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Nature's Bias: Renaissance Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness

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Impar coniugium: an unequal union, a conjoining of unlikes, a mixed marriage. The Latin phrase heads an emblem in Geoffrey Whitney's 1586 *A Choice of Emblemes, and Other Devises*, a popular compendium of images "gathered out of sundrie writers."¹ The emblem itself illustrates an ancient mode of punishment (attributed to tyrants) in which the naked criminal/victim is lashed to a corpse and left to die in that coerced embrace (see fig. 1). The margin refers us to book 8 of the *Aeneid* for Virgil's report of such punishment (lines 485–86), which emphasizes the part-by-part physical (mis)matching effected by "conjoining hand to hand and face to face."² Whitney's moralizing gloss emphasizes the obscene conjunction of binding "the quicke, and dead, together sure."³ In a forced union across the ontological divide of life and death, the "quicke" partner in this couple will "pine" to death. To say the least: a pose of erotic communication is hijacked for abuse as an instrument of juridical violence, and the way it simulates desire or intimacy fuels the revulsion this punishment works to inspire. A canny punitive power makes such mingling fatal, as if death works its effects by a sinister graft. Caught in a death sentence that inverts the norms of attraction and repulsion, nature rebels, but it cannot move.

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1. Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes, and Other Devises, for the moste parte gathered out of sundrie writers, Englished and Moralized* (Leiden, 1586), title page.

2. Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid*, trans. H. Ruston Fairclough, 2 vols., rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1934), 2:92.

3. Whitney, p. 99.



Figure 1. *Impar coniugium*, from Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes* (1586).

This circulating emblem of the dead yoked with the living inspires an extreme recoil as close to the instinctual as we can, perhaps, imagine. Thomas Nashe's narrator uses the same reference in *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) to suggest the bloody aftermath of warfare: "As the tyrant Roman emperors used to tie the condemned living caitiffs face to face to dead cor[p]ses, so were the half-living here mixed with squeezed carcasses long putrified."⁴ But Whitney's explanatory verse informs us that this picture (in good emblem fashion) "representes" not torturous death but something else: certain marriages or "wedding webbes." Whitney lists those involving one partner with a "straunge disease," those mixing age and youth or "those that hate," and marriages arranged by parents, especially, who make matches for their children without regarding "the birthe, the yeares, nor vertues of the minde."⁵ These, of course, are proffered as exceptional instances, describing natures that, on their own, would diverge or repel, but are yoked together here by marriage.

4. Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, in *An Anthology of Elizabethan Prose Fiction*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford, 1987), p. 228.

5. Whitney, p. 99.

Whitney's final gesture, however, raises the interpretative stakes by reciting a couplet from Ovid's *Heroides*, a collection of poems voiced by an array of classical heroines verbalizing the pains of abandonment by a male lover. The passage (*Heroides* IX, "Deianira to Hercules," lines 29–30) reads "quam male inequales veniunt ad aratra iuveni, / tam premitur magno coniuge nupta minor" [As unequal bulls fall badly to the plow, / So a lesser wife is overcome by her mighty husband].⁶ In Ovid, the ventriloquized Deianira goes on to offer what we can nevertheless call a feminist aphorism: "siqua voles apte nubere, nube pari" [would you be wedded happily, wed your equal] (line 32).⁷ These Ovidian lines suggest a further type of difference, incorporating a relative difference of strength or power into the list of other types of unlikeness enumerated in Whitney's verse as the emblem explores the possibilities in "imparitas."

These impediments to the marriage of true (i.e., apt, like) kinds might nevertheless serve as the working definition of normal marriage in sixteenth-century terms. Gender constructions primarily concern the production of difference and the administration of its meanings; gender's polarities are usually hierarchies. But Renaissance texts also frequently present gender as a concentrate that is diluted and changed by mixing, whether we consider the symbolic convergence of chastity with power in the female case or the now-established critical viewpoint that effeminacy marks men who become womanly by too strong an interest in women.⁸ Renaissance anxieties about such mixing offer heavy weather to an emergent ideology urging a heterosexual marriage that can only preside over just such a mixing. As Foucault describes the episteme I will call homonormativity in its affective instance, "resemblance" plays a constitutive role in the sixteenth-century organization of knowledge. Suggesting that "the semantic web of resemblance in the sixteenth-century is extremely rich," Foucault lists *Amicitia*, *Aequalitas*, *Paritas*, *Similitudo*, and *Conjunctio* as some of its forms and analogy and sympathy as two of its processes.⁹

Insofar as diverse logics rendering disparate phenomena normal can coexist, given cultural moments always contain competing normativities. Though heterosexual coupling—it goes without saying—is a sine

6. Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), p. 110; my translation.

7. *Ibid.*

8. See Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London, 1989); Rebecca Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990), pp. 20–25, 34–36; Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford, Calif., 1993), p. 111.

9. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1970), pp. 17–23.

qua non of social reproduction and so draws support from a range of other cultural imperatives, its merger of disparate, incommensurate kinds, especially in marital or celebratory forms, poses something of an intellectual problem. However normative it may be as hierarchy, it contradicts the likeness topos at the center of positive ideas about union.

I. COMPARING COMIC PAIRINGS IN SHAKESPEARE

On the first day's discussion of comedy in an undergraduate Shakespeare class, someone may be counted on to claim that the genre celebrates marriage through an inexorable teleology. Shakespearean scholarship has long proposed as much, whether we consider C. L. Barber's account of the social and ritual aspects of comic form or Mary Beth Rose's more recent phrase "the heroics of marriage" (which stresses its place in a developmental struggle for individuals).¹⁰ Leo Salingar's formulation began, perhaps, to mottle this view. Announcing that the "festive strains" in Shakespeare "always subserve or support the theme or love as an *initiation* to marriage," he equivocates, and a slight tick in his grammar appears: the comedies "are essentially celebrations of marriage, of the approach to marriage."¹¹ These qualifications—"initiations" and "approaches"—do not even begin to suggest the issues recent criticism has opened up with respect to the "marriage ending." Stephen Orgel defines the question with such simple elegance that one wonders why doubts had not surfaced sooner: "We are always told that comedies end in marriages, and that this is normative. A few of Shakespeare's do, but the much more characteristic Shakespearean conclusion comes just before the marriage, and . . . sometimes with an entirely unexpected delay or postponement."¹² At the same time, critics have opened up the meaning of the putative marriage ending with respect to the events that precede it. Considering *Twelfth Night* (ca. 1600–2), Stephen Greenblatt refers to the containment effects of ultimate heterosexual marriage in "a play that had continually tantalized its audience with the spectacle of homoerotic desire"; Valerie Traub, on the same play, emphasizes instead the incapacity of marriage endings to contain the energies released by the play: "Homoeroticism . . . disrupts the cultural code . . . , subverting patriarchy from within."¹³

10. See C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton, N.J., 1959); and Mary Beth Rose, *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in Renaissance Drama* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988), p. 93.

11. Leo Salingar, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 16–17.

12. Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 17.

13. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley, 1988), p. 67; Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of*

Greenblatt and Traub, despite their flat opposition, share an assumption about Renaissance ideas of “nature” and its relation to comic conclusions. Greenblatt reads *Twelfth Night's* marital dispensation with arresting simplicity: “Nature has triumphed. The sexes are sorted out, correctly [heterosexually] paired, and dismissed.”¹⁴ In Traub’s account, homoeroticism disrupts “the ideology of a ‘natural’ love based on complementary yet oppositional genders . . . the injunction that sexuality will follow gender in lining up according to a ‘natural’ binary code.”¹⁵ From Barber to Greenblatt to Traub, “nature” is what is represented or expressed or said to be expressed by heteromartial conclusions.

Renaissance articulations of nature can be seen to contradict this notion. “Nature,” I will argue, very often operates in a homonormative (sometimes, though not consistently, homoerotic) manner; this arises in Renaissance thought generally but is especially evident in Shakespeare. In affective terms, affiliation, affinity, and attraction normally proceed on a basis of likeness, a principle of resemblance strong enough to normalize relations between members of one sex above relations that cross sexual difference.¹⁶ In a sense, as countless comedies lean on friendship, twinning, and disguise (all species of likeness and resembling) to bootstrap their way to a leveraged marriage ending, expiring as often as not before its threshold, they seem to take marriage itself as the thing that warrants explanation and accounting, rather than same-sex affects or connection. The ideological work of much comedy, then, is less to celebrate or to critique marriage and its approach than to find a means to make it plausible or even thinkable in parity terms. Against the background of a natural prejudice or bias against gender mixing, comedy conscripts tropes of likeness to establish “commixtures” (to use one of Montaigne’s translated words for friendship) that are, oxymoronically, “unspotted” or clean.¹⁷ These relations within a sex then ground the final (and normally incomplete) gesticulation toward a heterosexual marital form that must always be mixed.

