

Time and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage

Sarah Lewis



TIME AND GENDER ON THE SHAKESPEAREAN STAGE

This book analyses the cultural and theatrical intersections of early modern temporal concepts and gendered identities. Through close readings of the works of Shakespeare, Middleton, Dekker, Heywood and others, across the genres of domestic comedy, city comedy and revenge tragedy, Sarah Lewis shows how temporal tropes are used to delineate masculinity and femininity on the early modern stage, and vice versa. She sets out the ways in which the temporal constructs of patience, prodigality and revenge, as well as the dramatic identities that are built from those constructs, and the experience of playgoing itself, negotiate a fraught opposition between action in the moment and delay in the duration. This book argues that looking at time through the lens of gender, and gender through the lens of time, is crucial if we are to develop our understanding of the early modern cultural construction of both.

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For my parents

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Note on Texts

In this book I use recent editions of plays where they exist and modern spelling wherever possible, with the significant exception of the Bowers edition of *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, which I use throughout. I have chosen not to use the modern spelling Taylor/Lavagnino edition of Part One of *The honest whore* because there is no equivalent modern spelling edition of Part Two. Where no modern spelling edition exists, I use the earliest text of each play. When quoting from Shakespeare, I use Wells and Taylor, *The Complete Works*, unless another edition is specified. Notably, I use the Arden 3 edition of Q2 *Hamlet* throughout. I retain original spelling and punctuation when quoting from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources, both in the body of the text, in the footnotes and in the bibliography. However, I replace the long 's' and substitute 'w' for double 'v' throughout. In the body of the book, I use an abbreviated version of the full title of a text, but retain the original spelling and capitalisation. After the first full reference is given, all subsequent references to that work are given in short-title form; however, all act, scene and line numbers or signatures of plays, line numbers of poems, signatures from early modern dictionaries and verses from the Bible are incorporated into the text in parenthesis after the first full reference has been given. I also give any references for section titles in endnote form. I have used three texts to establish dates/date ranges of first production, which are given in brackets after the name of a play when it is first cited: Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (New York: Norton, 1997); Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, with MacDonald P. Jackson, John Jowett, Valerie Wayne and Adrian Weiss, eds., *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007);

Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700: An Analytical Record of All Plays, Extant or Lost, Chronologically Arranged and Indexed by Authors, Titles, Dramatic Companies, etc.*, 3rd ed., revised by Sylvia Stoler Wagonheim (London: Routledge, 1989).

Introduction: The Actions and Delays of Gendered Temporalities

In the first scene of Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1605–6), the opportune moment for Vindice to enact his revenge is figured as a disdainful and venereally diseased 'madam', or prostitute.¹ Having waited nine years for the right moment to punish the Duke for the murder of his beloved Gloriana, Vindice impatiently enquires of his brother and co-conspirator: 'Has that bald madam, Opportunity | Yet thought upon's?' (1.1.55–56).² This female personification of the temporal concept of opportunity as sexually available yet simultaneously elusive and potentially destructive was common in the dramatic and emblematic culture of the period: seizing the moment was often imagined as seizing the fleeing or fleeting woman on the early modern stage and in early modern visual culture (see [Figures 1](#) and [2](#)).³ I begin this book with Vindice's evocation of Opportunity as a sexual temptress, and will return to it later in this introduction, because like many images and moments from the drama of England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it brings temporal concepts and gendered identities into conversation with each other in complex and revealing ways. This book argues that attending to time through the lens of gender, and gender through the lens of time, is crucial if we are to further develop our understanding of the early modern cultural construction of both, as well as our understanding of the sexual identities and behaviours that are often foundational to those constructions. It scrutinises the intersection of time and gender, and the identities and character types defined in relation to and as a result of that intersection, in both early modern culture and on the early modern stage.

