

Renaissance and Reformation

Renaissance et Réforme



Introduction

Alysia Kolentzis and Katherine R. Larson

Volume 35, Number 1, Winter 2012

Gendering Time and Space in Early Modern England

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1105884ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v35i1.19072>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Kolentzis, A. & Larson, K. (2012). Introduction. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 35(1), 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v35i1.19072>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2012

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Introduction

ALYSIA KOLENTSIS
Stanford University

KATHERINE R. LARSON
University of Toronto

At the beginning of Act 4 in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, Time takes to the stage, a winged choral figure that "slide[s] / O'er sixteen years" of dramatic action (4.1.5–6). He describes his temporal dexterity in distinctly spatial terms, as he deftly navigates the "wide gap" (7) of time since Perdita's abandonment as well as the geographical distance between Sicily and Bohemia.¹ In the 2010 Stratford Shakespeare Festival production of *The Winter's Tale*, director Marti Maraden accentuated Time's ability to span both temporal and spatial dimensions by having actor Randy Hughson rotate in mid-air, affixed to a hoist, while he delivered his lines. The cyclical motion of this "deftly acrobatic spirit of Time"² at once evoked the turning of the hands of a clock and playfully capitalized on the dynamic movement of the human body in space. Time dominates the space of the stage in this production, foregrounding his role as a structural and thematic pivot. Maraden's interpretation, moreover, highlights the extent to which perceptions and depictions of time bleed into those of space. As Shakespeare emphasizes, human experiences of time and space frequently collide and overlap. *The Winter's Tale* hinges on such moments of collision. Besides the figure of Time, there are continual suggestions in the drama of the affinities between the temporal trajectory of narrative and the often gendered spaces within which narratives are created.

The few textual indications of Time's appearance suggest that he resembled the Father Time of the emblem tradition: aged, winged, and holding an hourglass and scythe. Maraden's athletic Time arguably cuts an even stronger masculine figure. Yet the content of Time's speech provides a compelling contrast to such visual representations. Diffused throughout are allusions to reproduction, pregnancy, and birth, from the actions of "plant[ing]" and "br[inging] forth"

(4.1.9, 27) to the characterization of his account as the product of gestation: “I turn my glass, and give my scene such growing / As you had slept between” (16–17). Time’s capacity to generate narrative spaces aligns him with other features marked as feminine in the play. He asserts that he has the ability to “make stale / The glistening of this present, as my tale / Now seems to it” (13–14); here, “tale” is a knowing nod to the play’s title and to the story that is presently unfolding, but it also situates Time in the realm of the play’s women, the tale-tellers. Time’s speech evokes the whispered exchange between Hermione and Mamillius — “A sad tale’s best for winter” (2.1.27) — as well as Autolycus’s ballad of Mistress Tale-Porter, literally the bearer of tales. Most tellingly, it connects him to the “old tale” (5.3.118) of Hermione’s death as fabricated by Paulina.³

When Paulina stage-manages Hermione’s revival in Act 5, she becomes a feminized Time figure, her unveiling of the statue visually embodying the story earlier outlined by Time. This relationship is established in the doubly signifying words that open Paulina’s narrative — “’Tis time” (5.3.99) — for “Time” here refers both to the current moment, the all-important “now” in which the truth will be revealed, and, quite literally, to the character who stood before the audience one short act preceding this moment. For what Paulina tells here *is* the story of Time: she is unfolding error, “fill[ing] your grave up” (5.3.101) with the same stroke by which Time plants and overwhelms. Her words distinctly echo those of Time as she presides over Hermione’s revival, even as the scene reworks pictorial traditions of Time rescuing and revealing Truth (see Fig. 1). In one sense, Paulina is a deliberate reflection of the Time character who stood onstage in Act 4. Yet she is also a refraction of that figure; she represents an image of time re-envisioned and expanded, of narrative’s capacity to mediate and to create temporal and physical space.

