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THE FRENCH GARDEN: AN INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN'S FRENCH

BY JULIET FLEMING

In 1605 Peter Erondell published *The French Garden: for English Ladyes and Gentlewomen to walke in . . . Being an instruction for the attayning unto the knowledge of the French Tongue*, which he dedicated to Elizabeth Barkley, claiming that it was the first French phrase book written especially for women.¹ In his letter to the reader, Erondell says that although his book is suitable for men and women, it is intended primarily “to furnish English Ladyes and Gentlewomen with such conference and familiar talk as is incident unto them specially (which is wanting in other bookes).” This essay examines some of the implications of Erondell’s separatist text and questions his motives for writing it. For while on the one hand *The French Garden* seems to display a radical sensitivity to the need of women for an educational program “incident unto them specially,” on the other hand, precisely by catering to the difference between men and women, Erondell denies women access to the male world and confines them in the traditional sphere of home and family that forms the subject of his dialogues.

Furthermore, I shall argue that *The French Garden* is “cross-dressed”; that is, although it seems to offer itself to women, and is, as it were, dressed as a woman, in other ways it is a male text, designed specifically for the enjoyment of men. In providing women with speech “respecting or belonging properly” to them, it sets out to create and display the language of female separatism, which it grounds in the domestic scene. Then, perhaps for no reason other than that it is specifically female, women’s French immediately becomes the object of erotic interest, and the domestic articles that it names read as the fetishized attributes of female sexuality. While *The French Garden* thus offers its male readers (and writer) an erotic scrutiny of female domestic privacy, it occludes its own role in the creation of erotic pleasure, pretending to discover and display an impropriety that is always already inherent in the fact of female sexual difference. And of course in this process the cause of separatist female education that Erondell ostensibly supports is effectively damaged.

Here I should mention some of the issues surrounding *The French Garden* and my use of it that are largely ignored in the rest of this essay—a caution which is particularly necessary since I have used a text that is practically unknown to make an argument that is part of a very specific critical program. First, the impropriety ascribed to women by *The French Garden* may not function to their absolute disadvantage; indeed, it may have served female interests more effectively than the portraits of good women found in the conduct books of the period. A text that portrays an unruly woman at least provides its female reader an example of assertive dissatisfaction with the dictates of a patriarchal culture. In spite of itself, then, *The French Garden* may have pleased and served the interests of some of its women readers, but here I weigh only the pleasures that it offered to its male audience.

Second, because both *The French Garden* and this essay are addressed to the issue of sexual difference, I describe sexuality and eroticism as existing only in a space of antagonism between male and female. Not only does this preclude any discussion of the possible titillation that women may have found in the text, and of the presence there of a more benign and less polarized sexuality that both men and women could have enjoyed, but it also leaves me no room to discuss the homoerotic pleasures that inhere in a text that is cross-dressed—and that is, after all, an extended exercise in imagining the self a woman.

Finally, in describing *The French Garden* as being in some ways a trick played on women, I describe in terms of intentionality a practice that may not have been fully intentional. Furthermore, if the text has fun at the expense of an imaginary female audience and mobilizes notions of the feminine in order to please sectional interests that are defined in opposition to that feminine, the connection between textual practice and the active oppression of women has still to be proved. I believe, however, that to find the text playful but not pernicious would be to ignore the possibility that ideology affects the structure of action. Since *The French Garden* does not take sexual difference for granted but attempts to articulate and enforce it in a space where it claims it did not exist before, the text is a visible addition to the cluster of assumptions about the feminine that affected the conditions of possibility for women of the Renaissance. And since it is not a work of fiction but a teaching text—a series of instructions authorized by the special powers of a teaching relationship—*The French Garden* does represent an act of

interference in the lives of the particular group of women who were its first pupils. As such, the text is susceptible to an old-style feminist critique, and I undertake that here with the assumption that if feminist criticism wants to articulate (and ensure) its own freedom from practices such as the ones I ascribe to *The French Garden*, that is as legitimate a use of a Renaissance text as any other.