With Gloriana's skull in hand, Vindice watches the Duke and his family process across the stage by torchlight at the beginning of *The Revenger's Tragedy*. '[S]ighing o'er death's visor', he ruminates on the lost beauty of his 'betrothed lady', and on the challenge of identifying the right moment in the future – the right 'day, hour, minute' – in which to take action and achieve his revenge against the 'royal lecher' who poisoned her when she



Figure 1 George Wither, 'Occasions-past', *A collection of emblemes* (London, 1635), B2v RB 601390, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

rejected his sexual advances (1.1.16, 49, 41, 1). The extended period of time he has waited to enact his vengeance is made clear by the time-ravaged 'ragged imperfections' of his prized death's head, which links him via parodic hyperbole to that most famously dithering and feminised of revengers, Hamlet (1.1.18). Although he is impatient for the time to be right for his vengeful plot to commence (he intends 'speedy travel' and will 'quickly turn into another'), Vindice is also presented as trapped in a past



Figure 2 Geoffrey Whitney, 'In occasione', *A choice of emblems* (London, 1586), Z31 RB 79714, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

he longs to return to; he is torn between action and inaction, waiting and not waiting (1.1.117, 136). Like all revengers, he is tied to stagnating memories of past injuries, whilst at the same time he is focused on the attainment of revenge in the future. This temporal discord is a conventional element of revenge tragedies, but also of the early modern stage and of early modern culture more broadly, and, as this book will argue, it is foundational to conceptualisations of both gender and time in the period.

During the opening scene of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice reveals his own oscillation between a retrograde temporality of mourning, as represented by the skull, and a future-focused ambition to murder the Duke, represented by Opportunity, both of which are central to his revenging quest. By conjuring the figure of Opportunity he also creates the first of many metatheatrical moments in the play: he seems to be enquiring about both his brother's and the audience's readiness for the play itself to begin, as much as he is considering whether now is the right moment for his quest

for revenge to commence. Moments such as this, when the temporality of the theatrical event itself and the temporality of the play world gain access to one another, are among the most productive within the scope of the analysis carried out in this book. We are embedded in the world of the play and in that moment with our protagonist, our 'man o' the time' (I.I.94). Yet simultaneously, this opening scene distances us from the Italian court, by drawing attention to the context of revenge tragedy and its conventional temporal mode of delay: Vindice's parodic nine-year lead-time, as represented by Gloriana's skull. This meta moment, in fact, potentially forces us to think about the temporal experience of watching the play itself, as well as the generic conventions of revenge and of theatrical performance more broadly. At the start of this play, we are led to wonder whether we will be pleased with the denouement Vindice's vengeful ambition promises, or whether that dramatic satisfaction will elude us, as it has eluded him for nine years. In this opening scene, the actor playing Vindice works hard to secure the audience's attention, asking them to position themselves in his present moment through the construction of a possible future and his remembrance of a tragic past. The audience is asked to reflect on Vindice's fraught temporality through their own similarly fraught experience of the theatrical event; wavering, as all audiences must, between past and future, cause and effect, beginnings and endings.

The supposed binary opposition that defines Vindice's temporality – the patient inaction of his remembrance and impatient actions through which he drives towards an imagined future – in fact works to undo itself: it is in constant flux and under continual strain on the early modern stage and in early modern society. Identifying and examining the various fluctuations of that temporal opposition, and exploring how its instability is used to construct and deconstruct ideas about gendered behaviour, is at the heart of the readings of early modern drama and culture presented in this book. Three early modern dramatic character types in particular – patient wives, prodigals, and revengers such as Vindice – are presented on the early modern stage in ways that connect their gender to their behaviour through time. This study focuses on broadening our understanding of these characters and of the early modern discourses of patience, prodigality, and revenge in which they are embedded, in order to acknowledge the variety of ways in which the gendered self is also always a temporal self, and vice versa. In this introduction, I will first set out the critical and conceptual foundations of this book, explaining how scholarly work which has focused on time, gender and performance has helped me to develop an understanding of this opposition of action and inaction which I argue is

central to both the early modern temporal consciousness and the early modern construction of gendered identity. In the second part of the introduction, I go on to examine some of the ways in which early modern thinking about time and about gender developed in relation to classical ideas, religious and medical discourse, and conduct literature, all of which worked both to define and destabilise a conflicted binary opposition between waiting and not waiting. I then return to *The Revenger's Tragedy* to illustrate the range of ways in which this play engaged with this supposed binary opposition, suggesting that its negotiation and complication was central to early modern performances of both gender and time on the early modern stage.

