In the Field of Dreams: Transvestism in Twelfth Night and The Crying Game

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In the Field of Dreams: 
Transvestism in Twelfth Night 
and The Crying Game

As a film soon known by the public to have a secret, Neil Jordan's The Crying Game became one of the major movie hits of 1993. Fans often responded with the enthusiasm of religious converts, while less enthusiastic viewers still played along with the film's publicists in advertising a sensational secret they refused to give away. From the beginning, however, questions were raised about the film's participation in the mass-cultural reconstruction and policing of (primarily male) homosexuality as an open secret. Certainly, the formation of the Clinton administration's "don't ask, don't tell" policy regarding gays in the military coincided eerily with the arrival of The Crying Game and its success in making the moviegoing public into sharers of its related secret. Whether the film was to be read as progressive in mainstreaming gay male sexuality and cross-dressing or as reactionary in its alignment with the Clinton policy thus became debatable.

This informal debate largely concerned the film's transvestism and, by implication, the social compact(s) regarding male homoerotic desire and practice brokered by the film.1 The terms "progressive" and "reactionary" are too crudely categorical to permit analysis of The Crying Game, while the either-or choice presented by the terms will seem forced as soon as any sustained reading of the film is attempted. Yet the debatability of The Crying Game's political representations remains an uncomfortable fact. It is partly in response to this discomfort, but also to a larger discomfort with the ready acceptance of The Crying Game in the United States, that I shall connect the film as a gender-bending text to Shakespeare's Twelfth Night.

All historical and generic differences notwithstanding, I believe that Twelfth Night can supply a point of reference for further assessment of The Crying Game's transvestite politics.2 This conjunction does not necessarily entail mobilization of the play as a canonical blockbuster against the contemporary pop-cultural artifact.3 If Twelfth Night enables us to take a bearing on The Crying Game, the film simultaneously enables us to take a reverse bearing on Twelfth Night.4 More than just mapping and broad comparison are entailed, however, in this conjunction. Linking these texts virtually enforces consideration of transvestism in relation to
the always power-infused heterosexual marriage plot as a normative and/or hegemonic ordering device.

However problematically or resistantly, that organizing plot, with its reproductive telos, is inscribed from beginning to end of the Shakespeare canon. While the historical trajectories and actualities represented by the Shakespearean marriage plot(s) have long been debated, recent historicization has often been connected, explicitly or otherwise, to a critique of the marriage plot’s hegemonic character. This critique has generally been pursued as a progressive or emancipatory one—as antinormative and/or counterhegemonic—and many problematizing or resistant elements in Twelfth Night, including the play’s transvestism, have been appropriated for the critique. Connecting The Crying Game to Twelfth Night along this progressive axis hardly represents a challenge; the connection practically makes itself. The festive/utopian vistas of both these texts imply the undoing of the enforced marriage plot, whether through comic subversion in Twelfth Night or through its parodically marked displacement in The Crying Game. Yet the suspension of this plot as the dominant one for organizing and policing the sex-gender field seems less unequivocally emancipatory in The Crying Game than progressivist assumptions might lead us to expect.

Although both Twelfth Night and The Crying Game are situated in relatively open cultural and political fields, not closed ones in which only positional shifts and power displacements can occur, neither text can access a fully utopian multiplicity of gender and desire. On the contrary, both texts, The Crying Game hardly less than Twelfth Night, must confront the limits of their own transformational capacity and even of their impulse to access a utopian multiplicity. A comparative rather than a progressivist perspective brings this limitation into view. Moreover, while the (reproductive) marriage plot must still be characterized as hegemonic and even as oppressive from this comparative standpoint, its historical inflections and allowances as well as its proscriptions come into the picture. Finally, from a comparative standpoint, the frequently assumed functioning of the marriage plot as the linchpin of all oppressive sex-gender construction comes to seem a little less certain. The suspension of that plot in The Crying Game results in no polymorphous destructuring of the sex-gender field. If anything, its suspension allows that field to be restructured in male-universal terms anticipated in Twelfth Night. The figure of the male transvestite is crucial, as I will argue, to this restructuring.

To begin in summary fashion, then, the exigencies of the heterosexual marriage plot as a “timeless,” normalizing cultural plot are neatly encapsulated by Jacqueline Rose with reference to Freud’s psychoanalytic project, taken as one broadly upholding the cultural norm: “Order for psychoanalysis is also sexual order, the division of human subjects into male and female and the directing of desire on to its appropriate objects, but . . . this is effected only partially, and at a cost.” Practically any reader of Shakespeare will recognize the pertinence of this
description to the comedies. Yet within this generally conservative, putatively anthropological frame, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* reveals not only the contingency of marriage but the historical play of overdetermined forces involved in its reconstruction during the Renaissance. Well-recognized elements in this reconstruction include the development of a (companionate) ideal of married love to displace the adulterous courtly love/brutalized marriage paradigm of the Middle Ages;\(^7\) the emergence of a humanist feminism promoting increased human dignity and equality for women;\(^8\) the Protestant opposition of married life and procreation to monastic ideals of chastity and seclusion; infiltration of the privileged terrain of the “old” extended aristocratic/dynastic family by the “new” bourgeois nuclear family; and sweeping recodification of social subjects through the agency of Renaissance conduct books and liberal education programs.\(^9\) The importance of Shakespeare's “good-will” role in embedding the paradigm of married love in the English-speaking world can hardly be exaggerated, even if Shakespeare's resistances to the paradigm have tended to escape notice in the past.\(^10\) It is within this historically unsettled and reformative moment that the Shakespearean transvestite figure materializes.

Viola/Cesario is assigned a crucial if paradoxical function in *Twelfth Night*. As a highly improper, gender-ambiguous object of desire, s/he is scripted to direct desire “to its appropriate objects.” Yet the scenario under which s/he is imagined to do so is not simple, nor can s/he function in this scenario without producing a dangerous excess. For the purposes of the conjugal plot, desire appears to be either lacking or highly resistant to direction—hence to coercive efforts to channel it, to transfer it in a controlled manner from one object to another, or to fix it definitively on the sanctioned object. Some of these difficulties still arise at what might be called the anthropological level, where the courtship-and-marriage plot presupposes both a taboo on incest and an exogamous pattern of sexual pairing and family formation. A concurrent prohibition on autoerotism and same-sex connections sustains this norm.\(^11\) Thus the “knot” (2.2.40)\(^12\) of *Twelfth Night*, which Viola cannot untie by herself, is indistinguishable as voiced onstage from the inhibiting “not” of interlocking taboos determining the “appropriate” object. Yet these complications are compounded by historical ones of gendered power and sexual identity programmatically reviewed in Shakespeare's sonnets, where a severe disalignment of cultural discourses and imperatives is apparent.

