

Big Women, Small Men:  
The Erotics of Size in Early Modern English Literature and Culture

By

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## Abstract

When Venus lifts Adonis off his horse and tucks him under her arm at the beginning of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, she flaunts her large physical size and her willingness to use her size to satisfy her desires. Enormous, desirous female figures like Venus appear across a wide range of early modern written and visual texts. In four chapters that analyze poetry, drama, prose, and visual art, this dissertation argues that taking size as a category of literary analysis enables new understandings of embodiment, gender, sexuality, and desire as they are represented in early modern texts. These texts depict physical size as relational and performable: Venus is large, for instance, not because Shakespeare gives us her measurements but because she is so easily able to carry and dominate Adonis. My focus on the dyad of the larger woman and smaller man calls attention to size as a category that drives desire and produces queer expressions of heterosexuality. Depictions of relations between larger female and smaller male figures revise gendered patterns of dominance and submission in ways that resist traditional early modern constructions of masculinity, femininity, and companionate marriage and provide the readers and spectators that consume these texts with a set of queer pleasures conjured by the interplay between gender and size. In the first chapter, I analyze the erotic relationships goddesses, giantesses, and Amazons have with mortal men in the supernatural settings of *Venus and Adonis* and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Chapter two interrogates the pleasures of the large mother in as she appears in dramatic texts, including Brome's *The New Academy*, Hawkins's *Apollo Shroving*, Marlowe's *Edward II*, and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and *The Winter's Tale*. My third chapter argues that Elizabeth I performed large size with her costuming and rhetoric in order to magnify her

body and political authority in relation to her male courtiers. The final chapter argues for size as a crucial element in the dynamics of theatrical spectatorship and cross-dressing plays, analyzing Jonson's *Epicoene*, Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

For the Yoga Dinner Crew

For Tim

For my Parents

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## Introduction: Size Matters

The world of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1594) is populated by figures that exceed the bounds of human scale: an Amazon bride; a fairy whose name, Titania, associates her with largeness; servant fairies with diminutive names like Robin, Peascod, and Mote; the offstage votaress whose pregnancy leads to her comparison to a vast ship. With this cast of characters, *Midsummer* dramatizes a set of conflicts and desires driven by size and its fluctuations. The central conflict in the fairy world revolves around Titania and Oberon's competing desires to possess a small object in the form of a changeling boy, yet smallness becomes a disdained category in the human world when the four human lovers stumble into the forest and fall under the spell of fairy magic: three of them turn on Hermia, rejecting her for her smallness. Helena ridicules Hermia as "but little," and Lysander scornfully calls her "you dwarf" and "you bead, you acorn" (3.2.326, 329, 331). Bottom is the only character who moves between the human and fairy worlds, somehow fitting to the scale of each.<sup>1</sup> In Titania's bower, miniature servants tend to Bottom's desires while the fairy queen dotes on him for his "fair large ears" (4.1.4). Despite the largeness of this one feature, Bottom also becomes an eroticized substitute for the little changeling boy Titania has possessed until that point. The fluctuating size of *Midsummer*'s characters suggests that size, like gender, age, and status, was performable on the early modern English stage.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Sofer argues that the fairy world in *Midsummer* exists on a microscopic scale in relation to the human world and that Bottom is a unique character for being able to move seamlessly back and forth, existing simultaneously on the human and fairy scale (51).

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, considering David Mann's argument that the major female roles in plays performed by Shakespeare's company were played not by pre-pubescent boys but by young men, we might imagine a performance of this play in which Hippolyta and Titania are played by one of the tallest members of the company who perhaps uses props to make the characters he plays seem even larger (40-41). Mann bases much of his argument on the ambiguity of the early modern term "boy," which, as others such as Jeffrey Masten have argued, did not mean the same thing to early moderns that it means to us today. "Boy" was,

Taking size as a category of analysis for a text like *Midsummer* enables us to see how certain cultural discourses about gender and size are represented in early modern literature and how early modern literary texts develop a textual and visual rhetoric of size. The erotics of size at work in Titania's bower, for instance, fetishizes both largeness and smallness and prompts a second look at Theseus's desire to marry the surprisingly compliant Amazon queen Hippolyta. Though we see little interaction between these two, the scene in Titania's bower asks us to think again about why Theseus desires marriage to a woman of Amazonian stature and why Hippolyta appears receptive to such a match: perhaps an erotics of size difference underlies the political expediency of the marriage. The category of size yields new insights into the erotics circulating in *Midsummer* and helps us consider new parallels among the play's several sets of human and supernatural characters.

Size continues to surface in drama as a category with erotic valences over the next several decades, as seen nearly half a century later when the rake Nathaniell in Richard Brome's *The English Moore* (c. 1640) boasts his eclectic tastes in women by singling out size among other physical and intellectual traits:

But of all Ages, that are pressable

From Sixteene unto Sixty; and of all complections

From the white flaxen to the Tawney-Moore;

And of all Statures betweene dwarfe & Giantesse;

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rather, a vague category that could incorporate any male in a subordinate position, including those who appear physically adult ("Editing" 116-117). Mann argues that "there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that 'player-boy' became a technical term for players of female roles and could similarly be applied to members of the Children's groups whatever their age....Not surprisingly those trained to perform in the monarch's service were reluctant to give up its benefits and so the average age of the Children was ever upwards" (34). See also Ilana Ben-Amos, who shows that males might have been referred to as 'boy' all the way through their twenties if they had not yet finished their apprenticeships or if they were unmarried (7).

Of all Conditions from the doxie to the Dowsabell;  
Of all Opinions (I will not say Religious:  
For what make they with any?) And of all  
Features & shapes from the huckled-backd Bum-creeper,  
To the streight spiny Shop-Mayd in St. *Martins*;  
Briefly all sorts & Sizes I have tasted. (3.4.60-69)

Although Nathaniell lists a number of categories to identify the women he pursues, including age, race, height, status, opinion, and body shape, he seems particularly interested in categories that denote size, including in his list both height and shape and returning to size specifically to name it in the final line. *Midsummer* and *The English Moor* bookend an especially dynamic period of English drama, a period across which the erotics of size remains surprisingly central to representations of desire both on and off the stage. I have begun with drama because size matters doubly, in a sense, in a genre that represents size both textually and in embodied performance, but, as we will soon see, non-dramatic genres take up semiotic systems in which size matters to form as well as to textual depictions of embodiment.

This dissertation argues that size matters. Taking size seriously as a category of analysis for early modern printed and visual texts and performances can alter our readings of these texts, current conceptions about early modern desire, and our notions about more frequently-studied categories of early modern identity like gender, age, and status. I focus on the dyad of the larger woman and the smaller man as it appears in early modern texts to demonstrate that size difference not only drives desire, but queers the seemingly heterosexual relationships between larger women and smaller men that these

texts depict. I have chosen to analyze a broad range of dramatic and non-dramatic texts in this project, including poetry, prose, drama, and visual art. This generically diverse archive allows me to trace cultural discourses and textual rhetorics of size across texts that have often been separated categorically by genre and to interrogate how various genres, themselves subject to expectations of size (a sonnet is a short poem whereas an epic is a long poem), represent and reflect on size as a discourse and an aspect of embodiment. In chapter one, for instance, I consider the poetic technique of ekphrasis as a miniature narrative that stalls an epic narrative, often in order to describe the bodies depicted in a piece of visual art; the number of stanzas ekphrasis consumes sometimes becomes quite expansive, thus making the piece of visual art seem large even as its description is dwarfed by the larger epic form.

This project is well-suited to an early modern literary archive because during this time corporal size was not necessarily connected to precise measurement, and early modern texts express an array of alternative ways of understanding size. Modern western culture places great value on measuring the dimensions of the body: many Americans weigh themselves daily, and women, in particular, tend to invest a part of their identities in *being* (rather than *wearing*) a certain dress size. In early modern England, however, clothing was tailored rather than sized with a number, and people did not regularly weigh themselves.<sup>3</sup> Rather than comparing themselves to a body mass index chart or another

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<sup>3</sup> Pat Rogers presents evidence that the habit of weighing oneself at regular intervals began after 1750, and even then it was more of a novelty than something a person did to monitor his or her size or health (23-25). Rogers notes that, contrary to assumed habits today, the first to weigh themselves regularly seem to have been men (25). Rogers also argues that in the late eighteenth century, the growing “interest in shape [was] largely detached from any worry about the function of the bodily parts inside;” in other words, fatness was not then, as is often assumed now, assumed to be a marker of poor health (26). Quite the opposite: Rogers argues that before the nineteenth century, thinness was associated with disease and largeness with health (23). A 1587 proclamation by Elizabeth I titled “Establishing Standard Weights and Measurements” attempts to define weight for mercantile purposes, showing a move toward discrete measurements of size

abstract standard, early moderns determined their own or another person's size in comparison to those in proximity or relationship to them. Size remains comparative to some extent in the modern world, but early modern texts allow us to examine this category from the perspective of a culture that thought of corporal size as much more fluid and flexible than we generally think of it today. Literature thus becomes a mediator for knowledge of size, helping us see how early moderns understood this aspect of embodiment. This new understanding in turn gives us the tools to analyze representations of size where they occur in literary texts.

### **Categories and Terms of Size**

As *The English Moore* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* illustrate, early modern texts have a rich language for size, and I use a certain set of terms throughout this dissertation to discuss how texts construct size, in all its variations and differences. The small male figures I analyze become part of a category I term the *diminutive*, a category for men who have been rendered both powerless and erotically desirable because of their smallness of stature. The diminutive, like all categories of size, is a fluid category; the male figures I analyze move in and out of it and might become part of it willingly or against their will. Patricia Fumerton's *Cultural Aesthetics*, which traces the desirability of the ornamental in Tudor and Stuart England and analyzes miniature paintings, sonnets, and even children as aspects of the trivial (a category of ornamental miniature), provides the ground work for this definition of the diminutive. Fumerton argues that small items play an important role in the fashioning of the early modern aristocratic self, and her

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(Hughes and Larkin 543-44). In the context of this proclamation, however, these measurements apply only to goods to be bought and sold, not to human bodies.

book as a whole constructs the very small as collectible, possessible, and broadly desired in England at the time (1).<sup>4</sup> Susan Stewart's *On Longing* also theorizes size in terms of desire, taking an interdisciplinary, cross-temporal approach to categories of the miniature and the gigantic in order to analyze their cultural currency and the feelings of nostalgia and longing they provoke. Fumerton's and Stewart's projects cross boundaries that usually separate human from thing, boundaries that I, too, seek to pressure as I consider the diminutive as simultaneously a sexual subject or object, an eroticized accessory or plaything, and a submissive pet. In many ways, small characters are like toys, which Stewart links to fiction and fantasy: "the toy is the physical embodiment of fiction: it is a device for fantasy, a point of beginning for narrative. The toy opens an interior world, lending itself to fantasy and privacy" (56). As objects that potentially enable fantasy, smaller males give female figures the opportunity to enact fantasies of physical, social, and sexual dominance that also become fantasies about upending an array of social hierarchies.

This dynamic leads us to largeness, a second category of size that, in this project, is most often embodied by the woman who is large and in charge. This figure appears at the center of each chapter and asserts or performs large size in order to establish some form of social, political, erotic, sexual, and/or artistic authority, often actively rendering male figures diminutive. Departing from scholarship that tends to conceive of the large female in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body, I argue that the large woman embodies carefully-controlled, active agency. Bakhtin's analysis of the

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<sup>4</sup> Fumerton addresses the negative connotations of *trivial*, arguing that these connotations suggest our own anxieties about history: "while I embrace 'trivial' as a concept, I reject its derogatory connotation. Any such derogation, I believe, is at last only a repression pinpointing...the fear of the naked datum, of the fact that seems *mere* fact unsupported by any continuous structure or ground" (2).

carnavalesque posits the grotesque body as defined by “exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness” and argues that in “the logic of the grotesque,” “the limits between the body and the world are erased” (310, 315). Nuancing this statement about the relation between body and world, private and public, Stewart compares the miniature to the gigantic: “whereas the miniature represents closure, interiority, the domestic, and the overly cultural, the gigantic represents infinity, exteriority, the public, and the overly natural” (70). We see these sorts of binaries break down, however, in the interactions depicted in my archive, as large women and small men move back and forth between the public and the domestic, pastoral settings and cities. Also building on Bakhtin, Patricia Parker posits a “complex of ‘dilation,’” widespread in Renaissance texts and often linked to female figures or the feminine (9). She argues that dilated female bodies are associated with narrative delay and deferral (13). Part of what constructs the largeness of many of the female figures in my archive is the space they take up in the text: the number of lines they speak or lines devoted to describing their colossal bodies. However, I want to complicate Bakhtin’s and Parker’s arguments about excess by considering female largeness instead as a calculated performance of size that might expand the perceived boundaries of a body without erasing or overflowing these boundaries. While large female bodies might be exaggerated or dilated in some way, they nonetheless remain active and controlled. My approach to the large woman and her interaction with diminutive males in this project is both feminist and queer: as I will elaborate in the next section, large size gives female figures a method of resistance against patriarchal ideologies that disadvantage them, but size as an analytic category also troubles the place of gender in feminist scholarship as a constitutive marker of identity that sorts people and

characters into hierarchical categories. In other words, the more important part of a large woman's first impression in an early modern text might be *large* rather than *woman*.

This last point provides an example of what I term the *relationality* of size, or how one body appears positioned in proximity to another body. As I have indicated, the texts I analyze suggest that early moderns conceived of size as measured by relationality rather than by a discrete number, as we generally understand size today. This relationality provides opportunities for early moderns to use accessories to manipulate how others perceive their size. For example, platform shoes were developed in Italy in the fifteenth century as footwear for men who had to travel dirty streets, elevating them above the grime and enhancing their mobility. Michelle Laughran and Andrea Vianello, however, argue that when Italian women began to wear shorter skirts and taller shoes, sometimes as tall as twenty inches, they claimed both masculine stature and the ability to traverse local streets—even if their mobility was somewhat hampered by the excessive height of their footwear (264-65). Laughran and Vianello cite several contemporary travel writers who recorded their impressions of these women towering over men on city streets (266).<sup>5</sup> By turning height into a performative category rather than a biological given, these Italian women unsettle gender expectations and make a statement to both domestic and foreign men about their independence. Women and men might also perform size through the way they position their bodies in relation to the bodies of others: an average-sized woman, for instance, might look small beside a tall or muscular man but large beside a boy.<sup>6</sup> But even this example betrays a modern assumption that women are generally smaller than men, an

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<sup>5</sup> They cite travel writers Pietro Casola of Lombardy, Jacques de Villamont of France, and Englishmen Fynes Moryson and Richard Lassels, all of whom visited Venice between 1494 and 1607 (255-56).

<sup>6</sup> In a footnote, Rogers quotes Fanny Burney describing Horace Walpole as so thin that anyone standing next to him looked like Falstaff in comparison (37).



assumption I would argue was only partially shared by early modern culture. Women were often described in classical and early modern medical and polemical texts as naturally weaker, both physically and morally, than men, but as much as Aristotle, Galen, and Juan Huarte would like to diminish women, the many and diverse texts I analyze in this project assume that women either are larger than men or can easily perform largeness in ways that enable them physically and socially to dominate male figures.<sup>7</sup>

As I consider embodied size, I take into account not only physical dimensions and their performance but also the impact of age and rank on the perception of physical size. Though today we are less inclined to think of social rank as tied to the body in the same way as size or age, early moderns were concerned about the legibility of rank on the body as seen through dress, manner of speech, and general demeanor. Social relations and physical size might seem like separate issues, but they are linked rhetorically through phrases like ‘social stature’ and the ‘greatness’ of monarchs, and even today the aphorism “you can’t be too rich or too thin” connects wealth, status, and corporal size.<sup>8</sup> I am interested in probing such rhetorical invocations of size to understand not only how they produce status but also how status reflects back onto early modern understandings of size. To discuss size in this project, I thus frequently employ the word *stature*, a term that simultaneously connotes physical size, economic power, and social rank. I use this term deliberately, not to suggest that social status is the same as size, but to call attention to textual moments in which size and status work to construct each other. Costard, the

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<sup>7</sup> Evelyn Berriot-Salvadore provides an overview of ancient and early modern medical texts that describe women’s weaknesses, their relation to moral and theological texts, and the developing science of women’s medicine. Aristotle characterizes women as incomplete males, and Galen sees women as ruled by the uterus (349). Huarte argues that because of their physical weaknesses, women are also intellectually weak (354-55). In contrast, John Stubbs’s *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf*, discussed at more length in chapter three, describes Elizabeth I’s failings in terms of her monstrously large desires that threaten to swallow England whole.

<sup>8</sup> Wallis Simpson, Duchess of Windsor, coined this phrase.

clownish fool in Shakespeare's *Love's Labours Lost* whose name means "a large apple," is the subject of frequent puns on the language shared between size and status.<sup>9</sup> Holofernes suggests that Costard, "because of his great limb or joint, shall pass Pompey the Great" in the performance of the Nine Worthies (5.1.108-109). During the performance, Costard misidentifies himself as "Pompey surnamed the Big," and Biron calls him "Greater than great—great, great, great Pompey, Pompey the Huge" (5.2.543, 670-71). A similar pun on size and status occurs earlier in the play when Costard delivers a letter to the Princess:

COSTARD: Which is the greatest lady, the highest?

PRINCESS: The thickest and the tallest.

COSTARD: The thickest and the tallest—it is so, truth is truth.

An your waist, mistress, were as slender as my wit

One o' these maids' girdles for your waist should be fit.

Are not you the chief woman? You are the thickest here. (4.1.46-51)

Size and social stature share a vocabulary yet remain distinct in this series of puns; if size and social stature were entirely conflated, the puns would lose their comedy. This last quotation raises the possibility that one of the lesser ladies could usurp the Princess's royal stature by appearing larger than the Princess, a prospect that gestures toward the revisionary potential of size as a category of analysis. *Love's Labours Lost* illustrates the complexity of early modern embodiment as both performable and tied to the interactions among categories like size, gender, and status.

### Queer Size

<sup>9</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary*, "costard," n.1.

The performability of size and its relationship to status provide opportunities in texts for female figures to assert status as size in ways that figure them as relationally larger than those around them. A house-holding widow, for example, might appear socially and even physically imposing to a younger and less financially-secure suitor, a dynamic analyzed at length by Jennifer Panek.<sup>10</sup> The dynamic between these widows and their younger suitors, often the widows' employees or apprentices, brings us to another central aspect of the dynamics of size: its potential to queer relationships that seem normatively heterosexual at first glance. I employ the term *heterosexuality* deliberately and with caution, wanting to be sensitive to hetero- and homosexuality as categories of identity that came into being well after the Renaissance but, like Will Stockton and James Bromley, using modern vocabulary with the aim of positioning this project as both congruent with and distant from the past.<sup>11</sup> *Queer heterosexuality* is a deliberately anachronistic term that appears throughout my dissertation when I want to point out the destabilizing potential of relationships that might look sexually normative to us today. I join Catherine Belsey and Rebecca Ann Bach in critiquing the modern habit of enlisting

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<sup>10</sup> Panek's book *Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy* and subsequent article "Why Did Widow's Remarry?" argue that urban English widows could remarry while maintaining control over their households and their finances by wedding younger, less financially-secure men. Panek notes that early modern polemical tracts on marriage did not agree that gender necessarily supersedes all other hierarchies, especially in a marriage between a young, socially and professionally inexperienced man and his more established, previously-married wife ("Why" 287). Regardless of what prescriptive literature advised, the former widow might continue to run the household even after marriage had supposedly made her husband the head (292-93). Though marriage often elevated these young adult men socially in their communities as a whole, they might also find themselves categorized as what I term diminutive within their households, which were controlled by women of greater experience and social stature.

<sup>11</sup> Stockton and Bromley address their deliberately anachronistic use of the term "sex" to describe early modern sexual acts, arguing that they "are interested, on one hand, in demarcating the early modern period as a period before the invention of sex, with all its attendant narratives of intimacy and relationality. On the other hand, we recognize, along with most premodern and early modern sexuality scholars, that such before-and-after histories—what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls 'supersessionist histories' and Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon call 'heterohistories'—are always oversimplified, that temporal markers keep moving depending on the specific concepts, cultures, texts, and persons under discussion" (12-13). They claim that the essays collected in their volume, *Sex Before Sex*, "embrace the possibilities of the critic's simultaneous anteriority and posteriority. They recognize that there is no way now for a critic to stand before sex in early modern texts without locating herself after it" (13).

early modern texts, and particularly Shakespeare, “in support of family values, the naturalization of the nuclear family as the only legitimate location of desire,” in Belsey’s words (“Love” 280).<sup>12</sup> Marriage, the central binding force of the nuclear family, was indeed widely practiced in early modern England, yet it did not necessarily signal normativity then as it does now. Interrogating normativity as an early modern category, Bach, Laurie Shannon, and Valerie Traub argue that relationships based on sameness were seen as more natural than relationships based on difference, including gender difference. This valuing of sameness works in contrast to the difference modern Western culture considers normative (think of the cliché “opposites attract”). Bach contends that the “homosocial imaginary” dominant in Renaissance England privileged men’s relationships with men over male-female sexual activity, and Shannon argues that because early modern social and sexual relations were so firmly linked to hierarchy, relationships between those of alike categories were considered most stable and natural (Bach, *Shakespeare* 9; Shannon 185-86).<sup>13</sup> Larger women and smaller men who interact

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<sup>12</sup> Bach’s monograph *Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature Before Heterosexuality* “charts the process by which Shakespeare’s texts and Renaissance literature more generally have been made to reflect a heterosexualized world rather than to reveal their place in what I call ‘the homosocial imaginary’ of Renaissance England” (2). Bach goes on to argue that “contrary to the formulations of twentieth-century Shakespeare critics, Shakespeare was not our contemporary, nor did he invent ‘the human’; instead Shakespeare has been constructed over history as the contemporary of critics who live in a sex-positive world quite unlike the world that Shakespeare and his contemporaries knew” (3).

<sup>13</sup> Bach establishes a conflict between the early modern homosocial imaginary and a heterosexual imaginary she argues was developing throughout the seventeenth century. She argues that “though marriage and male-female sex are transhistorical phenomena, they have not always meant the same things to people” and that “a culture with what I call the ‘heterosexual imaginary’ values heterosexual intercourse for pleasure, values men’s sexual desire for women, and sees women as naturally less desirous than men. People living within that imaginary see male-female relations as central to male identity and see marriage and immediate family as more important for men than lineage and male-male (homosocial) bonds” (*Shakespeare* 2). Shannon argues that “though heterosexual coupling—it goes without saying—is a sine qua non of social reproduction and so draws support from a range of other cultural imperatives, its merger of disparate, incommensurate kinds, especially in marital or celebratory forms, poses something of an intellectual problem. However normative it may be as hierarchy, it contradicts the likeness topos at the center of positive ideas about union” (185-86). Traub employs the early modern concept of the natural as she analyzes norms as represented in anatomy, cartography, and *King Lear*, arguing that the play participates, along with the scientific discourses, in developing a human standard (“Nature” 44-45). Such a

erotically refuse the stability of sameness, differing as they do in both gender and size, and so reject both the logic of early modern gender hierarchy and the early modern idealization of sameness. When I call the relations between these two groups subversive, I mean to underscore their potential to disrupt the ideals and hierarchies on which early modern society was built.

Hierarchy and affect are central to early modern ideas of marriage and to the ways relationships between larger female and smaller male figures disrupt these ideas. Like Bromley, I am interested in teasing out the “pleasure or value individuals within Renaissance culture found in an array of relations that did not take their cues from long-term monogamy” (12). Bromley and Traub argue for the growing popularity during the early modern period of a relationship model that privileged long-term monogamy and affect, a model that eventually became modern heterosexuality. Traub uses the term *domestic heterosexuality* to describe an emerging imperative for heterosexual erotic passion as a key component of marriage, arguing that “under the regime of domestic heterosexuality, erotic desire for a domestic partner, in addition to desire for a reproductive, status-appropriate mate, became a *requirement for* (not just a happy byproduct of) the bonds between husband and wife” (*Renaissance* 265). For Traub, this new insistence on marital erotic bliss had particular consequences for female friends and lovers, but I am interested in probing the erotic meanings of temporary relations with a mate who may not be size-appropriate and for that reason offers pleasures not available within the schema of early modern companionate marriage. Indeed, despite its innocuous name, companionate marriage, according to Frances E. Dolan, was an ideology to which

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standard eventually developed, during and after the Enlightenment, into the modern idea of normativity (63).

conflict was endemic. Dolan argues that the supposed equality espoused by companionate marriage instead bred conflict under the historical and ideological conditions of early modern England: “once spouses confront one another as equals only one can win the resulting battles” for headship (*Marriage* 3). Dolan argues that marital battles arise in narratives about companionate marriage because cultural attitudes and practices such as the scriptural “one flesh” model and the legal fiction of coverture, in which a husband and wife became one when his legal identity subsumed hers, “suggest that marriage is an economy of scarcity in which there is only room for one full person” (3). This economy of scarcity most often privileges the husband and leaves the wife struggling to maintain a sense of selfhood, but even if a shrewish wife dominates her husband, this structure of dominance and submission remains intact.<sup>14</sup>

If early modern marriage was often a struggle for mastery that women were compelled to lose, then we might consider the relationships between larger women and smaller men depicted throughout early modern poetic, dramatic, and visual texts as alternatives to companionate marriage that offer companionship and erotic satisfaction without marriage and the resulting loss of selfhood. These relationships occur outside of and rarely as a prelude to marriage and reproduction, and the largeness of the female figures affirms their agency, as their enormous bodies and voices often subsume other characters and dominate narratives. In *Venus and Adonis*, for example, which I analyze in

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<sup>14</sup> As Dolan argues, “scripturally informed marriage instruction...often proposes ‘male headship’ as the solution to the inevitable conflicts that arise in marriage” (26). Dolan’s book *Marriage and Violence: The Early Modern Legacy* charts discourses of conflict and violence in Christian writings on marriage in the early modern period and the present. Dolan argues that the supposed early modern shift to companionate marriage is still in process and has never been fully realized. Instead, she argues, modern and early modern ideologies of marriage are built on the impossible conflicts between incompatible visions of marriage “as hierarchy, as fusion, as contract” (2). Dolan argues that as marriage came to be viewed as a companionate bond between two loving individuals rather than a hierarchy, conflict and violence also became central to the relationship.

greater detail in chapter one, Venus's physical largeness puts her desires at the center of the poem and enables her to satisfy these desires by physically manhandling Adonis. She pursues an erotic union that privileges her desires and remains focused on situational intimacy rather than on a monogamous partnership, countering emerging ideologies that value monogamous coupling. The sexuality of the large woman is in some ways similar to the Amazon sexuality Kathryn Schwarz describes as "already and self-consciously queer" (9). Schwarz's Amazons—among them *Midsummer's* Hippolyta—occupy an ambiguous and potentially destabilizing position in relation to patriarchy and domesticity, as Schwarz argues that "the domestication of Amazons subsumes a threat to social order, but it also leaves it there: Amazonian wives do not lose the adjective when they acquire the noun, and the spectacle of Amazonian domesticity is at least as disconcerting as it is triumphant" (3). The large female figures I analyze in the following chapters sometimes fit uneasily into the domestic and other times flaunt their largeness as they reject domesticity, but both groups provide the opportunity for early modern readers of both sexes to make use of the narrative of the large woman in potentially re-imagining or re-shaping their own domestic situations. Throughout this project, I contribute to histories of sexuality by arguing that relations between large women and diminutive men disrupt the formation of a heterosexual regime that privileges marriage as a site of male authority and desire and suggest that the development of the modern Western homo/hetero binary was never inevitable. As forms of intimacy that occur outside the rules of marriage, these relationships afford a critical look at the institution of marriage, in the early modern world and in our own, and the kind of heterosexuality it assumes. The intense interest in large women in early modern texts, at this particular moment in the history of marriage

and sexuality, suggests a desire shared across early modern English culture for a reprieve from certain expectations of marriage, femininity, and masculinity. Elizabeth I, the monarch who looms so large over this historical period and who becomes my object of analysis in chapter three, herself epitomizes this desire for a reprieve from certain gender roles and an early modern institution of marriage that proved fatal to her mother and politically ruinous for her sister.

The early modern ideology of companionate marriage is closely connected to early modern conceptions of patriarchal masculinity, which was to some extent conferred by becoming a husband and the head of a household.<sup>15</sup> Bach, for instance, argues that early modern masculinity was in part predicated on the ability to conceive (male) heirs (“Tennis Balls” 5). Alexandra Shepard, Bruce R. Smith, Mark Breitenberg, and Thomas Alan King have described early modern manhood as a demanding category available only to those with the social, financial, and/or physical means to claim it. Shepard characterizes patriarchal manhood by the virtues of “strength, thrift, industry, self-sufficiency, honesty, authority, autonomy, self-government, moderation, reason, wisdom, and wit,” a lengthy list from which men of different ranks might select in claiming a manhood that nonetheless remains difficult to attain and maintain (247). In this line, King argues that early modern manhood was less a state than a performance of dominance over women and other men and that “male entitlement was therefore tenuous, limited to certain spaces and times, a privilege to be exercised” (5). Breitenberg argues that anxiety is endemic to masculinity (1-2); these anxieties are hardly surprising considering the pressures of manhood and the likelihood of exclusion from the category as Shepard and

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<sup>15</sup> Bruce Smith argues that marriage was central to definitions of manhood and that the gentry had access to marriage at a much younger age than craftsmen and others who had to finish an apprenticeship and accumulate the means to establish a household (78).



King discuss it.<sup>16</sup> In her analysis of the young men who pursued older widows, Panek argues that some men refused this anxiety by instead embracing an inferior position as their new wives continued to run the household, calling these marriages “non-traditional re-arrangements of the domestic gender hierarchy” (“Why” 286). In my archive of texts, the anxieties surrounding the contingency of masculine identity manifest themselves in alternative expressions of masculinity that surrender dominance and the responsibilities it entails when male figures submit to larger women. These large women become objects of queer heterosexual desire for their capacity to provide pleasure and destabilize the restrictive categories of patriarchal masculinity. At the same time, these willingly diminutive men reject the homosociality so central to Bach’s conception of early modern culture by leaving their male friends when they submit to a large woman.

My use of the language of dominance and submission gestures toward modern psychoanalytical and sociological theories of masochism, theories I argue have purchase in my early modern archive. Though the terms of psychoanalysis and masochism are modern, placing early modern relations between larger women and smaller men in this context clarifies the subversive potential of their erotics.<sup>17</sup> According to Kaja Silverman, masculinities constituted by passivity, wounding, and masochism have the potential radically to destabilize gender difference and a culture sustained by it (2).<sup>18</sup> Silverman

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<sup>16</sup> Shepard similarly argues that “patriarchal manhood was...contingent and multifaceted” and that men of lesser means often performed anti-patriarchal manhood in the form of “prodigality, transience, violence, bravado, and debauchery” (247-48).

<sup>17</sup> Karmen MacKendrick defends her use of post-Nietzschean, -Freudian, and -Marxist theories to discuss premodern counterpleasures, as she terms them, arguing that “premodern understandings [of pleasure] are not generally available to us” (3). I would challenge her easy disavowal of evidence of premodern understandings of pleasure, but I accept her methodology in part because modern and post-modern theory gives us a vocabulary for beginning to understand premodern and early modern pleasures, desires, and sexualities.

<sup>18</sup> Like Silverman, John K. Noyes sees in the masochist’s desires the potential to destabilize social systems at large. Drawing on Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, Noyes argues that “the masochistic move is to seize

argues that these masculinities reject Freudian and Lacanian conceptions of the phallus and embrace castration, thereby disrupting “the commensurability of penis and phallus,” which she calls the “dominant fiction” of modern Western culture (15). Though Silverman is interested in post-World War II masculinities, early modern diminutive masculinity fits into her paradigm of socially disruptive alternatives to phallic masculinity. The diminutive males in early modern literature enjoy and embrace their encounters with large female figures in part because these women require them to surrender their masculine prerogatives. John K. Noyes, analyzing Victorian masculinity, argues that masochistic behaviors in men are born out of the “contradictory injunctions of culture both to live out the masculine urge to conquer the world and to exercise a liberal moderation” (156).<sup>19</sup> Although Noyes is interested in a period several centuries later than the period that interests me, we can nonetheless see the tension he discusses play out in a text I discuss at length in chapter one: the second book of Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, in which the Knight of Temperance seems caught between his chivalric duty to conquer and the moderation of the virtue he supposedly espouses. In the final canto, he encounters Acrasia’s bower as a site of masochistic pleasure for males who have surrendered to these “contradictory injunctions” and find pleasure in domination by female figures.<sup>20</sup> On a grander scale, a reader of *The Faerie Queene* might experience the pleasures of masochism in reading about the pain of the quest in each book or even in submitting to

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upon the machinery of domination and pervert its usage, attempting to derive nothing but sexual pleasure from machines that were designed to effect the smooth running of social structures” (12).

<sup>19</sup> Noyes also argues that although Freud and his contemporaries attempt to gender the masochist as feminine, Freud’s own theory subverts these notions of biological determinism (152-53).

<sup>20</sup> Norbert Elias traces a teleology of civilization from the middle ages to modernity, arguing in part that medieval male aggression gave way to demands for self-control (202-04). The internal conflict Noyes discusses, illustrated at moments in Spenser’s narrative, shows these forces of aggression and self-control working against each other. Submission to a large woman provides a third alternative that rejects both aggression and self-control.

the task of reading such an enormously long epic poem.<sup>21</sup> This final point returns us to the issue of size and genre, underscoring the new textual approaches size as a category might prompt when analyzing a genre characterized by its massive length.

The early modern diminutive male figure not only embraces defeat, but becomes complicit in or even a joint author of the process that diminishes him beside a large, dominant woman. Anita Phillips, distinguishing between victims, who experience violence against their wills, and masochists, who actively construct the violence enacted against them, gives me the vocabulary to discuss diminutive males not as powerless objects, but as sexual subjects who actively pursue miniaturization.<sup>22</sup> This is not to say that expressions of largeness are not empowering for female figures or that they need men's permission to be large. Rather, diminutive male figures, like the younger men Panek analyzes who married older women, discover the pleasures of the diminutive role the large woman has created for them and so submit to her authority. Size gives us a way of understanding the erotics of submission as not necessarily contingent upon gender, age, or status, giving these relationships subversive potential on a social as well as a personal scale: Bromley argues that "masochism provides a model for renegotiating the experience of domination by radically destabilizing the standard active/passive binaries from which the structures of domination take their form" (83). Similarly, relations between a larger woman and a smaller man not only invert expected gender roles within a

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<sup>21</sup> Analyzing both late 1950's film and the more recent *Casino Royale*, Tim Edwards argues that "masochism within filmic media... depends heavily not only on questions of *what* is depicted but *how* it is likely to be experienced by the audience," meaning that audiences might feel sympathy or sadism rather than masochism (161). I would posit a similar relation between early modern text and reader, with the diverse reactions of diverse readers playing into a text's potential for a kind of destabilizing or revisionary masochism.

<sup>22</sup> Phillips argues that "being a masochist and being a victim are different, even opposed. The victim has been forced on to the receiving end against her will, while the masochist has initiated a highly controlled situation involving bondage and pseudo-domination" (14). Phillips discusses mostly masochistic desires in women, but her broader arguments apply to men as well.

single relationship, but also expose the artificiality and constructed nature of those roles in the first place.

If we can read diminutive male desire in terms of a masochistic surrendering of the phallus, we might also consider the large woman as seeking possession of the phallus through, in Freud's terms, "the relation between 'baby' and 'penis'" (*Transformations* 198). In *On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Eroticism*, Freud argues that "in the symbolic language of dreams, as well as of everyday life, both may be replaced by the same symbol; both baby and penis are called a 'little one' [*das Kleine*]" (198).<sup>23</sup> The language of size in this detail makes the small body of the baby in some sense stand in for the penis. Though Jacques Lacan criticizes psychoanalytic tendencies to conflate *penis* and *phallus*, he connects the baby and the phallus when he contends that "if the mother's desire *is* for the phallus, the child wants to be the phallus in order to satisfy her desire" (278, emphasis in original). Female desire for diminutive maleness in the early modern texts I analyze anticipates Freud and Lacan in the ways that possession or domination of the small male comes to figure increased erotic and/or social prestige.

### **Early Modern Embodiment: Relational and Performed Size**

This dissertation is centrally interested in using literature as an approach to examining the sociological and psychoanalytical impacts of size on eroticism and in contributing to the history of sexuality, but it is equally interested in what literary depictions of size can tell us, or not tell us, about early modern embodiment. Though these texts do not allow us actually to see early modern bodies, bodies exist as ghostly

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<sup>23</sup> Freud goes on to argue that in healthy women, the infantile wish for a penis becomes desire for a baby, but women with a "masculine disposition" might continued to "wish to possess a penis like a man" (198).

reflections at the level of language, and these reflections in turn interact with the form of the literary work that contains the representation. For this aspect of my inquiry, I look to recent developments in the field of fat studies, a sub-field within disability studies. Elena Levy-Navarro employs a queer methodology for reading obesity, arguing that obesity is a modern construct like homo- and heterosexuality and that anachronistic uses of the term preclude “the opportunity of imagining very different ways in which bodies were constructed, imagined, and experienced in the early modern period” (18-19). Though for Levy-Navarro the cultural meanings of obesity are constructed, she still views fatness itself as a category that can be easily identified. I take up her call to imagine bodies differently but complicate her methods by thinking about size as inherently relational, or visual in complex, rather than obvious, ways. Greta Rensenbrink’s overview of the fat feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s highlights the slippery definition of the category “fat,” as she discusses the difficulties fat feminist activists had in defining fatness and regulating who could become a part of their movement and who could not (233).<sup>24</sup> This difficulty stemmed in part from the biological reality that weight can be gained and lost and a resulting cultural belief that fat is “a changeable condition, not an identity” (233).<sup>25</sup> Though this changeability proved problematic for the fat feminist movement, I am interested in historicizing attitudes toward the body by demonstrating that early modern size was thought of not as an absolute or fixed identity, but as performable and relational; I posit the malleability of size as the precursor to modern

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<sup>24</sup> Resenbrink describes some radical fat movements that began to exclude members who had lost weight because of illness, particularly diabetes, even though these women continued to identify themselves with fat feminism (236).

<sup>25</sup> Resenbrink argues that the fat feminist movement faced particular challenges that the civil rights movement, for example, did not face since fatness was presumed to be a physical state rather than an innate identity, as we generally consider race (233).

concerns about body size and shape. While in the modern West size falls under the rubric of identity politics, as evidenced by fat feminism, and so depends to some extent on definability, early modern size had the potential for cultural and political disruption precisely because it was not fixed and could be performed and claimed in the service of destabilizing other regimes like gender, status, and age.

I have already described the ways larger women in early modern texts might use their size to dominate men and seize forms of social and political power, a phenomenon that corresponds with Rensenbrink's description of fat feminism as a form of activist resistance to the patriarchal edict that women maintain an appropriately "feminine" (meaning "small") figure (217). In the 1970s and 80s, some activist groups crashed lectures on health and weight-loss meetings in order to politicize their fatness, using "the shock of their unapologetic size, their audacity, and their humor to demonstrate a radical alternative embodiment to the thin bodies sought by the participants" (219). Though the texts I analyze were written long before this political movement and the economic conditions and cultural concerns that spawned it, the female figures they depict similarly use size to establish authority, upstage the "chaste, silent, and obedient" femininity idealized by early modern conduct books, and resist patriarchal strictures on women's speech, movement, and desires. As I discuss in chapter four, Nell, the spectator-turned-theatrical-director in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, takes advantage of her largeness in relation to boy actors to manhandle them into performing the play she noisily declares she wants to see. We might think of Nell, then, as a precursor to fat feminist activists in the way she uses her enormous body and voice to seize artistic authority over the acting company and the performance.

Though I build on recent studies of fatness, this is not a project about fat women and skinny men. Such terms for size are limiting because they measure dimensions in only one way, and fatness and thinness are bound up with a particular social history, as is explored at length by Levy-Navarro. By expanding the definition of size to include height and muscularity as well as accessories and other performative aspects of stature, we gain a broader understanding of the pervasive early modern interest in physical size as a social, political, and erotic force. Given my interest in the relational aspects of size, I often add comparative endings to my adjectives: *larger* women, *smaller* men. This relationality makes largeness and smallness available to a wide range of male and female figures as useful categories of identification that have the potential to influence perceptions of other categories such as age, which has correlations with size. Age itself is a relational and contingent category in the early modern period, as Edel Lamb, David Cressy, Marjorie Garber, and others have demonstrated.<sup>26</sup> Cressy and Garber have analyzed age in early modern England as defined in terms of life cycle events such as marriage rather than by a number, but Claire S. Schen, Amy M. Froide, and Margaret Pelling, who study unmarried women, have noted that these life cycle formulations are patriarchal and exclude many who never passed through these rituals.<sup>27</sup> Lamb's analysis of early modern childhood posits an "understanding of age and childhood as cultural constructs, and not as biological states or temporal periods in the life span" (7). The emphasis in this scholarship on ritual, function, and performance reveals age as at least

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<sup>26</sup> Keith Thomas, an early scholar of age, succinctly states the "gerontocratic ideal" he sees operating in early modern England: "the young were to serve and the old were to rule" ("Age" 207). More recent scholars of age seek ways of nuancing the binary Thomas proposes.

<sup>27</sup> For example, a man or woman may marry before an older sibling, advancing first to the status of adulthood. In her analysis of aging women, Aki Beam suggests that a general uncertainty existed regarding when exactly a woman reached old age (98). She and Schen use the term "functional old age" to describe the moment when a man or a woman becomes unable to continue to fulfill his or her social role (Beam 104, Schen 14).

partly a social construction, removing this category from its connection to a physical body or a number and opening the opportunity for representations of age to be influenced by performances of size. The relationship between Mote and Don Armado in *Love's Labours Lost*, for instance, repeatedly emphasizes Mote's desirability because of his smallness and corresponding youth. Mote usually appears onstage with Don Armado, who calls him "dear imp" and "tender juvenal" in their first scene together, underscoring the connection between his diminutive name and his small stature (1.2.4, 7). Mote has particular appeal because of his small size, as Armado calls him "'pretty,' because little" (1.2.20). The language of both size and age as it applies to Mote's body suggests that either category can signal the other.

Performances of size, indeed, mark one way an individual might actively construct age, refiguring age independently of social rituals and number of years lived through manipulation of size and appearance. At the same time, a performance of youth might designate relational smallness. While Lamb focuses in part on children's performances of adulthood on the stage, I am interested, conversely, in adult performances of youth on and off the stage that might render a man small and place him in the category of the diminutive. If, as some scholars of early modern masculinity suggest, males only enjoyed the full privileges of patriarchy when they were in middle age, having passed through some life cycle rituals but not others, then an early modern man's social power could have been challenged by interfering with his ability to perform his age convincingly. The female figures in this project manipulate size in ways that keep the male figures around them from wielding gendered patriarchal power, miniaturizing men in order to infantilize and thus subordinate them. Miniaturization and infantilization



limit the men's ability to exercise forms of social power connected to patriarchal masculinity, and attention to depictions of miniaturization in literary texts prompt us to reconsider how these texts construct social categories such as age and status.

### **Sites for Size**

This project charts a widespread early modern fascination with the erotics of size by investigating four differently charged sites of interaction and conflict between men and women: poetic green spaces, the home, the court, and the theater. I trace depictions of size through increasingly embodied performances, beginning with poetic texts in which size is entirely mediated by male authors, then moving to dramatic and visual texts to consider how the physical bodies of both men and women influence the representation and performance of size. Close readings of a complex rhetoric of size that runs through short and long, dramatic and non-dramatic texts form the backbone of each chapter, as I seek to tease out this rhetoric and analyze its erotic valences and connections to form. The project's first chapter, "Beyond the Normal Scale: The Erotics of Size in *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene*," analyzes erotic encounters and relationships mortal men have with Amazons and goddesses in the supernatural settings of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1596). The large mortal and immortal female figures seize erotic control, and textual depictions of these relationships destabilize normative sexual hierarchies for the pleasure of the diminutive male figure, the large female figure, and the imagined reader. Chapter two, "An Infant in Her Hand: Large Mothers in English Drama," moves from poetic fantasy worlds into the more familiar setting of the home in order to rethink portrayals of mother-son relationships in

early modern drama. Though recent discussions of mothers have tended to see them as destructive of their sons' masculinity, I argue that dramas such as Richard Brome's *The New Academy* (1626), William Hawkins's *Apollo Shroving* (1636), Marlowe's *Edward II* (1592), and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (1608) suggest that large, socially and politically powerful mother figures provide social and erotic pleasure for male characters and spectators of both genders. This chapter takes up psychoanalytic theory of male infant development to analyze desire for the large mother figure or her body parts.

My third chapter, "Elizabeth I: Royal Performances of Size and Age," takes the size dynamic of dependency in a new direction to argue that Elizabeth I performed large size with her costuming and rhetoric in order to infantilize her male courtiers. I analyze the queen's speeches, prayers, and poetry as well as portraiture to show that Elizabeth's performances of size gave her both political and erotic dominance at court. I then turn to John Lyly's *Endymion* (1588), a play written for royal performance and acted by boy actors, to show how it works as a courtier's meditation on a queen who easily manipulates scale. Lyly offers one version of a male response to both the pleasures and the frustrations of serving a large female monarch. The project culminates with a chapter on theatrical spectatorship titled "Female Spectators, Cross-dressing, and the Erotics of Diminutive Theatrics." The depiction of female spectatorship in Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) involves a merchant-class woman who performs largeness as she uses her loud voice and physical strength to coerce the boy actors into performing her play. Performing large size enables Nell not only to challenge the supposed author of the play she has gone to see for artistic authority, but to gain erotic power over the actors, whom she touches and kisses throughout the performance. The

erotic appeal of the small actor for the large woman surfaces in a parallel form in cross-dressing plays such as Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1602) in which the powerful Olivia desires the cross-dressed Viola. Departing from dominant critical trends that see cross-dressing boy actors as objects of homoerotic desire, this section of the final chapter argues that the character in diminutive male disguise appeals to the powerful woman because he offers sexual satisfaction without the power dynamic of companionate marriage. This form of desire resonates with the ways the actors themselves might appeal to some female members of the audience.

As my references to readers and spectators in these chapter descriptions suggest, my analysis of the queer pleasures offered by early modern depictions of relations between larger women and smaller men considers the subversive ways in which audiences might have interacted with written and visual texts and performances. Sasha Roberts charts a history of early modern reader engagement, arguing that she has found “the agency of (often unidentified) individual readers, wielding power over the texts they manipulated, fashioning meaning from them according to their own interests and agendas” (4). She describes the ways male and female readers “copied, corrected, commonplacéd, applied, annotated, emended, reformatted, reworked, and responded” to texts, arguing that “we might regard this practice of textual appropriation as one mode of literacy in the period” (8). Roberts focuses on Shakespeare's poetry, but the evidence with which she supports her claims that Shakespeare's readers actively made his texts their own gestures toward the commonality of reader engagement with texts throughout

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>28</sup> Andrew Gurr's characterization of the early modern playhouse as a space in which spectators yelled back at the actors and interacted with the events on the stage suggests that a similar dynamic of appropriation existed at public performances (51-52). Throughout all four chapters, I consider how visual and textual depictions of relations between larger women and smaller men might have served as scripts for early modern readers and spectators to re-imagine and remake their own experiences. At the same time, I am careful not to assume a uniform reader or audience response, as any group of readers or spectators is necessarily diverse. The texts themselves do not assume a universal response but rather present an array of possibilities for the erotic enjoyment of their diverse readership. Most of the texts I analyze represent male-authored depictions of women's desire rather than the experiences of historical women who inhabited early modern England, but they reveal a set of cultural assumptions that likely impacted historical women and men as they ascribed to women's desire the power to undermine expectations of gender and marital categories when women choose diminutive erotic objects. These texts make the queer erotics of the diminutive available to female and male readers and spectators alike.

My dissertation has theoretical and historical implications for our understanding of early modern literature and theatrical practices as well as embodiment, erotics, and power, both then and now. Size has a place in sexual fetishism today, including microphilia and desire for BBW (Big Beautiful Women), and early modern interest in the erotics of size illustrates that versions of these fetishes circulated at a time before heterosexuality existed as an identity but when it was beginning to develop as an

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<sup>28</sup> Adam Smyth, for example, discusses the early modern practice of cutting the pages of books apart to excerpt, censor, or otherwise modify them. Similarly, William H. Sherman notes the ways early modern readers and printers "regularly transformed one printed book into another" (123).

ideology. In early modern texts, size works on its own as well as with other categories of identity as it motivates both desire and resistance to other social categories in queer expressions of heterosexuality. Through this investigation of size in early modern literature and culture, I aim to show that literary representations of interactions between larger women and smaller men can help us better understand systems of gender, age, desire, and power in early modern England. Understanding these systems can, in turn, help us see aspects of literary texts that we might otherwise miss, such as the close connection between the rhetorics of size and stature, the role of size in driving and nuancing the erotics of these texts, and the ways size as a category both bridges genres and creates new kinds of divisions among them. The chapters that follow interrogate a range of genres that vary in scale, from the sonnet to the epic to the five-act play, as I argue that taking size as a category of analysis gives us new insights into relations between the form and content of literary texts and alerts us to the role of size in driving desire and potentially queering the relationships those texts depict.

## Chapter One

### Beyond the Normal Scale:

#### The Erotics of Size in *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene*

When Venus lifts Adonis off his horse at the beginning of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, she takes advantage of her superior size and strength as a goddess to make her desires clear and to claim her object of pleasure. This dissertation begins in the supernatural green spaces of poetic narrative where size provides a useful category of analysis for examining immortal and supernatural figures whose bodies fall outside the normal human scale and to whom human categories such as age and status do not easily apply. For example, although Shakespeare's poem often describes Adonis in terms of his youth, it figures Venus in terms of her largeness, not her place in the human life cycle. A difference in status certainly exists between the deity Venus and her mortal love interest, but Venus eludes human structures of status based on social position. Size, instead, offers a new perspective on the queer heteroerotics of *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and of an array of episodes from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1596), including incidents involving Venus, the witch Acrasia, the giantess Argante, the huntress Belphoebe, and the cross-dressed knight Britomart. The supernatural settings of these poems, an unnamed forest in Shakespeare's text and Faerie Land in Spenser's, enable Shakespeare and Spenser to experiment with the erotics of size and the pleasures, benefits, and dangers this eroticism might provide for the enormous female, the diminutive male, and readers of either gender. At the same time, a focus on size lets us see the pastoral green world of these often-studied poems in new ways when we recognize that the landscape is populated not

only with knights, shepherds, and damsels in distress, but also with large women and diminutive men.

*Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene* make a useful introduction to the relations between larger women and smaller men at the center of this project because the bodies represented in these poems are so excessive in both size and sexual expression. The extremes of size depicted in these highly canonical texts underscore size as a category important for literary analysis that has nonetheless remained understudied throughout these poems' long time in the critical spotlight. A queer erotics of the diminutive operates throughout both works, destabilizing heterosexual couplings through a focus on size as well as gender as markers of difference. *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene* depict an erotics of size that probes and challenges gender and age categories while exploring the appeal and availability of forms of heteroerotic pleasure that exist outside of the limits implied by common cultural definitions of heterosexuality. This pleasure, however, also occasions suspicion, particularly in Spenser, because the dynamics of size in these relations challenge gender prescriptions and alter the goals and trajectory of martial masculinity, an expression of masculinity predicated on conquest and the denial of pleasure. Size works not only as a facilitator of pleasure, but as the mode through which attitudes toward masculinity and femininity are called into question and revised. *Large* rather than *male* often takes precedence in these relations, unsettling sexual hierarchies that usually give men an advantage.

Complicating the relation between size and gender in these poems is the relational construction of the sizes of supernatural bodies. Venus appears large, for example, not because Shakespeare specifically describes her dimensions but because of the way she

handles and exerts control over Adonis's body; her interactions with him reduce him, turning him into a diminutive object while making her seem larger. Goddesses, witches, giants, and dwarves take on excessive largeness or smallness as they interact with mortal bodies with shows of physical strength, dominance, or submission. To some extent, the eroticized descriptions of enormous female and diminutive male bodies are male fantasies, produced by male poets and consumed by male readers. However, the erotics of these poems might also unsettle the desiring male subject and appeal to female readers who potentially desire or wish to emulate the large woman or the diminutive male. The depictions of large women I examine in this chapter have often been read as figures of male anxiety; I want to consider how they also enable experimentation with non-normative pleasures for both men and women.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, my focus on size as a close reading strategy enables new insights into the disjunction between the poems' depictions of characters that are allegorical, yet embodied in significant ways.

Shakespeare's epyllion centers on the physicality of interactions between a mortal male youth and an enormous goddess, and while Spenser's epic includes male giants and warriors, it is also populated by an array of enormous female figures who seduce, manhandle, and otherwise assert dominance over the male figures around them. The female figures in both poems use their large size to pursue their own desires, and their desire for smaller objects, in particular, puts them in a powerful position in relation to

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Coppélia Kahn, who reads *Venus and Adonis* psychoanalytically as "a dramatization of narcissism" in which Adonis is too afraid to leave his role of the dependent and become a man through sex with Venus ("Self" 181). James Schiffer's Lacanian analysis argues that many of Venus's strategies have "the unintended effect of threatening emasculation" (363). Sheila Cavanagh analyzes the gender dynamics of dream visions in *The Faerie Queene*, arguing that "Throughout the epic, women associated with dreams initiate feelings of dread and danger as well as enticing, often frustrating desire" (131). She describes the women of dreams as most often nightmarish and argues that "the seemingly endless indeterminacy which characterizes these nightmarish females reinforces the suggestion that Acrasia and others possess no fixed image and that male fantasies de-terminate the contours these females present" (324).



those objects. The childish Adonis, the prone Verdant, the bound and kidnapped Squire of Dames: all are nominally striving to assert a form of martial masculinity yet have lost or lack the accouterments and accomplishments of this form of masculinity. My conceptualization of *martial masculinity* draws on the work of recent scholars who discuss a conquest-oriented version of masculinity characterized by violence, a sense of virtue, and the denial of physical pleasure.<sup>30</sup> Unlike the form of householding masculinity (discussed in my Introduction) that guides much of my theorization of masculinity in later chapters, martial masculinity is characterized not by marriage and the establishment of a household, family, and career, but by infinite conquest, unceasing movement, and constant physical strain. The enormous supernatural woman, however, offers the mortal man practicing martial masculinity a reprieve from these pressures by affording him the pleasure of becoming the conquest. Large, supernatural women are an ideal source of such a reprieve because they are virtually impossible to resist in a physical fight, giving

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<sup>30</sup> Jennifer A. Low explores martial forms of masculinity, establishing an important link between masculinity and conquest. She argues that masculinity is contingent on physical dominance and that “the conquered body is most literally affiliated not only with the passive, permeable woman but also with her alternative, the immature male” (71). Martial masculinity is thus other to both femininity and boyishness, and defeat can strip a warrior of his access to this kind of masculinity. Joseph Campana calls the knights’ armor in *The Faerie Queene* “the signifiers of heroic masculinity,” a masculinity characterized for Campana by the physical labor of the quest (466). In his book *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, Bruce R. Smith describes the Chivalrous Knight and the Herculean Hero as two early modern versions of ideal masculinity. The Chivalrous Knight tries to live by the somewhat anachronistic values of “virtue, honour, honesty, nobility, and gentleness,” while the Herculean Hero shows “formidable physical prowess” and often disregards chivalric codes (47, 49). My theorization of martial masculinity in a sense fuses these two paradigms into a figure who embodies virtue and can endure great physical strain. Patricia Cahill, arguing that the martial plays of the late Elizabethan stage were modern in their depiction of new technologies of warfare and the trauma of war, concludes both that during this time the male body underwent new forms of evaluation as a commodity to be expended in war and that the enactment of marital masculinity could be traumatic (101, 6). Her examination of the *Henry IV* plays suggests that attitudes toward martial masculinity were in flux during this time, as the chivalric methods that were still to some extent practiced under Henry VIII gave way to more rational forms of warfare under Elizabeth (11-15; 99-101). She also remarks that William Ponsonby, the printer of *The Faerie Queene*, printed military texts aimed at a middling audience, indicating that changes in military philosophy were accessible throughout England to those who could read (17).

the male figures an excuse to indulge in pleasurable diminutive positions without taking responsibility for their miniaturization.

This figure of all-powerful and irresistible female authority raises the specter of Elizabeth I: warrior queen, virgin mother, Gloriana, Astrea, Cynthia, and ultimate Petrarchan cruel mistress. Scholars have seen Elizabeth, a dominating queen both feared and desired, reflected in countless powerful early modern female figures, including Shakespeare's Venus and the myriad versions of female authority in Spenser's text.<sup>31</sup> I devote the third chapter of this project entirely to Elizabeth and provide a more thorough and nuanced analysis there of her rhetoric of size, but I mention her here because she appears as a ghostly presence in Shakespeare's and Spenser's texts and features prominently in scholarship on these poems. In the Proem to book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser invites Elizabeth to see herself "in mirrours more then one," meaning Gloriana and Belphoebe, but she might also see monstrous or corrective versions of herself in any female figure in the epic (III.proem.5).<sup>32</sup> Behind the desire for the large supernatural woman in Spenser and Shakespeare is an anxious desire for the female monarch as the source of potential social and sexual pleasure and pain.

Elizabeth's ability to provide both pleasure and pain resonates with some of the darker pleasures depicted in Shakespeare's and Spenser's poems. Incest, polyamory, bestiality, and practices that seem to align with what today we call BDSM (bondage and

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Louis Montrose ("Elizabethan"), Patricia Parker, Heather Dubrow, Katherine Eggert, Mary Ellen Lamb ("Gloriana"), Maureen Quilligan ("Comedy"), and Lisa Hopkins.

<sup>32</sup> For example, David Kinahan argues that Argante is a monstrous perversion of Elizabeth, reflecting the accusations of incest against Anne Boleyn and her brother that circulated throughout Elizabeth's childhood and indeed the rest of her life (210). Hannah Betts analyzes pornographic literature from the end of Elizabeth's reign, arguing that much of this literature is hostile toward virginity in a way that specifically targets the sovereign (166). She argues that when Spenser glosses over Belphoebe's genitalia in his blazon of her body when Braggadochio and Trompart see her in the woods, he "exposes Belphoebe to sexual misinterpretation" and "suggests the problems inherent in a political rhetoric that celebrated a commitment to virgin authority through the metaphor of sexual service" (161).

discipline, sadism and masochism) surface repeatedly in these poems, from the many ways Venus seeks to bind Adonis, to Artegall's submission to the Amazon Radigund, to Fradubio and Fraelissa, eternally bound into trees.<sup>33</sup> Importantly, the choreography of sadomasochist sexual practices depends upon the agency of the masochist who scripts his or her own suffering.<sup>34</sup> Viewed in this light, the male figures in *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene* are not necessarily victims, but may participate in the practices that render them diminutive. The excessive desires of a large woman and the excessive force she uses to pursue these male figures produce pleasures that enable them to experience a form of abjection that liberates them from normative and restrictive ideas about male sexuality. Readers aroused by this kind of abjection might join the male character in experiencing a sense of liberation in these texts. In his analysis of the relation between depictions of BDSM in early modern literary works and these works' audiences and readers, James Bromley argues that "through a transgressive re-enactment of hierarchical relations between and within classes and genders, masochistic pleasures offered

<sup>33</sup> After lifting Adonis from his horse, Venus ties up the horse, and then "To tie the rider she begins to prove" (40). This moment leads Richard Rambuss to compare Venus to Titania of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, arguing that both "share a taste for men and boys in bondage, restraint being a principal component of their amorous repertoires" (247). After Radigund defeats Artegall and forces him to dress as a female slave, Artegall "[serves] proud Radigund with true subjection," and Radigund describes him as "Bound unto me" (V.v.26, 33). Fradubio and Fraelissa, victims of Duessa, are "enclosed in wooden walls full faste" and bleed when their branches are broken (I.ii.42, 30). Venus, Radigund, and Duessa all take pleasure in binding others, and the texts make this pleasure available to readers who might share the female characters' interest in bondage or might want to experience bondage themselves.

<sup>34</sup> Anita Phillips argues that "being a masochist and being a victim are different, even opposed. The victim has been forced on to the receiving end against her will, while the masochist has initiated a highly controlled situation involving bondage and pseudo-domination" (14). Phillips discusses mostly masochistic desires in women, but her broader arguments apply to men as well. Analyzing the place of depictions of "perverse and undignified sex" in the history of sexuality, particularly regarding modern feminist attitudes toward female sexuality, Melissa Sanchez argues that "if we assume that affective or erotic excess inevitably disempowers women, we overlook the possibility that a pleasure in domination or abjection may challenge hetero- and homonormative ideas of proper and healthy female sexuality" ("Use" 502). Sanchez also argues that these ideas impact larger understandings of early modern sexualities: "erotic fantasies or practices that fit neither conservative nor feminist ideals of normality...help us recognize the alterity and diversity of early modern sexualities" (494). My argument builds on Sanchez's by considering the wide accessibility of the queer pleasures of female dominance and adding a parallel focus on abjection for male characters and masculinity.

Renaissance readers and audiences an opportunity to reimagine social relations” (80).

Part of the pleasure of reading about Venus’s physical domination of Adonis or Verdant’s willing submission to Acrasia involves the fantasy of new kinds of social relations that might be imagined when readers interact with texts. The alternative pleasures of these texts eroticize the large woman as both an object of desire for those readers who might want to be dominated by her and a subject of emulation for those who might want to enact this kind of dominance themselves.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the paucity of empirical evidence about early modern readers of poetry, especially female readers, scholars such as Bromley, Sasha Roberts, Richard Halpern, and Gary Kuchar have shown that early modern readers actively engaged with texts in very different ways than modern readers do. Roberts interrogates the reception history of Shakespeare’s poems and argues for “the agency of (often unidentified) individual readers, wielding power over the texts they manipulated, fashioning meaning from them according to their own interests and agendas” (4). Bromley analyzes intimacy in Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander*, arguing that fundamental differences exist between modern and early modern reading practices: modern reading focuses on teleology and consummation, or “closure-based reading strategies,” and occludes early modern non-teleological readings (31). My close readings of Spenser’s and Shakespeare’s poems

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<sup>35</sup> Bromley suggests a connection between the embrace of submission and the rejection of the heterosexual duties of marriage and procreation, arguing that marriage “produces a forward-looking embodiment in men that embraces reproduction while rejecting and leaving behind the potential pleasures of submission” (78). This assertion that marriage entails responsibilities that foreclose the pleasurable experiences of submission resonates with the appeal of the large woman for male characters in, and male or female readers of, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene*. Arthur and the Redcrosse Knight ostensibly hope for, or even obtain, marriage, but Spenser’s narrative defers a heterosexual ending by leaving the knights wandering, separated from Gloriana and Una. Arthur’s impossible quest to serve Gloriana—a stand-in for England’s Virgin Queen—and the Redcrosse Knight’s need to leave Una immediately after marriage close down the production of heirs in Spenser’s narrative, and Shakespeare’s Adonis explicitly rejects Venus’s attempts to convince him to procreate.

attempt to account for the individuality and agency Roberts finds in some early modern readers by addressing the range of erotic possibilities each text affords, and, like Bromley, I consider the momentary pleasures of the poems and attempt to divorce them from modern assumptions about gender and desire. *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene* challenge assumptions that men are generally larger than women and eroticize this reversal of expectation, both within the poems and for readers. Female and male readers alike might take pleasure in the fantasies aroused by reading about attractively diminutive male figures and large women who pursue their desires with the help of their large size.

In the rest of this chapter, I turn to close readings of the language of size and depictions of embodiment in *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene* to argue that a focus on size gives us new ways of approaching and understanding desire, motivation, characterization, and plot in the poems. The chapter is organized around size on the level of genre as well: I begin with Shakespeare's epyllion, or "miniature epic," and then transition to Spenser's epic, or rather fragment of an epic so large that it defied completion.<sup>36</sup> In *Venus and Adonis*, I analyze the erotic construction of the enormous body of Shakespeare's desiring goddess and tease out the tensions between the titillation Venus's desires supposedly provoke in the reader and the cold response she receives from Adonis. *The Faerie Queene* complicates the paradigms established in the reading of *Venus and Adonis* because of the ambivalence with which other figures in the poem

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<sup>36</sup> The genre of the epyllion, described by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a miniature epic," aligns with the discourses on size analyzed in this dissertation. William P. Weaver analyzes the epyllion specifically in the context of grammar school education and rites of passage from boyhood to adolescence signaled by grammar and elocution. He argues that the epyllion is "the literary genre through which poets represented *rites de passage* from boyhood to adolescence as enacted in the institutional context of the humanist grammar school. Given the prominence of these solemnities in the genre, 'minority epic' might be a better label than 'minor epic' in its English tradition" (3). The connection Weaver posits between stages of male youth and the genre of the epyllion further associates the genre with diminutive maleness.

respond to the large female figures. Some male characters find them terrifying, while others desire the freedom from responsibility and action that comes with submission to the large female figure and the category of the diminutive.

### **Queer Size in *Venus and Adonis***

Shakespeare's *Venus* is big, and the erotics of the poem depend on this bigness. This chapter adds size and scale to the past century's debate regarding the erotic dynamics of Shakespeare's epyllion, which generally either sees in the poem a moralizing discourse that pits love against lust, or interprets eroticism in the context of psychic drama.<sup>37</sup> Both strands of scholarship tend to naturalize attitudes about sexuality particular to twentieth-century heterosexuality. A. C. Hamilton, for instance, tidily argues that "the basis for Shakespeare's treatment of Venus's love for Adonis is the Platonic doctrine that love is the desire for beauty. For this reason [Shakespeare] identifies Venus with Love, Adonis with Beauty" (149). Hamilton sees Venus and Adonis as a natural pairing in keeping with a version of Platonic doctrine to which he imagines Shakespeare ascribed and that naturalizes modern heterosexuality. Continuing this tendency to interpret the poem's action in terms of heterosexual consummation, Coppélia Kahn argues that "to kiss willingly would in a crucial way define Adonis as a man. And Venus is the queen of love, the supreme object of desire for any man, whose manliness is defined by his desire for a woman" (189). Queer scholarship of the past few decades, however, has criticized earlier scholarship of this kind for its heteronormativity and blindness to the poem's male homoeroticism. Goran Stanivukovic cites Hamilton's essay

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<sup>37</sup> A. C. Hamilton provides a useful overview of the love vs. lust scholarship, citing R. P. Miller and C. S. Lewis (141-42). Kahn proposes "a radically psychological reading of the poem," as "a dramatization of narcissism" ("Self" 181).

as “characteristic of much normative heterosexual scholarship” in its failure to recognize the poem’s male homoerotics, arguing that “the existent criticism of the poem assumes only one desire, heterosexual desire” (95). Richard Rambuss criticizes Kahn for “collaps[ing] sexuality—more precisely, sexual object choice—into gender identity” and argues that the poem is “less monolithically heterosexual in its conception of love than the criticism concerned with the poem has tended to be” (249, 251). Stanivukovic and Rambuss rightly critique the heterosexual bias of much early *Venus and Adonis* scholarship, with Rambuss even arguing that Venus represents not just love but specifically heterosexual love and that “Adonis’ repudiation of Venus and his corresponding eroticized devotion to the hunt is effectively anti-heterosexual” (254).

