QUEER SUBJECTIVITIES IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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David L. Orvis

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As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation
prepared by David L. Orvis

entitled QUEER SUBJECTIVITIES IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

________________________________________ Date: 05/05/08
Kari Boyd McBride

________________________________________ Date: 05/05/08
Meg Lota Brown

________________________________________ Date: 05/05/08
David M. Robinson

________________________________________ Date: 05/05/08
John C. Ulreich

________________________________________ Date:

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate’s
submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and
recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

________________________________________ Date: 05/05/08
Dissertation Director: Kari Boyd McBride
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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SIGNED: David L. Orvis
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DEDICATION

To my parents,
who taught me how to be myself

and

To Kari,
my mentor and my best friend
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................ 7

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................. 8

CHAPTER 1. “EFFEMINATE MEN” AND “MOST UNNATURAL WOUNDS”: QUEER(ED) SOLDIERS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND ......................... 33

CHAPTER 2. “GOOD SWEET BEDFELLOWS” AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGES ON THE EARLY MODERN STAGE ................................................. 73

CHAPTER 3. “OLD Sodom” AND “Dear Dad”: VANBRUGH’S CELEBRATION OF THE SODOMITICAL SUBJECT IN *THE RELAPSE* ............. 110

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................... 145

WORKS CITED ............................................................................................... 152
“Queer Subjectivities in Early Modern England” contests the prevailing scholarly view that the formation of queer subjectivities could not have preceded the rise to prominence of more modern regimes of gender and sexuality, the hegemonic homo/hetero divide in particular. To the contrary, I demonstrate not only that throughout the period one could construct a sense of self around same- or mixed-sex object choices, but also that the attendant processes of subject formation enabled the development of conspicuously queer(ed) subjectivities—namely, the soldier, the bedfellow, and the sodomite. Tracing the salience of these subjectivities across a multitude of discourses—tragedies, comedies, and problem plays; epic and lyric poems; war manuals and martial conduct books; pro- and anti-theatrical polemics; vernacular translations of classical texts; and more—I show that queer subject formation was both widely recognized and variously interpreted, functioning in some instances (e.g., in the soldier) as a site of profound anxiety, in others (the bedfellow and the sodomite) as an empowering form of dissidence.
INTRODUCTION

The classical tale of Ganymede, the Phrygian youth espied, scooped up, and whisked away by an enamored Jupiter, has become, for many scholars of same-sex erotics and desires in the early modern world, the locus classicus of male homoerotic expression. And, indeed, the myth figures prominently in a wide range of cultural works—in poems, plays, prose works, woodcuts, emblem books, paintings, and more—that were written, published, circulated, displayed, or performed in England throughout the early modern period. The privileged source, of course, remains Ovid’s profoundly influential Metamorphoses (ca. 2-8 CE), an epic translated and adapted as part of the Renaissance preoccupation with classical texts.¹ In his widely popular English translation of The xv Bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, entytled Metamorphosis (1567), Arthur Golding offers an unequivocally homoerotic interpretation of Jupiter and Ganymede’s tryst, one that is worth citing in full, if only because its brevity—its mere eleven lines of verse—renders its impact and rich cultural history all the more remarkable:

But now I néede a méelder style too tell of prettie boyes
That were the derlings of the Gods: and of vnlawfull ioyes
That burned in the brests of Girles, who for theyr wicked lust
According as they did deserue, receyued penance iust.
The King of Goddes did burne erewhyle in loue of Ganymed

Having traced the pervasiveness of this myth in Renaissance European iconographies, James M. Saslow has concluded “that Ganymede was the single most appropriate, if not exclusive, symbol of male-male love as it was then understood” (Ganymede in the Renaissance 8). Similarly, Claude J. Summers has designated this myth “the single most pervasive myth of homosexuality in the Renaissance” (“Homosexuality and Renaissance Literature” 8). According to Bruce Smith, this held true not just for England but for all of Europe: “For Renaissance Englishmen, like their counterparts all over Europe, the story of Jupiter and Ganymede was the best known, most widely recognized myth of homoerotic desire” (Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England 191). This widespread appeal, suggests Leonard Barkan, is attributable not to the tale’s representation of male same-sex desire—a dynamic that one finds elsewhere in Ovid’s epic and all over the

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2 This citation includes book and line numbers. Here is the tale in the original Latin, which I have quoted from the second volume of Frank Justus Miller Loeb’s Classical Library edition of Ovid’ Metamorphoses:

nunc opus est leviore lyra, puerosque canamus
dilectos superis inconcessisque puellas
ignibus attonitas meruisse libidine poenam.
Rex supernam Phrygii quondam Ganymedis amore
arsit, et inventum est aliquid, quod Iuppiter esse,
quam quod erat, mallet. nulla tamen alite verti
dignatur, nisi quae posset sua fulmina ferre.
nec mora, percusso mendacibus aere pennies
abripit Iliaden; qui nunc quoque pocula miscet
invitaque Iovi nectar Iunonis ministrant. (10.152-61)

Unless otherwise noted, my citations of Ovid’s Metamorphoses refer to book and line number(s) as they appear in Miller’s edition of the poem.
place in Greco-Roman mythologies\textsuperscript{3}—but to its “being played in a triumphant key” (2). Indeed, of all the narratives of transformative desire, hetero or homo, that appear in The Metamorphoses, the story of Jupiter’s desire for Ganymede distinguishes itself as one in which the object of divine passion remains free from the threat of death via metamorphosis, a fate that befalls virtually all other humans in The Metamorphoses unfortunate enough to be lusted after by deities.\textsuperscript{4} Rather, it is, as Golding’s translation makes clear, Jupiter who would “rather bée than that he was,” Jupiter who would rather transform himself into an eagle so as to ravish Ganymede, to carry the boy—as a boy—away to the heavens, “though against Dame Iunos will it bée.” And yet, as Smith, Alan Bray, John Franceschina, Stephen Orgel, and others have pointed out, this undeniably rich tradition of celebrating Jupiter and Ganymede as exemplary lovers is counterbalanced by an equally vibrant history that portrays the youth as a dangerous

\textsuperscript{3} Other male couples found in Ovid’s Metamorphoses include Hercules and Hylas, Apollo and Hyacinthus, Apollo and Cyparissus, and Narcissus and himself. On the positive portrayal of these couples, see David Robinson’s Closeted Writing and Lesbian and Gay Literature: Classical, Early Modern, and Eighteenth-Century (163-97). Studies of same-sex desire in antiquity are abundant and wide ranging. Although K.J. Dover’s Greek Homosexuality has been criticized for its altererist assumptions—see, for example, James Davidson’s “Dover, Foucault and Greek Homosexuality: Penetration and the Truth about Sex”—it remains a useful starting point. On the constructionist-essentialist debate as it pertains to Greek and Roman literature and culture, see Mark Golden and Peter Toohey’s excellent edited volume on Inventing Ancient Culture: Historicism, Periodization, and the Ancient World. See also David Halperin’s One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and How to Do the History of Homosexuality; Thomas K. Hubbard’s edited volume on Greek Love Reconsidered and his anthology Homosexuality in Greece and Rome; Craig A. Williams’s Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity; Eva Cantarella’s Bisexuality in the Ancient World; and Beert C. Verstraete and Vernon Provencal’s edited collection on Same-Sex Desire and Love in Greco-Roman Antiquity and in the Classical Tradition of the West. This list is far from exhaustive, and one would benefit from consulting the extensive bibliographies of these more recent studies.

\textsuperscript{4} In Homoerotic Space: The Poetics of Loss in Renaissance Literature, Stephen Guy-Bray questions the assumption that the myth ends triumphantly: “The myth is triumphant only because Ganymede ends up in heaven. This may sound obvious, but the point is that happiness is elsewhere: in heaven, in the Ganymede myth; in the rural landscape, in pastoral elegy and in pastoral poetry as a whole” (14).
sodomitical figure who is a threat to the dominant, heteronormative culture of England.\textsuperscript{5}

Thus the long-term popularity of the tale owed as much to its moralizers as it did to its champions.\textsuperscript{6}

While there persists an intense continuist-alteritist debate regarding the cultural significances of same-sex desire and the (im)possibility of sexual identity formation prior to the homo/hetero divide of the modern era, a number of scholars have postulated that if any such possibility existed for homoerotically inclined men inhabiting the early modern world, it found expression in the Ganymede icon.\textsuperscript{7} John Boswell was the first to advance

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\textsuperscript{5} My use of \textit{heteronormative} here and elsewhere in this study may strike some as anachronistic. I would suggest, however, that mixed-sex norms structured numerous premodern societies—among them early modern England—long before notions of fixed homo- and heterosexual identities came to dominate late nineteenth-century sexological discourse. Thus Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s theorization of the term in “Sex is Public” remains pertinent to my analysis: “Th[e] sense of rightness—embedded in things and not just in sex—is what we call heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is more than ideology, or prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; and education; as well as in the conventions and affects of narrativity, romance, and other protected spaces of culture” (173). For an earlier formulation of the term, see Warner’s introduction in \textit{Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory} (xxi-xxv).


While what follows focuses primarily on homoerotic desires and subjectivities in early modern literature and culture, it bears notice that Ganymede’s grip on the cultural imaginary of England began long before the Renaissance reached the island. Saslow notes that “[a]lthough the myth was a less popular subject in medieval art than it had been earlier, it was by no means unknown: illustrations range from architectural sculptures to manuscript illustrations of several different works, both sacred and secular” (\textit{Ganymede in the Renaissance} 5). In \textit{Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality}, John Boswell devotes an entire chapter to “The Triumph of Ganymede: Gay Literature of the High Middle Ages” (243-68). According to Boswell, “Use of the Ganymede figure [during this period] was not necessarily a sign of participation in or even approval of the gay subculture, but in view of the widespread adoption of ‘Ganymede’ as a name for a gay person and the general familiarity of all educated persons of the time with his legend, artistic references to Ganymede during the period must be regarded as potential allusion to the subject” (251). Jeffrey Richards is more certain: “a homosexual youth was known as a Ganymede” (137).

\textsuperscript{7} My understanding of the terms of the debate is informed by Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero’s “Caxton, Foucault, and the Pleasures of History.” Fradenburg and Freccero define \textit{alteritism} as “a belief in
this claim, and he did so emphatically: “Ganymede is the archetype of a male erotically involved only with another male from Athens through the Renaissance; he is both desired by and desirous of other males but not females—in contrast to figures like Adonis who might provoke desire in either gender” (“Categories, Experience and Sexuality” 165). Following Boswell’s lead, Rictor Norton has concluded:

> The mythological archetype [of same-sex desire] was Ganymede, from which was derived the mundane term *catamitus* and the modern word ‘catamite’. Although Ganymede was raped (literally snatched up to serve Zeus in heaven), he is almost always portrayed not as a victim but as a boy who chooses men by preference, and to a nearly exclusive degree. He is not passive with men and active with women (which is the kind of paradigm that social constructionists would prefer), but vociferously despises women and actively sets out to seduce men. (“Exclusive Homosexuality” 7)

In recent years, this line of argument has gained wider acceptance in the academy, enabling alteritist scholars—that is, those scholars who insist upon absolute cultural and historical difference between premodern and modern societies—to concede, as Alan Sinfield has done, that “[i]f [early modern England] had no concept of the homosexual, it certainly recognized the Ganymede” (*Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality* 29). It would appear, rather, that the debate has begun to shift, as scholars are now deliberating whether the Ganymede identity was emergent or firmly established in the cultural imaginary of early modern England.³ Where as Saslow has suggested that by the early modern period

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³ My use of the term *emergent* is indebted to Raymond Williams, who uses the term to suggest “that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created.” As Williams points out, however, “it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which
“there [we]re embryonic hints of a distinctive and innate homosexual identity” constructed around the Ganymede figure (Pictures and Passions 104), Kenneth Borris has argued that the “archetypal significance of Ganymede” was already widely known by the sixteenth century (“Ille hand a bag and a bottle at thy back” 243).

This development in criticism that takes up the significance of that figure in early modern England is promising indeed, as it suggests that the reductive acts-versus-identities debate inspired by Foucault’s genealogy of sexuality has begun to give way to a more nuanced approach to representations of the Phrygian youth, one that recognizes the coexistence in early modern culture of both “minoritizing” and “universalizing” views of homoerotic and homosocial experience. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has shown, these models are seemingly contradictory—the minoritizing view insisting that same-sex erotics and desires are “an issue of active importance for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority,” the universalizing view that such erotics and desires are “an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities” (Epistemology of the Closet 1). And yet, it is precisely their contrariness that

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are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture (and in this sense ‘species-specific’) and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel” (123). In Williams’s analysis, emergent ideology is distinguished from another, the residual, which, according to Williams, “has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effect of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural institution or formation” (Marxism and Literature 122).

9 In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Michel Foucault describes his understanding of the term genealogy: “Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersal of forgotten things. . . . On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing in events in their proper dispersion” (146). Foucault adapted the concept from Friedrich Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality.

My use of homosocial is indebted to Sedgwick’s development of the term in Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (1-5).
makes both views of sexuality prominent in the cultural imaginary of a given period or culture: “the most potent effects of modern homo/heterosexual definition tend to spring precisely from the inexplicitness or denial of the gaps between longstanding minoritizing and universalizing, or gender-transitive and gender-intransitive, understandings of same-sex relations” (47). This understanding of abundant sexual diversity informs the more recent work of Norton, Sinfield, Saslow, and Borris, scholars who have begun to explore the broad range of cultural articulations—that is, acts as well as identities—that may have been attendant upon the well known tale of Jupiter and Ganymede.

And yet, while it is evident that the Ganymede icon provided early modern culture a salient model of same-sex love and desire, the growing scholarly consensus that this model was the singular or predominant site of homoerotic identity paints a deceptively monochromatic picture of premodern sexualities. This is not to say that same-sex relationships typically associated with Ganymede—those akin to classical paiderastia, where an older man (erastes) pursues a defiant young boy (eronomenos)—were rare or insignificant. Historical and literary studies have demonstrated precisely the opposite.10 But a narrow focus on this myth serves, ultimately, to expose its various limitations and,

10 While scholars have debated the extent of the age difference between erastes and eronomenos and the various cultural responses to paiderastia, it is clear that this intergenerational homoerotic model held a prominent place in the cultural imaginaries of ancient and early modern societies. Bruce Smith traces the influence of the classical man/boy paradigm on early modern culture in Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics. On the pederastic configuration of early modern drama, see Mary Bly’s Queer Virgins and Virgin Queans on the Early Modern Stage; John Franceschina’s Homosexualities in the English Theatre: From Lyly to Wilde; and Stephen Orgel’s Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England. Widespread concerns about intergenerational affairs between masters and pupils of grammar schools whose curricula included classical works endorsing pederastic pedagogy indicate that boys’ education constituted a form of institutionalized pederasty. See Alan K. Stewart’s Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England and his “Boys’ Buttocks Revisited: James VI and the Myth of the Modern Schoolmaster”; Smith’s Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England; and Alan Bray’s Homosexuality in Renaissance England.
in so doing, reveal the spectrum of homoerotic desires and identities it fails to register. First, the Jupiter/Ganymede model excludes or displaces women of all ages and classes.\(^{11}\)

This may be obvious, but it bears consideration that the tale of Jupiter and Ganymede, in its setting in opposition male/male and female/male desire, could rightly be interpreted as devaluing the love of women and buttressing patriarchal social norms. In this respect, the myth is susceptible to adaptations and appropriations that say as much about the absence or irrelevance of women as they do about love between men.\(^{12}\)

But the Ganymede paradigm is proscriptive in other ways as well. It celebrates and normalizes man/boy love in particular and intergenerational love in general,

\(^{11}\) I do not mean to suggest that Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is misogynistic text dismissive of female desire, whether hetero or homo. In *Closeted Writing and Lesbian and Gay Literature*, Robinson demonstrates that Ovid’s tale of Iphis and Ianthe (9.666-797) served as a powerful model of female same-sex desire throughout the ancient and early modern periods (163-250). On early modern representations of Iphis and Ianthe, see also Mark Dooley’s “Inversion, Metamorphosis, and Sexual Difference: Female Same-Sex Desire in Ovid and Lyly”; Theodora Jankowski’s *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (14-27); Laurie Shannon’s “Nature’s Likeness: Renaissance Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness”; and Christopher Wixson’s “Cross-Dressing and Lyly’s Gallathea” Ovid also portrays female same-sex desire in *Heroides* 15, the letter from Sappho to Phaon. For two strikingly different readings of this tale see Judith P. Hallet’s “Female Homoeroticism and the Denial of Roman Reality in Latin Literature” and John F. Makowski’s “Bisexual Orpheus: Pederasty and Parody in Ovid.” Hallet suggests that the letter could be interpreted as representing an affirmative portrayal, Makowski that it offers “a negative view of lesbianism” (30). On the influence of this letter’s ambiguous treatment of homoeroticism in early modern England, see Harriette Andreadis’s *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics, 1550-1714* (28-32); Paula Blank’s “Comparing Sappho to Philaenius: John Donne’s ‘Homopoetics’”; Lorna Hutson’s “The ‘Double Voice’ of Renaissance Equity and the Literary Voices of Women”; Stella P. Revard’s “The Sapphic Voice in Donne’s ‘Sapho to Philaenius’”; and Denise Walen’s *Constructions of Female Homoeroticism in Early Modern Drama* (29-30).

\(^{12}\) Although I devote a significant portion of chapter two, “‘Good sweet bedfellows’ and Same-Sex Marriages on the Early Modern Stage,” to female same-sex desire and attendant subjectivities, my focus on men elsewhere (i.e., in my chapters on the soldier and the sodomite) is a notable limitation of my project as well. There are, however, a number of studies that deal specifically with models of female homoerotic desire in early modern England. On romantic friendship and femme-femme desire, see Lillian Faderman’s *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Sixteenth Century to the Present*; Valerie Traub’s *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*; and Shannon’s *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts*. For alternative models, see the triad in Traub’s *The Renaissance of Lesbian in Early Modern England* and Kenneth Borris’s *Same-Sex Desire in the English Renaissance: A Sourcebook of Texts, 1470-1650* (317-42); the virgin Jankowski’s *Pure Resistance*; and the amazon in Kathryn Schwartz’s *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance*. See also Walen’s examination of what she terms “lesbian erotics” in *Constructions of Female Homoeroticism in Early Modern Drama*. 
effectually rendering invisible and/or unimportant same-age relationships between men and between boys. The model is also predominantly class-specific, as it reflects the tastes of the affluent literati, many of whom were men who would have known the myth and its homoerotic subtext either from translating it in grammar school or from their discussing it with other classically trained (male) students. Finally, the Ganymede model foregrounds the boy-object of desire, perhaps at the expense of the desiring subject: while there were several slang terms either adapted from or associated with the Phyrgian youth’s name—e.g., *ganymede*, *catamite*, *ingle/ingle*—one would be hard pressed to find such sexually explicit and often derogatory appellations developed from the name of Jupiter, the king of the gods who, incidentally, served as a stand-in for God on the early modern stage. Thus, as a tale of homoerotic love and lust, the myth of Jupiter and Ganymede reveals more about the cultural presence of the ganymedes—the boy prostitutes and the receptive, frequently younger participants in anal sex—than it does about early modern understandings of the men who hired and desired them.

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13 Even those relationships that appear to conform to the Jupiter/Ganymede model need not be understood as expressions of it. To assume that all man/boy relationships forged during the early modern period exemplify the dominance of the Jupiter/Ganymede model is to suggest that everyone who encountered the myth either in the grammar schools or the playhouses would have drawn correlations between mythological tales and their own lives.

14 Scholars are in agreement that “[t]he word ‘catamite’ is in fact a corrupt form of ‘Ganymede’” (Bate 159n42), and that “‘ganymede,’ ‘ingle,’ and ‘catamite’ first appeared in English in 1591, 1592, and 1593, respectively” (DiGangi 67). In his *Glossographia, or, A dictionary interpreting all such hard words of whatsoever language now used in our refined English tongue with etymologies, definitions and historical observations on the same . . .* (1661), Thomas Blount indicates that the terms are synonymous, defining *catamite* as “a boy hired to be abused contrary to nature, a *Ganymede*” (Hv.); *Ganymede* as the name of a Trojan Boy, whom *Jupiter* so loved (say the Poets) as he took him up to Heaven, and made him his Cup-bearer. Hence any Boy, loved for carnal abuse, or hired to be used contrary to Nature, to commit the detestable sin of *Sodomy*, is called a *Ganymede*, or Ingle” (Sv.); and *ingle* as “a boy kept for Sodomy. See *Ganymede*” (Yii.). John Florio’s definition of *catamito* in his *VWordle of wordes, or Most copious, and exact dictionarie in Italian and English* (1598) evinces a similar circularity in meaning in that the term is translated to mean “a ganimed, an ingle, a boie hired to sinne against nature” (Fii.). See also the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.vv. “catamite”; “Ganymede”; “ingle” (def. 2); and “ingle.”
Insofar as it privileges the object (Ganymede) rather than the subject (Jupiter) of homoerotic desire, the myth of Jupiter and Ganymede would appear to lend itself to explorations of identity rather than subjectivity. The distinction between identity and subjectivity, between identifying with a model and perceiving it as constitutive of one’s sense of self, is important, as social constructionist scholars such as David Halperin have argued that “most critical work in queer studies [i.e., the broader academic field comprising queer theories and LGBT studies] has nothing to say about the subject.” Halperin claims that the “silence of queer studies on the topic of gay male subjectivity—the inner life of male homosexuality, what it is that gay men want—is no accident” and that numerous queer critics oppose the profound influence of psychology, which has “long represented a tainted category for lesbians, gay men, and other sexual dissidents,” on studies of subject formation (What Do Gay Men Want? 1). But the tools of psychology, of Freudian psychoanalysis in particular, need not be employed to pathologize same-sex desires and attendant subjectivities. Rather, the Freudian model—with its consideration of object choice (homo or hetero) as constitutive of one’s subjectivity; its recognition of the various ways dominant culture and civilizing processes (i.e., the reality principle) effect the repression or suppression of supposedly counternormative or unproductive desires (the pleasure principle); its examination of sexual expressions and repressions through such things as paraphrases (slips of the tongue), dreams, and jokes—has the potential to help scholars recover premodern queer subjectivities, that is, constructions and expressions of selfhood founded upon same-sex desire. This potentiality, which Halperin has understood as largely outside the scope of
queer studies, may not be manifest in the Ganymede icon, as Gregory Bredbeck, in his reading of Richard Barnfield’s verse, has suggested.\(^{15}\) This does not mean, however that queer subjectivity was not possible in the early modern world but that the Jupiter and Ganymede myth is perhaps not the best cultural site to explore contemporary notions of subjecthood.

The various ways that Ganymede proves to be of limited usefulness in attempts to reconfigure early modern sexualities indicates that much work remains to be done on premodern homoerotic subjectivities, particularly any that may have developed independently of or in contradistinction to the Ganymede tradition. In attempting to recover a wider range of early modern sexual subjectivities, I have focused my research on three alternative same-sexual types that circulated in early modern England: the soldier, the bedfellow, and the sodomite. Homoerotic representations of these figures provided different but equally salient models for same-sex subject formation and hence helped cultivate a (homo)sexual plurality that is as yet unexplored in early modern studies. While I do not intend to suggest that these figures constituted a coherent queer subculture—an argument some scholars have made about the ganymede/catamite/ingle—a fundamental claim of this study is that early modern culture registered a variety of...

\(^{15}\) In *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton*, Bredbeck writes, “[A]s Barnfield acknowledges, one thing that could (and can) be reading [in the pastoral poetry and sonnets] is the sodomite. And the possibly coy disavowal also indicates that at least some of Barnfield’s reading public interpolated a link between the sexual subject of sodomy and Barnfield’s own social subjectivity” (152). Ultimately, however, Bredbeck suggests that this subjectivity, like all sodomitical subjectivities, is, in fact, mitigated or compromised by cultural factors: “These sonnets in the aggregate also begin to suggest that the sodomite is not something that is signified but something that is transacted or deployed. For although the sonnet sequences of Barnfield and Shakespeare differ in their strategies, on the broadest level they are both negotiating the sodomite, deploying the possibility of homoerotic subjectivity strategically and with a measured economy designed to gain other meanings at a calculated expense” (184-85). Thus the sodomitical subject is folded back into its discourse. Cf. Sam See’s claim in “Richard Barnfield and the Limits of Homoerotic Literary History” that “Barnfield’s poems defy identitarian taxonomies” (65).
homoerotically constituted selves. I want to show, in other words, that queer subject formation was both widely recognized and variously interpreted, functioning in some instances (i.e., in the soldier) as a site of profound anxiety, in others (the bedfellow and the sodomite) as an affirmative and perhaps empowering form of dissidence.

My preference for “queer” over less contentious locutions—e.g., “homoerotic” and “same-sex”—has both theoretical and political implications, and it is imperative to address at the outset my particular use of the term, first as it pertains to recent interventions in LGBT studies and queer theories and then as it applies to early modern literature and culture. Despite the increasing number of scholars who identify themselves as specialists in “Queer Theories/LGBT Studies,” the academic fields paired together here remain quite distinct, even adversarial. Indeed, the recent publication of LGBT Studies and Queer Theory: New Conflicts, Collaborations, and Contested Terrain demonstrates, in the words of its editors, that while “both LGBT studies and queer theory are modes of inquiry whose focal point is gender and sexuality,” these modes differ significantly in their approaches to identity and subjectivity: “gay and lesbian studies have tended to emphasize the stability of gay and lesbian sexual identities, while queer theory, though growing out of LGBT studies, primarily aims to continuously destabilize and deconstruct the notion of fixed sexual and gender identities” (Lovaas, Elia, and Yep 6). Likewise, in Queering Gay and Lesbian Studies, Thomas Piontek observes that the continuing importance of queer theory rests in its “contest[ing] beliefs and practices long considered sacrosanct in gay lesbian studies” and its using queer “to refer not to an
identity but to a questioning stance, a cluster of methodologies that lets us explore the
taken for granted and the familiar from new vantage points” (2).

Apparently not much has changed in the ten years since Lisa Duggan enumerated
what she then understood as queer theory’s three areas of critique for LGBT studies:

(a) the critique of humanist narratives that posit the progress of the self
and of history, and thus tell the story of the heroic progress of gay
liberationists against forces of repression; (b) the critique of empiricist
methods that claim directly to represent the transparent ‘reality’ or
‘experience,’ and claim to relate, simply and objectively, what happened,
when, and why; and (c) the critique of identity categories represented as
stable, unitary, or authentic. (181)

The primary aim of queer theory, then, is to queer texts, persons, histories, cultures, and
virtually everything else, in an effort to demystify and deconstruct identities and
subjectivities. “Queer,” then, comes to represent what has been portrayed as a signal
difference between LGBT studies and queer theory: while the former is interested
primarily in recuperating homoerotic figures and histories, the latter is invested in
destabilizing and upturning the very notion of identity or subjectivity.16

At the same time, my use of the term “queer” differs substantially from rigid
queer theorist applications in that I intend to show that queer theories and LGBT studies
are not necessarily incompatible and that they can indeed be brought together and applied
to early modern texts in a fruitful examination of homoerotic subjectivities. This

16 On the theoretical and political differences that continue to divide practitioners of queer theories and
LGBT studies, see the essays collected in Karen E. Lovaas, John P. Elia, and Gust A. Yep’s LGB T Studies
and Queer Theory and those in George Haggerty and Molly McGarry’s Blackwell Companion to Lesbian,
Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies. See also Annamarie Jagose’s Queer Theory: An
Introduction; Sedgwick’s Tendencies; Scott Bravmann’s “Queer Historical Subjects”; and Lauren Berlant
and Michael Warner’s “What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?”; Duggan’s “The Discipline
Problem: Queer Theory Meets Lesbian and Gay History”; and Teresa de Lauretis’s “Queer Theory:
Lesbian and Gay Sexualities: An Introduction.”
possibility lies the notion of “queer subjectivity”—*queer* in this context registering, on the one hand, same-sex desires and erotics, and, on the other, culturally constructed notions of difference, deviance, and identificatory mutability. Bringing these meanings of *queer* into proximity with the concept of *subjectivity* may give some critics and theorists pause, as these terms tend to represent what have been construed as opposing poles of sexuality studies, as in the quotation from Lisa Duggan. And yet, as Sedgwick’s study of “universalizing” and “minoritizing” views of erotic experience demonstrates, the same cultural sites that indicate cultural or sexual queerness serve as the foundations upon which women and men construct distinctly homoerotic subjectivities. “Queer subjectivities,” then, refer to those constructions and expressions of self that are founded upon homoerotic acts and desires whose meanings vary and whose relation to cultural norms fluctuate. That the significances of various homoerotic acts and desires are subject to change and contestation within a given culture and within a single historical period does not preclude them from being constitutive of subjectivity. For ongoing changes in a dominant culture’s perceptions of homoerotic acts and desires may, in fact, make same-sex attraction all the more significant and one’s sense of self all the more queer. This argument about the formulation of subjectivity is indebted to Sedgwick’s more inclusive (but less fashionable) definition of *queer*:

That’s one of the things that ‘queer’ can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excess of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t* be made) to signify monolithically. The experimental linguistic, epistemological, representational, political adventures attaching to the very many of us who may at times be moved to describe ourselves as (among many other possibilities) pushy femmes, radical faeries, fantasists, drags, clones,
leatherfolk, ladies in tuxedoes, feminist women or feminist men, masturbators, bulldaggers, dives, Snap! queens, butch bottoms, storytellers, transsexuals, aunties, wanna-bes, lesbian-identified men or lesbians who sleep with men, or... people able to relish, learn from, or identify with such. (Epistemology 8; ellipses in original)

Applied to early modern culture, this conceptualization of *queer* serves to decentralize iconic homoerotic figures such as Ganymede and replace them with a (homo)sexual plurality, the kind Sedgwick gestures toward with her ellipses. This is not to say that Ganymede and man/boy love did not occupy a prominent place in the cultural imaginary of the period; rather, it is to recognize that numerous other models of homoerotic desire were also in circulation, many of them independent of or in opposition to the well known tale of Ganymede. The attendant subjectivities, those I have termed *queer*, reflect the diversity of homoerotic experience in early modern society. So if the present study focuses rather narrowly on three subjects—the soldier, the bedfellow, and the sodomite—it is only in the hope that this kind of examination will incite others to complicate further critical approaches to premodern sexualities.

