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Shakespearean Women under Missionary Scrutiny: Exilic Readings from St Alban's English College

Alba Higelmo Puertas

Tutora: Ana Sáez Hidalgo

Departamento de Filología Inglesa

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have targeted the situation of women during the early modern period. This dissertation hopes to contribute a new perspective on gender dynamics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by exploring a singular bond between England and Spain. This study analyses the perceptions of English and Spanish Catholics on Shakespeare's female characters at the Royal English College of St Alban in Valladolid. English and Spanish Catholics collaborated at the college to train English seminarians for priesthood. The works at the college's library were censored and annotated with this aim in mind. This study employs four scrutinised works as primary sources, to extract the Catholic gaze on women. The result is a new multicultural vision, under a Catholic lens, that adds up to the social and moral constraints imposed on early modern women.

Keywords: Early modern women, Shakespeare, Female characters, Censorship, St Alban's English College, Seminarians.

RESUMEN

Muchos estudios han analizado la situación de las mujeres durante la temprana Edad Moderna. Esta tesis pretende aportar una nueva perspectiva a las dinámicas de género de los siglos dieciséis y diecisiete mediante la exploración de un lazo único entre Inglaterra y España. Este estudio analiza las percepciones de católicos ingleses y españoles sobre los personajes femeninos en Shakespeare en el Real Colegio de Ingleses, Seminario de San Albano, en Valladolid. Católicos ingleses y españoles colaboraron en el colegio en la instrucción de seminaristas ingleses para el sacerdocio. Las obras de la biblioteca del colegio fueron censuradas y anotadas con este objetivo en mente. El estudio emplea cuatro obras analizadas como fuentes primarias, para investigar la percepción católica sobre las mujeres. El resultado es una nueva visión multicultural, bajo un enfoque católico, que se suma a las restricciones sociales y morales impuestas sobre las mujeres de la temprana Edad Moderna.

Palabras clave: Mujeres de la temprana Edad Moderna, Shakespeare, Personajes femeninos, Censura, Colegio de Ingleses de San Albano, Seminaristas.

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“O, she is fallen / Into a pit of ink, that the wide sea / Hath drops too few to wash her clean again.” — *Much Ado About Nothing*, Leonato (Act 4, Scene 1)

INTRODUCTION

Ironically, ink has not only given voice to the thoughts of men and women throughout history, but it has also silenced many ideas deemed too dangerous to circulate. In the Shakesperean works housed at St Alban's English college in Valladolid, ink preserves the imprint of the author's imagination. However, readers consulting these volumes, will find that not all content remains legible. The same ink that shapes words and meaning in Shakespeare editions, was also used by the English seminarians at the college to erase information to their liking—a significant portion of this censored content dealing with Shakespeare's portrayal of women. Widely recognised as the most important figure in English literature and a central voice in the universal literary canon, Shakespeare (1564-1616), as an author of the Early Modern Period (1500-1750), gave his female characters an unprecedented depth of characterisation (Greenblatt, pp.49-57). His works challenged the flat literary depiction of women prevalent at the time (Clark, pp.8-17). Renaissance England, especially under Elizabeth I's reign, was a very vibrant era where joy and festivity led to a special focus on social and gender matters (Prescott, pp.21-22). Shakespeare's ability to transform the history of his period into drama, sets the literary model for a multifaceted and morally complex depiction of female characters (Bachrach, p.4).

At St Alban's English college in Spain, seminarians only tolerated a strict view of women shaped by Catholic doctrine. Any departure from this standard was deliberately obscured beneath a veil of ink. These emendations took place under the college's aim to instruct English priests (Williams, *St Alban's College*, pp.1-13). In their formation within the Catholic doctrine, only feminine depictions suiting Catholic standards were tolerated (Rawlings, pp.30-41). The foreign nature of the seminary prompts questions about the presence of an English religious institution in Spain and the rationale behind importing controversial works that required extensive correction—issues addressed in this paper. Although it may seem that this censorship spoils the works, interrupting their fluent reading, it instead gives St Alban's library holdings, and more in particular, Shakespeare's volumes, an added value. A reading of hidden information, rather than what is left visible, reveals a unique perspective on Renaissance women matters. The erasure of passages

silences Shakespeare's reflections but reveals the inner workings of the seminarians' minds. Just as the Bard masters deception through the cross-dressing of female characters and his playful use of language, the English seminarians disguise Shakespeare's words with black ink. The black spots, far from nullifying meaning, are transparent mirrors into the seminarians' minds.

Therefore, hidden information is what turns these works into highly valuable material for gender studies. The power of words to shape ideology is huge, and seminarians play with the visibility or obscuration of passages to mould Shakespeare's works into their own imaginary. Along with this, the exile situation of the college leaves a rich cultural trace in the volumes' pages (Sáez-Hidalgo, "St Alban's English College," pp.105-123). Shakespearean editions belonging to St Alban's and former English colleges across Europe were the first works by the author to arrive in Spain, at a time when censorship of literary works was strictly enforced by the Inquisition. They offer a contrasted approach to women's agency in the early modern period, that cannot be found in latter Shakesperean editions accessing Spain: they contain Shakespeare's depiction of women together with a Catholic reaction from both English seminarians and Spanish Inquisitors (Rawlings, pp. 90-113). Therefore, St Alban's represented a cultural convergence between the English and Spanish Catholic communities, while also providing some of the earliest access in Spain to English religious and secular texts (Mayer, *Shakespeare's Early Readers*, pp.185-190). The seminarians' particular interest in Shakespeare's works enabled the entry of his female character spectrum through the college's doors, where it was interpreted through a Catholic lens.

The aim of this investigation is to analyse four exile readings related to the author, uncovering the veil that silences female topics, to determine how the seminarians' restrictions add depth to Shakespeare's depiction of the female sphere. Shakespeare's female characters have been used many times as a tool to reconstruct female experience in Early Modern England. This research paper offers a new combined approach, examining Shakespeare's depiction of women as modified by British and Spanish Catholic views—providing a more complete picture of Renaissance womanhood. In order to do so, this

academic study is structured into four different chapters. Firstly, an introduction to the most relevant aspects of early modern femininity serves to frame the socio-historical background of Renaissance England. Next, Shakespeare's female characters from fifteen of Shakespeare's main works are analysed to expose the author's depiction of the female sphere of his time. This section shows Shakespeare's feminine portrayal unaltered by any form of censorship or external ideologies. Following this, a section on the context of St Alban's English college and its unique library holdings makes sense as an introduction to the last chapter, where the investigation of four scrutinised works belonging to English Catholic exile institutions is included. The censorship and annotations in these exile editions enriches Shakespeare's views on women, showing the co-existence of juxtaposing perspectives to build the female framework of the time.

SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Early Modern England was a hierarchical society. The terms ‘ordinary’ or ‘plebeian’ were used to refer to the female population. Nonetheless, women did not possess a defined social class in terms of civic identity. Their place within society was determined by their relationships to men, particularly their fathers or husbands. Three stereotypes were set around women’s lives, that determined the only stages of their lives: a woman was either a maid, a wife or a widow (Mendelson and Crawford, pp.65-71). This dependence on men to determine their societal position relegated women to the private sphere, leaving men in control of public affairs and conforming Renaissance England as a patriarchal society (Gowing, pp.29-32). Both, Divine and Natural Law upheld the belief that women were inherently inferior and, as a result, they should be subordinated to men. Men were considered divinely ordained rulers, either as heads of state or households, and were therefore expected to govern their wives (Wilcox, pp.56-79). These civic and religious ideologies played a crucial role in shaping England’s distinct constructs of femininity and masculinity.

Women’s experiences varied according to their social class. Working class women were relegated to child-care duties and housework, suffering from both gender and social inequality, while women from higher classes had access to private tutors and could be educated at home (Laurence, pp.165-180). Nonetheless, their education was restricted to subjects deemed appropriate for their gender, reinforcing notions on female inferiority, which also permeated the illiterate groups through oral culture (Mendelson and Crawford, pp.58-65). Since Antiquity and the Middle Ages, traditional songs, folklore, rhymes, jokes and anecdotes spread misogynistic ideas among the broader population. Mainstream proverbs reflected perceptions of female inadequacy: ‘women are in church saints, abroad angels, at home devils’; ‘women have but two faults, they can neither do well nor say well’ (Tilley, pp. 747-48 W702, W708). Women were excluded from access to formal, institutionalized learning, limiting their influence in the scientific field, where fixed conceptions on women spread even in the medical context.

Many medical texts from the period centred on the female body, presenting various biological and medical theories that developed woman's 'otherness' and inherent weakness. The Theory of Humours, originated in Ancient Greece and still prevalent in Renaissance England, associated bodily parts to gender identity. According to this theory, both male and female bodies were composed of four bodily fluids or humours. Men were associated with hot and dry qualities while women were considered cold and moist. This distinction, established as a biological fact, framed men as active and strong, while women were seen as passive and fragile (Gowing pp.24-26). Heterosexuality was regarded as the only natural form of sexual behaviour, with medical writings condemning all forms of same-sex relations. Women who were sexually attracted to other women, were thought to be seizing the role of men, regarding lesbianism as a disruption of male dominance (Mendelson and Crawford pp.242-251). Androgyny, which is the presence of both masculine and feminine traits in an individual, was viewed as a threat to the natural humoral order and was often satirized through the image of the cross-dressed woman—a literary device frequently employed by writers and playwrights as a form of ironic commentary (Shapiro, pp.1-12).

Science and exploration of the human body gained relevance in England during the early modern period, establishing the bodily differences between women and men. Previously, knowledge of the human corpse was very limited, but in Elizabethan England, dissections became a formalized practice that laid the foundation for important advances in anatomy and surgery. However, medical inquiry remained intertwined with older traditions and physicians defined the female body through three primary bodily functions: menstruation, childbearing and lactation (Mendelson and Crawford, pp.18-30). These processes were generally seen as highlighting the inefficiency of the female body in comparison to that of men, and all of them were thought to involve women's blood. Menstruation, for instance, was considered to make women both polluted and polluting and, in the case of lactation, women's blood was transformed into milk to feed the child. As natural processes, they were considered part of God's punishment on women, which rendered women inferior to men.

