

## **Independent Women? Representations of gender-specific possession in two Shakespeare plays.**

Heather Froehlich  
University of Strathclyde

### **Abstract**

Social roles for men and women are often perceived to be pre-determined in the Early Modern period, and literary criticism is grounded within these assumptions. I suggest that literary representation of men and women are dependent upon underlying linguistic structures and patterns that would not necessarily be noticed by human readers. Computers are ideal for finding such patterns: traditional methods of literary analysis are often blind to such structures. Through a combination of multiple corpus-driven tools, I investigate grammatical possession (his/her +NP) in a comparative study of two contrastive Shakespeare plays: *Macbeth* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

*Macbeth* focuses heavily on issues of masculinity; it is presented in contrast to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a play focused entirely on women. I suggest that specific collocational patterns for male and female characters are comparable across two very contrastive plays. The representation of men and women in these two plays are not always consistent with a literary critic's understanding of gender in these texts. I suggest that these grammatical structures inform the roles that men and women of these plays fulfill, which are then manifested in a literary understanding of the text.

### **1.Introduction**

In this paper, I present a case study of gender-specific possession in two Shakespeare plays: *Macbeth* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*. I suggest that through several software packages – WordHoard<sup>19</sup>, AntConc<sup>20</sup> and AlphaX<sup>21</sup> – specific patterns of grammatical possession can be identified. I identify specific ways that gender can be encoded in possessive pronouns in a literary text and select two plays for analysis – *Macbeth* and *Merry Wives of Windsor* - as both texts have strong female characters who are central to the action of the plays, but the representation of femininity in the two plays is very different. I ask if two

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<sup>19</sup> <http://wordhoard.northwestern.edu>

<sup>20</sup> <http://antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://alphancl.sourceforge.net/wiki/pmwiki.php/Software/AlphaX>

highly-contrastive plays will be similar in their representations of gender-specific grammatical possession.

## **2. Gender and language**

Gender can – but is not required to - be prototypically male or female in some sense. This is not true of all of the world's languages (Corbett 1991, Hellinger and Bußmann 2001, 2002, 2003). As Livia (2001, p. 12) alludes, gender is highly relevant to the process of characterization; the assignment of gender has a stronger relationship to form rather than meaning for the English language. However, gender is often categorized into binary categorical features [ $\pm$  male] or [ $\pm$  female]. These binary categories are primarily informed by a socio-cultural exploration of gender rather than a continuum of social, cultural and grammatical constructions.

Gender constructs ways people interpret the world around them. The continuum of identities available in English functions as “a fundamental social category which people use in making sense of others” (Livia 2001, p. 12). In Livia's discussion of 20<sup>th</sup> century French and English literature, she points out that “whether or not the author considers gender an important variable, the structure of language makes it required information. The same is not true of race [...] there is a [linguistic] category for gender which must be filled” (2001, p. 36-7). Avoiding gendered pronouns - especially in English - is awkward-sounding (Livia 2001, p. 38). Repetition of a character's name, lexical substitution (eg, “the man”) and the use of deverbal noun phrases (eg, ellipsis) highlight the lack of pronouns (ibid, Chapter 3). This approach requires lots of effort on the part of the reader (Livia 2001, Chapter 2). A literary text can avoid explicitly discussing race or ethnicity without much difficulty, whereas gender is considered to be a fundamental fact of characterization for a modern reader.

### **2.1. Shakespeare and gender**

Shakespeare is often considered the foremost representative of written language in the Early Modern period. Critical analyses of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets have generated a huge quantity of academic discourse. Though only recently have strictly "linguistically-inspired approaches" (Crystal 2003, p.62) to Shakespeare's works begun to appear, critics in the past have been especially interested in the "ways women are represented" (Demmen 2009, p. 1) in the plays. With regards to the social roles of men and women in the Early Modern Period, Shakespeare is widely regarded as proto-feminist: "The drama from 1590 to 1625 is feminist in sympathy. Shakespeare's modernity in his treatment of women has always attracted attention" (Dusinberre 1975, p. 5). Shakespeare's female characters are commonly noted for "challeng[ing] early modern (and even modern) conventions for female behavior [...]" (Kemp 2010, p. 173). Examples such as "courtship, illustrated by *Loves Labors Lost* and *The Taming of the Shrew*; sexuality, illustrated by *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *A Winter's Tale*; and women of power, illustrated by the *Henry VI- Richard III* tetralogy and *Antony and Cleopatra*" (ibid. p. 173) are cited as illustrative of Shakespeare's feminism, presenting women in situations which would be perceived as radical in Early Modern society (Amussen 1993; Mendelson and Crawford, 1998; Erikson 1993). Claire McEarchern identifies the problem in feminist studies of Shakespeare, saying that

advocates of a proto-feminist and a patriarchal Shakespeare have posited a mimetic/deterministic relationship between art and society – the text is either an innocent mirror of cultural processes or the no-less-idealized agenda of patriarchal ideology. Most proto-feminist advocates [...] of a play have found in Shakespeare's women, particularly in the comedies, evidence of his culture's incipient challenge to the patriarchy that, according to their reading, the text mirrors. Advocates of patriarchal