The French Garden is a standard French teaching text, with a chapter on pronunciation, a short grammar section, and thirteen dialogues with parallel texts in French and English to give the student practice with speech and vocabulary. Erondell's claim that his book is the first "respecting or belonging properly" to women is misleading; women had had a substantial influence on the production of French text books since the appearance of one of the earliest manuscripts on the subject, *Le tretysz ke moun sire Gautier de Bi-belesworthe fist a ma dame Dionisie de Mounchensy pur aprise de langage* (1302). In the fourteenth century, French letter-writing guides catered to men and women of various classes with model letters applicable to their different interests, including such topics as advice on clothing, cookery, gardening, and care of the newborn; and in 1409 John Barton published his *Donait françois pur briefement entroduyer les Anglois en la droit langage de Paris*, with a preface addressed to "mes chiers enfantz et tres doulcez puselles que avez fam d'apprendre cest Donait."²

In the sixteenth century, women at the English court were famous for their skill in "strange tongues."³ Anne Boleyn, Katharine Parr, Lady Jane Grey, and Queen Elizabeth were all accomplished linguists who encouraged translation and the preparation of foreign language books, while Henry VIII's sister Mary encouraged and facilitated the first extended treatment of the structure of French grammar, *Lesclarcissement de la langue francoyse*, published in 1530 by John Palsgrave.⁴

The work that most nearly anticipates Erondell's is *An Introductorie for to lerne to rede, pronounce, and to speke French trewly* (1533), which was "compyled for the right high, excellent and most vertuous lady, the lady Mary of Englande, daughter to our most gracious soverayn Lorde Kynge Henry the Eight," by her French tutor, Giles Duwes. Published in two books, the work has a short grammar section, followed by practical exercises:

letters missyves in prose and in ryme. Also diverse communications by way of dialoges, to receyve a messenger from the Emperour, the frenche kynge, or any other prince. Also other

co[mmun]ications of the p[ro]priete of mete, of love, of peas, of warres, of the exposition of the masse, and what mannes soul is, wyth the divisio[n] of tyme, and other conseites.⁵

The *Introductorie* is a personal and even tender interchange between Duwes and his pupil. Designed specifically to meet the needs of the young princess Mary, it was sufficiently popular to go through three editions in fifteen years, appealing perhaps to those who considered French a social grace, rather than to an audience who needed the language to cope with the practicalities of business and travel.

Why then is Erondell so insistent that he is the first to write a French book “belonging properly to women”? In the first place he is anxious to differentiate his own teaching efforts from those of a potent rival—a man who is singled out in the preface as a writer who has ignored the special needs of women:

Ladies have long'd to match old *Holiband*,
That they with men might parle out their parte:
Their wittes are rare, and they have tongues at hand,
Of Nature full, their onely want is Arte:
Where former age regarded not their neede,
Before all others thou hast done the deede.

Like Erondell, Claudius Holiband was a Huguenot refugee. As well as running a famous school he had written two popular French primers, *The French Scholemaister* (1565; fourteen editions by 1668) and *The French Littleton* (1566; fourteen editions by 1638), and a French-English dictionary (1598), which he dedicated to Elizabeth and for which he was rewarded with a lifetime's pension.⁶ Erondell admired Holiband, prepared later editions of his works for the press, and borrowed from him extensively.⁷ It is in the face of this powerful predecessor that he clears a space for his own work by insisting that the extant French primers were inadequate for female students:

It is to be wondred, that among so many which have written (and some very sufficiency) principles, co[n]cerning our French tongue, (making Dialogues of divers kinds) not one hath set forth any, respecting or belonging properly to women, except in the *French Alphabet*: but, as good never a whit as never the better: not that I find fault with it, but it is so little, as not containyng scarce a whole page, so that it is to be esteemed almost as nothing: I knowe not where to attribute the cause, unles it be to forgetfulnes in them that have written of it: For, seeing our

tongue is called the *Lingua Mulierum*, and that the English Ladyes and Gentlewomen, are as studious and of as pregnant spirits, quicke conceites and ingeniositie, as of any other Country whatsoever) me thinketh it had bene a verie worthie and spacious subject for a good writer to employe his Pen. . . . I have thought good to breake the yce first . . . and specially because (that having bene honoured so far, as to read our language to some honourable Ladyes and Gentlewomen of great worth and worship), I have found the want of it.