Religion was probably the most influential force in shaping gender roles and societal hierarchy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Sermons and homilies reinforced these

ideas, providing a framework for popular debates. While Protestant doctrine upheld the belief that 'souls have no sex' and granted women full spiritual rights, this principle did not translate into equal participation within the Church. Men monopolized the religious institution, and except for the queen, women had no access to any authoritative roles within the religious establishment (Laurence, pp.199-201). The justification for women's subordinate status in the Protestant Church was rooted in both the Old and New Testaments, particularly in the consequences of Eve's actions, which were believed to have condemned wives and mothers to divine punishment (Mendelson and Crawford, pp.31-34). Women's confinement to maternal roles was part of the punishment and even pain during childbirth was considered sufficient proof of women's inferiority. The ideal of the good mother and wife was defined in theological terms through obedience and acceptance of their roles, following the model of submission and passive role of the Virgin Mary (Wilcox, pp.30-55). In a society where religion was central, these theological views even influenced legal discourse, which borrowed from theology to justify female exclusion in the political field.

Legally, women faced severe constraints. The legal framework at the time was a collection of evolving rules, rather than a cohesive and fixed system. Under public law, women were afforded no rights and were excluded from roles in Parliament or the juries (Gowing, pp.71-72). Back in the thirteenth century, it was a matter of doubt whether a woman could rule England and while some queens, such as Margaret Beaufort (1443-1509), Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536) and Catherine Parr (1512-1548), did hold temporary authority, female monarchs were uncommon, and women only held power through inheritance or as wives of a king (Hogrefe pp. 97-105). This lack of legal rights persisted through the Tudor period and, in many respects, into the twentieth century. Women were legally regarded as the property of men—first their fathers, and then their husbands— requiring their husband's consent to make legal claims or draft a will. Moreover, women who attempted to assert property rights in court were less successful than men, since they were tried by the opposite sex, who were more inclined to favour their male counterparts (Hogrefe pp. 97-105). The patriarchal attitudes of lawyers and judges discouraged women from pursuing legal action, reinforced by their lack of resources and legal ignorance.

Private law, for its part, granted women similar rights to men, which were not put into practice. While women could inherit land, priority was given to male heirs to preserve the family name. Therefore, property inheritance only reached women when the male line was absent (Hogrefe pp. 97-105). Moreover, common law merged a wife's property with her husbands', granting men full control over their assets. The wife's role was limited to bear heirs to ensure the continuation of the male line and upon her husband's death, a wife was entitled to a portion of his property—to one-third if they had children, or to half if none. Nevertheless, this law turned stricter through marriage settlements, which became part of the wedding liturgy. In them, the amount of property that was to be inherited by the bride, in case of widowhood, was established before marriage. This quantity was influenced by the groom's interests, as well as the bride's status, wealth and perceived attractiveness (Hogrefe pp. 97-105).

A legal distinction was also made between single and married women—*feme sole* and *feme covert*—which established that all women were either married or destined to marry (Mendelson and Crawford, pp.37-39). While *feme sole* were theoretically granted the same legal rights as men, this was undermined by the lower legal age of marriage for girls, set at twelve compared to fourteen for boys (Laurence, pp.41-47). Furthermore, under the doctrine of coverture, a married couple was considered one legal entity, with the husband assuming full responsibility for his wife. Coverture placed women in the same legal category as children, idiots and lunatics, and left *feme covert* with few rights over their bodies. Husbands were legally allowed to 'correct' their wives, and women had no protection against physical abuse or marital rape, which was seen as a violation against their male guardians rather than against the women themselves (Laurence, pp. 47-50). This legal passivity extended into criminal law, where women were often considered incapable of instigating crime (Laurence, pp. 254-261). However, this perception was reversed in the cases of witchcraft, which was conceived as a predominantly female crime (Laurence, pp.217-224). Ninety-three percent of those indicted for witchcraft were women, many of them being executed. Witchcraft laws posed a unique threat to women, turning everyday behaviours into punishable, even capital, offences (James, pp.180-197).

The rigid *status quo* of England's society was set around the Renaissance conception that women were, in themselves, problematic. Social beliefs set a firm idea of women's 'otherness' and inferiority, that was prevalent in every social field. Politics, law, medicine, religion and science, all reinforced the idea of women's subordinate place in society. These ideas surrounded women, defining their world, and making them act according to the dominant discourse that had constructed the female sex, which were mainly men's ideas on how women should behave. Women lived within the frameworks of these theories, which had a huge impact on the image and self-representation they had of themselves, acting as the parameters of gender order in the period.

SHAKESPEARE’S FEMALE CHARACTERS

Shakespeare’s works include a considerable number of female characters, encompassing a wide range of typologies. This investigation focuses on some of his most iconic women—Hermia, Viola, Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Beatrice and Rosalind—whose intellectual richness and complexity challenges current assumptions on women’s agency in the period. Traditional Renaissance notions are reinforced through Hermia’s submission to Egeus, who demands that she should marry Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, or Juliet’s lack of autonomy to choose her husband in *Romeo and Juliet*. Nevertheless, at the same time, Shakespeare’s women also resist the period’s constraints. Juliet’s fight for her personal will and Hermia’s refusal to obey her father—despite the belief that “to you your father should be as a god” [1.1. 47-49]—present women who both comply with and defy patriarchal structures. Within this context, Shakespeare’s female figures resist being strictly categorized as either traditional or empowered. Instead, they exhibit multifaceted personalities that reflect the complexity of early modern womanhood, caught between Renaissance expectations and personal agency (Gowing, pp.29-32). Recurrent topics and motifs in Shakespeare’s plays show this two-fold portrayal of women.

Mimicking the social categories of his time, Shakespeare represents women in his works as wives, maids and widows. The influence of the common law, that treated women as transactional goods through marriage, explains how Hermia shifts from belonging to her father to belonging to Lysander in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, or Katherina is given away by her father and forced to commit to her husband’s will in *The Taming of The Shrew*. Another instance in this latter work includes the way Shylock imposes total authority over his daughter Jessica, forcing her to stay indoors and take care of the house while he is away. This treatment of women as property under male authority prompted marital violence, which is also depicted in Shakespeare’s works. Female *dramatis personae* are often referred to as fools, whores or sluts by their fathers and husbands (Mendelson and Crawford pp.239-240). *Othello* is the most representative play in this regard, where all women are mistreated at some stage, with Desdemona and Emilia being designated, respectively, as a “cunning whore of Venice” [4.2.93] and a “fool” [4.2.152] by their

husbands. Even women themselves make use of pejorative terms to attack on each other, having Emilia designate Bianca as a "strumpet" [5.1.123], mistakenly believing she is guilty of wrongdoing. Also, in *Much Ado About Nothing* these conceptions on the female nature are ever present, through the figure of Benedick:

> That a woman conceived me, I thank her. That she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks. But that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldric, all women shall pardon me. [1.1.223-227]

Here, he emphasises on the inherent sinfulness of women and the belief that all men are cuckolds, that is, they are cheated on by their wives (Orgel, p.197).

Richard III reinforces these ideas, focusing on the use of women as political tools in the process of men's search for power. Richard III marries Lady Anne at the beginning of the play and then has her murdered, following his plan to marry Elizabeth of York to secure his position as king. Nevertheless, it is Henry VII who, deposing Richard, eventually takes her as a wife, again attending to the convenience the union will grant to his reign. In analogy with this idea, Portia's free will in *The Merchant of Venice* is invalidated, being compelled to marry the first man who succeeds in the contest imposed by her deceased father, and Miranda, in *The Tempest* serves as well as a tool to secure her father's political power and restore his lost status, having him orchestrate her relationship with Ferdinand. However, Shakespeare also attributes his female characters with more liberal traits. This reflects in his depiction of more liberal models of marriage in other of his works, specifically in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where Titania is presented as an independent woman who refuses to follow Oberon's orders, or in *Twelfth Night*, where Olivia falls in love with Viola, who is disguised as Cesario. Despite these examples, the complexity of women's dual portrayal eventually turns these subversions of gender norms to traditional conventions. Titania reunites with Oberon, after having him use her as a puppet all throughout the play, and Olivia, upon discovering Cesario's female identity, conforms with her relationship with Sebastian instead, returning to the notion of 'order' prevalent in Shakespeare's period.

Shakespeare's plays also allocate highly gendered roles to men and women, often reinforced with the use of gendered objects and symbols. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,

Egeus describes how Lysander has stolen the love of his daughter through material gifts: "With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds, conceits […] hast thou filched my daughter's heart." [1.1.33-36]. Romeo, in *Romeo and Juliet*, woos Juliet through religious imagery after meeting her at the Capulet ball, comparing his love to a pilgrim's worship of his saint:

> If I profane with my unworthiest hand
> this holy shrine, the gentler sin is this:
> my lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
> to smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss. [1.5.92-95]

And Bassanio, in *The Merchant of Venice*, courts her beloved as well, asking for a loan to travel to Belmont and win her hand, adhering in this way to the period's conventions of men pursuing women's affection (Gowing, p.32-38). In early modern England, the acceptance of jewels and other gifts was a very symbolic manner to determine that a woman had accepted a proposal. Nevertheless, Shakespeare reverses this practice in the courtship procedure among other characters, where women gift tokens to their lovers, showing women's capacity to take initiative and earn men's affection. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Titania is the one who takes care of Bottom during their orchestrated relationship in the play, putting her fairies at his attendance. Moreover, Olivia, in *Twelfth Night*, gives a ring to Cesario as a token of her love and Rosalind gifts a necklace to Orlando in *As You Like It*, when she meets him after the wrestle, thus earning his love. Portia and Nerissa's gifted rings to their husbands also play a key role in *The Merchant of Venice* and in *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet commends her nurse to deliver a ring to Romeo after he had been banished for killing Tybalt, to reassure him of her love and loyalty.