My reading of the poem brings together these two critical camps that seem mutually exclusive by arguing that the poem registers forms of eroticism that are queer yet appeal to a readership with heteroerotic tastes and desires. Stanivukovic and Rambuss make compelling critiques of the heteronormativity of earlier scholarship, but I would challenge Rambuss’s willingness to dismiss heterosexuality as a monolithic ideology rejected by Adonis and the poem. The poem incorporates a range of queer erotics not limited to same-sex desire, including the queer heterosexual desire Venus expresses for the diminutive Adonis; size and scale, not only gender, drive the queer dynamics of this encounter.<sup>38</sup> If Venus on some level represents heterosexual love, as Rambuss contends,

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<sup>38</sup> Rambuss argues that “the panting, sweating, rapacious Venus of *Venus and Adonis*, for all the poem’s erotic plethora, is more a representation of aggressive female sexuality—or, really, aggressive heterosexuality—than she is a figure of gender inversion or indeterminacy” and asks, “why should the narrative feature of Venus wooing Adonis redound to his effeminacy? Similarly, why should Adonis’ erotic apathy for the very goddess of love herself come (as so many critics have cast it) at the cost of his masculinity? It clearly need not, at least to those who can conceive of masculinity and male sexuality apart from heterosexuality, that is, apart from Venus: to those, in other words, who can grasp that a boy *as a boy* might desire something else” (247, 244). Though the critical tendency has been to see Adonis as a

it is also an altered version of heterosexuality that fails to privilege reproduction and futurity or to support sexual hierarchies that forward patriarchal agendas. Although Venus uses arguments about reproduction in her pursuit of Adonis, these arguments comprise only a small part of her strategy and ring hollow since she does not seem interested in establishing anything like a heterosexual nuclear family with Adonis.<sup>39</sup>

Venus pursues the pleasures of the moment, making use of her largeness to retain control over her erotic experiences. By using the size of her body in this way, Venus undermines the heterosexual ideologies that privilege reproduction and male erotic dominance that were developing during the early modern period. Her character illustrates how heterosexual desire can take on queer dimensions when size and scale enable male and female figures to re-envision cultural habits and expectations regarding gender and power.

The two critical camps I have described may disagree about the erotics of the poem, but they share a mistrust of or distaste for Venus. Scholarship on sexuality in the poem over the past hundred years—whether moralizing, psychoanalytic, or queer—has expressed anxiety, ambivalence, or downright revulsion toward Venus and her enormous, heated, sweating body, with its outsized dimensions and desires. C. S. Lewis casts Venus as “a very ill-conceived temptress” whose largeness invokes “certain horrible interviews with voluminous female relatives in one’s early childhood” (498).<sup>40</sup> Kahn argues that

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feminized youth, I agree with Rambuss that shifting the roles of pursuer and pursued does not necessarily shift gender identities as well.

<sup>39</sup> Elena Levy-Navarro argues that Venus “gives free reign to her appetites in a way that will be perceived as dangerous to those who value a companionate marriage that requires that the appetites be moderated and contained within an increasingly more affectively and erotically demanding bond between husband and wife. In a similar way, Venus refuses to moderate or contain her body, but, instead, celebrates the principle of growth at its very core” (187).

<sup>40</sup> Lewis finds fault in that Venus “is made so much larger than her victim that she can throw his horse’s reins over one arm and tuck him under the other” (498). He suggests that “if the poem is not meant to



“the boar personifies the aspect of Venus most threatening to Adonis: her seemingly unsatiable desire” (197). Stanivukovic ignores Venus for the most part, and Rambuss’s tone is almost gleeful as he repeatedly describes Adonis’s rejection of Venus. Feminist scholars such as Elena Levy-Navarro and Catherine Belsey analyze what they see as the male anxiety that has guided much scholarship on the poem, and that is evident in both heteronormative and queer scholarship.<sup>41</sup> Levy-Navarro critiques male critical engagement with what she calls Venus’s fat body: “influential twentieth-century critics C. S. Lewis and Don Cameron Allen gave voice to what many probably knew by then: Venus was a ridiculous object of (heterosexual male) desire because she was middle-aged and fat. Because such fatphobic—and ageist—comments remain uncriticized, their assumptions remain alive and well, if implicit in contemporary criticism” (181). Readings of and attitudes toward Venus’s largeness, thus, are bound up with twentieth-century assumptions about femininity, sexuality, desire, and embodiment. Though Levy-Navarro’s parentheses lay the blame on male heterosexuality in scholarship, much of the work on the male homoerotics of the poem shares this disgust with the female body. Queer scholarship might seek to expose heteronormative biases, but its focus on male homoeroticism often leaves Venus out or, as in Rambuss’s case, joins Lewis in revulsion toward Venus’s body, casting Adonis’s rejection of Venus as a success rather than as an opportunity to analyze Venus on her own terms. This section re-evaluates Venus and her

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arouse disgust it was very foolishly written” (499). Lewis’s strongly negative reaction to Venus betrays his early twentieth-century assumption that women should be smaller than men, an assumption *Venus and Adonis* suggests was not widespread in early modern England.

<sup>41</sup> Belsey critiques a number of scholars for their assumptions about Venus’s age: “although the poem has nothing to say about her age except that her beauty is perfect and annually renewed (ll. 133-34), the goddess’s supposed decline has nonetheless proved explanatory for some male readers” (“Love” 269).

body while also revisiting the queer potential of the poem by regarding her as a queer figure of heterosexuality.

Levy-Navarro's focus on fatness rightly calls attention to Venus's dimensions as important for interpretive work on *Venus and Adonis*. Levy-Navarro invites her peers to "alter our relationship to the fat Venus," arguing that what she calls Venus's fatness does not preclude the figure's erotic appeal but rather endows the poem with a "queer and fattening aesthetic" (177, 188). Levy-Navarro makes a compelling argument about the kinds of bodies modern scholars are likely to marginalize, but there are advantages to broadening analysis of Venus's embodiment beyond the category of fatness. For one, Venus is a goddess, and by taking her supernatural size and physical strength as my objects of analysis rather than assuming that she belongs to a human category of fatness, I am able to draw out the nuances of the construction of her body in relation to Adonis's, the only other body to which she comes close in physical proximity in the poem. She casts an enormous shadow over him, offering to "lie between that sun and thee" to keep Adonis cool, and she has enough physical strength, in the opening stanzas of the poem, to manage both Adonis and his horse: "Over one arm, the lusty courser's rein; / Under her other was the tender boy" (194; 31-32). Venus's ability to cast this shadow and accomplish these feats constructs her as large specifically in relation to Adonis, adding another dimension to the poem's erotics by suggesting that it is not innate identity (man, woman; goddess, mortal; fat, thin; old, young) that structures desire, but relationalities: being more or less of one of these categories. This kind of analysis is foreclosed when scholars read Venus's largeness in these moments as a kind of poetic failure or compromised mimesis. For instance, when Heather Dubrow writes that "few women

could literally tuck a young man, however slim and ‘hairless’ (487) he might be, under their arms,” her emphasis on realism in the poem limits understandings of Venus as a goddess beyond human scale whose dimensions enable poetic experimentation with the interplay between size and desire (25). Indeed, the very genre of poetry arguably creates a distance from reality that opens new ways of imagining embodiment and desire. Venus’s stature and physicality lead Peter Hyland to argue that “at some level Shakespeare conceived of her as a cross-dressed boy” and that Shakespeare’s theatrical experience influenced him to write a poem featuring a “large and beefy” boy actor as Venus and a “small and barely adolescent” Adonis (135, 137). The genre of poetry, Hyland continues, allows Shakespeare to depict intimacy and eroticism in a way he could not present them on the stage (138). I would push Hyland’s claims further to argue that the poetic genre allows Shakespeare not to mix up the bodies of the actors envisioned for each role, but to leave the materiality of these bodies behind entirely as he experiments with the physicality of a goddess who exceeds human scale. The poem constructs Venus’s embodiment through techniques unique to the genre that do not necessarily translate to portrayal on the stage by a fat, tall, or expansively costumed actor.

Perhaps because Shakespeare can set aside the bodies of actors, the description in his poem centers on experimentation with mythical bodies that inhabit a green space. Dubrow points out that one of the major differences between Shakespeare’s epyllion and those by other poets is his lack of description of both landscape and the clothing Venus and Adonis wear (55-56).<sup>42</sup> Dubrow argues that this demonstrates Shakespeare’s interest

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<sup>42</sup> Dubrow argues that “with the single exception of that ‘mortal butcher’ (618) the boar, the landscape and its inhabitants are described only in brief and general terms. Nor does he devote attention to the clothing of his characters. We have no idea what Venus wears, while the costumes of her counterparts in other epyllia are detailed with a precision worthy of a commentator at a fashion show” (55-56).

in “that within which passeth show,” but I would contest this reading to argue that we are not given a clear idea of the interiority of the poem’s major figures at all: we see Venus’s desire but not her motives, and we are never quite sure why Adonis rejects Venus, despite the many reasons he gives (56). Instead, the absence of description of landscape and costume forces us to focus on what *is* described: Venus’s body in its largeness, curviness, and sweatiness. These descriptions establish the physical effects of Venus’s desire and its role in constructing her size and her strength: “Being so enraged, desire doth lend her force / Courageously to pluck him from his horse” (29-30). The poem’s descriptions focus on bodies and on expressions of desire, dominance, and submission closely related to the size and strength of these bodies.

Venus’s largeness exists throughout the poem in tandem with a certain grace and daintiness: Shakespeare depicts a goddess with a paradoxical body that seems not to obey the same laws of physics to which humans are subject. Anatomizing her own beauty, Venus gloats, “My flesh is soft and plump,” calling attention to the sensual pleasures of her voluptuous body (142). In the next stanza, however, she advertises that she can, “like a nymph, with long, disheveled hair, / Dance on the sands, and yet no footing seen” (147-48). Venus’s plump body is nonetheless delicate and graceful enough to dance on sand without leaving footprints; she next declares that “These forceless flowers like sturdy trees support me. / Two strengthless doves will draw me through the sky” (152-53). Venus takes up much physical space and possesses great strength, yet she depicts herself as nearly weightless. This interplay between largeness and delicacy places Venus outside the usual categories of human dimension and asks that we suspend our judgment of the large woman while we tease out the erotic significance of her paradoxical immortal body.

Moreover, these descriptions suggest that Venus's largeness itself is a function both of her material dimensions and of her supernatural power over the material world; as a goddess, she can make flowers support her weight. Size here is not only relational, figuring Venus as larger than Adonis, but varies in its properties and defies any easy correlation between *large* and *heavy* as the supernatural woman moves between the realms of the material (weighty) and the immaterial (weightless).

As we might notice, the paradoxes of Venus's ample yet weightless body are a part of her description of herself, adding another layer to the complexity of the poem's construction of Venus's body. Venus's willingness not only to act on her largeness by manhandling Adonis but also to talk about her enormous immortal body speaks to the frankness of her largeness and its centrality to the erotics of the poem; it also constructs her as verbally as well as physically large as she imposes her voice on the world she inhabits with Adonis. Indeed, the number of lines Venus speaks dwarfs Adonis's number and nearly equals the narrator's, in a sense contesting the narrative voice for dominance over the poem.<sup>43</sup> Venus's extensive speeches function similarly to her physical features in the poem's construction of largeness; for instance, we hear from her, rather than from the narrator, that her body is like a large park that encloses Adonis: "since I have hemmed thee here / Within the circuit of this ivory pale, / I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer" (229-31). By speaking about herself in this way, Venus constructs her body as an expansive landscape that dwarfs Adonis, rendered as a semi-domesticated grazer, while at the same time opening her body for male consumption and invoking a poetic trope that

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<sup>43</sup> Dubrow argues that Venus's "talkativeness... reflects her desire to impose her presence, to dominate the conversation just as she dominates in so many other ways" (28). Judith H. Anderson counts the total number of lines at 1194, with the narrator speaking 570, Venus speaking 537, and Adonis merely 87 ("*Venus*" 159).

figures a woman's body as a landscape. As Dymphna Callaghan points out, however, this "imagery reverses the familiar poetic trope whereby the woman is the poet's hunted hind" ("(Un)natural" 65). Venus adopts a tactic of the male poet to describe her own body as she woos Adonis, but under her control this common poetic trope enables her to miniaturize and domesticate Adonis so that she can trap him in her enclosure.<sup>44</sup> As an enormous, eroticized landscape, Venus can command the pet-like Adonis to "Feed where thou wilt, on mountain or in dale; / Graze on my lips, and if those hills be dry, / Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie" (232-234). Her immense body contains numerous natural features and limitless nourishment, and the description of her body as fertile land ripe for kissing and cunnilingus is designed to arouse Adonis, as well as readers, and invite them to experience the pleasures of this corporeal landscape.

As I have suggested, the enormity of Venus's body and the physicality of her desires have led a number of scholars to argue that the poem presents the goddess of love not as desirable but as monstrous, grotesque, or at least comically ridiculous, but this view of Venus comes more from critics' willingness to adopt Adonis's perspective than from the poem itself. Hyland recounts a number of critics who see monstrosity in Venus's first act of lifting Adonis off his horse, and Susan Staub examines the contradictions that arise from Venus's status as an immortal who is nonetheless subject to human categories of understanding: "as a goddess, Venus is divine; as a desiring woman, she is monstrous" (Hyland 135, Staub 17).<sup>45</sup> Venus's divinity should set her outside

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<sup>44</sup> Staub argues that "these lines seem at first a ceding of power. By appropriating the language of the sonneteers who anatomized the female body as land to be conquered and owned, Venus seems to transfer proprietary rights and power to Adonis; as a commodified and conquered enclosure she becomes his land and kingdom, thus restoring male sovereignty" (24). Staub continues, however, that "Venus actually subverts masculine control by enclosing Adonis himself within her boundaries.... The image here is as much one of entrapment as protection" (24).

<sup>45</sup> Hyland cites Dubrow, Gordon Williams, Robert Ellrodt, and Richard A. Lanham.

common categories of human identity: she does not age, and her largeness proportions her to occupy the home of the gods.<sup>46</sup> Her desires mirror those of other gods; like Jove, who loved Ganymede, Venus desires a young and diminutive male. For Staub, and for Adonis, however, Venus's desires lower her from the status of a goddess to the status of a monstrous human woman. Adonis complains, when Venus pulls him to the ground on top of her and clasps him to her belly, "you crush me. Let me go" (611). For Adonis, the desiring woman promises only physical discomfort, and critical readings of the poem have often fallen in line with Adonis's reaction to Venus. Scholars who do not see Venus as threateningly monstrous often tend to see her as comically so: Staub argues that Venus's "desire is so exaggerated...that it is rendered comic," and Kahn contends that Venus's "volubility contributes to the comic situation" because "the queen of love can only assuage 'love's fire' through words, and her oral aggressiveness is humorously at variance with the conventional female role of silent auditor receiving poetic tribute from a male poet-speaker" (Staub 21, Kahn 193). These arguments about comedy, especially when read in relation to arguments about Venus's monstrosity, raise the question: what anxieties exist beneath the urge to laugh at Venus's attempted seduction? I propose that we take Venus's largeness, in body and in desire, seriously as an object of study even while keeping in mind the playfulness of the poem's erotics, a critical practice that has the potential radically to shift scholarly approaches to Shakespeare's poem.

Much of the comedy of the poem comes not from Venus's desire or her largeness, but from Adonis's tendency to respond to Venus's lofty rhetoric of love and pleasure with practical discomfort with his physical environment. After a long speech in which

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<sup>46</sup> At the same time, her agelessness echoes Queen Elizabeth's motto "semper eadem" and implicitly links the ageless goddess with the queen who, by 1593, was quite obviously aging. This representation of Venus, then, might serve as an unflattering reminder to Elizabeth of her own age.

Venus elaborates on her own beauty and argues that reproduction is Adonis's duty, Adonis turns his response to his own physical discomfort: "Fie, no more of love! / The sun doth burn my face; I must remove" (185-86). He later complains, "You hurt my hand with wringing," and, as we have seen, he complains that her embraces crush him (421, 611). Gordon Carver argues that "the knowing reader finds [Adonis's] incomprehension of *eros*'s workings droll, because it flips the unstated but understood erotic undertone onto its opposite, irksome extreme and makes Adonis abruptly counter stereotypical notions of masculine desire" (118). What is funny, according to Carver, is not that Venus is frank about her desires but that Adonis responds to the desiring woman with total incomprehension. Carver's phrase "stereotypical notions of masculine desire," however, poses problems since he does not historicize this kind of desire and, like Hamilton and Kahn, assumes normative heterosexuality for Adonis. Instead, we see an Adonis who falls outside any stereotype of desire, not just stereotypes related to heterosexual masculinity. Adonis's complete obliviousness to his role in an erotic poem both surprises and amuses; he responds to typical gestures of love, like hand-holding and embracing, as if they are punishments rather than pleasures. His reactions underscore Venus's superior strength and the possibility that she might indeed squeeze his hand or embrace him too hard, perhaps in a sadomasochist gesture that is pleasurable for Venus and for some readers but not for Adonis.

Venus's tantalizing descriptions of her body repel Adonis and disturb some modern readers, but they are arguably calculated to alert the early modern reader to the erotic possibilities of the immense female body. Although the poem often seems to be about sexual delay rather than successful erotics, two voyeurs in the poem—the sun god



Titan, and the poem's speaker, who reveals himself as a hidden viewer—cue the pleasure of this erotic delay. In the midst of her passionate wooing of Adonis,

the lovesick queen began to sweat,  
For where they lay the shadow had forsook them,  
And Titan, tired in the midday heat,  
With burning eye did hotly overlook them,  
Wishing Adonis had his team to guide  
So he were like him, and by Venus' side. (175-80)

High above the couple, Titan looks down “hotly,” suggesting arousal, causing Venus (but not Adonis) to sweat. This detail indicates that the large woman, rather than the diminutive boy, is the object of Titan's gaze and desire. Titan, whose name and association with the sun suggest his largeness, desires to exchange places with Adonis so that he can become the diminutive object of Venus's affection and enjoy the pleasures of her immense body. Gary Kuchar argues that in these lines, “Titan manifests a heterosexual male reader's desire within the poem,” but this moment is erotically more complicated, and the category of heterosexuality is insufficient for describing Titan's desire (par. 14). Titan does not wish for a heterosexual conquest of Venus, but rather fantasizes himself in the place of Adonis, the diminutive male who is instead the object of conquest for Venus. Like Titan, the poem's speaker seems to take pleasure in watching the large woman pursue the small male, at one time reflecting, “O, what a sight it was wistly to view / How she came stealing to the wayward boy, / To note the fighting conflict of her hue, / How white and red each other did destroy!” (343-46). The speaker recalls the intense pleasure of viewing this moment when the large goddess approaches

Adonis, especially the pleasure of watching her struggle with her own desire, as evidenced by her changing color. He focuses not on the boy or his beauty, but on the specific pleasure of watching Venus's arousal. For Titan and the poem's speaker, the large desiring woman provokes not fear but desire, and watching her pursuit of the diminutive male invites them to fantasize about their own submission to her.

Titan and the poem's speaker serve as guides for rethinking the poem's erotic appeal for its original readers and for historicizing the kinds of desire the poem depicts. Scholars such as Carver, Kuchar, and Halpern analyze the poem with an eye toward its early modern readers, especially female readers, arguing that the poem has particular erotic appeal for women. Carver investigates the early modern voyeuristic pleasure of reading a seemingly private yet printed text, and Halpern argues that the poem deliberately works to arouse women readers but leave them unsatisfied.<sup>47</sup> Kuchar argues that the poem is designed to create sexual frustration in readers of both sexes and that "the poem's reversal of gender norms enables a complex and unstable series of identifications that betray any straightforward assertion that a male reader is less likely to sympathize with Venus's cause than is a female reader; or, on the other hand, that a female reader is necessarily prone to identify with Venus over and against Adonis" (par. 2). He adds that "one of the primary effects of the poem's gender reversal is to complicate the process of identification so essential to literary response, making the identificatory process itself an issue for the reader, rather than something operating in

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<sup>47</sup> Carver argues that "reading texts in public print, and not in the private medium of manuscript, was analogous to being a witness to a private sexual act" and that "the reading of printed books at large during this critical period was constructed as an act of voyeurism" (108, 109). Halpern argues that Shakespeare's contemporaries imagined a significant female readership for the poem and that "Venus's sexual frustration at the hands of an arousing but unresponsive artwork [Adonis] allegorizes the plight of the female reader of Shakespeare's erotic text. As a mildly pornographic poem, *Venus and Adonis* is meant to generate some kind of sexual thrill or tension. But since it is, in the end, only a book, the female reader, like Shakespeare's Venus, must content herself with 'venerian speculation' alone" ("Pining" 378, 380).

terms of gender alone” (par. 2). Kuchar simplifies the complicated gendering in the poem by calling it a reversal, but he usefully suggests that gender may not be the driving force behind reader engagement with this poem, supporting my argument that size and scale are as important as gender in shaping the poem’s erotics.

The poem’s potential for producing frustration, suggested by both Kuchar and Halpern, raises questions about the history of sexuality and the teleology of erotic experience. Though Kuchar and Halpern ostensibly focus on female readers, their claims betray an assumption that consummation and climax are the telos of eros and that any other kind of sexual play must result in frustration. However, the queer erotics of *Venus and Adonis* are in part driven by a sustained titillation made possible by Adonis’s refusal to satisfy Venus’s desires, which is also a refusal of heterosexual climax. As Madhavi Menon argues, Adonis’s death marks “desire without end” and operates as “a serious inquiry into non-teleological desire” (46).<sup>48</sup> What is queer about this poem, then, is not only Venus’s desire for the diminutive, but the perpetual elusiveness of the diminutive object that always provokes desire but never satisfies it. Indeed, if modern Western sexual stereotypes generally suggest that “size matters” for men, the same is true of Shakespeare’s poem but with a different investment in size: if today large male genitalia signify satisfaction by supposedly ensuring climax, in the early modern *Venus and Adonis* the diminutive male marks the pleasures of endless desire and arousal. The poem is successful in heightening desire because it does not work toward the predictable end that a masculinized teleology might require of it. The delay and ultimate failure of

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<sup>48</sup> Menon argues that “this fantasy of consummated endings is found less in the literary texts of the Renaissance than in the historical narratives about the movement from ‘early modern’ to ‘modern’ regimes of sexuality” (28). Modern desire for consummation in *Venus and Adonis*, then, is more about a desire for a particular modern narrative than a desire to understand the text.

consummation in the poem enable a proliferation of desire, both within the poem in characters like Venus, Titan, the speaker, and even perhaps Adonis, and between the text and its readers. The erotics of size in the poem expands and sustains arousal, mirroring the sustained expanse of Venus's large, aroused body and underscoring the tensions between this body and Adonis's titillating diminutive form.

The enormous and diminutive bodies of *Venus and Adonis*, which take on physical dimensions through poetic description, offer the pleasures of the poem to male and female readers with varying erotic tastes: both men and women might desire the voluptuous Venus or the diminutive Adonis (or both figures at the same time), and readers of both sexes might be aroused by Venus's displays of dominance and might appropriate this dominance for their own uses. Roberts analyzes the appeal of submissive masculinity in the poem, arguing that "Shakespeare's poem spins a fantasy of male sexual passivity—a relinquishing of control to the female lover" (36). She pairs this analysis with readings of conduct texts by early modern male writers who depict this kind of surrender of control as a threat to masculinity and male control over female sexuality, taking Richard Brathwaite as one of her main examples.<sup>49</sup> Roberts focuses on male anxiety regarding this kind of surrender, but male passivity is not unequivocally a threat to masculinity; it may, I argue, serve as a reprieve, temporary or permanent, from the expectations of Brathwaite's version of masculinity. Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* offers

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<sup>49</sup> Citing Brathwaite's *The English Gentlewoman*, Roberts argues that Brathwaite's "rancor seems to be fuelled by the threat of *Venus and Adonis* supplanting men, just as 'immodest Lovers' make cuckolds out of husbands. In this respect, Brathwaite's account of women's textual and sexual independence—supposedly achieved through reading Shakespeare's poem and other 'lighter discourses'—speaks of male sexual insecurity. *Venus and Adonis* threatens not only women readers' chastity but the assertion of male sexual control" (35-36, emphasis in original). Roberts's book as a whole surveys early modern writing about the reading of Shakespeare's poems, and she includes two chapters on *Venus and Adonis*, one focused on female readers and the other on male readers. She argues that female readers of erotic literature were seen as unchaste while male readers were seen as fops or jokes (see especially pp. 30-36 and 65-76).

an analogue to this depiction of passive masculinity when Redcrosse indulges in the pleasures of sex with the powerful Duessa, leaving him “poured out in loosnesse on the grassy grownd” (I.xii.7). This episode may focus on the male figure’s punishment for such indulgence in pleasure, as his pleasure in Duessa’s body causes him to shirk his duties as a knight and makes him vulnerable to the male giant Orgoglio, but it also reveals the desires for sexual pleasure and a momentary reprieve from the burden of wearing armor that tempt those trying to live up to the expectations of martial masculinity.<sup>50</sup>

Adonis refuses to indulge in the pleasures Venus offers, rebelling against the category of the diminutive in which Redcrosse finds reprieve, and ill-advisedly pursuing the hunt until he is killed. The hunt, as a pursuit that seeks domination and control, is arguably Adonis’s approach to fulfilling Brathwaite’s version of masculinity, and he pursues this form of masculinity single-mindedly. Mars, the ultra-manly god of war, on the other hand, seems much more amenable to the pleasures of miniaturization, perhaps because, unlike Adonis, the poem constructs him as having nothing to prove in terms of masculinity. As “the stern and direful god of war, / Whose sinewy neck in battle ne’er did bow, / Who conquers where he comes in every jar,” Mars has an established reputation that remains undamaged even when he becomes Venus’s diminutive plaything, held in the pleasures of bondage (98-100). Venus gloats that Mars was “my captive and my slave,” and that she ruled him, “leading him prisoner in a red-rose chain” (101, 110). Venus’s account of her relationship with Mars reveals the pleasures of bondage for the god of war as he is rendered diminutive, but it also suggests that a relationship with the

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<sup>50</sup> Redcrosse, in this canto, regresses in his experience of eros to a helpless, infantile state and finds himself at the mercy of a phallic father figure, in the form of the male giant, and a betraying mother figure, in the form of Duessa, who joins Orgolio in his conquest of Redcrosse and becomes Orgoglio’s mistress.

diminutive mortal Adonis might offer Venus a new set of pleasures. Venus emphasizes Mars's physical largeness and power as the god of war, but she also exults that she was able to turn this giant god into her diminutive object: Venus describes Mars "making my arms his field, his tent my bed" (108). Here, Venus grows to the size of Mars's battlefield so that she can enclose him in the field of her own arms, echoing the enclosure of Adonis as a deer in the park of her body. Venus takes pleasure in miniaturizing the large and powerful Mars, but her pursuit of Adonis suggests that the male who is already diminutive appeals to her as a new and exciting object of desire. As she holds Adonis against his will, "her arms enfold him like a band," and "she locks her lily fingers one in one" (225, 228). The strength of her entrapping arms is here figured as *enfolding*, a word that connotes both careful hugging and the swaddling that immobilizes infants, and she binds him with feminine "lily fingers" that seem like traits of a dainty Petrarchan mistress but that here work as accessories to bondage.<sup>51</sup> James Schiffer argues that Venus "intends her account of her affair with Mars to offer Adonis a model of 'normal' male response to her beauty," but her account also arguably reflects her pleasure in assuming the role as wooer to a diminutive object who cannot resist her embrace (363). Venus likes Adonis because he is not the 'normal' male of Schiffer's claims, and Adonis provides her with a new erotic experience, one that the poem's readers might also seek as they read the text either in private, apart from their spouses, or with their spouses or lovers as an act of intimacy.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> The delicacy of her domination here contrasts with the aggressive moments that align her more with the dominant woman of masochistic fantasy, such as the simile comparing her to a feeding eagle and her violent foraging on Adonis after they begin to kiss (55-60; 553-58). Venus can represent many kinds of masochistic pleasure, from subtle and playful forms of bondage to more painful physical domination, and all of these pleasures come from the interplay in the goddess's body between enormity and delicacy.

<sup>52</sup> Roberts argues that early modern writers like John Davies imagined women as especially threatening readers of erotic texts because they read in private, "behind closed doors and beyond the surveillance of

Venus's figuration as a dominating woman shades into her representation as a mother-figure who eroticizes the care of her infant Adonis.<sup>53</sup> I provide a fuller analysis of the erotics of the large mother in chapter two and in chapter three take up the infantilized courtiers at Elizabeth I's court who figure as versions of Adonis, but here I want to call attention to the ways infantilization in *Venus and Adonis* invokes the specter of incest and works as one of the poem's techniques for both heightening eroticism for its readers and locating Adonis in the category of the diminutive. From Venus's opening gesture when she tucks the "tender boy" under her arm, she handles Adonis like a child who needs subduing (32). Indeed, part of what Venus finds appealing about Adonis is his likeness to a child: she tells him, "The tender spring upon thy tempting lip / Shows thee unripe; yet mayst thou well be tasted" (127-28). Venus underscores Adonis's youth by emphasizing his beardlessness, and her admission is further eroticized by the emphasis on taste and temptation. Adonis himself later echoes Venus's language of unripeness, claiming, "Measure my strangeness with my unripe years" (524). Adonis, unwittingly perhaps, complies with the infantilization that eroticizes him for Venus and, potentially, for some of the poem's readers. When he gives into Venus's domination a few lines later, he is compared to "the froward infant stilled with dandling" (562). Venus temporarily succeeds

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their husbands and fathers" (33). Men and women, or pairs of same-sex lovers, might also have read the poem together, like Dante's Paolo and Francesca who consummate their love after reading erotic literature to each other (5.112-124).

<sup>53</sup> João Froes traces maternal representations of Venus to the Roman tradition, arguing that the "curious mixture of the maternal and sexual in Venus was clear to the Romans and to Shakespeare...Shakespeare presented a mother-figure with impulsive sexual instincts in the same sense that the Venus *Genetrix* of the Romans was also the Venus who had devotees wearing loose girdles" (306). Robert Merrix argues that the maternal aspects constitute only part of a highly diverse character: "Venus, the embodiment of all, runs the gamut from voluptuous mother to lusty temptress to frustrated lover to abandoned woman" (344). Hyland describes Venus as "both motherly and erotic," and Staub argues that "the fact that her desire is figured maternally makes her both powerful and dangerous" (Hyland 138, Staub 17). Kahn argues that Venus's "oft-repeated plea for a kiss is an invitation to physical fusion which suggests a parallel with the infant's relation to the mother at the breast, before he has begun to differentiate between self and others—precisely the stage at which Adonis exists psychologically" ("Self" 189).

in forcing kisses on Adonis because she has made him feel like an infant who to some extent must accept his role as part of the category of the diminutive.

The poem explores not only infantilization, but the links between incest and bestiality. Venus becomes most clearly maternal as she searches for Adonis near the end of the poem, “Like a milch doe whose swelling dugs do ache, / Hasting to feed her fawn hid in some brake” (875-76). This much-discussed simile makes her both animal and mother, her physical need here coming from a sexualized maternity.<sup>54</sup> This moment, like Venus’s suggestion that Adonis become like a deer in her park, flirts with both incest and bestiality.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Callaghan argues that “incest and bestiality constitute categories which are conceptually and antithetically related because they define with what or whom sexual congress is permitted or prohibited” (“(Un)natural” 66). In other words, because incest prohibits sexual activity among members of the same family unit, bestiality is the furthest humans can go from incest. This connection is important to *Venus and Adonis* because, as Callaghan argues, “if Venus can keep Adonis as a pet, she can possess him both as child and lover, human and animal” (66).<sup>56</sup> This focus on possession and on the fetishization of the pet, as both an animal and a member of the family, makes incest and bestiality into parallel practices, a link made clear in *The Faerie Queene*’s giantess Argante, who, in addition to having an incestuous relationship with her brother, “suffred beastes her body to deflowre” (III.vii.49).<sup>57</sup> Animals—boars, deer, rabbits, horses, pigs,

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<sup>54</sup> Callaghan argues that, throughout the poem, “Venus’s identity is essentially non-human, both bestial and immortal” (64).

<sup>55</sup> Maureen Quilligan argues that in early modern England, female agency and authority were almost universally linked with incestuous desire (*Incest* 6-8). In chapter two, I pursue a comprehensive analysis of infantile and maternal pleasures.

<sup>56</sup> Consequently, Callaghan argues that “incest and bestiality are, in fact, versions of one another, and neither prohibition is necessary or ‘natural’” (66).

<sup>57</sup> Callaghan argues that “pet keeping is, inescapably, parental, making the beast part of the family, obscuring the division between kin and kind” (66). Argante kidnaps knights and squires to serve as her



and satyrs—factor prominently in the erotic landscape of both *The Faerie Queene* and *Venus and Adonis* and underscore the pet-like aspects of the pseudo-maternal relations between the larger supernatural women and their smaller male paramours. The doe’s aching breasts in the simile describing the distressed Venus fuse the agonies of weaning with the pleasurable pain of the masochistic expressions of sexuality so important to the poem’s erotics. Even as the poem shifts in tone to accommodate Venus’s grief, it maintains an exploration of darker pleasures through its continued flirtations with maternity, infantilization, incest, bestiality, and masochism.<sup>58</sup> Adonis’s wound itself, the “wide wound that the boar had trenched / In his soft flank,” is figured as a kind of pleasurable wound associated with these practices (1052-53). Venus prefers to see Adonis’s death in this way, musing that “nuzzling in his flank, the loving swine / Sheathed unaware the tusk in his soft groin,” and then admitting that “Had I been toothed like him, I must confess / With kissing him I should have killed him first” (1115-18). Here, Venus imagines the phallic boar as a version of herself and Adonis as finally the submissive partner to her fantasies. The boar functions as the counterpart to the large woman, a projection of her physical dominance detached from the enormous female body and the pleasures this body offers in return for pain and submission. Venus’s admission that she lacks what the boar possesses—the tusk—momentarily locates her in the state of phallic lack defined by Freud and Lacan, but it also underscores the insufficiency of

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sexual slaves, and her perverse sexual practices began in the womb with incestuous intercourse between her and her twin brother: “Whiles in their mothers wombe enclosed they were, / Ere they into the lightsom world were brought, / In fleshly lust were mingled both yfere, / And in that monstrous wise did to the world appere” (III.vii.48).

<sup>58</sup> Anderson argues that “the switch from Venus as manhandler to Venus as the pathetic—some would say tragic—mourner over the body of dead Adonis has always been problematical. Although passion and grief are twinned conditions of want(ing), the shift in this poem from an aggressive, comic mode to a helpless, pathetic one proves larger than life and challenges credible mimesis or, otherwise put, human credibility” (“*Venus*” 149). Anderson’s use of the language of size here is telling—Venus herself is ‘larger than life,’ a construction reflected in the form of the poem.

modern psychoanalysis for understanding the erotics at work in Shakespeare's poem in which Venus and the boar can become interchangeable to some extent. The boar is, in a sense, incestuous desire without the pleasures of infantilization, domination without the masochist's agency, and bestiality in which the human, rather than the animal, cannot give consent.<sup>59</sup>

In his reluctance to consent to the pleasures Venus offers, the character of Adonis illustrates a tension that will recur in all of the sites of interaction I analyze in this project: a tension between desiring the pleasures the large woman offers, yet feeling uneasy about the temporary or permanent surrender of male prerogative that submitting to these pleasures requires. Despite his rejection of Venus, Adonis seems at moments to express an arousal that both he and the poem's speaker claim he lacks: for instance, early in the poem, "panting he lies and breatheth in her face" (62). After his horse breaks free to chase the mare, Adonis sits down "all swoll'n with chafing" (325). Though his panting and swelling are both attributed to anger, the suggestive word choice indicates that Adonis is aroused by something, even if it is his own masturbatory "chafing" rather than Venus's body. Perhaps Adonis finds the frustrating chore of struggling against Venus unexpectedly erotic, mirroring the erotics experienced by a frustrated reader waiting for consummation. Shakespeare's Adonis does not consciously desire, however, to be

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<sup>59</sup> Sanchez argues that "one attraction of bestiality may be that it affords forms of intimacy and pleasure that do not—that perhaps cannot—include mutual commitment or recognition" ("Use" 500). The boar features centrally in recent queer scholarship on *Venus and Adonis* that focuses on the male homoerotics of the poem, and my argument expands on these readings to consider female-centered homo- and heteroerotics. Resisting the scholarship that sees the boar as a version of Venus, Schiffer sees it as "Venus's masculine rival, perhaps, but not her double" (370). Rambuss argues that Adonis and his desires stand apart from heterosexuality and that "Adonis's desire—to the extent that it finds expression in the poem...—flows in only one direction: toward the boar" (252). Stanivukovic argues that the poem depicts a desirable union between men that undermines heteroerotic ideals even as it reflects anxieties about male homoeroticism by associating it with death (90). I want to acknowledge these readings as important to recognizing the queer erotics of the poem, yet to broaden the focus from the dyad of Adonis and the boar to the triangulation of queer desire among Venus, Adonis, and the boar.

Venus's diminutive object, setting him apart from the figure of Adonis as he appears twice in Book III of Spenser's text. As we will see in the next section, a number of male figures in *The Faerie Queene* also struggle with the tension between succumbing and rebelling, including Guyon, Scudamour, and Artegall. Spenser is also both more suspicious of the erotics of size difference than Shakespeare and yet more willing to experiment with the pleasures a large female figure might offer, either for a diminutive male or for a hero who might enjoy becoming a diminutive object.

### **Goddesses, giants, and dwarves: size and desire in *The Faerie Queene***

Spenser's epic abounds with small, enormous, and half-human bodies that fall outside normal human scale. Examining the poem with an eye toward size calls attention to the importance of scale in driving the erotics of the poem and suggests new readings that privilege, rather than censure, male passivity and female dominance. Scholarship analyzing Shakespeare and Spenser together experienced a surge in popularity during the first decade of the 2000s, and my project's focus on size enables me to approach this pairing by considering how both poets develop allegorical characters whose bodies are to some extent a function of allegory yet also serve to round out the characters and develop them beyond allegory.<sup>60</sup> Britomart, for instance, may be the knight of chastity, but her experience of being alternately seen by others as a diminutive male or an Amazonian

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<sup>60</sup> The 2008 collection *Shakespeare and Spenser: Attractive Opposites*, edited by J. B. Lethbridge, includes an introduction and nine essays that analyze both poets' work, including such topics as influence, form and genre, patronage, and desire. Elsewhere, Anderson argues that "*Venus and Adonis* is a seriocomic meditation on the landscape of desire, or wanting—on passion and grief—and on the kinds of figures desire generates in the third book of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Shakespeare's poem explores the effects of folding into characters Spenser's multiple refractions of desire that are expressed in numerous allegorical figures and thus the effects of folding the multiple refractions of Book III into more fully and materially realized constructs" ("*Venus*" 149). Joseph Campana argues that Acrasia "compares favorably with the aggressive Venus of Shakespeare's closely contemporary *Venus and Adonis*" (484).

fighter shifts and deepens her character. Although I deal most extensively with the 1590 publication of *The Faerie Queene*, a few episodes from books 4 and 5, published after *Venus and Adonis*, are important to my analysis. I begin with Spenser's two versions of the Venus and Adonis myth in book 3, then move to brief readings of the erotics of size that center on Acrasia, Argante, Radigund, Belpheobe, and Britomart.<sup>61</sup> Finally, I consider Una's relationship with her dwarf companion in book 1 and the ways in which Una's contradictory size, smaller than Redcrosse yet larger than her dwarf, prefigures issues of size that remain important throughout the epic. Representations of Una's size are among the most flexible and relational in the epic, shifting frequently with her circumstances and calling attention to the constructedness of size in the poem.

Before Venus and Adonis appear in the first canto of book 3, the proem establishes the issue of female power in terms of Queen Elizabeth's authority over both Spenser and Walter Raleigh. A reference to Raleigh's poem "The Ocean to Scinthia" invokes Raleigh's construction of himself as the enormous ocean that is nonetheless controlled by the moon, another enormous body that looks small from the earth (Proem 4).<sup>62</sup> The poet wonders how he might "Presume so high to stretch mine humble quill" in painting a "glorious portraict" of Elizabeth (Proem 3). The phallic undertones in this statement of anxiety about growing large enough to represent the queen eroticize Elizabeth's relational largeness and the task of depicting her in poetry, phenomena I address in greater detail in chapter three. Here, I want to focus on the shadow of Elizabeth over this epic poem extensively populated by enormous figures of female authority. The placement of the Venus and Adonis myth in the canto immediately after

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<sup>61</sup> Mutabilitie, the enormous female titan from the Mutabilitie Cantos, first published in 1609 after Spenser's death, could fit into this analysis, but I deal with this character at length in chapter three.

<sup>62</sup> I return to an analysis of Raleigh's poem in chapter three.

this proem, in a tapestry in the castle of another powerful female ruler, Malecasta, implicates Elizabeth in this myth and in Malecasta's activities. In the ekphrasis describing this tapestry, as in Shakespeare's poem, Adonis is called "Boy," and the focus is on Venus and her dominance of the situation (III.i.35). Having nearly all the active verbs—in one stanza alone "entyst," "wooded," "making," "crowne," and "leading" (III.i.35)—she goes on actively to infantilize Adonis, both by bathing him and watching him sleep:

And whilst he slept, she over him would spread  
Her mantle, colour'd like the starry skyes,  
And her soft arme lay underneath his hed,  
And with ambrosiall kisses bathe his eyes;  
And whilst he bath'd, with her two crafty spyes,  
She secretly would search each daintie lim,  
And throw into the well sweet Rosemaryes,  
And fragrant violets, and Paunces trim,  
And ever with sweet Nectar she did sprinkle him. (III.i.36).

Adonis's "daintie" limbs miniaturize him, and Venus assumes a celestial largeness when she covers him with her cloak, likened to "the starry skyes." If Adonis's genitalia can be included among his "daintie" limbs, then the verse aligns him with the endless desire provoked by diminutive maleness, which we saw also expressed in Shakespeare's poem. Maureen Quilligan argues that Venus's powerful gaze here anatomizes Adonis's body in the way that the male gaze usually anatomizes a female body in a poetic description

(*Incest* 140).<sup>63</sup> Important here, however, is not so much a gender reversal of the gaze but the power of the female gaze to anatomize or break down the male body into a series of small, manageable, dainty parts and then to oversee all of them. The desiring gaze of a large woman indeed becomes the driving force behind much of the action in book 3, most notably Britomart's desire for the image of Artegall in her mirror that sets in motion the action of her quest.

Malecasta's sprawling tapestry both depicts this powerful female gaze and invites the gaze of Britomart and those who accompany her, the five stanzas of ekphrasis describing the tapestry mirroring this expansive gaze. At the same time, the ekphrasis stalls the larger narrative and creates a miniature narrative within the story of Britomart's quest, revealing ekphrasis as a poetic technique with a contradictory relation to size.<sup>64</sup> The proliferation of the word "and," the additive conjunction, at the beginning of seven lines of the stanza quoted in the previous paragraph creates a sense of endless bounty that anticipates the largess of Shakespeare's Venus. As in Shakespeare, we do not see Adonis's one action, his hunt, but rather encounter him "languishing, / Deadly engored of a great wilde Bore" (III.i.38). The internal rhyme on *gore* and *boar* suggests an erotic fusion that brings death to Adonis as if he had been penetrated by the active, phallic Venus. Venus expresses her sorrow in an "endelesse moan," suggestive of both grief and orgasm, that eroticizes Adonis's death and underscores the expansiveness of Venus's

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<sup>63</sup> She argues: "usually only the purview of a male spectator, Spenser grants this objectifying vision to the dominant female, Venus, as she peruses an adolescent male body. In a fundamental sense, the tragedy woven on the tapestries works itself out in terms of mother-son relations" (*Incest* 140). For Quilligan, the power dynamic created by Venus's gaze is analogous to the mother-son dynamic.

<sup>64</sup> Claire Preston describes ekphrasis as "a usefully open device, with perhaps the single, consistent feature of discreteness and self-containment within a larger rhetorical structure" (115). She goes on to argue that ekphrasis is "interruptive" and "intrude[s] upon active narrative progress," and that "above all, then, ekphrasis is a trope of coercion, of enforcement – it requires interpretive notice from the reader" (119). The disruptive quality of this rhetorical move calls attention to the ways it works against the scope and teleology of the epic, even while contributing to that scope.

desire (III.i.38). This tapestry depicting the active, expansive Venus and the infantilized, miniaturized Adonis hangs in a room Britomart and the other knights pass through and in which they see “Damzels” and “Squires” “Dauncing and reveling both day and night, / And swimming deepe in sensuall desyres” (III.i.39). The diminutive erotics of the Venus and Adonis tapestry oversee and likely help to inspire this scene of pleasure, in which the “swimming” echoes Adonis’s bathing by Venus.<sup>65</sup> The knights initially look on this room “with scornfull eye,” but soon Malecasta, the lady of the castle, induces all of the male knights to give in to pleasure and remove their armor (III.i.40, 42). The knights, like the Adonis depicted in the tapestry, receive pleasure willingly from female figures of greater social stature, and Malecasta, like Venus, desires the “fresh and lusty” young knight she sees when she looks at the female Britomart (III.i.47). Like Shakespeare’s Adonis who resists Venus’s desires, Britomart also seems to be playing “hard to get” by refusing to remove the armor the male knights so easily shed.

Venus and Adonis appear again in canto 6, this time in the description of the Garden of Adonis as part of the tale of Amoret’s origins. Venus and Adonis reside together here in a landscape that anticipates the park to which Venus likens her body in Shakespeare’s poem. The feminized, sexualized landscape of the “stately Mount, on whose round top / A gloomy grove of myrtle trees did rise” evokes the female pubis, and the dampness coming from the trees prefigures the “pleasant fountains” Shakespeare’s

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<sup>65</sup> Campana analyzes the “pleasurable liquidity” (466) of books 1 and 2, a form of pleasure that surfaces repeatedly in book 3 as well. Analyzing Redcrosse’s vulnerable liquidity after a sexual experience with Duessa that leaves him “Poured out in loosenesse on the grassy grownd,” Campana argues that “at the moment of his greatest moral lapse, his greatest susceptibility to dangerous pleasures, Redcrosse is also most receptive to aesthetic experience....His experience of liquidity requires him to set aside the signifiers of heroic masculinity that confirm the labor of his quest and convert the energies of his body to violent force. As Redcrosse disarms and experiences this morally questionable liquidity, he experiences his body as sensuous and sensible flesh” (Spenser I.vii.7, Campana 466). Campana is less interested in what this liquidity means for Redcrosse morally than in the association between liquidity and pleasure here and throughout book 2.

Venus invites Adonis to enjoy: “And from their fruitfull sydes sweet gum did drop, / That all the ground with pretious deaw bedight” (III.vi.43). Venus and Adonis are both contained in this mountainous feminized landscape that also encloses the boar, imprisoned “In a strong rocky Cave, which is they say, / Hewen underneath that Mount, that none him losen may” (III.vi.48). The enormous landscape contains the violence of the “wilde Bore,” Venus’s own conquest over the beast and his masculine power, symbolized by his “cruell tuske,” made clear: “She firmly hath emprisoned for ay” (III.vi.48). Imprisoned in her mountain, the boar also functions as a destructive aspect of Venus’s sexuality that she keeps hidden and controlled. Spenser’s Venus manages to express and satisfy her desire for the diminutive without the violence Shakespeare’s Venus demonstrates:

There wont fayre *Venus* often to enjoy  
Her deare *Adonis* joyous company,  
And reape sweet pleasure of the wanton boy:  
There yet, some say, in secret he does ly,  
Lapped in flowres and pretious spycery,  
By her hid from the world, and from the skill  
Of *Stygian* Gods, which doe her love envy;  
But she her selfe, when ever that she will,  
Possesseth him, and of his sweetnesse takes her fill. (III.vi.46)

Adonis is again described as a boy, and Venus miniaturizes him further by covering him in flowers, making him a part of her landscape. Indeed, the flower Adonis becomes after his death in Ovid, Shakespeare, and the tapestry in Spenser’s 3.1 is a kind of ultimate



miniaturization that takes the place of reproductive masculinity, as the boy on the cusp of manhood is reduced to a delicate flower described by Shakespeare's Venus as Adonis's "next of blood," or child (1184). Spenser's Venus miniaturizes Adonis as a sweet flower in the Garden of Adonis in order to possess him as an object of pleasure always at her disposal. Adonis almost functions as a kind of dildo here, as Venus's will and possession seem to drive the relationship and he exists solely for her pleasure. The word "reape" also suggests rape, calling into question Adonis's willingness to be used as such an object of pleasure. With Venus in control sexually, Adonis is stripped of phallic power as the boar is stripped of his ability to do violence.

In other moments, however, Adonis does seem to have his own desires, both complicating and enriching the erotics of the diminutive in the Garden of Adonis. He returns Venus's desire and takes pleasure in their relationship: "There now he liveth in eternall blis, / Joying his goddesse, and of her enjoyd" (III.vi.48). The possessive "his goddesse" gives him and his desires some agency here, suggesting that he willingly acts the part of the diminutive with Venus. He also plays an important generative role in the garden beyond being Venus's boy toy: "For him the Father of all formes they call" (III.vi.47). Though Venus controls all in the garden and limits Adonis's access to human reproduction, she gives him an important task in the Garden's productivity. Adonis's desires also tend, like Venus's, toward the diminutive, as the "winged boy" Cupid shares the pleasures of the Garden with them: "laying his sad dartes / Asyde, with faire *Adonis* playes his wanton partes" (III.vi.49). Though Adonis is Venus's diminutive plaything, he also an object of desire for the diminutive Cupid, Venus's son, a sort of competing or

complementary diminutive object of Venus's with the added titillation of incest.<sup>66</sup> This Cupid, however, is ambiguously sized and aged, both a "winged boy" and the husband of Psyche, who bears him the daughter Pleasure (III.vi.49, 50). In neighboring stanzas, Cupid is at once a mischievous boy and a phallic father figure, though even his relationship with Psyche is tinged with childishness: "his trew love faire Psyche with him playes" (III.vi.50). "Playes" could refer to both childish and sexual games, and that Psyche is doing the playing puts her in the active role and questions Cupid's phallic power after all, even if he is a father. Size and the category of the diminutive are thus slippery and highly relational in the Garden of Adonis, a space for exploring both male and female pleasure.

The Garden of Adonis, with its many pleasures on offer for an array of figures including Venus, Adonis, Cupid, and Psyche, offers pleasures also to readers of both sexes. The canto describing the garden opens with an address to the "faire Ladies" whom the poet imagines as wanting to know how Belphoebe became so virtuous, but the focus of the canto quickly shifts from Belphoebe's chastity to the pleasures of the Garden of Adonis, bringing these female readers along (III.vi.1). Quilligan argues that for Venus and for female readers, "the Garden of Adonis may appear a place of delightful pleasure where sexual intercourse takes place eternally with a never failing lover" (*Incest* 143). She adds, however, that male readers might experience the garden as threatening

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<sup>66</sup> Quilligan argues that Cupid and Adonis are always interchangeable for Venus, suggesting a form of mother-son incest in her desire for and relationship with Adonis (*Incest* 139). William Junker argues that Venus cannot enjoy Adonis without Cupid (77-78). Junker's argument on the whole focuses on the role of the disarmed or unarmed Cupid in the 1590 *Faerie Queene*, ultimately concluding that "the unarmed Cupid is a medium through which otherwise disproportionate or incompatible entities are brought outside themselves and into union with the other" (79). Junker's statement is useful because it suggests that Cupid enables the erotics of the diminutive by bringing together mismatched pairs, including those mismatched in size. In the Garden of Adonis, Cupid's presence also suggests that erotic encounters can easily incorporate more than two parties and need not subscribe to monogamous coupling.

castration (143). Like Spenser's Adonis, though, who takes pleasure in being Venus's sexual object and who has his own erotic experiences with Cupid, male readers might also enjoy the alternative pleasures the Garden offers, insofar as it alleviates the pressure to be a "never failing lover," as the female figures almost exclusively take the active sexual role. Since the Garden offers pleasure for both male and female figures, a reader might identify with any or all of the figures in the garden and imagine the pleasures of assuming both the large and the diminutive position.

The Garden and the story of Adonis are later recalled in book 4 in Scudamour's account of the Temple of Venus, with far more ambivalent attitudes on the part of the male figure toward the enormous goddess. A version of Adonis is reflected in Hatred, the angry and petulant older son of Lady Concord who is mastered in strength by both his younger brother and his mother, who forces the brothers to hold hands. Scudamour describes Lady Concord as showing "great womanhood" and as controlling all the elements by "hold[ing] them with her blessed hands," using language that conflates status, power, and size to depict this woman who holds and controls the four elements with only her hands, which she does with ease (IV.x.32, 35). Acting like Shakespeare's rebellious Adonis, Hatred refuses to look at his brother "And turn'd his face away," but he cannot resist his mother: "Yet she was of such grace and vertuous might, / That her commaundment he could not withstand, / But bit his lip for felonous despight, / And gnasht his yron tuskes at that displeasing sight" (IV.x.33). Lady Concord has the "might" to restrain and contain her older son's behavior, a might he is unable to resist, like Shakespeare's Adonis, except through shows of petulance. Scudamour is afraid of Lady Concord at first, feeling "halfe dismayed," suggesting his unease in the presence of a

large woman, but she protects him from Hatred “with her powrefull speech” (IV.x.36). Hatred’s “yron tuskes” also align him with the boar of the Garden of Adonis, another figure of potential violence kept in check by a larger, more powerful mother figure.

Venus appears throughout this episode as an enormous figure of maternity, described as “great mother *Venus*” and “great *Venus*, that is hight / The Queene of beautie, and of love the mother” (IV.x.5, 29). The word *hight* in this context means “called,” but it also invokes the great height of the statue of Venus housed in her temple. The goddess’s enormous stature is reflected in the dimensions of the temple, which exceed those of the “famous Temple of *Diane*, / Whose hight all *Ephesus* did oversee,” and in her statue inside the temple, a “costly masse” (IV.x.30, 39). Tiny *putti* flit around the statue, underscoring its relational immensity:

And all about her necke and shoulders flew  
A flock of litle loves, and sports, and joyes,  
With nimble wings of gold and purple hew;  
Whose shapes seem’d not like to terrestiall boyes,  
But like to Angels playing heavenly toyes. (IV.x.42)

These *putti* are specifically described as little and are explicitly not to be confused with human boys. Their angelic bodies place them off the human scale, making them even more diminutive than a human child, and they are specifically gendered male by the mention of boyhood. Since “all the Priests were damzels” in the temple, supernaturally small male bodies underscore the relative largeness of both the goddess and her priestesses (IV.x.38). The insistence that these are not human boys also calls attention to the absence of human children from this temple devoted to a mother-goddess. Conception

does seem to happen here, however, in the hermaphroditic figure of Venus: the statue is veiled because “they say, she hath both kinds in one, / Both male and female, both under one name: / She syre and mother is her selfe alone, / Begets and eke conceives, ne needeth other none” (IV.x.41). Venus does not need Adonis nor any other male figure for generation, but creates everything out of herself. And although Scudamour calls attention to Venus’s hermaphroditic traits, she remains in his narrative and throughout Spenser’s poem unequivocally female, a goddess and a queen. Venus practices a queer form of reproduction that generates life without producing family units with mothers, fathers, and babies or privileging the male role in such a family.

Though Scudamour insists on his respect for Venus, he expresses ambivalence about his relation to the large maternal goddess. In order to obtain Amoret, he must become a surrogate for Cupid by bearing Cupid’s image on his shield. The shield enables him to claim that he fulfills the rites of Venus when he takes Amoret because “it fitteth best, / For *Cupids* man with *Venus* mayd to hold” (IV.x.54). Although he fancies himself Cupid’s man, in the sense of Cupid’s servant but also evocative of the “manhood stout” he sees in himself as he challenges the giant Daunger, Cupid himself is a fitting counterpart for Scudamour (IV.x.19). Cupid frequently causes trouble, plays impish pranks, and indulges in sensual pleasures, especially in book 3. Through this association with Cupid, Scudamour’s theft of Amoret begins to look like a prank-turned-rape rather than a valiant knightly deed, especially since Amoret resists him with prayers and tears (IV.x.57). Scudamour seems to think he wants a small woman he can control, and he finds this woman in Amoret, whose name ends with the diminutive *-et* and who is small enough that he finds her sitting “in the lap of *Womanhood*” (IV.x.52). Scudamour’s

behavior, however, repeatedly suggests that he cannot, or perhaps does not want, to take on the large and authoritative role of “manhood stout.” He lowers himself before entering the temple: “from my lofty steede dismounting low, / Past forth on foote” (IV.x.15). He briefly considers walking between the legs of the giant Daunger, following others who have “Crept in by stouping low,” but the giant immediately yields when he sees Scudamour’s shield and lets him pass without a fight (IV.x.18). Though Scudamour thinks he has “shak[en] off all doubt and shamefast feare” when he reaches Amoret with Womanhood and the other damsels, he struggles to lift the diminutive Amoret from Womanhood’s lap: “by the lilly hand her labour’d up to reare” (IV.x.53). The description of his fear as “shamefast” makes him seem more like a bashful adolescent than a decisive knight, and throughout the dispute with Womanhood he keeps a wary eye on the statue of Venus, as if asking permission:

And evermore upon the Goddesse face  
Mine eye was fixt, for feare of her offence,  
Whom when I saw with amiable grace  
To laugh at me, and favour my pretence,  
I was emboldned with more confidence,  
And nought for nicenesse nor for envy sparing,  
In presence of them all forth led her thence,  
All looking on, and like astonisht staring,  
Yet to lay hand on her, not one of all them daring. (IV.x.56)

Scudamour interprets Venus’s laugh in his favor, though he may be for Venus an object of fun or the butt of a joke. “Emboldned” by this laugh, he takes Amoret, and in telling

this story he essentially brags that he has overcome a few unarmed women. When Scudamour later faces a greater rival than Womanhood and her damsels in Busirane, he is unable to protect Amoret and needs the martial maid Britomart, who encounters him at the end of Book 3, to do the actual work of rescuing her; as Book 4 opens, we learn that Scudamour has disappeared before Britomart completes this task. Scudamour may think he is ready to be a husband and head a household, but his behavior suggests that he prefers to be a wandering boy and does not really want to escape the authority of large female figures.<sup>67</sup>

Venus is one of many large and powerful female figures who preside over Spenser's expansive text, including the witch Acrasia, the giantess Argante, the Amazon Radigund, the huntress Belphoebe, the knight Britomart, and even the steadfast Una who travels, notably, with a dwarf. These figures embody largeness in diverse ways in relation to other characters and through various tropes, and they cover a wide moral spectrum, from the saintly Una to the lustful and incestuous Argante. I suggest that we suspend moral judgment of these figures, however, and consider them as they relate to pleasure and to the male figures who encounter them. My approach builds on Joseph Campana's work on the Legend of Temperance, in which he argues that the poem re-envisioned pleasure and the heroic male body by making this body vulnerable (473). I extend this argument to consider the role of the large woman in creating this kind of pleasurable vulnerability for the martial male figure. If book 2 frequently portrays "a sexual vitality

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<sup>67</sup> A. Kent Hieatt argues that Busirane can so easily abduct Amoret because Scudamour seized, rather than wooed, her (270-71). Scudamour, then, seems to misunderstand how to be a husband, and the episode suggests that a successful marriage must take the wife's desires into account; she cannot simply be her husband's diminutive possession. Andrea Walkden argues that Scudamour's largest problem is himself, that "Scudamore may be at least partially responsible for diminishing his own possibilities, that his marginalization represents a failure not of the poem's design, but of his own imagination" (98). She goes on to link him with Paridell as a "reluctant husband" (102-03).

that emerges only as masculinity is disarmed,” as Campana argues, then this sexual vitality is made possible by the poem’s large women who force defeat on the knights and offer them pleasures their quests cannot (483).<sup>68</sup> Of course, disarmament is not always pleasurable, as we see when Britomart encounters Scudamour, disarmed and distraught, but it at least provides access to pleasures not available when male figures wear full armor. Patricia Parker argues that the Bower of Bliss in particular functions allegorically “as a predominantly female space—whose enclosures suggest the *hortus conclusus* of the female body—and a place that might excite the knight to forget his own higher purpose, an act of submission that would suspend his ‘instruments’” of martial masculinity (58-59). This envisioning of the female body as an enclosed garden prefigures Shakespeare’s construction of Venus’s body as a park and depicts the pleasure of the female body as stemming from its largeness. Parker’s use of “excite” is telling here—the large female body might sexually excite a male figure who has devoted himself to the physical denials of a life of wandering knighthood, and he might willingly submit to the category of the diminutive in order to excuse himself from his duties and enjoy the pleasures of this body. This willing submission is complicated, however, by the ambivalence many of the male figures express that makes it difficult to pinpoint whether they see themselves as victims or as accomplices. As we will see in the cases of Verdant and Argante’s kidnapped knights, sustaining this ambivalence enables male figures to escape blame for

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<sup>68</sup> Mary Ellen Lamb connects this sort of diversion from the quest to the kinds of infantilization discussed in the section on *Venus and Adonis*. She argues that “abandoning quests to lie in women’s laps represented not only sexual indulgence, but a childish regression to an earlier effeminate self” (“Gloriana” 93). This childishness and regression are accompanied by diminutive pleasures, as male figures throughout Spenser’s text experience erotic pleasure as they shrink and regress in a diversity of ways. Harry Berger Jr., indeed, argues that the pull toward regressive states of psychic development is a part of the workings of eros throughout the poem. He argues that the very setting in an antique world sets the poem in “a particular primitive phase of psycho-cultural experience,” characterized in part by infantile fantasies and pleasures (“*Faerie*” 399).



their submissive behavior. Because Acrasia and Argante possess supernatural powers and are constructed as so much larger than the knights they dominate, the knights can excuse themselves by insisting that they stood no physical chance against the large women. In other words, the male figures in *The Faerie Queene* who experience pleasure at the hands of larger female figures can to some extent salvage their martial reputations by denying their complicity with their own subjection, a denial made possible and believable by the female figure's superior size.

The erotics of Acrasia's Bower in book 2 of *The Faerie Queene* anticipate the Venus and Adonis motif of book 3, as another supernatural female figure, this time a witch, miniaturizes youthful knights and turns them into her sexual playthings. Since 2.12 is so important to analyses like Campana's and Parker's, I want to draw out moments in this canto in which a focus on size lets us see the erotics of dominance and submission in new ways. To be sure, Guyon and the Palmer reach Acrasia's island with the help of a boatman with "brawnie armes," a figure of large masculinity, but the dynamics of size on the island enlarge the female figures and reduce the male (II.xii.21). Immediately at the gate of the Bower of Bliss, Guyon and the Palmer encounter Genius, a male figure described as "A comely personage of stature tall," yet whose "looser garment to the ground did fall, / And flew about his heeles in wanton wize, / Not fit for speedy pace of manly exercize" (II.xii.46). The male figure at the entrance to Acrasia's bower is of contradictory size, described as tall yet dwarfed by much-too-large clothing that compromises his male potency by limiting his mobility. The closer Guyon and the Palmer move to Acrasia, the more reflections of diminutive maleness they encounter. As they near her bower, they pass a fountain decorated with "shapes of naked boyes, / Of which

some seemd with lively jollitee, / To fly about, playing their wanton toyes, / Whylest others did them selves embay in liquid joys” (II.xii.60). The rhyme that connects boys, toys, and joys anticipates the same rhyme in the Temple of Venus when similar *putti* fly around the enormous Venus, quoted earlier, and speaks to the appeal of diminutive masculinity throughout this poem and indeed throughout so many of the texts I analyze in this dissertation: a diminutive male calls up the powerlessness of boyhood and might become a toy for a larger woman, with this encounter offering pleasure or joy of different sorts to both the large woman and the diminutive male.

This fountain empties into an artificial lake in which Guyon sees two naked damsels bathing and playing: these life-sized female bodies tower over the diminutive *putti*, which they replace as objects of Guyon’s gaze.<sup>69</sup> The damsels invite the gazes of others, and they “seemed to contend, / And wrestle wantonly, ne car’d to hyde, / Their dainty partes from vew of any, which them eyd,” suggesting that they are putting on a show that requires the gaze of an onlooker (II.xii.63). By wrestling, they present a struggle for mastery that also plays out between them and Guyon and hinges on an interaction with a third party voyeur:

Sometimes the one would lift the other quight

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<sup>69</sup> Both the diminutive male and larger female figures are associated with pleasure through their connection with “the sensual and censurable qualities of water,” as Campana describes the liquid pleasures throughout book 2 (466). Analyzing the differences between Armida’s Palace in Tasso and Spenser’s Bower of Bliss, Robert M. Durling argues that the changes Spenser makes to the fountain scene “increase considerably the lasciviousness of the bathers” (338). According to Durling, “Tasso’s girls retain at least a modicum of modesty,” and “Tasso’s sirens invite the knights to a life of sensuality, but they do so in no lewd or obscene way, as do Spenser’s” (339). Like C. S. Lewis, upon whom he draws heavily, Durling seeks the morals in this Spenserian episode. However, this reading also underscores the non-reproductive eroticism of the scene and of the Bower more generally, which factors into my conception of the Bower as a space of queer pleasures. Durling goes on to argue that “like the lewdness of the bathers, the lavishness of the Bower is presented as excessive to the point of destroying nature’s true beauty” (345). By countering what is ‘natural,’ the Bower showcases a pleasurable queer erotics that is far more complicated than the ostensibly heteroerotic temptation the bathing damsels present to Guyon; the damsels offer delay and pleasures of the moment that distract from the seemingly natural teleological goal of Guyon’s quest.

Above the waters, and then downe againe  
Her plong, as over maastered by might,  
Where both awhile would covered remain,  
And whiles their snowy limbes, as through a vele,  
So through the christall waves appeared plaine:  
Then suddeinly both would themselves unhele,  
And th'amarous sweet spoiles to greedy eyes revele. (II.xii.64)

The damsels move between display and tantalizing concealment, all the while dramatizing a mastery over each other that also sets up the voyeur in a position of simultaneous mastery of and submission to the damsels, whose rising and falling eroticizes their play in terms of size.<sup>70</sup> While Guyon gazes at the damsels, giving in to the pleasures of watching them dominate each other, the damsels arrest the dominating power his gaze might have by gazing back and then continuing their performance:

The wanton Maidens him espying, stood  
Gazing a while at his unwonted guise;  
Then th'one her selfe low ducked in the flood,  
Abasht, that her a straunger did advise:  
But thother rather higher did arise,  
And her two lilly paps aloft displayd,  
And all, that might his melting hart entyse  
To her delights, she unto him bewrayd:

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<sup>70</sup> Sanchez argues that “this episode illustrates the appeals of sexual danger, recklessness, and vulnerability for women as well as men. Instead of excluding power or aggression, the women’s wrestling eroticizes their exchange” (“Use” 498). The damsels’ wrestling is performed not only for the eyes of Guyon and male readers with heteroerotic desires, but is in part enacted for the homoerotic pleasure of the two damsels themselves.