Shakespeare aligning themselves with the historical revisionism that ascribes to the renaissance an increased suppression of women (1988, p. 270)

Either Shakespeare is a feminist, and his works should be read to reflect this, or Shakespeare is a part of the patriarchal socio-political system, and his writing is reflective of the social realities of this doctrine. If Shakespeare is to be read as a feminist writer, we must disregard the social implications of giving women a voice on-stage or in a play-text. If Shakespeare is part of this privileging system, we have disregarded the importance of giving female characters a voice. Balancing these two conflicting schools of thought is difficult; many studies of Shakespearean feminist criticism ultimately have to choose one approach. I elect to use corpus methods to identify patterns from the texts themselves (cf Hunston and Francis: 2000, chapter 1) as evidence towards a more bipartisan interpretation.

## **2.2. Corpus Stylistic Studies of Shakespeare.**

Previous corpus stylistic studies serve as paradigms for a quantitative and qualitative study of specific linguistic features as they appear in a literary text. Demmen's (2009) presents an analysis of key lexical bundles Shakespeare corpus, investigating linguistic features of male and female dialogue as they appear in clusters and collocational patterns. Her investigation of gender in Shakespeare is truly both quantitative and qualitative, contrasting key female lexical clusters and what they tell us about feminine language in the plays with male lexical clusters and what they tell us about masculine language to illustrate the stylistic features of characterization across the entire Shakespeare corpus.

Through an analytically-blind statistical keyword analysis, gender-specific dialogue is identified, isolated and analysed. Unlike Culpepper's (2009) study of keywords in *Romeo and Juliet*, which identifies concepts specifically relevant to male and female characters,

Demmen's study focuses on "frequency-based units identified automatically, and as such they are fragments" (2009, p.77). Arranging the characters into social categories of "male" and "female" she finds multiple characters from multiple play-texts using the same features. These collective features can be used to identify stylistic representations of men and women. A stylistic study of gender as it is represented in the play-texts is possible: male and female dialogue will produce different stylistic features, suggesting that male and female linguistic representation in the Shakespeare corpus is in some way measurable.

Busse (2002) presents a similar stylistic study in his investigation of second-person pronouns (you/thou, mine/thine) and their variation. Presenting a shift from pronominalization as represented in politeness theory to our modern conventions of second-person pronouns, this quantitative and qualitative study addresses issues of genre, compositional date, and the use of time-sensitive pronoun structures. Busse identifies a pattern of function words and presents them as a way to identify the lexical shift between the earlier and later plays. These studies suggest a corpus stylistic study of pronouns and gender can highlight relevant stylistic features.

### **3. Methodology**

Where "tragedy ends in death", "comedy ends in marriage" (Whistle 2007, p. 178). Content words of tragedies are different than those of comedies; the lexical makeup of play-texts will reflect this. Lady Macbeth is often billed as a strong female character in tragedy; I wanted to know how she would be represented lexically. Function words such as pronouns with a major absence or remarkable presence are not especially noticeable, whereas thematic content words are very noticeable. A log-likelihood test in Wordhoard will show significant differences in the usage of function and content words to identify these patterns. The output

shows lemma and their part of speech which are significantly more or less likely to appear in one text compared to a corpus (Mueller 2011) in the first few columns:

Comparing frequencies in "Macbeth" and "Shakespeare." 438 lemmata appeared at least 5 times in 1 work. "Macbeth" contains 2,634 distinct lemmata in 16,665 occurrences. "Shakespeare" contains 17,609 distinct lemmata in 865,185 occurrences. The significance levels for the log-likelihood values are adjusted for the number of comparisons.

Lemma	Word class	Relative use	Log likelihood	Analysis parts per 10,000	Reference parts per 10,000	A c
thane	n	+	156.1 ****	18.00	0.35	
hail	v	+	51.3 ****	10.20	0.82	
knock	v	+	49.8 ****	11.40	1.17	
cauldron	n	+	41.6 ****	4.80	0.09	
our	po	+	41.5 ****	71.41	36.76	
she	pn	-	41.3 ****	21.00	53.05	
the	dt	+	41.0 ****	421.84	327.07	
tyrant	n	+	40.2 ****	9.00	0.89	
sleep	n	+	33.3 ****	9.60	1.38	
weird	j	+	31.2 ****	3.60	0.07	
i	pn	-	28.6 ****	283.23	359.55	
trouble	n	+	27.4 ****	5.40	0.43	
dagger	n	+	26.3 ***	6.00	0.61	
wood	n l	+	25.9 ***	6.60	0.80	
fear	n	+	24.5 ***	13.80	3.88	
nature	n	+	23.1 ***	15.60	5.00	
we	pn	+	20.5 **	98.41	67.30	
double	v	+	20.3 **	3.60	0.23	
horror	n	+	20.3 **	3.60	0.23	
you	pn	-	19.8 **	127.81	171.26	
which	crq	+	17.5 *	48.00	28.71	
upon	acp	+	17.5 *	37.80	21.07	
deed	n	+	17.0 *	10.80	3.32	
new	j	+	16.7 *	10.20	3.05	
castle	n	+	15.5 *	4.20	0.55	
air	n	+	15.0 *	8.40	2.36	
yet	av	+	14.9 *	34.20	19.41	
bloody	j	+	14.8	9.00	2.68	
time	n	+	14.8	28.80	15.50	
strange	j	+	14.5	10.20	3.36	
worthy	j	+	14.0	10.80	3.78	
love	v	-	13.7	4.20	13.15	
a	dt	-	13.5	144.01	181.24	

