

34. Steven Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).
35. There is considerable literature contesting the Ghost as definitively Hamlet's father or, rather "in the same figure like the King that's dead." (1.1.41). For my purposes here the important point is that Hamlet at least considers the Ghost his father.
36. Wreaking this kind of punishment can be seen as yet another form of Hamlet's work as scourge and minister. For the classic discussion of scourge versus minister as damned versus chosen agent of God's vengeance, see Fredson Bowers, "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge," *PMLA* 70 (1955): 740-49. See also R. W. Dent, "Hamlet: Scourge and Minister," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29 (1978): 82-4.
37. Eric Santner, *The Psychotheology of Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

4

Feminist Criticism and the New Formalism: Early Modern Women and Literary Engagement

Sasha Roberts

As figures be the instruments of ornament in every language, so be they also in a sort abuses or rather trespasses in speech, because they pass the ordinary limits of common utterance. . . . Figurative speech is a novelty of language evidently (and yet not absurdly) estranged from the ordinary habit and manner of our daily talk and writing.

George Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie* (1589): I: 7
(repr. in Vickers, 231–2 and 236)

The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar”, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*

Victor Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’ (1917), repr. in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965): 12

This is the compelling question: can formalist literary analysis be reconciled with feminist literary criticism? Of course, it was not always so: questions about form have only recently begun to excite scholars again, at least at an explicit and confrontational level. For in the wake of new historicist and materialist feminist criticism, formalist approaches to literature have long been tainted by their ahistoricism and apoliticism; stained by their failure to engage with the real world of social inequality and the complexities of cultural discourse. Skepticism has prevailed. What can form tell us, really, about the central categories of literary criticism that have been privileged in the last decades: politics, history, gender, race, class? What possible

contribution can formalist analysis make to the wider project of understanding the place of literature in the minute particulars of an unjust world?

It is no use beating about the bush: the disjunction between formalist and feminist criticism is gloriously profound. It all turns on gender, of course. For Shklovsky, "the object is not important," while the tacit assumption of so much materialist feminist criticism (which has dominated feminist approaches to early modern literature) is precisely the opposite: that not only the objects of art but the objectifications and, indeed, subjects of art are vitally important, constitutive even. We abandon content and context at our peril, for it is precisely in terms of content and context that notions of difference— notions which underpin critical discussion of gender, race, and class— can best (fundamentally?) be articulated. Thus in *Major Women Writers of the Seventeenth Century* James Fitzmaurice et al. argue that "feminist criticism must first be described according to its intent, that is, to acknowledge that men and women, because of their different positions and activities in a culture, approach writing and reading from different directions, directions that must be acknowledged in order for a literary analysis to have both theoretical and historical validity" (9). Formalism, however, does not readily (if at all) accommodate a difference that resides ultimately in identity. Even given the diversity of its practices, formalism is distinguished by a different set of critical interests: language, rhetorical figures, tropes, meter, versification, narrative structure, genre, etc.

It is not that feminist criticism has no use for these terms: on the contrary, feminist criticism has been deeply attuned to the gendered operations of language, tropes, genre, poetic and narrative structures. It is rather that formalism has not, historically at least, attempted to address issues of gender. As recently as 1992 Joe Andrew, presenting the work of the British Neo-Formalist Circle, posited that "we Neo-Formalists have insufficiently taken on board the more politically orientated branches of literary criticism," and "feminism" in particular: "very few papers reflect this vital (and no longer so new) current."¹ But this insufficiency is not wholly a function of lamentable gender-blindness; a political myopia that unwittingly plagued previous and current generations of scholars. No, this neglect of cultural context is critically deliberate. And as such it demands to be taken seriously.

By this I do not mean revisiting the mid-twentieth century to dismantle the latent gender politics of I. A. Richards' practical criticism, the American New Criticism, or the still fascinating work of Russian Formalist critics writing in the first decades of the twentieth century. In this essay my concern lies with "new formalism" or "new formalisms"—a tendentious label for a recent and disparate critical trend—and more particularly with the possibilities of reconciliation and resistance between new formalism and feminist criticism in the field of early modern literary studies. The case for new formalism has been variously argued in a special issue of *Modern Language Quarterly* (61: 1, 2000): "forms matter not just as local articulations, or even as local articulations radiating into and unsettling the ground on which they stand, but as constitutive

of the works at large" (Wolfson, 11); "the loss of form threatens both literary and cultural studies, not only at the level of methodology, where reading becomes impossible without it, but also at the level of disciplinarity" (Rooney, 20).² For scholars of early modern literature, however, the most pertinent recent exploration of new formalism comes in the 2003 volume edited by Mark David Rasmussen, *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements*.³ Rasmussen posits that "a freshly theorized formalism might be expected to take two main directions, either inflected toward the historical/cultural or toward the literary/aesthetic" (3). In the same volume, Douglas Bruster suggests that "new formalism could be defined as follows: a critical genre dedicated to examining the social, cultural, and historical aspects of literary form, and the function of form for those who produce and consume literary texts" (44), and points to recent studies focused on "words, tropes, figures, or genres" (ranging from Annabel Patterson's *Pastoral and Ideology*, 1988, to Lynne Magnusson's *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*, 1999) that understand form "as possessing significant agency before, during, and after literary composition" and often stress "the social and political implications of literary form" (45). Indeed, as Lynne Magnusson points out in her insightful study, "it is time to negotiate some common ground between close reading and cultural poetics and, in particular, to propose taxonomies for verbal analysis that can address the place of collective invention in the production of Shakespeare's complex texts" and, I would add, the work of early modern writers at large (7).⁴

Even so, the position of feminist criticism in relation to new formalism remains problematic. As Rasmussen admits, "most conspicuous in its absence" in *Renaissance Literature and its Formal Engagements* "is any sustained reflection on how formalist approaches might be broadened by reckoning with the achievements of feminist scholarship in the field, and particularly the recovery of Renaissance literary texts written by women" (9). This "absence" reflects the wider conceptual problem: while formalist analysis has not recognized gender difference, feminist analysis is predicated on it. In the same volume, Heather Dubrow points out that "if we need to realize that the study of form can be reconciled with a commitment to, say, the study of ideology or gender [we] need as well to confront and argue about tensions that will remain" (85), a confrontation which Dubrow does not have the space to develop but which I want to pursue here. And where best to begin than with bare inconsistencies in the basic tenets of criticism? For one tension is undeniable, even insurmountable: a feminist criticism that takes gender to be a central category of analysis and a formalist criticism that does *not* will remain, at this fundamental level, exquisitely incompatible.

But this does not preclude dialogue. From the perspective of literary history, and more precisely early modern women's literary history, there are not only productive but *necessary* grounds for reconciliation between new formalism and feminist criticism. It is not just a matter of understanding that access to forms and formal play has a gendered history. As I have

argued in relation to women's engagement with Shakespeare in the seventeenth century, and as I shall argue here first in the context of Renaissance literary criticism addressed to women—particularly by George Puttenham and Dudley North—and second, in Katherine Philips' discussion of her own writing practices, if we neglect early modern women's interest in questions of literary form, we fail to do justice to their work as readers and writers. In this respect I want to take up Rasmussen's challenge of reckoning formalist and feminist approaches precisely in the context of "the recovery of Renaissance literary texts written by women" (9).

The rub comes when we move from literary history to literary criticism; from the study of literary culture to specific literary works. Of course, I have to flag my provisos: neither literary history and literary criticism, nor literary culture and literary works, are neatly divisible—the waters are always muddy (and therefore more interesting). What I have in mind here are not differences of kind but of *emphasis*. It is in the close reading of the formal properties of literary works that the interests and agendas of new formalism and feminist criticism really begin to collide. I want to explore that collision by taking what may seem the most uncompromising material for anything but a feminist analysis—misogynist verses "Upon women" discovered in a woman's manuscript miscellany—and subject them to a formalist close reading inspired by Puttenham's critical lexicon. I want to see where reading against the grain of our current critical climate might lead.

