

Dame Usury: Gender, Credit, and (Ac)counting in the Sonnets and *The Merchant of Venice*

NATASHA KORDA

SCHOLARS HAVE OFTEN NOTED echoes of the early modern usury debate in Shakespeare's Sonnets addressed to the young man, which chide him as a "Profitless usurer" (4.7) for failing to generate reproductive "increase" (1.1).¹ Less attention has been paid to the reappearance of the usury trope in Sonnet 134, however, where the female addressee is taken to task for the opposite offense: she is an all-too-successful "usurer," who "put[s] forth all to use" (l. 10) and thereby profits too much.² The poet, who claims he has "mortgag'd" himself to this female creditor's "will," offers to "forfeit" himself to redeem the young man, who stands "surety-like" for him under the terms of her "bond" (ll. 2, 3, 7, 8). The offer is refused because the female creditor is sexually "covetous" and insists upon taking all that she can under the "statute of [her] beauty" (ll. 6, 9); she would rather "sue" than release the poet's "friend" (l. 11) from her bond. Sonnets 135 and 136 extend the trope, using the lexicon of counting and accounting to describe the usurer's "overplus" of "Wills" (135.2).

I am grateful to Amanda Bailey, Mary Bly, Pamela Allen Brown, Julie Crawford, Bella Mirabella, Patricia Parker, Nancy Sellek, and the editors and anonymous readers at *Shakespeare Quarterly* for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. All quotations of early modern texts in this essay silently expand contractions, give the modern equivalents of obsolete letters, and transliterate i/j and u/v.

¹ References to Shakespeare's works, with exceptions noted below, are to G. Blakemore Evans, gen. ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

² On the trope of usury in the Sonnets addressed to the young man, see John B. Mischo, "That use is not forbidden usury": Shakespeare's Procreation Sonnets and the Problem of Usury," in *Subjects on the World's Stage: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1995), 262–79; Peter C. Herman, "What's the Use? Or, the Problematic of Economy in Shakespeare's Procreation Sonnets," in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, ed. James Schiffer (New York: Garland, 1999), 263–83; and Neil Dolan, "Shylock in Love: Economic Metaphors in Shakespeare's Sonnets," *Raritan* 22.2 (2002): 26–51. David Hawkes's analysis of sodomy and usury in the Sonnets culminates in a reading of Sonnet 134, yet Hawkes downplays the agency and significance of the figure of the female creditor by suggesting that she is not so much a lender as a "borrower" (of the young man) who profits from the poet's "usurious transaction" (his lending of the young man to her) and is thus only "in effect though not in law or intention, a 'usurer.'" See David Hawkes, "Sodomy, Usury, and the Narrative of Shakespeare's Sonnets," *Renaissance Studies* 14 (2000): 344–61, esp. 360.

This lexicon and the gendered bond of credit it describes likewise appear in the roughly contemporaneous *Merchant of Venice*, when Portia accuses Bassanio of forfeiting their marital bond—which she likens to an “oath of credit” (5.1.246)—and Antonio stands “surety” for him (l. 254).³ The language of (ac)counting in these and other dramatic texts is richly suggestive of the central role played by bookkeeping and formal instruments of credit, such as bonds, in the expanding credit economy that gave rise to the commercial theaters.⁴ It is no accident that much of what we know about the stage in Shakespeare’s time is derived from an account book; keeping track of credit and debt was crucial to the commercial success of theater people, as well as of shopkeepers, tradespeople, and merchants.⁵ This essay will analyze the gendered bonds of credit and lexicon of (ac)counting that feature so prominently in the Sonnets and *The Merchant of Venice* in relation to the emergent figure of the female moneylender, in an effort to understand how the complex power dynamics between female creditors and male debtors influenced social bonds of friendship, kinship, marriage, and civic community, including the community or fellowship of the all-male playing companies.⁶

In spite of Portia’s insistence on the centrality of affective trust or trustworthiness and fiscal credit or creditability to the marriage bond, her provision of capital to pay off her husband’s debts, and the exactitude with which

³ Quotations from the play are from William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Methuen, 1951). In two instances, I have slightly emended quotations from this Arden edition where it departs from the Folio text (see n. 68 below). *The Merchant of Venice* looms large in New Economic criticism; in one recent collection edited by Linda Woodbridge (*Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003]), no fewer than five of the essays focus on the play. See also Walter Cohen, “*The Merchant of Venice* and the Possibilities of Historical Criticism,” *ELH* 49 (1982): 765–89.

⁴ On the language of (ac)counting in Shakespeare and early modern English drama, see Linda Woodbridge, “Introduction,” in *Money and the Age of Shakespeare*, 1–18. See also the forthcoming essay by Patricia Parker, “Cassio, Cash, and the ‘Infidel 0’: Arithmetic, Double-Entry Book-Keeping, and *Othello*’s Unfaithful Accounts,” in *A Companion to the Global Renaissance: English Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion*, ed. Jyotsna Singh (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2009), 223–41.

⁵ I refer to the account book or “diary” of Philip Henslowe; see R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert, eds., *Henslowe’s Diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1961).

⁶ Although indebted to Mary Poovey’s account of exactitude in accounting and of truth claims grounded in quantification in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, my analysis departs from her contention that this shift was grounded in the wholesale exclusion of women. See Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), 62–63, and “Accommodating Merchants: Accounting, Civility, and the Natural Laws of Gender,” *Differences* 8.3 (1996): 1–20.

she wages law in the trial scene, the critical tradition has largely resisted reading her as a creditor, much less as a usurer.⁷ That tradition has preferred to view Portia as one who freely and unconditionally gives, rather than one who lends, as a profitless purveyor of capital between men, due to its image of the usurer as the “*man with the moneybags*.”⁸ Recent historical research suggests that we may need to revise this image, as there is mounting evidence that women were among the most prominent lenders of money at interest in early modern England.⁹ This phenomenon has several possible explanations. Because women tended to inherit liquid assets or movables, rather than landed property, their portions were in demand as a source of business capital, whether in the form of dowries or loans.¹⁰ While some women turned to moneylending before marriage in order to increase their inherited portions, others remained unmarried and were able to live off the interest from loans.¹¹ Unmarried women and widows, who had fewer claims on their money and who were unconstrained by the law of coverture, were among the most important providers of credit in both rural and provincial urban communities, often putting large portions of their estates out at interest to friends, neighbors, and kin, as well as to tradesmen, merchants,

⁷ Harry Berger Jr. views Portia as a practitioner of “negative usury,” someone who deploys the rhetoric of liberality to instill in others a sense of emotional obligation, “a burden of gratitude,” in “Marriage and Mercifixion in *The Merchant of Venice*: The Casket Scene Revisited,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 32 (1981): 155–62, esp. 161. Lars Engle argues that Portia establishes “mastery of the systems of exchange in the play” and thereby succeeds in protecting her portion; see “‘Thrift is Blessing’: Exchange and Explanation in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *SQ* 37 (1986): 20–37, esp. 37.

⁸ Jacques Le Goff, *Your Money or Your Life: Economy and Religion in the Middle Ages* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 33 (emphasis added). On literary representations of the male usurer, see Celeste Turner Wright, “Some Conventions Regarding the Usurer in Elizabethan Literature,” *Studies in Philology* 31 (1934): 176–97.

⁹ On female creditors in early modern England, see John T. Swain, *Industry before the Industrial Revolution: North-East Lancashire c. 1500–1640* (Manchester, UK: Chetham Society, 1986), 190–91; Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660–1730* (London: Methuen, 1989), 171; William Chester Jordan, *Women and Credit in Pre-Industrial and Developing Societies* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993); and Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300–1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 85–116.

¹⁰ Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), 68–78, 81. On changes to inheritance laws, see Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983), 85–86. See also Judith M. Spicksley, “To Be or Not to Be Married: Single Women, Money-Lending, and the Question of Choice in Late Tudor and Stuart England,” in *The Single Woman in Medieval and Early Modern England: Her Life and Representation*, ed. Laurel Amtower and Dorothea Kehler (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003), 65–96, esp. 92.

¹¹ Spicksley maintains that an early seventeenth-century single woman could support herself “with a more than tolerable living standard” from the interest earned on a loan of £30. See Judith Spicksley, “‘Fly with a Duck in Thy Mouth’: Single Women as Sources of Credit in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Social History* 32 (2007): 187–207, esp. 206.

and local town governments.¹² The growing numbers of women lending money at interest in the late sixteenth century may be linked to legislation easing restrictions on the practice, such as the 1571 Usury Act, which tolerated interest rates of up to 10 percent.¹³ In the century following passage of this act, the number of single women moneylenders using formal instruments of credit and the percentage of single women never marrying grew significantly. This suggests that single women's attitudes regarding their own capital shifted toward a more proactive approach to credit and investment and that some began to view "formal lending as a route to increased autonomy."¹⁴ Women's moneylending may likewise be linked to restrictions on employment: not all widows were able to carry on their deceased husbands' trades, and single crafts- and tradeswomen often met with strong opposition from guilds and civic authorities.¹⁵ For such women, moneylending represented an attractive alternative source of income.