The essays featured in this special issue, which originated in two sessions organized for the 2010 meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in Venice, take as their focus the productive collisions and interconnections among gender, space, and time that are so integral to *The Winter’s Tale*.⁴ With its rapidly expanding conceptions of space and time, exemplified by advancements in timekeeping, endeavours in global exploration, and changes in the ways that individuals were positioned within social and cultural encounters, early modern England provides a particularly fertile context within which to investigate these questions. Certainly, time and space — and the intersections between them — have emerged as vital areas of critical interrogation across disciplines



Figure 1. “Veritas temporis filia,” Geoffrey Whitney, *Choice of Emblemes* (London, 1586), p. 4. Reproduced with the permission of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Special Collections Department, the Pennsylvania State University Libraries.

in early modern studies. Ricardo J. Quinones’s formative work *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* has helped to illuminate the peculiar temporal urgency of the early modern context; more recently, studies such as Jonathan Gil Harris’s *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* have accented the productive links between theories of time and the material culture of early modern England.⁵ This unpacking of temporal experience has coincided with an explosion of interest in early modern conceptualizations of space. Scholars such as Mary Floyd-Wilson, John Gillies, Andrew Gordon, Richard Helgerson, Bernhard Klein, Steven Mullaney, Julie Sanders, Bruce Smith, and Garrett Sullivan have helped to elucidate how early moderns positioned themselves within and moved

among particular spaces and how spatial experience — whether architectural, geographical, national, acoustic, or physiological — and the imaginative construction of space contributed to the formation of early modern identities.⁶

This special issue intervenes within these critical discussions in two ways. On one level, we aim to draw attention to the close interchange between time and space, as evidenced by the similar critical vocabularies used to represent these concepts, and, more fundamentally, the ways in which time and space are understood and defined in terms of each other. More significantly, as our example from *The Winter's Tale* suggests, this collection opens up new avenues for considering this interplay by probing the ways in which time and space coalesce with gender in the literature of the period. Surprisingly, gender has not been a sustained focus of seminal studies of time, though important contributions by Michelle Dowd, Julie Eckerle, Megan Matchinske, and Sharon Cadman Seelig have persuasively examined the intersections between gender and temporal experience in their explorations of women's historical narratives and life writing in early modern England.⁷ Gender has featured more prominently in studies of early modern space, notably in discussions tracing the tension between public and private boundaries, the function of architectural spaces like the closet, and the relationship between spatial construction, confinement, and women's self-expression.⁸ Yet with very few exceptions — exemplified by Kate Chedgzoy's brilliant spatial interrogation of memorial practices in the period — the specific tensions among time, space, and gender that lie at the heart of this special issue have received limited critical attention.⁹ The essays featured in this volume are distinctive in that they consider the collisions between time and space in specifically gendered terms.

Inviting us into a rich array of spaces and historical moments, and taking up a variety of genres and critical approaches, our contributors explore how women writers envisage and portray time and space, how the notions of time and space are themselves gendered in literary works, and how gender shaped early modern temporal and spatial experience. The collection opens with a group of three essays that use a series of physical spaces — the prison, the closet, the thicket, and the early modern stage — as lenses through which to explore temporal suspension, liminality, and permeability. We begin by entering the space of the Tudor prison. Molly Murray's essay probes the "proximity and intersection of courtly and carceral life" (p. 23) in Henrician England. Focusing on the sequence of love poems exchanged between Sir Thomas Howard and

Lady Margaret Douglas and preserved in the Devonshire manuscript, Murray explores the unexpected opportunities for collaboration and textual exchange available within the seemingly confined space of the Tower of London. In so doing, she demonstrates courtly poetry's capacity to suspend and transcend spatial and temporal restrictions. The Devonshire manuscript provides important evidence for women's active participation in Tudor manuscript culture and helps to illuminate the sociopolitical currency of poetry within the courtly prison context, but it testifies equally strongly to the movement of texts within and through prison walls. Murray reads the Howard-Douglas poems as a "versified prison correspondence" (p. 27) that negotiates temporal gaps while also embodying the fluidity and sociability of prison culture. In her analysis, the conventionality of these poems, often derided by critics, becomes an important marker of community, demonstrating an "ongoing, vigorous participation in the cultural world beyond the prison" (p. 29) even as they critique Henrician politics.

