

Gendering the Late Medieval and Early Modern World

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Gendered Temporalities in the Early Modern World

Edited by Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks

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3 Time, gender, and nonhuman worlds

Emily Kuffner, Elizabeth Crachiolo, and Dyani Johns Taff

Abstract

Early modern constructions of gender reach beyond the human in ways that complicate the male/female binary and efface the border between beings and environment. This essay examines three categories of gendered temporality in representations of nonhuman realms, revealing botanical, nautical, and disease-based perspectives on time that disrupt hierarchies of gender and redefine ontological boundaries. Drawing on a wide range of texts from early modern Spain and England, including works of natural history, poetry, and drama, we analyze manifestations of gendered temporality that frequently disrupt the authors’ attempts to stabilize binary constructs, thus revealing the interdependence between human and nonhuman worlds.

Keywords: nonhuman; temporality; ocean; plant; ecocriticism; new materialism

Some historians have located a shift in perceptions of chronology around the fourteenth century, when Europeans moved from a circular model of time that emphasized repetition and return toward a modern and more linear conception in which time moves from past to future, marked from the death of Christ.¹ While the depiction of this shift may be useful in general, early modern temporality often defies attempts to conceive of time within a single framework. Instead, definitions of time overlap and compete, particularly when one looks outside the human world, as early moderns themselves did often. Recent work in animal studies, for instance, has moved beyond definitions of temporality that separate historical, or human, time from ahistorical, or natural, temporality, addressing, as Erica

¹ Ruggiero, *Renaissance in Italy*, pp. 7–8.

Fudge advocates, 'the absence of the nonhuman from history'.² Fudge's work foregrounds 'significant shifts in human thinking and thus human history' brought about by nonhuman agents.³ Likewise, the emerging field of critical plant studies has extended the definition of nonhuman actor to the plant world.⁴ Several scholars within plant studies have posited a phenomenological account of plant existence, including with regard to time.⁵ Michael Marder, in particular, proposes a vegetable temporality that involves 'hetero-temporality',⁶ a plant time that is dependent on outside factors like sunlight and mechanical interventions by humans; 'the infinite temporality of growth', that nevertheless includes interruptions in that growth; and 'the cyclical temporality of iteration, repetition, and reproduction'.⁷ Further, Randy Laist asserts that 'plants seem to inhabit a time-sense, a life cycle, a desire-structure, and a morphology that is so utterly alien [to humans] that it is easy and even tempting to deny their status as animate organisms'.⁸ Despite humans' familiarity with plants and animals, they are animate and agential in a way that seems 'alien' to and therefore confounds human understanding. This tension between familiarity and alienation also characterizes representations of the environment. For example, Steven Mentz argues that in early modern mercantile, colonial, and religious discussions of the ocean, 'the sea's mysteries became urgent; the ocean needed to be understood even as it frustrated understanding'.⁹ According to Mentz, these oceanic mysteries interrupt human timelines, sometimes suspending human lives between life and death: in *Navigatio Spirituualiz'd* (1698), John Flavell asserts that mariners should be seen as neither alive nor dead, but rather 'as it were, [as] a Third sort of Persons [...] their Lives hanging continually in suspense before them'.¹⁰ For some early moderns, those who ventured out to sea could be deemed neither alive nor dead and as such, existed outside normative conceptions of time. The oceanic environment thwarts human efforts at mastery and understanding even as

2 Fudge, 'History of Animals', n. pag.

3 *Ibid.*

4 See, for instance, Kohn, *How Forests Think*; Laist, 'Introduction'; Ryan, *Posthuman Plants*; Gagliano, 'Seeing Green'; Pollan, *Botany of Desire*; and Vieira *et al.*, eds., *Green Thread*.

5 See Houle, 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral', and Myers, 'Conversations on Plant-Sensing'.

6 Not to be confused with the heterotemporality that has become contentious in literary criticism and queer theory.

7 Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, p. 95. See pp. 93–117 for a full account.

8 Laist, 'Introduction', p. 12.

9 Mentz, *At the Bottom*, p. 4.

10 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 52.

humans deploy new scientific or philosophical theories and new navigational instruments designed to enhance that mastery and understanding.

Just as the nonhuman could suspend normative conceptions of time, it could disrupt early modern constructions of gender.¹¹ The texts we examine here often subscribe to a gendered view of time in which the masculine is more durable while the feminine quickly expires. They participate in a larger cultural narrative about the 'ages of man' and 'ages of woman', which takes the early modern subject through a series of linear stages, separated by gender, from birth to old age. Such a notion of time underpins Jaques's famous speech in *As You Like It*, which, despite its opening reference to 'all the men and women' who are 'merely players' on the world stage, makes the 'seven ages' descriptive exclusively of male life.¹² Women appear merely as nurses and mistresses, and even then are signified only by representative body parts: the nurse's arms, the mistress's scornful eyebrow.¹³ Here and elsewhere, writers often present men as active members of social and political life who are therefore esteemed through their old age, whereas women's valued social time is limited to their youth and fertility, as for example when poets exhort young women to 'gather ye rosebuds while ye may'.¹⁴ In what follows, however, we argue that nonhuman agents disallow rhetorical efforts to establish a fixed, gendered notion of time.

We investigate three manifestations of temporality that appropriate imagery from the nonhuman realm, focusing on disease-based, botanical, and nautical perspectives on time, each of which disrupt gendered hierarchies and redefine ontological boundaries. First, we discuss representations of the plant guaiac, used to combat the spread of the so-called 'French disease' through Europe, that expose temporally contingent definitions of masculinity. Next, we turn to texts that portray human characters with plant-like characteristics. Such portrayals display alternative, often gendered, notions of botanical time that contravene human chronologies. Finally, we analyze maritime metaphors in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* that disrupt human attempts to describe masculine erotic desire as everlasting and

11 Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, and Sandilands, 'Eco Homo', demonstrate that cultural constructions of gender are central to understanding the relationship between bodies and the environment. Paster, *Body Embarrassed*, Laroche and Munroe, *Ecofeminist Approaches*, and Estok, *Ecofeminism and Shakespeare* make related claims in their work on interrelations between sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conceptions of gender, bodies, and the nonhuman world. See also George, *Botany, Sexuality and Women's Writing*, and Miller, *Vegetative Soul*.

