SAA 2025: How Not to Be a Misogynist
Paper Abstracts

Putting Her in Her Place: Misogyny and Ageism in *The Winter's Tale*
Stephanie Chamberlain, Southeast Missouri State University

One need not look far in contemporary culture for attacks upon women. Within the fraught socio-political environment in which we find ourselves, misogyny, as Phyllis Rackin astutely asserts of Shakespeare's late sixteenth century England, is quite literally everywhere.[1] Less discussed is its not infrequent coupling with ageism. While criticism abounds against flagrant instances of misogyny, pervasive ageism passes largely unnoticed. Indeed, those whose sensibilities rage against sexism, racism, and misogyny often unwittingly engage in ageist discourse. Ageism, however, especially when coupled with misogyny constitutes a serious attack on women and as such should constitute an urgent feminist concern.

With this concern in mind, my paper examines misogyny and ageism in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale,* a late romance that celebrates atonement and reunion—at least from a male perspective. Indeed, even as the text exonerates the abusive Leontes, it re-enforces roles deemed appropriate for women, including those for dutiful wife and daughter. I focus especially on the final scene of the play, where Leontes redeemed by time and forced contrition, reunites not only with his grown daughter Perdita, but with the abused Hermione as well. Taken to the newly completed statue of his wife, this repentant husband, whose misogyny presumably led to her death, witnesses Hermione's miraculous awakening from the idealized form to which she is consigned sixteen years after her "death." What should be a moment of exoneration for this abused wife at the hands of a misogynous husband is swiftly undercut when Leontes complains that "Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing / So agèd as this seems" (5.3.28-29). Leontes, I argue, commits a second act of misogyny when he criticizes Hermione's age and loss of beauty—putting this exonerated wife in her place even as he celebrates their reunion.

Ophelia's "Madness"?
Benjamin Hilb, Francis Marion University

Whether or not Hamlet goes "mad" has proved a perennial question in Shakespeare criticism. Near the end of Act One Hamlet suggests that he may later put on an "antic disposition," but during the play his sanity, even given his forewarning, is suspect. Perhaps he passes temporarily, here or there, into "madness," or perhaps at some point he "goes mad" more enduringly. Yet for all the critical discussion of Hamlet's psychology, scholars have long assumed that Ophelia "goes mad." There seems to be a double-standard at work, here, and an early instantiation of the misogynistic trope of the "hysterical" or "crazy" woman. My essay aims to revise accounts of Ophelia's psychology in order to help halt the unwarranted, gendered assumptions of Ophelia's apparent "madness." I will argue that Ophelia has just as much reason as Hamlet to feign "madness," and that the text contains good reasons to think she might do so. But I won't argue unreservedly that she does so, for she may not be feigning, and her suffering, which could be

read as "madness" in Shakespeare's early modern English cultural vocabulary, provides a testament to the real psychological harm inflicted on women by misogynist patriarchal cultural practices. So I will make the case, instead, for keeping the question of Ophelia's madness open, as has been done in the case of Hamlet.

Dirty Joking and Its Discontents: Dirty Clowning Slang and the Rustic Sexual Grotesque As Obscene Pedagogies and Initiation in Renaissance Rape Culture
Bob Hornback, Oglethorpe University