Sexuality in Renaissance Drama (London, 1992), p. 143. See also Mario DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge, 1997).

14. Greenblatt, p. 71.

15. Traub, p. 143.

16. As Paula Blank has argued, likeness principles may even be found structuring heteroeroticism; “the rhetorical homogenization of Renaissance lovers,” however, as she acutely terms it, is a process Blank is concerned to demonstrate as ultimately impossible to effect, even in the same-sex contexts of Donne’s “Sappho to Philaenis.” See her “Comparing Sappho to Philaenis: John Donne’s ‘Homopoetics,’” *PMLA* 110 (1995): 358–68.

17. Michel de Montaigne, “Of Friendship,” in *The Essayes of Montaigne: John Florio's Translation*, ed. J. I. M. Stewart (New York, 1933), p. 149.

II. NATURAL ATTRACTION

Ironically, it is the unmarried sister in *The Comedy of Errors* (ca. 1590) who judges that husbands have more liberty than their wives and thus have justifiable sovereignty over them. Luciana's view accords with any standard account in the period. What is relevant here is the precise way the natural world (everything "situate under heaven's eye")¹⁸ serves to rationalize the institutional relations of marriage:

The beasts, the fishes, and the wingèd fowls,
Are their males subjects and at their controls.
Men, more divine, the masters of all these,
The lords of the wide world and wild wat'ry seas,
Indued with intellectual sense and souls,
Of more pre-eminence than fish and fowls,
Are masters to their female, and their lords.

(2.1.18–24)

Gender differentiation and its political implications ground our cross-species likeness to animals; husbandry is governance.

But Luciana's natural marital regime is not without alternatives. One of the most popular marriage books of the period advances what seems, at first, to be a similar analogy. In Edmund Tilney's dialogue, *A briefe and pleasant discourse of duties in Mariage, called the Flower of Friendship* (boldly presented to Elizabeth I in 1573), one character proposes debate as an appropriate pastime. Here is his formulation of a subject: "forasmuche as everye thing sheweth nowe a certaine naturall amitie amongst themselves, yea the trees (sayeth Plinie) have a naturall instinct of friendship, the sweete flowers, the pleasaunt herbes," so, he urges, should "wee entreat somewhat of friendship." "Friendship" here, however, means marriage: "no friendship, or amitie, is or ought to be more deere, and surer, than the love of man and wyfe, [and so] let thys treatise be thereof."¹⁹ Likening human marital relations to the world of plants, Tilney moves away from Luciana's rationale for gender differentiation as the basis for marital power imbalances. Tilney's phrase "naturall amitie amongst themselves" stresses instead the categorical homogeneity—a common nature—within which amity proceeds.

18. William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington (New York, 1997), 2.1.16. All subsequent references to Shakespeare's works are to this edition and are cited hereafter parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.

19. Edmund Tilney, *The Flower of Friendship* [1568]: *A Renaissance Dialogue Contesting Marriage*, ed. Valerie Wayne (Ithaca, N.Y., 1992), pp. 103–4.

In proposing that marriage is a species of friendship, Tilney's speaker follows Aristotle. But in placing it as friendship's highest form, its "flower," he certainly reverses the logic of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which pursues ramifying hierarchies of friendship all arrayed beneath its true form (between two equal and virtuous men). Aristotle calls marriage a friendship of utility and pleasure, and he generates an apparatus of proportionality across difference (male and female each having "a proper virtue" of their own kind) to compensate for unlikeness within the practical friendship category.²⁰ In a move similar to Tilney's, the Elizabethan homily on marriage termed it a "perpetual friendship."²¹

The classical friendship tradition as taken up in the sixteenth century accords special primacy to its Latin exponent, Cicero. His *De amicitia* betrays no interest in elaborating its lower forms; it barely remembers the possibility of female practitioners enough to disqualify them briefly as weak and, on that account, only able to act from need. Montaigne summarizes this notion of fiber or "stuff" in "Of Friendship": "The ordinary sufficiency of women, cannot answer this conference and communication, the nurse of this sacred bond; nor seeme their minds strong enough to endure the pulling of a knot so hard, so fast, and durable."²² The first published English translation of Cicero's text (by John Tiptoft in 1481) shows just how directly friendship logics collide with marital ones, using "the birds and the bees" analogy we have seen above to an altogether different end. Following the passage where Cicero likens friendship to self-love and terms the friend an *alter idem* (not an *alter ego* but "the/an other the same"), Tiptoft's English proceeds: "And yf that appereth in beestys and fowles bredyng in the woodes or in the waters tame or wilde that fyrste they love theym self / ffor that is a thyng that is innate unto everiche that hath lyf Secundly that they seke and desire suche beestys as they wolde couple them self with and be of the same kynde . . . how moche more it is caused by nature in a man that he sholde love hym self and gete hym another / whos will he shold medle with his / that of tho tweyne he shold make wel nygh one."²³ Nature here offers likeness as the basis for affect and equality, not difference as the ground of superiority. Cicero's Latin says nothing about animals "bredyng"; it only lists their various locales. And Tiptoft's inserted verb, to "couple," suggests different valences than the

20. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* 8.7.1–2, trans. Horace Rackham (Cambridge, Mass., 1926), pp. 476–79.

21. Mary Rickey and Thomas Stroup, eds., *Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I (1547–1571): A Facsimile Reproduction of the Edition of 1623* (Gainesville, Fla., 1968), p. 239.

22. Montaigne, p. 147.

23. Cicero, *De amicitia*, trans. John Tiptoft (London, 1481), pp. 22r–v.

Latin *se applicare*, "to attach" or "to devote oneself or one's attention to" an object.²⁴ While Tiptoft's word does not yet signify only the sexual coupling of male and female, it moves toward individuated pairs and away from the collective species implied by animals seeking other "beestys" (plural) "of the same kynde." In this passage, animal keeping to kind (i.e., species) grounds a homonormative logic of affectionate kinds (i.e., sex); it is as if a powerful underlying investment in gender differentiation raises male and female sex to the level of species difference. *De amicitia's* nature-driven, same-sex "meddled wills" may bear an ancient Roman provenance, but a century later they will appear at the center of the Shakespeare sonnets as "the marriage of true minds," a phrase which, in turn, would be unmoored from its same-sex origins to preside over scores upon scores of modern ceremonies of legal or ecclesiastical marriage.

What stands out about Tiptoft's translation, of course, is its obliviousness to the possibly analogy-defeating difference we might sense between his animal "bredyng" or coupling and a male friendship that grounds itself neither on procreation nor, necessarily, eroticism.²⁵ A rich criticism has emerged tracing the phenomenon of same-sex (especially male) eroticism in Renaissance culture. Its procedures, however, often maintain eroticism as an organizing principle in some tension with the Foucauldian argument dating the classificatory impulse regarding erotic practices from a roughly nineteenth-century *scientia sexualis*. How, then, to hear the significance of Renaissance nomenclatures? Male same-sex eroticism warrants a name when it appears, hierarchized above the love of women, in an extraordinarily direct formulation in Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender*. E. K.'s gloss states there that "paederistice [is] much to be praeferrred before gynerastice, that is the love whiche enflameth men with lust toward woman kind."²⁶ This construction emphasizes the greater degree of category-crossing that heterosexuality involves (an approach to woman as a "kind"), but the naming of pederasty also highlights a question of unequals, or unlikes. This inequality (imparity) may be the trigger for articulation. In "Of Friendship," Montaigne shows just the same logic when he dismisses "Greeke licence" from true

24. Cicero, *De amicitia* 21.81, in *De senectute, De amicitia, De divinatione*, trans. W. A. Falconer (Cambridge, Mass., 1923), pp. 188–89.

25. The procreative logics of male friendship, however, are explored in Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge, 1997).

26. Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender* ("Januarye"), in *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. J. C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1912), pp. 422–23. This reference is discussed in Goldberg, *Sodometries* (n. 8 above), p. 66 and Orgel (n. 12 above), p. 43.

friendship. Here, the problem is not eroticism, but difference: "It had so necessary a disparity of ages, and difference of offices between lovers, [and so] did no more sufficiently answer the perfect union and agreement, which here we require."²⁷ In a series of exclusions from friendship (heterosexuality, pederasty, utility, and consanguinity), Montaigne leaves the prospect of eroticism between equals of the same sex utterly unaddressed.²⁸

Eroticism, especially homoeroticism, in the Renaissance does not operate as a governing hermeneutic device; its presence or absence seems not to be determinative in nomenclatures, knowledges, or social practices. Alan Bray's work on the relation between friendship and homosexual practice may be taken as definitive: what we can know about Renaissance orderings of these matters is that unequal friendship—in class or status terms—could, but need not invariably, trigger an allegation of "sodomy."²⁹ Sodomy itself, in turn, describes an "utterly confused category," as Foucault termed it and as Jonathan Goldberg has shown in detail for Renaissance England.³⁰ Both categorization and its transgression derive less from eroticism and more from the linking of unlikes or unequal partners. Indeed, as Janel Mueller has shown in the context of John Donne's "Sapho to Philaenis," likeness per se serves a legitimating role in the astonishingly direct case she terms Donne's "brief for lesbianism."³¹ Principles of likeness, then, exert greater controlling powers than a classificatory view of sexual practices does in the Renaissance naming of desires and affects.

Because the presence or absence of homoeroticism sets no necessary interpretive limits, the texts of the period have proven enormously fruitful for historians and critics concerned to explore the social and signifying functions of homoeroticism. Although Lorna Hutson has argued that much of this work has to do with seeing our own obsessions in the cornucopian Shakespearean text, it gets much of its power from what I am calling Renaissance homonormativity: an almost philosophical preference for likeness or a structure of thinking based

27. Montaigne (n. 17 above), p. 147.

28. Constance Jordan construes this lacuna in "Sexuality and Volition in 'Sur des vers de Vergile'" (unpublished essay).

29. Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London, 1982) and "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England," in Jonathan Goldberg, ed., *Queering the Renaissance* (Durham, N.C., 1994), pp. 40–61.

30. See Jonathan Goldberg, "Sodomy and Society: The Case of Christopher Marlowe," in *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, ed. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York, 1991), and *Sodometries*.

31. Janel Mueller, "Troping Utopia: Donne's Brief for Lesbianism," in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*, ed. James Grantham Turner (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 182–207.

on resemblance.³² Homoeroticism instances this norm, so while the ‘-eroticism’ may, sometimes, be transgressive, the ‘homo-’ prefix itself describes something commonplace and normal, affirming the proverbial rule that like seeks like. The perspectives embedded in the Latin tags *impar coniugium* and *alter idem* both elevate this principle as a law of natures.

Nature (everything “situate under heaven’s eye”) aside, it is nature (as a specific quality, substance, or way of acting; the specific features of a thing) that will govern the processes of attraction and repulsion, distinguishing commixtures that concentrate from those that dilute and alter the parties. While to contemporary ears “the law of nature” suggests a larger, reactionary, inexorable, and incorporative force, sixteenth-century usage more often connotes the diversity of its local effects. Specific entities are expected to express the individuating law of their (diverse) natures, to display severally their unique qualities. While this can be read juridically as a kind of categorical imperative, its emphasis on open-ended variability and even incommensurability may also be seen to approach *différance*: the natural order, on the one hand, a natured performance, on the other.

Richard Hooker’s *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593) crafts a nuanced statement defining “law” in this sense as expressive of certain properties: “All things that are have some operation not violent or casual . . . for unto every end, every operation will not serve. That which doth assign unto each thing the kind, that which doth moderate the force and the power, that which doth appoint the form and the measure, the same we term a law.” Such things or kinds, “in such sort as they are,” trace out a “course” established by “nature’s law.” Drawing on classical notions of the irresistibility of goodness, he argues that “every thing naturally . . . doth desire the utmost good and greatest perfection, whereof nature has made it capable,” and the path of that perfection is, suggestively, “straightness.” Despite the fact that, in Hooker’s terms, “swervings are now and then incident into the course of nature,” the normative (and flexible and Aristotelian) view holds that “those things which nature worketh, are wrought either always or for the most part after one and the same manner.” Natures follow their courses; these courses vary across kinds but, within kinds, usually operate after the same “manner” according to the “sort.”³³

The cultural pressure brought to bear on gender difference, as I have suggested, allows habits of mind about kind (i.e., species of animals) to

32. Lorna Hutson, “On Not Being Deceived: Rhetoric and the Body in *Twelfth Night*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 38 (1996): 140–74.

33. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. Arthur Stephen McGrade (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 54, 60, 74–75, and 61.

shape constructions of male and female kinds. We have seen how Ciceronian friendship, as translated in early modern England, analogized reproductive couplings of animals to male friendship without remark. This, too, is attributed to a natural impulse: "What so evir it be in the nature of thynges . . . whiche hath a naturell movyng, [it] desireth his lyke & fleeth his contrarye . . . there is nothing more desyrous of his lyke and semblable or more cacchying than is nature."³⁴ Erasmus locates this impulse at an almost chemical level in his colloquy "Amicitia," employing metaphors of blood, venom, and smell to describe affections and aversions, referring to "this type of sympathy and antipathy—for so the Greeks call the natural feelings of friendship and hostility."³⁵ As Bacon phrased it in one iteration of his friendship essay, "union strengtheneth any naturall motion."³⁶ Union, that is, of likes, whose natures move in tandem.

The literature on gender difference is too vast to be summarized here, even in terms of the divergence accorded to male and female nature, substance, or constitution alone. As Peter Stallybrass and Anne Rosalind Jones have argued, across the diverse textual productions of gender, "gender is never *grounded*: there is no master discourse which is called upon to fix the essence of gender."³⁷ But from period misogynist tracts emphasizing female weak-fibered instability, to a view in which, say, temperature distinguishes bodily/moral states, to a separate-spheres view in which each sex is perfect in its kind, to the Galenic "single-sex" theory elaborated by Thomas Laqueur, the will to ascertain gendered states persists as the pressing common denominator.³⁸ Sexual difference remains material to argument, if without "material" grounds. As Ian Maclean's formidable survey of the vast, controversial, and clearly unsystematic literature on the "notion of woman" shows, inquiry into the origins and meanings of sexual difference remained utterly unresolved but apparently irresistible.³⁹ This preference for fixed gender, so widespread in so many places, haunts and compromises even so strong an ideology as patriarchal marriage, which itself offers a form of composite gender in which the mixture can "infect"

34. Cicero (n. 23 above), p. 8r.

35. Erasmus, *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, trans. Craig R. Thompson (Chicago, 1965), p. 524.

36. Francis Bacon, "Of Friendship," in *The Essayes or Councils, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p. 80, n. 1.

37. Peter Stallybrass and Anne Jones, "Fetishizing Gender: Constructing the Hermaphrodite in Renaissance Europe," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (London, 1991), p. 81.

38. This is not at all to dismiss the cogency of accounts of Renaissance public theater that concern the undecidability of gender in cross-dressed performance.

39. Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge, 1980).

one gender with the other. Formulations by, for example, Philip Stubbes concern the extent to which cross-dressing produces “hermaphrodit, that is, Monsters of both kindes.”⁴⁰ But heterosexual marriage, too, offers an essentially hermaphroditic figure, one whose uneasiness Neoplatonist celebrations of marital androgyny could not fully enclose.⁴¹

Against such a hermaphroditic image, a powerful discourse of natural attraction, then, operates to direct same-sex, intersubjective relations and casts doubt on any claim that heterosexual relations are fully normative in the period. With the figure of Elizabeth presiding, as it does, over so many configurations of attraction, it is worth noting the degree to which a frustrated Sir Walter Raleigh represented her resistance to him in these natural terms. As Philipa Berry shows in her discussion of a passage in Raleigh’s “The Ocean to Cynthia,” Elizabeth’s rejection of his attempted patriarchal enclosure—her refusal to be constrained within the logics of a heterosexually mixed paradigm—appears as an inevitable effect of nature. In language resembling Hooker’s, Raleigh likens Elizabeth to “a streame by strong hand bounded in” and thus diverted from its proper “natures course”; those unnatural bounds will be eroded and the stream will “runn att large in th’auuncient channells.”⁴² This account reverses the logic of the complaint voiced by Helena in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (ca. 1595) at the abandonment of female friendship for heterosexual love (“Will you rent our ancient love asunder?” [3.2.215])—it reverses, too, the psychoanalytic reading of those lines James Holstun has given.⁴³ Heterosexuality is thus very incompletely naturalized in the Renaissance; its imposed tenure seems fragile and insecure. Lapses away from heterosexuality by a nature constant only to itself appear inevitable. Homonormativity thus embraces both the self-constancy so celebrated in myriad cultural venues and same-sex bonds in an affective cosmology where (a law of) like natures attracts them, draws them on, toward each other.