12 Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2.7.139–43.

13 *Ibid.*, 2.7.143 and 2.7.148.

14 Herrick, l. 1.

female erotic desire as having an expiration date. Our investigations reveal that nonhuman realms and agents unsettle early modern writers' attempts to establish essentialized constructs of gender and time.

Time, gender, and disease

The outbreak of the 'French pox', or syphilis, in 1494 constitutes one instance in which the nonhuman disrupted fixed chronologies; the sudden emergence of a terrifying new illness contravened the dictum of humoral medicine's founding fathers that ailments existed immutably since the world's formation.¹⁵ Shortly thereafter, the Spanish encountered the medicinal plant guaiac in the Indies; this plant enjoyed a brief vogue as a miracle cure, but initial optimism faded rapidly as it became clear that those purportedly cured often relapsed.¹⁶ In this section, we examine the gendered language surrounding disease, plant, and medical care in guaiac narratives, drawn from fiction, natural history, and medicine. These texts, authored by and for an educated male elite, assume the patient to be male, thereby eliding female experience—which figures as a diseased and corrosive, yet simultaneously passive, absence—effectively defining human time as masculine.¹⁷ Earlier accounts regard the disease as epidemic and curable, relying on a linear construct of time, while later ones resign themselves to disease as an endemic and incurable social ill governed by a circular model of temporality.

Sixteenth-century medical epistemology, shaped by humoral theory, ascribes a cold and wet disposition to the female body in contrast with the hotter and drier male.¹⁸ Treatises on the pox concur that it stems from an excess of cold qualities, ascribing a similar nature to pox as to the female body.¹⁹ As Kevin Sienna and others have shown, women in medical accounts of pox operate as vectors that spread disease, often without exterior sign of illness; yet, paradoxically, they are less affected by it even as they are more

15 Foa, 'Old and the New', pp. 27–28.

16 Quézel, *History of Syphilis*, p. 30. Syphilis does not appear as a diagnostic term until the eighteenth century, and the early modern equivalent incorporated other illnesses like gonorrhea that would be separated in modern diagnostic practices. Early modern authors employed a variety of terms for the disease; we use the English equivalent, pox.

17 Berco, *From Body to Community*, p. 81.

18 See Paster, 'Unbearable Coldness', who argues that while Laqueur's 'one-sex model' adequately describes early modern anatomical knowledge, early modern gender construction is grounded as much (if not more) on a humoral understanding of the body as on body parts.

19 Arias de Benavide, *Secretos*, fol. 10v; Lobera, *Libro*, fol. xxiii; Sienna, 'Pollution, Promiscuity and the Pox', p. 557.

susceptible to it, due to their innately cold nature.²⁰ Many texts explicitly blame women, particularly the native women of the Indies, for the existence of pox.²¹ Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Historia natural y general* (1535), for example, states that Christians contracted disease through 'carnal knowledge of native women', adding that 'they are the ones who bear the burden of spreading and communicating this pain and disease'. He thus ascribes sole responsibility for spreading the disease to women.²² As these examples attest, pox narratives disavow female suffering; yet the disease itself is marked as feminine in that it is spread by women and endemic to the female body, particularly the doubly disenfranchised native woman.

The illness—cold in nature, and accompanied by a loss of heat through humoral depletion during intercourse, has a cooling and thereby emasculating effect that threatens the humoral definition of maleness, leaving the patient 'full of cold humors'.²³ As a consequence, patient responses are marked by an attempt to define and defend the boundaries of the male body while disease and plant become metaphors for gendered identity. While the disease is similar in humoral character to the female body, guaiac shares and restores the quality of vital heat that defines the male by purging the corrupted humors from the body and restoring balance.²⁴ In earlier accounts, patients regain masculinity through struggle with disease, resulting in victory over it, while later accounts define masculinity through forbearance and imperviousness to pain.

Nicolás Monardes, an early and ardent Spanish proponent of guaiac, employs combat metaphors to figure the plant as an implicitly male warrior who enters the body and does battle with disease. In his medical history, the personified plant enters the human body and eradicates pox even as it reduces the disease to a plant-like state.²⁵ Guaiac, he asserts, 'roots out

20 Sienna, 'Pollution, Promiscuity and the Pox', p. 557; Quézel, *History of Syphilis*, p. 28.

21 Sources on guaiac tend to rely on an American origin for pox, contending that a merciful God placed the remedy for disease in its place of origin; however, this was but one of several origin theories (albeit the most popular). Other competing narratives placed the origins of pox in Naples or occasionally France. These narratives likewise placed the blame on women, specifically prostitutes, for the spread of disease (Quézel, *History of Syphilis*, pp. 66–67; Arrizabalaga et al., *Great Pox*, p. 36). The etiology of syphilis has not yet been fully resolved.

22 'participación carnal con las mugeres naturales [...] ellas son las que tienen cargo de reparar é comunicar este dolor y enfermedad', Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia general*, p. 365. Similar language is found in other sources, such as Delicado, *El modo de usar*, p. 79. All translations are by E.K., unless otherwise noted.

23 'Llenos de humores fríos', Mosquera de Figueroa, 'Paradoxa', p. 216.

24 The guaiac cure involved drinking 'agua de palo' or decoction of guaiac accompanied by disciplined fasting and extreme sweating.