Familiarly, the sonnets bring into question any “natural” trajectory, discrete subject, or discrete object of desire. Not only is “the master-mistress of my passion” (sonnet 20)\(^13\) gender-indeterminable, but the one who speaks under the possessive pronoun “my” remains unstipulated. The well-worn persuasion to marry and propagate, addressed under the communal pronoun “we” by the sonnet speaker to the young man in the sonnets, invokes divine, natural, and economic imperatives, yet is stubbornly resisted by an autoerotism (“sin of self-
love,” sonnet 62) through which a different and more sophisticated economy manifests itself:

But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed’st thy light’s flame with self-substantial fuel,
Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.

(sonnet 1)

Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend
Upon thyself thy beauty’s legacy?

(sonnet 4)

In the figure of the thriftless young man perpetually regenerated from his own immolation, self-consumption and self-production are dialectically connected, not antithetical. Abundance, understood in cumulative, procreative, agricultural terms, does indeed lie. The impossible economy of self-sustaining self-production figured by the young man is also a poetic economy: the young man’s being unlawfully “contracted” to his own bright eyes (the origin and terminus of his specular gaze) does not constitute a diminution but a powerful, idealizing synecdoche of the self. An invidious desire to inhabit this forbidden economy motivates many of the sonnet speaker’s admonitions and reproaches, thus undermining their persuasiveness. Moreover, the “lie” of abundance, to which the marriage plot will remain connected, entails the denial of a particular loss, self-loss:

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty’s rose might never die,
But as the riper should by time decease,
His tender heir might bear his memory.

(sonnet 1)

The sonnet’s effort to persuade that no loss in nature is absolute or final might be clinched by a perfect rhyme between “increase” and “decrease,” yet this closure falls short by one letter: the word “decease” actually appears in the stressed rhyming position. The compensatory thought of being immortalized through progeny is somewhat checked by the oxymoron “tender heir”: who ever heard of one?14

Heavily invested self-love as radical endogamy becomes not merely a form but a potent focus of resistance to the heterosexual marriage plot in the sonnets and, by extension, in the plays. With reference to this focus of resistance, the designated marriageable object may seem like the one furthest removed from the self, hence least “familiar,” least “naturally” desirable. This nonimaginary other person, definitively marked by sex-gender difference and nonconsanguinity and inhabiting a political-biological sphere that is potentially one of “waste,” sacrificial immolation, and loss, will ordinarily lie beyond the range of “human” recognition.
and pursuit. It is within this prescriptive context that the problems of the marriage comedies (and the marriages of the problem comedies) arise; their specific articulation and solution in *Twelfth Night* requires not only the deployment of the transvestite but something like a general mobilization and subsequent fixation of desire effected through that figure.

Although Orsino is generally (and correctly) read as a conventional male Petrarchan suitor, addressing himself to an idolized woman who no less conventionally rebuffs him, the embedding of this Petrarchan figure in a marriage comedy represents a political task often pejoratively overstated and politically understated in critiques of male narcissism. Consider Orsino’s initial yet already defensively *retrospective* characterization of Olivia:

O, when mine eye did see Olivia first,
Methought she purg’d the air of pestilence;
That instant was I turn’d into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E’er since pursue me.

(1.1.16–20)

The instantaneous reflux of Orsino’s desire from the “proper” object to the self at the first encounter is a form of repetition so well-worn that the hart/heart pun and the Actaeon allusion in this exchange are virtual automatisms of Petrarchan erotic discourse. Here “love at first sight” apparently means a *return* of love to the self at the first sight of the potentially diminishing, wounding, or annihilating other person. Courtship will, in effect, be scripted for failure rather than success from that moment. At the same time, desire seems so incapable of being shifted from the self to another that a formulaic, ennui-laden jest suffices to register one more repetition of the same rebound.

On her side, Olivia is no less famously self-absorbed than Orsino. At least, as an anomalously independent woman whose domestic sovereignty and resistance to her suitor’s messages no doubt recall Queen Elizabeth’s, she is so described by Valentine, Orsino’s messenger: “like a cloistress she will veiled walk” (1.1.28). She is similarly perceived by her own domestic “subjects,” and pressured from inside her household as well as from the outside to open up. Her forms of enclosure, not Orsino’s, are the ones repeatedly diagnosed—by male speakers—as false, unhealthy, or inappropriately defensive (cloistered). It is she, not Orsino, the authorized performer of courtship, who is identified as the primary source of resistance to the sanctified conjugal script. Given these asymmetrical pressures on her as the proper object of courtship, extended mourning for her brother may well be a convenient way to keep decorous control over her unruly household and keep unwanted suitors at bay. Nonetheless, Valentine’s account of her refusal resonates with something more than calculation on her part; like Orsino’s, her cloistering may partake of a politically illicit closeting:
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.

(1.1.26–32)

Admittedly, Olivia’s immobilized and beleaguered state as heiress may subject her to a gendered form of depression, an “irrational” subjective condition for which her brother’s death might serve as an objective correlative. Yet the phrase “a brother’s dead love,” which seems like a deviation by way of transferred epithet from the syntactically more normal “dead brother’s love,” may link her ostensible excess of mourning to a tabooed form of desire. Such is the love of a brother that is “dead” to her even while he lives, but that, paradoxically kept “fresh and lasting” on account of its prohibition, survives his death. Its nonexpenditure permits her to remain self-conservingly fixated on him as her masculine alter ego. When John Hollander, in a famous essay on *Twelfth Night*, sees Olivia as a “private glutton” gorging herself on the fragrant memory of her brother, he diagnoses her, in effect, as one whose self-production is tantamount to a psychic eating disorder: female identity and pathology thus become virtually indistinguishable.