The rest hidd underneath, him more desirous made. (II.xii.66)

The damsels return Guyon's gaze, raising and lowering themselves to toy with the knight through their easily-changeable, relational size. They restrict Guyon's gaze here by looking, showing, and refusing to show, and when the damsels see Guyon, they stop wrestling, suggesting that they now direct their efforts at mastery toward Guyon, who indeed stalls to watch them until the Palmer draws him on with his quest.<sup>71</sup> In this way, the damsels turn voyeurism on its head, using Guyon's gaze as a way to exert power over him in a form of dominance they dramatize with their struggle to master each other.<sup>72</sup>

As in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, moments of voyeurism in the Bower of Bliss also raise questions about the erotic experiences of readers of this poem. The invitations to look at figures who are always partly revealed and partly obscured mirror the enticements of reading, as texts always reveal to some extent but leave the rest to the imagination. Arlene Okerlund argues that the erotics of Guyon's encounter with the Damsels in the lake are meant to cause a moral realization in the reader: "as we see

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<sup>71</sup> Though Spenser closely follows Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* in this episode, the dynamics of size and delay are slightly yet significantly different. Tasso's damsels are called "girls," assigning them, rather than the knights, a diminutive status (15.58-59, 65-66). They swim, dive, and splash together rather than wrestling (15.58). Tasso includes the size-related detail in which one of the girls "rose so high she showed the men her full / breasts, and all else that could entice their sights / from the hips up," and this girl manipulates the dynamics of voyeurism by later "feigning to see / the men for the first time," at which she "grew shy" (15.59-60). However, unlike Guyon, Tasso's knights retain a level of detachment as observers that keeps the girls from mastering them. The knights "stopped to watch them play awhile," the "awhile" suggesting that the knights know this delay is only temporary (15.59). When, unlike Spenser's damsels, one of the girls speaks to the knights and invites them to "soothe the pain of life" and "let the bed be your pleasant battlefield," the knights have no trouble quickly walking away: "the knights' hearts were deaf and would not heed, / hardened against those false and faithless chances" (15.63, 64, 65). In their phallic hardness, the knights reject the pleasures of becoming a diminutive object. Whereas Spenser's damsels to some extent master Guyon by manipulating the voyeuristic gaze, Tasso's girls are left frustrated and "dunked themselves for discontent" (15.66).

<sup>72</sup> Sanchez argues that "however much Guyon may enjoy the women's wrestling, it is not initially performed for his benefit, nor does it receive sexual meaning from his voyeurism" (498). In other words, the erotics and the power dynamics of this episode are more complex than what might be explained by the power of the male gaze. Campana argues that the exchanges of gaze and the wrestling are aspects "of a larger circuit of motion, one in which mastery shifts back and forth, never resting solely in one party" (488). This "circuit of motion" drives the erotics of this scene by dramatizing a contest for power that also creates a nearly egalitarian circulation of desire in which men and women are both desiring and desired.

Guyon abandon the maidens in their lake while our own concupiscence cries out to join them, we are forced to realize that our erotic lust has made *us* into very susceptible mortals” (64). Such a moral revelation, however, would never be experienced equally by all readers, and some might not be “forced” to realize it at all. Even a moral revelation, however, does not preclude the pleasure of reading this episode—indeed, this reminder of moral susceptibility may enhance the reader’s erotic experience. William Junker looks to the “Letter to Raleigh” and its claim to “fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline” as he analyzes the erotics of reading the 1590 *Faerie Queene* (451). Junker argues that the phrase “gentle discipline” contains a pun, referring both to the qualities of nobility and to “tenderness and pliancy”; the latter reading “posits erotic joy as the highest end attainable by the human being” (66). While I agree that the poem promotes experiences of pleasurable reading in male and female readers alike, especially with regards to the erotics of the diminutive, I resist the moralizing urge of both Okerlund and Junker. Instead, I join scholars like Melissa Sanchez to argue that the text is open to a variety of reader responses, including arousal, titillation, and even disgust, that do not necessarily need to lead to moral revelation. Sanchez argues that the scene with the bathing damsels shows “not a controlling, voyeuristic male gaze but a mobile set of identifications in which the reader is implicated. For even as we see the women through Guyon’s eyes, we watch Guyon from the perspective of the women” (499). She goes on to argue that “the women’s sadomasochistic play makes shame, aggression, and disempowerment central to the pleasure of the intimate encounter in which we, like Guyon, have just participated” (499). Reader participation in the erotics of the “mobile set of identifications” is crucial to this moment in the text, and there is even an invitation

to split as well as mobile identification in the many levels of erotic experience this episode sustains, with readers potentially identifying with both the dominant and submissive parties.

Junker's mention of the "Letter to Raleigh" also brings up the specific readers Spenser imagined for his epic: Raleigh and Elizabeth I. Spenser addresses Elizabeth in the dedication and in the proems preceding each book, establishing her as the most important reader of the epic. By addressing the explanatory letter to Raleigh, however, Spenser adds another preferred reader, this time a male reader, who in some sense competes with Elizabeth as the poem's primary audience.<sup>73</sup> My focus on large figures of female authority raises questions about how Elizabeth, a female monarch who, as I argue in chapter three, strategically constructed a largeness of person, and Raleigh, a male courtier at times diminished by his female sovereign, might have experienced the poem's representations of big women and the erotics of the diminutive.<sup>74</sup> The responses of these two imagined readers, moreover, likely differed significantly from the ways other early modern female and male readers, close to or apart from Elizabeth's court, experienced these poetic depictions. As I have been arguing, the erotics of the diminutive potentially inspires a range of reactions, though some of the most significant reactions involve challenges to normative heterosexuality that might have been available to male and female readers across the realm.

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<sup>73</sup> Montrose argues that in the book 3 proem, Raleigh is a kind of mediator for Elizabeth and her two bodies, one political and the other mortal, and that the specter of Raleigh challenges Elizabeth's claims to authority over the ways she shapes herself and her subjects ("Elizabethan" 325).

<sup>74</sup> For a fuller analysis of the Elizabeth-Raleigh dynamic, see chapter 3. Scholars have seen reflections of Elizabeth in nearly all of Spenser's female characters, and indeed Catherine G. Canino argues that every female figure in the epic is a version of the queen. She draws on Montrose's work to argue that Elizabeth "held the power of the future over every Englishman" (113). Similarly, in *The Faerie Queene*, "each female character is given the prerogative not only to shape a man's identity and future but also to bestow an identity upon him. This makes every female in the book analogous to Elizabeth who, as we have seen, held the same prerogative for England" (114).

The large, powerful female continues to function centrally when Guyon and the Palmer finally reach Acrasia and Verdant in her bower. Our first glimpse of Acrasia shows her using her gaze to construct her own largeness in relation to Verdant and to subject him to her desires:

And all that while, right over him she hong,  
With her false eyes fast fixed in his sight,  
As seeking medicine, whence she was stong,  
Or greedily depasturing delight:  
And oft inclining downe with kisses light,  
For feare of waking him, his lips bedewd,  
And through his humid eyes did sucke his spright,  
Quite molten into lust and pleasure lewd;  
Wherewith she sighed soft, as if his case she rew. (II.ii.73)

Acrasia hangs over Verdant, prefiguring Shakespeare's Venus in her greed to devour Verdant combined with motherly care she takes in not waking him. We later see Acrasia cradling Verdant, "Whose sleepe head she in her lap did soft dispose," in another motherly gesture that figures him as small enough to fit in her lap (II.xii.76).<sup>75</sup> The

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<sup>75</sup> The episode in Tasso between Arimda and Rinaldo, which Spenser follows closely here, is similarly concerned with the pleasures the male body might experience as a diminutive object. Armida traps Rinaldo with a Siren-like magical creation that rises out of a stream and sings to Rinaldo about the pointlessness of martial masculinity: "What men call praise and valor—a mere name, an idol only, no reality!....Let the body, free of care, lie at its ease, / and the calm soul delight in pleasant things" (14.63-64). The song devalues the goals of martial masculinity and instead makes appealing the physical pleasures of rest and delay. When Armida falls in love with the sleeping Rinaldo, who has easily succumbed to the song, she uses flowers and "composes / a gentle but a most tenacious band; / these round his neck and arms and feet she closes, / so binds him, like a prisoner in hand" (14.68). The end result of the pleasures of delay for the male knight is bondage to the powerful sorceress who seems large in her ability to control him with one hand. Like Spenser's Verdant, Rinaldo enjoys being a diminutive object in Armida's garden: "Over the knight / she hung; in her soft lap he lay his head, / raising his hungry eyes to hers, to feed / greedily on her charms, and as he fed / his sight, he was himself consumed, undone" (16.18-19). Armida hangs over Rinaldo like Acrasia hangs over Verdant, but Rinaldo is at least conscious and somewhat active as he

description also emphasizes the physical evidence of Verdant's youth, suggesting that he may be particularly receptive to the motherly aspects of Acrasia's miniaturizing charms. Verdant is a "young man," and "on his tender lips the downy heare / Did now but freshly spring, and silken blossoms beare" (II.xii.79). Like Adonis, he seems to appeal to the powerful female figure because he can easily fit into the category of the diminutive, his vulnerability and inability fully to exercise masculinity suggested by the soft beginnings of facial hair, likened to flowers. His unmanly miniaturization is on display beside him, as his instruments of war hang on the branches of the bower:

His warlike Armes, the ydle instruments  
Of sleeping praise, were hong upon a tree,  
And his brave shield, full of old monuments,  
Was fowly ra'st, that none the signes might see,  
Ne for them, ne for honour cared hee,  
Ne ought, that did to his advauncement tend,  
But in lewd loves, and wastfull luxuree,  
His dayes, his goods, his bodie he did spend:  
O horrible enchantment, that him so did blend. (II.xii.80)

The unused symbols of warrior masculinity hang uselessly around Verdant while he devotes his body instead to the pleasures offered by the enchantress who looms over him.<sup>76</sup> Parker argues that "these suspended 'instruments' are also clearly *male*

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returns Armida's gaze. She takes control over this gaze, however, using it to keep the knight as her diminutive object.

<sup>76</sup> Parker and others note that Verdant's "ydle instruments" echo Colin Clout's broken and suspended pipes at the beginning and end of *The Shepheards Calender*. Bemoaning the scorn with which Rosalind laughs at him, in the January Eclogue Colin "broke his oaten pype, and downe dyd lye" (72; see also December Eclogue, ll. 141). Parker argues that "the 'idleness' of the suspended instruments of Verdant suggests in their echo of Colin's gesture the potential impotence of poetry itself in a state in which it was scorned as a



instruments and that the impotence their suspension betokens is an impotence that is sexual as well as martial or lyric” (57, emphasis in original).<sup>77</sup> But female dominance over male figures does not necessarily connote male impotence or castration. Instead, Spenser’s text suggests that depictions of dominant women that are usually read as threatening can be revalued as elements of pleasure in which submission, pain, and scale play central roles. The text shows male energy devoted to the pleasures of the large female body rather than to martial conquest.<sup>78</sup> Verdant gives up his knightly duties with his armor, “Ne for them, ne for honour cared hee, / Ne ought, that did to his advancement tend, / But in lewd loves, and wastfull luxuree, / His dayes, his goods, his bodie he did spend” (II.xii.80). Verdant embraces the pleasures the poetic voice dismisses as wasteful and chooses stationary ease over advancement, or teleology. His agency in choosing what he cares about and how to spend his time, resources, and youth suggests his complicity with Acrasia’s efforts to miniaturize him. Verdant struggles when Guyon throws the net over him and Acrasia not necessarily because he resists capture, but because he does not want to be parted from Acrasia and the pleasures she provides (II.xii.82). He is “sorrowful and sad” as Guyon leads him away from the destroyed bower and presumably back to his life as a knight (II.xii.84). Though neither Verdant nor Acrasia has the opportunity to speak, Gryll, another of Acrasia’s diminutive objects

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potential form of effeminacy, or idle ‘toye,’ in contrast to more active, imperial pursuits” (56). If poetry is a ‘toye,’ then the poet, like Verdant, becomes a diminutive object of sorts, perhaps to the large and powerful queen who ruled Spenser and his contemporaries. Indeed, Halpern argues that “much of the *Shepherdess Calendar* was written in late 1579, when Spenser and the rest of Leicester’s circle were smarting from the Alençon affair. It is quite likely that Rosalind in part represents the wayward Queen Elizabeth and that Colin’s rural melancholy in part reflects Spenser’s fear of alienation from the court” (“Great” 16). Suspended and idle masculinity is thus a central concern of the poet.

<sup>77</sup> Parker’s analysis brilliantly weaves together strands of a crisis in male potency regarding both sexuality and poetic production, and she names a number of other pairs of dominant females and subjected males this episode evokes, including Omphale and Hercules, Venus and Adonis, and Samson and Delilah (57-58).

<sup>78</sup> Campana argues that “these moments of stupefaction also witness a sexual vitality that emerges only as masculinity is disarmed” (482-83). I would add that Acrasia’s status as a large supernatural woman lets her easily disarm Verdant and access this sexual vitality.

whom the Palmer restores from hog to human form, “Repyned greatly, and did him miscall” (II.xii.86). Gryll seems to share Verdant’s desire for the vacation from martial masculinity Acrasia offers, wanting to remain the kind of eroticized pet that Shakespeare’s Venus seeks in Adonis.

Verdant’s and Gryll’s reactions to rescue suggest that occupying a diminutive position in relation to a large and powerful enchantress brings with it desirable pleasures that the poem does not completely reject: the book’s final stanza is entirely a dialogue between Guyon and the Palmer, and the narrative voice keeps the same silence as Verdant, never joining in with Guyon’s and the Palmer’s condemnation of Gryll’s desire for continued subjection to a large woman. Mary Ellen Lamb argues that we only see Acrasia’s bower “through the appalled eyes of Guyon” and that “what would appear to be a condition of erotic and aesthetic fulfillment is portrayed, in the book of Temperance, as a terrible fate” (“Gloriana” 93, 91).<sup>79</sup> The dialogue that makes up the final stanza reminds us that we only see the bower from Guyon’s and the Palmer’s perspective, but the bower, seen from another perspective, also signifies a celebration of the erotics of the diminutive. The surprising lack of security in the Bower of Bliss suggests that its inhabitants do not imagine that they engage in a form of pleasure anyone would seek to destroy: Guyon and the Palmer easily move past the gate keeper, and they pass countless individuals on their way to Acrasia, none of whom seem concerned about the approach of an armed knight and a religious man. Guyon meets no resistance because the Bower, like the Garden of Adonis, is a space free of martial masculinity and where no one desires war or heroics. Instead, the Bower is a space in which figures of female authority miniaturize

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<sup>79</sup> For other arguments that see the poet implicated in the pleasures of the Bower and see Guyon’s destruction of the Bower as neither temperate nor virtuous, see, for example, Parker and Campana.

knights in order to promote the experience of pleasure. Campana argues that Acrasia's care of Verdant, her sighs and her efforts not to wake him, "suggests that the disarming of heroic masculinity opens up the possibility of relationships grounded in mutuality" (485). Acrasia's position over Verdant also calls this mutuality into question, however, suggesting instead that dominance and submission are "wanton partes" any subject might play, regardless of gender. This episode in the text might especially appeal to readers who seek alternatives to heterosexual marriage in the fantasy of a relationship structured by mutuality or a hierarchy denaturalized from gender.

The looming witch Acrasia prefigures the array of large female figures that take a more central role in book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*, which follows the Amazon-like Britomart, the knight of chastity, and includes figures like the semi-divine huntress Belphoebe and the giantess Argante. Argante's status as a giantess constructs her most clearly as an enormous woman, and her size is specifically connected to her sexual desires. She and her twin brother Ollyphant, according to the Squire of Dames, were born having incestuous intercourse, and Argante not only continues this relationship with her twin but also practices bestiality and makes a habit of raping young men (III.vii.48, 49). The Squire of Dames describes Argante's sexual tastes and her technique for entrapping male victims:

But over all the countrie she did raunge,  
To seeke young men, to quench her flaming thirst,  
And feed her fancy with delightfull chaunge:  
Whom so she fittest findes to serve her lust,  
Through her maine strength, in which she most doth trust,

She with her brings into a secret Ile,  
Where in eternall bondage dye he must,  
Or be the vassall of her pleasures vile,  
And in all shamefull sort him selfe with her defile. (III.vii.50)

Argante relies on her size and strength as a giantess to carry young men to a life of captivity and servitude on her island, and the language of “eternall bondage” and “vassall” evokes her BDSM erotic tastes and her preference for the dominant role: she provides an extreme example of a large, strong woman who can take advantage of her size to satisfy desires that fall outside normative expressions of heterosexuality. The Squire of Dames tells Satyrane that no man can conquer Argante; she can only be defeated by the female knight Palladine “or such as she, that is so chaste a wight” (III.vii.52). The allegory here tells us that female chastity must conquer extreme female lust. At the same time, however, the Squire of Dames tells us that all men, but not all women, are vulnerable to the large woman who can so easily sling them over her horse (III.vii.37, 43). Though Argante seems to be a clear allegory of monstrous femininity, she is not dissimilar from Venus or Acrasia who, while they use men as pleasure objects, also provide pleasures for these men. The Squire of Dames mentions death twice in his description of Argante, but both of these moments pun on *die* as *orgasm*: a captive knight “in eternall bondage dye he must,” and the Squire of Dames insists “That thousand deaths me lever were to dye” on Argante’s island (III.vii.50, 51). These statements gesture toward the sex slavery that might require thousands of orgasms from the captive male, a fate the Squire of Dames describes with horror. However, his account also leaves open the possibility that a captive who shares Argante’s BDSM interests might meet this role

with pleasure rather than distress, and perhaps even the Squire of Dames's exaggerated revulsion betrays a desire for the large and dominant woman. There is thus an opportunity to read Argante's island as a space of alternative pleasures presided over by an enormous female figure who facilitates both her own and male pleasure, as well as the pleasure of readers who might enjoy her shows of strength and dominance.

The poem suggests that the Squire of Dames is particularly vulnerable to Argante because of his beliefs about pleasure, power, and gender. His beloved has set him the task "To wander through the world abroad at will, / And every where, where with my power or skill / I might doe service unto gentle Dames, / That I the same should faithfully fulfill" (III.vii.54). The Squire of Dames already occupies a somewhat subordinate position as a squire rather than a knight, and his sole goal is seeking out the submissive role of service to ladies. He also possesses a diminutive beauty that makes him exceptionally attractive to women: "a comely personage, / And lovely face, made fit for to deceive / Fraile Ladies hart with loves consuming rage, / Now in the blossome of his freshest age" (III.vii.46). Argante, then, seems an exaggerated expression of the kinds of relations the Squire of Dames has been seeking. Even his name suggests his diminutive stature in relation to the ladies he serves, a stature that is literalized when the enormous Argante tosses him over her horse, holding him in her lap "Fast bounden hand and foote with cords of wire" (III.vii.37). This total-body binding suggests his enslavement to his diminutive role and perhaps even to his desire to inhabit the diminutive, despite his protests to the contrary.

Like the Squire of Dames, Arthur's squire Timias finds himself subjected emotionally and physically to a larger woman, the huntress Belphoebe. Timias's

subjection originates from his desire for Belphoebe, who finds him wounded and vulnerable and nurses him. Through his wound Timias shares qualities with Adonis, but Timias's wound results from his own desire for the enormous woman. Belphoebe seems colossal in our first glimpse of her in book 2, in which ten consecutive stanzas are devoted to blazons and similes that describe her body. She not only is "a woman of great worth / ...borne of heavenly birth," but is also textually large, with a body that occupies many stanzas (II.iii.21). One simile describes her legs: "Like two faire marble pillours they were seene, / Which doe the temple of the Gods support. / Whom all the people decke with girlands greene" (II.iii.28). This comparison of Belphoebe to an enormous temple uses simile to exaggerate her physical size, but it also underscores a relational largeness produced by her noble birth and virtue, and her status as a reflection of Elizabeth I. Timias seamlessly adapts to Belphoebe's expanded size, lowering himself when he finds she has dressed his wounds by offering to "kisse thy blessed feete" (III.v.35). As he later contemplates his love for her, he reminds himself that he is a "foolish boy," a "meane Squyre, of meeke and lowly place, / She heavenly borne, and of celestially hew" (III.v.47). Timias envisions Belphoebe as measured by an entirely different scale than the one that measures him, making her both desirable and erotically inaccessible. Unlike Adonis, Verdant, and, to some extent, the Squire of Dames, Timias finds the pleasure of the large woman unavailable; unlike the other large women, Belphoebe seems to have no desires that the diminutive can satisfy, though she does enjoy possessing Timias as a kind of small accessory. Timias loses his status as an accessory, however, in book 4 when Belphoebe finds him with Amoret, and as a consequence Timias undergoes a further miniaturization by starving himself: "Through

wilfull penury consumed quight, / That like a pined ghost he soon appears” (IV.vii.41).

Timias eventually regains Belpheobe’s favor and his old physique, but he must first undergo this exaggerated miniaturization in order to prove that he is indeed a suitable diminutive object for Belpheobe.<sup>80</sup>

Britomart, as the knight of chastity, has a particularly complex relationship to the erotics of the diminutive because her gender is fluid, at times female and at other times male. Judith H. Anderson argues that Britomart’s character includes elements of both Venus and Mars, making her simultaneously feminine and masculine, lover and warrior (“Britomart’s” 74-75). Men and women alike desire the cross-dressed knight who is at once a large female and a diminutive male, both “full of amiable grace, / And manly terror mixed therewithall” (III.i.46). Although Britomart does not seem to be of outsized stature, her prowess in battle aligns her with Amazonian warriors. Kathryn Schwarz reads Britomart’s quest as producing the “troubled eroticisms and shifting identities” of Amazonian encounters and argues that “as a woman who fights like a man in order to find one, Britomart at once conceals sex and insists on it, making her own masculinity the means to a happy ending” (39). The knight of chastity indeed inspires and encounters diverse eroticisms as she travels as a powerful woman in knightly armor, and her gender becomes inseparable from how other characters interpret her size: when she is a woman, she has an Amazonian stature, but when she is a man, she has qualities of the diminutive.

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<sup>80</sup> As many scholars have noted, the episode in which Timias loses Belpheobe’s favor because of her jealousy over his attentions to Amoret has parallels with a historical incident in which Raleigh lost favor with Elizabeth I after he impregnated and then secretly married one of her ladies in waiting (also named Elizabeth). The miniaturization required as part of Timias’s penance reflects the shows of diminutive submission Elizabeth required of her courtiers, especially those who had fallen out of favor. For further discussion, see chapter 3.

As a large woman, she bests Marinell with one blow, penetrating his shield, his chain mail, and his side:

But she againe him in the shield did smite  
With so fierce furie and great puissaunce,  
That through his threesquare scuchin percing quite,  
And through his mayled hauberque, by mischaunce  
The wicked steele through his left size did glaunce;  
Him so transfixed she before her bore  
Beyond his croupe, the length of all her launce,  
Till sadly soucing on the sandy shore,  
He tumbled on an heape, and wallowd in his gore. (III.iv.16)

This triple penetration, one of which puns on “male” in the “mayled hauberque,” exaggerates her masculine prowess, and she miniaturizes Marinell by forcing him to the ground. The male giant Ollyphant, Argante’s twin, fears and flees from Britomart: “It was not Satyrane, whom he did feare, / But *Britomart* the flowre of chastity; / For he the powre of chaste hands might not beare” (III.xi.6). Although the giant should be larger and stronger than Britomart, he is weak and vulnerable to her, especially to her powerful hands. Immediately after Briomart loses the fleeing Ollyphant, she encounters Scudamour, unmanned and pitiful:

there lay a knight all wallowed  
Upon the grassy ground, and by him neare  
His haberjeon, his helmet, and his speare;  
A little off his shield was rudely throwne,



On which the winged boy in colours cleare

Depeincted was, full easie to be knowne,

And he thereby, where ever it in field was showne. (III.xi.7)

Scudamour's "wallowing" echoes the description of Marinell's defeat at Britomart's hands, and his prone body on the "grassy ground" is reminiscent of Redcrosse's vulnerability after his sexual encounter with Duessa. Scudamour's state of undress also recalls Verdant's neglected armor: both men lay surrounded by the accouterments of their chivalric masculinity, and both neglect their manly duties. All of these figures of vulnerable maleness converge in Scudamour, whose association with Cupid through the image on his shield marks him not only as a lover but also as a diminutive plaything. By finishing Scudamour's quest to rescue Amoret, Britomart in a sense becomes the champion of, and a replacement for, all diminutive males who have put aside their arms to enjoy the pleasures offered by large women.

Britomart reprises this role in book 5 when she appears as a guest star, so to speak, in the book that ostensibly belongs to her beloved, Artegall. Like Redcrosse, Verdant, and Scudamour, Artegall has been disarmed, and Britomart finds him dressed as a woman, subject to the Amazon queen Radigund. Artegall accepts his defeat by Radigund and "yielded of his owne accord," "Left to her will by his owne wilfull blame"; as a consequence, he is "disarmed quight," and Radigund even breaks his sword, the ultimate signifier of phallic martial masculinity (V.v.17, 20, 21). These stanzas stress Artegall's agency in accepting his own submission, aligning him with Adonis and Verdant in his acceptance of the diminutive role. He is associated with the aspects of bondage in the pleasures these other diminutive males experience when Radigund muses

about changing his physical bonds of iron for the bonds of love: “Bound unto me, but not with such hard bands / Of strong compulsion, and streight violence, / As now in miserable state he stands; / But with sweet love and sure benevolence” (V.v.33). There is a hint of rebellion in Artégall, who goes on “Serving proud *Radigund* with true subjection; / How ever it his noble heart did gall,” but he is also compared to a Hercules who very much enjoys his time in women’s clothing under the rule of a powerful woman: Hercules gives up his “huge club,” a symbol of his masculine prowess described in terms of size, and “with his mistresse toyed” (V.v.26, 24). This language recalls the boy toys associated with Verdant and Scudamour, and Radigund herself is associated with largeness not only through her designation as an Amazon but through a number of similes that compare her to large animals like bears and tigers (V.iv.40, V.v.9, V.vii.30). Artégall ends up in bondage with countless other male knights who have also submitted to Radigund, and it takes Britomart to best the Amazon queen and free them. When the two female warriors meet in battle, they are likened to “a Tygre and a Lionesse” fighting over prey, allegorizing them as enormous, powerful predators (V.vii.30). At the same time, this description figures their physical contest as a cat fight, eroticizing it by recalling the wrestling maidens Guyon sees in the fountain in book 2. Britomart’s victory establishes her as the ultimate figure of large womanhood who can physically dominate the female figures who so easily dominate the poem’s men, and she works counter to figures like Venus, Acrasia, and Argante by putting knights back on their quests rather than allowing them to linger in pleasure.

Although Britomart repeatedly occupies positions of largeness in battle, her relational size becomes ambiguous in her encounter with Malecasta. Malecasta sees her

not as a large woman but as a young male knight whom she desires for his diminutive beauty and vulnerability. The male knights with whom Britomart does battle also see her as a male knight until they learn otherwise, but they never comment on her diminutive stature; Malecasta, whose political power and easily-aroused desires align her with the Venus depicted in her tapestries, sees Britomart as a youthful, diminutive object.

Britomart keeps her armor on at the Castle Joyeous, but she raises the visor of her helmet:

“Whom when the Lady saw so faire a wight, / All ignorant of her contrary sex, / (For shee her weend a fresh and lusty knight) / Shee greatly gan enamoured to wex” (III.i.47).

Malecasta is attracted to the femininity in Britomart’s face, which she interprets as a youthful maleness that suggests sexual availability. In chapter four, I return to analyses of powerful women’s desire for cross-dressed women who look like youthful men or boys, particularly in drama, but here I want to call attention to Britomart’s simultaneous occupation of male and female subject positions. Malecasta reads Britomart as the Adonis to her Venus, slipping into Britomart’s bed without waking her in a reenactment of Venus’s and Acrasia’s efforts not to wake their sleeping paramours (III.i.60-61). When Britomart reacts with violence upon discovering Malecasta in her bed, her response counters the reaction of figures like Adonis and Verdant who willingly share their beds with large and powerful women. The misunderstanding that associates Britomart with the category of the male diminutive is quickly undone in this scene when Britomart unwittingly reveals her female body by the sight of her “locks unbownd,” her hair working as proof of her sex and, in being “unbownd,” dissociating her from the pleasurable forms of bondage enjoyed by Adonis and Verdant (III.i.63). This episode underscores the relationality and performability of the categories of large woman and

diminutive male, and Britomart's range of experiences throughout the epic both calls attention to the assumption that men are generally larger than women and challenges this assumption. As the only female character analyzed in this chapter who is not of supernatural origins, Britomart does not have the physical advantage of a goddess's or giantess's outsized body, but instead moves through Faerie Land perceived alternately as a large Amazonian warrior, a powerful male knight, and a diminutive male paramour.

Like Britomart, Una possesses a body of human scale that fluctuates in perceived and relational size as she travels alternately with a dwarf and a lion. Although Una seems anti-erotic in some ways, and indeed is replaced for a time by Duessa as the object of Redcrosse's desires, the issues of size and relationality we see in her narrative develop and take on erotic dimensions in the following two books. Though Una is often read in terms of her allegorical function as Truth or as a stand-in for the Church of England, I am interested in reading her as a more fully-formed character in line with the interpretation provided by Susanne Woods, who argues that "Una blurs the traditional equations of male=active, female=passive" (104).<sup>81</sup> Una as a character also blurs categories of size when she appears beside smaller and larger companions, a poetic technique that complicates her seemingly straightforward allegorical meaning by linking her with the large female figures to come in the following books. Our first glimpse of Una associates her with three diminutive objects: she rides "a lowly Asse" and leads "a milkewhite lambe," and "Behind her farre away a Dwarfe did lag, / That lasie seemd in being ever last, / Or wearied with bearing of her bag / Of needments at his backe" (I.i.4, 6). The ass and the lamb seem emblematic of Una's humility and innocence, but the dwarf

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<sup>81</sup> Woods summarizes part of the allegorical tradition surrounding Una's name in order to read Una as a character rather than an allegory: "Allegorists have long seen its many allusions in Spenser's use: to singularity, perfection, completeness, to the truth that is one, to the one True Church" (Woods 104).

complicates this trio of small living accessories because he so clearly has a human personality and resists categorization as an emblem. Though the ass and the lamb might suggest that Una is similar to these diminutive accessories, the dwarf's service to her troubles the perception of scale in this stanza and makes us reconsider Una's size relation to the ass and the lamb: instead of connoting her smallness, they make her seem large when she appears beside them.

Una's scale shifts in canto 2, however, when the dwarf and Redcrosse leave Una behind at Archimago's house. The double loss of Redcrosse and the dwarf causes Una much pain: she awakens and "Lookt for her knight, who far away was fled, / And for her dwarfe, that wont to wait each howre; / Then gan she wail and weepe, to see that woeful stowre" (I.ii.7). Though Una mourns the loss of Redcrosse, she also has a strong bond with the Dwarf and is devastated to have lost *her* knight and *her* dwarf, both of whom she thinks of possessively. The lamb and the ass, meanwhile, quietly disappear from the narrative, and no one seems to miss them. Una soon takes up with a lion as a traveling companion and develops a strong bond with him as well:

The Lyon would not leave her desolate,  
But with her went along, as a strong gard  
Of her chast person, and a faythfull mate  
Of her sad troubles and misfortunes hard:  
Still when she slept, he kept both watch and ward,  
And when she wakt, he wayted diligent,  
With humble service to her will prepar'd:  
From her fayre eyes he tooke commandement,

And ever by her lookes conceived her intent. (I.iii.9)

The lion is large and strong enough to guard Una well, but she has also tamed him and he serves her in much the same way, it seems, as the dwarf. At this point in the narrative, Una is associated with the strength of the lion, and thus also with Queen Elizabeth through the lion's monarchical symbolism, but she is also dwarfed by her new traveling companion.

Unlucky with her companions, Una loses the lion in the next canto when Sansloy kills it, and she then wanders alone until she reunites with the Dwarf in canto 7 after Redcrosse's defeat by Orgoglio. At the same time that Redcrosse is miniaturized by his sexual encounter with Duessa and subsequent defeat by Orgoglio, Una seems to grow in stature when she reunites with the Dwarf. Like Verdant and Scudamour, Redcrosse had removed his armor, and the Dwarf takes it up and begins to wander, soon finding Una. Here the close bond between Una and the Dwarf becomes clear when the Dwarf tells Una about Redcrosse's defeat and imprisonment, causing her to faint:

The messenger of so unhappie newes,  
Would faine have dyde: dead was his hart within,  
Yet outwardly some little comfort shewes:  
At last recovering hart, he does begin  
To rub her temples, and to chaufe her chin,  
And everie tender part does tosse and turne:  
So hardly he the flitted life does win,  
Unto her native prison to retourne:  
Then gins her grieved ghost thus to lament and mourne. (I.vii.21)

The dwarf struggles with the story he has to tell Una and takes care of her faint by essentially massaging her back to life, showing great care for both her body and her soul. Sara Van Den Berg also notes the strong bond between Una and the Dwarf, but she overlooks the erotic valence of this bond, which is suggested when the Dwarf “everie tender part does tosse and turne.”<sup>82</sup> In a reversal of the gender and size dynamics of later books, the Dwarf’s rubbing of Una’s body anticipates the rubbing Venus and Acrasia do to their prone male paramours. This is not to say that we should read Una as having an affair with her dwarf, but the Dwarf is the character who seems to have the most contact with her body, even more so than her future husband Redcrosse and her potential rapist Sansloy, who in canto 6 only manages to disorder her clothing (I.vi.9). The ass Una rides in the opening canto also arguably has contact with her genitalia as she rides it, the bawdy implications of which anticipate the fairy queen Titania’s degradation through erotic contact with Bottom as an ass in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Although Una’s purity and chastity of both mind and body are never questioned by the narrator in book 1—though Redcrosse questions them after the dream sent by Archimago—Una’s strong and arguably eroticized bond with the dwarf lays the foundation for the relationships between larger female and smaller male figures to come later in the epic.

The supernatural female figures in Shakespeare and Spenser embody a largeness eroticized by the ways they relate to the smaller, weaker, or more vulnerable male bodies around them. The erotics of size in *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene* suggest a cultural fascination with the ways size, physical or performed, drives desire and pressures

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<sup>82</sup> Van Den Berg argues that “the physical and psychological bond between the dwarf and Una heightens the force of the narrative” and that the Dwarf “counteracts the impact of his words by the intimacy of his touch” (32).

gender and other social categories. In these poems, size is closely tied to status: supernatural origins as the daughters of gods and goddesses allow these female figures to grow immensely in size and strength so that they can easily manage the bodies of the male knights and squires they encounter. Stature continues to serve as a useful term linking physical and social size in the chapters that follow, but these two categories align less easily in the drama to which I now turn. Female figures in the home and in the theater, settings that are meant to be more realistic than the landscapes of the poems I have been discussing, often either use social stature to perform an intimidating physical largeness or use their size to climb socially or trouble status boundaries. Dramatic texts also function consciously as texts for performance, and on the stage a character's size is mediated by the body of the actor and the physical attributes that can aid or constrain his performances of largeness or smallness. Despite this seeming limitation, early modern dramatic texts repeatedly suggest that actors used their human bodies to perform supernatural stature, which we will see in the following chapters. Although *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene* explore depictions of extreme size distinct from staged performance, they can offer us a model for how to approach dramatic texts that are concerned with developing representations of size that lend themselves to embodiment on the stage. At the same time, the copies of early modern plays that have survived to the present day were printed for reading, meaning that early modern readers may have experienced printed dramatic texts similarly to poetry. *Venus and Adonis* and *The Faerie Queene* inspire fantasies of interactions between large female bodies and diminutive male bodies that cross genres, potentially appealing to male and female readers and playgoers alike.



## Chapter Two

### An Infant in Her Hand: Large Mothers in English Drama

The last chapter focused on poetic representations of supernatural female bodies, and I now take up representations of maternal bodies that seem more familiar yet that sometimes seem to take on similarly supernatural qualities. Amazons and goddesses in poetic texts are fully figures of invention, but mothers are real, even when imbued with fantasy. Mother figures are a common and highly visible example of relational largeness in our culture as in early modern England, since all children experience the care of a person much larger than they, and mothers and other caregivers often appear in public with small children. Though the dyad of the larger mother and smaller child is transhistorical, however, it provokes a particular set of questions and meanings in an early modern context. As we saw in the previous chapter, for instance, qualities of the maternal in early modern literature are often bound up with representations of the divine in ways that lend even human mothers, as they are textually represented, a kind of supernatural stature. A 1610 anti-Catholic diatribe by William Crashaw attacks the Virgin Mary as a troubling figure who straddles maternal and the divine categories:

...generally in all places where the mother and the sonne, the virgin Mary, and our *Lord Jesus* be pictured together in their Churches, she is alwaies set forth as a woman and a mother, and he as a childe and infant, either in her armes or in her hand, that so the common people might have occasion to imagine, that looke what power of overruling and commaunding the *Mother* hath over her *little childe*, the same hath *she* over her sonne *Jesus*....still they will make him an infant, still in his mothers armes, still under her power, and still all miracles must be wrought by

her, and at her picture, as though either he could not, or in his mothers presence would not... (sig. E3-E4, italics in original)

Among the assumptions Crashaw makes about motherhood in his attack on Catholics here is that the size difference between mother and son connotes a power differential easily legible to the “common people” whom he worries that Catholicism targets. The size difference is so stark that Mary can sometimes hold the infant Jesus in just one hand, according to Crashaw. Mary might challenge God, and thus ascend to the status of the divine, with this act as she holds his son in one hand in a parody of the image of the Son sitting at the right hand of the Father. According to Crashaw, Mary is the active agent in these depictions, while Jesus remains passive, either because Mary does not let him act or because he does not want to act in her presence. The passivity of the infant son angers Crashaw, a Protestant invested in countering Catholic adoration of Mary, who finds the large and powerful Mary threatening both because her largeness seems to deem her more important than her son and because Catholics find this kind of image inspirational. This example from Crashaw helps us see that the appeal of large women explored in the first chapter is not limited to the world of epic or romance, and the plays to which I turn in this chapter illustrate how representations of the pleasures and anxieties aroused by deified maternal figures can cross genres. We will see the dramatic texts I discuss return to this same belief that a king, divine or human, can only reign effectively in the absence of his mother.

This chapter analyzes the role of mother figures in a range of early seventeenth-century drama, including comedy, history, tragedy, tragicomedy, and a school play. My analysis also pairs plays by some of early modern England’s most canonical

playwrights—Shakespeare and Marlowe—with two comparatively obscure plays. Taking size as a category of analysis helps us see the value of studying the non-canonical plays and produces unexpected points of comparison among texts of vastly different cultural stature, both in the Renaissance and today. The shift away from the first chapter’s focus on poetry and toward drama allows us to interrogate the materiality of size in new ways, as performance involves both a written role and this role’s embodiment by an actor with his own physical dimensions and other traits. The actor, in turn, has many options in dressing and acting his role. Though these aspects of embodiment differentiate theatrical from poetic representations of mothers, theatrical spectators, like the readers of poetry or printed play-texts, remain a diverse group. Thus, I continue in this chapter to consider a range of responses that the representations of mothers and sons in the plays I analyze might provoke. Motherly authority in these plays comes from the way the mother uses her size in relation to her offspring, and assertions of large size, in turn, give mothers authority over their sons, access to social power and privileges, and eroticized control over smaller bodies. Members of the audience might share the large mother’s social and erotic desires or experience her largeness pleurably. Parts of my argument could apply to daughters as well as to sons, but sons were better poised than daughters to benefit from social opportunities in patriarchal early modern England, giving mothers who retained influence over their sons into adulthood access to forms of patriarchal power.<sup>83</sup> A focus on sons thus makes more visible the social benefits a mother might gain by asserting her largeness. The category of size also illustrates the queer heteroerotic appeal of the large

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<sup>83</sup> Barbara J. Harris argues that widows sought to retain possession and control over their young sons not only out of affection, but also because they relied on their eldest sons and the fortune these boys inherited for their own livelihoods and the livelihoods of their other children (614-15). The plays I analyze in this chapter suggest similar but more subtle payoffs for mothers, widowed or not, who maintain control over their sons.

mother for her small son, other adult male characters, and a set of spectators who might fantasize themselves on stage in the place of the son, playing the diminutive with the large mother.

Scholars of psychoanalysis and masculinity, whose work I will return to shortly, tend to read mother-son relationships in early modern literature as expressing anxieties about masculinity, but attention to size difference as a variable in a set of dramatic representations of mothers and sons suggests that these relationships are much more nuanced and that they invite audiences to experience pleasure as well as or instead of anxiety. In the texts this chapter considers, large and powerful mothers are represented as objects of desire rather than as threats to masculinity or social order. The plays contain evidence that supports my claim for a connection between mothers' large relational size and expressions of erotic desire on the part of male characters, both child and adult, and spectators of both genders. The plays thus invite a queer reading of maternal figures who inspire forms of desire that are driven by size as well as gender and inflected with the erotics of incest. At the same time, the plays suggest that as a consequence of this desire for the large maternal body, the mother figures themselves can claim new forms of public power and influence. Isabel in Marlowe's *Edward II* (1592) and Volumnia in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (1608), for example, obtain increased social standing and political influence through their roles as the mothers of politically powerful sons, and, despite the many scholars who see these female characters as villains, they are, in fact, the driving forces behind the restoration of social order at the end of the plays. The comic mothers in Richard Brome's *The New Academy* (1626) and William Hawkins's *Apollo Shroving* (1636) may seem misguided and suffer ridicule, but they also provoke desire in

other characters and potentially in the audience in ways that undercut the ridicule and fashion them as powerful erotic objects and subjects. By placing desire at the center of my analysis of early modern mothers, I question Mary Beth Rose's assertion that Shakespeare's plays, especially the comedies, rely on "the sacrifice of the mother's desire" for harmonious conclusion (303). This chapter proposes that we read dramatic depictions of mothers with attention to maternal desire as a less singular and predictable category than others have allowed, and to the textual evidence that points toward a queer erotics circulating in the texts and among actors and spectators.

Feminist psychoanalytic work on early modern mothers and women's bodies by Gail Kern Paster and Janet Adelman set the tone for much of the scholarship on the maternal body over the past two decades. Although a number of scholars such as Jennifer Panek and Christina Luckyj have recently argued that motherhood was associated with different forms of private and public power, their claims generally avoid the maternal body, perhaps because the idea of maternal power is at odds with the feminist psychoanalytic scholarship that has characterized the maternal body as an object of censure that was experienced as shame-inducing by mothers, fathers, and children.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Jennifer Panek discusses the paradoxes in early modern attitudes toward motherly authority, citing evidence from drama and prescriptive literature to argue that motherly authority was seen as virtuous and biblically-derived, yet dangerously easy to use for ill ("Mother" 416). Mary Beth Rose describes the power accorded to mothers in Protestant tracts on the family that enjoin children to obey their mothers and charge the mother with the task of arranging marriages for her children—a task which, as Rose points out, has the potential to re-structure social relationships by forging marriages across status lines (307-10). Frances Dolan, Christina Luckyj, and Naomi Miller focus on the mother's role as the primary religious instructor for young children in order to argue that women could assert themselves socially or even attempt to change English society through the ways they taught religion to their children. (Dolan, "Command" 136-40; Luckyj, "Disciplining the Mother" 102; Miller 3). Still other scholars posit that adopting a maternal voice in writing gives women access to various forms of social, political, or artistic influence: Edith Snook argues that the maternal voice can legitimate women's intervention in politics, and Theresa Krier asserts that in Spenser, maternal figures represent creative possibility (Snook 162; Krier 293). For Rose, Miller, and Wendy Wall, mothers also claim particular social and artistic authority by anticipating their own deaths and writing from the grave, so to speak. In death, these mothers arguably become larger than life, capable of asserting power as long as their children can read what they have set in writing.

Paster, for instance, discusses medical treatises and drama as she analyzes the relation between early modern medical discourses about women's bodies and cultural attitudes toward mothers and motherhood, arguing that pregnancy was seen as a kind of disease and childbirth as a "great evacuation"; both attitudes associate the maternal body with the shame caused by a lack of bodily control (182). Paster shows that the womb was seen as a source of "poison" and argues that this view represented fear of maternal power more generally (175). Like Paster, Adelman argues that Shakespearean tragedy exhibits fear and revulsion toward maternal bodies, particularly the fear that men's origin as fetuses in the maternal body contaminates men and masculinity (*Suffocating* 30).<sup>85</sup> She returns throughout her book *Suffocating Mothers* to depictions of the maternal body that constitute "images of engulfment and swallowing suffocation," employing language suggestive of a destructive largeness that threatens the son both physically and socially (4). Mary Beth Rose conceptualizes the threat of mothers less in terms of suffocation than indulgence: "mothers are construed almost entirely in terms of a private world of individual desire. Their potential threat lies...in their overindulgence of love" (301).

An overindulgent love, however, is not universally threatening in early modern drama, and Rose's claim obscures a tradition of evaluating indulgent mothers positively and signaling that positive indulgence with physical largeness. We do not need to focus on the maternal body as a source of shame or condemn largeness in order to discuss maternal power; indeed, I suggest that the maternal body, and especially its largeness, is central to the establishment of maternal power in both the domestic and the socio-

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<sup>85</sup> Though Adelman generally describes mothers and other female figures as representing deprivation, one exception is Cleopatra, whom she describes as offering a "female bounty" that stands opposed to the "scarcity" offered by Caesar in Rome (176-77). This bountiful yet threatening Cleopatra shares qualities with Crashaw's depiction of Mary.

political spheres and that early modern drama depicts this power as benefiting both mothers and sons. Like Felicity Dunworth, I am interested in reading mothers in terms of their dramatic function (5). The mother figures in these plays may on the one hand serve a comic function, but they also speak to the inseparability of the domestic and the socio-political spheres and serve as sources of power and pleasure on the stage. In emphasizing the political valences of motherhood, I draw on the work of Barbara Harris, who argues that “the family was a political as well as a reproductive and affective unit” (608), a formulation that places mothers at the center of local and national politics, and Wendy Wall, who “locate[s] domesticity, in a deep structural way, as at the core of national identity” (*Staging* 6).<sup>86</sup> The mother figures in these plays serve dramatic functions of nation-building by deposing kings, starting and ending wars, altering succession, and arranging strategic marriages. This chapter shows how the dimensions and relative largeness of maternal bodies function as central tools in the mother figures’ abilities to intervene in the social and political events of the plays.

While I argue that the focus on male anxiety in Paster and Adelman’s analyses occludes significant evidence in early modern play-texts, some psychoanalytic theory is useful for considering the relation between the maternal body and the social roles mothers assume in early modern drama. Valerie Traub, for example, takes up the Freudian and Lacanian theory that the boy must reject the maternal body and the mother on his path to patriarchal adulthood, arguing that Shakespeare’s history plays mirror this

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<sup>86</sup> David Glimp’s book *Increase and Multiply: Governing Cultural Reproduction in Early Modern England* argues that bioreproduction is a central concern of the early modern English protestant state, which suggests the significance of mothers to emergent cultural concerns about nation-building.

narrative (“Prince” 456).<sup>87</sup> Sociologist and psychologist Nancy Chodorow examines the social meanings of mothering and pre-Oedipal psychology, arguing that before this rejection of the mother, the infant does not realize that the mother has any interests beyond the infant (79).<sup>88</sup> Mothers, both historical and as represented in drama, do have other interests, of course, and we can see reflections of Chodorow’s theory play out in early modern dramatic texts when maternal figures use a seemingly single-minded devotion to their sons surreptitiously to pursue their own interests and seize authority in the sociopolitical realm. Chodorow argues that mothering is a persistent social construct, not a biological imperative, and, engaging the work of sociologist Margaret Polatnick, contends that mothering, “as an unpaid occupation outside the world of public power...reinforces and perpetuates women’s relative powerlessness” (31).<sup>89</sup> The societies depicted in the plays this chapter analyzes indeed undervalue the labor of mothering, but the women are able to mother their sons in ways that give them access to the social sphere and to forms of social and political power not otherwise available to them. Instead of understanding their mothers as representing a nonsocial sphere that must be forsaken in order for individuation and progress toward the social sphere to occur, most of the sons in my archive choose to align themselves with their mothers’ private and public interests.

Young Prince Edward, for example, is placed safely on the throne by his mother Queen

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<sup>87</sup> See, for example, “Anal Eroticism and the Castration Complex,” in which Freud discusses a male patient who identified with his mother rather than rejecting her and as a result grew up to be homosexual and have a number of nervous disorders particularly related to digestion.

<sup>88</sup> Chodorow is also helpful in theorizing the relationality of size and the ways physical size can enable a mother to intervene in various social contexts: she argues that “the most important feature of early infantile development is that this development occurs *in relation to* another person or persons” (77, her emphasis). Chodorow refers to the infant’s realization that it is separate from the mother, but I would add that we can consider the mother’s comparatively larger size as a crucial part of this relationality since the caregiver must be able to lift and carry the infant.

<sup>89</sup> For example, in American society today, nannying pays little, many low-paying jobs do not give time off for maternity leave or child care, and states are cutting social programs that help single mothers perform the duties of both bread-winner and mother.



Isabel, and Nehemiah of *The New Academy* prepares for the marriage his mother arranges for their social and financial benefit. In these plays, we see sons who recognize their mothers as separate beings with social and political goals, and they choose to remain with these mothers and make their mothers' goals their own.

The rest of this chapter consists of close readings of the plays themselves; though I focus mostly on the play texts, I continue to imagine possibilities for the plays in performance that might exaggerate or undermine the treatment of size in the texts. First, I analyze comic mothers of the lower gentry or middling orders in *Apollo Shroving* and *The New Academy*, mothers who use their size to compete with schoolmasters for power over their sons. I then turn to the royal or high aristocratic mothers in Marlowe's *Edward II* and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* to argue that the stakes are higher for these mothers because their elevated status positions them to claim political power when they assert large size. The chapter concludes with an analysis of *The Winter's Tale* (1611), a play that complicates my argument: although Hermione is pregnant, her body expanded, she does not use her largeness as a political tool. Nonetheless, her body produces feelings of anxiety rather than pleasure in Leontes, who sees her largeness as an attempt to supplant him. But Hermione's clear innocence and the other characters' belief in this innocence suggest that in the world of this play, large mothers are a source of anxiety only for certain men, perhaps especially for those with the most social or political power. I engage such a great range and number of dramatic texts in this chapter in order to trace the trope of the large mother across representations of many social spaces as well as to stress that the figure of the large mother was represented more complexly in early modern drama than scholars influenced by psychoanalysis and masculinity studies have allowed. The

next section's focus on less frequently studied plays challenges many critical generalizations and sets the stage for the fresh readings the category of size offers to more canonical texts in the following two sections. I have chosen plays as my object of study for this chapter because they depict embodied performances of motherhood and thus must grapple with the complications of representing size, age, and gender through the body of the actor, who brings to the stage an already sized biological body, albeit one whose dimensions can be manipulated through various theatrical techniques. Keeping in mind the conditions of authorship and performance in the early modern theater, we might read these mother figures as representing the fantasies of male playwrights, actors, and spectators.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, these representations of mothers potentially feed the fantasies of female spectators—who may find in these stage mothers models of women who use motherhood actively to pursue their social and erotic desires—and male spectators who might fantasize about being dominated by such a mother figure. The large maternal body in these plays signifies as a source of plenty, power, and desire, for those onstage as well as for some in the audience. This chapter seeks to interrogate and to make more flexible the psychoanalytic paradigms for reading relationships between mothers and sons by focusing on size, including the ways size interacts with gender and enables mother figures to exert social and political authority.

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<sup>90</sup> Dymna Callaghan and David Mann have recently called attention to the issues raised by the absence of women from the English stage. Callaghan argues that “the female body, while not literally present on the Renaissance stage, was constantly and often scabrously constructed in masculine discourses in ways that reinforced larger patriarchal institutions and practices” (*Shakespeare* 30). Mann takes to task scholars who read Shakespearean characters like real people, arguing that Shakespeare’s women are “male dramatic constructs” (25). He argues for “the extreme ambivalence with which the male performer treats, and the male spectator receives, the female role: part condemnation and part fascination; part self-display, perhaps, but also part self-exorcism?” (8). I argue in this chapter that the language of size in the male-authored plays I analyze and the opportunities for the performance of size on stage suggest that mothers were desirable figures of power in the early modern cultural imagination. It is of course important to remember these texts as records of performance, but plays can still tell us about cultural attitudes toward mothers even when there are no actual maternal bodies numbered among a company’s actors.

## Mothers and schoolmasters

I consider first the schoolhouse as a site of tension where mothers who have moved outside the domestic compete with male schoolmasters for authority over their sons. William Hawkins's *Apollo Shroving* and Richard Brome's *The New Academy* stage contests between a mother and a schoolmaster or schoolmaster figure in which size factors as a crucial element in the mother's bid for power. Schoolmasters represent a masculine realm in which mothers have little authority and one that threatens women's control over their sons. Mistress Indulgence of *Apollo Shroving*, for instance, takes her son out of school and then asks, "why should'est thou be weaned from my lappe?" (sig. D2v). The mothers in both plays not only want to keep their sons close because they love them, but because the mothers stand to gain socially by winning control over their sons: Mistress Indulgence seems to have made a socially advantageous match when she married her son John Gingle's father, and she wants to use her son, the product of this marriage, to show off her high status and win the love of those she calls the "common people" (sig. D3r). Like Mistress Indulgence, Lady Nestlecock of *The New Academy* has married up, but she is widowed and hopes to use her son Nehemiah to contract an even more advantageous marriage for herself. By keeping her son under her strict authority, she hopes to marry him to the niece of a wealthy widower and then use this marriage to convince the widower to marry her. Mistress Indulgence and Lady Nestlecock are both motivated by their social positions beyond the domestic, positions they can manipulate by performing large size to manage their sons. At the same time, the mothers are also subject to ridicule in each play, with other characters laughing at the sometimes outlandish ways in which they infantilize their sons. This ridicule seems to undercut the mothers' social

aspirations, but I would like to call attention to cues in the texts that point toward the potential for positive audience responses to these mothers that in turn destabilize the plays' ridicule of them. I read these responses as queer because they resist the plays' attempts to ridicule large mothers, embracing them instead as objects and subjects of desire.

In this section I analyze dramatic depictions of mothers and schoolmasters who struggle for control over sons because both groups occupied marginal positions in early modern public social hierarchies. Constrained by their gender, women often assumed public roles that took the form of policing the sexual conduct and domestic disputes of their neighbors rather than outright political power.<sup>91</sup> Schoolmasters, too, were marginalized in early modern patriarchal society because they were usually of non-noble birth. Nicholas Orme describes schoolmasters as "overlooked," with modest reputations (59). Rebecca Bushnell elaborates on the social paradoxes that arise when a low-born schoolmaster attempts to assert absolute authority over a class primarily composed of the sons of noblemen, arguing that "schoolroom society blurred the status distinctions that would be reinstated in [the boys'] maturity" (25). Both Bushnell and Lynn Enterline also discuss schoolmasters as a kind of fatherly surrogate, but the master's low status likely created a paradox that troubled this association of him with the father.<sup>92</sup> Alan Stewart

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<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Laura Gowing's "Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England." Elizabeth I is an obvious exception to this paradigm, and I explore her situation at more length in the next chapter.

<sup>92</sup> Bushnell reads the difference between the father and the schoolmaster in terms of the sources of their authority: the father rules, like a good king, by nature, while the schoolmaster rules, like a tyrant, by force (33). She also cites a competing discourse, however, in which the biological father is the father of the body, while the schoolmaster is the father of the mind (40-41). Enterline shows that masters often styled themselves as fathers, though occasionally also as mothers (*Shakespeare's* 70). Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine argue that humanist education caught on so well during the Renaissance because it fostered a docile attitude toward authority; we can see the fostering of this attitude in the above comparisons of the schoolmaster to the father, a natural kind of authority (xiv).

argues that the humanist pedagogue challenged the dominant system of patriarchal alliance by gaining his position and salary (even if a modest one) through his own skill rather than through marriage and the exchange of women (xliii).<sup>93</sup> The work of these scholars illustrates the contradictory position of the schoolmaster as simultaneously a representative of patriarchy and a marginal figure within or even a challenger of that same patriarchy. This paradox, I argue, makes him an ideal target for mothers looking to assert power in a social world dominated by men.

The institution of the Renaissance humanist grammar school reinforced a long-standing divide between “mother tongue” and “father tongue,” thereby provoking a type of competition between mothers and schoolmasters (Ferguson 107; Enterline 15; Wall, *Imprint* 62). Like mothers, however, schoolmasters can be figures of largeness: Enterline discusses a woodcut on the cover of a 1573 Latin primer in which an immense master sits in judgment, hearing the orations of the tiny scholars at his feet (41-42). The schoolmaster’s ability to beat his pupils, to which I will return shortly, underscores his size and strength and aligns him with mothers, who also had the right to beat their children, while estranging him from the pleasurable motherly domestic practices of bodily care. Tracing a long history of the relation between vernacular languages and Latin in medieval and early modern England, Margaret W. Ferguson argues that the vernacular came to be “associated with individual pleasure and caprice,” in contrast to the exalted Godliness of Latin (108). The supposed pleasures of the vernacular language mirror the pleasures the mother offers. On the level of grammar school lessons themselves, Enterline notes that “a fairly explicit kind of warfare between masters and

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<sup>93</sup> Stewart sees feudal systems of exchange re-figured as the son becomes an object traded between father and schoolmaster (103).

mothers subtended both rudimentary and advanced lessons,” citing Latin translations that ask boys to leave their allegiance to their mothers and obey the schoolmaster and Latin lessons that teach the names of male body parts but omit the female body (147).

Enterline, Bushnell, and Ursula Potter all note the explicit contest established between mothers and schoolmasters not only in texts used in the classroom, but also in writing on education. Enterline cites fears that mothers’ lessons might threaten sons with effeminacy, and she acknowledges the reality that not all boys were likely ready to leave their mothers when they started school (146; 15). Bushnell posits schoolmasters as particularly troubled by mothers who pampered their sons and treated them like playthings—like the aptly named Mistress Indulgence—suggesting that this kind of mothering slowed a boy’s educational progress (40). Potter argues that mothers were involved in their sons’ schooling more than fathers were, whether as positive or negative forces (246). Even when positively involved, they might be unwanted and read by the schoolmaster as interfering rather than as helpful and concerned. As a part of the structure and ideology of a humanist education, this antagonism between mothers and schoolmasters plays out in drama as a conflict between members of two groups hoping to climb socially.

It would be easy to read *Apollo Shroving* and *The New Academy* from the perspective of schoolmasters, as male-authored commentaries on indulgent mothers who keep their sons from advancing to manhood: both mother-son pairs seem comical and receive some kind of rebuke at the end of the plays. Mistress Indulgence’s name, in particular, recalls Rose’s argument that early modern mothers threatened their sons with “overindulgence of love,” as discussed in the previous section (301). While the characters

Mistress Indulgence and Lady Nestlecock could be read as supporting this claim, I propose a more nuanced reading of the representations in Hawkins's and Brome's plays. To read the plays with an eye only toward the negative connotations of *indulgence* is to miss a subtext wherein the plays depict these mother-son relationships as desirable both for the mothers, who experience them as sexual and social gratification, and for the sons, who take pleasure in their status as sexualized objects free from the challenges and responsibilities schooling imposes on them. The plays might ask the audience to laugh at the mother-son pairs, but they also invite spectators to envy the pleasurable relationships dramatized. *Apollo Shroving*, as a school play, presents the fascinating possibility that the boys performing the play might actually have longed for a mother like Mistress Indulgence to take them away from school. At the start of the play, Mistress Indulgence has removed John Gingle from Apollo's school in order to educate him at home with a private tutor, Captain Complement, a decision she says is motivated by concerns for the boy's health. Though Apollo's school seems pleasant and well-ordered, John describes the "terrible scepter shaken over us" there (sig. D3r). The schoolmaster's rod, according to John, is an always-looming presence *over* them, keeping them in a diminutive position. Indulgence rants about this mode of schoolmasterly control: "Out upon that bloody butcherly weapon. What a base thing it is, that a man should bee arm'd against children? What naturall Mother can suffer her owne flesh and blood to bee torne by these black gown'd Canibals?" (sig. D3). Here, she articulates a conflict with the schoolmaster as a physical attack on her own body. Her racialized insult against the schoolmasters as she equates their black attire with the dark skin of cannibals also subtly speaks to her social

competition with them: she seeks to undercut their authority by associating them with cannibals.

Indulgence's attack on the schoolmasters' form of discipline points not only to her social competition with them but also to the competing erotics of the strategies employed by mothers and schoolmasters in their contest over boys' bodies: mothers on stage coax their sons with pampering and other physical pleasures, while schoolmasters beat boys into obedience. Flogging in schools carried erotic valences that, at first glance, might challenge the mother's status as the main source of pleasure for her son. The erotics of beating in humanist education has been well-documented, with Enterline describing the connection between flogging and homoeroticism as "at best, an open secret" (52).<sup>94</sup> Though Freud suggests that children have erotic fantasies of watching or receiving beatings, Enterline hypothesizes that in practice most chastised boys were unlikely to look forward to beatings or experience them positively.<sup>95</sup> We thus might imagine that although beating was erotically charged, pleasure was experienced primarily by the schoolmaster. The kinds of erotic experiences a large mother like Indulgence might provide, on the other hand, are more reliably pleasurable for the boy, as names like

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<sup>94</sup> Stewart cites "marrying the master's daughter" as a common euphemism for flogging that "places punishment within an erotic economy" and "resituates the now sexualized practice of beating within the economy of the male kinship structure," meaning the exchange of women in marriage to form bonds between men (98). In this second sense, flogging continues the erasure of women the grammar school establishes with its privileging of the Latin "father tongue" over the English "mother tongue" by eliminating women from the kinship exchanges that cement male bonds and replacing them instead with the birch used for corporal punishment. Bushnell asserts that the master's rod was a symbol of feudal male authority, citing Mulcaster who wrote about the rod as associated with kingship: "as a 'scepter' the rod symbolized male authority and the right to speak: as a 'sword' it expressed that power through the threat of violence" (35). She stresses, however, that humanists were not agreed on the practice of beating: Erasmus sees flogging as evidence of the master's "lack of erotic self-control," and Vives believes that it produces slaves rather than thinking men (30; 31-32). Mulcaster also believes that the rod belongs in the home as well as in the school and advises parents to use it to correct their children: "for the private, what soever parentes say, my ladie *birchely* will be a gest at home, or else parentes shall not have their willes" (270). Mulcaster imagines this specifically female source of discipline presiding over both the school and the home.

<sup>95</sup> See Freud, "A Child is Being Beaten."



“Indulgence” and “Nestlecock” suggest, and the boy’s role as an eroticized diminutive object in his mother’s home works as the counterpoint to his role as the boy beaten in school. I will return to the line between pleasure and pain, beating and indulgence, in chapter four, where I argue that this line is blurred when it comes to mothers administering physic to their children, apprentices, and other medical dependents.

Under Indulgence’s pleasurable care, John seems to spend all of his time with her or with his new private tutor, Captain Complement, a con man whom both John and Mistress Indulgence nonetheless see as an improvement over Apollo because he can educate the boy at home. Private tutoring not only keeps John away from the violence of the schoolroom but also has status implications: Philoponus, one of John’s classmates, muses that he does not envy John for leaving school and remarks that “our sable robe is too homely for such gaudy butterflies” (1.4, p. 13). Another classmate, Ludio, bemoans that John will no longer play with him because “hee’s grown so proud, he tells me hee’s not for boyes play now” (2.4, p. 33, sig. D). These comments equate private tutoring with high status, but specifically with a prideful and tasteless sense of status. The charge of tastelessness suggests that Indulgence may not be succeeding in her efforts to raise her social status, but it also underscores status as one of her reasons for keeping her son away from school. Ludio’s remark that John is “not for boyes play now” also reflects John’s new pursuits: he no longer plays with other boys, but instead engages in erotic games with his mother, serving as her diminutive object of pleasure. Indulgence has removed John from the homosocial world of the school and into the heteroerotic world of her home: he is for his mother’s play now, and she directs this play toward pleasure and her family’s advancement.

Lady Nestlecock in *The New Academy* exerts even more control over her son's schooling, presumably never letting Nehemiah attend school at all. Instead, Nehemiah is educated by her servant Ephraim, over whom Lady Nestlecock can exercise total authority. Nestlecock and Ephraim discuss Nehemiah's education, which Nestlecock describes as "harmlesse exercises;" Ephraim tells her that, rather than reading books or practicing music, Nehemiah "is busie at his exercise of Armes with a new Castingtop, a Cat and Carstick, I bought and brought him home" (sig. J4r). Ephraim at times challenges Nestlecock's approach to her son's education, but she disregards his advice: upon learning that Nestlecock has planned a marriage for Nehemiah, Ephraim suggests "that since his riper yeares require, and that faire propositions of marriage are tender'd for him, that we gently by degrees do take him off from childish exercise, indeed plaine boyes play. More manly would become him" (sig. J4v). Nestlecock reacts violently to this challenge to her education of her son, calling Ephraim "varlet" and terrifying him into an apology (sig. J4v). Since she has enlisted her own servant as Nehemiah's tutor, she fuses control over her social inferior with control over her son's schoolmaster.<sup>96</sup>

As Indulgence and Nestlecock seek total control over their sons' educations, they both rely on their large size as a strategy for establishing authority. Rather than beating John to establish bodily control, as a schoolmaster might, Indulgence dresses him in ways that underscore his smallness and her physical dominance of him. Indulgence puts a girdle on John, instructing him to "shrinke in while I buckle it, that you may bee gaunt

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<sup>96</sup> This domestic and educational arrangement is further complicated by Ephraim's desire to marry Lady Nestlecock. He, too, wants to climb socially, though he would presumably continue his submission to Nestlecock after marriage rather than seeking authority over her. In this sense, he desires to assume Nehemiah's position as the diminutive plaything of Lady Nestlecock while indulging himself in the more comfortable lifestyle he would enjoy as her husband. For further reading on lower-status men who sought to marry widows, see Panek, "Why Did Widows Remarry?" and *Widows and Suitors*, as well as my discussion of Panek's work in the Introduction.

and fine in the wast” (sig. D3r). She micromanages his appearance, finding clothing and accessories that make him appear thin and small. Both mother and son seem to enjoy this dressing process. When Indulgence calls John “so precious a fruit” and “my living walking joy, thy fathers picture, and thy mothers selfe,” she identifies him at the same time as an edible treat, a copy of his father, and a little man who remains dependent on her maternal presence (sig. D2v). John, for his part, speaks to Indulgence in a simple rhyme (or jingle, to reflect his name, Gingle) that underscores both his childishness and his devotion to her: “Sweet Mother, if I were to chuse a Mother, / Thou and no other / Should be my Mother” (sig. D2v). John willingly takes part in his mother’s efforts to retain him as part of the category of the diminutive, submitting to her dressing of him and to her social uses for him and suggesting that he, too, prefers the pleasures of his mother’s lap to the hardships of a public school.

We might read Mistress Indulgence as a mother who loves her son too much and so cannot let him grow up, but such a reading simplifies their relationship and ignores what Indulgence stands to gain socially from keeping her son in the category of the diminutive. John asks his mother if he will have to return to Apollo’s school, and she responds that he will not because “we are higher flowne now” (sig. D2v). Indulgence believes that taking her son away from the male schoolmaster and educating him herself and with a private tutor shows off the family’s status, which Indulgence’s “now” seems to suggest is newly-acquired (John refers to his father as “a man of great worth, and lands,” but these two remarks are all the audience receives regarding the Gingles’ status) (sig. D3v). According to John, Captain Complement teaches him “fine gestures,” or bodily comportment for specific social situations, rather than Latin or Greek. While *fine*

here primarily means *refined*, suggesting nobility, the word also connotes smallness or narrowness, as it does when Indulgence wants to see him “gaunt and fine in the wast,” quoted earlier. The small and refined gestures Captain Complement teaches seem dainty and at odds with the “boldness and audacity” Edel Lamb cites as “crucial traits of the orator” that were fostered during a boy’s education in Latin and Greek (99). Indulgence likely approves of Complement as an educator for her son because he simultaneously teaches John refinement and how to remain little in gesture, with no hint of boldness that might enlarge him vocally or physically.

