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“Feminist Ethics of Complaint in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*”

In their chapter on “Complaint” Rosalind Smith, Michelle O’Callaghan, and Sarah C. E. Ross argue that “[t]he medieval origins of complaint are grounded in the interlinked traditions of religion and protest. . . . allowing carriage of a spectrum of emotions from despair to anger directed to both shared and intensely personal grievances: amorous, religious, and political” (340). Their definition of complaint, which elegantly traces the form through the temporal interests of our seminar, as linked to protest and to grievances that are often political are at the center of John Fletcher’s and William Shakespeare’s *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, an adaptation and revision, as we know, of Geoffrey Chaucer’s “The Knight’s Tale” which opens with three queens who make the play’s first political complaint, motivated by injustice and grief. Using forms of lamentation, they call attention to masculinist tyranny, to the costs of war for the women who remain alive, and to the power of women to speak back, to demand a higher form of responsibility to others. Throughout the play, Emilia adopts and performs what I argue is a feminist ethics of responsibility prompted by the three queens through a lament for the inevitable death of one of the cousins. Preferring that both Palamon and Arcite should live and that she should continue in chaste service to Diana, she protests death sentences and forced marriage. Her lamentations are speech acts, calling for an ethics of responsibility that, in Judith Butler’s terms, acknowledges our bonds with others. She asks, “what makes for a grievable life” (Butler 18)? Emilia answers this question by refusing to choose who to marry and, therefore, who will die. Consequently, she agrees to marry the man who wins the contest so that one man might live, sacrificing her desire to live a vestal of Diana and submitting to marriage. Her decision not only requires a sacrifice of will, of self, of happiness, but also protests Theseus’s violent ethos. Thus, Emilia’s lamentations both uncover the masculinist and heteronormative drive toward bloodshed and establish a radical feminist ethics of responsibility and sacrifice.

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“I have the Council’s warrant to apprehend him”: Choosing Conspiracy and Murder Instead of Divorce in *Arden of Faversham*

This essay examines the role that material evidence uncovers to expose murderous conspiracy and its co-conspirators in the cases of Alice Arden and Mary Queen of Scots. Specifically, this paper considers how these conspiracies function in the early modern domestic tragedy. For instance, Michael Billington, in *The Guardian*, wrote of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s 2014 *Arden of Faversham* adaptation: “the play, which reeks of documentary realism, was based on a notorious case, in which Arden, a local landowner, was murdered in 1551 in Faversham, at the instigation of his wife Alice and her low-born lover, Mosby.” Even though these married women possessed different socioeconomic stations, they found themselves in similarly “notorious” circumstances. In her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks observed: “many married women, recognizing their oppression in the family, have divorced. They are thrown, with no preparation or protection, into the labor market.” While the multiple conspiracies rival the plots of both Iago and Lady Macbeth, eventually Alice’s own malevolence emerges, by her critics, as criminal, unwomanly, and dangerous. I explore the problematic nature of conspiracy and murder for these married women, and their

choices as innovative, bold, and perhaps a little sinister. Here, this analysis examines illegality, proofs, and material culture as a way to investigate this distinctive tragedy while considering written evidence, particularly its intervention as a vital, early modern legal vehicle.

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“When my freed soul flies to her place of birth’: Complaint, Confinement, and Hester Pulter’s Queer Poetics”

As Hester Pulter’s poems, “breathed forth,” grapple with emotion and embodiment in the wake of isolation and grief, Pulter describes a movement toward disembodiment. Pulter’s complaints depict what she calls “universal dissolution,” a process of disintegration; a transition into dust. This description reflects the originations of the complaint in isolation and loneliness. Many of Pulter’s poems describe an eventual cosmic rearticulation that reorients the speaker in community with others. This is poetry that invites us to rethink (as Sarah Ahmed puts it) “the concept of ‘orientation ’ through different sites, spaces, and temporalities.” In considering the ways that bodies generally “take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon,” Ahmed suggests a queer phenomenology that takes some joy in a “failure to be proper” - that is, that a body that does not cohere or orient itself to the nearby, or to the familiar, takes joy in that incoherence. The queer body that orients itself in relation to what is uncanny or unfamiliar is the metaphysical body, intricately articulated; the metaphysical body that Hester Pulter articulates in her poetry feels, and seeks to re-orient that feeling in a way that moves neatly through the spatialities Ahmed describes.