The topic of Woman has always provided “a spacious subject for a good writer,” and a book for women is often motivated by the perception that an exhausted subject can be made new again if women can be discovered to need their own version of it. Market considerations apart, however, Erondell has another reason for insisting that he is not sharing a “spacious subject” but is rather the first on the scene. The playfully erotic tone of *The French Garden* is well conveyed by the slipperiness of language in this preface, which works to suggest that women who study are easily seduced—“of as pregnant spirits, quicke conceites and ingeniositie, as of any other Country whatsoever.” If the woman who studies French is in danger of getting pregnant, then the French lesson can be understood as an act of sexual intercourse with Erondell himself, and his insistence on being first would represent a wish to deflower his spacious subject (to break the ice, as it were). The combination of respect and contempt with which Erondell speaks of his female pupil (“a very worthie and spacious subject”) foreshadows his representation of women as being at once chaste and sexually available, an image that he will force his female pupil to enact as she follows him through the text. And in order for this rhetorical trick to be successful, it is necessary to be first on the scene, since dutiful innocence may be convincingly surprised by sin only once.

What did *The French Garden* offer its innocent readers, those women who intended simply to learn French? It is Erondell’s claim that he had “found the want” of a French book that he could use as tutor to “ladyes and Gentlewomen.” Certainly those texts that had appeared in the second half of the sixteenth century, designed for merchants, soldiers and travelers rather than for the aristocratic court audience served by earlier teaching texts, were male oriented in their choice of topics and were sometimes overtly, if conventionally, misogynist. In *Ortho-Epia Gallica* (1593), whose subjects include the Armorer, the Sergeant, the Marriner, the Slasher, and the Bragger, John Eliot presents an exclusively male enjoyment of the

freedoms of travel, one of which is the absence of women. There are no characters with whom a female student could identify: only a pregnant woman heard protesting as she is pushed out of the way at the Drunken Men's Banquet, and the landlord's daughter propositioned as she puts a sick man to bed.⁸ Holiband's *French Littleton* refuses to construe or acknowledge a woman who is independent or good, and its collection of golden sayings is filled with the witticisms of classical misogyny:

I pray you, how do you call in latin a good wife
Find her for me first, and I will tell it you: for according unto the
doctrine of Plato, one can not name a thing, which can not be
found at all.

Education designed for men inherits a cultural bias that, designedly or not, may hinder and discourage the female student. A woman reading in her French primer "Hearken well and print it in your mind: a good wife, a good goat, and a good mule be three evil beasts," or "It is not good to trust unto a prattling woman," may be deterred at the outset by a text that is hostile to her nature and that constantly reminds her that education is not for women.⁹ Under the circumstances, *The French Garden* is remarkable among the phrase books of its time for its willingness to consider a female audience. It is free from gratuitous attacks on the nature of women, it provides characters with whom a female reader can identify, and traditional female concerns figure prominently in the text, together with the vocabulary to enable a woman to name the things around her. The book's promise of the swift acquisition of a functioning knowledge, though a standard phrase book claim, also caters to women who may have less time to study than men, and encourages them not to be daunted by the task: "I have compiled this book for them of judgement and capacitie which may far sooner attain to the perfect knowledge of our tongue by reason of the cutting off of these overmany rules, wherein the students were overmuch entangled."¹⁰