A common division of Shakespeare's female spectrum categorizes his female characters into independent and submissive figures. This distinction, upon closer examination, proves to be marked by a blurry and flexible boundary. Shakespeare's independent women often exhibit moments of vulnerability or conformity, while his more submissive characters occasionally reveal agency and inner strength, illustrating the vagueness of this categorization. Regarding his commonly labelled empowered female figures, Lady Macbeth epitomizes the influence of women over men. Her character can be related to the

figure of Iago in *Othello*, attending to her manipulative abilities. She is portrayed as a very powerful woman, who drives her husband into an endless circle of ambition. Nevertheless, she reveals traits of vulnerability in her famous “unsex me” speech, where she calls upon the spirits to strip her of her feminine qualities which she associates to weakness, to be able to fulfil her aspirations (Rackin, p.121). Also, despite her great intellect, her range of influence remains limited to the confines of her castle. She is always depicted indoors, following the model of women’s submission (Rackin, p.131). Cleopatra, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, embodies female power as well. Depicted as a seductive lover and political leader, she holds control over her body and the kingdom of Egypt (Rackin, p.117). Nevertheless, her emotional vulnerability undermines her empowered image, aligning with early modern conceptions of women’s sensitivity. Her love for Antony gives him free reign to manipulate her and she fakes her death after her troops have abandoned Antony in battle, out of fear of Antony’s rage. In a similar fashion, Beatrice, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, is also a compelling female figure. Her character embodies female independence and self-determination. She is portrayed as a very witty, sharp-tongued woman, who declares herself averse to love: “I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man / swear he loves me” [1.1.125-126]. She rejects the expectations of women at the time, but in this case, her change towards the other end of the spectrum is marked by her eventual marriage to Benedick, whose ideas towards women are quite misogynistic.

On the opposite extreme, more traditional female creations also display contrasting traits. Desdemona in *Othello* is illustrated as a very faithful, submissive character. She stays loyal in her love to Othello even when the latter is deceived into believing the opposite. Nevertheless, she shows a strong authority in the way all the quarrels revolve around her, being the centre of attention of both Othello and Roderigo, as well as in her audacity to accompany Othello to Cyprus (Jardine, p.75). Cordelia, in *King Lear*, appears as the ideal Renaissance woman as well: quiet and discrete. She refuses to excessively flatter her father with false praise and rather stay true in her affection towards him. While this drives Lear to banish and disinherit her, she shows resilience in maintaining her fondness for him, returning to his side when he is rejected by her two other sisters at power. Similarly,

Ophelia, in *Hamlet*, is portrayed as a passive character, who lets her father dictate her actions. She is unsettled by Hamlet's fluctuating interest in her and when her father Polonius is killed, she is left mourning him and drowns herself out of sadness. Nevertheless, she can also be analysed from the opposite perspective, attending to her great capability for independent thought, challenging her brother Laertes when he warns her against a relationship with Hamlet. Moreover, her mourning not only presents a weakness inherent to women's nature but also serves to expose the corruption around her.

The act of mourning reinforces the stereotypes associated to women in the period, together with common designations of women as "the maid", "the wife" or "the widow", as well as "the scold", "the whore" and "the witch" (Gowing, pp.62-64). In addition to Ophelia, Rosalind griefs her banished father in *As You Like It*, just in the same way as Olivia mourns her father and brother's death in *Twelfth Night*, or the Queen in *Richard II* mourns on her husband's departure on an expedition to Ireland. In general, grieving serves to highlight women's vulnerability, associated with the state of widowhood in the period or the loss of the male guardian (Mendelson and Crawford pp.174-184). While female grief is more personal, male characters may mourn publicly, often for political gain. For instance, Othello's mourning on Desdemona after having wrongly killed her is theatrical and calculated. It serves as a form of self-justification, integral to his sense of honour and duty. These behavioural differences between women and men allocated them in the private and public spheres, respectively, which Shakespeare brings to a larger scale in his spatial differentiation between the courts and the woods (Dod and Cleaver, p.168). The plot of a *Midsummer Night's Dream* shifts between the court of Athens and the enchanted woods, as well as the action in *As You Like It* moves from the court to the Forest of Arden. While the court represents an indoor space where everything is regulated and follows a strict hierarchy, the woods are presented as a magical place, where laws and traditional conventions do not apply, allowing the author to alter the gender norms of the time.

This alteration of the established 'order' is prevalent in the motif of cross-dressing. Shakespeare did not only portray the duality of women in terms of their more restricted and liberal traits, but he also addressed gender fluidity. The use of cross-dressing challenges

notions on femininity in Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night* is a great example of disorder, through its engagement with gender inversion. Cross-dressing was a widespread practice in Elizabethan theatres. The restriction on women appearing on stage led to boy actors performing female roles (Laurence, pp.141-143). In Shakespeare's plays, this practice caused a greater confusion on gender identity. The cross-dressing of his female characters in many of his plays, implied a double gender change: boy actors playing women disguised as men—which led to a playful depiction of femininity. In *As You Like It*, Rosalind disguises as Ganymede, a male shepherd, and Celia adopts the neutral name of Aliena, to travel through the forest in search of Rosalind's father. Moreover, in *The Merchant of Venice* Portia and Nerissa disguise themselves as lawyers to defend Antonio at court, as well as Shylock's daughter Jessica dresses as a page to escape her father and elope with Lorenzo. Furthermore, in *Twelfth Night*, the character of Viola cross-dressed as Cesario is a representation of binary genders. She claims that she is both female and male in various points of the play:

> As I am man,
> my state is desperate for my master's love.
> As I am woman, now, alas the day,
> what thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe! [2.2.36-39]

This blurred line between a female and a male identity challenges Orsino's speech, who draws upon the Humoral Theory to establish fixed gender divisions, stating that women are not able to hold feelings as strong as men's:

> There is no woman's sides
> can bide the beating of so strong a passion
> as love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
> so big, to hold so much. They lack retention. [2.4.92-95]

Deeply intertwined with the field of medicine, witchcraft also shapes women in Shakespeare's plays, specifically in his contrast between evil and benevolent female archetypes and, more directly, in his depiction of the Three Witches in *Macbeth*. Lady Macbeth and the Three Witches are portrayed as the instigators of ambition in the play, and

therefore responsible for all the committed crimes (Rackin, p.132). But women do not need to be presented as witches in order to expose their evil. Goneril and Regan in *King Lear* are also driven by ambition, to obtain political power, prioritizing their social status over their own family, and demonstrating in this way that women can be as cruel and greedy as men. While more benevolent characters include Cordelia, Juliet or Desdemona, these negative conceptions of women contributed to a strong sense of shared condition in the period. Female friendships, that relied on mutual help and cooperation, were relevant to women at all social levels (Mendelson and Crawford, pp.231-251). In *Othello*, Emilia defends her mistress' innocence before Othello, and in *As You Like It*, Celia is willing to make Rosalind the heir to her father's kingdom, to cure her from her sadness. The cousin's union is presented as deeply strong: "For the Duke's daughter her cousin so / loves her […] that she would have followed her exile, or have died / to stay behind her." [1.1.102-105]. Similarly, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Helena describes her bond with Hermia as follows, presenting the two cousins, in analogy to Rosalind and Celia, as a unique entity:

> We, Hermia, like two artificial gods
> have with our needles created both one flower […].
> So we grew together,
> like to a double cherry: seeming parted,
> but yet an union in partition,
> two lovely berries moulded on one stem. [3.2.204-212]

Friendships were very sentimental in the period and the expression of strong emotions was paramount, making women almost seem like lovers. Lesbian relationships in the period reveal another use of cross-dressing. Taking into account that lesbian relationships were prosecuted, one way in which women disguised their relationships was by cross-dressing. Together with the use of this device in dramatic performances, this is great proof of how much the sense of self-identity in the period depended precisely on externals (Orgel, pp.195-206). Appearances were more important in determining gender than anatomical differences, and certain material objects, including textiles and household goods, were associated to womanhood (Mendelson and Crawford, pp. 218-225). Material objects in Shakespeare's plays serve as a final resource to materialise his twofold perspective on

women. These objects have an embedded meaning, and many times reinforce contemporary stereotypes of women. For instance, handkerchiefs were a distinct woman garment in the period, commonly associated to maids and used as tokens of love, but which also alluded to the moist qualities assigned to women through the Theory of Humours. In this way, the handkerchief in *Othello*, while being representative of women's purity and chastity, satirizes the female body as being uncontrollably leaky, highlighting its role in controlling the expulsion of women's bodily fluids (Fisher, pp.199-207).

On the whole, the appearance of these symbols in Shakespeare's plays is the maximum expression of the author's mastery of every minute detail in early modern England's society. Influenced by the socio-historical context that surrounds him, his female characters mirror the society of his time. Although many critics tend to divide his female spectrum into fixed categories, his female *personas* do not show a strict set of characteristics, and their portrayal fluctuates, crossing the limits established by the binary oppositions submissive/empowered and benevolent/evil. His portrayal of women as belonging to both sides of these categorizations does not reveal a more traditional or liberal vision of women from the author but rather exposes how women in early modern England already possessed these dual traits. Personality traits and material objects combine in his works to describe the feminine sphere with a depth unmatched by any previous author. Shakespeare represents life as he knows it, depicting women in their full complexity, as versatile individuals who live through the gender norms of the period but also resist to them.

ST ALBAN'S COLLEGE AND ITS LIBRARY

The origins of St Alban's English college in Valladolid trace back to 1589, when it was founded by Robert Persons (1546-1610), an English Jesuit priest, under the patronage of the Spanish king Philip II. It is the last remaining English seminary on the continent along with the Venerable English College in Rome (1579), and the uniqueness of its library holdings sets it apart from other religious institutions in Spain. The college was established as part of the English Mission—an operation resulting from the religious unrest in post-Reformation England (Williams, *St Alban's College*, pp.1-13). The introduction of an English presence in a foreign country posed significant challenges, given the tense relations between the two nations at the time, deeply involved in a propagandistic war in the aftermath of the Anglo-Spanish war (1585-1604). However, it also enabled the flourishing of connections and cultural exchanges between England and Spain. These exchanges are reflected in the college's exceptionally valuable library collection— including works by Shakespeare—that has survived virtually untouched to this day and reveals a rich Anglo-Spanish cultural legacy (Sáez-Hidalgo, "St Alban's English College," pp.105-123).