Compress log-likelihood value range in tag clouds

Cloud

Other columns of this table show relative use (which lemma are significantly more or less likely to appear in the analysis text compared to the reference text) and log likelihood calculation itself (the more asterisks next to the calculation, the more statistically significant this calculation is). This output also gives normalized frequencies (parts per ten thousand) in the analysis and reference corpora as well as raw frequencies for the analysis and reference texts. We see a very different chart when we run a log-likelihood analysis on *Wives* compared to the rest of the Shakespeare corpus:



*Papers from the Lancaster University Postgraduate Conference  
in Linguistics & Language Teaching 2012*

Comparing frequencies in "Merry Wives of Windsor" and "Shakespeare." 463 lemmata appeared at least 5 times in 1 work. "Merry Wives of Windsor" contains 2,669 distinct lemmata in 21,387 occurrences. "Shakespeare" contains 17,609 distinct lemmata in 865,185 occurrences. The significance levels for the log-likelihood values are adjusted for the number of comparisons.

Lemma	Word class	Relative use	Log likelihood	Analysis parts per 10,000	Reference parts per 10,000	Al cc
master	n	+	384.7 ****	82.76	10.99	
mistress	n	+	200.2 ****	40.68	4.98	
brook	n	+	176.6 ****	19.64	0.71	
gar	uh	+	141.8 ****	14.03	0.35	
doctor	n	+	126.1 ****	16.37	0.88	
sir	n	+	120.5 ****	80.42	29.82	
i	pn	+	114.6 ****	509.19	359.55	
host	n l	+	107.2 ****	12.62	0.53	
lord	n	-	100.5 ****	3.74	36.07	
woman	n	+	90.1 ****	30.86	6.97	
you	pn	+	80.7 ****	259.04	171.26	
basket	n	+	76.6 ****	7.95	0.23	
will	vm	+	73.6 ****	191.71	120.66	
thou	pn	-	66.8 ****	54.71	107.71	
fairy	n	+	62.0 ****	9.82	0.80	
husband	n	+	60.4 ****	19.64	4.22	
wife	n	+	56.1 ****	23.85	6.50	
she	pn	+	54.3 ****	94.45	53.05	
humour	n	+	52.4 ****	11.22	1.48	
thy	po	-	50.7 ****	21.51	52.99	
worship	n	+	50.0 ****	9.82	1.14	
de	fr	+	49.9 ****	10.75	1.43	
garter	n	+	49.2 ****	6.08	0.29	
forsooth	uh	+	45.4 ****	7.01	0.54	
knight	n	+	43.9 ****	11.69	2.03	
parson	n	+	39.7 ****	4.68	0.20	
good	j	+	39.2 ****	62.19	33.90	
bully	n	+	38.9 ****	4.21	0.14	
come	v	+	38.7 ****	75.28	43.77	
search	v	+	36.9 ****	6.08	0.53	
go	v	+	36.6 ****	56.58	30.56	
warrant	v	+	35.9 ****	9.82	1.76	
jealousy	n	+	34.7 ****	6.08	0.59	

Compress log-likelihood value range in tag clouds

Cloud

Where feminine lemma were much statistically less likely to appear in *Macbeth* when compared to Shakespeare's entire corpus, we see that feminine lexical items are much more likely to appear in *Wives*. We see a pattern of both function and content words related to gender

– that is, pronouns and nouns – being marked as “relatively more frequent” in *Wives*. *She* appears in *Wives* in 94.45 parts per ten thousand, compared to the entire Shakespeare corpus - where *she* appears in 53.05 parts per ten thousand.

*Wives* is fundamentally different than *Macbeth* in many ways, but where feminine lexical items were significantly less likely to appear in *Macbeth*, feminine lexical items were much more likely to appear in *Wives*. But most notably, one function word – *she* – appears significantly less frequently in *Macbeth* than compared to the rest of the Shakespeare corpus, and significantly *more* likely in *Wives*.