Most studies of dirty joking in Shakespeare (most notably, Eric Partridge's seminal *Shakespeare's Bawdy* [1955]) have been written from a laddish perspective congratulating Shakespeare in highly selective fashion for an assumed cis-hetero masculine-dominant sexuality figured as "normal." By contrast, drawing upon myriad sources — scenes in many plays featuring clowns engaged in aggressive dirty joking with women (or leads like Hamlet and Petruchio mirroring clowning conventions); James Turner's work on traditions of "festive-violent shaming ritual" authorizing "festive-punitive assaults" against women employing only slightly veiled and/or mock- rape (e.g., "tumbling" and "sousing") by groups of young men publicly exposing the genitalia of targeted prostitutes; Freud's analysis of public obscene joking by men "directed towards women" as likewise "serving the purpose of exposure" of "a woman … feeling shamed" in terms of a joke-telling male "assailant," an "assailed" woman ("the object of the … sexual aggressiveness"), and a third male "laughing as though he were spectator of an act of sexual aggression"; Carissa Harris's demonstration in *Obscene Pedagogies* (2018) of "obscenity's role in authorizing masculine aggression and fostering misogyny" via men "teaching their peers to perpetuate rape culture"; the stunning rape-joke scene featuring a clown in the Queen Anne's Men's play *The Rape of Lucrece* (1608) in light of heretofore ignored evidence of gang rapes by members of this popular Red Bull theatre playing company; and Barbara J. Baines' demonstration of ways in which female consent was rendered always already moot — I argue that dirty clowning/joking in Renaissance English drama often taught messages that promoted misogyny, made light of violence against women, and obviated or effaced consent, just as modern psychological studies and the predatory behavior and rape joking of modern comedian Louis C.K. show that public dirty joking by men directed at/against woman still does.

"All the crafty deceits of women"; or, How to Find Real Women in Misogynist Texts
Laura Kolb, Baruch College, CUNY

"All the crafty deceits of women," claimed Joseph Swetnam, could not be recorded even "if all the world were paper, and all the sea inke" and "every man in the world were a writer." Plenty did their best. Swetnam himself filled *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* (1615) with warnings against feminine dissembling, and a huge range of cultural materials, from misogynist popular songs and jests to marriage sermons, condemned women's capacity for deceit. Women's deceptions threatened male honor, the stability of the household, and the fabric of society. Alarmingly, such deceptions might well be indetectable. As Thomas Grantham warns in a 1641 marriage sermon, a woman's duplicity is "like the flight of a Bird in

the aire" or "the passage of a ship upon the Sea"; there is, he writes, "no sign of the birds flying" and no mark "of the ship's passage."

This paper recognizes that the common claim, *women lie*, is often deployed in service of a misogynist ideology that essentializes and dehumanizes women. At the same time, however, it holds that this claim—even in misogynist contexts, like Swetnam's anti-feminist screed—indexes the real social conditions of women and, in so doing, destabilizes the misogynist project of essentializing women. Surveying a range of cultural materials (with special emphasis on domestic manuals, and a brief foray into *Arden of Faversham*), it argues that early moderns recognized that women lie in conditions of entrenched inequality and circumstantial precarity. Through analyzing the period's relentless interest in feminine dissimulations, we find not women's *essence* but what Simone de Beauvoir termed their *situation*: structural disenfranchisement and, often, situational risk.

Believable Femininity: Virgin Power
Jessica McCall, Delaware Valley University

For this paper I am exploring my concept of believable femininity—the presence of specific textual markers that make a woman (fictional or not) "real." These markers are read through a woman's embodiment, rhetoric, and/or textual performance primarily and I am considering how they operate in the writings and speeches of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth offers a unique exploration of this idea. I have previously researched this concept with fictional warrior women only; however, Elizabeth, and specifically her use of The Virgin identity, presents an interesting opportunity to explore this structure as it coalesces in reality as opposed to fictional representation. Additionally, Elizabeth's place on the throne created a unique set of circumstances in Early Modern England that required some fancy footwork on the part of patriarchal authors to cede power to women (real and fictional) without wholly upending the gender hierarchy.

Listening Rhetoric and Gender in *Antony and Cleopatra*: The Aural Dimension
Esther B. Schupak, Bar-Ilan University

In this paper, I will examine the way that gendered identifications and difference are aurally constituted through sound in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra.* The drama, I hypothesize, portrays female discourse in a manner that is both quantitatively and qualitatively different from male discourse. Moreover, these qualities intersect with the drama's portrayal of racial difference, as well as political hierarchies, to craft a complex web of identifications. Cleopatra wields political and affective power, but within the text, that power is delimited and circumscribed by her gender and race. This phenomenon is reflected by discursive patterns that signal her identity, in counterpoint to her hegemonic political status.