St Alban's history merges Spanish and English Catholicism over four centuries since 1589. In response to the persecution of Catholics during Elizabeth I's reign, English exiles established a network of seminaries across Europe to train priests, who would return to England to restore the Catholic faith. St Alban's English College in Valladolid was the first seminary in Spain initiated for that purpose, established as a Jesuit-led institution. English presence in the country was not well received in the context of recent war conflicts such as that of the Spanish Armada (1588), and cooperation with the Spanish king was essential to secure St Alban's establishment, which rapidly became the centre of a broader network of seminaries across the continent: two other seminaries in Seville (1592) and Madrid (1610), the English centre at Sanlúcar de Barrameda (1591), and the seminaries at Lisbon (1628), Saint-Omer (1593) and Douai (1568), also operated under Spanish direction (Williams, *St Alban's College*, pp.1-13). In this context, St Alban's was far from an isolated institution. It welcomed a steady flow of students and books from its partner seminaries and served as a

hub for Anglo-Spanish relations, getting in contact with locals from Valladolid and working along with Spanish institutions from its initial stages.

To begin with, Spanish rectorship of the seminary was established by Philip II as a prerequisite for its existence. Consequently, Spanish rectors collaborated with English ministers and students, at least during the college's early years. Its Catholic identity also required compliance with the Spanish Inquisition, leading to joint censorship practices between English priests and Spanish Inquisitors concerning the library's holdings (Williams, "The Library of St. Alban's English College," pp.132-142). Furthermore, St Alban's maintained regular correspondence with England. Connections with important book collectors there, together with the publishing of English Catholic works by clandestine presses in England, facilitated the reception of numerous texts for its library. It also served as a channel for news through documents known as *avisos de Inglaterra*, which reported on the political and religious situation in England—essential information for seminarians preparing to return there (Sáez Hidalgo, "English recusant controversy", pp.24-30). Moreover, the college's cultural significance earned it various royal visits from Spanish monarchs as well as notable English figures, including Charles, Prince of Wales who visited during his unsuccessful marriage negotiations with Infanta Maria Anna of Spain (Williams, *St Alban's College*, pp.40-43).

The blending of English and Spanish influence at St Alban's extended to its reading, translation and production of texts. Translations by Licenciado José Alonso Ortiz on *The Sinner's Guide*, James I's *Proclamation Against Catholics* and Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, indicate Spanish access to and engagement with college materials. The college also built ties with the local community in Valladolid, attenuating the initial resistance to an English presence. St Alban's collaborated with other Jesuit institutions in the city, and its seminarians attended some lessons at the Jesuit College of St Ambrose (Sáez-Hidalgo, "St Alban's English College," pp.105-123). Local residents, in turn, attended St Alban's events and celebrations, particularly within the context of the college's veneration of the Virgin Vulnerata. The statue, originally belonging to a church in Cádiz, and desecrated by the English during a 1596 raid of the city, arrived at

the college in 1600 and remains a symbol of the mission's significance (Williams, *St Alban's College*, pp.61-64). Ultimately, the college's library holdings best reflect its cultural fusion. St Alban's special educational needs, instructing seminarians into the English Catholic faith, granted it a special Inquisitorial permission to import foreign books. This privilege gave its library a character unlike any other in post-Reformation Spain, with the presence of English books alongside those in Latin and Spanish, as well as a minor amount of them written in other European languages (Revilla-Rivas, pp.185-207).

The college's texts are currently stored in three distinct rooms: The *Pigskin*, where all books bound in parchment are found; the *Biblioteca;* and the *Student Library*. According to the only surviving inventory from 1767, approximately 1,200 volumes were kept in the *Biblioteca*, or 'common library' by that date (Revilla-Rivas, pp.185-207). Due to the college's location in Spain, most of the books were in Spanish and Latin, with a small percentage written in the vernacular. English books accounted for 58 volumes, out of which 45 were religious, and other 13 dealt with non-religious topics. These non-religious works are particularly relevant to this study, since they include literary works by Shakespeare, with notable excision marks on his female characters. St Alban's privileges did not exempt its written material from Inquisitorial scrutiny, and the Inquisition conducted regular visits to supress heterodox content (Sáez-Hidalgo, "St Alban's English College," pp.105-123). The presence of non-religious English books in the library is significant, since it suggests an interest among English priests in both Protestant controversial literature and leisure reading. Few non-religious works were present in the library before 1767 and the expansion on the holdings of this nature can be mainly explained through the figures of two of the college's rectors: Philip Perry, rector of the college between 1768 and 1774 and Joseph Shepherd, exercising his rectorship from 1775 to 1796.

Both rectors were the first English secular heads of the college, following the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spain in 1767. Under the leadership of Philip Perry, the seminary experienced significant adjustments: a new curriculum of studies was introduced, the seminaries at Seville and Madrid were merged in that of St Alban's and, most notably, Perry's bibliophile character led to a substantial growth of the college's library. He

contributed his personal collection to the library holdings and successfully petitioned for the acquisition of numerous books from various other Jesuit libraries in the city, as well as from the former colleges of Seville and Madrid (Williams, *St Alban's College*, pp.71-116). The library's collection also grew in diversity, including history books as well as controversial Protestant works, both types of texts serving a common purpose: to ensure that seminarians were well-versed in the history of Britain and Protestantism, being able to refute Protestant arguments upon returning to England for their mission (Sáez-Hidalgo, "St Alban's English College," pp.105-123). Nonetheless, Joseph Shepherd stands out as the most relevant rector for this investigation. If the library experienced a huge expansion under Perry's rectorship, his preferences were still restricted to theological grounds. Literary works could only find their way into St Alban's library owing to Shepherd's broader interests as a man of enlightened ideas.

According to the 1767 inventory, the only literary works present in the college's library prior to that date were a Second Folio of Shakespeare's works (1632), found in the common library, along with two other literary texts: John Milton's *Paradise Regained* and a sixth edition of Philip Sidney's *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (1622), both located in a separate room known as *Infierno*, where their reading was prohibited for seminarians (Revilla-Rivas, pp.185-207). Joseph Shepherd's openness to the latest intellectual trends in Britain led to the post-Jesuit expansion of the library's literary collection. One of the many volumes he owned of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, a monthly digest aimed at educated readers, remains in the college's collection. He facilitated the inclusion of literary works by Alexander Pope, Milton, Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, or James Thomson's *The Seasons* (Williams, "St Alban's Library: Censorship," pp.132-142). A nine-volume edition of Shakespeare's works was also found in the library, relevant to this research, which, like the rest of the literary works, was subjected to the same censoring practices as the other volumes in the library. Thanks to Shepherd, these works were present at St Alban's two decades before Spanish interest towards English literature had developed, since it was not until the late eighteenth century that English literature began to gain popularity among the

Spanish, by means of French translations (Sáez-Hidalgo, “St Alban’s English College,” pp.105-123).

In this regard, St Alban’s college embodies the convergence of English and Spanish Catholicism in the early modern period. At a time of unpeaceful relations, Catholic faith joined both countries under a common purpose: to preserve the influence of Catholicism in Europe over the Protestant expansion. This cooperation allowed for the creation of an interconnected web of English institutions, whose flow of people, information and written material is encapsulated in St Alban’s college, one of the last surviving institutions of this nature. Thanks to the excellent preservation of its library holdings, Anglo-Spanish cultural exchanges can be explored in the present. Its written materials, with notable marks of censorship and annotations, are the legacy of the college’s history, and their unparalleled value is reason enough to explain why the college has survived to this day, and how it still dedicates itself to the instruction of young seminarians for priesthood.

MISSIONARY SCRUTINY AT ST ALBAN'S

Shakespeare's women challenged Catholic notions of femininity enough to be examined at St Alban's English College in Valladolid. The institutional censorship and annotation constitute one of their earliest readings and interpretations (Mayer, *Shakespeare's Early Readers*, pp.185-190). As a hub for Anglo-Spanish relations, the college provides an unparalleled view on Shakespeare's female characters: a combined scrutiny from both English exiles and the Spanish Inquisition. No other institution in Inquisitorial Spain had the privilege of importing foreign books—not to mention secular literature from a Protestant author (Sáez Hidalgo, "St Alban's English College," pp.105-123). Within the context of the English Mission, this study examines three key Shakespearean volumes linked to English seminaries across Europe: A collection of nine small books compiling Shakespeare's works at St Alban's library, a Second Folio (1632) which once belonged to the institution but is now property of the Folger Library in Washington DC, together with a copy of the First Folio (1623), discovered in 2014 at Saint-Omer's College in France, seminary which was also under control of the Spanish Crown at the time. Along with this, a 1622 edition of Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, is included in the investigation, as a significant intertext for Shakespeare's plots and a potential model of the censorship practices applied to English literary works (Fitzroy, pp.449-455).

The nine-volume Shakespeare collection in the Valladolid College library and the Saint-Omer First Folio display signs of seminarian censorship. Printed in London in 1751, the nine-volume edition likely reached the college in the late eighteenth century, bequeathed by Shepherd— rector of the college from 1775 to 1796—when Inquisitorial control had strongly diminished (Rawlings, pp. 135-151). In the same lines, Saint-Omer's First Folio was mainly excised in two plays, likely adapted for performance by seminarians, reflecting the importance that drama played on Jesuit education. Additionally, The Second Folio, known as the Valladolid Folio, and Sidney's *Arcadia* bear marks of Inquisitorial censorship from 1707. While the censor of *Arcadia* remains unknown, William Sankey is identified as the expurgator of the Valladolid Folio (Cummings, pp.306-322). He arrived at the college from Flanders in 1641 (Henson, *Registers of the English College*, pp. xxviii-xxix). He took

the direction of the college for a couple of months in 1649, until the arrival of a new rector and held effective rectorship of St George's College in Madrid between 1651 and 1662 (Henson, *The English College at Madrid*, pp.v-xii). His expurgations are signed under the Spanish translation of his name: Guillermo Sánchez. Whether categorized as inquisitorial or seminarian censorship, this scrutiny was undeniably executed by English priests, since knowledge of the language is essential for interpreting the texts (Revilla-Rivas, pp.185-207). Therefore, a form of collaboration between the Inquisition and the English missionaries took place, and censorship patterns remained consistent even after the dissolution of the Inquisition, due to the Catholic background of the institution.