While it was previously thought that women's moneylending was altruistic, taking the form of small, interest-free loans to friends and relatives, we now know that women often lent large sums at interest, not only to members of their families and communities, but also to merchants and tradesmen who lived at a considerable distance and who were previously unknown to them.¹⁶ When women did lend money to kin, usually to finance family business ventures, their "assertive, business-like approach . . . contradicts the standard assumption that female lenders treated kin differently," as they used formal bonds and charged interest to relatives and close friends.¹⁷ Amy Froide argues that single women in particular were "in the vanguard" of the transition to formal, written instruments of credit, which "specified a date for repayment as well as a penalty for non-payment"; they thereby "ensured that they would be able to recoup their considerable investments in court if need be" and "were not shy" about doing

¹² Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 128–41; and B. A. Holderness, "Credit in a Rural Community, 1660–1800: Some Neglected Aspects of Probate Inventories," *Midland History* 3 (1975): 94–116, esp. 100–101.

¹³ For a general history of the 1571 statute, see Norman Jones, *God and the Moneylenders: Usury and Law in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

¹⁴ Spicksley, "To Be or Not to Be Married," 96; also 91, 93. See also Judith Spicksley, "Usury Legislation, Cash, and Credit: The Development of the Female Investor in the Late Tudor and Stuart Periods," *Economic History Review* 61 (2008): 277–301.

¹⁵ L. A. Clarkson, *The Pre-Industrial Economy in England, 1500–1700* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1971), 148; and Froide, *Never Married*, 28–30.

¹⁶ Robert Tittler, "Money-Lending in the West Midlands: The Activities of Joyce Jeffries, 1638–49," *Historical Research* 67 (1994): 249–63.

¹⁷ Amy Froide, "Surplus Women with Surplus Money: Singlewomen as Creditors in Early Modern England," paper presented at the North American Conference on British Studies, Boston, MA, 19 November 1999. See also Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660–1850* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001), 44.

so.¹⁸ Her findings should be viewed against the backdrop of the rising number of women involved in litigation more generally; as Tim Stretton has shown, more women were traveling long distances to London and staying there for extended periods in order to “wage law.”¹⁹ Widows, like never-married women, were also actively involved in the world of credit. Moneylending has been described as the “most prominent economic function of the widow in English rural society between 1500 and 1900”²⁰ and as a common means of support for widows in towns and cities, including London.²¹ Historians describe widow moneylenders as astute investors who diversified their assets in investment portfolios that included secured and unsecured loans at varying rates of interest in order to minimize risk and maximize profit.²²

The cultural phenomenon of the female moneylender met with a range of responses in early modern popular literature, including pamphlets, ballads, and plays. In his 1572 *Discourse uppon Usurye*, Thomas Wilson expressed his astonishment that usury was practiced by women of all stripes, describing it as “merveilous straunge and uncharitable.” His depiction of female creditors includes “weomen” of small means “in whome a man woulde thinke were no crafte or subiltie to live,” who nonetheless “aske the shillynge pennie for a weeke, which in a yeare amounteth to foure shillynges & foure pence besydes the principall,” as well as wealthy women, who make “lone[s] of a hundred pounds by the yere” at interest.²³ Single women moneylenders were viewed as objects of desire, seduction, and courtship by men who itched to be at their coin. They

¹⁸ Froide, *Never Married*, 134–35. On smaller loans, see Spicksley, “Fly with a Duck,” 195. For other examples of single women lending both small and large sums on bond, see Spicksley, “To Be or Not to Be Married,” 86–87; Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 233, 246; and Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 118.

¹⁹ Stretton, xi; also 43, 99.

²⁰ B. A. Holderness, “Widows in Pre-Industrial Society: An Essay upon Their Economic Functions,” in *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle*, ed. Richard M. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), 423–42, esp. 435. The widows’ wills examined by Holderness contain “sheaves of promissory notes or bonds of debt owing to them at death” (430). Of the 170 probate inventories of widows who worked as moneylenders, 43.5 percent of their personal estates comprised debts owed to them (436, 440).

²¹ According to Vivien Brodsky, wealthier widows in London in particular worked “as rentiers and as the facilitators of urban credit,” as manifested by “the bills of hand, bonds and extra leases scattered throughout [their] wills.” See “Widows in Late Elizabethan London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientations,” in *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure*, ed. Lloyd Bonfield, Richard M. Smith, and Keith Wrightson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 122–54, esp. 144.

²² Holderness, “Widows in Pre-Industrial Society,” 439–40; Clarkson, 148; Swain, 190–91; and Jordan, 68.

²³ Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse uppon Usurye* (London, 1572), fols. 15r–15v, 33–34.

were also derided or slandered by a society prone to view commercially active, unmarried women as prostitutes. Women who lent money to friends and family members were regarded with a mixture of gratitude and resentment. The positive or negative valence of such cultural representations often turned on the degree to which female creditors seemed to exercise independent will or agency: those perceived as willful or self-interested, like the usurer of Sonnet 134, were decried as covetous, lustful, or deceitful, while those perceived as lacking in agency, resorting to moneylending out of necessity, were depicted as victims worthy of sympathy and charity.

Within the early modern usury debate, the female creditor's agency became a subject of explicit controversy. Polemicists who wished to defend lending money at interest seized on the many scriptural references to God as the protector of widows and the "fatherless" in order to characterize single women's and widows' interest-bearing loans as evidence of God's special mercy.²⁴ In so doing, they tended to portray female moneylenders as lacking in fiscal agency and ability—what was termed "will" and "skill." Widows who had "stockes of money" but wanted "skill or power to imploy the same"²⁵ and whose "inhabilitie to menage worldly affaires, & to withstand wrong" left them "no other way to get their living" would "spend their stockes" and be "quite undone" if they were not allowed to lend money at interest.²⁶ Since God exhorts us "so often in Scripture to provide for the fatherlesse and widowes," it was reasoned, "is it not a safe way by this meanes to allot them a certainty for the use of their moneyes, their principall being still preserved; they maintained by the interest; and the Common-weale to enjoy both the moneyes of them who want skill, and the skill of them who want money?"²⁷ By 1641, an anonymous "Well wisher of the Common-wealth" went so far as to argue against lowering the legal maximum interest rate, claiming that to do so would hurt widows who had "neither Skill nor Will to manage it in Trade of Merchandize" and so put "Much money [out] . . . to Interest."²⁸ By characterizing widows and maids as lacking in fiscal agency and acumen, as socially vulnerable and victimized, their defenders could construe women's moneylending as an expression of God's mercy, rather than as a self-interested, profit-making venture. Ironically, this rhetorical strategy was

²⁴ See Roger Fenton, *A Treatise of Usurie* (London, 1611), 115; and [Robert] Bolton, *A Short and Private Discourse betweene M^r. Bolton and One M.S. Concerning Usury* (London, 1637), 50.

²⁵ Fenton, *Treatise of Usurie*, 110.

²⁶ These popular arguments are rehearsed in order to be refuted in the following treatises: Wilson, 70; Henry Smith, *The Examination of Usury in Two Sermons* (London, 1591), 27; Thomas Pie, *Usuries Spright Conjured: Or a Scholasticall Determination of Usury* (London, 1604), 38–39; Fenton, 41; and Bolton, 51.

²⁷ Fenton, 110.

²⁸ Anonymous, *Decay of Trade: A Treatise against the Abating of Interest* (London, 1641), 3.

adopted by financially savvy single women and widows themselves when they sought to defend their commercial interests in equity courts.²⁹

Opponents of usury refused to accept this interpretation. Scripture, they argued, draws no fine distinctions between “the Merchants Usurie . . . and the Widdowes Usurie.”³⁰ God demonstrates his condemnation of “Widdowes Usurie” by immediately following his admonition “Ye shall not trouble any widowe” (Exodus 22:22–25)³¹ with the prohibition against usury. Rather than offering widows a special dispensation to practice usury, these two injunctions indicate that widows “of all others” should “not come neere unto that transgression.”³² Far from being a manifestation of God’s charity, widows’ moneylending actually precludes charity and expresses a lack of faith in providence: “Hath God then so many waies bound himselfe by promise to provide for widdowes . . . and shall these by usurie withdraw themselves out of his fatherly providence? Shall these be secured by usurious contracts against the act of God himselfe? Verily God will take it more unkindly at their hands, then at any other.”³³ Gender was also invoked to cast maids and widows as inappropriate moneylenders: “Shall these two Ages, which of all others ought to be most holie and heavenlie,” one treatise asks, “the one for innocencie, and the other for devotion, be stained with usurie?”³⁴ In effect, antiusury polemicists accused their opponents of bad faith and hypocrisy, of allowing the practice of usury to “creep in under the pretence of widdowes.”³⁵ Widows who are truly needy, they claimed, “have no stocke at all” to lend; how, then, shall those who “lacke money to put out” be provided for?³⁶ In Thomas Wilson’s treatise, which takes the form of a dialogue, the Lawyer (who favors widows’ moneylending) inadvertently demonstrates this hypocrisy by citing the example of a “poor” helpless widow who is left the considerable sum of £500 by her merchant husband, with an additional £200 to support each of her children. The Preacher responds that such a widow would be quite able to support herself and her children through “buyinge or sellyng” or some other “lawful trade,” without entering “into the devils dungeon, and seekyng out these croked corners of

²⁹ Stretton, 46, 50–51.