Of course, the invocation of "feminist analysis" as an apparently stable entity is itself problematic. Further, in *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler makes the point that the very categories of analysis of "gender" and "women" are not stable but performative: "the postulation of a true gender identity" is "as a regulatory fiction," for "gender reality is created through sustained social performances" (180).⁵ This in turn impacts on our conception of feminism: "if a stable notion of gender no longer proves to be the foundational premise of feminist politics, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very reifications of gender and identity" (9). In this respect pitting formalism against a feminism that assumes "gender" or "women" to be a stable category of analysis may appear to evade the ways in which feminism, at least in the field of literary theory, is changing.

But history works its magic, and the feminist politics of today may not always be the best tool for reading the position of women or men in the past. I am struck by the disjunction between Butler's innovative and often liberating emphasis upon gender as performative and the repetitious and restrictive performances of gender that were readily available to early modern women and men. Even as we may chart the performative operations of "gender" in the period—perhaps especially in the field of drama and sexuality where Butler appears to have been most useful to Renaissance scholars—it is hard to conceive of a feminist criticism of Renaissance literature that does not make recourse to "gender and identity" and their material effects;

indeed, their reifications. Which is not quite Butler's point, but nonetheless we should remain alert to the (productive) points of tension between "performative," historicist and materialist conceptions of gender.

Materialist feminist criticism has rightly dominated feminist analysis of Renaissance literature because it is materialism that teaches us most about men's and women's lives and their work in literary culture. There is no substitute for materialism. But it is precisely the points of resistance between materialist and formalist approaches to literature that may encourage us to think more expansively.⁶ We can learn much from the conjunctions and agreements between new formalism and feminist criticism, but we can learn more from their disjunctions and discords. If the reconciliation between new formalism and feminist criticism should prompt us to think in more nuanced ways about the conditions of early modern women's literary engagement, then the resistance between new formalism and feminist criticism should inspire us to think about what it is we really mean by literature, by literariness or, as Puttenham would put it, by *poesy*.

Poesie, formal engagement, and the woman reader

Perhaps one reason why the fledgling canon of Renaissance literary criticism has proved of comparatively little interest to feminist criticism of Renaissance literature is precisely that it appears to have so little to say on the subject of gender or women, or more widely on the content and contexts of specific literary works. As such it has, in our current critical climate, all the semblance of irrelevance. Of course we are not obliged to adopt the critical frameworks, assumptions, and occlusions of past generations: how else could literary criticism continue to be relevant for readers? But precisely because the gap between early modern and modern critical modes runs so wide and deep, it is worth probing in terms of the investment we choose to make in questions of form, content, and context. While Renaissance literary criticism—beyond the broader project of mounting a defense of vernacular literature (Sidney, Heywood)—is obsessed by versification, rhetoric, rhyme, and decorum (Wilson, Puttenham, Daniel, Jonson, North), modern critical discourse has little time for such matters. In this respect modern critical discourse, for all its talk of historicizing and contextualizing, is brilliantly, beguilingly anachronistic.

George Puttenham's compendious *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) has proved emblematic for New Historicist criticism of the political maneuvers and instrumentality of Renaissance poetry.⁷ In part this is enabled by Puttenham's dedication of the volume to Queen Elizabeth, whose portrait appears so prominently in the volume's frontispiece. Puttenham was not merely aiming at a royal figurehead; the dedication to Elizabeth was especially apt given her own aptitude at writing poetry:

But you (madam) my most honoured and gracious, if I should seem to offer you this my device for a discipline and not a delight, I might well

be reputed of all others the most arrogant and injurious, yourself being already, of any that I know in our time, the most excellent poet . . .

(Book I, chapter I: "What a poet and poesy is, and who may be worthily said the most excellent poet of our time"; repr. in Vickers, 193)

All well and good in the rhetoric of flattery. But I want to move beyond both political instrumentality and the patriarchal master narrative as a lens through which to read Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*. In a feminist reading of the *Arte of Poesie* (1990) that deploys deconstruction and psychoanalysis, Jacques Lezra notes "the insistence with which Puttenham returns to the issue of sexual difference—principally in stories of rape, seduction, or instruction, but also of generation and/or infanticide" when attempting to persuade the reader or explicate a point (55). In this way the *Arte of Poesie* may be read in terms of its indelibly gendered tropes that serve to reduce women to their sexuality or, alternatively, to limit their rhetorical discrimination—as in Puttenham's example of a "lady [who] was a little peruerse, and not disposed to reforme her selfe by hearing reason" (153; cited in Lezra, 58). This critical narrative may be characterized as one of exclusion; however, the *Arte of Poesie* remains an ambivalent and conflicted text in relation to women, articulating their exclusion from humanist literary culture while assuming their participation and interest in it as writers and readers. It is this emphasis upon participation that especially interests me. Here I want to go beyond Robert Matz's persuasive recent reading of the role of poetry in Puttenham "as a form of linguistic cultural capital" in the context of courtly speech and humanist literacy (196). For the *Arte of English Poesie* functions in part as an exercise in the promotion of women's literary capital; a literary competence that is exemplified precisely through the manipulation of poetic form.

Puttenham not only dedicates the *Arte of English Poesie* to a woman "excellent" in poetry and monarchy; he continues to address gentlewomen readers in the most substantive Book of the treatise, *The Third Book: Of Ornament*—a brilliant and expansive taxonomy of rhetorical figures from allegoria to zeugma.⁸ The mastery of rhetorical figures was a fundamental element of humanist literary practice, understood to enhance eloquence and thus persuade: hence the attention devoted to taxonomies of *figurae* in rhetoric manuals from Aristotle, Quintilian, and Longinus through to Peacham, Puttenham, and Hoskyns.⁹ Puttenham contributed to this distinctive and highly codified literary discourse by defining poesy in terms of figurative speech: as "the instrument of ornament" (231) rhetorical figures constitute ornamental language, "a novelty of language . . . estranged from the ordinary habit and manner of our daily talk and writing" (236). Hence Puttenham's analysis of rhetorical figures dominates his discussion of the five elements of poetic language: staff (stanza), measure (meter), concord (rhyme), situation (positioning of verse in a stanza), and figure (figurative speech).

What makes it all the more compelling is that Puttenham should single out women as the "chief" audience of the *The Third Book: Of Ornament*—and in so doing assume women's interest in the formal details of rhetorical figures, both as "good makers" of poetry themselves and as a discerning "judge" of others' work:

Chapter X. A Division of figures, and how they serve in exornation of language
And because our chief purpose herein is for the learning of ladies and young gentlewomen, or idle courtiers, desirous to become skilful in their own mother tongue, and for their private recreation to make now and then ditties of pleasure, thinking for our part none other science so fit for them and the place as that which teacheth *beau semblant*, the chief profession as well of courting as of poesy. . . . we have in our own conceit devised a new and strange model of this art, fitter to please the court than the school, and yet not unnecessary for all such as be willing themselves to become good makers in the vulgar, or to be able to judge of other men's makings.

(repr. in Vickers, 235)

"The chief praise and cunning of our Poet is in the discreet using of his figures" (3.1, 221); hence Puttenham's innovation of giving English adaptations for the Latin names of rhetorical figures speaks precisely to his chief audience, since in the vernacular they are "pleasanter to beare in memory: specially for our Ladies and pretie mistresses in Court, for whose learning I write".¹⁰ Yet if, on the one hand, Puttenham credits gentlewomen with the aptitude to make and judge poetry, albeit as a private and courtly "recreation," he goes on to assume their lack of knowledge in even the "plainest" "school points":

Chapter XIII. Of your figures auricular working by disorder
PARENTHESIS; or, the insertor.