Expurgation marks on women target themes considered immoral under Catholic standards. Subtle excision techniques include marginal annotations and blacked-out passages, while more extreme measures involve razor-excised pages and the removal of entire plays. References to female empowerment, sexuality, marital defiance and improper language are repeatedly censored. The eighteenth-century edition contains extensive marginal annotations, in the form of bracketed passages, highlighting inappropriate content for seminarians. Additionally, ink-blackened text is frequent and seven pages from the play *Titus Andronicus* of its eighth volume have been cut off. The Second Folio and *Arcadia* present a similar scheme, with censored speeches in ink, while also showing more stringent modifications. The Valladolid Folio bears the mark of maximum obliteration, having had *Measure for Measure* removed in its entirety, and the expurgation of *Arcadia* primarily targets improper use of language and sexual references, bearing traces of razor excision. Lastly, annotations in Saint-Omer's First Folio concentrate on two history plays: bawdy allusions in *Henry V* are condemned, while *Henry IV* is deliberately altered for seminarian performance, with the omission of its female characters (Mayer, "The Saint-Omer First Folio," pp.7-20).

A joint analysis of the annotations and censorship reveals the portrayals of women that were considered deviations from Catholic doctrine and deemed unacceptable in an early modern Anglo-Spanish context. Notably, expressions of female power are heavily bowdlerized. In the nine-volume edition, Duke Theseus speech in *A Midsummer Night's*

Dream, on Hermia's disobedience, is crossed out due to its challenge to the Church's view of women as subordinate, as well as for its reference to forced celibacy as Hermia's punishment, which contradicts Catholic beliefs about religious vocation (Rawlings, pp.114-128).

> "~~Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires~~ […] ~~/ You can endure the livery of a nun~~ […]" (A Midsummer Night's Dream, Volume I, p.67, nine-volume edition, henceforward NVE)

Along with this, Falstaff's speech in The Merry Wives of Windsor, expressing his anger and confusion after being deceived by Mistress Ford and Mistress Page is obliterated due to the direct involvement of women in his deception, challenging female submissiveness:

> "~~O powerful love, that in some respects / makes a beast a man; in some other, a man a beast!~~ […] ~~/ what shall poor men do~~?" (The Merry Wives of Windsor, Volume I, p. 246, NVE)

Figure 1. St Alban's College Library, henceforward SACL, nine-volume edition, Volume I (The Merry Wives of Windsor, 5.5.1-22), showing the glued-out deletion of the censor. Published with permission.

Regarding marriage, distinct forms of misbehaviour are strictly penalized. Pre-marital relations are a recurrent bowdlerized issue (Rawlings, pp.121-125). In *Measure for*

Measure, Claudio's speech is excised when he refers to his sexual relations with Juliet in their unmarried state. He suggests that their private agreement holds the same value as a formal wedding, undermining the Church's authority over marriage.

> "~~Upon a true contract, / I got possession of Julietta's bed~~ […] ~~/ she is fast my wife, / save that we do the denunciation lack / of outward order.~~" (Measure for Measure, Volume II, p.11, NVE)

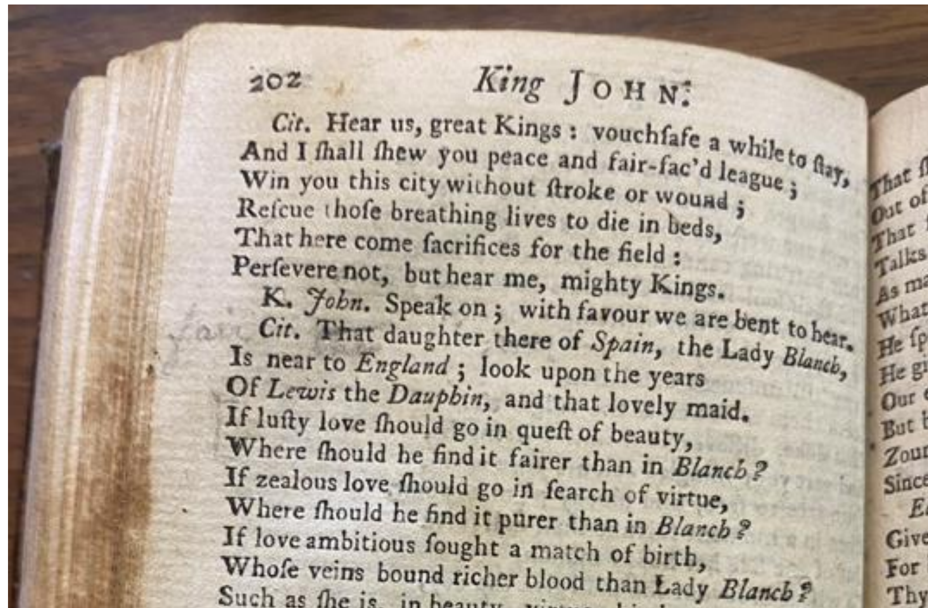
Albany's speech in *King Lear*, addressing marital issues, is expurgated for its reference to non-monogamous relations (Rawlings, pp.121-125). His description of his wife as a "gilded serpent" is severely struck through due to his recognition of Goneril's infidelity. The notion of women engaging in extramarital affairs and violating marriage vows is strongly condemned.

> "~~This gilded serpent. For your claim, fair / sister, / I bar it in the interest of my wife~~ [...] ~~/ If you will marry, make your love to me. / My lady is bespoke~~." (King Lear, Volume IV, p.174, NVE)

The portrayal of marriage as a political tool is also penalized, since censors sought to uphold it as a sacred institution rather than a diplomatic strategy. Specifically, several dialogues in *King John* concerning the union of Louis the Dauphin of France and Lady Blanche of Spain are blotted out, as the marriage aimed to secure peace between England and France. This illustrates how international relations also influenced readings of Shakespeare's women (Sáez Hidalgo, "St Alban's English College," pp.105-123). In particular, the extensive excisions in *Henry V* from Saint-Omer's First Folio reflect concerns over Anglo-French rivalries, just as Anglo-Spanish relations shape numerous alterations in the volumes (Mayer, "The Saint-Omer First Folio," pp.7-20).

The Anglo-Spanish religious conflict, shaped by English portrayals of Catholicism and the Inquisition through the Black Legend, influences numerous emendations concerning women (Rawlings, pp.4-5). In *King John*, an annotation replaces "that" with "fair" in "~~That~~ (Fair) daughter there of Spain, the Lady Blanche, / is niece to England. […]", reflecting an effort to enhance favourable references to Spain and to reduce hostilities. Moreover, many dialogues in *Henry VIII* surrounding Elizabeth I's christening are obliterated, given her Protestant identity and association with the Anglo-Spanish tensions that culminated in England's victory over the Spanish Armada (1588). In this context, English missionaries

likely amended the volumes from a complex position—as English Catholics in Spain—interpreting women through an Anglo-Spanish lens (Revilla-Rivas, pp.185-207).


202 *King* JOHN.

Cit. Hear us, great Kings: vouchſafe a while to ſtay,
And I ſhall ſhew you peace and fair-fac'd league;
Win you this city without ſtroke or wound;
Reſcue thoſe breathing lives to die in beds,
That here come ſacrifices for the field:
Perſevere not, but hear me, mighty Kings.
K. *John.* Speak on; with favour we are bent to hear.
Cit. That daughter there of *Spain*, the Lady *Blanch*,
Is near to *England*; look upon the years
Of *Lewis* the *Dauphin*, and that lovely maid.
If luſty love ſhould go in queſt of beauty,
Where ſhould he find it fairer than in *Blanch*?
If zealous love ſhould go in ſearch of virtue,
Where ſhould he find it purer than in *Blanch*?
If love ambitious ſought a match of birth,
Whoſe veins bound richer blood than Lady *Blanch*?
Such as ſhe is, in

Figure 2. SACL, nine-volume edition, Volume IV (King John, 2.1.424-446), showing the handwritten correction of the censor, replacing the word “that” by “fair”. Published with permission.

Further gender-related omissions in the eighteenth-century edition can be analysed through the central figures of Portia, Constance, Richard II’s Queen and Isabella. Portia’s speech in *The Merchant of Venice* challenges the expected female subordinate position in marriage. She commands Nerissa and the servants to hide her absence from her husband. Her behaviour implies a degree of female autonomy, acting with independence from her husband.

> “~~Go in, Nerissa. / Give order to my servants that they take / no note at all of our being absent hence; / nor you, Lorenzo; Jessica, nor you.~~” (The Merchant of Venice, Volume II, p.267, NVE)

In a similar vein, Constance reflects on women’s powerlessness in *King John*. The speech where she laments her inability to defend her son Arthur’s claim to the English throne, is deliberately blacked out. Her critique of women’s inferior social position challenges the stereotype of female silence and submission. Her endorsement of female political

intervention is particularly controversial in a male-dominated society, especially in the aftermath of Spain's conflict with Protestant Queen Elizabeth I, which reinforced the perception of female power as destabilizing (Rawlings, pp.4-5).

> "~~A widow husbandless, subject to fears; / A woman naturally born to fears~~ [...] ~~/ With my vexed spirits I cannot take a truce, / but they will quake and tremble all this day~~" (King John, Volume IV, p.207, NVE)

Constance's persistent advocacy for female political intervention makes her a primary target for censorship. She fiercely condemns King John for usurping her son's rightful position and expresses her desire for a voice powerful enough to reach the heavens. Her defiance of royal authority challenges the divine right of kings and openly critiques the monarchy— actions strictly suppressed by missionary censors (Rawlings, pp.114-128).

> "~~O, that my tongue were in a thunder's mouth!~~[...] ~~/ Which cannot hear a lady's feeble voice, / which scorns a modern invocation~~." (King John, Volume IV, p.219, NVE)

Similarly, the Queen in *Richard II* also expresses her desire to voice her thoughts. In her conversation with the gardener, she laments women's exclusion from political affairs. Moreover, her awareness of the kingdom's turmoil, in contrast to his husband's blindness, suggests that female wisdom can surpass male authority.