One of the paradoxes of female separatism, however, is that it reemphasizes the division of humanity according to sex. The offer of a substitute educational program for women, reinforcing the idea that each sex inhabits a different sphere, may return to haunt the very people it was designed to help. When Fynes Moryson accused merchants, women, and children of neglecting any serious study of languages and "rushing into rash practice," he in effect attached the stigmas of class, gender, and age to those people who used efficient

practical guides rather than the more ponderous grammars.¹¹ More serious is Erondell's contention that women can find nothing to interest them in French books written for an audience that is not specifically female. *The French Alphabet*, the gender specificity of which is scorned by Erondell in his preface as being "almost nothing," distinguishes male and female interests only when it comes to clothes. (It includes a dialogue on "The Rising of Women," as well as one on "The Rising of Men.")¹² Erondell's aim to make *The French Garden* "incident . . . specially" to women is much more radical insofar as it assumes that their interests are separate from everything already dealt with in French books and that only certain topics will be relevant to them. Lady Ri-Melaine shows that classical learning is patently and comically useless to her in *The French Garden*:

What is it so farre day? O God! I went to bed yesternight so timely, thinking to rise this morning, at the farthest at 6 a clock: now I verifie in me the grave speeches of that great Philosopher the Emperor *Marc. Aur.* speaking of the unsatiableness of man-kinde, he said (among other things) the more I sleepe, the more I would sleepe. Go too go too, drawe the windowe curtaines.

Ri-Melaine constantly displays the redundancy of her formal education and its comic disproportion to the domestic scene, and instead of burdening the reader further with the vocabulary of travel and commerce, the text supplies her only with those things that will be useful in a life spent at home:

The first Dialogue, treateth of the rising in the morning:
wherein is a morning Prayer, and the names of women's apparell.
The second . . . wherein is a rebuke of slouthfulness.
The third . . . treateth of the education of Children . . . wherein is showed the care of a wife mother.
The fourth . . . is a conference betweene Gentlewomen, and the French Tutor.
The fift . . . nameth all partes of the body of Man, with the cloathes and necessities for a sucking Childe.
The sixt . . . reprooveth Idlenes, sheweth the duetie of Schoole-masters, rebuketh envie, sluggishnes. . . .
The seaventh . . . sheweth the welcomming into ones house.
The eighth . . . treateth of cheapening and of Sempster's wares.
The ninth . . . is also of buying and selling, nameth Mercers wares. . . .
The tenth Dialogue is a conference with the Goldesmith.

The eleventh . . . is of Table-talk . . . shewing the names of
 sundry fowls, Fishes, and Fruites.
 The twelfth Dialogue, is of the walke . . . of birdes, of fishing,
 of the Orchard, of the Garden, and of Flowers.
 The thirteenth . . . treateth of the going to bed, of Playes,
 nameth the Ladies or Gentlewomen's night cloathes, and
 endeth the whole Booke with an evening prayer, wherein is
 a prayer for the Kinges Majestie.

Men who learn French from Eliot or Holiband have their horizons broadened as they are prepared to travel; "Know you no newes? What say they from Barbarie; Italie, from Spaine and Turkie? Is there no good newes?"¹³ Women who follow the program designed for them by Erondell find themselves reinscribed in the traditional sphere of home and family. For them, to learn French is to reexperience the narrowness of the world.

In spite (or perhaps because) of its potentially radical subject and appearance, *The French Garden* rewards its female reader only with an enclosed space where her "natural" propensity to talk can be channelled into an acceptable form: "they have tongues at hand / Of Nature full, their onely want is Arte." The text is sprinkled with recommendations of humility, chastity, and contentment; here it is worth remembering a peculiarity of phrase books—that they do not just offer opinions and information for consideration, but require that they be learned and repeated. Whatever Erondell writes, he writes for a female student repeating aloud: "As for me, I love the Turtle, because of her conjugall loyall chastity." It is a literal case of putting words into somebody's mouth. The woman in *The French Garden*, as I argue below, has a troublesome and disruptive female body, but she does not have a voice and must move her lips silently in accordance with a script written for her by a man from within the assumptions of his patriarchal culture.