This is a particularly good time to consider the notion of “Queer Subjectivities in Early Modern England,” as scholars who had at one time argued strenuously against the possibility of a homoerotically inclined subject inhabiting the premodern world have in recent years expressed a willingness to entertain such a prospect. As one might expect, however, this development has challenged the theories of prominent social constructionists—particularly those who assume and/or insist upon absolute difference between cultures and historical periods—to reconcile emergent theories of same-sex
subjectivity and identity with their previous publications, which had relied on Foucauldian models of the premodern world.

Alan Bray, for instance, in a brief epilogue he composed for Tom Betteridge’s recent volume on *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe*, reflects upon the enduring influence of his pathbreaking book, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, where he had argued that sodomitical discourse of the early modern period would have precluded the formation of same-sexual identities or subjectivities. Upon reconsidering “the exotic language of ‘sodomy’” in early modern England, Bray acknowledges, “Ubiquity on the one hand and identity on the other are two poles between which sexuality can be set; and not only over time; they can coexist within the same culture, even within the mind of the one individual” (165). While his recognition of “ubiquity on the one hand and identity on the other” would suggest that Bray has accepted Sedgwick’s model of coexistent “universalizing” and “minoritizing” views of sexuality, he reasserts, albeit in a more careful manner, that sodomitical discourse would not necessarily have fostered attendant identities. Rather, sodomitical identities became possible only “with the coming of civil society in the late-seventeenth-century England” (165), the same cultural milieu Bray identified more than twenty-five years ago, in the final chapter of *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, as giving rise to the molly, the supposed forebear of the modern homosexual (81-114). The implication here is that while homosexual identities were possible prior to the late seventeenth century, historical evidence supports Bray’s paradigm. Thus, at the same time that he concedes the possibility of homoerotic identity, he reiterates, mutatis mutandis, the Foucauldian model he had set out to revise. As I
intend to demonstrate, however, queer identities and subjectivities were there all along, well before the existence of the molly houses became public knowledge near the close of the late seventeenth century.

In a similar context—i.e., the ten-year anniversary of *Queering the Renaissance*—Jonathan Goldberg has sought in “Queering History” to reevaluate possibilities for cultural and historical continuities that he had rejected in his earlier work on the history of sexuality. In particular, he has endeavored in this article to show that it is time for scholars to reopen questions of identity and subjectivity—the same kinds of questions he dismissed in his book *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities*: “such questions,” he insisted, “will never deliver the sodomite per se, but only . . . sodometries, relational structures precariously available to prevailing discourses” (20). Written with Madhavi Menon, the organizer of the MLA session devoted to theoretical and critical innovations inspired by *Queering the Renaissance*, “Queering History” proposes a new kind of history that “would be invested in suspending determinate sexual and chronological differences while expanding the possibilities of the nonhetero, with all its connotations of sameness, similarity, proximity, and anachronism” (1609). This new history, which Goldberg and Menon have termed “homohistory,” would take a more open-minded approach to sexuality and not “sacrifice sameness at the altar of difference nor collapse difference into sameness or all-but-sameness” (1616). In the same article, Goldberg and Menon advocate what they term “unhistoricism,” an approach to queer historiography that would deploy “acts of queering that would suspend the assurance that the only modes of knowing the past are either those that regard the past as wholly other
or those that can assimilate it to a present assumes identical to self” (1616). Seemingly, Goldberg and Menon want to have it both ways: they wish, paradoxically, to produce a homohistory replete with homoidentities that would be recuperated through unhistorical, deconstructive acts.

Halperin describes a similar future for historiography as he tries to retool Foucault and keep his oft-contested chronologies pertinent. In his aptly titled *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, Halperin contends that scholars have misinterpreted Foucault’s pronouncement in the first of volume of *The History of Sexuality* that “the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43). Halperin suggests that Foucault is:

making a carefully limited point about the differing styles of disqualification applied to male love by pre-modern legal definitions of sodomy and by nineteenth-century psychiatric conceptualizations of homosexuality, respectively. The intended effect of his rhetorical extravagance . . . is to highlight what in particular was new and distinctive about the modern discursive practices that produced the category of ‘the homosexual.’ As almost always in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault is speaking about discursive and institutional practices, not about what people really did in bed or what they thought about it. He is not attempting to describe popular attitudes or private emotions, much less is he presuming to convey what actually went on in the minds of different historical subjects when they had sex.” (29)

According to Halperin, scholars have misread and taken seriously what Foucault intended as “rhetorical extravagance” employed merely to emphasize his point. And yet, while Halperin insists that Foucault’s study has nothing to say about what actually transpired between men and what such acts actually meant to them as well as to the culture at large, he arrives at a strikingly familiar conclusion, one that supposed misinterpreters of Foucault have misattributed to *The History of Sexuality*:
This passage [on the distinction between the premodern sodomite and the modern homosexual] prepares the reader to gauge the differences between these ‘juridical’ prohibitions against ‘acts’ ‘contrary to nature’ and the nineteenth-century prohibitions against homosexuality, which did not simply criminalize sexual relations between men as illegal but medically disqualified them as pathological and—not content with pathologizing the act—constructed the perpetrator as a deviant form of life, a perverse personality, an anomalous species, thereby producing a new specification of individuals whose true nature would be defined from now on by their reference to their abnormal ‘sexuality.’” (31)

This clarification compels Halperin to claim not only that Foucault’s theories are consonant with studies of identity, but also that The History of Sexuality has paved the way for such studies. Thus, on Foucault’s authority, Halperin encourages sexual historians “to inquire into the construction of sexual identities before the emergence of sexual orientations and to do this without recurring necessarily to modern notions of ‘sexuality’ or sexual orientation” (43). Distinguishing between identity and orientation is helpful insofar as it reminds historians and literary critics to ponder the multifarious ways identity is constructed; at the same time, the need to deny the possibility that a homoerotic preference or predilection might be part of this identificatory multiplicity is oddly dismissive, as if Halperin cannot bring himself to consider recent studies that might disrupt his premodern paradigms of sex without sexuality.

The work of Bray, Goldberg, Menon, and Halperin evinces a scholarly trend that is simultaneously receptive and resistant to revisionist reconsiderations of premodern identity or subjectivity. But Valerie Traub’s recent essay on “The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography” is evidence that some scholars are embracing theories and methodologies they had previously dismissed. Beginning with a metacritical analysis of her earlier work on female same-sex desire, Traub notes that an important limitation of
The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England was its assumption “that early modern representations [of female-female desire] are definitively estranged from modern conceptual categories” (128). Although she maintains that important differences exist between premodern and modern categories, Traub admits:

The two figures whose genealogies I traced [i.e., the tribade and the female friend] nonetheless appear strangely familiar to subsequent emanations of female homoerotic desire. Figures that, since the foundational work in lesbian history, have been treated as prototypical for the nineteenth century (the passing woman and the romantic friend), as fundamental to the pathologizing discourses of sexology and early psychoanalysis (the invert and the pervert), and as vital to twentieth-century self-definitions (butch and femme), seem to have been cut from much of the same cloth as the early modern tribade and friend. (128)

Traub distinguishes herself from Bray, Goldberg, and Halperin in that she has chosen to draw upon both the strengths and the weaknesses of her earlier work to rethink possibilities for premodern sexualities. While remaining firm in her belief that scholars err when they search for transhistorical, transcultural continuities, Traub concedes that she has been persuaded to reexamine some of her more absolutist claims. The result of this metacritical analysis is her theorization of “cycles of salience,” that is, “recurrent explanatory meta-logistics that accord to the history of lesbianism over a vast temporal expanse a sense of consistency and, at times, uncanny familiarity” (125). So while the cultural significances of various same-sex acts and desires may undergo diachronic change, the perception of sameness enables the formation of identities that closely resemble older (e.g., ancient, medieval, and early modern) models. I would argue further that cycles of salience contribute to the process of subject formation, as homoerotically inclined persons of any milieu might look to historical figures, distant though they may
appear, for validation. In this respect, “strangely familiar” models of sexual selfhood provide queers of disparate historical periods a comforting if ultimately illusory form of subjective essentialism.\(^{17}\)

Building upon the work of Sedgwick and Traub and bearing in mind the critiques of scholars such as Bray, Goldberg, Menon, and Halperin, the present study focuses on queer subject formation at work well before the rise of the sexological discourse that would identify and pathologize the modern homosexual. Chapter one, “‘Effeminate Men’ and ‘Most Unnatural Wounds’: Queer(ed) Soldiers in Early Modern England,” brings together queer theories and Freudian psychoanalysis to illustrate that subject formation is itself inherently and ineluctably queer(ing). For objectification in a martial context entails dismembering and reinscribing gendered and eroticized bodies, effectually positioning Others (male or female) as the effeminate, penetrated objects upon which the masculine,

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\(^{17}\) My use of essentialism is meant to recall the purported debate between strict essentialists, who claim homosexual and heterosexual persons as we know them today have had a transhistorical, transcultural existence, and ardent constructionists, who argue that sexuality and sexual identity have no fundamental existence apart from the culture within which they are cultivated. My point here, however, is not that essentialist understandings of self are inherently incorrect or misguided but that such a possibility hardly matters to any number of queer people who look to the past and to other cultures for a sense of prehistory and community. On the forging of communities across historical periods, see Carolyn Dinshaw’s *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities: Pre- and Postmodern*. As for the framing of the essentialist-constructionist debate, Boswell has pointed out that very few scholars would identify themselves as essentialists, and thus constructionist arguments against them amount to nothing more than straw-man critiques: “one of many ironies about the controversy is that no one deliberately involved in it identifies himself as an ‘essentialist,’ although constructionists (of whom, in contrast, there are many) sometimes so label other writers. Even when applied by its opponents the label seems to fit extremely few contemporary scholars. This fact is revealing, and provides a basis for understanding the controversy more accurately not as a dialogue between two schools of thought, but as a critique by revisionists of assumptions believed to underlie traditional historiography” (*Categories, Experience and Sexuality* 133). A notable exception, however, is Rictor Norton, who in *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual* declares, “My position is sited within the essentialist camp, and I hope [in this book] to expose some of the fallacies of social constructionist theory, which I see as the main impediment to the understanding of queer history” (11). Germinal essays on the essentialist-constructionist debate—including Steven Epstein’s “Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism” and Mary McIntosh’s “The Homosexual Role”—can be found in Edward Stein’s edited collection on *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy*. 
penetrating subject is defined. But such a process forecloses the possibility of an independent, normative martial subjectivity, as subjects and their queer(ed) objects/Others remain interdependent and mutually constitutive. The pertinence of this structuring principle to early modern discourse is borne out in a proliferation of texts that include war manuals and soldier conduct books (over 150 of them printed between 1580 and 1620), as well as numerous epic poems and plays—all of which attest to the inevitable queerness of the martial subject. Fixed normative subjectivity is therefore an ideal—a fantasy—that soldiers pursue throughout their careers without ever being able to attain it. Of course, the notion of subjective instability, especially as it pertains soldiers who construct their identities in an ideally homosocial environment that is simultaneously violent and erotic, is not in itself uncharted theoretical territory. Rather, it is one of the main concerns of queer theory. But the importance of this structuring principle to early modern English discourse has not been analyzed. I will show that the idea that subjectivity is contingent upon the eroticized bodies of others was widely recognized and at times a cause of profound anxiety.

Chapter two, “‘Good sweet bedfellows’ and Same-Sex Marriages on the Early Modern Stage,” examines queer subjectivities as constructed vis-à-vis the ostensibly normative, culturally sanctioned institution of same-sex bedcompanionship. Drawing on the polysemy of bedfellow—a word employed throughout the early modern period to describe mixed- and same-sex social categories ranging from spouse, to adulterer, to clandestine lover, to confidante, to favorite, to friend—I show that queer marriage was imaginable and intelligible long before the inception of LGBT identity politics. Indeed,
while sexual categories such as *heterosexual* and *homosexual* were outside the cultural imaginary of premodern Europe, notions of *marriage* were circulating firmly within it, available for normative representations as well as queer or dissident reinscriptions. Not surprisingly, same-sex marriage occupies a prominent place on the early modern stage, a cultural institution celebrated and scorned for its playful displacement of gender and sexuality. One could argue that the all-male acting companies of Elizabethan and Jacobean England would have guaranteed that every marriage performed on the stage would be queer, but certain plays provide enhanced environments for exploring queer(ed) subjectivities. Thus I focus primarily on Thomas Dekker’s *Satiro-mastix*, John Fletcher and William Shakespeare’s *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and Thomas Middleton’s *Michaelmas Term*, three plays that deploy the language of bedfellowship to construct an idealized union akin to same-sex marriage. That such a union could be performed for and understood by a heterogeneous audience suggests that in early modern England the concept of same-sex marriage was both intelligible and provocative, eliciting a range of responses from playgoers.

Chapter three, “Reclaiming ‘Old Coupler’ and ‘Dear Dad’: Vanbrugh’s Celebration of the Sodomitical Subject in *The Relapse*,” confronts the longstanding scholarly consensus that notions of sodomy—“that utterly confused category,” in Foucault’s words (*History of Sexuality* 101)—could not have been constitutive of one’s sense of self prior to the so-called construction of homosexuality in late nineteenth century, in part because the term *sodomite* was ideologically loaded and thus always already embedded in other discourses. Hence the depravity associated with sodomy
would have prevented homoerotically inclined men from identifying with the sodomite caricature. Although I recognize the usefulness of Foucault’s distinctions between the premodern sodomite and the modern homosexual, that is, between acts and identities, I argue that this model would not have precluded the formation of markedly *un*confused sodomitical subjectivities. I take as my primary example Coupler, the sodomitical matchmaker of Sir John Vanbrugh’s popular Restoration play *The Relapse; or, Virtue in Danger*. Not only does Coupler flirt unabashedly with other men and suggest sex as payment for his services; he also revels in his being called “Old Sodom” and “old devil” by Young Fashion, the very man he desires. But Coupler is also tolerated and accepted by the play’s dramatis personae. Indeed, he is also assumes the identity of “dear dad” and “old dad,” and it is clear from his enduring presence on the Restoration stage that he serves as an affirmative portrayal of a sodomite, one that appears not to have disturbed or enraged either the vociferous theatrical polemicists of the period or the vast majority of spectators. Indeed, one of the more striking continuities in sodomitical discourse is that, while sodomy statutes were rarely enforced and seldom prosecuted successfully, they managed in early modern, Restoration, and eighteenth-century England to cultivate a culture of sodomophobia. Coupler’s ability to prosper despite this culture suggests that numerous other examples of queer subjectivity remain to be found and brought into discussions of sodomitical subjectivity and social tolerance.18

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18 My analysis of sodomophobia as it relates to actual convictions of purported sodomites is informed by James Shapiro’s analysis of anti-Semitism and depictions of Jews in early modern England. In *Shakespeare and the Jews*, Shapiro states, “While Jews were not fully tolerated or granted citizenship in early modern England, they were never subject to violent attacks, forced to convert, penned up in ghettos, or burned in inquisitorial fires, as they were elsewhere” (11). Nonetheless, there existed in England a flourishing culture of anti-Semitism: “Long after stories of Jews poisoning wells, desecrating hosts, and marching against
While individual chapters deal with particular figures, the overarching claim of the present study is that myriad models for queer life existed in early modern England and that wide recognition of these models in the period fostered (homo)sexual multiplicity. Surely, there were catamites and ingles, and surely these figures represented a particular kind of homoerotic experience. But there were also soldiers, bedfellows, and sodomites, and while these figures need not always be understood or perceived as rigidly distinct either from another (a soldier could be one’s bedfellow, for example) or from the subjectivities modeled after Ganymede, they provide evidence for the existence of significant sexual and cultural differences. My primary focus, then, is to trace those differences while remaining mindful of the broader cultural multiplicity they fostered throughout the early modern period.

Christendom had passed into the world of fanciful legends, the belief that Jews abducted children and killed them, using their blood for ritual purposes, continued to be told by various British writers” (100). So while both the Jew and the sodomite functioned as Others against which the English national identity was constructed, persons suspected of being one of these particular Others were not, on the whole, subjected to harsh punishments.
CHAPTER 1

“EFFEMINATE MEN” AND “MOST UNNATURAL WOUNDS”:
QUEER(ED) SOLDIERS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

In *The booke of honor and armes . . .* (1590), one of more than 150 martial treatises printed and circulated in England between 1580 and 1620, Richard Jones endeavors to delineate “all causes of Quarrell or Combat, the nature of Injuries and repulses, the equalitie and disequalitie of men, who may bee challenged, and for what respects Challenges ought bee refused: with many other things in matter of Honor and Armes worthie to be knowne and considered” (Aiii). While he insists that honor derives in part from one’s ability to discern whether a given situation warrants retaliatory violence, Jones foregrounds in his section on “the nature of Injuries and repulses” the critical role wounds and wounding play in the formation of a soldier. Indeed, Jones preoccupies himself with taking up and resolving potentially ambiguous outcomes of combat, situations where both combatants have sustained life-threatening injuries and

19 On the proliferation of war manuals and soldier conduct books during Elizabeth’s reign, see Nina Taunton’s *1590s Drama and Militarism: Portrayals of War in Marlowe, Chapman, and Shakespeare’s Henry V* (1-22). See also Maurice J. D. Cockle’s excellent *Bibliography of Military Books up to 1642*. Although I am concerned primarily with early modern English martial discourse, it is worth noting that the ideas circulating about proper soldierly conduct were initially drawn from continental pamphlets and treatises. Indeed, many of the earliest war manuals and conduct books printed in England were translations of works imported from Spain, France, and Italy.
where there is no clear victor. Among the various scenarios he presents to his readers is this one:

Two Gentlemen being come into the field to fight for life, the one in fighting happeneth to fall, the other presentlie sitteth vpon him and saith, yeeld thy selfe; he that lieth vnder, saith like words, and therewith woundeth his enemie lying vpon him, who feeling the griefe mortall, striketh the other in the throate; he that was first faine ariseth and walketh, shortlie after they both die; the question is, which of them ought to be iudged victorious?

Detailing the location and timing of the lacerations as well as the exact positioning of the combatants at their time of death, the scenario takes into account multifarious factors—e.g., who’s on top? who penetrated first? who deepest?—that determine the victor and the victim of male/male penetrative violence. That both men have died hardly seems to matter. What is at stake here is precisely what is impossible to secure, that is, enduring martial valianc e predicated on a clear demarcation of winner and loser. It is perhaps no surprise that Jones’s verdict is as intricate as the hypothetical circumstances he has provided:

Albeit no dead man can require iudgement of victorie; yet to the end the honor due vnto the victorious may be in signe of his valerous merit bestowed, and the spoyles of the vanquished laid vnder his Ensigne, thus it is said. He who first had the bodie of the enemie in his power and vnder, ought be reputed victorious: yet may it be alleagd, that the other who gaue the first mortall wound, ought haue the victorie, because the time thereof & not the time of death is to bee considered. Others are of opinion, that the longer liuer ought to haue victorie: and some affirme, that if the Challenger gaue the first wound whereof death ensued, although himselfe did first die: yet had he performed his part and deserved most praise. Some also doo thinke, there is no judgement can bee giuen but that the matter should lie dead. Howsoeuer it bee, I leaue the same to more learned Doctors and better experienced Knights. (ili,-ili,)
Though Jones defers to “more learned Doctors and better experienced Knights,” the expenditure of space in *The Booke of honor and armes* . . . to dilemmas such as this one indicates that wounds were a source of anxiety for the early modern soldier: on the one hand, wounds sustained in battle attest to valiant service; on the other, they reveal the vulnerability of the martial body (*vulnus*, Latin for “wound”). In both cases, wounds expose the martial subject’s dependence on other male bodies, that is, on acts of homoerotic violence and narratives of same-sex penetration. Indeed, the very premise of Jones’s scenario is that such narratives are contestable and often contested, and thus normative/masculine martial subjectivity can never be firmly established or ever secure. Rather, martial subject formation is an ongoing and intrinsically insufficient process of negotiating homoerotic violence—a process, however, that upholds the ideal—the fantasy—of an impenetrable body and a stable normative subjectivity. This is a queer process indeed: not only does it impose upon men a subject/object, masculine/feminine dynamic that forces penetrated warriors to assume the position of the effeminate Other; it also forecloses, while it insists upon, fixed martial masculinity.20

My analysis of Jones’s *Booke of honor and armes* . . . is informed by a significant body of scholarship that has viewed martial masculinity and erotic violence through deconstructive and queer theoretical lenses. Much of this work has sought to deconstruct martial subjectivity—to expose its uncertainty and indeterminacy and to trace the attendant anxieties percolating through the discourse of the period. In *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England*, Bruce Smith locates the source of these anxieties in what he

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20 See Simone de Beauvoir’s profoundly influential discussion of binary oppositions—e.g., subject/object, Self/Other, male/female—in *The Second Sex* (xix-xxxv).
has identified as “the most public and pervasive myth of homosexual desire in early modern England, the Myth of Combatants and Comrades.” This myth, according to Smith, “owes it hold on Renaissance imagination to the way it expresses, in specifically sexual terms, the ambivalences of feeling that are involved in male bonding generally. . . . Though all human beings seem to need some sense of opposition to form a self-identity—some sense of psychic ‘otherness’ against which they can play off the individual self and give it definition—opposition seems to be especially crucial for human males” (58). Thus martial masculinity and normative subjectivity are contingent upon the soldier’s ability to objectify—to construct as the Other—soldier’s enmeshed in precisely the same processes of subject formation. But as Smith points out in Shakespeare and Masculinity, the ideal of normative subjectivity is an unattainable ideal: “In proverbs, in conduct books, on the stage ideals remain ideals: models of what a man might be, not copies of what he is” (63). So while homoerotic violence serves as the primary means by which a soldier strives for subjectivity, the ideal of fixed martial masculinity remains a mere fantasy. Subject formation, then, is both inherently insufficiently and integral to the soldier’s sense of self.

Mario DiGangi and Nina Taunton have critiqued Smith’s emphasis on male same-sex bonds in the construction of martial subjectivity. Whereas as Smith insists that the soldier “belongs to an all-male world in which women have no place” (Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England 63), DiGangi contends that women, too, serve as Others against which masculine martial subjectivity is constructed. Comparing war manuals and soldier conduct books to several tragicomedies produced contemporaneously, DiGangi concludes, “The representation of disorderly
homoeroticism . . . stigmatizes not male homoerotic desire in particular, but the “effeminacy” of men who act like women or desire women” (25). The implication here is that martial masculinity is compromised not, necessarily, when men become the objects of homoerotic violence but when men associate with or too closely resemble the feminine Other. The pervasiveness of this threat is the subject of Taunton’s exploration of “erosions of the masculine self” in martial discourse (16). Taunton “locat[es] the nexus of anxieties about nation and manhood specifically in the war literature of the [1590s], and . . . measur[es] its accumulation of articulated reactions to the threat of foreign invasion against specific events” (16-17). This analysis demonstrates that while proscriptions against women in the military camps pervade martial discourse, there is an abundance of evidence that suggests not only that wives, servingwomen, and prostitutes lived and worked among the soldiers, but also, and perhaps more importantly, that these women were positioned, when they were not rendered invisible, as the real threat to martial masculinity.

The pioneering work of Smith, DiGangi, and Taunton indicates that martial subject formation is contingent upon an unending process of Othering: on the one hand, soldiers must penetrate and objectify other seemingly masculine men; on the other, they must repudiate, in principle if not in practice, the company of women who function as the embodiment of effeminacy. This conceptualization of subject formation, with its emphasis on mixed- or same-sex object choice and the sublimation of carnal desires in the service of the nation, is indebted to Freudian understandings of subjectivity. And yet, Smith, DiGangi, and Taunton downplay the importance of Freud to the construction of
martial subjectivity, perhaps because such an explicit application of psychoanalysis would be interpreted as anachronistic. Smith, for instance, suggests that Freud is largely unhelpful in examinations of early modern soldiers: in his analysis of the homoerotic speeches of Aufidius, the sometime friend, sometime rival of the eponymous hero of *Coriolanus*, Smith claims, “The rhetorical focus is on the speaker, on Aufidius as the desiring subject, and not as Freudian psychology would have it on the anatomies of the object-bodies he desires” (*Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England* 55). But the desiring subject is defined by his object—that is, by the “object-bodies” he desires—so it is precisely Aufidius’s desire both to conquer and to embrace Coriolanus, another “desiring subject,” that engenders the martial anxiety that in turn sets in motion the tragic end of Shakespeare’s play. While Smith tends to invoke Freud only to dismiss him, DiGangi and Taunton ignore psychoanalysis altogether, as if its foundational understanding of object choice and repressed sexual desire has no usefulness to studies of premodern subjectivities.\(^{21}\)

I would argue rather that notions of repression and sublimation play a large role in early modern martial discourse—in war manuals, soldier conduct books, epic poems, and plays: for not only do a variety of martial texts emphasize the importance of repression for the man who would be a true soldier; they also celebrate a psychic phenomenon Freud

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\(^{21}\) In *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England*, Smith states, “In the standoff between essentialists and social constructionists Freud figures as the most important and influential essentialist of them all. He assumes that the human psyche has an existence outside history and that human sexual development follows the same pattern in all times and in all places” (25). This mischaracterization of Freudian psychoanalysis enables Smith to dismiss theories of repression and sublimation in his analysis of same-sex erotics and desires. Since the publication of *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England*, a number of scholars have taken issue with this misreading of Freud. See note 22.

DiGangi and Taunton, whose analyses of the early modern soldier were published several years after *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England* (five and nine years, respectively), make no mention of Smith’s work. Taunton, moreover, ignores DiGangi’s book, which was published five years before hers.
would later term *sublimation*. Historicizing Freudian psychoanalysis in this way indicates not only that Freud was participating in a longstanding discourse concerning the importance of repression and sublimation in processes of subject formation, but also that early modern martial discourse, too, is part of this philosophical tradition. In the present chapter, then, I would like to place both Freudian and early modern texts in the enduring philosophical tradition of repression and sublimation. In particular, I want to show how Freud’s contributions to the discourse can illuminate the processes suggested in the martial manuals and enacted in the poetry and drama of the early modern period. In so doing, I intend to demonstrate that the queerness of the martial subject—and hence, too, of all subjects—was well known and hence a cause for great concern

A comparison of Freud’s theories to early modern martial texts reveals the structural queerness of subject formation, its production of soldiers who are compelled to engage in processes that are intrinsically inadequate. One such process is repression. Both Freudian psychoanalytic theory and early modern martial discourse hold the act of repressing socially unacceptable desires to be critical to the formation of the normative/civilized subject. For Freud, this means repressing sexual desires that civilization deems deviant; for soldiers, it means repressing desires that would distract them from carrying out their martial duties. The ability to channel unacceptable sexual desires into productive activities is what Freud would later term *sublimation*. In early modern martial discourse, sublimation entails repressing and redirecting carnal desires via state-sanctioned violence in the service of a socially valued aim, namely, the protection of the English nation. Ostensibly, sublimation is essential to the man who
would be a soldier. At the same time, early modern martial discourse reveals this process to be inadequate and, as such, a manufacturer only of queer(ed) subjectivities. Freudian theories of repression and sublimation serve as apt theoretical lenses for reading this process: not only does Freudian psychoanalysis concern itself with the structuring principles of subject formation that underwrite the processes soldiers must navigate in their pursuit of subjectivity; it also helps explain the instability—the queerness—of these same subjectivities. As Freud’s conceptualization of the return of the repressed suggests, the inability to succeed in the repressing and sublimating carnal desires effects the reemergence of the very qualities one sought to project onto the Other in the first place. Thus, while militaristic ideals pervade war manuals, soldier conduct books, epic poems, and stageplays of the early modern period, these ideals are continually undermined by the inevitable proliferation of queer(ed) soldiers for whom normative subjectivity is elusive, even impossible.

Because early modern English notions of repression and repressed (sexual) drives cohere with and help historicize Freudian psychoanalysis, it is important at the outset to map out these correlations and the clarification they provide in the face of persistent charges of ahistoricism and theoretical anachronism, the kind Stephen Greenblatt famously raises in “Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture,” where he writes, “Psychoanalysis is . . . less the privileged explanatory key [of premodern phenomena] than the distant and distorted consequence of [a] cultural nexus” (137).22 And yet, one

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22 For responses to Greenblatt’s essay, see Elizabeth J. Bellamy’s “Psychoanalysis and the Subject in/of/for the Renaissance”; Meredith Skura’s “Understanding the Living and Talking to the Dead: The Historicity of Psychoanalysis”; Michael Schoenfeldt’s Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton (15-18); and Carla Mazzio and Douglas Trevor’s
can find references to repression that anticipate Freud by many centuries. As early as the fourteenth century, *to repress* could mean “To check, restrain, put down or keep under (something bad or objectionable)” (*OED* def 1.a). The term could also denote “To check or withstand (some passion, feeling, etc.) in another by opposition or control” (def 2.a) and “To keep down, suppress (one's desires, feelings, etc.), to keep under control; to restrain, refrain from (an action)” (3.a). And by the 1550s, *to repress* could mean “To keep under, check, curb, prevent from natural development, manifestation, etc.” (def 5). Taken together, these definitions illustrate not only that “bad or objectionable” desires were understood in early modern England as part of the human condition but also that such desires needed to be repressed (“prevent[ed] from natural development”) in order for subjectification and acculturation to transpire.

Similarly, this conceptualization of repression occupies a prominent place in early modern military discourse, as many martial conduct books and war manuals make clear that the subjectivity of the warrior depends in part on his ability to repress unacceptable desires. In his English translation of Justus Lipsius’s *Sixe booke of politickes or ciuil doctrine*. . . (1594), William Jones insists that immoral behaviors (both on and off the battlefield) and military successes as mutually exclusive: “*Constraint*. . . doth represse and bridles the maners of the soldiers. For although, *I know not how it commeth to passe*

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introductory essay in their edited collection, *Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and Early Modern Culture*. Against the New Historicist charge that psychoanalytic interpretations of pre-Freudian texts are inevitably ahistorical, Mazzio and Trevor observe, “It is suggestive . . . to note the ways in which the methodologies of historicism and psychoanalysis often operate by means of the same constellations of terms: *anxiety, alienation, desire, otherness, fetish, and symptom,* to name a few” (3). In addition, several collections of essays serve as rejoinders to scholars dismissive of psychoanalytic approaches to early modern culture, including Murray M. Schwartz and Coppelia Kahn’s *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*; Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz’s *Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature*; Mazzio and Trevor’s *Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and Early Modern Culture*; and Timothy Murray and Alan K. Smith’s *Repossessions: Psychoanalysis and the Phantasms of Early Modern Culture*. 
that it is a very hard matter, to cause them that hazard their life daylie to keepe a meane in their behauiour, and manner of life: yet are the same in some sort to be looked vnto, otherwise your warre is dissolue, nay it is utterlie ouerthrowne” (Xii). A similar understanding of proper martial conduct governs John Norden’s The Mirror of Honor . . . (1597), which delineates, among other things, the proper conduct of the “worthie . . . soldier that can subdue sin”: “[I]f abominable blasphemies, beastly drunkennes, common carding, dicing, whoredome, Atheisme and Papsime, with such like were repressed, no doubt but vertuous exercises wold be better accou[n]ted of” (Fiiv-Fiivi). For Norden, the “worthie . . . soldier” is defined as much by what he represses as he is by what he achieves in combat. Finally, in his Englishing of Jacques Harault’s Politicke, moral, and martial discourse (1595), Arthur Golding devotes an entire chapter to the importance of temperance, which “represseth the sensuall delight. Socrates said, That no man could be wise, which was not temperat. Saint paule saith, That a good life consisteth in three things, namely Godlinesse, Vprightnesse, and Sobrietie; which sobrietie is nothing else but Temperance, when we abstaine from all lustes, and suffer not our selues to be overcome by our desires” (Vvii). As in the treatises examined above, “sensuall delight[s]” and “lustes” are in this text figured as both primal and in need of repression. It is worth noting, moreover, that this last work traces the philosophical tradition of repression back to classical and biblical authorities.