³⁰ Smith, *Examination of Usury*, 23.

³¹ Théodore de Bèze, *The Bible and Holy Scriptures Contained in the Olde and Newe Testament* (London, 1576), fol. 32r.

³² Fenton, 41, 116. See also Bolton, 48–49.

³³ Fenton, 115.

³⁴ “Christ is *Alpha* and *Omega* unto us, the *first* and the *last*, the *beginning* and the *end*; and shal the *alpha* of our nonage, and the *omega* of our dotage be dedicated unto usurie?” (Fenton, 116).

³⁵ Wolfgang Muscul[us], *Of the Lawful and Unlawful Usurie amongest Christians* (Wesel, 1556), sig. E2v. See also Fenton, 110.

³⁶ Phillipp Caesar, *A General Discourse against the Damnable Sect of Usurers* (London, 1578), fol. 29 (sig. H1r). See also Fenton, 115; Bolton, 49.

wicked ockre and dampnable usurye." Under no circumstances, he argues, should "unlawfull trade . . . be used, to advance welfare," for God "wylleth all . . . to lyve as he hath commaunded by lawful trade."³⁷ Ironically, polemicists opposed to female moneylenders thus endowed them with greater agency, financial savvy, and capacity to earn a living through "honest" trade than did their defenders. Such treatises deployed a variety of rhetorical tactics to buttress this argument. "Impudent ladie Usurie" was invoked to impugn the willful impudence of female moneylenders; by allegorizing usury as female, authors made their arguments appear particularly applicable to women moneylenders.³⁸

As if to underscore the agency of the widow moneylender, Roger Fenton addresses her directly in his 1611 *Treatise of Usurie*—apparently assuming that such women took an active interest in the contemporary debate and formed part of his readership. "I write unto you widowes," he apostrophizes, admonishing, "during the time of your widowhood, by this trade of Usurie, divers of you have attained unto farre greater wealth then your husbands themselves ever could." "Is it not strange," he asks, "that a sillie woman . . . should thrive better, with greater ease and security, then her husband with the same or better meanes?" His imaginary widow-interlocutor takes this as a compliment, and "thanke[s] God for it," claiming that "it is his blessing." Fenton scoffs that the widow's good fortune has come not from any "extraordinary blessing of God," but from "the ordinarie trade of Usurie." God ordains widowhood "to bee an estate of humiliation," but "she has "made it, by the practise of Usurie, to be an estate of exaltation."³⁹

Polemics against female moneylenders were particularly opposed to their use of inflexible, formal instruments of credit.⁴⁰ Rather than resort to such means, Fenton argues, widows should entrust their estates to men who will employ them in lawful, albeit risky, ventures: "Why dare you not trust [men] to imploy your money for you by way of partnership; allowing them a proportion of gaine for their skill and care, and bearing answerably part of the losse?"⁴¹ Fenton persists in calling his imaginary widow "sillie woman" because her

³⁷ Wilson, *Discourse uppon Usurye*, fols. 70r–70v. "Ockre" derives from the Old English *wocor* or *wocer*, meaning "increase, offspring, usury," and is also related to the Dutch word for usury, *woeker*; see the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), 2d ed., J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, prep., 20 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), s.v. "ocker, *n.*1." (Further citations to the OED will be made within the text.) See also Wilson, 87–88; and Caesar, fol. 29 (sig. H1r).

³⁸ Thomas Bell, *The Speculation of Usurie* (London, 1596), sig. G3v. "Usurie," we are told, "requireth more than *her owne*" and "rejoyceth to gather other mens goods to *her selfe*"; Smith, *Examination of Usury*, 9 (emphasis added).

³⁹ Fenton, 117–18.

⁴⁰ "If a composition bee made, and that be demaunded by covenant," it was argued, female creditors "pollute themselves with usurie." Caesar, fols. 29–29v (sigs. H1r–v).

⁴¹ Fenton, 119.

care for her business affairs is not matched by her care for her soul, or for the commonwealth.⁴² He asks, “How doe you silly women know who is oppressed or bitten by such gaine?”—implying that she does not care, so long as they “*pay you your money.*”⁴³ In a final plea, he invokes gender, exhorting the widow to “let the tendernesse of [her] sexe worke unto a remorse,” and cautioning her not to believe other treatises favoring her cause, maintaining that “it is dangerous to relie upon them, who give most liberty in the matters of deceitfull *mamon.*”⁴⁴

The wills of theater people and other documents of stage history reveal that the commercial theaters were not insulated from changes in the gendered landscape of urban credit. Indeed, theater historians have argued that the Usury Statute played a crucial role in the rise of the commercial theaters, as they were financed with the aid of “many Hundred poundes taken up at interest.”⁴⁵ More research is needed on the role of female creditors in financing these ventures. Extant wills show that actors in need of ready cash sometimes turned to women moneylenders, including the wives and widows of theater people.⁴⁶ Elizabeth Burbage, wife of Cuthbert Burbage, is mentioned as a creditor in the will of actor Nicholas Tooley (also known as Wilkinson), who left her “the somme of Tenn poundes over and besides such sommes of money as I shall owe unto her att my decease,” describing it as “a remembrance of my love in respect of her motherlie care over me.”⁴⁷ The 1635 will of actor John Shank left “the somme of Threescore and Tenn poundes debt which I doe owe unto her the said mrs Morgan and for which she hath my bond.”⁴⁸ These and other references suggest that women were as active in the culture of credit surrounding the commercial

⁴² Fenton’s use of the term “sillie women” (118) draws on several of the meanings for “silly,” including “lacking in judgement,” “weak or deficient in intellect,” and perhaps “deserving of pity, compassion” (OED, s.v. “silly, *a., n., adv.*,” 5a, 4, 1a).

⁴³ Fenton, 118–19. See also Bolton, 49–51.

⁴⁴ Those “distinctions and interpretations which seeme to qualifie the matter,” Fenton says, “are but the comments of some few learned men, who differ from the rest, and among themselves; according to the variety of their severall apprehensions” (119–20).

⁴⁵ According to Cuthbert Burbage, son of Richard Burbage, “The Theater hee [Richard] built with many Hundred poundes taken up at interest,” and the Globe was built “with more summes of money taken up at interest, which lay heavy on us many yeeres.” Quoted in E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 2:65–66. See also William Ingram, “The Economics of Playing,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 313–27, esp. 316.

⁴⁶ For example, the abstract of the 1620 will of Joan Hovell, widow of actor William Hovell, refers to “£10 and odd money due to her from John Swynnerton and John Edmondess, two players, by obligations.” See E. A. J. Honigmann and Susan Brock, eds., *Playhouse Wills, 1558–1642: An Edition of Wills by Shakespeare and his Contemporaries in the London Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester UP: 1993), 118.

⁴⁷ Honigmann and Brock, eds., 125.

⁴⁸ Honigmann and Brock, eds., 187–88.

theaters as they were in the culture at large. In speculating about theater publics, we would do well to consider how the gendered bonds of credit that structured urban commerce in early modern London may have influenced the depiction of credit relations onstage. Fenton's female readership suggests that at least some of these women not only were literate but also were interested in the controversies surrounding usury and familiar with the intricacies of statute law concerning formal instruments of credit. Such an audience might well have admired Portia's exercise of will and skill in protecting her assets, waging law, and interpreting statutes regarding bonds of credit.

The view of Portia as one who gives and is herself given, rather than one who lends, follows from the traditional contrast between Belmont as a green world of mercy and aristocratic largess and Venice's pettifogging commercialism.⁴⁹ According to this reading, Portia's portion is initially circumscribed by the dictates of her dead father's will and precludes her agency entirely as it passes to her husband under the common law of coverture.⁵⁰ This reading assumes that single women's and widows' financial interests in and management of their capital simply evaporated when they married. Yet scholars have known for some time that "there were important ways in which wives were able to circumvent [the] rigidities"⁵¹ of the common law—such as trusts for separate estate, which were in use by the 1580s and spread rapidly thereafter.⁵² Needless to say, husbands did not always give up proprietary rights in their wives' property without a fight. Beginning in the 1590s, petitions were increasingly presented to Chancery by married women seeking to protect their separate property. A series of favorable rulings led to the more confident use of these instruments, which stipulated that the assets in question "shall be for [the wife's] sole and separate use and benefit, independent and exclusive of her husband and without it being anywise subject to his debts, control, interference or engagement."⁵³ By such

⁴⁹ See, for example, Harry Levin, "A Garden in Belmont: *The Merchant of Venice*, 5.1," in *Shakespeare and Dramatic Tradition: Essays in Honor of S. F. Johnson*, ed. W. R. Elton and William B. Long (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1989), 13–31, esp. 14; and Ronald A. Sharp, "Gift Exchange and the Economies of Spirit in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Modern Philology* 83 (1986): 250–65, esp. 252.