The French Garden opens and closes with a prayer. In the morning, Erondell teaches his pupil to give thanks for having passed the night safely, unmolested by spiritual or physical dangers. She is then to prostrate herself before her heavenly Father in total abnegation of her own worth: "We are so farre from being anything which might please thee, that we cannot so much as have any good thought or imagination, unless it be inspired into us by Thy Grace." Ruth Kelso suggests that while classical self-fulfillment was the ideal held up for the Renaissance man, Renaissance women were expected to cultivate Christian virtues of humble self-effacement; and certainly it is true that while the female student of French

offers up her morning and evening prayers, the characters in the male-designed French texts are trading on the Exchange and carousing in inns.¹⁴

One of the strategies that conduct books use to encourage female obedience is to represent women as being already simple, chaste, and obedient. This effective tranquilizer can be found throughout *The French Garden*, even infiltrating the grammar section, which Erondell adapted from *The French Littleton* by adding descriptive traits to the examples of gender. In *The French Garden*'s grammar the men have active, scholarly, and sometimes wicked attributes; the women are passive and invariably good (and incidentally often of a lower class). The following examples are taken from the section on grammatical gender, in which Erondell undertook to "set you downe heere how to knowe the Masculine from the Feminine—because it is necessarie in wel speakeing to observe the difference of genders":

O man, O boye	o faire maide! o wise woman!
The Lordes be gone a hunting	The Ladies are honoured
I speak of the Gentlemen	I speak of the vertuous Ladies
I have given to the Schollers	I have given to the Gentlewomen
The wicked men have killed him	The maidens have overcom'd him
Where is the King?	Where is my goddaughter?
I see him not.	Call her.
By or with the Lordes	By or [with] the maiden servantes.

In current debates about the nature of sexual difference in language, the presence of grammatical gender is sometimes used to explain the feminist intuition that language shows itself more tractable to men than to women. Monique Wittig, for example, holds that because men have appropriated the universal to their own use, a woman can only enter language "in a crab-like way," as a person whose identity is not absolute but relative, defined in terms of its difference from the universal. Although the grammatical gender system in Indo-European languages did not originate as a reflection of natural sex distinctions, once in place it readily served as a framework on which given societies could hang their prejudices, and became one more context in which discrimination against women is articulated and enforced.¹⁵ The grammar section of *The French*

Garden demonstrates how easily grammatical categories can be made to serve specific social assumptions. In keeping with his attempt to offer women a territory that is wholly their own, Erondell does not mark the feminine as a subset of the masculine, but instead completely separates the two spheres. The term chosen to match *King* is not *Queen*, but *goddaughter*; and instead of creating a female noun to match *scholler*, such as *she-scholler*, or *Lady-scholler* (which would infuriate a scholar such as Wittig), Erondell simply uses *Gentlewoman*. The result is that in Erondell's grammar the learned woman is not marked as something aberrant, nor is her presence hidden behind a universal masculine—instead, she is completely excluded from the world of scholarship and set aside in a place marked “women only.”

In spite of its promise, then, *The French Garden* is not a text that celebrates and empowers female separatism. Nor, however, is it a simple conduct book designed to inculcate chastity and obedience in women. By making a deliberately inappropriate combination of the notions of woman that were available to him, Erondell creates a radically unstable text in which women are represented as being essentially sensual and disobedient, even as they try to remain chaste and good. And it is this text, which looks as if it has been prepared for women, that is delivered into the hands of men.

The French Garden is not a private domain for women; it has spacious accommodation for male interests, and for at least one man who has made himself at home in its center. By his own account, Erondell lost his possessions and was driven into exile by the Catholic Guise, and he was conscious that as an alien refugee he had lost status as well as his rightful inheritance. In 1586, the year of his arrival in England, he published *A Declaration and Catholick Exhortation to all Christian Princes to succour the Church of God and the Realm of France*, in which he urged the crowned heads of Europe to intervene on behalf of the Huguenot cause.¹⁶ In 1609 he again attempted to gain the royal ear by dedicating his translation of Marc Lescarbot's account of the French colonization of Newfoundland to Prince Henry. Lescarbot and the nobleman in whose service he traveled apparently went to the colonies “to avoid a corrupted world,” and they found in the “New Acadia” a pastoral land where they could be free from injustice and ingratitude. In the letter to the reader that prefaces his translation, Erondell takes up the theme of ingratitude and makes it his own as he requests recognition for his service to the commonweal:

If a man that showeth forth effectually the zealous care he hath to the welfare and common good of his country deserveth praises of the same, I refer to the judgement of them that abhor the vice of ingratitude (hateful above all to God and good men) whether the said Mr Hakluyt (as well for the first procuring of this translation as for many works of his set out by him for the good and everlasting fame of the English nation) deserveth not to reap thanks. As for this my labour, if it be censured favourably, and my good affection (in undertaking the translation of this work for the benefit of this land) taken in good part, it will encourage me to endeavour myself to do better hereafter.¹⁷

The French Garden, Erondell's only nonpolitical work, represents his own "New Acadia," a place he has created to fulfill his own political and emotional needs. He appears as a character in the text, and although the tutor is an unauthoritative figure—servant as well as master to the women who employ him—he is gratifyingly popular with the ladies, who recognize his worth and defend him against male calumny. In the twelfth dialogue, when it has been established that the name Erondell means swallow, one of the characters is inspired to mention "a gentlewoman, which above all birds loveth a swallow, and hath no contentment but when she enjoyeth either the sight or the sound of it." Similarly, when M. du Petit Sens mocks the tutor for his plain clothes, saying "some gallant fellowe and brave withall would be fitter to teach Gentlewomen of so good a house, and of such qualities as you are," Erondell's female pupil Fleurimond springs to his defense:

Cousin, you deceive yourself. It is not the weed that maketh the monke, all they that are clothed in silke and are brave, are not alwaies the most sufficient. . . . would to God you would speake to him, he would tell you well enough that though he be in canvas, yet he is no sonne to a windmill. . . . Truly it is a vice which beareth too much sway in our time, that one doth respect more the gilding of the body, then the riches of the minde.

By thus inscribing himself within a women's world, Erondell finds a milieu in which he is powerful, attractive, and appreciated (and where, moreover, he can use his alien status as a teaching qualification and so give himself market value). But association with women is also effeminizing, and although it can soothe a male soul it can never legitimate it. At several points in the text Erondell looks over the shoulders of the women he is addressing to attract male attention. Thus, when Fleurimond defends Erondell's appearance she is also relaying a message to her more powerful male

counterpart, explaining to him what the tutor cannot get close enough to say for himself—that Erondell is a “sufficient” man, and well born, “no sonne to a windmill.” Similarly, although Erondell dedicates *The French Garden* to Elizabeth Barkley, he looks through her to her father and husband and the tradition of male honor and inheritance that they represent—a tradition in which a woman is merely a conduit for the continuance of an order that excludes her:

A Tres Honorable Dame, et parfaict Patron de vertus, Madame *Elizabeth Barkley*, Fille unique de feu tres Honorable Seigneur, le Seigneur Baron de Hunsdon, etc. et Femme de tres Honorable et digne Gentilhomme Messire *Thomas Barkley*, Chevallier de l'honorable Ordre du *Baing*, Filz et heritier de tres Honorable Seigneur, le Seigneur Baron de *Barkley*.

The French Garden's concern with male approval is also displayed between the twelfth and thirteenth dialogues, where the book written especially for women is startlingly fractured by a poem that Erondell wrote and dedicated to Thomas Norwood of Norton, “his most intimate and honoured friend.” He justifies its inclusion to his women readers on the grounds that they need to understand poetry as well as prose, but he also admits that he does not see how else he will be able to get the poem and tribute published:

Before I had purposed this work of Dialogues, these verses were devoted to the Gentleman therein named, whose great worthines well knowne to manie of the best degree and dignitie in this land, and unknowne to none of his countrie (the happier for his being) deserveth to grace the forefront of a far worthier worke then this, notwithstanding I presume so much upon his gentle and benigne nature, well manifested unto me, that (considering this book of dialogues respecteth women specially and that I know not if I shall ever have such opportunitie to publish to the world the earnest desire I have to shew my gratefulness for the often reiterated kindenes by him powred on me, the more to bee esteemed by reason I have lesse deserved them) he will not take it offensive to have placed hindermoste, that which is worthe to be placed with the formoste, I meane his worthie name.