. . . The figure is so common that it needeth none example; nevertheless, because we are to teach ladies and gentlewomen to know their school points and terms appertaining to the art, we may not refuse to yield examples even in the plainest cases. . . .

(repr. in Vickers, 240–2)

But even (especially) in the hands of an unschooled lady a little wit is a dangerous thing; thus, at least, Puttenham perpetuates the ubiquitous stereotype of women's shrewish wit:

Chapter XXI. Of the vices or deformities in speech and writing principally noted by ancient potes

... So as every surplusage, or preposterous placing, or undue iteration, or dark word, or doubtful speech are not so narrowly to be looked upon in a large poem, nor specially in the pretty poesies and devices of ladies and gentlewomen makers, whom we would not have too precise poets lest with their shrewd wits, when they were married, they might become a little too fantastical wives.

(repr. in Vickers, 280)

Perpetuates or plays upon? For it is not unfeasible, especially given Puttenham's dedication of the volume to Elizabeth, his repeated addresses to women throughout the volume, and his condemnation of anti-feminist Latin verse as the injurious writing of "some old malicious Monke" that Puttenham is being ironic here; teasing his female readers as much as pandering to the projected prejudices of his male readers.¹¹ As Puttenham writes of "IRONIA: or, the dry mock," "ye do likewise dissemble when ye speak in derision or mockery, and that may be many ways: as sometimes in sport, sometimes in earnest" (repr. in Vickers, 249). After all, he never loses sight of his (albeit unmarried) dedicatee, addressing his "most excellent Queen" in the final chapter of the Book (III: 25, repr. in Vickers 290) and in the volume's conclusion: "I write to the pleasure of a Lady and a most gracious Queene, and neither to Priestes nor to Prophetes or Philosophers" (The Conclusion, WW 308).

Questions of content and context are not entirely lost in the *Arte of Poesie*: Puttenham briefly attends to "the subject or matter of poesie" and its modes from "rejoicings" to "lamentations" (I: 10, 23–4), while the (Aristotelian) notion of *decorum*—of fitting "style" to "the nature of his subject: that is, if his matter be high and lofty that the style be so too" (III: 5, 228)—implies an engagement with "subject" and "matter": with "the person who speaks; another, of his to whom it is spoken; another, of whom we speak; another, to what we speak" (III: 23, 287). For Derek Attridge, *decorum* is central to Puttenham's principle of "naturalness" in poesy: "the ideal is to be natural, by being yourself as nature is. But if you cannot—and the entire manual is built on the premise that you cannot—you need to supplement your own natural inadequacies by the exercise of *decorum*, that 'natural' art" (43). Further, "nature" and "art" serve to frame the distinction between non-literary and literary (artificial) language (8); an unstable distinction that, in Puttenham and beyond, is beset by contradiction (45). In this context, however, I want to take Puttenham's methods literally. It is the painstaking articulation of the formal properties of verse that dominate the *Arte of Poesie* and especially Book III, "for the learning of young ladies and gentlewomen" (235).

Likewise questions of form dominate another work of Renaissance literary criticism dedicated to a woman, Dudley North's "Preludium" addressed to Lady Mary Wroth (c.1610), first published in North's *A Forest of Varieties*

(1645). Arguing against poets who "affect to shew more wit than love," North mounts a critique of contemporary poetry that centers on the undisciplined deployment of rhetorical figures:

Like ill-ranging spaniels they spring figures, and, ravished with their extravagant fancies, pursue them in long excursions The poetry of these times abounds in wit, high conceit, figure, and proportions; thin, light, and empty in matter and substance; like fine-coloured airy bubbles or quelque-choses, much ostentation and little food. Conceits, similes, and allegories are good, so the matter be carried along in them, and not interrupted by them.

(Vickers, 505)

It is not that North rejects figurative language; it is "over-crushed" conceits, "lines of a far-fetched and laboured fancy" that he objects to (509, 511). Thus his "Preludium" continues with a careful analysis of diction in "versifying" (506), of "cadence and sound" (508), of "pithy and tough lines" (509) and "terms well chosen" (510). What the poet should aim at is "well-wrought" verse:

[a] fineness of conceit, and conclusions so designed, wrought, limned and coloured, touches so bold, covert allegories and subtleties so neat, transitions so easy, epithets so material, metaphors and ambiguities so doubly fine, as shall be more master-like than sententious, sublime, abstruse, and strong-appearing lines.

(510)

North's emphasis, like Puttenham's, not only on the varieties of poetic discourse (allegory, epithet, metaphor, ambiguity) but also the *craft* of poetry (designed, wrought, limned, colored), demonstrates his passionate interest in questions of literary form. That he anticipates these interests will be shared by Mary Wroth—not only as a practicing writer but as Sidney's niece ("your unimitable uncle's extant works"; 507) and a and as a literary patron in her own right ("I wish your Ladyship's authority would so abate the price [of second-rate poetry] that our poorer abilities might hold trade without straining"; 509)—should alert us to the contemporary *expectation* of early modern women's engagement with the formal properties of literature. Or, more precisely, privileged, educated, literary gentlewomen: as so often, inequalities of class cut deeper than those of gender.

Expectation engenders engagement (though not always). (Elite) women's literary engagement and rhetorical mastery—an engagement that runs counter to the weary adage of women's axiomatic silence—has precedent in both the print culture of poetry (Gascoigne's *Adventures of master F.J.* (1573), for instance, pivots upon the exchange of poems between men and women)

and the manifold poetic forms women deployed in manuscript culture (as the 2001 Oxford anthology of *Early Modern Women Poets: 1520–1700*, edited by Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson demonstrates). We need further to grasp that the formal conventions, experiments and innovations of early modern women's writing were made in the context of a literary and critical culture that placed high value on form; hence the emphasis in so much Renaissance literary criticism on rhetorical forms, imitation (that is, understanding formal models), and decorum (adapting form and style to subject matter). Or, more succinctly, early modern women's writing is *predicated* on their engagement with literary form.¹² This statement is elementary in formulation—tautological even—but expansive in implication: to ignore the formal engagements of early modern women's writing is to ignore what constitutes their literary practice and their literary capital.¹³

Katherine Philips and the intricacies of form

One of the difficulties, and delights, of studying early modern women's writing is that we are forced to work in the dark. So rarely do the specific conditions and contexts of the production, transmission, or reception of early modern women's writing come to light, particularly by comparison with later periods; so rarely is early modern women's writing, in all its activity and range, fully visible. Among the sources that we lack for early modern women's literary production, as indeed for men's, are records of the *process* of writing—although manuscript culture represents a vital medium for thinking about the processes of transmission. Without wishing to generalize (and thus proceeding to do so), while scholars of later periods of literature may sometimes consult a writer's working drafts and papers or supporting correspondence and accounts of the writing process, scholars of Renaissance literature inevitably work at an ontological disadvantage—and hence an imaginative advantage.

But the ontological cupboard is not entirely bare. Katherine Philips' letters to Sir Charles Cotterell, posthumously published by Bernard Lintott as *Letters from Orinda to Poliarchus* (1705), offer a glimpse into one woman's writing practices. The *Letters* are commonly cited as evidence that Philips' did not seek publicity, especially in her response to the piratical publication of her poetry by Richard Mariott in 1664—"I] never writ a Line in my life with the Intention to have it printed" (Letter XLV, January 29, 1663)—but rather than offering evidence of a restrictive gender ideology the *Letters* demonstrate Philips' proprietary *control* over her work, her authorial ambition, and her collaboration with powerful male allies (especially Cotterell and Lord Orrery in Dublin) in the progress of her literary career. This is especially clear in letters that discuss her translation of Corneille's *Pompey*—the first play written in rhymed couplets and written by a woman to be produced on the public stage in Britain (Dublin, 1663, and later London), and which Philips

took pains to see published not once but twice (in fact, she died before the reprint went to press). For Philips the rub lies in versification. For instance, she finds the couplet "And lending his Despair a kinde Effort, / It should the staggering Universe support" (1.1.27-8) particularly problematic:

I am oblig'd to you [Cotterell] for examining POMPEY with so much care, as to have found one Fault, though I believe you might still find many: I had it once in my Mind to tell you, that I was loath to use the word *Effort*, but not having Language enough to find any other Rhyme without losing all the Spirit and Force of the next Line, and knowing that it has been naturaliz'd at least these twelve Years; besides, that it was not us'd in that place in the *French*, I ventur'd to let it pass: But I know you are better able to correct that Passage than my self, and I hope you will yet do it.