⁵⁰ On the common law of coverture, see Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680–1780* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996), 152.

⁵¹ Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, 159.

⁵² Erickson, 103–13. Trusts for separate estate were upheld by the Court of Chancery starting in Elizabeth's reign; by the 1630s, one authority stated that it was "no uncommon thing for a wife to have separate property, independent of her husband." Quoted in Earle, *Making of the English Middle Class*, 159. See also Maria L. Cioni, "The Elizabethan Chancery and Women's Rights," in *Tudor Rule and Revolution: Essays for G. R. Elton from His American Friends*, ed. Delloyd J. Guth and John W. McKenna (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), 159–82.

⁵³ Hunt, 158. See also Cioni, 161; and Mary Prior, "Wives and Wills 1558–1700," in *English Rural Society, 1500–1800: Essays in Honor of Joan Thirsk*, ed. John Chartres and David Hey

means, fathers were able to protect their daughters' assets, and widows their own assets, from avaricious, impecunious, or insolvent spouses.

As Margaret Hunt has shown, however, "when a man was especially hard-pressed by his creditors, it was all too easy for him to develop his own designs on his wife's funds," as men were "accustomed to believe that they had a 'right' to the assets of female family members."⁵⁴ Hunt cites numerous cases of husbands resorting to violence when their wives refused to hand over money set aside for their own use.⁵⁵ Such violence reveals that wives' property was the source of considerable strife within marriage and of ideological conflict in the culture at large. Still, Hunt argues, as the concept of separate estate gained increasing cultural acceptance, it "undeniably had the effect of empowering some women" who administered their assets "as part of an ongoing trade or program of investment."⁵⁶ Hunt and Muldrew cite evidence of seventeenth-century wives lending money to their husbands and other male relatives under coverture and of charging interest and using formal instruments of credit to do so.⁵⁷ Even when wives had no formal trusts set aside for separate estate, they still expected to take out of their marriages what they brought in, which suggests that women may have thought of their marital portions as *de facto* loans, rather than gifts, to their husbands.⁵⁸ If wives did consider their portions as loans, it would help to explain their active interest in financial management of their assets during marriage.

The wills of theater people reveal their own use of trusts for separate estate.⁵⁹ The 1634 will of actor William Browne makes clear that his mother, Susan Browne (also known as Susan Greene or Susan Baskerville), had set aside separate property for herself in the form of a trust held by her son when

(Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 201–26, esp. 220.

⁵⁴ Hunt, 160.

⁵⁵ One husband beat his wife with a horsewhip, another threw his wife's clothes in the fire and tried to burn her, while a third held a dagger to his wife's throat, threatening to "cut her Neck off" unless "she would consent to sell some of her own estate to pay his debts" (Hunt, 161).

⁵⁶ Hunt, 158–59. Drawing on evidence of women's depositions in the university courts in Cambridge, Alexandra Shepard notes that married women, when asked how much they were worth, sometimes referred to "their own considerable independent worth in blatant contradiction of the terms of coverture"; see *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 201.

⁵⁷ Hunt, 158; and Muldrew, 97.

⁵⁸ Ordinary women were known to mark the goods they brought into marriage so that they could reclaim them in their widowhood (Erickson, 137–38). As Fenton maintains in his *Treatise of Usurie*, "A gift is for ever: [a] loane is only for a time"; during this time, it is the borrower's "to doe withall what he list; only at the time appointed that he returne the like againe" (16).

⁵⁹ For examples of actors' wills, see Honigmann and Brock, eds., 199.

she married her third husband, James Baskerville.⁶⁰ Susan was wise to have protected her assets, for several years later it was discovered that Baskerville had a second wife. He fled to Ireland, after “having taken up diverse commodities in and about London upon credit.”⁶¹ Perhaps she had learned the lesson in the aftermath of her second marriage to Thomas Greene: when he died in 1612, Greene left her his share in Queen Anne’s playing company, along with other credits owed to him by the company, and made her executrix of his will.⁶² Susan was unrelenting in pursuing these claims and further financial arrangements made with the company to pay off the debt, at one time enlisting the services of a scrivener to draw up “divers other covenants” and “bondes for performing of the said covenants.”⁶³ In 1623, the company filed a bill of complaint in the Court of Chancery against her, claiming among other things that she charged them “excessive usery” on their debts.⁶⁴

Susan Browne and her peers clearly set precedents in a number of ways. Like other early seventeenth-century theater wives, widows, and daughters, she was among the first generation of women to inherit shares and other credits in the all-male playing companies, to protect their assets by setting aside trusts for separate estate during marriage, to pursue such claims in equity courts, and to lend money as a profit-making enterprise with formal instruments of credit. It is in light of these cultural shifts that I wish to read Portia’s comparison of the marriage bond to a bond of credit, and her exercise of will and skill in guarding the creditability of that bond and protecting her portion against the risk of male (ad)venture. Portia’s solution to the strictures that circumscribe her agency, or will, is not to abrogate the law but to maneuver skillfully within it. In so doing, she relies on precisely the sort of ingenuity exhibited by Susan Baskerville’s cohort in pursuing equitable remedies for the laws of coverture.⁶⁵ The ideological tensions surrounding the advent of separate estate and the phenomenon of married female creditors described above may also help to shed

⁶⁰ See Honigmann and Brock, eds., 181. On Susan Browne’s relations to the playhouses and playing companies, see Frederick G. Fleay, *A Chronicle History of the London Stage, 1559–1642* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1890), 270–97; C. J. Sisson, “Mr. and Mrs. Browne of the Boar’s Head,” *Life and Letters To-Day* 15.6 (1936): 99–107; and Charles J. Sisson, “The Red Bull Company and the Importunate Widow,” *Shakespeare Survey* 7 (1954): 57–68.

⁶¹ Deposition of Thomas Basse, quoted in Sisson, “Red Bull Company,” 65.

⁶² Sisson, “Mr. and Mrs. Browne,” 99; Fleay, 271.

⁶³ Fleay, 275–76.

⁶⁴ Fleay, 278. For other examples of female moneylenders accused of charging higher than the legal rate of interest, see McIntosh, 101.

⁶⁵ Such ingenuity may be what Thomas Edgar intended in *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights*, where he claims that although women “make no Lawes, they consent to none, they abrogate none,” yet “some women can shift it well enough.” T[homas] E[dgar], *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights: Or, the Lawes Provision for Woemen* (London, 1632), 6.

light on Portia's vexed evocations of coverture and on the marital strife that troubles the final act of the play.

Portia's deployment of the rhetoric of coverture in her dealings with Bassanio does not, I think, represent a "taming" of the independent woman" who is reduced to a will-less gift exchanged between men.⁶⁶ Her ambivalence is first signaled by her indecision as to whether (or how) to "teach" Bassanio "to choose right" (3.2.10–11) without contravening her dead father's will. Her iteration of the rhetoric of coverture is strikingly equivocal:

Beshrew your eyes,
They have o'erlook'd me and divided me,
One half of me is yours, the other half yours,—
Mine own I would say: but if mine then yours,
And so all yours; O these naughty times
Put bars between the owners and their rights!
And so though yours, not yours.

(ll. 14–20)

We might simply read the speech as expressing a daughter's divided duty to her father and her potential future husband. In this case, the "bars" she reproves would be the paternal dictum that prevents Bassanio from simply claiming what is rightfully his. Her use of the language of coverture ("if mine then yours, / And so all yours") would then indeed function to elide her will, agency, and estate, suggesting that they are already possessed by Bassanio, who surveys and divides her as an owner would his property. Yet Portia's tone is hardly passive or acquiescent, but rather chiding: she "beshrew[s]" her suitor directly, her "naughty" father indirectly, and the law's rigidity more generally. Insofar as it is Portia who apportions or divides her property here and elsewhere, her will would seem merely to be veiled or "covered" by the rhetoric of coverture, rather than simply eviscerated, suggesting that her "Mine own I *would* say" (emphasis added) has a volitional resonance. Read in this way, the legal stricture she scorns refers to the formulaic rehearsal of the (il)logic of coverture, and she herself is the owner whose rights are denied. Her "though yours, not yours" could then be read as an apt motto of the skillful maneuvering through which women

⁶⁶ Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters*, 60–61. See also Sharp, 254; and Susan Oldrieve, "Marginalized Voices in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 5 (1993): 87–105, esp. 88.

managed to circumvent the “bar” of coverture, and suggestive of the control she will retain over her inherited estate.⁶⁷

When the rhetoric of coverture reappears later in the scene, Portia rings a change within it that allows her to retain mastery over what she is so loath to relinquish:

Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours
Is now converted. But now I was the lord
Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
Queen o'er myself: and even now, but now,
This house, these servants, and this same myself
Are yours, my Lord, I give them with this ring,
Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
Let it presage the ruin of your love,
And be my vantage to exclaim on you.

