

1. What was the intellectual climate like at the start of career and how do you think it has changed between now and then?

I was in graduate school at Yale in the late 1960s and no feminist criticism was taught in the English department, I had only one course with a female faculty member and she was a visitor, Rosalie Colie. However, I heard Kate Millett, still then working on her dissertation which became Sexual Politics, give an informal talk about gender role socialization, probably at a NOW meeting. My dissertation advisor resisted feminist criticism but its role in my dissertation was fairly submerged most of the time, though I was giving a lot of attention to assertive female characters. I had been trained to do close reading and have confidence in my interpretations, I had colleagues who were also interested in feminist criticism, and we mentored each other. We found out more about feminist criticism at the Modern Language Association, or MLA, through speakers like Adrienne Rich and Kate Stimpson. There wasn't any feminist criticism at the Shakespeare sessions, unless it came up in a question from the floor, as it sometimes did. However, the MLA soon opened up and had a procedure by which you could propose what was called a special session to their committee and you might get on the program. So in the mid 70s was one on feminist Shakespeare

criticism, which different people went on proposing and usually getting accepted for years, and there was one I proposed on marriage and family in Shakespeare, which also was carried on by others for quite a while, and feminist critics sometimes showed up on the programs of more established divisions, including the Shakespeare division. And the Shakespeare Association, established in the 1970s, soon had active feminist participation, and has now had many feminist presidents.

Feminist criticism was already diverse, with some people focusing more on showing oppression and others on pointing out the strengths of female characters—some taking a Marxist approach and some taking a more liberal or individualistic approach. However we were talking about many of the same issues, some of us trying to bridge gaps or make syntheses. It was an exciting time.

Today I think the most obvious points about Shakespeare's representation of women have already been made, on both sides. In order to get published, scholars need to make points that are unexpected and less obvious. Phyllis Rackin has written about the emphasis on misogyny and subordination in recent scholarship about women in Shakespeare, arguing that this is unbalanced. I think she is right. If you see a production of As You Like It, you

remember Rosalind's strong character, even though she is disguised as a boy. You probably don't remember her father for long. It's hard to think about her being subordinate to her husband, who we've seen as much less forceful and witty than she is. She's chosen him, she educates him, when she comes out of disguise she doesn't wait for her father to give her away. Yet articles emphasizing the way the play confines her, by Peter Erickson and Louis Montrose, both of them male feminists, have been very influential. They wrote, for example, about the structure of marriage as an institution linking men to other men, and this is indeed relevant to the play and its conclusion. They made discoveries that were interesting, I think, because they went against the fascination that audiences and readers have often had with Rosalind.

Feminist criticism of Shakespeare more recently has looked more closely at the interaction of gender with other categories such as race, sexuality, class, and religion. It has looked at the representation of groups such as girls, older women, single women, and widows, in relation to their historical circumstances. It has looked more at the issue of gender in the representation of women by boys on Shakespeare's stage—Pamela Brown, for example, has noted that some in his audiences had seen women on the public

stage in the commedia dell-arte troupes visiting from England, and thinks these actresses influences the presentation of the female characters in his comedies. Scholars have contextualized Shakespeare's women with many other kinds of archival work from the early modern period. They have also looked at how and why various women's roles have been acted and shortened in different historical periods and cultures, and how women writers, such as Jane Smiley and, more recently, Toni Morrison, have rewritten Shakespeare's plot and characters. These are just a few of the many exciting kinds of work going on now.

2. I was very complimented when Lynn Gajowski asked me to write this volume. I have been teaching Shakespeare's plays with regard to feminist questions since the early 1970s, and was excited by the opportunity to put my thoughts together and also to develop them with regard to plays and approaches that I hadn't taught much. I think there are a number of reasons feminist theory is important to the study of Shakespeare's plays. Feminist theory helps us think about several aspects of his female characters that are relatively unusual by contrast to those of most other male playwrights of his time and later. Many of them have a strong sense of agency. Think about Portia, who sets out to save her husband's friend, Juliet, who commits herself to Romeo. Some of

them—these characteristics overlap—disguise themselves as boys, and others are compared to men or speak about what they would do as men. Feminist theory provides analyses of these practices. More of his women than in most male writers of his time and until recently in literature have female friends and speak about female friendship as important, even if they feel they have lost it, like Helena in Midsummer night's Dream. In many of his plays, male distrust of women that proves to be unwarranted is a central theme—most disastrously in Othello but also in Much Ado About Nothing, the Winter's Tale, and some lesser known plays. And in even more there are places where men describe women with qualities that they themselves have, a practice that we can call projection. These are also issues with which feminist theory is concerned.

3. It is both, but there are lots of different feminist methodologies and different feminist political commitments. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary says that feminism is an advocacy of women's rights based on a theory of equality of the sexes. But the historian Joan Kelly discusses writers as early as the French Christine de Pisan, who she thinks are doing feminist theory when they see women as a group, discuss the influence of culture, education, and custom and women, and point out examples of bias

in descriptions of women. Bell hooks says that feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression—in other words, the equality of privileged women to privileged men would not be enough. The novelist Chimamanga Ngozi Adichie says that feminist is a person, man or woman, who says that is a problem with gender as it is today, and we must fix it, we must do better. She points to revising the male role in our society as one feminist goal.

