wife's scheme Macbeth says to her, "Bring forth men-children only, / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males" (1.7.72–4). "Undaunted" describes something that is not held back; Scottish writers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century used it to refer to something that is unbridled or unrestrained ("Un-daunted, adj."). This word reflects the "unsex[ing]" that Lady Macbeth attempted involving the destruction of any aspect of her that impedes the achievement of her purpose and suggests that in the eyes of her husband, Lady Macbeth has succeeded with this elimination. Furthermore, "mettle," meaning disposition, plays on *metal*, suggesting that the material of Lady Macbeth's body is completely solid and impenetrable, a characteristic that links her to the body of her warrior husband from the beginning of the play (Adelman, 139). Macbeth interprets these characteristics of unbridledness and impenetrability as signs of masculinity when he declares that his wife is only capable of producing "men-children."

Critics have engaged in debate about Lady Macbeth's attempted "unsex[ing]," with some parties arguing that she is trying to remove her feminine qualities and become all masculine and others holding that she is trying to enter into a category apart from either sex and from humanity altogether.<sup>10</sup> Lady Macbeth's description of this process as one of "unsex[ing]" and the allusion she makes to the female menstrual cycle by describing her impediments as "visitings of nature" suggest that she aims to destroy her feminine capacities in order to become the strong and ruthless figure that she envisions. Furthermore, Macbeth's declaration to "Bring forth men-children only" suggests that Lady Macbeth has eliminated her feminine aspects in exchange for masculinity. But this reading of Lady Macbeth's "unsex[ing]" is in tension with the image of

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<sup>10</sup> Joan Klein and Janet Adelman both argue that Lady Macbeth is specifically attacking her feminine aspect, while Stephanie Chamberlain argues that she is attempting to move beyond the categories of gender altogether, into a nonhuman space that would allow her to behave without the restrictions of gender norms (Chamberlain 79).

manhood that the play has created to this point through its male characters. Both Duncan and Macbeth have been revealed to possess maternal qualities, such as tenderness and the capacity to nourish. Through these portrayals, Shakespeare suggests a conception of manhood that goes beyond gender distinctions and harmonizes with a notion of humanity as a whole. This notion casts Lady Macbeth's "unsex[ing]" as an un-gendering or a de-humanizing: by eliminating her ability to reproduce as well as her capacity to feel remorse, she is not removing aspects of her being that are strictly female, but aspects of it that are *human*. Thus Macbeth adheres to a mistaken construction of manhood when he regards Lady Macbeth as purely male in substance—he fails to see that her attempted transformation moved her beyond human categories altogether.

When Lady Macbeth calls upon spirits to "unsex" her, she literally asks that they slow and stop up the flow of her blood. In this formulation, she associates the movement of blood with the maternal qualities that she disdains: compassion and nurturement. This appraisal of her blood flow is realized in the metaphor Macbeth later uses to describe Duncan's blood. When he informs Duncan's sons of their father's murder, Macbeth says to them, "The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood / Is stopped, the very source of it is stopped" (2.3.95–6). In this image, Duncan's blood symbolizes the fluid that sustains his children; it is like the fertile tears with which he waters his seeds.

However, moments after he refers to Duncan's blood flow as a "fountain" that has been "stopped," Macbeth describes the scene of murder as if it is a battle scene, emphasizing the penetration of Duncan's bodily barriers. He reports,

His silver skin laced with his golden blood,  
 And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature  
 For ruin's wasteful entrance; there the murderers,

Steeped in the colours of their trade, their daggers

Unmannerly breeched with gore. (2.3.109–113)

By describing Duncan's stabs as "a breach in nature," Macbeth suggests that prior to the invasion of the murderers, Duncan's body was perfect and intact; like nature, it was an unblemished container for life. But the murderers, like nature's enemy "ruin," invaded his body with their daggers, breaking the perfect container in an image that evokes the blood-covered battlefield as well as the "dashed... brains" of Lady Macbeth's infant. By punning on "breach" when he describes the murderers' weapons as "breeched with gore," Macbeth emphasizes the dislocation of Duncan's blood from inside his system to the outsides of the murderers' bodies and weapons. He also highlights the word's paradoxical meanings: while the "breach" in Duncan's body suggests that something has been opened or uncovered, the daggers that are "breeched with gore" are covered up or concealed.

Returning to the aforementioned image of Duncan's body as a fountain, it appears that by "breach[ing]" Duncan's body and spilling his blood the murderers have metaphorically stopped up the blood and prevented its flow, which occurs because Duncan's body is simultaneously a container leaking its contents and a fountain whose blood has been stopped up. These two constructions of Duncan's body reflect the dual ideas of manhood operating in the play. In the masculine realm of the battlefield, the movement of blood from inside to outside the body suggests weakness and vulnerability, signifying that a container has been penetrated. But when manhood corresponds to humanity as a whole, blood becomes a nourishing fluid—equivalent to tears or milk—that is metaphorically capable of moving from one individual's body and into another, nourishing and sustaining life across generations. It is this latter formulation of blood

that Lady Macbeth attempts to destroy when she “unsex[es]” herself: she tries to thicken her blood and prevent it from passing through her body in order to eliminate her maternal capacities.