III. ELIZABETH’S OWN COMEDY

Elizabeth’s motto—*semper eadem*—suggests this sense of a (grammatically feminine) nature constant with respect to its own law, expressive of its particular properties, translatable as “always the same, or always in the same way.” The implications of this moral claim of self-sameness

40. Philip Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses* [1583], ed. William Turnbull (London, 1836), p. 68.

41. Stallybrass and Jones, pp. 98–100.

42. Berry (n. 8 above), pp. 150–51.

43. James Holstun, “‘Will You Rent Our Ancient Love Asunder?’: Lesbian Elegy in Donne, Marvell, and Milton,” *ELH* 54 (1987): 835–67. See also Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, ed. and trans. Philip Rieff (New York, 1963), p. 142n.

converge precisely with Elizabeth's clear sense of how the political exigencies of heterosexual marriage would have cancelled her sovereign identity, subordinating her to another's rule. As her case makes abundantly clear, sex difference in marriage forecloses the possibility, in Renaissance terms, of a union of likes or balanced marriage—wifely status would dethrone even a sitting monarch. Aside from Elizabeth's refusals to marry, however, another stream of marital logics pertains here. The monarch's relation to the state, as many have observed, often figures as a mystic marriage.⁴⁴ As Berry has astutely detailed, the historical, legal, and symbolic logics of this union carry a gendered freight: "The spheres of both secular and religious activity with which Elizabeth could claim an intimate relationship [*respublica* and *ecclesia*] were not gendered masculine in political theory and theology. . . . In this respect, Elizabeth's rule figured *the feminine in a mystical or symbolic relation with itself*."⁴⁵ While Berry suggests that this female marital logic rendered the queen a "disturbing figure," such disturbance may derive more from the fact of Elizabeth's queenship (female rule) than from its figuration of marriage as a union identifying like with like. As a *par coniugium* in the proper sense, such an image comports with the analogical bias in Renaissance thought.

Elizabeth's rhetorical proposition of a same-sex marriage in talk with the Spanish ambassador (an episode scholars have recently begun to note) is, then, less bizarre than commentators have taken it to be. In a letter dated June 27, 1564, Guzman de Silva reported to his sponsor, Philip of Spain, the events of his first meeting with the queen on his arrival in England. "Addressing me in the Italian language," he writes, "she said she did not know in what tongue to speak to me." De Silva replied with a prepared Latin speech, and Elizabeth then replied in kind, "in Latin with elegance, facility, and ease." After questioning de Silva about Philip's health and affairs, "She took me aside and asked me very minutely about the Prince—his health and disposition, and afterwards about the Princess [Juana, the widowed sister of Phillip II], saying how much she should like to see her, and how well so young a widow and a maiden would get on together, and what a pleasant life they could lead. She [Elizabeth] being the elder would be the husband, and her Highness, the wife. She dwelt upon this for a time, talking now in Italian, which she speaks well."⁴⁶ Elizabeth's language fluencies are more

44. See, e.g., Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York, 1995). Hackett observes that this logic "reached its fullest expression in England with Elizabeth" (p. 56).

45. Berry, pp. 66–67.

46. Joseph Stevenson, ed., *Spain*, vol. 1 of *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1558–1588* (London, 1966), p. 364.

remarkable to de Silva than the marital fantasy that he records with no comment beyond noting that "she dwelt upon" it. Diplomatic and gender protocols somehow enabled this thought experiment and its communication at what had to have been a high stakes meeting (the resumption of Spanish diplomatic representation in England). Scholars, perhaps too narrowly focused on a specifically sexual/erotic sense, often hasten to assure us that Elizabeth did not actually or seriously wish for a female partner and emphasize the heterosexualizing terms of husband and wife.⁴⁷ But her invocation of the gendered terms of marital roles must vie with the gender congruence and biographical facticity of "widow" and "maiden." What is also clear is that female marriage presented so logical (if not practical) a solution to her dilemma that she cannot have failed to think of it, as this story shows; what is more stunning about the fantasy is its apparent utterability in such a context and the completely unvexed account of it de Silva provides.

Elizabeth's (I'll presume) hypothetical, then, draws on existing logical preferences for resemblance; the historical circumstances of her female sovereignty played into available discourses disfavoring mixtures or hybrids in this regard. The degree of sway held by any given discourse will always be open to challenge, as coexistent but incommensurate norms present themselves; improvisations in thought and practice occur by intent, accident, and nonattention. It is for this reason that representations of the queen's affective strategies require a critical practice that does more than assess their relation to (one) ideology and/or its transgression.⁴⁸ In Elizabeth's case, as Goldberg argues, royal representation "is a locus of the transformation of every sort of desire outside marriage," and so the various desires "she could play upon can be understood far more 'normatively' once one dispenses with the notion that the institution of marriage" was desire's only

47. Carol Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia, 1994), p. 133; Leah Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Berkeley, 1988), p. 97 (describing the queen's *mascula vis*). Compare Goldberg, *Sodometries* (n. 8 above), p. 41.

48. The strategy of reading employed by Valerie Traub with respect to "lesbian (*in*)significance" in the period associates "signification" per se with "transgression" and so declines to take up the ways textual or discursive phenomena participate in "established" structures of thought. My project here is to view the ways homonormativity shapes the licit and therefore (in my view) recasts our sense of its apparent singularity. See Valerie Traub, "The (In)significance of Lesbian Desire in Early Modern England," in Goldberg, ed. (n. 29 above), pp. 62–83, 79–80. See also Theodora Jankowski, "'Where There Can Be No Cause of Affection': Redefining Virgins, Their Desires, and Their Pleasures in John Lyly's *Gallathea*," in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, ed. Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Dymphna Callaghan (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 253–74.

form.⁴⁹ In other words, the affective forms enabled around Elizabeth are impossible to reduce to a question of ideological conformity or resistance.

It is not only a matter of reflecting the complexity of available competing paradigms. This complexity itself has implications for the claims inherent in a category like the “licit,” revising our sense of its monumental singularity. Goldberg points out that “what was regarded as illicit in the period can be connected to the queen’s refusal of the licit,” that is, marriage.⁵⁰ But, further, the degree to which a reigning monarch (*lex loquens*, “the speaking law”) serves to catalyze, even express, the illicit highlights the way royal power itself cannot be reduced to a narrow expression of, for example, patriarchal ideologies of marriage. How many “licits” are actually in circulation? I thus agree with Goldberg that there are dangers to overstating Elizabeth’s anomaly as a gendered performer (“to treat her as ‘anomalous’ is to assume that biological sex and gender are unproblematically sutured in ‘ordinary’ cases”).⁵¹ Yet I also wish to explore the small but real degree to which virginity and the tropes of female marriage both refracted and informed preexisting licit norms, gender logics generating articulable and serviceable figures for Elizabeth’s milieu. A consideration of three homonormative female marriage texts, Ovid’s “Iphis and Ianthe,” John Lyly’s *Gallathea*, and Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, will concretize these issues by suggesting why such imagery may itself reflect one strand of the licit.