25 Medical authorities occasionally take recourse in the language of plants to describe disease. Monardes, for example, refers to pox as a 'bad seed' ('mala simiente') (p. 13), foreshadowing

disease and uproots it completely, so that it may never return'.²⁶ The use of two synonyms for the act of uprooting the disease from the blood of the infected—the more metaphorical *extirpar* paired with a more literal yanking out of *desarraigar*—insists upon a botanical construction of disease. By reducing the disease to a vegetative state, the plant becomes a warrior within the human body, entering it and rooting out the scourge of illness. Monardes confidently assures the reader that patients will 'be perfectly cured, without falling ill again'.²⁷

The idea of pox as an invasive force that overpowers its male victim appears in Fracastoro's epic poem *Syphilis sive morbus gallicus* (1530) as well, wherein he states that 'this raging disease is one of the most tenacious there is [...] it cannot be easily and lightly vanquished or tamed and in its harshness it disdains to be conquered'.²⁸ Fracastoro describes the disease as predatory and attributes human emotion—to contempt—to it. Similarly, Pietro Matthiolo's *I discorsi* (1573), presents a personified view of the plant, whose branches are 'children of the trunk, and therefore like little animals', that enter the human body and 'valiantly [...] liquefies and purifies the infected humors [...] in its fury opposing the contagion and putrefaction that reigns in the French Disease'.²⁹ Matthiolo ascribes agency and human emotion to the plant, and in all three of these accounts the plant works actively within the human body to restore the patient's imbalanced masculinity by vanquishing disease. The construction of plant as a defender of the body reveals optimism regarding guaiacum's potential healing power coupled with fear of the corrosive effects of the female.

As initial confidence that the pox could be cured faded, accounts of the disease came to rely on a more cyclical temporality of endemic disease, giving way to satirical accounts that portray the plant in a more passive role as a mediator who intercedes with the allegorized disease on behalf of the hapless patient. Following the initial 1494 outbreak in Naples, pox spread rapidly across Europe until around 1530 when infections leveled off

Girolamo Fracastoro's later configuration of the seeds of disease in *On Contagion* (Fracastoro, *De contagione et contagiosis morbis*, 1546).

²⁶ 'lo extrupa y desarraiga del todo, sin que mas buelva', Monardes, p. 15.

²⁷ 'sanar perfectissimamente, sin tornar a recaer', *ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁸ 'quippe effera labes, / inter prima tenax et multo fomite vivax, / nedum se haud vinci placidis et mitibus, at nec / tractari simit et mansuescere dura repugnat', Fracastoro (Gardner trans.), *'Syphilis'*, pp. 20–21.

²⁹ 'figliuoli del tronco: & imperò simili à piccoli animali [...] valentemente [...] liquificare & mondificare i già infetati humori [...] con la raggia, que possesse, opporsi alla contagion & puriffatione, che regnano nel nel man Fracese', Matthiolo, *I discorsi*, pp. 154–55.

and the illness became accepted as part of the status quo.³⁰ Even during guaiac's initial vogue, detractors such as the doctors Alfonso Chirino and Ruy Díaz de Isla continued to regard mercury as a more effective remedy, and in 1529 Paracelsus pronounced it useless. These authors felt that any results from the guaiac cure were due to the severe fasting and sweating that accompanied it rather than the effects of the plant. Later proponents of guaiac no longer believed that it alone could cure pox, a decline in expectations that mirrors societal attitudes towards pox more broadly as the initial terror that accompanied its epidemic spread gave way to acceptance; later authors recommended guaiac's use either at regular intervals to contain the disease or in combination with other treatments.

As the epidemic phase of disease faded, pox increasingly became an object of satirical portrayals designed to ease suffering through humor. Several poems in Sebastián de Horozco's *Cancionero*, for example, laud the use of guaiac as an ameliorative, yet demonstrate no confidence in a lasting cure. In the opening poem, the 'Cofradía del Santo Grillimón' ('The confraternity of Saint Pox), Horozco personifies the disease as a burlesque saint whose sufferers parody a religious brotherhood.³¹ In his account, the disease and its victims are gendered male; though he states that the brotherhood of sufferers is inclusive, all the professions and statuses he names (young men, friars, married men, kings, lords, and prelates) are masculine, thus negating female experience of disease.³² He states that 'Saint Pox does not concede absolution unless it is to relapse. But if anyone wishes to be relieved a little, they should endeavor to engage the virtue of the holy wood as mediator'.³³ He asserts that pox is incurable, yet the plant functions as a mediator with the anthropomorphized disease to grant temporary relief. Moreover, the masculine *santo* is juxtaposed with the feminine variant of intercessor, *medianera*, applied to the plant, thus gendering it female. Horozco draws on the legacy of female intercessors, particularly the Virgin Mary, as healing agents in Spanish literature, dating back to Gonzalo de Berceo's thirteenth-century *Los milagros de nuestra señora*.³⁴ The use of this

³⁰ Quétel, *History of Syphilis*, p. 51.

³¹ *Grillimón* or *greñimón* are among the many names that the disease went by in Spanish. Francisco Delicado explains that this name arose from the groaning (*grañir*) sound that sufferers emitted at night due to the persistent pain in their joints (Delicado, p. 262).

³² Horozco, *Cancionero*, p. 1.

³³ 'el santo Grillimon / no concede absolucion / si no fuere á reñcendencia / Mas si quisiere qualquiera / ser relevado algun tanto, / procure tener manera / de poner por medianera / la virtud del palo santo', Horozco, *Cancionero*, p. 3.

³⁴ See Dangler, *Mediating Fictions*, p. 6; pp. 19–21.

trope suggests that pox treatment has moved out of the perceived purview of human doctors and into the realm of the miraculous.