(ll. 166–74)⁶⁸

From the moment it appears, the wedding band is defined by Portia as a bond (the terms “bond” and “band” were used interchangeably during the period⁶⁹) of sexual trustworthiness and fiscal creditability. The gift of herself and her estate is bound to the ring, becoming conditional upon its (and, by extension, their) protection; although his, it is yet not his (“though yours, not yours”), since he may not give it away. The ring, with this condition, is more loan than gift. When Portia discovers that her groom’s financial condition is “worse than nothing” (l. 259), she apports him capital to pay off his debts and then follows him to Venice to ensure its safekeeping.⁷⁰ In so doing, she skillfully maneuvers within

⁶⁷ Lisa Jardine argues that Portia “does not commit her ‘gentle spirit’ to Bassanio’s direction (she continues to act with authority, and without his knowledge or permission); and as her accounting imagery reminds us, she retains full control of her financial affairs (even the servants continue to answer to her).” See “Cultural Confusion and Shakespeare’s Learned Heroines: ‘These are old paradoxes,’” *SQ* 38 (1987): 1–18, esp. 17.

⁶⁸ I have slightly emended the Arden text here, which renders the Folio’s “yours, my Lord” as “yours,—my Lord’s!” I also emend the Arden’s punctuation of line 169, which ends in a period, and use a comma, as in the Folio. See *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, prep. Charlton Hinman (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), through-line numbers 1518, 1516.

⁶⁹ According to the *OED*, “bond” was a phonetic variant of “band,” and was “used interchangeably with it in early senses,” until the usage of “band” to mean “a moral, spiritual, or legal bond of restraint or union” became obsolete sometime in the nineteenth century, to be replaced by “bond.” *OED*, sv. “bond,” *n.*¹, etymology; and “band,” *n.*¹, etymology and branch 2, especially definitions 8–11. Shakespeare uses the term “band” to designate both the wedding bond (*Much Ado*, 3.1.114; *As You Like It*, 5.4.129; 3 *Henry VI*, 3.3.243; *Hamlet*, 3.2.160) and the bond of credit (*Richard II*, 5.2.65; 1 *Henry IV*, 3.2.157; *Comedy of Errors*, 4.2.49–50).

⁷⁰ In Carol Leventen’s words, Portia “doesn’t say, despite her ‘everything I have is yours’ avowal, ‘hey, lighten up; just write a cheque; it’s a joint account now’; she says, in effect, ‘I will write that

the legal system to protect her “bond” and hedge against risk. In the end, she will devise a scheme to provide “surety” for her marriage bond as well (5.1.254). The play thereby associates Portia’s will and skill with surety, contrasting it with the risks of male (ad)venture. Unlike contemporary polemics against female moneylenders, however, the play does not excoriate Portia’s safeguarding of her estate as an attempt to circumvent divine Providence, but rather aligns it with an emergent ethos of virtuous, Christian exactitude.

When Portia bestows her ring on Bassanio with the condition “when you part from, lose, or give [it] away, / Let it presage the ruin of your love, / And be my vantage to exclaim on you” (3.2.172–74), she echoes Shylock’s earlier use of “advantage” as a synonym for the interest paid on a loan, when he says to Antonio, “Me thoughts you said, you neither lend nor borrow / Upon advantage” (1.3.64–65).⁷¹ Yet to say that Portia’s language echoes Shylock’s is not quite accurate, as she demonstrates her own familiarity with formal instruments of credit before Shylock is ever mentioned or appears onstage. In Act 1, she jokes that her Scottish suitor “borrowed a box of the ear” of her English suitor, “and swore he would pay him again when he was able,” adding that her French suitor “became his surety, and seal’d under for another” (1.2.76–79). In the trial scene, it is Shylock’s language that replicates Portia’s, rather than vice versa, when he describes his pound of flesh as “dearly bought” (4.1.100), recalling her earlier remark to Bassanio, “Since you are dear bought, I will love you dear” (3.2.312). Through such parallels, the play invites us to question how Portia’s marriage bond differs from, and resembles, Shylock’s pound of flesh. Critics who read Portia as Shylock’s antithesis have difficulty with the terminology of credit and accounting that characterizes her speech, which is replete with references to accounts, full sums, terms in gross, oaths of credit, sureties, and the like (3.2.155, 157–58; 5.1.246, 254).⁷² Without discounting Portia’s rhetoric of

cheque.” Carol Leventen, “Patrimony and Patriarchy in *The Merchant of Venice*,” in *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Valerie Wayne (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 57–79, esp. 72. Lars Engle argues that Portia “wisely chooses to follow [Bassanio to Venice] to protect her investment,” and that her interventions in the trial scene serve to protect her “endowment from threats” (34, 36).

⁷¹ Karen Newman suggests that we read Portia’s vantage in structuralist-anthropological terms, as arising from a gift that is “more than can be reciprocated,” a gift that “short-circuits the system of exchange and the male bonds it creates.” See “Portia’s Ring: Unruly Women and Structures of Exchange in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *SQ* 38 (1987): 19–33, esp. 25–26.

⁷² This reading has certainly predominated within the critical tradition. See E. C. Pettet, “*The Merchant of Venice* and the Problem of Usury,” *Essays and Studies* 31 (1945): 19–33, esp. 29; and Nancy Elizabeth Hodge, “Making Places at Belmont: ‘You Are Welcome Notwithstanding,’” *Shakespeare Studies* 21 (1993): 155–74, esp. 166. Other recent criticism, noting the resemblances between Portia and Shylock, sees them as similarly oppressed or marginalized. See, for example, Oldrieve, 87. One critic asserts that Portia, like Shylock, will have her pound of flesh insofar

liberality, I want to suggest that the ideological resonances of her speech pull in opposite directions—toward the familiar figure of the bountiful heiress who willingly hands over her portion to pay her husband's debts⁷³ and toward the emergent figure of the female creditor, whose use of formal instruments of credit and skilled navigation of legal systems evoke the new techniques of (ac)counting that accompanied and enabled the expansion of England's credit economy.

Portia's vocabulary of counting, ciphering, and reckoning echoes similar language in Sonnets 134–36 addressed to the female usurer. In certain respects, the two figures appear diametrically opposed: whereas Portia laments that she “cannot choose one, nor refuse none” (1.2.25–26) because her “will” has been “curb'd by the will of a dead father” (ll. 24–25), the usurer of the Sonnets has “Will to boot and Will in overplus” (135.2), yet can “add . . . / One will . . . more” (l. 12) because she is “covetous” (134.6) and because “In things of great receipt” the “number one is reckon'd none” (136.7–8). Sonnet 136 draws on the classical notion that one is no number but is rather the principle of number, indivisible in itself, in order to set up a gendered opposition between the male one and the female “nothing.”⁷⁴ This opposition is destabilized, however, by the female creditor's “will”—construed as both the enormity of her wants and the spaciousness of the receptacle in which her sexual and monetary “treasure” (l. 5) is stored. This will is so large that her debtors “pass untold” (l. 9) or uncounted, which suggests an inexactitude in her (ac)counting practices born of excess. Although her debtors “[pay] the whole” (134.14) or full sum of their debt, she always demands more—the “overplus” (135.2) of the usurer. The “whole” or unified “one” they pay disappears like a drop of rain into the sea (l. 9), and they remain perpetually indebted to her. The usurer is thus figured as a nothing or cipher who turns her debtors' all into naught, while at the same time she increases her own profit or “great receipt.”⁷⁵ Her will-fullness is coupled with

as “she cuts Bassanio out of Antonio's heart”; see Keith Geary, “The Nature of Portia's Victory: Turning to Men in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Shakespeare Survey* 37 (1984): 55–68, esp. 66.

⁷³ This figure features prominently in several city comedies, in which male debtors marry wealthy usurers' daughters, thereby canceling their debts and gaining access to the usurer's wealth. As Lorna Hutson argues, the figure of the usurer's daughter functions to establish credit between men, rather than to depict her as a creditor in her own right; see *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1994), esp. 224–38.

⁷⁴ According to Aristotle, “unity is not a number” (1088a7–8); “to be one is to be indivisible . . . a unity is the principle of number” (1052b15–24). See Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1966). My argument here is indebted to Eugene Ostashevsky, “Crooked Figures: Zero and Hindu-Arabic Notation in Shakespeare's *Henry V*,” in *Arts of Calculation: Quantifying Thought in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Glimp and Michelle R. Warren (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 205–28, esp. 206, 209.

⁷⁵ On the figure of the cipher in early modern English drama, see Sandra K. Fisher, *Econolinguia: A Glossary of Coins and Economic Language in Renaissance Drama* (Newark: U

her “surety” and exaltation and with the perpetual uncertainty or want (both lack *and* desire) of her male debtors. The usurers’s “nothing” (136.12) may likewise suggest her “noting,” or the notarial practice providing the bonds that afford her this surety.