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“The Echoes of Anne Bacon's Complaints in her Sons' Silence”

Anne Bacon, a highly educated woman whose work in translation was well regarded, played a large role in educating her young sons Anthony and Francis. When they were grown and working in government-adjacent professions, they continued to rely on her for money and treats from her garden. Despite the affections expressed by both sides, there was a great deal of contention between Anne Bacon and the adult Bacon sons. She frequently offered advice, and they usually declined to follow it. She frequently complained of their reveling, diets, sleeping patterns, etc., and even tried to have their friend tried for treason. Much of the contention came down to her commitments as a Puritan, which contrasted with her son’s beliefs and lifestyles. Anne outlived Anthony, whose true religious commitments are lost to us, the evidence skewed by his espionage activities, though at times he seemed to follow in her spiritual footsteps and always he seemed to be Francis’s confidante and collaborator. The adult beliefs of Francis Bacon seem to be the result of some combination of his brother’s spy life and his mother’s firm religious convictions. Her Puritan complaints had a deep effect, though it was not the effect she hoped. He seemed to absorb her belief that a person’s eternal fate in the afterlife was predetermined, that it was unaffected by a person’s words and deeds in this life. For Anne, this meant that a person’s life should consciously reflect their elect status. Francis, on the other hand, followed out the logic of predetermination and took God out of the equation of his

thinking. Since what he thought and did mattered not in the light of eternity, his deepest thinking took account of God by not including God.

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“Sepulchres in mud”: Damage, Loss, and Eloquence in *A Lover’s Complaint*”

This essay is about how lost and discarded objects can become a generative source for formal experimentation. It explores the temporality of lament—an expression of retrospection, repetition, and reverberation—both verbally and materially. In Shakespeare’s *A Lover’s Complaint*, published as the final component of his 1609 *Sonnets*, the unnamed speaker is described as “shrieking” in an “undistinguished woe” (l. 20). *A Lover’s Complaint* also demonstrates the affective significance that Shakespeare invests in material excess, or rather, in the dispersal of objects that carry traces of a lost and damaged past. The bereft lady is awash in tokens from her former love, “A thousand favours from a maund she drew” (l. 36). Her anguish creates a veritable dumping ground of unwanted things: she “sighed, tore, and gave the flood, / Cracked many a ring of posied gold and bone, / Bidding them find their sepulchres in mud” (ll. 44-46).

Taking the images of destruction in *A Love’s Complaint* seriously, I treat Shakespeare’s strange poem as an opportunity to reflect on how we interpret texts that have fallen out of their original circuits of production and reception. The lover’s poetics of discard operate as a kind of anti-*copla*, sourcing potential eloquence in an abundance of examples that are counter-intuitively constellated through dispersal. Far from a humanist practice of gathering—that is, of seeking out and collecting textual excerpts as sources for future composition—the lover’s eloquence derives from an act of destruction. In what follows, I take the tangled circuits of verbal complaint and physical destruction as a provocation to explore how these expressions of loss are intertwined. What are we to do with objects that speak to a prior existence we can no longer reconstruct? With traces of loss in histories that seemingly aspire to completeness? With forms that attain eloquence through the damage they have endured?