In another poem from Horozco's *Cancionero*, the poetic voice laments a long history of suffering from the pox, which he compares to gout, alluding to the disease's later reputation as a courtly affliction. Having tried many painful purges and remedies, he turns at last to guaiacum for relief. After using the decoction and fasting for 30 days, the poetic voice states that 'for now the disease has left me, and been thoroughly purged, unless it returns'.³⁵ This poem, like the 'Cofradía del Santo Grillimón', insists on the cyclical nature of recurrent disease, wherein any relief is temporary. Accounts of disease that emphasize relapse and regard it as incurable rely on a circular model of temporality in which the disease can be alleviated yet never escaped; this is reinforced by the turn from an active and implicitly male plant described through war metaphors in the earlier accounts towards the female plant who intercedes with disease yet cannot eliminate it. The turn from the linear chronology that traces human life from birth to death towards a circular narrative of repetition and therefore infinite time suggests that optimism has been replaced by resigned acceptance of disease.

Cristóbal Mosquera de Figueroa's satiric essay *Paradoxa en loor de las bubas* (1569) adopts a similar perspective by treating the disease as mundane.³⁶ In his ironic eulogy, pox becomes a marker of aristocratic identity and an 'entertainment for courtiers'.³⁷ Using phrasing similar to Monardes and Fracastoro, he declares that the disease 'seizes control of the humors of men'.³⁸ However, the invasion of the body is no longer as insidious as that in earlier accounts. Instead, the ailment becomes a long-term companion that 'grows along with the body', whose pains are merely 'feelings given to man so that he may know he is alive and feeling'.³⁹ Although Mosquera de Figueroa, unlike the other authors mentioned, includes women and children among the afflicted, they serve as a foil to the imperviousness to disease that becomes a marker of masculine virtue; he enjoins his reader that 'those

35 'por agora la dolencia ha días que me ha dexado, / y quedó muy bien purgado / si no vuelve a restidencia', Horozco, *Cancionero*, p. 83.

36 'The paradox, inherited from the classical tradition, was a satirical eulogy to a commonplace subject (Núñez Rivera, ed., *Paradojas*, p. 123).

37 'entretenimiento de cortesanos', Mosquera de Figueroa, 'Paradoxa', p. 215. As the disease became endemic, criticism of courtiers for sexual licentiousness frequently attributed the spread of pox to the poor morals of the nobility. It should be noted that Mosquera de Figueroa was himself a member of the minor nobility.

38 'señoreando en los humores de los hombres', *ibid.*, p. 205.

39 'criándose a la par con los cuerpos [...] sentimientos para dar a entender al hombre que está vivo y que siente', *ibid.*

who are men should not dwell on such trivialities as the pains suffered by children'.⁴⁰ The dismissal of pox as a minor ailment when suffered by the non-elite is common in pox treatises that belittle the suffering of women and natives. The hotter climate of the Indies supposedly lessened pox's severity whereas the colder air of Europe produced a more deadly variant.⁴¹ Mosquera de Figueroa, for example, asserts that pox is known as the 'Indian measles', Oviedo compares it to scabies, and Monardes states that its symptoms are as common in the Indies 'as to us the smallpox, and almost all the Indians have it without paying it much heed'.⁴² Mosquera's paradox draws on the idea that women's colder and wetter disposition meant that they suffered less from the effects of a cold disease. While women and children succumb to pox, men rise above it by dismissing the pain. Consequently, the male patient overcomes the effeminizing effects of disease by using it as a site to exert masculine self-control and autonomy. He advocates the plant's effectiveness against disease, yet in his and similar accounts, the cure administrated does not eradicate disease entirely from the body, but rather needs to be repeated periodically to expel the buildup of corrupted humors. Thus, in later accounts of the disease and the plant, as disease-time shifts from an epidemic trajectory to an endemic cycle, the gendered language used to construct the disease and the plant shifts, though the underlying ideology does not. Early accounts define masculinity through battle with disease and victory over it, while later accounts define masculinity through forbearance and suffering. In both these models, female experience is elided, privileging male subjectivity. In guaiac narratives, when disease pushes back against human definitions of time, as patient relapses belie attempts to vanquish the illness, humans simply change their definitions of illness, disease, and masculinity, rather than adjusting the underlying ideology of diseased femininity.

Flower-time and gender in English texts

Like Spanish accounts of guaiac, which gender the plant either masculine or feminine in different situations, English texts ascribe gender to plants, often assigning different genders not only to whole plants but also to various

40 'los que fueron hombres no paren en cosas tan livianas como son los dolores que sufren los niños', *ibid.*

41 Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia general*, p. 365.

42 Mosquera de Figueroa, 'Paradoxa', p. 209; Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia general*, p. 364; 'como a nosotras las viruelas, y casi los mas de los Indios y Indias las uene[n] sin q[ue] dello haga[n] mucho escrupulo' (Monardes, *Primera y segunda*, p. 13).

parts of plants. We can see this in John Parkinson's *Theatricum Botanicum* (1640), which the author describes as 'this Manlike Worke of Herbes and Plants', and his earlier work as 'a Feminine of Flowers'.⁴³ In Parkinson's conception, the more robust parts of plants—those used for medicinal or culinary purposes, like leaves and roots, as well as ferns, grasses, and trees—are evidently masculine, whereas the flower, particularly the garden flower, which his earlier work catalogues, is feminine.⁴⁴ His divisions also contain an implicit gendering of temporality, as the 'feminine' is composed of the shortest-lived parts—flowers—and the masculine of the hardier, longer-lasting parts—'herbes and plants'. Parkinson's distinctions are typical of a body of English texts that we examine in this section, which gender plants with respect not only to their material parts, but also to their perceived temporality.