Rather than drawing exclusively on the assumptions of late 19th-centiury Vienna, Freud is calling upon a well-established tradition that predates both the Victorian and early modern period. In An Outline of Psychoanalysis, Freud states, “[T]he childish ego,
under the domination of the real world, gets rid of undesirable instinctual demands by what are called repressions” (203). These repressions happen as a response to “two different situations, namely, when an undesirable instinctual impulse is aroused by some external perception, and when it arises internally without any such provocation” (Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety 94). Such a process is not, in Freud’s estimation, “to be regarded as an event which takes place once, the results of which are permanent, as when some living thing has been killed and from that time onward is dead”; rather, “repression demands a persistent expenditure of force” (“Repression” 151). Although Freud himself contends that this view of repression “could not have been formulated before the time of psycho-analytic studies” (146), he is in fact participating in an enduring philosophical tradition that has, at the very least, recognized the necessity of repressing certain desires (or drives, in Freud’s words) in the process of subject formation. Freud’s ideas about repression are not, therefore, part of “an entirely different system of consciousness,” as Greenblatt maintains (217). Rather, Freudian theories attend to an enduring structuring principle that calls for the repression of socially unacceptable desires in the construction of normative subjectivities—in this context, a soldier who forgoes certain pleasures (sex, alcohol, gambling) in order to pursue other, socially sanctioned ones (combat, conquest).

While repression remains an integral component of martial subjectification, it is the soldier’s ability to redirect repressed drives from one kind of pleasure to another that determines his prowess on the battlefield and makes him a true, victorious soldier. This redirection recalls sublimation, “a process,” in Freudian terms, “that concerns object-
libido and consists in the instinct’s directing itself toward an aim other than, and remote from, that of sexual satisfaction; in this process the accent falls upon the deflection from the sexual aim” (“On Narcissism” 94). Freud theorized that two instincts are at work here: the pleasure principle, which is governed by the id and which entails “processes striv[ing] toward gaining pleasure” or avoiding “unpleasure” (“Two Principles of Mental Functioning” 219), and the reality principle, which is governed by the superego and which “replaces the pleasure principle” and pursues other aims by “tak[ing] into account the conditions imposed by the real external world” (The Question of Lay Analysis 201).

Sublimation, therefore, is inextricably bound up in culture and the prohibitions a society imposes upon its subjects:

> Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life. . . . [I]t is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction . . . of powerful instincts (84). \(^{23}\)

Here Freud underscores the constructedness of the reality principle and the arbitrariness of the cultural contingencies that shape the aims of sublimation. “Higher psychical activities,” then, comprise all acts that appear to benefit civilization. Given the array of wars, foreign as well as domestic, that were fought throughout the early modern period—e.g., the ongoing English endeavors to quash the Irish rebellions; the panicked planning both before and after the defeat of the Armada in 1588 for fear of a Spanish invasion; and

\(^{23}\) In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud reconceived the reality principle, acknowledging that this process can in fact happen on a more conscious level: “One comes to learn a procedure [i.e., the reality principle]. . . through a deliberate direction of one’s sensory activities and through suitable muscular actions” (67). The implication here is that conscious efforts at sublimation are possible, even if for Freud they occur at an early stage of psychic development.
the various military campaigns on the continent and in the West Indies—
it is not surprising to find an explosion of war manuals and martial conduct books in early modern England soliciting “Galliant minded young gentlemen, and good countriemen in general, which haue not yet marched under Mars his colours, nor knowne the parts incident to his followers” (Digges, *An arithmetical vvarlike treatise named Stratioticos Aiv*). These treatises both echo and propagate the threat to England, insisting that all men should enlist and prepare themselves for imminent combat. Perpetuating the threat of foreign invasion, this discourse upholds martial service as the greatest form of personal sacrifice and, as such, the most honorable and normative form of English subjectivity.

Freud’s theory of sublimation helps make sense of some apparent contradictions in early modern martial discourse—in particular, its veneration of a subjectivity that is in fact impossible to maintain. Though Mario DiGangi argues that “an empowering conjunction of sexuality and gender ideology eludes soldiers . . . who remain unable to reconcile their heteroerotic impulses with their responsibility to uphold the masculine ideals of noble friendship and military discipline” (*The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama* 141), his formulation posits that “reconcil[iation]” remains for martial subjects a viable possibility. What Freudian theories demonstrate, however, is that discourses of subjectification foreclose that possibility, in part because processes of repression and

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24 See Cockle’s *Bibliography of Military Books up to 1642*. For more on the various wars waged by the Tudors and Stuarts, see Susan Brigden’s *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors, 1485-1603*; Paul E. J. Hammer’s *Elizabeth’s Wars: War, Government and Society in Tudor England, 1544-1604*; Wallace T. MacCaffrey’s *Elizabeth I: War and Politics 1588-1603*; and R. B. Wernham’s *After the Armada: Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe 1588-1595*. The controversies and scandals surrounding early modern English conscription are outside the scope of this chapter, but one can find a useful introduction to this topic in Vimala Pasupathi’s dissertation on “Playing Soldiers: Martial Subjects in Early Modern English Drama, 1590-1660” (1-31) and in Curtis Breight’s *Surveillance, Militarism and Drama in the Elizabethan Era*. 
sublimation demand a suppression of drives that ultimately are insuppressible. Moments where such processes collapse are not, therefore, reconciliations but ineluctable failures that evince the queerness of subject formation. Effeminacy, then, is not figured in martial discourse simply as “an excessive desire for women or boys,” as DiGangi claims (5); nor is it merely “a trait of excessive male desire regardless of object choice,” as Gary Spear suggests (417). Rather, the effeminate soldier is evidence of an ongoing process of subject formation that must invariably break down. This inevitable insufficiency explains why early modern martial discourse abounds with effeminate/effeminized warriors—warriors, in other words, striving endlessly for martial masculinity and normative subjectivity.  

Widespread concern about the effeminate soldier and the queerness he heralded inspired the circulation of sundry cautionary tales regarding the importance of repressing...
sexual desires and sublimating them into other activities. Many such stories were drawn from the popular and extensively translated classical epics that laid the groundwork for and continued to shape early modern notions of martial normativity.\(^26\) For all their martial prowess, archetypal warriors such as Aeneas and Odysseus must, over the course of their journeys, work to repress and sublimate the effeminizing desires that are engendered by bad women and reinscribed onto the soldier’s body as a marker of martial queerness/effeminacy. What these tales suggest is that nobody—not even an iconic epic hero of antiquity—is secure in his martial masculinity. Indeed, forging martial subjectivity is, as Freud suggests, an ongoing process, one that is liable, at any moment, to break down and render the soldier effeminate—not a soldier at all.

The consequences of neglecting the essential actions of repression and sublimation become clear in the telling of these familiar stories. In the fourth book of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, for instance, in an episode retold throughout the early modern period, it is his devotion to Dido that distracts Aeneas from his destiny as founder of Rome. In their 1573 edition of *The whole .xii. bookes of the Æneidos of Virgill*, Thomas Phaër and Thomas Twyne describe Dido and Aeneas as “louers . . . forgettyng life of better fame” who spend the “winter season long in pleasure . . . / Regarding none estate, but giue them selues to filthy lust” (Fv-Fv).\(^27\) Pursuing those “filthy lust[s]” and shirking their greater

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\(^26\) On the influence of the classics on early modern manuals, see Henry J. Webb’s *Elizabethan Military Science: The Books and the Practice* (3-50) and Jeremy Black’s *Rethinking Military History* (151-173).

\(^27\) I have consulted Thomas Phaër and Thomas Twyne’s 1573 edition of *The whole .xii. bookes of the Æneidos of Virgill* . . . for citation and reference, primarily because it went through numerous printings—more than any other Englishing of Virgil’s epic—throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Phaër and Twyne’s translation was published in segments in 1558 (seven of twelve books) and 1562 (nine books) and in full in 1573, 1584, 1596, 1600, 1607, and 1620. Roughly contemporaneous translations include Gawin Douglas’s *The xiii. bukes of Eneados of the famose poete Virgill* . . . (1553);
responsibility to civilization, Aeneas and Dido have, if only for a time, abandoned the sublimating processes propelled by a sense of martial obligation:

The workes of towers are left, no feats of armes the youth applies,
Nor haunons are wrought, nor for the wars the mighty bulwarke rises.
All things unperfitt stand, the buildings great, and thretnings hie
Of huyg walles, and engines for their height that match the skie. (Fiiii,)

In the absence of a sense of duty—the reality principle, in Freudian terms—Carthaginian safety is jeopardized and Rome’s future remains uncertain. Only when Mercury—adopting the role of the superego—chastises Aeneas for “dooting . . . / To please [his] lusty spouse” and for disregarding his “owne affaires or kingdoms” does the epic hero recall and resume his important epic journey.

In *Dido Queen of Carthage* (perf. 1585/6; pub. 1594), Christopher Marlowe’s dramatization of this Virgilian episode, the superego is manifest in not one but three distinct voices: first as Aeneas’s conscience, then, in turn, as his fellow Trojans, and finally as Mercury, all of whom attempt to remind the warrior of his failure to repress his desires. Well aware of his queer predicament, Aeneas tries to say “Adieu” to Dido, “Since destiny doth call [him] from the shore” (4.3.1-2). 28 But Aeneas’s will proves inadequate, and so the warrior’s men, sensing their commander’s effeminate fickleness, endeavor to remind him of his preordained duty:

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Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey’s *The fourth boke of Virgill, intreating of the loue betweene Aeneas and Dido*. . . (1554) and *Certain bokes of Virgiles Aeneis turned into English meter*. . . (1557; second and fourth books); Richard Stanyhurst’s *Thee first foure bookees of Virgilis Aeneis*. . . (1582, 1583); Thomas Wrothe’s *The destruction of Troy, or The acts of Aeneas*. Translated out of the second booke of the *Aeneads of Virgill*. . . (1620); Walter Burre’s *Didos death* (1622); John Vicars’s *The XII Aeneids of Virgil*. . . (1632); and Robert Stapylton’s *Dido and Aeneas the fourth booke of Virgils Aeneis*. . . (1634). 28 I have used H. J. Oliver’s Revels Plays edition of *Dido Queen of Carthage* for citation and reference. For the dating of the play, I have consulted Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey’s introduction in their edition of *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays* (563-65).
Achates. Banish that enticing dame from your mouth,
And follow your foreseeing stars in all;
This is no life for men-at-arms to live,
Where dalliance doth consume a soldier’s strength,
And wanton motions of alluring eyes
Effeminate our minds inured to war.

Ilioneus. Why, let us build a city of our own
And not stand lingering here for amorous looks.
Will Dido raise old Priam forth his grave
And build the town again the Greeks did burn?
No, no, she cares not how we sink or swim,
So she may have Aeneas in her arms.

Cloanthus. To Italy, sweet friends, to Italy;
We will not stay a minute longer here. (31-44)

Rehearsing for spectators a series of oppositions that structure martial subjectification—
“strength” vs. “dalliance,” “build[ing]” vs. “lingering,” “raising” vs. “standing”—
Aeneas’s companions map out the various ways in which the effeminizing Other
“consume[s],” “effeminate[s],” and hence queers martial subjectivity. But these appeals
to martial masculinity fall short, too, and it is no less than Mercury’s reprimand to
Aeneas that he is being “too too forgetful of [his] own affairs” (5.1.30) that sends the epic
hero back to Italy and Dido, the female threat to Roman civilization, to her death. As Sara
Munson Deats has shown, this staging of Aeneas’s emasculation serves to disturb
conventional ideologies of gender, as the hero of Virgil’s epic becomes in Marlowe’s
play the object of Dido’s ferocious passions. According to Deats, “this reorganizing of
Virgil’s sex/gender priorities is signaled not only by the change of title-hero to privilege
the tragic queen of Carthage over the Trojan epic hero but also by the transference of
initiative from Aeneas to Dido” (92).

While this subversion of gender norms may place the eponymous queen in a more
prominent position in Marlowe’s retelling of Virgil, the fact remains that neither Dido nor
Aeneas is able, finally, to secure the dominant subject position for which each is competing. This is as true for Marlowe’s tragedy as it is for Virgil’s epic. Thus, despite their seemingly different portrayals of Aeneas and Dido, both works exemplify the perpetual unfixedness of martial subjectivity. In this respect, subjectivity functions much like the Lacanian phallus, as neither can be possessed or owned. Rather, subjectivity, like the phallus, is a position men and women struggle endlessly to occupy.\(^29\) What early modern renditions of the classical tale of Aeneas and Dido demonstrate, therefore, is that queer(ed) martial subjectivities are the inevitable end result of endless attempts at subject formation, as men enmeshed in culturally normative processes of repression and sublimation become, in contrast to ideal of fixed masculinity, effeminized soldiers.

The salience of this structuring principle to martial discourse of both the ancient and the early modern periods explains the centrality of a parallel episode, this one between Odysseus and Circe, in Homer’s *Odyssey*, an epic George Chapman published in English in 1615. In the Chapman translation, Circe functions as the Dido figure, convincing Odysseus to “Sheath . . . thy sword, and let my bed enjoy / So much a man; that when the bed we proue, / We may beleue in one anothers loue” (Ovi.).\(^30\) Here Circe commands the exchange of the sword (which will be sheathed) for the penis (which will

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\(^{29}\) In “The Signification of the Phallus,” Lacan explains that all sexuality is created by the awareness of lack of phallus: “Man cannot aim at being whole . . . once the play of displacement and condensation to which he is destined in the exercise of his functions marks his relation, as a subject, to the signifier” (277). This self/Other relation is constituted, therefore, by desires—by what one lacks: “The fact that the phallus is a signifier requires it to be in the place of the Other that the subject have access to it. But since this signifier is there only as veiled and as ratio of the Other’s desire, it is the Other’s desire as such that the subject is required to recognize—in other words, the other insofar as he himself is a subject divided by the signifying *Spaltung* [splitting]” (278).

\(^{30}\) Citations from Homer’s *Odyssey* are from George Chapman’s 1615 translation. Although this text was printed several years after a number of the martial treatises I examine in this chapter, it is quite plausible that similar interpretations of this widely translated epic were in circulation well before its printing.
be unsheathed), a gesture of disarmament signaling that phallic power has been transferred from the warrior to the temptress and that the sublimating processes that heretofore have been propelling the epic have been undone. Circe, like Dido, has managed to “make [the soldiers’] Countrey vanish from their thought” (Pi.). Eventually, the sublimating demands of the epic genre itself, articulated through the moans of homesick soldiers, jumpstart the stalled journey, but once again the fantasy of fixed subjectivity has been revealed as merely a fantasy. Indeed, the journeys of Aeneas and Odysseus attest that subject formation is an ongoing process precisely because the attendant processes—repression and sublimation—never succeed.

Lest these moments of failed repression and sublimation be explained away as insignificant in the grander epic tales being told, it bears remembering that the soldierly ideals explored in *The Aeneid* and *The Odyssey* influenced in profound ways early modern war manuals and martial conduct books, which often cite ancient authorities as precedent for proscriptions against the women invariably perceived, in Taunton’s words, as “threat[s] to the carefully constructed and policed boundaries built and defined by men” (203). For example, in his *Anima'dversions of vvarre; or, A militarie magazine of the truest rules, and ablest instructions, for the managing of warre . . .* (1639), Robert Ward explicates the queering/effeminization of a “Warlike knight renowned in divers

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31 As Nina Taunton points out, though, “sizeable numbers of women [were] in the camps,” and thus proscriptions against wives and prostitutes were by and large idealistic: “Wives and camp followers were not necessarily a distinct category from women who followed the camps in the hope of eking out a living as prostitutes” (203). While it might appear that historical evidence finally gives the lie to the soldierly ideal, the systemic deprecation of women figured ad nauseam as the dangerous, effeminizing Other had very real consequences. Women were rendered invisible, their vital role in maintaining the camps effaced.
Histories for his worthy enterprise,” but now in danger of becoming effeminate. This knight:

espoused himself to th[e] fayre Lady of a noble Family; his fame and honour being one chiefe cause she setled her affections; perceiving shee by her amorous courses did withdraw his spirits and love from following the Warres, whereby his honour began to diminish; shee gently reproved him (as hee was courting of her) and blamed him for effeminizing himselfe, and leaving the Warres, whereby formerly hee had achiieved his greatest reputation; and that it neither suted with the nature of valour, nor duty of a true Gentleman, to lose the least repute of honour wone before, by over much affecting his new made choice; as for my part (quoth shee) I ought to shine by the bright radience of your splendent fame; and shall thinke my selfe too much dejected, if you doe not prosecute so honourable a course begun, and loose your spirits in doting on love. (Qvi,)

The processes of repression and sublimation that forged the subjectivity of the “Warlike knight” failed under the destabilizing influence of “amorous courses”—in Freudian terms, the drives of the pleasure principle. As a result, the “Warlike” warrior “effemini[zes] himself,” “withdraw[ing] his spirits and love from following the Warres,” that is, the superego-driven instincts constitutive of normative martial subjectivity. Not coincidentally, it is the soldier’s wife who initially recognizes the “effeminiz[ation]” he has undergone. One might argue that this portrayal of a woman who displays a noble firmness of character—indeed, who instructs her paramour in his duty—defies the misogyny that typifies martial discourse. While certainly this tale is open for this kind of interpretation, such a reading would perhaps serve to underscore the disquieting role reversal depicted in this cautionary tale. The “fayre Lady,” in other words, may not be demonized in this particular account, but she represents, just as the “effeminiz[ed]” knight does, gender in disorder.
Sir John Smythe makes virtually the same point in his *Certain discourses* . . . *concerning the formes and effects of diuers sorts of weapons, and other verie important matters militarie* . . . (1590), though with a significant difference: he widens his scope to consider the plight of an entire nation undone by failed sublimation:

[B]eing one of the first Nations of the world, [the Egyptians] had the Art and science Militarie in great perfection, by the which they attained many victories and conquests. And thereby finding no Nation that durst assaille them, they did after by enjoying long peace and prosperitie, so giue themselves to their delights, couetousnesse and effeminacies, neglecting all orders and exercises Militarie, that being in processe of time, and in diuere ages assailed and inuaded by diuers other warlike Nations, that had the Arte and Science Militarie, in great perfection, and were allured thereunto, partly by the wonderful fertilitie of *Aegypt*, but chiefly, because the *Aegyptians* were grown effeminate without anie orders and exercises Militarie, they came to be by them subdued and conquered. (*iii, v*)

Egypt suffered on a national scale the fate of Ward’s effeminized knight, as the corrupting influence of “effemincies,” those associated with and embodied in intemperate women, enticed warriors to “giue themselves to their delights” and “neglec[t] all orders and exercises Militarie.” The stakes were high and the consequences dire: without masculine martial subjects to take up arms and defend the nation, Egypt was “subdued and conquered.” Ever since, Egyptians “haue liued in subiection, and seruitude to diuers other Nations” (*v*). The failed sublimation and consequent queering of an entire nation—one, moreover, that at one time “had the Art and science Militarie in great perfection”—suggests that when lapses in repression and sublimation occur, martial subjectivity is compromised by and thus assumes the position of the effeminate/effeminizing Other.
These cautionary tales of antiquity suffuse the cultural imaginary of early modern England, revealing in their circulation the martial queerness of heroic figures who inhabit the literature of the period. The warriors of these sixteenth-century texts, facing by now familiar obstacles to the fantasy of normative subjectivity, bear out the axiomatic volatility of martial subjectification. In the fifth book of Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1590; 1596), Arthegall, the supposed allegorical embodiment of justice, is disarmed simply by Radigund’s revealing her female identity:

At sight thereof his cruell minded hart  
Empierced was with pittifull regard,  
That his sharpe sword he threw from him apart,  
Cursing his hand that had that visage mard:  
No hand so cruell, nor no hart so hard,  
But ruth of beautie will it mollifie. (5.5)  

Like Odysseus, Arthegall is unable to wield his “sharpe sword”—that is, both his martial and his sexual sword—the moment he gazes upon the face of Radigund. At this moment, the knight’s endeavors to repress and sublimate fail, and his sword is surrendered to his penis. As a result of this loss of phallic power—this “mollifi[cation]”—Arthegall exhibits no resistance as Radigund overpowers and conquers him:

Soone as the knight she there by her did spy,  
Standing with emptie hands all weaponlesse,  
With fresh assault vpon him she did fly,  
And gan renew her former cruelnesse:  
And though he still retyr’d, yet nathelesse  
With huge redoubled strokes she on him layd;  
And more increat her outrage mercilesse,  
The more that he with meekc intreatie prayd,  
Her wrathful hand from greedy vengeance to haue stayd. (5.6)

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32 I have used A. C. Hamilton’s second edition of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* for citation and reference.
This episode offers readers two forms of queer martial subjectivities: the conquered, “weaponlesse” knight and the emasculating Amazonian warrior who has usurped his martial masculinity. Kathryn Schwarz has suggested that Spenser’s portrayal of Radigund exposes “the martial woman [as] manifestly unnatural” (18). But so too is the martial man: as this episode makes clear, Arthegall’s masculinity reveals itself to be nothing more than a posture, as something he exudes until the moment he faces the threat of the effeminate Other embodied in Radigund. In other words, it is precisely when he confronts perceived difference that Arthegall’s masculine subjectivity breaks down. According to Lisa Celovsky, this martial man’s inadequacies stem not from his failure to conquer Radigund but from his inability to reconcile the demands of two, competing masculinities, that is, those of knighthood and those of husbandhood: “What Radigund takes from Arthegall is what he must forsake for husbandhood and the civil order it supports: his Braggadochio-ness, the extremes of chivalric posing” (239). From Celovsky’s perspective, Arthegall does not give up his masculinity so much as he loses form of masculinity in order to possess another. Hence it is more accurate to speak of masculinities, among them martial and domestic, circulating in Spenser’s epic

The epic voice of The Faerie Queene, however, declares that Arthegall’s newfound domesticity is far from manly; rather, it is “to manhood shame”:

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33 For a defense of Radigund and her emasculation of Arthegall, see Susanne Woods’s “Amazonian Tyranny: Spenser’s Radigund and Diachronic Mimesis.” Although Woods recognizes that Radigund is unquestionably portrayed in strong negative language as a tyranny emblematic of improper and perverse rule, she is also mimetic of a more sympathetic reality on at least three levels: she has the stately misery believed to be true of real Amazons she enacts a tragedy of female powerlessness that we can deconstruct in our time, one that probably was not accessible to Spenser; and the dilemma of Radigund’s scorned beauty is the poet’s own” (59). On the queerness of Radigund in particular and the Amazon in general, see Schwarz’s Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance and Maureen Quilligan’s “The Comedy of Female Authority in The Faerie Queene.”
Then tooke the Amazon this noble knight,
Left to her will by his owne wilfull blame,
And caused him to be disarmed quight,
Of all the ornaments of knightly name,
With which whylome he gotten had great fame:
In stead whereof she made him to be dight
In womans weedes, that is to manhood shame,
And put before his lap a napron white,
In stead of Curiets and bases fit for fight. (5.20)

“Disarmed” and in “womans weedes,” Arthegall has, instantaneously, “by his owne
wilfull blame,” succumbed to the effeminizing Other and assumed the queer subjectivity
of the effete soldier. This end result is, in Schwarz’s words, “neither cataclysmic nor even
shocking, but simply inevitable” (156). I would suggest that this “inevitab[ility]” is
attributable to the unavoidable inadequacy of repression and sublimation, that is, those
processes by which Arthegall would forge his masculine martial subjectivity. Because
these processes are ongoing, their idealized end result, namely, fixed martial masculinity,
remains unattainable, something Arthegall could never embody. He is destined, in other
words, for martial queerness.

Whereas in book five of The Faerie Queene the condign punishment for
emasculation is “true subjection” to the very woman who dismantled the structure of
subjectification, in Marlowe’s Tamburlaine, Part Two (perf. 1587; pub. 1590), the
penalty is, as Freud’s formulation of the Oedipus Complex forewarns, death at the hands
of one’s own father.34 Having discovered his son Calyphas’s designs to “go to cards” and
daydream about “kiss[ing] the fairest of the Turks’ concubines” while his brothers

34 In “The Development and Vicissitudes of Freud’s Ideas on the Oedipus Complex,” Bennett Simon and
Rachel B. Blass identify six distinct stages of Freud’s conceptualization of the Oedipal phase of psychic
development. At each stage, fear of death by one’s parent remains the signal event/crisis. Tamburlaine
actualizes this grisly fear.
participate in military campaigns (4.1.60, 62), Tamburlaine drags “th[e] effeminate brat” from the tent and stabs him to death in front of his fellow soldiers (l. 161). Murdered on account of his effeminate actions, Calyphas has become associated with the effeminate/effeminizing Other and therefore is as defiling as any woman. Hence Tamburlaine instructs the Turkish concubines to dispose of the corpse: “[N]ot a common soldier shall defile / His manly fingers with so faint a boy” (ll. 163-64). By and large scholars have located Calyphas’s effemeness specifically in his fantasizing about fondling the imprisoned concubines. Ian Frederick Moulton has compared Calyphas to the speaker of the elegies Marlowe published in the 1590s: “Like Calyphas, who prefers ‘a naked lady in a net of gold’ to the swords and cannons of the battlefield (2.4.1), in the final poem the speaker of Marlowe’s Elegies succumbs to ‘martial justice’ and is made captive” (107). Carolyn Williams, citing the Oxford English Dictionary, argues that “Calyphas, with his taste for wine and women, is clearly “effeminate”; what makes him even more despicable (in Renaissance eyes) is his preference for moving straight on to rape and pillage without any preliminary fighting” (71). Approaching Calyphas as a “conscientious objecter against those tenets” Tamburlaine champions, Alan Shepard suggests that Calyphas’s interest in playing cards and kissing women bespeaks his effort to “rejec[t] his father’s model of how males ought to behave and what they ought to

35 I have used Anthony B. Dawson’s New Mermaids edition of Tamburlaine: Parts One and Two for citation and reference. On the play’s publication and performance history, see Dawson’s introduction (xxviii-xliv).

36 Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed, s.v. “effeminacy.” Williams acknowledges that she is drawing specifically on def. †3: “The notion ‘self-indulgent, voluptuous’ seems sometimes to have received a special colouring from a pseudo-etymological rendering of the word as ‘devoted to women’” (71).
desire” (43). What draws these interpretations of the “effeminate brat” together is their understanding of effeminacy as grounded in his preference for women over men.37

And yet, while early modern martial discourse holds that carnal desire for women do, in fact, emasculate martial subjects, this in itself is not what infuriates Tamburlaine. Indeed, in the same scene that he strikes down his youngest son, the Ur-warrior makes clear his intentions to ravish “those Turkish harlots” Calyphas had previously dreamt of kissing (4.1.164). What enrages Tamburlaine is the boy’s flagrant defiance—his utter refusal to repress and sublimate his carnal drives in the service of combat and the expansion of his father’s empire. In his killing his son, then, Tamburlaine endeavors to make the point that “effeminate brat[s]” who intend not to fight in the wars will become effeminate objects of Tamburlaine’s martial subject formation. Of course, at the same time that this act serves to punish martial effeminacy, it reveals precisely what Tamburlaine tries hopelessly to suppress, namely, the unfixedness of all martial subjectivities. Effeminacy in the Tamburlaine plays is not, therefore, equated with excessive sexual desire per se but with the inability to channel those drives into violence, whether in times of peace or war.

As one of the more probative contributions to this discourse, Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida (perf. 1601-02; pub. 1609) interrogates widely accepted notions of

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37 On the conditions of Calyphas’s effeminacy, see also Stephen Greenblatt’s Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (193-221) and Bruce Smith’s Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England (208-211). Although Lisa Hopkins does not explain her particular use of the term effeminacy, she suggests that “Calyphas's effeminacy, although clearly present from the beginning, could be interpreted as perhaps becoming exacerbated by a subconscious attempt to take over the role within the family of a lost mother” (202). In Shakespeare’s Marlowe: The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare’s Artistry, Robert A. Logan rejoins the critical tendency to view Calyphas as an “effeminate brat.” Instead, Calyphas exemplifies a new code of manliness, one, apparently, that upbraids early modern notions of effeminacy: “the play makes clear that Calyphas’s decision not to subscribe to [Tamburlaine’s notion of] manliness has nothing to do with his sexuality, which is firmly, even lecherously established as heteroerotic” (97).
repression, sublimation, and subjectification, questioning (without ever answering) whether martial violence ever betokens valiance or masculinity. The play opens with a juxtaposition of wars, as an “unarm[ed],” enamored Troilus asks, “Why should I war without the walls of Troy, / That find such cruel battle here within?” (1.1.1-3). Engaged in a war of passion, Troilus cannot bring himself to enter battle. The queerness of this predicament is not lost on the effeminized warrior, who declares, “Each Trojan that is master of his heart, / Let him to field; Troilus, alas, hath none” (4-5). This consciousness spills over into the exchanges of Achilles and Patroclus, two soldiers who, like Troilus, choose to spend their days in bed, acquiescing to sexual drives and ignoring the demands of war. These soldiers, too, are aware of their effeminization, though Patroclus is the one who seems most concerned about their reputations:

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A woman impudent and mannish grown
Is not more loath’d than an effeminate man
In time of action. I stand condemn’d for this;
They think my little stomach to the war,
And your great love to me, restrains you thus.
Sweet, rouse yourself, and the weak wanton Cupid
Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold,
And like [a] dewdrop from the lion’s mane,
Be shook to air. (3.3.218-27)
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As David McCandless has suggested, Achilles and Patroclus are “effeminate m[e]n” not because they are indulging in same-sex desires but because, in so doing, they have succumbed to passions typically associated with women: “Achilles’ effeminacy stems not from a specifically homosexual desire but from the emasculating effects of desire itself, its capacity to deflect a man from his narrative of competitive self-actualization” (161).