Indulgence’s desire that John learn gestures suggests the importance of his appearance and his ability to act a certain status and stature, and John happily plays along with his mother’s definition of their status and his diminutive role in helping to define it. In the following conversation, we see the two of them choreograph their dynamic of large mother and diminutive son:

GING. Mother. When you goe in your coach up Parnassus hill, I must sit in your lap, must I not? and hold Tisbies left eare in my hand with two fingers thus, must I not? O it is the finest Puppy.

INDUL. I, darling, and hold my fanne in thy other hand, and some time shake it at the common people when we passe by them.

GING. Indeed Mother, these are very Gentlemanlike feats. I wonder the Captaine has not read any lectures to me of them.

INDUL. The Captaine is to teach thee more souldierlike trickes. I can teach thee these at home. (sig. D3r)

In this fantasy of boyish smallness, John will sit on his mother's lap, holding a puppy, and we might imagine that Indulgence requires enormous strength and quite a wide lap in order to hold both her growing son and a dog as she sits in her carriage. Indulgence describes her son's feminized fan-shaking as an act done for the "common people," or one that will dramatize their higher status. In this way, John becomes another status accessory for Indulgence, like the lace she wears in 4.3 and the maid she mistreats every time they share the stage. Indulgence's extreme vanity and cruelty might be a status joke, or they might suggest that she is relatively new to her wealth; this sudden good fortune might explain why she feels she needs her son to flaunt her status. Indulgence also, significantly, wants to teach John these postures at home, in a space controlled by her and well removed from the authority of the schoolmaster, and she characterizes John's education from his tutor as oxymoronic "souldierlike trickes," simultaneously martial and insignificant.<sup>97</sup>

Indulgence's emphasis on gesture also calls attention to the performativity of size, both as the actors practice it on the stage and as the characters in the play perform it. The character John is not assigned an age in this play, and it is interesting to imagine him in ambiguous territory between a boy and a young man. Since we do not know the ages and sizes of the boys playing Indulgence and John, we might imagine various possibilities for the embodiment of these roles on the stage. A large boy might play Indulgence and a small boy might play John, underscoring the size difference Indulgence exploits; on the other hand, there may be little size difference or John may be cast as the larger, turning this scene into a comical fantasy in which both mother and son still believe the son will

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<sup>97</sup> Among the *Oxford English Dictionary's* many seventeenth-century definitions for *trick* is "a trifling ornament or toy; a trinket, bauble, knick-knack" (n.1 6.b). This sense of the word particularly connotes smallness.

fit on his mother's lap. In the latter case, we would see two degrees of size performance: the actual bodies of the actors cast in these roles, and the way the characters act in order to perform larger or smaller size as they fantasize about this scene. In other words, the characters might perform a kind of size drag and the actors might perform size in a way akin to an actor who plays a female character cross-dressing as a boy. The actor playing Indulgence plays a woman who asserts large size, and this role accompanies and interacts with the size and limitations of his own body.

Like the stage, Indulgence's home becomes a space for John to rehearse what he learns from Captain Complement. Indulgence asks for a performance of the skills John has been learning under his new tutor: "I preethy, sweet sonne, let me see thee once act the fine gestures, which the Captaine hath taught you. You doe them by your selfe alone in the chamber, and the doore shut to you. I look't in yesterday at the key-hole, and me thought it did me good to see thee repeat some of them in the presence of a Candlestick, and Bed-staffe that were set upon the table" (sig. D3v-D4r). John responds indignantly: "That is a secret, which the Captaine tells me, that I must shew my feates to none till I am well practiced. And another secret, better then that, is, in my private practicing to set up imagined spectators for the whetting of my care and diligence. And therefore sometime I set upon my table, a full auditory of Cushion, Candlestick, Slippers, Bellowes, and Chamberpot" (sig. D4r). This exchange is significant for several reasons: most importantly, Indulgence casts John's learning with Complement as a type of performance for her pleasure, and her act of looking through the keyhole underscores her role as a voyeur to her son's performances of social refinement and suggests that she wants to be part of what he does in private. This attitude reinforces John's status as a little plaything

for his mother's enjoyment, and the particular items he chooses for his audience—a cushion, a candlestick, a bellows, and a chamber pot—suggest anal eroticism, insinuating that this kind of education may be erotic for him as well as for his mother. Finally, the pleasure she takes in watching John's performances might reflect audience pleasure in watching the small male bodies that perform this school play.

John's indignant reaction and his insistence that Complement has instructed him only to perform before "imagined spectators" for the time being additionally illustrates the extent to which Complement's form of education is at odds with the ideal boy's education as Lamb describes it. Practicing gestures before candlesticks and staffs does little to develop the audacity Lamb calls "a masculine trait, which in [the early modern humanist] educational system must be cultivated in every boy as part of his development. Acquiring the ability to deliver a speech with audacity is thus a rite of passage for the early modern boy" (99). Complement and Indulgence ask John to practice primarily gestures, forgoing oration altogether, and he does not seem to want a real audience. Even so, at this moment John does show some signs of audacity as he talks back to his mother. When Indulgence continues to insist that he perform some of his "fine gestures" for her, he rebuts, "As I am a Gentleman Mother, I cannot doe withall as yet" (sig. D4r). John suddenly invokes his status as a gentleman to quiet his mother, but, unable to refuse her entirely, he concedes that the Captain will allow him to perform his postures in public within a month and tells Indulgence, "I will doe your Mothership the favour to bee in the first forme of my Spectators" (sig. D4r). By placing her in the "first forme," he inverts the teacher-pupil dynamic and casts himself as the schoolmaster performing for his mother as his student. Indulgence continues to insist, however: "Next moneth? I cannot

tarry till next day. Hold, heer's a crowne, carry to him for this favour, to make me a spectator without delay" (sig. D4r). She gives John money for Complement to remind the tutor who is his patron and to display the control she expects to have over her son's education, refusing to be relegated to the status of pupil. As she says, "it may be in your repeating, I shall teach you some gesture that the Captaine thinkes not of"; she even competes with this tutor, whom she ostensibly already controls through her patronage (sig. D4r).

John's assertion that he is a "gentleman" constitutes a claim to manhood and privileged social rank though a language game, in which calling himself a gentleman might be enough in and of itself to raise him, that Indulgence takes up and manipulates in order to underscore John's diminutive status. Indulgence addresses John as "my sweet Babby," using a diminutive name for him, but John responds by reminding her, "my Father's a man of great worth, and lands, and I am his heir apparant" (sig. D3r-D3v). He then goes on to request, "I pray you in good company, call mee not plaine sonne *Gingle*, or sonne *John*, or so, but Master *John*, or Master *Gingle* my sonne, or so. Others will doe me the more honour for it" (sig. D3v). Though John seems to have played the diminutive with relish, here he seems aware of his mother's social uses for him and makes a point of asking his mother to use his title instead of a babyish nickname. The text suggests that he enjoys playing the baby with his mother in private, but he wants to seem less diminutive in public; perhaps he even recognizes that his mother derives social benefits from representing him as diminutive, but at a cost to his own identity as a man. Indulgence responds by addressing her son as "my honorable childe Master *John Gingle* or so," adding the title he asked for but also retaining the mention of him as her child and adding



the dismissive “or so” (sig. D3v). John has also just told her that if any horses misbehave toward his mother’s horses, he will stab the offending horses through the ears with his poniard (sig. D3r-D3v). Indulgence follows her new address to her son with the assertion, “sonne I doubt, if the horses be tall, thou canst not have them by the eares with thy ponyard. Thou shalt have thy Fathers long guilt Rapier. That will reach them, unlesse they flye as high as *Pegasus*” (sig. D3v). Indulgence reminds John that he is too small to perform the gallant feats he boasts, underscoring his diminutive stature but at the same time offering to exchange his short sword for his father’s long one. This moment becomes comically sexualized as she offers to bestow upon her son his father’s phallic power, thereby miniaturizing him further by encouraging the audience to picture him with a sword that is clearly too large for him to wield. John replies, “O for that Rapier,” signaling his desire for the sword and the size and phallic power it might lend him (sig. D3v). The text marks him as comically unaware of the miniaturization that would accompany its attainment, or, perhaps, as complicit with his mother in this miniaturization. His desire for his father’s sword also places him in an Oedipal position in which he inherits his father’s property and takes his place as a kind of substitute husband to Mistress Indulgence, perhaps as a miniature version of his father.<sup>98</sup>

Like Mistress Indulgence, who uses her size advantage to make her son into a personal status accessory, Lady Nestlecock uses her control over her son for her own social advantage. The social stakes seem higher for Nestlecock, however, who exploits her son’s marriage to Blithe to negotiate a lucrative marriage of her own to Blithe’s uncle Whimlby. By keeping Nehemiah in the category of the diminutive for all this time,

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<sup>98</sup> Gingle, like the other sons in this chapter, maintains an erotic connection with his mother while identifying with his father in striking ways. He seems stalled in the Oedipal phase, wanting to replace his father as his mother’s lover and protector.

Nestlecock ensures that she can control him when she needs him as a bargaining chip: as a widow who must negotiate her son's marriage alone anyway, she makes her job much easier and extracts additional benefits from it.<sup>99</sup> Nestlecock already seems to be an expert at marrying up: early in the play, she makes it clear that her deceased husband had been a Justice, and she draws social lines to separate herself from her merchant brother Matchil and her illegitimate and "debaush'd" half-brother Strigood (sig. H3v). Nehemiah, then, is a product of this earlier advantageous marriage, and, as a widow, Nestlecock seems to have had the sole role in raising her son. Before we see Nehemiah on the stage, a conversation between Nestlecock and Matchil's apprentice Cash establishes a contradictory image of a grown son who remains as delicate as an infant. Nestlecock insists that even the sight of Strigood "would fright [Nehemiah] into a sickness" (sig. H4r). Cash reacts with astonishment, insisting that "he's now a man," but Nestlecock's reply is telling: "Alack a childe; but going in's nineteenth year" (sig. H4r). How can Nehemiah, who, unlike John Gingle, has an age assigned to him, simultaneously be a man to Cash but a child to Nestlecock? Nineteen is arguably a liminal age in which the male body has reached sexual maturity and nearly finished growing in height, yet during which he likely has not assumed the marital and professional responsibilities that would fully designate him a man.<sup>100</sup> As an apprentice, Cash may also be around nineteen years old and likely inhabits a similarly liminal life stage. As a male of higher status, though, Nehemiah has easier access to the privileges of manhood, should he desire them, than does Cash, possibly provoking Cash's assertion that Nehemiah is a man. For Nestlecock,

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<sup>99</sup> Panek argues that although conduct book writers generally agreed that wives should give way to husbands in the choice of spouses for their children, widows often took charge of ordering their children's marriages rather than leaving this task to another male relative ("Mother" 418-21).

<sup>100</sup> See my discussion of Ilana Ben-Amos and Alexandra Shepard in the Introduction.

though, it remains important that Nehemiah stay a child, and her language prompts the audience to anticipate the stage entrance of a childish teenaged son.

The audience has its first glimpse of Nehemiah in act 2, scene 2, in which, according to the stage direction, he enters “looking down and eating” (sig. J4v). His first line is simply, “F’sooth,” a response to his mother’s “My boy *Negh*, Sonne *Nehemiah*” (sig. J4v-K1r). His stooped posture diminishes his grown size, and his eating lends him the appearance of a child who is stuck in the oral stage. Since he eats or talks about food during much of his time onstage (and indeed later in this scene offers sugar plums to another character but then eats them himself), we might also imagine him as chubby or overweight, a largeness of the body that paradoxically renders him diminutive as, coupled with his slouching posture, it makes him appear like a chubby baby rather than a man with an adult physique. He might mumble or lisp his brief first line, as indicated by the apostrophe, conveying underdeveloped speech that makes him sound childish and that certainly shows he has not had training as an orator. Though her son likely has a large stage presence, Nestlecock continues to employ strategies that figure her own greater size. Her name suggests her position as a comforting maternal figure and agent of sexual gratification as, in Freudian terms, the “cock” and the baby become one, both nestled in the mother.<sup>101</sup> “Cock” is similar to “cocker,” an early modern word for pampering and indulging, but the word also has phallic connotations as it invokes the cock as a rooster, a metonymy for aggressive male animal sexuality. Nestlecock’s name is thus teasingly

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<sup>101</sup> Freud states that *baby* and *penis* are the same in the unconscious and that as girls with penis envy grow into healthy women, the wish for a penis becomes the wish for a man and then the wish for a baby (“On Transformations of Instinct” 128-29). He cites a linguistic commonplace, relevant in both German and English, in which both a baby and a penis are sometimes called “little one” (128); this phrase underscores the smallness of both penis and baby in relation to the maternal body. The word “cock” abounds in this play, especially in the sub-plot involving the citizen Camelion and his wife Hannah, whom he affectionately calls “cock.” The term thus serves several purposes in the play, as a term of endearment as well as a phallic signifier.

contradictory, suggesting both cuddling and penetration and gesturing toward a set of queer pleasures she both offers and enjoys, pleasures that remain outside easy gender categorization.

Presumably working against this queer potential is the set of marriages Nestlecock tries to arrange for Nehemiah and herself that would subscribe both of them into the early modern network of bio-social reproduction. She responds to Nehemiah's entrance with, "That's my good Lamb. Hold up thy head; and thou shalt have a wife" (sig. K1r). The diminutive nickname she gives him refers to a mild-mannered young domesticated animal and contrasts with the aggressive "cock" in her own name, and she promises him a wife in the same way other mothers might offer their small children sweets or a toy. Nestlecock conflates childhood games with adult responsibilities by using marriage as a reward in this way, and indeed, Nehemiah's first question is whether his new wife will "play with me at peg-top" (sig. K1r). He soon, however, begins to express an anxiety about his future wife's size: when Nestlecock tells him that the girl in question is Blithe, the niece of Sir Swithen Whimlby, Nehemiah asks, "is not his Neece too big for me? I would be loth to be over-matched" (sig. K1v). These size words capture a set of anxieties that might reflate to her age, social status, personality, and/or physical dimensions, but Nehemiah seems to allay his fears by saying that he will test her by asking "if she can speak with plums in her mouth; and then I'll offer her a long one and two round ones, and nod at her" (sig. K1v). He will ask Blithe to join in an eating game with him, making her less intimidating as she engages in a familiar activity, but this game has specifically sexual overtones as a game of speaking with a full mouth turns into a fantasy of a wife whose mouth is large enough to hold what resembles a penis and a pair

of testicles. Despite his initial uncertainty, Nehemiah does appear to desire a woman whose large mouth makes her a good playmate, sexually desirable, and, potentially, extremely talkative, all qualities his mother also possesses. Nehemiah, indeed, seems to desire marriage to a woman like his mother, who would continue to let him play the diminutive. Nestlecock laughs with him and says that he is “too witty,” encouraging his diminutive performance of a mixture of childish and adult games (sig. K1v).

Indeed, it is this mixing of the childish and the sexual that enables Nestlecock to use her size so effectively as a method of control over her son. Her brother Matchil recalls a mother-son game that hinges on Nestlecock’s large size: “till he was twelve years old she would dance him on her knee, and play with’s cock” (sig. L1v). Even at age twelve, Nehemiah would seemingly have been too large for Nestlecock to bounce on her knee, yet she manages this titillating physical feat which, even as Nehemiah grows, continues to reinforce his mother’s largeness. Though Philippe Ariès argues that sexual play with children such as that described here was common during the early modern period, he also asserts that after boys were breeched this kind of play stopped (41-43). When Nestlecock both bounces her son and engages with him in sexual play, she performs actions that invoke boyhood and smallness in Nehemiah and also likely stimulate sexual pleasure. The aristocratic Sir Whimlby, the husband Nestlecock is pursuing, reacts with excitement to Matchil’s narrative, betraying his own desire to return to the pleasurable lap of a large maternal figure: “Just so esac my mother would serve me, ha ha. Is not this better than whining, yes, or perhaps then wiving either” (sig. K5v). Whimlby’s language mirrors Nehemiah’s with its babyish abbreviations and sounds, perhaps suggesting that he is an elderly character and marking a congruent diminutive

stature shared by youth and old age, a topic to which I return in my reading of John Lyly's *Endymion* in chapter three. And like John Gingle, Nehemiah arguably continues to act the part of the diminutive because of the pleasure he receives in exchange for remaining diminutive and pliable, a pleasure to which Sir Whimlby also wishes to return.

Sir Whimlby's reaction to Matchil's story also raises questions about audience reactions to mother-son pairs like Nestlecock and Nehemiah and Indulgence and John Gingle. The mother-son pairs in *The New Academy* and *Apollo Shroving* seem to be ridiculed within their texts and might come across as comic and ridiculous; reading the plays in this way, we can easily see them as dramatizations of masculine fears and anxieties about mothers. However, there is also a competing discourse in these plays that taps into maternal desires of retaining control for personal and social gain and male fantasies of taking comfort in the large maternal body and the subsequent pleasures of evading the responsibilities and challenges of adult manhood. Though it is easy to read Nestlecock as a bad mother for refusing to let her son grow up, Matchil provides a back-story that asks us to reconsider her characterization: he says that Nehemiah "was her youngest sonne, and all that's left of seven, and dreaming that he needs must prove a Prophet, she has bred him up a fool" (sig. K5v). Here, the audience is unexpectedly invited to feel sympathy for a woman who watched her first six children die and has put all of her resources into the only survivor. Like all of the other mother figures I analyze in this chapter, with the exception of Hermione, Lady Nestlecock has only one child: a single son. This moment also introduces the possibility of a generic shift through the ghost of tragedy. Nestlecock later shows her kind heart when she invites Joyce and Gabriella, Matchil's disinherited daughter and her best friend, to stay with her until she

can intercede for them with her brother (sig. I1v). Though to much of the audience Nestlecock likely appears foolish and comical throughout the play, her solidarity with the young women and her position as a mother who has experienced great loss also encourage audiences to sympathize with her and find analogues between her situation and their own. In turn, just as Whimlby expresses a jovial desire for a mother like Nestlecock, parts of the audience might desire to play the role of the diminutive Nehemiah or the large and domineering Nestlecock.

*Apollo Shroving* supports similar possibilities: written as a school play for performance in Suffolk rather than for professional actors on the London stage, the play likely attracted an audience that included families of the boy actors and other community members who knew them or their parents. Though any mothers in attendance might see themselves ridiculed, they and other audience members might also take pleasure in watching Mistress Indulgence miniaturize her son. The play itself reflects on the motherly component of its audience in the Prologue, in which a female character named Lala, presumably seated among the audience, interrupts the Prologue's Latin monologue and insists that he and the other schoolboys perform their play "in honest English...for every shee, / Whom here you see" (sig. B2r). Lala's complaint is that the women in the audience have not been trained in Latin and so will not enjoy the play unless it proceeds in English. Her noisy verbal exchange with the actors, which continues through the Prologue and the first scene of the first act, successfully convinces the schoolboys to continue in English. Though Lala does not appear to be the mother of either of the boys with whom she interacts, she claims to represent the interests of all women in the audience, a group that likely consisted of mothers as well as other community women in

caregiving roles who have decided to spend the afternoon watching small boys act and who might enjoy the scenes in which Indulgence and John interact as large mother and diminutive son.<sup>102</sup>

We can imagine these texts in performance in front of diverse audience members who might react quite differently to the mother–son pairs on the stage. Crashaw reacts with violent anxiety to images of an enormous Virgin Mary perhaps because he, too, recognizes the appeal of the large maternal body that he believes male artists use to attract potential Catholics who might want to feel like either the large and dominating Mary or the safe and cared-for infant Jesus. In a similar vein, *Apollo Shroving* and *The New Academy* present the possibility that audience members might identify positively with the mother or son figures instead of seeing them only as objects of ridicule. My interest in gendered size differentials has taken me into the new territory of these infrequently-studied plays, but, as I will now show, this approach also enables me to see some of Renaissance England’s most-discussed and maligned stage mothers in a new light.

### **Royal mothers competing for power**

While Indulgence and Nestlecock, mothers from the middling ranks or lower aristocracy, compete with schoolmasters for social advancement by asserting their largeness over their sons, high aristocratic mothers in drama raise the stakes of size performance, emphasizing their relationally large size in order to compete with high-status men for not only social, but political power. Isabel in Marlowe’s *Edward II* and

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<sup>102</sup> For more on women in caregiving roles at theatrical performances, see the reading of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* in chapter four.



Volumnia in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* make their sons into the conduit for this political influence. By using their large size to manipulate their sons, Isabel and Volumnia tap into the privileges of being mothers to powerfully-placed sons. These maternal characters seem to threaten the male-dominated worlds of tragedy, particularly Isabel, who aids a rebellion and commits adultery, but my earlier queer readings of the mothers of comedy suggest an alternative wherein the mothers of tragedy can be read less as threats than as objects of queer desire. *Edward II* and *Coriolanus* differ in a key way, however: the age and physical size of the plays' respective sons. Isabel's proximity to the small body of the young Prince of Wales enables her to assert political authority during the dangerous time of rebellion against her husband, Edward II. Volumnia, however, finds ways to assert largeness in relation to her adult, warrior son Coriolanus. Like Lady Nestlecock, who continues to diminish her physically full-grown son, Volumnia maintains control over her powerful son by reminding him of her own largeness. The relationship between Volumnia and Coriolanus is much more complex than that between Lady Nestlecock and Nehemiah, however, as Coriolanus has a wife, a son, and many military honors, all of which should designate him a man and place him outside the category of the diminutive. Volumnia, indeed, has pushed him toward these military honors and does not seem to interfere in his family life; her methods of asserting largeness over her son are much more subtle than Lady Nestlecock's. *Coriolanus* shows how a mother might continue to use relational size to exert authority over even a fully adult son.

Queen Isabel occupies a precarious position at the beginning of *Edward II*: when the play opens, her husband has sent her away, preferring instead the company of his lover Gaveston and leaving her vulnerable and unsure of her place in court life. During

the early acts of the play, Isabel tries a number of strategies for reclaiming her lost power, finally learning to use her size. A brief look at the beginning of the play will illustrate Isabel's shifting approaches to her problem. The first time we see her, she walks past a group of noblemen conspirators and tells them that she is hastening

Unto the forest, gentle Mortimer,  
To live in grief and baleful discontent;  
For now my lord the King regards me not,  
But dotes upon the love of Gaveston.  
He claps his cheeks and hangs about his neck,  
Smiles in his face and whispers in his ears,  
And when I come he frowns, as who should say,  
"Go whither thou wilt, seeing I have Gaveston." (1.2.47-54)

Her plan to live in the forest anticipates *As You Like It* in which those exiled from a corrupt court find sanctuary in the forest.<sup>103</sup> As she seeks allies and sympathy, Isabel casts herself as a royal and specifically female victim who has lost her husband and her position at court. The goal of this journey seems calculated to attract attention and support instead of an honest search for sanctuary, as she seems to be unattended by ladies in waiting and returns to the court without protest when Mortimer orders her to do so (1.2.56). Displays of self-sacrificial female victimhood are Isabel's main strategy at the beginning of the play for garnering support; for instance, she asks the conspirators in this

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<sup>103</sup> Isabel opens the play seeking a "second world," or a fictional space apart from reality that, according to Harry Berger, on the one hand "provides a temporary haven for recreation or clarification, experiment or relief," and on the other "projects the urge of the paralyzed will to give up, escape, work magic, abolish time and flux and the intrusive reality of other minds" (*Second* 36). By returning to the court, Isabel gives up this escape but also positions herself to take an active role in the politics of the real world (or the on-stage version of the real world) by refusing fantasy.

scene not to start a war on her behalf, declaring, “rather than my lord / Shall be oppressed by civil mutinies, / I will endure a melancholy life, / And let him frolic with his minion” (1.2.64-67). Though she gains some sympathy from the noblemen who conspire against Gaveston, however, her pleas as a victimized woman do nothing to move her husband Edward. She shows her willingness to fight, confronting Gaveston in Edward’s presence and accusing him, “Villain, ’tis thou that rob’st me of my lord,” then turning to Edward to plead her case: “Witness the tears that Isabella sheds, / Witness this heart that, sighing for thee, breaks, / How dear my lord is to poor Isabel” (1.4.160, 164-66). The tears and the sighing heart turn Isabel into a kind of trope of grief, but Edward reacts not with sympathy but by banning her from his sight (1.4.169). Isabel makes little progress with Edward by performing literary tropes of victimized womanhood, though she begins to find allies among the rebellious noblemen.

A turning point occurs for Isabel when Edward and Gaveston part to flee the noblemen conspirators in Act 2. Edward rejects Isabel again, leaving her alone on the stage, but this time she finds strength in a fantasy in which she grows large enough to embrace all of England: “Oh, that mine arms could close this isle about, / That I might pull him to me where I would” (2.4.17-18). At this moment, Isabel’s character suddenly shifts from the passive, victimized wife to an active political player.<sup>104</sup> Immediately after this fantasy of encircling largeness, Isabel takes a strong political stand by sending the conspirators after Gaveston, and then she resolves, “My son and I will over into France, / And to the King, my brother, there complain / How Gaveston hath robbed me of his love”

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<sup>104</sup> However, Isabel continues to play the role of the passive victim as an active strategy when it suits her. For instance, she seeks to build Sir John’s support for her and for Prince Edward when she turns to the prince in John’s presence and sighs, “Oh, my sweet heart, how do I moan thy wrongs, / Yet triumph in the hope of thee, my joy!” (4.2.27-28). She stresses Prince Edward’s, and her own, victimhood, then sets her son up as a figure of hope.

(2.4.65-67). She imagines that France will be more amenable to her complaint with his small nephew at her side, and from this time on, Isabel and the small Prince Edward, whom King Edward calls “little son,” nearly always share the stage (3.1.70). They appear as a pair, his smallness underscoring her growing self-assurance and power.

Though we lack information about size and casting when the play was first performed, Prince Edward repeatedly constructs himself as small and young. He admits his dependence on his mother, declaring, “The King of England nor the court of France / Shall have me from my gracious mother’s side / Till I be strong enough to break a staff” (4.2.22-24). He stresses his physical connection to her, his need to be at her side, and his lack of masculine prowess. Marie Rutkoski points out that Prince Edward’s attachment to his mother makes him seem “unbreached,” or under the age of seven and considerably younger than the historical Edward III as he appears in Holinshed, aged fourteen years at the time of his coronation (284). This change seems significant. For H. David Brumble, for example, it makes the prince innocent of his father’s murder rather than complicit with his mother and Mortimer (66). The change also invokes size to illustrate the Prince’s vulnerability, enabling the adults around him to show off their dominance in relation to the small heir; Isabel especially, because of her continuous proximity to him, benefits from his smallness. Since Prince Edward and his father share a name, the son’s smallness also comes to reflect the father’s vulnerability at the hands of noblemen he cannot control.

While Prince Edward’s smallness underscores his father’s vulnerability, it increases his mother’s power: Isabel is quickly able to gain support from the rebellious noblemen because she has little Prince Edward at her side. Her son is not only a small

boy but also the heir to the throne, making him highly valuable both to her and to the noblemen as a kind of pawn or possession. With Prince Edward by his mother's side, the noblemen take up Isabel as their cause and the standard of their fight, declaring that they march "that England's queen in peace may repossess / Her dignities and honors" (4.4.23-24). Rice addresses mother and son together, as a royal pair: "God save Queen Isabel and her princely son!" (4.6.46). Leicester arrests Spencer and Baldock "in the name of Isabel the Queen" (4.7.59). Since teaming up with her son, Isabel has gone from bereaved victim to the royal authority of England. Though Prince Edward is next in line for the throne, Isabel exploits his youth and exerts her motherly authority over him in order to drive the rebellion forward and to keep him from protesting his father's imprisonment. As Edward II loses his power, Prince Edward becomes a more valuable possession, and Kent and Mortimer soon struggle with Isabel for control over her son. Sensing Kent's shift in loyalty, Isabel takes the prince from the companionship of his uncle, saying, "Edward is my son, and I will keep him" (5.2.114). Keeping possession of the small boy is essential for Isabel, who asserts her power by appearing as the protector of the small and vulnerable heir.

Although she struggles with Kent for possession of and power over the prince, Isabel never challenges Mortimer, leading to questions about the limits of the power Isabel can attain through her son. Leicester laments both Isabel's affair with Mortimer and her lack of control over him: "What cannot gallant Mortimer with the Queen?" (4.7.50). Mortimer himself commands Isabel, "Be ruled by me and we will rule the realm," and she responds by confessing "I love thee well ; / And therefore, so the Prince, my son, be safe, / Whom I esteem as dear as these mine eyes, / Conclude against his

father what thou wilt, / And I myself will willingly subscribe” (5.2.5, 16-20). Isabel surely acquiesces out of love, but she has also placed herself and her son in a precarious position in relation to a group of traitors and therefore arguably lets Mortimer rule her out of concern for her son. Isabel, then, is able to garner a good deal of support because of her possession of a small, dependent heir, but the high stakes of the rebellion make her unable fully to ensure the safety of her valuable little son. The play suggests that Mortimer, for his own part, seems to understand that he derives his power from Isabel and she from her son; despite Isabel’s fears, he never tries to harm Prince Edward.

Though he never threatens the prince with serious harm, Mortimer begins to assert his own largeness in the form of physical dominance over Prince Edward as Mortimer becomes more powerful. During Isabel’s argument with Kent, Prince Edward, perceiving his own vulnerability to Mortimer, insists that he will go with his mother, “but not with Mortimer” (5.2.107.) Angered, Mortimer calls him “youngling” and seizes him, declaring, “Then I will carry thee by force away” (5.2.108-09). Prince Edward cries out in distress, “Help, Uncle Kent! Mortimer will wrong me!” (5.2.110). This moment underscores the prince’s physical vulnerability, and the actor playing Prince Edward must be small enough that the actor playing Mortimer can easily carry or drag him offstage. The next time we see young Edward, just after his coronation has made him Edward III, the conflicted boy monarch wants to resist Mortimer but does not yet know how to do so. He and Mortimer argue over Kent’s execution, with Edward insisting Kent should live and Mortimer condemning him to death despite the new king’s wishes. Edward and Isabel confer over this problem:

EDWARD III: Sweet mother, if I cannot pardon him,

Entreat my Lord Protector for his life.

QUEEN: Son, be content. I dare not speak a word.

EDWARD III: Nor I, and yet methinks I should command;

But seeing I cannot, I'll entreat for him. (5.4.93-97)

Like John Gingle, the new king addresses his mother as “sweet mother” and seeks her help, still very much dependent upon her. Isabel’s response is ambiguous: she seems to agree with Mortimer that Kent should be executed and so is once again performing the powerless role she occupied at the beginning of the play, but the “I dare not” suggests that this scene could be played with Isabel exhibiting fear to speak out in agreement with her son when Mortimer is in such a bloodthirsty mood. This moment illustrates Isabel’s paradoxical position as the possessor of the highly valuable Edward III who at the same time cannot fully guarantee his safety.

The death of Edward II, combined with Mortimer’s ever-growing sense of his own largeness, finally kindles the spirit of active kingship in Edward III and changes his relationship with his mother. The son shows a degree of discomfort with the idea of wearing the crown while his father is alive, begging Isabel, “Mother, persuade me not to wear the crown” and insisting “I am too young to reign” (5.2.90-91). Edward III’s position as a crowned monarch while his father still lives presents him with a dilemma: if he fails to act as a king, then he lets Mortimer continue his dangerous rule, but if he exercises kingly authority, then he opens the door for a usurper to do the same to him while he lives. When Edward III receives news of his father’s death, however, he suddenly steps into the role of king, punishing Mortimer and sending away his mother; he acts as John Gingle seems to want to act when he inherits his father’s sword. Mortimer

does not at first see this change in Edward and instead fixates on his own largeness after Edward II's murder: "I stand as Jove's huge tree, / And others are but shrubs compared to me" (5.6.11-12). He dismisses Edward III's anger, asserting that "The King is yet a child" (5.6.17). In this final scene, however, the same actor who has so far performed smallness, vulnerability, and dependency suddenly grows into a kingly role and not only takes command over his court by having Mortimer executed, but also sends his mother to the Tower for her part in Edward II's death. He commands, "Away with her! Her words enforce these tears, / And I shall pity her if she speak again" (5.6.85-86). His emotional outpouring sets him up in contrast to his father: Edward II let his love for his favorites interfere with his politics, but Edward III will not let his love for his mother, the character to whom he has been closest throughout the play, interfere with his political goals. He needs to separate himself from the large mother, to remove her from his sight, but also to remove the image of large mother together with small son from the minds of the noblemen he hopes to control with more success than his father did. Following Crashaw's logic regarding Christ's inability to reign in the presence of the Virgin Mary, Edward III can only be a king in the absence of his large mother, whose size reminds him of his dependency when he should exercise power; she cannot fade to the background during his reign but must rather be physically sent away in order for Edward III to rule with authority.

By physically sending his mother away, Edward III attempts to shield himself from becoming a ruler like Shakespeare's King John, who relies on his mother to help him protect his crown. Queen Eleanor demonstrates her role as King John's main advisor in her first aside to him during the political plotting of the first scene, after he declares



that “our strong possession and our right” stand on his side in the conflict with Constance and Arthur over the English throne (1.1.39). Eleanor whispers to John, “Your strong possession much more than your right, / Or else it must go wrong with you and me: / So much my conscience whispers in your ear, / Which none but heaven and you and I shall hear” (1.1.40-43). She begins by reminding him that he holds the throne by force, suggesting his own physical power, but in the next line she links mother and son as conspirators and sharers in power. Eleanor figures herself as a conscience whispering in his ear, directing her grown son from behind the scenes. She soon shows, however, that she is anything but behind the scenes as she spars with her young grandson Arthur’s mother Constance at their meeting at Angers. The mothers both ruthlessly fight for the rights of their sons, each calling the other “monstrous” and vying for possession of young Arthur. The insult “monstrous” is charged with suggestions of enormous size, and indeed the conflict over Arthur reveals both mothers struggling to assert their larger size over each other and over the men around them. Arthur, like Marlowe’s Prince Edward, is an important figure because of his bloodline and because he is small; both his mother and his grandmother seek to strengthen their own positions by possessing the small boy. Later in the play when King John leaves Eleanor and Constance behind in France and takes Arthur back to England with him, all four characters suffer from this separation, suggesting that each mother-son pair needs to be together in order to exercise power. We hear only a brief mention of the mothers’ offstage deaths, though we have seen some of Constance’s expressions of extreme grief, and King John seems to lose his direction when he hears of Eleanor’s death. He loses the support of his nobles when he undervalues

the possession of the small boy and orders Arthur's death; only the two mothers seem fully to understand Arthur's value as a small object of power.

While *Edward II* and *King John* illustrate how mothers might garner political power by exaggerating their largeness beside small sons, *Coriolanus* depicts a mother who has found ways to continue to assert largeness over an adult son. Coriolanus has presumably grown as large as or larger than Volumnia and possesses a great deal of his own social and political power: he has his own wife and son, has accumulated innumerable military honors, and during the course of the play becomes a Roman consul. We might read Coriolanus as an exaggeratedly violent adult version of John Gingle or Nehemiah Nestlecock and his relationship with his mother as in some ways analogous to the mother-son relationships in *Apollo Shroving* and *The New Academy* in which the mother continues to invoke relational size to give her power over her son well past the moment when he has actually surpassed her in physical size and strength.<sup>105</sup> Volumnia's name invokes associations with voluminous size and invites us to picture her as being of Amazonian stature; indeed, her violent speeches and her relentless pursuit of her son's and Rome's glory show that she, at the very least, talks a big talk. While Isabel appears alongside her small son in order to gain political support for both herself and her son, Volumnia is intent on promoting her son in order to earn both war glory and political power for herself; as Dunworth argues, Volumnia "dramatically [creates] a link between

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<sup>105</sup> Much recent scholarship on *Coriolanus* has analyzed age in the play. Marjorie Garber reads *Coriolanus* alongside *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* to argue that naming and re-naming constitute important moments of transition between infancy and adulthood in these plays (52-78). Lucy Munro argues that "Caius Martius will not 'grow up,' and his childishness is the foundation on which Shakespeare constructs his tragedy" (80). She goes on to argue that "the depiction of Martius's relationship with his mother is part of a wider blurring of the boundaries between adult and child" (88). This chapter complicates these readings of age by considering male dependency on mothers as a function of size that is not necessarily incompatible with adulthood; in other words, I argue that a mother's large size can enable her to exercise influence over a son who otherwise fits into the category of adulthood.

her son's martial attainments and her own victory" (187). Dunworth follows Adelman in arguing that Volumnia's maternal body is always bound to Rome, and I would add that Volumnia uses her large size in order to align herself with the large and powerful empire as she seeks a say in the running of Rome. Volumnia frequently expresses the frustrations of being a violent woman who wants to do great deeds yet has not had the chance to prove herself on the battlefield; instead, she sustains an extended performance of largeness to drive her son to attain more and more glory and power and to coerce him into sharing these honors with her.

Volumnia's relationship to power and military glory are complex, however: she may want to prove herself as a warrior, but she wants to do so within the social contexts of *wife* or *mother*. Upon his banishment, Coriolanus reminds his mother that "you were wont to say, / If you had been the wife of Hercules / Six of his labours you'd have done, and saved / Your husband so much sweat" (4.1.17-20). In Coriolanus's mind, Volumnia is a large and powerful hero, and this memory serves as a comfort to Volumnia and encourages the audience to share Coriolanus's vision of the heroic large mother. This passage also shows Volumnia inscribing herself in a heroic tradition specifically as a wife: her jest or fantasy about Hercules puts her physical prowess in Hercules's name. She would perform heroic deeds to aid her husband, not to win acclaim for herself. At the same time, this reference to a fantasized Herculean husband underscores the absence of Coriolanus's father, of whom the play says nothing. It is almost as if Volumnia is mother and father, having produced Coriolanus from parthenogenesis like the hermaphroditic Venus in Book 4 of *The Faerie Queene*, discussed in chapter one. As husband and wife fuse for Volumnia, so do the roles of mother and soldier. Excitedly imagining her son in

battle, she tells Virgilia, Coriolanus's wife and the play's other mother figure, that "The breasts of Hecuba / When she did suckle Hector looked not lovelier / Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood / At Grecian sword, contemning" (1.3.37-40). The nurturing breast of the mother and the contemptuous bleeding head of her warrior son become one in beauty here for Volumnia, and this image binds her military aspirations to her role as a mother. Ralph Berry argues that moments like this reveal the erotic pleasure Volumnia takes in Coriolanus's victories and that war indeed is "a quasi-sexual activity in the battle scenes" of the rest of the play (302). In this way, Volumnia fuses the roles of mother and wife by imagining Coriolanus as a sexual surrogate who is like the husband for whom she would do battle and who also offers her access to the pleasures of war.<sup>106</sup>

This fusion of motherhood and access to the pleasures of war reflects Volumnia's goals as the large mother to a successful son and prefigures Balsam's psychoanalytic argument that for some women, the young son operates as "their one perceived chance to live with vigor, if vicariously" (153).<sup>107</sup> Volumnia touts her role in establishing and meeting Coriolanus's goals when he returns home from the battle of Corioles, lauded with honors and a new name: "I have lived / To see inherited my very wishes, / And the

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<sup>106</sup> Dunworth describes this scene as "a jarring bringing together of the domestic and the martial" and argues that "the violent rhetoric that appears as much a part of their world as their sewing and gossiping... is disconcerting and at odds with assumptions about what domesticity and maternity comprise" (181, 182). Volumnia's status as a martial mother, then, is not wholly odd within the world of the play but does seem out of place to modern readers like Adelman who see her martial attitude as akin to starving her son (147). Volumnia's model of martial mothering also conflicts with Coriolanus's wife Virgilia's squeamishness toward her husband's injuries and her own son's violent behavior toward butterflies (1.3.35, 64).

<sup>107</sup> Balsam continues, arguing that "a mother whose prehistory has disposed her to marked fantasies of penis envy has a new opportunity in pregnancy to merge psychically with a joyful possession of maleness that is actually created from right inside her own womb. I believe that this concrete bodily experience lends a more reified caste to a previously wishful fantasy penis that she now treats as her rightful possession. The baby son that was literally attached to the mother's uterine wall, after delivery continues into the cradle of their joint interactive psychic register as her object for a mirrored self-glorification and idealization. His individuality therefore becomes a special problem for both this mother and this son" (154). The continued closeness between Coriolanus and Volumnia suggests that he has not entirely differentiated from her as an individual.

buildings of my fancy. Only / There's one thing wanting, which I doubt not but / Our Rome will cast upon thee" (2.1.184-88). Coriolanus has fulfilled *her* wishes of honor, and her use of the word "inherited" suggests a lineage of wishes and deeds Volumnia desires both for her son and for herself. She calls these wishes "the buildings of *my* fancy," casting herself as the creator of her son's success.

Volumnia's role as the one who built Coriolanus becomes complicated, however, when Coriolanus refuses to humble himself before the people. She scolds him, "Thy valiantness was mine, thou sucked'st it from me, / But owe thy pride thyself" (3.2.128-29). Paster looks to this moment in the play to support her argument that early moderns believed a nursing baby would come to share the traits of the woman who nursed it: Volumnia figures herself as the source of Coriolanus's bravery, yet she distances herself from his pride (200). However, Volumnia's phrasing, "thou sucked'st it from me," leaves open a slightly different reading: rather than sharing his mother's valiance, Coriolanus, like the devouring baby of Kleinian psychoanalysis, may have sucked away all of Volumnia's valiance, or perhaps her opportunity to prove her valiance.<sup>108</sup> Though Volumnia does not seem particularly nurturing, she has devoted her whole life to her one son, and she may have sacrificed her own social or even political aspirations to care for him. In this case, Volumnia's attempts to gain glory through Coriolanus are also attempts to regain the potential to achieve glory she felt she possessed before she became a mother. Christina Luckyj argues for a critical re-assessment of Volumnia not as a monstrous mother but as "a fully developed figure with the capacity for psychic depth and change" ("Volumnia's Silence" 330). She goes on to argue that the fantasy in which Hecuba's breast becomes Hector's wound exhibits "a vulnerability underlying

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<sup>108</sup> See "Weaning."

Volumnia's maternal self-denial" (331). A Volumnia who has made sacrifices for motherhood might be poised to reclaim some of what she has sacrificed now that her son is grown, and she seeks to reclaim it through him.

Volumnia has been preparing her son for both his and her glory his whole life, from the moment she found out he was a boy. By aligning motherhood with violence, she has been able to produce a man whose capacities as a warrior are a function of his position as her son, a man who does not need to forsake, and may even depend upon, his mother to perform great feats of military masculinity:

When yet he was but tenderbodied and the only son of my womb, when youth with comeliness plucked all gaze his way, when for a day of kings' entreaties a mother should not sell him an hour from her beholding, I, considering how honour would become such a person—that it was no better than, picture-like, to hang by th' wall if renown made it not stir—was pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him, from whence he returned his brows bound with oak. I tell thee, daughter, I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man. (1.3.5-15)

Volumnia stresses the smallness and prettiness of Coriolanus's body the first time he went to war and underscores her own role in his first campaign with her four first-person pronouns and the active verb "I sent." This passage suggests that Volumnia not only pushed her son toward adulthood and military honor but also created a paradoxical body for him that was young and small yet had been proven manly in battle. Volumnia and Coriolanus's relationship sustains this paradox even in adulthood: Volumnia often speaks

of her son's largeness, one time fantasizing, "Methinks I hear hither your husband's drum, / See him pluck Aufidius down by th' hair; / As children from a bear, the Volsces shunning him," and insisting that Coriolanus will "beat Aufidius' head below his knee / And tread upon his neck" (1.3.26-28; 43-44). Here, she envisions her son as large and bearlike in relation to the childlike Volsces, and she pictures him asserting his largeness over Aufidius in his victory. These images of Coriolanus's largeness when he does not share the stage with Volumnia, however, are at odds with the ways they interact in scenes together. Twice upon meeting his mother, Coriolanus kneels, lowering himself in her presence, and waits for her to raise him, performing an act of deference that plays specifically on size (2.1.157; 5.3.52). Excited by Coriolanus's return home after the battle of Corioles, Volumnia tells Menenius, "my boy Martius approaches," using the possessive "my" and the diminutive "boy" to figure him as her small possession rather than a decorated warrior (2.1.88). The word "boy" returns in Aufidius's insult at the end of the play, suggesting that Volumnia has exclusive rights to this term, which she uses for endearment, when it applies to Coriolanus. Though Volumnia at times builds Coriolanus up as a large warrior, the pair's interactions continue to reinforce her largeness in relation to him.

Although I would argue that relational size is central to the way Volumnia interacts with Coriolanus's body, her intimate knowledge of the scars that cover his body functions as another way of making his victories her own. In some ways, her knowledge of his wounds, that "He had before this last expedition twenty-five wounds upon him," suggests that she owns the gashes on his skin (2.1.139-40). She also knows even before she sees him that, in this most recent battle, he has been wounded "I'th' shoulder and

i'th' left arm" and proudly states that "there will be large cicatrices to show the people when he shall stand for his place" as consul (2.1.133-34). Volumnia knows her son's body intimately, and she takes meticulous interest in his scars, the small and large marks that signify his battle prowess, and in the pleasure others might find in viewing these wounds. The way she advertises her extensive knowledge of the detailed ways by which each battle has changed his body works as a strategy of making his body a part of her own, and her wish to exhibit his wounds as a political strategy makes public this body and her involvement with it. Rose argues that Volumnia dooms Coriolanus by refusing to remain in the private world to which she has been assigned as a mother, continually struggling to assert herself in public (305). However, her actions do not necessarily lead to the tragic end of the play, and we can read Volumnia not as a monstrous mother who has broken out of the domestic sphere but rather as a mother who carefully fuses the domestic and the political in her attention to her son's body. Volumnia's relationship to Coriolanus's scars makes use of a domestic task—care for a son's health—as a method for entering into a public identity as the mother of a powerful warrior.<sup>109</sup> In other words, Volumnia does not so much transgress the domestic as make motherhood into a public role through the ways she catalogues and then displays her son's wounds for political ends.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> For a discussion of the medical practices of housewives and their potentially erotic overtones, see Wall (*Staging* 164-73), and my discussion in chapter four.

<sup>110</sup> Dunworth reads the scar scene as evidence of the psychosexual attachment between mother and son: "the extent of [Volumnia's] knowledge blurs the distinction between what she knows for political reasons and what is excessive maternal intimacy, a point exacerbated by the silent presence of his wife—who should know his body but says nothing—throughout the dialogue" (186). Volumnia certainly seems to have some kind of erotic attachment to Coriolanus: she scolds Coriolanus's squeamish wife Virgilia, "If my son were my husband, I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour than in the embracements of his bed where he would show most love" (1.3.2-4). Volumnia here instructs Virgilia on how to be a proper wife to a warrior, but she also conflates the roles of wife and mother and unexpectedly condemns attachment while glorifying separation.



Volumnia's role as a public mother surfaces most clearly after Coriolanus's banishment when she confronts the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius in the street to curse and threaten them. She scolds them by mentioning Coriolanus's scars, "the wounds that he does bear for Rome," invoking the marks on his body with which she identifies and making Coriolanus's banishment an affront to her as well as to her son (4.2.30). Menenius entreats her, "Peace, peace, be not so loud," suggesting both her vocal largeness and his discomfort with the public setting of her assault on the politicians (4.2.14). Virgilia, finally prompted by Coriolanus's banishment to forsake her role as Coriolanus's silent and tearful wife, joins Volumnia's verbal assault. She tells Brutus and Sicinius that Coriolanus would "make an end of thy posterity," to which Volumnia adds, "Bastards and all" (4.2.28-29). The women attack the tribunes as fathers and as potential fathers, suggesting that their act in banishing Coriolanus has threatened Volumnia and Virgilia as mothers. Though this scene primarily turns on the women's verbal abuse, it could reasonably be staged so that the two women also act large to threaten Brutus and Sicinius physically: twice the women tell the politicians to leave and then immediately counter, "You shall stay" or "Nay, but thou shalt stay," suggesting that they block the tribunes' path (4.2.17, 25). Volumnia and Virgilia, indeed, might mimic the intimidating physical presence of Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew* when Petruccio warns her, "nay, look not big, nor stamp, nor stare, nor fret" (3.3.99). Trying to mask their fear of Volumnia and Virgilia, the tribunes call the women "mad" and say Volumnia "wants her wits," and they hurry away at the first opportunity (4.2.11, 47). In this scene, we see two politically powerful men who recognize and feel threatened by large and powerful mother figures, so they attempt to reduce the women's threat by dismissing Volumnia as crazy;

the tribunes are finally forced to make a speedy exit. Though there is nothing in this scene to suggest that Volumnia and Virgilia actually physically attack the men, it could be staged in a way that shows the women as physically threatening. This kind of staging could align the women with the soldier Volumnia wants to be through Coriolanus and could show both mothers manipulating perceptions of their size with loud voices and physical threats as they discipline these male public figures.

The two scenes in which Volumnia works to convince Coriolanus to follow a certain course of action illustrate both her role as a public mother and the ways she can use size to manipulate this role. As Dunworth points out, Volumnia never interacts with Coriolanus in private but only in the presence of other politically powerful men:

Menenius participates when Volumnia tries to convince Coriolanus to show contrition and humility, and Aufidius is present when she begs Coriolanus not to attack Rome.<sup>111</sup> As Volumnia and Coriolanus discuss humility, both use rhetoric of size. She advises him to kneel before those he has defended, to repeat an action of smallness he has so far only performed for his mother (3.2.75). At this moment, she finally has Coriolanus's attention in a way she does not when she uses reasoned arguments on him earlier in the scene. She also speaks to him as if he is a child who competes for her praise: "I prithee now, sweet son, as thou hast said / My praises made thee first a soldier, so, / To have my praise for this, perform a part / Thou hast not done before" (3.2.107-110). Like Mistress Indulgence, she asks her son to perform feats for her and makes his contrition into a kind of game shared between mother and son.<sup>112</sup> The diminutive nickname "sweet son"

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<sup>111</sup> Dunworth argues that "the mother is only available in public spaces" and that "the hero is always precipitated away from the private into public action" (184).

<sup>112</sup> This point also echoes the psychoanalytical theory of Melanie Klein, in which small children perform feats for praise as a way of restoring the bond with the mother (294).

disarms Coriolanus of his anger, and here Volumnia reminds him of her active role in his development: she made him a soldier. Both she and Coriolanus use theatrical language, as she encourages him to play a new part and he tries out different roles. He wryly imagines,

My throat of war be turned,  
Which choired with my drum, into a pipe  
Small as an eunuch or the virgin voice  
That babies lull asleep! The smiles of knaves  
Tent in my cheeks, and schoolboys' tears take up  
The glasses of my sight! (3.2.112-117)

Coriolanus conceives of his humility as akin to a physical shrinkage of the vocal pipes, and perhaps in general stature, that might align him with a eunuch or a woman, both figures of castration, or a schoolboy, a figure of unformed masculinity. At this moment, the idea of performing smallness in public with these roles makes him angry, and he again refuses to humble himself. Volumnia rebuts him: “Let / Thy mother rather feel thy pride than fear / Thy dangerous stoutness” (3.2.125-27). With “stoutness,” which can mean both “stubbornness” and “largeness,” Volumnia attacks Coriolanus for overreaching her or for trying to make himself larger. This largeness in him would be dangerous, she suggests, though it is not clear whether she fears this largeness for her own sake or because he poses a threat to others when he is not under his mother’s control. Her accusation that he usurps her large size chastens him, and after this speech Coriolanus capitulates and leaves ostensibly to make amends, saying, “Mother, I am

going,” and then again, “Look, I am going,” specifically seeking his mother’s approval as he asks her to watch him (3.2.131, 134).

Volumnia must re-think her tactics, however, when Coriolanus fails to humble himself and instead faces banishment, allies with the Volscians, and readies to destroy Rome. Volumnia’s success at the end of the play in persuading her son against such a course hinges on her performance of large size not only in relation to Coriolanus, but also in relation to his small son Young Martius. Volumnia accomplishes what Marlowe’s Isabel could not fully realize: whereas Isabel remains vulnerable to the rebellious noblemen even when she appears in public beside her small son, Volumnia ultimately exerts power over Coriolanus and gains glory throughout Rome when she displays her largeness next to Young Martius. Young Martius has few lines in the play, yet his small body and tiny vocal presence exaggerate his diminutive stature and establish him as an important miniature object in the several scenes he appears in with the mothers. Early in the play, Valeria and Volumnia set up the likeness between father and son, with Valeria responding, “O’ my word, the father’s son!” to Volumnia’s statement that the boy would “rather see the swords and hear the drum than look upon his schoolmaster” (1.3.52-54).<sup>113</sup> Their dialogue fashions him as a miniature version of Coriolanus, a detail that makes it easy at the end of the play for both Coriolanus and the audience to see the two characters align; this alignment could be reinforced by costuming the actors similarly. Young Martius’s presence at the end of the play when Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria petition Coriolanus for Rome’s safety is crucial. As Coriolanus sees his family entering to entreat him, he notes, “My wife comes foremost, then the honoured mould / Wherein this trunk

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<sup>113</sup> This statement positions the schoolmaster as at odds not with the mother, but with military masculinity, and draws a contrast between Young Martius, who is the image of his father, and Coriolanus, who is his mother’s projection.

was framed, and in her hand / The grandchild of her blood” (5.3.22-24). Virgilia comes first, but Volumnia is the center of this vision as Coriolanus sees her as larger than life and places himself back in her womb. He identifies Young Martius not as his son, but as his mother’s grandchild and sees both himself and his son as a part of his mother’s body. Adelman argues that at this moment “Coriolanus seems to think of his child less as his son than as the embodiment of his own childhood and of the child that remains within him” (*Suffocating* 161). I would add that Coriolanus sees himself in Young Martius because of the way he experiences size in this scene: Volumnia has the grandson “in her hand”—perhaps she is holding him by the hand or in her arms, but Coriolanus’s wording here is reminiscent of Crashaw’s image of an infant Jesus so tiny that he fits in his mother’s palm. Coriolanus sees his own smallness in the exaggeratedly miniature son. The sight of the two generations of larger women and youngest generation of small boy begin to influence Coriolanus, and Volumnia exploits the resemblance between father and son to drive home the associations between them that have already begun to form in Coriolanus’s mind: “This is a poor epitome of yours, / Which by th’ interpretation of full time / May show like all yourself” (5.3.67-69). She has in her possession a small boy, a reduction of the father who makes Coriolanus reflect on his own smallness. When Volumnia shows Coriolanus her grandson, she shows him a small, obedient boy who reflects the son’s submission to the large mother.

Volumnia’s ultimate success in this scene comes from the skillful and continuous invocations and manipulations of size throughout her entreaty. When the women first arrive, Coriolanus kneels to his mother out of respect, lowering himself before her as he has done earlier in the play, but this time she raises him and instead kneels to him at this

crucial moment (5.3.50-57). Volumnia, who has spent the whole play performing largeness, chooses this strategic moment to perform smallness: the chastened Coriolanus responds, “What’s this? / Your knees to me? To your corrected son?” (5.3.56-57). As he raises her, Volumnia makes a calculated claim of possession on Coriolanus: “Thou art my warrior” (5.3.62). When Coriolanus still resists, Volumnia launches into two truly voluminous speeches of thirty-one and fifty-one lines, comparing the mother country of Rome to a nurse, insisting that “There’s no man in the world / More bound to’s mother,” meaning Rome, than Coriolanus, and further shaming him by kneeling again with Virgilia, Valeria, and Young Martius (5.3.111, 159-60, 172). The mother figure becomes exaggeratedly large when Volumnia characterizes the whole polity as a mother, and in a statement that both reduces and inflates the female body, Volumnia insists that if Coriolanus marches on Rome, she will kill herself so that he must tread on “thy mother’s womb / That brought thee to this world” on his way into the city (5.3.125-26). Virgilia takes up this same threat, echoing Volumnia’s reminder that the womb has power as a container that holds sons: “Ay, and mine, / That brought you forth this boy to keep your name / Living to time” (5.3.126-28). This threat reduces both women to a single body part, the womb, but Volumnia and Virgilia underscore the womb’s expansion in pregnancy and cast it as a formidable obstacle if it lies in Coriolanus’s path to Rome. Young Martius, however, is not as keen to reduce himself to body parts as his mother and grandmother are: he responds, “A shall not tread on me. / I’ll run away till I am bigger, but then I’ll fight” (5.3.128-29). These words underscore the boy’s smallness, his state of being not big enough, and they also repeat Volumnia’s assertion that Young Martius is a miniature of his father who will grow up to be his copy and gesture toward a time when

the son will be big enough to match his father, even if he will never be a match for the mothers.

When Coriolanus finally gives in to the women's suit, he expresses his overwhelming emotions in almost pre-language, and chiasmic, cries of "O mother, mother!...O my mother, mother, O!" (5.3.183, 186). Not until fourteen lines later does he acknowledge Virgilia: "O mother! Wife!" (5.3.200). Coriolanus acts out a kind of linguistic reduction here, using few words and seeming to shut out all but his mother in a return to an infancy in which the mother is the only separate being for the baby.<sup>114</sup> His verbal immaturity is reminiscent of Nehemiah's "f'sooth" upon his first stage entrance, suggesting in some ways that Coriolanus has regressed to end Shakespeare's play at the same level of maturity with which Nehemiah begins Brome's.<sup>115</sup> In contrast, Volumnia seems to grow at the end of the play in her victory: Menenius proclaims that "this Volumnia / Is worth of consuls, senators, patricians, / A city full," and a senator cries, "Behold our patroness, the life of Rome!" as Volumnia re-enters the city (5.4.47-49; 5.5.1). She is celebrated as the savior of Rome with a worth greater than all the powerful men of the city, or as a woman so large she remains larger than the city full of consuls, senators, and patricians. She finally achieves the glory for herself that she has sought through her son, but her silence at the end leaves us unsure how she feels about this victory that has saved the city but sacrificed her son. Luckyj proposes that Volumnia might show a range of distraught emotions at the end of the play as she knowingly sends her son to his death ("Volumnia's" 338). By this moment in the play, she might no longer

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<sup>114</sup> See Klein, who asserts that infants do not start to distinguish other people until about three months of age, and the first person they distinguish is the mother (290-91).

<sup>115</sup> Garber reads the end of the play as a regression catalogued by the stripping of Coriolanus's names from him: he first loses the earned title "Coriolanus," and at the moment of his death he is scornfully degraded to "boy" by Aufidius (76-77).

want the glory she has finally achieved only by giving up her son, the source of her power and the person she most loves, to a violent and disgraceful death away from the battlefield.

The emotionally ambiguous ending of *Coriolanus* makes it possible to stage a mother who both is large and evokes sympathy, who might be big but is not monstrous. As with the mothers in the comic plays, it is important to keep in mind the diversity of possible audience responses to powerful royal mothers like Isabel, Eleanor, Constance, and Volumnia. While the mothers might in some instances seem ruthless and threatening, some audience members might enjoy the ways the female characters use large size to turn motherhood into a politically powerful role. Some spectators might also find sharing important responsibilities with older, larger, more experienced women appealing. And though there is less overt eroticism in the histories and the tragedy than in the comedies, the mothers' largeness might eroticize the mother-son bonds in ways that produce a masochistic range of pleasures for those watching these relationships play out on the stage.

### **Pregnancy and the royal mother: *The Winter's Tale***

We have seen that depictions of mothers who use their size to control both their sons and the adult men around them are widespread and appear in school drama, city comedies, histories, and tragedies, and I want to conclude with a reading of *The Winter's Tale* to argue that Leontes experiences the large maternal body as a threat because he sees what the other male characters I have discussed do not: that mothers can use their largeness to claim political power. Unlike the other mothers I have discussed in this



chapter, Hermione is pregnant, her body in a state of expansion and exaggerated largeness, yet, also unlike the other mother figures, she does not use her largeness to challenge the authority of the men around her. Leontes seems insecure about his status as king when the play opens, and when he sees Hermione's large body he reacts erratically because he is unwilling to assume the subordinate social or political position that male figures like Nehemiah Nestlecock have found pleasurable. Since he sees the large maternal body as a political threat rather than as a source of pleasure, Leontes begins to suspect Hermione of manipulating her size to co-opt his power and thus accuses her of the treasonous act of adultery. He interprets her large body as an assertion of power—of both her power to make him a cuckold and a usurping political power—and takes action against the woman he reads in terms of the negative discourse on large, powerful motherhood. The play offers Leontes's misogynist reading of the large mother, but it also condemns his extreme reaction and enables conditions for the recuperation of the mother at the end.

Hermione's large, pregnant body is both the key image of the early scenes of *The Winter's Tale* and the driving force behind the conflict at the beginning of the play, its size at first signaling royal fecundity and the productive love between Hermione and Leontes, but soon becoming, for Leontes, a source of fear, shame, and revulsion. Adelman argues that Hermione's body has a great visual impact when she first enters the stage, an impact I would argue takes attention away from the actors playing the male characters on stage (*Suffocating* 220). Hermione's ladies in waiting describe her body as undergoing a process of changing size: they say that she "rounds apace" and "is spread of

late / Into a goodly bulk” (2.1.17, 20-21).<sup>116</sup> The ladies’ comments underscore the dynamic nature of Hermione’s body and construct it as both enormous and beautiful. Margaret Cavendish’s *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664) describes women who enjoy pregnancy specifically because it makes them large: “I have observ’d, that generally Women take more Pleasure when they are with Child, than when they are not with Child, not onely in Eating more, and Feeding more Luxuriously, but taking a Pride in their great Bellies, although it be a Natural Effect of a Natural Cause” (M4v).<sup>117</sup> Sid Ray’s analysis of *The Duchess of Malfi* stresses the sovereign power a queen’s maternal body might wield. She argues that “the sovereign’s maternal body is a kind of super-body that can accommodate doubleness” (19). In her formulation, a queen’s pregnant body is not just physically large, but also holds a double political value since it includes both monarch and future monarch. Leontes seems to understand Hermione’s pregnancy in this way, reacting against her politically significant body. One important difference between these two plays is that the Duchess is actually ruling her lands whereas Hermione is a queen consort, supposedly ruled by her husband. Ray argues that “the Duchess’s great belly challenges the universalized male human body as the dominant figure for authority” and that the Duchess’s maternity leads her to exercise transgressive political power (17, 24). Leontes also reads the maternal body as a transgressive force and reacts with anger toward and suspicion of Hermione when he perceives her body as a challenge to his masculine claims to authority.

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<sup>116</sup> Titania describes a similarly beautiful spreading of the body in pregnancy in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The Indian boy’s mother begins to look like the graceful ships she and Titania watch together: “we have laughed to see the sails conceive / And grow big-bellied in the wind, / Which se with pretty and with swimming gait / Following, her womb then rich with my young squire, / Would imitate” (2.1.128-32). This passage and the one in *The Winter’s Tale* stress the beautiful and graceful enormity of the pregnant body.

<sup>117</sup> A first edition of this book held by the Huntington Library (no. 384536) has pencil marks beside this passage and others having to do with pregnancy, suggesting that this topic was of particular interest to at least one early reader.

We can better understand Leontes's erratic behavior at the beginning of the play if we consider both the growing dimensions of Hermione's body and its presence on the stage alongside Leontes's young son Mamillius and childhood friend Polixenes. In act 1, Hermione inhabits the stage beside adult men and her young son Mamillius, whose small presence in this scene further exaggerates Hermione's largeness in much the way Young Martius's smallness exaggerates Volumnia's voluminous size in *Coriolanus*. Though Hermione does not seem to use her shifting size in any kind of active strategy in her relationship with her husband, she does convince Polixenes to reminisce about his boyhood as part of her strategy to persuade him to stay at their court: she starts the conversation, "Come, I'll question you / Of my lord's tricks and yours when you were boys. / You were pretty lordings then?" (1.2.61-63). Polixenes is quick to remember, perhaps inspired by the pregnant body before him, describing himself and Leontes as "Two lads that thought there was no more behind / But such a day tomorrow as today, / And to be boy eternal" (64-66). The pleasure of boyhood, for Polixenes, comes from the naïve belief that boyhood lasts forever. This idea resonates with plays like *The New Academy* and *Apollo Shroving* that suggest that the pleasures of boyhood can indeed last forever if the boy does not resist his mother's assertions of largeness and control.<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, this same notion causes anxiety in Leontes who, as both Adelman and Paster have argued, finds himself regressing to boyhood as he fixates on Hermione's large maternal body.<sup>119</sup> Unlike the other infantilized male figures in this chapter, Leontes

<sup>118</sup> Gina Bloom sees these reflections on youth as central to play's conflicts: she argues that the two kings' "recollections of boyhood games lead to a displaced obsession with youth and recreation ("Boy" 331).

<sup>119</sup> Adelman argues that Leontes feels himself pulled back to the maternal body but that he despises his connection to her body and that "the delusion of Hermione's adultery affords Leontes secure ground in part because it helps him resist this regressive pull back toward her body" (224). Paster argues that Leontes regressively identifies with Hermione's child and that his anger is driven "by Leontes' memory of his own early displacement from the maternal body" (265). To these psychoanalytic readings, I would like to add

cannot enjoy dependency because he is a king with responsibilities he cannot lay aside to take up the pleasures of dependency.

Leontes suddenly becomes jealous and suspects Hermione of infidelity when he sees her talking with Polixenes, her large belly between them prompting him to question his paternity and his status as king. The space Hermione's large body takes up becomes a metaphorical space between husband and wife, between childhood friends, and between Leontes and his throne; Adelman argues that Hermione repeatedly comes between the two kings both visually and metaphorically (*Suffocating* 223), and I would add that it is her physical size that causes such un-ignorable visual and metaphorical gaps. In the moment her suspiciously positioned pregnant belly inspires jealousy, Leontes turns to Mamillius and asks, "Art thou my boy?", then begins to brood on his presumed status as a cuckold and on his wife's possible usurpation of his royal power (1.2.122). It is indeed Hermione's possible assumption of maternal sovereign power, like that of the Duchess described by Ray, that makes Leontes categorize himself as a cuckold: his possible loss of sovereignty becomes the loss of his status of patriarch of his family unit. Size in this scene is dynamic and unstable, with bodies on the stage ranging from adult men to the pregnant Hermione to ladies-in-waiting to the young Mamillius. Polixenes, though an adult, engages in reflections on childhood and, arguably, inspires similar reflections in Leontes. As Leontes begins to fear that he has been displaced as the patriarch of his family and his nation, he suddenly finds himself identifying with the diminutive, with a category of dependency and powerlessness. Feeling himself miniaturized, he turns to his

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size as a category that not only makes him feel boyish but that also makes this boyishness unacceptable in a king.

son and begins to occupy the boy's place as relationally smaller than Hermione.<sup>120</sup> Her vividly expanded body exaggerates the size difference between her body and Mamillius's and fuels Leontes's feelings of smallness that both come from and contribute to the fear that he has lost his status as a father and a patriarch. He acts out his own smallness for Hermione and Polixenes, telling them that "Looking on the lines / Of my boy's face, methoughts I did recoil / Twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreeched, / In my green velvet coat" (1.2.155-58). Leontes momentarily travels back in time and sees himself dressed in a small and boyish article of clothing; this memory makes him "recoil" rather than bringing the kind of pleasure it brought Polixenes moments ago. Leontes fears this return to a boyhood that makes him smaller than Hermione yet that seems far too possible if her larger-than-usual pregnant body has indeed stripped him of his status as patriarch by assuming his royal power for itself and making him a cuckold.<sup>121</sup>

When Leontes begins to view Hermione's large body as a threat, she becomes subjected to opposing readings of pregnancy and agency. The verbs her ladies use to describe her body's shifting size, "rounds" and "is spread," express pregnancy as an active process that creates a physically large and imposing body.<sup>122</sup> The presumed agency of the maternal body, an object of admiration for the ladies, is perceived by Leontes as a

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<sup>120</sup> Bloom places Leontes's anxieties in the context of an early modern continuum between boys and men, arguing that Leontes is insecure about his position "in a developmental narrative of manhood" ("Boy" 332). She goes on to argue that Leontes actually *seeks* a connection to boyhood by comparing himself to Mamillius (340). I would add to her point that it is not only the conception of manhood as a process that causes Leontes to feel insecure about his position in it, but also the size of the maternal body of his wife that makes him remember acutely what it feels like to be on the little end of that continuum.