The conclusion of *Macbeth* returns us to the battlefield, where the two ideas of manhood directly confront each other in the fight between Macbeth and Macduff. In the words of Ramsey, Macbeth’s moral career follows a “terrible progressive disjunction between the manly and the humane” and by the end of the play he achieves this disjunction and becomes almost entirely “manly” in the narrow, violent sense of the word (286). To do so, Macbeth progressively diminishes the gap between his thoughts and his actions—the gap that reflects his conscience, which initially impedes his ability to pursue his ambitions. After he murders Duncan, Macbeth anguishes,

Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red. (2.2.58–61)

Here, Macbeth laments that his conscience will never be eased, and he will be perpetually plagued with guilt and paranoia, metaphorically represented as blood staining his hand. In his eyes, this blood is inexhaustible—he imagines that if he were to try to wash it off it would stain an ocean’s worth of water red. Later, after learning that Banquo has been killed, Macbeth says, “I am in blood / Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o’er” (3.4.135–7). Evoking the depth of the blood that he has shed as a metaphor to describe the intensity of the guilt and anxiety that he feels, Macbeth declares that he is so “deep” in the river of this blood that returning to his earlier state of innocence would be just as “tedious” as continuing to move deeper into violence and crime. His suspension is a reversal of the image of

Macbeth's warrior self at the beginning of the play, who was "carv[ing] his passage" through his enemies' bodies and "bath[ing]" in their "wounds," with no guilt or remorse weighing on his conscience. Now, his mobility is impeded by his consideration of the horrible deeds that he has done, which Macbeth acknowledges when he says, "Strange things I have in head that will to hand, / Which must be acted ere they may be scanned" (3.4.138–9).

Macbeth resolves to overcome his hesitations after his second encounter with the Weird Sisters, who send him an apparition of a bloody child that instructs him to adhere to the narrower code of manhood: "Be bloody, bold, and resolute" (4.1.95). Macbeth in turn affirms his intent of eliminating his conscience and acting without contemplation: "From this moment / The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand" (4.1.163–4). This resolve leads him to carry out the most horrifying and unwarranted murder of the play—the slaughter of Macduff's unprotected wife and children.

In contrast to Macbeth, who eradicates his humane aspect and becomes purely and violently *masculine*, Macduff embodies an androgynous, compassionate manhood when he learns that his family has been killed. When Malcolm tells him to "Dispute it like a man," Macduff responds, "I shall do so, / But I must also feel it as a man" (5.1.221–3). Malcolm goes on to say, "Be this the whetstone of your sword. Let grief / Convert to anger: blunt not the heart, enrage it" (5.1.230–1). While Malcolm is adhering to a narrow formulation of manhood, telling Macduff not to dwell on his grief but rather to use it as fuel for immediate vengeance, Macduff asserts that some humane consideration—some experience of emotion—must precede such action. His response reflects Duncan's implication that compassionate tears, representative of human emotion, are an essential ingredient for the maintenance of a successful warrior culture. In reference to Macduff and Malcolm's exchange, Ramsey writes, "Nowhere in the play is there

a more cruel disjunction of the moral claims on ‘Man’” (296). Ramsey further notes that Macduff is soon “driven into that familiar harsh polarization according to sex of human feelings that should belong to the race as a whole” when he exclaims, “O, I could play the woman with mine eyes / And braggart with my tongue!” (296) (4.3.232–3). Macduff then shifts into the performance of a confident warrior, asking the “gentle heavens” to “cut short all intermission” and bring him “front to front” with his enemy, Macbeth (4.3.233–4). This transformation leads into the final confrontation between Macbeth, the seemingly all-masculine monster, and Macduff, who embodies a balance of the “manly and the humane”.

By juxtaposing the androgyny of Duncan and Macduff with Macbeth’s monstrosity, Shakespeare presents a code of manhood that demotes a gendered concept of masculinity and replaces it with a code that values compassion and fertility. Through its emphasis on continuity across genders rather than distinction, this new code of manhood evokes the Galenic, one-sex model of the body that views bodies as mixtures of male and female elements. Interestingly, a second kind of mixing takes place in *Macbeth*: the image of blood moves from one code of manhood to the other, at times signifying sterile, violent masculinity and elsewhere evoking androgynous unity. I revisit this second kind of mixing in Chapter 3, after a brief stop to Illyria, where *Twelfth Night* sets its scene.





## Chapter 2: Elusive Objects of Desire in *Twelfth Night*

In contrast to *Macbeth*, which is set in a warrior culture and coded in masculine imagery of violence, ambition and honor, *Twelfth Night* is a comedy that deals in terms of courtly romance and the carnivalesque. In spite of these differences, *Twelfth Night* introduces a paradox similar to the one in *Macbeth*: as *Macbeth* evokes two separate spheres of manhood, one narrowly linked to masculinity and the other associated with humanity as a whole, *Twelfth Night* presents two contrasting views in its depiction of desire. On the one hand, the play presents a “festive” logic that moves from tension to resolution and suggests that the only valid kind of desire is between a man and a woman. However, the play simultaneously depicts non-normative paths of desire that undermine this two-gender logic by alluding to the constructed nature of gender categories.

For years critics have debated the implications of Viola’s cross-dressing in *Twelfth Night* and whether it ultimately challenges or reinforces a patriarchal two-gender hierarchy. In his 1959 book *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy*, C. L. Barber argues, “the most fundamental distinction the play brings home to us is the difference between men and women... The disguising of a girl as a boy... is exploited so as to renew in a special way our sense of the difference” (277–8). In Barber’s view, Viola’s cross-dressing is not merely unproblematic to patriarchal logic; it “renews in a special way” the differences that comprise this logic’s backbone.