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“The Desert’s safer than a Tyrant’s court”: Musical complaint in “The Blessed Virgin’s Expostulation” and *The Winter’s Tale*

My paper will offer a close reading of Henry Purcell and Nahum Tate’s “The Blessed Virgin’s Expostulation” (*Harmonia Sacra*, 1693). Though long appreciated by singers and audiences, it has received little scholarly or critical attention. “Expostulation” has the dramatic force of an operatic aria, but on a religious topic: Mary’s grief at losing twelve-year-old Jesus in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-52). This Baroque song connects to literary, musical, and religious traditions of the Middle Ages and earlier. For example, the medieval hymn *Angelus ad virginem*, which dramatizes the Annunciation, is vividly evoked—thematically, if not musically—in “Expostulation,” which reimagines the joyous announcement of Mary’s pregnancy as the mother’s cry of despair and abandonment by both Jesus and the archangel Gabriel. Indeed, Mary’s complaint in “Expostulation” draws much of its affective and rhetorical power from the textual and musical motifs of the abandoned woman: a literary trope that extends from Catullus’s *Ariadne*, Vergil’s *Dido*, and Ovid’s *Heroides* to their innumerable

medieval and early modern imitators. The *abbandonata* was a favorite subject in early opera, from Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna* (1608) onward, though typically in mythological and secular narratives; Purcell and Tate's appropriation of the abandoned lover's discourse for Mary raises numerous questions about women's performance and religion in Restoration England. I will investigate how "Expostulation" (early)modernizes the medieval Marian lament by infusing it with classical and humanist tropes.

While musicians know Tate best as the librettist of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, Shakespeareans know him for his "happy ending" adaptation of *King Lear*. I argue that "Expostulation" bears a thematic kinship to *The Winter's Tale*, as multiple critics have read Hermione as a Marian figure. I aim to build on the reading of "Expostulation" as a blend of sacred and secular musical gestures to explore how similarities between Hermione and Mary are expressed in *The Winter's Tale*'s musical/sonic world.

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"Natural" Lament: Ecossemiotic Frustration and the Medean Complaint in Petrarch's *Rvf* and *Familiars* I.4, and Gaspara Stampa's *Rime*

The insufficiency of the natural world is centered in Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*. Petrarch continually describes himself as confused, disoriented, weary, and deprived of an adequate vantage point, while the murky, difficult landscape causes him to frequently lose his bearings. Maximizing the parallelisms between a conflicted interior world and an inimical external world, the poet's unproductive trajectory and obsession with perambulation prevent him from properly orienting himself towards God, as he claims he is attempting to do, or from properly orienting himself towards his beloved, as he desires. Although Petrarch offers oblique and direct references to Medea at various moments throughout the *Rvf*, his use of ecossemiotic metaphors, along with his assessments of various types of terrain that underscore the dramatic effect that landscapes have upon the suffering lover are rarely linked to his citation of Medea's affective complaints.

Indeed, and in a fashion that is explicitly performative, the difficult landscape in which the lover finds himself both foments and responds to his spatial and epistemological confusion. He stumbles, falters, and falls to the ground as he wanders along a twisted path obstructed by mountains, dense woods, and chasms. Responding to the downward directionality of falls and inhospitable terrain that exemplify spiritual amorous, and poetic perdition, the poet Gaspara Stampa offers a provocative renegotiation of Petrarch's depiction of landscape and self. As such, the complaints of Stampa's lover also productively enter into dialogue with key elements of Medea's lament, as the lover is pulled towards a beloved situated in inaccessible territories and at unreachable heights.

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"I cannot forbear to complain": Mary Carleton and the Materiality of Complaint"

This essay examines how "German Princess" Mary Carleton's autobiographical *Case of Madam Mary Carleton*, a text that bridges her rise to fame and her subsequent bigamy trial, unites early modern discourses of complaint with emphatic material performances of legal and institutional protest. I argue that Carleton harnesses the formal structures and rhetorical discourses of complaint to push

back on English legal structures, including coverture, and to instead align herself with powerful figures of the Restoration court, and that Carleton issues these critiques through precise attention to the material nature of her complaints, grounding complaint in a focus on garments, jewels, and material display. Carleton's complaints, repeated across her writings, include emphases on the violent removal of her clothing by associates of her husband, John Carleton, as well as repeated discussion of the garments and jewels that ground Carleton's own identity claims. By engaging with genres of complaint as they exist in the 1660's, Carleton issues critiques inherent to this genre, and shows how early modern women extended complaint rhetoric into powerful material performances and protests. Situating the Carleton texts within the genre of complaint can shed new light on their recursive nature, on the circulating objects that appear again and again within them, and on Carleton's own authorial voice.