(Philips to Cotterell, Letter XXI, December 11, 1662, 98-9, sigs. H1v-H2r)

Evidently Philips was dissatisfied with the rhyme of "Effort" with "support" and perhaps with its disruption of the regular meter of iambic pentameter ("support" functions as a regular iamb, / _ but "Effort" is a trochee, _ /). As Puttenham might put it, when "rime is strained" and "sound[s] not nor be written alike" it is "a signe that such a maker is not copious in his owne language" (2.5). Cotterell responded with a "Turn" of "Expression" to alter "the Word *Effort*" (Letter XXIII, January 10, 1663), but Philips resolved to keep the original since "my Lord Orrerry would absolutely have it continu'd" (Letter XXVI, April 8, 1663). The exchange demonstrates Philips pulling the sleight of hand of deferring to Cotterell's expertise with conventional modesty while asserting her own authorial judgment over the necessary "Spirit and Force" in a line of verse.

Philips was equally exercised over "the words *Heaven* and *Power*" in Cleopatra's lament for Pompey's widow, Cornelia:

*To mourn your fortune, Madam, and to swear,
You'd still enjoy, a Man so justly Dear
If Heaven, which does persecute me still,
Had made my Power equal to my Will.*

(5.2.5-8)

Apparently responding to Cotterell's reservations about "Heaven" and "Power" as bi-syllables, Philips argues that "Heaven" "may, I think, be sometimes so plac'd, as not to offend the Ear, when it is us'd in two Syllables" (in fact, she used both words both as monosyllables and bisyllables; Greer and Little, 3: 78 n. 2; Letter XXIII, January 10, 1662/3, 112, sig. H8v). But heaven and power cannot be so readily resolved, in line or in life, and by January

31, 1662/3 Philips had apparently changed her mind. Sending Cotterell "a Packet of printed POMPEY'S", one intended for the king to "Place in his Closet," Philips asks Cotterell "before you part with any [copy], pray mend" the offending lines: "My Objection to them is, that the words *Heaven* and *Power* are us'd as two Syllables each; but to find fault with them is much easier to me, than to correct them" (Letter XXV, January 31, 1662/3, 122-3, sigs. 15v-16r). And yet correct she must. When arranging for the "reprint" of *Pompey* ("there being in all but five hundred [copies] printed" of the first edition), Philips requests that Cotterell should "correct it before it goes to the Press, particularly the two Lines I writ to you of last Post, and those where the word *Effort* was us'd, which I desire may be alter'd as you once advis'd. And unless you will take the trouble upon you of correcting the Proofs, I am sure it will be as false printed as was my Copy of Verses to the Queen" (Letter XXVII, April 15, 1663, 127, sig. 18r; in fact, the early printings of the play do not emend "Heaven" and "Power," although the 1667 edition substitutes "did" for "does").

The scansion of three little words in lines of iambic pentameter is hardly the stuff of ambitious literary criticism today. Philips' concern appears to lie with particulars too minute to be consequential: the broader picture is entirely lost in her partial account of the writing process. Where are the big ideas? Where is the relevance? It is not as if the work is unpromising in terms of its content. *Pompey*, as one can imagine from a play with Cleopatra as a central figure, makes for productive reading in terms not only of the portrayal of female sexuality, stoicism, and heroism, but of the retrospective nostalgia for an age when women's literary capital rose to prominence in the court of Henrietta Maria; further, its exploration of friendship, clemency, and reconciliation had active political connotations in the Restoration, as Sophie Tomlinson points out.¹⁴ But for Philips the challenge of writing *Pompey*, at least as recorded in her letters to Cotterell, lay not in questions of content but of form. By the same token, to study Philips' work without engaging with their formal maneuvers is to ignore a vital context of its production and, indeed, reception. Now, to an extent we can submit those formal interests to a gendered analysis in terms of access and appropriation: for instance, by observing Philips' rhetorical deference to Cotterell's literary authority in the correction of "Lines" or, conversely, her active engagement with male literary associates (Cotterell, Orrery, Cowley) on points of language. But the devil lies in the detail, and the details of scansion and meter offer little mileage for gender as a category of analysis. It is thus. We cannot squeeze gender out of the syllables of Heaven.

"Upon women" and Puttenham's rhetorical figures

At one level our critical choices can be simply conceived: they are about where we look and what we want to look for. Despite appearances this is

not an altogether redundant truism or a prelude to a politically impotent relativism. Sometimes simple observations can serve us well; the shame would be if, in the context of a critical culture that (for many good reasons) values complexity, simplicity should strike us as wholly surprising, irrelevant, or irresponsible.

And so I want to look for different things in the same material, by exploring the confrontation between a critical reading of a misogynist poem that attends to gender and one that examines its rhetorical figures as outlined in Puttenham's *Third Book: Of Ornament*. Conventional wisdom in the field of feminist criticism is, intriguingly, often incredulous in expression: how can gender possibly be ignored in the context of a profoundly patriarchal culture, let alone in a poem "Upon women" which resolutely, relentlessly, turns on gendered stereotypes? But what of rhetorical ignorance? Brian Vickers is typically strident on this point:

We cannot understand the goals and preoccupations of writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries without a knowledge of their use of rhetoric. . . . Most modern critics have yet to acquire the basic knowledge of rhetoric that would allow them to identify the verbal devices used by Renaissance poets, the necessary first stage in evaluating how they have been used, according to the coherent rationale given by rhetoricians like Puttenham or Peacham ('for a figure is ever used to some purpose').

(Vickers, 21-2)

Of course, we are not obliged to agree with Vickers; and it would be a strange critical world if we did (as Vickers might be the first to admit). But I think it does behove us—and by us I include feminist literary critics of early modern literature—to engage with the modes of Renaissance literary criticism more thoughtfully. It is not simply about reading Renaissance literature in its critical context, but about reading it more expansively; of seeing more.

"Upon women" appears amidst the pages of a c.1630s manuscript miscellany (British Library Add MS 10309) autographed by one Margaret Bellasis: probably the daughter of Sir George Selby (Co. Durham), later the wife of Sir William Bellasis, mayor of Newcastle and supporter of anti-Royalist forces, and through this marriage to the prestigious Bellasis family of the North Riding. Bellasis's miscellany presents many of the methodological problems of interpretation that are germane to manuscript studies: we do not know the circumstances of the volume's compilation (although it appears to be transcribed in the single and neat italic hand of an amanuensis) and what role Margaret Bellasis may have played as compiler or even as reader of the volume. Certainly it includes a lot of material readily associated with men's miscellanies from the universities or inns of court—romantic, erotic, misogynist, bawdy, and topical verse, ranging from "Gnash: his Valentine" to satires on Buckingham—but this does not rule out Bellasis

as a reader of the volume; rather, this range should challenge us to think again about the possibilities of early modern women's engagement with homosocial manuscript culture. Among the plentiful material that relates to women in the volume are these unashamedly mediocre verses:

"Upon women"

Are women fayre? I wondrous fayre to see to,
 Are women sweet? yea passing sweet they be to,
 Most fayre & sweet, to them that inly loue them
 Chast and discreet to all saue those that proue them.