Femke Molekamp's essay shifts us from the architectural boundaries of the Tower to the domestic spaces of closet and bedchamber as she explores how seventeenth-century printed funeral sermons inscribed and prescribed female devotional experience. Reading funeral sermons gave early modern women strategies for critically examining their own private devotional practices, thereby helping to shape their behaviour within their closets and on their deathbeds. The closet offered a singular site to which women could retreat — either alone or with a small gathering — to indulge in the "secret duties" of devotion and "enjoy Christ behind the door" (p. 48). The potential transgressions implicit within such sexualized descriptions were realized more fully on the deathbed, which presented women with a "final trial of faith" (p. 58) as they wrestled with spiritual doubt in the face of Satanic temptation. Indeed, the deathbed is emblematic of curious temporal and spatial contradictions. It embodies a charged temporal moment that exists apart from quotidian time. The deathbed also represents the most private of spaces, nonetheless emerging, in Molekamp's reading, as a surprisingly public and social event. The ambiguous time and space of the deathbed struggle is extended after physical death in the published sermon, which looks to both past and future as it serves as memorial and example for women readers.

Enacted within a liminal site on the boundaries of ordinary space-time, these deathbed performances stand in fascinating counterpoint to the early

modern theatre, the focus of Lloyd Kermode's essay. In his analysis of the anonymous Queen's Men play *King Leir*, and Shakespeare's reimagined version of the story in *King Lear*, Kermode considers the theories and mechanisms that underpin dramatic representations of space and time. The unique space of the stage allows for more flexible delineations of categories of space, place, and time, and Kermode suggests ways in which foundational work on theories of time and space — by critics such as George Kubler, Michel de Certeau, and Henri Lefebvre — might productively be reconsidered in this context. In early modern drama, "space-time" is a protean concept that highlights the tensions between represented space and "real" space, the *now* of performance versus the *then* of narrative, and the invocations of places created, imagined, and staged. In his close reading of *King Leir*'s "thicket scene," Kermode explores the implications of female claims for the negotiation and control of space. By asserting control over a contested space, Ragan exposes the power of the will to establish and delimit spatial boundaries, however temporarily, within the "O" (*Henry V*, 1.0.13) of the early modern theatre.

Even as these three essays offer new insight into the slippage between metaphorical and material markers of time and space in the period, together they help to conceptualize and, in the case of Kermode's argument, to theorize how early modern space-time helped to shape communal identity and individual agency. The second group of essays in the volume builds on these issues by developing temporal and spatial perspectives on gendered processes of textual construction, formal and generic experimentation, and canonical categorization. Two of these essays concentrate on Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*. It is difficult to imagine an early modern writer who exerts her will on time and space more audaciously than the Duchess of Newcastle. In *The Blazing World*, she circumvents the temporal and political limitations of the Interregnum through radical generic disruption and the creation of alternate worlds. The third essay in this group compellingly reworks critical assumptions concerning the formal architecture and chronological boundaries of one particular genre, the sonnet. Breaking down the walls of the sonnet's "pretty rooms" and challenging the genre's established temporal trajectory, this reading opens up important space within which to consider the significant contribution of hitherto overlooked seventeenth-century female sonneteers.

Taking us deep into the multiple landscapes of *The Blazing World*, Marina Leslie's essay sets out to map this generically hybrid work and the journeys

undertaken within it. Leslie tackles Cavendish's generic experimentation head-on, elucidating Cavendish's materialist understanding of fiction and philosophy, which fundamentally shapes her reworking of space, place, and time in the narrative. She reads Cavendish's fiction "less as an escape from the world or a vision of a possible world than as a material engagement with the world that is" (p. 88), and concludes that the vertiginous geographies of *The Blazing World* ultimately force the reader to assess the boundaries between past and present, history and fiction, fancy and reason. This manifests itself most poignantly in Cavendish's "personal geography" (p. 99), notably her engagement with the architectural details of the Newcastles' estates in her depiction of her alter ego's visit to England. Even as the Duchess's return home resists idealization of the Cavendishes' time-bound civil war experiences, its juxtaposition with the promise of the construction of newly imagined worlds foregrounds the possibility of redemption and temporal renewal inherent in the act of creation.

