

## **Taking Liberties: Pastoral Exile and Gender in *As You Like It***

Amy Cooper

Colby Gordon has recently called attention to the “version of ‘performance’” that has long dominated gender criticism of *As You Like It*, which “turns on a fundamentally transphobic distinction between surface and depth, costuming and ‘the body beneath.’” He calls on early modern scholars to engage trans scholarship, but rightly cautions against “simply renaming their ‘cross-dressing female protagonists’ as ‘transgender.’”<sup>2</sup> Gordon’s justified skepticism invites us to ask what a trans hermeneutic might reveal about the play’s representation of gender. My essay takes as its starting point, the play’s epilogue. After seeming to foreclose the potential for genderqueer identity at the end of Act Five, the player performing Rosalind | Ganymede reappears on stage and calls attention to their own gendered indeterminacy: “it is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue, but it is no more unhandsome than to see the lord the prologue” (1-3). The epilogue seems to invite the kinds of questions that have preoccupied scholars for decades: are you boy or a girl? Crucially, this final speech does not answer. Instead, it uses the “virtue in If” (5.4.103) to deflect the aggression behind such questions—above all, the transphobic threat of “the reveal.” Whereas Marjorie Garber reads this line as a disavowal (I am not a woman, but *if* I were “I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleas’d me”) I read it instead as a refusal: “if I were a woman,” and *I might be*. It takes “If” as “the only peacemaker” (5.4.104) as Touchstone says in Act Five, in the sense that such questions can be *settled* without being *answered*.

Deuteronomy 22:5:

1539 Great Bible: “The woman shall not weare that whiche pertayneth unto the man, nether shall a man put on woman’s rayment. For all that do so are abhominacion unto the Lorde thy God.

1560 Geneva Bible: “The woman shal not weare that which pertaineth vnto the man, nether shal a man put on womans raiment: for all that do so, *are* abominacion vnto the Lord thy God”

1568 Bishops Bible: “The woman shall not weare that whiche parteyneth unto the man, neither shall a man put on womans rayment: for all that do so, are abhominacion unto the Lorde thy God.”

## **“Behold the Child”: Pilate in Shakespeare’s Roman Plays**

Elisha Hamlin

Abstract: In the final moments of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, Titus’s brother, Marcus, gestures towards the unnamed child of Tamora, Queen of the Goths, and Aaron the Moore, and states “behold the child.” His motions and words, his position aloft and the circumstances of the scene, all evoke the familiar scene of Christ’s trial, derived both from the Biblical account in John 19, and from Shakespeare’s dramatic predecessor’s, most notably the Cycle Plays and Liturgies of the Medieval Church. Those scenes similarly saw a Roman official, Pontius Pilate, positioned above a gathered crowd asked to pass judgement, who instructed the crowd to “Behold the man,” or as it famously appears in the Vulgate, “ecce homo.” By referencing these scenes, Shakespeare problematizes the Andronici’s position

in the play by associating them with a character often presented as one of the central villains of the New Testament. This scene even further complicates the significance of the illegitimate child of the two major antagonists of the play, who is placed in the same relative position to Christ, and is presented with a comparable announcement. The disconnect between the context of the play and the meanings behind the Biblical narrative displays the convoluted portrayal of power and the imprecise role of religion in Shakespeare's first tragedy.

Verses: John 19:1–23

## **Prescribed Virtue and Female Resistance in Shakespeare's *Othello***

Laura Koleva

**Abstract:** How can early modern English conduct literature, with its Pauline Christianity underpinnings, enrich our readings of Shakespeare's works? Using a historical and feminist approach, I argue that early modern conduct literature aids our understanding of how *Othello* foregrounds female characters behaving in unruly ways to complicate and critique contemporary ideas concerning women's behavior and their duties as daughters and wives that were based on principles of Pauline Christianity. To support this reading, I examine key debates in conduct literature about women that draw on Pauline teachings and resonate with the play, but my intention is not to suggest that the genre is monolithic. My analysis demonstrates how Pauline-inflected ideals from conduct literature become weaponized against women in the play, largely by Iago, but how Desdemona and Emilia actively resist and reframe these ideals.