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38 For a discussion of the play’s performance and publication history, see Walter Cohen’s “Textual Note” in *The Norton Shakespeare* (724-26).
Troilus and Achilles face a similar problem, then, in that they are both kept from the wars because of their effeminate passions.

Only when their respective objects of desire become unreachable—Cressida because she absconds with a rival soldier; Patroclus because he is murdered—do Troilus and Achilles vow to achieve great feats in war. Ostensibly, these vows mark a turning point in *Troilus and Cressida*, the point at which two soldiers remember their martial duties and take up their swords. As it turns out, though, the only staged military action is anything but heroic, as Achilles orchestrates an ambush on an unarmed, unsuspecting Hector. Soon thereafter, Achilles performs a second act of cowardice, that is, he attempts to rewrite martial history: “[C]ry you all amain, / ‘Achilles hath the mighty Hector slain’” (5.9.13-14). This is a far cry from valiant military service. Of course, as James O’Rourke and McCandless have demonstrated, *Troilus and Cressida* is heavily invested in burlesquing soldierly braggadocio.\textsuperscript{39} It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the play calls into question the efficiency of the machinery of subjectification, as Troilus and Achilles exit the play having failed to perform any notable acts of valiance. In this play, as in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*, queer/effeminized subjectivities are in abundance, while valor exists only in the unattainable abstract.

But the ever-present threat of effeminization—the temptation to yield to unmanly desires and luxuriate in the fulfillment of erotic fantasies—is only one piece of the process of subjectification delineated in early modern martial treatises and the literature

\textsuperscript{39} See James O’Rourke’s “‘Rule in Unity’ and Otherwise: Love and Sex in *Troilus and Cressida*” and McCandless’s *Gender and Performance in Shakespeare’s Problem Comedies* (123-66). Cf. Daniel Juan Gil’s reading of *Troilus and Cressida* as enacting “asocial sexuality,” that is, “a form of sexual intersubjectivity that flourishes alongside or beneath early modern sex-gender norms, neither attacking nor affirming them” (78).
of the period. Resisting the temptations represented by women merely saves the masculine subject from becoming womanly. Full subjectivity for a man—a fortiori for a soldier—depends upon the act of penetrating other men. The homoerotics of this violence evinces yet another failure of repression, as the sexuality repressed and sublimated for the benefit of the state resurfaces in the form of highly eroticized weaponry. Or perhaps *returns* is a better word for what is happening here. For this reappearance mirrors in remarkable ways Freudian theories of the return of the repressed. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud observes that “[w]hat is forgotten is not extinguished but only ‘repressed’; its memory-traces are present in all their freshness, but isolated by ‘anticathexes.’ They cannot enter into communication with other intellectual processes; they are unconscious—inaccessible to consciousness” (94). Repressed instincts return, in this formulation, not through introspective exercises but through parapraxes (Freudian slips), dreams, and jokes.\(^{40}\) This understanding of the means by which repressed desires return and are put into discourse helps explain the confluence of the erotic and the violent in descriptions of weapons and warfare. As Gordon Williams remarks in his *Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language*, weapons in general and swords, lances, and pikes in particular register in countless early modern texts as symbols of phallic aggression, that is, as prosthetic penises.\(^{41}\) To brandish one’s sword and employ it in the penetration of another man is—as Williams’s entries on *draw, foin, stab*, and *thrust* suggest—to expend

\(^{40}\) Freud discusses parapraxes, dreams, and jokes in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, The Interpretation of Dreams*, and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* respectively.

through violence the aggression one might otherwise use during intercourse.\textsuperscript{42} Vaginas are present, too, though only as repositories for the male phallus: the case for the sword is routinely figured as a surrogate vagina (Latin, “scabbard”), as is the buckler a soldier uses to protect himself from the thrusts of other men.\textsuperscript{43} The pervasiveness of these puns in early modern English texts—in martial discourse and elsewhere—shows how sublimated sexuality permeates the lexicon of combat, so much so that Williams and Partridge, in their foundational compendia of sexual language of the period, have identified \textit{soldier} as a frequently used and widely recognized double entendre for “sexual virility.”\textsuperscript{44}

This correlation of martial and sexual prowess might appear markedly heteroerotic—swords and sheaths, lances and bucklers, penises and vaginas—but, paradoxically, queer subjectivities emerge from the narratives of same-sex combat and conquest. Indeed, a triumphant military campaign requires that soldiers uncase their swords and break through the bucklers of their combatants, thereby abandoning the heteroerotic configurations of their weapons and penetrating other men. In this, male/male violence perverts the default positions of male subject and female object, as the penetrated, blazoned, anatomized martial body becomes the object/Other through which sword-wielding soldiers hope to construct their subjectivities. Wounds thus script narratives of same-sex penetration and subjugation, manufacturing yet another kind of queer(ed) martial subjectivity. This process renders all subjects vulnerable to

\textsuperscript{42} Williams, \textit{Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language}, s.vv. “draw,” “foin,” “stab,” and “thrust.” See also Partridge’s entries in \textit{Shakespeare’s Bawdy}.

\textsuperscript{43} Williams, \textit{Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language}, and Partridge, \textit{Shakespeare’s Bawdy}, s.vv. “case” and “buckler.”

\textsuperscript{44} Williams, \textit{Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language}, and Partridge, \textit{Shakespeare’s Bawdy}, s.v. “soldier.”
objectification and conquest, and so forging a martial sense of self through eroticized violence suspends all sword-wielding warriors, queerly and indefinitely, between subjectivity and objectivity.

This mutability amounts to a crisis of interpretation, as lacerations on the martial body present soldiers with problems of reading, scripting, and controlling narratives of same-sex conquest. In his analysis of ancient notions of masculinity, Jonathan Walters has determined that the “Roman soldier provides us with [an] exception to the rule that unmanly degradation results from the penetration of the body—a soldier’s wounds are honorable, not dishonoring” (40). On the authority of ancient Rome, then, John Norden can claim that “To be wounded in the warres is glorie, and to dye in a iust cause purchaseth immortall memorie” (iii), and Robert Dallington, in his Aphorismes ciuill and militarie . . . (1613), can boast that “SCarres in a souldiers face, are the markes of honour; and wounds in his weake bodie, are strong pleaders for reward” (Tiii). At the same time, however, this mentalité is counterbalanced by numerous manifestations of “disesteem[ing] . . . wounds” (Smythe ***ii); “seditious wounds” (Digges A breife and true report . . . B2); “drery wounds” (Spenser 1.6.45); “grieuoustwoundes” (Rich Ciii); “constrain[ing] . . . wondes” (Barret Yi); and “most unnatural wounds” (Shakespeare I Henry 6 3.3.50) recorded elsewhere in martial discourse. Within the same discourse, then, wounds signify dominance as well as submission, conquest as well as defeat.

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45 Walters argues further that a Roman soldier “can without losing his superior status be penetrated by a sword or a vine, but not by a penis or a birch” (40). As I have been suggesting throughout this chapter, distinguishing from the violent and the erotic is perhaps a dubious enterprise.
At once sites of subjectivity and markers of objectivity, wounds are fiercely contested and hence always susceptible to being reinscribed and reinterpreted. As Baltazar, of Thomas Dekker’s *The Noble Spanish Soldier* (pub. 1634; perf. 1631), puts it, “[D]eath [is] the story; a sword imbrued with blood, the pen that writes, and the Poet a terrible buskind Tragicall fellow, with a wreath about his head of burning match instead of Bayes” (2.1.67-70). Baltazar’s conceit suggests that while the inevitable telos of the martial narrative is death, the various tales leading up to this tragic ending present serious problems of writing and interpreting wounds. Figure as “the pen that writes” the tragedy, the “sword” is “imbrued with blood”—but whose blood? On the one hand, the “Tragicall fellow” may be writing with the blood of those conquered in battle; in this case, the lacerations of wounded and slain soldiers serve as both corporeal ink blotters in which the poet dips his quill and actual testimonies to the victorious warrior’s achievements in battle. On the other hand, the blood may be that of the victor, in which case wounds serve as proof the soldier’s valiant performance in combat. Still another possibility is the blood is the poet’s own, as he retells the carnage of war and describes the penetrable, penetrated bodies of its winners and the losers. As a martial tragedy recounted by a poet “with a wreath about his head of burning match,” the story entails all three, and so wounds take on various meanings that must then be read and interpreted by readers who will, ultimately, both bear witness to and contest their significance.

Contemporaneous dramatic productions rehearse the anxieties attendant on wounds, performing in illuminating ways the soldier’s inevitable and ceaseless oscillation

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46 Citations from this play are from Fredson Bowers’s multivolume *Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker.*
between normativity and counternormativity, subjectivity and objectivity. The cultural significances of wounds—which Antony in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* terms “dumb mouths [that] do ope their ruby lips / To beg the voice and utterance of [his] tongue” (3.1.260-61)—are especially disconcerting: on the one hand, they signify valiant service; on the other, the threat of penetrability and objectivity. In Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* plays, it is precisely these concerns that explain the eponymous hero’s contradictory views of wounds sustained in the service of the realm. Prognosticating earlier in the play that the warrior “Whose head hath deepest scars, whose breast most wounds” shall rule (1.4.75), Tamburlaine boasts to his sons that his body bears none:

> View me thy father that hath conquered kings  
> And with his host marched round the earth  
> Quite void of scars and clear from any wound,  
> That by the wars lost not a dram of blood,  
> And see him lance his flesh to teach you all.

> *He cuts his arm.*

> A wound is nothing, be it ne’er so deep,  
> Blood is the god of war’s rich livery.  
> Now look I like a soldier. (*Part Two* 3.2.110-17)

According to Alan Shepard, Tamburlaine’s contradictory views on wounds and wounding stem from “a deep anxiety that he only looks ‘like’—but in some ultimate, humanist way is not—a soldier, that he only looks like—but is not—a man” (47). I would suggest rather that the warrior’s histrionic gesture of self-mutilation reflects the unnerving polysemy of wounds, which could attest both to valiant service and vulnerability and defeat. By “lanc[ing] his [own] flesh,” Tamburlaine tries to control what in battle becomes the contested terrain of martial subjectification. So while he insists he “now look[s] . . . like a soldier,” the self-inflicted laceration scripts an onanistic
narrative of self-conquest, one in which he masterfully crafts himself as both the subject and the object. This gesture befits the narcissistic warrior, who claims at one point that he could “with [his] sword make Jove to stoop” (*Part One* 4.4.73). Of course, this is all artifice, fabricated to assuage his sons’ well-founded fears of penetrative violence and the objectification it enables, and it is appropriate that the only son who sees through the charade—who “know[s] not what [he] should think of” the self-mutilation except that “‘tis a pitiful sight” (*Part Two* 3.2.130)—is none other than Calyphas, “th[e] effeminate brat” Tamburlaine strikes down a few scenes later.47 From this grandiose display, playgoers are able to see through Tamburlaine’s hubris and perceive, albeit briefly, a scripted self-awareness of the unfixedness of his martial subjectivity.

A similar anxiety about the queering potential of wounds characterizes the title character of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* (perf. 1608; pub. 1623), though, unlike Tamburlaine, Coriolanus lacks the ability to mask his discomfort and fashion illusions of a fixed normative subjectivity. Although he exhibits a sense of pride in his wounds—validated, no doubt, by his mother’s declaring that injuries sustained during battle “more becom[e] a man / Than gilt his trophy” (1.2.39-40); Menenius’s exhorting the citizens to “Think / Upon the wounds his body bears” (3.3.49-50); and various citizens referring to “wounds receiv’d for’s country” as “marks of merit” (2.3.162)—Caius Martius becomes agitated by the prospect of other men gazing upon and blazoning his martial body, especially by one citizen’s claim that “if he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them. So if he tell us his noble

47 The term *artifice* is Karen Cunningham’s, used in her article “Renaissance Execution and Marlovian Elocution: The Drama of Death” to describe Tamburlaine’s self-presentation.
deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them” (2.3.5-9). Philip Brockbank has pointed out that class-consciousness colors this antagonistic relationship, as Coriolanus and the citizens struggle throughout the play for predominance. But I would argue that this only exacerbates an already volatile situation. Figured in early modern English discourse as a phallus, as a defining characteristic of the subject, the tongues of the tribunes perpetrate yet another sequence of male/male violence on the body of the Roman soldier. There are, in fact, nearly as many tongues in the play as there are wounds—the former term appearing twenty-one times, the latter twenty-two. As Lee Edelman has pointed out, the act of putting one’s tongue into another person’s orifices is a culturally transgressive gesture, as it undermines notions of bodily autonomy and fixed subjectivity: “The representation, however formulaic, of one man’s tongue in another man’s mouth can not only figure the penetration of one orifice of one orifice as an inlet for, and an image of, the sodomitical penetration of another, it can also suggest the connotative overlay in sodomy’s cultural construction of an anxiety about the authority and autonomy of one’s own signifying practices” (125). The patricians, playing on the word power, recognize the queerness of this situation: “We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power we have no power to do” (2.3.4-5). This juxtaposition of tongues and

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48 On the blazon as a form of violence, see Jonathan Sawday’s The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture (191-212) and Nancy J. Vickers’s “Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme.”

49 Brockbank explores Coriolanus’s disdain for the empowered patricians as “one contribution among many to the play’s probings of the integrity of the state” (38). It is no coincidence that the citizens themselves introduce this line of inquiry at the play’s start with their recapitulation of the fable of the belly, which Michael Schoenfeldt discusses in his provocative essay, “Fables of the Belly in Early Modern England.”

50 See the entry for tongue in Williams’s Glossary. Partridge ignores the tongue/penis pun, perhaps because he hopes to negate the existence of “homosexual” puns and subtexts in Shakespearean drama—a “few . . . definite references” notwithstanding (16). I discuss his deeply homophobic essay titled “Homosexual” in the conclusion of this study.
wounds—the former being the organ of the subject, the latter being the organ of the object—reveals what Coriolanus would hope to conceal, namely, that even the most decorated soldiers depend upon the penetrating, signifying tongues of other men. In this respect, even meritorious soldiers such as Coriolanus oscillate between penetrating subject and penetrated object.

Such a predicament impels soldiers to compulsory orgiastic violence, wherein the aim is not simply to penetrate and objectify but to disfigure object(s) beyond all semblance of subjecthood. Acts of mutilation represent extraordinary but ultimately futile attempts at securing the normative subject position. Hector threatens Achilles, “I’ll not kill thee there, nor there, nor there, / But, by the forge that stithies Mars his helm, / I’ll kill thee everywhere, yea, o’er and o’er” (Shakespeare Troilus and Cressida 4.5.254-56); the Duke of Medina designs to “rip up / [the Spanish King’s] very entrailes, cut in two his heart, / And search each corner in’t” (Dekker The Noble Spanish Soldier 4.1.92-94); Bajazeth fantasizes, “Volleys of shot pierce through [Tamburlaine’s] charmed skin / And every bullet dipped in poison drugs, / Or roaring cannons sever all thy joints, / Making thee mount as high as eagles soar!” (Marlowe Tamburlaine Part One 5.2.158-61); Tamburlaine designs “t’appease [his] wrath” on the body of Alemda, “Searing thy hateful flesh with burning irons / And drops of scalding lead, while all thy joints / Be racked and beat thee asunder with the wheel” (Marlowe Tamburlaine Part Two 3.5.123-25); and Amyras, Tamburlaine’s son, wishes upon the Turks, “I would strive to swim through pools of blood / Or make a bridge of murdered carcasses / Whose arches should be
framed with bones of Turks” (1.5.92-94). This is subject formation at its ghastliest and most misguided.

In death, soldiers are liberated from the otherwise endless, inescapable, and inescapably queer(ing) process of subjectification. But this liberation actualizes what aspiring subjects had defended against throughout their lives in military camps and on battlefields: ultimate and final objectification. Tamburlaine finds the prospect of death calming, in part because he hopes to join his deceased wife, but also because after a long life of conquering, mutilating, and objectifying, the self-described “scourge of God” is dying not of a mortal wound but of old age (5.3.248). That is, he is dying on top. His parting words, though, are devoted mostly to reminding his son about the queer life that lies ahead:

[R]eign my son, scourge and control those slaves,
Guiding thy chariot with thy Father’s hand.
As precious is the charge thou undertak'st
As that which Clymen’s brain-sick son did guide
When wand’ring Phoebe’s ivory cheeks were scorched
And all the earth like Aetna breathing fire.
Be warned by him, then learn with awful eye
To sway a throne as dangerous as his.
For if thy body thrive not full of thoughts
As pure and fiery as Phyteus’ beams,
The nature of these proud rebelling jades
Will take occasion by the slenderest hair,
And draw thee piecemeal like Hippolytus,
Through rocks more steep and sharp than Caspian cliftes.
The nature of thy chariot will not bear
A guide of baser temper than myself. (Part Two 5.3.228-43)

This valediction provides a clearer understanding of the anxieties behind Tamburlaine’s modus operandi, his unrestrained violence enacted upon the bodies of those he conquered: if one is not the subject of violence, that is, the one who wreaks violence upon
another, then one is by default the object, the penetrated flesh upon which another soldier’s subjectivity is constructed. Until death, seemingly the ultimate form of objectification, subjectivity is always contested, always in danger of becoming undone.

The circumstances of Coriolanus’s death are strikingly different from Tamburlaine’s, in effect laying bare for spectators the lifelong struggle for martial subjectivity, the inevitable end of which is objectivity. By the close of *Coriolanus*, the eponymous hero’s subjectivity, signified in his *agnomen*, is revoked, first by the citizens and then by his mortal enemy-turned-friend-turned-enemy, Aufidius—all within the space of two acts. Aufidius exclaims, “Ay, Martius, Caius Martius! Dost thou think / I’ll grace thee with that robbery, thy stol’n name / Coriolanus, in Corioles?” (4.6.88-90). Unable to restore his martial subjectivity and reclaim the *agnomen* that authenticates it, Coriolanus pleads for annihilation: “Cut me to pieces, Volsces, men and lads, / Stain all your edges on me” (5.4.111-12). The veracity of Coriolanus’s claim to his *agnomen* matters less than his refusal to allow anyone to “writ[e]” otherwise, and the inability to secure subjectivity, despite many years of valiant martial service, is too much—is too queer—for Coriolanus to bear. Consequently he wishes to be dismembered entirely. As Bruce Smith has noted, Coriolanus “positively begs the fate that befalls him at the end of the play” (136), and to the chant of “Kill, kill, kill, kill him!” the soldier is executed. The stage directions make explicit the significances of the murder: “The conspirators draw, and Kill Martius, who falls; Aufidius stands on him.” Whereas he had entered the scene confident in his subjectivity (the stage directions indicate as much: “Enter CORIOLANUS marching with drum and colours, the Commoners being with him”), he
exits the play as Caius Martius, another “fall[en]” soldier (stage directions: “Exeunt, bearing the body of Martius. A dead march is sounded”). So when Aufidius mounts the Roman soldier’s corpse, spectators observe a profound gesture of one soldier’s attempt at subjectification across the queered body of another.

While they come to terms with their impending deaths in very different ways, Tamburlaine and Coriolanus are forced to confront what every aspiring soldier-subject devotes his repressing, sublimating, wounding career trying to fend off—objectification. In this respect, they represent just two of the multitudinous reactions—not just from soldiers but from anyone struggling for subjectivity—to an ineluctable form of objectification that is simultaneously terrifying and reassuring: terrifying because subjectivity is at last foreclosed, reassuring because the onerous yet futile subjectification process is foreclosed as well. Viewed through a Freudian lens, these conflicting points of view constitute an outward expression of the death instinct (*Thanatos*), which, simply put, is “an urge inherent in all organic life to restore to an earlier state of things” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 36). Certainly Coriolanus’s beckoning for annihilation is an articulation of this type of urge, but so too is Tamburlaine’s ceremonious departure—his relinquishing his crown to Amyras, his preparing and then summoning Zenocrate’s coffin, his measured goodbyes. From this vantage point, both warriors are assenting, as all aspiring subjects do, to an inherited instinct of self-aggression, the aim of which is to liberate the self from the intrinsically inadequate system of subjectification through which it is constructed and to which it is bound.
What the lives and deaths of soldiers such as Coriolanus and Tamburlaine demonstrate, then, is that martial subjects are nowhere to be found because normative subjectivity—martial or otherwise—is at best a delusion, at worst an unattainable fantasy. Hence, to read martial queerness as it is formed and expressed in early modern English discourse is to read beyond the tales of failed repression and the sadistic, homoerotic narratives of same-sex conquest. For ultimately these testimonies to the dynamics of military camps and battlegrounds speak to the queerness not of individual soldiers or of martial discourse but of subjectification itself. Insofar as violence demands a subject and an object, and insofar as the demarcation of subject and object underscores the transience and interchangeability of these positions, discourses of subjectification demand but finally negate normative subjectivity. So while early modern English soldiers could be termed *queer* for a variety of reasons, they are queer because they are soldiers.
CHAPTER 2

“GOOD SWEET BEDFELLOWS” AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGES
ON THE EARLY MODERN STAGE

A keyword search of bedfellow in the Early English Books Online (EEBO) database locates the term in more than 350 books printed between 1550 and 1660, in texts ranging from lyric and epic poems, plays, court masques, and satires to travel narratives, medical pamphlets, religious and political tracts, and antiquarian surveys. These results are all the more striking when we bear in mind that they do not include works that deploy various synonyms, such as bed-friend, bed-mate, and bed-companion; that they do not account for moments in texts where bedfellowship is represented or implied but not named; and that they represent only the small fraction of the books catalogued in EEBO (less than 10% of over 118,000) that have been transcribed and thus made available for full text searches.\(^\text{51}\) Nonetheless, even my limited search makes it clear not only that the word bedfellow circulated extensively in early modern English discourse, but also, and perhaps more importantly, that the institution of bedfellowship was well known and widely recognized as a common social arrangement.

At the same time, pinning down precisely what bedfellowship signified in any given text, and to whom, is an arduous task, as the term and its synonyms were employed

\(^{51}\) This search is current as of 14 April 2008.
throughout the early modern period to describe a wide array of mixed- and same-sex sleeping and social arrangements—a range not fully acknowledged by either the *Oxford English Dictionary* or the various glossaries of early modern bawdy language now available to early modern scholars. While the editors of the *OED* recognize that *bedfellow* could mean “one who shares a bed with another” (def. 1), they indicate in a subsequent entry that the word referred more specifically to “a husband or wife” or “a concubine” (def. 2), two categories that are seemingly opposed on the spectrum of social mores and yet consonant in their reference to heteroerotic relationships. Of course, the entries are not even parallel, as the man or woman needed to complete the patron/concubine binary (which could be male/male, male/female, female/male, or female/female) is noticeably absent from the second definition, as if the editors of the *OED* would rather make a usage error than turn their gaze to—and admit the existence of—either a man’s role in the dynamic of prostitution or the same-sex arrangements possible in bedfellowship.

Gordon Williams, in his otherwise more complete *Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language*, defines *bedfellow* ambiguously as a double entendre for “sexual partner.”

These reference works suggest that, while *bedfellow* could register both normative and counternormative sexualities (“spouse” and “concubine” or “spouse” and “sexual partner”), such possibilities were available only to mixed-sex couples whose actions were nameable, even when censurable. Elided by these entries—buried, perhaps, in the more ambiguous definitions of *bedfellow* as “one who shares a bed with another” and “sexual

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53 The editors of the *OED* do not recognize the possibility of a male concubine. The implication here is that sexual relationships are nameable and noteworthy only when they cohere to dominant sexual norms. *OED*, 2nd ed., s.v. “concubine.”
54 Williams, *Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language*, s.v. “bedfellow.”
partner”—is the broad spectrum of same-sex relationships that might have been meant by the term *bedfellowship*. This elision is curious indeed, as it would have been much more common in the early modern period for women to sleep with women and men with men outside the marital or commercial (i.e., with a prostitute) relationships.

In this chapter, then, I would like to begin to map out a particular kind of same-sex bedfellowship that becomes legible when the various meanings of the word *bedfellow* overlap. For if the term was employed throughout the early modern period to signify both “spouse” and mixed- or same-sex “sexual partner” (prostitute, mistress, ingle, catamite, etc.), then juxtapositions of these bedfellows in early modern texts have the potential to produce what would have been recognized as a queer marriage, that is, a conjugal union between women or between men. It is precisely this queer marital possibility that motivated the early modern Oxford educator and theater critic John Rainolds, in *Th’Overthrow of Stageplays (1599)*, to decry the staging of bedfellowship. According to Rainolds, a boy actor’s “suing to be [one’s] bedfellow” teaches “a youth of tender yeares . . . how hee may by amorous speeches, lookes, and gestures, wooe for a husband, or a wife” (Oliv.).

55 Since “youth” always refers to a young man, the mention of “woo[ing] . . . a husband” invokes in this passage the possibility of a queer relationship between man and boy. It is perhaps no surprise that one would find the possibility of same-sex marriage rehearsed and played out on the early modern stage, a performative space infamous for its enacting and commercializing the playful displacement of gender and

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55 On the influence of Rainolds’s polemic in the theater controversies of early modern England, see Tanya Pollard’s *Shakespeare’s Theater: A Sourcebook* (170-78) as well as Jonas Barish’s important book on *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. 
sexuality. My task, then, is to take Rainolds’s objections seriously, that is, to read them as providing clear evidence that early modern audiences understood bedfellowship to represent both mixed- and same-sex relationships, and to examine some theatrical moments wherein same-sex marriage would have been intelligible for audiences comprising women and men of diverse classes, ages, and literacies.

To an extent, all marriages performed on the early modern stage were queer, as the roles of women and girls would have been played by boy actors. In this respect, all dramatized marriages were between men or between men and boys. But I would like to focus on several early modern plays that posit queer spousal subjectivities articulated through the language of bedfellowship, a formative cultural institution that enabled—indeed, encouraged—the exploration of same-sex relationships of various levels of intimacy. Presenting bedfellows as queer spouses, these plays imagine subjectivities that contest the dominant culture’s representation of marriage as always between a man and a woman. First, I consider Thomas Dekker’s *Satyro-mastix* (perf. 1601; pub. 1602) and John Fletcher and William Shakespeare’s *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (perf. 1613; pub. 1634), two plays that envision same-sex female bedfellowship as an idealized, eroticized version of conventional marriage. Both plays open with aristocratic nuptials, as servants strew flowers about the stage. In each case, though, the ceremonies are halted. Dekker’s

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56 On controversies and social concerns involving the public and private theaters, see Steven Mullaney’s *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* and Jean Howard’s *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*. Studies of the performance of gender and sexuality on the early modern stage abound. My scholarship has been most influenced by Dympna Callaghan’s *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage*; Mario DiGiangi’s *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*; John Franceschina’s *Homosexualities in the English Theatre: From Lyly to Wilde*; Stephen Orgel’s *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England*; and Bruce R. Smith’s *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics*. 
Satiro-mastix begins with the lively, bawdy commentary of two servingwomen who mock mixed-sex marriage and intercourse. As they burlesque the ceremony about to take place, they elevate themselves and same-sex marriage to a superior position vis-à-vis the aristocratic wedding party. In Fletcher and Shakespeare’s play, the wedding of Theseus and Hippoltya is delayed when three widowed queens bring news of their husbands’ deaths. This interruption presages the play’s demythologizing of the romance of mixed-sex marriage, which is nothing more than a form of institutionalized patriarchal violence. Resisting this cultural imperative is Emilia, a maid who throughout the play remains faithful to the same-sex vows she made to her deceased bedfellow Flavina. A self-fashioned queer widow, Emilia stands as the embodiment of romantic love, while the play’s other characters conform to grisly marriages founded upon politico-economic contracts and duels.

Although men largely benefited from the patriarchal, heteronormative social structure of early modern England, homoerotically inclined men faced a situation similar to their female counterparts. Thomas Middleton’s Michaelmas Term (perf. 1605/1606; pub. 1607) stages precisely this predicament, as the Essex gentleman Richard Easy endeavors to negotiate the sodomitical economy of contemporary London. While this play abounds with examples of gallants and merchants exploiting the homoerotic bonds fostered by masculine friendship and male same-sex bedfellowship, it portrays Easy as a sympathetic man-desiring man who seems indifferent to the exchanges of wealth and property that characterize such relationships. Instead, he searches for a different kind of bond, that is, a long-term partnership akin to marriage. While his inexperience in London
draws him to a man who robs him of his country estate, and while he finds solace, for a time, in marriage to a woman who has been mistreated by the same man who has duped him, Easy manages by play’s end to regain his land and continue his search for a male bedfellow and companion.

All three plays were staged sundry times for heterogeneous groupings of spectators and circulated widely in print, contributing to the extraordinary visibility of queer marital possibilities and suggesting, I would argue, that notions of same-sex marriage were not foreign to the cultural imaginary, as the OED and many scholars would have us believe. Rather, queer unions were articulated, interrogated, and troped in a variety of ways to diverse ends—sometimes to titillate or confound, other times to reprove the very idea of queer marriage. If Rainolds’s antitheatrical polemic represents those who may have cringed at the thought of same-sex marriage, then Satiro-mastix, The Two Noble Kinsmen, and Michaelmas Term serve as playful, erotic rejoinders to such priggish points of view.