Delving further into the relationship between time, space, and creativity, Jennifer Park situates *The Blazing World* in dialogue with Francis Godwin's *Man in the Moone* to consider the spatial and temporal dimensions of knowledge making, discovery, and creation in seventeenth-century utopias. Park generates an innovative theoretical framework for reading these texts, drawing on the work of humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan to chart the epistemological journeys that drive both narratives. She argues that Godwin and Cavendish negotiate the tension between the knowable or real and the creative claim to alternative modes of knowledge formation in very different ways, prompting the development of distinctly gendered approaches to "Paradise." Godwin situates knowing as "the ability externally to locate and pinpoint, to name and to identify" (p. 119), claiming a place for his lunar paradise alongside existing narratives of discovery. In contrast, Cavendish "sees the act of creating as a means of departure" (p. 122), a way of critiquing the Civil Wars and her experience of exile by "constructing a past anew" (p. 123). Ultimately, for Cavendish, the process of world construction shifts inward, to the space of the mind, opening up possibilities for women's active involvement in knowledge making that holds the power to rewrite and rework the past.

Diana Henderson's essay opens a similarly creative space for seventeenth-century female poets within the sonnet tradition. Shifting from the astonishing array of genres that make up *The Blazing World* to the "little rooms" (p. 139) of the sonnet, her essay takes up the question of generic classification by asking

us to redraw the conventional generic boundaries of the sonnet form and, in so doing, of literary history. Tracing a wide range of seventeenth-century “sonnets” authored by women that depart from the standard fourteen-line form, Henderson argues persuasively for a more flexible understanding of this lyric tradition. Female poets — including Elizabeth Cary, Anne Southwell, Katherine Philips, and Hester Pulter — clearly flourished in this genre, producing lyrics that were no less playful and innovative than Cavendish’s generic experiments. Calling for a reconsideration of how these poems are classified, anthologized, and interpreted, Henderson’s essay invites us to step back from the representation of specific spaces and moments within literary texts to consider the framework and the legacy of literature itself.

The special issue concludes with a review essay by Alison Findlay that dexterously interweaves reflections on the six articles featured within the volume with a broader consideration of how early modern men and women experienced and expressed space-time. The notion of a physical relationship between time and space, famously articulated in Einstein’s theory of relativity, would have been somewhat recognizable within the pantheistic worldview of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. Writers like Henry Vaughan, Rachel Speght, and John Webster hold past, present, and future in tension in their evocations of a divinely governed dimension of existence beyond normal space-time. Findlay’s essay also draws attention to the capacity of early modern texts to reframe the boundaries of gender and class that delimited spatial and temporal experience in the period. In Act 4, scene 4 of Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, for example, the death of the princes moves the grieving widows into the authorizing realm of what Julia Kristeva has termed “women’s time.”¹⁰ The Duchess of York draws on an account of her labour and Richard’s monstrous birth in framing her curse, while Queen Elizabeth negotiates a strategic marriage between the Princess and Richmond, “thus reanimating the reproductive womb as a space-time that can rewrite history” (p. 173). However tragic, death opens outwards to new kinds of spaces and temporal possibilities.

Findlay’s reading of this dramatic temporal shift and ensuing establishment of a gendered, and ultimately generative, narrative space brings us back full circle to the embodiment of Time in *The Winter’s Tale*. Shakespeare’s Time is, above all, a tale-teller: “I witness to / The times” (4.1.11–12), he declares. As he sums up the events of sixteen years and divides the action of the romance between past and present, tragedy and comedy, winter and springtime, Sicily

and Bohemia, one generation and the next, Time ultimately foregrounds the power — so often associated with women in this play — to craft and to control narrative. His pivotal monologue provocatively anticipates Paulina's spatial and temporal choreography as she moves Hermione through what Findlay calls in her essay "the doorway of mortality" (p. 180) back into everyday space-time, reuniting her with Leontes and Perdita. Spinning tales through time and space, these choric figures together encapsulate the focus of this special issue: the capacity of artistic expression to bear witness to and to rewrite the space-time of gendered experience in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.