Critical and Conceptual Foundations

Scholarly work across disciplines has focused on the multiple discourses that have shaped the way gender was conceptualised in the early modern period. Cultural historians and literary scholars have long acknowledged a variety of social relations (familial structures, service, inheritance, friendship, sex), systems of knowledge (religion, emotion, medicine) and frames of representation (language, performance, song, conduct literature) that worked to form gender categories in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴ This work has, in a range of ways, transformed our understanding of early modern society and the early modern self. Until relatively recently, however, early modern literary scholars have neglected the fact that, as Jonathan Gil Harris argues, temporality is a 'culturally variable production' that shapes social identities in the early modern period and beyond.⁵ As Jeffrey J. Cohen suggests, 'time has been doomed to the vast realm of that which is unthought' because it 'seems so obvious', in the same way that gender seemed 'obvious' until relatively recently.⁶ The moments from *The Revenger's Tragedy* that I consider in this introduction, and the plays I offer readings of throughout this book, draw our attention to time as a socially constructed category of selfhood. In recent years, temporal scholars working across a range of disciplines have begun to recognise the impact that discourses of religion, philosophy, cosmology, history, agriculture, technology and economics had on the early modern understanding of time, particularly in relation to ontological concepts of identity.⁷ This book brings together these two fields of work to explore the ways in which gender is used to define time, and time is used to define gender, on that most temporal and gendered of spaces: the early modern stage.

As Harris suggests: ‘Once upon a time, Time was all the rage in Shakespeare scholarship’.⁸ The kind of scholarship Harris is here describing, published in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, presented time ‘with a capital T’, and tended to proffer a reductive and universalising picture of a homogenised and teleologically structured early modern temporal consciousness.⁹ The mid- to late twentieth century saw the production of multiple books on the subject of ‘Time’ in Shakespeare, and in early modern culture more broadly, but none of these texts challenged the homogeneity of the critical notion of early modern temporality in order to explore the variety of ways in which different cultural groups experienced time and constructed themselves as temporal entities in early modern England.¹⁰ Furthermore, although many of these studies of temporality recognise that broad ideological change affected the construction of time in the early modern period, they often consider ‘Renaissance man’ to be involved in a fraught relationship with temporality which distinguishes him from his medieval forebears, an oversimplification to which I will return later in this introduction.

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, new directions in early modern literary scholarship did little to address this reductive critical assessment of temporality in early modern England. New Historicism and Cultural Materialism tended to focus on local and specific constructions of space, rather than what they saw as essentialist and reductive constructions of time.¹¹ These critical approaches rightly rejected the universalising impulse that drove much of the early modern temporal criticism of the 60s and 70s, but in doing so they effectively sidelined considerations of temporality altogether. Postmodernism’s focus on the spatial and its neglect of the temporal also meant that scholarship on time suffered in the last quarter of the twentieth century.¹² There has, however, been a resurgence of interest in time and its relation to cultural identity in recent years, through work which has rejected the linear and teleologically structured chrononormativity of earlier engagements with temporality. Scholars have drawn on the temporal philosophies of Latour, Serres, Deleuze and Guattari, all of whom reject the temporal binary of past and future to focus on the antigenealogical experience of time as folded or crumpled (Latour), as polychronic or multitemporal (Serres) and as matrixed rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari).¹³ Increasing numbers of critics are exploring the literature and society of the early modern period in relation to multiple temporalities, and considering a variety of different kinds of temporal consciousness in relation to a wide range of social identities.¹⁴

Temporality has once again come to the fore of Shakespeare and early modern studies, and exciting work in this field has increasingly drawn attention to the instability of early modern pasts, presents and futures, an instability that highlights the unsustainable nature of the binary opposition between active linear progression and delaying passive endurance. For example, J. K. Barret has challenged the accepted wisdom that historical recuperation was key to the early moderns, as well as the belief that a Christian end-time was central to temporal consciousness, arguing for a sense of 'anticipatory nostalgia', which denies the binary opposition of past/future and 'provides a vision of the future that is uniquely open-ended and non-apocalyptic'.¹⁵ Work by Chloe Porter similarly explores the early modern paradoxical rejection of and commitment to the achievement of endings, whereas studies by Lucy Munro and Lukas Lammers have complicated our ideas about the early modern construction of the past.¹⁶ Others, such as Jonathan Gil Harris and Tiffany Stern, are interested in the conflicted nature of the present moment, which for Harris, drawing on Serres, is polychronic or multitemporal, and for Stern, analysing the temporality of the theatrical experience itself, is inaccurately measured and marked, and often, as a result, obscure.¹⁷ Some critical work, particularly in the field of Queer Studies, has specifically considered how notions of time worked to shape early modern concepts of gender and vice versa, and this book has been influenced by a handful of key studies which have begun to bring these two fields together.¹⁸ These works are all concerned with complicating our sense of the early modern temporal consciousness as operating beyond the binary of past and future/linear action and retrograde delay, and with recognising the important part temporality plays in defining subject positions in the literature of the period. As such, they have enabled me to develop my own focus on the complex push and pull between action and inaction that I argue in this book is foundational to both early modern temporal concepts and gender politics.