The absorption of both empowered principals, exemplary bearers and saboteurs of the play’s marriage plot, does, however, create the political impasse that Viola/Cesario will be called upon to break. She will be cast as an effective go-between, substituting for the pandering Feste and for Valentine, whose repeated failure to get the message through allows Orsino to remain so “richly” embowered. Viola/Cesario undoubtedly does get through to Olivia as Valentine cannot, yet s/he does not succeed as a mediator on Orsino’s behalf, nor is the substitution of Viola/Cesario for Valentine simply the substitution of a forceful emissary for a feeble one. As soon as Viola enters Orsino’s service in the guise of the boy Cesario, it becomes evident that something has changed in Orsino’s repetition-governed household:

> VALENTINE: If the Duke continue these favors towards you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanced: he hath known you but three days, and already you are no stranger.

(1.4.1–4)

This precipitate advancement and “family” inclusion of Viola/Cesario attracts Valentine’s notice (he is getting displaced, after all), and when Orsino speaks it is only to affirm Cesario’s unprecedentedly intimate access to his bosom:

> Thou know’st no less but all. I have unclasp’d
To thee the book even of my secret soul.

(1.4.5–6)
This disclosure begins a process of opening up that continues until Viola and Sebastian stand revealed as boy-girl doubles in the dimactic scene of the play.\textsuperscript{17} This is hardly a simple or continuous process of opening up, however, but rather a crossing pattern that destabilizes the assumed identity of the principals and unfixes their desire.

A new urgency infuses Orsino’s speech as he instructs Viola/Cesario in “his” duties as messenger to Olivia:

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
O then unfold the passion of my love, 
Surprise her with the discourse of my dear faith; 
It shall become thee well to act my woes; 
She will attend it better in thy youth, 
Than in a nuncio’s of more grave aspect.
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

This commission to “surprise” Olivia includes an implication of military ambush not inconsistent with Orsino’s earlier fantasies of violent possession—how little Olivia can be surprised in any sense by Orsino’s rote profession of faith will be seen when Cesario delivers it—but what seems new is Orsino’s wish for a stand-in who will act his woes rather than just deliver his message. By scripting Viola/Cesario to act his stereotypical part, he at once pursues and avoids the face-to-face encounter with Olivia and invests “himself” in a more youthful, becoming alter ego. This \textit{outward} splitting and doubling of Orsino, to be distinguished from the inner splitting of the play’s first scene, enables this part-self to be mobilized on a trajectory of erotic conquest without risky exposure. This despatch of a fully empowered plenipotentiary may seem finally to effect the mobilization of Orsino’s desire in the direction of Olivia (even if it is only a desire to conquer her), yet in anticipating Olivia’s favorable reception of the more becoming youth, Orsino can appropriate a more flattering view of himself relayed by her disarmed gaze: “It shall become thee well to act my woes; /She will attend it better in thy youth.”

The quasi-paranoid short circuit of the opening scene, in which Orsino’s desires fix on his always-insufficient self like fell and cruel hounds, becomes a more extended circuit in which self-love is doubly relayed through a worthy stand-in and the imagined favorable gaze of the other.

The already complex functioning of Viola/Cesario as stand-in becomes even more so as her mediating role makes her, in the ironic manner everyone recognizes, the displacing object of Orsino’s passions:

\begin{verbatim}
For they shall yet belie thy happy years, 
That say thou art a man; Diana’s lip 
Is not more smooth and rubious: thy small pipe 
Is as a maiden’s organ, shrill and sound, 
And all is semblative a woman’s part. 
I know thy constellation is right apt
\end{verbatim}

In the Field of Dreams
In terms of the comic narrative, the displacing intrusion of Viola/Cesario has amusingly excessive consequences: before s/he even leaves on her first mission to Olivia, s/he is being offered Orsino’s entire retinue and promised his fortunes in the classic language of a rich man’s infatuation. The affair Orsino refers to is implicitly his courtship of Olivia, yet precisely what the affair comprises seems indefinite when it is designated only as “this.”

Most obviously, it comprises Orsino’s sudden, unwitting homoerotic infatuation with the beautiful girl-like boy. On the face of it, this development threatens the heterosexual marriage plot and diverts Orsino from his proper conjugal object.18 This “unnatural” turn is not necessarily fatal to the marriage plot, however, since the mobilization of Orsino’s desire—and his affective “humanization” in this way—may seem like the first step to be taken, not without risk, in a transfer of desire to its proper object. Same-sex desire, it might seem, can thus be rendered functional as a transitional phase in the otherwise intractable heterosexual marriage plot, while the pretty youth serves as a transitional object. (More than just a vestige of this historic scenario, in which any other functioning of the homoerotic is stringently pathologized or criminalized, remains apparent in Freud’s work.19) Yet an exclusively homosexual construction of Viola/Cesario’s appeal to Orsino on that basis would be historically suspect, as we know from the work of Alan Bray and Jonathan Goldberg, among others.20

For one thing, Orsino’s affair indistinguishably comprises “innocent” heterosexual infatuation with a younger and less powerful woman than Olivia—a boyish one who is also more “like” Orsino. To the “undesiring” Feste’s eye, Viola is not passing as male altogether successfully, yet Orsino seemingly has no wish to recognize that. At the narrative level, it is indeterminable whether Orsino is falling for a girl in the semblance of a boy or for a boy who resembles a girl. At the performative level, he is falling for a boy passing for a girl passing for a boy. In neither case is the object or species of desire gender-determinable. What Orsino’s affair will seemingly include, even if it remains imaginative only, is sexual empowerment with respect to a nonprocreative adolescent “other,” without need for gender stipulation. “Small pipe” covers a multitude of sins.21

As an indeterminate object of desire for Orsino, Viola/Cesario may seem to displace all other objects including his own self, thus bringing on the infatuation we have seen. As a stand-in for Orsino, however, Viola/Cesario also precipitates Orsino’s appealing feminine alter ego (or “woman’s part”) and mobilizes his conquering masculine ego, both without compromising the seclusion in which Orsino
still feels that “I myself am best.” In fact, as a stand-in who doubles and redoubles Orsino, allowing him to be at once divided and whole, abroad and at home, Viola/Cesario contributes to Orsino’s self-sufficiency. Rather than mobilizing Orsino’s desire along any single axis, Viola/Cesario represents the implosion of categories through which all things might become possible for Orsino: age and youth, same-sex and other-sex pursuit, a mobilized and cloistered self, male and female parts, domination and submission, solitary and social being, part and whole, self and other, high and low, suddenly become noncontradictory.