<sup>121</sup> Bloom, on the other hand, argues that Leontes seeks a connection to his youth, to a time when he would have been under the authority of a mother figure: "he attempts to realign himself with his son in order to imitate and inhabit the youth his son represents" ("Boy" 341). My reading here, however, suggests that Leontes fears this realignment with his son as a diminutive object and that rather than attempting to align himself with his son, he believes that Hermione has forced him back into this role.

<sup>122</sup> Paster describes the interaction between the growing fetus and the mother's expanding womb as "both dynamic and portentous," operating as a strikingly visual change in size that prefigures the mother's largeness in relation to her child (182).

threat, and he seeks to undercut that agency by ascribing Hermione's enlargement to Polixenes: "'tis Polixenes / Has made thee swell thus" (2.1.63-64). Leontes's accusation makes him into a cuckold, but it also defends against female power by giving the action to another man; Polixenes is the one who has made Hermione large. By making Polixenes the active agent, Leontes also expresses the feelings of displacement and miniaturization, caused by his wife's vividly expanded, "swollen" maternal body, as a patriarchal displacement: he imagines Polixenes replacing him in the bedroom and on the throne.

Leontes acts on his anxieties about fulfilling his duties as king not only by accusing Polixenes and Hermione of adultery, but also by removing Mamillius from Hermione's care. Leontes believes that his son must join him in his resistance to dependence on the maternal body, and with Mamillius parted from Hermione, Leontes no longer has to look at the small boy beside his large mother.<sup>123</sup> Mamillius, however, is happy to be dependent upon his mother and himself has a complex relationship to size and age: Camillo, one of Leontes's lords, tells the Bohemian lord Archidamus that Mamillius "is a gallant child; one that, indeed, physics the subject, makes old hearts fresh. They that went on crutches ere he was born desire yet their life to see him a man" (1.1.32-35). Camillo suggests that the boy Mamillius does have a strange power to inspire new youth in others, but, in Camillo's formulation, this return to youth is a return to health and vigorous manhood, not to the dependent infancy Leontes fears. Mamillius

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<sup>123</sup> David Lee Miler argues that the relationships at the beginning of the play break down because "proximity has turned sinister: when the friend who is so close he might be oneself turns into a deadly rival, the son who seems his father's copy must be snatched from his mother's presence" (122). Proximity here is sinister not only because Leontes and Polixenes were emotionally close, however, but because the son's proximity to his mother's body exaggerates her own largeness and amplifies her perceived threat to her husband and king.

himself is wholly immersed in the world of his mother, engaging in playful banter with Hermione's ladies in their private rooms. He is at ease among Hermione's ladies when Hermione opens the second act by momentarily putting him aside, saying, "Take the boy to you. He so troubles me / 'Tis past enduring" (2.1.1-2). Mamillius is not put out by this brief separation that lasts through only a few lines of dialogue and keeps him in close proximity to his mother, and he is comfortable teasing the ladies and amusing them by insisting that he is not "a baby still" (2.1.7). His wit in this scene shows that he enjoys the attention of this host of nurses, even as he insists that he is "a big boy." Though he seems to be cared for by many women, he has a particularly close relationship with his mother, telling her a story in a whisper so that the other ladies cannot hear (2.1.32-34). Mamillius does not comment on his mother's pregnancy, but this intimate scene surrounds the boy with larger women and dramatizes a close mother-son bond, highlighting the great pleasure Mamillius takes in being among larger female bodies.

Leontes's action in removing Mamillius from the comforting, nurturing world of Hermione and her ladies has a series of consequences that gesture toward the play's recuperative discourse for mothers: the maternal character is large and life-sustaining, whereas the paternal character is miniaturized and comes to be at odds with his family and with the state precisely because he fails to understand the maternal body. At first, Leontes's forced displacement of Mamillius from the nursery triggers a rapid decline in Mamillius's health. The boy's health seems directly attached to his mother, but Leontes misreads his son's needs, proudly declaring that

Conceiving the dishonour of his mother

He straight declined, drooped, took it deeply,

Fasted and fixed the shame on't in himself;  
Threw off his spirit, his appetite, his sleep,  
And downright languished. (2.3.13-17)

Leontes projects his own jealous adult understanding of the situation onto his small son, incorrectly, and fatally, attributing his son's illness to psychology rather than physiology. Mamillius, whose name implies his connection to the maternal body, grows ill without his mother's presence, suggesting that he needs her body to sustain him. The devastating consequences of Leontes's misreading become more clear when we consider them in terms of the social role of the mother in the play-world: Mamillius's removal from Hermione results in his death, indicating that the king's heir cannot live without her maternal body, and Hermione's death signals the social collapse of Leontes's kingdom of Sicilia, a country now ruled by a tyrant without an heir.<sup>124</sup>

By casting Leontes as a tyrant, the play suggests that the real problem with the maternal body is that it can easily be misunderstood by adult men. *The Winter's Tale* critiques the discourse that links pregnancy with shame and disease, as Paster characterizes it. The virtuous Hermione's pregnancy represents hope for everyone but her irrationally jealous husband, and her labor and childbirth only become shameful because Leontes forces her to give birth in prison. The real shame for this act falls on Leontes, whose false belief in the shame of Hermione's maternal body puts her in jail. Paulina chastises Leontes, telling him that his actions "will ignoble make you, / Yea, scandalous to the world" (2.3.120-21). According to Paulina, Leontes has made himself shameful

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<sup>124</sup> Dunworth similarly argues that, in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, "motherhood is fundamental to a social and political fabric which cannot hold without it. When the mother is lost, not only the families but the societies of both plays disintegrate" (215). This reading suggests that the threat is not, as Leontes believes, maternal power, but rather the loss of maternal power.



rather than shaming his wife. During her trial, Hermione echoes Paulina, proclaiming that “innocence shall make / False accusation blush” and then reminding Leontes that she has always been “as continent, as chaste, as true” (3.2.28-29, 32). Significantly, she places continence first in her list of personal virtues, responding directly to discourses Paster typifies as describing women’s bodies, and especially the maternal body, as “leaky vessels” incapable of holding both fluids and sexual virtue (25). Hermione’s claim to continence insists both that she is sexually virtuous and that there is nothing shameful about her maternal body. She goes on to invoke her social roles as a royal daughter, wife, and mother in her defense: “For behold me, / A fellow of the royal bed, which owe / A moiety of the throne; a great king’s daughter, / The mother to a hopeful prince” (3.2.35-38). Her statement reminds Leontes of her own large social stature as well as of the most basic social roles and rights of the royal mother who indeed has claim to certain royal privileges.

Like Volumnia, who often uses long speeches that construct a kind of verbal largeness that resonates with her physical largeness, Hermione speaks a lengthy defense of herself at her trial. This moment of sizeable verbal presence, however, contrasts with her new, no longer pregnant body in this scene. Her slimmer appearance at her trial might be just as shocking as her initial appearance as a “goodly bulk” in Act 1. And though she and others insist that her large body signaled neither a betrayal of nor a challenge to Leontes or his rule, her long defense speech does challenge his recent unjust decisions. Hermione takes on a large vocal presence even as her speech remains eloquent and continent. As Leontes continues to rage at her and threatens her with death, Hermione harangues him specifically for the way he has treated her as a mother. She casts herself as

wholly maternal, speaking of her family as her joy (husband as first joy, firstborn as second joy, second born as third joy):

My second joy,  
And first fruits of my body, from his presence  
I am barred, like one infectious. My third comfort,  
Starred most unluckily, is from my breast,  
The innocent milk in its most innocent mouth,  
Haled out to murder; myself on every post  
Proclaimed a strumpet, with immodest hatred  
The childbed privilege denied, which 'longs  
To women of all fashion; lastly, hurried  
Here, to this place, i'th' open air, before  
I have got strength of limit. (3.2.94-104)

Hermione casts Leontes's crimes as crimes against her maternal body, against children who should be attached to her breast and against a body that has particular physical and social needs at the time of giving birth and immediately after.<sup>125</sup> By describing the weakened state of her body, which in this scene appears smaller than it has in previous scenes, Hermione creates a paradox in which her words become powerful even as she figures her body as made vulnerable by the childbirth process. The brevity of the speech returned by Apollo's oracle, read soon after Hermione's defense, underscores the length of her own answer. I would argue that, by allowing Hermione to speak in this way, the

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<sup>125</sup> Paster notes the severity of Leontes's neglect of the stages of lying-in, arguing that exposure "to public view too soon after birth" questions "her reincorporation into the social body not on physical but on moral grounds" (272). The timing of the trial, then, works as a strategy for proving Hermione's guilt because it makes her into a display of suspect morality; the clarity of her innocence works against this assumption.

play critiques discourses about the shame of the maternal body by instead allowing the mother to shame the jealous husband. Read this way, *The Winter's Tale* holds male figures accountable for the discourses that frame the maternal body as in some way shameful or disgusting, suggesting that it is male readings of this large body, like the one of Mary's body advanced by Crashaw, not this body itself, that are grotesque.

To be sure, there is a degree of discomfort with large mother figures in all of the plays analyzed in this chapter, usually expressed as comic ridicule or as some kind of censuring of the mother at the end. Mistress Indulgence and John Gingle are ridiculed before Apollo, Lady Nestlecock does not conclude the marriages for her son and for herself, Volumnia makes a decision that results in her son's death, and Isabel is rejected by her son and sent to the Tower of London. Hermione's happy ending is precarious, as she is redeemed and resurrected yet seems happier to see her daughter than Leontes. This chapter, however, has called for a focus on the desirable aspects of the maternal body so that we can better understand mothers in early modern drama as figures with many meanings who inspire a range of reactions beyond fear and anxiety. I suggest that we can fruitfully expand our critical understanding of early modern motherhood by focusing on dramatic representations of large maternal bodies in playful relation to smaller male figures. The maternal body invokes associations not only with loss and rejection, but, equally importantly, with pleasure, nurturance, and bounty. Each of these plays shows multiple perspectives on the mother and invites its audience to experience the maternal figures in diverse ways; each play shows how even a ridiculed or violent mother might be desired for her largeness. Female and male spectators alike might want to enact the mother's dominating largeness or the son's pleasurable submission. Motherhood is not

confined to a domestic or familial role in these plays, but is associated with sociopolitical power and authority. This form of large female power is concentrated in the figure of Elizabeth I, to whom I now turn.

## Chapter Three

### Elizabeth I: Royal Performances of Size

The supernatural large women and mother figures of the previous chapters merge as they evoke the specter of the powerful woman who reigned at the center of English politics for nearly half a century. I now turn to a focus on Elizabeth I and the role of size in her rhetoric of power, arguing that the power and strategy of Elizabeth's performances of size derive, paradoxically, from the ways she moderates them by constructing herself as simultaneously large and small. Representations of the queen's shifting relations to size and scale cross media to include portraits, prayers, poetry, letters, speeches, and dramatic texts and performances. The Queen Elizabeth of the Coronation Portrait (c. 1600; figure 1), for instance, fills the space of the canvas, beginning with a small head at the top and expanding through her robes and skirts as the eye travels down the painting. Beneath the enormous robes of state, however, are discernible the queen's narrow waist and small hands. In this visual representation, the English queen appears simultaneously large and small, enormous but not monstrous. As the portrait plays with these paradoxes of scale, it underscores the queen's ability to perform size effectively as part of a convincing display of power. This Elizabeth asserts regal power through size, and the clear lines of the portrait keep her from the charge that her female body has become unregulated and out of control. The body beneath the enormous clothing remains flirtatiously little, and her face and loose hair suggest youth, but Elizabeth's commanding presence in the dress reminds viewers that this tiny body represents a body politic that wields power on a grand scale. The body beneath the dress acknowledges Elizabeth's femaleness, but the dress shows the extensive power this particular woman can wield.

Painted near the end of her reign when Elizabeth was in old age, the portrait also reflects on the young woman who came to the throne in 1558 yet who ruled with the sagacity of the queen as she was in 1600.

This chapter argues that scale in visual and rhetorical representations of Elizabeth reinforces the queen's power at a court in which she was surrounded by politically powerful men. Though we cannot know what Elizabeth intended when she commissioned works like the Coronation Portrait, we can see in a range of evidence, from her own letters, prayers, and speeches to others' depictions of her in writing and the visual arts, the suggestion that she managed her own size in relation to that of her courtiers. Building on familiar arguments that Elizabeth used her body, at once royal and female, for display in ways that reinforced her power and that Elizabeth exhibited mastery over herself and her courtiers, I examine size as one particularly significant method of such mastery and trace the shifts in Elizabeth's discourse of size as she aged.<sup>126</sup> Whereas the evidence I examine suggests that early in her reign Elizabeth tended to perform the size of her own body, later in her reign she began to manipulate the perceived sizes of her courtiers in order to miniaturize them in relation to her. Elizabeth's rhetoric of size queers both her own body and its desires and the circulations of power and desire at her court, leaving perceptions of the size, age, and gender of her body in constant flux and provoking queer desires among courtiers who sought proximity to this highly changeable body. In various written and visual texts, Elizabeth's rhetoric of size consolidates the queen's power by

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<sup>126</sup> For arguments about how Elizabeth used display to reinforce her power, see Tennenhouse (28) and Montrose, "Midsummer" (80).

developing an explicitly paradoxical queer rhetoric of rule that continuously destabilizes gender and age in the service of bolstering monarchical authority.<sup>127</sup>

Insofar as size can work as an indicator of age, as we have seen it work in interactions between mothers and sons, one consequence of the miniaturizing techniques Elizabeth uses on the bodies of her courtiers is that she also infantilizes them. This infantilization enables the queen to assert control over powerful courtiers and to contain these courtiers' social influence. The term *infantilization* as I use it here describes the process through which small size comes to figure childhood or youth; Elizabeth performs size in a way that infantilizes the male courtiers around her, sending them back to a period of powerless youth, childhood, or even infancy that resembles the powerlessness and dependency of sons in the previous chapter. Such a diminutive position, as I have shown in chapters 1 and 2, can be experienced as pleasurable by male figures, and Elizabeth's courtiers seem to have accepted their infantilization with a mixture of pleasure and frustration. Submission to a position as Elizabeth's diminutive is often figured in terms of erotic desire and eroticized political rewards at the same time as it limits courtiers' political and personal aspirations and excludes them from forms of masculinity predicated on self-control.<sup>128</sup> This analysis considers a seeming paradox in which Elizabeth could perform size with her body in such a way that this performance reconstructed the size—and, consequently, relative age—of a courtier's body against his will. Of course, male courtiers did not pose the only challenges to Elizabeth's rule and were not her only potential foes—the queen had rivals abroad, especially in Spain, and

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<sup>127</sup> Throughout this chapter, I use the past tense to discuss events that happened or that I contend happened during Elizabeth's reign, and the present tense to discuss various texts, portraits, and documents by and about Elizabeth.

<sup>128</sup> See Thomas King (68).

Mary Stuart represented one of her longest-standing threats. Elizabeth also had court ladies to manage at home. This chapter, however, focuses in particular on the men at Elizabeth's court in order to examine how size, age, and gender interacted in the localized space of Elizabeth's court, a space over which the queen had significant control.

My analysis of Elizabeth expands on the work of Deanne Williams, Jeanne McCarthy, and Patricia Fumerton, all of whom have investigated aspects of Elizabeth's rhetoric of size. Williams focuses on portraits of the queen and Shakespearean representations of her, arguing that Elizabeth's "queenly power performs itself by moving theatrically between the magnificent and the slight" (72). McCarthy is also interested in theatricality, particularly in the boy company plays performed at court that she calls part of "an Elizabethan aesthetics of the miniature" that also includes sonnets and miniature portraiture ("Queen's" 102). Fumerton examines miniature portraiture and sonnets at Elizabeth's court as part of a class of cultural currency she calls the trivial, or the "fragmentary, the peripheral, and the ornamental" (1). This chapter places the work of these scholars in a larger context of a rhetoric of size that spans Elizabeth's reign and takes on a number of forms both visual and rhetorical. The relationships among size, status, and power become manipulable when theatricality and performance are involved, whether in the obvious form of a court entertainment or a more subtle form of gesture or dress. In other words, for Elizabeth size is not simply a language for describing power: when performed, it helps to constitute that power. Building on the work of Mary Beth Rose, who critiques the virgin-mother dichotomy that has been at the center of so much recent scholarship on Elizabeth and argues that Elizabeth exploited both male and female gender positions as she developed her queenly persona ("Gender" 37), I argue that



Elizabeth exploits both large and small and that she resists an exact equation between small and feminine and large and masculine as she builds her rhetoric of rule.

Though Elizabeth reigned for nearly half a century, most literary studies of the queen tend to generalize about her reign and do not take into account the ways in which her visual and rhetorical self-presentation shifted over the course of her many years on the throne.<sup>129</sup> This chapter asks what we might learn about Elizabeth by considering her reign as a temporally protracted process during which her strategies for establishing and maintaining authority shifted and took on new meanings. A range of expressions of size at Elizabeth's court—large state portraits; speeches, letters, and nicknames that invoke size; miniature portraits of courtiers; and performances by children's acting companies—illustrate the shifts that occurred throughout this process. As the first section of this chapter argues, Elizabeth performed a paradoxically moderated largeness that helped to represent her female body as strong and powerful yet also delicate and vulnerable; these performances shifted in meaning and in execution as Elizabeth aged from a new queen in her mid-twenties to an established monarch well beyond childbearing years. This paradox of scale worked as a useful political strategy for Elizabeth because it enabled her to represent herself as large and powerful enough to rule effectively but moderates this largeness in an attempt to avoid the charges of monstrosity often levied at powerful women and that are reflected in the ridicule to which some of the mothers analyzed in the previous chapter are subject. Much like Britomart, one of several figures of Elizabeth in

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<sup>129</sup> Some notable exceptions that do acknowledge Elizabeth's changing rhetoric come from Rose, John King, and Leah Marcus. King argues that "Elizabethan iconography was closely tied to the life history of the monarch and to political events of her reign" (32). Marcus traces shifts in the gendering of Elizabeth's rhetoric throughout her reign and argues that, though at the beginning of her reign Elizabeth occasionally refers to herself as a "princess" or a "sovereign lady," as her reign progresses she more frequently styles herself as a "prince" ("Shakespeare's" 140). Rose argues that, as Elizabeth aged, she employed less maternal rhetoric ("Gender" 32). Accompanying this shift in the gendering and maternal references in Elizabeth's language is, I would argue, a shift in the way her language draws on and reflects age and size.

Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* who is cautioned to moderate her chastity—"be bold, be bold, but not too bold" (3.11.54)—Elizabeth must moderate her performances of age and size: be old, be old, but not too old.<sup>130</sup> The second section of the chapter argues that in the latter part of her reign, as both she and her courtiers aged more considerably, Elizabeth began to employ the rhetoric of size not only in relation to her own body, but also as a way to shrink the size of her courtiers' bodies in relation to her. This miniaturization often became infantilization, reducing the men at her court to a stage of powerless infancy. The final portion of the chapter takes up John Lyly's *Endymion* (1588) to examine the ways a male author who relied on Elizabeth for patronage and advancement appropriated the invocations and performances of size analyzed in the first two sections. *Endymion*, a play written specifically for performance at Elizabeth's court, praises Elizabeth by playing out the symbolism of scale she endorses: the play presents her as big but not too big and old but not too old. At the same time, however, the play registers male anxieties about and discomfort with miniaturization and infantilization and the female monarch who employs such strategies. This chapter reconsiders the ways Elizabeth overcame the challenges her gender posed to her rule by performing and constructing age and size, and the ways in which men who hoped for patronage from her took up, appropriated, and modified her rhetoric of size as they pursued political advancement and coped with their own anxieties regarding the queen's authority.

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<sup>130</sup> The cryptic warning in the House of Busirane is meant to deter the female knight from attempting to save Amoret, but it also arguably serves as instruction for the knight of chastity regarding how she should manage this virtue: she must boldly relinquish her virginity to her husband at the right moment after she has guarded it carefully throughout her quest, transforming from a chaste virgin to a chaste wife.

## Size and the female monarch's body

I want to begin my exploration of how Elizabeth manipulated the size of her own body for political ends with representations of her body that we might say are at least partly her own—speeches, poetry, and prayers as well as royal fashion and state portraits she commissioned.<sup>131</sup> Across these media, we can see an Elizabeth who makes use of tropes of both largeness and smallness to perform her political experience and royal genealogy as she assures her court and her realm that this ruler with a female body is, indeed, equipped to rule the nation. I am especially interested in Elizabeth's prayer volumes, which have attracted considerably less critical attention than her speeches, for the ways they invoke size by establishing hierarchies of power, dominance, and submission as Elizabeth aligns herself with God and with preceding Tudor kings. Elizabeth's speeches and portraiture, in turn, reflect and refract the rhetoric of size in her prayers, and we gain greater insights into these written and visual texts when we understand the interplay among constructions of size, dominance, and submission in the prayers. The prayers evince complex interactions between large and small and, correspondingly, youth and wisdom, that speak to Elizabeth's careful regulation of her displays of size and age. The prayers construct her as large and strong enough to wield

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<sup>131</sup> Of course, attributing authorship is often fraught with Elizabeth, especially when it comes to her speeches and portraits, which were usually mediated by male transcribers or painters. Leah Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose discuss the problematics of Elizabeth's agency in cultural productions we see as hers in their introduction to *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*. See especially pp. xii-xiii. Elsewhere, Rose argues that we can leave the question of intentionality in Elizabeth's speeches aside and instead focus on their participation in "an ongoing cultural dialogue" ("Gender" 29). Susan Frye also discusses the problems with interpreting representations of Queen Elizabeth and the history and processes of Elizabeth's self-presentation (*Elizabeth I*). Nanette Salomon, in contrast, argues that the control Elizabeth exercised over her visual images suggests the queen's intentionality in what her court and the public saw of her image. Salomon observes that there was no dominant painter of state portraits during Elizabeth's reign and argues that this absence reflects "Elizabeth's desire to be the single and only agent at work in the fashioning of her image" (65).

power and old enough to do so wisely, yet they show her moderating her expressions of this power in ways that deflect accusations of the monstrosity of female rule.

The specter of monstrous female rule, which figured powerful women as grotesquely enormous and as a threat to those over whom they held power, hovered over Elizabeth's reign. John Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), for instance, employs monstrosity in its title and claims that any rule by a woman is "repugnant to nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reveled will and approved ordinance, and finallie it is the subversion of good order, of all equitie and justice (21). John Stubbs's pamphlet against Elizabeth's marriage to the French Duke of Alençon, *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf whereinto England is Like to be Swallowed by an other French marriage* (1579), imagines England swallowed into a "gaping gulf" equivalent to the female monarch's vagina or uterus.<sup>132</sup> Stubbs evokes the "gaping" size of the female body, and this enormous body's appetite for consumption, as particular threats to English social order. At the same time, however, the excessive size of the female monarch's body does not overturn gender roles; according to Stubbs, Elizabeth threatens England with her marital choice because, as a woman, she must submit herself to her husband, and her political body would thus be compelled to submit itself to her French husband's political body, making England subject to France. Ilona Bell argues that Stubbs's failing is that he "is incapable of seeing Elizabeth's female body except in terms of conventional gender roles" that dictate women's submission to men (111). It is this view of the submissive female body that Elizabeth combats throughout her reign by using visual markers to construct her femaleness in terms of a powerful royal

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<sup>132</sup> As Ilona Bell argues, Stubbs's "alarmist rhetoric plays upon the gender unconscious—inciting fears that the queen's female body is threatening the social order" (100).

relational largeness. And, although Elizabeth ordered Stubbs's right hand cut off, she herself took up his argument when it was convenient. After she finally rejected Alençon, she wrote to him, "if ever our marriage were made, I would not take away from it any good for England" (Elizabeth I 256).<sup>133</sup> The older and wiser Elizabeth turned arguments like Stubbs's to her advantage when it behooved her to do so.

Important for the construction and functioning of this rhetoric of size are medieval and early modern political discourses concerning the king's (or queen's) two bodies: the body natural, or the human body of the ruler, and the body politic, or the political body the monarch represented and which, according to Marie Axton, "was supposed to be contained within the natural body of the queen" (12).<sup>134</sup> Elizabeth employs this rhetoric in her first speech to Parliament in 1558, declaring, "I am but one body naturally considered, though by His [God's] permission a body politic to govern" (Elizabeth I 52). Her verb, "I *am*" a body (rather than "I *have*" a body) figures her identity as tied to this corporal contradiction. At once a union and a division that creates a political fiction, "the body politic inhered in the body of the prince," in Louis Montrose's words ("Elizabethan Subject" 307). As a female monarch, Elizabeth complicated this discourse because the nation's identity was bound to the body of a woman. As Montrose and others have noted, women often appeared in medical and legal discourses of the time as imperfect versions of men, and gender hierarchy functioned as a way of explaining and naturalizing other kinds of hierarchies (308). The seeming natural inferiority of the female body and the importance of gender to social organization suggest why Elizabeth's femaleness could

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<sup>133</sup> For more information about Stubbs's punishment, see Bell (112-113). Elizabeth also punished Philip Sidney, albeit far less drastically, for his religiously-motivated opposition to the French marriage.

<sup>134</sup> See also Ernst Kantorowicz; both he and Axton discuss the legal language of the concept of the king's two bodies and its origins several centuries before Elizabeth ascended the throne.

have presented particular problems for her rule and why she needed to devise strategies to combat it. Elizabeth dealt with this potential problem in a variety of ways over the course of her rule; in some instances, she paradoxically underscored this contrast between her natural and political bodies. For example, she famously asserted in her 1588 speech before the troops at Tilbury that she had “the body but of a weak and feeble woman” but “the heart and stomach of a king” (Elizabeth I 326). Leonard Tennenhouse argues that, in moments such as this, “Elizabeth treated sex as her particular signature upon the body politic which in no way changed the essential nature of its power” (29). Though Elizabeth surely did not intend to challenge her own political authority, Tennenhouse’s statement ignores the possibility that some of Elizabeth’s subjects might not have been able to acknowledge Elizabeth’s female body natural without compromising their view of the body politic. We might ask, how effective were Elizabeth’s strategies of managing her gender in the eyes of her subjects, and might some strategies have been more effective than others, or more effective among certain groups of subjects than others? Though this chapter will not attempt to answer these questions definitively, they remain central to my analysis.

Surrounded by so much rhetoric that linked the female body with weakness in rule, Elizabeth, evidence suggests, tried to reach her subjects both rhetorically and visually by manipulating the size of her body in ways that equated it with power and kingliness rather than weakness. Visual representations like the Ditchley portrait (c. 1592; figure 2) show a strategic management of the relationship between Elizabeth’s personal and political bodies. In this painting, the queen stands on a map of her realm, her enormous skirts covering England and the sleeves and cape of her dress consuming space

in the upper section of the portrait. Williams employs the language of size to describe Elizabeth in this painting as “standing on top of and dominating an England that is overwhelmed, even diminished by her personality” (72). The giant sleeves, however, end in tiny hands, and the voluminous skirts cascade out of an impossibly narrow waist. Her personal female body, signaled through the hands, may have tiny attributes, but her political body, represented by the enormous skirts that cover her realm, is both the visual and topical focus of the painting. The Ermine portrait (c. 1585; figure 3) depicts a ballooning Elizabeth whose sleeves, ruffs, and headwear dwarf the tiny ermine that wears a diminutive crown around its neck and perches on her sleeve near her left hand. Beside this hand sits a sword, only the hilt visible within the boundaries of the portrait. The animal gazes at Elizabeth’s face while she looks out of the portrait, at the viewer. According to Heather Campbell, the ermine was a symbol for chastity; the *Oxford English Dictionary*, also noting it as an emblem of purity, goes on to state that its coat was often worn by judges and the high aristocracy, making it a status symbol as well (92; “ermine”). Here, the ermine suggests virginal youthfulness and reflects Elizabeth’s diminutive femaleness, traits which are, through the tiny crown and the animal’s association with robes of state, figured as royal (92).<sup>135</sup> In contrast, Elizabeth’s expansive garments and accessories show the vastness of her political body; the sword at her fingertips is a masculine symbol of rule to which, even as a female monarch, this portrait

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<sup>135</sup> A late fifteenth-century portrait by Leonardo da Vinci, sometimes titled “Lady with an Ermine,” depicts Cecilia Gallerani, mistress to the Milanese duke Ludovico Sforza, holding an ermine. According to Joseph Manca, the ermine was present in both medieval bestiaries and in Leonardo’s own writing as an emblem of purity, moderation, and tenacity, virtues that could apply equally to male and female rulers (129-31). The ermine was particularly emblematic of chastity because it was said to prefer to be caught by a hunter than to stain its pure white coat with mud (129).

suggests she has ready access.<sup>136</sup> The interplay between large and small in this portrait goes beyond gender, however, by constructing a kind of supernatural body that is delicate and ephemeral yet has the strength to wield a mighty sword. The large and regal Elizabeth of this portrait can lay claim to qualities designated both masculine and feminine, selecting, as Sara Mendelson notes, the virtues of both sexes and the vices of neither (197). Elizabeth thereby fashions her political body as strong not because it is one gender or the other, but because it is beyond human gender: it is of supernatural stature.

The elaborate dresses Elizabeth wears in these portraits not only reflect an expansive political body, but also strikingly illustrate the ways size could be performed through accessories and prosthetics and demonstrate the relation between enormous clothing and an eroticized female body.<sup>137</sup> As Elena Levy-Navarro argues, women's fashions fulfilled a contradictory role in the period, increasing the size of the body while simultaneously underscoring that body's smallness and rigid boundaries. She asserts that, while ladies' undergarments and the shape of their clothing became larger throughout the sixteenth century, these fashions "increasingly made a show of how the individual body was controlled and contained" (51-52). She argues that new undergarments like the corset and the Spanish farthingale, or hoop skirt, gave the body structure and clearly defined boundaries even as they made that body large and imposing. The outlines of the body became artificial, underscoring the self-control it would take to wear such a rigid costume that forced the body into an unnatural shape (52). This trend, as Levy-Navarro describes it, illustrates a way that largeness can avoid excess, registering instead as moderation

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<sup>136</sup> Campbell further argues that this portrait equates Elizabeth with the Laura of Petrarch's *Triumphs* at a moment when Laura is figured as the sun, a symbol of male monarchy.

<sup>137</sup> Will Fisher similarly argues that gender could be performed and constituted through prosthetics such as false beards and codpieces ("Had" and "Staging"). Size, too, is prosthetic and can be moderated through performance.



between the extremes of small and weak on the one hand and excessively enormous on the other. Levy-Navarro also asserts that these fashions began to develop during Henry VIII's reign but reached their height during Elizabeth's, a detail suggesting that Elizabeth might have cultivated their popularity (52). We see this fashion and the self-restraint it implies exaggerated in the Ditchley portrait, in which Elizabeth's body is at the same time enormous and clearly delineated, her expression holding firm as she bears the weight of what must have been many pounds of fabric, boning, jewels, and other accessories.

Elizabeth's costumes, both in her portraits and in her speeches and prayers, to which I will turn shortly, eroticize her body at the same time they regulate it. Indeed, the control and regulation I have been discussing heighten the eroticism of this body because they simultaneously display and eclipse it. Valerie Traub argues that Elizabeth's body operates as an eroticized aspect of her clothing in her portraits: "Elizabeth's body is both present and absent, centralized and displaced, seductive and protected...she enacts modesty and revelation...she is both erotic subject *and* object" (*Renaissance* 131). The dainty ermine, clothed flirtatiously in only a crown, invites viewers to imagine the fully covered and tightly-laced Elizabeth in a similarly provocative form of royal undress; the ballooning sleeves, collars, and hips of her dresses draw the eye but frustratingly deny any hint of the shape of the body beneath. The scale of the clothing and accessories in portraits of the queen entices yet frustrates the gaze, giving Elizabeth erotic control and subjecthood by ostensibly placing her in the position of an erotic object. The portraits are also calculated to inspire forms of desire in her subjects we might describe as queer: the desire for a large figure rather than a gendered figure; the desire to be dominated as

Elizabeth dominates England by standing on it; the desire, perhaps, to feel the sword in the Ermine portrait wielded by a delicate hand.

The language of royal fashion appears in several of Elizabeth's speeches, translating the visuals of her state portraits to political rhetoric. In 1566, chastising Parliament for their suggestion that she marry, she declared, "I thank God I am indeed endued with such qualities that if I were turned out of the realm in my petticoat, I were able to live in any place of Christendom" (Elizabeth I 97). Elizabeth here figures herself as enticingly vulnerable in her undergarments, seemingly presenting a view of the body her portraits obscure beneath layers of fabric. The speech constructs the queen without the enormous outer robes of state, clad only in a piece of clothing that was worn close to her body and that, though it helped fashion the largeness of her outer layers, was not itself voluminous. A decade later, at the close of Parliament in 1576, Elizabeth states that she cannot put herself before her nation, cannot "put off my upper garment when it wearies me" (170). Elizabeth again conjures the tantalizing image of the monarch undressed, only to state the impossibility of displaying the monarch's human body. Though these speeches were delivered ten years apart, placing these references together suggests a complex relationship between the royal body and its stately garments. In the earlier speech, Elizabeth insists that the power of her queenship extends beyond her voluminous robes of state to her female body natural; just before her petticoat reference, she acknowledges the contradiction between her gendered body and her royal body: "though I be a woman, yet I have as good a courage answerable to my place as ever my father had" (97). She acknowledges a vulnerable female body, a body perceivable as small and that with her next rhetorical move will be covered suggestively only in a petticoat, but in

the same moment she invokes her enormous courage and her high “place” and calls up the memory of Henry VIII, painted most famously in largeness (figure 4). The petticoat speech invokes Elizabeth’s father while at the same time refiguring the relations among clothing, size, and body to indicate that, because Elizabeth loves her subjects so much and is descended from Henry VIII, her enormous robes of state are bound to her person; even if they are heavy and tiring, she cannot strip down to her petticoat.

Elizabeth indirectly invoked her powerful royal father several times early in her reign, especially in the Latin prayer book she published in 1563.<sup>138</sup> It was widely available to those in England who read Latin, and though infrequently studied, Elizabeth’s prayers comprise a significant aspect of her self-presentation. Jennifer Clement is among the few to give extended attention to Elizabeth’s prayers, arguing that the prayers were the aspect of Elizabeth’s self-presentation that would have been best known by English men and women throughout her realm (165). Adding to Clement’s work, I contend that the invocations of Henry VIII in these prayers work as complex rhetorical performances that make Elizabeth seem small compared to her father yet enlarge her through her association with him. David Starkey suggests that Elizabeth looked remarkably like Henry, a coincidence that, if Starkey is correct, arguably made these invocations even more effective (4). Elizabeth’s performances of smallness seem disarming, calculated to reassure the powerful men of her realm that she knows her place, so to speak, as a woman, but she frames these performances of smallness so that they paradoxically become performances of largeness.<sup>139</sup> For example, in the fifth prayer in

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<sup>138</sup> For publication information about this volume, see p. 135 of Marcus, Mueller, and Rose’s edition of Elizabeth’s collected works.

<sup>139</sup> The claim that Elizabeth knows her place builds on Rose’s argument that Elizabeth’s “rhetorical technique involves appeasing widespread fears about female rule by adhering to conventions that assume

the series, Elizabeth asks, “What am I, Lord God, or what is the house of my fathers, that Thou shouldst do this great mercy unto us? Thou makest peace in my days; Thy arm in strength has fought for me and my people against all our enemies” (137). This reference to God reminds Elizabeth’s subjects that she is a strong ruler who keeps a peaceful, safe realm and to place herself in a line of powerful fathers, including Tudor kings Henry VII and Henry VIII. In the seventh prayer, she thanks God by invoking her youth, her father, and her royal status: “Behold me, Thy handmaid, whom Thou hast heaped with immense and infinite benefits from my beginning years onwards; who, descended from a king, raised to the dignity of a kingdom, Thou hast placed in the highest rank of honor among mortals” (139). She first lowers herself to the position of a handmaid, then stresses her own kingliness and “highest rank.” In a similar rhetorical move in the eighth prayer, Elizabeth writes,

Thou hast willed me to be not some wretched girl from the meanest rank of the common people, who would pass her life miserably in poverty and squalor but to a kingdom Thou hast destined me, born of royal parents and nurtured and educated at court. When I was surrounded and thrown about by various snares of enemies, Thou hast preserved me with thy constant protection from prison and the most extreme danger; and though I was freed only at the very last moment, Thou hast entrusted me on earth with royal sovereignty and majesty. (141)

First, Elizabeth evokes the image of a “wretched girl,” a young and diminutive figure vulnerable because of her youth, her gender, and her low status. Then she evokes her royal parents, a move that conjures up her powerful father as well as her mother, once

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the inferiority of the female gender only in order to supersede them” (“Gender” 35). Elizabeth’s performances of smallness disarm and make her performances of largeness all the more compelling.

called a traitor and a whore but extolled as a martyr in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1559). Elizabeth then styles herself as "thrown about" in her early years, a physical image that casts her as small and easily physically dominated. She closes with a reminder of her own "royal sovereignty and majesty," finishing her set of contrasts with a grand image of herself enthroned. Here and elsewhere, the prayer book suggests that one of Elizabeth's early strategies to garner authority seems to have been to remind those who read Latin, including the most powerful and educated men and women of her realm, that though she seems a small and vulnerable female ruler, large and powerful patriarchs like God and her own royal father stand behind her.

The volume's construction of Elizabeth as a daughter with a duty to her father is particularly strategic for the young Elizabeth. Calling attention to her father's control over her, she performs a miniaturizing submission, yet one that paradoxically gains her power and status. She opens the sixth prayer thus: "Almighty, eternal God, Lord of lords, King of kings, to whom is all power, who has constituted me prince of Thy people and by Thy mercy alone hast made me sit on the throne of my father, I Thy handmaid am slight of age, and inferior in understanding of thy law" (138). Here, the queen stresses her youth and her smallness in thanking God, and we might imagine her as a tiny woman seated on an enormous throne built to hold Henry VIII. At the same time, Henry and God become dual kingly and fatherly figures for Elizabeth in her prayers, as in the same volume she begins one prayer addressing "Lord God of mercy, my and my people's King," in another thanks God because he "adopted me, and made me Thy daughter, sister of Jesus Christ Thy firstborn and of all those who believe in Thee," and in a third begs, "behold me truly, then, in the place of a daughter whom Thou hast adopted in Christ" (137, 157, 159). Her

posturing as a sister to Jesus stresses her subordinate position as a daughter yet also elevates her to a member of the Holy Family. Near the end of the sixth prayer, she addresses God as “God of peace and concord, who hast chosen me Thy handmaid to be over Thy people that I may preserve them in Thy peace,” and begs God to “be present and rule me with the Spirit of Thy wisdom, that according to Thy will I may defend a Christian peace with all peoples. In Christ Thy Son (who is our peace) make us all be of one accord, so that Thy enemies may be ruled by Thy hand, and confound them with Thy outstretched arm” (139). Elizabeth asks God to rule her, as a father or husband might rule his daughter or wife, but when she asks him to rule “His” enemies, she casts herself as a defender of both her nation and a larger Christian nation. Indeed, *Christian* and *English* conflate in this prayer to figure Elizabeth’s power as beyond the scope of Protestant England. The prayer book disseminates an image of Elizabeth as small and obedient, yet as wielding the authority of large and powerful kings or even channeling the authority of God.

In addition to using miniaturizing rhetoric to enlarge the scope of Elizabeth’s power, the prayer book eroticizes the monarch by invoking her vulnerability to sin and encouraging voyeuristic reading practices that delight in the queen’s transgressions. Elizabeth’s descriptions of the sacrifices she makes for England and her continual pleas for God’s protection align her with the erotics of hagiography. Summarizing the work of Richard Rambuss and others, Melissa Sanchez argues that “tales of sacrifice and suffering...carry an erotic charge” (18). This volume of highly personal prayers constructs the queen as a suffering sinner who continually sacrifices her weak female body for the good of her nation and gives readers a glimpse into the struggles and

vulnerabilities of the most powerful person in England. Elizabeth's royal status enhances the erotics of her suffering, creating distance between her and her subjects even as her sinful nature seems to place her on equal spiritual terms with them. Titled *Precationes privatae. Regiae E. R.*, or *Private Prayers of Queen Elizabeth at Court*, the volume emphasizes a performed privacy that places readers in the position of voyeurs witnessing the queen's eroticized suffering.<sup>140</sup> The prayer book seduces at the same time that it reassures, as Elizabeth's erotically charged vulnerability encourages both desire and submission in her subjects.

With this prayer book in mind, we can return to the heavy and rigid costumes Elizabeth wears in state portraits to read them on yet another level, as not only a demonstration of the strength of both her sovereign and natural bodies, but also as a powerful show of submission to a masculine God that might alleviate some of her subjects' fears of female rule: the queen submits to God and to her role as monarch through her submission to the material discipline imposed by the God-given robes of state. She thus becomes a small woman who nonetheless finds the strength and bodily bulk to support the weight of her royal attire as well as her royal duties. Elizabeth's speeches and writings make frequent use of this trope of submission as a form of power by figuring her status as queen as a submission to God's will. I will return shortly to speeches that make use of this trope, but for now I would like to continue the focus on Elizabeth's prayers. In one of the 1563 Latin prayers, Elizabeth declares, "For Thou art my God and my King; I am Thy handmaid and the work of Thy hands. To Thee therefore

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<sup>140</sup> The Latin title is given in Marcus, Meuller, and Rose (135). Discussing the erotics of reading printed texts, Gordon Carver argues that "reading texts in public print, and not in the private medium of manuscript, was analogous to being a witness to a private sexual act" and that "the reading of printed books at large during this critical period was constructed as an act of voyeurism" (108, 109). By titling her prayers with privacy, Elizabeth encourages her readers to feel like voyeurs.

I bend the knees of my heart; against myself I confess my impiety” (136). Elizabeth casts herself here, yet again, as a lowly handmaid of the kingly God, making a show of submission in kneeling to him. It is significant, however, that these are the knees *of her heart*, not her actual knees: this is a rhetorical gesture of submission, not a physical one that would lower the stature of her physical body. She also presents herself as the work of God’s hands, submitting to God but also stating that he has made her carefully into the monarch she is. Clement rightly argues that in moments such as these, “Elizabeth simultaneously points out her drawbacks as a female monarch and enlists those drawbacks as signs of her status as God’s chosen ruler, paradoxically emphasizing a stereotypical, essentialized weakness of the female body and mind to stress God’s special favor in choosing and strengthening her” (165). I would add that Elizabeth’s rhetorical posturing of submission to God also legitimates her rule based on the political theory of the divine right of kings, since God has chosen her to rule, and that this legitimation occurs through a miniaturizing rhetoric in which she reduces herself in importance beside the grand God.<sup>141</sup> Her rhetorical submission has a visual equivalent in her submission to the robes of state, which dwarf her small and vulnerable female body and present a physical struggle for which God has strengthened and prepared her.

A second prayer book (c. 1579-1582, postdating the 1563 volume by about two decades), comprised of prayers in several European languages, remained unpublished and seems to have been for Elizabeth’s personal use, yet it evinces an evolution in the queen’s rhetoric of size. In a Latin prayer, Elizabeth calls on God as “most mighty King and most

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<sup>141</sup> Rose argues that Elizabeth employed the language of the divine right of kings in order to define herself “by inscribing herself in prestigious male discourses” (“Gender” 35). Elizabeth makes this male discourse entirely her own, however, in the way she figures submission as a key aspect of her divinely ordained right to her throne.



merciful Father” (317). As in the earlier published prayer book, these common names for God take on a gendered significance by suggesting that this female monarch is ruled by a masculine authority at once sovereign, husband-like (a queen might also call her husband “my king”), and fatherly; the prayer goes on, however, to make a new kind of rhetorical show of submission: “I come as a supplicant to the throne of Thy grace, I bend my knees before the foot-stool of Thy feet; I lift my hand, I direct my eyes, I pour out words, I beat my breast, I prostrate myself body and soul; from my soul asking most humbly that Thy spirit may teach me and instruct me in all Thy ways” (317). The physicality of this description revises the “I bend the knees of my heart” rhetoric of the 1563 prayer book and shows the older Elizabeth styling not only a figurative, but a physical submission, lowering her body before God. In the Italian prayer from the same volume, Elizabeth calls God “O my highest Emperor” and begs, “I entreat Thee to keep me under the shadow of the wings of Thy divine power, as Thou hast done with a powerful hand since my girlhood” (316). Here, we see a tiny Elizabeth, associated with her own girlhood, under God’s comparatively immense shadow.<sup>142</sup> This later prayer book constructs an Elizabeth much more willing to reduce herself in size before God, perhaps because, unlike the earlier volume, it is a manuscript for personal devotion penned by an experienced monarch less anxious about asserting power over her subjects.

This manuscript prayer book not only expresses a rhetoric of size in its language, but also in its physical characteristics: Leah Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose’s edition of Elizabeth’s collected works describes it as a “tiny volume, measuring 2

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<sup>142</sup> Jennifer Higginbotham provides an extended analysis of the word and category *girl*, arguing that by the sixteenth century, *girl* “was a term that enabled early modern texts to acknowledge the roles of female characters in liminal social and sexual positions” (26). Elizabeth’s particular use of “girlhood” potentially underscores the vulnerability and uncertainty of her early years when her status as heir to the English throne was unclear.

inches wide by 3 inches long” with “38 vellum leaves.” It begins and ends with a miniature portrait, one of a youthful Elizabeth (by 1579 she was in her mid-forties) and the other of François, Duc d’Alençon, the younger man who was Elizabeth’s last serious suitor. The prayers are in Elizabeth’s handwriting, and the book seems to have been “a girdle prayer-book,” or small portable book that could fit into a belt, with “the opening word or words of each prayer...in outsize lettering” (311-12).<sup>143</sup> I note this description at length because of how this prayer book, the contents of which include a complex mix of royal authority and submission to God, itself embodies the relationality of size and a physical contest between large and small. The book itself is tiny, but the first word of each prayer is comparatively large. The miniature portraits reduce both the queen and her suitor to pocket size, but the figures look imposing next to the tiny script, and the placement of the portraits suggests that Elizabeth and Alençon’s romance, in a sense, frames the grand prayers within. In 1581, however, around the date Marcus, Mueller, and Rose have given for this book, Elizabeth finally rejected Alençon, and he died in 1584 (252). If Elizabeth continued to use this prayer book beyond these dates, it furthers her performance of courtship and wifeliness beyond the end of their relationship by suggesting that she truly was considering marriage. This book and the prayers written in it together perform a complex dialogue between size and power that operates on sovereign and supernatural levels.

Similar issues regarding the relationship between size and power arise in Elizabeth’s prayers and speeches when she uses the word *handmaid*, which we have already seen several times in the prayers quoted here. Though the words *virgin* and *mother* have dominated scholarship on Elizabeth, the word *handmaid* actually appears

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<sup>143</sup> The book itself is lost and now exists only in facsimile.

many more times in Elizabeth's prayers and other writing than either of these other words—at least twenty-three times, and seven times in one 1563 prayer alone.<sup>144</sup> In fact, this word dominates Elizabeth's prayers from the beginning to the end of her reign, particularly in prayers composed in English and in Latin.<sup>145</sup> The prominence of this word is especially telling in the context of Rose's observation that Elizabeth actually rarely employed motherly imagery, and then only early in her reign, and of Helen Hackett's critique of those scholars who fixate on connections between Elizabeth and the Virgin Mary (Rose 32-33; Hackett 7, 55). I would argue that Elizabeth employed *handmaid* more frequently because it is a more strategic word that suggests submission and diminutive female sexuality. Tellingly, the word does evoke the Virgin Mary in the way that it echoes Mary's response to the Annunciation in which she declares that she is the handmaiden of the Lord (Luke 1:38).<sup>146</sup> In light of the prayerful contexts in which Elizabeth so frequently uses this word, it seems reasonable to infer that she evokes the maternal qualities of Mary as well as the duality of the submission of Mary's answer and the authority gained through this submission. By submitting herself to God, Mary becomes the most powerful woman in Christianity; when Elizabeth submits herself to God, she becomes the most powerful woman in England, and perhaps in all of Christendom.

Elizabeth's 1576 speech at the close of Parliament is the only recorded public speech in which she uses the word *handmaid* (it appears other times in prayers), and here

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<sup>144</sup> For scholarship focused on *virgin* and *mother*, see, for example, Louis Montrose, Allison Heisch, and Susan Frye. Rose also critiques these and other scholars for their dedication to this dichotomy ("Gender" 31-32).

<sup>145</sup> Among her French and Spanish prayers, she more often employs a word that translates as *maidservant*, a similar though slightly different term of rhetorical submission.

<sup>146</sup> The verse in the Bishop's Bible of 1568 reads, "And Marie saide: Beholde the handmayden of the Lorde, be it vnto me accordyng to thy worde. And the Angel departed from her."

she employs it to avoid marriage by marking herself as subject to God rather than to a husband: she calls God “the Prince of rule” and declares, “[I] count myself no better than His handmaid” (169).<sup>147</sup> In this speech, Elizabeth forges a connection between the handmaid and the similarly diminutive milkmaid as she expresses a fantasy of a simpler life that figures her as an ever-young virgin: “if I were a milkmaid with a pail on mine arm, whereby my private person might be little set by, I would not forsake that single state to match with the greatest monarch” (170). These images underscore Elizabeth’s feminine humility (in the same speech, she states that, as a woman, she is too humble not to attribute her successes to God) and suggest a girlish desire for a simple life, while allowing Elizabeth to be imagined again in roles without her large robes of state (168). Elizabeth’s references to milkmaids align with Wendy Wall’s argument that milk in early modern England symbolized simplicity and the pastoral life and that only women practiced dairying, making it a foreign object of fascination for men (*Staging* 129-30). The milkmaid, Wall contends, is sexualized as an active woman and seen as innocently beautiful, standing as the “epitome of ideal womanhood” (138). Elizabeth plays on these cultural associations to figure herself as simple, desirable, and resolutely feminine. She returns to the milkmaid image ten years later in 1586 in response to Parliament’s urging her to execute Mary Stuart: Elizabeth could have forgiven Mary “if it had pleased God to have made us both milkmaids with pails on our arms, so that the matter should have rested between us two” (188). By 1576, and certainly by 1586, Elizabeth’s body natural

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<sup>147</sup> Here, as elsewhere when Elizabeth is asked to respond to questions of her marriage, the succession, or the fate of Mary Stuart, Elizabeth performs a linguistic switch in which she turns away from the question at hand. Daniel Ellis argues that one of Elizabeth’s major rhetorical strategies throughout her reign—and, indeed, throughout her life—was indeterminacy of language. He observes in the eleven-year-old Elizabeth’s 1544 translation of Marguerite de Navarre’s *The Glass of the Sinful Soul* the same language of indeterminacy that he sees in her much later speeches that defer an answer to questions of marriage and succession (31-32).

had aged well beyond a point where she might have been mistaken for a youthful or maternal milkmaid, but her ability to cast herself rhetorically as such signals Elizabeth's ability to manipulate her own age. Both milkmaid references include the pail on the arm, suggesting on the one hand that this identity is communicated through costuming and accouterments, and on the other that even her rustic, girlish alter-ego has, perhaps, a bulky physical strength that enables her to bring nourishment to her realm in the form of milk. Furthermore, the "if" in both references underscores the reality that Elizabeth does possess the robes of state, even as she disingenuously fantasizes about being rid of them just as she does when she invokes her petticoat.

By representing her political body in these portraits and speeches through clothing, Elizabeth underscores the performability of this body and showcases her ability to perform sovereignty well. Elizabeth treads a fine line here between effective performance and fictionalized play: marking the size of the body politic as manipulable might undermine her divinely-ordained monarchical authority. Evoking the sexually charged figures of the handmaid and the milkmaid also gives her a girlish desirability and sexuality that seem to invite a potentially dangerous fixation on a vulnerable and sexualized female body. However, Elizabeth reinforces her suitability as a ruler by managing her body as part of this performance to show that, with her gendered body and gendered attire, she can still occupy the enormous political body of a prince. Indeed, throughout her reign, Elizabeth mixes humble and princely language in order to elide her gendered body in expressions of authority even as she acknowledges it. For example, the young Elizabeth begins her response to a 1563 Parliamentary petition that she marry by

stating that, though she is a bashful woman, her princely authority will crush the Commons's presumptuous request:

The weight and greatness of this matter might cause in me, being a woman wanting in both wit and memory, some fear to speak and bashfulness besides, a thing appropriate to my sex. But yet the princely seat and kingly throne wherein God (though unworthy) hath constituted me, maketh these two causes to seem little in mine eyes, though grievous perhaps to your ears, and boldeneth me to say somewhat in this matter, which I mean only to touch but not presently to answer.

(70)

She begins by setting up a contrast between the largeness and heaviness of the issue of her marriage and her own feminine smallness, only to turn to a refusal to answer the petition that, so to speak, cuts Parliament down to size. Elizabeth, of course, lacks neither wit nor memory, and she chastises Parliament for its insult while stating that the gendered reasons she should not speak are “little” compared to her kingly authority to do so.

Marcus rightly argues that in such moments, acknowledging feminine weakness is a disarming tactic for Elizabeth (“Shakespeare's” 139). I would add that Elizabeth uses highly visual rhetoric that invokes size in ways that both figure her as delicate and assert her power as grand and expansive.

This rhetoric suggests that Elizabeth could enact effective leadership by making herself look like a king as she managed both her physical body and the body of the state, countering some in her realm who might question Elizabeth's right to rule England, favoring instead Mary Stuart or opposing any female rule. Importantly, as the reigning monarch, Elizabeth was entitled to perform kingship; she did not risk the charge that she

overturned social order by using size to reinforce these performances of power. As monarch, she could not only manipulate her own size but also use the law to dictate the role of clothing and accessories in others' performances of size: Nanette Salomon points out that Elizabeth enacted nine sumptuary laws during her reign, a statistic suggesting that regulation of how clothing could be used to perform various degrees of power was important to Elizabeth (79). While these laws generally concern appropriate fabrics for various noble ranks, two notable proclamations dated 1562 and 1580 single out the size of various articles of clothing or weapons. The 1562 proclamation calls for "the reformation of the use of the monstrous and outrageous greatness of hose, crept alate into the realm to the great slander thereof" and seeks to limit the amount of cloth used to make hose so that they fit snugly to the body (Hughes and Larkin vol. II, 189).<sup>148</sup> This same proclamation also bans double ruffs and limits the length of swords to one and a half yards, daggers to twelve inches, and bucklers to two inches (190-91). The 1580 proclamation restates the ban on "great and excessive ruffs" and reiterates the same length limits for weapons (462). With these proclamations, Elizabeth attempted to regulate certain accessories that enable shows of largeness, particularly among her male courtiers: courtiers of both sexes wore ruffs, but these proclamations are concerned with men's hose and not with the width of women's skirts. This regulation, as we will see shortly, was also carried out on the bodies beneath the clothing of her male courtiers.

The portraits, prayers, and speeches I have so far examined make plain

Elizabeth's expert shows of both largeness and smallness, markers of size that depict the

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<sup>148</sup> "No tailor, hosier, or other person... shall put any more cloth in any one pair of hose for the outside than one yard and a half, or at the most one yard and three-quarters of a yard of kersey or of any other cloth, leather, or any other kind of stuff above that quantity; and in the same hose to be put only one kind of lining besides linen cloth next to the leg if any shall be so disposed; the said lining not to lie loose nor to be bolstered, but to lie just unto their legs as in ancient time was accustomed" (189).

queen's ability to control her royal largeness to keep it from exceeding the boundaries of propriety. The sharp angles of her dresses in the portraits mark where the large body ends, the prayers continually style the queen as a handmaid, and the speeches evoke the girlish milkmaid or the delicate woman in a petticoat beneath the robes of state. These texts suggest that it was especially important for Elizabeth, with her female body natural, to perform large size but also to prove that her body's largeness was carefully moderated. In so doing, she utilized size to reinforce her power, but she also visually confronted fears that a woman is unfit to rule because her body is unregulated.<sup>149</sup> Unlike other female figures examined in this project, Elizabeth carefully controlled her performances of size in order for them to work most effectively because she occupied a political position always at risk of being threatened by her gender.<sup>150</sup> Visual representations of the queen show that her body was simultaneously dilated and confined, big enough to rule her nation but not so big as to become a threat to that nation.

### **Size and the male body at Elizabeth's court**

Elizabeth did not stop at management of her own body but was deeply invested in managing the bodies of her courtiers, an investment that becomes clear when we shift focus from Elizabeth's self-representations to representations of her courtiers. These representations suggest that Elizabeth manipulated the visual aesthetics of size at her court not only to shift the size of her own body, but to shift the sizes of the bodies of courtiers that surrounded her—and thus shaped relationally the public perception of her

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<sup>149</sup> For an extensive study of women's bodies as unregulated "leaky vessels," see Gail Kern Paster.

<sup>150</sup> According to Montrose, Elizabeth, "as the anomalous ruler of a society that was pervasively patriarchal in its organization and distribution of authority[.]...embodied a challenge to the homology between hierarchies of rule and gender" ("Elizabethan Subject" 309).



body. Williams argues that smallness, when evoked by Elizabeth and applied to her own body, represents both beauty and power, and we have seen this figuration of smallness play out when Elizabeth paired large and small in the same representation of herself (71). I add to Williams's point by arguing that the workings of size in Elizabeth's visual and rhetorical constructions suggest that she consolidated her power not only by managing the size of her own body and its relationship to her queenship and her nation, but by deftly managing the perceived sizes of others' bodies as well. Though the diminutive can signal power when applied to Elizabeth, it is refigured to signal dependency and childishness when she applies it to her courtiers and works to strip male figures of power. This section also takes up an argument voiced by Sara Mendelson and others that Elizabeth, through the use of cosmetics and youthful fashions, continued to perform youth and beauty to the end of her reign (196). Jacqueline Vanhoutte has recently challenged this critical commonplace by citing moments in which Elizabeth does allude to her own old age, arguing that Elizabeth employs old age as a rhetorical trope that underscores her own wisdom or performs vulnerability in ways that mimic the gendered vulnerability we saw in the first section of this chapter ("Age" 56-57). I agree with Vanhoutte but would argue that this is only part of the story: as she aged, Elizabeth also turned to a management of size that reconstructed the ages of the bodies of the men at her court. Here, size works as an indicator of age so that miniaturizing her courtiers also infantilizes them. Through this representational strategy, Elizabeth could keep her own body moderately sized and moderately aged by directly targeting others' performances of these categories.

We can see this strategy at work in miniature portraits, such as the ones of Elizabeth and Alençon discussed in the previous section. Miniature portraits enjoyed a particular vogue at Elizabeth's court under the expertise of painter Nicholas Hilliard, and there seems to have been a proliferation of these tiny, personal paintings that speaks to the popularity of the aesthetics of the miniature at Elizabeth's court.<sup>151</sup> Miniature portraits depict only the subject's shoulders and head inside a frame that is small enough to be carried around and worn for display or hidden inside clothing. At the same time, though, the subject of a miniature portrait might appear expansive, as the subject's head (and often a large neck ruff) nearly fills the entire space of the tiny canvas. As we see in miniature portraits of Mary Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh, neck ruffs help the relatively long and thin human form fill out the horizontal space of the round or oval miniature (figures 5 and 6). These portraits function as a form of miniaturized display that showcases the relativity of size: the subject of the portrait, so enormous within its frame, is nonetheless dwarfed by the real human body that might wear it.

Elizabeth put the contradictory smallness and expansiveness of miniature portraits to use by employing them as a unique display of her monarchical power. Patricia Fumerton argues that the function of the miniature portrait was directly opposed to that of the state portrait: the latter celebrates the subject's public identity with all the symbols of rank, while the former depicts its subject more personally, as an intimate (70). However, my analysis of size throughout this project suggests that the size difference between these two art forms indeed posits a public role for the intimate miniature. Lacking the trappings of rank (swords, scepters, coats of arms, maps) and confined to a tiny, portable frame, the subject of a miniature portrait is both politically and physically vulnerable to the whims

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<sup>151</sup> For more information on Hilliard and the miniature portrait vogue, see McCarthy ("Elizabeth" 440).

of the much larger wearer of the miniature. For example, Fumerton cites a letter from William Browne to the Earl of Shrewsbury dated 1602 that recounts an incident in which Elizabeth discovered Lady Darby, niece of Robert Cecil, wearing a miniature portrait of her powerful uncle. Elizabeth took the miniature from Lady Darby and tied it first to her own shoe, then to her elbow (75-76). Analyzing this incident, McCarthy argues that Elizabeth “signals her ability to use the miniature in a gesture of self-assertion: she turns the powerful but diminutive Cecil into her tiny subject always at elbow or wisely keeping step with his giant queen” (“Queen’s” 102-03). More importantly, Elizabeth used physical dominance over a tiny and easily-controlled object to figure Cecil, as well as his niece, as the foot of her body politic, hearkening back nearly forty years to her 1566 admonition to Parliament that “it is monstrous that the feet should direct the head” (Elizabeth I 98). In this speech, it is the male members of Parliament, and, forty years later, the male secretary of state, who constitute monstrosities on the body politic, not this body’s female head.<sup>152</sup> Elizabeth’s action also anticipates her reported scolding of Cecil as “little man, little man” in the last days of her life (Loomis, *Death* 89). It is particularly significant to this project that these are miniatures, objects of very small size, that Elizabeth manipulates strategically and symbolically to signal political dominance. Of course, miniature portraits of Elizabeth also circulated at her court, but the ways in which she presided over her own collection of miniatures—McCarthy notes that she kept many such portraits in a cabinet in one of her most private rooms— suggests that Elizabeth could easily call upon any courtier in a display of power (Fumerton 70; McCarthy, “Queen’s” 102). Through the wearing of or simply the potential to wear these miniatures,

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<sup>152</sup> Robert Cecil was, himself, small in stature, having been born with, among other disabilities, a deformed spine that caused him to stoop. See Catherine Loomis for an extended analysis of representations of Cecil’s body in contemporary writing and visual art (“Little”).

Elizabeth constructed for herself a large body both natural and politic that managed not only itself, but the bodies around it as well.

Miniaturizing her courtiers in this way not only signaled Elizabeth's political dominance, however; evidence suggests that it also worked to reconstruct perceptions and experiences of age at her court so that Elizabeth never aged beyond childbearing years, while her courtiers were sent back in time, so to speak, into an infancy dominated by a female authority figure. In this way, Elizabeth's strategic use of miniatures paralleled the rhetoric of motherhood she occasionally employed in her speeches early in her reign. For example, in a 1559 speech responding to Parliament's request that she marry, Elizabeth is recorded as saying that "every one of you, as many as are English, are my children and kinsfolks" (Elizabeth I 59). In 1563, answering another such petition, Elizabeth ended her speech with the assurance that "though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have any a more mother than I mean to be unto you all" (72).

Maternal imagery associated with Elizabeth has been frequently analyzed by scholars, many of whom see her invocation of the role of mother of her country as a major political tool used throughout her reign, though we might recall Rose's observation that Elizabeth's references to motherhood in her speeches are actually quite rare, appearing in only a few of her many speeches and never after this 1563 example ("Gender" 32-33). I would like to resituate this argument by suggesting that Elizabeth's invocations of motherhood were less a strategy in themselves than a part of Elizabeth's more comprehensive project to use relative size and age to establish dominance. As it does for the mothers discussed in chapter two, the occasional invocation of motherhood by

Elizabeth reinforced her miniaturizing gestures and rhetoric without limiting the queen only to a motherly rhetoric of rule.

We can read early references to motherhood as inaugurating the size- and age-based rhetoric of power that Elizabeth would deploy throughout her reign. Elizabeth was only twenty-five when she ascended the throne, and in her first years as queen, her age, as well as her gender, must have presented her with problems that she was able to negotiate by performing maturity and experience. Rose argues that early in her reign, Elizabeth claimed “the authority of lived experience,” particularly the experience of her politically vulnerable youth as the daughter of an executed queen who nonetheless survived her father’s declaration of her illegitimacy and the reigns of both of her siblings (“Gender” 40). Elizabeth’s early references to herself as the mother of her subjects contribute to the speeches’ construction of her as an experienced queen, suggesting that she has seen enough of life to preside over an enormous brood of subject-children. Significantly, these few early references respond to requests that she marry; she fends off this pressure by suggesting that she is a care-worn and busy mother of many rather than an innocent, blushing bride.

This reading of Elizabeth’s invocations of motherhood challenges a body of criticism that holds that Elizabeth needed to perform youth in order to maintain her authority as she aged. Nanette Salomon contends that for a queen to represent herself as older than her courtiers could have invited disaster: aging was “an advantage for the image of male rulers such as Henry VIII or Philip II” because it “communicated their greater experience, maturity, and hence power” (82). For women, in contrast, aging was associated with vice, and old women were often considered socially useless in early

modern ideology because they could no longer bear children (82-83). Vanhoutte, however, reminds us that as Elizabeth aged, so did her courtiers, and she argues that aging was perhaps even more fraught for men because early modern society viewed lusty old men with abhorrence (52-53). Some of the queen's poetry from the 1580s concedes her own advancing age: the opening line of "When I was fair and young" acknowledges that she is no longer either, and "Now leave and let me rest" describes the speaker's tiredness "in my elder years" (303, 306).<sup>153</sup> On the other hand, it is true, as Salomon points out, that Elizabeth at times had her real face in later portraits replaced with a stock youthful face (90).<sup>154</sup> For example, the Rainbow Portrait (c. 1600; figure 7) depicts Elizabeth with a glowingly youthful face and breasts. Her headwear and expansive garments inflate the size of her body, and she holds a rainbow, suggesting that she is celestial in size and can easily grasp this heavenly symbol of biblical promise. Rather than performing youth specifically, however, this portrait depicts a performance of size that intersects with a performance of age to construct an enormous, ageless, and possibly immortal queen whose power extends beyond the map of England and into the celestial realm; the portrait aligns her with the kinds of supernatural female figures analyzed in chapter one and makes a statement about her power rather than a statement about her age.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Marcus, Mueller, and Rose attribute these poems to Elizabeth, but they note that the authorship of these poems is questionable: the poems could show either the queen or an unnamed courtier or courtiers reflecting on her aging body.

<sup>154</sup> Some copies of the Ditchley Portrait at Burghley House and Wimpole Hall, in contrast, show Elizabeth with a decidedly aged face, more aged than in the original (luminarium.org). Perhaps Elizabeth allowed these two copies showing a more aged face, or perhaps the copying artist inserted a more aged face of the queen without her knowledge or consent.