Critics have long considered the ways in which the reading and staging of early modern drama draws our attention to the performative construction of gender. This book recognises that early modern drama also asks us to think about the performative nature of temporality, which, like gender, is both historically and culturally specific. Temporality is the currency of the theatre in terms of both audience and actor experience and dramatic narrative structure, and plays from the period employ temporal imagery in order to present characters of different genders, social statuses, or national identities moving through and responding to time in different ways. Therefore the theatre of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries

is perhaps the most dynamic site for early modern society's exploration of its own constructions of both time and gender. The experience of play-going is fundamentally temporal at the same time as it complicates what we might think of as the inherently linear experience of temporality. The theatre industry was born of and is reliant upon the individual's desire to return. Visiting an early modern theatre was a regular occurrence for large numbers of early modern Londoners, and theatre-going was, for many, a repetitive action which defined, through its regularity, the steady onward march of days, weeks, months and years. However, going to the theatre also extracted those audience members from the linear progression of their quotidian lives: the time within the theatre was, in many ways, a time outside of time itself. Theatrical time is in this sense fleeting and impermanent, a grasped, unrepeatable instant; complex, uneven and difficult to define. Yet within the narrative structures of these ephemeral performances, actors and audience members can present and experience longevity and, to some extent, permanence; these plays present times past, times to come and enduring presents in ways which challenge notions of temporal flow and teleology. The temporal frameworks of the play worlds that are presented on stage are also often complicated and confusing. Therefore, both experiential and narrative dramatic time is malleable: years of plot are condensed, and moments of reaction are lengthened, and, as a result, time is both stretched and compressed by and for actors, characters and audience members alike.¹⁹

Early modern definitions of delay and of action, temporal concepts that are central to every chapter of this book, allow me to begin thinking about the ways in which both the urge to advance with agency through time and the necessity of passive endurance in time are sustained alongside each other on the early modern stage and beyond. In early modern lexicons, delay is defined as both a prevention of action and a profusion of action. It is both, as defined in Randle Cotgrave's *A dictionarie of the French and English tongues*, 'a stay, lingering, protraction [. . .] deferring or driuing off; a pause, a space, an intermission', and is used to describe a 'dilation, enlarging or ouerspredding'.²⁰ Delay is too much and too little all at once. Similarly, an 'action' itself is defined as a 'deed, exploit, enterprise' and yet it is also used to describe something which 'plunges, or hinders from proceeding'.²¹ Actions can work to delay and delays can be defined by action. The deconstruction of the binary opposition between action and delay in the temporal discourse of the period, and particularly in relation to the concepts of patience, prodigality and revenge, is central to the arguments this book presents. By exploring the construction of gender through

the dual temporalities of action and delay and the tensions they produce – both forward- and backward-looking, both waiting and not waiting – this study gives us another way to understand the inherent malleability of temporal concepts and gendered identities as they are negotiated in early modern society and on the early modern stage.

In the chapters that follow, I engage with two theoretical concepts that negotiate and complicate the linearity of pasts, presents and futures, and the supposed binary opposition between action and delay. The first of these is Jacques Derrida's *différance*. Derrida defines *différance* as follows:

The verb 'to differ' [*différer*] seems to differ from itself. On the one hand, it indicates difference as distinction, inequality, or discernibility; on the other, it expresses the interposition of delay, the interval of a *spacing* and *temporalizing* that puts off until 'later' what is presently denied, the possible that is presently impossible. Sometimes the *different* and sometimes the *deferred* correspond [in French] to the verb 'to differ'.²²

The French verb *différer* can mean both to differ in kind and to defer in time, and it is this dual meaning which Derrida identifies through *différance*. *Différance* exemplifies the way in which systems of signification such as language perpetually defer meaning through differences of meaning. As Derrida suggests,

[t]he sign represents the present in its absence [...] The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence [...] the circulation of signs defers the moment in which we can encounter the thing itself, make it ours, consume or expend it, touch it, see it, intuit its presence.²³