Are women wise? not wise, but they be wittie
 Are women wittie? yea the more's the pittie.
 They are so witty, and in wit so wilye,
 That be yee ne're so wise, they will beguile you.

Are women fooles? not fooles but fondlings many
 Can women fond be faithful unto any?
 when snow-white swan co[n]verts to colour sable
 Then women fond, will be both firme & stable.

Are women saints? no saints, nor yet no deuills
 Are women good? not good, but needfull euills.
 So angell like, that deuills I ne're doubt them,
 So needfull ills, that few can liue w|]thout them.

Are women proud? yea passing proud [that] praise 'em
 Are women kind? I wondrous kind [that] please 'em
 Euen so imperious, as no man can endure them
 Or so kind harted, any may procure them.

(British Library Add MS 10309, 175-6, fols. 89r-v)

It is hard not to submit this poem to a feminist analysis: there is little resistance in the material on this count. The poem trots out one gendered stereotype after another of women's sexual proclivity, infidelity, and mutability, and is dismissive in its conclusions: that women are "needfull euills," unendurably "imperious" (the bossy woman never goes away), indiscriminately available to "any." We could then go on to argue whether the poem participates in the perpetuation of these gendered stereotypes—contributing in its own small, mediocre way to the wider suppression of early modern women—or whether it attempts to unpiece them. This is in part a question of tone and humor. If, for instance, we read the tone of the poem as straight-faced or sarcastic, it might be said to feed a perniciously misogynist agenda; if we read it as vitriol or satiric rant, it might be said to undermine such an agenda. Similarly, we can think of the humor of the piece (and I am conscious that not all readers will find "Upon women" humorous) as

speaking principally to a male readership (perhaps an adolescent homosexual readership centered on the universities and inns of court) or *beyond* that readership—in which case the target of the poem's humor shifts significantly. In other words, is the poem attacking women or the ubiquitous putting down of women, especially by unimaginative ranting men? At this point other criteria might enter the field: the poem, it could be argued, is not sufficiently subtle or skillful to operate at the level of nuanced, self-reflexive irony; it lacks complexity. Alternatively, we might consider the poem in the field of reception: in the hands of its erstwhile reader Margaret Bellasis, the poem may have functioned to enforce her sense of exclusion from a misogynistic discursive tradition; to confirm her sense of superiority over the rank and file of fickle women; to endorse her critical dismissal of the tired spent tropes of misogynist rhetoric; to confirm her assessment of the limited creative ability of its author; to make her laugh.

All well and good. But a reading of the poem inspired by Puttenham's rhetorical figures leads us both away from the operations of gender and back towards a more nuanced understanding of how the very forms of the poem may speak to gendered interests. Like Philips' scansion of Heaven, it is hard to locate gender in the poem's tight rhyming scheme (aabb) and metrical structure (an eleven-syllable line beginning with four stressed syllables, proceeding to iambs)—although we can notice the coincidence between its subject matter and the feminine (unstressed) ending of each line. Then there are those rhetorical figures in which gender as a category of analysis appears, frankly, irrelevant. With its refrain "Are women . . . ?" the poem turns on the use of *Anaphora*, or the "Figure of Report" or "Repetition in the first degree . . . when we make one word begin, and as they are wont to say, lead the daunce to many verses in sute, as thus. *To thinke on death it is a miserie, / To thinke on life it is a vanitie*" (*Arte of Poesie*, 3: 19, WW, 198).

But it also makes use of the "*Ploche*, or the *Doubler*": "a speedie iteration of one word, but with some little intermission by inserting one or two words betweene" (*Arte of Poesie*, 3: 19, WW, 201), as in "sweet? yea passing sweet," "wise? not wise." The poem's deployment of *Ploche* works hand in glove with "*Antistrophe*, or the *Counter turne*" that ends "many clauses in the midst of your verses or dittie . . . [called] the *counter-turne*, because he turnes counter in the midst of euey meetre," signaled most obviously in "Upon women" by the use of question marks (*Arte of Poesie*, 3: 19, WW, 198–9). Indeed, the poem is structured around questions or "*Antipophora*, or *Figure of response* . . . when we will seeme to aske a question to th' intent we will aunswere it our selues, [a] figure of argument and also of amplification" (*Arte of Poesie*, 3: 19, WW, 204).

To understand these figures is, in part, to understand how the poem is constructed—yet it yields little if any insight into the poem's construction of gender. Hence perhaps the impatience that modern criticism has with such formal analysis: it does not seem to further our understanding

of a poem beyond anything but a superficial level. Syllables and repetition: so what? But I suggest that this is partly down to the impatience of the critic, not the creative writer; if you or I tried to write across eleven syllables and deploy rhyme and repetition (*anaphora*, *plochie*) and counterturns (*antistrophe*) and response (*antiphopora*), these formal challenges might become more engaging. Indeed I think this is, in part, the point about such poems as "Upon women" circulating in manuscript: among an interpretive community of readers who are themselves writers or, at the very least, emenders of verse in transmission, a poem is intriguing not least for its formal conventions and challenges. And this is what emerges so powerfully from a sustained reading of manuscript miscellanies from the period: their accumulative shifts of genre, voice, and viewpoint force an attention to the formal dimensions of verse; to literary experiment; to literary play. In the context of Margaret Bellasis' miscellany, not only are the misogynist sentiments of "Upon women" swiftly undercut by the poem following praising women's wit; amid the range of material encompassed by the miscellany the misogynist rhetoric of "Upon women" begins to look even less like authentic or authoritative expression and more like formal performance; a play upon words.

But I am being misleading here because the great thing about Puttenham's taxonomy of rhetorical figures is that he goes far beyond metrics, rhyme and repetition. In this way Puttenham's explication "Of sensible figures altering and affecting the mynde by alteration of sense or inte[n]dements in whole clauses of speeches" (3: 18) can be used to generate a nuanced analysis of tone ("sense or intendements") and its impact upon our understanding of a literary work ("affecting the mynde"). Reading "Upon women" in terms of "*Sarcasimus*. or the Bitter taunt . . . when we deride with a certaine seueritie" we might argue that its conclusions should be viewed with a degree of seriousness, a severity born out of knowledge, or that those conclusions are merely the bitter taunts of the disrespectful (*Arte of Poesie*, 3: 18, WW, 189). In this respect the poem's deployment of "*Meiosis*, or the Disabler"—to "diminish and abbase a thing by way of spight or mallice, as it were to depraue it", as in "*A great mountaine as bigge as a molehill*" or, in "Upon women," the line that women are "Chast and discreet to all saue those that proue them"—arguably diminishes the authority of the speaker by marking their remarks as spiteful and malicious (185). Moving from spite to mockery again alters the sense of the poem. For instance, reading the poem in terms of "*Micticismus*. or the Fleering frumpe . . . when we giue a mocke with a scornefull countenance as in some smiling sort looking aside or by drawing the lippe awry, or shrinking vp the nose" (191) entails less emphasis on malice and, consequently, on the (arguably) diminished authority of the spiteful speaker, while yoking the poem into the remit of "*Ironia*, or the dry mock" arguably allows for a more authoritative construction of the speaker—precisely because we do not have to take those tired old taunts against

women seriously—and opens up the possibility of a more playful relationship with the reader. In Puttenham's "sensible figures" that alter and affect the mind "by altering the sense . . . of speeches," there is, then, great scope for altering our understanding the construction and range of meaning in poetry.