In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the two Cretan youths Iphis and Ianthe fall in love. Ianthe is a girl; Iphis, however, is a girl raised from birth in a boy’s disguise. Her father having vowed to put a female child to death, Iphis’s mother dissembles the child’s sex in an act of “pious fraud.”⁵² “The child was dressed like a boy,” the story goes, “and its face would have been counted lovely whether you assigned it to a girl or boy [fuerat formosus uterque]” (*Metamorphoses* 9.713). The appropriateness of her father’s ultimate marriage choice for Iphis is stressed in terms of their likeness: “The two were of equal age and equal loveliness [par aetas, par forma fuit],” and they had the same teachers (line 718). As a result of these convergences, “love came to both their hearts . . . and filled them both with equal longing [hinc amor ambarum tetegit rude pectus, et aequum / vulnus utrique dedit]” (lines 720–21). But because only one lover knows their sexual likeness, the two are said not to love “with

49. Goldberg, *Sodometries*, pp. 47, 42.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

52. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9.711, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), p. 55. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by book and line number.

equal hope [erat fiducia dispar]" (line 721). *Uter, par, ambo, aequum*—all these terms suggest the likeness between them.

Iphis laments her condition as "a girl madly in love with another girl" ("ardetque in virgine virgo," line 725); such a love is prodigious and newfangled ("prodigiosa novaeque," line 727) in natural terms. She points out the heterosexual orientations of animals: "The ram desires the sheep, and his own doe follows the stag . . . in the whole animal world there is no female smitten with love for a female" (lines 733–34; though, of course, *The Metamorphoses* itself often undercuts this view of orderly desire). Intense supplications to the gods have their effects, and Iphis, leaving the temple with her mother, is turned into a boy: "Iphis walked . . . with a longer stride than was her wont. Her face seemed of a darker hue, her strength seemed greater, her very features sharper, and her locks . . . were shorter than before. She seemed more vigorous than was her girlish wont" (lines 784–90). The marriage goes forward, and Iphis inscribes a plaque at the temple to read: "These gifts as man did Iphis pay, which once as maid he vowed" (line 794).

I have given Ovid's story in detail for comparative reasons. Likeness establishes the social aptness of the pairing as well as the basis for love. Nature plays a complex role (its Ovidian polymorphousness in this instance is to couple two who are the same). Only one of the lovers knows both are female. Most striking, the gender conversion itself is represented in the story's confines, and its progressive changes are itemized. Each of these aspects will be altered in the tale's Renaissance iterations. Arthur Golding's 1576 English translation of *The Metamorphoses* ensured widespread consumption of Ovid's tales of conversion. The Iphis story served as the explicit basis of at least one play in the period—Alfred Harbage's *Annals of English Drama* records a lost play of uncertain origin, written at some time between 1591 and 1615, entitled *Iphis and Iantha; or, A Marriage Without a Man*.⁵³ Such a play would be fascinating to have, judging from the subtitle's suggestion that marriage need not require the gender conversion incorporated in Ovid's story.

But the story also serves more loosely as the basis of another play, one whose cultural location could hardly be more central. John Lyly's *Gallathea* was written for Elizabeth's court, performed there on January 1, 1588, and published in 1592. Lyly, grandson of the Latin grammarian, authored plays we can describe as uniquely part of Elizabeth's milieu. While Lyly was as frustrated in his attempts to seek patronage from the queen as her more Petrarchan suitors, we may presume his

53. Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, 3d ed., rev. Silvia Wagonheim (London, 1989), pp. 106–7. The play is recorded as having been attributed to Shakespeare (I am very grateful to David Bevington for this reference).

classicizing drama suited her as well—and probably better—than most. Elizabeth preferred to cast her identity in royal rather than in gendered terms, by a standard derived from classical discourses on the princely virtues.⁵⁴ Lyly's *Campaspe* and *Sapho and Phao* (both published in 1584) represent the monarch's subduing desire and passion and thus forgoing sexual entanglement in these classical terms.

Gallathea, however, offers a somewhat more complicated affective picture. A drama populated substantially by female characters, it weaves a dense fabric of virginity, a classical ideal of self-constancy, and love that yields female marriage. While commentators have observed a tension among these ideas, homonormativity supplies a perspective from which both the preservation of self-constant chastity (among Diana's virgins) and the unusual, marked authorization of love (between two girls) cohere. As a lens for reading, it will also have something to say about the array of quasi-scientific trades in the subplot, a feature to which criticism has paid less attention. Last, while the play's thorough homonormative structure leaves heterosexual marriage profoundly unrepresentable, it offers its own imageries as persuasive exempla for Elizabeth and the other ladies in *Gallathea's* initial audience.

The play has three strands. The first plotline establishes that a peridodic tribute of the "fairest virgin" must be paid by the play's pastoral community; this virgin is to be offered up to a fearful sea monster, Agar (Neptune's agent) as compensation for past affronts to Neptune's authority. Two cautious fathers disguise two resistant daughters in boys' clothes, each certain his daughter is "the Countrey's" fairest. These two girls, Gallathea and Phillida, will fall in love. The second plot involves Cupid's trespass into two zones of Diana's jurisdiction: her woods (to which the girls retreat) and the hearts of her chaste votaries. A third plot incorporates more recognizably English figures, including an alchemist, a mariner, an astronomer, and some rustics. The plots converge in the final scenes, when Neptune pointedly presides over the jurisdictional disorders the plots have entailed.

Gallathea's opening gesture claims (in Euphuistic form) that its presenters have done all they could to make the play clean and perfect: "As the Athenians were most curious, that the Lawne, wherewith Minerva was covered, should be without spotte or wrinkle, so we have endeavored with all care, that what wee present your Highnesse should neyther offend in Scene or sillable."⁵⁵ Whatever offense might have

54. See Janel Mueller, "Virtue and Virtuality: Gender in the Self-Representations of Queen Elizabeth I," in *Virtual Gender: Fantasies of Subjectivity and Embodiment*, ed. Mary Ann O'Farrell and Lynn Vallone (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1999), pp. 37–64.

55. John Lyly, *Gallathea*, "Prologue," lines 10–14 in *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, ed. R. Warwick Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1902), 2:431. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by act, scene, and line numbers.

touched Elizabeth's authority in Lyly's representations of Neptune (as an irrational devourer of virgins whose legitimacy might be impugned thereby) is substantially obviated by the play's identification with the virgins and by its constant affirmation of Neptune's ultimate authority.

What might seem to be offensive to a female audience otherwise are Lyly's three representations of male/female relations. The opening foray into this area displays a figure of voracious male desire in the sacrificial virgin story. Agar, the monster, horrifies nature itself. When he appears, "the waters rore, the fowles flye away, and the Cattell in the field for terror shunne the bankes" (1.2.48–50). When the fateful hour of sacrifice arrives late in the play and Haebe (a substitute virgin who will be rejected) is led in, her procurers observe that she comes "accompanied onelie with men, because it is a sight unseemely (as all virgins say) to see the misfortune of a mayden, and terrible to behold the fierceness . . . of that Monster" (5.2.4–6). Haebe's lament envisions the encounter in great detail, calling, "Come Agar thou insatiable Monster of Maidens blood, & devourer of beauties bowels, glut thy self till thou surfet, & let my life end thine. Teare these tender ioynts wyth thy greedie iawes, these yellow lockes with thy black feete, this faire face with thy foule teeth" (lines 48–52). Bitterly criticizing the process that brought her to this case, she attests, "men will have it so, whose forces command our weak natures" (lines 13–14). Haebe thus sees an alliance between the exacting gods and mortal men, an alliance against natures further specified as female when she addresses her farewell to "you chast virgins," her former company (line 27).

Within this rather drastic frame of gender conflict, Lyly offers two further instances of heterosexual mixing, each offensive enough in their own kind. When the two fathers confront and challenge one another in act 4, Gallathea's father accuses Phillida's of having displayed an "affection I feare me more than fatherly" (4.1.35–36). The accused responds that he must have been seen kissing his wife, not his daughter. But whatever the truth is, his defense incriminates, since it advocates an *impar coniugium* doctrine: "if you thought so young a peece unfit for so old a person . . . you must know that silver haire delight in golden lockes, and the olde fancies crave young Nurses, and frostie yeeres must be thawed by youthfull fyres" (lines 48–52). Here too we see an exaggerated gender (and generational) conflict in which the female role is both prosthetic and subordinated.