This deferral is infinite: meaning is always postponed in language and finite signification is perpetually delayed through the 'systematic play of differences'.²⁴ Derrida suggests that *différance* 'is not simply active (any more than it is a subjective accomplishment); it rather indicates the middle voice, it precedes and sets up the opposition between passivity and activity'.²⁵ Through *différance*, Derrida deconstructs the binary opposition between action and the delay of action, and it is this that is of central importance to my understanding of early modern temporalities and genders. The impossibility of reaching a conclusive 'meaning' or ending is also the defining temporal position of an early modern Christian society anticipating the perpetually deferred Day of Judgement. Thus, Derrida's *différance* resonates throughout this book in that it describes culture and language as circumscribed by the interplay of action and delay. It is this interplay that contributes to the construction and presentation of gendered identities and temporal modes of being on the early modern stage.

The second theoretical concept which has been crucial to the shaping of this book is Judith Butler's definition of gender as a '*corporeal style*, an "act", as it were, which is both intentional and performative'.²⁶ This proposition is central to *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, in which Butler suggests that the performance of gender is reliant upon the '*stylized repetition of acts*'.²⁷ It is through repetition that gendered identity is constituted as a '*social temporality*':

If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the spatial metaphor of a 'ground' will be displaced and revealed as a stylized configuration, indeed, a gendered corporealization of time. The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *discontinuity*, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this 'ground'.²⁸

Time and gender for Butler are inextricably linked, and her argument for the eternal deferral of any kind of definitively gendered subjectivity is founded on what she considers to be the necessarily repetitive nature of gendered actions of 'self'. Meaning for Derrida and gender for Butler are both, therefore, perpetually delayed; neither can, or should, be finalised. It is through the actions of repetition that these delays are born, and it is this paradoxical interaction between action and inaction, between waiting and not waiting, which is foundational to this book.

The Early Modern Temporal Consciousness

Classical and Biblical Influences

'[O]f that day and *that* hour knoweth no man'.²⁹

Classical and religious discourses in the early modern period suggest that a constant fluctuation between the drive to act and the need to delay action in the face of time either as destroyer (*tempus edax rerum*) or as revealer of truth (*veritas filia temporis*) was central to temporal consciousness and identity formation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Greeks, whose temporal philosophies were key to early modern considerations of time, like other non-Judaeo-Christians of the ancient Mediterranean, considered the world to be 'moving aimlessly in a circle'.³⁰ Historical events were meaningless, unconnected and eternally repeated without beginning or end. Greek thinkers believed in the notion of the 'Great Year', a period of ten thousand to thirty thousand years that was repeated

ad infinitum.³¹ This denial of linear advancement is apparent in *Timaeus*, Plato's dialogue from c.360 BCE, in which his essential thesis of two realms devalues the sensible world of temporality and change as not fully 'real', having only the 'semblances of moral and aesthetic values, whereas the intelligible world, eternal and changeless, has true being and absolute value'.³² Plato's temporal philosophy, which was influential in early modern Europe, and the cyclicity of classical temporality in general, work to undermine the actions of human endeavour, and to encourage the passive acceptance of time's revolution.

Within Christian temporal philosophy and in direct contrast to this classical cyclicity, time operates in one direction and through it mankind journeys towards an ultimate goal. Time, for Christians, is defined via action, and is conceived in the Bible

as linear, as history, as the vehicle for fulfillment, as the carrier of meaning. It opens with an account of ancestral chronology, focuses on a set of historic events, and ends with prophecy. From Genesis through Revelation, there is a continuity of movement from an unrepeatable past to a yet pending future.³³

God creates a beginning and an ending, and the time which moves in one direction between these two points defines Christian existence.³⁴ Within a Christian frame, then, time defines being, rather than existing simply as a mirror of a more perfect eternity, yet, paradoxically, by journeying through time, humankind can achieve a timeless unity with God. Furthermore, the cyclicity and return implied by the narrative of Christ's Second Coming is arguably a movement against the linearity of temporal experience. The sense of a linear finality is deconstructed by Christian doctrine because the end of time (paradoxically defined by a return and by a movement into eternity) in fact never comes.³⁵