Erondell apologizes to Norwood for not being able to put his name at the front of *The French Garden*, a place already (and more suitably) filled by that of Elizabeth Barkley; but at the point where he writes “to you dear Norton . . . I address my verses to you alone,” he effectively turns away from women, using their text as a vehicle for the representation and furtherance of male friendship.

Erondell's poem, which laments the ingratitude of the world and its blindness to true worth, tells the biblical story of the faithful centurion, the alien captain who proved to be more worthy than the native Israelites (Luke 7:1–13; Matt. 8:5–10). By enclosing this poem within a text addressed to women, Erondell dramatizes his own retreat from a world in which he is an exile, disempowered and denied the rights of full citizenship. But a woman's world provides a refuge for the disenfranchised precisely because it is not part of the more powerful male community, and as such it is not a place where a man will gladly stay. I suggest that Erondell sacrifices his garden retreat even as he creates it, offering it up to a male audience whose approval can legitimate him. Thus on the larger level, as well as within the text and its dedication, Erondell looks beyond the women he addresses to the men who stand behind them, juggling his audience in a visible display of the triangulation of male desire through women, and turning his female text into a gift for the men beyond.¹⁸

Of all the poems that appear in the preface to *The French Garden* thanking Erondell for his attempt, not one has been written by a woman. It is men who seem to have been so keenly appreciative of the book. Nicholas Breton's poem, "In Praise of Mr Erondell his Work," implies that *The French Garden* caters to both halves of the human race:

To profit many is a work of praise,
To profit more deserves a greater Grace,
To profit most doth most advancement raise,
To profit all deserves a worthy place.

In his letter to the reader, Erondell himself claims that "the generallitie of these Dialogues is such, that any (of both sexe) may reape great profit by it, by reason it maketh mencion of things belonging as well to men and women . . . and for the rules containned herein." Yet any man interested in an "easier and shorter method" of learning French could have consulted one of the many available French primers that would have been more suitable to his interests and that did not carry the stigma of being a woman's text. What *The French Garden* does offer its male reader, however, is the opportunity to imagine women in their most private moments, alone with other women. And as the curious male gaze penetrates female separatism, it violates its propriety and turns it into an erotic display understood to exist for the pleasure of men. Thus in one

blow the man who addresses himself to sexual difference creates pleasure for himself and other male readers from the sexual objectification of women, damages the cause of female education which he ostensibly espouses, and intervenes in the lives of the real women pupils of *The French Garden*, who are tricked into expending energy and innocence on a text that seeks to compromise them.

French occupied an ambiguous status in Tudor England. It had become the language of international correspondence and was considered a necessity for those looking for employment under the Crown. It was also the language in which Queen Elizabeth usually spoke to her followers, and by the second half of the sixteenth century it had become a fashionable accomplishment among the middle classes. Unlike Latin, however, French was not formally taught in grammar schools until the Restoration, and it seems to have been regarded as a social or practical skill rather than a scholastic achievement. French texts from this time, all agreeing that grammar rules should be kept to a minimum, emphasize reading, pronunciation, and conversation. Perhaps the insistence on French as a practical skill helps to explain why so many women were allowed to become proficient in it: for whatever reason, French seems to have been considered an effeminate language by the English—the *Lingua Mulierum*, as Erondell says.

At a time when English national pride often expressed itself through accusations that the French were effeminate, it was perhaps through a metonymic association that the French tongue was seen as a language of passion and deviousness, while English with its inflexible word order was understood to be forthright and virile.¹⁹ Vowel sounds in romance languages were assumed to be “feminine,” in contrast to the “masculine” consonantal sounds of Germanic languages, and in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries English writers insisting on the capabilities of the English vernacular always praised its “masculinity.”²⁰ Apart from bearing the stigma of effeminacy, French was also associated with sexual impropriety. The clichés that still pass for French national traits were already present in Erondell’s London, where the French were famed for their sexual prowess, as well as for their gesticulations and their fashions. Venereal disease was often referred to as the French disease, and then as now the French lesson was a euphemism for a visit to a prostitute.²¹