Lyly's third "offensive" instance involves the masterless Raffe. The scavenging youth reports of his service to an alchemist who "sayd, that by multiplying he would make of a penny tenne pound" (5.1.16). Sardonicly glossing the impossibility attributed to alchemical conversion throughout the play, Raffe tells what the alchemist did do: "I sawe a prettie wench come to his shoppe, where with puffing, blowing, and

sweating, he so plyed her, that he multiplyed her” (lines 18–20). Perhaps this punning on alchemical vocabulary refers back to Raffe’s initial reaction to it, when he smirked, “multiplication is a miserable action” (3.3.71). Each image this play affords of heterosexual mixing involving actual male figures of the *dramatis personae* pointedly suggests some inappropriate combination of violence, rapaciousness, impropriety, or vulgarity—one is even named “unseemely” for virgin eyes. The exemplarity, then, this play will claim for Diana’s votaries cannot refer to this affective paradigm.

Diana’s followers register a different kind of resistance to cross-gender affect, even though the boys they unwillingly love are actually girls. Love’s effects are usually surprising, but in the case of these nymphs, Lyly records a comic level of dumbstruck alienation, due, in part, to the ineffectuality the play will accord Cupid’s ruses. Telusa begins act 3 by soliloquizing her confusion and consternation at finding herself in love. Cupid’s first effects include a sudden Petrarchism (“Howe nowe? What newe conceits, what strange contraries breede in thy minde?” [3.1.1–2]). Lamenting that “conquering modestie” has turned into “captive imagination,” she contends with herself that such “words are unfit for thy sexe, beeing a virgine, but apt for thy affections being a lover” (lines 6–7). The experience of love correlates with a hostile invasion: “can there in yeeres so young, education so precise, in vowes so holy, and in a hart so chast, enter eyther a strong desire, or a wish, or a wavering thought of love?” (lines 8–9). The lines suggest—strangely to twenty-first-century readers—that love’s onset presents no necessary cause for celebration in the context of sixteenth-century understandings of selfhood. Telusa’s companion, Eurota, arrives in the same condition, and her baffled expressions are even more concise: “I confesse that I am in love, and yet I sweare I knowe not what it is” (lines 45–46). Metamorphosed by Cupid’s interventions, Eurota describes the lover’s condition with “thoughts unknit” and eyes “unstaid.” Her heart, she delibrates, is “I know not how affected or infected” (line 47).

Crucially, love “enters in” rather than springing from the self.⁵⁶ The substitutability or confusion between being “affected” or “infected” highlights the nymphs’ alienated relation to a passion they find self-canceling. Eurota finds “my selfe in all thinges unlike my selfe” (3.1.48–49). When the third nymph enters with the remark “I am sent to seeke others that have lost my selfe,” the matter is clearly a group problem, not an individual one, as she explains: “if my selfe felt onelie this infection, I would then take upon me the definition, but being incident to so manie, I dare not myself describe it” (lines 79–81). By now Lyly spoofs

56. Montaigne (see n. 17 above) uses this idiom as well: “so are these two passions entred into me” (p. 147).

both Petrarchan contraries and tropes of self-loss as well as the more generically comic deployment of love across a group. He allows the nymphs to puzzle over the odd inappropriateness of Cupid's effects, unlike, say, the youths in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, who never realize that their sensations of love result from the agency of a magical flower.

The nymphs' case pits their theory of love and sex or kind against Cupid's. In the play's second scene, Cupid strays in Diana's woods and meets an unnamed votary. His opening query wonders whether "you straied from your company by chaunce, or love you to wander solitary on purpose?" (1.2.1–2). Diana's followers, of course, act only "on purpose," but they also are never really solitary, as they belong to a "trayne" or a "sweete troope" (lines 6, 12). Here is the nymph's assessment of the stakes: "This difference is betweene my mistris Diana, and your Mother (as I gesse) Venus, that all her Nimphes are amiable and wise in theyr kinde, the other amorous and too kind for their sexe" (lines 26–29). Diana's votaries are wise because they remain "in theyr kinde"; Venus's followers stray from their sex by being "too kinde" to the other sex, as the sentence plays out the multivalence of the term 'kind'.

The judgment of the play, as we will see, is that announced here by Diana's votary. Like E. K.'s gloss in Spenser, the play places bonds "within kind" above cross-gender erotic mixing. When Diana reprimands her lovesick train that "of all affections, love hath the greatest name, & the least virtue" (3.4.26–27), citing its "staining" and "corruption" of "lovely faces," they immediately confirm, "it worketh effect as contrarie to what wee wishe" (line 56). Announcing his plan to bring love in against their choosing, Cupid shows a different perspective on sex, gender, or kind. "I will make their paines my pastimes," he crows, "& so confound their loves in their owne sexe, that they shall dote in their desires, delight in their affections, and practise only impossibilities" (2.2.6–9). Instead of drawing identity and substance by virtue of keeping to kind, the nymphs in this coyly anatomical view can only "practise impossibilities" when among "their owne sexe." But the play itself will displace this "impossibility" from same-sex relations onto Cupid's efforts (Diana captures him and forces him to undo the "love-knots"), confounding the usual inevitability of love and Cupid's powers. "Impossibility" also, as we will see, will describe the ultimate status of heterosexual representation in the play.

Keeping to kind and the reversibility of nonconsensual love: these two notions bring us to Gallathea and Phillida, who are neither of Diana's milieu nor under Cupid's power. The process by which they fall in love differs emphatically from the nymphs' suffering of Cupid's mischief. Both girls resist adopting boys' attire, as variously unfit for them. Gallathea rather sagely reproves her father that "destenie may

be deferred, not prevented,” but her father retorts “to gaine love, the Gods have taken the shapes of beastes, and to save life art thou coy to take the attire of men?” (1.1.69–70, 88–89). When Phillida’s father proposes she adopt “mans apparell,” she complains “it will neither become my bodie, nor my minde” (1.3.14–15). She then explores the possibilities to which a cross-dressed condition limits her. If she keeps company with boys, she “muste . . . commit follies unseemlie for my sexe” (a gender violation only she will know of), while if she keeps company with girls, she will “be thought more wanton than becometh” her (i.e., be ill-reputed for being thought to be mixing) (lines 17–19). In either case, the norm here is one of same-sex company, and both compromising prospects commit her to some level of lamentable sexual mixing.

What seems especially odd is that, while male disguise is viewed as corrupting by the girls, they also have little faith that it can actually work. Phillida fears she will be so ashamed “of my long hose and short coate, and so unwarelie blabbe out something by blushing at everything” (1.3.20–21). Gallathea has concerns beyond the tell-tale blush, though she has that too: “Blush, Gallathea, that must frame thy affection fitte for thy habite. . . . Thy tender yeeres cannot dissemble this deceit, nor thy sexe beare it” (2.1.1–4). She also frets that she has no idea how to act but is glad when a “boy” approaches (it is Phillida) so she may “learne of him how to behave my selfe” (lines 11–12). But Phillida, too, enters lamenting: “I neither like my gate, nor my garments; the one untoward, the other unfit, both unseemely” (lines 13–14). This commentary on the inaptness of gendered costume (it does not fit) argues an incommensurability between genders.⁵⁷ The girls also suppose men to be a distinct kind. Phillida proposes that “under the color of my coate, I shall decipher the follies of their kind” (lines 21–22). Gallathea’s halting anthropology theorizes that men customarily inquire of one another about their virginity, “since the question among men is common” (line 29). Like the nymphs, then, the girls conceive of the sexes as alien kinds; here, sexual difference entails no concomitant desire.

If the nymphs are the main voicers of this view of kind, Gallathea and Phillida’s attraction illustrates its processes. While the play is largely inconsistent about whether they know they are both girls, the mechanisms by which their affections grow is wholly homonormative. Their mutual “fair beauty” draws them on. They reciprocally confirm their fears about the efficacy of cross-sex disguise, because Phillida’s first

57. Although I have not pursued this question here, as a theatrical matter, the sex of the all-boy company performing the play raises the cross-gendering stakes by transvestism but also preserves the homo-logics I am describing.

response is an aside to the effect that Gallathea is such “a prettie boy and a faire, hee might well have been a woman” (2.1.19–20). Twenty lines later, Gallathea has fallen in love, calling him (in an aside) “mine owne Deare” when Diana and company arrive in quest of the deer, and she muses “yonder boy is in my eye too beautiful!” (lines 42, 45). Diana immediately confirms, calling Phillida “a prettie lad” (line 47). Both girls stammer under Diana’s interrogation, and a follower concludes “these boyes are both agreed,” that is, they are both like and in agreement (line 55). Each girl then has a scene in which she soliloquizes her apparent dilemma. Gallathea, finding Phillida “too faire,” queries: “Why did Nature to him, a boy, give a face so faire?” And she wonders: “It may be Gallathea, —foolish Gallathea, what may be? Nothing” (2.4.8, 11–12). In suggesting that “nothing” paradoxically “may be,” Gallathea’s speech densely uses Renaissance topoi of female genitalia as “nothing” to envision the something that may be: that Phillida is a girl. Phillida, in turn, employs a complex logic to ask herself: “Art thou no sooner in the habite of a boy, but thou must be enamored of a boy?” (2.5.3–4). Only a bias for likeness can make this musing logical.