Viola/Cesario functions comparably though not identically for Olivia. Unlike Valentine, s/he gains access to Olivia by refusing to take no for an answer, yet Olivia may too be piqued by the age-gender indeterminacy and nonthreatening appearance of the youth Malvolio describes to her:

OLIVIA: Of what personage and years is he?

MALVOLIO: 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. He is very well-favor’d, and he speaks very shrewishly. One would think his mother’s milk were scarce out of him.

(1.5.156–64)

That the orderly, repressive Malvolio, who wishes to control Olivia, is irritated by this pushy, indecipherable intruder already suggests the possibility of Viola/Cesario’s liberating potential for Olivia. Whatever mothering impulse she possesses may be triggered by Malvolio’s description, but her romantic memory of the lost sibling, for whom this youth might stand in, may be so, too.

During the long, vertiginously parodic exchange that follows “his” admission, Viola/Cesario prosecutes Orsino’s courtship both in conventional Petrarchan terms and, more uncharacteristically, in the same procreative terms as those addressed to the young man in the sonnets:

Lady, you are the cruell’st she alive
If you will lead these graces to the grave
And leave the world no copy.

(1.5.243–45)

This gender-equalizing of persuasion may or may not be explained by the fact that the man’s part is now being played by a woman, but it is a refreshing change in the patriarchal-patrilineal script, and may well be what renders Viola/Cesario, rather than Orsino, appealing to Olivia. Yet even the most conventional, Orsino-like Petrarchanisms get dizzyingly unmoored, ironized, or reanimated throughout the scene because of the indeterminacy of their speaker. Although Viola/Cesario speaks for Orsino and even “acts his woes” in her more impassioned departures from the basic script, s/he is no neutral medium for his discourse: s/he displaces Orsino as much as s/he stands in for him, and becomes
an interactive party to the exchange with Olivia. Correspondingly, Olivia's responses become a mode of exchange and even of interchange rather than repulsion.

At the narrative level, let us recall, a romantic discourse is being improperly addressed by a woman disguised as a young man to another woman. At the performative level it is still improperly being addressed from one boy in boy's costume to another boy cross-dressed as a woman. The proper axis of desire is thus crisscrossed by improper ones throughout the scene, while the appropriate subject and object of desire as well as the gendered "parts" get lost in the interchange. This theatrical dislocation and doubling of the language of masculine courtship brings out multiple new "selves" even under the most orthodox guises, as when Olivia unveils to display a new "picture" of herself. The image presented is that of the woman in male Petrarchan discourse, but now Olivia is making herself available in that guise; however male the stereotypes of Petrarchan courtship may be, their erotic potential is not exclusively or controllably so:

VIOLA: 'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on.

(1.5.241–42)

The familiar Petrarchan irony that the "natural" face revealed by Olivia to Viola/Cesario's admiring gaze is quintessentially conventional loses its edge here since the displacement of the conventional male suitor allows Olivia pleasurably to re-appropriate the image as her own instead of repelling or denying it. At the same time, Viola as woman finds herself in the admiring and desiring position, thus identified not only with Orsino's supposed will but with her own masculine Cesario persona. She thereby gains new access as a woman to "prohibited" desire and can, as a male stand-in, voice it with passion:

VIOLA: If I did love you in my master's flame,
With such a suff'ring, such a deadly life,
In your denial I would find no sense,
I would not understand it.

OLIVIA: Why, what would you?

VIOLA: Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon the soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Hallow your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out 'Olivia!' O, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth,
But you should pity me.
The Viola/Cesario who delivers these lines is not so much acting Orsino's woes as imagining them (incorrectly, as it happens) in his place, stirred by the beauty of Olivia. S/he is imagining them, that is to say, as a woman impersonating a man stirred by the beauty of another woman, and is moved to “act” them even against her own material interests as Orsino's would-be captor. It is likewise to an impassioned woman disguised as a man—or to a youth more “like” herself—that Olivia is responding: the anagrammatic relation between Olivia and Viola comes into play here.

The desire released in this scene is no more definitively homosexual or heterosexual than it is in the Orsino-Viola scene; rather it is desire no longer confined to the single approved channel along which it can supposedly be transmitted from a designated sender to a designated receiver. Its relays are complex, its circulation endless, its field practically boundless. Its tendency to amplify and disperse itself, but also to be generated in the process of amplification and dispersal, is implied in the passionate echoing of “Olivia” in Viola/Cesario's speech.

Even more than s/he does in the scene with Orsino, Viola/Cesario as intermediary here becomes the displacing object of desire. Both Orsino and Olivia want whatever it is that Viola/Cesario represents to them; in each case, what s/he represents is an overdetermined complex of noncontradictory (and non-self-contradictory) possibilities rather than any single or identifiable object. The person to whom Olivia responds is class- and gender-qualified as a self-proclaimed “gentleman” (“I'll be sworn thou art” [1.5.295]), but perhaps for once a gentle man, too, in his juvenile/feminine/ castrato aspect. Beyond the formal qualifications, however, the appeal of Viola/Cesario defies specification by Olivia:

Methinks I feel this youth's perfections
With an invisible and subtle stealth
To creep in at mine eyes. Well, let it be.

In terms of the marriage plot, the emergence of the transvestite as displacing intermediary is no doubt a looming disaster, while in broader terms an entire politics of order predicated upon the enforcement of the marriage plot seems threatened with utopian, festive dissolution. At the same time, the fact that both principals want the only represented boy-girl on stage threatens a replay of the conflict between Titania and Oberon over the Indian boy in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Yet the mobilization of desire effected through the transvestite is the preliminary condition for any reconstruction and new fixation of the marriage plot. The play's solution, which establishes a “new” gender equity by dividing power
and desire between the principals, depends on the production of another copy of Viola/Cesario. Each principal thereby gains some of what he or she wills and still avoids the fully exogamous other, while the social resolution of the androgyne into its male and female “parts” with the arrival of Sebastian promises to disambiguate the play’s leading gendered subjects and objects of desire, and to restore class and gender proprieties, though not without a large residue of bigendered and bisexual subjectivity. This persistence is marked, for example, when Sebastian says to Olivia after the clarification: “You would have been contracted to a maid; / Nor are you therein, by my life, deceiv’d: / You are betrothed to both a maid and man” (5.1.259–61), or when Orsino says to Viola, “Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times / Thou never shouldst love woman like to me” (5.1.265–66). When the twins reencounter each other, they go, with surprising redundancy, through the “long-lost” routine of erotic romance, identifying each other and themselves by family history and common recollection that their father had “a mole upon his brow” (5.1.242). If this routine identifies them as siblings, hence not as possible exogamous marriage partners, it also reunites them as one person of double gender. As such, they figure the play’s privileged “new” structure of identity.

