

## Notes

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- 1 Other frequent members of this seminar have included William B. Long, William Ingram, Rosalyn Knutson, S.P. Cerasano, John Astington, Scott McMillan, Frances Teague, Andrew Gurr, Paul Nelson, and others. Books and essays by the participants include Alan Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* and *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984 and 1995, respectively); Leslie Thomson, 'Enter Above: The Staging of *Women Beware Women*', *Studies in English Literature* 26 (1986): 331–43 and 'Window Scenes in Renaissance Plays: a Survey and Some Conclusions', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 5 (1990): 225–43; John H. Astington, 'Descent Machinery in the Playhouse', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 2 (1985): 119–33; William B. Long, 'Stage Directions: a Misinterpreted Factor in Determining Textual Provenance', *TEXT*2 (1985): 121–37; Scott McMillan, *The Elizabethan Theatre and 'The Book of Sir Thomas More'* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Roslyn Lander Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, 1594–1613* (Little Rock: Arkansas University Press, 1991); William Ingram, *The Business of Playing: The Beginnings of Adult Professional Theatre in Elizabethan London* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Frances Teague, *Shakespeare's Speaking Properties* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1991).
  - 2 See Linda McJannet, *The Voice of Elizabethan Stage Directions: The Evolution of a Theatrical Code* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 117–24.
  - 3 *The Voice of Elizabethan Stage Directions*, 129–30.

Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (eds). *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

As its title page suggests, this collection of articles introduced and edited by Susan Frye and Karen Robertson focuses on ways in which women in early modern England combined together in order to validate, strengthen, or otherwise better their circumstances in life, whether those circumstances involved their kinship relations, their working lives, their social and civic engagement, or their material and intellectual well-being. So doing, the editors suggest in their Preface, the authors of these articles have given us 'an overview of women's activities that challenges prevalent conceptions of women's limi-

tations within patriarchal society by confronting the differences that bind and divide women' (Preface, viii). In the process, they have redefined and expanded our perceptions of the kinds of alliances women formed in the period and the ways in which these alliances were constructed.

At the same time, as Jean Howard says in her Afterword, they also enlarged the definitions of historical evidence by helping us to understand more fully that 'fantasies, narratives, discourses, and genres' all constitute important 'historical phenomena' (311). Thus Ann Rosalind Jones's examination of Isabella Whitney's 'A Modest meane for Maids' and the anonymous 'Letter sent by the Maydens of London' makes it clear that the writers intended their complaints about wrongs done them as well as their understanding of their own contributions to family and society to reach wider audiences and to represent themselves in more extensive and powerful alliances than their dependent status in individual households would imply. In her fascinating essay, 'Women, Work, and Plays in an English Medieval Town', Mary Wack demonstrates the extent to which women in sixteenth-century Chester contributed not only to Chester's community life in general, but also more particularly to the production of its plays. Women worked as blacksmiths, cooks, tapsters, and brewers and in the process acquired membership in their respective guilds; they produced and acted in the town's Assumption play and were paid to assist in the production of other plays. Although these activities brought them closer to men's engagement in Chester's civic affairs, Wack also shows us how two sixteenth-century interpolated scenes in the Chester plays of Noah and the Harrowing of Hell, which earlier critics believed were no more than clumsy comic intrusions, were instead caused by or at least reflected new civic laws designed to restrict women's work in the trades of alewives and tapsters that were formerly theirs by tradition. The interpolation which portrays Mulier in Hell in the Harrowing play is especially disturbing, implying as it does that women but not men who worked as tapsters (and as brewers, if they doctored their product) were damned, condemned to everlasting torment, wives of demons and daughters of Satan. That the authors of these interpolations were anonymous, like the authors of the plays themselves, links this essay to Valerie Wayne's intelligent piece on 'The Dearth of the Author: Anonymity's Allies and *Swetnam the Woman-hater*', although the play she treats contests misogyny rather than validates it. Wayne suggests that anonymous texts in the debate about women, a debate in which the two Chester interpolations also participate, 'cannot be grounded in the essentialized gender of an author'; they are rather 'products of the diffusion of arguments and texts in a popular

discourse that extended throughout Europe for more than three centuries' (223–4). And Wayne sensibly reminds us that plays like *Swetnam the Woman-hater's* 'performative mode [despite questions about its authorship and one of its characters, that "Masculine Feminine," Lorenzo] was a frequent and effective strategy for responding to misogyny in early modern texts' (229, 226).

The editors define alliances not only as 'marriage and kinship, but also defensive and offensive unions, intellectual, educational, and religious connections, friendship, and same-sex love' (4–5). Yet it is the common early modern meaning of alliance as a 'union by marriage', its cognate, 'affine', that is, 'affinity', as a relationship dependent upon a union by marriage (*OED*), and the connections resulting from both that are at the heart of most of the real life alliances these essays consider. When Whitney writes for publication, for instance, she addresses her sisters and brother. When Lady Elizabeth Raleigh seeks to secure a property about to be lost to her on account of her husband's treason conviction, she reaches out for support to a wide circle of kinship relations (Karen Robertson, 'Tracing Women's Connections from a Letter by Elizabeth Raleigh'). See, too, the ways in which needlework portrays and reinforces kinship bonds in Susan Frye's comprehensive and finely detailed essay, 'Sewing Connections: Elizabeth Tudor, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth Talbot, and Seventeenth-Century Anonymous Needleworkers'). Elizabeth Brown in 'Companion Me with My Mistress', argues that Queen Elizabeth's reliance upon a female privy cabinet based on a complex network of kinship bonds was one reason for her success as a queen, just as Cleopatra's neglect of similar alliances contributed to her failure and death (at least insofar as Shakespeare portrayed her. The facts of Cleopatra's actual life, I think, point to different conclusions.)