### **3.1. Selecting terms for analysis**

Gender-specific pronouns in English are very predictable as a semantic feature, showing membership in a specific community (Livia 2000, p. 29). Deviation from grammatically assigned case is not allowed; each pronoun retains specific lexical properties. Nominative case is ascribed to subjects, whereas accusatives, datives, and genitives are ascribed to different kinds of grammatical objects. There are three pronouns (Huddleston 1984, p. 256-298) which are considered as markers of possession which could be used:

- i As pronominal genitive (*his/her*)
- ii As part of a D+N construction (*his/her* + noun)
- iii As pronominal accusative form (*him/her*)

*Her* can function either as an accusative or as an attributive genitive. This construction of possession does not map perfectly across the gender binary. *His* can appear as either an attributive or as an absolute, as shown in (1a) or as part of a D+N construction, as shown in (1b):

(1a) The red hat is *his*

(1b) I called *his mother*

*Hers* cannot be part of a D+N construction in the same way. It appears to be ungrammatical, as shown in (1c), but is fine as a pronominal in (1d).

(1c) The red hat is *hers*

(1d) \*I called *hers mother*

Because *hers* is strictly absolute and *his* can be either attributive or absolute, (1a) and (1b) are acceptable; only (1c) is grammatical; (1d) is not.

Interestingly, *hers* did not appear at all in either play; I therefore cannot comment on the relationship between the general possessive *his* and the absolute possessive *hers*. The table below presents the overall usage of *hers* in the corpus:

	Raw frequency in corpus <sup>22</sup>	Total words in corpus	Works appeared in (out of 47 total)	Percentage of works containing word
<i>hers</i>	55	884,429	23	53%

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<sup>22</sup> These numbers are taken from the Open Source Shakespeare concordance (<http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/>) which includes all of Shakespeare's poems and plays: 37 plays, 154 sonnets and 5 poems (and considered as 43 total works).

*Hers* appears more frequently in some plays compared to others.<sup>23</sup> *His/her* can function as determiners and will appear in a noun phrase as such. *His* has a second role of denoting possession in the sense of ‘it is his’. *Her* has a separate sense ‘the noun of her’, the equivalent construction would be ‘it is hers’. I focus exclusively on these D+N clusters representing a single semantic unit of possession.

### 3.2. Distributions

I begin by illustrating the distributions of *his* and *her* as linguistic features in *Macbeth* and *Wives*, using the corpus analysis software AntConc.<sup>24</sup> A distribution allows us to visualize the location of these lexical items in the text. These distributions included both *his/her* + N and independently. Each black line represents one instance chronologically. These visualizations show that the two gender-specific pronouns have entirely different distributional frequencies representing the broad usage of *his* and *her* in these two opposing play-texts, and corroborate the representations of these search terms initially identified with WordHoard. Below is the screenshot for *his* in both plays, followed by the screenshot for *her*:

Figure 1.



<sup>23</sup> *Cymbeline*, for example, has 11 instances of *hers* but *Titus Andronicus* only has one instance. Unfortunately the scope of this study does not allow for a full investigation of *hers* and its full representation in the Shakespeare corpus.

<sup>24</sup> These images are cropped from the full screenshots on AntConc for detail.

HIT FILE: 1 FILE: Merry Wives Of Windsor rev.txt



No. of Hits = 175  
File Length (in chars) = 118194

HIT FILE: 2 FILE: Macbeth rev.txt



No. of Hits = 42  
File Length (in chars) = 95550

The distribution for *her* in *Macbeth* looks quite different than the distribution for *her* in *Wives*. There are a total of 35 examples of *her* in *Macbeth*; these examples are visualized as small clumps, especially in Act 5, Scene I. Lady Macbeth's role as a tragic character is cemented in this scene: the Doctor and the Gentlewoman observe and comment upon her strange behavior. Lines 2126-2205<sup>25</sup> are full of examples of *her* and *she*. Based merely on the rapid-fire mentions of *her* in these lines, we see that a female character is the focus of others' attention for the duration of the scene. This is contrasted with many rapid exchanges of *his* throughout the entire play-text of *Macbeth*, and presented in further contrast to *Wives*, which shows a fairly even distribution of the search term throughout the play. *Her* is much more frequent in *Wives*: it is perhaps easier to see where women are not mentioned in the play-text rather than where they are.

#### 4. Analysis.

Using a Regular Expression concordancing technique in AlphaX, I isolated each example of *his* and *her* in both plays within the context of the line the example was contained in.<sup>26</sup> A noun in the D+N constructions presented below will be syntactically ascribed to *his* or *her* through complement structures. I begin with examples of male possession in *Macbeth*:

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<sup>25</sup> These line numbers have been taken from Open Source Shakespeare (<http://opensourceshakespeare.org/>)

<sup>26</sup> Each example has been cross-referenced to the Open Source Shakespeare texts for act/scene/line references.