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“*Macbeth* and the Medieval Inheritance of Maternal Lament”

In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Lady Macduff appears in only one scene. Yet this scene is the moral heart of the tragedy. Her murder, and the murder of her son, expresses the cost in human lives of the political machinations for the power and privileges of the Scottish throne. Her anger, though, is most pointedly aimed at her husband, who has abandoned his family to accompany Malcolm to England and further his cause. Perhaps Lady Macbeth can be understood as naïve, but she justly sees all those who get sucked into these power struggles as abandoning the cause of the innocent and vulnerable. Lady Macduff, the “good woman” of the play, is also an angry woman.

This paper will consider Lady Macduff's emotional scene with her son as a dramatic descendent of medieval cycle play pageants of the Slaughter of the Holy Innocents. These plays are noted for a complexity of tone almost unintelligible to modern sensibilities. They convey maternal grief and mourning for the murdered infants but also include misogynistic comedy of vituperative women attacking the soldiers verbally with coarse language and physically with distaffs. This project was originally prompted by Gloria Olchow's observation: “These pageants also featured [...] mothers using the tools of their trades to resist the soldiers who had come to kill their children in stark contrast to Lady Macduff [...], who, lacking work implements, flees rather than fights and dies with her boy-child.” It is this alleged lack that I want to explore further. I'll argue that Lady Macduff is armed with rhetorical rather than vocational tools, and that the sophistication of her complaint fully exposes the extent of Macbeth's tyranny and Macduff's perfidy just as the haunting laments of the Slaughter plays served as cry for justice.

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“Trespass Forms and Formal Departures: The Rhetoricity of Women's Complaint in Common Law Records”

The common law courts of Common Pleas and King's Bench were England's busiest in the early seventeenth century, constituting a regular feature of lives lived through the forms and structures of the law in a period of unprecedented litigiousness. Yet, whilst scholars have considered the rhetoricity of women's complaints in equity, criminal, and ecclesiastical court contexts, the female

voices and fictive strategies contained within the voluminous civil ‘plea side’ rolls have received little by way of corresponding attention. This neglect can largely be explained by what the legal historian John Baker has described as the ‘terse formalism’ of the common law rolls, whose strict, repetitive, abbreviated-Latin forms have long been seen to obscure not only the “true” facts of a case, but the “authentic” selves supposedly concealed beneath an enrolment. In reading *through*, rather than around such forms, I am, instead, interested in the extent to which the voices of women are recoverable in the records of England’s central common law courts. In particular, I want to consider the possibility of what I call the “narrated self”; that is, the textual subject I suggest is produced by, and given voice through, jurisdiction-specific forms of complaint.

My paper takes as its case study a bill of complaint filed by Thomasine Ostler in the King’s Bench in Trinity term 1616. Thomasine Ostler was the daughter of John Heminges, then financial manager of the King’s Men, and the young widow of William Ostler, who, like Heminges, had been one of the company’s principal actors. I first explore the use of fourteenth-century ‘trespass’ forms in Thomasine’s seventeenth-century *narratio*, or narration. I then suggest that paying attention to moments of departure from precisely these elements can allow us to hear traces of Thomasine’s ‘voice’ in the King’s Bench.