Scholars commonly acknowledge a figurative association between young women in their reproductive prime and blooming flowers.⁴⁵ One prominent example is Sonnet 64 from Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595). In it, the love interest is compared to various flowers: lips that smell like gillyflowers, cheeks like roses, neck like columbines. In fact, the woman's parts out-flower the flowers: although 'Such fragrant flowres doe give most odorous smell; the speaker finds the woman's own 'sweet odour' to 'excell' those of the flowers.⁴⁶ It is notable (and predictable, given how common these tropes are) that the lover compares the woman's body parts to blooms only in their early stages or their prime: 'budded Bellamoures', 'Pincks but newly spread', 'lillyes, ere they leaves be shed', 'yong blossomid Jessemynes'.⁴⁷ The overall impression when the parts are combined is that of the woman as a garden, one with nothing rotting or wilted or desiccated, that smells good and contains only flowers that are budded or in bloom. We might think here of any number of other typical examples, such as Milton's Eve, similarly compared to her lush garden, which is brimming with flowers and fruit that can barely be contained. Eve,

43 'To the King's Most Excellent Majestie', n. pag. For the context of female practitioners of medicine in relation to this quote, see Laroche, *Medical Authority*, p. 28.

44 His classification breaks down somewhat when we consider that flowering plants are included in *Theatricum Botanicum*, and the plants of a kitchen garden—herbs and vegetables—are included in his previous work, *Paradisi in sole Paradisus Terrestris* (1629), but that he sees plant characteristics in terms of masculine and feminine is telling.

45 Levin, 'Flower Maidens', p. 96, touches on the 'connection of young women and flowers', specifically in early modern English literature, but the connection is by no means limited to early modern England. For other contexts, see McCracken, 'Floral and the Human', and King, *Bloom*.

46 Spenser, *Amoretti* 64, ll. 13–14.

47 *Ibid.*, ll. 7–12.

first seen by Satan clouded in fragrance from the flowers and half-visible through the opulent roses, seems to merge with them and is then thought by Satan to embody a blooming, 'fairest unsupported flow'r' herself.⁴⁸

The element of passing time is implicit in the above poems' measures of beauty and freshness—though in Milton's utopian prelapsarian vision of Eve, she is seen as everlastingly in her prime, which is contrary to, for example, *carpe diem* poems that threaten a virginal or reluctant mistress with the prospect of future fading beauty and bodily rot. Although older women are rarely identified with flowers,⁴⁹ looking at such atypical examples can provide a more complicated view of how time and gender relate. Thomas Fuller's work *Antheologia: or the Speech of Flowers* (1655), for instance, contains an inset story that functions like a *carpe diem* poem, but which is spoken by an old, wilting rose 'pale and wan with age' to a younger budding one.⁵⁰ The elder explains that she used to be coy and virginal and reluctant to be plucked by ladies. Eventually, the sun faded her color, 'so that the Green or white sicknesse rather, the common penance for over-kept virginity, began to infect me'.⁵¹ She then tried to 'prank' herself up and attempted to offer herself to any passerby,⁵² which entails

rape to a Maiden modesty, if forgetting their sex, they that should be all Ears, turn mouthes, they that should expect, offer; when we women, who only should be the passive Counterparts of Love, and receive impression from others, boldly presume to stamp them on others, and by an inverted method of nature, turn pleaders unto men, and wooe them for their affections. For all this there is but one excuse, and that is absolute necessity, which as it breaks through stonewalls, so *no wonder if in this case it alters and transposes the Sexes, making women to man if in case of extremity*, when men are wanting to tender their affections unto them.⁵³

The lesson to the younger bud is to lose her 'virginity in a good hand', rather than risk acquiring the 'Green or white sicknesse', which is likened to a kind of overflow or inordinate lengthiness of modesty and virginity, qualities that are desirable only within a short window of time. The older, faded rose emphasizes that her 'over-kept virginity' has masculinized her 'by an inverted method

48 Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1674), 9.432.

49 Levin, 'Flower Maidens', pp. 96–97.

50 Fuller, *Antheologia*, p. 25.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

53 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30, italics ours.

of nature', coincident with her faded, wilted appearance. Nature 'alters and transposes the Sexes' so that the fading rose must 'man it' out of necessity. In this conception of temporality, women's desirability, and even femininity, is a temporary state that can be altered by time, eventually morphing into masculinity. Masculine time, we can infer, is much more durable than feminine. This suggests a sense of gender unmoored from human physicality, disrupted by and mingled with the alternate timescales offered by plant ontology.

If masculine time is longer lasting than feminine, the application of the feminized trope of the flower to a male character, as might be expected, often signals the character's effeminate fragility, much as Fuller's elderly rose is masculinized by her inability to embody a fresh bloom. The femininity implicit in the comparison to a blossoming flower is, in fact, leveled not only at female characters, but also male. Flower imagery conjoined with masculinity is not a connection critics commonly discuss, but it appears regularly in literary texts and allows us to complicate our picture of early modern botanical temporality and to see gender as detached from human bodies. For instance, in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (published 1592), Hieronimo mourns his son Horatio's death by lamenting, 'Sweet lovely rose, ill-plucked before thy time.'⁵⁴ 'Sweet' and 'lovely' are not specifically feminine characteristics, though they may seem so from a modern point of view. The femininity of the image comes rather from the commonplace notion of the fragile and transitory blossom, applied to Horatio posthumously, after he has proven to be 'plucked' earlier than expected. Elsewhere in the same play, Belimperia similarly mourns her dead lover, 'Who, living, was my garland's sweetest flower',⁵⁵ noting his fragility only after his death. Shakespeare's *Richard II* (eponymous play published 1597) is described in a similar way by his queen once he's dethroned. She catches sight of him being paraded past to the Tower of London and exclaims, 'But soft, but see—or rather do not see—/ My fair rose wither'.⁵⁶ The emasculation inherent in this image becomes clear when she rebukes him for not fighting back, asking, 'What, is my Richard both in shape and mind/ Transformed and weakened?'⁵⁷ In these instances, the frailty and short lifespan of blooming flowers signifies the characters' feminine weakness. Gender here is less a trait of the characters' physiology than an attribute projected onto an understanding of plant time and overlaid onto characters through the work of metaphor.