Elizabethans in general, and Shakespeare in particular, were fascinated by the figure and mathematical function of the cipher, due to its association with Hindu-Arabic numerals, which were only just coming into widespread use during the period.⁷⁶ The term “cipher” referred not only to the symbol for zero, but to Hindu-Arabic notation generally and its use in arithmetical calculations, or what was then considered the new math. Although of no value in itself, the cipher increased or decreased the value of other figures, depending on its positioning relative to them: placed after a number, it increased the value of that number tenfold; placed before it in decimal fractions, it decreased the number’s value in the same proportion. Because many people still used Roman numerals and relied upon counters to do calculations, however, ciphering—and the cipher or zero in particular—took on cryptic or occult associations.⁷⁷ At a time when the legally tolerated rate of interest on loans was 10 percent, it was associated with the calculation of interest and indebtedness; its power to increase or decrease by a factor of ten suggested the gains and losses of creditors and debtors, respectively.

Portia evokes the cipher when she tells Bassanio, “the full sum of me / Is sum of [nothing]” (3.2.157–58) when they are betrothed. Although editors frequently prefer the Quarto’s “full sune of something” to the Folio’s “sum of

of Delaware P, 1985), 55; Patricia Parker, “Temporal Gestation, Legal Contracts, and the Promissory Economies of *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *Women, Property, and the Letters of the Law in Early Modern England*, ed. Nancy E. Wright, Margaret W. Ferguson, and A. R. Buck (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004), 25–49, esp. 37–38; Patricia Parker, “Sound Government, Polymorphic Bears: *The Winter’s Tale* and Other Metamorphoses of Eye and Ear,” in *The Wordsworthian Enlightenment: Romantic Poetry and the Ecology of Reading*, ed. Helen Regueiro Elam and Frances Ferguson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), 172–90, esp. 182–83; and Parker, “Cassio, Cash, and the ‘Infidel 0.’”

⁷⁶ Ciphers and ciphering were adopted only slowly and unevenly in England beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, not fully replacing Roman numerals until the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. See Keith Thomas, “Numeracy in Early Modern England,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 37 (1987): 103–32; Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1987), esp. 7–14; and Michele Sharon Jaffe, *The Story of O: Prostitutes and Other Good-for-Nothings in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999), 25–81.

⁷⁷ The new skills of ciphering were not easily acquired: prior to 1660, few grammar schools taught arithmetic, which had to be learned through trade, by private tutoring, or in special ciphering schools. Ciphering was thus viewed with a mixture of fascination and suspicion, and the term “cipher” itself was frequently associated with concealment, obscurity, and the occult. Many Elizabethan merchants and tradesmen still depended on table books or “ready reckoners which poured out in profusion” and allowed them “to look up rates of simple or compound interest or to work out the price of some commodity” (Thomas, 117; see also 109–10, 120–22).

nothing,”⁷⁸ Q’s reading elides Portia’s evocation of the cipher’s power to render naught and to generate increase, just as in the preceding lines, where she wishes herself “A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich, / . . . only to stand high in [Bassanio’s] account” (ll. 154–55). We may add to this her many references to counting or arithmetic, as when she says she “would be trebled twenty times [her]self” for Bassanio (l. 153) or when she tells Bassanio to “Pay [Shylock] six thousand, and deface the bond,” and then to “Double six thousand, and then treble that,” and “To pay the petty debt twenty times over” (ll. 298–99, 306). However, more troubling to critics than Portia’s language of multiplication (suggesting liberality) is her language of division (evoking illiberality, divisiveness, and economic self-interest), which is deployed most famously when she bars Shylock from taking “the division of the twentieth part / Of one poor scruple” more than what is stipulated by his bond (4.1.325–26; see also 3.2.15). Yet if Portia’s vocabulary of (ac)counting evokes the “noting” of contemporary female creditors, her exactitude sets her apart from the un(ac)countable excess linked to Shylock and the usurers of Sonnets 134–36.

Early English treatises on arithmetic and accounting offer a compelling context for understanding Portia’s use of such terminology, as well as her emphasis on exactitude in the trial scene.⁷⁹ For such treatises repeatedly stress the “many daungers and discomodities” visited upon those who fail to keep their account books “exactly,” “diligently and perfightly.”⁸⁰ This ethic of exactitude was grounded in the capacity of ciphers or Hindu-Arabic numerals to calculate and record with the precision afforded by decimal arithmetic. Account books were

⁷⁸ For example, see *Merchant of Venice*, ed. Brown, 3.2.158n; and Evans, gen. ed., *Riverside Shakespeare*, 3.2.158.

⁷⁹ Thomas (106) maintains that by the late sixteenth century these new techniques of (ac)counting began to be embraced not only by merchants, but also by members of the gentry and aristocracy such as Portia; thus, we need not view Portia’s exactitude as something out of keeping with her social status. The play’s association of exactitude with its female protagonist may likewise have been influenced by the allegorical figure of Lady Science, who is portrayed holding instruments of precise measurement on the title page of James Peele’s popular treatise on double-entry bookkeeping, *The Pathe Waye to Perfectnes, in th’Accomptes of Debitour, and Creditour: In Manner of a Dialogue, Very Pleasaunte and Proffitable for Marchauntes and All Other That Minde to Frequente the Same* (London, 1569).

⁸⁰ Accounting treatises maintained, for example, that the “negligent kepyng of reconynges” caused “great shame” and “trouble in mynde,” “disquietnes of body” (including “fevers & diseases”), as well as “great discencion” and “strife in lawe” between “frendes or neighbour.” To avoid these “discomodities,” readers were urged to be “desirous & studious” in learning the new methods, rather than dismissing them as “painfull” and not worth the effort. Jan Ympyn Christoffels, *A Notable and Very Excellente Woorke, Expressyng and Declaryng the Maner and Forme How to Kepe a Boke of Acco[m]ptes or Reckonynges . . .* (London, 1547); quoted in B. S. Yamey, H. C. Edey, and Hugh W. Thomson, eds., *Accounting in England and Scotland, 1543–1800: Double Entry in Exposition and Practice* (London: Sweet and Maxwell, 1963), 6–7. See also James Peele, *The Maner and Fourme How to Keep a Perfecte Reconyng* (London, 1553), sigs. A2r, A5r.

often used by themselves or with formal instruments of credit as evidence in legal proceedings involving debt. Exactitude and precision also took on juridical value: treatises on accounting insist that “there may not be any alteration of Cyphers, [or] blotting” in account books, “otherwise the books are of no credit in Law, or before any Magistrate; whereas otherwise much credit is given to books well and orderly kept, for the deciding and determination of many controversies.”⁸¹ These treatises maintained that justice in debt litigation relied upon precision, which was a matter not only of neatness, but also of mathematical rigor. As Robert Record wrote, “The man, that is ignorant of Arithmetike, is no[t] neither meete to be a Judge. . . . For howe can hee wel understande another mannes cause appertayning to distribution of goods, or other dettes, or of summes of money, if he bee ignorante of Arithmetike?”⁸² Portia’s arithmetical verdict would doubtless have appealed to those who embraced this ethic of exactitude, including an emerging class of numerate female creditors who kept account books and waged law to protect their portions.⁸³

For many critics, Portia’s reliance on exactitude and precision prevents reading the trial scene as a contest between the Old Testament law of the flesh and the New Testament law of the spirit, or the rigidity of the common law and the flexibility of equity.⁸⁴ From this perspective, Portia’s exactitude disappoints, as it seems to rely on mere casuistry, a hypertechnical, legalistic, verbal quibble “more literal-minded than Shylock’s.”⁸⁵ In terms of contemporary treatises on bookkeeping, however, Portia’s exactitude would have confirmed her Christian virtue. Instruction in the new techniques of counting and accounting was

⁸¹ Quoted in Yamey et al., eds., 49.

⁸² Robert Record, *The Ground of Artes Teachyng the Worke and Practise of Arithmetike* . . . (London, 1543), fol. 3v. See also Peele, *How to Kepe a Perfecte Reconyng*, sig. A3r. The juridical value of exactitude had earlier been emphasized in Italian treatises on double-entry bookkeeping; see James A. Aho, “Rhetoric and the Invention of Double-Entry Bookkeeping,” *Rhetorica* 3 (1985): 21–43, esp. 25.

⁸³ Although numeracy, according to Thomas, was most likely “relatively restricted” among ordinary women, many English women kept account books, and “the daughters of well-to-do families sometimes learned mathematics to great effect” (113).

⁸⁴ On the trial scene as a contest between the Old Law and the New, see Barbara K. Lewalski, “Biblical Allusion and Allegory in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *SQ* 13 (1962): 327–43; and Murray Roston, *Tradition and Subversion in Renaissance Literature: Studies in Shakespeare, Spenser, Jonson, and Donne* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2007), 12. On the trial scene as a contest between common law and equity see, for example, Charles Spinosa, “Shylock and Debt and Contract in ‘The Merchant of Venice,’” *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 5 (1993): 65–85.