So, which is more important: women's lacking of legal rights and equal pay, or social disparagement and general neglect of values traditionally associated with women such as kindness and nurturing? Should we welcome both masculine and feminine characteristics in both women and men, or should the terms themselves be abandoned, as Catherine Belsey has suggested, because they maintain divisions and associations that should be broken up? The answer you give to these and similar questions will affect the kind of feminist critical approach that you take. If you want to break up gender identities, you may like the fact that Rosalind's last speech ends as from the boy actor who played her rather than the character, or makes it impossible to tell who is speaking—but if you are looking for the persistence of Rosalind's strong female identity at the end, you will find this a weakness.

The innocence of the women suspected of adultery gratifies some feminists as an exposure of male fantasies about their infidelity, but it offends others as maintaining an assumption of the all-importance of a wife's chastity as opposed to other characteristics. Similarly, from one point of view it is feminist that most of the women in Shakespeare's comedies marry the husband that they have chosen, but from another feminist point of view the repeated conventional ending with heterosexual marriage is still too limiting. When Desdemona, in her last breath, asked who killed her, says "Nobody—I myself," should we praise her for taking responsibility or forgiving Othello, or say this is an unfortunate example of women blaming themselves too much?

4. I have to start with Juliet Dusinberre's Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (1975), which argues that Shakespeare's plays showed women as equals in a world that declared them unequal. She found support for this as a historical possibility in the fact that religious reformers were attacking enforced marriage, the ideal of virginity and the double standard—other historians found that the impact of religious reform was more ambiguous. The 1980 collection of essays The Woman's Part, edited by Carolyn Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely, was very important in setting out a range of approaches to feminist criticism. Neely went

on to write Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays (1985), using feminist psychoanalytic and genre criticism as well as close reading and study of Shakespeare's changes from his sources. Catherine Belsey, materialist, Lacanian, and poststructuralist, wrote about the loss of a speaking position for women in The Subject of Tragedy, but about flexible gender roles in the comedies in her article "Disrupting Sexual Difference," both published in 1985. More recently, Janet Adelman wrote a series of influential articles of feminist psychoanalytic Shakespeare criticism, culminating in her book Suffocating Mothers (1991). Jean Howard wrote The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England: her approach is feminist materialist but she also integrates psychoanalytic, theater history, and other approaches and has been particularly influential as an editor of collections such as Shakespeare Reproduced, coed of the Blackwell 4-volume Companion to Shakespeare, and the Norton Shakespeare. Ania Loomba is a leading postcolonial critic, the author of Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama and Shakespeare, Race, Colonialism. Valerie Traub is the most important feminist scholar/critic dealing with sexuality—she has written The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England and a new book, Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns, which I am looking forward to reading.



5. Shakespeare was not a consistent feminist. However, he could imagine the viewpoint of a lot of different kinds of characters, and he could imagine a speech with a feminist viewpoint. The most obvious example is Emilia's speech attacking the double standard "Let husbands know/their wives have sense like them...Have not we affections, desires for sport, and frailties, as men have?" He wrote many plays about men's unjustified suspicion of women—Much Ado, Othello, Winter's Tale, Cymbeline, Merry Wives of Windsor. The plays all show that the men are wrong to have this obsession with the idea that their wives or fiancés are committing adultery. He wrote a lot of plays in which assertive women are presented positively. On the other hand, taking his wife's advice can be seen as the beginning of Macbeth's ruin—and if it doesn't come from his wife, it comes from the witches, usually played by other women. I think Shakespeare wanted to write exciting plays and could see that he could make drama out of tensions between the sexes. He didn't worry if a play occasionally put a woman in a bad light in one way or another.

6. Let me mention one recent book I found very interesting, Natasha Korda's Labors Lost. She discusses examples of women's work in Shakespeare's England, and shows through archival evidence that though women didn't act in the English public

theater in his time they supported the theater, for example by making costumes and even by money-lending. Why were they on the stage in Italy, France, and Spain and not in England at the time? She argues that the English theater wanted very much to be taken seriously as a vocation (partly the influence of Protestantism) and they thought they would be taken more seriously if they appeared to be all male. Have we not heard similar explanations for why voice-overs in certain genres are more likely to be male?

I would also like to mention a few recent theaters doing interesting things that might be further discussed by scholars. For example, the Donmar Warehouse presentation of Henry IV played by an all-female cast, and the Cornerstone Theater, based in Los Angeles, which works with various communities, hearing people discuss current issues of importance to them, and uses performances and discussions of Shakespearean and other plays to explore conflicts—for example they have recently done a Tempest with a female Prospero and an emphasis on the human effects of both severe weather events and the prison system. But I like work that surprises me, so by definition I can't predict it.