This anthology, of course, also considers and documents other important kinds of alliance, some hinted at in court records, others suggested in literary works, one organized into a formal community. Hardest to document, perhaps, are alliances among the female vagrants Jodi Mikalachki surveys in 'Women's Networks and the Female Vagrant' because knowledge of them depends upon passing references in often flawed court records and the romantic vagaries of popular fiction. Such alliances, however, must have resulted from the union of desperate, solitary, and impoverished women expelled from family and parish alike. Another set of well-documented, real life alliances that this anthology, surprisingly, does not consider are those formed by women thought to be witches, whose supposed crimes were punished with greater rigor than were the crimes of vagrant women and whose persons were hunted down and

abused with greater hostility. Women's 'gossip' alliances are easier to find in literary sources and harder to document in the historical record. One suspects that these alliances were often more powerful in their effects than other social relationships among women, if only because gossips are excoriated so extensively in male-authored literature, for instance, in the Noah interpolation in the Chester play, where Noah's wife prefers them to him, or in Thomas Parrot's 'The Gossips Greeting', which reveals, as Margo Hendricks demonstrates, how the 'discursive act engenders a range of possibilities for women to function as social agents' ('Alliance and Exile: Aphra Behn's Racial Identity', 262). Part of gossips' power may also derive from their old associations with childbirth and baptism and thus with tangential participation in what Karen Robertson suggests is the 'most readily available source of power for the majority of women': 'their capacity to form the next generation of kinship through marriage and reproduction' (152). Inverse power relationships between gossips and their mistress can develop when a mistress is believed to have committed a criminal act, in this instance, the murder of her bastard child (Brown 'A P[ar]cell of Murdereing Bitches': Female Relationships in an Eighteenth-Century Slaveholding Household'). When norms of marriage and reproduction are violated, Kathleen Brown shows, differences between race and class moderate and an enslaved woman of African descent, an Indian, and a hired white spinning-woman on a Virginia plantation in August 1714 are able to join in a gossip alliance which is instrumental in bringing their mistress to trial and subverting the privileged position of white womanhood that Barbara Bowen sees emerging in eighteenth-century Europe and America ('Aemilia Lanyer and the Invention of White Womanhood'). Kathleen Brown shows us how gossip among the three women and its dissemination into the larger plantation society become means by which enslaved and non-elite white women gain potentially subversive power and the behaviour of one elite white woman is regulated.

The trial itself, however, was conducted by male justices, among whose associates, Kathleen Brown also suggests, was the unacknowledged father of the murdered child. In fact, the presence of male authorities can be found at the margins of many, if not most, of these alliances: Chester's mayor, male guild members, and their apparent surrogates, Noah, God, and Satan in the plays' interpolations; the jailed and ineffective Sir Walter Raleigh, the carefully powerful Robert Cecil, and behind them both, the misogynist James I; Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar; a miscellany of male justices and anonymous court recorders as well as the male poets and playwrights through whom we come to know many of the women described in these essays. In Helen

Ostovich's brilliantly layered analysis of *The Magnetic Lady*, however, we find Jonson staking out a position at the centre of patriarchal pretension, where women who slip from under male controls are shown to be stupidly transgressive, lascivious, duplicitous, 'leagued in a devilish compact', and inclined to infanticide ('The Appropriation of Pleasure in *The Magnetic Lady*', 106). But see also Simon Morgan-Russell's "'No Good Thing Ever Comes Out of It": Male Expectation and Female Alliance in Dekker and Webster's *Westward Ho*', where an alliance of 'citizen Wives' successfully establishes a powerful alternative to male homosociality, 83).

Only occasionally, when women write for and about women, do they seem able to elide male claims of agency and dominion. Two late seventeenth-century women, for instance, found in the learning and rhetorical powers of Elizabeth I a viable model for women to emulate (Lisa Gim, "'Faire *Eliza's* Chaine": Two Female Writers' Literary Links to Queen Elizabeth'.) Harriette Andreadis, in 'The Erotics of Female Friendship in Early Modern England', works out with exquisite precision ways in which mostly high-born women in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries allowed themselves to express female same-sex intimacy in the 'sexually evasive yet erotically charged language of female friendship' (241). See too, perhaps, Jessica Tvordi, 'Female Alliance and the Construction of Homoeroticism in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*'. In life, if not in literature, however, even the remarkably successful and ferociously independent society of women founded by Mary Ward, though it was able to stave off episcopal authority and the constraints of women's religious communities for a time, was finally all but destroyed by papal power (Lowell Gallagher, 'Mary Ward's "Jesuitresses" and the Construction of a Typological Community'). Nonetheless, as this anthology demonstrates so well, alliances in the early modern period formed by women, reinforced by the power of their own learning and intelligence, were able to accrue to themselves increased social and civic responsibility along with heightened realization of their own interior identities.

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Margreta De Gratia and Stanley Wells (eds). *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Pp xx, 328.

Shakespeare need never feel lonely, if we are to judge from the books that have recently proclaimed themselves his companions. Hot on the heels of David