But in this context perhaps the most intriguing of Puttenham's figures comes in the field of argument: "Of Figures sententious, otherwise called Rhetoricall" (3:19); figures which serve precisely to emphasize the adversarial mode of the poem. A key figure of "Upon women" is "*Orismus*, or the Definer of difference," a "maner of definition, thus: Is this wisdome? no it is a certaine subtrill knauish craftie wit, it is no industrie as ye call it, but a certaine buside brainsickness" (*Arte of Poesie*, 3: 19, WW, 231). Not only does the poem proceed by one such definition of "difference" after another ("Are women wise?; not wise but they be wittie"), but in so doing it arguably evokes the adversarial stance that Puttenham characterizes for *Orismus*: it serves "many times to great purpose to preuent our aduersaries arguments, and take vpon vs to know before what our iudge or aduersary or hearer thinketh, and that we will seeme to vtter it before it be spoken or alleaged by them" (*Arte of Poesie*, 3: 19, WW, 231). Likewise the poem's deployment of *Paragon*, "the figure of comparison . . . [setting] the lesse by the greater, or the greater to the lesse, the equall to his equall, and by such confronting of them together, driues out the true od[d]s that is betwixt them, and makes it better appeare," as in the lines "Are women saints? no saints, nor yet no deuills / Are women good? not good, but needfull euills" (*Arte of Poesie*, 3: 19, WW, 234). Puttenham incorporates *Paragon* into the figure of "*Expediitio*, or the speedie dispatcher," when "our maker [poet] as an oratour, or perswader, or pleader should go roundly to worke, and by a quick and swift argument dispatch his perswasion," briefly setting down "all our best reasons seruing the purpose, and reiect[ing] all of them sauing one, which we accept to satisfie the cause: as he that in a litigious case for land would prooue it not the aduersaries, but his clients" (*Arte of Poesie*, 3: 19, WW, 233). Of course, the allusion to law suits is not incidental: not only is *Paragon* common to both lawyer and poet "as an oratour," but the legal reference is relevant to the social contexts out of which such poetry was so commonly circulated, the inns of court.

Even more keenly relevant is the poem's use of "*Antitheton*, or the rencounter," a "figure very pleasant fit for amplification," which answers one point with a contrary one, as in "Are women wise? not wise, but they be wittie." Puttenham notes that "following the Latine name by reason of his contentious nature, we may call him [*Antitheton*] the Quareller, for so be al such persons as delight in taking the contrary part of whatsouer shalbe spoken: when I was a scholler in Oxford they called euery such one *Iohannes ad oppositum* . . . In this quarrelling figure we once plaid this merry Epigrame of an importune and shrew wife, thus: 'My neighbour hath a wife, not fit to make him thriue, / But good to kill a quicke man, or make a dead reuiue'" (*Arte of Poesie*,

3: 18, WW, 210–11). *Antitheton* not only takes us to the contentious nub of the poem but to a culture of “quarelling” at the universities which gives rise, among other things, to “merry” epigrams of shrewish wives. To be “quarrelling,” adversarial, and “litigious” “Upon women” is to be expected from a *Iohannes ad oppositum* at Oxford. The literary figure unfolds the dialogic nature both of literary composition and anti-feminist discourse.

And yet, if we probe further into *antitheton* we can glimpse one woman’s purchase upon even this quarrelling figure. *Antitheton* is often known as *contentio* (opposition, strife, contrast) in rhetoric manuals: hence Thomas Wilson summarizes the figure as “contrariety . . . when our talk standeth by contrary words or sentences together” (*An English Rhetoric*, 1560), and John Hoskyns as “an opposition” of “terms disagreeing” (*Directions for Speech and Style*, c.1599). But Hoskyns goes further: “this figure Ascham told Sturmius that he taught the Queen of England, and that she excels in practice of it.” Indeed, Roger Ascham, private tutor to Elizabeth (1548–50), remarked in a letter of April 4, 1550 that “she especially admires and strives for suitable metaphors and combinations of antitheses aptly matched and happily set in opposition.”¹⁵ *Contentio*[*fn*] does not always preclude the woman writer.

And so an understanding of the rhetorical figure can lead us not only away from but precisely towards a more nuanced feminist analysis; towards a finely calibrated taxonomy for understanding the tone, “sense,” argument, and oratory of poetry—and, where relevant, the gendered dynamics and disruptions of figurative speech. In this respect my attempt to read a Renaissance poem against the grain of materialist feminist criticism has only been partially successful: gender returns as a point of reference. But this is not indicative of the inescapability of gender. Rather, it should yield a *contingent* understanding of literature: depending on rhetorical context, form may either speak or not speak to gender; thus formal analysis is *not necessarily* antithetical to feminist criticism. Sometimes the obvious is, in fact, right, and worth restating.

Towards a dialogic formalism

Of course, early modern writers and readers were not composing or reading poetry in earnest consultation with Puttenham’s *Arte of Poesie*. My interest does not lie in train-spotting rhetorical figures, although I think that their proliferation and location embedded in verse may have appealed to the anoraks of early modern poetry. (How many figures can I use here? How many can I identify?) Indeed, such identification was of fundamental concern to the humanist curriculum: hence in *The Education of Children* (1588) William Kempe advises that pupils should learn, observe, and practice “every trope, every figure” of rhetorical ornament; in *Ludus Literarius or The grammar Schoole* (1612) John Brinsley recommends annotating “the several tropes and figures” in the right-hand margin of texts, “but in two or three

letters. As for metonymia, efficeintia, nor more but met, effie, or the like"; and, in his copy of Harington's *Orlando Furioso* (1591) the dutiful pupil John Milton carefully marked out the use of rhetorical figures and metaphors (see Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], 260-1). Puttenham's emphasis on the importance of rhetorical figures was generic to rhetoric manuals of the period and germane to the construction of literary capital in the context of a humanist education (see my "Women's literary capital in early modern England: formal composition, rhetorical display, and the possibilities of manuscript miscellanies," in *Women's Writing*).

What especially interests me here, however, is that Puttenham's account of rhetorical figures illuminates not only the gendered dimensions of figurative language but the *dialogic* nature of literary culture in the period; quarrelling, adversarial, provocative; anticipant of an answer, a rejoinder, a reposte. More widely, the *Arte of Poesie* remains useful as a guide to thinking about form and rhetoric more expansively and subtly. In a curious way, my own rhetorical ignorance puts me in a situation analogous to Puttenham's projected readers of Book III and to "the learning of ladies and young gentlewomen . . . such as be willing themselves to become good makers in the vulgar, or to be able to judge of other men's makings" (repr. in Vickers, 235). To judge other men's and women's "makings" better, I need to engage not only with the ideas and contexts that make literature but also with the very materials that make literary writing: words, figures, tropes, rhythm, rhyme, rhetoric, genre—and, still more expansively, the materials that make up the history of the book such as marginalia, page layout, editorial apparatus. In this respect we could, mischievously, refigure "materialism" to embrace both an attention to literary and bibliographic materials (forms) and a (post-) Marxist understanding of the economic and social conditions of literary production.

To be sure, a conventionally materialist feminist analysis and a formalist analysis of early modern literature will look different and look differently, and despite their points of overlap will remain inconsistent on the centrality of gender as a category of analysis. But it seems a nonsense, especially in the context of the formal engagements of Renaissance literary criticism, to have to choose between them. We should instead be working across them; working with and across literary form. As the examples of Philips and Puttenham suggest, there are at least two modes in which feminist criticism of Renaissance literature can work with formalist analysis: first, by examining (where relevant) the gendered dimensions of rhetorical figures, tropes, and genres; second, by examining the formal conventions, experiments, and innovations of writing by women—writing that was, if Renaissance literary criticism is to be believed, produced within the context of a literary culture heavily invested in form and rhetoric as principal modes of literary endeavor. Indeed, to understand and appreciate the work of Renaissance women's writing fully, we need to consider its formal engagements; "to

attend more closely," as Katherine King argues for poetry, "to such matters as poetic models, poetic apprenticeships, manipulation of verse forms and kinds, borrowings, and answerings" (57). As Margaret Ezell puts it, to fail to read women's writing in the context of its formal traditions and appropriations is to "deny [women] their mastery of their chosen forms and impoverish our understanding of the abilities and influence of early women writers in general."¹⁶ And we can press the point further: formalist analysis can and should serve the feminist project of promoting Renaissance women's writing and ensuring its longevity in the (albeit ever-changing) literary canon. In this respect formalism may indeed prove politically strategic.