What, then, of The Crying Game? The formal devices of the film, which in some respects closely parallel those of Twelfth Night, include not only cross-dressing but a destabilizing double-talk of gender, voiced with wicked deadpan irony by the transvestite Dil or with reference to him—as when Dil plaintively asks: “What’s a girl to do?” or when the barman in the Metro advises Fergus about what a girl really wants. In keeping with this double-talk, the castratory topos of haircutting is inverted when the cutting of Dil’s womanly hair reduces “her” to the shorn and abject condition of a boy; similarly, in the film’s ironic crossing of gender codes, the IRA gunman Fergus ends up cutting Dil’s hair in the salon while Dil uses Fergus’s gun to blow away the avenging IRA conspirator Jude. All this brilliant gender-destabilizing and -dispersing irony is recapitulated in the cinematic genre-crossings of The Crying Game, as when Dil’s expertise in sexual bondage enables her to immobilize Fergus in the film noir plot. As Dil puts it, “If there’s one thing I know, it’s how to tie someone up in bed.” Finally, the fixated and gender-coded cinematic gaze is dislocated by the presence of the transvestite, initially presented as the conventional type of the female pinup and then revealed as male, though only after a prolonged and explicit tease about the gender and identity of the pinup. Such devices as these make The Crying Game an exemplary film of the present, at once marking and contributing to a multicultural refiguration that, for example, places a young, working-class, black man in the value-defining position occupied by the fair young man in Shakespearean romance, that allows the transvestite character Dil to function as a switchpoint between interacting categories of race and gender, and that enables same-sex relationships between men to be shifted from their still-marginalized and stigmatized position,
however strongly marked, in *Twelfth Night* to the center of attention in *The Crying Game.*

Reading *The Crying Game* in critical conjunction with *Twelfth Night* does, however, prompt some questions about the limits of the film’s problematizing and transforming capacities, or, more broadly, about those of the political present. The progressive project of *The Crying Game* is not merely threatened by an intense displacing animus thematized in the film as jealousy between Dil and Jude, Fergus's former lover and IRA comrade, but by a whipsawing oscillation between misogyny and homophobia that characterizes the dominant political culture of the present. In effect, the film's exemplary negotiation of sexuality, race, and gender risks succumbing to a cultural misogyny and homophobia within which the figure of the male transvestite performs a powerful negative function, anticipated in *Twelfth Night.*

To make my point first in general terms, let me reiterate that one crucial difference between *Twelfth Night* and *The Crying Game* is that in the latter the cultural-dramatic plot of heterosexual marriage and procreation is no longer compulsory, at least in the sense of being economically and biologically almost inescapable and therefore so readily enforceable ideologically. The imperative of married heterosexual bonding, which constituted the Renaissance social norm and reciprocally buttressed the “order” of the Renaissance state, whether monarchical, despotic, or republican, is no longer as binding. At least in the capitalist West, constructions of authority or order can no longer depend on the massive power of the compulsory marriage plot to organize social relations, however coercively that plot may continue to be reinvoked.

Where the marriage plot is made virtually compulsory, a hegemonic motive, properly speaking—as distinct from a merely coercive one—exists to render marriage “attractive” as well as formally consensual. This is especially the case when human dignity and entitlement are explicitly claimed for women, as they are under Renaissance humanist feminism. Where the compulsory marriage plot ceases to be the virtual ground of constructed order and authority, the ameliorating motive is no longer present, and a surprisingly unqualified misogyny can reassert itself, as the default position, so to speak. Unexpected loss or threat as well as gain thus accompanies the historical dismantling of compulsory heterosexuality. Under this scenario of an overarching, antihistorical, essentializing misogyny, strongly anticipated in *Twelfth Night,* the attractive young male transvestite turns out to be what “everyone” really wants, or wants to be identified with, hence his “timeless,” “universal,” and unique appeal. All things to all men and all women, he is posited as the universal object of desire, or, as *The Crying Game* puts it, “anybody’s type.” One highly invidious implication of this scenario is that boys make the best women; another, its virtual corollary, is that same-sex attraction between women is essentially nonexistent, and that there is accordingly no real basis for a lesbian politics. The current availability of this politics as a counter-
hegemonic resource, for women in the first instance, is thus mooted, leaving only devitalized transvestite romance on display as a current option or even as a historical prospect.28

In The Crying Game, unlike Twelfth Night, the transvestite Dil is definitively represented as a beautiful boy passing for a girl. He is exposed bodily, leaving no doubts: this exposure may help to avert the threat of castration as the only possible condition of the universal. In passing for a girl, however, Dil also becomes the means whereby both the unambiguously gay man and the predatory, heterosexual woman (Jude) are displaced in the narrative. Ostensibly a crossover figure who deconstructs gender-determinate desire and identity, or undoes hardened adult dispositions, Dil as transvestite functions to effect a punitive displacement of both categorical sexualities and identities.

This process of displacement includes Dil's detachment of Fergus from Jude, his IRA girlfriend. The separation is strongly anticipated early in the film. Jody, a soldier with the British forces in Ireland, is captured by the IRA and threatened with imminent death unless an IRA captive is released. Fergus is left to guard him, and, somewhat against political as well as naturalistic probability, a process of “humane” male bonding rapidly transpires between them, facilitated by the compassion Fergus shows in removing a stifling hood from Jody's head. Same-sex initiation, racially overdetermined, is intimated when Fergus has to hold Jody's penis in helping him urinate; thus, when Jody tells Fergus to look in his wallet for a picture, one half expects to see a male face. The fact than an attractive woman's face is disclosed doesn't quite cancel the expectation, so when the beloved, who is Dil, turns out to be a boy, it is no great surprise. (The construction of a mass-cultural open secret around the film's disclosure is indicative of its vulnerability to ideological incorporation.) Jude responds to the affectionate (and depoliticizing) male bonding between Fergus and Jody by cruelly hitting the bound and helpless Jody in the face with a pistol, thereby teaching Fergus a lesson in manhood as well.