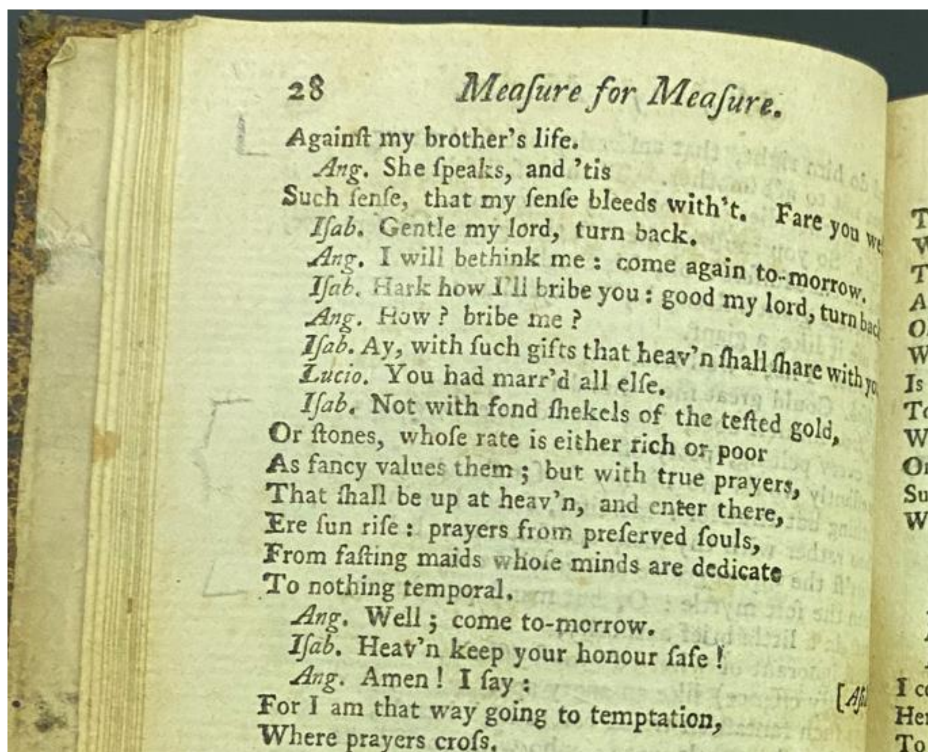
> "~~O, I am pressed to death through want of speaking! / Thou, old Adam's likeness, set to dress this garden~~ […] ~~/ Why dost thou say King Richard is deposed?~~" (Richard II, Volume IV, p.304, NVE)

Furthermore, particular attention is given to the character of Isabella in the context of gender dynamics. In *Measure for Measure*, her outspoken defence of mercy over strict adherence to law, placed her in the spotlight for seminarian censors, given the Inquisition's reliance on harsh punishments to suppress heterodox behaviours (Rawlings, pp.30-41). Censors condemn her lack of compassion for her brother, prioritizing her chastity over his life (Muir, pp-1-10). Her speech, in which she addresses him as a "beast", "faithless coward" and "dishonest wretch" is censored due to her assumption of moral authority—a role typically reserved for male figures.

"~~O, you beast! / O faithless coward, O dishonest wretch, / wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?~~ […] ~~/ I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death, / no word to save thee~~." (Measure for Measure, Volume II, p.39, NVE)

She repeatedly challenges authority, openly defying Angelo's decisions and strongly critiquing the corruption within powerful institutions, questioning the purity of religious life. She deeply entangles with themes of wealth and political power, alluding to the Church's materialism, and therefore undermining the authority of religious institutions.

"~~Not with fond shekels of the tested gold, / or stones, whose rate are either rich or poor~~ […] ~~/ but with true prayers~~ […] ~~/ From fasting maids whose minds are dedicate / to nothing temporal~~." (Measure for Measure, Volume II, p. 28, NVE)



28 *Meaſure for Meaſure.*

Againſt my brother's life.
Ang. She ſpeaks, and 'tis
Such ſenſe, that my ſenſe bleeds with't. Fare you
Iſab. Gentle my lord, turn back.
Ang. I will bethink me: come again to-morrow.
Iſab. Hark how I'll bribe you: good my lord, turn
Ang. How? bribe me?
Iſab. Ay, with ſuch gifts that heav'n ſhall ſhare with
Lucio. You had marr'd all elſe.
Iſab. Not with fond ſhekels of the teſted gold,
Or ſtones, whoſe rate is either rich or poor
As fancy values them; but with true prayers,
That ſhall be up at heav'n, and enter there,
Ere ſun riſe: prayers from preſerved ſouls,
From faſting maids whoſe minds are dedicate
To nothing temporal.
Ang. Well; come to-morrow.
Iſab. Heav'n keep your honour ſafe!
Ang. Amen! I ſay:
For I am that way going to temptation,
Where prayers croſs.

Figure 3. SACL, nine-volume edition, Volume II (Measure for Measure, 2.2.153-159), showing marginal annotations in pencil. These are the most abundant censoring traces throughout this edition, marking passages deemed inappropriate, for further revision. Published with permission.

She even asserts that no authority is exempt from sin, and her acknowledgment of priests' sinful behaviour may have been perceived as dangerous by the English censors.

> "~~Spare him, spare him!~~ […] ~~/ Who is it that hath died for this offence? / There's many have committed it.~~" (Measure for Measure, Volume II, p. 26, NVE)

Nonetheless, the relevance of *Measure for Measure* in this investigation extends beyond Isabella, as she is not the only character facing strict censorship in the play; Angelo's soliloquy also addresses women's issues, particularly when he feels tempted by Isabella in her plea for her brother's life. Under Catholic doctrine, the idea that royal authorities could experience sexual arousal was inconceivable. The crime of solicitation condemned priests who violated their vows of celibacy (Rawlings, pp.125-128). While Angelo is not a priest, he is still expected to meet these moral requirements, as a figure of authority designated by God.

> "~~What's this? What's this? Is this her fault or mine? / The tempter or the tempted, who sins most, ha?~~ […] ~~/ this virtuous maid subdues me quite~~." (Measure for Measure, Volume II, pp. 28-29, NVE)

The extensive censorship imposed on this play in the nine-volume edition is not an isolated phenomenon. It is no coincidence that the most censored play in these volumes is also entirely absent from the Second Folio of Shakespeare's works. *Measure for Measure* has been classified by many contemporary critics as one of Shakespeare's "Problem Plays" (Muir, pp.1-10). Its primary controversy arises from its complex moral dilemmas, including Isabella's defiant attitude, Angelo's corrupt behaviour, and the overall problematic nature of the plot, which centres on the Duke disguising himself as a friar. All of this explains the meticulous scrutiny of the play, absent from the Second Folio, a document predominantly excised for religious blasphemy and sexual misconduct.

The uniqueness of Shakespeare's Second Folio has made it subject to numerous analyses. Brian Cummings, Professor of English and Related Literature at the University of York, differentiates three different types of excision traces in this Folio: the censoring of oaths, the expurgation of sexual innuendo and, in general, the amending of doctrinal and theological concerns. His study has a distinct focus, addressing the mystery surrounding Shakespeare's religious identity as either Catholic or Protestant. He predominantly makes a religious reading of the document, focusing on doctrinal emendations. Cummings examines the obliteration of oaths addressing pagan deities:

> "~~Saint~~ Cupid, then, and, soldiers, to the field!" (Love's Labour's Lost, 4.3.342; Valladolid Folio, henceforward VF, M2r)

Catholic doctrine restricts this kind of idolatry to the veneration of saints. Furthermore, Cummings explores every theological correction. Censors intervened in every contradiction to the Catholic doctrine, including the suppression of all favourable references to Protestant religious figures, such as Archbishop Cranmer in *Henry VIII*. While Cummings approach to the Second Folio's expurgations is mainly theological, these dogmatic excisions are many times deeply connected with moral concerns. For instance, the expression "~~as the nun's lip to the friar's mouth~~" in *All's Well That Ends Well*, suggests physical intimacy between religious figures, or "That's a fair thought ~~to lie between maids' legs~~" in *Hamlet*, depicts what Catholicism considered a scandalous sexual image at the time. Beyond Cummings' religious interpretation, these expressions can be examined in relation to women's matters, imposing limits on women's behaviour.

Highly relevant to this study is the elimination of sexual references, where the heaviest bulk of censorship is concentrated. While Cummings addresses them as a secondary source in his research, they are central to this paper to understand early modern gender roles. To begin with, many inappropriate words are excised in isolation. The term "~~codpiece~~", referring to a piece of clothing used to cover men's genitalia, is supressed twice in the Second Folio and once in the nine-volume edition. Its occurrence in Shakespeare's plays is tied to lustful desires, leading to its repeated removal. Furthermore, terms like "~~whoreson~~", "~~bastard~~", "~~pander~~" and "~~bawd~~" are blacked out in the Second Folio, due to their direct association with sexual misconduct and their implication of women's illicit behaviour. In a similar fashion, Pandarus uses the term "~~maidenheads~~" in *Troilus and Cressida* in a vulgar pun about virginity, mocking Cressida's potential loss of chastity: "How now, how now, ~~how go maidenheads~~?" (4.2). Additionally, the term "~~unstanched wench~~" used by Gonzalo in *The Tempest*, is noteworthy. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "unstanched" refers to being "unrestrained; not stopped (referring to the flow of a body liquid)" and "wench" means "a young woman". So, this phrase likely refers to a maid not using a cloth

to stop her menstrual flow, a metaphor that may have provoked Catholic censors, due to its open reference to menstruation, which was associated with impurity in the period.

Along the same lines, sexual double entendres proliferate in Shakespeare's comedies and censors are visibly keen to intervene in this area. In *As You Like It* from the nine-volume edition Touchstone mentions "~~love's prick~~", concept which refers to Cupid's arrow, symbolizing romantic love, but which also designates male genitalia. As well, Malvolio's speech in *Twelfth Night* contains an elaborate sexual pun.