Christian temporality is, then, not only structured through a celebration of action and linear development through history, but also premised on delay and on the eternal deferral of the ultimate goal, because the realisation of that oxymoronic conclusive moment of repetition – Christ's Second Coming – is perpetually deferred. Jesus' first lesson as a preacher is that the end is nigh: 'Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matthew 4:17). Yet Jesus denies the possibility of himself, or any of God's subjects, predicting when the Kingdom will arrive: 'of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the father' (Mark 13:32). St Peter tells us that 'the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the

night', and stresses the need for constant readiness for that moment; we should be '[l]ooking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God' (2 Peter 3:10, 12). Christians continued to believe in the imminent return of Christ, despite the fact that history 'persistently failed to end on time', and, as St Peter's 'thief in the night' simile might suggest, the end time could potentially result in earthly loss, and offered no guarantee of spiritual gain.³⁶ Waiting with patience, and accepting what is to come rather than acting through time to seize and shape the future, is therefore as central to Christian temporal philosophy as it is to Greek notions of cyclicity. We see this in the appropriation of the somewhat morally ambiguous classical concepts of *occasio* and *kairos* (the principles of right timing and proper measure – of fitting the action to the moment – allow for a certain amount of moral flexibility), which are Christianised through Providence: god intersects in the life of man at divinely ordained moments.³⁷ The good Christian is empowered to act in the right moment, but that right moment and right action is determined and directed by God.

For early modern Christians, then, temporal experience was dependent both on the actions that drove their linear advancement towards God and on the constant deferral of the Second Coming, which necessitated passivity and the acceptance of unavoidable and perpetual delay. Similarly, although I have suggested that classical temporal philosophy is premised on the acceptance of cyclicity and a rejection of the possibility of linear advancement, it is also used to define the need for an individual's commitment to active progression through time in the early modern period. The Greek concept of *kairos* authorises 'prudent deliberation, action and speech'; the individual can choose to reject the temporality of *chronos* – of passive duration – in favour of decisive action in the moment.³⁸ We see this rejection of cyclicity and passive inaction in *Physics*, in which Aristotle, whose temporal philosophy was as influential as Plato's in early modern Europe, argues against his teacher's assertion that time is merely the repetitive cycle of human existence by suggesting that time is the way we measure motion.³⁹ Time cannot exist independently of motion, because when change does not occur we are not aware of the passing of time. Thus, Aristotle brings humanity into the equation by asking whether time can exist if the mind of man does not, when it is the actions of mankind that define temporality. Other classical conceptions of time constantly pulled early modern thinkers between courses of action and inaction; for example, the Neoplatonic devaluation of humankind's action through time was countered by the Epicurean celebration of the instant.⁴⁰ Furthermore, whereas Stoicism encouraged passivity, early modern

Humanism, which of course drew on those classical notions of temporality, was driven by the desire to use time to its fullest potential and to cram every moment with productive action.

Temporal thinking in the early modern period was, therefore, informed by the complex and unstable strategies of action and the necessary delay of action which structure both classical and Christian concepts of time. The skull of Gloriana represents both the past as a (dis)embodied reminder of Vindice's loss and the future: the moment, as represented by the bald-headed Opportunity herself, in which vengeance will be achieved. Beyond the play world, this skull also reminds the audience of the past that is *Hamlet* (1600–1), and works to signal *The Revenger's Tragedy* as a play that heralds the future development of the genre of revenge into the seventeenth century. As will become clear, this oscillation between action and delay, past and future, is also negotiated by the medical and conduct literature of the period, with its specific focus on the perfection of finality and the imperfection of the unfinished.

Medical and Conduct Literature

The 'feminine birth of time'.⁴¹

Early modern medical discourse defined masculinity in terms of completion; patriarchy's assertion of the superiority of manhood is built on a connection between masculinity, perfection and positive action. Women were considered to be the by-product of a defective generative process; a lack of heat prevented an unborn child from externalising the genitalia that signified developmental fulfilment in the womb. Men were presented as fully formed and women were considered malformed and unfinished. This conception of maleness as completeness drew heavily on both Aristotle, who wrote that of all the animals it is man who 'has the most perfect nature', and Galen, who, himself drawing on Aristotle, considered man to be 'more perfect than the woman' and the 'primary instrument' of human endeavour.⁴² Although perfection in the early modern period carried with it a sense of continual development, of 'nearly approaching such a state' of 'complete excellence', it also signified completion, a sense of being '[c]ompletely formed, finished, or made' and was commonly used to describe 'offspring, esp. at birth' as 'fully formed'.⁴³ In a Latin–English dictionary from 1587, for example, 'concludo' is defined as to 'conclude, finish, determine, or make perfect'.⁴⁴ Thus, through their perfection, men are presented as having achieved an ending before they have even been born.