- (1) And fix'd *his head* upon our battlements (Sargeant, I.ii.42)
- (2) To *his home* before us (Duncan, I.vi.461)
- (3) Those of *his chamber*, as it seem'd, had done't (Lennox, II.iii.887)
- (4) Lays blame upon *his promise* (Ross, III.iv.1328)
- (5) Whether it was *his wisdom* or *his fear* (Ross, IV.ii.1745)
- (6) The devil to *his fellow* and delight (Macduff, IV.iii.1988)
- (7) Nothing in love now does he feel *his title* (Angus, V.ii.2229)
- (8) That struts and frets *his hour* upon the stage (Macbeth, V.v. 2383)
- (9) *His secret murderers* sticking on *his hands* (Angus, V.ii.2226)

Male characters in *Macbeth* retain possession of conceptual, external, and corporeal objects. *His home* and *his chamber* are examples of 'the property in which he lives'. *His hour* is his conceptual property; *his secret murderers* are a group of people that he is in charge of. *His wisdom*, *his promise* and *his fear* are all non-tangible qualities ascribed to him. They also retain ownership of their body parts, such as *his hands*, *his head*, *his eyes*, and *his heart*.

Much like the male characters of *Macbeth*, male characters of *Wives* also retain ownership of conceptual, physical and corporeal objects, as shown in examples (10) through (20):

- (10) In the manner of *his nurse* or *his dry nurse*, or *his cook*, or *his laundry*, *his washer*, and his wringer (Evans, I.ii.292-5)
- (11) It is a shallenge: I will cut *his troat [throat]* in de park (Caius I.iv.510)

- (12) Cut all *his two stones*, by gar he shall not have a stone (Caius, I.iv.513-514)
- (13) Were they *his men* (Ford, II.i.734)
- (14) Wives are a yoke of *his discarded men* very rouges now (Page, II.i.730)
- (15) He is not show *his face* (Caius, II.iii.1129-30)
- (16) The prologue of our comedy and at *his heels* a rabble of his companions (Falstaff, III.v.1815-16)
- (17) Blessing of *his heart* (Mistress Quickly, IV.i.1903)
- (18) Methinks *his flesh* is punish'd (Evans, IV.iv. 2218)
- (19) And I will deliver *his wife* into your hand (Falstaff, V.i.2508-9)
- (20) *His horses* are arrested for it, Master Brook (Ford, V.v.2689-90)

An important man such as Falstaff in *Wives* will have a servant or two (Pistol and Nym), while looking for a wife (which, by the Renaissance legal system, he will also be in possession of). This should be unavailable to women in the same way: Judith Butler notes that the legal identity of a single individual as the “property holder [...] is a figure of disembodiment, but one which is nevertheless a figure of a body, a body forth of a masculinized rationality, the figure of a male body”, is in contrast with the “way that the feminine is ‘always’ the outside, and the outside is ‘always’ the feminine” (Butler 1993, p. 48-9). Thus a female character in the play-texts would not retain the proprietary ownership of another person in the same way that a male character in these play-texts would.

All men are not equal, however. Male characters embody a gradient system of masculinity: while men do retain features of specific kinds of power which is inherently

unavailable to female characters, some men (such as Falstaff and Lennox) are considered by critics to be more masculine than others (Bardolph, Rugby, the Servant, Donalbain), creating a hierarchy of maleness based on a series of features:

concepts of manhood coincided with patriarchal principles that both privileged males over females, and favoured particular men above others. Patriarchal manhood endorsed a gender hierarchy that exalted maleness as a cultural category by ranking men generally above women. This was patriarchy in a feminist sense. In its early modern sense, however, it most frequently served the interests of middle-aged, householding men [...] Strength, thrift, industry, self-sufficiency, honesty, authority, autonomy, self-government, moderation, reason, wisdom, and wit were all claimed for patriarchal manhood, either as the duties expected of men occupying patriarchal positions or as the justification for their associated privileges. (Shepard 2003, p. 247)

Self-sufficiency, autonomy, and self-government are all features of corporeal ownership - body parts in the Renaissance “have individuated functions, locations and differentiations to the body as a whole, they can become concentrated sites where meaning is invested” (Hillman & Mazzio 1997, p. xii). Hillman and Mazzio describe how the “influential natural philosophers [...] went so far as to argue that parts were individuated not only lexically and physiologically but also ontologically: to the isolated organs belonged what were termed *ideae sigularum partium* [...] imparting integrity and spiritual significance to each part of the body.” (1997, p. xviii). Body parts are often ascribed symbolic status in literary studies; thus it is unsurprising that Caius refers to *his stones* as symbolic of another male character’s masculine identity. The possession of one’s own body parts constructs a specific kind of autonomous, inherent power: these are your corporeal objects which function differently than conceptual or external-to-the body objects.