Barber reaches his interpretation of *Twelfth Night* by analyzing the play’s structure, which he describes as “festive.” In his view, all of Shakespeare’s comedies follow a variation of this structure, which involves “a basic movement... through release to clarification” (2). Barber outlines this structure by describing how it manifested itself in the holiday traditions of Elizabethan England. These traditions involved periods of revelry and misrule that temporarily

overthrew the social order. Blurring the lines between categories of gender and social class, participants cross-dressed and enacted role reversals in which low-class citizens temporarily reigned as authority figures. According to Barber, this transitory chaos allowed participants to release their pent up energies and desires, a liberation that fueled a “clarification” or a heightened awareness of the relationship between man and nature. By translating holidays onto the stage, “festive” plays extended this awareness and enabled audiences to “becom[e] conscious of holiday itself in a new way”—that is, of its temporary, unstable nature and the ultimate value of social order (7).<sup>11</sup>

Barber’s assessment of holiday traditions and recognition of their structural similarity to Shakespeare’s comedies illuminate his claim that *Twelfth Night* “brings home” the “fundamental distinction” between men and women. He explains, “Just as a . . . reversal of social roles need not threaten the social structure, but can serve instead to consolidate it, so a temporary, playful reversal of sexual roles can renew the meaning of the normal relation” (278). The nature of this “normal relation” is illustrated in his discussion of the final scene of *Twelfth Night*, which depicts two heterosexual pairings. Referring to Olivia’s misguided infatuation with Cesario—really the cross-dressed Viola—Sebastian says, “So comes it, lady, you have been mistook. / But nature to her bias drew in that” (5.1.252–3). Barber interprets this “bias” as “the general force which has shaped particular developments [in the play],” arguing that Sebastian’s words reflect an awareness of the “festive” form that guides human experience through confusion to resolution (279). Barber goes on to argue that Sebastian’s subsequent observation that Olivia is “betrothed both to a maid and man” reflects a recognition as to “how much the sexes differ yet how much

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<sup>11</sup> Barber’s perspective reflects Thomas Aquinas’ theory of natural law, which viewed social order as divinely ordained, mirroring God’s separation of man from woman and human from beast. This theory fueled an understanding of social divisions as natural and good. See Daston’s essay for an overview of how Aquinas’ theory influenced early modern thought.

they have in common, how everyone who is fully alive has qualities of both” (5.1.254) (279). Barber’s assessment of Sebastian’s words evokes the twofold awareness that he argues the “festive” form produced in early modern audiences—an awareness of both “natural” disorder and the sanctity of social order.

In his 1988 essay “Fiction and Friction,” Steven Greenblatt challenges Barber’s reading of *Twelfth Night*. Referencing the Galenic one-sex model of the body, Greenblatt characterizes Viola’s cross-dressing—and the greater phenomenon of cross-dressing on the Elizabethan stage—as a subversive practice that reminded early modern audiences of the fluidity of sex and the constructed nature of gender. Greenblatt argues that the movement of Viola through the identity of Cesario and back to her “true” womanly self mirrors the early modern belief that boys pass through “effeminate” stages—following a trajectory from “defective to perfect”—before reaching their superior male selves (78, 81). In Greenblatt’s view, the “clarification” that Barber reads in the final scene—the image of union and harmony—is more dreamlike and elusive than the figure of Cesario.

Both Greenblatt and Barber recognize that the gender-bending in *Twelfth Night* depicts the similarities between men and women; however, they come to opposing conclusions about the effect that this portrayal had on audiences. While Barber sees Viola’s disguise—suggestive of the continuities between men and women—as a “temporary, playful reversal” that ultimately reinforces the boundary between the genders, Greenblatt argues that it highlights the instability of this line.

Malvolio’s description of Cesario in Act I inconclusively welcomes the interpretations of both Barber and Greenblatt. Malvolio describes the youth to Olivia as “Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy; as a squash is before 'tis a peascod, or a codling when 'tis

almost an apple. 'Tis with him in standing water between boy and man" (1.5.139–142). While Malvolio does not directly reference Cesario's gender, his description of the threshold between boy and man evokes the Galenic notion that adolescent boys pass through "effeminate" stages, a reference that may have reminded audiences of Cesario's androgyny. This suggestion is carried out in the metaphors that Malvolio goes on to use: describing Cesario as a pea bud that is not yet a pod and an apple that is not quite ripe—entities that serve no purpose besides evolving into their full forms—Malvolio reflects the Galenic belief that the transition into manhood follows a trajectory from "defective to perfect." Furthermore, the state of in-betweenness—of "standing water"—that Malvolio observes is suggestive of a hermaphroditic body that contains a balance of male and female elements. When regarded through the lens of Greenblatt's essay, these allusions to continuity across gender categories destabilize the line separating men from women.