In a patriarchal and teleologically ordered society, the perfect completion of the masculine body justifies male domination. Although a variety of hierarchies of masculinity, including age, social status and nationality, worked to define authoritative manhood in early modern England, the binary of gendered opposition was foundational to the notion of male supremacy, and was figured temporally.

The 'one-sex' model lay at the heart of both Aristotle's and Galen's conceptualisations of the physical body and the reproductive process. This anatomical concept is central to the consideration of women as temporally delayed in the early modern period. By 1600, this model was beginning to be challenged by advances in anatomical understanding; however, Galen's and Aristotle's positioning of females as less perfect (or in fact deformed) males – 'the result of a generative event not carried through to its final conclusion' – continued to form the basis of many considerations of gender difference by authors of medical tracts and conduct manuals well into the seventeenth century.⁴⁵ In their works, women are not different in kind from men, only in degree. It is the consideration of women as somehow incomplete men that is of key importance to the ideas I develop in this book. The incomplete woman, I suggest, is the permanently delayed woman. Her incompleteness and imperfection are inherently temporal.

Drawing on the works of Aristotle, Galenic humoral theory, which dominated considerations of the physical body in the early modern period, placed men and women not in binary opposition to each other but on a sliding scale of gender differentiation. The four fluids that Galen suggested dominated the human body – blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm – corresponded with four physical qualities – hot, dry, cold and moist – and were considered to be in a constant state of flux. However, despite the fungibility of these fluids, humoral theory was in fact used to confirm the polarities of male and female. Women were considered to be generally moist and cold, whereas men were usually hot and dry. In *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, Galen argues first that 'the man is more perfect than the woman' and second that 'it is no wonder that the female is less perfect than the male by as much as she is colder than he'.⁴⁶ Describing female genitalia, which were commonly considered to be an inversion of male genitalia, Galen writes that 'the parts were formed within her when she was still a foetus, but could not because of the defect in heat emerge and project on the outside'.⁴⁷ In line with Galen, Aristotle's *The History of Animals* similarly presents women as underdeveloped because of their coldness and concomitant inability to act. It argues that women do not

have enough generative heat to turn their blood into sperm, and in fact Aristotle describes menstrual blood as deficient and residual semen. Therefore, despite developments in anatomical research at the turn of the sixteenth century, which seemed to provide an authorised and active role for women in the reproductive process, women continued to be defined by their physicality as incomplete, imperfect and, as I suggest, perpetually delayed.⁴⁸

Early modern accounts of gender transformation, from female to male, were in circulation across Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and are testament to this belief in the temporality that defined gender difference. As Stephen Orgel suggests, '[t]hose transformations [. . .] only work in one direction, from female to male, which is conceived to be upward, toward completion'.⁴⁹ Women can attain perfection by developing into males, but it would be impossible for a man to regress into the underdeveloped female state. Thus, women are defined as delayed in that there is always the potential for their 'completion' through their transformation into men. The majority of women, whose sexual organs never 'thrust outward' in order to realise the ultimate transformation, persist, therefore, in a state of delayed development.

Throughout his life, early modern man is presented as active, in contrast to the incomplete, slothful and delaying early modern woman. At the pinnacle of his masculine authority, the married master of the household is expected to dominate his wife, children and servants. This domination is assured through the active role he takes as the head of the family unit. As this passage from Dod and Cleaver's marital conduct book, *A godly forme of houshold government*, first published in 1598, makes clear, the duties of the husband are dependent on his action:

The duty of the husband is to get goods: and of the wife to gather them together, and saue them. The duty of the husband is to trauell abroad to seeke liuing: and the wiues dutie is to keepe the house. The duty of the husband is to get money and prouision: and of the wiues, not vainely to spend it. The dutie of the husband is to deale with many men: and of the wife to talke with few. The duty of the husband is, to be intermedling: and of the wife, to be solitarie and withdrawne. The duty of the man is, to be skilfull in talke: and of the wife to boast of silence. The duty of the husband is, to be a giuer; and of the wife to be a sauer [. . .] The dutie of the husband is, to be Lord of all: and of the wife, to giue account of all.⁵⁰

In conduct manuals such as this, which are firmly grounded in Christian doctrine, the actions the husband takes which define his masculine authority are directly balanced against the denial of action that signifies chaste,