The argument I have sketched above places my work in opposition to other studies of “same-sex unions in premodern Europe,” the topic of John Boswell’s pathbreaking book of that title. Since its publication in 1994, the book has been routinely dismissed as haphazardly essentialist—as imposing onto the past conspicuously modern regimes of sexuality and gender. The most vociferous critics have been those who have aligned themselves with the ardently social constructionist work of Michel Foucault and David Halperin, both of whom have assumed that in the premodern world same-sex desires could not have been constitutive of one’s identity. Because my arguments build
upon some of Boswell’s claims, and because I intend to take issue with some of the assumptions made by those who have pilloried Boswell’s argument, it is critical that I position this chapter within this ongoing social constructionist-essentialist debate, especially as it engages questions of whether same-sex marriage existed prior to the late nineteenth-century sexological discourse responsible for terms such as *homosexual* and *heterosexual*.57

The main arguments of Boswell’s book are twofold: first, that “it is nearly impossible to formulate in a precise and generally acceptable way what is meant by ‘marriage,’ either as used by modern speakers or in ancient texts” (9); and second, that premodern “brother making” ceremonies may have been understood as one of many marital possibilities, constituting what we might think of today as a same-sex union, that is, in Boswell’s words, a “romantic commitment between two people, witnessed and recognized by the community” (281). By and large, the same scholars who have panned the book for its conclusions have tended to extol both Boswell’s methodologies and the

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57 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first recorded use of *homosexuality* and *heterosexuality* in English is in Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, translated from German by C.G. Chaddock, in 1892. In *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*, Marjorie Garber notes that *heterosexuality* is a “back-formation” of *homosexuality*, since “before people began to speak of ‘homosexuals’ as a kind of person, a social species, there was no need for a term like ‘heterosexual’” (40). Of course, tracing the history of *homosexuality* (if only as a word) has implications for histories of sexualities, the complexities of which are outside the temporal scope of this essay. But see, as a starting point, Jonathan Ned Katz’s *The Invention of Heterosexuality* and, of course, Michel Foucault’s first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Recounting the extent of Foucault’s influence would be an impossible task, but some important interventions in the conversation he initiated include David Halperin’s *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiology* and *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*; Didier Eribon’s “Michel Foucault’s Histories of Sexuality”; and Frederic Silverstolpe’s “Benkert was not a Doctor: On the Non-Medical Origins of the Homosexual Category in the Nineteenth Century.” I thank David M. Robinson for referring me to Silverstolpe’s essay.
archival research upon which those conclusions are founded. Lutz Kaelber finds Boswell’s “methodological proficiency and depth of analysis . . . impressive” but notes that “historical and philological specialists have already raised strong doubts about the lexicographical adequacy of Boswell’s modern circumlocution” (367-68). The turn of phrase under scrutiny here is “brother making” (άδελωποιησις), which Joan Cadden has interpreted as Boswell’s effort to “mask [his] conviction that the institution reflected in the texts is, in some significant sense, ‘gay marriage.’” Still, such critics will allow that the book is commendable for its “sharing with the reader, in the text, notes, and appendices, the raw materials on the basis of which debates about meaning will continue” (695). The gist of these reviews, suggests Alan Bray, is that “claim[ing] that the relationships blessed by [brother making] were sexual and akin to marriage . . . involve[s] an unsettling degree of anachronism” (316-17). These points evince an equally “unsettling” reliance on alteritism, a theoretical perspective that both assumes and insists upon the absolute historical and cultural difference between the premodern and modern worlds’ ideas about sexuality, sexual identities, and sexual relationships. Boswell may, as his critics point out, make his case under the assumption that the “brother making” ceremony is an ancient or medieval analogue to gay marriage, but a similar charge could be laid against those who assume that such associations are never possible and therefore

58 In addition to the reviews I survey here, see Timothy Perper’s “Serge and Bacchus: Out of the Closet at Last”; Brent Shaw’s “A Groom of One’s Own?”; Ralph Hexter and Shaw’s heated debate, published together as a single review in The New Republic; and Randolph Trumbach’s review in the Journal of Homosexuality. For a nearly complete listing of reviews of Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe, see the page devoted to Boswell’s life and work on Paul Halsell’s web site, People With a History: An Online Guide to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans* History.

59 I discuss my use of alteritism and continuism in the introduction. See note 7.
take the linguistic argument as definitive, as closing off all engagement with the intricacies of Boswell’s argument.

But I would like to suggest that Thomas Dekker’s decision to open his play *Satiro-mastix* with a homoerotic scene that juxtaposes conventional nuptials with same-sex bedfellowship shows that the possibility of same-sex identities, relationships, and marriages was widely accepted. For without audience knowledge of that queered world, Dekker’s erotic opening scene would make no dramaturgical sense and, consequently, would fail to draw in and hold the attention of the audience, especially the notoriously boisterous groundlings. A seasoned dramatist and a master of bawdy city comedy, Dekker chose to begin the play with a scene guaranteed to grab playgoers’ attention: two adolescent female bedfellows discussing maidenhead:

1. Come bedfellow, come, strew apace, strew, strew: in good troth tis pitty that these flowers must be trodden vnder feete as they are like to bee anon.
2. Pitty, alacke pretty heart, thou art sorry to see any good thing fall to the ground: pitty? no more pitty, then to see an Innocent Mayden-head deluiered vp to the ruffling of her new-wedded husband. (1.1.1-7)

Playing upon the popular troping of maidenhead as a flower, these bedfellows lament the cultural imperative toward marriage and the inevitable wedding-day de-flowering that follows the ceremony. Indeed, where most attendees of the ceremony see strewn about the ground “Embleame[s]” of the bride’s virginal promise to her husband (1.1.62), these

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60 I have used Fredson Bowers’s edition for citation and reference.

61 Gordon Williams, *Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language*, s.v. “flower.” See also Eric Patridge, *Shakespeare’s Bawdy*, s.v. “flower.” Adrienne Rich was the first to theorize marriage and intra-marital sex as manifestations of what she has termed “compulsory heterosexuality.” On Rich’s development of this term, see her germinal article “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” In this article, she argues that heterosexuality is not natural and therefore must be maintained by a plethora of cultural forms that naturalize heterosexuality and mystify its construction.
women see patriarchal violence: flower hymens that will be trampled by the wedding guests just as the husband would soon be “ruffling” his wife and her maidenhead.

The servingwomen’s comments—so inappropriate and unexpected in the marital scene—become a kind of anti-epithalamion and make possible the articulation of a counternormative, homoerotic marriage between bedfellows. Their wordplay with the sexually charged locution “to lye with” crystallizes the marriage-like arrangement they envisage for themselves:

1. I pray thee tell mee, why doe they vse at weddings to furnish all places thus, with sweet hearbes and flowers?
2. One reason is, because tis —— ὃ a most sweet thing to lye with a man.
1. I thinke tis a O more more more more sweet to lye with a woman.
2. I warrant all men are of thy minde. (1.1.15-21)

The mock-sentimentality that underwrites this exchange assumes a common understanding of the multifarious significances of the bed—the signal sexual space of both married and unmarried, mixed- and same-sex bedfellows. Exploiting this range of meaning, the servingwomen appropriate the symbolism of the “sweet hearbes and flowers” that initially seemed to represent a virginal hymen and normative conjugal sexuality, and the sex that is “most sweet” between spouses becomes “O more more more more sweet” when the participants are same-sex bedfellows. This queering of spousal relations carries over into the second servingwoman’s critique of the wedding ceremony itself:

[W]hat a miserable thing tis to be a noble Bride, there’s such delayes in rising, in fitting gownes, in tyring, in pinning Rebatoes, in poaking, in dinner, in supper, in Reuels, & last of all in cursing the poore noddling
sidlers, for keeping mistress Bride so long vp from sweeter Reuels.

(1.1.46-50)

Ostensibly, she is disparaging the pomp and circumstance of upper-class nuptials, but the circumlocution “sweeter Reuels” also gestures back to the bedfellows’ debate about which sleeping arrangement is “most sweet.” The ambiguity here invites playgoers to compare heteroerotic and homoerotic “Reuels” and, in so doing, legitimizes sex between women as sex, as a queer form of consummation.

It bears notice that while other scholars have recognized the erotics at work in this scene, the consensus has been that Dekker stages the bawdy exchange between bedfellows in an effort to subordinate female homoerotic sex to heteroerotic sex within marriage by portraying it as a (perhaps) innocent juvenile stage on the road to a more mature, hetero-sexual relationship. I would suggest that these readings are needlessly narrow and even prudish, evincing the power of sexual norms to conceal any alternative. Mario DiGangi, for instance, concludes that the first servingwoman’s fantasies of the “sweet[ness] [of] ly[ing] with a woman” are effaced the moment her bedfellow quips that “all men are of [her] minde.” This response, argues DiGangi, “serves to erase or subsume female homoeroticism by shifting the terrain away from any consideration of a female desiring subject towards the heteroerotic desire felt by ‘all men’” (96). Valerie Traub provides an alternative reading, quibbling not with DiGangi’s analysis but with the purported efficaciousness of the containment mechanism: “in the very act of articulating alternatives [to heteroerotic desire], a faultline in the dominant ideology is exposed.” Moreover, “[Dekker’s] efforts of containment are insecure” (61). Implicit in DiGangi’s
and Traub’s interpretations is the assumption that men, by default, occupy the subject position and that Dekker must therefore be writing for and playing to a predominantly male audience. Female homoeroticism is thus deployed at the start of *Satiro-mastix* to titillate hetero-sexual men, not homoerotically inclined women, just as lesbian pornography is often understood as masturbatory material for straight men, not lesbian women.⁶² As Jean Howard has amply demonstrated, however, a significant number of women from a broad spectrum of class attended the public playhouses, and frequently enough to be considered an important paying constituency: “as a playgoer, the female spectator . . . [occupied] a subject position potentially at odds with . . . patriarchal injunctions governing the behavior of a ‘good’ woman” (*The Stage and Social Struggle in England* 91). Similarly, Alison Findlay has argued that “[t]heatregoing can be seen as a feminist act since the monetary nature of admission eliminated gender inequalities, albeit on a temporary basis. . . . The tastes of female spectators had to be acknowledged and catered [to] by the companies whose productions they paid to see” (3). Rather than exposing a faultline in a dominant, presumably male-centered ideology, the bawdy persiflage between bedfellows in Dekker’s play more plausibly reflects the dramatist’s attempt to reach a broad range of desiring subjects—female as well as male, homo as well as hetero.⁶³

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⁶² In “Spectatorship in Lesbian Porn: The Woman’s Woman’s Film,” Mary T. Conway responds to this dominant reading of lesbian pornography, tracing the ways films “anticipate, organize, produce, and mobilize the lesbian porn spectator” (93). See also Terralee Bensinger’s “Lesbian Pornography: The Re/Makeing of (a) Community” and Lisa Henderson’s “Lesbian Pornography: Cultural Transgression and Sexual Demystification.”

⁶³ Howard and Findlay cite Andrew Gurr’s analysis in *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London* of attendance records indicating that women constituted a significant presence in the public playhouses (56-60). See also
Nonetheless, I would suggest that if Dekker sought to portray any category of desiring subject in an affirmative light, it would be the same-sex serving girls who serve as foils to the aristocratic women in the play: the sexual freedoms of the servants are contrasted to the sexual limitations on the liberty of Lady Cælestine, who has been promised from birth to a husband in order to secure the family line, and who functions as a conduit for the legitimate transfer of property. Indeed, the servingwomen seem utterly content to exit the scene and absent themselves from the comic trajectory, that is, the marital telos of the play. As they exit, one of the bedfellows says to the other, ”[C]ome pew-fellow” (1.1.65), thereby complicating her already heterodox sexual identity by the addition of a religious moniker. Invoking the identity “pew-fellow” is both an affirmation and an affront: on the one hand, it makes the servant girls’ bedroom a church and their bed an altar upon which they consecrate their queer union; on the other hand, it makes fun of the solemnity of marriage by attributing piety to scandalous women whose bedfellowship undermines the predominance of traditional marriages, which are solemnized by religious rites.

I would also argue that their self-identification as bedfellows and pew-fellows calls into question the claim made by scholars of premodern sexualities that servingwomen could not have constructed anything akin to a queer subjectivity because such possibilities were available only to people with disposable income living in a capitalist society. This is John D’Emilio’s argument in his influential essay on capitalism and sexual identities, which claims that while capitalism “created conditions that

Richard Levin’s examination in “Women in the Renaissance Theatre Audience” of prologues and epilogues that address, and thereby acknowledge the presence of, female spectators of various classes (165-74).
allow[ed] some men and women to organize [their] personal lives around their erotic
[and] emotional attractions to their own sex,” this possibility would have been
unavailable prior to the twentieth century, when “individuals began to make their living
through wage labor, instead of as parts of an interdependent family unit” (50-51). On the
contrary, it is precisely their status as serving girls, as women who cannot marry while in
service, that enables the bedfellows of Satiro-mastix to dismiss culturally normative
mixed-sex relationships and to pursue instead a queer kind of marriage. 64

The dramaturgical practice of doubling would have foregrounded this freedom, as
the boy actors who played the roles of the obstinate serving women would have
reappeared onstage in subsequent scenes as the only other female characters who appear
in the play: Mistris Miniuer, the widow who “ha sworne to leade a single and simple life”
(3.1.73) and who has her money stolen by a man who tries to persuade her otherwise, and
the Lady Cælestine, the bride poisoned by her father as a macabre test of “The Bride-
grooms loue, and the Brides constancie” (5.2.103). The fact that the boys who played
these gentlewomen had already appeared onstage as the carefree bedfellows serves as a
reminder to playgoers that none of the women in the play consummate a traditional
marriage or find joy in it. Rather, mutual gratification is to be found among the female
same-sex bedfellows who remain free from the cultural pressures to marry and procreate.
Thus, while the serving women disappear after the first scene, the boy actors who played

64 D’Emilio is responding to and contesting the claims of Foucault, in the first volume of The History of
Sexuality, and Jeffrey Weeks, in Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century
to the Present, that gay and lesbian subjectivities emerged during the course of the nineteenth century. On
the exclusion of serving girls from the marriage economy, see Pamela A. Sambrook’s The Country House
Servant (245-46).
them returned as the ill-treated widow and the bride-to-be, effectively exemplifying for spectators the difference between heteronormative and queer unions.

The heteroerotic trajectory that Dekker’s bedfellows devote an entire scene to mocking, subverting, and queering also fascinated Shakespeare, who rehearsed in many of his plays the transition, for better or worse, from adolescent homoeroticism to adult heteroeroticism. In his romantic comedies, for instance, homoerotic bonds between boys and between girls are routinely abandoned for mixed-sex marriages. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (perf. 1595; pub. 1600), Helena and Hermia are “like to a double cherry, . . . / Two lovely berries moulded on one stem: / . . . two seeming bodies but one heart” (3.2.209, 211-12). But the sanctity of the site of their same-sex encounters, the “faint primrose beds [they] were wont to lie [on],” is violated by the intrusion of the distinctly hetero Lysander, whose very difference from the women breaks the women’s sexual and amorous bond and makes Hermia an Other rather than a double. From that moment, they “turn away” from Athens and each other to “seek new friends and stranger companies” (1.1.215, 217-18). In *As You Like It* (perf. 1599; pub. 1623), Rosalind and Celia are doubles of each other, their “loves / . . . dearer than the natural bond of sisters” (1.2.275-76). But that same-sex bond, as well as the “untreasured bed” they leave behind when they escape into the Forest of Arden, has been replaced by the play’s end with the “blessèd bond of board and bed” that Hymen, the god of marriage, solemnizes (5.4.131). The same fate befalls male homoerotic relationships in this play, as the nuptials rehearsed between Orlando and “Ganymede” (4.1.113-31) are replayed in and replaced by Hymen’s ceremony. Representing the lady’s transition from one bed to another as unavoidable,
*Midsummer* and *As You Like It* both reinforce cultural norms and open them up for critique.\(^6^5\) Of course, what a given spectator would have taken away from each production of these plays would have been contingent upon various cultural factors and personal tastes, and the multiplicity and complexity of individual responses, which would have ranged from approbation, to skepticism, to sorrow, would have precluded a single, correct reaction to the heteronormative conclusions of these comedies.

While the well-known conventions of comedy would have prepared most early modern playgoers for the ceremonious endings of *Midsummer* and *As You Like It*—unsatisfactory as those endings may have been for any number of playgoers seeking a conventional happy ending—the nascent genre of tragicomedy distinguished itself as a kind of play that upended comedic, and hence matrimonial, expectations. A notable example of this is *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, a play Shakespeare co-authored with John Fletcher that juxtaposes offstage deaths with onstage betrothals so as to make traditional marriage seem anything but the inevitable telos and happy ending of either the play or a woman’s life. In contrast to the play’s myriad portrayals of unromantic love and conjugal violence is Emilia’s vow to withstand the grisliness of marriage and remain loyal to her childhood bedfellow Flavina, who has now “the grave enriched, / [And] made too proud the bed” (1.3.51-52). As she traces their relationship from the bed they shared to

\(^6^5\) For a reading of the female homoerotic bonds staged in these plays as always already lost, see Traub’s essay on “The (In)Significance of ‘Lesbian’ Desire in Early Modern England” (70-73). These ideas are more fully developed in her book *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (57-58, 170-71). Cf. Theodora Jankowski’s understanding of same-sex bonds as acts of queer resistance to patriarchal marriages (144-49), and Denise A. Walen’s discussion of the female homoerotic pairings as examples of “utopian lesbian erotics” (123-24). See also Orgel’s observation in *Impersonations* that Hymen’s union would have joined two boys, i.e., Orlando and Rosalind-still-in-drag, and that editors of *As You Like It* err when they alter the playtext to impose a hetero ending (32-33).
Flavina’s grave, Emilia casts herself as a widow who has learned that “[T]he true love ‘tween maid and maid may be / More than in sex dividual” (1.3.81-82). Her sister Hippolyta, the bride-to-be whose wedding is postponed at the play’s start, attributes this mindset to Emilia’s “sickly appetite” but acknowledges nevertheless that the vow is genuine:

You’re out of breath,
And this high-speeded pace is but to say,
That you shall never, like the maid Flavina,
Love any that’s called man. (90, 82-85)

Despite their opposing views on which kind of love is superior, hetero- or homo-erotic, Emilia and Hippolyta agree that sexual difference is not governed by or reducible to one’s age, class, or experience. Rather, the kind of marriage one pursues, whether mixed- or same-sex, is determined by something more intrinsic. Hippolyta uses the word *persuasion* to describe Emilia’s sexual inclination; Emilia (in a word that hearkens back to the self-proclaimed pew-fellows of *Satiro-mastix*) prefers the word *faith* (92, 98). Emilia’s commitment to her deceased bedfellow and her faith in the same-sex love they shared also invites comparisons to the notoriously violent wooing of Hippolyta and to the circumstances surrounding the deaths of the kings whose widows interrupt Hippolyta and Theseus’s wedding. 66 Whereas mixed-sex marriages both begin and end with acts of war, Emilia and Flavina “were,” as the former informs her sister, “things innocent” (1.3.60).

Although Emilia speaks of her relationship with Flavina in past tense, their love for each other outlasts other unions that are formed throughout the play. The common

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66 In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Theseus reminds Hippolyta, “I woo’d thee with my sword, / And won thy love doing thee injuries” (1.116-17).
The denominator of these failed or abandoned marriages is that they involve men. The noble kinsmen of the play’s title, for example, exchange vows and embark, if only for a few minutes, if only in prison, upon a same-sex marriage. Beseeching his cousin Palamon to “think [their] prison a holy sanctuary,” Arcite begins:

What worthy blessing
   Can be, but our imaginations
   May make it ours? And here being thus together,
   We are an endless mine to one another:
   We are one another’s wife, ever begetting
   New births of love; we are father, friends, acquaintance;
   We are in one another, families—
   I am your heir, and you are mine; this place
   Is our inheritance: no hard oppressor
   Dare take this from us. (2.2.71, 76-85)

The tendency has been to read this ceremony as the male-male counterpart to Emilia’s vow to Flavina, both of which, supposedly, give way to the heteronormative telos of the play. Marjorie Garber, for instance, compares the kinsmen’s queer nuptials, which are effectively annulled the moment they gaze upon Emilia in the garden, to Emilia’s own promise not to “love any that’s called man” and concludes, “Like Emilia’s ‘never,’ Palamon’s ‘not . . . ever’ invites dramatic reversal, and that is exactly, and immediately what it gets” (897). Likewise, Traub has argued that Emilia and Flavina’s “bonds are represented as temporary, as firmly located in childhood or adolescence, and necessarily giving way to patriarchal marriage” (*The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* 174). According to Garber and Traub, then, homoerotic oaths are doomed the moment they are uttered, and it comes as no surprise, therefore, that they are surrendered as soon as Arcite and Palamon acknowledge their infatuation with Emilia. And yet, while Emilia finds herself implicated in a duel to the death that will, at play’s end, make her
both a wife and a widow, she never renounces her vow to Flavina. Having searched—exhaustively—for a moment where Emilia enacts the normative gesture scholars have ascribed to her, I have found only a couple instances where she deploys the word love in reference to Palamon and Arcite. In every case, Emilia couches such sentiments in the conditional, as she does, for example, in the vacillation scene when, holding miniatures of Palamon and Arcite, she declares: “For if my brother, but even now, had asked me / Whether I loved, I had run mad for Arcite; Now if my sister, more for Palamon” (4.2.47-49; my emphasis). Unable to avoid her fate, Emilia manages, nonetheless, to keep her promise to Flavina; this is in stark contrast to Palamon and Arcite, who do recant their vows. The implication here is not that same-sex marriages are impossible but that marriages to men are, whether mixed- or same-sex.

This distinction between conventional and queer marriages is an important one, as most scholars who have recognized the utopian dimension of Emilia and Flavina’s passionate relationship have insisted that it reflects the play’s investment in denigrating the very idea of marriage. Laurie Shannon, for instance, has argued that The Two Noble Kinsmen’s “stunningly negative conception of marriage” as “a (brutally) political institution” serves to idealize female same-sex desire, which “appears to extraordinary effect, linking marriage and tyranny and intensifying the otherwise familiar disapprobation the play registers toward absolute . . . power” (98, 101). Similarly, Theodora Jankowski has interpreted Emilia’s devotion to Flavina as a homoerotic dynamic that “question[s] patriarchally mandated marriage” (149-52). Without question, Emilia and Flavina’s bond represents a challenge to cultural norms and mixed-sex
marriage, but this is not the only definition of marriage circulating in the play. Arcite and Palamon’s nuptials, though short-lived, represent at least one same-sex marriage performed for playgoers. But this ceremony, staged early in the play, follows a Prologue that invites spectators to reimagine the concept of marriage, to ponder new, queer(ed) kinds of connubiality:

New plays and maidenheads are near akin:
Much followed both, for both much money giv’n
If they stand sound and well. And a good play,
Whose modest scenes blush on his marriage day
And shake to lose his honour, is like her
That after holy tie and first night’s stir
Yet still is modesty, and still retains
More of the maid to sight than husband’s pains. (1-8)

In other words, the Prologue suggests that the dramatic production about to unfold should be imagined as male but compared to a bride about to lose her virginity. The implication here is that the audience, here gendered male, will collectively be the spouse who will break the theatrical hymen. But if the performance is also male, then a queer marriage is formed between the play and its audience as well. As the Prologue exits, effectually signaling the commencement of both the production and the queer marriage between play and playgoer, a second ceremony, this one between Theseus and Hippolyta, begins, only to be interrupted by mourning widows. Hence, within the first few minutes of the play’s performance, a same-sex marriage succeeds and/as a mixed-sex one is postponed. By the end of the first act, it is unclear exactly what constitutes a good marriage.

In staging an array of mixed- and same-sex marriages between characters and between the production and its audience, the play encourages an interrogation of spousal relationships and the meaning of marriage. As part of this examination, Emilia’s elegy
for Flavina idealizes a same-sex union distinct from patriarchal marriage and the attendant heteroerotic violence. Forged instead through acts of homoerotic violence, the marriage Emilia remembers produced not children, the presumed issue of mixed-sex marriage, but mutual ecstasy:

I
And she I sigh and spoke of were things innocent,
Love for we did, and like the elements,
That know not what, nor why, yet do effect
Rare issues by their operance, our souls
Did so to one another. What she liked
Was then of me approved; what not, condemned—
No more arraignment. The flower that I would pluck
And put between my breasts—O then but beginning
To swell about the bosom—she would long
Till she had such another, and commit it
To the like innocent cradle, where, phoenix-like,
They died in perfume. (1.3.59-71)

Just as the audience and the production give birth to the staging (Prol. ll. 15-20), just as Palamon and Arcite imagine “new births of love” that exclude women, Emilia recalls “rare issues” borne of “things innocent,” acts of mutual pleasure that transpired upon a strikingly lesbian-like stage, the “swell[ing] . . . bosom” of the bedfellow.67 The repetition of innocent in this context is suggestive. As Jankowski has noted, Emilia’s emphasis on innocence reveals ostensibly what it is meant to hide, that is, the sexual nature of her

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67 My use of lesbian-like is indebted to Judith M. Bennett, who uses the term to describe “women whose lives might have particularly offered opportunities for same-sex love; women who resisted norms of feminine behavior based on heterosexual marriage; women who lived in circumstances that allowed them to nurture and support other women” (9-10). While Bennett discusses the term in a historical rather than literary context, “lesbian-like” is applicable to both academic disciplines in that it “allow[s] us to expand lesbian history beyond its narrow and quite unworkable focus on women who engaged in certifiable same-sex genital contact (a certification hard to achieve even for many contemporary women), and to incorporate into lesbian history women who, regardless of their sexual pleasures, lived in ways that offer certain affinities with modern lesbians” (14).
bedfellowship with Flavina. But it also registers Emilia’s conviction that their love for one another is legitimate, naturalized by appearing first in “the elements,” the natural world and superior to other, culturally sanctioned forms. Whereas Palamon and Arcite perceive marriage as “an endless mine”—a sodomitical arrangement founded upon mutual penetration and extraction—Emilia remembers her relationship with Flavina as regenerative, as “phoenix-like.” Thus, whereas mixed-sex marriage produces children authored by the father and merely carried by the mother, same-sex marriage generates pleasure for partners. This reproductive quality is anchored, just as it is in Satiro-mastix, in the flower-as-maidenhead trope: men trample flowers/maidenheads in order to produce progeny; between women, these same flowers/maidenheads are, in the words of Emilia,” “pluck[ed] / . . . and commit[ed]” to “the innocent cradle,” where they “die in perfume.” In this respect, same-sex marriage remains violent, but this violence is idealized as “phoenix-like.” Just as the phoenix never really dies—it is always reborn—the love Emilia and Flavina share creates life out of an act typically association with death, that is, with losing or giving up part of the self.

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the “issues” imagined by male characters engaged in the play’s heteroerotic marital plots are progeny of violence, conceived by and for violent acts. While in prison, Palamon and Arcite complain they will never marry, by which they mean they will never produce children who will perpetuate the cycle of martial and marital violence. Arcite laments:

Against the claim that Emilia and Flavina would have been too young to be perceived as sexually involved, Jankowski has argued, “[T]here is no reason why eleven-year-olds could not engage in erotic behavior—or be considered able to engage in such behavior in early modern England. If prepubescent choir boys were objects of erotic interest, prepubescent girls—who would resemble boys more than sexually mature women—could be objects of the erotic interest of men, women, boys, or other girls” (150).
The sweet embraces of a loving wife
Loaden with kisses, armed with thousand Cupids,
Shall never clasp our necks; no issue know us;
No figures of ourselves shall we e’er see
To glad our age, and, like young Eagles, teach ‘em
Boldly to gaze against bright arms, and say:
‘Remember what your fathers were, and conquer.’ (2.2.30-36)

While this fantasy begins with images of spousal affection, “loving wi[ves]” are already marginalized, present only to dote upon and please the male at the center. These “sweet embraces” and “kisses, armed with thousand Cupids” lead to a male-centered version of procreation, one that renders women invisible. Following the logic of the speaker of Shakespeare’s procreation sonnets, who enjoins his addressee, “Make sweet some vial, treasure thou some place / With beauty’s treasure, ere it be self-killed” (6.3-4), Arcite presumes his “issue” will be replicas of himself, that is, male warriors who celebrate and construct a sense of self around a martial patrilineality and conquest.

This effacement of women, condemned throughout the play by Emilia, the maid who finds herself the conjugal prize in a duel between kinsmen, is refracted in the

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69 This aspect of Shakespeare’s so-called procreation sonnets (i.e., nos. 1-17) has received much critical attention. Joseph Pequigney and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick were the first to examine these sonnets as evidence of the speaker’s amatory desire for the male addressee. In Such Is My Love: A Study of Shakespeare’s Sonnets, Pequigney claims that they token three “psychological states” experienced by the speaker: “(1) his desire for the hereditary continuation of the youth’s beauty; (2) his desire for the genetic survival of his beautiful friend; and (3) his desire to render his beloved everlasting in poetry” (29). Sedgwick, in a study published the same year as Pequigney’s, notes that “the first group of sonnets is notable for the almost complete absence of mention of women; women are merely the vehicles by which men breed more men, for the gratification of other men” (Between Men 33). More recently, Richard Halpern has argued that “Shakespeare’s image of the perfume bottle [in sonnet 5] takes the commonplace but mysterious process whereby the father’s sexual substance produces a baby, and puts it in its place the even more mysterious process whereby the young man’s sexual substance—his semen—is distilled into poetry.” Hence, the procreation sonnets in general and sonnet 5 in particular “offer a curiously material demonstration, even before the fact, of the Freudian thesis that sexual desire can be sublimated into art” (Shakespeare’s Perfume: Sodomy and Sublimity in the Sonnets, Wilde, Freud, and Lacan 14). Cf. Helen Vender’s analysis of sonnet 5 in The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets (66-70) and Joel Fineman’s discussion in Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye of the procreation sonnets’ functionality in what he calls Shakespeare’s “genuinely new poetic subjectivity” (1-2, 206-209).
subplot, as the Jailor’s Daughter’s insurmountable desire for Palamon drives her mad to the point that she foresees only two possible outcomes: she will either have Palamon or “drown or stab or hang [her]self” (3.3.30). Functioning in part as a foil for Emilia, the Jailor’s Daughter fixates on marrying and copulating with Palamon (5.4.88-89, 93-96, 109-114), the kinsman who ignores her throughout the play. While the Jailor reports in the play’s final scene that his Daughter is “well restored / and to be married shortly” (5.6.27-28), the marriage is a ruse: the Jailor’s Daughter has been tricked into sleeping with, and thus being compelled to marry, the Wooer, the man whose advances she has spurned throughout the play.

Both the main plot and subplot culminate with betrothals—Palamon to Emilia, the Wooer to the Jailor’s Daughter—but neither arrangement evinces the mutual devotion upon which Emilia and Flavina’s same-sex bedfellowship was founded. Theseus’s concluding words make plain the difference, as he orders only a very brief period of mourning for Arcite before Emilia is to be married to Palamon:

A day or two
Let us look sadly and give grace unto
The funeral of Arcite, in whose end
The visages of bridegrooms we’ll put on
And smile with Palamon. (5.6.124-28)

This proclamation reveals the frighteningly easy slippage from (false) mourning to joy, with the “end” of Arcite and the “end” of mourning for him co-opted for marriage even before that “end” can even “end” the line. The elegy, in other words, is interrupted by an epithalamion: “in whose end,” with the intervention of “in whose” stealing the “end” for the next phrase/phase of Emilia’s (co-opted) life. For her part, Emilia is silent. She has
resigned herself to the inevitability, the compulsoriness, of marriage, but she has nothing
to say—no expressions of love, no words of hope for the future—only the quiet
acceptance of her fate. But I would argue that, more importantly, her silence indicates
that even in the inevitable mixed-sex marriage, she will remain, as a queer widow,
faithful to her same-sex vows to Flavina. Thus the impending wedding raises more
questions about heteroerotic couplings than it lays to rest, while Emilia’s love for her
bedfellow Flavina, declared near the beginning of the play, remains intact and unsullied
to the end, the queer marriage that queers all the supposedly normative unions paraded
across the stage at the close of this play.