> "By my life, this is my lady's / hand. ~~These be her very c's, her u's, and her t's, and / thus makes she her great P's~~." (Twelfth Night, Volume III, p. 257, NVE)

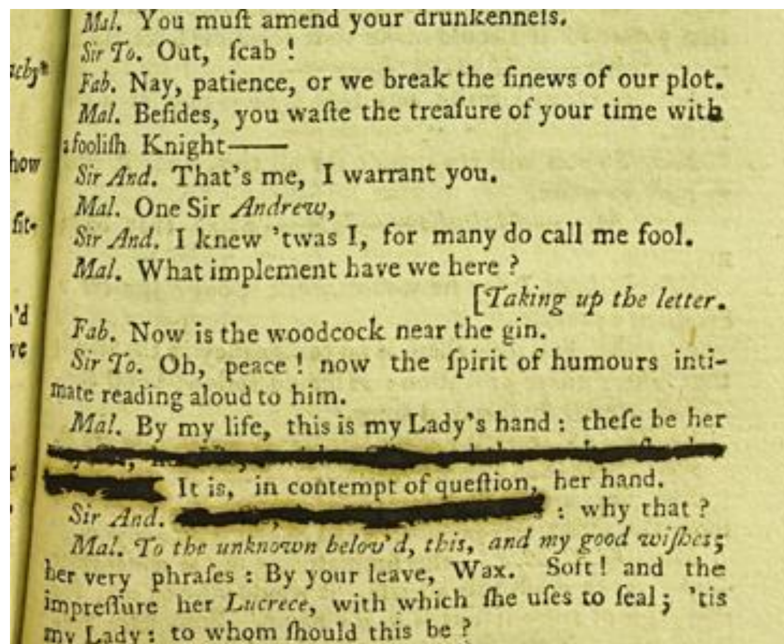
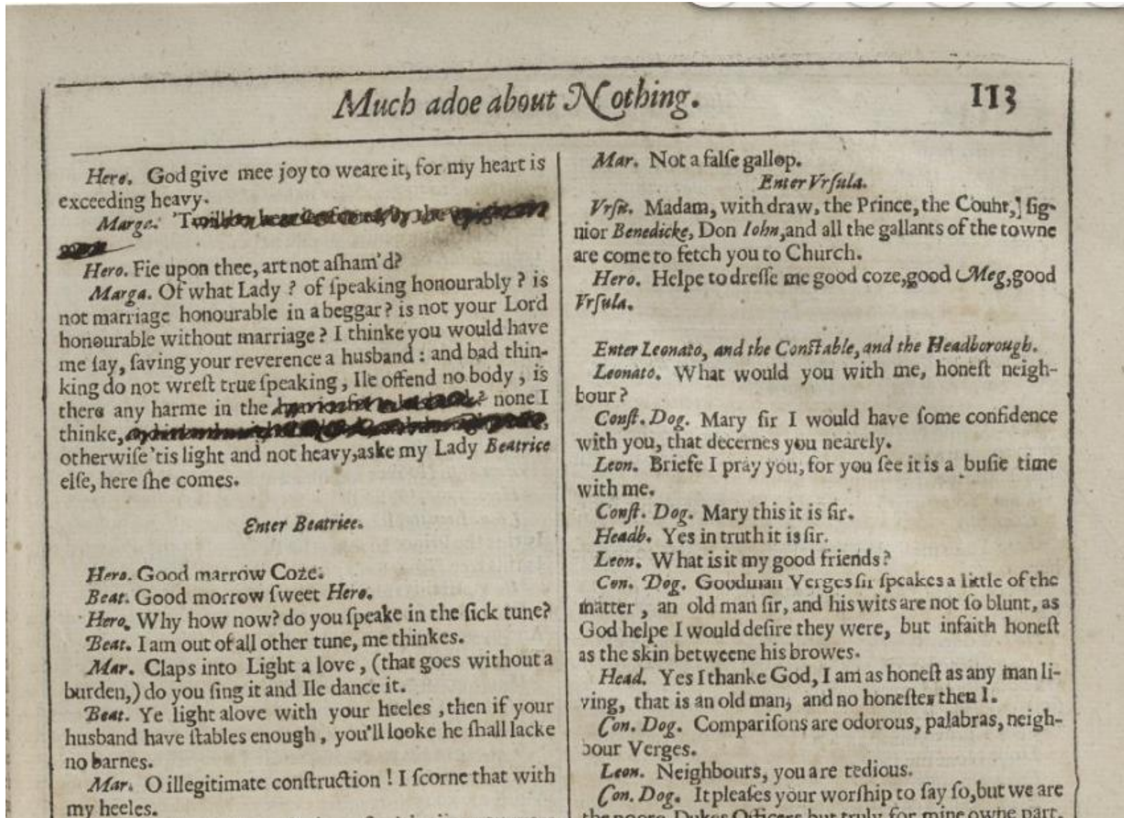

Mal. You muſt amend your drunkenneſs.
Sir To. Out, ſcab!
Fab. Nay, patience, or we break the ſinews of our plot.
Mal. Beſides, you waſte the treaſure of your time with a fooliſh Knight——
Sir And. That's me, I warrant you.
Mal. One Sir *Andrew*,
Sir And. I knew 'twas I, for many do call me fool.
Mal. What implement have we here? [*Taking up the letter.*
Fab. Now is the woodcock near the gin.
Sir To. Oh, peace! now the ſpirit of humours intimate reading aloud to him.
Mal. By my life, this is my Lady's hand: theſe be her
It is, in contempt of queſtion, her hand.
Sir And. : why that?
Mal. *To the unknown belov'd, this, and my good wiſhes;* her very phraſes: By your leave, Wax. Soft! and the impreſſure her *Lucrece*, with which ſhe uſes to ſeal; 'tis my Lady: to whom ſhould this be?

Figure 4. SACL, nine-volume edition, Volume III (Twelfth Night, 2.5.85-88), showing the blacking-out of Malvolio's bawdy pun. Published with permission.

The letters "c", "u" and "t" build up the word "cut", which was a vulgar term for female genitalia, and "her great P's" refers to "pees" or urine, reinforcing its sexual innuendo (Shakespeare, p.160). Along with this, the servant in *The Winter's Tale* also introduces lewd connotations with his expression "~~Jump her, and thump her~~", as an overt reference to sexual intercourse, as well as his direct reference to a "~~dildo~~".

Further instances of bawdy jokes can be found in the Second Folio, highlighting the excisions on Margaret's character in *Much Ado About Nothing*. She playfully comments on "~~the weight of a man~~" and the "~~heaviness~~" of marriage, referring to the physical weight of the husband, and therefore implying the consummation of marriage.

"~~'Twill be heavier soon by the weight of a man~~" (Much Ado About Nothing, 3.4.25; VF, K3r)



Much adoe about Nothing. 113

Hero. God give mee joy to weare it, for my heart is exceeding heavy.
Marg. 'T[illegible]
Hero. Fie upon thee, art not aſham'd?
Marga. Of what Lady? of ſpeaking honourably? is not marriage honourable in a beggar? is not your Lord honourable without marriage? I thinke you would have me ſay, ſaving your reverence a husband: and bad thinking do not wreſt true ſpeaking, Ile offend no body, is there any harme in the [illegible] none I thinke, [illegible] otherwiſe 'tis light and not heavy, aske my Lady *Beatrice* elſe, here ſhe comes.

Enter Beatrice.

Hero. Good marrow Coze.
Beat. Good morrow ſweet *Hero.*
Hero. Why how now? do you ſpeake in the ſick tune?
Beat. I am out of all other tune, me thinkes.
Mar. Claps into Light a love, (that goes without a burden,) do you ſing it and Ile dance it.
Beat. Ye light alove with your heeles, then if your husband have ſtables enough, you'll looke he ſhall lacke no barnes.
Mar. O illegitimate conſtruction! I ſcorne that with my heeles.
Mar. Not a falſe gallop.

Enter Vrſula.

Vrſu. Madam, with draw, the Prince, the Count, ſignior *Benedicke*, Don *Iohn*, and all the gallants of the towne are come to fetch you to Church.
Hero. Helpe to dreſſe me good coze, good *Meg*, good *Vrſula.*

Enter Leonato, and the Conſtable, and the Headborough.

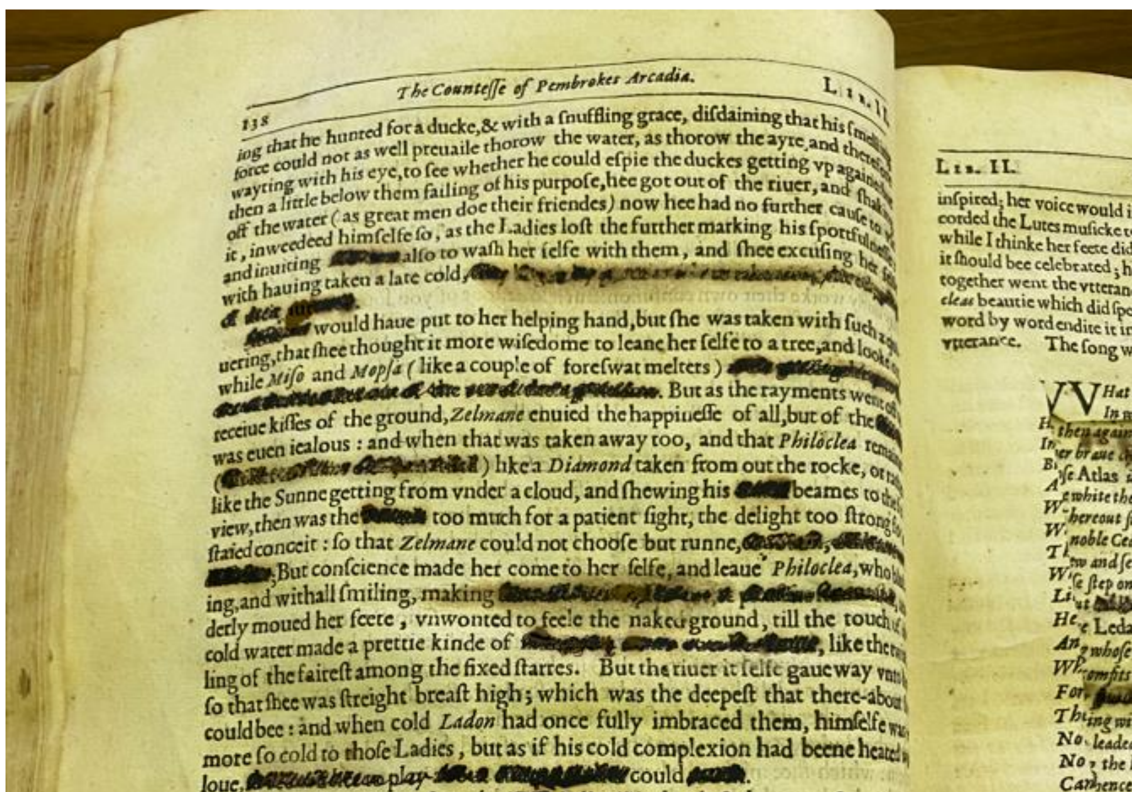
Leonato. What would you with me, honeſt neighbour?
Conſt. Dog. Mary ſir I would have ſome confidence with you, that decernes you nearely.
Leon. Briefe I pray you, for you ſee it is a buſie time with me.
Conſt. Dog. Mary this it is ſir.
Headb. Yes in truth it is ſir.
Leon. What is it my good friends?
Con. Dog. Goodman Verges ſir ſpeakes a little of the matter, an old man ſir, and his wits are not ſo blunt, as God helpe I would deſire they were, but infaith honeſt as the skin betweene his browes.
Head. Yes I thanke God, I am as honeſt as any man living, that is an old man, and no honeſter then I.
Con. Dog. Compariſons are odorous, palabras, neighbour Verges.
Leon. Neighbours, you are tedious.
Con. Dog. It pleaſes your worſhip to ſay ſo, but we are the poore Dukes Officers but truly for mine owne part,

Figure 5. Folger Shakespeare Library, Valladolid Folio (Much Ado About Nothing, 3.4.25-34), showing the expurgation marks on the Second Folio of Shakespeare's works. Published with permission.

