# Jennifer Drouin, ed. 2020. *Shakespeare / Sex: Contemporary Readings in Gender and Sexuality.* London: Bloomsbury

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Jennifer Drouin begins her introduction boldly with the statement "Shakespeare is sexy" (1), in order to contrast critical, editorial and performative awareness of this sexiness with the experience of many a student who has studied Shakespeare without being allowed to enjoy such sexiness. Drouin also announces that the book itself "aims to be sexy" (2), so does it live up to its own promises? Is this a sexy book about a sexy Shakespeare? Or does the slash in the title indicate a continuing separation between Shakespeare and sex rather than the possibility of intersection?

After reading the twelve contributions, I would say neither one nor the other. There is certainly plenty of sex in the volume, though in keeping with new directions in critical work on gender and sexuality, it is more often enforced than desired, connected with contagion and death as much as with fulfilment and life and more often queer and non-procreative than heteronormative and future oriented. The sex is often non-reciprocal, as in Goran Stanivukovic's discussion of masturbation in Sonnet 4 (ch. 8) or in Drouin's focus on ocular excess in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (ch. 10) which enables male heteronormative glances while disavowing those that are queer, female or self-directed. Melissa E. Sanchez's chapter on asexuality and Protestantism (ch. 5) even advocates a turning away from "compulsive sexuality" and concludes that "in the case of *Measure for Measure*, to think about sex and Shakespeare may also require thinking about the queer significance of the *absence* of sex" (117) through a character such as Isabella. *Measure for Measure* is also the focus of Alison P. Hopgood's chapter (ch. 4) which mobilizes the non-normative force of crip sexualities to discuss risky sex in an atmosphere of sexual contagion which, as with the AIDS crisis or the 2020 pandemic, can lead to "kinship in contagion" (84). Her recasting of Lucio as a contemporary sex facilitator points to the paradoxes of his mediation of the encounter between Isabella and Angelo in the play. Both these chapters occur in a section on intersectional approaches which is the

largest section of this volume. Other chapters here are by Sharon O'Dair (ch. 3), who is characteristically on the button in her assessment that territorial squabbles between historicism and presentism fade into insignificance in the face of the magnitude of the ecological crisis. Her conclusion that Shakespeareans need to get down and dirty with the science of climate change is one way out of this impasse, but her main conclusion is that there needs to be a positive focus on non-reproductive sex so that it is not only Macbeth who has no children. This has the double advantage of not only stopping reproductive futurity in its tracks, but also representing the type of difficult thinking about sex that the volume only occasionally achieves. Non-normative reproduction in the form of parthenogenesis appears in Urvashi Chakravaty's chapter on *Richard III* (ch. 7) where Richard's fantasy of the rebirth of Elizabeth's dead children in "a cyclical repetition which will reanimate the past to secure the future" (153) links queer sex and the death drive in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to deny the "fair" reproductive future outlined in Richmond's final speech. Parthenogenesis also inflects an innovative trans reading of Sonnet 20 by Colby Gordon (ch. 12) where the "prick" of the final line is widened beyond the heterosexual and the homosexual to suggest the needle prick of craft and collaborative artistic creation and where binaries between the natural and the artificial are deconstructed in a vision of all bodies as technologically mediated. It is perhaps Kate Chedgzoy's chapter on Ovid's *Metamorphosis* as a text for children (ch. 6) that most fulfils the intersectional remit of the book, pointing to the ways in which it acted as a racialized, heteronormative script for learnt behavior, but also how it enabled children to shape themselves as sexual subjects.

Yet although each of these chapters is well-researched, cogently argued and indicative of new directions in the field, I wonder whether the necessary corrective to notions of sex and particularly queer sex as inherently transgressive has given way to a view of sex in Shakespeare as a place of suspicion and negation of pleasure. This seems particularly evident in the section of the book on the perils of heterosexuality. Kay Stanton's chapter (ch. 1) on rape culture, toxic masculinity and *Lucrece* rightly points out the ways in which rape culture persists 400 years afterwards and the ways in which teaching plays that focus on rape has been problematized in a context where teachers and students have themselves been rape victims. Jessica C.

Murphy's chapter (ch. 2) on the pathologizing of virginity and inadequate masculinities in references to greensickness in Shakespeare plays is similarly important but her conclusion that "greensickness might make us laugh, but it is no joke" (22), while unobjectionable, is also indicative of the volume's tendency towards suspicion of sex and heterosexual sex in particular. In a later chapter (ch. 11), Kathleen E. McCluskie does acknowledge that Shakespearean comedies offer some degree of pleasure in that despite the compulsion to perform one's gender correctly, the plays consistently produce figures who do not fit gender and sexual norms and her focus on Bottom's trans-lation and trans-formation reinforces this view. Similarly, Huw Griffith's "When Coriolanus was Hot" (ch. 9) in the Queer Shakespeares section does live up to the promise of its title in an analysis of Restoration adaptations by Tate and Dennis and stage and cinematic performances by Tom Hiddleston (2014) and Ralph Fiennes (2011). Griffith's astute analysis of the editorial closeting of the homoeroticism between Aufidius and Coriolanus which in turn prompts queer attempts to out them, exhibits what he refers to as "a variegated history of homoeroticism that dances, or wrestles, with homophobia" (208). Paradigmatically, the chapter acknowledges the realities of sexual repression, but also asserts the multiple pleasures to be found in critical and performative approaches to Shakespeare. Indeed, a greater focus on the performance of Shakespeare might have brought out such pleasures more as opposed to the rather bleak view of sex in the rest of the mainly text-based contributions. The contributors are also exclusively anglophone, with contributions from the US, the UK and Canada which, for someone reading outside these locations, at times makes them seem rather insular. Revealingly, Drouin comes to the end of her introduction with the somewhat lackluster "Shakespeare is indeed quite sexy after all" (8) which I think might not convince that bored and increasingly desperate student that Shakespeare is indeed sexy.

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