54 Kyd, *Spanish Tragedy*, 2.5.46.

55 *Ibid.*, 1.4.4.

56 Shakespeare, *Richard II*, 5.1.7–8.

57 *Ibid.*, 5.1.26–27.

Spenser offers a familiar use of flower imagery in his pastoral elegy for Sir Philip Sidney, *The Doleful Lay of Clorinda* (1595), but then manipulates it, controlling the impression of Sidney's gender and preserving Sidney's masculine image, which comes not from a specific characterization of him but from his association with the flowers described in the poem.⁵⁸ Sidney is figured as an unspecified and generic flower in various ways. One description follows conventional examples in mourning his early death:

What cruell hand of cursed foe unknowne,
Hath cropt the stalke which bore so faire a flowre?
Untimely cropt, before it well were growne,
And cleane defaced in untimely howre.⁵⁹

Here, as in the *Antheologia*, there is a sense of the bloom being subject to improper handling. In the former, the elderly rose stayed too long on her stalk. In this passage, Sidney is unjustly and 'untimely cropt', which confers on him the fragility of the flower, like the 'ill-plucked' Horatio. Yet other figurations of Sidney complicate this image. He is the 'fairest flowre in field that ever grew',⁶⁰ but an elaboration of this metaphor turns him into multiple flowers, apparently all of the same species, that had previously adorned 'woods, hills and rivers'.⁶¹ Sidney's death has left the land denuded and bewailing its 'widow state'.⁶² In this figuration, Sidney as a conglomeration of wild flowers is husband to the feminized land, despite the language—'fairest flowre'—conventionally reserved for depictions of women and femininity. This depiction allows Sidney to retain his masculinity as a husband, and to combat the impression of fragility by the vast coverage he once achieved in various locales: as flower, he has managed to occupy not only fields, but woods, hills, and even rivers. He has been omnipresent. Moreover, he has left behind a 'flowre' which 'Is but the shadow of his likenesse gone'.⁶³ This flower is apparently his poetry—a connection strengthened by the final lines comparing the 'dolefull layes' written for Sidney to flowers decorating

58 There is some dispute about the authorship of this poem, with Mary Sidney sometimes thought to be either the author or collaborator. The Yale Edition, which I reference here, attributes the poem to Spenser. See Coren, 'Edmund Spenser, Mary Sidney, and the "Doleful Lay"', for a helpful overview of critical debates about the poem's authorship.

59 Spenser, *Doleful Lay*, ll. 31–34.

60 *Ibid.*, l. 29.

61 *Ibid.*, l. 25.

62 *Ibid.*, l. 27.

63 *Ibid.*, ll. 57–58.

age or time. But women, Orsino pontificates, 'are as roses, whose fair flower/ Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour'.⁶⁶ Men might be generally more fickle than women in their 'fancies', but women are on the clock; they change in a single, temporally directed way, blooming and then fading, becoming—in Orsino's eyes—unworthy of male affection once they are 'too old' and the flowering—as it were—of their beauty has passed. Orsino's comparisons imply that love makes an otherwise constant man changeable and inconstant, while a woman is inconstant regardless of whether she is in love because of the inverse relationship between her beauty and time. His inconstancy is 'wavering,' moving in and out of passion with no strict regard to his age, while a woman's progresses from beauty and desire to their absence in a manner parallel to the temporal direction of her age.

Comparisons between lovers and the sea in the play—spoken by both Orsino and Feste—undermine Orsino's bi-gendered organization of erotic time. After witnessing Orsino's mood changes and unsatisfiable tastes for music, Feste asserts that lovers like Orsino ought to be put to sea:

Now the melancholy god protect thee, and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal. I would have men of such constancy put to sea, that their business might be everything, and their intent everywhere, for that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing.⁶⁷

Feste's speech maps Orsino's emotional state onto the nonhuman world—both the opal and the ocean—and has the effect of positing consonance between human and nonhuman action. Orsino's changeable 'intent' makes him like a precious stone—an everlasting object—but only like one known for its changing nature. His intent also makes him an ideal partner with the changeable sea. But this fundamental unpredictability, in a basic, practical sense, also endangers the 'good voyage'; a 'business' venture whose 'intent [is] everywhere' seems reckless and unreliable, vulnerable to shipwreck or other maritime hazards. In Feste's joke, we see both Orsino's passion and the sea as simultaneously destructive and productive, at once abetting and interrupting human pursuits (economic, marital, social) in Illyria. Although Feste describes Orsino and the sea as expansive—'everything', 'everywhere'—he also implies the value of an end-date: in order to make a 'good voyage', Orsino would need

uses of this biblical chapter and other constructions of the woman as the 'weaker vessel', see Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination*, chap. 4.

66 Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 2.4.37–38.

67 *Ibid.*, 2.4.72–76.

his hearse—which is seen as a poor substitute for Sidney in the flesh. Yet it allows him to exist, in a sense, beyond the bounds of his physical life, and it allows him to be everlasting in bloom. In this way, the poem manages his potential feminization and portrays him as stronger and longer-lasting than an individual fragile bloom; he is as ephemeral as a flower but not weakened by his association with it, and can avoid the effeminacy incurred by other objects of such a comparison. The malleability of this gendered inflection of time, which confers masculinity or femininity through depictions of plants, presents an alternative understanding of gender grounded in the nonhuman.

Opals, oceans, and expiring desire

Early modern writers unmoor gender from the body not only in representations of humans as plants but also in imagery connecting humans to the maritime environment. In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (performed c. 1601; printed 1623), we see again the association of a flower's wilting with a woman's loss of physical beauty. But comparisons between wooers and seafarers—and the sea itself—in the play undermine the idea that a woman's love and beauty has an expiration date and that a man's love and attractiveness, in contrast, lasts a lifetime.