However, Malvolio's description also reflects the "festive" form and thereby re-stabilizes two-gender logic. The movement from "defective to perfect" that his metaphors describe is analogous to the movement through chaos to "clarification" that Barber sees in holiday traditions. Furthermore, "standing water" indicates a state of suspension—a liminal space in which movement has stopped—which mirrors the suspension of norms that these traditions brought about. When viewed through Barber's "festive" lens, Malvolio's words confirm that Viola's cross-dressing is truly a "temporary, playful reversal" of norms that ultimately reinforces the "clarification" of the play's resolution and the stability of the two-gender distinction.

In his essay "*Gender Trouble and Twelfth Night*," Casey Charles takes a new approach in his assessment of Viola's cross-dressing. Instead of focusing on the figure of Cesario, Charles analyzes the erotic encounters that this figure induces. He builds his argument off of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, in which she argues that gender identities are not fixed, but rather

produced through performance and legitimized by patriarchal structures that perpetually silence alternate possibilities. Butler presents parody—specifically drag—as a mode by which people can challenge these structures by performing genders and exploring sexualities beyond those deemed “normal.” Applying this idea to *Twelfth Night*, Charles argues that the cross-dressed performance of Viola has the desired effect of Butler’s drag because it leads to non-normative sexual encounters that reveal gender identities to be “staged, performed, and ‘playable’ by either sex” (130).<sup>12</sup> Taking cue from Charles’ approach, my ensuing discussion of *Twelfth Night* upholds and underscores the inextricable link between gender and desire.

As Greenblatt notes, the play’s “initiatory design” appeals to audiences’ awareness of social expectations for desire: it “invites [them] to envisage the unification of court and household through the marriage of their symbolic heads, Orsino and Olivia” (68). The path leading to this unification is one of masculine conquest, as it requires that Orsino “tak[e] possession” of Olivia—the “eligible, perfectly independent maiden prize” (Greenblatt, 69). These expectations are displayed through Orsino’s language when he describes his desire for Olivia. Hyperbolically professing the power of her beauty, Orsino declares that the moment he first saw Olivia he was “turned into a hart” and has since been hunted by the “fell and cruel hounds” of his desires (1.1.20–1).<sup>13</sup> Carrying on this hunting imagery, Orsino fantasizes about what Olivia will be like

.... when the rich golden shaft

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<sup>12</sup> Charles notes that the Elizabethan convention of using male actors for both male and female parts heightens this effect (123-4).

<sup>13</sup> Orsino’s words evoke the myth of Diana and Actaeon, a story in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in which a hunter is transformed into a deer and killed by his own hounds after he accidentally sees Diana, the chaste Roman goddess, bathing in the nude.

Hath killed the flock of all affections else  
 That live in her—when liver, brain and heart,  
 These sovereign thrones, are all supplied, and filled  
 Her sweet perfections with one self king! (1.1.34–8)

Orsino imagines himself attaining Olivia's love by "kill[ing] the flock" of all her other "affections," that is, by eliminating all of her feelings for other people. Orsino will replace these multiple affections with "one self king," a replacement that will render all aspects of her person "supplied" and "filled." In addition to reflecting the patriarchal notion that men must control and contain woman, Orsino's language suggests a concept of love that aligns with Barber's formula for thinking about holiday traditions. The "affections" that Orsino imagines eliminating reflect the pent up desires that holiday traditions were thought to release. Moreover, the unity and fulfillment achieved by marriage in Orsino's account mirrors the ensuing order and "clarification."

The play's inaugural depiction of Olivia unveils a challenge to Orsino's patriarchal fantasies: Valentino tells Orsino that the duchess has vowed not to show her face for seven years following the death of her brother. Instead, "like a cloistress" she

.... will veiled walk  
 And water once a day her chamber round  
 With eye-offending brine—all this to season  
 A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh  
 And lasting in her sad remembrance. (1.1.27–31)

This description suggests that Olivia is actively circumventing Orsino's attempts at courting her. Her grief is not something she is enduring, but rather something she is creating and

maintaining—she is “water[ing]...her chamber” with “eye-offending brine” to keep her love for her brother “fresh” and “lasting.” This image casts Olivia as an independent agent who is actively resisting the expectation of marriage.

While the juxtaposition between Orsino’s theatrical expressions of desire and Olivia’s stubborn independence establishes a simple conflict that heightens rather than weakens a heteronormative concept of desire, a closer look at Orsino’s language reveals a curious complication. In his opening monologue he exclaims,

O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,  
 That, notwithstanding thy capacity  
 Receiveth as the sea, naught enters there,  
 Of what validity and pitch so e’er,  
 But falls into abatement and low price  
 Even in a minute! (1.1.9–14)

Orsino’s declaration “O spirit of love” evokes a lover’s outburst to a loved one: it would seem natural for Orsino to exclaim “O Olivia!” as an expression of his desire. However, Orsino does not go on to discuss Olivia, but rather passionately describes the experience of being in love, comparing it to an ocean that ceaselessly swallows and dilutes the value of everything it encounters. Evoking a reversal of Olivia’s salty tears, which she used to preserve her brother’s memory and her independence, the saltwater in this metaphor has power over Orsino, as it swallows and reduces him. Recalling the discrepant behavior of blood in the metaphors of

*Macbeth*, this dual conduct of saltwater introduces a slipperiness to *Twelfth Night* that resists decisive, comprehensive interpretation.<sup>14</sup>

Orsino and Olivia's shared interest in the ambiguously sexed Cesario and the erotic language that they use to describe him further complicate the heteronormative logic of the play. After knowing him for just three days, Orsino proclaims to Cesario, "Thou know'st no less but all. I have unclasped / To thee the book even of my secret soul" (1.4.12–3). Orsino's language evokes a heterosexual encounter: he has "unclasped" himself to the youth, giving Cesario access to his previously closed off interior self.