The aural dimension of language, especially dialect, pronunciation, and prosody, play a pivotal role in constructing identity, rendering the auditory aspect fundamental to the way we apprehend

our cultural narratives. In *The Sonic Color Line*, Jennifer Stoever interrogates the complex link between sound and the societal framing of race, exploring how auditory experiences contribute to our biased perceptions, "how sound and listening enable racism's evolving persistence" (2016, p. 5). She views sound, "as a critical modality through which subjects (re)produce, apprehend, and resist imposed racial identities and structures of racist violence" (2016, p. 4). While visual cues associated with race are undoubtedly critical, our perception of racial differences are also deeply influenced by our interpretation of auditory cues.

In this paper, my intent is to go beyond Stoever's focus on race to understand other aspects of difference, especially gender. Both of these forms of difference are, at times, enabled and distinguished at the sonic level, and I seek to examine how this phenomenon functions in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*.

"We Get Angry": feminine rage and flipping narratives in *Titus Andronicus* and *The Hungry*
Alexandra K Sengupta, George Washington University, D.C

While Ana Taylor-Joy was promoting her new film *The Menu* in 2022, an interview surfaced that became somewhat of a meme across TikTok. In the video, she says "I have a thing about feminine rage" paired with a dainty little kick of her crossed foot before she describes the difference between what is usually portrayed in films—a man disrespecting a woman who shows anger silently—and the truth of feminine rage that she wanted to show—that "no, we get angry."

In Shakespeare's canon, the women get angry. While characters like Lady Macbeth, Beatrice, and Katherine have all been analyzed in different contexts and at great length, in this paper, I want to focus on characters that seemly grate against the connotations of "feminine rage" as we use them in today's society. *Titus Andronicus* is one of Shakespeare's bloodiest plays, riddled with not only death and war but also the rape of a main character, Lavinia—a crime in which the other main female character, Tamora, is complicit. Yet, both characters exhibit what can be considered feminine rage within the source text—a throughline that writer and director Bornila Chatterjee uses when adapting the story into the 2017 film *The Hungry*.

In my paper I will use feminist film theory, especially ideas of the male gaze (and a possible female gaze) introduced by Laura Mulvey in her landmark essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" and her later works to define what feminine rage looks like on screen, while also analyzing how feminine rage acts as a driving force for women's agency and activism within art and beyond. Using works that focus on the idea of feminine rage specifically (*Rage Becomes Her* and *Feminist Killjoy Handbook*) I will analyze *The Hungry* to show it as a work that can successfully grapple with uncomfortable topics of rape and complicit violence while accurately depicting what I consider to be the female gaze of feminine rage.

What is he who's afraid of women? - "It is I...
Natasha Sofranac, Belgrade University

The right strategy to read Shakespeare as a feminist and not as a misogynist is to read all his plays. And read them closely. For, if we limit ourselves to tragedies, though his most philosophic and complex works, we will find sexism, violence and uxoricide. The "justification" is in women's frailty, treachery and monstrosity. They are "detested kites", "fiend-like queens", "pernicious women" and "baits". But even there, examples like Emilia, Cordelia or Desdemona shine bright and pave the way for Portia, Rosalind and Marina. Shakespeare's heroines, in their "infinite variety", demonstrate courage, wit and resilience, but above all – feelings. They are the soft power of words over raw strength, of the heart complementary with the mind, not its hindrance.

New Historicism enables us to read Shakespeare beyond his age, yet in its context. His biography and family dinamics certainly set the tone for most of his works, with a conspicuous shade of melancholy at the turn of the century and with fascinating young women of his problem plays and comedies, as he mended his relationship with his daughters. Women remain the source of life, but also of fear and tainted flesh. That had to wait for psychoanalysis to be explained and labelled. They allure men into erroneous decisions and gross sin, so they are punished with madness, expulsion or death. They exist only as *femme a homme*, empty vessels or blank books for men to fill them with voices and letters. Yet, as Professor Greenblatt explains in his recent book *Second Chances*, in Shakespeare's comedies women are survivors. They are not passive, obedient and timid as in tragedies; they earn their way to happiness after vicissitudes and temptations that make them strong and independent. Yet, in order to do that, they need subversion – look like a man to be treated like one. So, gender-bending and cross-dressing in comedies is cast over by the Weird Sisters who do the same.