Her improper language is furtherly condemned in her speech: "~~To have no man come over me – why, shall I / always keep below stairs~~?" (5.2). While "coming over" and "below stairs" are terms used to denote an inferior social position, in this context, they carry a sexual connotation, suggesting being literally beneath the husband's physical dominance.

The censor's suppression of "corrupt images" is taken to the extreme in *Arcadia*, where mere references to female anatomy are excised. The number of emendations is extensive, but some representative examples include "A ~~naked~~ Venus", "There was Diana when

Actaeon ~~saw her bathing~~ […]", "[…] young Philoclea appeared in her nymph-like apparel, ~~so near nakedness~~", where the depiction of female nudity is repeatedly penalized. Similarly, censors also took issue with descriptions of female body parts visible through clothing—evident in phrases like "The foot was dressed in a short pair of crimson velvet buskins; ~~in some places open, to shew the fairness of the skin~~." or "~~hiding the beauties~~, whereof nature was proud […]"—which reinforces their broader effort to erase bodily references. This is particularly evident in the song embedded in the narrative, where the terms "~~knees~~", "~~flesh~~", "~~foot~~", "~~shoulders~~", "~~skin~~", or even "~~limbs~~" are deleted, alongside the removal of its opening stanzas.



The Counteſſe of Pembrokes Arcadia. Lib. II.

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ing that he hunted for a ducke,& with a ſnuffling grace, diſdaining that his ſmell-
force could not as well preuaile thorow the water, as thorow the ayre, and there-
wayting with his eye, to ſee whether he could eſpie the duckes getting vp againe
then a little below them failing of his purpoſe, hee got out of the riuer, and ſhak-
off the water (as great men doe their friendes) now hee had no further cauſe to
it, inweeded himſelfe ſo, as the Ladies loſt the further marking his ſportfulneſſe
and inuiting [illegible] alſo to waſh her ſelfe with them, and ſhee excuſing her
with hauing taken a late cold, [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible] would haue put to her helping hand, but ſhe was taken with ſuch a
uering, that ſhee thought it more wiſedome to leane her ſelfe to a tree, and looke
while *Miſo* and *Mopſa* (like a couple of foreſwat melters) [illegible]
[illegible]. But as the rayments went off
receiue kiſſes of the ground, *Zelmane* enuied the happineſſe of all, but of the [illegible]
was euen iealous: and when that was taken away too, and that *Philoclea* remained
([illegible]) like a *Diamond* taken from out the rocke, or
like the Sunne getting from vnder a cloud, and ſhewing his [illegible] beames to the
view, then was the [illegible] too much for a patient ſight, the delight too ſtrong for
ſtaied conceit: ſo that *Zelmane* could not chooſe but runne, [illegible]
[illegible], But conſcience made her come to her ſelfe, and leaue *Philoclea*, who
ing, and withall ſmiling, making [illegible]
derly moued her feete, vnwonted to feele the naked ground, till the touch of
cold water made a prettie kinde of [illegible], like the
ling of the faireſt among the fixed ſtarres. But the riuer it ſelfe gaue way vnto
ſo that ſhee was ſtreight breaſt high; which was the deepeſt that there-about
could bee: and when cold *Ladon* had once fully imbraced them, himſelfe was
more ſo cold to thoſe Ladies, but as if his cold complexion had beene heated
loue, [illegible] play [illegible] could [illegible].

Figure 6.SACL, *Arcadia* (Lib.II, p.838), showing the extreme excision on sexual images in the work. Published with permission.

Furthermore, the simple action of kissing, which usually has a sexual undertone in the narrative, is penalised: "Now forsooth, as they went together, often fall to ~~kissing~~ one another", "their souls desired to meet, and their hearts to kiss ~~as their mouths did~~, they

passed the promise of marriage", "And then ~~kissing me~~ […]", and any form of physical connection has been erased: "~~for the narrowness of the coach made them join from the foot to the shoulders very close together~~ […]", "~~she sat upon her bed-side by her~~", " ~~took her in his arms, and~~ began to comfort her". In the context of these extreme emendations, Arcadia's "lesbian" relationship between Zelmane and Philoclea (which is actually a heterosexual relationship in disguise) is central to most of the sexual references in *Arcadia*, presenting a further reason for the rigorous censoring of the narrative. Same-sex relations were deemed unacceptable under Catholic doctrine, severely punished by the Inquisition (Rawlings, pp.121-125). Relations between women, regarded as bestial practices in the period, might have posed a huge threat to the English censors, contributing to the strict censorship of representations of women throughout the text.

In this regard, annotations and censorship serve as a supplement to historical context, to understand how women were viewed in the early modern period. In this case, I have explored a unique instance of annotation: that of English Catholics reading Shakespeare from exile. Their reactions to the texts reveal the limitations imposed on women. Anglo-Spanish relations are not only portrayed in Shakespeare's works but also shape the entire process of reception carried out in the English missionaries' censorship, trying to remain loyal to their country while also having to comply with the Inquisition's methods. Ultimately, cultural relations between the two countries have allowed for the nine-volume edition, Shakespeare's First and Second Folios, and the 1622 edition of Sidney's *Arcadia* to arrive in Spain, with shared censorship patterns offering a distinct view of the period's conception of women.

CONCLUSION

A new approach on the Renaissance perception of women and womanhood has been discussed throughout this dissertation as presented in readers' marks from the First and Second Folios of Shakespeare's works, the nine-volume edition of his works and Philip Sydney's *Arcadia.* At St Alban's English College in Valladolid, ink superimposes the seminarians' views over Shakespeare's ideas. In a similar way, this dissertation has provided perspectives that overlap each other. Historical context, Shakespeare's female sphere and multicultural Catholic restrictions conflate in this paper to create a detailed Renaissance female scenario. While historical context suggests a passive behaviour of women, shaped by social and legal limitations, Shakespeare shows a different reality (Gowing, pp.29-32). Through his works, the author presents early modern women as weak, compliant and submissive, but also as self-determined, independent and rebellious. On top of this, the scrutiny practices at St Alban's English College modify Shakespeare's views to make them fit the religious reality of the period (Rawlings, pp.114-128). As a result, this paper has added a multicultural layer to Shakespeare's portrayal of Renaissance women.

Historical accounts show the limitations imposed on women by their surrounding environment. The Early Modern Period was characterised by the relegation of women to an inferior position in every social field. Gathering a global vision of their experience, one of the strongest forces that condemned women to silence is religion. Eve's secondary creation from Adam's rib seems to justify the relegation of women to a submissive role (Mendelson and Crawford, pp.31-34). These ideas influenced legal discourse and were reinforced through rudimentary medical theories. In this context, relying solely on historical accounts may lead to the assumption that women behaved according to these expectations. Nevertheless, as seen in Shakespeare's plays, women did resign themselves to their assigned roles, but they also showed agency and rebellion (Gowing, pp.29-32). Shakespeare's female spectrum adds up to the narrative of the period, presenting the author's own historical account on early modern womanhood. All his feminine characters, whether more independent or submissive, display a contrasting behaviour, between compliance and rebellion, that according to the author, characterised Renaissance women.

His complex female spectrum reached Spain thanks to the creation of St Alban's English college in Valladolid. Paradoxically, the religious confrontations between England and Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, contributed to the cultural enrichment of the nations. The establishment of a Catholic seminary network in Europe, that allowed for a transnational flow of English books, was one of the positive side-effects of the tensions between Catholics and Protestants (Sáez Hidalgo, "St Alban's English College," pp.105-123). The seminarians at St Alban's English College were familiar with Shakespeare's works, through their possession of a copy of the Second Folio, and it was rector Joseph Shepherd's interest in secular literature that allowed for more of The Bard's texts to slip into this multinational flow of English literature (Williams, "St Alban's Library: Censorship," pp.132-142). The shrouding of female topics at the college reinforces how Shakespeare's female creations surpass the limits of imagination. They are not just characters in an imaginary world, but potential representations of real early modern women, that had the power to trigger the seminarians' ideologies. Shakespeare's First and Second Folios, the nine-volume edition and *Arcadia* underwent thorough revision, which provides a privileged insight into the seminarians' reactions to the texts (Mayer, *Shakespeare's Early Readers*, pp.185-190). The analysis of every section where the censors interrupted their reading to make corrections has opened a window onto their reasoning.

All the blacked-out passages and excised sections share a common nature: they were eliminated for contradicting the Catholic feminine discourse as well as for moral restrictions imposed on women showing independence and initiative. In this sense, the silencing of female voices on the page reflects the actual repression of women in real early modern society. On the whole, this dissertation has examined an unprecedented phenomenon: English exiles reading Shakespeare's works in Spain. Shakespeare's works at St Alban's reveal the experience of reading about intelligent, decisive, capable and witty women. Their censorship has moulded the understanding of women into the period's Catholic experience. More broadly, this research has shown how historical context, cultural relations and religion intersect in the construction of gender. In a world where cultural exchange has always been present, more connections such as that of St Alban's might be

revealed, offering alternative views on Renaissance womanhood. Every available viewpoint should be considered, and this research has added its own piece to the complex puzzle of the contemporary perceptions of early modern femininity.

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