Orsino goes on to admire Cesario's features, observing,

... Diana's lip

Is not more smooth and rubious; thy small pipe

Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,

And all is semblative a woman's part. (1.5.30-3)

Beholding a Diana who does not elude his gaze—which seems to linger erotically—Orsino describes Cesario with a specificity that his descriptions of Olivia lacked. In a reversal of the gender roles implied by his previous words, Orsino now casts Cesario as a woman, hinting at the female anatomy with the terms "organ" and "part." This shift destabilizes the boundary separating men from women and complicates the nature of Orsino's desire.

Olivia is similarly intrigued by Cesario: she says after her first interaction with him, "Methinks I feel this youth's perfections / With an invisible and subtle stealth / To creep in at mine eyes" (1.5.266–8). Olivia's use of the word "perfections" recollects Orsino's earlier use of the word, when he described himself "suppl[ying] and fill[ing]" the "sweet perfections" of

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<sup>14</sup> This saltwater also evokes the sea that washes Viola onto the shore of Illyria, and presumably drowns her brother; see 1.2.1–16.



Olivia. While Olivia's "perfections" connote a void to be filled, those of Cesario are doing the filling: they are "creeping in" at Olivia and penetrating her being. In a displaced realization of Orsino's fantasy and a continuation of Orsino's "unclasp[ing]," this description evokes a heterosexual encounter in which Cesario is the man. However, Olivia's use of the words "invisible" and "subtle" to describe the effect that Cesario has on her suggests that there is an aspect to him—or to her attraction to him—that she is unable to pin down. This vagueness alludes to Cesario's androgynous appearance and the elusive in-betweenness of Malvolio's descriptions.

From Viola's point of view, the messy paths of desire that her disguise has created are frustrating but ultimately inconsequential. When she suspects Olivia's attraction she exclaims, "Poor lady, she were better love a dream!" (2.2.24–5). By affiliating her cross-dressed self with a "dream," Viola emphasizes the deviation from reality that Cesario represents—to her, the disguise is a temporary illusion. She goes on to lament her convoluted situation:

My master loves [Olivia] dearly,  
 And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,  
 And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.  
 What will become of this? As I am man,  
 My state is desperate for my master's love.  
 As I am woman, now, alas the day,  
 What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!  
 O time! Thou must untangle this, not I.  
 It is too hard a knot for me t'untie. (2.2.31–9)

Viola's concluding plea for time to "untangle" the "knot" of her circumstances affirms the "festive" perspective that her disguise and the confusion it has caused are passing states of disorder that will ultimately be resolved. In her view, this "knot" is comprised of the different paths of desire that are refusing to be fulfilled, signified by Olivia's "thrifless sighs" and Viola's "desperate" condition. These longings correspond to the energies and desires relieved through Elizabethan holiday traditions.

As Jean Howard notes, "there is no doubt in the audience's mind of [Viola's] heterosexual sexual orientation or her properly 'feminine' subjectivity" (431). Indeed, Viola's descriptions of her hermaphroditic self as a "poor monster" reminds the audience of the distinction between her "true" self and her disguise. She also maintains her heterosexuality by resisting Olivia's advances and remaining steadfast in her desire for Orsino: when she sets off to woo Olivia on Orsino's behalf she says, "Whoe'er I woo, myself would be his wife" (1.4.41). Furthermore, Viola reflects an internalization of social expectations for desire when she characterizes Olivia's desire as "mistaken." Reflecting the heteronormative belief that desire is only possible between a man and a woman, Viola's characterization invalidates the possibility of lesbian attraction. Interestingly, Viola's attitude throughout the play upholds a two-gender framework that supports Barber's interpretation of her cross-dressing as a "festive" deviation that ultimately reinforces the "fundamental distinction" between men and women.

However, Viola's perspective is not the only one reflected in the play; her constant reminders to the audience of her feminine identity do not affect other characters' perceptions of Cesario. Rather, both Orsino and Olivia view Cesario as a subject and their gazes shape him into one. Shakespeare alludes to the transformative power of the human gaze in a metatheatrical moment when Olivia says to Viola/Cesario, "I would you were as I would have you be"

(3.1.133).<sup>15</sup> A reversal of her earlier description of Cesario “creep[ing] in at her eyes,” in which Cesario has the power, Olivia’s words disrupt notions of objectivity, a disruption that in turn destabilizes the essentiality of identity.

This destabilization continues after Cesario’s “true” identity is revealed. In his final words of the play, Orsino says,

Cesario, come—

For so you shall be while you are a man;

But when in other habits you are seen,

Orsino’s mistress, and his fancy’s queen. (5.1.372–5)

By continuing to use the page’s name and insisting that Viola remain Cesario while in a man’s clothing, Orsino asserts that Viola’s “true” identity does not invalidate the reality of Cesario. Furthermore, in addition to referring to the wife of a king or nobleman, the word “queen” has historically held transgressive implications; it has been used to refer to prostitutes, cross-dressers, and effeminate male homosexuals (“queen, n.”) (“quean, n.”). Thus in addition to troubling the line between objective reality and subjective perception, Orsino’s final words—the last words of the play before Feste’s ending song—“bring home” an ultimate *indistinction* of categories of gender and sexuality.