If male characters are ascribed ownership of physical, conceptual, and corporeal nouns in D+N constructions, what are female characters ascribed? I now repeat my analysis for *her* +noun in *Macbeth*. Example (21) illustrates the difference between D+N clustering and pronominal D perfectly:

(21) Rise from *her bed* throw *her nightgown* upon *her* (Gentlewoman, V.i.2131)

*Her bed* and *her nightgown* are objects that are ascribed to Lady Macbeth. Nouns in the D+N constructions presented are syntactically ascribed to *her* through complement structures; these are objects that are syntactically possessed by a woman. *Her* also appears as a pronominal at the end of this line to further illustrate the semantic and syntactic differences between a pronominal and a D+N construction. The following pattern of a woman's body parts as the noun of a D+N construction begins to emerge:

(22) A sailor's wife had chestnuts in *her lap* (1<sup>st</sup> Witch, I.iii.101)

(23) By each at once *her choppy finger* laying (Banquo, I.iii.144)

(24) What is it that she does now? Look how she rubs *her hands* (Doctor, V.i.2152)

(25) Upon *her skinny lips*: you should be women (Banquo, I.iii.145)

(26) Remains in danger of *her former tooth* (Macbeth, III.ii.1312)

(27) You see, *her eyes* are open (Doctor, V.i.2150)

(28) Oftener upon *her knees* than on *her feet* (Macduff, IV.iii.1968)

Example (21) is a rare occurrence of a female character retaining ownership of something external to her own body. Many of the other examples found collocate to a body part (tooth, feet, eyes, hands). Female characters in *Macbeth* do not generally possess – or

own – anything outside of their own body. Butler’s analysis of property ownership presents the masculine as “a figure in a crisis”, whereas “the feminine, strictly speaking, has no morphe, no morphology, no contour [...] it is itself undifferentiated without boundary” (1993, p. 48-9). Butler’s earlier (1990) framework for gender suggests “if sex does not limit gender, then perhaps there are genders, ways of culturally interpreting the sexed body that are in no way restricted by the apparent duality of sex [...] if gender is something that one becomes – but can never be – then gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity” (p. 153). Merely being ascribed a masculine character-role is not enough. One must enact maleness in order to fully inhabit a male identity. We can begin to construct feminine possession in *Macbeth* as a masculine feature: ownership of corporeal objects ascribed to female characters adheres to the masculine construction of ownership established above.

The distribution of *her* is already very limited; most of the examples of *her* +noun are cited above in examples (22)-(28). There are few instances of *her* in *Macbeth*; so very few examples of *her*+N are found within the play-text. Of these examples, almost all relevant constructions cited are in reference to Lady Macbeth, most often occurring in Act 5, Scene 1. Other female characters in *Macbeth*, such as the three Weird Sisters and Lady Macduff, are present on-stage and have lines, yet other characters rarely reference them in the same way.

The Weird Sisters are a supernatural phenomenon representing the Three Fates; they may not necessarily be female.<sup>27</sup> Banquo identifies this confusion for us: “Upon your skinny lips you should be women, and yet your beards forbid me to interpret so” (I.3.145). While the title ‘witches’ is socially feminine in connotation, “the link between bearded women and witchcraft seems to be firmly embedded into the cultural consciousness of Early Modern England” (Hirsch 2008, p. 94). A bearded woman is not inherently feminine – nor is such a

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<sup>27</sup> See <http://hfroehlich.wordpress.com/2013/02/08/how-many-female-characters-are-there-in-shakespeare/> for an exploration of categorizing characters by gender.

figure inherently masculine. Will Fisher's study of beards in the Renaissance concludes, "the beard (or lack thereof) did not absolutely determine gendered identity" (2001, p. 190). Thus it is arguable that the witches of *Macbeth* are supernatural beings and therefore not exactly female, though they count as non-masculine entities.<sup>28</sup> This claim is furthered by other characters' reluctance to ascribe pronouns to the Witches, whereas other characters refer to Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff as *she* and *her*.

However, male characters remain masculine even when their masculinity is called into question. Male characters are not occupying such a gender-flexible space: masculine identity is "constructed and constrained by a patriarchal culture – infused with patriarchal assumptions about power, privilege, sexual desire, the body". There is, continues Breitenberg, a "broad and powerful discourse that assumed a divinely ordained basis for authority based on gender and status" (1996: 1). Female characters such as Lady Macbeth can be ascribed a masculine identity in this way, thus moving "up" the social hierarchy, because of what Adelman calls "female's failed maleness, not in terms of male's originary femaleness" (1999, p. 40). Male characters, it seems, cannot move down the social hierarchy. Though they may be referred to as effeminate or appear otherwise emasculated, they are not ascribed the category of womanhood in the same way that Lady Macbeth can be ascribed masculinity. To have this social mobility afforded to them, female characters need to dress and act as men (like Viola in *Twelfth Night* and Portia in *Merchant of Venice*); male characters do not have the same need to present as female – it is for strictly comedic purposes.

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<sup>28</sup> The witches, or Weird Sisters, are in some way both feminine and masculine: As "sisters" and "[bearded] women" they are in some way feminine, but as "bearded women" they would also exist somewhere along the masculine spectrum.

Yet social gender-bending occurs in *Wives*: Falstaff disguises himself as “a woman [who] has a great beard” (IV.ii.2149). Falstaff will still be ascribed corporeal objects using D+N construction – a form of possession available to characters categorized as masculine. While dressed as a woman, Falstaff has the noun *woman* applied to him but still retains male pronouns (*he, his, him*) as illustrated in this exchange (IV.ii.2139-2169):

Ford. I'll prat her. [Beating him] Out of my door, you witch, you hag, you baggage, you polecat, you runyon! out, out! I'll conjure you, I'll fortune-tell you.