In this way, the play also enters discourses about Pauline obedience, chastity, and women's submission that shaped conduct literature in early modern England, and in turn, helped to form prevailing beliefs and attitudes about women. Rather than simply mirroring prescriptive codes for women's behavior, Shakespeare exploits their theatrical potential to expose their limits and contradictions, refusing to reduce women's conduct and virtue to such a strict set of rules and encouraging audiences to reflect critically on the complex intersections of feminine duty, virtue, and agency. The play not only reflects cultural tensions surrounding women's conduct but also destabilizes the very discourse that aimed to regulate their behavior. By portraying Desdemona and Emilia as women who challenge the prescriptive ideals of obedience, chastity, and silent submission, Shakespeare undercuts the Pauline framework that conduct writers used to define women's virtue and moral worth. Thus, *Othello* actively engages in ongoing cultural-theological debates about women's conduct and roles.

Verses: Titus 2:5 – “That they [women] be temperate, chaste, keeping at home, good and subject unto their husbands, that the word of God be not evil spoken of.”

1 Thessalonians 5:22 – “Abstain from all appearances of evil.”

Ephesians 5:22-24 – “Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the wife's head, even as Christ is the head of the Church, and the same is the Savior of his body. Therefore, as the Church is in subjection to Christ, even so let the wives be to their husbands in everything.”

## **Attending to Guilt and Waiting for Grace in *The Winter's Tale***

Kelly Lehtonen

Abstract: This essay investigates the relevance of the virtue of *attention* to *The Winter's Tale*, notably the play's focus on how religious practitioners should attend to the condition of guilt. The play anticipates a concept of attention theorized by religious philosopher Simone Weil, who emphasizes that religious virtue begins with careful attunement to what is true, fueled by compassion for people, especially people who are suffering. In this theory, Weil distinguishes virtuous attention from "cheap" grace, whereby wrongs and their impact on victims are brushed aside and "forgiven" without acknowledgement or change on the offender's part. Her concept of grace rests instead on a biblical principle – featured in Paul's letter to the Romans – opposing libertine theology and insisting that sin, oppression, and their consequences must be humbly and sincerely repented for grace to take effect. In Weil's terms, attention to one's guilt requires *waiting* (another translation of the French *attendre*) for forgiveness on the terms of the offended party.

In *The Winter's Tale*, the virtue of attention is best practiced by Paulina, who channels Pauline theology in helping Leontes through his guilt and orchestrating his reunion with Hermione. In effect, Paulina becomes not only a practitioner but instructor of attention, guiding Leontes to see for himself that he cannot atone for his own wrongs, but must wait for grace on Hermione's terms. In making Paulina the embodiment of this virtue, the play affirms the value of attention as a tool for spiritual restoration and reconciliation for even serious offenders, if they are willing to renounce their self-serving urge for control. Meanwhile, the play makes a woman the spokesperson of this theology – issuing a subversive transfer of religious authority to those who care best for the vulnerable, rather than those with the most social power.

### **Verses to consider:**

Romans 6:1: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue to live in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid."

2 Corinthians 1:3-4: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, Which comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any affliction by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

### **"upon his owne head": Cunning and Retributive Justice in the Imprecatory Psalms and Hamlet** N. Amos Rothschild

Abstract: Dogged by false accusations, the psalmist leaves off protestations of innocence and pleas for God's aid and turns, near the end of Psalm 7, to ominous prognostications of (poetic) justice through divine providence. Specifically, the psalmist forecasts their slanderer's comeuppance with a pair of

memorable metaphors: “He shal travail with wickednes: for he hathe conceived mischief, but he shal bring forthe a lye. / He hathe made a pit and digged it, and is fallen into the pit that he made. / His mischief shal returne upon his owne head, and his crueltie shal fall upon his owne pate” (7:14–16, Geneva Bible). In this paper, I argue that the tropological language and retributive logic of Psalm 7 (and other of the imprecatory psalms) helped shape the “widespread ambivalence toward artifice” and cunning that Jessica Wolfe has detected in early modern English culture. In fact, the prudential cunning that the ancient Greeks termed *mêtis* seems to have presented a particular quandary for English humanists, who often sought to reconcile the Greek and Latin works they strove to recover with the imperatives of early modern Christian morality. A brief survey of the period’s discourses concerning *mêtis* and its associated terms and practices reveals that Psalm 7’s parallel tropes of a monstrous birth and a backfiring contrivance served as rhetorical staples that early modern writers commonly invoked to construct the distinction between praiseworthy premeditation and problematic cunning. I conclude by examining how Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* engages such discourses, offering new significance to the flurry of deadly devices that end up “Fall’n on th[eir] inventors’ heads” (5.2.369) at the play’s climax—not least the plot Alan Stewart deems “the play’s most difficult moral issue”: Hamlet’s lethal letter scheme to dispose of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Verses: Psalms 7:14–16