A two-gender logic shapes the expectations for gender relations in *Twelfth Night*, and from Barber’s point of view, incorporates the ambiguity produced by Cesario’s transvestitism into the play’s “general force”—a normative force that restores and underscores social order. However, Barber’s reading only rings true if Cesario is never *really* Cesario, but merely a temporary illusion produced by Viola’s disguise. Unfortunately for Barber, this truth depends on

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<sup>15</sup> For an insightful deconstructive reading of Viola and Olivia’s exchange, see Charles 134.

a clear-cut notion of the essentiality of identity—specifically gender identity—which the play unsettles more than it bolsters. The erotic encounters that emerge as a result of Viola's cross-dressing cast Cesario as a real subject and thereby undermine the notion that he is merely an illusion produced through Viola's performance.

Presenting Cesario as an individual distinct from Viola, *Twelfth Night* invites audiences to consider his gender identity. Though he wears a man's clothes and performs a man's work, other characters recognize womanly aspects in him. Furthermore, the ambiguity and in-betweenness that their descriptions of him convey suggest a hybrid gender that defies the categories *man* and *woman*. Evoking the androgyny represented in the male characters of *Macbeth*, Cesario's inscrutable gender challenges the two-gender binary suggested by the heteronormative structure of the play and evokes a fluid, Galenic model of sexual difference.

### Chapter 3: Adding A Twist

*Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* both call upon the Galenic, one-sex model of the body by depicting androgynous characters who reflect syntheses of manly and womanly aspects. The language of *Macbeth* suggests that its male characters—Duncan, Macbeth and Macduff—all possess feminine traits, associated with the womanly fluids of menstrual blood, maternal milk, and motherly tears. In *Twelfth Night*, androgyny is evoked through the figure of Cesario, whose ambiguous appearance suggests a blend of masculine and feminine aspects and whose hybrid identity is validated by the lingering gazes of other characters.

The androgynous representations in both plays undermine the two-gender logic that structures their corresponding social and political orders in a manner that reflects the negotiations that were taking place in early modern London. As economic and scientific developments caused the city's population to become more diverse, people were forced to rethink the categories that shaped their social order. Scholars note that the theatre played an important role in these negotiations: Jean Howard argues that the formation of the “middle-class female playgoer” reflected a transgression of “physical and social boundaries of the middle-class woman's domestic containment” (440). In a related vein, Steven Mullaney argues that the theatre's physical location on the margins of London enabled it to critically regard and reflect the “limits and contradictions” of the city's social order (38).

The social changes reflected and incited by early modern theatre are analogous to ongoing developments in America that call into question oppressive beliefs and institutions. One manifestation of these developments are movements advocating for social change on the bases of notions of gender and sexuality. In spite of much progress, these movements have been held back by the demands of the U.S. identitarian political system, which forces people to group and

label themselves in order to be recognized and validated in society (Garber 281). As Judith Butler notes, these demands have caused many feminist groups to cling to the notion that *women* is a “seamless category,” an attachment that conflicts with other groups that advocate for non-normative manifestations of femininity (4). Similar tensions have emerged within LGBT movements, as activists who argue that homosexuality is innate and can be “scientifically” proven promote a dimorphic idea of sexuality that excludes and delegitimizes alternate sexual identities.<sup>16</sup>

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that the identitarian political system is an oppressive patriarchal product and that feminists must discard notions of gender identity altogether. However, others have argued that such an eradication might impede rather than aid feminist aims. In her 1994 essay “Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias,” Biddy Martin writes that an eradication of gender categories might result in an “evacuation of interiority... and too exclusive an understanding of psychic life” that could “impoverish the language [feminists] have available for thinking about social construction” (105). Sandra Lipsitz Bem argues along similar lines in her essay “Dismantling Gender Polarization and Compulsory Heterosexuality: Should We Turn the Volume Down or Up?” Bem writes that she cannot foresee how an elimination of categories of identity would advance feminist and queer movements.

In an interesting move, Bem proposes that a better approach to undermining oppressive paradigms of gender and sexuality might be to “proliferate” categories of gender—and of other identities—so that binary distinctions lose their power (334). In her view, this shift is already taking place; she writes,

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<sup>16</sup> See Garber, chapter 11.

“what is happening... is not the silence of turning the volume down on difference and diversity but the cacophony of sound (and also of conflict) that comes from having finally turned the volume up on the many multidimensional voices that have been silenced far too long—including not just lesbians, gay men, and now bisexuals, but the much more color-full Crayola kaleidoscope of, for example, f-to-m and m-to-f transgendered people, lipstick lesbians, butches, baby butches, stone butches, femmes, butchy femmes, bulldaggers.... And so on and so forth ad (perhaps) infinitum.” (334)

By describing human gender as a “kaleidoscope” filled with categories that could number to “infinitum,” Bem introduces a new way of thinking about identity that reconciles the aforementioned tensions within feminist and LGBT movements. On the one hand, Bem appeals to Martin’s concern that Butler’s theories might lead to an “impoverish[ment]” in feminist discourse when she lists and validates non-normative gender categories. On the other hand, by suggesting that these categories could multiply to “infinitum,” Bem challenges identitarian logic, reflecting how human reality refuses to be broken up into distinct and quantifiable pieces.

