

**Kate Aughterson and Ailsa Grant Ferguson. 2020.  
*Shakespeare and Gender: Sex and Sexuality in  
Shakespeare's Drama.*  
London: The Arden Shakespeare**

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Feminist Shakespeare criticism, as is widely known, emerged as a field of study during the development of second-wave feminism. In fact, the publication of Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975) constitutes the first full-length feminist analysis of the portrayal of women in Shakespearean drama. The last few years have seen a gradual interest in scholarly criticism in regard to Shakespeare and feminism. In 2016 Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare published *Shakespeare in Our Time: A Shakespeare Association of America Collection* (edited by Dymphna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett), to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's death. Phyllis Rackin (former SAA President 1993–1994) inaugurates the collection with an essay entitled, quite pertinently, "Why Feminism Still Matters." It is significant that feminism is the first topic discussed in a volume which analyses the current state of affairs and future developments in twenty key areas of research in Shakespeare criticism.

Indeed, nowadays, in the age of the #MeToo movement, the Black Lives Matter movement, or the LGBTQ+ movement, conversations and debates on questions relating to gender and sexuality, particularly when examined through the lens of current fourth-wave or intersectional feminism, seem more relevant and necessary than ever. In *Shakespeare and Gender: Sex and Sexuality in Shakespeare's Drama*, Kate Aughterson and Ailsa Grant Ferguson (University of Brighton) provide an insightful, thought-provoking and enriching discussion on sex and sexuality in a variety of Shakespearean plays, thus offering a monograph that constitutes a valuable contribution to the field of feminist Shakespeare criticism. In the introduction to their work, the authors acknowledge and attest to the growing engagement with analyses of Shakespearean material from the perspective of intersectional feminism, as evidenced by the following recent

publications: the second edition of *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare* (edited by Dymphna Callaghan 2016), Valerie Traub's *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality and Race* (2016), Ania Loomba and Melissa Sánchez's *Rethinking Feminism in Early Modern Studies: Gender, Race and Sexuality* (2016), and Marianne Novy's *Shakespeare and Feminist Theory* (2017).

Bearing in mind representation and inclusion, Aughterson and Grant Ferguson address early modern and twenty-first century debates on gender and sexuality. *Shakespeare and Gender: Sex and Sexuality in Shakespeare's Drama* offers a detailed critical account of how gender and sexual identity are represented and constructed in Shakespearean drama. The methodological approach and format chosen are suitable. Each chapter provides a broad examination of a given topic relating to gender and/or sexuality, but the focus lies on one or several Shakespearean plays, named "Key Text(s)" by the book's authors. In other words, Aughterson and Grant Ferguson have opted for a case study format. Close reading is employed, as themes are analyzed according to their depiction by different female and male characters, selected from the varied corpus of Shakespearean history plays, tragedies, and comedies. Both early modern and current contexts are taken into consideration, paying special attention to recent performances of Shakespearean drama in theatre, film and television. Readers will strongly benefit from the inclusion in each chapter of textual extracts that the authors label as "Resources." These resources constitute examples of different types of early modern texts (literary, medical, political, religious, etc.) that help to contextualize the themes discussed in each chapter within the context of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. In addition, the authors engage with past and present theoretical and critical approaches to gender and sexuality, mostly borrowed from the fields of feminism, queer studies, and performance studies. Hence, textual analysis, historical contextualization and theory perfectly intersect, resulting in an engaging and highly informative read.