An ensuing scene is key to both the topoi of sexual likeness in the play and the gender discourses of *Twelfth Night*, which draw much upon this Lylyan passage. Phillida, a girl disguised as a boy, protests to Gallathea, the girl Phillida loves, “it is a pitty that Nature framed you not a woman, having a face so faire, so lovely a countenance, so modest a behavior” (3.2.1–2). But, then, speaking as a boy, she says “I doe not wish [thee] to be a woman, for then I should not love thee, for I have sworne never to love a woman” (lines 9–10). Gallathea’s convoluted response embeds both homonormative and heteronormative models: “A strange humor in so prettie a youth” (Phillida being a “boy”), but, she continues, “accordyng to myne, for my selfe will never love a woman” (lines 11–12). Again the girls are in accord. Phillida asks Gallathea, then, to suppose that “under the habite of a boy were the person of a mayde”; Gallathea replies, “admit that I were as you would have me suppose that you are” (lines 18, 22–23). The flirtatious banter continues barely parsable, but its structure constantly proceeds by such analogies: “I feare me he is as I am, a mayden,” says Phillida, and Gallathea likewise fears “the boy to be as I am a mayden” (lines 28–31). Analogical patterns shape Gallathea’s conclusion, too: “Aye me, he is as I am, for his speeches be as mine are” (lines 41–42). When Phillida finally enquires whether Gallathea can prefer a “fond boy,” Gallathea’s reply takes the form of a comparison. “Why should not I as well as you?” (line 57). Privately assured of their sexual conditions, they exit on Phillida’s classical invitation: “Come. Let us into the Grove, and make much of one another, that cannot tell what to think one of another” (lines 58–59).

What they make of one another is not represented. When they return at the end of act 4, the wordplay continues even more strongly, marked by equivocations with each vying to out-flatter the other's "virginal" or "maidenly" fairness. Phillida proposes "seeing we both are boyes and both lovers, that our affection may have some showe, and seeme as it were love, let me call thee Mistris" (4.4.16–17)—in a sense, calling for a heteronormative rhetoric, after the fact, as a "showe" for the girls' now virtually articulated state. Phillida remains onstage, still supposing she loves someone who "is as [her] selfe is" (line 38). Her assessment of the outlook in this case is pessimistic. "If she be a mayden there is no hope of my love," she complains, and "I will after him or her and lead a melancholie life, that look for a miserable death" (lines 42–44). It is precisely this sense of impossibility, however, that the play's ultimate logic will dispel.

The trope of impossibility resounds through the play, from Cupid's initial plea to consign the nymphs to "practising impossibilities" (3.3.8–9); to the subplot's repeated concerns with the claims of alchemy—its "termes impossible to be uttered" and its ambition impossible to achieve (2.3.14, 79)—and of astronomy—"there is nothing so easie . . . to compasse as impossibilities" (3.3.51); to a debate whether "loveknots" can be untied ("'tis impossible to unknit them" [4.2.23]); to another apprentice's unnamed master with the power of "devising impossibilities" (5.1.69); and to Venus's final positive verdict on two girls in love that proposes the possibility of changing one girl into a boy. It is in the third plot, where masterless men seek employment from a variety of masters, that the meaning of this impossibility topos emerges.

First, they try the mariner with whom they have been shipwrecked, who offers to instruct them in his "secrets: for there is not a clowte nor carde, nor boord, nor post, that hath not a speciall name, or a singuler nature" (1.4.48–50). They admire his knowledge, but resist his effort to instruct them in the laws and names identifying diverse things and their particular functions. Instead, one of them proceeds to attach himself to an alchemist, whose professed art of converting natured things—pennies into pounds, base matter into gold—is consistently ridiculed as folly and transgression. The next apprenticeship, to an astronomer, raises the stakes concerning the metamorphosis of singular natures. When Raffe jokes that the astronomer's foreknowledge will "translate" Raffe from "mortality," the astronomer responds by revealing his transgressive ambition: "thy thoughts shall be metamorphosed, and made haile fellows with the Gods" (3.3.80–82). Taken together, these instances explore the parameters of metamorphosis, juxtaposing the mariner's effectual knowledge of "singuler natures" with mountebanks' false claims of metamorphic power. The question remains open as to Venus's power to produce the play's promised end: converting

one girl to a neo-Ovidian maid-and-man. Converting “singuler nature” appears impossible among mortals; as for the power of the gods, as Gallathea’s father warns, “it is not permitted to knowe, and encurreth danger to coniecture” (1.1.55–56).

The play’s judicial finale assembles the gods, *en banc*, to sort out their jurisdictions in cross complaints between Venus and Diana, with Neptune presiding. The gods discover they must face another matter. “Doe you both, being Maidens,” Neptune inquires of Gallathea and Phillida, “love one another?” (5.3.116). When the girls profess their absolute and constant attachment, Neptune considers it “an idle choyce” (line 128), just as Cupid had considered loves among Diana’s nymphs as “impossibilities.” But when Neptune turns to Venus for her view, she announces (as we should hope of the goddess of love), “I like well and allowe it, they shall both be possessed of their wishes” (line 132). Interrogating the girls about the surety of their affection, she then offers to change one into a man. Diana, who finds this mildly alarming, asks “Is it possible?” Venus answers with a question: “What is to Love or the Mistrisse of Love impossible?” (line 142), recalling herself, in the third person, as the transformer of Iphis. After the most elaborate and thorough consent process in any play I know (three divinities, two fathers, and the two girls all offer explicit consent), Venus defers the decision as to which girl will be transformed and the act of transformation itself to beyond the play’s borders. Though they are still both dressed as boys, the last consent is exchanged between the two girls.

Thus while the explicit discourses of the play attach “impossibility” to same-sex love, the workings of the play and whatever approach to marriage it accomplishes depend on it. With nymphs restored to the community of their “sweete troope” and love hatched between two girls approved in a legal display, at the play’s end there are still only two kinds of gender-mixed bonds on the table: a predatory heterosexuality marked as inimical to female characters and a deferred sex-change within a love established clearly on the basis of “natural attraction,” that is, a drawing-toward effected by a law of like natures. Heterosexual marriage is even more impossible for the play to represent than the homo-normative bonds it ratifies and articulates. It remains unrepresentable as a conclusion to *Gallathea*. Instead, likeness-driven affect is doubly invoked, first as a law of desire and of consent and second as a fact legitimated by a juridical intervention, one whose device of metamorphosis remains a promise as haunted by impossibility as alchemy had been. The play’s last scene shows us a betrothal without a man.

Cupid had directly offered the visions of love in this play as exemplary models for Elizabeth’s court, by means of which they might conclude “wee may all love” (2.2.14). Gallathea delivers the epilogue affirming that the evidence shows Venus can work “things impossible

in your Sexe" ("Epilogue," lines 3–4). "Homonormativity" describes the two, otherwise contradictory, gestures with respect to this "Sexe" that the play seems to authorize: self-constancy (*semper eadem*) in the undoing of a love that makes the chaste nymph "in all things unlike [her] selfe" and the attraction of likes (*alter idem* or *par coniugium*) that has been ratified through a display of divine adjudication.