While the institution of bedfellowship afforded female same-sex desiring subjects
a language through which to envisage and articulate unions that challenged patriarchal
notions of marriage, the presence of male same-sex bedfellows on the early modern stage
suggests that the heteronormative cultural imperative toward mixed-sex companionate
marriage denied queer unions to men-desiring men as well. That is, while both single and
married men were free to forge meaningful (and even sexual) relationships with other
men, and while the largely patriarchal structure of early modern England often privileged
such bonds and celebrated masculine friendships, the dominant culture’s restriction of
marriage to mixed-sex couples foreclosed the possibility of publicly recognized male
same-sex marriages. As Bruce Smith has observed, “[S]tructures of power in early
modern England fostered the homosexual potentiality in male bonding, yet society gave
official sanction only to matrimony” (Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England 72-
73). This marital restriction, notes Kenneth Borris, clearly concerned Michel de
Montaigne, who in his profoundly influential essay “Of Friendship” (1603) interrogates the dominant culture’s attitudes toward mixed- and same-sex unions: “Males who pursued heteroerotic love could not do so, except by successfully rejecting the socially prevalent gender ideology, on which Montaigne himself based his essay. Many of his own assumptions would logically require him to privilege sexual love between males over any male-female relations. But his culture forbade this very conclusion that its depreciation of feminine capacities promoted” (Same-Sex Desire in the English Renaissance 259). That male same-sex bonds were celebrated on the one hand and proscribed on the other suggests that although men-desiring men benefited in profound and myriad ways from a principally patriarchal culture, they, like their queer female counterparts, were unable to embark upon a same-sex marriage.

Thomas Middleton’s simulation of this concomitantly homoerotic and heteronormative culture in Michaelmas Term, a city comedy set in contemporary London, suggests that tensions between same-sex masculine friendships and mixed-sex marriages resonated with a significant portion of spectators who would have seen the play performed by the Children of St. Paul’s. As Mary Bly has demonstrated in her

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70 Originally published in French in 1580, Montaigne’s Essays were translated into English by John Florio and printed in London in 1603. The Essays proved popular in England (Shakespeare likely owned a copy) and were reprinted in London regularly throughout the early modern period. On the influence of the classical tradition on early modern expressions of male same-sex desire, see Borris’s section on “Love and Friendship” in Same-Sex Desire in the English Renaissance (251-316); John Franceschina’s section on “Platonic Lovers” in Homosexualities in the English Theatre (89-100); and Joseph Cady’s article on “Masculine Love,” Renaissance Writing, and the ‘New Invention’ of Homosexuality (9-40).

71 I have used Gail Kern Paster’s Revels Plays edition of Michaelmas Term for citation and reference. On the controversial history of the Children of St. Paul’s troupe, which held a prominent place at court, only to be dissolved temporarily in the 1590s and then permanently in 1608, see Michael Shapiro’s Children of the Revels: The Boy Companies of Shakespeare’s Time and Their Plays (11-14); Joy Leslie Gibson’s Squeaking Cleopatras: The Elizabethan Boy Player (145-60); and Reavley Gair’s The Children of Paul’s: The Story of a Theatre Company, 1533-1608.
study of the roughly contemporaneous Whitefriars syndicate (1607-1608), audiences at private, indoor theatres may have been prepared for—indeed, may have been expecting—precisely this kind of entertainment. Like Whitefriars, then, St. Paul’s would have cultivated a “homoerotic community in early modern London,” one fostered through various aspects of dramatic performance:

First, the similarities between . . . collaboratively written comedies suggest not only that a community of authors who appreciated homoerotic humour existed, but that they wrote their plays with a specific audience in mind. . . . Second, puns inscribed in the language of a boy actor who is himself a notable object of desire (the cross-dressing lead actor) create intimacy between the boy and his audience. . . . Third, queer puns create a sense of community among audience members. . . . The community drew together those who appreciated homoerotic humour, whether due to personal erotic choice or due to a wish to promote cultural insurrection. (23-24)

Written with this kind of community in mind, Michaelmas Term draws upon a familiar vocabulary of bawdy homoerotic experience that opens up queer possibilities for the boy actors and the characters they portray. Of course, these possibilities are precisely what spectators are searching for, and so the bawdy puns that suffuse the play serve to fulfill spectators’ desires.

In this theatrical environment, the Induction of Michaelmas Term exceeds audience expectation, as the eponymous allegorical figure “Michaelmas Term,” accompanied by an unnamed boy servant, claims to possess “wealth [that] would redeem beggary” (l. 22). Having made this declaration, “Michaelmas Term” pledges to “spread [him]self open” to spectators (l. 65). These prefatory utterances bring together notions of sexual and commercial availability and exchange, demarcating for playgoers a sodomitical urban space wherein male bodies become, like female bodies, conduits of
property and wealth. According to Theodore Leinwand, “[I]t is impossible to say where [in Michaelmas Term] infractions of social decorum and a dark rendering of incipient capitalism leave off and where sodomy begins” (53). For Gail Kern Paster, the association between sodomy and urban commerce serves, on the one hand, to render women invisible and irrelevant, and, on the other, to critique masculine friendship and the superficial community constructed around it: “Ultimately Middleton represents the cherished ideal of male friendship as just another component of the fashionable urban lifestyle. Thus the mutuality and self-sacrifice integral to idealized friendship dwindles in this play to the mutual indebtedness of the merchant’s bond” (33). In Michaelmas Term, then, male homoerotic bonds are exposed as tenuous relationships founded not on classical ideals, but on the self-interest produced by emerging capitalism where everything—and everyone—is a commodity.

While evidence for the play’s critique of masculine friendship abounds in Michaelmas Term, there exists amidst the sodomitical puns, the self-indulgent gallants, and the ruthlessly ambitious merchants a character who comes to London searching for a different kind of relationship altogether, namely, a same-sex marriage. I would argue that this character, the Essex gentleman Richard Easy, exemplifies a homoerotically inclined desiring subject whose reckless investment in a by then familiar commodity scam is the result of his longing for a long-term male partner of equal status—a man he could “hold . . . to be the only companion on earth,” a man without whom he could “have no being”
These sentiments might, as Paster has suggested, “bear the hallmarks of early modern constructions of masculine friendships, especially that display of intimacy signified by a ‘common bed shared in the public eye’” (32). But Easy, duped into believing he has taken as his bedfellow a gentleman of comparable social standing, sees his monogamous relationship with “sweet Master Blastfield” as more than masculine friendship.

To crystallize the difference between Easy’s desires and those of the other gentlemen who inhabit the play, I would like to trace “Blastfield” and Easy’s relationship through three distinct phases—courtship, marriage, and divorce—all of which are scripted through the language of bedfellowship—the same language Quomodo deploys when he fantasizes about absconding to his Essex estate with his wife, “his fair bedfellow” Thomasine (3.4.13-14). Beyond this obvious linguistic consonance, the salience of “Blastfield” and Easy’s queer marriage, its positing male same-sex spousal subjectivities, is borne out in the play’s juxtaposition of sexual and marital contracts with exchanges of wealth and property. Indeed, just as Quomodo intends to become “rich in custom, strong in friends, happy in suits” (2.3.42) through the proposed marriage between his daughter and Sir Andrew Lethe, the scheming London merchant designs to acquire estates through his servant’s union with Easy. A signal difference, however, is that while Lethe seems virtually indifferent to the fact that he will not, ultimately, marry Susan (he

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72 On the commonness of the commodity scam plot in early modern English literature, see Paster’s section on “Contexts” in her Revels Plays edition of the play (10-16).

73 Here Paster is quoting Alan Bray’s study of “Homosexuality and Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England (40-61). According to Bray, signs of male friendship and signs of sodomy could, under certain conditions, be virtually indistinguishable, and so evidence of one suggests the possibility of the other without providing a final resolution—we cannot know with any certainty if they are friends with benefits or just friends. Bray returned to this subject in The Friend (177-204).
only grumbles that a judge orders him to marry his mistress, the Country Wench), Easy exits the play noticeably upset—not because he was tricked out of his estate (which he eventually recovers) but because he was deceived by a man he had idealized as his “only companion on earth.”

Quomodo proposes a number of ways in which “Blastfield” might court Easy: he might, for example, “flatter, dice, and brothel to him; give him a sweet taste of sensuality; train him to every wasteful sin that he may quickly need health, but especially money; ravish him with a dame or two” (1.1.124-27). It is evident from the play’s start, however, that what will be most enticing to Easy is same-sex seduction, that is, as Quomodo suggests, Shortyard’s “creep[ing] into bed to him; kiss[ing] him and undo[ing] him” (1.1.128-29). Easy and Cockstone’s discussion near the play’s beginning suggests that it is precisely this opportunity for same-sex “affection” that has brought the gallant back to the notoriously sodomitical realm of London:

Cockstone. You seldom visit London, Master Easy,  
    But now your father’s dead, ‘tis your only course.  
    Here’s gallants of all sizes, of all lasts.  
    Here you may fit your foot, make choice of those  
    Whom your affection may rejoice in.

Easy. You have easily possessed me. I am free;  
    Let those live hinds that know not liberty. (1.1.44-50)

Hitherto unavailable for reasons that remain mysterious (because Easy’s father would not have approved? because a rural setting affords fewer opportunities for same-sex encounters and relationships?) is the “free[dom]”/“liberty” to “fit [his] foot” and be “easily possessed” by other men. Easy’s decision to return to this sodomitical urban culture—to be “free,” finally, from the isolation of a country estate—suggests a sense of
self that is constructed across the bodies of gentlemen who are phallicly and anally constituted, men “of all sizes, of all lasts, men such as Master Rearage, Master Salewood, Master Cockstone, and Master “Blastfield.”74 Commingling status and sodomy, these names indicate precisely the kind of sexual experience Easy seeks when he arrives in London. That he falls in love with “Blastfield,” the gentleman whose name suggests, as Eric Partridge indicates in *Shakespeare’s Bawdy*, someone who is sexually experienced and aggressive should come as no surprise to playgoers who recognize the sodomitical urban economy represented in the play.75 Thus it is not an “escalating sequence of actions that climax in same-sex erotic behaviors” that persuades Easy to sleep with “Blastfield” (Paster 26), nor is it a perceived indistinguishability of “the erotic enchantments of women . . . and men” (DiGangi 89). Rather, it is nothing short of same-sex seduction that undoes the Essex gentlemen, but only because he has, as his conversation with Cockstone demonstrates, a predilection for other men.76 To put it another way, “Blastfield” manages to ensnare Easy not because the gallant is clueless and impressionable but because a queer relationship is precisely what he wants.

“Blastfield” and Easy’s coming together as bedfellows is the only union staged and consummated during the course of the play. Notably, it is the bedfellows themselves

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74 Williams, *Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language*, s.vv. “cock” and “wood.” See also Partridge, *Shakespeare’s Bawdy*, s.v. “cock.” I have drawn the locutions “anally constituted” and “phallicly constituted” from Leinwand’s “Re redeeming Beggary/Buggery in *Michaelmas Term*” (55). My interest in examining capitalism as the cultural site that allows for self-construction across the body of an Other, male or female, is a variation of Sedgwick’s reading of gender as the significant cultural site. See Sedgwick’s *Between Men* (1-27).

75 Partridge, *Shakespeare’s Bawdy*, s.v. “blasted.”

76 About the seduction scene, Leinwand writes, “[E]verything we see suggests that Easy falls for Shortyard and not for some ’some dame or two,’ and that Shortyard himself means both to kiss and to undo” (57). Cf. Paster’s note that “Quomodo’s vision of ruin implies an escalating sequence of actions that climax in same-sex erotic behaviours, with one young man’s undoing of another with a deceptively friendly kiss” (29).
who insist that their relationship should be perceived not as yet another instance of masculine friendship but as a same-sex marriage:

Shortyard. Why, our purses are brothers; we desire but equal fortunes. In a word, w’are man and wife; they can but lie together, and so do we.

Easy. As near as can be, i’faith. (2.3.166-69)

Shortyard’s pun on “purses” is revealing, as the term could refer to either male or female genitalia throughout the early modern period. The proximity of their “purses” recalls marriage in two ways: first, as an indication that Easy and “Blastfield” have become financially interdependent, and second, as a bawdy reminder that these men have consummated their union and continue to engage in sexual acts regularly—perhaps even nightly. Neither of these aspects of their relationship is any secret: “[S]weet Master Blastfield” admits that Easy is his “very inward” and that together they enjoy “a fruitless motion,” that is, nonreproductive sex that serves to subvert cultural norms pertaining to sex between spouses (2.3.180, 108-109, 164). Given the play’s interest in juxtaposing marital and financial contracts with sexual exchanges, one can see “Blastfield” and Easy’s signing of the contract securing their mutual indebtedness as a matrimonial moment:

Shortyard. [offering to let Easy sign first] Come, Master Easy.
Easy. I beseech you, sir.
Shortyard. It shall be yours, I say.
Easy. Nay, pray, Master Blastfield.
Shortyard. I will not, i’faith.

... Easy. But to avoid strife, you shall have your will of me for once.

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77 Williams, *Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language*, s.v. “purse.” Cf. Partridge, *Shakespeare’s Bawdy*, s.v. “purse.” Partridge refuses to see the homoerotic pun. The homophobia that informs this approach to Shakespearean dirty words is discussed in my conclusion.

78 Williams, *Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language*, s.v. “inward.”
Shortyard. Let it be so, I pray. [Easy signs] (2.3.349-353, 360-63)

Mistaking his bedfellow’s gesture as one made out of a sense of chivalry, Easy agrees to act the role of the receptive partner and sign the contract first. While in reality this contract is nothing more than the paperwork needed to ensnare Easy in a commodity scam that will force him to give up his lavish Essex estates, it is at the same time clear that nothing short of a marriage-like union (a union akin to the one proposed between Lethe and Susan) will work on Easy. That is, it is the idea of a same-sex marriage that draws Easy to “Blastfield” in the first place, not the contract or hope of financial gain, and it is the possible realization of this idea that persuades the Essex gentleman to risk his property.

When “Blastfield” disappears, Easy bemoans not the potential forfeiture of his valuable estates but the loss of his contractual partner and bedfellow. Consequently, his expressions of concern betoken a spurned lover, not a man who frets his financial undoing. Having spent his first night alone since meeting “sweet Master Blastfield,” Easy suspects the worst: “All night from me? He’s hurt, he’s made away” (3.5.25). Further, it is clear from his discussions with other gallants that Easy’s monogamous relationship with “Blastfield” is public knowledge:

Easy. Did you see Master Blastfield this morning?
Salewood. I was about to move it to you.
Rearage. We were all three in a mind then.
Salewood. I ha’ not set eye on him these two days.
Rearage. I wonder he keeps so long from us, i’faith.
Easy. I begin to be sick.
Salewood. Why, what’s the matter?
Easy. Nothing in troth, but a great desire I had to have seen him.
Rearage. I wonder you should miss on’t lately; you’re his bedfellow.
Easy. I lay alone tonight, i’faith, I do not know how. (3.5.41-53)
The “sick[ness]” Easy evinces during this exchange reappears as self-loathing when he discovers the true identity of his bedfellow and lover. But where Paster interprets this final exchange as exhibiting “the pain and secret shame of . . . betrayal” by one’s supposed friend (24), I would contend that it reflects the self-disgust of a devastated lover who has come to the realization that his queer subjectivity has been exploited for heteronormative ends:

Easy. —Have I found you, Master Blastfield?
Shortyard. This is the fruit of craft.
Like him, that shoots up high, looks for the shaft
And finds it in his forehead; so does hit
The arrow of our fate. Wit destroys wit.
The head, the body’s bane and his own bears.

[Easy boxes his ears]
You ha’ corn enough; you need not reap mine ears.

[Imitating Easy] ‘Sweet Master Blastfield!’

Easy. [Gesturing for their removal] I loathe his voice. Away!

Physically restrained and unable to counter Easy’s impassioned blow, Shortyard mocks Easy’s fondness for men—or for one man in particular, anyway. That Shortyard imitates his former bedfellow’s preferred term of endearment suggests that he also means to ridicule the ease with which Easy entered into the marriage-like contract. Easy’s violent reaction only affirms that Shortyard’s final insult has hit home.

Of course, any analysis of the homoerotic bonds staged in *Michaelmas Term* must attend to the play’s heteronormative trajectory and seemingly conservative conclusion, both of which, I would suggest, accommodate Easy’s very public queer subjectivity. After the disappearance of “Blastfield,” for instance, Quomodo (the architect of the entire
project) feigns his own death in order to see how his family and friends will react. Soon thereafter, his wife Thomasine seizes this opportunity to re-marry, this time to Easy. DiGangi accounts for this turn by emphasizing Quomodo’s blindness to his own wife’s desires: “Significantly, it is the seizure of his authority by his wife, not his servant, that ultimately puts an end to Quomodo’s homoerotics of mastery. Quomodo’s mistake is treating a treacherous, eroticized servant too much like a partner, and a witty, sexually neglected wife too much like a subordinate” (92). Certainly, playgoers expect from the moment of its articulation that Quomodo’s plan to cheat Easy out his estate—the plan of homoerotic mastery—will be foiled somehow. Curiously, though, DiGangi says nothing about Easy’s role in all of this. True, Easy agrees to marry Thomasine, but given the other alternatives before them (debtor’s prison for him, a miserable, sexless marriage for her), one wonders if the nuptials between the jilted lovers mean anything more than a mutual reprieve from men who have scorned them. Thomasine’s presentation of the stratagem suggests exactly that:

Delay not now
Y’ave understood my love; I have a priest ready,
This is the fittest season, no eye offends us,
Let this kiss
Restore thee to more wealth, me to more bliss (4.4.69-73; emphasis added)

Thomasine and Easy never display the kind of affection Easy had demonstrated toward “Blastfield.” In fact, the marriage itself is never really legitimate, as the Judge decrees in the play’s final scene that, according to the “dues of law,” Thomasine must return to her

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79 Feigned death is a timeworn dramatic trope played out in many other early modern plays, most notably William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (perf. 1595; pub. 1599) and Ben Jonson’s *Volpone* (perf. 1606; pub. 1607). Scholars have noted the strong similarities between *Michaelmas Term* and *Volpone* and have continued to deliberate which play was staged first. On this debate, see Pastern section on “Contexts” in her introduction to the play (10-16) as well as Brian Gibbons’s *Jacobean City Comedy* (94-101).
neglectful husband Quomodo (5.3.59). Easy’s future looks considerably less bleak: the Judge nullifies his debts and restores his properties to him. There are no long-term penalties for falling in love with another man. Thus Easy is free and financially able to carry on his search for a “good sweet bedfellow,” his “only companion on earth.”

The courtship, marriage, and divorce of “Blastfield” and Easy, like the same-sex union of Dekker’s bedfellows and the widowhood of Fletcher and Shakespeare’s Emilia, opens up for us new ways of thinking about early modern bedfellowship, not only as a salient form of queer marriage, but also as a social arrangement that enabled—indeed, encouraged—explorations of the sexual self. It is worth remembering that in early modern England, nobody slept alone, and unwed women and men often shared their bed with friends, family members, servants, and so on. Decorum would have dictated that such sleep arrangements be same sex, lest the community suspect sexual misconduct. Thus, under the banner of socially sanctioned same-sex bedfellowship, women and men of all ages and classes were able to engage in sexual acts ranging from exploratory fumbling to expert consummation, without the kind of public scrutiny mixed-sex relations outside of marriage most certainly would have elicited. It was perhaps inevitable, then, that same-sex bedfellowship would influence in profound ways peoples’ senses of self. For many people living in early modern England, the shared bed was the first occasion for intimacy.

These plays demonstrate the degree to which playwrights could count on—and play to—an audience familiar with same-sex relationships and more titillated and entertained by the staging of queerness than shocked or put off by it. This held true not
only for the elite audience of Whitefriars but also for the open playhouses that brought in the groundlings along with the more sexually sophisticated. Dekker, Fletcher, and Shakespeare counted on their spectators’ familiarity with the homoerotic facet of bedfellowship, else the double entendres and pointed critiques that pervade *Satiro-mastix* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* would have failed to capture the attention of an abundantly diverse audience comprising everyone from high-born women and men to the groundlings who paid a penny to crowd the stage. Queer marriage is admittedly only one possibility afforded by bedfellowship, but it is an important one, as many scholars continue to dismiss Boswell’s important work and deny the possibility of same-sex marriage before the construction of homosexuality. I would suggest that *Satiro-mastix* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* show that queer marriage was well established in the cultural imaginary of early modern England. Without question, the concept of marriage between women or between men served to critique heteronormative social arrangements. More importantly, though, it provided people who had formed same-sex bonds with their friends and bedfellows a trope around which they could construct their identities. So while numerous scholars may continue to argue that lesbians and gay men did not exist in the early modern period, my examination of queer marriage on the early modern stage suggests that same-sex subjectivities were widely available and that people could imagine a lasting same-sex union, even if social barriers prevented many people from pursuing one off stage. In this respect, more recent battles over gay marriage have significant historical relevance, as they confirm that unions between women and between men need not be legal to have a cultural presence—to be envisaged, longed for, and reviled.
CHAPTER 3

“OLD SODOM” AND “DEAR DAD”:
VANBRUGH’S CELEBRATION OF THE SODOMITAL SUBJECT
IN THE RELAPSE

While the cultural landscape of England changed in profound ways over the course of the seventeenth century, there lay in the sodomitical discourse of the period a striking continuity. As Jonathan Goldberg and Alan Bray have shown, early modern (i.e., Tudor and early Stuart) notions of sodomy were often “embedded in other discourses, those delineating anti-social behavior—sedition, demonism, atheism” (Goldberg, “Sodomy and Society” 75). The sodomite, according to this model, was “an enemy of the state: a traitor and a man given to lawless violence against his enemies” (Bray, “Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England” 3). Cameron McFarlane’s description of the sodomite at the dawn of the eighteenth century is strikingly similar: “social types” typically associated with sodomy and the sodomite included “the plotter or secret conspirator, the insurrectionary, the foreigner, the papist or Jesuit, the corrupt government minister, the crafty stock-jobber, the enervated and supercivilized indulger in luxury, [and] the freethinking libertine” (30-31). Goldberg, Bray, and McFarlane are all drawing upon and revising the pioneering work of Michel
Foucault, who famously described sodomy as “an utterly confused category” (*The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 101)—a category, in other words, that comprises a broad range of “forbidden acts” (43), not just those perpetrated by men upon other man. Despite their various differences, then, the dominant cultures of early modern, Restoration, and early eighteenth-century England shared a conceptualization of sodomy that was both indeterminate and politically expedient.

Scholars have since sought to decipher whether seventeenth-century sodomitical discourse could have enabled the construction of a distinctly sodomitical subjectivity, that is, a subjectivity founded upon homoerotic acts commonly associated with the sodomite. In spite of the notable continuity of this discourse, scholars of different periods have arrived at strikingly different conclusions. While earlier studies of early modern English literature and culture tended merely to reaffirm and/or exemplify the Foucauldian model of sodomy, more recent interventions have posited that sodomitical subjectivities were not only possible but also widely recognized.\(^80\) Scholars of the period have broadened their scope, looking beyond what Foucault termed “juridico-political discourse” (*The History of Sexuality* 88) and exploring everything from literary and dramatic works, to medical and scientific treatises, to theological tracts—all in an effort to show the broad spectrum of cultural sites that made possible sodomitical subjectivity. Gregory Bredbeck

\(^80\) On the impossibility of sodomitical subjectivity, see Alan Bray’s “Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England”; Jonathan Goldberg’s “Sodomy and Society: The Case of Christopher Marlowe”; and Stephen Orgel’s *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England* (59). In “Homosexuality and Renaissance Literature, or the Anxieties of Anachronism,” Claude J. Summers argues that while “homoerotic subjectivities” were possible, “[t]he term *sodomite* reveals very little about the subjectivity of those persons who were so labeled; it says nothing about their emotions, desires, or identities” (5). Likewise, Bruce Smith observes in *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics* that there is an important distinction between sodomy and homosexual subjectivity and that this distinction is “crucial to understanding homosexual behavior in any given society, early modern England included, that stigmatizes homosexual acts” (18).
has argued that the speakers of Richard Barnfield’s and William Shakespeare’s sonnet sequences attest to the legibility of sodomitical subjectivity: “[T]he specific comparison of Barnfield’s *Cynthia* (and its attendant publications) and Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* shows that the conditions that allowed ‘the sodomite’ to be written also allowed sexual inscription in general to be unwritten and ‘the subject’ to be empowered” (148). Kenneth Borris, in his volume on *The Sciences of Homosexuality in Early Modern Europe*, demonstrates that a range of medical and scientific texts printed and circulated throughout the early modern period indicates that “the sexual preferences of males could already be understood according to a nascent same-sex/opposite-sex model that assumed male sodomites were disinclined or averse to sex with females” (6). And Mark D. Jordan, in his examination of ancient and medieval religious discourse, concludes that “the invention of the homosexual may well have relied on the already familiar category of the Sodomite. The idea that same-sex pleasure constitutes an identity of some kind is clearly the work of medieval theology, not of nineteenth-century forensic medicine” (164). Taken together, these diverse studies suggest that the conditions for a sodomitical subjectivity were everywhere present in early modern English discourse and, perhaps more importantly, that this subjectivity could be, contra Foucault, markedly unconfused, that is, constructed specifically around homoerotic desires.81

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81 In addition to the critical responses I have cited here, see Kent Gerard and Gert Hekma’s volume on *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*. In their introduction, Gerard and Hekma write, “The title of this volume may be appreciated in a threefold sense: the pursuit of sodomy by early modern sodomites; the pursuit of sodomites by those authorities opposed to them; and the pursuit by contemporary scholars of the documentary evidence for these activities” (1). While Gerard and Hekma do not make explicit reference to sodomitical subjectivity, the observation that sodomites could be pursued by authorities suggests that various individuals identified or were identified by others as such. See also Gregory Bredbeck’s *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton* (141-86); his “Tradition and the
The critical and theoretical trajectories of Restoration and early eighteenth-century studies have evolved largely in the opposite direction, as the foundational work of Rictor Norton—who argued in *Mother Clap’s Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England 1700-1830* that the formation of sodomitical subjectivities is evident in a range of Restoration and early eighteenth-century texts—has been challenged in recent years by scholars invested in demonstrating that sodomitical discourse reveals little about contemporary practices and attendant subjectivities.\(^2\) George Haggerty has argued in his recent study of *Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century* that “‘[s]odomy’ and accounts of sodomitical assault have proved a crude measure of same-sex desire” (154). Likewise, Cameron McFarlane indicates in *The Sodomite in Fiction & Satire 1660-1750* that while some descriptions of sodomites seem to correlate identity with same-sex desire, such textual moments “tell us more about the place of the sodomite in the cultural imagination than about actual social practice—much less what sodomites may have thought or felt themselves” (62-63). And Paul Hammond, in *Figuring Sex between Men from Shakespeare to Rochester*, contends, “A man who enjoyed sex with other men would hardly place himself in [the] company” of the sodomite, “an ideological category . . . bracketed with Jesuits, Spanish spies, and werewolves as agents of social and moral subversion” (9). Framing the accounts of sodomitical subcultures as fictions or

\(^{1}\) Individual Sodomite: Barnfield, Shakespeare, and Subjective Desire”; and Nicholas Radel’s “Can the Sodomite Speak? Sodomy, Satire, Desire, and the Castlehaven Scandal.”

\(^{2}\) In *Mother Clap’s Molly House*, Norton observes, “During the eighteenth century, the terms used most frequently for gay men were ‘mollies,’ which derives from slang for a female prostitute, ‘sodomites,’ ‘buggerers,’ and ‘indorsers,’ which derives from boxing slang for ‘to cudgel on the back.’ . . . By such labeling they were forcibly made aware they belonged to a category of men different from the norm. . . . Sodomites alone could not have remained oblivious to their identity when everyone else in society had some notion of it” (14-15). See also Norton’s more recent defense of his self-professed essentialist methodology in *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (102-104, 219).
journalistic hyperbole, Haggerty, McFarlane, and Hammond suggest that descriptions of popular cruising grounds and molly houses in Restoration and eighteenth-century London reveal more about the dominant culture’s concerns than it does about what homoerotically inclined men may have felt or practiced. So while the recent reissue of Norton’s *Mother Clap’s Molly House* may, perhaps, be an indicator that scholars are becoming more receptive to studies of queer subjectivities and subcultures in Restoration and eighteenth-century England, the prevailing scholarly assumption—reiterated in the largely dismissive reviews of Netta Murray Goldsmith’s *The Worst of Crimes: Homosexuality and the Law in Eighteenth-Century London*—is that the discourse of sodomy would have prevented the formation and expression of anything akin to a sodomitical sense of self.

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84 Originally published in 1992 by Gay Men’s Press, *Mother Clap’s Molly House* was revised, enlarged, and reissued in 2006 by the Chalford Press. By contrast, some of the more caustic responses to Norton appear in books published by leading academic presses—McFarlane’s *The Sodomite in Fiction & Satire 1660-1750* and Haggerty’s *Men in Love* by Columbia University Press and Halperin’s *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (127-28) by the University of Chicago Press. In this sense, the work of Norton is still marginalized in many academic circles.

While Goldsmith makes clear at the outset of *The Worst of Crimes* that “the word ‘homosexual’ was not current until the nineteenth century” and that “many males who engaged in casual sex with their own kind never thought of themselves as being sodomites at all” (5, 6) critics have routinely dismissed the book as both inattentive to historical and cultural differences and, in its questioning Foucauldian models of premodern sexualities, theoretically unsophisticated. According to Andrew Elfenbein, Goldsmith’s positing a sodomitical identity indicates that she “avoids theory” and “has a flatly essentialist view of sexuality in which homosexuals and heterosexuals are fixed in their identities” (140). Isaac Land contends that “[i]f Goldsmith wishes to challenge the past twenty years of scholarship in the field, she is under an obligation to state her objections and articulate her own position clearly,” a criticism brought on by Goldsmith’s use of the terms “homosexual” and “sexual orientation” (522). For similar charges, see also T.P. Gallanis’s and Peter Earle’s reviews.
Conspicuously absent from this ongoing debate regarding the plausibility of a sodomitical subjectivity is any sustained attention to Coupler, the sodomitical matchmaker of Sir John Vanbrugh’s *The Relapse; or, Virtue in Danger* (perf. 1696; pub. 1697). By and large, scholars have chosen either to ignore Coupler altogether—as McFarlane, Hammond, Trumbach, and Kristina Straub have done in their book-length studies of Restoration and eighteenth-century sexualities—or to relegate the sodomite to a single, passing observation regarding his supposed uniqueness to contemporary culture.\(^8^5\) This scholarly omission is, I would argue, far from an oversight, as Vanbrugh’s portrayal of an unequivocally, unapologetically sodomitical character—a character, moreover, who is accepted by the dramatis personae and who plays a crucial role in advancing the plot—calls into question the presumed confusedness of sodomy and pervasiveness of sodomophobia in Restoration and eighteenth-century England. Whereas other scholars have opted to marginalize or dismiss Coupler, I intend in this chapter to give the sodomite his due—to show that sodomitical subjectivities were widely recognized by the theatergoing public of Restoration and eighteenth-century London and that sodomites were not exclusively portrayed or understood as monstrosities. The implications of this unprecedented focus on Coupler for studies of premodern sex(ualities) and sodomitical discourse are profound, as Vanbrugh’s play, first performed at Drury Lane in November 1696, was an instant and longstanding success, revived regularly by various acting companies throughout much of the eighteenth century.