As he discusses love with Viola/Cesario in Act 2, Orsino characterizes male erotic desire as fickle but ultimately linked to ideas about longevity and eternal time. He contrasts this characterization to female erotic desire, which he associates with change over time because it abates on the same time scale as female beauty. Orsino asserts that 'all true lovers' are 'Unstaid and skittish in all motions', and goes on to specify that men, 'however [they] do praise [themselves],/ [their] fancies are more giddy and unfirm,/ more longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,/ Than women's are'.⁶⁴ Orsino's portrait of male lovers whose moods 'waver' runs counter to common early modern assertions about women's natural inconstancy and infidelity in their role as the 'weaker vessel'.⁶⁵ He bases male lovers' changeability in their moods and inclinations, unattached to concerns of

64 Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 2.4.72–76. We refer throughout this chapter to Viola/Cesario using this form to indicate Viola/Cesario's position as both male and female. We have elected, though, to refer to Viola/Cesario using female pronouns for the sake of simplicity. On Viola/Cesario's identity as *both* genders' and on her relationship in the character of Cesario—i.e. as male—to Orsino, see Osborne, 'Marriage of true minds', 102 and following.

65 See 1 Peter 3.7: 'Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered' (King James Version). For a historical analysis of early modern

to return to the harbor and to end his 'wavering'. Though Orsino lauds the durable, nonchronological nature of a man's erotic desire, Feste reminds him subtly that human commercial productivity requires actions that have a beginning, middle, and end. The ocean in Feste's metaphor endangers this necessary chronology, and places Feste's and Orsino's metaphors in tension. Orsino's own comparisons of his passion to the ocean further complicate the conception of female erotic desire as having a beginning and end and male erotic desire as, in some sense, outside of time. After remarking on the failure of his attendants' music—which he calls 'the food of love'—to satisfy the 'appetite' of his desire for Olivia, he laments,

O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou
That, notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, naught enters there
Of what validity and pitch so e'er,
But falls into abatement and low price
Even in a minute! So full of shapes is fancy
That it alone is high fantastical.⁶⁸

Orsino compares the 'spirit of love' to the 'sea', asserting that both are depthless and that both have the capacity to immediately—"in a minute!"—devalue anything that enters into them, no matter how precious. In one sense, the sea here appears feminized: it is penetrated by whatever it 'receiveth', and as in some classical, reoccurring views of monstrous femininity (Scylla and Charybdis, for example), the sea is ravenous and insatiable; it destroys virility. In this reading, we might see Orsino as emasculating himself by aligning his all-consuming passion with the all-consuming, feminized sea. But Orsino's sea—and by analogy his passion—is also productive; it overflows with 'shapes' and is 'high fantastical', a phrase that the Norton editors gloss as 'uniquely imaginative'. Orsino's sea and his passion, then, are also arguably masculinized, in that he describes both the sea and the spirit of love as mutable, dangerous, and artistically productive *because* of their volatility. The sea, then, exhibits both masculinized and feminized qualities; its productivity does not have an expiration date, and it tends to endanger voyages that rely on chronological time. When representations of the ocean exhibit durable temporality *and* ambiguous gender designations, comparisons of a lover's desires or moods to the ocean destabilize the idea that a woman's erotic pursuits expire while a man's endure.

68 *Ibid.*, 1.1.1.1.3.1.1.9–15.

Orsino argues forcibly that no woman could possibly bear as intense an erotic passion as his passion for Olivia, but in so doing, he again ambiguously genders the sea. In response to Viola/Cesario's assertions of Olivia's steadfast disinterest, Orsino cries

There is no woman's sides
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
So big, to hold so much. They lack retention.
Alas, their love may be called appetite,
No motion of the liver, but the palate,
That suffer surfeit, cloyment, and revolt.
But mine is all hungry as the sea,
And can digest as much.⁶⁹

Orsino emphasizes his own fickleness in this moment: despite having just asserted how much more 'wavering' men's erotic passions are than women's, Orsino accuses women of lacking 'retention', a word that can also mean constancy. According to Orsino, women's passions are weaker, less deep, belonging not to the 'liver' but to the tongue. If Orsino's liver—or perhaps stomach—is the seat of his passion, and is compared to the depths of the 'hungry' sea, then a woman's passion, in Orsino's view, located in her 'palate', would correspond to something higher up, such as the surface of the ocean. The depths of the sea, for Orsino, are masculine, strong, hungry, and powerful. And yet, he and Feste both remark on Orsino's own changeability, comparing it to that of the sea. This comparison links his passion and the sea more to the feminine—according to Orsino—a quality of nonretention and wavering changeability than to a purportedly masculine strength or continence: the sea proverbially overflows bounds (the beach is a boundary in constant flux) and is inconstant, as Feste's joke makes clear. Even as Orsino attempts to draw a firm distinction between his own passion and the passions of which women are capable, the metaphors of ingestion, hunger, and the sea undermine the gender roles he sets out to reinforce.⁷⁰ Comparisons of courtship to human commercial or exploratory ventures, like the comparisons we have examined between erotic desire and the ocean, often trouble boundaries between masculine and feminine erotic

69 *Ibid.*, 2.4.91–99.