<sup>155</sup> Tarnya Cooper also notes that in later paintings, Elizabeth seems less and less real, a trend Cooper attributes to a crisis in how to represent an unmarried, childless female monarch (177-78). She argues that the later paintings aim not for facial likeness but for "the majesty of the monarch," represented through dress and accessories (179). In other words, Cooper sees an emphasis on the political body, rather than the

Though Elizabeth acknowledged age when it benefited her, she also likely took up this construction of agelessness in part to elide the potential problem that she had passed childbearing age without providing an heir for the realm. She sustained the image of her body as young and fertile into her late forties through her marriage negotiations with Alençon (more than twenty years her junior), thereby constructing a fiction that her body had matured, but not so much that she could not bear an heir. Not only was Alençon physically younger than Elizabeth, however; Bell has noted that he “was a younger brother with limited assets and no power” who was mistrusted by both his mother and brother, and he was ugly and sometimes mockingly called “dwarfish” by his contemporaries; Elizabeth herself diminutively called him “frog” (105; 99).<sup>156</sup> Alençon’s social powerlessness and his apparently small physical stature combined with his youth to make him an appropriately diminutive match for a powerful queen. When she finally wanted to be rid of him as a suitor in 1581, however, she wrote to him specifically of her own old age: “Monsieur, my dearest, grant pardon to the poor old woman who honors you as much (I dare say) as any young wench whom you will find” (Elizabeth I 251). Elizabeth acknowledges her aging body here, suggesting that she is no longer an appropriate bride for him, but at the same time she claims the same virtues as a “young wench”—her virtue is not subject to age in the same way her body is.

Though Elizabeth expertly performed both wise age and agelessness, she could ultimately perform the age of her own body only within certain limits imposed by her physical body and by her role as queen. Countering these limits at moments that

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natural body, of Elizabeth in later paintings. I would agree and add that these paintings are effectively able to represent the political body through the way they manipulate size to construct a transcendent, ageless royal body.

<sup>156</sup> See Marcus, Mueller, and Rose: Elizabeth closes a c. 1579-80 letter to Alençon “with my commendations to my very dear Frog” (244).

particularly underscore the queen's wise experience, Elizabeth used miniaturization techniques to transform the perceived age of her courtiers, effectively sending them back in time rather than sending herself forward. In this way, Elizabeth pushed the boundaries of the performability of categories like age and size by using scale to manipulate the perceived ages of others. Elizabeth could not physically change the bodies of her courtiers, but by shaping their performances of size, she could manage their performances of age. This construction in the existing evidence occurs complexly, as Elizabeth figures her courtiers as small not only to equate them physically with children, but also to mark various symbolic reductions that mimic the reduced social stature of childhood. In other words, Elizabeth manipulated the highly visual physical cue of smallness so that it figured child-like powerlessness and dependency.

Recent theories of childhood make this connection more clear because scholarship on age has described it as a category produced by a process rather than by an absolute number.<sup>157</sup> Edel Lamb argues that in early modern England, childhood was constructed rather than absolute (41).<sup>158</sup> Focusing on constructions of childhood on the early modern stage in particular, she argues that "childhood is, in one sense, a status relative to...figures of authority in the contexts of [the] domestic, education and work" (4). Age, like size as I have been theorizing it, is relational. Indeed, I would add size to Lamb's list of categories that construct childhood. Lamb's analysis of *Epiceone*, in which the patriarch Morose is tricked into surrendering his position of power, concludes that "Morose's reversal from the position of independent and adult patriarch of the play to

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<sup>157</sup> See Cressy, Garber, and Lamb, and my discussion of age in the Introduction.

<sup>158</sup> Lamb's argument is a response to theories of childhood that have been dominant since the 1960's when Philippe Ariès argued that childhood as we know it did not exist as a life phase in the premodern world and only developed slowly into what it is today (23-29; 33).



dependent ward demonstrates the precarious nature of adulthood and the potential to re-become the child at any moment” (39). A similar conclusion may be applied to Elizabeth’s court: by using size to figure dependency, Elizabeth could force her courtiers to “re-become” children. If, as Lamb argues, “the category of the ‘boy’” was “an institutional identity rather than a physical one” in early modern England, then I would argue that Elizabeth’s place at the top of the national hierarchy gave her an optimal position from which to manage the institutional identities of her courtiers (41). She was more than equipped to construct a courtly version of childhood, signified by small size and social powerlessness, into which her courtiers could easily fit.

But why is re-becoming a child so threatening to the male courtier and so effective a method of royal control for Elizabeth? According to Alexandra Shepard, the life stage she calls manhood, which was in between and different from both youth and old age, was the enabling factor that allowed some men to claim authority and entitlement over others (21-23).<sup>159</sup> When Elizabeth infantilized her courtiers, she jeopardized their access to this life stage and so threatened their ability to wield public power. Thomas King describes the public role and duties of socially and economically privileged men as particularly crucial to these men’s ability to establish themselves as members of the category of *men*: effeminacy, the antithesis of manhood,

recalled those capacities for pleasure, common to all persons, that by rule only those men occupying certain social positions—because of their rigorous training, education, discipline, and above all publicness—overcame. Only these particularly placed men could become manly—a rule confirmed in the celebrated exceptions of manly women who had overcome the effeminacy to which their

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<sup>159</sup> See also King (4-5) and my discussion of these scholars in the introduction.

physiology inclined them or aristocratic women who had seized access to publicness, overriding their subordination and dependency. In these terms Queen Elizabeth claimed the manliness of her public body. (69)

His mention of Elizabeth here underscores the degree to which manly power could be performed, even by a woman. Elizabeth, however, not only seized public power for herself through this kind of performance, but also manipulated size to infantilize her courtiers in ways that restrict their access to the public realm. We see this strategy play out in the miniature portrait fad at her court that enclosed her courtiers in tiny frames without their markers of rank.

As a female monarch who, as we have seen, sometimes employed maternal imagery to figure herself and her rule, Elizabeth both equated her courtiers with child-like dependency and alluded to female power in the nursery to create an analogy for her rule that may have been seen as emasculating by her courtiers. Infant children of both genders lived in a nursery world primarily controlled by female nurses and mothers until about the age of seven, a cultural practice that could have been especially fraught for young boys because, as Janet Adelman argues and I discuss at more length in chapter two, boys create their masculine identities by separating themselves from the mother, yet the period of infancy during which boys were dressed in skirts and cared for by women was prolonged in early modern England (7).<sup>160</sup> In part for this reason, Dymphna Callaghan

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<sup>160</sup> Adelman tells us that infancy was dangerous because of the high risk of sickness and death, and certain of these illnesses could delay the eating of solid food and walking until age two or three (*Suffocating* 4-5). She argues that “what we know of the actual conditions that shape infantile fantasy suggests...that many would have experienced a prolonged period of infantile dependency, during which they were subject to pleasures and dangers especially associated with nursing and the maternal body” (5). Paster argues that because of high maternal mortality rates and wetnursing practices, “babies must have experienced a significantly high incidence of inconsistent, difficult, or ruptured nurture” (217). For more information on this stage of life and on the ceremony of breeching, in which boys were dressed in men’s attire and moved under the supervision of men, see Adelman (7), Susan Snyder (211-212), and Bruce R. Smith (76).

argues that “in a rigidly patriarchal society any form of female sovereignty could be represented as a form of overpowering maternal control” (*Shakespeare* 67); Elizabeth exploited this connection by representing herself as a particular kind of desirable mother. Even once children were removed from the nursery, they were still subject to the adult authorities in their lives: Fumerton discusses the practice of sending aristocratic children to live for a time with other families or at court, describing these children as “gift trinkets,” as “little, peripheral, detached, and...ornamental” (36). With this status, children easily “flowed to other families to fill what were in essence vacancies created by the prior transmission of children—the whole system comprising a sort of cascade of children, one after the other, in a series” (37). Mary Ellen Lamb describes the potential anxieties produced by the life stage of childhood, arguing that “in his dependence upon women who dominated him, a boy was not yet able to enact his masculinity” (“Apologizing” 500).<sup>161</sup> If enacting masculinity included a man’s ability to regulate his own body and political and economic interests, as King suggests, then infantilization stripped a man of his potential access to a social manhood status and the power it might have conferred, politically containing him by subjecting him to the control of the female monarch (68).<sup>162</sup> Elizabeth dramatized this peculiar mother-child relationship through actions like the one she reportedly performed with Cecil’s miniature. She attached Cecil’s

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<sup>161</sup> For an analysis that expands motherly power in the nursery into motherly power over adult sons, see Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, especially chapter 6. See also Mazzola, who argues that “reactions towards the Queen’s maternal figure ranged beyond mere gynophobia or misogyny, for in arrogating to herself so much of a mother’s cultural authority, Elizabeth also inspired much of the anxiety which that image induces, inflaming fears about infantilism and dependence, animating longing and frustration” (137).

<sup>162</sup> King asserts that, “according to classical physiology, which retained its hegemony into the early modern period, manliness was not innate in male bodies but was the effect of maturation from a state of bodily weakness and susceptibility to passions...Dependent males (slaves, servants, and laborers, for example) would perpetually lack the capacity to command the passions and exercise reason; consequently they remained ‘boys’” (68). By figuring her courtiers as diminutive dependents, Elizabeth suggests that she, rather than they, has control over their bodies. See also Shepard, who argues that only men installed as patriarchs had access to this type of masculine social power (34-37). Also see my analysis of Wendy Wall’s argument about dependents in chapter four.

miniature to her large female body, suggesting that Cecil needed her body (both royal and female) for his survival, but that she might do with him what she liked. And like children of the nobility, who could be traded among aristocratic households or between their own families and the court, Cecil's miniature could be moved forcibly from his niece's body to the queen's, signaling a social powerlessness akin to that experienced by mobile aristocratic children who were compelled to go where the larger adult forces in their lives directed.

As well as relegating her courtiers to a type of courtly nursery, Elizabeth figured her courtiers as child-like and dependent by controlling their marriages and restricting their access to marriage as an important defining moment that marks adulthood.<sup>163</sup> Bruce R. Smith describes "the importance of marriage as a passage from youth to adulthood," highlighting marriage as the time when a man "became his own master, the head of his own household, the prospective father of his own children" (86). As Sallie Bond reminds us, the ability to marry was not a given among the nobility who wanted to remain in good graces at Elizabeth's court—Raleigh and Leicester were particular favorites who fell out of favor when they married (191). By restricting marriage in this way, Elizabeth on the one hand styled herself as a mother whose job was to choose suitable mates for her children, but on the other hand, when she blocked marriage entirely, she kept her courtiers in a state of arrested development by not allowing them to advance to full adulthood through marriage.

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<sup>163</sup> Mazzola more fully takes up the analogy of Elizabeth's court to a nursery as she analyzes Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*. She takes a psychoanalytical approach toward infancy and motherhood to argue that Sidney seeks Elizabeth's love while striving not to remain her child, but that the infantile imagery throughout his sonnets undercuts this effort (132, 140). I agree that Elizabeth's strategies for containing her courtiers' power align with Freudian theories of infantile desire, and I would add that the dynamics of size at Elizabeth's court particularly encourage her courtiers to identify with infants as a group of humans that is typically needy and powerless.

This kind of infantilization relates not just to Elizabeth's management of her courtiers' masculinity, however, but to a particular circulation of erotics and power at Elizabeth's court. The role of size in the queen's rhetoric of rule fits in complexly with Melissa Sanchez's argument that discourses of eros shaped politics and the experiences of political subjects in early modern England (*Erotic* 3-5).<sup>164</sup> Elizabeth's largeness eroticizes her as a source of power, enabling her to straddle the line between tantalizing and terrifying as she inverts the binaries of sexual and political hierarchy. Though Cecil might find himself chastened by Elizabeth's actions with his miniature, he might also reap erotic satisfaction from the kind of discipline that infantilizes him and figuratively places him in close contact with the large and seemingly unattainable body of the female monarch. Mazzola investigates similar dynamics at Elizabeth's court, arguing that, in her relationships with her courtiers, Elizabeth cultivated congruence between reward and childish submission; as a result, "in Elizabeth's nursery, childish pleasure was political, and therefore inconstant, unreliable, and short-lived" (132). To extend Mazzola's figuration, the large and potentially motherly body of the monarch offered particular pleasures predicated on childish submission and could inspire infantile desire, but the courtier could never depend fully on the pleasures offered by this body and so was always left desiring. By attaching political advancement to childish pleasure, Elizabeth made her courtiers continually enact childish submission in their hopes of winning some form of political favor; the connections between pleasure, desire, and favor at court

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<sup>164</sup> Analyzing hierarchies and Spenser's allegories, Sanchez argues that "the prevalence of such identifications between man and woman, ruler and ruled, involved an allegorical mode of reading heterosexual relations that was both political and psychological, opening a series of equivalences that Spenser could exploit. In picturing abstract ideas as concrete and thus gendered beings, allegory almost inevitably draws us into conflicting identifications generated by eroticized notions of domination and submission" (*Erotic* 61).

worked to establish the large monarch as a fraught object of both political and erotic desire.<sup>165</sup>

Sanchez and others have noted the discourse of love and service that surrounded Elizabeth's court, but I would like to call attention to the references to size this discourse uses to figure love and submission in order to underscore the intimate connection between political submission and the body. A verse exchange between Sir Walter Raleigh and Elizabeth (c. 1587), a few years before Raleigh's disastrous marriage, shows how Elizabeth's courtiers could invoke the rhetoric of the diminutive to seek the queen's favor, and how Elizabeth could invoke the rhetoric of size to infantilize as she disciplined her courtiers. Notably, both Marcus, Mueller, and Rose's edition and David Norbrook and H. R. Woudhuysen's Penguin edition of Renaissance poetry pair Raleigh's "Fortune hath taken away my love" with Elizabeth's "Ah silly pugge wert thou so sore afraid." Raleigh's poem bemoans that he has fallen out of the queen's favor and sets up a conflict between Fortune on one side and himself and Cupid on the other: "fortune that rules on earth and earthly thinges / hath taken my love in spight of Cupids might / so blinde a dame did never Cupid right" (Norbrook and Woudhuysen 6-8). Here, the powerful female Fortune easily overpowers the boyish Cupid and the speaker, who is rendered diminutive through both his association with Cupid and his defeat. The poem ends, however, with the poet's reassertion of his own self-control: "but love farewell though fortune conquer the[e] / no fortune base shal ever alter me" (11-12). At the end of the poem, the poet suddenly becomes superior to Fortune, whom he disdainfully calls "base."

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<sup>165</sup> See also Theresa M. Krier, who reads the Song of Songs and Spenser's *Amoretti* psychoanalytically and argues that the lovers in the Song of Songs are like adult children who rediscover the erotic and creative pleasures of dependency in their newfound interdependency (298).

Though Elizabeth's response poem appears the same in both editions, Raleigh's poem appears in Marcus, Mueller, and Rose in a slightly different version that includes significant differences, shifting the poet's attitudes toward size and submission. I provide the last two stanzas of the two versions in full for comparison:

Norbrook and Woudhuysen:

I joy in this that fortune conquers kinges  
fortune that rules on earth and earthly thinges  
hath taken my love in spight of Cupids might  
So blinde a dame did never cupid right.

With wisdomes eyes had but blind Cupid seene  
then had my love my love for ever bene  
but love farewell though fortune conquer the[e]  
no fortune base shal ever alter me.

Marcus, Mueller, and Rose:

And only joy that Fortune conquers kings.  
Fortune, that rules on earth and earthly things,  
Hath taken my love in spite of virtue's might:  
So blind a goddess did never virtue right.

With wisdom's eyes had but blind Fortune seen,  
Then had my love, my love forever been.

But love, farewell—though Fortune conquer thee,  
No fortune base nor frail shall alter me.

In Marcus, Mueller, and Rose, the word *virtue* stands in for *Cupid* in the third and fourth lines, taking away the poet's boyish alliance with this figure and blaming the queen's virtue for lacking strength. Fortune is elevated from *dame* to *goddess* in the fourth line, and *Fortune* replaces *Cupid* in the fifth line, dramatically altering the cause of lost wisdom. The sneer in the final line is compounded by the addition of *frail*: "no fortune base nor frail shall alter me." The version in Marcus, Mueller, and Rose's edition lacks the image of the diminutive god Cupid and packs more insult than the one in Norbrook and Woudhuysen's edition.<sup>166</sup>

Elizabeth's reply wittily extracts her from the charges Raleigh has levied against her and corrects him and his superior attitude by cutting him down to size, so to speak, with infantilizing endearments. The poem opens, "Ah silly pugge wert thou so sore afraid, / mourne not (my Wat) nor be thou so dismaid" (Norbrook and Woudhuysen 1-2). She puns on "dis-maid," making Raleigh into a little toy carried by maids or wives, and calls him by two diminutive names in these two lines: "silly pugge" and the possessive "my Wat." In the latter, she stresses her ownership of him and uses "Wat," a diminutive form of his name Walter but also, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a common

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<sup>166</sup> Norbrook and Woudhuysen's transcription comes from a manuscript in Archbishop Marsh's Library, Dublin, MS Z.3.5.21, f. 30v, described as "a manuscript of the 1620s in the Wiltshire Record Office," and they refer to another copy of the poem in a Phillipps manuscript (763, n. 19). Marcus, Mueller, and Rose's transcription comes from the British Library MS Additional 63742, fol. 116r, described as "Letters of Henry, fourth Early of Derby." They note that "other MS copies are listed in Peter Beal, *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (London: Mansell, 1980), pp. 388-89." All following citations are from Marcus, Mueller, and Rose.



name for a hare: a small, harmless animal.<sup>167</sup> Among the *OED*'s sixteenth-century definitions for "Pugge" are: a term of endearment for a person, a pet, or a child; a ship's boy; and any small animal such as a hare, a squirrel, or a ferret. Both "Wat" and "Pugge" miniaturize Raleigh, especially when used in tandem, and "silly" trivializes his words and his concerns. These epithets also mimic language a nurse or a mother might use with a child. A few lines later, Elizabeth again employs one of these nicknames as she refutes Raleigh's main charge: "No fortune base thou saiest shall alter thee, / and may so blinde a Witche so conquere me? / No no my pugge, thoughe fortune were not blinde, / assure thy self she could not rule my mynd" (5-8). Elizabeth here puts Raleigh in his place by suggesting that her "pugge" is too ignorant or naïve to understand how well she resists fortune. Instead of reacting with outright anger to his insulting suggestion that he is superior to Fortune but she is not, Elizabeth takes the patronizing tone of a gently chastising caregiver, relegating Raleigh to the role of the infant or the pet who has much to learn. Elizabeth also refigures Fortune as a witch, setting herself up as a victorious rival to this other powerful semi-divine female figure. Elizabeth diminishes Raleigh at the same moment that she stresses her supremacy as a female ruler: "fortune I knowe sometimes conquere kings / and rules and raignes on earth and earthly thinges / But never thinke fortune can beare the sway, / if vertue watche and will not her obay" (9-12). Though Elizabeth sometimes used the masculine "prince" to refer to herself, the gendered language here suggests that male rulers are susceptible to Fortune in a way Elizabeth is not because they lack the female virtues Elizabeth figures herself as possessing in

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<sup>167</sup> Venus digresses in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* to muse in detail over the experience of a hunted hare, whom she calls "poor Wat" (697). Venus spends several stanzas describing the hare's fear and the physicality of the hunt.

abundance.<sup>168</sup> Though male rulers are susceptible to the female Fortune, Elizabeth, as a woman, is not. Her response to Raleigh disciplines him by underscoring her own female virtue and power while reducing him in relative age and size through her infantilizing and miniaturizing rhetoric.<sup>169</sup>

Elizabeth often used diminutive nicknames such as those in her poem to Raleigh as a significant aspect of the erotics of the diminutive at her court. She had several nicknames for her powerful secretary Robert Cecil, including “pygmy,” “little man,” and “elf” (Loomis, “Little” 138, 149). Cecil was, indeed, small of stature, owing to a set of congenital physical disabilities, and her language serves to curtail his power by reminding him of his physical smallness and disability. Elizabeth used similar rhetoric on men with larger builds, however: in a 1588 letter to James VI of Scotland, Elizabeth tells him she writes to send him Robert Sidney, a “gentleman, a rare young man and wise” (358).<sup>170</sup> Sidney, in his mid-twenties, would have been a relatively young man at this time, but Elizabeth underscores his greenness by calling him young, even as she also calls him wise. When James writes back the next month, he thanks Elizabeth for “sending so rare a gentleman unto me” (359). James echoes her language for the most part, but he leaves out “young,” perhaps evincing a degree of discomfort with Elizabeth’s infantilizing rhetoric. Notably, Elizabeth’s nicknames most often invoke, in particular, animals of small size: she used the nickname “Robin” for Leicester, “monkey” for a French envoy, and, as mentioned earlier, “Froggy” for Alençon, a habit Callaghan

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<sup>168</sup> This argument is an extension of Constance Jordan’s assertion that, by claiming both genders, Elizabeth gave herself access “to a range of affect to which no male monarch could lay claim” (111).

<sup>169</sup> Scholars have often read the episode in book 4 of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* in which Timias falls out of favor with Belphoebe as reflecting Elizabeth’s anger with Raleigh after his marriage. See my analysis in chapter 1.

<sup>170</sup> The letter does not name Sidney, but Marcus, Mueller, and Rose identify him.

describes as a form of petting: “Elizabeth’s penchant for petting allows her to maintain power over her courtiers both as minions and as lovers” (“(Un)natural” 67). Figuring her courtiers as pets underscores Elizabeth’s control over them and eroticizes their pet-like acts of submission.

The infantilizing rhetoric of petting extends even to Elizabeth’s invocations of large animals whom, she intimates, are like children. In a draft of a 1566 speech to Parliament in response to demands that she marry, Elizabeth compares the men in Parliament to colts, young horses that need breaking: “I muse how men of wit can so hardly use that gift they hold. I marvel not much that bridleless colts do not know their rider’s hand, whom bit of kingly rein did never snaffle yet” (93). Keith Thomas notes that children who needed discipline were often associated with colts in early modern England (*Man* 45), making Elizabeth’s angry comparison of Parliament to young and unruly colts particularly shaming through its infantilization of some of England’s most powerful men; she also puns on rein/reign to drive home the insult that these men cannot follow authority.<sup>171</sup> Much later in her reign, in 1590, Elizabeth returns to this comparison in a letter to Henry IV of France in which she advises him not to ride to battle with his troops, as he seems to intend. She argues that this sort of behavior is not suitable for a prince because it risks his person too much: Elizabeth declares that “what is called valor in another, in you is imputed to temerity and feebleness of such judgment as should be great in a great prince” and scolds, “you will show yourself in greater need of a bridle than a

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<sup>171</sup> Marcus, Mueller, and Rose argue that the version of the speech Elizabeth actually gave, however, leaves out this comparison and is, on the whole, more even-tempered than her angry draft, an edit that affirms the force of the insult of this particular comparison. The angrier fragment is in Elizabeth’s own hand, whereas other surviving versions of this speech were recorded by auditors. Marcus, Mueller, and Rose believe that the copy in Elizabeth’s hand reflects her angry thoughts either before or after she delivered the actual speech. For more reading on the differences between versions of Elizabeth’s speeches, see Rose (“Gender” 28).

spur” (363). She declares that what should be great in him has been reduced to diminutive feebleness by his poor decisions, and she figures him not as a victorious warrior on horseback but as an out-of-control colt who needs a bridle. Elizabeth goes on to infantilize—and threaten—Henry further by comparing him to her own hypothetical son: “for as to my son, if I had one, I would rather have seen him dead than a coward” (363). Henry may have been twenty years younger than Elizabeth, but in 1590 at the age of thirty-seven, he was far from the unruly child Elizabeth makes him out to be.<sup>172</sup>

Even later in her reign, Elizabeth made use of the language of size to discipline the king of Poland through his ambassador as a proxy. Marcus tells the story: “on 25 July 1597, after an ambassador from the king of Poland took an *offensively high and combative tone* in a Latin speech before her at court, she *cut him down to size* in a Latin response of her own” (“Speech” 189, emphasis added). Though the words and phrases that connote size here are Marcus’s, they reflect a performative aspect of Elizabeth’s rhetoric that plays with size and station. According to a letter from Robert Cecil to the Earl of Essex, the ambassador had accused Elizabeth of a series of injustices, culminating in the charge that she had “assum[ed] thereby to herself a superiority not tolerable over other princes” (Elizabeth I 335). This accusation is articulated particularly in terms of size and station, with the charge that Elizabeth has elevated herself even beyond what is acceptable for a prince. In response to this attempt to undercut her authority—at her own court and in front of a large group of courtiers—Elizabeth begins by calling the speaker a herald rather than an ambassador, a symbolic reduction of his social stature, and then

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<sup>172</sup> This letter is also interesting in that Elizabeth refers to her own bravery and exceptionalism as a woman ruler: “It may be that you will disdain this advice as coming from the fearful heart of a woman, but when you remember how many times I have not showed my breast too much afraid of pistols and swords that were prepared against me, this fault will pass, being a fault of which I do not acknowledge myself guilty” (363-64).

suggests that if he has spoken truly the message given him by the Polish king, the message's offensive tone must result from the king's youth and lack of diplomatic experience:

if you have been commanded to use suchlike speeches (whereof I greatly doubt) it is hereunto to be attributed: that seeing your king is a young man and newly chosen not so fully by right of blood as by right of election, that he doth not so perfectly know that course of managing affairs of this nature with other princes as his elders have observed with us, or perhaps others will observe which shall succeed him in his place hereafter. (333)

Here, Elizabeth uses miniaturizing strategies on the King of Poland similar to those she uses on her courtiers: she invokes his youth and his unmannerly behavior, suggests that he does not occupy his position by full right, and looks forward to his being succeeded by a less naïve (likely comparatively older or larger) monarch. Cecil's account of this answer prompted Essex to declare the response "a princely triumph" for Elizabeth in his return letter to Cecil, showing Elizabeth's courtiers also taking part in the shaming of the now-diminutive Polish ambassador (335).

Though Elizabeth's miniaturizing and infantilizing strategies may have seemed demeaning and frustrating to some of her courtiers, those who wished for favor from her sometimes played into this rhetoric by using it themselves. German poet Paul Melissus plainly states in a c. 1577 verse to the queen, "I place myself beneath your royal yoke. / Make me your bondsman, lady, and be mistress / To a freeborn slave who ever sings your praises" (301, ll. 8-10). The rhetoric of size and social submission fuse here as Melissus chivalrously offers his services to Elizabeth, figuring himself as in bondage and using a

relational word to place himself “beneath” her. Just as Marcus argues that Elizabeth’s subjects throughout her realm slowly took up her masculine rhetoric of rule as her reign progressed, so, I would add, they took up her rhetoric of size: size and submission figure centrally in a speech delivered by a boy to the queen on progress in 1578 when she visited Norwich (“Shakespeare” 140). The speech, delivered by a diminutive orator, precedes and excuses the entertainments to come:

*Great* things were meant to welcome thee (o Queene,)

If want of time had not *cut off* the same:

*Great* was our wish, but *small* is that was seene,

For us to shew, before so *great* a Dame.

*Great* hope we have it pleasd our Princes eye,

*Great* were the harmes that else our paynes should reape:

Our grace or foyle, doth in your judgement lie,

If you mislike, our griefs do *grow on heape*:

If for *small* things, we do *great* favour find,

*Great* is the joy, that Norwich feeles this day:

If well we waid the *greatnesse* of your mind,

*Few* words would serve, we had but *small* to say.

But knowing that your goodnesse takes things well

That well are meant, we boldly did procede:

And so good Queene, both welcome and farewell,

Thine owne we are, in heart, in word, and deede. (Nichols 183, italics added)

The words “great” and “greatness” appear seven times in the speech, and “small” appears three times; “cut off” and “grow on heape” also figure changing size. The size words here construct the monarch as great in stature, deserving of the large wishes and hopes of the community’s production. The community in turn is figured as small; while it has large dreams, it has only small realities. The boy performs the whole community’s submission to the monarch, who honors it with a stop on her progress, with both his rhetoric and the smallness of his body. This performance shows one instance of Elizabeth’s subjects willingly playing into her oral and visual rhetoric of size, using size to defer to and compliment her. While it is difficult to draw conclusions about the extent to which Elizabeth’s subjects employed her rhetoric of size away from the court, this passage shows that this rhetoric had spread beyond the court by 1578 and demonstrates that her subjects might have endorsed it by employing it themselves.

Indeed, even the royal James VI of Scotland performed a version of his own smallness as he strove to stay in Elizabeth’s good graces. Susan Frye notes that Elizabeth had been honored at James’s birth with the title of his godmother, and in a series of 1585 letters, James capitalizes on this relation by addressing Elizabeth as “Madam and mother” and signing his letters “Your most loving and devoted brother and son” (Frye, *Elizabeth* 87; Elizabeth I 263, 65-66).<sup>173</sup> In the latest of these, he places extra emphasis on this complex rhetorical familial relationship in the body of the letter, asking Elizabeth “to continue still my loving mother, as I shall be your devoted son” (266). James uses this rhetoric again in a 1588 letter wherein he promises “to behave myself not as a stranger and foreign prince, but as your natural son and compatriot of your country in all respects”

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<sup>173</sup> There is also a hint of incest in this phrasing that resonates with *Hamlet*’s concerns about an incestuous mother blocking her son’s progress to the throne.

(357). There are several layers to these rhetorical moves: first, Elizabeth had had James's mother, Mary Stuart, in her custody since 1568, and in 1585 Elizabeth had recently increased security around the deposed queen. James shows himself to be politically savvy in expressing his loyalty to Elizabeth by refiguring himself as *her* son, ignoring his biological mother. At the same time, his use of the word *mother* might uncomfortably remind Elizabeth of the other queen and James's biological mother awaiting Elizabeth's action. Additionally, James likely had his eye on the role as Elizabeth's successor by 1585 and may have been using filial and nationalist rhetoric to sway Elizabeth in his favor. Mary was finally executed in 1587, and in his 1588 letter, James increases the familiar tone of his rhetoric by calling himself Elizabeth's *natural* son. With his other mother figure now deceased, and as Elizabeth continued to age, James performed more diligently his role as Elizabeth's obedient son and countryman in his letters. Interestingly, Elizabeth signs her letters to him during the same time "Your most affectionate sister and cousin" or some version thereof—she never calls herself his mother or him her son (262, 264, 267, 269, 356, 358). Perhaps Elizabeth is uneasy with James's rhetoric because she, too, reads into them associations with Mary Stuart and with the fate of the English throne after her death. James's letters thus show not only how Elizabeth's infantilizing rhetoric could be appropriated to seek favor, but also how it could be adopted to unsettle the queen in complex political situations.

For the most part, however, miniaturizing and infantilizing the men around her seems to have worked effectively for Elizabeth in tandem with her own performances of the size and age of her body. Elizabeth employed a two-fold strategy that figures her as a perpetually wise yet ageless mother and her courtiers and kingdom as, in contrast, small



children in need of both nurturance and discipline. Elizabeth asserted power over her male courtiers by miniaturizing them in ways that made them feel the dependency of infancy or childhood; for example, Robert Cecil, and the rest of Elizabeth's court, would have seen his image carried around by the comparatively enormous queen, her placement of his miniature on her elbow particularly mimicking the way a nurse or mother carries an infant. Elizabeth's management of size constructed her courtiers as small and dependent, and the rhetoric of motherhood that appears, as we have seen, in some of her early speeches—and that reappears beyond the last use of the mother trope in the form of the rhetoric of relational size—drove home the point that they were as politically powerless as children in a nursery. The particular strategy of using performances of size to infantilize might have suggested to Elizabeth's male courtiers that though they were once men, they have regressed to infancy, compounding the frustration of their required submission to a female monarch. At the same time, the aesthetics of miniature size at Elizabeth's court idealized this return to a state of infancy and even framed it as erotically appealing.

### **Natural order and performance of size in *Endymion***

I have focused thus far on Elizabeth's use of the rhetoric of size, though we have seen Raleigh and others also employ this rhetoric to negotiate their places at court. I turn now to Lyly's *Endymion* (1588), written specifically for performance at Elizabeth's court by Paul's Boys, to investigate a form of courtly entertainment that flatters Elizabeth by invoking her rhetoric of size while expressing a courtier's ambivalent feelings regarding the monarch's fluctuating size. The play serves both as a dramatization of the erotics of

size that reinforces Elizabeth's status as a powerful monarch, and as the reaction of a male playwright, possibly channeling the reactions of Elizabeth's courtiers, to his own diminutive status. As a dramatic text written for performance by a troupe of boy actors, this play literalizes the performances of diminutive stature Elizabeth expected to see from her courtiers.

In *Endymion*, the title character pines in unrequited love for Cynthia, the moon goddess and ruler who does not know of his affections. He also attracts the love of the jealous Tellus, who employs a witch to punish Endymion for not returning her love. The witch, Dipsas, puts Endymion into a forty-year sleep that lasts until a kiss from Cynthia awakens him. In this play, Lyly flatters the queen yet also expresses anxiety regarding the female monarch's power as he dramatizes Cynthia's control over size, age, and status at her court. Like miniature portraits, the exclusive use of boy actors in this production shows Elizabeth's courtiers diminutive versions of themselves and underscores her power over those watching the play.<sup>174</sup> McCarthy rightly situates such boy company court entertainments as a political strategy: "by promoting a theatrical space inhabited only by boy actors, [Elizabeth] reinforced her efforts to figure her subjects not only as diminutive, but as child-like and dependent.... The rhetoric and aesthetic of the children's plays thus allows her to employ... the strategic use of scale to regulate status" ("Elizabeth" 446-7). Derek Alwes argues that the visuals of boy actors might have affected the playwright's thoughts about his own status, as he may have seen his own social and professional vulnerability reflected in the boys who might abruptly find themselves without employment when their voices changed (224). Bond, in contrast, asserts that the use of

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<sup>174</sup> Michael Shapiro notes that Elizabeth saw more entertainments by boy companies than any of the preceding Tudors, suggesting that the London vogue in boy acting companies during the latter part of her reign came in part from the queen's taste ("Patronage").

boy actors, with their appearance and “the soothing rhythm of their lines,” would have produced “an atmosphere of ease and romance” that actually would have made the play seem less relevant to the lives of those present (192). However, the complex interactions between size and age that dominate the play suggest that the use of boy actors likely made the play startling because it was allegorically tailored to offer courtiers in the audience an image of themselves in relation to the queen.<sup>175</sup> By figuring Elizabeth as Cynthia, the moon, the play casts her supernatural authority as deriving from her fluctuating size.<sup>176</sup> At the same time, by staging the passage of forty years, which must have involved the boy actors putting on grey wigs, beards, and other trappings of age, the play calls attention to the performability of age, and the youthful bodies of the actors make even more comic the childish mistakes made by the human characters. When Cynthia finally enters the action, she must sort out the mess made by the childish subjects she has left unattended, and this task underscores the dependency not only of those on stage with her, but those watching the play as well.

Cynthia, who is at the same time a female ruler with supernatural powers and the moon itself, presides over the play, lending political meaning to the other characters’ performances of age and size. She has both a female body—the one that appears onstage for the first time in Act 3—and a celestial body—which, according to the smitten

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<sup>175</sup> Vanhoutte argues that it is, in fact, the theme of old age that causes the play to resonate with Elizabeth’s courtiers: “Lyly’s depiction of the courtly Endymion as a lover who fails to recognize the advent of old age struck a topical note. Lyly’s meta-theatrical references to his boy actors construe aging male sexuality as a categorical transgression: the playwright highlights one contradiction—the old man playing the lover—by means of its inverse, the boy cross-dressed as old man” (52). I would add that the real threat in the play is not the transgression of the old man playing the lover, but rather the female ruler compelling the adult man to play the boy.

<sup>176</sup> From the earth, the moon appears to change size, sometimes appearing large and at other times appearing small or disappearing altogether. Endymion frequently refers to Cynthia’s shifting size, though he does not note that she ever disappears. However, the play’s problems in part stem from Cynthia’s absence until the third act: Cynthia is not present at the beginning of the play to manage her courtiers, and the play seems to blame her on some level for disappearing and leaving them unattended, for failing to oversee them in the way a motherly and caring monarch should.

Endymion, is at its most beautiful when it is enormous and old (1.1.50-73).<sup>177</sup> We can see echoes of this dual female and heavenly body in the Rainbow Portrait, briefly discussed earlier (figure 7). Elizabeth's clothing, ruffles, and headwear expand in every direction around her strikingly young and radiantly beautiful face, and, like the celestial Cynthia who is larger than the heavenly world, she holds a rainbow in her hand. Many critics, such as Alwes, Vanhoutte, and Robin Headlam Wells, see *Endymion* as a play primarily dedicated to praising Queen Elizabeth.<sup>178</sup> In the analysis that follows, I suggest that the play works, on the surface, as praise of Elizabeth in the way that it dramatizes and condones her management of shifting size and age as a political strategy. However, slippages in the language, a witty language for which Lyly is celebrated, reveal an uncertainty and an anxiety regarding the power of this bigger and older female monarch.<sup>179</sup>

Female characters dominate this play titled after a male character who spends most of the play asleep, and the central conflict actually exists between the goddess-ruler Cynthia and the witch Dipsas.<sup>180</sup> The female characters differ not only in the source of

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<sup>177</sup> Since Cynthia does not appear on stage until act 3, it might be surprising to an audience that she appears at all. Endymion's early descriptions of her seem to defy representation, and though the actor playing Cynthia likely wore a spectacular costume, there may still have been a sense of disappointment in seeing the celestial goddess embodied.

<sup>178</sup> Alwes, who reads the play as reflecting Lyly's particular relationship with Elizabeth, argues that Lyly tries especially hard to flatter the queen with his depiction of her court (213-14). Vanhoutte contends that Lyly praises Elizabeth with the particular way the play acknowledges the queen's advancing age as an attractive feature (54). Bond, however, complicates these readings by arguing that the play dramatizes the considerable power the queen had to punish her courtiers for seemingly minor infractions (191). Sara Deats also challenges readings that see the play as a form of praise, asserting that the comic subplot deflates the praise in the main plot (288). These critical approaches are not necessarily in tension, however, as my reading of the play will suggest.

<sup>179</sup> For a discussion of the complexity and wit of Lyly's language, see Scragg, who discusses the word play and linguistic doubleness of Lyly's writing, especially his prose.

<sup>180</sup> Considering the play's action, the title indeed seems puzzling. The subtitle, "The Man in the Moon," also seems to have nothing to do with the play, though we might read it as a bawdy pun that expresses Endymion's sexual desires. Alternatively, the subtitle might suggest a form of reverse coverture, so to speak, in which the male Endymion becomes incorporated into the identity of his beloved moon goddess.

their power, but, more importantly, in their relationships to size and age, categories which confer and legitimate power in the world of the play. Cynthia represents the correct way to be large and older, while Dipsas represents the opposite, becoming monstrous in her size and advanced age. It is easy to read Dipsas as Cynthia's foil or counterpart, but Natalia Khomenko challenges the stark division between the two by arguing that Cynthia's role as a healer is closely linked to the practices of witchcraft (47). Christine Neufeld argues that the reference to the chimera in the play's prologue further equates them, aligning Elizabeth with both witchcraft and stagecraft; the play as a whole "communicates a profound anxiety about the monstrous shadow cast by the Virgin Queen" (352). Neufeld's statement about monstrosity and the large size the word connotes enable me to re-think the relation between these two characters. Dipsas's enormous and unregulated body, rather than serving only as a foil for Cynthia's, signals a critique of Cynthia's fluctuations in size and age that arises from male anxieties about the pleasures and pains of miniaturization at Elizabeth's court.

Early in the play, Endymion's hyperbolic praise of Cynthia suggests that the female monarch's virtues lie in her moderated (as opposed to extreme) performances of size and age:

Cynthia, being in her fulness, decayeth, as not delighting in her greatest beauty....What thing, my mistress excepted, being in the pride of her beauty and latter minute of her age, that waxeth young again? Tell me, Eumenides, what is he that having a mistress of ripe years and infinite virtues, great honors and unspeakable beauty, but would wish that she might grow tender again, getting youth by years, and never-decaying beauty by time. (1.1.51-61)

Size and age conflate in this description, as the larger Cynthia becomes, the older she is; the play represents a cycle of growing aging that renews every month as smallness and youth. Like the Elizabeth of the state paintings, Cynthia is both large and small, and not only is Cynthia at her most beautiful when she is fullest, both in size and in age, but she is considered virtuous because she decreases at this zenith so as to avoid vanity. These lines praise Elizabeth for her virtuous moderation, but they might also serve as a reminder to the queen to continue in moderation. Cynthia paradoxically and supernaturally ages both forward and backward, as signaled by her shifting size, making her an ideal mistress and ruler who has all the virtues and wisdom of an older woman but the beauty and tenderness of a youthful one. She is experienced enough to be fit for rule without succumbing to the physical ravages of old age.

Dipsas, in contrast, is not only a witch, but possesses an ugliness described specifically in terms of size. Instead of moderating the categories of age and size, she grotesquely overflows their boundaries. The humorous knight Sir Tophas, declaring his love for Dipsas in a comic blazon that repeats and parodies Endymion's earlier praise of Cynthia, gushes,

What a tall and stately nose! What little hollow eyes! What great and goodly lips!  
How harmless she is, being toothless! Her fingers fat and short, adorned with long  
nails like a bittern! In how sweet a proportion her cheeks hang down to her  
breasts like dugs, and her paps to her waist like bags! What a low stature she is,  
and yet what a great foot she carrieth! How thrifty must she be in whom there is  
no waste! (3.3.53-60)

Dipsas is big and small in all the wrong ways, her height short but her feet large, her fingers short and fat instead of long and slender. Her sagging cheeks and breasts spill out of their places to betray both enormous size and enormous age. Again, size correlates with age, but Dipsas's "great" features make her grotesque rather than beautiful and powerful. She functions here as Cynthia's foil by illustrating the wrong ways to be large, the wrong ways to pressure the boundaries of acceptable size and age.

Though this grotesque blazon ostensibly praises Cynthia by insisting that Dipsas is the opposite of the moon queen, it also invokes a strain of parodic poetry in which pornographic blazons transform the Petrarchan subject from courtly to grotesque in ways that specifically target Elizabeth (Betts 155-56). Hannah Betts discusses this satiric sub-genre of poetry as reflecting "the political metaphors of the Elizabethan court in a way that compromised the queen's own virginal iconography" (153). Notably, Betts observes that pornographic blazons that describe female genitalia typically employ geographic metaphors and take a cue from George Puttenham's representation in *The Arte of English Poesy* (1589) of Elizabeth's body as an immense park in which her subjects graze (162; 158). Though Puttenham's description is meant to flatter, the resistant male poet also employs Elizabeth's own rhetoric of size to degrade her, feminizing the colossal political body to turn it into a park for male erotic pleasure.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Other of Betts's primary sources include Thomas Lodge's *Scillaes Metamorphosis* (1589), Barnabe Barnes's *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* (1593), and William Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593). This kind of critique also looks ahead to the degrading remarks in *Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden*, first published in 1711, sixty-two years after Drummond's death and probably about ninety years after the manuscript was written. Drummond cites Jonson as saying that Elizabeth "had a membrana on her, which made her uncapable of man, though for her delight she tryed many" (30). Like the pornographic blazons that imagine the huge genitalia of the female monarch, this description imagines a massive hymen too thick to be penetrated in sex and instead needing "a French Chirurgion who took in hand to cut it" (30). These remarks, purportedly articulated about a decade and a half after Elizabeth's death, show how her rhetoric of size might have persisted beyond her reign as a tool for ridiculing the former queen.

Considering Dipsas's comic blazon in this light enables us to see a broader set of problems in the play; even as it seems to set up a contrast between Cynthia and Dipsas, the play's praise of Cynthia is at times troubled and disingenuous. Theodora Jankowski, in fact, suggests that another of Lyly's plays, *Sapho and Phao* (c. 1581-84), actually calls into question "both the political stature and political efficacy of the woman he intended to flatter," not because Lyly did not wish to praise Elizabeth, but because in sixteenth-century England, "no traditional language existed for presenting a woman in any sort of political context" (70). Similarly, *Endymion* adopts Elizabeth's own rhetoric of size and age to praise her, but moments in the play also betray a degree of discomfort with this rhetoric and Elizabeth's repeated infantilization of the men around her. For example, what begins as Endymion's praise of Cynthia for the political ends of her management of the age and the size of her body turns into a rape fantasy about the female monarch: "O Cynthia, if thou should'st always continue at thy fulness, both gods and men would conspire to ravish thee" (1.1.65-67). The gigantic Cynthia is universally beautiful and desired, but this beauty and desire can lead to her ravishment by male deities—and, more provocatively, male humans—threatening to undercut her power. *Endymion* suggests that Cynthia manages this particular threat by constantly changing her size and her age, by not always continuing at her "fullness," but he has nonetheless voiced the thought of ravishing the queen's enormous body. The ambivalent meanings of Lyly's lines are evinced even further when we take into account Katherine Eggert's discussion of the many sixteenth-century definitions of the word "ravish," some of which are positive. "Ravish" certainly means abduction with intent to rape, but it can also mean excessive rapture that takes one away from oneself. *Endymion* might be suggesting that Cynthia's



beauty makes gods and men forget or lose themselves, thus making them into the objects, rather than the subjects, of ravishment (7-8). The double-edged nature of the word “ravish” here enables Lyly to walk a fine line between praise and slander.

Endymion’s friend Eumenides sees Cynthia’s perpetual bodily change neither as virtue nor as a political strategy, but rather as a threatening example of Cynthia’s fickleness and unpredictability: “There was never any so peevish to imagine the moon either capable of affection or shape of a mistress; for as impossible it is to make love fit to her humor, which no man knoweth, as a coat to her form, which continueth not in one bigness whilst she is measuring” (1.1.22-26). Eumenides’s charge is particularly noteworthy because he employs clothing to underscore the instability of Cynthia’s size. As I have discussed, the changeability of clothing, and the opportunity it offers to add to the body items that change its size—such as corsets that shrink it or puffy sleeves and hoop skirts that enlarge it—is a major feature of the manipulability of size at Elizabeth’s court. According to Eumenides, however, clothing is the constant while the actual size of the body fluctuates. This corporeal fluctuation, which here also signifies fluctuation in Cynthia’s disposition, is particularly threatening and unnatural to Eumenides, who goes on to describe Endymion’s desire as “monstrous” (1.1.29). He also believes that “without doubt Endymion is bewitched” by Cynthia, rhetorically linking the queen with the play’s actual witch, Dipsas (1.1.85). With these aversions, Eumenides might articulate the feelings of some of the courtiers present in the play’s audience who were also troubled by their monarch’s uncanny ability to shift size at important political moments.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> There are some obvious ironies to Eumenides’s role and his name, which comes from the Greek root *eu* meaning “good” and *Menai*, the ancient Greek nymphs of the moon. Though he is an exemplary friend who looks out for the good of Endymion and of the court and shows respect to Cynthia by kneeling to her, he voices dissatisfaction with Cynthia and, according to Robert Knapp, must teach Cynthia how to wield her

A poem of Raleigh's titled "Sir Walter Raleigh to the Queen" engages in a similar complex doubling of praise and critique and evinces a struggle for power expressed through the imagery of size. The poem, which glorifies silence in love, echoes Endymion's refusal to speak of his love to Cynthia. This five-stanza poem addressed to Elizabeth makes a show of choosing silence that is at once excessive in form and miniaturizing for the speaker. The first stanza, written in rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter, insists that "They that are Rich in Words must needs discover / That they are Poore in that which makes a Lover" (5-6). Despite the speaker's insistence on silence, the next four stanzas (which, in an odd shift, are octaves alternating tetrameter and trimeter) do prove to be rich in words. The third and fifth stanzas most clearly echo Endymion's predicament: "I rather chuse to want Relief / Then venture the Revealing," and "Hee smarteth most that hides his smart, / And sues for no Compassion" (19-20, 37-38). In the third stanza, the speaker names his "desires that aime too high," establishing a size relation between himself and the beloved who is above him (23). His insistence on silence, which acknowledges the size difference, becomes a miniaturizing trope that the speaker uses to degrade himself before the beloved queen. However, the poem itself is lengthy, and the repeated insistence on silence becomes ironic as the speaker overstates it. Indeed, the second stanza invokes this irony: "Since, if my Plaints serve not to prove / The Conquest of your Beauty, / It comes not from defect of Love, / But from Excesse of duety" (11-14). The word "excesse" applies to the poem as a whole, thirty-eight lines that declare the poet's silence. "Excesse" even receives special notice in its line through its capitalization: all nouns are capitalized in the preceding three lines, whereas the

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power mercifully (131). If this is so, then the play seems to suggest that a female monarch cannot control her power on her own but rather needs male advisors to teach her how to wield that power.

capitalized “Excesse” stands out in its line next to “duety,” the only noun not capitalized, not only in these lines, but in the whole stanza. Though likely an effect of the printer rather than the poet, the capitalization here also subordinates duty to excess for the poet, and though he postures duty through miniaturization, he ends up performing excess. Endymion, too, is guilty of lengthy and excessive complaints, which only cease when sleep finally silences him, suggesting that the play’s courtier also might have risked performing his diminutive status to excess.

Though Eumenides critiques Cynthia’s size and virtue, Endymion quickly jumps to her defense, expressing what might have been seen as the more appropriate response from a courtier, who should respect, admire, and even adore his monarch while accepting his insignificance and her claims of dominance over him.<sup>183</sup> He counters that Cynthia is instead “unmovable” and asks, “is she inconstant that keepeth a settled course, which since her first creation altereth not one minute in her moving? There is nothing thought more admirable or commendable in the sea than the ebbing and flowing; and shall the moon, from whom the sea taketh this virtue, be accounted fickle for increasing and decreasing?” (1.1.38-44). Endymion figures Cynthia’s continual change, paradoxically, as constancy, and thus as virtue. He continues from the sea analogy, also mentioning that buds turn into flowers, twigs into trees, and children into adults, invoking elements of nature to imply that Cynthia’s changeability of size, too, is natural rather than monstrous (1.1.44-51). Though Endymion defends Cynthia, his diction troubles the strength of his

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<sup>183</sup> One such example of an ideal courtier was Philip Sidney, who for New Year 1581 gave Elizabeth a jeweled whip (Loewenstein 132). Mazzola suggests that “the jeweled whip is a neat metaphor for the cunning and strength of the double bind, a signal that Sidney... knows how to succumb to infantile defeat” (138). Endymion, too, accepts the defeat of his desire without even approaching Cynthia to voice it. He bemoans, “O unfortunate Endymion! Why was not thy birth as high as thy thoughts, or her beauty less than heavenly? Or why are not thine honors as rare as her beauty? Or thy fortunes as great as thy deserts? (2.1.1-4). Words like “high” and “great” here debase him with the language of size.

claims: the phrasing in the questions he asks sets him up for word choices like “inconstant” and “fickle” that remind the auditors of the irony that the only constant is change. Though Endymion, the ideal courtier, even called by Cynthia “the flower of my court,” praises Cynthia’s changeable size, the play betrays male discomfort with such shifting size in a monarch (5.4.18-19). A comparison with another long Raleigh poem underscores this point. In “The Ocean to Scinthia,” Raleigh also takes up the motif of the suspiciously changeable female monarch, casting Elizabeth as the moon and himself as the ocean, a large body of water (punning on one of his nicknames, Wat) that is nonetheless governed by the moon. Even with this size inversion, the poem stresses Cynthia’s power—“such force her angellike appearance had / to master distance, tyme, and crueltye”—that pushes and pulls him through misery and happiness, as the moon pushes and pulls the tides (112-13). Like Edmund Spenser’s *Mutabilitie*, the Cynthia figure in both Raleigh’s poem and in *Endymion* derives her power from both her size and her continual change; in Cynthia’s case, though, this change is visualized as a shift in size.

When Spenser takes up the figure of *Mutabilitie* roughly a decade after Lyly’s play, he casts her as monstrous and overreaching as she uses her size and age to challenge Cynthia and to assert her power over Jove. She is described as “of stature tall as any there / Of all the Gods” (6.28). Underscoring her large size, Spenser describes her as a “hardy Titanesse” twice and a “haughty Titanesse” once, and she is called a “Giantesse” when she reaches out forcefully to pull Cynthia from her throne (6.10; 6.33; 6.25; 6.13). Her name also appears once printed in all capital letters, the enormous lettering conveying the enormous size of the character (6.6). *Mutabilitie* asserts her right to rule based on her age

and on her parentage, which is ancient and giant: “I am a daughter, by the mothers side, / Of her that is Grand-mother magnifide / Of all the Gods, great Earth, great Chaos child” (6.26). Like many of the female figures we have seen in previous chapters, including Venus, Volumnia, and Hermione, Mutabilitie asserts her greatness of size through voluminous speech: she speaks far more than Jove at the trial (twenty-three stanzas to his one). Jove counters, however, by using miniaturizing rhetoric similar to that which Elizabeth employed on her male courtiers: he calls her “fraile woman” and “foolish gerle” (6.35; 6.34). Mutabilitie is finally cut down to size by the androgynous yet seemingly feminine “great dame Nature” who is “far greater and more tall of stature / Then any of the gods or Powers on hie” (7.5). The large and old yet beautiful Nature is described as “This great Grandmother of all creatures bred / Great Nature, ever young yet full of eld” (7.13). Nature here embodies the contradictory Elizabethan ideals of wise youth and beautiful agelessness. She reduces the enormous Mutabilitie, who only speaks after “being lowe before her presence feld” (7.13). Nature also embodies some of the paradoxes of *Endymion*’s Cynthia, “still mooving, yet unmoved from her sted” (7.13). Indeed, Nature, Mutabilitie, and Spenser’s Cynthia seem to have much in common, as Mutabilitie observes of Cynthia, “Besides, her face and countenance every day / We changed see, and sundry forms partake, / Now hornd, now round, now bright, now brown and gray: / So that *as changefull as the Moone* men use to say” (7.10).

Though Mutabilitie is soon overruled by Nature, these lines are highly insulting to Spenser’s Cynthia and also, potentially, to Queen Elizabeth. Indeed, even as the Mutabilitie Cantos dramatize strong female authority through the figures of Mutabilitie, Cynthia, and Nature, they make several moves that slight allegorical reflections of the

queen in the poem. Cynthia has been given her authority by Jove, meaning that a male monarch ranks above her (6.12). Diana, also a figure for Elizabeth and the moon, features in the Arlo narrative, and she catches Faunus spying on her while she bathes because he laughs (6.46). The furious Diana is then compared in a lengthy simile to a housewife or a dairy maid whose dairy has been destroyed, degrading her in status even as it takes up Elizabeth's milkmaid imagery (6.48). With its multiplication of female authority figures, the Mutabilitie Cantos, like many other moments in *The Faerie Queene*, play with the motif of the "mirrours more then one" in which Spenser invites Elizabeth to see herself in the Proem to Book 3, an invitation that itself seems to call for excess in the female monarch (5.6). In the context of the female figures of the Mutabilitie cantos, is Elizabeth actually asked to choose where she might see herself, or is she instructed to see herself in all three of these powerful female figures?<sup>184</sup> We might approach this question differently now than during the discussion of the Book 3 Proem in chapter one, since we have gained more insight into Elizabeth's complex uses of the rhetoric of size.

Endymion is not the only character whose diction betrays the discomfort some of the courtiers in the audience might have shared; the aged Geron, who helps Eumenides solve the riddle about who can awaken Endymion by prompting him to answer that Cynthia can do so with a kiss, seems unequivocally to praise Cynthia for her indeterminable size: "Is she not always Cynthia, yet seldom in the same bigness; always wavering in her waxing or waning, that our bodies might the better be governed, our seasons the dailier give their increase; yet never to be removed from her course, as long

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<sup>184</sup> Lisa Hopkins argues that the Mutabilitie Cantos make a fitting end to *The Faerie Queene* as we have it because it is a poem about change: "it is mutability rather than stability that blurs and breaks up its [the poem's] image of the queen to whom it ostensibly holds up its glass" (51). William Blissett similarly asserts the Mutabilitie Cantos as an appropriate end, and he connects Mutabilitie and Gloriana and argues that although Mutabilitie seems monstrous at first, she makes us like her (259).

as the heavens continue theirs?” (3.4.181-85). Regardless of what her physical body looks like at the moment, Cynthia is always Cynthia, the monarchical body who governs other bodies; this language invokes Elizabeth’s motto *semper eadem* with a twist of irony—she is “always wavering” even as she is “always the same”—and also underscores the power the female monarch has over not just the careers of her courtiers, but over their physical persons as well. What is more, this governance lasts forever, showing the play imagining the everlasting power of the female monarch, who brings nature “increase.” Here, as in Endymion’s speech, however, the phrasing of “never to be removed” troubles the praise by vocalizing the idea of removal. Just before this question, Geron asks, “Is it not impossible to measure her, who still worketh by her influence, never standing at one stay?” (3.4.78-79). The double negative of “not impossible,” followed by “never,” fills his question with negativity and calls attention to the possible pun on “measure.” It is impossible to *tell the size* of the moon because it is so large and because it continually changes size. Cynthia is outside the boundaries of size categorization; her power over her nation mysteriously figures in terms of her ability to supersede the measurements by which the rest of the world must live. However, if we take *measure* to mean *control*, then Geron states that the queen cannot control herself nor be controlled as she asserts her influence everywhere and continually shifts her position. Though a monarch is the head of the nation and is expected to rule, a monarch over whom counselors wield no influence poses a potential threat to the state.<sup>185</sup> This issue becomes even more problematic in the

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<sup>185</sup> See Natalie Giannini, who engages the common assertion of historians that the power of royal counselors increased during Elizabeth’s reign. Giannini instead investigates the widespread writings in which counselors portray themselves or are portrayed as powerless during this time; she argues that counselors felt ambivalence about the effectiveness of their advice at Elizabeth’s court.

eyes of the men at court when an unmeasured, unregulated female body natural is paired with the body politic.

Because Cynthia is both a character and the moon, which is called “new” when it is smallest (and darkest), size and age conflate in her character and also cause the other characters to read and perform size in terms of age. Sir Tophas, the comic knight of the sub plot, confuses Samias and Dares, two young pages to Eumenides and Endymion, with small larks or wrens and must be set straight by his page Eption (1.3.18-25). When Tophas finally talks with these boys, he tells them that the three of them cannot be friends because they are not equal to him in physical as well as social stature: “Now, my pretty companions, you shall see how unequal you be to me. But I will not cut you quite off; you shall be my half friends for reaching to my middle, so far as from the ground to the waist I will be your friend” (32-35). Tophas verbally infantilizes the boys by calling them “pretty” and suggesting that they are “cut off” in height, then confuses physical size with social stature in stating why they are not his equals. This comment also shows Tophas exerting potential sexual mastery over the boys: he will only befriend them with what is below his waist. Tophas’s size enables him to dominate the boys both socially and sexually, even as he remains the comic fool.

This scene raises questions about casting and what this play actually looked like during performance at Elizabeth’s court, questions that have particular significance in light of my interests in the performative construction of size. Is the audience merely asked to picture Tophas as a grown man, or was there a great variation in height among the boys in the acting company? To what extent does Tophas exaggerate the difference in height in order to set the boy actor playing this role apart from the young pages in terms



of age? Would the tallest boy have played Cynthia, rather than any of the male characters? These questions are impossible to answer, but the play continually prompts them. When these same two pages later attempt to see the sleeping Endymion, the Watchman refuses to let them because Cynthia has commanded “that no man shall see him” (4.2.87). When the pages insist that they are boys, not men, the Watchman replies, “small raisins are raisins, and boys are men” (101). This statement calls attention to the many boy actors representing adult men in this play and, consequently, to tensions between size and age, since time in the sun makes raisins smaller but also dries them to make them more lasting; the statement also serves as a possible sexual insult that likens the boys’ testicles to “small raisins.” And if boys and men are equivalent, then the men in the audience hearing these lines must accept that they, also, are boys with “small raisins.” The reduction in testicular size suggests a reduction in age that potentially sends these adult male courtiers back to a period of boyhood before they could assert their masculinity; it at least reminds them of this boyhood, of the powerlessness that accompanied it, and that this powerlessness remains as long as they are subject to a female monarch.<sup>186</sup>

*Endymion* is one of many entertainments performed at Elizabeth’s court that dramatizes the submission of male courtiers through markers of size and age. One brief account of another such entertainment, told by Roy Strong, will help us see the potential relevance of *Endymion* to its audience. Strong recounts a 1581 entertainment performed during one of Alençon’s visits in which Philip Sidney “led the Four Foster Children of Desire to assault the Fortress of Perfect Beauty, in which sat the Queen as that

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<sup>186</sup> Rebecca Ann Bach argues that manhood in Shakespeare’s *Henry V* is particularly expressed as “testicular masculinity,” or the ability to conceive heirs (“Tennis” 5). Lyly’s raisin joke fits into this discourse on masculinity.

‘unattainable beauty’” (60). Strong adds that this assault included “footmen climbing little ladders to scale the fortress and pelting it with roses” (60). In this entertainment, Elizabeth becomes an enormous fortress that cannot be captured even by many men, courtiers who are miniaturized by their placement below her and by their ineffectual flower-throwing. This scene is acted out by Sidney and other men from Elizabeth’s court, not by a company of boy actors, making the size and submission metaphor even more clear as the courtiers themselves participate in the performance.<sup>187</sup> Boy company plays, I would argue, remind Elizabeth’s courtiers of this other kind of entertainment and create a feeling of participation and even complicity in a drama that miniaturizes courtly male characters. Taking this idea a step further, Tarnya Cooper reads Elizabeth’s court as a feminized space in which young men functioned as ornaments for female pleasure (181). While this reading seems reductive, considering that many men, both young and old, held positions of power at Elizabeth’s court, it does suggest that these men might have at times *felt* ornamental, especially when seeing themselves represented as such onstage.

The passage of time in *Endymion*, more than anything else, makes clear how the flexibility of age works alongside the performability of size to create the tools through which Cynthia and Dipsas compete for power and control. As Dipsas puts Endymion to sleep, she curses him with age: “Thou that layest down with golden locks shalt not awake until they be turned to silver hairs; and that chin, on which scarcely appeareth soft down, shall be filled with bristles as hard as broom” (2.3.31-35).<sup>188</sup> We learn that twenty years

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<sup>187</sup> Frye, however, notes that the nobles playing the Four Foster Children of Desire entered in pomp and that, though they enacted their own submission, the entertainment as a whole was designed as an allegory of Alençon’s defeat (*Elizabeth*, 76). Frye names Fulke Greville, the earl of Arundel, and the Lord Windsor as the other three participants along with Sidney (75).

<sup>188</sup> Vanhoutte notes that Lyly departs from his source in having Endymion age rather than remain eternally young through his sleep (“Age” 60).

have passed by act 3, scene 4, and in the next scene Tellus observes that “on [Endymion’s] head already are grown gray hairs” (4.1.15). When Endymion awakes in act 5, Eumenides tells him, “Thou hast slept forty years” (5.1.53). With these references to grey hair, beards, and the passage of time, we can imagine the boys acting this play making several costume changes involving new beards and wigs. They could possibly have added other trappings as well, such as make-up to show wrinkles or clothing that signals old age. In the last act, Dipsas is described as so stooped over that “her chin almost toucheth her knees” (5.2.58-59). Dipsas has been old since the beginning of the play, but we might imagine her stooping lower and lower in each act as time continues to pass, showing her age by shrinking her physical appearance. In contrast to the miniatures mentioned earlier, smallness in this play can signal both childhood and extreme old age, life stages that suggest a kind of dependency and indeed are often compared in the period.<sup>189</sup> Endymion has slept straight through his years of manhood, falling under the spell during his passionate youth before his manhood is fully formed and awaking after his aging body has disqualified him from access to the assertive power of manhood.<sup>190</sup> Among the courtiers, only Tophas, oddly, seems to forego the costuming of age, at least in part: in the last act, he mentions, “something pricketh me” on his chin, and Eption confirms that he has grown “three or four little hairs” (5.2.17-20). The suggestion is that Tophas, like his Chaucerian namesake, remains beardless because he never matures mentally; he never comes to understand his actual role as a knight and instead continues

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<sup>189</sup> Shepard and Smith both discuss childhood and old age as parallel states of dependency (Shepard 44; Smith 74-75). *As You Like It*’s Jaques describes aging as a regression toward a “second childishness,” reflected in the body as “sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything” (2.7.164-65).

<sup>190</sup> Shepard discusses this assertive power and its availability only to men of a certain age and social standing (44-45).

in his comically misinformed love of Dipsas.<sup>191</sup> Like Dipsas, Tophas works as a counterpart to Cynthia in age: only Cynthia remains ageless yet virtuous, standing as Tophas's wise opposite. The physical aging of the human characters might have been underscored at the end of the play when Cynthia stands surrounded by stooped-over characters wearing grey wigs and beards in a highly visual moment that showcases the female monarch's extreme control over, and exemption from, age.

Though I see this moment as primarily dramatizing the female monarch's power over age, the invocation of the topic of age also works as a potential weapon against the queen, undermining praise of her in that it reminds Elizabeth's courtiers that their real monarch *has* aged, perhaps unflatteringly. This potential insult becomes more clear in the context of poetry such as the simply titled "A Poem of Sir Walter Rawleighs." The poem, like a conventional love poem, begins with Nature crafting the perfect beloved mistress:

Her eyes he would should be of light,  
A Violet breath, and Lipps of Jelly,  
Her haire not blacke, not overbright,  
And of the softest downe her Belly,  
As for her inside hee'ld have it  
Only of wantonnesse and witt. (7-12)

This description is both flattering and erotic, and its language is echoed three stanzas later when Time comes to destroy the mistress's beauty:

The Light, the Belly, lipps and breath,  
He dimms, discolors, and destroyes,

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<sup>191</sup> In naming this character after a familiar Chaucerian figure, Lyly invokes a male authorial predecessor, building a sense of masculine authority into his play.

With those he feedes but fills not death,  
Which sometimes were the foode of Joyes;  
Yea Time doth dull each lively witt,  
And dryes all wantonnesse with it. (25-30)

The perfect mistress of the first three stanzas is easily corrupted by Time, and, what is more, Time is not merciful enough to grant her death. This unflattering portrait of an aged woman who will not die all too easily evokes Elizabeth as she might have been seen by some of her court in 1588 when *Endymion* was first performed—indeed, she continued to age without dying for another fifteen years.

We might, therefore, see glimpses of the aging Elizabeth in *Endymion* as he appears at the end of the play. *Endymion* becomes aware of his own age when he awakes, looking at himself in shock as he sees “a gray beard,” “hollow eyes,” “withered body,” and “decayed limbs,” all of which he thinks he has received overnight (5.1.50-51). Here, the audience is given verbal cues for imagining age on the actor’s body, as “withered body” and “decayed limbs” suggest a physical shrinking that is difficult to simulate on stage unless with clothing that hangs loosely over the body. In other words, the size of the character’s body appears smaller in relation to his larger costume, and this performance of scale creates the illusion of old age. The performability of age takes center stage at the climax of the play when, as a reward for loving her appropriately—with “duty, loyalty, and reverence”—Cynthia makes *Endymion* young again (5.4.157-58). She blesses him, saying, “*Endymion*, continue as thou hast begun,” and he confirms, “your words have again restored my youth. Methinks I feel my joints strong and these moldy hairs to molt” (5.4.177, 179-81). At this moment, as the actor playing *Endymion* likely sheds wig,

beard, and baggy robes, his body would paradoxically appear to grow as he removes these stage properties and stands up straight, now filling out his clothing rather than appearing shrunken within it. If, as Shepard has argued, old age disqualified an early modern man from the category of manhood, then Cynthia gives Endymion the chance to live the socially powerful period of his life that he has missed (44). However, as the actor playing Endymion removes the trappings of age, the actor calls attention not only to the performability and relationality of age, but also to the female monarch's control over age performance and perceptions at her court. The play underscores for the courtly audience that they, too, live at a court in which age and size categories are crucial to their ability to assert their interests, yet these categories are controlled not by themselves, but by their female monarch. Cynthia sends Endymion back to his early manhood out of ostensible goodness, but this happy ending for the character also reminds Elizabeth's courtiers of the power she wields over their bodies, which she can so easily diminish through her rhetoric of size and, consequently, of age. This ending even evokes the possibility that she might send her courtiers too far back in time, past the assertive power of early manhood and into the dependency of youth or even infancy.