Later, in London, Dil effects Fergus's separation from Jude without difficulty. This separation does not result, however, in Fergus's categorical conversion from straight to gay or in a developing same-sex relationship between the two characters. The nicely textured scenes of cultural “translation” staged in the Metro bar, in which sex, gender, ethnicity, and identity seem to become transitive, thus turn out to be scenes of failed or limited translation. The separation of Fergus from Jude leads to something more like suspended romance, mediated by the idealized figure of the dead Jody, than to same-sex practice. As Dil insists, his relationship with Jody was and remains prohibitively “different.” The desexualized rather than resexualized relationship between Fergus and Dil does not merely continue after Fergus is jailed for the shooting Dil has actually performed; it arguably takes on its definitive form when the two can speak only through the security glass that
literalizes the safe separation and sexual deferral that constitute the relationship. With the disappearance of Jude, and along with her the spectacle of desire in its predatory yet demanding aspect—which is also to say in its politically troublesome aspect—the film's structure of relations is reduced to a simultaneously male and universal bond, in which it remains literally arrested.

In *The Crying Game*, Jude's desire as “biological” woman is not merely represented as frustrated, treacherous, and predatory, exploiting and exploitable, but seems causally aligned with the represented irrational negativity of IRA-style political activism, from which a divorce is being sought. In her initial seductive guise as a denim-miniskirted slut with teased blonde hair, Jude deceives the audience as well as Jody, since she appears to be only the exploited and enraged female pawn of political men. This impression begins to change when she, in marked contrast to the more humane Fergus, pistol-whips the bound and blindfolded Jody. It changes decisively when she returns, after seeming to have been killed in a British attack, as the one who will never let Fergus off the political hook, and as the relentless driving force in an IRA assassination plot. She returns from the dead, so to speak, as a politicized version of the dark-haired, film noir vamp, in masculinized suits at which she is always tugging uncomfortably. Dil, meanwhile, is playfully, winningly, subtle and glamorous. Dressing as she does, it is Jude rather than the feminine Dil who seems to be enacting an awkward struggle between the semiotics of maleness and femaleness.

Jude (i.e., Judy) betrays the anagrammatically displacing Jody to his death despite his disinclination for her in particular and for women in general (“The funny thing is, she wasn't even my type!”). She proclaims a racist disgust for Jody's body but is still aroused by contact with him; tracks Fergus down in hiding and, grabbing his crotch, commands him to have sex with her immediately (“Fffook me, Ferrrgus”). At least partly in revenge for his refusal, she sets him up for a suicidal assassination attempt. It is no mere plot coincidence that it is the transvestite Dil, in his boy capacity, who pulls the trigger when Jude is unexpectedly shot dead, to everyone's vast relief. As he fires, Dil says: “You used those cute little tits and ass to kill my Jody!”

The lethal nature of male heterosexual contact with “biological” women, as well as women's power of monstrous doubling, is intimated by the political plot, in which a geriatric British judge becomes vulnerable to assassination on account of his regular weekly visits to the same pair of prostitutes. With respect to *Twelfth Night*, then, and even to a feminism no more radical than that propounded in pretechnological Renaissance humanism, *The Crying Game* seems dangerously prone to a politics of backlash. Insofar as the film “alternatively” domesticates gay male sexuality and transvestite camp for a mass audience, it performs this service at a potentially high cost, not just to women but to gay men. The sinister yet stereotypical leatherman in the Metro bar, who has been Dil's most recent lover
and putative pimp, is cast off by Dil and finally beaten up as a nuisance by Fergus, who has earlier been complimented as a “good man” by his rabid IRA superior. One “protector” takes the place of another.

The removal from the scene of Jude as a female figure of threat, intransigent demand, and masculinized violence may entail a certain critique of decayed old-style political militancy, yet that critique seems inseparable from a misogynistic coding of such violence and a corresponding tolerance for the exercise of English power in the face of provocation. Not for nothing have the film’s political representations seemed indistinguishable from English Tory journalism to some viewers. The only human face of English, as distinct from Irish, power in Ireland is Jody’s amiable one. An unwilling conscript, he is never shown in military uniform but first in everyday denims and then later, in idealized recall, in standard white cricketing garb. As a young black man whose avowed connections are working class and West Indian, he is anything but a representative of British establishment values. As he himself claims, he is just doing a working-class job without necessarily identifying himself with the goals of British occupation, yet even he betrays an anti-Irish animus in describing Ireland as the only country on earth where you can be called “nigger” to your face. (Another film, Hanif Kureishi’s My Beautiful Laundrette, makes this seem a rather common English occurrence.) Apparently misplaced by class, race, and sexual orientation in the army, and fatally betrayed by a single heterosexual lapse, Jody nevertheless remains, by virtue of his cricket playing, a powerful figure of the Anglo-colonial cultural imaginary.

While Jody is quick to point out, in the best C. L. R. James tradition, that his cricket playing does not entail identification with British race-class hierarchy or colonial domination, cricket having been appropriated as “a black man’s game” in Antigua, he nevertheless—or above all—knows what is and is not cricket.29 Fergus, a devotee of the ancient Irish game of hurling (a variant of field hockey), apparently has yet to learn this difference, which he will never learn in Ireland, and which has long marked a civil boundary in the Anglo-colonial cultural imaginary. It is on a construction site overlooking a cricket field that Fergus takes his first-ever practice swings in imitation of the players below. The term “hurling” is also, of course, slang for throwing up, which Fergus duly does when he discovers that he has been fellated by a young man.