Mistress Page. Are you not ashamed? I think you have killed the poor woman.

Mistress Ford. Nay, he will do it. 'Tis a goodly credit for you. Ford. Hang her, witch!

Evans. By the yea and no, I think the 'oman is a witch indeed: I like not when a 'oman has a great peard; I spy a great peard under his muffler.

Ford. Will you follow, gentlemen? I beseech you, follow; see but the issue of my jealousy: if I cry out thus upon no trail, never trust me when I open again.

Page. Let's obey his humour a little further: come, gentlemen.

[Exeunt FORD, PAGE, SHALLOW, DOCTOR CAIUS, and SIR HUGH EVANS]

Mistress Page. Trust me, he beat him most pitifully.

Mistress Ford. Nay, by the mass, that he did not; he beat him most unpitifully, methought.

Mistress Page. I'll have the cudgel hallowed and hung o'er the altar; it hath done meritorious service.

Mistress Ford. What think you? may we, with the warrant of womanhood and the witness of a good conscience, pursue him with any further revenge?

Mistress Page. The spirit of wantonness is, sure, scared out of him: if the devil have him not in fee-simple, with fine and recovery, he will never, I think, in the way of waste, attempt us again.

Mistress Ford. Shall we tell our husbands how we have served him?

Only Ford uses a female pronoun to describe the effeminized Falstaff. Mistress Ford, Evans, and Page continue to ascribe male-specific pronouns to Falstaff. Mistress Page returns to

using male lexical items by line 2156. But Evans' line (2150) has a curious note in Melchiori's Arden Shakespeare edition of *Wives*: Melchiori notes that the Folio edition of *Wives* reads *his*, but the Quarto edition reads "*her muffler*". This line would have ascribed a feminine identity to Falstaff, but it is no longer read this way.

If we are to assume that *her* is the correct pronoun here, we see that there are two possibilities. This "may be Evans' confusion, but more likely Shakespeare's slip or a printer's misreading of 'hir', an alternative spelling of *her*" (2000, p. 253). Halliwell's edition (1854, reprinted 1970) reads "*her muffler*", but attaches the following note: "earlier editions read, by mistake, *his muffler*" (1970, p. 434). But turning to other critical editions of the text, including Wells, Taylor & Salmon 1986's Original Spelling edition (1986, p. 565), based upon the Folio edition, and Kokeritz's facsimile edition of the First Folio (1954, p. 55) both read *his muffler*. It seems less likely that *his muffler* is the mistake, but rather that *her muffler* is the error. This is an editorial decision upon which my entire argument can hang: If it is indeed *her muffler*, as Halliwell and the Quartos state, Falstaff has successfully constructed himself, albeit temporarily, as a female character. Furthermore, Evans is so convinced by this disguise, he can only refer to Falstaff as a woman. But Falstaff could not possibly be ascribed a feminine identity here; Evans himself is unconvinced of this, calling Falstaff "a witch". As established above in *Macbeth*, the gender of witches in the Early Modern period is questionable, but we can be certain from this passage that "a witch" and "a woman" are different social identities: "I think the woman is a witch" (line 2148). A witch is perhaps more likely to have masculine features (such as a beard, cf. Fisher 2001), but we will not mistake a witch for a man, either. A beard is a feature of masculinity; if Falstaff is to be perceived as a woman, his beard cannot be visible. But his beard is visible, and Falstaff is considered a witch rather than a 'true' woman, *her* is effectively removed as a conceivable

pronoun option in this scene. Repeated references to third-person male pronouns used to describe Falstaff in this passage (*his* honor, he beat *him*, pursue *him*, if the devil have *him*, *he* will never) continue refute the use of *her* as the appropriate pronoun under these circumstances.

Dressing Falstaff as a woman should effectively strip him of his patriarchal privileges, yet he retains maleness through other characters' application of male pronouns towards him. It is clear that the Folio emendation from *her* to *his* was necessary, and that *his* is in fact the correct pronoun to be using in this circumstance. Because the editorial decisions have already been made and applied prior to digitization and the emended Folio edition of the text is widely used as the basis for publications of *Wives*, most – if not all – digital editions will allow Falstaff to retain his male identity. Thus biological, rather than social, constructions of sex are much more prevalent for the male characters of *Wives*.