Marjorie Garber similarly presents a useful model through her concept of the “third,” which she begins to explore in *Vested Interests*, published in 1991. In this book, she examines the transvestite, a figure that she believes has the capacity to subvert hegemonic modes of thinking about both gender and sexuality by calling into question the categories *woman*, *man*, *heterosexual* and *homosexual*. In her view, the subversive potential of the transvestite is

characteristic of the “third,” a concept she applies to other in-between types that call into question preexisting binaries.<sup>17</sup>

In *Vice Versa* Garber uses her concept of the “third” to articulate a theory of bisexuality, which traditionally refers to a person’s capacity to be attracted to both men and women. In this sense, bisexuality reflects a combination of *homo-* and *heterosexuality*, a logic that has led two-dimensional models such as the Kinsey scale and the Klein grid to depict it as a flat, middle space. Arguing that bisexuality defies such representation, Garber says,

... what if we were to begin with the category “sexuality” (or “desire”) rather than with a binary opposition between homosexual and heterosexual, or same-sex and opposite-sex partners? What if, in an attempt to understand this version of the “third,” we were to turn not to a two-dimensional model (the scale, the grid) but rather to a model that incorporated a third dimension, and that also made the question of two-versus-one, or inside/outside, essentially moot? (30)

Inviting readers to reconsider their ideas about sexuality, Garber proposes a model of bisexuality that begins with the all-encompassing category of “desire” rather than the mutually exclusive poles of *homo-* and *hetero-*. With this move, Garber indicates that “thirds” are not merely mixtures that can be represented as the middle spaces of scales or grids. Rather, “thirds” transcend the two-dimensional spaces of these models and distort the rigid categories that they present.

To reflect the destabilizing effect that “thirds” have on binary systems, Garber presents a new, three-dimensional model for thinking about the “third” of bisexuality:

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<sup>17</sup> For example, Garber applies this concept to the Third World, which originally referred to countries and regions that were not a part of the West or the Communist bloc during the Cold War. According to Garber, this category destabilized the binary logic that participants in the Cold War upheld, which relied upon the rigid distinction delineating *us* from *them* (11).



What I propose is a model closer to the so-called Möbius strip, a topological space that can be visualized by pasting together the ends of a rectangular strip after having first given one of the ends a half twist. It thus has only one side, not two, and if split down the middle, remains in one piece. Thus, we have no “third” but one space that incorporates the concepts of “two,” “one,” and “three” (two apparent “sides,” illusionistically; one continuous surface, and a third dimension in space). (30)

The distortion of two-dimensional space that Garber describes reflects the destabilizing effect that “thirds” have on binary systems. When creating a model of the Möbius strip, one literally eliminates a binary: by bringing together the ends of a rectangular strip, one causes these ends to disappear, replacing “two” with “one.” As Garber explains, the end result is “no ‘third’ but one space”—a continuous surface that resists segmentation. This description conflates bisexuality with desire as a whole: the “third” of bisexuality becomes concurrent with the category of sexuality, or human desire, out of which it arose.

Garber again evokes a conflation of bisexuality and desire when she discusses the futility of efforts to find biological “proof” of sexual identities. She writes, “Ultimately... the object of scrutiny will escape even the most vigilant and searching eyes. Bisexuality undoes statistics, confounds dimorphism, creates a volatile set of subjects who will not stay put in neat and stable categories. No calipers will fit the shape of desire, which remains, thankfully, unquantifiable by even the most finely tested instruments” (283). While the “object of scrutiny” in this passage initially refers to bisexuality, Garber skillfully shifts its reference to desire, which she describes as a phenomenon that defies containment by any physical shape or quantity. With this move,

Garber suggests that the inscrutable nature of bisexuality reflects, and is derived from, the stubborn elusiveness of human desire as a whole.

Garber's Möbius strip, like Bem's kaleidoscope, is particularly useful for the post-structuralist project of undermining oppressive binaries because it conveys how categories of gender and sexuality are derived from the same human whole—an all-inclusive whole that defies segmentation. Furthermore, the Möbius strip induces meta-awareness in its viewers of the incompatibility of reality and perception: while one can look at it, and even recreate it with one's own hands, it simultaneously defies comprehension. By using the Möbius strip to explain her concept of the "third" Garber demonstrates the tension between human classification systems and in-between spaces—such androgynous figures or bisexual desires—that stubbornly refuse to be pinned down.

The imagery of androgyny in Shakespeare's plays reflect Garber's way of thinking about the "third." As I discussed in the previous two chapters, the androgynous characters in *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* call to mind the Galenic, one-sex model which classifies bodies on a continuum rather than a binary. Through this association, Shakespeare's androgynous representations reflect the biological "truth" that all bodies are androgynous and the gender binary is merely a construct.

Shakespeare reflects this Galenic "truth" through his portrayal of two spheres of manhood in *Macbeth*. In one sphere, manhood is defined through two-gender logic; the Macbeths closely adhere to this logic that ultimately induces the downward trajectory of Macbeth's morality. In turn, the second sphere corresponds to the one-sex model, as Duncan, its model man, is depicted as a hybrid of masculine and feminine qualities. By conflating this androgynous figure with the virtues of the human race as a whole, Shakespeare reflects how

“thirds” are not unnatural mixtures derived from preexisting, pure categories, but indicative of a continuity that precedes classification.