The epilogue to *Endymion* further aligns size and submission as the actor or actors stoop before the queen: "if Your Highness vouchsafe with your favorable beams to glance upon us, we shall not only stoop, but with all humility lay both our hands and hearts at Your Majesty's feet" (12-15). We might imagine the boys bowing so low that their hands, and perhaps even their chests, touch the ground. While the Epilogue speaks for Lyly and the boy company as he asks Elizabeth to approve the production, the "we" of this passage also potentially extends to the rest of her court, encompassing all those

who need the queen's favor and would thus be expected to show submission; kneeling or bowing is a particularly coded act of submission in the wake of a performance that to such an extent showcases the queen's power as a function of her relative size. The play expresses anxieties about a female monarch who is too adept at managing her own and others' ages and sizes, but it also flatters her by depicting age and largeness as beautiful and reinforces her political strategies by dramatizing the powerful extent to which she controls the relationality and performability of the sizes and ages of other bodies.

Lyly, like Raleigh, crafts a text that expresses conflicted feelings toward the female monarch who on the one hand is the perfect mistress yet on the other hand manipulates size in order to assert her authority over the potentially powerful men around her, keeping these men, including the poet, in a continual state of miniaturized infancy. This analysis of Elizabethan aesthetics shows how a queen could employ the rhetoric of size to perform or construct age so as to legitimate and manage her royal power over a nation that might have contested her rule on grounds of her gender. Of course, as Elizabeth aged, so did many of her most powerful courtiers, meaning that the problems associated with the aging female monarch's body could also apply to the aging male courtier's body. As Anthony Esler notes, however, a younger generation of courtiers, which he calls the generation of 1560 and which included such gentlemen as Philip and Robert Sidney, Robert Cecil, Henry Percy, and Robert Devereux, rose to power in the mid-1580's, around the time *Endymion* was first performed. This younger group potentially challenged Elizabeth's older favorites like Leicester and Walsingham as well as the queen herself, adding another layer to the complex relationship between age and size throughout Elizabeth's reign (194). Indeed, Roy Strong's analysis of Nicholas

Hilliard's *Young Man Among Roses* (figure 8) raises questions about the rise of this new generation, as he argues that the portrait depicts the seventeen-year-old Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, hopelessly in love with the aged Elizabeth (57).<sup>192</sup> Of course, within a few years, Essex's love had turned to a disenchantment that led him to a poorly-planned rebellion that resulted in his execution. The older, larger queen reigned despite challenges to her rule, and the courtier who tried to be a lover rather than an infant suffered a frustration that led to rebellion and death. By Elizabeth's death in 1603, even the younger generation of her courtiers had reached middle age and they, like the generation before them, were expected to continue their posturing of infancy. The politics of Elizabeth's court required size and age performances that miniaturized and infantilized, that expressed desire without the hope of attaining what was above the courtier's station. Elizabeth's court was characterized by a balancing act between the queen's production of a rhetoric of size and her courtiers' compulsory participation in the rule this rhetoric established; Elizabeth managed this balance by continually adapting it to new pressures and situations throughout her reign.

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<sup>192</sup> Strong's investment in this context for the portrait suggests that four hundred years later, the image of Elizabeth as an older woman continues to hold erotic appeal and mystique, even for scholars.



## Chapter Four

### Female Spectators, Cross-dressing, and the Erotics of Diminutive Theatrics

Elizabeth I managed her court in part by making herself into a powerful performer and spectator: she performed her own fluctuating size and demanded visual and verbal performances of size from her courtiers and court entertainments like Lyly's *Endymion*. Although during Elizabeth's reign actresses did not regularly appear on England's public stages, women made up a significant portion of public playgoers and had the opportunity to become powerful spectators like the queen. The English professional theater, in which only male bodies were offered to the spectator's gaze, provided female spectators with the potentially empowering experience of watching diminutive actors perform for them, just as Elizabeth saw her power as an immense monarch reinforced when Paul's Boys played *Endymion* for her. The epilogue to Nathaniel Lee's 1677 *The Rival Queens* references the erotics of the female gaze in the theater as part of a light-hearted threat to return boys to the stage if the men in the audience do not clap:

For we have vow'd to find a sort of Toys  
Known to black Fryars, a Tribe of chopping Boys.  
If once they come, they'l quickly spoil your sport;  
There's not one Lady will receive your Court:  
But for the Youth in Petticoats run wild,  
With oh the archest Wagg, the sweetest Child.  
The panting Breasts, white Hands and little Feet  
No more shall your pall'd thoughts with pleasure meet (65).

This passage figures the return to the pre-Restoration theatrical convention of using boy actors to play female roles as a potential loss to male spectators, who lose their access to women's appealingly diminutive "little feet," but a thrilling prospect for female spectators who will see boy actors as "toys" for their own amusement. The imagined female spectator transitions from an object with diminutive body parts for the amusement of adult men to a desiring subject who takes pleasure in easy sexual access to the diminutive actor in skirts. The epilogue illustrates a trend that began long before the Restoration among male writers who, like Lee, depict female spectators as having uncontrollable desires for boy actors. Though the construction of this kind of desire becomes exaggerated in Restoration texts, it has roots in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century drama.

This chapter analyzes the erotics of size at work in hall theaters and amphitheaters before the Civil War closures, with particular attention to plays that dramatize women's desire for diminutive males in ways that reflect the dynamics of female spectatorship. The rest of this introductory section pursues diminutive erotics in the context of the theater as a public space that gathers together many gazing and performing subjects. I then turn to an analysis of Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) and Ben Jonson's *Epicoene* (1609), arguing that in these plays female characters derive social, sexual, and artistic authority through their desire for diminutive theatrics. The third and final section takes up plays in which female characters cross-dress as diminutive males, arguing that these plays dramatize the desires of socially and economically powerful women in ways that reflect the dynamics of spectatorship in the playhouse. This section hinges on a comparative analysis of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

(1602) alongside one of its Italian source texts, *Gl'Ingannati* (1531), and the Spanish *comedia Don Gil de las calzas verdes* (1615). The continental plays are helpful for thinking about female characters cross-dressed as diminutive males in theatrical traditions in which actresses, rather than boys or men, played female roles. Taking size as a category of analysis in these plays can help us think beyond the male homoerotics so central to recent scholarship on English cross-dressing so as to better understand the plays' treatment of female desire.

The study of early modern female spectatorship presents challenges stemming from the little surviving evidence we have of women's experiences in early playhouses. I am conscious of Dymphna Callaghan's warning not to take dramatic portrayals of female spectators at face value since "the gap between representation...and social 'reality' sometimes yawns oppressively wide" (*Shakespeare* 11). I do, however, want to suggest that the gap between representation and reality is less a source of oppression than an opportunity for inquiry and speculation. This chapter is less interested in making empirical claims about actual theatrical experience than it is in analyzing a set of cultural attitudes toward spectatorship and the opportunities those attitudes might have afforded some female audience members. I build on the work of scholars like Richard Levin and Jean Howard, who argue that women made up an influential part of theater audiences, as I argue that desire for the diminutive boy actor becomes a form of power for the female spectator in plays like *Burning Pestle* and, potentially, in actual theatrical spaces as well.<sup>193</sup> I explore cultural attitudes toward female spectators through an examination of

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<sup>193</sup> Levin argues that "during the Renaissance women were generally regarded as a significant component of the theater audience, and that their interests and feelings seem to have been taken into account by at least some of the playwrights of the period" (174). See also Lena Cowen Orlin, Andrew Gurr, Kathleen McLuskie, Charles Whitney, and Ellen MacKay. Orlin argues that women were highly important in a

staged representations of the type of women who may have been in theater audiences, probing the contradictory and ambiguous portrayals of the female spectators dramatized in early modern plays. Women's desire in these plays is potentially threatening, yet its threat is neutralized when this desire fixates on diminutive maleness, which might also be desirable to adult men. Early modern scholars generally agree that boy actors were objects of male desire, and male dramatists could depict women desiring small boys without turning grown men into erotic objects.<sup>194</sup> Although these male-authored texts might attempt to limit and neutralize women's desire, however, they also gesture toward ways that female spectators might express forms of desire beyond the control of the theater's male writers, actors, and producers.

Much of this argument engages scholarship on gender and its role in driving the erotics of the early modern stage, an erotics better understood through the work of critics such as Michelle Dowd, Michael Neill, and Barbara Correll who have discussed status and rank in terms of their relationships to the erotics of the stage.<sup>195</sup> Size interacts with all of these categories, as we have seen in previous chapters, and shifts the erotics at work in

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related economic exchange: women "might be considered the central agents in a history of printed play texts" (141). Though women's consumption of printed texts is not the same as their presence in the theater, Orlin's evidence suggests that women exerted economic pressure on many elements of theatrical production. Gurr's groundbreaking monograph *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* demonstrates that typical audiences included many women and women of every class. However, he acknowledges that based on his scanty evidence, he cannot draw conclusions about their motives, desires, or reactions to and for playgoing (67).

<sup>194</sup> Many scholars have rightly discussed boys as objects of desire for adult men. See especially Lisa Jardine, Jonathan Goldberg, and Valerie Traub (*Desire*).

<sup>195</sup> Dowd argues that, as numbers of serving women in London increased around 1600, plays like *Twelfth Night* show service relationships developing into marital relationships as a way of negotiating this social change (103-26). Neill examines servant desire for a master or mistress in *The Changeling*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *Twelfth Night*, arguing that these texts to varying extents align servant loyalty and sexual ambition (127-44). Correll argues that John Webster re-works *Twelfth Night*'s Malvolio plot in *Duchess*, with the steward as a figure of class mobility enabled by the potential social leveling effect of women's desire (65-92). Jane Kingsley-Smith's arguments about the universal desirability of the "beautiful boy," a figure in her book embodied by Cupid, make clear how gender, age, and status all drive sexual desire in early modern texts (135-36).

certain exchanges on the stage and between the stage and the audience. A focus on size allows us to revisit spectatorship as a particular experience of the erotics of the diminutive and opens new lines of inquiry with regards to female spectators and boy actors. The scholarly conversation on both spectatorship and boy actors has so far tended to focus on male audiences and their desires. Scholars such as Lisa Jardine, who argues that the seductive mannerisms of boy actors specifically target a male audience, and Jonathan Goldberg, who constructs an erotic history of the early modern English theater in terms of male-male desire, advance compelling arguments yet tell a story that involves only one part of the early modern playgoing public (Jardine, "Boy Actors" 63; see Goldberg, *Sodometries*). Howard, however, usefully pushes the conversation toward the social and political effects of female spectatorship and stresses that in the theater, "men and women alike were spectacles and spectators, desired and desiring" (91). She argues that "for some subjects, playgoing itself could be as disruptive of established social relations as watching the most iconoclastic drama," a claim this chapter builds on to show how women's playgoing might provoke performances of size that enable overt forms of social disruption (73). Howard goes on to argue that the disruptive power of female spectators comes in particular from the money they exchange to enter the theater and the way that money authorizes their gaze (79). I would add that this economic transaction produces dynamics inside the theater that privilege the paying woman so that her gaze takes on the power to render even large male actors diminutive.

More recently, Callaghan has argued that women's gazes alone do not make the theater an empowering space and that even though women seem to have enjoyed the theater, their exclusion from the stage was oppressive and misogynist (*Shakespeare* 15).

Phyllis Rackin counters, however, that the same boys Callaghan sees as oppressive may have erotically excited female spectators and given all playgoers access to the pleasures of experiencing “the mystery of theatrical representation” (“Shakespeare’s” 117).

Thinking about the theater in terms of size lets us see the possibility that women went to plays precisely because boy actors offered them visual and aural pleasures, regardless of the subtle ideological work boy actors might have performed. Even if the use of boy actors reinforced misogyny and patriarchy, as Callaghan contends, it also presented boys as erotic objects on display for the pleasure of female and male spectators alike.

The traits most often associated with the homoerotic allure of boy actors—a soft, hairless face and a high-pitched voice—are often discussed in terms of their similarity to female features, but they are instead notable here for their dissimilarity from typical adult male features. Although Jardine argues that women and boys were equivalent erotic objects in early modern England and privileges men as the only erotic subjects in the theater, Jeffrey Masten contends that the position of boys as neither female nor quite male might make boy actors universally desired, appealing to both men and women (Jardine, “Twins” 28; Masten, “Editing Boys” 117).<sup>196</sup> In other words, boys might be desirable to both men and women not because they are like women but rather because they are not like men. Will Fisher argues that boys are entirely different from men and that “boy actors were as much ‘in drag’ when playing the parts of men as when playing the parts of women” (“Staging” 231). I argue that this categorical separation between men and boys makes boys available to women as part of an entirely different erotic

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<sup>196</sup> Linda Phyllis Austern, discussing the seductive power of the youthful male voice coming from the stage, similarly argues that women and boys have a parallel erotic appeal for the desiring man (87). She also argues that the interchangeability of women and boys in early modern literature furthers the misogynist assumption that to be normal is to be male and adult and thereby reinforces the exclusion of women and boys from the privileges of patriarchy (85).

experience than the ones they might have with men. A woman seeking an erotic experience different from the kind she has with her husband, for example, might look for an erotic object that does not resemble him; she might look for another woman or for a boy. Wendy Wall calls the boy actor's soft face and high voice part of "the seductive danger of male youthfulness," but these features are, importantly, markers of size as well as of age: the beauty of these actors comes across as diminutive cuteness, and a high-pitched voice correlates with a small voice box and small physical size (*Staging* 180).<sup>197</sup> If male spectators desire boys for their diminutive traits, female spectators likely experienced the erotics of the diminutive differently because their largeness in relation to boy actors places them in a position of dominance that is not always accessible in their relations with adult men.<sup>198</sup> This claim builds on Valerie Traub's work on the queer potential of the boy actor: she argues that he functioned "as the basis upon which homoeroticism [could] be safely explored—working for both actors and audiences as an expression of non-hegemonic desire within the confines of conventional, comedic restraints" (*Desire* 118). Although Traub focuses on male-male desire, she acknowledges the presence and desires of women in the playhouse (122). I would like to take up her

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<sup>197</sup> Wall cites an anonymous pamphlet from 1569 titled *Children of the Chapel Stript and Whipt*, which describes the boys who performed at the royal chapel as "pretty upstart youthes" who "profane the Lord's day by the lascivious writhing of their tender limbs, and gorgeous decking of their apparel" (*Staging* 180). Wall reads the pamphlet as a reflection of "the seductive danger of male youthfulness," as they are described as both "pretty" and "tender" (180). A boy actor's speaking and singing ability, however, were probably at least as important as his appearance. Jackson I. Cope argues that boys were chosen for boy playing companies for their voices, not their acting abilities, and that a cultural idea existed that "sweet-singing boys were ideally prepared to declaim complex verse" (316-17). Austern analyzes cultural assumptions about the seductive power shared by the female and the youthful male voice, arguing that both require adult male control (91). Gina Bloom discusses the unpredictable and potentially uncontrollable young male voice as a site of anxiety regarding definitions of manhood. She argues that a boy's voice must be carefully controlled in order to meet the demands of performance and that "vocal discipline" enables "a fulfillment of the voice's potential for order and spiritual harmony" (*Voice* 31).

<sup>198</sup> Kingsley-Smith suggests that small boys appeal to women because they are biologically male yet do not have access to the prerogatives of patriarchy (135). In this case, boys are small both in physical and in social stature.

claim regarding homoerotic “non-hegemonic desire” in order to re-think female spectators’ experiences viewing boy actors. Though ostensibly heteroerotic, this desire refigures the gendered power of the gaze. Diminutive actors offer female spectators not only visual and aural pleasure, but the fantasy of an easily-controlled erotic object and a playful reprieve from the hierarchy of desire in patriarchal heterosexuality that positions women as objects rather than as desiring subjects.

Spectators in the playhouse would have experienced diminutive acting not only through the small body of the boy actor, but also through perspective. Inside early modern playhouses, as in our modern theaters, the spectator’s point of view makes the actors on the stage look miniature, and the farther a spectator sits or stands from the stage, the smaller the actors on it appear. Complicating this issue of perspective, some of the early modern audience stood in the pit, directly in front of the stage, where the actors would have been raised and perhaps seemed larger than life. In the amphitheaters, the most expensive seats were those in the gallery, set back and up, farthest from the stage. The lords’ rooms, directly behind the stage, were close but provided a perspective in which the spectators looked directly down on the action (Gurr 21-25). Thus, the more a spectator paid, the smaller the actors appeared. A lady, then, could pay more money for smaller men to entertain her for the afternoon. Though I have not seen any references to perspective in early modern discussions of playgoing, Barbara Freedman sees perspective as centrally important to the drama of the period. She examines Shakespeare’s plays within “the context of a Renaissance tradition of learned ignorance, trick perspectives,



and optical experiments” (4).<sup>199</sup> Freedman’s work suggests that, in the context of diminutive theatrics, perspective renders even adult men on the stage relationally smaller than the women and men who gaze at them from a distance, thereby incorporating them, along with boy actors, into the category of the diminutive and making them erotically available as objects for the female spectator’s gaze.<sup>200</sup> Laurie Osborne elaborates on the potential of the female gaze in the playhouse, asserting that “unlike film, which can actively preclude some perspectives, the theater was open to various gazes, including the gaze which focused on audience members. The plays themselves also allow the viewer to watch what he or she pleases, so that the female spectator... may look at things which the production itself does not emphasize” (493). The theater is thus always a potential site of disruption because a playwright and an acting company can never fully control the focus and responses of their audience as a perspectival relationship develops between the large subject and the diminutive object of a spectator’s gaze.

In performance, perspective was most obviously an issue in masques, where the monarch was seated at the best possible perspectival location, and these courtly performances provide a useful tool for re-thinking the visual and power dynamics circulating in early modern playhouses.<sup>201</sup> As Freedman points out, the round playing spaces of Elizabethan theaters meant that there was no “true” vantage point from which

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<sup>199</sup> Freedman also speculates on the relationship between Renaissance philosophy and perspective in the playhouse: “since individual viewpoint hampers rather than guarantees true sight, right interpretation is necessarily a communal activity” (24).

<sup>200</sup> For a different early modern view of perspective, see Elizabeth Spiller’s work on Margaret Cavendish’s thoughts on the microscope and the telescope. Spiller asserts that Cavendish understood Robert Hooke’s work with the microscope as a limitation for readers, as “a substitute for, rather than an encouragement to, experience itself” (214-15). Important here is the distinction, for Cavendish, between “natural vision” and “artificial technologies” (216). I would add that it is possible to read Cavendish’s aversion to the man-made microscope and telescope, which distort the small into the large, as a response to the alarming loss of “size privilege” Cavendish might have had in relation to far-away or very small objects. This issue was perhaps particularly important for Cavendish as a female observer.

<sup>201</sup> See Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* (66). Orgel cites Nicoll Allardyce, *Stuart Masques and the Renaissance Stage* (London, 1937), p. 34.

to experience the action (25). This shape marks one important difference between perspective in masques and perspective in the public theaters: in the playhouses, no gaze is privileged over the others; each spectator's gaze has the potential to render its object diminutive. There were, of course, men in the audience, but since there were no historical women on the stage in early modern public playhouses, any gaze directed at the stage saw male bodies, even when those male bodies were clothed as women.<sup>202</sup> When female spectators took part in this gazing from their equally privileged perspective, they potentially challenged early modern sexual hierarchies by making male actors into objects of a female gaze. In a masque, the privileged perspective of a monarch, even a female monarch, upheld social order; however, order might have been challenged when a woman gazed at a male body made smaller by perspective in a space like the theater where many classes came together. Although other ladies of the court could also look down on masques, the royal focus of these performances created a viewing hierarchy that, even if undermined, could still have existed in the imagination of those present. No such clearly delineated hierarchy existed in public playhouses, where money as well as rank could decide seating, leaving social and gender order more open to challenge in that space. Even male-authored texts like *Burning Pestle* participate in this social disruption by depicting female spectators specifically in terms of their desire for diminutive actors.

Prologues and epilogues of such male-authored plays sometimes appeal to female spectators as a group the playwright or the actors imagine might experience the play differently than the rest of the audience. One particularly fascinating example of such a prologue begins the Italian play *Gl'Ingannati* (1531), which I will discuss in the third

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<sup>202</sup> For an argument that early modern spectators indeed saw female bodies when they looked at boy actors playing female roles, see Stallybrass.

section. The prologue presents the play to the women in the audience as an apology for an earlier play by the Academy that satirized women, and it speaks to the women in the audience as superior spectators who appreciate the theater more deeply than men, who only come to the theater to flirt with women. Certain moments in the play, such as an aside by a servant that vividly describes a sexual encounter between two aristocratic characters, are also singled out as being for the ears of the female spectators only. Perhaps these solicitations of ladies in the audience are tongue-in-cheek, implying that women have less taste than men and playing into stereotypes about female playgoers as less critical and more emotional than male spectators (Whitney 202-03). But at the same time, this prologue and others like it acknowledge female spectators as an important part of the audience who must be pleased, and perhaps the playwright hopes to make them more likely to return to spend money on the theater by flattering them. The Prologue speaks for himself and his fellow actors as well as for the playwright, and arguably for any other men—or women—involved in the theater business who have a stake in the profits. By deferring to female spectators in this way, all the men in the theater also submit themselves to women who have paid to view this production.

Although I read spectatorship as an opportunity for early modern women to exercise agency and power over men through their desire for diminutive actors, there are reasons to view the theater as a disempowering space for women.<sup>203</sup> For the most part,

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<sup>203</sup> For example, see Kathleen McLuskie and Callaghan. Citing Barry Reay, McLuskie asserts that women were excluded from cultural production in all areas of early modern life, including the writing and performing of plays, and thus participated as spectators rather than agents of cultural change (87). She shows that, in contemporary writing, female spectators appeared less as a diverse group with individual reactions to performances and certain stakes in the theater and more as a faceless way for antitheatricalists to prove that the theater was a dangerous and immoral place (89-91).

women neither wrote plays for the public stage nor performed in them.<sup>204</sup> Callaghan argues that, because all parts in Renaissance plays were acted by men, “dramatic enactment becomes a kind of violent misrepresentation directed at women” (*Shakespeare* 146). Where Callaghan sees victimization, however, I, like Howard, see the opportunity for resistance and evidence that cultural attitudes toward female spectators may not have been as overwhelmingly negative as we might imagine based on the writings of antitheatrical commentators who, of course, had their own political agendas at stake. Though Callaghan argues that keeping women off the stage was a form of violence, the theater is much larger than the stage itself and the presence of gentlewomen and citizens’ wives in the galleries and boxes and lower-class women in the pit, along with female money gatherers, vendors, and prostitutes who circulated throughout the playhouse selling their wares, made women a highly visible part of the theater, integral to the playgoing experience.<sup>205</sup> Indeed, Natasha Korda argues that the concept of the “all-male” theater “is in important ways a myth. It is true only if we confine our definition of the theater to the onstage activities of the professional playing companies in London and divorce these activities from the larger apparatuses of theatrical production and the varied

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<sup>204</sup> Though women did not write for the English public stage until after the Restoration, some aristocratic women such as Elizabeth Cary and Margaret Cavendish were writing closet dramas that may have been performed in private settings. Marta Straznicky highlights the public significance of the closet drama of Margaret Cavendish, arguing that though her plays were not written for performance, they nonetheless carry political weight.

<sup>205</sup> See Callaghan (*Shakespeare* 146). Gurr notes a detail surprising to those who subscribe to the idea of an all-male theater: as far as his research has revealed, money was taken at the theater doors only by female gatherers, as they were called (74). This small yet significant detail places women at the threshold of the theater, the first theater workers playgoers would encounter upon arriving. Their handling of money also puts them at the center of an economic exchange on which Howard places central importance: “at the theater door, money changed hands in a way which enabled women access to the pleasure and privilege of gazing, certainly at the stage, and probably at the audience as well;” this exchange of money makes “it possible that in the theater women were licensed to look—and in a larger sense to judge what they saw and to exercise autonomy—in ways that problematized women’s status as objects within patriarchy” (79). According to Howard, the economics of playgoing potentially provided an important space for resisting patriarchy in the culture at large.

commercial practices that contributed to the business of playing” (13). Even if women did not write or act, they had a form of control as vendors and as consumers that, I will argue, might have been both pleasurable and powerful. Male representations of female spectators often challenge the rigidity of early modern patriarchal heterosexuality by depicting female influence as desire for the diminutive. While this form of desire does not look like outright resistance, it does refigure patterns of dominance and submission in the public space of the theater, providing women with the opportunity for erotic superiority through the construction of their relative largeness.

### **Spectatorship and the Diminutive in *Epicoene* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle***

A dramatization of this kind of erotic superiority occurs at the opening of Ben Jonson’s *Epicoene* (1609) in an exchange that seems to have little impact on the ensuing plot yet establishes size as an important aspect of the battle of the sexes that dominates the rest of the play. The minor character Clerimont’s Boy describes an encounter he has just had with Lady Haughty, whose love Clerimont has sent him to solicit, and several of her ladies: “The gentlewomen play with me, and throw me o’the bed, and carry me in to my lady; and she kisses me with her oiled face and puts a peruke o’my head and asks me an I will wear her gown, and I say no; and then she hits me a blow o’the ear and calls me innocent, and lets me go” (1.1.12-17). The Boy tells his master this story with saucy boastfulness, and Clerimont replies that he cannot send the Boy on such an errand again because the Boy only hurts his master’s suit: “No marvel if the door be kept shut against your master, when the entrance is so easy for you” (1.1.18-19). The pleasure of the encounter, for both Lady Haughty and the Boy, revolves around a physical domination

that specifically calls attention to the Boy's diminutive body in relation to the ostensibly mature body of the offstage Haughty. According to the Boy's story, Lady Haughty and her ladies use the boy's body as a plaything in a way that recalls Venus's gesture of lifting Adonis from his horse and tucking him under her arm. Venus, analyzed in depth in chapter 1, is a supernatural female figure of enormous stature who chooses a diminutive male erotic object she can easily control physically; Lady Haughty, though presumably of human scale, shares this desire for diminutive maleness.

The opening of *Epicoene* gestures toward the appeal of diminutive erotic objects both for female figures within the play and, potentially, for women seated in the audience at this boy company production. The theatricality of Haughty's action in trying to dress the boy like a transvestite actor aligns her particularly with the desiring female spectator: her interest in making the boy act as a sexual object for her entertainment and satisfaction potentially reflects the desires of some of the women who came to see this play; at the very least, it reflects the male playwright's ideas of what ladies liked. This play presents new evidence of a subversive political dimension to women's desire for diminutive male erotic objects in the early modern English theater. The subversive politics of this desire model a destabilization of gender order and heterosexual marriage, and this desire might be read as a queer expression of heterosexuality that privileges female desire and drives female figures to assert their advantage of size in order to attain a sexually, socially, or physically powerful position to which they might not otherwise have access. In Lady Haughty's case, physical domination of Clerimont's proxy extends to social and sexual mastery of Clerimont, whom she refuses to satisfy with an affair. Desire for the diminutive has particular consequences at boy company performances where female

spectators pay for the pleasure of watching small actors entertain them and where the represented fictions of the plays construct some characters as large women and others as small boys, even as all parts are played by boy actors. *Epicoene* and *Burning Pestle* both ask boy actors to perform the roles of large women who can physically dominate men or invite them to perform the parts of small women who act large. This latter scenario involves the boy actor doubly acting, in a sense, and requires a skill akin to the virtuosity Rackin ascribes to boys who played heroines cross-dressed as boys (“Shakespeare’s,” 120). Like cross-dressing, such performances of size rely on inversions that carry an erotic charge.

The physical violence of the scene involving Lady Haughty and the Boy is described rather than dramatized and occurs before the audience has seen Haughty, encouraging the spectators to imagine her and her accomplices played by much larger boys than the actor who plays Clerimont’s Boy.<sup>206</sup> Casting possibilities certainly vary, but the Boy’s story constructs these characters as large before we have seen them on the stage. When Haughty and her attendants finally appear in person, the audience might see confirmed what it has already imagined, or it might laugh to find that Haughty and the other women are instead played by smaller boys; this latter possibility would suggest that the Boy quite willingly participated in Haughty’s show of erotic dominance, performing his own diminutive stature and pursuing submission for his own pleasure.

As a queer expression of heterosexuality, desire for the theatrical diminutive has implications for the history of sexuality by offering an alternative to the ideology of

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<sup>206</sup> Jackson I. Cope has a similar take on casting and size in a boy company production of Marlowe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage*. He also observes that the text repeatedly calls for the female characters to carry the male characters around the stage and thus argues that the female characters would have been played by the largest boys in the acting company (321-22).

companionate marriage as it was taking shape during the early modern period.<sup>207</sup> The group dynamic of the encounter at the beginning of *Epicoene*, in which several ladies collude in their domination of the boy, underscores their resistance to long-term monogamy and the values of marriage. James Bromley argues that such opposition to monogamy in early modern texts resists a cultural shift toward idealizing long-term monogamous coupling, which most modern cultures value (29). The promise of physical domination and erotic mastery, enabled by the woman's larger size in relation to the diminutive male object, is an essential part of what drives desire for the diminutive at the performance of a play like *Epicoene* in female figures like Lady Haughty as well as in the female theater spectators who might identify with her. Like Haughty, these spectators might seek erotic pleasures in the city. In other words, while most characters in *Epicoene* see the Collegiate Ladies, especially Lady Haughty, as monstrous, Lady Haughty might be experienced differently by a female spectator whose desires are aroused by her display of dominance and who might appropriate this erotic dominance for her own uses outside the theater. There is some evidence that boy company plays were a popular destination for upper-class women looking for entertainment: Jeanne McCarthy analyzes a letter that suggests that there was a "sisterhood of Blackfriars," a group of court women who attended boy company plays at the Blackfriars late in Elizabeth's reign and early in James's ("Queen's" 99-100).<sup>208</sup> Andrew Gurr notes that the audience at the Blackfriars was generally more aristocratic than at the outdoor amphitheaters and suggests that gentlewomen, like those to whom McCarthy refers, were attracted to this particular venue for its social prestige (37-38). However, in light of my analysis of diminutive erotics and

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<sup>207</sup> For more on companionate marriage and heterosexuality, see the introduction.

<sup>208</sup> McCarthy's evidence comes from the surviving letters of Dudley Carlton.



its consequences for women who desire social and sexual power, it seems equally likely that powerful women of the court sought out venues like Blackfriars particularly for the performances of diminutive male sexuality available there. Desire for the theatrical diminutive has the subversive potential to re-work conventional expectations of gender and intimacy, and depictions of diminutive erotics on the stage provide female spectators with a model of a playful alternative to marriage and married sexuality.

Complementing the Boy's—and the boy actor's—diminutive size is his innocent attitude: in her book on the boy company plays performed at Whitefriars, Mary Bly highlights the charm of boy actors' particular brand of wit, asserting that these plays frequently employ a type of “queer pun that constructs cross-dressed boy actors as sexually aware and sexually available” (4).<sup>209</sup> While Bly is interested in cross-dressed boy actors in a particular playhouse and the homoerotics of their sexual availability, I would like to call attention to the way the boys' diminutive bodies across textual representations of early modern performance spaces project a kind of innocent sexual knowledge that both male and female spectators potentially find alluring. The boy actor makes aggressive expressions of sexuality look playful, cute, and comical, and even non-sexual moments in the plays carry erotic potential because the boy actor's physical charms always render him a potential sexual object. The boy actor is sexually precocious, simultaneously naïve and mature as he makes sexual puns that, because of his smallness, the audience can imagine he says innocently, without a full understanding of their meanings. Lady Haughty seems to see the Boy this way, dismissing him by calling him “innocent” and letting him leave when he says he does not want to wear her dress.

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<sup>209</sup> Bly argues that these plays were particularly aimed at courtly men with a taste for homoerotic punning (5-6).

Though we can tell by the Boy's narrative of the events to Clerimont that he understands and has enjoyed his erotic encounter with the ladies, his answers allow Haughty to perceive him as simultaneously sexual and naïve. This simultaneous posturing as sexually knowledgeable and diminutively innocent is particularly alluring because it suggests the boy's erotic interest in the larger woman and offers Haughty the chance to dominate the erotic encounter.

My discussion of the eroticized diminutive has so far focused on the aristocratic Lady Haughty, whose social status puts at her disposal a number of waiting women who can assist in her physical domination of the Boy, but the diminutive is a category that crosses status lines and has varied expressions and social and sexual consequences across rank. Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* depicts a merchant-class female spectator, and this play invokes size to bring the politics of household management into the theater. Middling-status housewives, who would have fallen below their husbands in the household order but held a superior position in relation to children, servants, and apprentices, would have interacted with diminutive bodies in the daily tasks of housewifery; these experiences might have heightened the erotics of diminutive theatrics for middling-status female spectators. Wall describes the housewife's responsibility for the medical and disciplinary management of the bodies of her dependents as a highly physical set of practices that "smacked of aggressiveness, both on the part of the patient who may well have resented the wife's mandate to poke, probe, and purge the body, and on the part of the housewife who might be imagined to take pleasure in controlling bodies and asserting her medical authority" (*Staging* 183). The housewife might engage in even more overt shows of violence and dominance: Frances E. Dolan discusses the potential

pleasures of servant and child beating, adding that administering corporal punishment was part of how a wife could assert herself as an authority figure in the household alongside her husband (105). These acts of bodily discipline and management confer on the housewife a sense of larger size and strength, perhaps especially when she disciplines an adult servant. The reading of *Burning Pestle* that follows argues that the authority of the housewife, resulting from her size relative to the diminutive bodies of dependents, can also take the form of theatrical authority: the diminutive is the vehicle through which housewives who become theater spectators might not only experience desire but also control theatrical productions. In *Burning Pestle*, the category of the diminutive enables the convergence of domestic and theatrical economies, unsettling social, economic, sexual, and artistic hierarchies as Nell, a grocer's wife, manages the stage as she would a household.

The theater, like the household, is driven by a series of relationships of dependency. Wall implicitly links household practice and the theater by reflecting that “since boys in the children’s companies were not members of guilds, they were dependents within a highly unusual and vague structure of mastering—subject to the authority of the manager but also the royal household and the audience” (*Staging* 177). This dependency on the audience opens a space in which a middling-status housewife—who has not only paid to enter the theater but who seems to spend a good deal of her time caring for the bodies of dependent children and youths at home—can take charge of a boy company performance. Nell’s domestic authority finds its way into the theater and enables her to make the playgoing experience into one that offers her—and possibly other middling-status women—an extension of the pleasures of mastery over small bodies that

were a part of the domestic regime. Thinking through Wall's use of the term *dependents* clarifies the complexity of the connection between household dependency and theatrical economies. Wall uniformly uses *dependents* to discuss those in the home who receive medical treatment from housewives, but a housewife might have treated children, servants, and apprentices as well as her husband and perhaps other unmarried or widowed neighborhood men. Though Wall does not discuss what I see as the inclusiveness of, and contradictions in, this definition of *dependent*, we can read her definition, which is medical rather than economic, as suggesting the potential subjection of adult men to the housewife's power over bodies. In other words, the large body of a man is rendered diminutive through his medical dependency, which causes him to take on relationally small qualities compared to the housewife. This domination of bodies not only smaller but also possibly larger than the housewife's potentially occurs—and is represented—in the theater as well, subjecting adult actors, and perhaps also directors, playwrights, and other theatergoers, to the fantasies and demands of female spectators. The middling-status female spectator's peculiar power in the space of the theater can thus be interpreted as an extension of her domestic authority, which licenses her to demand a playgoing experience that will please her. Though Wall positions the play as part of a broader cultural discourse on housewifery, I focus on the ways in which Nell's largeness in relation to her dependents and to the boy actors enables her to move her dominance as a housewife into the playhouse. This is not to suggest that boy actors are stripped of agency when rendered diminutive: in *Burning Pestle*, the actors' collusion with Nell suggests ways in which diminutive actors could become sexual subjects themselves and in which they might take pleasure in playing the role of the diminutive.

The social status of the grocer George and his wife Nell, the main characters in *Burning Pestle*, has led many critics to read the play as a satire of middle-class audiences.<sup>210</sup> However, my reading of the play posits a representation of women's power over the diminutive within the theater space that crosses classes. Nell's power to direct the action onstage may even be enabled by her non-noble status: she oversees the play in ways similar to Ursula's domination of the fair in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614).<sup>211</sup> The large and in charge middling-status female character in both plays becomes partly an object of satire, but she also has a greater ability to transgress gender strictures and thus to represent the influence of female spectators on the stage. Nell arguably exercises a form of power that extends Charles Whitney's argument about aristocratic female playgoers: he analyzes diaries and letters to argue that gentlewomen "use drama to help identify and assert their interests in relation to male-dominated public arenas and institutions" (203). Whitney's gentlewomen in a sense take the theater home with them, referring to it later and invoking specific performances or characters during moments of struggle with the male forces in their lives. The middling-status Nell, on the other hand, takes charge within the theater itself to challenge the authority of male writers and actors, or at least to assert a parallel and competing kind of female authority.

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<sup>210</sup> For example, see Gurr, who argues that *Burning Pestle* is a commentary on the differences "between crass citizen tastes and the superior gentlemanly values" of those with whom Nell and George sit to watch the play (121). However, Mary A. Blackstone and Cameron Louis's analysis of a disturbance among upper-class spectators at the Globe theater in 1612 questions whether an upper-class audience would have been any better behaved than a middle-class one. Ray J. Booth also posits that it may seem that George, Nell, and their middle-class lack of sophistication are satirized, but the real targets of the satire are the gallants who sit on the stage and who represent an "ignorantly critical" bad audience (52). Like Booth, Leslie Thompson not only contends that *Burning Pestle* satirizes middle-class tastes, she adds that it also satirizes the kind of theater that the Blackfriars itself regularly produced (61).

<sup>211</sup> The working-class Ursula sells roasted pork at the fair in this Jonsonian city comedy. Obese and sweaty, Ursula has worked at the fair for twenty-two years and oversees the business and the bodily functions at the fair from her chair, whose sides her body overflows (2.2). Her size enables her to physically dominate the other characters in the play, as an adult woman like Nell might dominate the boys in a children's company production.

First performed by the Children of the Queen's Revels in 1607, *Burning Pestle* was written for a cast entirely composed of boy actors. George and Nell, a grocer and his wife, are supposedly theater patrons who come to see a city comedy called *The London Merchant*, but they climb onto the stage and insist on the performance of a romance instead.<sup>212</sup> At Nell's suggestion, her husband's apprentice Rafe takes the stage, and she giddily anticipates the pleasure she will take in watching him act: "I warrant our Rafe will look finely when he's dressed" (Induction 92). Like Lady Haughty, Nell particularly enjoys dressing her husband's diminutive apprentice, using the resources of the tiring house for her own pleasure. She builds her theatrical authority from her authority as a housewife, a role in which she likely already has some degree of control over Rafe since he would have lived in her home and been subject to both her and her husband's authority. In the Epilogue, Nell refers to Rafe as "a poor fatherless child", underscoring his social vulnerability and dependence on her and George (Epilogus 4-5).<sup>213</sup> Nell, however, is not simply a voyeur: she takes pleasure in artistic production, in creating increasingly elaborate scenes for the boys to act out under her gaze. She even choreographs the routine performed by a "little boy" during the Interlude between acts 3 and 4: she insists, "I will have him dance 'Fading'—'Fading' is a fine jig" (Interlude 3.7-10). She tells the boy when to begin and leads him through the steps: "Now a turn o'th'toe, and then tumble. Cannot you tumble, youth?" (Interlude 3.11-13). Nell is highly

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<sup>212</sup> Although in the analysis that follows I discuss Nell as a particular representation of female spectatorship, it is important to keep in mind that this is a boy actor representing the desires of the noisy, aggressive Nell. Thompson, however, suggests that the particular ways in which Nell and George interact with the boys in the play—particularly the fact that they never enter the tiring house like the other actors would have done—construct them more 'realistically' as audience members than as boy actors (64).

<sup>213</sup> Ben-Amos argues that the apprentice-master relationship was in some ways like a family relationship, with the master replacing the apprentice's father and the apprentice owing child-like obedience to the master and living in his home (85). She does not, however, discuss the role the master's wife might play as a potential substitute mother.

invested in every detail of the small boy's movements, and her question of whether the boy can "tumble" also betrays a curiosity regarding whether this diminutive boy is yet capable of intercourse.<sup>214</sup> Nell's desire for eroticized diminutive actors drives her to take charge over the production of *The London Merchant* as she fashions herself as a theatrical director who scripts every detail of the performance.<sup>215</sup> Her desires and her ability to coerce the boys into performing her version of the play also set her up as a rival author figure, giving her a form of unauthorized control over the production.<sup>216</sup> As Gurr notes, the seats on the stage at Blackfriars were occupied by gallants, not by the middling sort or by women of any status (36). In this way, Nell transgresses both status and gender for the opportunity to direct this performance and make it into the play *she* wants to see. Nell's size, in turn, becomes the tool through which Nell establishes her authority as a director and satisfies her desire for diminutive theatrics. Her particular form of theatrical engagement mimics the directing of household affairs, thus equating the theatrical diminutive with household dependency and giving the housewife a privileged place in the production of theater.

Nell's desire for diminutive theatrics occurs within the context of a play interested in the performance of size through characters who pretend to be dwarves and giants. When Rafe assumes his role as the Knight of the Burning Pestle, his first act is to equip himself with a squire and a dwarf: "Have you heard of any that hath wandered

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<sup>214</sup> Gordon Williams defines *tumble* as "copulate" based on evidence from *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Hamlet* (315).

<sup>215</sup> In this sense, Nell becomes a reflection on the process of collaborative dramatic authorship, a process with which *Burning Pestle* was intimately involved: Masten describes the history of the shifting authorial attribution of this play, which is sometimes attributed to Fletcher only, sometimes to both Beaumont and Fletcher, and today commonly to Beaumont alone (*Textual* 21-22).

<sup>216</sup> Claire M. Busse is also interested in the circulation of authorial power in the play, seeing the boys who act both plays simultaneously as rivals to the author and the theater company because they take money from Nell and George in exchange for changing the play (93).

unfurnished of his squire and dwarf? My elder prentice Tim shall be my trusty squire, and little George my dwarf” (*BP* 1.3.49-52). Rafe suggests that the actor playing George (not George the grocer, though in the context of this argument it seems significant that the dwarf and the husband share a name) is already of small stature and thus is perfect for playing his dwarf companion. Rafe continues to remind his audience of George’s stature and role, calling him “George my dwarf” and “My trusty dwarf and friend” (1.3.60; 2.2.58). Alternatively, these comments might suggest that the actor playing George is no smaller than the others and therefore the audience must be reminded that he plays a dwarf. Juxtaposed with this focus on George’s miniature body is the recurrence of giants throughout the play. When Mistress Merrythought sees Rafe and his companions in the woods, she cries, “Here be giants” and flees (2.2.48). Here, the audience is asked to see Rafe, Tim, and even George as Mistress Merrythought sees them, and the comedy of the scene is perhaps enhanced by all the talk of George as a dwarf. On his later adventures as a knight, Rafe encounters “this huge giant Barbaroso,” whom the audience knows is Nick the Barber in disguise (3.2.121). Nell sees the boy actor playing Nick playing the giant as indeed enormous, calling out when he enters the stage, “Oh, George, the giant, the giant!” (3.4.14). When Nell sees this terrifying giant, she might see the actors using props to perform largeness, and the audience might laugh at Nell for being fooled by the trick Nick is playing.

Nell becomes swept up by the erotic valences of size in spectatorship, once distracting herself from the play’s discussion of giants to reflect on a time when she and her husband saw a “great Dutchman,” “a goodly man, if all things were answerable to his bigness” (3.2.135-37). Nell supposes that the Dutchman must have been a good person,



but her words also reflect her musings on the Dutchman's potentially proportionally large genitals. These thoughts about the Dutchman remind her that "of all the sights that ever were in London, since I was married, methinks the little child that was so fair grown about the members was the prettiest" (3.2.140-42). Nell finds particularly alluring the interplay between large and small on the body of this "little child" with large genitals. Her desire for the diminutive bodies of the actors throughout the play is arguably driven as much by her fantasies about similarly disproportionate bodies as by her desire to dominate small boys.

We have no way of knowing how *Burning Pestle* was originally cast, but, as in *Epicoene*—in which Lady Haughty and her ladies may have been played by larger boys—we might imagine that Nell and George were also played by larger boys who could be seen as physically intimidating to the smaller boys performing *The London Merchant*.<sup>217</sup> George asks for the Prologue's hand in helping Nell up onto the stage, perhaps as a courtesy to his wife but perhaps also suggesting that the boy actor playing Nell might be wearing padding to make the character appear fat (Induction 49-51). Nell at one point remarks that her tailor "had fourteen yards to make this gown;" she blames the tailor for dishonesty, but this measurement might also reflect her large figure (2.7.19-20). Alternatively, part of the humor of the play might come from casting a very small actor who performs largeness with a loud voice and bossy attitude, and Nell's small stature instead might cause her need for help climbing onto the stage. George continually uses diminutive nicknames, such as "cunny," "mouse," "lamb," and "duck," to address his wife, a habit that becomes increasingly comedic as Nell's presence seems to grow

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<sup>217</sup> Busse also suggests that the actors playing Nell and her husband are "most likely physically stronger" than the other boy actors—I would add that at least they appear to be so (93).

larger throughout the play. Regardless of casting, Nell asserts largeness by verbally infantilizing and diminishing the boy players with diminutive nicknames of her own and exclamations about their miniature cuteness. She addresses one of these characters as “my pretty youth” and, after Rafe’s dwarf George makes a speech, she declares, “the little boy can hit it. By my troth, it’s a fine child” (1.1.69; 1.3.87-88). Describing the same character again, she says, “that same dwarf’s a pretty boy,” equating his cuteness with his diminutive size (2.5.48). She repeatedly underscores the size difference between the audience members and the boy actors, a particularly comic move since Nell, too, is played by a boy; she even once calls attention to the boy beneath her costume by declaring that she will beat Jasper, Luce’s younger suitor and rival to Humphrey, for his disrespectful treatment of Humphrey, or “I am no true woman” (2.4.43). This metatheatrical line implies that all “true women” are capable of physical dominance, aligning the women in the audience with Nell’s shows of largeness. At the same time, it further exaggerates the size differences and dynamics at work in the playhouse during this performance: even as Nell threatens to use her superior size to discipline the diminutive suitor with physical violence, she reminds the audience that she is really a boy actor and that the adult spectators in the rest of the theater are in turn larger than the boys who play Nell and George.

Nell not only diminishes the players with her words; the volume of her demanding voice itself becomes an expression of her enormous desires for these diminutive actors and a method for dominating them and reinforcing her relational largeness compared to the males around her. She is noisy enough that the production cannot proceed while she is talking and directing: George repeatedly tells her, “Hold thy

tongue” and “Peace, cunny” so that the production can resume (1.3.23; 2.7.40). The players continue to acquiesce to her demands not only because George gives them money, but also arguably to keep Nell quiet. Scholars such as Gina Bloom, Linda Phyllis Austern, and Jackson I. Cope and have discussed the sweet, seductive voices of small boy actors, which contrast with Nell’s loud, disruptive vocalizations.<sup>218</sup> Throughout the play, the volume of Nell’s vocalizations aligns her with the female vendors whose cries of “goods for sale” Korda argues made women’s voices a central and competing element of the playgoing experience (145).<sup>219</sup> In tension with the pleasurable aural experience of a boy company performance, Korda argues, were the sounds of the “boisterous, largely female, sideshow” of market women selling snacks in and near the theaters; she notes that these female voices intruded especially on the outdoor amphitheaters but goes on to suggest that the boy companies that played in indoor playhouses had “a more caustic attitude toward the cacophonous cries of the London street” than the adult companies that played in the amphitheaters (147, 146, 172). Korda’s analysis sets up a competition between the sweet sounds of boys’ voices and the noisy cries of market women that threaten to overpower the young male voice and co-opt the play itself. Whitney mentions the prevalence of contemporary derogatory statements about the loud voices of fishwives in early modern playhouses; Nell is above these fishwives in the social hierarchy, but

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<sup>218</sup> Cope proposes that boys were chosen for children’s playing companies for their voices, not their acting abilities (316-17). Austern argues that the boy actor’s voice could make him seductive like a woman (91). Callaghan also discusses the vogue during Elizabeth’s reign for the talents of young boys, citing an instance in which Queen Elizabeth herself was reportedly so impressed by the Latin and Greek oration of the fourteen-year-old Peter Carew that she sent for Robert Cecil so that Cecil could hear Carew repeat it over again. Then “she with Cecyll and divers eminent persons then present were much taken as well with the Speech as with the Orator” (*Shakespeare* 152). This anecdote shows how the boy actor’s voice and person can appeal to a regal female audience and to the men at her court in a more private performance than the one Nell enjoys.

<sup>219</sup> The existence of women as an “absent-presence” of early modern playgoing is central to Korda’s argument that the theater relied on women’s work but neither legitimized nor valued their labor (1-3).

Whitney's point can be extended to loud women of the middling sorts as well (195-96). Nell, though the wife of a grocer, employs a similar strategy as the market women, using her big voice to upstage the players as she gives them new stage directions. By incorporating volume into Nell's size advantage over the diminutive boys, *Burning Pestle* shows how the triumph of the noisy female voice can produce a pleasurable theatrical experience for female spectators in particular.

Though working-class market women might have distracted audience attention from the play, they also provided goods and comestibles that added to the pleasures of playgoing (Korda 146). Nell interacts with these women by sending her husband to buy beer as she re-fashions the pleasures of her own experiences with *The London Merchant*. She commands her husband to "Get me some drink, George," and upon his return she insists that he extend hospitality to the men seated around them: "Fill the gentlemen some beer, George" (3.5.83, Interlude 3.5-6). Her commands to the men around her contribute to the dominance she exerts over the play itself, showing that she is able to extend the largeness of her voice to the interludes between play acts and to the grown men next to her, rendering them also diminutive in terms of their vocal presence (these men are given no lines, though they may well have talked back to the actor playing Nell during the performance). Earlier in the play, Nell scolds the gentlemen seated on the stage with her for smoking, disciplining these male social superiors as she might discipline dependents in order to create a more pleasant environment for her viewing of the play: "what good does this stinking tobacco do you? Nothing I warrant" (1.2.137-38). A female spectator named Lala causes a similar disruption at the beginning of William Hawkins's lesser-known school play *Apollo Shroving* (1626), discussed in chapter two. When the Prologue

begins in Latin, Lala stands up and demands, loudly enough to halt the play, that the boys present a play in English instead so that the women in the audience can understand it (B2r). Lala insists that she speaks not only for herself, but for every housewife present. Once the boys change their play and she is satisfied that it will continue in English, she enters the tiring house, declaring that she will take a male part in the play (B5r). Whereas Nell directs Rafe into the tiring house and manages the play from her privileged seat on the stage, Lala is subsumed into the play as the same boy actor reappears near the end of the performance as Apollo's priest and judge.<sup>220</sup> Both female characters, however, feel they deserve to see a play they will enjoy, and both manage to create such a production by using their voluminous voices to assert their size advantage; they also derive pleasure from this size advantage itself.

Like Lala, who claims to speak for all housewives, Nell shows other housewives in the audience how they might claim for themselves the pleasures of theatrical directing. Laurie Osborne reads Nell's interactions with the performance as motivated by an identification with Luce and Mistress Merrythought, women who struggle to assert their own interests in a patriarchal culture (514). Though Nell seems to dominate her husband George almost as much as she dominates the boys on the stage, she is watching a play in which female characters suffer because of the demands of marriage and patriarchy.<sup>221</sup> If Nell identifies with the female characters in the play, then she likely also identifies with the other women in the audience and might at least imagine that she acts in their interests

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<sup>220</sup> The title page lists the name Nicholas Coleman beside the roles of Lala and Museus, Apollo's Priest and Judge. Tomlinson reads Lala as a satirized upstart but goes on to argue that "this prologue functions as a graphic articulation of assertiveness on the part of the female audience, both as auditors and would-be actors" (193). I would add that Lala and Nell manage this assertiveness through their size, even if rhetorically constructed, and the loudness of their voices.

<sup>221</sup> Luce is the bargaining pawn of her father Venturewell, who wants to marry her to the wealthy Humphrey rather than allowing her to marry her love Jasper. Jasper's mother, Mistress Merrythought, suffers economically because her husband is financially irresponsible.

when she asks for the staging of household practices. When Mistress Merrythought's son Michael complains that his "feet are full of chilblains with traveling," Nell advises that his mother "rub all the soles of his feet, and the heels, and his ankles, with a mouse skin" (3.2. 51-52, 55-56). Though this action is never dramatized, Nell's domestic instructions here work as directorial advice: she wants to see this sort of domestic practice staged. The performance of Mistress Merrythought's medical treatment of her small son, involving potentially erotic foot-rubbing, might appeal to other housewives who could see, through this action, their own dominance over domestic bodies performed and eroticized. Nell also insists that Rafe fight Jasper "and beat him well," directing an integral part of the romance genre in which a knight does battle (2.4.58). However, this type of violence, which would probably look more like a comic beating than chivalric combat, is more typical of plays such as Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* that deal with domestic conflict.<sup>222</sup> This domestic violence dramatizes the pleasure Nell might take in beating her dependents at home, a task Dolan argues could carry an erotic charge (106-07). Nell later demands a staging of her fantasy that the Princess of Cracovia fall in love with Rafe and woo him (4.1.33-39). This scene also fits into the romance Nell wishes to construct, but it shows her meddling with whom her husband's apprentice might choose as a wife. A housewife who has come to know her husband's apprentice might indeed assume this role out of care for the apprentice's social well-being and personal happiness, but such a concern also shows an interest on the part of the housewife in the apprentice's married sexuality. Even these two moments of theatrical instruction, which could be interpreted as conventional elements of the romance Nell and George want to see dramatized, come

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<sup>222</sup> Dolan points out that *The Taming of the Shrew* never actually shows a husband beating his wife. Instead, the violence is inflicted by master on servant and by older sister on younger sister and music instructor (*Marriage* 120-26).

from Nell's domestic experience and show how domestic authority might develop into an eroticized theatrical authority when the housewife asserts her large size to dominate the production.

Nell's version of play-crafting carries potential far beyond her own delight in the diminutive: Alexander Leggett mentions that in 1607, the Children of the Queen's Revels had recently lost their royal patronage in the wake of performances that satirized James I and argues that Beaumont's play dramatizes the company's financial reliance on the public, which included and may have even been dominated by women, for its survival (297).<sup>223</sup> The acting company's dependence on its audience creates the opportunity for a playgoing housewife—who has not only paid to enter the theater but who seems to spend a good deal of her time caring for the bodies of dependent children and youths at home—to take charge of a performance. It is the female spectator who takes center stage as Nell's domestic power finds its way into the theater and enables her not simply to see or hear the play, but to ensure that the playgoing experience offers her, and perhaps other middling status female spectators, theatrical pleasures that extend the pleasures of mastery over small bodies that were a part of the domestic regime. As a consequence, Nell's play might be imagined as saving the company from bankruptcy with its potential to appeal to the demographic of playgoing housewives. Nell's desire to see Rafe dressed as a knight also gestures toward an aspect of the theatrical economy that certainly was dominated by women: Korda demonstrates that market women were the driving force in the second-hand trade that furnished costumes and props for theaters (13). These women might alter dresses to fit diminutive male bodies and even help boy actors dress,

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<sup>223</sup> See also Gurr (66-67).

accessing the same kinds of pleasures Nell takes in imagining the costumed diminutive apprentice and Lady Haughty finds in dressing Clerimont's Boy.

The domestic dominance Nell is licensed to wield as a housewife facilitates the pleasures of Nell's highly physical interactions with the bodies of the actors. She simultaneously flirts and dominates, begs and commands. Before Rafe's first appearance, Nell asks another boy to go into the tiring house and "make my commendations unto him, and withal carry him this stick of licorice. Tell him his mistress sent it him, and bid him bite a piece. 'Twill open his pipes the better, say" (1.1.71-74). Nell, in a sense, woos and flirts with Rafe by sending gifts to him in his dressing room, but this particular gift is charged with medical and sexual meaning significant to her role as the mistress of the house in which Rafe resides. She asserts her physical control over Rafe's body from a distance and makes her power over both Rafe and the other boy clear when she stresses that the boy must tell Rafe who has sent the licorice and the advice. Moreover, the pun on "piece" as "vagina," which Nell instructs Rafe to bite in order to open his throat for better voice projection on stage, links oral sexual activity with the aural experience of attending a boy company play.<sup>224</sup> The large and domineering housewife here constructs a production that hinges on the erotic connection between her body and the smaller boy's oral talents.

Nell's interest in orality surfaces again when she seizes and kisses one of the players, leading her to comment, "Faith, the child has a sweet breath, George, but I think it be troubled with the worms. *Carduus Benedictus* and mare's milk were the only thing in the world for't" (BP 3.3.24-26). Her pleasure in dominating the small actor by forcing

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<sup>224</sup> For evidence that "piece" was commonly used as slang for "vagina" in Jacobean drama, see Williams (234).



a kiss on him quickly turns into a desire to medicate his body not only with plants but also, significantly, with milk from a female animal. In this way, Nell makes clear the boy's dependency on female bodies and imports her tasks as a housewife onto the public stage, and she does so with a physical aggression enabled by her larger size. The aggression of Nell's medical treatments is reflected in the tales told by the knights Rafe rescues after he defeats the giant Barbaroso. The knights reveal that the giant has been treating them for venereal disease but compare their treatments to torture: the first knight tells Rafe that "in courteous wise / This giant trained me to his loathsome den, / Under pretence of killing the itch; / And all my body with a powder strewed, / That smarts and stings" (3.4.65-69). Like this knight, the boy actors might associate the discomfort of medical treatment with torture and experience Nell's medical dominance as pain rather than with the same erotic enjoyment Nell seems to feel.

As the production progresses, Nell's experience as a spectator and a director of the diminutive becomes increasingly eroticized. What begins as giddy excitement over the pleasures of watching small boys act evolves into a desperate need to see and hear her husband's apprentice. Nell even begins to address Rafe as a lover and to express anxiety when he moves offstage and out of her sight. As Rafe exits early in the play, Nell pleads, "I prithee come again quickly, sweet Rafe" (1.3.96). Her anticipation of seeing her husband's apprentice on the stage increases as the performance continues: she whines, as Rafe exits again, "I will not have him go away so soon; I shall be sick if he go away, that I shall. Call Rafe again, George, call Rafe again" (2.2.72-74). Nell's words here draw on tropes of Petrarchan lovers' discourse, a set of conventions parodied when Rafe later rejects the Princess of Cracovia, who moans, "Thou kill'st my heart in parting thus away"

(4.2.71). Nell and the Princess both particularly desire the sight and presence of the beloved, underscoring the eroticization of the gaze at work both within the play and throughout the playhouse.<sup>225</sup> Part of the pleasure Nell derives from her gaze involves the gazes of others, specifically the gentlemen seated around her on the stage: she asks, “Do the gentlemen like Rafe, think you, husband?” and seeks confirmation of their enjoyment several other times (1.3.67-68, 3.4.149-50, Epilogus 7-8). Nell finds watching Rafe pleasurable, and she wants these grown, moneyed gentlemen to share in her desire for the diminutive. However, since Rafe is her husband’s apprentice, the audience might imagine that he would leave the theater with her rather than with any of the gentlemen. Though these events are beyond the scope of the play and there are no stage directions to indicate what happens at the end of the production, the play might imply that the erotic pleasure Nell finds in watching Rafe is heightened for her by the knowledge that, while other spectators take pleasure in Rafe’s performance, Rafe will come home with her after the show. Ellen MacKay discusses Prynne’s assertions about boy actors’ supposed sexual availability to spectators, arguing that the desire for the boy actor is “an impossible desire, excited by the misguided conflation of signifier and signified,” of the actor himself and the sexualized role he plays (155-56). By placing on the stage a diminutive male with whom she shares her house, however, Nell enacts a fantasy in which this conflation is not misguided nor the desire impossible. And while we cannot take Prynne’s word for what may have happened after performances, he expresses a cultural belief that actors were available for audience enjoyment beyond the end of the play, a notion that is

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<sup>225</sup> Wall argues that the eroticization of the gaze was particularly heightened in boy company plays by the position of boys as dependents of the companies and the spectators who paid to see them (*Staging* 179).

very real for the character Nell. In this way, Nell triumphs erotically over the diminutive actors as well as over the gentlemen spectators who might share her desires.

Representations of Nell's desire for the diminutive apprentice-actor surface more provocatively in moments that turn him into a sexual substitute for her husband. A dalliance with her husband's apprentice may not only satisfy her erotically, but also offer a potential relief from the order of gendered dominance and submission prescribed in traditional heterosexual marriage. It is worth noting that, while Nell converses with her husband about kissing the boy she wants to treat, she has no scripted erotic contact with George during the play but much with the diminutive actors. All of her erotic attention is focused on the smaller bodies around her, and none on her husband. For Nell, the theater may be a space that offers an alternative to the category of *wife* in the form of easily-dominated diminutive actors. Certain moments in the performance simultaneously underscore Rafe's diminutive traits and show how he might take the place of the grown husband; indeed, he makes an ideal substitute husband precisely because he is not an adult man and does not rival the female character's largeness.<sup>226</sup> Mistress Merrythought is the first character in the play-world of *The London Merchant* to eroticize a diminutive male, her young son Michael whom she miniaturizes by associating him with his nurse: "We'll go to thy nurse's, Mick: she knits silk stockings, boy; and we'll knit too, boy" (4.3.57-58). In this brief line, she calls him "boy" twice and uses a diminutive form of his name while planning to enlist him in the feminine craft of making small articles of

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<sup>226</sup> This substitution has psychosexual roots in the Freudian theory of the interchangeability of penis, baby, and man. The diminutive dependent, who might figure as a 'baby,' in some sense, can easily substitute for the adult man, as both reflect the desire for a penis (Freud, "On Transformations of Instinct" 198). For an analysis of young male characters who actually marry widows and provide sexual fulfillment without contesting the women's dominant position in the relationships, see Jennifer Panek (*Widows and Suitors* 98).

clothing. When she leaves her husband and flees with Michael, she dotes on her son while declaring that her husband “shall never come between a pair of sheets with me again while he lives” (2.2.18-19). By lavishing her attention on her small son, Mistress Merrythought (whose name also puns on the potentially sexual thoughts she might have) makes him a sort of rival to her husband for her love. Nell reacts to this scene, immediately declaring, “I would have Rafe, George; I’ll see no more else indeed, la,” then going on to refer to Rafe as “my boy” (2.2.29-30, 32). Jealous of the small dependent boy upon whom Mistress Merrythought dotes, Nell seeks her own eroticized dependent; in calling him “my boy”—a term early moderns used to refer to both youths and servants—she reinforces his diminutive stature and her possession of him as an object.<sup>227</sup> Her use of the singular possessive pronoun also contrasts with the plural “our Rafe” in the Induction, quoted earlier, stressing that she no longer wants to share him with George. Nell additionally implies that her husband does not satisfy her erotically—but his apprentice can. Later in the same scene, Nell demands that Rafe perform a version of military masculinity especially for her: “let him come fight before me, and let’s ha’ some drums and some trumpets, and let him kill all that comes near him” (2.2.74-76). Because Rafe performs manhood through these deeds, he inhabits a paradoxical body that is soldierly, virile, and manly—yet still diminutive. When the diminutive apprentice performs this kind of manhood, he becomes more available to Nell as a sexual surrogate because he appears sexually mature but remains easy to manipulate physically.

The eroticized diminutive might appeal to female figures for a number of reasons both social and sexual, but, as we have seen in the previous chapters’ analyses of *The*

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<sup>227</sup> Amanda Bailey argues that boys at the side of gallants could work as eroticized human accessories (309). She also demonstrates that the possessive “my boy” was often used in such relationships as they appeared in drama (318).

*Faerie Queene*, *The New Academy*, and the rhetoric of size at Elizabeth I's court, the diminutive can also be a category with which some male characters wish to be aligned because it enables modes of erotic expression and opportunities for advancement not available to them otherwise. Jennifer Panek argues that marriage to an older, socially and economically established woman could quickly elevate a young man's status, and some men might take pleasure in the reduced domestic responsibilities that go along with becoming a diminutive erotic object (*Widows* 48-49; "Why" 292). Panek presents evidence that apprentices who married their masters' widows could quickly attain the status of master themselves (*Widows* 16). Whatever may have motivated apprentices to marry their masters' widows, in this play Rafe's erotic banter with Nell suggests that he hopes for social advancement: to step into George's shoes as Nell's husband, and thus as a grocer, if George were to die. Rafe shows a subtle receptivity to Nell's advances, indicating that he foresees the advantages of becoming Nell's diminutive object. Nell remembers a time when her child was lost in the city: "Rafe was the most comfortablest to me. 'Peace, mistress,' says he, 'let it go. I'll get you another as good'" (2.5.23-25). The pun here on "get," which could mean either "find" or "beget," expresses Nell's fantasy of having the apprentice perform the husband's job in bed and situates Rafe between the lost child and the progenitor-figure.<sup>228</sup> More importantly, though, Rafe is here figured as ready to grow up into the husband's role—almost. As the subordinate to the older, sexually and socially experienced Nell, Rafe would never quite attain a relationally larger status in this fantasized relationship. Nell's memory of this incident not only dramatizes her desire for the diminutive, but also suggests that the diminutive male might take pleasure in such a relationship. Rafe participates in flirtatious banter with her, at least in

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<sup>228</sup> See Freud, "On Transformations of Instinct" (198).

her imagination, shifting the diminutive apprentice-actor from an object of Nell's gaze to a possible sexual subject.

In Jonson's *Epicoene*, Clerimont's Boy similarly betrays a degree of enjoyment at being rendered diminutive, taking pleasure in becoming an object of desire for the older, larger, stronger, and more socially elite Lady Haughty. The Boy asks Clerimont not to repeat the story he has just told in case it angers the women; as he boasts, "now I am the welcom'st thing under a man that comes there" (1.1.8-9). The Boy puns on being "under a man"—smaller than a man and beneath the status of manhood, but also under Clerimont during sexual activity, a reading bolstered by Truewit's description of the Boy as Clerimont's ingle (1.1.24). This pun stresses the Boy's small size while sexualizing him as an object of both homosexual and queer heterosexual desire, and it also suggests that this boy merely feigns his sexual innocence with Lady Haughty as part of the game that keeps him returning to her house. Although, or perhaps because, he receives mild physical abuse from her, the Boy finds Haughty desirable, reflecting a paradoxical duality in the widow's effect on men: her superior age, wealth, and experience might threaten men yet also provoke their desires (Panek, *Widows* 47-48). Mr. Otter, a minor character in *Epicoene*, is a man who has succeeded in marrying into a higher status and a life of material (if not marital) ease: Mrs. Otter maintains her control over the household by reminding her husband that she raised him socially through marriage (3.1.24-44).<sup>229</sup> Mrs. Otter's marriage to her social inferior gives her a way around seemingly restrictive gender roles and enables her to keep her authority over her household and, while Mr.

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<sup>229</sup> Juana Green analyzes Mrs. Otter's control over the couple's material goods and argues that though women did not have legal rights to property, they often managed it anyway (261).

Otter is subject to her authority, he spends his time gaming and relaxing with his friends rather than working.