⁸⁵ Levin, 16. See also Thomas C. Bilello, “Accomplished with What She Lacks: Law, Equity, and Portia’s Con,” in *The Law in Shakespeare*, ed. Constance Jordan and Karen Cunningham (Houndsmill, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 109–26, esp. 117; and Horace Howard Furness, ed., *The Merchant of Venice* (1888; repr., New York: American Scholar, 1965), 221.

intended for “the laude of God and increase of vertue.”⁸⁶ Keepers of account books were instructed “at the beginnige of their writingis,” before entering their accounts, “to put fyrst the name of God” and “the signe of the crosse”; a phrase such as “in the name of God and Profit”⁸⁷ is typically found at the beginning of business ledgers.⁸⁸ Exactitude, construed as a means of conveying one’s trustworthiness or creditability, was considered part of the justice or rectitude of the profits one earned and therefore opposed to the unjust profits of the usurer.⁸⁹ This diligent striving after “perfection” was a way of “approching toward the image of God,” described in Pythagorean terms as the “true fountaine of perfect number.”⁹⁰ Insisting on perfection, while recognizing that absolute exactitude belonged only to the divine, as “there is no persone so perfight but that he shall sometyme misse, and entre some thyng wrong,” accounting treatises sought to develop virtuous alternatives to the vice of blotting so that “there shallbee no cause to blame or suspecte the boke,” such as marking the error with the sign of the cross, “betokenyng that it was entred by negligence,” rather than by fraudulent intent.⁹¹

Although we tend to think of Shylock in terms of rigor and exactitude and to assume that Portia’s verdict merely hoists him with his own petard, there is in fact a great deal of evidence that Shylock is not a convert to the Christian ethic of precision and the new math of cipheryng. “I am debating of my present store,” he tells Bassanio and Antonio; he admits that he must resort to “the near guess of [his] memory” to determine whether he can “instantly raise up the gross / Of full three thousand ducats” (1.3.48–50). His “near guess” would have sounded an alarm to merchants versed in the art of double-entry bookkeeping, guided

⁸⁶ [Hugh Oldcastle,] *A Briefe Instruction and Maner Hovv to Keepe Bookes of Accompts after the Order of Debitor and Creditor* (London, 1588), sig. A3r.

⁸⁷ According to James Aho, “Without exception, Renaissance ledgers open with the following exordium: a nome di dio Guadagnio (in the name of God and Profit)”; see *Confession and Bookkeeping: The Religious, Moral, and Rhetorical Roots of Modern Accounting* (Albany: State U of New York, 2005), 67.

⁸⁸ Weddington, *A Brief Instruction*, quoted in Yamey et al., eds., 48. See also Aho, “Rhetoric and the Invention of Double-Entry Bookkeeping,” 28–29; David Murray, *Chapters in the History of Bookkeeping, Accountancy, & Commercial Arithmetic* (New York: Narno Press, 1978), 205; Christopher Nobes, ed., *The Development of Double Entry: Selected Essays* (New York: Garland, 1984), 109; and Ceri Sullivan, *The Rhetoric of Credit: Merchants in Early Modern Writing* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), 40, 155. On the problem of (in)fidelity in accounting, see Parker, “Cassio, Cash, and the ‘Infidel 0.’”

⁸⁹ Aho, “Rhetoric and the Invention of Double-Entry Bookkeeping,” 34.

⁹⁰ Robert Record, *The Grounde of Artes: Teaching the Perfecte Worke and Practise of Arithmetike* (London, 1582), sigs. A3v, B3v, A6v. On Pythagoreanism in Renaissance thought and poetics, see S. K. Heninger Jr., *Touches of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1974).

⁹¹ Christoffels, quoted in Yamey et al., eds., 126.

by Luca Pacioli's mantra that one "can never be too clear" about the state of one's accounts.⁹² Shylock then appears to forget the length or duration of the loan: "I had forgot,—three months,—you told me so" (l. 62). When he begins to calculate the rate of interest, he says, "Three thousand ducats, 'tis a good round sum. / Three months from twelve, then let me see the rate" (ll. 98–99). By "round," Shylock means that it is a large, or considerable, amount (*OED*, s.v. "round, a.," 7a); yet in the context of mathematical calculation, the term "round number" meant one that was "only approximately correct, usually one expressed in tens, hundreds, [thousands,] etc., without precise enumeration of units" (*OED*, s.v. "round, a.," 7b). A "round reckoning" was one that was "approximately exact; roughly correct" (*OED*, s.v. "round, a.," 7c). Shylock seems pleased that the sum does not involve the precise enumeration of an irregular amount. Although there is no stage direction to indicate whether he uses a counter table or attempts to cipher with pen and ink, the fact that the calculation seems to take him some time (Antonio impatiently interrupts him) might suggest the former, as the new math of ciphering was promoted as a quicker and more efficient method than casting by counters.⁹³ When Shylock later says to Bassanio, "If every ducat in six thousand ducats / Were in six parts, and every part a ducat, / I would not draw them, I would have my bond!" (4.1.85–87), his mode of reckoning evokes calculation by counters, which was based on the classical concept of number as a plurality of indivisible units.⁹⁴ According to this system, when the one or unity was divided, it was "not cut, but . . . Multiplied into [more] Unities."⁹⁵ When Shylock breaks the one into parts, he counts each part as a one.

Although this inexactitude may initially be strategic (a method of drawing out his clients' discomfiture and buttressing his claim that the loan is not for gain but for friendship), Shylock's hatred of Antonio leads him to succumb to a passion that privileges vengeance above profit or precision. Over the course of the play, this passion supplants the profit motive entirely. Shylock's rigor is motivated not by monetary gain or meticulous accuracy, but by revenge;

⁹² R. Gene Brown and Kenneth S. Johnston, *Paciolo on Accounting* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 40; and Aho, "Rhetoric and the Invention of Double-Entry Bookkeeping," 25.

⁹³ David Eugene Smith, *History of Mathematics*, vol. 2 (New York: Dover, 1953), 188. Palsgrave's 1530 French-English dictionary contains the following entry: "I shall reken it syxe tymes by aulgorisme or you can caste it ones by counters / *Je ienchifreray six foys avant que vous le puissiez compter une foys par jectons.*" John Palsgrave, *Leslarcissement de la Langue Francoyse* . . . (London, 1530), sig. 336v.

⁹⁴ "Fractions or Broken numbers, as they used to be called, presented great difficulty in Roman computation. . . . According to the views of the ancient philosophers, unity, that is absolute or numerical unity, was the principle and element of number, but was in itself indivisible; division could not proceed beyond this point" (Murray, 387).

⁹⁵ Agrippa of Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans. J[ohn] F[rench] (London, 1651), 174.

in consequence, he is not so much exact as exacting. Our impression of his exactitude stems not from mathematical precision, I argue, but rather from his rigid insistence on the “exaction” (1.3.160) of his bond, an insistence conveyed through stubborn repetition: “let him look to his bond! . . . let him look to his bond! . . . let him look to his bond!” (3.1.42–44).

I'll have my bond . . .
 . . . I will have my bond . . .
 I'll have my bond; I will not hear thee speak,
 I'll have my bond.

(3.3.4–5, 12–13)

As he himself avows, his “lodg'd hate” induces him to pursue a “losing suit” (4.1.60, 62) for a pound of flesh, which “Is not so estimable, profitable neither” (1.3.162). His hatred makes him obdurate, impenetrable to reason (e.g., 3.3.12, 17; 4.1.59, 65); the excess of his passion exceeds account, and renders him and his bargain un(ac)countable: “You'll ask me why I rather choose to have / A weight of carrion flesh, than to receive / Three thousand ducats: I'll not answer that!” (4.1.40–42).⁹⁶

It is Shylock's passion for vengeance at all costs, the play suggests, that clouds his judgment and ability to reckon. His obduracy, impenetrability, and unaccountability are manifestations of the materiality of both the Old Law of the flesh and the old math, with its reliance on the abacus or counter table. By contrast, Portia is eager to learn (3.2.160–62), and her eagerness is linked not only to the New Law of the spirit and of equity, but to the new math of abstract ciphering, new techniques of accounting, and an ethic of Christian exactitude that would slowly come to define early modern England's culture of credit. “Shed thou no blood” (4.1.321), she says to Shylock,

. . . nor cut thou less nor more
 But just a pound of flesh: if thou tak'st more
 Or less than a just pound, be it so much
 As makes it light or heavy in the substance,
 Or the division of the twentieth part
 Of one poor scruple, nay if the scale do turn
 But in the estimation of a hair,
 Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate.

(ll. 321–28)

⁹⁶ On Shylock's “inscrutable calculus of hatred” and the problem of excess in the play more generally, see Eric Spencer, “Taking Excess, Exceeding Account: Aristotle Meets *The Merchant of Venice*,” in *Money and the Age of Shakespeare* (see n. 3 above), 143–58, esp. 147.