Notes

1. All references to Shakespeare's plays are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008).
2. Richard Ouzounian, "The Winter's Tale: Rich and Marvelous, but Just Short of Greatness," *Toronto Star*, 10 June 2010, accessed online 13 October 2011, <http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/theatre/stratford/article/821503--the-winter-s-tale-rich-and-marvelous-but-just-short-of-greatness>.
3. For a valuable discussion of Time in relation to gendered tale-telling in *The Winter's Tale*, see Marion Wells, "Mistress Taleporter and the Triumph of Time: Slander and Old Wives' Tales in *The Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (2005), pp. 247–59.
4. We would like to thank the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women for sponsoring these conference sessions.
5. See Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972) and Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). Other significant works on early modern time include Carlo M. Cipolla, *Clocks and Culture 1300–1700* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978); Angus Fletcher, *Time, Space, and Motion in the Age of Shakespeare* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007); David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time* (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1982); Wylie Sypher, *The Ethic of Time* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976); and David Houston Wood, *Time, Narrative, and Emotion in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). See also *Timely Meditations*, a

special issue of *Early Modern Culture: An Electronic Seminar* 6 (2007), accessed 16 April 2012, <http://emc.eserver.org/1-6/issue6.html>, which features innovative work by Sadia Abbas, Linda Charnes, Huw Griffiths, Jonathan Gil Harris, and Shankar Raman.

6. See Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, eds., *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Andrew Gordon and Bernhard Klein, eds., *Literature, Mapping, and the Politics of Space in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Bernhard Klein, *Maps and the Writing of Space* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Julie Sanders, *The Cultural Geography of Early Modern Drama, 1620–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Garrett A. Sullivan, *The Drama of Landscape: Land, Property, and Social Relations on the Early Modern Stage* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). See also Bernadette Andrea, ed., *Space, Place, and Signs in Early Modern Studies*, a special issue of *Genre* 30.1 (Spring/Summer 1997); John Gillies and Virginia Mason Vaughan, eds., *Playing the Globe: Genre and Geography in English Renaissance Drama* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998); Andrew Hiscock, *The Uses of This World: Thinking Space in Shakespeare, Marlowe, Cary, and Jonson* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004); D. K. Smith, *The Cartographic Imagination in Early Modern England: Re-Writing the World in Marlowe, Spenser, Raleigh, and Marvell* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); and Russell West, *Spatial Representations and the Jacobean Stage: From Shakespeare to Webster* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). On the spatial representation of interiority, see Anne Ferry, *The “Inward” Language: Sonnets of Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and William W. E. Slights, *The Heart in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

7. See Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle, eds., *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Megan Matchinske, *Women Writing History in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Sharon Cadmon Seelig, *Autobiography and Gender in Early Modern Literature: Reading Women's Lives, 1600–1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
8. See Kate Chedgzoy, "Women, Gender, and the Politics of Location," in *The Impact of Feminism in English Renaissance Studies*, ed. Dympna Callaghan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 137–49; Alison Findlay, *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer for the Royal Historical Society, 2006); Laura Lunger Knoppers, *Politicizing Domesticity from Henrietta Maria to Milton's Eve* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Katherine R. Larson, *Early Modern Women in Conversation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Erica Longfellow, "Public, Private, and the Household in Early Seventeenth-Century England," *Journal of British Studies* 45.2 (2006), pp. 313–34; Gordon McMullan, ed., *Renaissance Configurations: Voices, Bodies, Spaces, 1580–1690* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Lena Cowen Orlin, "Gertrude's Closet," *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 134 (1998), pp. 44–67 and *Locating Privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Nicole Pohl, *Women, Space and Utopia, 1600–1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Alan Stewart, "The Early Modern Closet Discovered," *Representations* 50 (1995), pp. 76–100; Marta Straznicky, *Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama, 1550–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Mark Wigley, "Untitled: The Housing of Gender," *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 327–89. The significance of gender to current interrogations of space is evidenced in the theme of the 2012 Attending to Early Modern Women Conference: "Re-mapping Routes and Spaces."
9. Kate Chedgzoy, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World: Memory, Place and History, 1550–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
10. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," *Signs* 7.1 (1981), pp. 13–35.