Like Mr. Otter, who is often read as a foolish character, Nell is read by some critics as a satirized, humiliated version of the female spectator.<sup>230</sup> Nell, however, exhibits a degree of social savvy that makes her comical without becoming wholly an object of satire. She ends the play inviting the gallants seated on the stage with her and George to her home—once again using the singular possessive pronoun—to continue their acquaintance: “if I might see you at my house, it should go hard but I would have a pottle of wine and a pipe of tobacco for you” (Epilogus 6-7). Though the rest of the audience may have snickered at Nell, she knows what gallants like—wine and tobacco—and presents herself as an authoritative hostess rather than as an object of mockery. Indeed, Nell is shamed much less than male characters who exhibit excessive desires in contemporaneous plays, such as Falstaff, Malvolio, and *Epicoene*’s Morose, all of whom are made to feel acutely their humiliation.<sup>231</sup> Nell may be less subjected to discipline because her desires construct women’s power in relation to the diminutive, subtly, rather than overtly, challenging existing social order. However, in inviting the gallants to her home to continue the pleasures of the day, Nell also reinforces her own large-scale prominence in the theatrical world she has spent the past several hours dominating. If the gallants indeed find the diminutive Rafe as desirable as Nell does (in the Epilogue she reiterates her hope that they “do like the youth”), then she is also inviting them to

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<sup>230</sup> See Osborne, who argues that Nell expresses female theatrical power but also acknowledges that “Beaumont’s display of her as an object of fun subjects her to patriarchal disapproval for her inappropriate choices of gaze and action” (494).

<sup>231</sup> Wall suggests a similar lack of discipline for the intruding housewife: “Nell’s strange passion for the players—her gleeful desire to make everyone into an ailing dependent that she can medicate—is lightly satirized but never demonized as a threat to male subjectivity” (*Staging* 172).

continue gazing at him, but this time in her home and fully on her terms (Epilogus 7). By offering to continue the show, Nell underscores Rafe's status as her diminutive dependent and extends her theatrical control back into the domestic sphere.

Nell's loquacious excitement throughout the performance and her aggressive flirtation with Rafe and the other boys point toward a particular erotics of the diminutive available to audiences of boy company plays and, I would argue, especially to the women in these audiences. This is not to say that all female spectators experienced boy company plays as erotic; rather, women's relationships with domestic bodies heighten the potential for an erotic response to the diminutive, easily-managed bodies on the stage. Companies with adult actors, such as those I consider in the next section, are also subject to the erotics of diminutive theatrics, both as they are represented on the stage and as they exist through tricks of perspective. My analysis of size and spectatorship suggests that higher-paying patrons who sat farther from the stage than lower-paying spectators might have understood their positions as privileged because they could look down upon the tiny actors onstage. More to the point, a lady could pay more money to ensure that the actors who entertained her for the afternoon appeared quite small from her point of view. Perspective can render even adult men on the stage relationally smaller than those who gaze at them from a distance, thereby incorporating them, along with boy actors, into the category of the diminutive and making them erotically available as objects for the female spectator's gaze. Women's experiences of desire for the diminutive onstage, whether that desire be for boys, adult actors, or men in the audience, might have affected their understanding of and behavior in the household because of the ways this desire could shift patterns of gendered dominance and submission. The category of the diminutive



thus not only revises a set of artistic and erotic possibilities for female spectatorship, but also refigures male–female desire in ways that privilege female erotic agency.

### **Female Transvestism and the Imitation of the Male Diminutive**

Shakespeare's cross-dressing plays, staged by companies consisting of adult and boy actors, take up representations of female desire for diminutive theatrics not by depicting female spectators, but by dramatizing the desire of a socially and economically powerful woman for another woman masquerading as a diminutive male. The ways Viola in *Twelfth Night* and Rosalind in *As You Like It* perform their roles as youths prove attractive to Olivia and Phoebe. Unlike theater spectators, Olivia and Phoebe are characters unaware they are witnessing a performance, but their desire for diminutive males may reflect the desires some theatrical spectators experienced for diminutive actors. In each play, the character disguised as the male youth exhibits markers of smallness that eroticize him, such as boyish wit, a high-pitched voice, and a job in service that marks him as a dependent. Through these markers, he becomes a diminutive object of desire for a woman of or seeking high status; desire becomes another form of power for female characters such as the heiress Olivia and the social-climber Phoebe. And like *Burning Pestle's* depiction of female spectatorship, *Twelfth Night* and other cross-dressing plays represent this form of female desire not as monstrous, but as pleasurable and beneficial for both the older woman and the younger boy or man. By condoning rather than critiquing female desire for the diminutive, these plays gesture toward cultural acceptance of this form of eroticism and the queer marital alliances to which it might lead.

My discussion of cross-dressing plays differs from many recent discussions of this topic in that I consider the character in male disguise as a male youth with particular traits that make him part of the category of the eroticized diminutive. Previous work on boy actors has emphasized the boy beneath the costume or the gender bending and social subversion facilitated by the female character passing as a man.<sup>232</sup> This work has focused primarily on the ways the boy visible beneath the costume is an object of attraction for male audience members.<sup>233</sup> And while critics like Traub have examined the appeal of cross-dressed characters to female audiences in order to theorize female same-sex desire, there has been less attention to the queer heteroeroticism that develops in cross-dressing plays.<sup>234</sup> When we focus, however, on the play-worlds in which female characters see

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<sup>232</sup> For example, Catherine Belsey's early work on cross-dressing argues that "Shakespearean comedy can be read as disrupting sexual difference, calling in question that set of relations between terms which proposes as inevitable an antithesis between masculine and feminine, men and women" ("Disrupting" 171). Stephen Greenblatt's work on hermaphrodites and the Galenic one-sex model of early modern biology takes Belsey's claims about the challenge to sexual difference even further: if men and women have the same sex organs with only a difference in heat to determine sex, then gender is always double and never absolute (78). Thus, "sexual difference...turns out to be unstable and artificial at its origin" (76). For Belsey, cross-dressing challenges sexual difference; for Greenblatt, cross-dressing exposes the truth that sexual difference never really existed in the first place. Howard points out a contemporary contradiction in Greenblatt's argument, which is that Stubbes and other writers who criticized real-life cross-dressing invoked the gender difference in the Genesis creation story. She goes on to assert that "the Renaissance needed the idea of two genders, one subordinate to the other, as a key part of its hierarchical view of the social order and to buttress its gendered division of labor" (98). Thus, for Howard, cross-dressing is less an issue of disrupting biological sex than of challenging social structures based on gender. Greenblatt and Howard, along with Mark Breitenberg, Sara Gorman, and Rebecca Jennings, link literary study with historical accounts of cross-dressing and conclude that real-life cross-dressing, like cross-dressing on the stage, challenges the fixity of biological gender and potentially upsets patriarchal power and order.

<sup>233</sup> Lisa Jardine argues that the boy was always visible beneath the costume and that cross-dressing plays in particular emphasize the maleness of female characters in a way that appeals specifically to other male characters in the play and to men in the audience ("Boy Actors" 62-65).

<sup>234</sup> Traub focuses on the male homoerotic desires depicted in and aroused by *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, but she acknowledges that previous study of these plays "neglects the female desires constructed by the playtexts and imaginistically available to female play-goers" (*Desire* 122). Expanding on these ideas, Traub argues that "homoerotic activity within Shakespeare's plays is predicated on, but not identical to, the presence of boy actors playing female parts. The material conditions of the early modern theater offered a de facto homoerotic basis upon which to build structures of desire, which were then, through theatrical representation, made available not only to male but to female audience members" (122). Here, Traub counters assertions like the following one from Jardine: "it does not matter that the seductiveness of the boy player is for plot purposes being appreciated by a woman" within the play because the erotic performance is always for a male audience (63). Jardine's argument makes a fascinating case for the homoerotic appeal

Cesario, for instance, as a charming male youth and interact with him as a diminutive male object, we find that *Twelfth Night* and other cross-dressing plays engage transvestism to produce an alternative form of heteroeroticism with a unique place in early modern English culture and its own implications for that culture's gender hierarchies. The transvestism in these plays adds yet another dimension to the erotics of the diminutive that we have seen represented in dramatic and non-dramatic texts throughout this project.

Despite the prolific work on the boy actor beneath the disguise and the multidimensional eroticism made possible by the boy dressed as a woman playing a boy, I have chosen to bracket the boy actor in the argument that follows. This decision respects Traub's warning about the pitfalls involved with discussing cross-dressing plays: "whereas formalist critics often ignore the impact of the boy actor on the text's signification, historical critics...conversely emphasize the extent to which early modern theatrical practice enabled what is increasingly being called a 'transvestite theater.' In this, they follow the lead of the antitheatricalists in conflating the material reality of the boy actor with the play's action" (*Desire* 122). By positioning my arguments about cross-dressing plays in the context of spectatorship, I hope to avoid Traub's charge against formalists who ignore an important convention of performance, but I also move boy actors to the background of my argument so that I can better focus on the world of the play.<sup>235</sup> I do not deny that the use of boy actors is an important theatrical convention that crucially shapes the erotic dynamics of the early modern theater. However, my argument

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of the boy actor, but she ignores female spectators and conflates the physical presence of a boy on stage with the world of the play taking place on that stage.

<sup>235</sup> In this I follow Jennifer Drouin, who reads "characters as fictional agents who function in a world similar to our own" (39).

is primarily concerned with representations of *female* desire on the stage, in playhouses in which women were present in the audience. For this reason, I choose to analyze female characters as female characters, bracketing the boy actor in order better to understand female desire as it is represented in the plays and may have functioned in the theater.

My decision to keep boy actors on the periphery of this part of my argument is also historically motivated: English cross-dressing plays replicate a plot convention that was first popular on the continent—where women did play women’s roles. Attention to continental drama enables a comparative approach that will help elucidate the way the erotics of the diminutive works in English texts. One of Shakespeare’s sources for *Twelfth Night* is thought to be the anonymous Italian play *Gl’Ingannati* (1531); though writing for an all-male stage, English playwrights take cues from continental predecessors and contemporaries as they adapt certain tropes like cross-dressing to the English stage.<sup>236</sup> Details from *Gl’Ingannati*, as well as details from the Spanish *comedia Don Gil de las calzas verdes* (1615) by Tirso de Molina, reveal parallels between representations of female desire in all-male productions and on stages that included both male and female actors.<sup>237</sup> Isabella in the Italian play and Inés in the Spanish *comedia* share Olivia’s aggressive desire for the character passing as a male youth. The most significant difference is that the continental plays exaggerate the erotic appeal of the

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<sup>236</sup> Rachel Poulsen argues that “the fame (and notoriety) of Italian actresses proved irresistible to English playwrights, many of whose works...explored the limits of female behavior and charisma in terms both admiring and critical” (172). She states that early Italian plays “made their way into England via printed copies, translations, prose variations, and performances by professional troupes” (172).

<sup>237</sup> Although the Spanish stage attempted to exclude actresses from the stage for a few years at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the public massively rejected this move and actresses quickly returned to their profession. In fact, leading actresses were considered the most important members of their acting troupes and were generally paid more than the male actors in the company (Oehrlein 21; Daniels 18).

diminutive more than their English counterparts, making these plays useful in drawing out an erotics of the diminutive that is somewhat less explicit in the English texts.

Though the diminutive works in similar ways in these three theatrical traditions, I want to call attention to the different stakes for the disguised female character in each country's drama. As Howard and others have discussed, early modern pamphlet writers across Europe associated cross-dressing women with prostitution and criminality.<sup>238</sup> On the English stage, however, female characters cross-dress specifically to protect their chastity.<sup>239</sup> Viola changes into male garb to enter the service and receive the protection of a nobleman in a strange land, and Rosalind in *As You Like It* dresses as a youth with "a swashing and a martial outside" for the potentially dangerous journey into the forest of Ardenne (*As You Like It* 1.3.114).<sup>240</sup> Viola and Rosalind hardly even contemplate this choice: it seems to be the natural survival solution for a noble virgin far from home. However, Juana, the cross-dressed protagonist in *Don Gil*, has assumed masculine attire in order to pursue the man who had promised to marry her, slept with her, and then left for Madrid to marry another woman. Rosaura in Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño* and Leonor in Ana Caro's *Valor, agravio y mujer* disguise themselves as young men for similar reasons.<sup>241</sup> Across the genre of the Spanish *comedia*, female characters employ cross-dressing to recuperate lost honor rather than to preserve virginity, as in

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<sup>238</sup> Surveying several pamphlets and referencing depositions, Howard concludes that "in court cases female crossdressing seems to be read as a generalized marker of criminality" (97). She specifically quotes William Harrison, who comments at the end of his diatribe against cross-dressing women, "I have met with some of these trulls in London so disguised that it passed my skill to discern whether they were men or women" (quoted in Howard, 95). The word "trull" here is crucial, since Howard and others have remarked that the word had a contemporary association with cheap prostitutes.

<sup>239</sup> Michael Shapiro remarks that this emphasis on chastity is likely influenced by earlier genres: "in prose romances, epics, and pastoral narratives, cross-dressed women demonstrated fidelity to their lovers, fiancés, and husbands" (*Gender* 66).

<sup>240</sup> See 1.1.99 for the spelling of *Ardenne* and a note on that spelling.

<sup>241</sup> This trope exists in *Don Quixote* as well: Dorotea, a virgin seduced by don Fernando, the second son of the man who owned her family's land, dresses in male attire to stop his marriage to Luscinda, a noble woman from a nearby village (255-56).

English comedies. Interestingly, Rebecca Jennings's historical approach to English cross-dressing provides several accounts of English women who cross-dressed for practical reasons similar to the heroines of Spanish *comedias*.<sup>242</sup> The Italian play I discuss here falls somewhere in the middle: Lelia's virginity is in question, as she may have been raped by Spanish soldiers several years before the action of the play.<sup>243</sup> Her honor also seems to have been compromised the moment she changed into male attire, and she races to win the man she loves before she is discovered and shamed. Additionally, Lelia notes that she is really no safer wandering around Modena dressed as a boy than if she were not so disguised because the gallants of the city are just as likely to sexually assault a diminutive male as a lone woman (*Gl'Ingannati* 1.3). These variations reflect differing cultural attitudes during the period regarding the relationship between cross-dressing and the sexual availability of women. What all three literary traditions share, however, is the idea that when a female character disguises herself as a youth she quickly becomes the object of desire for another female character. This convention makes her available to women as an erotic object but also makes her completely unavailable when the plays' endings close down the possibility of marriage between two women.

Although I have chosen to bracket the boy actor, I would nonetheless like to return to the work of earlier scholars such as Belsey and Howard, who discuss the social and erotic significance of cross-dressing. Recent scholarship on cross-dressing plays has moved away from these issues, focusing instead on genre, class, or religious issues in the

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<sup>242</sup> For example, one woman dressed as a man to rescue her husband who was "press-ganged into the army" and another, the eighteenth-century Hannah Snell, disguised herself as a man to chase after her husband, who had stolen from and then abandoned her, leaving her pregnant (25, 26).

<sup>243</sup> She discusses her captivity with her maid Clemenzia, but she never makes it clear exactly what happened to her (1.3).

plays, or on modern performances and Hollywood adaptations.<sup>244</sup> These shifts in the critical terrain, I argue, were partly motivated by theoretical problems in earlier discussions of cross-dressing. Traub's critique of work by Jardine and others who study cross-dressing and eroticism takes issue with the way "gender and sexuality pose as synonymous in our critical discourse in a way that not only despecifies our analyses but denies and delegitimizes erotic difference" (*Desire* 94). Jonathan Goldberg also takes to task earlier scholars for their naturalization of heterosexuality. Unfortunately, the recent turn away from the erotic dynamics of cross-dressing plays has sacrificed an important site for the study of early modern sexualities. My project re-engages an earlier set of critics in order to re-open this discussion, as I assert that cross-dressing plays challenge patriarchal values by complicating the practices of heterosexuality. In this claim I build on Howard, who posits that "crossdressing threatened a normative social order based upon strict principles of hierarchy and subordination, of which woman's subordination to man was a chief instance" (94). According to Howard, this subordination plays out through a heterosexual dynamic that binds women to men in marriage.<sup>245</sup> I build on the

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<sup>244</sup> Robin Headlam Wells and Nancy Lindheim have critiqued the arguments of scholars such as Greenblatt, Belsey, and Howard, asserting that, rather than striving for historical accuracy, the work of early scholars expresses our own postmodern anxieties about gender and power. For example, Lindheim re-thinks the historical relevance of earlier arguments, focusing on how the class and gender issues in *Twelfth Night* fit into the structural need for a generically-appropriate comedic ending (679). Critical close readings of recent performances have revealed a range of ways of representing gender and class in modern-day Shakespeare. See, for example, L. Monique Pittman's analysis of the 2006 film *She's the Man*, based on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*; Catherine Thomas's essay on Trevor Nunn's 1996 film version of *Twelfth Night*; and Chad Allen Thomas's discussion of performing "queer Shakespeare." James C. Bulman's collection *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance* features essays on contemporary performances of a wide section of the Shakespearean canon by all-male and all-female acting companies. In his introduction to the collection, Bulman states that he has put together this volume because "it is symptomatic of a conservatism endemic to Shakespeare studies that scholars have preferred to argue endlessly about historical performances that they can only imagine, and for which very little documented evidence exists, than to discuss performances that they have seen and for which they have all the material evidence necessary to do a thorough cultural analysis" (13).

<sup>245</sup> As Adrienne Rich and Bach have argued, heterosexuality operates as an ideology that subordinates women to men. Rich describes "the institution of heterosexuality itself as a beachhead of male dominance," arguing that heterosexuality cannot simply refer to sexual relations between a man and a woman but is

work of Jardine and Howard by shifting my focus from the figure in male disguise to the female character who desires him and thereby resists the limitations of the heterosexual dynamic Howard describes. A woman's desire for the diminutive, for the boyish traits she sees in the character disguised as a male youth, counters patriarchal ideas of normative sexuality that dictate women's sexual submission to men. Female desire for a diminutive male actually seems to elide that problem of patriarchal heterosexuality: male-female intimacy can exist without the male clearly taking the superior position, especially when the woman maintains the size advantage.<sup>246</sup>

*Twelfth Night*, *Don Gil*, and *Gl'Ingannati* all dramatize a female desire for the diminutive that challenges the ideology of heterosexuality. However, I would argue that Spain and Italy were not a part of the "homosocial imaginary" that Rebecca Ann Bach posits for early modern England.<sup>247</sup> As I discuss in more detail in my introduction, Bach argues that part of the turn to the "heterosexual imaginary" in England occurred during the Restoration when male honor began to depend on the sexual conduct of women (*Shakespeare* 52). This formulation of honor existed much earlier in Spain and Italy; thus, I would argue that in the worlds of *Don Gil* and *Gl'Ingannati*, heterosexuality is

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actually a complex ideology that drives the subordination of women in our culture (633). Bach points out that "most people would call heterosexuality a natural feature of the human condition, not an ideology," then goes on to illustrate the ways in which the ideology of heterosexuality creates certain expectations for men and for women and divides both groups into "normal" (those who desire to conform to these expectations) and "deviant" (those who do not) (*Shakespeare* 10-11). Howard links these issues to marriage specifically, positing that "for women heterosexual marriage is the primary cultural *form* in which their gender subordination is enacted" (115, emphasis in original).

<sup>246</sup> For a discussion of the patriarchal power reinforced by heterosexuality and its practices, see Bach, who distinguishes between heterosexuality as a power relation and the heteroerotic experiences of men and women: "marriage is not heterosexuality, and sex between a man and a woman is not heterosexuality" (*Shakespeare* 12).

<sup>247</sup> Bach uses this term to refer to a culture that values relationships between people of the same sex more than it values relations between men and women (*Shakespeare* 2). The counterpoint to this term is Bach's "heterosexual imaginary," which refers to a culture that "values heterosexual intercourse for pleasure, values men's sexual desire for women, and sees women as naturally less desirous than men" (2).



already, to use Adrienne Rich's term, compulsory.<sup>248</sup> I posit that this differing ideology in part accounts for the overt diminutive erotics in the continental texts. Thus, while it is important to keep in mind that different sexual ideologies might underlie each of these texts, this very difference highlights aspects of the diminutive which enable a richer analysis of Shakespeare's plays and reveal a European fantasy of female desire for the eroticized diminutive.

The plot of *Twelfth Night* may be familiar to my readers, but a brief overview of the plots of the Spanish and Italian plays to which I compare it will be helpful. Tirso de Molina's *Don Gil* begins with doña Juana enlisting the help of her family servant Quintana as she puts on green breeches in order to pursue don Martín, the man who has promised to marry her, seduced her, and left Valladolid to marry doña Inés in Madrid. Juana has learned that Martín plans to assume the name don Gil because he expects the feisty Juana to try to stop him and so that he can better deceive Inés and her father. Juana, too, takes the name of Gil and woos Inés before Martín has the opportunity to meet her. The plot follows a series of mistaken identities and the competition between the two Giles as Inés's cousin doña Clara also falls for Juana/Gil and as Inés's other suitor, the foppish and incompetent don Juan, attempts to take revenge on both Giles. A scene near the end of the play that takes place in the dark involves four different characters, Martín, Juana, Clara, and Juan, all impersonating the fictional Gil. The plot of *Gl'Ingannati* follows Lelia as she dresses as a boy and presents herself to Flamminio, the man she loves, as a servant named Fabio. Flamminio sends Fabio to woo Isabella, who quickly falls in love

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<sup>248</sup> Rich uses the phrase "compulsory heterosexuality" throughout her article to refer to the cultural assumption that women are oriented "sexual[ly] toward men and reproductive[ly] toward their young" (631). For work on honor in Golden Age Spain and in Renaissance Italy, see C. A. Jones, Scott K. Taylor, and Laura Giannetti and Guido Rugierro.

with Lelia as Fabio. In the meantime, Lelia's long-lost twin brother Fabrizio, thought dead, returns to Modena and seeks his father. His father, however, has heard a rumor that Lelia is dressed as a boy and is wandering the city; when he sees Fabrizio, he assumes he is Lelia and locks him in Isabella's house for safekeeping. Isabella is overcome with desire, which she and Fabrizio consummate before promising themselves to each other. Although Flamminio sets out for revenge when he hears that his servant Fabio has been kissing Isabella, when he learns the truth he agrees to marry Lelia. For the rest of this chapter, I will refer to the disguised characters as the other characters see and refer to them: most often, therefore, I refer to Juana as Gil, Lelia as Fabio, and Viola as Cesario. I employ this strategy because even though the characters retain their female names when the plays introduce their lines of speech, the other characters in the plays all see male youths instead of disguised women, and all three female characters successfully pass as diminutive males during most of the action.<sup>249</sup> For example, while Viola draws attention to her femaleness during moments when she is alone with the audience (for instance, she calls herself "poor monster"), she remains Cesario as far as the other characters within the world of the play are concerned (2.2.32). The exceptions to my naming system occur at moments when I do want to emphasize the femaleness of the character.

Gil, Fabio, and Cesario share traits that define them as diminutive males with a particular appeal for the plays' powerful female characters; these same traits also align the characters in male disguise with boy actors, thus reinforcing their potential desirability for women. As with *Burning Pestle*, we have no way of knowing how these plays were originally cast and what these bodies looked like on the stage, but this is not

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<sup>249</sup> See Drouin, who analyzes *Twelfth Night* and examines Viola's successful passing as Cesario throughout the play in interactions with a broad set of characters (40-45).

as much of a limitation as one might think, for, as I argued in the previous section, the diminutive is constructed relationally. In these plays, traits such as high-pitched voices and beardless faces mark not simply biological age (or gender) but a kind of miniaturized masculinity, and the dependent status of the disguised youths leads them to bow and kneel to the more socially powerful women they solicit. These markers of the diminutive are particularly alluring for the women: Olivia and Isabella both seem to enjoy toying with the less powerful proxy of their socially prominent suitors, and Gil's, Fabio's, and Cesario's high voices and beardless faces inspire female desire. It is important to note, however, that although Olivia, Inés, and Isabella do not know that the male youths they desire are "really" women, the audience might laugh as they imagine the characters they know as cross-dressed women growing facial hair and acquiring deeper voices.

Considering the relationships in these plays as undergirded by an erotics of size helps us better understand the social and marital goals of the female characters and underscores the extent of their challenge of patriarchal heterosexuality while calling attention to the gap between what characters know and what the audience knows.

Olivia best articulates the complex relations among status, age, and intelligence and the ways these contribute to female desire for a husband who can perpetually be rendered diminutive. Sir Toby states early in the play that Olivia will "not match above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit, I have heard her swear't," possibly indicating that Olivia seeks an equal, but also suggesting that in Olivia's ideal match she will hold the upper hand socially and economically as well as in age, experience, and intelligence (1.3.90-92). As Howard and Stephen Greenblatt have both argued, Olivia is a shrewd, strong-willed manager who enjoys ruling her own household and refuses to submit to a

heteronormative marriage.<sup>250</sup> Cesario, then, seems to be just what Olivia has been waiting for when he arrives at her door, “as a squash is before ’tis a peascod, or a codling when ’tis almost an apple” (1.5.140-41). Olivia’s desire for Cesario, whom Malvolio describes as a miniature fruit or vegetable, parallels the desire other diminutive males arouse in Inés and Isabella. In each case, this arousal comes from the diminutive speech and physical appearance of the disguised character at the moment he meets the desirous woman. While Inés’s original suitor Juan seems easy to control, he is less erotically appealing because he lacks Gil’s beauty and courtly speech: Inés describes Gil’s “shining face, / his words like honey” (1.990-91).<sup>251</sup> Her description turns Gil into the object of a Petrarchan blazon, a miniaturized image of beauty contained in the tiny space of a fourteen-line poem.<sup>252</sup> Inés goes on to emphasize the appeal of Gil’s legs in his green breeches, musing, “and his breeches all of green, / which are heaven more than breeches” (1.992-93).<sup>253</sup> She later disdains Martín when he puts on green breeches, indicating that she finds his “manly” legs less attractive than the diminutive calves Gil exhibits as Juana in disguise. The clownish character Caramanchel, who becomes Gil’s servant, unknowingly sees through Gil’s disguise, though he does not put the facts together to discover the character’s true identity. He does, however, frequently comment on Gil’s androgyny; in the process he calls the audience’s attention to the high voice and beardless face that mark diminutive masculinity.<sup>254</sup> The diminutive is similarly attractive in the

<sup>250</sup> Both Howard and Greenblatt extend this assertion into an argument that Olivia represents a particular threat to the patriarchal order of the play-world (Howard 114; Greenblatt 68-69).

<sup>251</sup> “Una cara como un oro, / de almibar unas palabras.” English translations of passages from *Don Gil* are my own, but they are cited by the line number of the Spanish text.

<sup>252</sup> For a discussion of sonnets as a form of the miniature, see Patricia Fumerton.

<sup>253</sup> “Y unas calzas todas verdes, / que cielos son, y no calzas.”

<sup>254</sup> Caramanchel calls his master “don Gilito” and, upon first coming into his service, reflects, “qué bonito / que es el tiple muscatel” [how pretty is his treble, adolescent voice] (1.535-36). As don Gil goes off to court doña Inés, Caramanchel laughs and tells him, “que en el juego de amor, aunque os déis priesa, / si de

Italian play: the maid Pasquella advises Fabio to take advantage of his beardless face and his red lips while he has them (2.2).<sup>255</sup> Olivia, too, reflects on Cesario's long list of physically appealing traits: "Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit / Do give thee five-fold blazon" (1.5.262-63). Again we see the language of the Petrarchan sonnet, this time miniaturizing Cesario to turn him into an erotic object for Olivia.<sup>256</sup> Rosalind, disguised as the youth Ganymede, holds a similar erotic appeal for *As You Like It's* Phoebe, who reflects, "'Tis but a peevish boy. Yet he talks well," and later continues with an erotic and feminized description of his face: "there was a pretty redness in his lip / A little riper and more lusty-red / Than that mixed in his cheek" (3.5.111; 121-23). This broad range of evidence shows the diminutive beauty of the character in male disguise emerging as a trope that crosses several literary traditions.

The powerful women in all of these plays are attracted to those features that the audience recognizes as signaling femininity but that the other characters in the play read as diminutive masculinity. Orgel hypothesizes that in early modern England, similar features were considered attractive in both women and boys; he concludes from an examination of Elizabethan portraits that the "idea, at least of aristocratic womanhood,

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la barba llego a colegillo, / nunca haréis chilindrón, mas capadillo" [Though you hurry in the game of love, if I draw the bearded card, you'll never make a royal flush, but only a daisy hand] (1.736-38). (*Chilindrón* refers to a Spanish card game, whose winning hand includes a bearded king, a horseman, and a page. An inferior hand in this game is a *capadillo*, which is also a play on the words *capar* and *capón* referring to castration. Many thanks to Timothy F. Johnson for explaining the nuances of this card game.) Later, when don Juan impersonates don Gil, Caramanchel comments, "muy grueso don Gil es éste" [this don Gil has too deep a voice] (3.2779).

<sup>255</sup> Another Italian play, *La Calandria* (1513), depicts a love affair between a young man and a woman who is still very beautiful yet old enough to have a son her lover's age. While the older woman, Fulvia, and the other characters do not dwell on Lido's beauty or his youth, he is readily mistaken for his cross-dressed sister Santilla, also going by the name Lidio. The text emphasizes the similitude between the twins by calling Santilla "Lidio femina" (the female Lidio) when her character speaks.

<sup>256</sup> Lindheim also notes that Olivia seems to be attracted to Cesario because of his "kind of androgynous youthfulness" and "a striking verbal exuberance" (681). However, Lindheim emphasizes the homoerotics of their courtship and continually reminds us that Cesario is really Viola in male disguise, while I focus on the implications of viewing Cesario as the other characters in the play do, as a youthful male.

was what we would call boyish and they called womanly: slim-hipped and flat-chested” (*Impersonations* 70). This similarity not only enables a homoerotic reading of these plays, but also shifts the definition of the diminutive to include a combination of the most attractive traits of both women and boys.<sup>257</sup> A certain schoolboyish verbal skill seems naturally to accompany diminutive beauty: these characters in male disguise have the grace and beauty of women but the wit of impish boys. In a culture in which the “ideal” woman was often figured as silent, boys, and especially boy actors, had a greater opportunity than women to perfect and exercise their verbal skill. In these plays, the diminutive is thus partly defined through an affinity with small actors who have great talent. The dynamic created by this detail also renders the diminutive entertaining, as well as erotically-charged, for those who are larger and more powerful.

Not surprisingly, this connection to the verbal prowess of the boy actor is stronger in England than on the continent, where actresses played women’s parts. It is not entirely clear why exactly Isabella desires Fabio so uncontrollably, and why Inés seems taken primarily by Gil’s looks.<sup>258</sup> While Olivia certainly desires Cesario for his beauty, his verbal skill is what truly wins her over. Indeed, Orsino has correctly predicted that Cesario’s “small pipe” is the perfect voice for wooing Olivia (1.4.31). She tells Cesario, “I heard you were saucy at my gates, and allowed your approach rather to wonder at you than to hear you” (1.5.173-75). In their opening exchange, Olivia treats Cesario like a boy actor, saying she only invited him in for her own amusement at his entertaining speech,

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<sup>257</sup> Scholars such as Levine, Orgel, and Lindheim have posited that cross-dressing plays indicate a cultural assumption that women desire an erotic object similar to themselves.

<sup>258</sup> However, Gil’s eloquence is later contrasted with Juan’s inability to imitate courtly speech when he is disguised as Gil. Standing beneath doña Inés’s window, Juan, impersonating Gil, says, “Don Gil am I, who seek my April in thee, my lady, believing that I could temper my fever at the sight of thee” [Don Gil soy, que en fe / de que en vos busco mi abril, / en viéndoos, señora mía / mi calor pude templar]. Wondering what has happened to Gil’s eloquence, Inés responds, “That is, to put it gently, calling me cold” [Eso es venirme a llamar, / por gentil estilo, fría] (3.2773-78).

not to take his speech seriously. Cesario, too, plays the part of a boy actor, starting by attempting to deliver this rehearsed speech. He quickly abandons his script, however, to improvise with Olivia. They move from prose to blank verse when Olivia unveils and Cesario praises her beauty: “’Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white / Nature’s own secret and cunning hand laid on” (201-10). After this exchange, Olivia wants to hear none of Cesario’s descriptions of Orsino’s love, made of “groans that thunder love, with sighs of fire” (225). Greenblatt states that Cesario’s “cheeky replies to Olivia arouse the latter’s passion in a way Orsino’s sighs and groans cannot” (89); perhaps this is because Orsino’s noisy, thundering love threatens to consume Olivia in its largeness. Instead, Olivia wants to hear more about how Cesario might woo her more delicately (237). In response, Cesario gives a theatrical declaration of wounded love that counters the violent imagery of Orsino’s text. Were he to woo Olivia, Cesario would

Make me a willow cabin at your gate  
And call upon my soul within the house,  
Write loyal cantons of contemned love,  
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;  
Halloo your name to the reverberate hills,  
And make the babbling gossip of the air  
Cry out ‘Olivia!’ O, you should not rest  
Between the elements of air and earth  
But you should pity me. (237-45)

This courtship is verbal and musical, drawing on the boy actor’s particular vocal skills. The song Cesario promises to sing, though performed loudly, contrasts with the

thunderous noise of Orsino's love: Cesario's song emphasizes loyalty and humility rather than force and violence and does not threaten to overpower Olivia as accepting Orsino's love would. Though Cesario exhibits some forcefulness in *making* the echo cry her name, he makes sure it is not himself but only an echo that will produce this volume.<sup>259</sup> Cesario also positions himself at her gate, outside the household she runs, and physically in the position of a gatekeeper who might work as an employee for Olivia. Olivia tells Cesario not to come again from the Duke, "Unless, perchance, you come to me again / To tell me how he takes it" (251-52). While she wants none of Orsino, she invites Cesario to return of his own accord to speak to her in his diminutive voice.

Though the diminutive characters in male disguise are similarly attractive in all three linguistic traditions, the woman's desire for the diminutive is exaggerated in the continental plays. Isabella forces kisses on Fabio in her doorway, even as Fabio tries to pull away (2.6). When Isabella is locked into her bedroom with Fabrizio, the twin she thinks is Fabio, she forces sex on him (though he does not really seem to resist): the servant Pasquella tells the audience that "My mistress had the person down on the bed, and she called me to help her while she held his hands. And he was letting her win, so I opened the front of his clothes..." (4.5).<sup>260</sup> In this telling, Isabella is large and, especially

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<sup>259</sup> This echo also resonates with the Ovidian myth of Echo and Narcissus, suggesting that Orsino suffers from narcissism.

<sup>260</sup> "Avendolo la padrona disteso in sul letto, e chiamandomi ch'io l'aiutasse mentre ch'ella gli teneva le mani, egli si lasciava vincere. Lo sciolsi dinanzi." The Italian comes from *Commedie del Cinquecento*, edited by Aldo Borlenghi. All English translations are from *Five Comedies from the Italian Renaissance*, translated and edited by Laura Giannetti and Guido Ruggiero. Giannetti and Ruggiero state that their "aim in these translations has been to render these comedies in clear, rich, and playful English prose that is as faithful as possible to the playful Italian that is such an important element of their humor... Moreover, in providing a reading that reasserts these comedies' irreverent and insistent interest in sex, the cultural differences between men and women (gender), and the centrality of play, pleasure, and passion in Renaissance life, we have sought to highlight a crucial set of themes that many modern translations overlook but that were central to these comedies' successes in the Renaissance" (xl). They state that each translation is based on one modern Italian critical edition and that they compared their translations with



with the help of the servant she commands, strong enough to force herself on Frabrizio, who participates in the construction of his own miniaturization here by “letting her win.”<sup>261</sup> Though the two father figures in the play are primarily concerned with preserving their daughters’ virginity, Isabella is keen to lose hers with the diminutive male who has so inflamed her passion. She acts on her desire far more aggressively than do Inés and Olivia, two women who seem more used to getting what they want. Olivia runs her own household though she is unable to control the large Toby, who has his own candidate for her hand in Sir Andrew, and, while Inés, like Isabella, lives in her father’s house, she seems to hold significant sway over the aging patriarch. At the opening of the play, she has arranged a marriage for herself to don Juan without her father’s knowledge. She subverts his fatherly control to wed a foppish man who obeys her and proves himself easy to manipulate throughout the play, and she even talks back to her father when he informs her he has arranged another marriage for her (1.648-713). Once Inés has fallen for Gil, however, she begins to scheme about how to have her way, even going so far as to ask Juan to kill Martín, who is posing as the rival don Gil (1205-16). The violence of Isabella’s and Inés’s actions to obtain the diminutive male go much further than Olivia’s; these plays magnify the desire for the diminutive present in Shakespeare’s text, providing a useful frame for returning now to the English play.

Olivia is certainly passionately in love with Cesario; however, her love, because it does not become uncontrollably violent, appears more calculated than Isabella’s and Inés’s. While the continental plays highlight the erotic charms of the diminutive body,

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other English translations, when they existed (xl). Citations are by act and scene in the English text; no line numbers are provided in either the Italian or the English.

<sup>261</sup> Though I read Isabella’s conquest of Frabrizio as constructing him as smaller and weaker than she is, the text also graphically emphasizes the great size of Frabrizio’s “large pestle or...big stick” (4.5).

*Twelfth Night* underscores as well the social appeal of a diminutive husband. Returning to Sir Toby's assertion that Olivia will "not match above her degree, neither in estate, years, nor wit," we see that she has given careful thought to her social and economic situation (1.3.90-91). As a single woman whose father and brother are both recently deceased, Olivia owns and manages her own household. Indeed, her only living male relative seems to be Sir Toby, a gargantuan man who takes up a lot of room in the household (and on the stage) physically, aurally, and in terms of his appetite for drink and for Olivia's generosity, but who, nonetheless, is content to stay in Olivia's house as a guest with few responsibilities. As the quotation above demonstrates, Olivia is searching for a husband with diminutive qualities, the exact opposite of both her enormous uncle Sir Toby and the landed, smothering Orsino. Sir Andrew arguably exhibits traits of the diminutive, but he also exists as an aspect of Sir Toby's large appetite, since Toby is sponsoring Andrew as a marital choice so that he can maintain a place in Olivia's household. Marriage to a diminutive male without attachments to the enormous Sir Toby allows Olivia to maintain control over her fortune and her household, and it even puts her in the unique position of adding a husband as a dependent to this household. A diminutive male makes an ideal husband for Olivia because he has erotic charms that offer her pleasure, but he will be less likely to struggle with her for power before or after the marriage.

Cesario is already eroticized by his diminutive physical charms, but the transgressive shift in the dynamic of marital power in a relationship between a woman and a diminutive youth has the potential to eroticize this relation further; the diminutive male is not only socially appealing, but also more sexually appealing than a grown man. Olivia remains socially and erotically interested in Cesario both because he flirts with her

and because he remains aloof and hard-to-get: the diminutive male object gives her the chance to play the pursuer, reversing the situation with Orsino with which she had grown so tired. Olivia's erotic attraction to Cesario's beauty and witty speech is supplemented by this reversed dynamic of gendered power, which, in Olivia's eyes at least, is likely to remain unchanged after marriage. The Italian play offers what seems to be a counterpoint to this analysis: male and female characters alike assume that wives want to be sexually passive and that Fabio makes an inappropriate match for Isabella because "he's more fit for being screwed than for screwing," as the Spaniard Giglio puts it (2.3).<sup>262</sup> However, this assumption in the Italian play actually underscores part of what makes the male diminutive erotic for the female characters in all three traditions: the transgression of switching roles, of being in an active, dominant position in relation to the diminutive who seems to be a universal passive sexual object, is titillating for the English Olivia, the Spanish Inés, and the Italian Isabella.

Indeed, the extent to which all of the diminutive males actively use their beauty and their wit further to inflame the female characters' passion for them suggests that, though this version of diminutive erotics might be ideologically disruptive, it was likely not drastically socially disruptive. By using their diminutive qualities to arouse the female characters, the diminutive males draw upon cultural ideas about women's desire that transcend these play-worlds. Juana and Isabella both clearly state that they have dressed as youths specifically to thwart the intended marriages of Martín and Flamminio to other women, and they both plot to target the other women rather than the men

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<sup>262</sup> "Que quiere azer d'aquel, ch'es megior per ser sanado que per sanar?" For other examples that portray the diminutive male as an object for men, see the conversation between Lelia and her maid Clemenzia in 1.3 in which Clemenzia points out that, as Flamminio's boy servant, Lelia might be expected to go to bed with him. Additionally, the Spaniard who makes the above remark attempts to seduce the maid Clemenzia by repeatedly calling himself her "son," setting up an age hierarchy between them as well.

themselves. Lelia at first disguises herself as Fabio in order to be close to Flamminio, with whom she has been in love for years. However, she admits that she took the post as his servant in order to make sure that he has no other female lover, and when he makes her carry letters to Isabella, who instantly falls in love with her as Fabio, she tells Isabella that she will not “be her lover unless she makes Flamminio forget about her” (1.3).<sup>263</sup> Juana, too, tells her servant Quintana that, rather than trouble her father when her unfaithful lover left to marry Inés, she has decided to handle the situation herself and has dressed as a man so that she will not be recognized (229-38). However, the next time Juana appears on stage, she tells her new servant Caramanchel, who knows her only as Gil, that she is in love with Inés and then begins to woo Inés under the same false name assumed by Martín (734; 778-828). Juana makes most clear the trend that runs through all three plays: the female characters in these traditions assume masculine disguise because the diminutive appeals to women who want to choose their own husbands.

These readings of the continental plays make it plausible, too, to read Viola as motivated by desire for Orsino; although Olivia seeks a diminutive husband, Viola has a different set of goals and desires and she poses as a diminutive male in order to satisfy these desires. When she first lands in Illyria and asks the Captain about the land’s ruler, the Captain describes Orsino as “A noble duke, in nature / As in name” (1.2.22-23). Viola then reflects, “Orsino. I have heard my father name him. / He was a bachelor then” (24-25). Upon this first mention of the duke, Viola’s mind turns to his marital availability. When the Captain goes on to report Orsino’s pursuit of Olivia, who has been refusing his advances as well as those of all men, Viola responds, “O that I served that lady” (37). There are several, not incompatible, ways to read this statement. Viola may want

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<sup>263</sup> “Io fingo di non volerla amare, se non fa sì che Flamminio si levi dal suo amore.”

protection from this other noble woman whose father and brother are also recently deceased. She may also want to enter Olivia's household in order to learn about the status of the relationship between Olivia and Orsino. And she may imagine serving Olivia sexually, as the diminutive object she is soon to become.

While posing as Cesario, Viola encourages Olivia's desire by engaging in flirtatious repartee and returning to Olivia's house even when Olivia makes it clear that she is interested in Cesario rather than in Orsino. Olivia takes up Cesario's language by mock-blazoning herself after Cesario compliments the beauty of her face (1.5.214-18). Cesario flirts back with more than superficial compliments, insisting, "If I did love you in my master's flame, / With such a suff'ring, such a deadly life, / In your denial I would find no sense, / I would not understand it" (233-36). Cesario encourages Olivia with the "if" clause, prompting her to ask how he would woo her and building to the willow cabin speech, quoted earlier. On Cesario's second visit to Olivia's household, Olivia openly declares her love: "Cesario, by the roses of the spring, / By maidenhood, honour, truth, and everything, / I love thee so that, maugre all thy pride, / Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide" (3.1.140-43). Cesario responds with rejection but also echoes the form of Olivia's speech, rhymed couplets: "By innocence I swear, and by my youth, / I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth, / And that no woman has, nor never none / Shall mistress be of it save I alone" (148-51). Even while seeming to reject Olivia's advances, Cesario forms a bond between them through the distinctive sound of rhymed couplets and through the repetition of the word "truth." Of course, this response also admits the 'truth' of which the audience is aware: Cesario is Viola in disguise, a woman with her own social and erotic aspirations. Viola plays the kind of boy she thinks Olivia will desire,

drawing on cultural assumptions that a witty, pretty youth will be attractive to a powerful woman. Viola seems to anticipate the erotics of the diminutive, playing the diminutive role for its appeal to the woman who is displeased with the advances of adult men.

*Twelfth Night*, *Don Gil*, and *Gl'Ingannati* not only depict female desire for the diminutive; all three plays have endings that, to some degree, fulfill the women's desires and represent female desire for the diminutive as obtainable. Inés has the least happy ending: there is no twin to step conveniently into Juana's place, so Inés must settle for her second choice, the foppish and uneducated Juan, whose name nonetheless aligns him with the cross-dressed Juana. Inés seems to surrender her power over her household along with herself in marriage, telling Juan, "you are the owner of myself and my household" (3.3240).<sup>264</sup> However, throughout the play Inés has proven that she can easily manipulate Juan; though he lacks the erotic appeal of the diminutive, he would nonetheless likely become Inés's "owner" in name only, while she would continue to control the household and make the decisions for both of them. The Italian Isabella, by contrast, seems quite pleased with her match: the sex scene described in detail by the maid Pasquella illustrates Isabella's satisfaction with the exchange of Fabrizio for Lelia (4.5). Juana and Lelia also win back Martín and Flamminio.

Like the Italian play, *Twelfth Night* celebrates desire for the diminutive. Although some argue that Olivia is humiliated and put in her place at the end of the play, I would contend precisely the opposite: Olivia actually gets exactly what she wants at the end of the play.<sup>265</sup> Howard sees patriarchal dominance reasserted when Olivia unwittingly

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<sup>264</sup> "Dueño sois de mí y mi casa."

<sup>265</sup> Howard, for example, reads the play's ending as a "quite traditional comic disciplining" of Olivia, a woman who has overstepped her gender by rejecting Orsino, an appropriate match, and continuing to run her own household; Olivia is "punished, comically but unmistakably, by being made to fall in love with the

marries Sebastian, whom Howard euphemistically reads as “a fellow good with a sword” (115). However, Sebastian looks and sounds boyish enough to be mistaken for his cross-dressed sister, equating him more with the erotic diminutive than with patriarchal masculinity. In theory, at least, the twins should look so much alike that in the final scene Sebastian can easily become a visual substitute for Viola. In his final words of the play, Sebastian tells Olivia, “You are betrothed both to a maid and a man;” here, he refers to not only his gender but his youth and virginity, and perhaps even his dependent status (5.1.256). Olivia may not have the erotic object she has been pursuing, but she has captured a mate who is attractive in many of the same ways and who is diminutive enough to let her continue to run her own household. Sebastian also abandons his position as Antonio’s beloved when he marries Olivia, giving her erotic success over Antonio as well as over her own diminutive Sebastian.

Sebastian, for his part, seems to recognize, choose, and enjoy his submission to Olivia: he sees his marriage to her as both erotically and socially satisfying. He is so taken with her beauty at first sight that he wonders if her aggressive wooing of him is merely a very good dream (4.1.59). He quickly subordinates himself to her, answering in the affirmative when Olivia asks, “would thou’dst be ruled by me” (4.1.60). Sebastian later reflects on his good fortune, telling himself that this must not be a dream because “This is the air, that is the glorious sun. / This pearl she gave me, I do feel’t and see’t” (4.3.1-2). The pearl is a typical symbol of love and faithfulness, but it also symbolizes the wealth and the status into which Sebastian is about to marry. Sebastian goes on to praise Olivia for her excellent household management; he decides that these events must be

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crossdressed Viola” (114). Howard goes on to equate Olivia’s disciplining here with Titania’s humiliation when she is made to fall in love with an ass in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (114).

neither a dream nor madness because if they were, Olivia “could not sway her house, command her followers, / Take and give back affairs and their dispatch / With such a smooth, discreet, and stable bearing / As I perceive she does” (4.3.17-20). Marrying Olivia, Sebastian will rise socially, benefit financially, and be relieved of the responsibilities of household management.<sup>266</sup> This reading lends yet another punning dimension to Sebastian’s statement that he is “a maid and a man”: he is also a made man, elevated by this match. Indeed, Sebastian seems quite content to assume the role of the silent spouse at the end: scholars have often remarked on Viola’s silence at the end of the play once she has agreed to become Orsino’s wife, but Sebastian is silenced as well and delivers his final line before Viola speaks hers. Rather than stepping into the shoes of a patriarch, Sebastian stands back while Olivia continues to manage. Becoming a diminutive husband benefits Sebastian as well as Olivia and causes no perceptible disruption to the social order of Illyria: the play ends with both Orsino and Olivia very much in control of their respective households, which have now formed an alliance fulfilling the original goal of Orsino’s courtship.

*Twelfth Night*’s resolution refigures heterosexual relations through this rewarding of the desire for the diminutive, but it does so without causing major disruptions to the social fabric of the play-world. As Phyllis Rackin points out, Malvolio, not the aggressive Olivia or the cross-dressed Viola, is actually the most humiliated and disciplined figure in the play (“Shakespeare’s” 122-23). Indeed, instead of being shamed into silence, Olivia continues to direct the affairs of her household to the end of the play, questioning Malvolio and chiding his persecutors. Rather than disciplining or seeking to limit

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<sup>266</sup> Panek makes a similar argument in an essay on remarried widows: some men might have preferred to find themselves in a household they did not need to spend time and effort governing (“Why” 292-93).



aggressive female desire, the play imagines ways this desire might benefit both women and some men. Olivia wins a husband less powerful than both herself and her other suitor Orsino, and Sebastian is elevated financially and socially by the match. Both characters seem erotically and socially satisfied. The flexibility of Sebastian's role in the relationship troubles the patriarchal power relations presupposed by an ideology of conventional heterosexuality: he has a male body and thus seems a proper match for Olivia, but he does not assume the position of power and dominance to which the ideology of heterosexual marriage entitles him. Olivia's desire for a diminutive male looks conventional from one angle, but its peculiar form of heteroeroticism challenges the gender hierarchies endemic to marriage. The play opens up sexual possibilities that fall outside of a hetero/homoerotic binary, in a sense queering heterosexuality by reminding us that heteroerotic desire can take non-conventional forms. What is more, it depicts these possibilities as attainable. The range of behaviors and desires in these plays falls outside the typical proscriptions of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century moralist writers, yet they were apparently not socially disruptive enough to warrant a strong critique in the highly social space of the public playhouse. Dramatic depictions of female desire for the diminutive provide a particular representation of non-normative sexuality which nonetheless may correspond with a social practice which, while running counter to contemporary moral advice, seemed to be largely socially acceptable.<sup>267</sup>

What is more, Olivia's actions facilitate the comedic ending and the happy results for the other female characters as well. With Olivia married to Sebastian, Orsino takes his former page as his wife, finally returning Viola's love and elevating her in social status

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<sup>267</sup> Panek also theorizes that these seeming social inversions were not widely perceived as disruptive: young men and widows might become husbands and wives living "orderly lives in non-traditional re-arrangements of the domestic gender hierarchy" ("Why" 286).

like Olivia elevated her brother. We may question to what extent Maria is satisfied with her offstage marriage to Sir Toby, reported in the final scene by Fabian, but she is still included in the comedic ending rather than excluded like Antonio, Malvolio, and Sir Andrew. Even if some modern readers might be inclined to dispute the happiness of Maria's ending, the play, at least, rewards her with marriage and, in a sense, elevates her by placing her alongside Olivia and Viola, the other brides-to-be. We also have no reason to assume that Maria is unsatisfied with her match—she has probably risen in status, if not financially, and she and Sir Toby seem to have a fairly equal relationship based on a mutual love of fun and practical joking. Olivia's pursuit of the diminutive not only matches her with an ideal husband but also facilitates erotic and social fulfillment for the other female characters. This ending indicates that female desire for the diminutive in literature creates opportunities for women to manage their own futures in a way that satisfies these desires without causing a perceptible threat to social order. It suggests that resistance to patriarchal and heteronormative conventions need not appear in the form of total social subversion, but can perhaps work more effectively from within, through a manipulation of social norms and assumptions.

The theater, a space of entertainment, provides an opportunity for erotic play between large women and diminutive actors that carries lower social stakes than such play likely had outside the theater. Theater creates a social experience with spatial (inside the playhouse) and temporal (the duration of the performance) boundaries within which a woman could exercise an ideologically disruptive gaze for the afternoon before returning to the order of her home. However, the theatrical representations this chapter has considered also suggest that both of these boundaries are highly permeable and that the

eroticized diminutive could be attainable outside the theater, perhaps in the form of a husband's apprentice or a messenger boy. Plays like *Burning Pestle* and *Twelfth Night* represent female desire for diminutive males as comic but socially accepted, and they privilege the perspective and the desires of the female spectator. Considering the erotic role of the diminutive in the theater produces consequences for the erotics of spectatorship that open a new avenue for the study of female spectators and of women's desires more broadly.

To be sure, the representations analyzed here are just that—theatrical depictions of women and their desires, penned by men and acted by boys. Nevertheless, this chapter shows that male-authored and acted representations of female spectators can challenge conventional gender order in their depictions of female desire for the diminutive. Lady Haughty's interest in making the boy act as a sexual object for her entertainment and Olivia's inevitable desire for the cross-dressed woman might reflect male playwrights' stereotypical ideas of what ladies desire, but they also prove satisfying for these female characters and arguably offered spectators the opportunity to appropriate this desire for their own ends. This chapter has brought to the center the issues of spectatorship and performance that the other chapters have considered peripherally, showing how the performability of size plays out in many forms in the playtext, on the actor's body, in the actor's interpretation of the text, and in the spectators' reception of the representation. These several elements of performance compete with yet complement each other as the plays I have analyzed develop an erotics of size. And like poems and other non-dramatic genres, these plays, when read, invite their readers to imagine the size and gender of bodies in ways that might inspire a variety of anxieties and pleasures. This chapter has

shown that attending to size as a category of analysis enables new engagement with cross-dressing plays and productive connections among texts across several European literary traditions. Size operates alongside gender in all of these texts to complicate representations of desire and pleasure in ways that give us a richer understanding of the early modern erotic landscape.

## Epilogue: New Directions for the Study of Size

In this dissertation, I have argued that size was a category depicted and engaged pervasively in early modern written and visual texts, and that this category was conceived of as both performable and relational. Attending to size as a category of literary analysis has enabled me, in this project, to bring together and make connections among many genres and texts of variant stature in the current literary canon. Analyzing representations of bodily size and gender across genres illustrates the ways reading practices and spectatorship interact with dramatic and non-dramatic constructions of bodies and desires. In each chapter, I have shown that written and visual texts and performances can provoke a proliferation of desires and anxieties among diverse readers and spectators and that attitudes toward gender and size represented in the texts remain ambiguous. Chapter one illustrated how the new literary histories of embodiment this project posits enables new engagement with poetic genres and tropes such as epic, allegory, ekphrasis, litotes, and blazon. The next chapters' analyses of drama show the project's implications for performance studies. Size is represented in texts penned for various performance spaces, including outdoor amphitheaters, indoor hall theaters, and the court, as an effect of the actor's own body, his costuming and props, and language—as play dialogue cues time of day, for instance, it also cues the size of the characters. Across texts and genres, we have seen language play an important role in constructing size, especially as long or loud speeches come to signal an aspect of largeness for female figures in poetic and dramatic genres alike.

This dissertation's cross-genre applications extend to portraiture, a genre that underscores the highly visual dimension of the language of size in prose, poetry, and

dramatic texts. My third chapter on Elizabeth I makes this connection particularly clear, but the first chapter's analyses of texts with classical themes provokes questions about Renaissance paintings that depict the myth of Venus and Adonis, Armida's palace, or Diana as a huntress. For example, whereas Shakespeare makes a point of portraying Venus as an immense goddess who easily manhandles Adonis, Titian (c. 1554) and Rubens (c. 1636) depict a muscular Adonis who towers over Venus (figures 10 and 11). Cupid's presence in these paintings, however, reproduces the diminutive in an alternate male body. Size as a category of analysis seems to call out for such cross-genre engagement, particularly raising questions about how different kinds of texts depict size relationally or as a kind of performance.

The relationality and performability of size are central to my analyses in the preceding four chapters, as I argue that male and female figures throughout my archive of texts manipulate perceptions of their own and others' sizes. In chapter one we saw goddesses, giantesses, and Amazons pursue knights and squires whose sexual appeal derives from their small size in relation to the supernatural female figures, and chapter two showed us how mother figures might take pleasure in their small sons' bodies and how the sons, in turn, might take pleasure in the enormous mother. At the same time, these mothers make political meanings out of size, manipulating adult men by forcing these men to see themselves in the small, vulnerable, pleased boys over whom the mothers hold authority. Chapter three provided an overview of the multifaceted rhetoric of size used by and about Elizabeth I throughout her reign, including the language of largeness and smallness in written texts and records of speeches, visual manipulations of scale in state and miniature portraiture, and representations of fluctuating size and its

connection to age at commissioned courtly dramatic performances. The final chapter thought more closely than the previous chapters about the performance of size on the stage and the way size performance asks us to look again at performances of other categories such as gender, age, and status. Not only the chapters centered on drama, but also chapter one, ask us to think again about texts as scripts for performances. I propose that we read dramatic texts with an eye toward the spectral evidence regarding their staged performances, but all texts, dramatic and non-dramatic, also function as possible scripts for readers and spectators who might learn to perform size as a part of their erotic experiences. All four chapters have interrogated the role of size in driving textual and visual representations of desire and have shown how erotic relations between larger women and smaller men produce queer expressions of heterosexuality that are important for modern understandings of early modern desire and the history of sexuality. My use of the term *queer heterosexuality*, which might seem anachronistic in an early modern project, seeks to underscore the disruptive potential of early modern relationships that might look normative at first glance by modern standards.

This focus on queer expressions of heterosexuality driven by the dyad of the larger woman and the smaller man raises questions about the homoerotics of size and size difference. This project might make more of the intense bond between Titania and the pregnant votaress in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for instance. I have already discussed Titania as a figure of largeness, and the votaress has a complex relation to size in the beautiful language Titania uses to describe the expansion of her body during pregnancy as mimicking merchant ships' sails that "grow big-bellied with the wanton wind" (2.1.129). When the votaress dies in childbirth, Titania, rather than the child's father,

assumes responsibility for the boy of the woman she loved. While I briefly mention two male giants in my analysis of *The Faerie Queene* in chapter one, more stands to be said about Redcrosse's abjection to the phallic Orgoglio and the particular function of size and sexuality in that dynamic. Taking up part of my archive in chapter two, we might use size to probe the homoerotics of the schoolmaster-pupil dynamic by interrogating the connection between size and flogging in the schoolroom and how Latin grammars reinforced and eroticized the smallness of boyhood.<sup>268</sup> Amanda Bailey's analysis of boys as accessories for gentlemen in city comedies suggests that we are due for a fuller examination of the erotics of size in master-servant relationships.<sup>269</sup> We might find these erotics not only in city comedies, but also in tragedies like Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which Antony and his aptly-named page Eros sustain intense affection for each other.

Cleopatra herself is a figure of enormous womanliness, as she is constructed in Shakespeare's play and also as a figure who appears countless times in early modern, as well as modern, texts. Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra on the Nile in her barge aligns her body with the grand description of the boat, and she is made to look larger beside the "pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids" who fan her (2.2.208). Like Elizabeth I, Cleopatra was a historical woman with immense political power who appears in textual and visual representations as a figure of enormity and excess, both in the early

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<sup>268</sup> In his analysis of the epyllion, William P. Weaver argues that poets and grammar school exercises represented transitions between boyhood and adolescence and that these transitions were associated with violence (14-16).

<sup>269</sup> Bailey calls boys in city comedies "a certain kind of fashion accessory" and argues that the boy functions as a "crucial means by which men materialized manhood. As a sartorial supplement, the boy confirmed his man's taste and enabled him to access a community of like-minded men who looked to boys as display items....As economically or socially diminished a particular gallant may be [sic], by appearing with a boy at his side, he announced to the world that he had rights in at least one person" (309). Bailey's use of the word "diminished" calls attention to the ways a physically small boy could enhance the social stature of his gallant.



modern period and today. The Virgin Mary, whom I discuss briefly at the beginning of chapter two, is another figure of female enormity to whom I could have devoted a chapter in this dissertation, but I chose to bracket religion in order to focus on discourses surrounding the family and the theater. Mary provides continuities between England and continental western Europe, where a great deal of Italian Renaissance painting depicted the Virgin with the Christ Child. In Spain, the tradition of the *mujer varonil* glamorized physical feats of women whose muscularity and stature enabled them to rival men for physical and social power. Gila, the *mujer varonil* heroine of Luis Vélez de Guevarra's *La serrana de la vera*, enters the stage for the first time after much talk of her strength and prowess on the back of a horse, towering over the others on stage.<sup>270</sup> And while Elizabeth I provided England's main representation of large female authority, an array of powerful continental women rulers were often depicted in terms of their largeness, particularly in relation to their sons, in whose stead these women for a time ruled. A 1561 portrait of Catherine de Medici and her children, for instance, presents Catherine in dark attire, looming out of the background over her oldest son (figure 12). In her biography of Caterina Sforza, Elizabeth Lev calls attention to the Italian countess's frequent pregnancies and her apparent strategy of using her enormously pregnant body to her advantage in moments of political crisis; at one point the countess re-took a lost fortress while "pregnant up to her throat" and "as wide as she was tall" (112). These continental analogues to the large English woman open the door for comparative analyses that ask

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<sup>270</sup> The stage direction in Vélez de Guevara's manuscript calls for a number of *labradores* to enter the stage and then "detrás, a caballo, *GILA*, la Serrana de la Vera, vestida a lo serrano, de mujer, con sayuelo y muchas patenas, el cabello tendido, y una montera con plumas, un cuchillo de monte al lado, botín argentado, y puesta una escopeta debajo del caparazón del caballo" (1.205). The direction is careful to point out that Gila is dressed as a woman, but she makes a grand show on horseback with her flashy clothing, accessories, and weapons.

what values and erotics various European literary and visual traditions attached to the large female figure.

My analysis of size also has implications for the opposing dyad: large men and small women. A study of male largeness might ask how muscularity and martial prowess construct the largeness of a character like Coriolanus or how drink and song construct fatness as a category of largeness for Falstaff or *Twelfth Night's* Sir Toby. Indeed, Falstaff's incompetence in battle in the two *Henry IV* plays asks us to see fatness as directly opposed to the largeness of martial prowess. Small women are surprisingly difficult to find in early modern English drama and poetry, though *Midsummer's* Hermia and *As You Like It's* Celia stand out in a dramatic archive, and the female beloveds idealized in sonnets are associated with smallness through their depiction in short poems. The sonneteer's reduction of the beloved to body parts such as eyes and lips arguably miniaturizes her further, though she also, in such blazons, becomes larger than life. Sonnet 9 of Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, for example, anatomizes the beloved as a house, enlarging Stella's face so that her mouth becomes a door, her cheeks porches, and her eyes windows.

Early modern depictions of size also raise questions about disability and engage the field of disability studies, with its focus on bodies that fall outside a human standard, as such a concept was beginning to develop during the Renaissance. To take up some bodies I have already discussed, we might reconsider giants, dwarfs, and Amazons using the lens of disability. Dwarfs tend to be associated with courtliness and diminutive luxuries, whereas giants serve as figures of excess. We see this dynamic in *The Faerie Queene*, in which a dwarf serves Una as her squire and a giant defeats Redcrosse after he

indulges in sexual excess with Una's replacement, Duessa. A 1552 portrait of Nano Morgante, the dwarf jester at the court of Cosimo I de Medici, creates a spectacle of the courtly dwarf's body that likely looked small beside Cosimo and his courtiers but takes a wide and authoritative stance in the portrait (figure 13). He holds a hunting bird, but diminutive butterflies flit around his genitals, suggesting the smallness of his sexual organs. Amazons have a warlike physique that might exceed human scale in much the same way a giant's body does, but they are also visibly mutilated by cutting off one breast to better use a bow and arrow. This form of bodily mutilation raises questions about what constitutes ability or disability, as it arguably makes them more able fighters.

Size as a category enables us to think differently not only about bodies, but about scientific discourses and technologies that began to circulate during the Renaissance. The telescope and microscope both appeared near the turn of the seventeenth century, bringing with them the ability to alter the perceived size of a very small or very large but far away object. The focus on size in my dissertation raises questions about these new technologies and the social and scientific discourses that surrounded them. Margaret Cavendish, for instance, expresses a complex set of attitudes toward these technologies of size in the *Blazing World*. The Empress orders her subjects to break their telescopes because these "Glasses are false Informers," but she shows an intense interest in microscopes, which "never delude, but rectifie and inform the senses" (170, 172). The relation between these technologies and the Empress's ideas about true sight suggest that the Empress is more comfortable viewing small objects enlarged than large objects that seem small because of perspective. After viewing a number of small items, like charcoal and a flea, through the microscope, the Empress is disappointed that she cannot magnify

a whale; she then asks the scientists to “make glasses of a contrary nature to those they had shewed her, to wit, such as instead of enlarging or magnifying the shape or figure of an object, could contract it beneath its natural proportion” (174). The Empress is interested in using technology to manipulate the smallness, in addition to the largeness, of everyday objects and uses her requests to regulate the scientists of her realm. Scholarship on early modern scientific discourses could benefit from attention to the language of size, particularly as it intersects with gender in the work of Cavendish and others engaged in the burgeoning field of natural philosophy.

This dissertation intervenes in scholarly debates regarding early modern embodiment and the history of sexuality and has implications for studies of science, religion, and disability, and it also enables me to bring literary texts together in new ways. The less canonical, or even obscure, plays I analyze in chapter two, the understudied prayers of Elizabeth I I take up in chapter three, and the continental plays I examine in chapter four all help us look in new ways at highly canonical Shakespearean drama and the more well-known speeches and poetry of Elizabeth I. My arguments about depictions of size in early modern literature, in turn, can help us analyze modern texts and phenomena. Today, as in the early modern archive I have analyzed, size is generally associated with power, but early modern female figures in particular relate to largeness much differently than modern women are understood to do. Whereas modern Western women are often anxious about being too tall or too fat, my archive suggests that early moderns had different expectations regarding the relation between physical size and gender; an embrace of female largeness permeates the literature and visual art of the period. The erotic appeal of the large woman continues to exist today in common forms

such as the fetishization of large breasts and in less mainstream sexual fetishes such as desire for BBW (Big Beautiful Women). With these connections I do not wish to construct a strict teleology from the early modern to the modern English-speaking West, but I do want to suggest that analyzing early modern literary representations of embodied size on their own terms might help us reflect on the history of embodiment and on that history's relationship to histories of gender, sexuality, aging, disability, economics, class, status, and literature. Early modern literature and culture give us a place to begin to interrogate how and why size matters.

Appendix

Figure 1  
*Queen Elizabeth I (The Coronation Portrait)*  
Unknown artist  
c. 1600



Figure 2  
*Queen Elizabeth I (The Ditchley Portrait)*  
Marcus Gheerearts the Younger  
1592



Figure 3  
*Queen Elizabeth I (The Ermine Portrait)*  
William Segar  
c. 1585



Figure 4  
*Portrait of Henry VIII*  
Hans Holbein the Younger  
c. 1539-40



Figure 5  
*Portrait of Mary Sidney Herbert*  
Nicholas Hilliard  
c. 1590



Figure 6  
*Portrait of Sir Walter Raleigh*  
Nicholas Hilliard  
c. 1585



Figure 7  
*Queen Elizabeth I (The Rainbow Portrait)*  
Isaac Oliver  
c. 1600



Figure 8  
*Young Man Among Roses*  
Nicholas Hilliard  
c. 1588



Figure 9  
Ditchley Portrait copy  
unknown artist  
c. 1592



Figure 10  
*Venus and Adonis*  
Titian  
c. 1554



Figure 11  
*Venus and Adonis*  
Peter Paul Rubens  
mid- to late-1630's



Figure 12  
*Portrait of Catherine de Medici and Her Children*  
Francois Clouet  
1561





Figure 13  
*Portrait of the Dwarf Morgante*  
Il Bronzino  
1552



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