Another manifestation of Garber’s “third” emerges through the imagery of *Macbeth*, specifically through the symbol of blood. As I observed in Chapter 1, the significance of blood shifts from one metaphor to the next and these changes undermine the integrity of the play’s symbolic logic. Just as leaking wounds signify both strength and weakness on the battlefield, a distinction dependent on the soldier who bears them, blood corresponds to each of Ramsey’s spheres of manhood in different descriptions throughout *Macbeth*. This paradox is presented most plainly when Macbeth describes Duncan’s blood as a nourishing fluid whose movement has been stopped, and then goes on to construe it as a sign of the king’s effeminate weakness, expelled by the murderers’ brutal penetration of his body. The movement of the symbol of blood from one sphere of manhood to the other undermines the line that distinguishes these two spheres; the fluid thus becomes another “third” that deconstructs a binary.

The blood in *Macbeth* corresponds to the saltwater in *Twelfth Night*, which similarly resists comprehensive interpretation. At times it is the ocean that engulfs and destroys; it washes Viola onto the shores of Illyria and supposedly drowns her brother and elsewhere is cast as the “spirit of love” that swallows and diminishes Orsino. But saltwater also emerges as the “brin[y]” tears that Olivia uses to “keep fresh” her brother’s memory; in this image it is a tool rather than an agent and it preserves rather than destroys. The slipperiness of saltwater in *Twelfth Night* evokes the elusiveness of Garber’s Möbius strip—it defies the human impulse to understand and classify.

The language surrounding Cesario in the last scene of *Twelfth Night* similarly corresponds to Garber’s Möbius strip. In the final moments of the play, Cesario and Sebastian

stand side-by-side while the other characters—and the audience—behold them together for the first time. Antonio wonders at Sebastian, “How have you made division of yourself? / An apple cleft in two is not more twin / Than these two creatures” (5.1.215–7). Antonio’s description of the twins as an “apple cleft in two” reflects Garber’s Möbius strip, as it alludes to how the gender binary is derived from the preexisting class of humanity as a whole.

Interestingly mirroring Antonio’s description, Orsino exclaims, “One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons / A natural perspective, that is and that is not!” (5.1.208). While Antonio reports one creature—Sebastian—that has been “cleft in two,” Orsino describes two distinct individuals who are outwardly identical, an appearance that makes him question what is real, or “natural,” and what is an illusion. However, his words implicitly invoke the figure of Cesario—the androgynous object of his desire—who was, throughout the play, “two persons” embodied by one. In a cyclical manner, this “one” becomes the “apple” that Antonio describes, confirming that the androgynous “third” is one and the same with the greater human whole.

## Conclusion

While researching and drafting this thesis I very aware of that which didn't *fit*. This awareness was spawned, in part, by the first text I encountered—Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger*. In this study, Douglas examines the ways people and societies deal with phenomena that challenge their belief systems, using “dirt” as a metaphor to refer to anything that defies classification. Douglas proposes that systems maintain their integrity by actively controlling and repressing “dirt,” as such work clarifies and strengthens the categories upon which systems are based.

Douglas' text was central to the development of my ideas, and led me to consider the strands of thought that I discarded in order to create this final product as examples of “dirt.” One such strand is the figure of the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*, whose androgynous bodies incited my interest in the play's depiction of gender. These figures defy the distinction between man and woman as well as the boundary separating fantastical from real, and thereby correspond to Douglas' “dirt” as well as Garber's notion of the “third.”

The Weird Sisters also challenged—and thereby strengthened—the boundary separating this thesis from that which it almost was: an analysis of *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* through the lens of a particular idea presented in *Purity and Danger*. Douglas presents this idea in her chapter titled “Powers and Dangers,” in which she writes,

Granted that disorder spoils pattern, it also provides the material of pattern. Order implies restriction; from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realized in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite. This is why, though we seek to create order,

we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognize that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolizes both danger and power (95).

Here, Douglas acknowledges that “dirt”—or disorder—is not merely destructive and threatening, but that it also has creative potentiality. She recognizes disorder as the source of all meaning; the material out of which all patterns of thought emerge.

Contemplating the atmospheric differences between *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night*, I began to regard these plays as reflective of the two sides of the coin of Douglas’ “dirt.” On the one hand, I saw *Macbeth* as a world in which ambiguity is a threat, a perspective upheld by the Macbeths and seemingly verified by the witches, who represent a fusion of ambiguity and apocalyptic danger. In contrast, I saw in *Twelfth Night* an allusion to the creative potentiality of disorder, embodied in the figure of Cesario, who points to the exciting possibilities for desire that lie beyond the two-gender system.

While I abandoned this framework in favor of one that sees similarities rather than differences in the plays’ depictions of androgyny, it shaped the concepts I explored as well as my consideration of my writing process. Douglas’ words rang in my ears when I studied Garber’s Möbius strip, a model that “spoils” previous concepts but also “provides the material” for new patterns of thought. Furthermore, every time I discarded a source, or removed a sentence, paragraph, or even chapter from my work, I saw these excluded entities as a part of a greater whole—a part of the infinite, disordered pool of unclassified ideas—out of which all systems of thought, including this thesis, emerge.

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