The repeated, idealized recall of Jody in field-of-dreams cricketing sequences, at a considerable remove from the bruising competitiveness of modern professional cricket, in which players wear Plexiglas face guards and protective body armor, constitutes the deployment of an ideological trope that still seems peculiarly invidious with respect to Ireland. This redeployment is not incompatible with ironic disguise, postmodern camp, or defensive violence when Jody’s gear is taken over and worn by Dil; cricketer’s white flannel, by the same token, seems capable of being variously and even erotically deployed as a gay signifier.
off the field as well as on it. Yet however much cricket may undergo resignification in the postcolonial, postmodern, cinematic text of *The Crying Game*, its idealized character, virtually incarnated in Jody, circumscribes and regulates from afar the representational field of the film. One might make something of that as a manifestation of postcolonial nostalgia for the colonial, still invidiously focussed on the historic Irish holdout; yet in helping to constitute a field of legitimacy from which intransigent demand is violently expelled, the cricketing hero circumscribes the political within an “English” civil imaginary. Jody’s nonethnic accent attests to the absorptiveness of this construction. Insofar as “order” remains “sexual order,” its construction appears to be (at least) no less exclusive in *The Crying Game* than it is in *Twelfth Night*.

Notes

1. To my knowledge, this debate has not yet taken on a formal existence in critical journals. The possibly invidious racial representations of *The Crying Game* have, however, been the subject of at least two substantial critiques. See Frann Michael, “Biology Notwithstanding . . . ,” *Cineaste* 20, no. 1 (1993): 30–35; and bell hooks, “Seduction and Betrayal: *The Crying Game Meets The Bodyguard,*” in *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York, 1994), 53–62.

2. As specifically cinematic representation and critique, *The Crying Game* obviously has claims to which I cannot do justice here, though the same can be said about *Twelfth Night* as dramatic representation and critique. Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), suggests how a critique of the spectatorial gaze might bridge the generic and historical divide between Shakespearean drama and contemporary cinema, allowing both to be brought under a single theoretical perspective. Insofar as this approach is cinematically generated, however, and primarily facilitates an ideology critique, it allows only limited engagement with Shakespearean gender discourse.

3. Some readers may need to be assured that this claim is serious. How, it may be asked, can this comparison not be invidious, given the play’s authorship and its blue-chip canonical status? I can respond only that in the present moment of pop-cultural celebration and high/low reversal, the invidious distinction can easily go the other way. Moreover, any retroactive assignment of canonical, high-cultural status to *Twelfth Night* belies the play’s initial status as a popular work of the Elizabethan theater.

4. At least potentially invidious pop-cultural celebration and high/low reversal are generally apparent in Marjorie Garber’s *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York, 1992). Garber specifically gives *Twelfth Night* short shrift as a transvestite text, her point being that what is crucially at stake in the play is class mobility and resistance rather than sexual mobility (36–38). This point is well taken, especially as regards the cross-gartered if not strictly cross-dressed Malvolio, but “rather than” is the problem: act 2, scene 5, shows how inseparably Malvolio’s aspirations to class mobility are connected to fantasies of sexual domination.

5. Limits are not merely perceived in *Twelfth Night*, according to C. L. Barber, “Testing Courtesy and Humanity in *Twelfth Night*,” in *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy* (Princeton,
N.J., 1959), 240–59, but they are also ideologically instituted far beyond the warrant of the play: “The most fundamental distinction the play brings home to us is the difference between men and women. To say this may seem to labor the obvious; for what love story does not emphasize this difference? . . . just as saturnalian reversal of social roles need not threaten the social structure . . . so a temporary, playful reversal of sexual roles can renew the meaning of the normal relation. . . . it is when the normal is secure that playful aberration is benign” (245).

6. “This process is also described by psychoanalysis as a drama—the Oedipal drama which allocates subjects to their sexual place while also showing that the norm can be violated by the one who most firmly believes he is submitting to its law.” Jacqueline Rose, “Sexuality in the Reading of Shakespeare: Hamlet and Measure for Measure,” in Alternative Shakespeares, ed. John Drakakis (London, 1986), 99. That such violation can occur in service of the norm, and must in fact do so if the norm is to be maintained, is generally pertinent to my reading of Twelfth Night.

7. In work forthcoming on Quaker women of the seventeenth century, Rosemary Kegl compellingly demonstrates the continuing asymmetry and masculine domination of companionate heterosexual marriage, while perceiving a realization of the companionate ideal between women in at least one recorded Quaker instance. I take it as reasonably uncontentious that the aspiration to equality can attain only a limited realization in the heterosexual companionate model of the early modern period.

8. For a broad survey of Renaissance humanist feminism, see Mary Garrard, “Historical Feminism and Female Iconography,” in Artemisia Gentileschi (Princeton, N.J., 1989), 141–82.


10. In “Androgyny, Mimesis and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage,” PMLA 102 (1987): 31–35, Phyllis Rackin properly connects the Shakespearean transvestite to the divine androgyne, a potent Renaissance-neoplatonic figure of gender reunion and harmony. Perhaps the “epiphanic” intimations of Twelfth Night most concern this figure, through which a conjugal utopianism is prophesied. In Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities (Stanford, 1992), 269 n. 10, however, Jonathan Goldberg notes the complete erasure of same-sex desire in Rackin’s account, an erasure by no means effected in the play. The sweeping heterosexual normalization of the Shakespeare text in nineteenth-century performance, editing, and criticism is the subject of important work in progress by Laurie Osborne. See also Laurie E. Osborne, “The Texts of Twelfth Night,” ELH 57 (Spring 1990): 37–61.

11. At least since Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex,” in Towards an Anthropology of Women, ed. R. R. Reiter (New York, 1975), 267–319, an argument has been elaborated that the incest taboo, on which heterosexual marriage depends as a putatively universal cultural norm, cannot stand alone, but must presuppose prior taboos on same-sex relations and autoeroticism. What might need to be added is that each of these taboos produces a powerful structuring effect, the results of which are cumulative yet not fully overlapping.


13. Shakespeare, Sonnets, ed. Stephen Booth (New Haven, 1977); all further references to the sonnets are to this edition.
Moreover, if biological transmission of a particular gendered image is to constitute the male profit of immortality, it should be noted that the image transmitted may not be one’s own, or a masculine one at all: “Thou art thy mother’s glass, and she in thee/Calls back the lovely April of her prime” (sonnet 3). This apparent reversal of the trajectory of patrilineal inheritance reveals a suppressed matrilineal counterscenario: “As with language, so with sexuality; an insistence on order always speaks the other and more troubled scenario which it is designed to exclude.” Rose, “Sexuality in Shakespeare,” 99.