70 For a discussion of Orsino's relationship with the 'foreign-ness of the ocean' in *Twelfth Night*, see Mentz, pp. 50–62.

temporality. In Act 3, Fabian uses the figure of an ill-directed ship to describe Sir Andrew's erotic failures, again engaging with but also undermining the idea that a man's erotic desires have no expiration date. Commenting on Sir Andrew's despondency in the face of Olivia's continual rejection of advances from suitors, Fabian and Sir Toby assure Sir Andrew that 'the youth'—Viola/Cesario—hasn't made it impossible for him to win Olivia in the end.⁷¹ They seek to keep Sir Andrew at court in order to use his money for drinks, but they also appeal to Sir Andrew's appetite for romance, and tell him that Olivia showed favor to Viola/Cesario in order to 'awake [his] dormouse valor, to put fire in [his] heart and brimstone in [his] liver.'⁷² Fabian chides Sir Andrew for failing to rise to Olivia's supposed challenge, exclaiming 'The double gilt of this opportunity you let time wash off, and you are now sailed into the north of my lady's opinion, where you will hang like an icicle on a Dutchman's beard unless you do redeem it by some laudable attempt either of valour or policy.'⁷³ Fabian figures Sir Andrew as a ship or a sailor who has missed his opportunity to come into the harbor of Olivia's favor, and has instead 'sailed [...] north', into the cold and possibly dangerous seas away from his object of desire.⁷⁴ Sir Toby and Fabian use the concept of unending male passion to convince Sir Andrew that he still has a chance to woo Olivia; if Sir Andrew can 'redeem' himself by means of a show of 'valour', he can avoid the emasculating effect of having 'let time wash off' or abate his erotic pursuit of Olivia. But audiences might see that Sir Toby and Fabian are leading Sir Andrew by the nose. They assure Sir Andrew of the never-sated quality of his erotic desire for Olivia, but in doing so, they also underline Sir Andrew's position as a foil for Orsino, challenging Orsino's definition of masculine erotic temporality.⁷⁵

Where Sir Andrew fails to figuratively sail into Olivia's harbor, Viola/Cesario succeeds. Maria figures her in 1.5 as one of many ships in Olivia's

71 Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 3.2.15.

72 *Ibid.*, 3.2.16–17.

73 *Ibid.*, 3.2.20–24.

74 For a reading of Sir Andrew's 'failure to prove his masculinity' and to succeed in 'the profitable commerce of sociability', see Hutson, 'On Not Being Deceived', pp. 162–63. The *Norton Shakespeare* editors note that Fabian may allude to navigator Willem Barents, who led an expedition to the Arctic in 1596–97 (726, n. 4). See also Hadfield's argument that early modern writers saw a 'distinction between the sophisticated and decadent South and the hard, virtuous North, a geographical division that had an obviously sexualized element' (par. 4). The 'North' is a feminizing location in Fabian's metaphor, but early modern cultural ideas—as well as the potentially phallic 'icicle'—destabilize that gender designation.

75 On Sir Andrew, romance, and masculinity in *Twelfth Night*, see Stanivuković, 'Masculine Ploas', p. 115 and following.

harbor, destined to be rebuffed. After Olivia has asked Viola/Cesario to 'be gone',⁷⁶ Maria emphasizes her mistress's dismissal and says to Viola/Cesario 'Will you hoist sail, sir? Here lies your way.'⁷⁷ Maria compares Viola/Cesario's mission as a suitor's proxy to the voyage of a ship that comes to harbor, seeking mercantile gain. Maria asserts that Viola/Cesario's erotic mission has failed and turns her figurative ship away from Olivia's harbor, but Viola/Cesario resists: to Maria's dismissal, she retorts, 'No, good swabber, I am to hull here a little longer.'⁷⁸ Even if she cannot drop anchor, she will 'hull'—i.e. 'lie unanchored with lowered sails'⁷⁹—in Olivia's court and try to carry out Orsino's orders. Viola/Cesario appropriates Maria's metaphor, placing Maria herself as a 'swabber' on Viola/Cesario's deck and figuring herself as both sailor in command and as ship that will 'hull' in the harbor. She creates and negotiates a complex erotic triangle between herself, Orsino, and Olivia; her desires do not expire in that she meets Orsino and loves him from that moment and—at least ostensibly—beyond the end of the play. Her desires, like her anchored ship, are also decidedly *un-*'waving'. She drives the beginning, middle, and end of the plot and her success with Olivia, however unintentional or undesiring, is very much akin to the chronologically driven success of a merchant venture. The nonhuman forces in the play, while they invite a contrast between Viola/Cesario's strength and Sir Andrew's weaknesses as a navigator, also jeopardize her life and disrupt the social hierarchies that are central to the courtship narratives in the play. Steven Mentz reads Viola/Cesario's 'unstable identity' as marginalizing her and aligning her with the boundary between the ocean and the land.⁸⁰ Mentz's analysis illuminates the alienation that can plague those who shipwreck and who experience submersion in the ocean. And yet, in wresting linguistic control over the maritime metaphor from Maria and performing as a successful merchant in Olivia's court, Viola/Cesario refocuses our attention from the margins to the social center of the play. Her 'unstable identity' affords her a position from which to challenge gendered conceptions of erotic temporality.

As the preceding examples illustrate, early modern notions of time are inextricably bound up with notions of the nonhuman in ways that destabilize attempts to define human chronology within a single rubric. The three

76 Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.176.

77 *Ibid.*, 1.5.178.

78 *Ibid.*, 1.5.179.

79 See 707, n. 6, in Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*.

80 Mentz, *At the Bottom*, 61–62.

kinds of temporality we examine—linear versus circular, botanical time overlaid onto human ontologies, and enduring versus fleeting—coexist and overlap. This multivalence suggests a queering of temporality grounded in nonhuman beings and substances.⁸¹ Moreover, the texts we have discussed often disassociate gender from the human body, displacing it onto the nonhuman so as to upend gendered norms, suggesting resonances with ecofeminist perspectives. In our readings, the nonhuman resists writers' attempts to construct gendered binaries, de-essentializing gender from human morphology and dispersing it into the environment. This dispersal takes two forms, occasionally manifesting as a continuum between human and nonhuman in which little distinction is made between the two, but at other times establishing an opposition between human and environment. The writers we examine—and perhaps early modern cultures more broadly—grapple with emergent, contested attempts to classify time, gender, and the nonhuman. Our analysis therefore reveals the richness of early modern notions of the natural environment, inviting further inquiry into body–environment relations and the mediating role of language in shaping those relations.

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Part II

Frameworks and taxonomy of time