IV. SHAKESPEARE'S BIAS

Readers of *Twelfth Night* will recognize many resemblances between the two plays. *Twelfth Night's* countless riddling lines about the cross-dressed Viola's sex throughout derive much from these scenes in *Gallathea*. For example, Viola's verbal parrying to deny to say she is a man or a woman improvises directly on Lyly's earlier example, answering Phillida's "My father had but one daughter, and therefore I could have no sister" (*Gallathea* 3.2.39–40) with Viola/Cesario's "I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too" (*Twelfth Night* 2.4.120–21). The final scene, too, resonates precisely; as many scholars have noted, *Twelfth Night* ends with a gesture toward a marriage sometime after the finis, meanwhile pointedly leaving Viola "as a man." An imprisoned sea captain holds her "woman's weeds," and the Duke proposes she keep the name "Cesario" until she changes clothes, "For so you shall be while you are a man" (5.1.273, 386). Like *Gallathea*, then, the play's last emblem remains a same-sex pair, with marriage an approximated but unfulfilled gesture.

Although Shakespeare never voices the possibility, as Lyly's characters do, that cross-gender disguising will fail, the affective dynamics of *Twelfth Night* rely on a sense of the sexed character escaping or exceeding the clothes that encase it. When Viola becomes Cesario to serve Orsino, the main reason he selects her as a proxy to the reluctant Olivia is her nonmasculinity. And this is not in order to prevent what eventually occurs (Olivia's falling for the messenger) but, on the contrary, to make use of a homonormative principle of affect and attraction that he supposes will make Olivia more receptive than all the previously spurned messengers from the Duke. Asserting her fitness for the role, Orsino urges that she will be more effective than "a nuncio" of "more grave aspect" (1.4.28). When Viola protests, he explains:

Dear lad, believe it;
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 the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman's part.

I know thy constellation is right apt
For this affair.

(Lines 29–36)

Viola's aptness, her fitness, depends on her likeness to Olivia. Her femininity appears as a virtue in the persuasion of a female beloved, an inducement (Orsino hopes) that will generate a desire that could somehow later be transferred to him, even though he personally lacks those attributes that he believes will draw Olivia into love.

The sense of kind-ness or likeness that causes persons of the same sex to be presumed amenable to each other also governs a second order of likeness in the play: the relatedness of siblings or twins. This species of likeness, too, is gathered as a way to approach or to approximate marriage. Orsino, for example, views Olivia's plan to mourn her brother for seven years less as evidence of excessive attachment than as a sign of great loyalties to come: "she that hath a heart of that fine frame / To pay this debt of love but to a brother, / How she will love . . . / When liver, brain, and heart, these sovereign thrones, are all supplied and filled, / . . . with one self king" (1.1.32–38). Like the homonormativity at the base of same-sex relations, there is a homonormative bias understood to hold in familial relations; each, in *Twelfth Night*, facilitates the play's intellectual approach toward the *impar coniugium* of heterosexual marriage, in which glaring unlikeness needs to be somehow moderated. As Cesario and Orsino remain the play's final, male marital pair, so the double couple of Viola-Orsino and Olivia-Sebastian is framed as an expanded group of siblings based on the axis of the twins. Olivia invites Orsino to "think me as well a sister as a wife," and she greets Viola as "A sister! you are she" (5.1.317, 326). Various same-sexed pairs effectuate the making of new sisters and brothers, and each of these likeness-based kinds ameliorates and leverages the (gestural) marital mixing to come.

This brings us to the oft-considered lines in *Twelfth Night's* recognition scene. Sebastian turns to the surprised Olivia, who has just discovered that the person she thought she married is female:

So comes it, lady, you have been mistook.
But nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid,
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived.
You are betrothed both to a maid and man.

(5.1.259–63)

Nature's bias: the phrase condenses the sense Hooker describes of nature as a law of kinds or things ("in such sort as they are") operating in a way or traveling a course ("after one and the same manner"). John

Florio's very contemporary translation of Montaigne's essays employs a similar idiom. In "Of Experience," the essayist makes one of many passes, or casts, at describing the self, this one focusing on illness: "My health is to keepe my accustomed state . . . I see that sicknesse dothe on the one side in some sort divert me from it, and if I beleeve Physicians, they on the other side will turne me from it: So that both by fortune and art, I am cleane out of my right bias."⁵⁸ This view of the working self builds on a natural law that describes keeping to a characteristic tendency or manner of moving. Shakespeare uses the same language in *King Lear* (ca. 1605), when Gloucester describes the break between Lear and Cordelia: "the King falls from bias of nature; there's father against child" (1.2.114–15). The words are normally glossed to mean a natural tendency or "inclination" for "kindness" to govern relations of (genealogical) "kind."⁵⁹ The sense of this phrase appears in *Othello* (ca. 1604), too, as Brabantio describes Desdemona's choice of otherness in Othello, finding it incredible "For nature so preposterously to err" (1.3.64) and as Othello himself obsessively insinuates, "And yet, how nature erring from itself" (3.3.243). Diverted, fallen, errant: when self-constancy, familial kindness, or the desire for likes wavers, nature is implicated.

This habit of thought and expression offers a rich context for reading Sebastian's "but nature to her bias drew in that." The difficult lines have long been viewed as describing nature correcting Olivia's course, from a woman to a man, rather than its directing her course toward her own "like" sex in the first place. Stephen Greenblatt began to recast the terms slightly by arguing that nature dictated a "swerve" as or toward heterosexuality. Pressing the bowling metaphor, he suggests that "in *Twelfth Night*, events pursue their natural curve, the curve that assures the proper mating of man and woman. To be matched with someone of one's own sex is to follow an unnaturally straight line; heterosexuality, as the image of nature drawing to its bias implies, is bent."⁶⁰ This reading does not assess the local resonance of Montaigne's usage, where to be "turned from" or "out of the bias" is to be "bent," to swerve, or to stray. Nor does it consider the contextualizing interest of the natural law concept Hooker elaborates, for which the "straight way" defines nature's course as the "evenest" and therefore "fittest" way.⁶¹ Renaissance patterns of thought associate the straight line with "a naturell movyng." Insofar as nature has operated to the bias instead of from or outside it in Olivia's attraction to Viola, there really has been no mistake.

58. Michel de Montaigne, "Of Experience," in Stewart, ed. (n. 17 above), p. 977.

59. Bevington, ed. (n. 18 above), p. 1177n, glossing *King Lear* 1.2.114.

60. Greenblatt (n. 13 above), p. 68.

61. Hooker (n. 33 above), p. 75.

Joseph Pequiney argues something to this effect, suggesting these lines indicate the naturalness of a “curved course,” but he glosses this swerve anachronistically as “a homoerotic swerving or lesbian deviation from the heterosexual straight and narrow.”⁶² Philologically speaking, it is heterosexual association that period discourses treat as a deviation of sorts in its variance from kind. What the lines presuppose is a law of nature operating according to either a like-seeking-like or a like-seeking-to-remain-itself principle; the key feature of the bias here concerns less its swerving aspect and more centrally the fact that the body in question must follow a self-defined or internally set course, tracing the route charted by the weight implanted inside the ball (to continue the bowling imagery). Homoeroticism requires no swerve; it is even, strangely enough, “straight” in Hooker’s sense, which is also to say it is not “unnaturally straight.” For heterosexuality enjoys no exclusive or necessary relation to the natural in the specific sense the idiom I have been tracing accords. Indeed, it may even involve a kind of denaturing in its mixture of kinds.

Let us consider the lines again: “So comes it, lady, you have been mistook. / But nature to her bias drew in that.” The person Olivia thought she happily married was a woman. In “that” antecedent matter, “nature” only drew to, not from, its bias, reflecting the principle that “like seeks like” that structures Renaissance ideas of attraction and repulsion. The bias expresses this tendency, according to an idea of law as expressive of the peculiar qualities of specific kinds. A certain sense of nature, in this historical and semantic moment, constructs its “bias” homonormatively. In comic strategy, likeness and resemblance roll as close to a hetero-marital conclusion as begins to make it plausible, without quite touching the “impossible”—and not (yet) fully desired—mark.

62. Joseph Pequiney, “The Two Antonios and Same-Sex Love in *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*,” in *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*, ed. Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps (London, 1995), p. 183. Drawing more closely on a psychoanalytic discourse, Charles Frey proposes a kind of bicameral affective capacity, offering a heterosexual “bias of generative nature” and a homosocial “bias of affectionate nature” (“The Bias of Nature,” *Upstart Crow* 12 [1993]: 5). But the “nature” in Shakespeare’s line bears little evidence of a bifurcation in this modern sense of split subjectivity.

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[Footnotes]

⁴³ **"Will you Rent our Ancient Love Asunder?": Lesbian Elegy in Donne, Marvell, and Milton**

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