This trajectory in the play invites the ideological reading of Twelfth Night still most strongly represented by Hollander’s “Twelfth Night and the Morality of Indulgence.” According to Hollander, the festive-theatrical masquerade in Twelfth Night allows the discovery and manifestation of true desires, hence true selves, in place of the conventional social guises (comic masks, antisocial disguises). Paradoxically, theatrical masquerading and cross-dressing facilitate this simultaneous discovery and epiphanic revelation of a true self, while the humanizing and liberating effects of such revelation make festivity a sacred (holy day) as well as profane (holiday) phenomenon. I would say that a powerful thematic of uncloteting is latent in Hollander’s essay—that is, a counterideological subtext is present that could now be explicitly precipitated. The utopian telos of this uncloteting would be universal “openness.”

As Hollander puts it (“Twelfth Night and the Morality of Indulgence,” 237), Viola-Sebastian is the master-mistress of Orsino’s and Olivia’s passion. To the extent that Viola is Orsino’s word made flesh rather than a naturalistic character, compounded from the sea/violet/music/spirit figures of his opening speech, she is the creature of his “will” and seems destined at moments to function as the play’s general medium of erotic exchange and conversion. Insofar as Viola proves unable to function in this way, s/he marks a continuing lack.

Under this schema, historically persistent through and beyond Freud, any homoerotic bonding can seem like a too-proximate displacement of self-love: the proper terminus is other-directed, heterosexual exogamy. It goes virtually without saying that this schema cannot fully absorb or construe same-sex desire even in Twelfth Night, where the reciprocal passion of Viola and Olivia remains anagrammatically fixed, and where Antonio’s love for Sebastian suggests an irreducible orientation of the kind posited by Joseph Cady in “‘Masculine Love,’ Renaissance Writing and the New Invention of Homosexuality,” Journal of Homosexuality 23 (1992): 9–40.

Since Alan Bray’s Homosexuality in Renaissance England (London, 1982), the categorical anachronism of talking about “homosexuality” in an Elizabethan context has been widely recognized. Identifying Orsino’s infatuation as an exclusively male homosexual one would also promote the confusion, to which Jonathan Goldberg has objected, between male homoeroticism and a power-structured pedophilic transvestism. Goldberg, Sodometries, 107–26 and passim. Despite these critiques, and explicitly rejecting their assumptions, Joseph Cady has identified a Renaissance category of “masculine love,” distinct from “sodomy”; Cady, “‘Masculine Love.’”

In Twelfth Night, unlike The Crying Game, the appealing and displacing transvestite is

22. On same-sex desire between Viola and Olivia, see Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (New York, 1992).

23. It might be said that Viola can plead so empathetically for Orsino’s cause, and find Olivia’s refusal of Orsino incomprehensible, because she is herself in love with Orsino, and would consent in Olivia’s place. Yet her targeting Orsino as the most eligible bachelor around even before seeing him implies no more than an intention to pursue an Elizabethan “male” course of upward mobility. See Christina Malcolmson, “‘What You Will’: Social Mobility and Gender in *Twelfth Night,*” in *The Matter of Difference: A Materialist-Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Valerie Wayne (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), 29–57.

24. If Viola does find herself falling in love with Orsino, it is at least “partly” in the imagined place of Olivia, “partly” in place of her imagined sister as alter ego, and “partly” because in her disguise as Cesario she tells Orsino that she could fall in love with a woman of his “complexion” (2.4.27). Furthermore, her feeling for Orsino is overdetermined, it seems, by her recollection of her father’s having named him to her (1.2.28–29) and by Orsino’s capacity to stand in for her father and/or brother, both indistinguishably named Sebastian.

25. Some credence is lent to the familiar topos of Shakespeare’s creative androgyny by such outcomes as these. The point is not, of course, that Shakespeare’s mind is constitutionally androgynous, but that one potentiality of the marriage plot is the construction of a bigendered subjectivity.

26. Not to beg the question, the represented Viola/Cesario in *Twelfth Night* is a girl who dresses as a boy, while Dil in *The Crying Game* is a boy who dresses as a girl. Where pertinent, I try to take account of this difference. Whether the playing of women’s parts by boy actors was a provocative issue or merely a conventional donnée for Elizabethan playgoers has been discussed both ways: see Bruce Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago, 1991), 147–55.

27. The possibility of a (male) homosexual alternative, strongly represented in the friendship between Antonio and Sebastian, is forestalled by Olivia’s overpowering intervention in Sebastian’s life. It is also apparently bedeviled by an incipiently homophobic/homoerotic structure of male friendship. The nexus of attraction and violence is marked by uneasily hyperbolic courtesies:

Sebastian: O good Antonio, forgive me your trouble.

Antonio: If you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant.

Sebastian: If you will not undo what you have done, that is, kill him whom you have recovered, desire it not.

(2.1.32–37)

28. The charismatically aggressive, nonsentimentalized Jude may invite open lesbian political identification—and recontextualization—but in the world of the film she can represent little more than a structural threat to be eliminated. Absent the political, economic, and institutional conditions for a lesbian politics in post-Reformation England, perhaps it is understandable that no lesbian political alternative to the hegemonic marriage plot can be scripted in *Twelfth Night*. When Marvell, in “Upon Appleton House,” conceives of a specifically lesbian politics—the “specter” of which may have arisen once again during the disturbed conditions of the English civil war—it is displaced back to the pre-Reformation era during which Nun Appleton House was a convent. Nonetheless, the specter of such a politics explicitly haunts this aggressively heterosexual, dynastic poem, while lesbian desire (or the male fantasy of it) remains powerfully marked in texts by Shakespeare, Spenser, and Donne, among others.


30. Partly because of his physical build, Jody plausibly describes himself as a slow bowler. He is thus differentiated from the more threateningly stereotypical Caribbean fast bowlers, uncivil wreckers of successive English international teams. Jody’s nonaccession to that macho stereotype on account of his gayness may also be intimated in the dream sequences, in which his action seems ambiguous; the fact that the ball is never released leaves him on the threshold of the “masculine,” but also in a liminal relation to colonial-anticolonial violence.
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