While it is easy to follow the pattern of discrimination – villains are racists, anti-Semites and misogynists, Hamlet is a noble hero whose misogyny is not easily accounted for. That's why most of this paper is about him and the eponymous play. Othello demonstrates the same disgust with sex, especially after conversion into Christian, as noted by Professor Greenblatt. "Let copulation thrive!", exclaims King Lear, defending promiscuity, but also debasing women to sexual objects and humans to beasts. In *Hamlet*, there is no "ocular proof" against women, no "metaphysical aid" or "filial ingratitude". The female characters are the mirrors up to the hero's nature or, rather, his psyche. If women lived in a male-dominated world, men lived in dependency on their influence and the more they suppressed them in the real world, the more populated they became by the women inside themselves. When they stop fighting, when they embrace their own female principle inside and silence the women-hating voices, they can validate their masculinity and become heroes again, though tragic.

Hermeneutic Labor in *All's Well that Ends Well*
Mary K. Steible, Southern Illinous University Edwardsville

Whereas some of Shakespeare's characters in romantic relationships may be viewed as comic, misogyny, not Cupid's arrow, might be the basis of comedy. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Beatrice's feelings for Bertram initially reveal her to be youthfully single-minded, almost audacious in her love for this least deserving of lovers--which can be humorous-- but her ensuing willingness to seek intimate relations with a fellow so non-committal, non-communicative, and indifferent to her feelings is one process among many that Ellie Anderson defines as "hermeneutic labor" (180). Hermeneutic labor is similar to emotional labor undertaken by women in hetero intimate relationships but differs in that it involves interpreting the emotions of a male partner, of anticipating his reaction to intimacy, of planning how to succeed in an intimate relationship (Anderson 180), all activities not needed to be undertaken by male partners. Such activity is misogynistic according to Anderson, because it is part of a patriarchal system that expects such labor of women; at the same time, the labor is "devalued" leaving women in the "double-bind" of being blamed for either failing in their labor or turned into "nags" if they do their jobs (192). The consequences of mental and emotional activity lost to hermeneutic labor are several, one being repressed desire, another being unfulfilled intimate needs as women play the role of caregiver rather than equal partner. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Beatrice labors to win Bertram as husband, is rejected by him in his refusal to consummate their marriage and further humiliated by having to arrange a bed-trick to prevent Bertram from exploiting another woman and to have her own marriage made legitimate. The subterfuge involved in the bed trick is demoralizing, even if the outcomes are socially legitimate.

"At Your Age": Sexy, Menopausal Gertrude
Alicia Tomasian, William Rainey Harper College

As a feminist literary critic of a certain age, I found myself often fighting against the idea that the plays I loved most were misogynist. *The Winter's Tale,* I argued, rewrote Pandosto to honor a network of ladies attending the queen. In retrospect, imagining a Shakespeare nodding to women such Penelope Rich and Lucy Russel feels like child's play. Now I find myself asking how to silence the misogynist still welcome in literally every circle of our current society: the ageist. I think about this most often when I teach *Hamlet*. Much has been written about Hamlet's insistence that "you cannot call it love . . at your age." Hamlet, of course, channels misogynists from across Elizabethan England throughout the play. Even if we dismiss his attitude, can we read Gertrude as a woman aware of her own lovability, desirability, and sexual power? If Hamlet is 30, she must be in at least her mid to late forties. Still, she sits on Claudius's short list of motives for fratricide: "my crown, mine own ambition, and my queen." In the much-discussed Q1, the queen agrees to "soothe and please" the king for a time. While Claudius eventually lets her die rather than expose his treachery, he seems to want no woman but her. Whenever I teach Hamlet or discuss it with colleagues, I hear over and over that Claudius probably "had" to marry Gertrude to gain the throne. Sometimes I hear the theory that he only wants everything his brother had. Once a fellow Renaissance scholar tried to explain to me that we can't really think of Gertrude as middle aged, because Hamlet can be thirty and also not, still

a student. Yet, as I pointed out, nobody expects Gertrude to produce an heir. She is well past forty. She has desires and more than that, desirability.