\(^8^5\) Here I am referring to McFarlane’s *The Sodomite in Fiction & Satire*; Hammond’s *Figuring Sex between Men from Shakespeare to Rochester*; Trumbach’s *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Vol. 1*; and Straub’s *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology*. Scant treatments of Coupler can be found in Haggerty’s *Men in Love* (51-52); Goldsmith’s *The Worst of Crimes* (16); and Straub’s “Actors and Homophobia” (271).
Indeed, before its replacement in the latter part of the century with several prudish (and considerably less successful) adaptations—most notably John Lee’s *The Man of Quality* (perf. 1773; pub. 1776) and Richard Sheridan’s *A Trip to Scarborough* (perf. 1777; pub. 1781)—*The Relapse* prospered in London’s theaters. Its stage history indicates that the play was performed for both public and private audiences on at least 250 occasions between 1696 and 1766 and that the part of Coupler remained virtually unchanged, and rarely omitted, for the overwhelming majority of these stagings.

While scholars may never know for certain how a given audience or a particular spectator might have responded to the sodomite, I argue in this chapter that Vanbrugh’s fashioning of Coupler betokens on the part of the play and its author a culturally dissident espousal of tolerance and acceptance for sodomitical subjects. I turn first to several theatrical polemics that offer commentaries on the (im)morality of *The Relapse* and its dramatis personae. These texts provide crucial insight into what about the play seems to have stirred controversy and what, apparently, did not. Although various aspects of play did incite moralizing polemicists, the staging of an unabashed sodomite who was solicited and embraced by other characters is not singled out for censure. My analysis of these tracts and their veritable silence regarding Coupler raises important questions about the sodomitical matchmakers’s roles and relationships within the realm of the play and

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86 John Lee and Richard Sheridan purge their respective plays of traces of sodomy. Lee excises all passages referring to Coupler’s lust for Fashion, but, in leaving alone much of the other passages in the same scene, creates a confusing relationship. For instance, Coupler’s defense of his lifestyle—“I’m still a friend to thy person, though I have contempt for thy understanding”—makes no sense if Lee refuses to give him a lifestyle that needs defending. The attendant confusions and inconsistencies are what probably led Sheridan to try his hand at revamping *The Relapse*. In his adaptation, he avoids the Coupler mess altogether, rewriting all of Coupler’s lines and transforming him into a seemingly asexual woman.

87 I have collected this information from E. L. Avery’s *The London Stage, 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments, and Afterpieces*. I thank J. P. Wearing for calling my attention to this excellent resource.
about the acceptance of sodomites in seventeenth-century English society. Juxtaposing the sodomite with the play’s fop proves especially useful here, as the efficacious matchmaker Coupler manages to thwart the machinations of the grotesque, self-indulgent fop and, in so doing, demonstrates his membership in the play’s anti-fop community, where the other characters are situated. This comparison leads, ultimately, to a larger consideration of Vanbrugh’s scripting of Coupler’s sodomitical desires, which are at fore from the start of the play and seemingly dissipate as the plot moves toward its marital, comic conclusion. While scholars have assumed that this disparity evinces the impossibility of sodomitical subjectivity, I argue that it serves to humanize Coupler—to show, in other words, that the sodomite can desire and have sex with other men while remaining an accepted member of society. For he, like the play’s numerous heteroerotically inclined characters, desires not all members of a particular sex but specific people to whom he is attracted. My argument, in sum, is that, far from functioning as a caricature to be ridiculed and condemned, Coupler—as a sodomite, as a man-desiring man—stands at play’s end as a character to be applauded, and hence accepted, by the theatergoing public.

Although the present chapter deals primarily with Restoration and eighteenth-century attitudes toward sodomy and sodomitical subjectivities, my analysis has important implications for early modern studies as well. For one of the more striking continuities in sodomitical discourse is that, while sodomy statutes were rarely enforced and seldom prosecuted successfully, they managed in early modern, Restoration, and eighteenth-century England to perpetuate the stigmatization of all things sodomitical. As
Goldsmith’s extensive study of eighteenth-century sodomy laws and their enforcement suggest, the achievements of the Reforming Societies committed to rounding up and prosecuting reputed sodomites were “somewhat marred in that most of those arrested were released for lack of conclusive evidence, but this did not unduly discourage the Societies. For even if they could not bring a case that would stand up in court, they spread fear and distrust in the homosexual community” (8). Although such Societies did not exist during the early 1600s, Borris points out that a similar culture of sodomophobia pervaded the early modern period:

Insofar as the English sodomy law was rooted in [Christian] ideas and their presumed biblical precedents, the state assumed that sexual acts between males other than anal coitus, and probably those between females as well, were deplorable corruptions that would incur divine retribution anyway. Such a situation cannot be considered tolerant. Nor one where, in theory if not in practice, the lives of all those who consensually engaged in a main means of sexually consummating masculine lover were legally forfeit” (Same-Sex Desire in the English Renaissance 80).

Cultivating widespread sodomophobia, the dominant cultures of early modern, Restoration, and eighteenth-century England shared an interest in depicting the sodomite in an uncompromisingly negative light. Of course, the dominant culture of any given historical period is only dominant in relation to those groups and persons it identifies and positions as subordinate or counternormative/queer. As Alan Sinfield has argued, “The

88 On the role of sodomy statutes in the institutionalization of sodomophobia, see Norton’s Mother Clap’s Molly House (293-99); Caroline Bingham’s “Seventeenth-Century Attitudes Towards Deviant Sex”; Edward J. Bristow’s Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain Since 1700; Arthur N. Gilbert’s “Buggery and the British Navy, 1700-1861”; and Gilbert’s “Sodomy and the Law in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain.”

89 Smith traces both the transformation of English sodomy statutes and their inconsistent enforcement in Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England (41-53). See also Borris’s section on “Law” in Same-Sex Desire in the English Renaissance (75-114) and B.R. Burg’s “Ho Hum, Another Work of the Devil: Buggery and Sodomy in Early Stuart England.”
inter-involvement of resistance and control is systemic: it derives from the way language and culture get articulated. . . . Any position supposes its intrinsic *op*-position” (*Faultlines* 47). Thus in the cultural imaginaries of early modern, Restoration, and eighteenth-century England, the sodomite functions as an instantiation of “dissident sexuality”—an instantiation, however, that is open for both normative and dissident portrayals.90 These portrayals, moreover, are themselves open to a broad range of responses, including, I intend to argue, empathy for alleged/reputed sodomites. While I propose to read Coupler as an example of this dissident sexuality, my approach is applicable to the study of any culture that stigmatizes sodomy and sodomites, not least Tudor and early Stuart England, which, as Bruce Smith has demonstrated, saw considerable interest and ongoing revision in sodomy statutes.91

*The Relapse’s* popularity among public and private audiences is matched perhaps only by the frequency with which it appeared in the theatrical polemics of Restoration and eighteenth-century England. And yet, while various polemicists attacked the play, and while Vanbrugh published several defenses of it, the sodomitical impulses of the matchmaker Coupler were never discussed, as if this dimension of the character was itself unremarkable or uncontroversial. In *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage . . .* (1698), polemicist Jeremy Collier devotes an entire section of the book to Vanbrugh’s play. While virtually no character escapes his censures, the sodomitical desires of Coupler go unnoticed. Young Fashion, for instance, is nothing

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90 I have borrowed the locution “dissident sexuality” from Sinfield, who develops it *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (27-28). This book serves as a recent defense of cultural materialism as both a philosophy and a literary and cultural theory.

91 See note 88.
more than “a Lewd, Prodigal, younger Brother . . . reduced to extremity,” a “Fortunate Cheat” (Pi,-Pi,). Loveless, similarly motivated by base inclinations, engages in “Lewd Discourse” and participates in a “Scene of Debauch” (Pvi,-Pvii,). Berinthia, “one of the Top-Characters [in “quality”],” becomes, over the course of the play, “impudent and Profane,” whilst Worthy, “the Relaper’s fine Gentleman . . . grows Foppish . . . and courts Amanda in Fustian, and Pedantry” (Pvi, Qii,). About Lord Foppington, Collier complains, “Vanity and Formalizing is Lord Foplington’s [sic] part. To let him speak without Aukwardness, and Affectation, is to put him out of his Element. There must be Gumm and stiffening in his Discourse to make it natural” (Pviii,). Coupler, notably, is described succinctly as, “a sharper by Character” (Pv,). The sodomite’s unabashed, unapologetic flirtations with another male character are nowhere described—this despite Collier’s insistence on “bring[ing] every Thing that is Ill under Infamy, and Neglect” (Bi,). Why would Collier refrain from condemning Coupler’s unquestionably sodomitical actions in an antitheatrical polemic centering on the lewdness of the stage? Are the character’s dalliances among those “unacceptable” passages “in no Condition to be handled” (Bii,)? Or do his behaviors somehow slip past Collier?

It is worth noting, and perhaps to the point, that elsewhere in A Short View Collier has no qualms about “handl[ing]” sodomy. In a section titled “A Censure of Aristophanes,” Collier mentions but ultimately finds unsatisfactory the Greek playwright’s condemnation of sodomitical figures:

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92 He uses sharper in the following sense: “A cheat, swindler, rogue; one who lives by his wits and by taking advantage of the simplicity of others; esp. a fraudulent gamester” (OED, def 2).
[W]e are told, that [in the play *The Frogs*] He that Bilks his *Catamite* after a *Sodomitical Abuse*, is thrown into the Common shore of *Hades*. And what Company do you think he is lodg’d with? Why with those who Perjure themselves, with those who Kick their Fathers and Mothers? It seems in the *Poets Justice* a Man might as good be false to his Oath, as to his Lewdness” (Dv5).

The implication here is that not even the damning of a sodomite to “the Common shore of *Hades*” can compensate for what Collier construes as the “Heathen Scheme of Heaven” constructed in *The Frogs* (Div1). And though it remains unclear why the sodomite belongs in Hades—because of the “*Sodomitical Abuse*?” or the “Bilk[ing of] his *Catamite*? or both?—it is clear that by “*Sodomitical Abuse*” Collier means sex between a man and his catamite and that this kind of sex might in itself constitute a sodomitical subjectivity. This author’s “handl[ing]” of *sodomy* demonstrates that the term and its permutations are in no way outside the scope of his critique of the play. The same is true for Collier’s later essays, which exhibit a similarly intricate use of the term.93 That he avoids discussing sodomy in his treatment of Coupler suggests not that Collier refused any mention of such sexual acts and characters but that he found the sexual proclivities of Vanbrugh’s sodomite less troubling than the excesses of the extravagant, self-important fop.

Not surprisingly, Vanbrugh responds in kind. In his prompt reply, *A Short Vindication of “The Relapse” and “The Provok’d Wife,” from Immorality and Profaneness* (1698), he too avoids discussing Coupler’s sodomitical actions, conceivably for practical reasons: why defend against, and in this way bring about, as yet unmade

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93 In his *Essays upon Several Moral Subjects* (1720), Collier calls for the execution of all sodomites: “[I]n ancient Times, these criminals were burnt by Common Law. Indeed such Monsters ought to be the Detestation of Mankind, pursued by Justice, and exterminated from the earth” (qtd in Crompton 35).
charges? Nonetheless, he maintains that his plays are far from immoral or profane and that Collier is simply misinterpreting them: “This honest doctor, I find, does not yet understand the Nature of Comedy, tho’ he has made it his study for so long. For the Business of Comedy is to shew People what they shou’d do, by presenting them upon the Stage, doing what they shou’d not” (Di-Dii.). Collier, in other words, identifies correctly the many vices of the dramatis personae, but he fails to see the larger edifying message the playwright intends to deliver with these vices. Vanbrugh illustrates his point not with the brazen sodomite but, just as Collier had in his critique, with the notorious Lord Foppington, who is without question a reprobate. According to the playwright, however, the fop appears only for the sake of “instruct[ing] the Audience (even to the meanest Capacity) that what [Foppington] says of his Church-Behavior, is designed for their Contempt, and not for their imitation” (Biii-Biiii.). Foppington’s objectionable behaviors, then, serve only to instruct spectators how not to act. This defense is far from novel, and scholars generally agree that Vanbrugh’s use of this and other stock arguments were received poorly, even by some of his sympathizers, if only because his blatant reliance on well-worn rhetorical tropes did not keep pace with Collier’s notorious wit. The point here, however, is that the fop’s actions are, for both Collier and Vanbrugh, the center of controversy; the sodomite, meanwhile, goes without comment.

Some scholars have argued that Coupler’s advances toward Young Fashion might not have warranted comment in antitheatrical polemics of the period because such actions

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94 Samuel Hynes, in his collection *English Literary Criticism: Restoration and 18th Century*, believes Vanbrugh’s response to Collier was a failure: “Neither [of the dramatists’ major arguments] is appropriate to Vanbrugh’s plays, and one must conclude that Collier won this round” (131). Bernard Harris, in his critical introduction to *The Relapse*, agrees, adding, “[A Short Vindication] makes the disappointing mistake of fighting on Collier’s prepared ground” (xiii).
may not have been viewed as blatantly sodomitical. According to Bernard Harris, “There is . . . the distinct possibility, since Young Fashion was played originally by Mrs. Kent, in the ‘breeches part’ later established as a pantomime convention, that Coupler’s interest in Young Fashion was cruelly mistaken from the start” (xxii).95 That is, Collier and others may have interpreted the exchanges between Coupler and Fashion as lewd but not, necessarily, as an exchange between two men. If this were the case, however, it would hold true only until December 12, 1715, when the role of Fashion came to be assumed exclusively by men, first by Thomas Walker and in later performances by a number of prominent male actors, among them Colley Cibber, Jr., Peter Bardin, and Michael Dyer.96 Even so, the sex of the actor(s) playing the role of Fashion matters little when one scrutinizes the terms Collier employs in his discussion of Fashion. Without exception Collier uses masculine pronouns to refer to the character, suggesting, for the purposes of his polemic, he means to analyze and censure the play’s characters, not the actors and actresses portraying them. Vanbrugh, in A Short Vindication, does the same. Harris’s suggestion that spectators might have viewed the Coupler/Fashion dynamic as heteroerotic, not homoerotic or sodomitical, is not implausible, but it runs counter to the evidence in both to the available stage histories and to the points of view of at least two persons embroiled in the debate at the time the play was being performed.

95 On the presence of breeches parts in Restoration and eighteenth-century drama, see Jill Campbell’s “‘When Men Women Turn’: Gender Reversal in Fielding’s Plays”; Beth H. Friedman-Romell’s “Breaking the Code: Toward a Reception Theory of Theatrical Cross-Dressing in Eighteenth-Century London” See also Marjorie Garber’s Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety.

96 Avery’s The London Stage, 1660-1800 offers the most complete stage history of The Relapse. This compendium of dates, companies, and theaters shows that only one woman played the role of Fashion and only for a relatively short duration. See note 89.
Given the lack of attention to Coupler in the antitheatrical tracts, it is no surprise that Coupler is also absent from John Dennis’s *The Usefulness of the Stage, to the Happiness of Mankind, to Government, and to Religion* (1698), a protheatrical treatise written specifically to controvert Collier’s litany of charges. But to assume that the polemicist fails to mention Coupler because he found nothing particularly incendiary about the sodomite would be to miss the virulent strain of sodomophobia that pervades the treatise: “[A]s for that unnatural sin, which is another growing vice of the Age, it would be monstrous to urge that it is in the least encourag’d by the Stage, for it is either never mention’d there, or mention’d with the last detestation” (Cvi,). Dennis’s logic in this passage is uncharacteristically frantic: he disallows the possibility of “that unnatural sin” being “mention’d” on stage and then, as if anticipating (or possibly being already aware of) evidence to the contrary, he defends its appearance by moralizing it. Curiously, he does not substantiate the latter part of his claim as he does with most others he makes in the pamphlet, so it is not clear whether or not he means to gesture toward Coupler in his ruminations about “another growing vice of the age.” If so, he is remarkably oblique, perhaps because Coupler is not, as I will demonstrate below, “mention’d with the last detestation,” as Dennis no doubt would have his readers believe. Regardless of the motives underpinning Dennis’s approach, Coupler’s sodomitical actions once again escape scrutiny and censure, even in a treatise that goes out of its way to excoriate “that unnatural sin.”

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97 Adultery is only one of many sins that Dennis defends as being instrumental in the education of Restoration playgoers. About William Wycherly’s *The Plain Dealer*, he argues, “I thought Mr. Wycherly had more than made amends for [his perceived abuses of the theater], by exposing Adultery, and making it the immediate cause of Olivia’s misfortune, in that excellent Play, which is a most instructive and a most noble Satyr, upon the hypocrisie and villainy of Mankind” (Cviii,-Cviii,).
His absence from the theater controversies of Restoration and eighteenth-century England—indeed, from the very treatises attending to the (im)morality of Vanbrugh’s play—suggests, if nothing else, that Coupler did not attract the barbs of either the antitheatrical polemicists railing against the lewdness of the stage or the protheatrical polemicists who denied or turned a blind eye to the staging of sodomy in contemporary dramatic productions. One explanation of this veritable silence could be that disputation from both camps were simply following the standard convention for (not) writing about sodomy and sodomites. As McFarlane aptly notes, “Represented as unrepresentable, named as that which cannot be named, sodomy is *peccatum illud horribile, inter christianos non nominandum*—the horrible crime not to be named among Christians, even when . . . it is named” (25). Doubtless this logic informed Dennis’s conviction that “that unnatural sin . . . is either never mention’d [on stage], or mention’d with the last detestation.” Following this conventional dictum of unspeakability—of naming and condemning something that must not be mentioned at all—might also serve as a means for Collier and Dennis to address, without particularizing, the presence of sodomites, both living and literary, in contemporary culture.

But where the theatrical tracts are either silent or merely wearing the veil of silence, the play itself is outspoken on the subject. For in the same scene that he flirts with, propositions, kisses, and even molests Young Fashion, Coupler responds, without any form of protestation, to several epithetical monikers commonly deployed in sodomite caricatures: “Old Sodom,” “old Satan,” and “old lecher” (1.3.183, 202, 267).\(^\text{98}\) Of course,

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\(^{98}\) I have used Bernard Harris’s New Mermaids edition for citation and reference.
numerous studies of sodomy as “that utterly confused category” have demonstrated that the kinds of terms Young Fashion employs first to identify and then to describe Coupler often carried in pre-“hetero/homosexual” England numerous, sometimes self-contradictory significations. But in the abovementioned exchanges between Young Fashion and Coupler, the signification of “Old Sodom” is markedly unconfused, in that the particulars of their sexually charged persiflage—the extensive flirting, the physical contact, the suggestion of sex as payment for a favor—authorize, and in this way work to disambiguate, the nicknames “Old Sodom,” “old Satan,” and “old lecher.”

Thus, in a single scene (1.3), Coupler both exhibits the behaviors of and welcomes the label sodomite. He is, in fact, no less than “Old Sodom” personified. This process of subjectification—of correlating behaviors and subjectivities—is acknowledged and addressed by the sodomite himself and the youth he desires. Upon recognizing Fashion, Coupler wastes no time trying to fondle the youth. Fashion objects to the conduct, exclaiming, “Stand off, Old Sodom!” (1.3.181-83). Articulated the instant he displays a sodomitical gesture, this identificatory utterance establishes a link between behavior and subjectivity. Furthermore, it portrays Coupler not as a sodomite but as the embodiment of the city of Sodom. Old Sodom does not take offense to the appellation; rather, he appears to revel in it. Although the specificity of the allusion to same-sex desire may not have been immediately clear, by the close of the scene the signification of “Old Sodom” is unambiguous and unconfused.

99 For a cogent analysis of the “confused[ness]” of sodomy in modern discourse, see Goldberg’s Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities (1-26).
It is clear, for instance, from Coupler’s inquiry about Fashion’s year-long travels abroad that both men understand the sodomite’s proclivities as constitutive of his subjectivity. Indeed, in order for their banter to make sense to the theatergoing public, the notion of a sodomitical subjectivity had to have been circulating widely in the cultural imaginary of the period. About the trip to Italy, Coupler inquires:

Hast thou been a year in Italy, and brought home a fool at last? By my conscience, the young fellows of this age profit no more by their going abroad than they do by their going to church. Sirrah, sirrah, if you are not hanged before you come to my years, you’ll know a cock from a hen. But, come, I’m still a friend to thy person, though I have contempt of thy understanding; and therefore I would willingly know thy condition, that I may see whether thou stand’st in need of my assistance. (1.3.187-95).

His eagerness to discuss, or perhaps fantasize about, Fashion’s trip plays into widely circulated stereotypes about the foreignness of sodomy. If Fashion has spent a year in Italy, Old Sodom reasons, surely he has experimented with other men. There is evidence to suggest that young men who traveled abroad often used this opportunity to explore their sexual desires, but it is critical to note that Old Sodom contrasts this rite of passage with his own “understanding” or “condition.”100 The sodomite, in other words, recognizes the difference between his own subjectivity and that of Fashion, between his desire for “a cock” and Fashion’s for “a hen,” and though he may be disappointed by and “have

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100 McFarlane’s discussion of the foreignness of sodomy as a nationalistic, ideological construct (55-60) are helpful here, but, as Norton points out, “[T]he English associated homosexuality with France and Italy not simply because they wanted to construct homosexuality as something ‘foreign,’ but because they observed that homosexual relations were much more openly practiced in France and Italy than in any other European country” (qtd in Robinson 73n31). See Norton’s Mother Clap’s Molly House (252-56) and Jeffrey Richards’s Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages (132-49) as well as Valerie Traub’s discussion in The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England of English travelers to Turkey (198-203, 314-15). I thank Robinson for sharing with me Norton’s personal communication and for calling my attention to Traub’s comments.
contempt for [Fashion’s] understanding,” he agrees to come to the aid of his friend out of what playgoers might interpret as a complex commingling of friendship, love, and lust.

As Fashion details his desires to retaliate against his greedy older brother, Coupler interjects with a homoerotic proposal and a classical allusion that serve to connect his subjectivity with a well-known sodomitical past. When Old Sodom reveals that he could help Fashion in his pursuit of revenge, the following exchange transpires:

Fashion: Sayest thou so, old Satan? Show me but that, and my soul is thine.
Coupler: Pox o’thy soul! give me thy warm body, sirrah; I shall have a substantial title to’t when I tell thee my project.
Fashion: Out with it then, dear dad, and take possession as soon as thou wilt.
Coupler: Sayest thou so, my Hephestion? Why, then, thus lies the scene.

(1.3.202-209)

The allusion to Hephestion, Alexander the Great’s legendary favorite, sets up an intriguing analogy: Coupler is to Fashion as Alexander is to Hephestion. Whether one wants to argue for alterity or continuity here, the fact remains that Old Sodom sees a salient resemblance between his (desired) relationship with Fashion and the mythic friendship of Alexander and Hephestion.101 There is, moreover, an overt eroticization of the allusion in that Fashion has just agreed, if in jest, to pay for Old Sodom’s help with sex. Given the Platonizing tendency of many neoclassical writers, I would argue further that Old Sodom’s comparison re-eroticizes a dynamic represented in other texts and

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101 In “The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography,” Traub calls for a renewed focus on “cycles of salience,” that is, “forms of intelligibility whose meanings recur, intermittently and with a difference, across time.” While Traub cautions scholars not to see such cycles as evidence of historical or cultural continuity, she recognizes the importance of the past in the construction of present and future queer subjectivities: “Emerging at certain moments, silently disappearing from view, and then re-emerging at particularly relevant (or explosively volatile), these recurrent explanatory logics seem to underlie the organization, and reorganization, of . . . erotic life” (126).
contexts as innocent, transcendent, and spiritual—even if, as David Robinson observes, this insistence “implicitly defend[s] against a carnal interpretation” already available (xiv).

At this moment, then, Old Sodom glances back to antiquity for a model of his own subjectivity. As he does so, he participates in a cultural phenomenon Valerie Traub has recently described as “cycles of salience.” According to Traub, “It is less that there exist transhistorical categories that comprise and subsume historical variation than that certain perennial logics and definitions that remain useful, across time, for conceptualizing the meanings of . . . bodies and bonds” (126). So while the classical allusion Coupler employs may not carry a single, transhistorical meaning, it serves in this instance as an apt model of homoerotic desire, one that distinguishes ephemeral acts from those that evince same-sex subjectivity across time. Coupler is not a man who has succumbed to common sodomitical impulses; rather, he is a sodomite who, like Alexander, loves and pines for another man.

The play’s other characters seem untroubled by this aspect of Coupler/Old Sodom. Such acceptance is, I think, punctuated by two factors: first, the other characters’ antipathy toward Lord Foppington, the play’s fop; and second, the striking but not altogether unwarranted change in behavior that occurs in Coupler over the course of the play. These dimensions of The Relapse bring to the fore Coupler’s sodomitical actions, but they do so in such a way that betokens approbation, not scorn. I do not mean to suggest that, on its own, this representation of Coupler caused the censors and polemicists to ignore or look past the matchmaker’s sodomitical remarks and actions, but
I do think that there is a compelling correlation to be drawn. Mapping out this correlation will be the focus of the rest of this chapter.

By and large, Coupler and Foppington have been understood as occupying a similarly marginalized position in The Relapse: both are reducible to caricature, and so both, supposedly, are alienated from the play’s larger community. According to Kristina Straub, “The Relapse makes even clearer [than does Colley Cibber’s Love’s Last Shift (perf. & pub. 1696)] the fop’s liminal position—this time both in relation to the dominant heterosexual economy and in relation to homosexual desire.” She elucidates:

As the allusion to the masked prostitute [1.3.137-39] suggests, Foppington, by his desire to be seen, travesties woman as sexual commodity. At the same time, however, he is distinguished in the play from male homosexuality in the character of Coupler, an overtly gay male who pursues Foppington’s desirable younger brother, Fashion. Foppington stands in an ambiguous relation to both sexual economies in the play. While certainly no Coupler, his position within the heterosexual economy of romantic love is not clear. (“Actors and Homophobia 270-71)

While seemingly making the case for Foppington’s sexual “ambigu[ity],” Straub claims that the fop is “certainly no Coupler,” that the fop, unlike the “overtly gay male,” remains safely within the normative “heterosexual economy of romantic love”—if, in fact, such an economy could have existed before the rise to prominence of the homo/hetero dichotomy. This interpretation supposes, moreover, that Vanbrugh, in his construction of Foppington and Coupler, agrees with and ultimately perpetuates contemporary attitudes toward sodomy and sodomites. Hence for the playwright’s intended audience, “certainly no Coupler” might also mean “thankfully no Coupler” or “at the very least not Coupler.” Or to put it another way: although the fop may assume effeminate mannerisms and
opprobrious affectations, and although he may at times transgress the traditional boundaries of masculine subjectivity, he is no sodomite.

George Haggerty arrives at a somewhat different conclusion, stating that “the presence of a sodomite in the first scene of a comedy, a sodomite who is both integral to the comedy and included at its close, both defies readings of the sodomite as monstrous and colors the mood of the play,” while the fop’s “elaborate face-saving, his male-directed determination, and his affected pronouncements all mark him as an unsuitable character without a center.” Having pointed out their various differences, Haggerty observes that the sodomite and the fop share a notable positionality vis-à-vis marriage: “[T]hey both appear to be relegated to an extramarital position: Coupler because he chooses to exercise his desires in a different direction and Lord Foppington because he has no other choice” (51-52). At issue here, as it is in Straub’s analysis, is the purported significance of nuptials both to the dramatis personae and to the audience. The question, then, is whether or not Coupler and Foppington become pariahs because of their supposed exclusion from the normative institution/cultural imperative of marriage. While their readings of Coupler and Foppington differ in important ways, both Straub and Haggerty appear to answer this underlying question affirmatively.

But if it is a character’s proximity to the institution of marriage that determines his or her status as either natural or monstrous, accepted or shunned, then it would appear that Vanbrugh has worked to shape spectators’ opinions of Coupler and Foppington in a direction different from those posited by Straub and Haggerty. Specifically, he has fashioned Coupler and Foppington as foils for each other—the former belonging to the
play’s large anti-fop community, the latter functioning as the effeminate, self-involved
Other against which all other characters, including the sodomite, construct their
normative subjectivities. Consider, for instance, the names Vanbrugh gives the sodomite
and the fop. Coupler’s name points specifically to his occupation as a professional
matchmaker, an arranger of middle- and upper-class unions. In this way, his name
associates him with weddings and families and, as Haggerty points out, it ensures his
inclusion at the play’s close. Haggerty is right, therefore, to notice that Coupler “chooses
to exercise his desires in a different direction,” but this choice does not in itself establish
the same positionality prescribed for the fop. As a coupler of heteronormative unions, the
matchmaker remains an integral component of the marriage process and at the center, not
the margins, of society.