But the tensions and conjunctions of formalist and feminist analysis are also shaped by chronology. Moving from "early modern" to "modern" and, especially, modernist literature yields different terrain for the crossed paths of formalist and feminist analysis. Arguably, modernism may be regarded both as historically "gendered masculine" (Scott, 1990) and "a way of seeing pioneered by women" (Hanson, 1990); a way of seeing that finds expression, not least, in formal experiment (Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, and Mina Loy, for instance, in an extended trajectory of modernism). While formal experiment has been underplayed in the study of Renaissance women's writing, the "primacy given to experimental form" in modernist women's writing is a point of critical departure and contention (Scott, 2003).¹⁷ The relations between formalist and feminist analysis should, then, be contingent on the material. There is no one-size-fits-all thesis that can be applied across literary cultures.

In the field of Renaissance literary studies we are so spoiled by the riches of the canon—by the dazzling work of Shakespeare, Donne or (in the revisionist canon) Mary Sidney—that it is all too easy to take formal innovation for granted. And so we have allowed ourselves to become less sensitive to the *work* of form. But form constitutes literariness; it makes poesy. This is the fundamental point which links the work of Puttenham with Russian formalism (an otherwise anachronistic coupling). Moreover, both Puttenham and Shklovsky understand literary writing as "*estranged* from the ordinary habit and manner of our daily talk and writing" (*Arte of English Poesie*, 1: 7; repr. in Vickers, 236); as characteristically "*unfamiliar*" (Shklovsky, 12)—a conception of the literary that extends back to Aristotle ("a really distinguished style [uses] strange words and metaphor and lengthened words and everything that goes beyond ordinary diction," *Poetics* 1458a; cited in Attridge, 2). Of course, this principle applies more readily to poetry than to prose or drama, and even in the field of poetry there are many ways of arguing against defamiliarization: with poetry that deliberately mimics the ordinary habits of speech; with poetic forms that have become so relentlessly familiar that they lack estrangement; with the political implications of an aesthetic that distinguishes itself from the vernacular (this is, in part, Raymond Williams' problem with modernism, and of Lunacarskij's with the

intellectual "decadence" of Russian Formalism).¹⁶ But regardless of the wider functions and qualities we might choose to ascribe to literary form—whether ornament, estrangement, defamiliarization, unity, or mere technicality—we cannot ignore the *distinctiveness* of literary discourse.

This is all the more so in the wake of materialist modes of critical analysis that have dominated literary studies in the past decades. Let me be clear at the outset: materialism is necessary—necessary if we care about class, history, politics, gender, race. My objection is emphatically not with materialist feminist criticism—it has produced brilliant, insightful, impassioned critical readings that have changed the way we conceive early modern literary culture and energized the academy. My point is rather that amid the textuality of history and the history of textuality, materialist feminist criticism should not abandon the distinctiveness of literary writing. Actually, I would be more passionate: it should embrace what makes literature special. This appeal is not new, but the articulation of "new formalism" as a response to the new historicist turn is. In *Renaissance Literature and its Formal Engagements* Paul Alpers argues that an account of Renaissance lyric "that seeks to be both formalist and rhetorical must work through Burke, who alone among modernist critics made it a principle that human uses of language, including literary uses, are inevitably rhetorical," but the most (historically) relevant formalist precedents are precisely those from the early modern period: the work of Renaissance literary critics, if such they can be called, like Puttenham.¹⁷ We need to read this body of work—especially its points of resistance with the interests of modern criticism—with more critical imagination: to confront, not ignore, the wider implications of the gaps between early modern and modern critical discourse. And Renaissance literary critics assumed literature's distinctiveness: thus in Sidney's hands poesy may be conceived on a continuum with history and philosophy but it remains vitally different from them.

What feminist criticism of early modern literature needs to engage with, then, is the literary as a category of critical analysis and distinction. Like all categories of analysis, the literary and literariness can be conceived in different ways; further, those conceptions may be political in scope: the literary is not immune to history, society, culture. On this point Derek Attridge's *Peculiar Language: Language as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (1988) remains a valuable and intelligent study. For Attridge, "the conception of the special language of literature which we inherit from the Western aesthetic tradition seems to be based on two mutually inconsistent demands—that the language of literature be recognizably different from the language we encounter in other contexts, and that it be recognizably the same": further, "our notions of the 'literary,' and the functions of literature within our culture, depend on just this oscillating and unstable relationship" (3–4). More recently, Jonathan Culler observes the "general tendency in recent theory to locate the distinctive features of literature not in particular

qualities of language or framings of language, but in the staging of agency and in the relation to otherness into which readers of literature are brought," prompted in part by Stephen Knapp's conception of "literary interest" as offering analogies of agency.²⁰ Or, to return to the early modern, rhetorical controversies in the period were "charged with ideological valence," as Deborah Shuger points out: "changes in what appears to be a formalist aesthetic in fact adumbrate the central tensions in Renaissance intellectual and political history."²¹ As Barthes succinctly puts it, "a little formalism turns one away from History, but . . . a lot brings one back to it."²²

And yet if we draw literariness, as I want to, into the wide green field of form, we must also acknowledge that politics, history, and culture cannot fully explain or explicate the work of literary form, especially at a local level; in a literary thick description. And although such categories of critical analysis as gender, history, politics, race, and class remain fundamental in many (most?) contexts of literary production and reception, we should be prepared to let go of their centrality for every analytical context. This is not as contentious as it may sound: critical master-narratives cannot be expected to treat all minute particulars; this is not their function. It does not matter that "the patriarchal master narrative" or, more widely, the operations of gender cannot *always* be discovered in form, in rhetoric, in literariness. This does not mean that feminist criticism is merely optional; one among many critical -isms to choose from on the literary shelf. Critical relativism is not my intent. Even in the field of form, gender remains crucial at the fundamental level of access and appropriation. But what is fundamental is not what is necessarily, or always, central. The trace of gender cannot be uncovered under every stone. The literary ground is inconsistent. That is the point.

Inconsistency has a troubled reputation in academic discourse, however; deemed almost as bad as the denial of history in early modern literary studies. Again, I find the battleground of Russian Formalism especially suggestive on this point—and pertinent to the incipient debate on the "tensions that will remain" (Duhrow) between feminism and new formalism. The first flush of Formalist thinking was swiftly denounced in the 1920s for its failure to engage with historical materialism. Trotsky, no less, articulated in *Literature and Revolution* (1923) one of the most insightful of contemporary Marxist counter-arguments to the work of "the formalists" (40), and Shklovsky in particular, by insisting upon the social embeddedness of literature:

The form of art is, to a certain and very large degree, independent, but the artist who creates this form, and the spectator who is enjoying it, are not empty machines, one for creating form and the other for appreciating. They are living people . . .

(32)

Although "materialism does not deny the significance of the element of form, either in logic, jurisprudence or art" (37) it does insist on "the social

process" of art (31) and its historical contingency (37). Thus "the methods of formal analysis are necessary, but insufficient" to understanding what really matters: the "social conditions" of art, especially "its moving force [in] economics—in class contradictions" (38). Ultimately, the problem with Formalism is that it understands works of art synchronically not diachronically; it substitutes Kantian idealism for materialism (40). Persuasive stuff, despite other passages of reduction and now outmoded determinism, but Boris Eichenbaum's rejoinder was brilliantly instructive. Eichenbaum argued that Formalism and Marxism were "mutually irrelevant": "the former explained literature from the inside, the latter from the outside; because each had a different object of study, there could be no real conflict between them." Mikhail Bakhtin made the same point in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928): "Completely different things cannot contradict one another."²³ Transposed to the "tensions" between feminism and formalism, there is no intrinsic conflict between feminism and formalism because, as critical projects, they are inconsistent. Before assuming conflict we should, in fact, perceive intellectual differences more astutely.