I now shift my attention to issues of feminine representation. Male representation of possession was consistent across *Macbeth* and *Wives*. Assuming that *Macbeth* can be representative of feminine possession in the same way that it was for patterns of masculine possession, similar patterns of feminine ownership should be found in *Wives* – that is, women should have possession of their bodies and not much else. Instead, a different kind of possession is identified in examples (29) through (35):

(29) Did *her* grandsire leave her seven hundred pound (Shallow, I.i.54)

(30) *Her* father will be angry (Mrs Page, III.iv.1725)

(31) *Her* husband goes this morning a-birding (Mrs Quickly, III.v.1786-7)

(32) The jealous fool to *her* husband I suspect without cause (Mrs Ford IV.ii.2090)

(33) *Her husband* has a marvelous infection to the little page (Mrs Quickly, II.ii.905)

(34) *Her father* hath commanded her to slip (Fenton, IV.vi.2445)

(35) Poor old woman. That same knave Ford, *her husband*, hath (Falstaff, V.i.2495)

(36) *Her mother*, even strong against that match (Fenton, IV.vi.2448)

(37) Straight marry her. To this *her mother's* plot (Fenton, IV.vi.2453)

(38) She shall go with him *her mother* hath intended (Fenton, IV.vi.2459)

The recurring pattern of D+N constructions containing *her* in *Wives* is one of familial relationships: women in this play seem to be constantly in reference to their relationship(s) to other characters.

Female characters in this play are correlated directly to a patrilineal system of husbands, fathers and grandfathers. Based on our understanding of Early Modern culture, we understand that women in *Wives* are the property of the men in their lives – their husbands, their fathers, and their grandfathers. This constructs a hierarchy of patriarchal possession of women within the social realm of the play-text. As Stallybrass notes, “‘woman’, unlike man, is produced as a property category. The conceptualization of woman as land or possession has, of course, a long history [...] In early modern England ‘woman’ was articulated as property not only in legal discourse but in economic and political discourse” (1986, p. 127). In examples (29)-(35), a second pattern of collocation is visible in the responses of Mrs Page, Mrs Quickly, and Mrs Ford: one of jealousy and anger. The response to feminine identity within this framework is concerned with how other male characters who are immediately connected to those being discussed, will respond to their actions. Words such as “jealous”

and “angry” imply that the male characters will be displeased with an errant female character that does not follow the patrilineal expectations set forward by Early Modern Society.

*Wife* and *woman* are synonymous in the Early Modern period.<sup>29</sup> It is not entirely surprising that the social relationships ascribed to women are accurate within the historical context of woman-as-property, as they are semantically constructed as the object of another person. A wife is the woman who belongs to a man; thus a male character would retain ownership over his wife and daughters; grandfathers would also retain power over their granddaughters. It is important to note that these D+N constructions in *Wives* using *her* do not exclusively refer to men. There are three examples of *her mother* in the play-text, all said by Fenton and found in the same speech in Act IV, scene 6:

(38) *Her mother*, even strong against that match (Fenton, IV.vi.2448)

(39) Straight marry her. To this *her mother's* plot (Fenton, IV.vi.2453)

(40) She shall go with him *her mother* hath intended (Fenton, IV.vi.2459)

Here, Fenton explains Anne Page and Slender's plan to elope. Mistress Page disapproves of this match, preferring Doctor Caius as a husband. Anne's mother, Mistress Page, is slightly elevated in the social hierarchy; Anne and Slender's elopement is an act of rebellion against this familial decree. As Fenton's speech illustrates, mothers in *Wives* retain a form of social mobility. While female characters are limited in their social identities, women retain power over their children that would be unavailable to single or unmarried women according to scholars of social order in the Renaissance. Female characters of *Wives* are ascribed a specific kind of ownership which appears to be unavailable to female characters of *Macbeth*. There is

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<sup>29</sup> See wife, n. 1a in the OED and HTOED under the category of the external world > the living world > people > person > woman.



a reversal of the pattern as seen in *Macbeth*: in *Wives*, it is the men – not the women - who are described in these D+N constructions as having possession of body parts; here the women are the possessed, not the possessor. A sufficient metaphor for familial relationships in the Early Modern period would be as follows: the patriarch of a family would be analogous to a king; the rest of the family could be considered his subjects, but with some agency (Amussen 1988: 60). The familial possessions presented by the semantic constructions of *her husband* and *her father* are not uncharacteristic of the social realities of the period.

## **5. Conclusions**

Gender is a quantifiable and qualifiable construct in literary objects. Using a trio of digital tools for a multi-faceted analysis of gender representation, patterns of gender representation in *Macbeth* and *Merry Wives* do not always match the expectations set forth by feminist scholars and literary critics of Shakespeare and the early modern period. Male characters are represented consistently throughout both plays: agency and ownership of body parts, external objects, and conceptual things, whereas female characters are represented noticeably differently. In *Macbeth*, female characters are represented with regards to their body parts, whereas in *Merry Wives*, female characters are limited through their familial relationships. Aditi S. Muralidharan, a researcher at UC Berkeley, using different tools (her WordSeer toolset) was able to find the same pattern of grammatical possession manifested in a much larger dataset: the whole corpus of Shakespeare.<sup>30</sup> This suggests that these may be salient patterns of gender representation in the whole of Early Modern play corpus, and stress that feminist approaches to literature are only looking at the textual representation, and not

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<sup>30</sup> Please see <http://mininghumanities.com/2012/01/24/men-and-women-in-shakespeare/> and Muralidharan, A and Hearst, M. "Supporting exploratory text analysis in literature study" (2013)

considering the social and legal realities of women within a relevant socio-historical framework.

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