The monograph is divided into nine chapters. Chapter 1, "The Woman's Voice," centers on *Much Ado About Nothing*. As a female characterized by her wit and public eloquence, Beatrice disrupts patriarchal ideology. The authors contrast the image of the witty, outspoken woman that Shakespeare presents as desirable, with the restrictive image of the silent female archetype defended by early

modern male poets. The chapter ends with an analysis of Paulina from *The Winter's Tale*, a character who, like Beatrice, publicly disrupts male hierarchy, but is also eventually silenced by men. Chapter 2, "The Male Body, Kingship and the Body Politic," explores the body politic model, particularly in relation to *Richard II*. This play depicts a king traditionally described as effeminate, who disrupts the masculinity of kingship and the monarch's relationship with a feminized England. The chapter also examines recent all-female productions of Shakespearean history plays that challenge the masculinity of the kingly body politic. Chapter 2 ends with an interview with director and actress Adjoa Andoh, whose recent—and first—all-women-of-color production of *Richard II* on a British stage (Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, 2019), further challenged the body politic analogy within the context of white patriarchal history. Chapter 3, "Testing the Marriage Plot: Form, Violence and Gender," examines Shakespeare's use of the marriage plot in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*. It is argued that, despite challenging dramatic and social conventions, all three plays ultimately celebrate heterosexual marriage. Chapter 4, "Cross-Dressing and Gender Transgression(s)," focuses on *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, two plays that employ female-to-male cross-dressing as a plot device. The authors discuss Shakespeare's exploration of erotic fluidity and non-binary identities, and how the playwright problematizes the heteropatriarchal plot that ends with heteronormative marriage. The chapter includes an interview with actress Lucy Phelps, who reflects on her playing Rosalind in *As You Like It* and Isabella in *Measure for Measure* for the RSC (2019–2020).

Chapter 5, "Gendering Madness," centers on *Hamlet* and its gendered portrayal of madness. The authors defend that, whereas Hamlet's feigned or actual madness reflects contemporary ideas on the rational, intellectual male afflicted by melancholy, Ophelia's mental illness – similarly to the Jailer's Daughter's madness in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* – is presented as visceral, based on early modern ideas of female madness and its supposed relation to the reproductive organs. Chapter 6, "Paternity and Patriarchy," mostly focuses on *King Lear* and the carnivalesque reversal of both the parent-child relationship and gendered hierarchy that brings about the collapse of domestic and public order. *King Lear* and *The Tempest*, two plays in which mothers are absent, are shown to expose the tyranny and

fragility of paternal rule. Chapter 7, "Sexual Excess: Space, Sex and Gender," analyzes *The Comedy of Errors*, *Measure for Measure*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Pericles*, reflecting on how space can be gendered. It discusses how these Shakespearean plays employ space as setting and metaphor to problematize assumptions about gender and sexuality. Chapter 8, "Anxious Masculinity," explores different depictions of male anxiety in *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*, demonstrating how Shakespeare portrayed and challenged contemporary notions of masculinity based on physiological beliefs about male and female bodies (humoral identity). Chapter 9, "Maternal Bodies: Female Power," discusses the performative connotations of the female maternal body through the representation of maternity in the *Henry VI* plays, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *The Winter's Tale*. These plays feature maternal characters whose bodies symbolize female power, female agency, and sacredness, respectively.

One of the strongest points worth highlighting from the book is the format designed by Aughterson and Grant Ferguson to close each chapter, which will prove particularly useful for students and teachers of Shakespearean theatre alike. Chapters end with a summary that takes the form of bullet points, in which the main conclusions derived from the analysis are enumerated. Conclusions are followed by two final sections: "Further Work," and "Further Reading." In the former the authors ask several questions, so as to invite readers to further explore a given theme in Shakespearean plays, which often differ from the texts discussed in the chapter. The section entitled "Further Reading" not only provides a list of bibliographical references, as is common in scholarly criticism, but also adds a brief—though pertinent—description of what is to be expected from a reading of the works selected for further research and study.

In summary, reading *Shakespeare and Gender: Sex and Sexuality in Shakespeare's Drama* constitutes a rewarding experience. Aughterson and Grant Ferguson write in a style that is both clear and didactic, which significantly contributes to engage readers from the very first page. Consequently, one ought to highly recommend this work of well-informed scholarly research. The target audience—educators, students, researchers, and theatre practitioners—, will discover a useful resource that invites readers to re-evaluate and re-examine Shakespearean texts and current performances on the basis of the

challenges posed to traditional representations and stereotypes of gender and sexual identity.

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