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“Rejecting Queenship, Challenging Monarchy? Margaret Douglas’s ‘Deathbed’ Complaint”

In an entry in the Devonshire Manuscript likely written or transcribed c. 1536, Margaret Douglas dramatizes a final will and testament. Her poem activates a hybrid space of oral contract, in its imagined speech, and written document, recorded in the shared manuscript. I want to extend, here, the growing consensus that Douglas uses this space in memoriam of her husband, Thomas Howard, and to register the injustice she believes inheres in their separation by Henry VIII, by (1) further considering the poem’s temporal position (historically and biographically) and (2) considering how monarchy and foreignness interact in the text. How is Douglas imagining her relationship to the English crown in this poem? How is that imagined relation inflected by medieval and by early modern views of monarchy and queenship? How, and why, does Douglas activate English visions of foreignness? While the poem’s form and narrative situation are also important, these questions all anchor on Douglas’s claim that “to be quen off all Italy, nat on day lengere leve I wol,” which I particularly want to examine through the increasing work on “Race-ing Queens,” inspired by Mira Assaf Kafantaris, even as we consider the poem in the additional context of women’s manuscript collaboration.

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“Tydings of hainous tort’: Hearing the Curious Case of Britomart’s Complaint”

In a rarely examined testimony of rape in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, Britomart accuses her future husband Artegal of having done her “foule dishonour and reprochfull spight” (3.2.8). Fearing that she has “missayd,” Britomart takes the accusation back, a retraction that works to elide her

testimony from both the poem's narrative of her marital quest and the body of feminist scholarship that this narrative has engendered (3.2.9). In this paper, I suggest that Britomart's unsaying of rape poses a particular problem for critics invested in the poem's representation of gendered power dynamics. For Britomart's interlocutor, Redcrosse Knight, and *The Faerie Queene's* modern editors, the complaint is easily dismissed and quickly forgotten as a slanderous defamation of Artegal's character. But its striking absence from the poem's feminist critical history reflects, I argue, an ongoing struggle in feminist theory more broadly—how to account for missayings of rape. My analysis negotiates the critical reluctance to address this scene, treating Britomart as what Ahmed has called in *Complaint!* the “malicious complainer,” a figure motivated by a desire to do damage to the system. I bring together Ahmed's theorization of the affective and phenomenological registers of complaint and the House of Busirane's Ovidian tapestries, woven textiles that surface the gendered and embodied labour of complaint. In Spensesr's engagement with the material politics of these tapestries, I suggest that we might see a model for understanding the kind of complaint that Britomart issues. In other words, in their ability to simultaneously hide and reveal, conceal and discover, the tapestries help us hear what Britomart is saying by unsaying rape.

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“my desire is to imitate that approved Hannah’: biblical models of complaint in Anna Trapnel’s *Report and Plea* (1654)”

In 1654, Anna Trapnel's visionary treatises, predicting the return of Christ and the fall of Cromwell, flooded the market. These works not only fuse diverse modes such as life-writing, exegesis, and complaint but also fuse Trapnel's own voice with extensive (even relentless) biblical quotation. Slipping in and out of her own voice, Trapnel engages with the book of *Lamentations* while modelling herself on biblical prophets and on Hannah, the mother of Samuel, in particular. As she claims in her letter ‘To the Reader’ in her *Report and Plea*, ‘my desire is to imitate that approved Hannah in 1 *Sam.* 1. who was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore for a Samuel’. Yet, here, Trapnel's echoing of both biblical dream visions and female-voiced devotional complaint moves beyond the model Hannah offers. Trapnel does not weep for ‘a Samuel’, but for herself, as she outlines explicitly: ‘for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto’. In Trapnel's hands, complaint is a fiercely individual speech-act which creates an exclusive connection between speaker and addressee. For Trapnel, this divine connection is reciprocal: ‘I weep not for sorrow, but my tears flow from apprehensions of communion with the Lord.’ Centring her own politics, Trapnel gestures to a literary tradition of female spiritual complaint while positioning herself in a privileged conversation with God. This paper then examines Trapnel's conflict between inward-facing lament and public-facing prophecy.