Lord Foppington’s name also demarcates employment—in the fop’s case a career
of extravagant dress, ornate accoutrements, and self-indulgent histrionics. He is, in brief,
the Lord of Fops/Foppery. Of course, Lord Foppington is already a form of rewriting in
that the playwright filched and adapted this character, as well as several others, from
Cibber’s Love’s Last Shift, a play to which The Relapse is in effect a dramatic riposte.
Hence his refashioning of Sir Novelty Fashion into Lord Foppington represents an
attempt at dramaturgical emendation and amplification.102 That several characters in The
Relapse point out and scoff at Lord Foppington’s purchasing his barony from the King
only adds to this derogatory, though no doubt amusing, depiction of the fop. And

102 Both characters were played by Cibber, the most celebrated portrayal of fops in Restoration and early
eighteenth-century drama. On the formation and modifications of the fop social type, see Robert B.
Heilman’s “Some Fops and Some Versions of Foppery”; Thomas A. King’s The Gendering of Men, 1600-
1750, Vol. 1: The English Phallus (228-56); Susan Staves’s “A Few Kind Words for the Fop”; Straub’s
Sexual Suspects (47-68); and Haggerty’s Men in Love (44-80).
although he too appears in the play’s final scene, Foppington remains an embodiment of excessive self-love. Stepping forward to speak the play’s epilogue, he proclaims:

    I hold no one its friend, I must confess,
    Who would discauntenance your men of dress.
    Far, give me leave t’abserve, good clothes are things
    Have ever been of great support to kings;
    All treasons come from slovens, it is nat
    Within the reach of gentle beaux to plat;
    They have no gall, no spleen, no teeth, no strings,
    Of all Gad’s creatures, the most harmless things. (ep. 9-16)

As one has come to expect from the fop, Foppington endeavors to direct playgoers’ attention away from the particulars of the marriage plots, from which he has been recently excluded, in order to make a final case for foppery and save face. Delivering the epilogue _solus_, he effectually reaffirms his distinct Otherness. Coupler, on the other hand, has by the fifth act either set aside or hidden his erotic interest in Young Fashion and has devoted himself entirely to ensuring the marriage of Fashion and Hoyden. He exits with Fashion, Hoyden, and the others just before Foppington delivers the self-indulgent epilogue, a subtle gesture of inclusion that illustrates visually and spatially the sodomite’s place in the society constructed in Vanbrugh’s play. Foppington remains the spectacle; Coupler withdraws with his friends. To argue, then, that Coupler and Lord Foppington are similarly alienated from the marital process disregards an important way in which Vanbrugh guides his audience’s impressions of the sodomite and/versus the fop.

    Even so, placing emphasis on the relation of each character to marriage is potentially misleading, for one of the more unconventional aspects of _The Relapse_ is that the Amanda/Loveless story, the only marital plotline carried over from _Love’s Last Shift_, ends abruptly in the fifth act without any indication of resolution, reconciliation, or
closure. Spectators see the husband and wife alone together only twice—in 1.1 and 2.1, in their country house and town house, respectively—and after their relatively brief conversation at the start of 2.1, the couple fails to appear together at all. When Loveless makes his final exit, he carries with him Amanda’s cousin, Berinthia, who whispers playfully, “Help! help! I’m ravished! ruined! undone! Oh Lord, I shall never be able to bear it” (4.3.78-79). Despite her declarations of constancy, Amanda also makes her final appearance in the company of a would-be, and perhaps will-be, sexual intrigue. While it is not clear whether or not she will, in the end, submit to his advances, Amanda’s final speech regarding her honor is directed at Worthy, not her husband (5.5.146-57). In staging Loveless’s inevitable relapse into infidelity and leaving open the possibility for sex and/or love between Amanda and Worthy, Vanbrugh effectually calls into question the validity of Cibber’s ending in Love’s Last Shift, which had concluded with Loveless’s promise of a lifelong commitment to Amanda. The message here could be that rovers are incapable of reform, but it is as likely that Vanbrugh means to suggest that marriage itself is incapable of reforming anyone. Because the tension between commitment and roving is articulated several times but never resolved, Vanbrugh sets up for extensive critique marriage as a culturally sanctioned institution.

I agree that Coupler and Foppington invite comparison, but I would argue, contra Straub and Haggerty, that an emphasis on the role of nuptials in The Relapse skews Vanbrugh’s handling of the fop and the sodomite. I would also suggest that the fop, not

103 The 1697 playtext of The Relapse indicates that these lines should be spoken “Very softly.” Although he includes these instructions for delivery in his New Mermaids edition of the play, Harris silently alters the punctuation of the lines themselves, which in the 1697 text appear as follows: “Help, help, I’m Ravish’d, ruin’d, undone. O Lord, I shall never be able to bear it” (Ll.).
the sodomite, more closely resembles what scholars have theorized as the excluded, caricatured Other. For it is Foppington, not Coupler, who is continually denigrated and humiliated by the dramatis personae, and it is Coupler, not Foppington, who remains a member of the play’s anti-fop community. Granted, both characters behave in ways meant to draw laughter, and in this sense both are subjected to the variable preconceptions and unpredictable reactions of playgoers. But Coupler’s sodomitical actions, amusing though they may be, differ from Foppington’s foppish antics in part because the sodomite never incites the opprobrium of other characters. On the contrary, the sodomite works alongside others who have been wronged by the ostentatious fop. This is not to say that Foppington is the scripted villain of the play. As a satiric response to Love’s Last Shift, the play works against this sort of moralizing.104 But Vanbrugh appears to have developed the fop and the sodomite in ways that are meant to produce certain kinds of reactions. That the fop’s epilogue ushers in the audience’s final round of laughter and applause is, therefore, precisely the point: the fop fulfills his role as the caricatured man of fashion, while the sodomite remains offstage, only to return when the rest of the actors and actresses in the company do so.

The play’s epilogue is not the first occasion for comparing Foppington and Coupler; rather, it is the culmination of a series of moments that elicit comparison. Here it serves to recapitulate the audience’s initial encounters with the fop and the sodomite. Spectators saw them for the first time in the same scene (1.3), in the same location (the

104 I disagree, therefore, with J. Douglas Canfield’s assessment that The Relapse belongs to a class of plays, which he terms corrective satire, that “condemns aberrant behavior by exposing it to ridicule and lashing it with a rod clearly representing the violated standard of behavior.” I do not believe, as Canfield does, that this play “judge[s] behavior as morally reprehensible” (1375).
fop’s dressing room), within seconds of one another (Foppington exits as Coupler enters). But even before this opportunity for visual comparison arises, Vanbrugh provides another, subtler way of assessing the sodomite and the fop, i.e., through their respective reputations. Upon his first entrance, Coupler is identified by Young Fashion: “Here comes a head, sir, would contrive [a plot] better than us both, if he would join our confederacy” (1.3.172-73). The synecdochical moniker for Coupler points to a reputation based on cleverness and ingenuity—the ability to “contrive.” Nowhere in this preliminary description is there even a hint of the flagrant sodomitical behavior exhibited after the matchmaker first appears. One reason for this might be that apprising Lory, and also the audience, of Coupler’s sodomitical behaviors before they manifest themselves would detract from the dramatic effect of the matchmaker’s first appearance in the play. At the same time, this early description speaks to what about Coupler seems to matter to Fashion. The character’s desire for men, which becomes apparent the moment Coupler engages him in conversation, does not strike Fashion as immediately relevant or worthy of comment. The implication here is that Coupler’s sodomitical subjectivity is not, as Lord Foppington’s mannerisms prove to be, topical or a source of derision; rather, the matchmaker’s proclivity for men is at best widely accepted, at worst simply uninteresting.

His reputation for being well connected rouses Young Fashion and Lory’s hopes to recruit Coupler into their “confederacy.” Their optimism serves them well, as Coupler proves to be, paradoxically, something of a social sodomite. Simultaneously irritated with Lord Foppington, who hopes to cheat him out of money (1.3.234), and enamored of
Young Fashion (204-205), Coupler offers to exploit his connections among the landed gentry in order to help Fashion cuckold his older brother:

This plump partridge, that I tell you of, lives in the country, fifty miles off, with her honoured parents, in a lonely old house no body comes near; she never goes abroad, nor sees company at home. To prevent all misfortunes, she has her breeding within doors; the parson of the parish teaches her to play upon the base viol, the clerk to sing, her nurse to dress, and her father to dance. In short, nobody can give you admittance there but I. (1.3.241-49)

The sodomite has gained the trust of this particular “honoured” family. He knows and has exclusive access to a daughter who otherwise remains completely isolated from outsiders. Admittedly, his qualifications are not enough to entice Sir Tunbelly to betroth his daughter to a man as impoverished as Fashion—hence the stratagem that has Fashion wooing her as Lord Foppington (1.3.249-50)—but the overprotective patriarch trusts Coupler enough to promise Hoyden’s hand to a man neither parent has met (3.5.1-35). Reputation justifies this pseudo-blind trust.

Serving as a kind of foil to Coupler, Lord Foppington is a notorious fop whose reputation antedates Vanbrugh’s play. In Cibber’s Love’s Last Shift, characters repeatedly express their disapprobation of Foppington’s precursor, Sir Novelty Fashion. As in Vanbrugh’s play, spectators already know the fop’s reputation before they actually gaze upon him. Indeed, upon hearing the name Sir Novelty Fashion, spectators know what to expect from him. Elder Worthy describes the fop as “[o]ne that Heaven intended for a man, but the whole business of his life is to make the world believe he is of another

105 The extent of the father’s paranoia is perhaps clearest when Young Fashion and Lory arrive at his estate: a servant orders another to “Call to Nurse that she may lock up Miss Hoyden before the gate’s open” (3.3.38-39).
species. . . He’s so fond of public attention that he is more extravagant in his attempts to gain it than the fool that fired Diana’s temple to immortalize his name” (1.1.299). Other characters echo Elder Worthy’s assessment of Sir Novelty’s monstrous self-involvement, essentially giving credence to the former’s scathing characterization. Sir William Wiswoud, for instance, scoffs at the thought of his daughter marrying the fop: “[Y]ou have too great a passion for your own person to have any of your wife’s. . . . Had I a son so dressed, I should take the liberty to call him an egregious fop” (3.1.173-79). Narcissa, Sir William’s daughter, flirts with Sir Novelty, assuring the fop that he is “a true original, the very pink of fashion” (2.1.53), but she soon realizes that her attempt at flattery yields curious results: instead of returning the compliment, Sir Novelty fishes for additional praise. At this moment, the fop finds his narcissistic double, though he, like Narcissa, is too self-involved to notice. Throughout the play, then, the fop’s affectations, pretenses, and acute narcissism match others’ derisive descriptions of him. He is, consequently, marked repeatedly as an object of communal derision, a figure who, in the words of one of his many scorned mistresses, is not “of humankind” but a “monster,” a “wretch,” a “thing,” an “animal” (4.1.160-65).

So, too, in *The Relapse*, a play that builds on the characterizations first realized in *Love’s Last Shift*. When, for example, Lory suggests that he appeal to his older brother for financial assistance, Young Fashion responds, “[H]e’s such a dog, he would not give his powder puff to redeem my soul” (1.2.55-56). Similarly, Lory advises Fashion, “Apply yourself to his favorites: speak to his periwig, his cravat, his feather, his snuff box, and

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106 Here I am citing from Gary A. Richardson edition of the play, in Canfield’s *Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Drama*. 
when you are well with him, desire him to lend you a thousand pounds” (1.2.82-85). Although the fop has not yet made his first entrance in *The Relapse*, spectators familiar with Cibber’s popular play have every reason to find these characterizations credible. Spectators do not wait long to have such speculations validated: the first time he appears, Lord Foppington is in his nightgown in his dressing room as an entourage of fashion—a perriwigmaker, a hosier, a shoemaker, a tailor, and a sempstress—works diligently to “make him a favorite at Court” (1.3.41-42). Predictably, responses to his narcissism resemble those articulated by the dramatis personae of Cibber’s play.107 True, the nature of the play as a satire precludes any character, Amanda included, from being depicted as entirely innocent or virtuous, but it bears notice that Foppington’s allies—his train of attendants and traveling companions—operate primarily as extensions and visual reminders of his preoccupation with self-objectification. Sir John may help clear up the case of mistaken identity involving the fop and his younger brother, but at the play’s close, Lord Foppington stands alone.

Although the proliferation of fops in Restoration drama suggests that such characters were quite popular with the theatergoing public, I would suggest that this popular trend probably had the effect of encouraging spectators to view Lord Foppington as a mere caricature. Susan Staves, for example, has written against the “lugubrious tone” scholars “have often taken . . . toward the fop,” insisting that “[h]owever balefully the

107 A number of derisive comments leads up to the final, exclusionary moment. Fashion dubs him “the prince of coxcombs” (3.1.112-13). Worthy suspects “he’s coxcomb enough to believe anything” (2.1.398, my emphasis). Hoyden concludes that Fashion would “have made a husband worth two of this I have” (5.5.5-6). Her nurse agrees: “[H]e is but a slam” (5.5.11). Indeed, the only character who attempts to flatter Foppington is Sir Tunbelly, and this occurs only after the latter finds out that the former is, as it happens, the titled man intended for his daughter. Before this moment of discovery, he mocks the fop as a “pretty fellow” (4.6.65-66).
moralist may feel compelled to regard the fop, in the Restoration and eighteenth century fops were clearly favorite characters with both audiences and actors” (413, 416). The implication here is that an audience’s enjoyment of the fop would have stemmed largely from this character’s ability to imitate and outdo earlier figurations. Consequently, Lord Foppington’s success on stage would have depended on his ability to reinvent or out-fop his *Love’s Last Shift* predecessor, Sir Novelty Fashion, as well as a slew of other fops who appeared in early modern productions. This is precisely not the case with Coupler, one of few expressly sodomitical characters to have appeared and assumed a pivotal role in a Restoration or eighteenth-century play.\(^{108}\) To stage a sodomite, then, was to bring to life a figure commonly found in nonperformative texts, occupying, more often than not, the position of the unnatural, uncivilized, demonized Other. This effort bespeaks a kind of dissident cultural work. For Vanbrugh appears to have crafted his fop and sodomite, figures generally depicted as similarly valid targets of scorn, in opposition to one another: Lord Foppington as the latest take on the fop *caricature*, Coupler as a tolerated, communally accepted sodomitical subject.

In addition to being a prominent member of the play’s anti-fop community, Coupler assumes the role of father figure/confidant for at least one character in the play, the maltreated youth, Young Fashion. While Fashion refers to the matchmaker in their first scene together as “old Sodom” and “old Satan,” he addresses him far more often as “dear dad” or “old dad.” Coupler responds in kind, referring to Fashion repeatedly as “my

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\(^{108}\) On the popularity and pervasiveness of the fop, see note 102. A number of studies have addressed the sodomite social type in Restoration and eighteenth-century literature, but one will notice the dearth of material on the drama of the period. For an incisive critical analysis of the sodomite in nondramatic literature, see McFarlane’s *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire*. For a broad sampling of primary sources, see Norton’s *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook*. 
boy” (1.3.195, 206, 264)—which, in the context of Young Fashion’s endearing epithets, does not conjure images of man/boy love, as it likely would otherwise. These terms of endearment carry over into later scenes—as, for example, when Coupler reprimands Fashion for his hysterics, and the youth responds, “Dear dad, don’t be angry, for I’m as mad as Tom of Bedlam” (5.1.21). In turn, Coupler acknowledges the gesture, addressing Fashion once again as “my boy” (5.1.86). At worst this rapport represents mutual esteem and social tolerance; at best it presents spectators with a potentially subversive relationship—namely, the sodomite as a father figure to a misguided youth rather than a predatory cruiser looking to ensnare an innocent. Coupler’s “profound statesman[ship]” (5.1.87) and clout among the country estates indicate that, despite (or perhaps because of) his same-sex sexual proclivities, the sodomite serves as a powerful role model. Doubtless Fashion is aware of this: as they prepare to enact their plan, he addresses Coupler as his “protector” (5.3.32). The play’s final act makes clear that without Coupler’s aid and sage advice, Fashion and Hoyden, the “turtle-doves,” have no hope of duping Lord Foppington. Fittingly, Coupler’s final speech takes the form of an avuncular blessing: “[M]y young folks, I wish you joy” (5.5.238).

Vanbrugh’s interest in complicating the sodomite figure and emphasizing the humanness of Coupler might explain why the flirtatiousness that comes to the fore in 1.3 does not appear elsewhere—not in Fashion’s prefatory commentary about the matchmaker’s reputation, not in any scenes that follow 1.3. Foucauldian analysis would account for this ostensible inconsistency by claiming that Coupler’s sodomitical behaviors would have been perceived by most spectators as amounting to nothing more
than a momentary lapse into sin. I have been arguing against this reading of Coupler, but it stands to reason that some moralistic spectators—almost certainly Collier and Dennis—would have construed his actions in precisely this manner. If so, this perception of sodomitical acts might have worked to Vanbrugh’s advantage, as moralists who were horrified at the sight of Coupler’s desires could have viewed Fashion’s rejections of them as adequate anti-sodomitical commentary. A potentially threatening moment is thus sufficiently contained. The uniqueness of this scene in the play might have meant, moreover, that by the fifth act Coupler’s purportedly solitary moment of sin is, by the play’s close, eclipsed by the deeds of a matchmaker resolved to bring about Fashion and Hoyden’s marriage and, in the process, save a young woman from the self-centered, narcissistic fop.

But to claim that in a single scene Coupler’s subjectivity as Old Sodom is both constructed and abandoned is to ignore the broader implications of the humanizing process at work throughout The Relapse. Such a claim assumes, for example, that in order for his same-sex desires to be constitutive of his subjectivity, Coupler must somehow exhibit them throughout the play, from his first entrance to his last exit. And yet, to ask this of heteroerotically inclined characters inhabiting the same play would be ridiculous—a fortiori for Coupler, who has reason to suppress his homoerotic desires, especially when he is not in the company of tolerant or accepting people: he has a reputation to maintain and a profitable business to run. A mature, worldly man such as Coupler would know when he could exhibit sodomitical behaviors and when such behaviors would be dangerous, even life-threatening. That he flirts only with a man he
has known for a substantial period of time is not evidence of subjective ephemerality or inconsistency. It indicates, quite possibly, an awareness of his milieu and his place in it.

Nevertheless, Coupler never finds himself in danger of being prosecuted or imprisoned, primarily because Vanbrugh has a created a community tolerant of the sodomite. So rather than hiding his sodomitical proclivities, Coupler might not indulge them for the simple reason that he does not desire anyone other than Fashion. On this point it helps to remember that Old Sodom feels comfortable molesting Fashion in front of his companion Lory but does not, at any time, flirt with him. He converses with Lory, but this interaction is markedly congenial:

Fashion: What, have you forgot Lory?
Coupler: Who? Trusty Lory, is it thee?
Lory: At your service, sit.
Coupler: Give my thy hand, old boy. Egad, I did not know thee again; but remember thy honesty, though I did not know thy face; I think thou hadst like to have been hanged once or twice for thy master. (1.3.210-16)

Coupler remembers Fashion’s face but not Lory’s. One could attribute this difference to a bad memory (but why can he recall one and not the other? what triggers his memory?) or to erotic interest. Fashion, in Coupler’s own words, is the “handsome young fellow.” One could dismiss this locution as merely an expression of affection, but the fact that Coupler longs for Fashion opens up a revealing subtext in the modifiers “handsome” and “young.” It clear is that Coupler dotes on Fashion, but this doting does not preclude the professional matchmaker from following through with a promise. It may, in fact, function as source of motivation. The point here is that Coupler’s sodomitical subjectivity is not contingent upon the frequency with which he enacts his impulses. Indeed, Vanbrugh’s decision not to have Coupler flirt with or molest numerous male characters suggests that
the playwright means to subvert the broad range of stereotypes and sins bound up in sodomite caricatures. By the close of the play, then, Coupler’s name takes on an additional meaning, as the character embodies the easy coupling of “old Sodom” and “dear dad.”

Because the sodomite of *The Relapse* is humanized, not caricatured, and presented positively, not negatively, it stands to reason that some spectators—especially men who fantasized about, pursued, and/or sustained covert relationships with other men—may have actually recognized themselves in the character of Coupler. That is, in the same way that Coupler identified with Alexander, any number of men in the audience may have looked at Coupler—“Old Sodom” and “Dear Dad”—and thought, *That’s me.* In this respect, performances of *The Relapse* provided spectators with a powerful model for constructing and expressing a sodomitical sense of self. This is not to suggest, as Stephen Orgel does in passing, that Coupler is “the first character . . . who would be recognizable as gay in the modern sense,” nor that the sodomite is a forbear of the modern homosexual (*Impersonations* 61). At the same time, Vanbrugh’s affirmative portrayal of the sodomite would have supported, and might even have encouraged and validated, the formation of a homoerotic subjectivity. Might it also have helped Coupler escape the censures of sodomophobic moralists and theatrical polemicists? The longevity of Coupler’s stage presence serves as compelling evidence: the sodomite remained on stage—unchanged and unchanging—for nearly seventy years.
CONCLUSION

My primary aim in this study has been to trace constructions and expressions of what I have termed “Queer Subjectivities in Early Modern England.” I have employed the concept of *queer* to mean a number of things: 1) same-sex erotics and desires; 2) perceptions of difference or deviance; and 3) notions of identificatory or subjective mutability. Theorizing the various ways these ideas about lived experience may have contributed to one’s sense of self, I have tried to locate, in contemporaneous representations of the soldier, the bedfellow, and the sodomite, several forms of queer selves. Scholars need not seek out these figures in literary or cultural faultlines; they were, as I have shown, paraded on the stage, memorialized in poetry, and debated in tracts and treatises.

While I have engaged queer scholarship most explicitly, I have in fact been responding to two critical impulses that continue to influence early modern studies—one heteronormative, the other homonormative. Heteronormativity, as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner have defined it, comprises “a constellation of practices that everywhere disperses heterosexual privilege as a tacit but central organizing index of social membership” (“Sex in Public” 173).\(^\text{109}\) Heteronormative criticism, then, operates under the assumption that the dominant culture of early modern England, like the dominant cultures

\(^{109}\) I discuss heteronormativity vis-à-vis charges of anachronism in the introduction. See note 5.
of many present-day societies, viewed same-sex relationships as aberrant or deviant rather than as evidence of abundant sexual diversity. This kind of criticism is, I shall demonstrate, alive and well in early modern studies; it is one that scholars must continue to critique. But so too is homonormative criticism, that is, criticism that has tried to uncover \textit{the} dominant or socially acceptable form same-sex desire took in the cultural imaginary of early modern England. In the present, homonormativity tends to register “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, “The New Homonormativity” 179). A good example might be gay marriage, which promises LGBT persons social acceptance on the condition that they conform to the dominant heterosexual paradigm of marriage. In studies of the early modern period, homonormativity reveals itself in the privileged position of the Ganymede icon, which has become the preeminent model for discussing same-sex desire in England. This is the other form of criticism I have sought to critique, though, as I shall show, exposing and resisting homonormativity is as difficult as rejecting the far more pervasive heteronormativity.

The more enduring criticism has been that which has privileged heterosexuality—that which has naturalized it to the point of being understood or implied in the absence of irrefutable evidence to the contrary. Throughout this study, I have been responding to scholars who have maintained that searching for explicit treatments of same-sex erotics and desires in early modern English texts is wrongheaded, driven entirely by a radical and
inherently anachronistic LGBTQ agenda.\textsuperscript{110} The irony here is that such arguments are themselves founded upon an anachronistic premise, i.e., that early modern authors and their texts are by default “straight”—“straight,” that is, until proven “queer.” This heteronormative perspective has not subsided. This is perhaps clearest in a comparison of the work of Eric Partridge and Stanley Wells. More than sixty years ago, in his important book on \textit{Shakespeare’s Bawdy}, Partridge offered an overtly homophobic defense of Shakespeare and his corpus:

Like most other heterosexual persons, I believe the charge against Shakespeare; that he was a homosexual; to be, in the legal sense, ‘trivial’: at worst, ‘the case is not proven’; at best—and in strict accordance with the so-called evidence, as I see it—it is ludicrous. . . . To re-examine the ‘evidence’ adduced by the homosexuals (as pathetically eager to prove that ‘Shakespeare is one of \textit{us}’ as the Germans are to prove that he is German) would be a waste of time. (13-14)

For Partridge, rescuing Shakespeare from “the homosexuals” is an act of utmost importance—equivalent, apparently, to saving him from the Germans in the 1940s. To do so, however, Partridge must dismiss, rather than “re-examine” or take on, evidence of homoeroticism in Shakespeare’s works. The cultural icon can be “bawdy,” but this bawdiness belongs to heterosexuals (“\textit{us}”), not homosexuals (“\textit{them}”).

One is not likely to find such blatant homophobia in much of the scholarship published today, as the debate has shifted from questions about Shakespeare’s sexuality to discussions of homoeroticism in his poems and plays. But the heteronormative

\textsuperscript{110} The exception, perhaps, is Christopher Marlowe’s \textit{Edward the Second} (perf. 1592; pub. 1594), which has become, in the words of Martin Wiggins and Robert Lindsey, “a gay classic” (xvii). In their introduction to \textit{Edward the Second}, Wiggins and Lindsey discuss the play’s controversial reputation (xvii-xxiv). Although Stanley Wells cautions scholars against reading homosexual desire into early modern plays, especially those of Shakespeare, he admits, “[I]t is perfectly clear in Marlowe’s play \textit{Edward II} that Edward and Gaveston are lovers” (68).
assumptions upon which Partridge based his claims continue to inform studies of sexuality in the early modern world. In 2004, Wells produced a book on *Looking for Sex in Shakespeare* in an attempt to save Shakespeare from so-called “lewd interpreters,” a locution borrowed from *The Merchant of Venice* (3.4.80). As it turns out, two-thirds of the book deals with the dirty minds of homosexuals—or, more generally, scholars who read homosexuality into Shakespeare’s works. In a chapter on Shakespeare’s sonnets, Wells “distinguish[es] between explicit and implicit meanings—those that are clear from the text, such as the fact that the poet had sexual relations with the woman, and those that have to be extrapolated from the text, such as whether he had sexual relations with the (or a) ‘sweet boy’” (66). To put it another way, textual evidence can prove that Shakespeare had sex with women, but it cannot—in fact, could never—show definitively that he had similar experiences with boys. These are markedly different evidentiary standards, neither of which seems particularly judicious.

In a separate chapter, Wells turns to homoerotic readings of Shakespeare’s plays: citing Partridge, who handled “the topic . . . in a pioneering fashion,” Wells argues, “[I]t is not easy in Shakespeare’s plays to point to the portrayal of any same-sex relationships that are of a sexual nature, or to identify more than a very few indubitable references to homosexual behaviour or relationships” (68). Like the sonnets, the plays are incontrovertibly heterosexual, making Shakespeare “the greatest celebrant of heterosexual love” (68). The implication here is that arguing for the presence of homoerotic imagery and same-sex relationships in Shakespeare’s poems and plays requires an abundance of evidence that quite simply does not exist. Proving heterosexuality, on other hand, requires
very little evidence, as it is the norm. In fact, the very absence of homoerotic images in a
given text is enough to convince scholars such as Partridge and Wells that it is, by default,
straight.

As I have demonstrated, however, representations of same-sex relationships
pervade the literature of the period, providing salient models for fashioning a queer sense
of self. The prominence of the soldier, the bedfellow, and the sodomite in such a broad
range of texts (more than I have been able to cover in this study) indicates, moreover, that
the dominant culture acknowledged not a single paradigm of homoerotic expression, as
various literary critics and art historians have argued about the Ganymede icon, but a
variety of queer subjectivities. These other subjectivities were no less popular than
Ganymede and the man/boy love he came to represent, and they too elicited diverse
responses. The soldier was both a model of masculinity and a source of profound anxiety.
The bedfellow was both a socially sanctioned identity and one that fostered dissident
relationships such as queer marriage. And the sodomite was both a reviled Other and, in
the case of Coupler, accepted as part of the dominant culture. What these figures
demonstrate, then, is that ideas about queer selves were not buried in or hidden by the
cultural imaginary of early modern England. Rather, the cultural imaginary allowed for a
“public”—and thus potentially dialogic—figuring of same-sex relationships and desires.

Although I have endeavored to dislodge Ganymede from his privileged place in
early modern studies, in some respects I have simply replaced one form of
homonormativity with another. That is, by singling out and focusing on the soldier, the
bedfellow, and the sodomite as prominent examples of “Queer Subjectivities in Early
Modern England,” I have ignored and marginalized countless others that were circulating contemporaneously. A decision of this kind is inescapably homonormative, as it requires one to determine which forms of sexuality were more popular or more visible during the period. It requires one to formulate taxonomies and recover evidence that reifies them. A more comprehensive study, one that would begin to capture the (homo)sexual multiplicity of the period, would need to include, among other figures, sapphists, tribades, amazons, mollies, hic muliers and haec virs, virgins, papists so on. But even a project as far reaching as that would be homonormative insofar as it would fail to register the myriad experiences and relationships that did not find expression in well known early modern models.

It is imperative, however, that scholars continue to search for and recover early modern expressions of same-sex love and lust, even though such projects will inevitably produce inadequate and incomplete pictures of the state of sexual experience in the period.

111 Although many of these figures have received sustained attention in book-length studies, they have yet to be brought together in a single project focused on sexual plurality. In my introduction, I provide a list of important work that has been done on sapphists, tribades, amazons, and virgins. See note 12. On the molly subculture, see Alan Bray’s Homosexuality in Renaissance England (81-114); George Haggerty’s Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century (54-59); Thomas A. King’s The Gendering of Men, 1600-1750, Vol. 1: The English Phallus (111-119) Rictor Norton’s Mother Clap’s Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England 1700 – 1830; Randolph Trumbach’s “Sodomy Transformed: Aristocratic Libertinage, Public Reputation and the Gender Revolution of the Eighteenth Century”; and his “Sodomitical Assaults, Gender Role, and Sexual Development in Eighteenth-Century London.” My inclusion of hic muliers and haec virs is a gesture toward the early modern period’s querelle des femmes. On this controversy, see Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus’s Half Humankind: Contexts & Texts of the Controversy about Women in England 1540-1640 and Susan Gushee O’Malley’s “Custome Is an Idiot”: Jacobean Pamphlet Literature on Women. Associating Catholics with sodomy in particular and sexual deviance in general was a common practice in early modern England. As Mario DiGangi points out, “Sodomy was created as a legal category to serve as a weapon against Catholic priests, who had traditionally been associated with homosexual practices” (The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama 19). See also Alastair Bellany’s The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England (257-61); Bray’s Homosexuality in Renaissance England (27, 71); and Bruce Smith’s Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics (43-47).
These efforts may not suppress homonormative criticism, nor are they likely to eradicate heteronormative scholarship, but they will help us gain a better sense of the abundant diversity of sexual experience in the early modern world. Such efforts will make visible articulations of desire that for now remain occluded by normative readings of canonized texts and scholarly dismissals of obscure texts. And this is to say nothing of the vast array of documents that remain buried in the archives and the countless letters and records that were, unfortunately, expurgated or burned a long time ago. So while I have tried to theorize “Queer Subjectivities in Early Modern England,” I recognize that the present study offers a starting point for the recovery of a vast array of queer subjectivities. My hope is that scholars will take issue with and add to the paradigms I have sketched here in an effort to retrieve the vibrant sexual cultures that populated early modern England.
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