Portia's verdict associates justice with fractional exactitude and the precision of the "just pound," the term "just" here denoting an "[e]xact, as opposed to approximate" unit of measure or calculation (*OED*, s.v. "just, *a.*," 9). In so doing, she proves the contention of mathematical treatises that one who "is ignorant of Arithmetike, is not neither meete to be a Judge." Yet her verdict also evokes the limits of precision, for it is precisely because absolute exactitude belongs only to God on the day of reckoning, when all souls are called to account, that her verdict prevents Shylock from taking his pound of flesh.

Through her skillful exactitude and shunning of excess, Portia demonstrates at several crucial junctures that she has learned Nerissa's lesson that "competency lives longer" than "superfluity" or "surfeit" (1.2.9, 8, 5). "O love be moderate," she says when Bassanio chooses the lead casket, "allay thy extasy, / In measure rain thy joy, scant this excess" (3.2.111–12). She embraces measure and moderation, the play's terms for justice, rather than the excess or overplus of passion, (ad)venture, and usury; in so doing, she forges a virtuous identity for the wife-as-creditor. Portia deploys the cipher, used so often to stigmatize the female creditor's sexual and financial excess, to associate it with the exactitude of just measure. For she apportions to each a proper share, in accordance with "due proportion or measure" (*OED*, "apportion, *v.*," 3). She does so not only through her verdict in the trial scene, but also through her skillful manipulation of the ring, a visual emblem of the cipher and its complex associations with the wedding band, the marital bond, the "nothing" of female sexuality, and the "noting" of the bond-wielding female creditor. While investing the ring with these associations, Portia dissociates herself from the covetousness and sexual promiscuity they were commonly used to convey. She draws together the security of the marital bond and marital chastity: "Let me give light, but let me not be light," she says to Bassanio when he returns to Belmont, "For a light wife doth make a heavy husband" (5.1.129–30). In the end, she deploys the juridical rhetoric of fidelity in accounting practices ("charge us there upon inter'gatories, / And we will answer all things faithfully" [ll. 298–99]) in order to defend her own creditability and thereby the sexual and financial virtue of wives as creditors.⁹⁷

In likening marriage to a bond of credit, Portia draws on the Pauline doctrine of "due benevolence,"⁹⁸ which conceived of the sexual bond within marriage as a reciprocal debt between husband and wife, a concept that accords well in theory with Portia's embrace of just measure. The doctrine was frequently cited

⁹⁷ On the rhetorical relationship between interrogatory questions and accurate accounts, see Aho, "Rhetoric and the Invention of Double-Entry Bookkeeping," 26.

⁹⁸ On the doctrine of due benevolence or the "marital debt" and the penance for failure to comply, see Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977), 170–74, esp. 173.

in domestic manuals as a prescription for marital harmony and chastity.⁹⁹ In his 1622 work *Of Domesticall Duties*, William Gouge defined “due benevolence” as “one of the best remedies” to prevent adultery and ensure the production of a “legitimate brood.” To this end, the sexual bond in marriage must be performed “with good will and delight, willingly, readily and cheerfully.”¹⁰⁰ Gouge explains the term “due” not only in fiscal terms as that which is “owing or payable, as an enforceable obligation or debt,” but also as that which is “adequate, [or] sufficient” in measure (OED, s.v. “due, *a.* and *adv.*,” 1a, 7). Thus, although the sexual bond within marriage “is said to be *due* because it is a debt which the wife oweth to her husband, and he to her,” this debt is “warranted & sanctified by God” only to the extent that it is exacted in due or appropriate measure. Yet achieving due or just measure is no simple matter in practice: “There are two extremes contrarie to this dutie,” Gouge warns, “One in the *defect*: another in the *excesse*.” Those who deny their sexual duty when it is “justly required . . . denie a due debt.” The “punishment inflicted on *Onan* (*Gen.* 38. 9, 10),” according to Gouge, “sheweth how great a wrong this is.” Those who demand “*Excesse* . . . In the *measure*,” as “when husband or wife [are] insatiable,” likewise pose a threat to marital chastity.¹⁰¹ In the *Sonnets*, Shakespeare refers to the doctrine of due benevolence when the poet asserts, “That use is not forbidden usury, / Which happies those that pay the willing loan” (6.5–6).¹⁰² In onanistically wasting his seed by “having traffic with [him]self alone” (4.9) and “spend[ing] / Upon [him]self [his] beauty’s legacy” (ll. 1–2), the young man fails to pay his due debt to a wife and thereby to produce what Gouge terms a “legitimate brood.” The female usurer of the later *Sonnets*, by contrast, is guilty of “*excesse*”; her insatiable lust causes her to exact sexual payments from multiple male debtors outside of wedlock.

In spite of Portia’s rhetoric of just measure and due benevolence, the scales of justice and marital harmony in the final act of *The Merchant of Venice* do

⁹⁹ “Paul saith, *Let the Husband give unto the wife, due benevolence*, here is a commandment to yeeld this duetie: that which is commanded, is lawfull; and not to do it, is a breach of the commandment.” Henrie Smith, *A Preparative to Mariage* (London, 1591), 18. Dudley Fenner, for example, defines due benevolence as “the honorable possession of their vessels in holines one towards another, for avoyding of sinne, bringing forth a seede of God, and the honest and proper delight which ought to be betweene the man and the wife”; see *The Order of Housholde, Described Methodically out of the Worde of God . . .*, in *The Artes of Logike and Rethorike Plainelie Set Forth in the English Tounge . . .* (Middelburg, 1584), sig. B3v.

¹⁰⁰ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties: Eight Treatises* (London, 1622), 221–23.

¹⁰¹ Gouge, 221–23.

¹⁰² The term “willing loan” likewise evokes a common argument rehearsed (and rebutted) in treatises on usury, which maintained that if neither the lender nor the borrower “hath harme but both receive benefites,” then “there is none offence committed, but rather great goodnes used” (Wilson, fol. 45v).

not, as many commentators have noted, appear to be perfectly in balance. My claim is that Portia's ambivalent rehearsals of the logic of coverture and the discordant strains at the end of the play point to a broader cultural shift that destabilized the ideal of marriage as a reciprocal debt. For if this ideal had long been contradicted by the common law of coverture, which tipped the scales of reciprocity in favor of the husband ("if mine then yours, / And so all yours"), the rise of separate estate and the phenomenon of wives lending money, even to their own husbands, threatened to tip the scales in the other direction ("so though yours, not yours"). At the end Portia conjures, in an effort to ward off the threat of excess of the female creditor, a restoration of her bond/band as a symbol of due benevolence only after summoning the dangers of cuckoldry ("For by this ring the doctor lay with me" [5.1.259]). Yet the specter of the usurers remains. For at the last, all are indebted to Portia,¹⁰³ who continues *de facto*, if not *de jure*, to treat her property as her own¹⁰⁴ while enforcing the terms of her marital bond and demanding "surety" (l. 254). It is an outcome that may have led audience members, female creditors as well as male debtors, to view her as a skillful lender upon advantage, for better or for worse.

¹⁰³ Jill Phillips Ingram maintains that Portia "shifts the balance of obligation in her favor" by "controlling, to her advantage, the credit of all economic agents by the play's end." See *Idioms of Self-Interest: Credit, Identity, and Property in English Renaissance Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 99.

¹⁰⁴ Engle (37) observes that when Portia returns to Belmont at the end of the play, she refers to the domicile as her own: "I have not yet / Enter'd my house" she says (5.1.272–73; emphasis added). See also Newman, 32.

CONTRIBUTORS

DAN BRAYTON is Assistant Professor of English and American Literatures and teaches literature and environmental studies at Middlebury College.

MARK THORNTON BURNETT is Professor of Renaissance Studies at Queen's University, Belfast. He is the author of *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (1997), *Constructing "Monsters" in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture* (2002), and *Filming Shakespeare in the Global Marketplace* (2007) and is the editor or coeditor of numerous other works.

ROBERT A. ERICKSON is Professor of English Emeritus at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is the author of *The Language of the Heart, 1600–1750* and of several articles and reviews on the cultural study of the heart.

MICHAEL HATTAWAY now teaches at New York University in London. He has edited four plays for the New Cambridge Shakespeare and *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture* (2000); he is the author of *Renaissance and Reformations* (2005).

MACDONALD P. JACKSON, Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Auckland, is the author of *Defining Shakespeare: "Pericles" as Test Case* (2003). He has edited or coedited plays by Shakespeare, Marston, Middleton, and Webster.

NATASHA KORDA, Associate Professor of English at Wesleyan University, is author of *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (2002) and coeditor of *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama* (2002). She is currently completing a book entitled *Labors Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage*.

PETER W. MARX is Associate Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Berne and author of *Ein theatralisches Zeitalter* (2008).

LINDA McJANNET, Professor of English at Bentley University, is the author of *The Sultan Speaks: Dialogue in English Plays and Histories about the*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.