I began with a different articulation of this same idea: that feminism and formalism are exquisitely incompatible. But this incompatibility, this inconsistency, is a point of intellectual departure not an impasse. It is an invitation to dialogic analysis. (I would use the term dialectic if it had not, from Platonic discourse through to Kant, Hegel, and Marx, brought with it the burden of analytical *synthesis*. Indeed, the impulse to synthesize characterizes even Bakhtin's thesis of dialogic translanguistics in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928; see Holquist, 86). My point is rather that synthesis is a chimera in the confrontation between feminism and formalism, though not in all contexts: contingency remains inherent in the material.)

Dialogic thought is afraid of neither confrontation, inconsistency, nor agreement; it does not seek synthesis but remains open to it. What I am calling for, then, is what might be termed *dialogic formalism*. "New formalism" is an umbrella term covering different practices and remains useful as such. Dialogic formalism at least has more economy of scope; a recognition that formalist analysis can work in conjunction with or disrupt other modes of analysis; that it is not the be all and end all; that it is not a critical master narrative. It might be countered that we are obliged to choose our central categories of critical analysis and choose between them; to do otherwise is to practice a critical pluralism or eclecticism that is without theoretical or methodological integrity. I cannot both practice and abandon feminist or formalist analysis at will; I cannot have my cake and eat it too. But there are (at least) three problems with this contention. The first is that it misunderstands the dialogic for the eclectic; the two are distinct. The second is that it remains insensitive to the infinite varieties of literary contexts; to contingency. The third, and most important, is that such theoretical puritanism is experientially misplaced. Cake is for eating.

Notes

1. Joe Andrew, "Introduction," *Poetics of the Text: Essays to Celebrate Twenty Years of the Neo-Formalist Circle*, ed. Joe Andrew (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1992): iii–xx, viii–ix.
2. Susan J. Wolfson, "Reading for Form," *Modern Language Quarterly* 61: 1 (March 2000): 1–16; Ellen Rooney, "Form and Contentment," *Modern Language Quarterly* 61: 1 (March 2000): 17–40; see also Jim Hansen, "Formalism and its Malcontents: Benjamin and de Man on the Function of Allegory," in *New Literary History* 35: 4 (Autumn 2004): 663–84. For Hansen, "a new formalism must not concern that which it studies into objects of or for consumption . . . but rather [practice] a politically and historically inflected formalism" (680).
3. Mark David Rasmussen, *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 9.
4. Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7; see also Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1–2 and 17–18.
5. It might be argued, via French feminist literary theory of the later twentieth century, that language itself collapses any disjunction between formalism and feminism since linguistic forms (grammar, the pronoun) are argued to enshrine and encode not merely gender but gender inequality. But the debate has moved on. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) plays Luce Irigaray's conception of language as fundamentally phallogocentric against Monique Wittig's thesis that language is not misogynist in its structures but only in its applications (35) to argue that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (33).
6. William Morris's argument still holds true: that there is no art without resistance in the material. See Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), xiii.
7. See Robert Matz, "Poetry, Politics and Discursive Forms: The Case of Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*," *Genre XXX* (Fall 1997): 195–214, 195–6.
8. Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, allegoria, "the figure of false semblant," III: 18, Vickers, 247; zeugma, "the single supplie," III: 12, 136.
9. See, for instance, Ann Moss, "Humanist Education," in Glyn P. Norton, ed., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 145–60; and Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), chapter 6.
10. Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Gladys Doidge Wilcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 173. Puttenham earlier characterizes women as "judges neither sour nor severe . . . being all for the most part either meek of nature or pleasant humour", however, the judgment at stake here is not of the literary merit of specific works but of the status of figurative speech *per se*. By being favorable "judges" of figurative speech (unlike "the grave judges Areopagites" forbidding figurative speech in the court of law) women make apt judges of "the exercise of this art" of poetic discourse (3.7, Vickers, 232–3).
11. *Ibid.*, 14. Puttenham's account of women is both conventional in its articulation of the feminine virtues of pity and shamefastness (249 and 267) and innovative

- in the field of rhetoric manuals in its assumption of women's creative and critical literary interest, for instance by introducing tropes and figures as particularly "meete study for Ladies" (anagram, 108; see also the "hipallage. Or the Changeling", 173).
12. As Montefiore puts it: "no one can write poems without being enabled, however contradictorily, by knowledge of a tradition, even if their relation to that tradition may be marginal and awkward. To produce even straightforward forms like ballads, and to do it well, a poet must learn the skill of narrating a story by stanzas. . . the art of metrical competence and probably an ear for refrains" (Jan Montefiore, "Women and the English Poetic Tradition: The Oppressor's Language," in *Arguments of the Heart and Mind. Selected Essays 1977-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002: 33-47, 36)
 13. See my "Women's Literary Capital in Early Modern England: Formal Composition and Rhetorical Display in Manuscript and Print," in *Women's Writing*.
 14. Sophie Tomlinson, "Harking Back to Henrietta: The Sources of Female Greatness in Katherine Philips's *Punpey*," in Jo Wallwork and Paul Salzman (eds), *Women Writing 1550-1750*, special issue of *Meridian* 18: 1 (2001): 179-90, 181.
 15. For Wilson, see Lee A. Sonnino, *A Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 60; for Hoskyns and Ascham, see Vickers, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 416.
 16. Kathryn R. King, "Cowley Among the Women: or, Poetry in the Contact Zone," in Katherine Binhammer and Jeanne Wood (eds), *Women and Literary History: "For There She Was"* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003): 43-63, 57; Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 159.
 17. Bonnie Kime Scott, *The Gender of Modernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 2; Clare Hanson, in *The Gender of Modernism*, 303; Bonnie Kime Scott, "Beyond (?) Feminist Recuperative Study," in *Women and Literary History: "For There She Was"* eds. Katherine Binhammer and Jeanne Wood (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003): 220-34, 228.
 18. Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History, Doctrine* (1965; New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1981): 106.
 19. Paul Alpers, "Learning from the New Criticism: The Example of Shakespeare's Sonnets," in Mark David Rasmussen, ed., *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 115-38, 131.
 20. Jonathan Culler, "The Literary in Theory," in Judith Butler, John Guillory, and Kendall Thomas, eds., *What's Left of Theory? New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000): 273-92, 281-2. Culler's analysis is centered on Stephen Knapp's conception of "literary interest" as "linguistically embodied representation that tends to attract a certain kind of interest to itself" and which "offers an unusually precise and concentrated analogue of what it is like to be an agent." Stephen Knapp, *Literary Interest: The Limits of Anti-Formalism* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993): 2 and 139. On literariness in Russian Formalism, see Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Methuen, 1979): 59-60.
 21. Deborah Shuger, "Conceptions of Style," in Glyn P. Norton, ed., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Volume 3: The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 176-86, 177.
 22. Roland Barthes, "Myth Today" (1957), trans. Annette Lavers, in *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 111-12.

23. Boris Eichenbaum, in *The Press and the Revolution*, 1924, paraphrased by L. T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis in their introduction to Eichenbaum's "The Theory of the 'Formal Method,'" in Lemon and Reis (trans.), *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln, NB and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1865): 99–139, 100; Eichenbaum's *The Press and the Revolution* still awaits translation. Erlich gives an alternative paraphrase in *Russian Formalism*, 108]. Mikhail Bakhtin makes the same point in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928): "Completely different things cannot contradict one another," trans. A. T. Wehrle (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 146.