To learn French was then to show interest in a nation and a

tongue readily associated with impropriety. Presumably a man who learned French in order to trade or wage war would have been able to deflect such aspersions; they would have been avoided with more difficulty by a woman who learned French not for profit, but for delight. Apart from the overdetermination of French itself, the idea that a language lesson makes a fine opportunity for erotic dalliance was certainly present in the early seventeenth century. Shakespeare's Lucentio disguises himself as a tutor to gain access to the closely guarded Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1.1), a plan that occurs independently to Tranio, Gremio, and Hortensio. Hortensio disguises himself as Bianca's music teacher "That so I may by this device at least / Have leave and leisure to make love to her / And unsuspected court her by herself" (1.2.134–36). To further his plan he devises a text that has many of the properties that Eron-dell claims for *The French Garden*:

To teach you gamut in a briefer sort,
 More pleasant, pithy and effectual,
 Than hath been taught by any of my trade;
 And there it is in writing, fairly drawn

 "Gamut, I am, the ground of all accord:
 A *re*, to plead Hortensio's passion;
 B *mi*, Bianca, take him for thy Lord;
 C *fa ut*, that loves with all affection;
 D *sol re*, one clef, two notes have I;
 E *la mi*, show pity or I die."

(3.1.65–68, 71–76)

No wonder Katharine broke the lute over Hortensio's head when he "bow'd her hand to teach her fingering" (2.1.150). Hortensio's suit is unsuccessful with Bianca, for she has already been won by the delicate insinuations of her Latin tutor, who uses his lesson (from Ovid's *Heroides*) as a cloak for amorous intrigue:

Lucentio: Hic ibat—as I told you before; *Simois*—I am Lucentio; *hic est*—son unto Vicentio of Pisa; *Sigeia tellus*—disguised thus to get your love; *Hic steterat*—and that Lucentio that comes a-wooing; *Priami*—is my man Tranio; *regia*—bearing my port; *celsa senis*—that we might beguile the old pantaloon. . . .

Bianca: Now let me see if I can conster it. *Hic ibat Simois*—I know you not; *hic est Sigeia tellus*—I trust you

not; *Hic steterat Priami*—take heed he hear us not;
regia—presume not; *celsa senis*—despair not.

(3.1.31–36, 41–44)²²

There may have been special dangers to female chastity associated with language lessons in a society where conduct books were unanimous in recommending silence to women, where the disorderly female scold was one of the stock figures of popular literature, and where a woman's tongue, the female "boneless member," was often represented as being a potent sexual lure.²³ Meanwhile, it is in the nature of a language book to advocate speech and insist on its sensual nature. Where etiquette manuals advise the chaste woman to keep her tongue firmly imprisoned behind her teeth and lips and avoid opening the mouth to laugh or yawn, *The French Garden* has instructions on pronunciation that involve practicing with tongue and lips. These instructions imply that in the beginning the student of French will make unchaste movements with her mouth (which the teacher can observe as he corrects them):

In this sorte we avoide that gaping which wee should be forced to doe (as you may finde by experience) in pronouncing (a) or (e), which vice we abhoer above all other faultes.

The text invites its gaping student to join the skillful speakers of French who have learned to obscure the physical nature of speech behind a veneer of competence:

Observation; The curiosity of our Country-men (I mean the Nobilitie, the Scholers, and them of the best sort) is so great about the smoothnes of their language, that to avoid too much yawning, intermingle letters (not written, but taken in) in their speaking.

To speak the French tongue nobly is to slide over the impropriety that Erondell suggests is resident in the act of speech, but the beginner will be enmeshed in precisely that impropriety and will thus be exposed as being of less than "the best sort."²⁴

When Erondell wrote *The French Garden*, the idea of a woman's French lesson was already overdetermined, shadowed by the associations of impropriety that were attached to the ideas of women's speech, women's lessons, and the *Lingua Mulierum* itself. It is less of a surprise, then, that although *The French Garden* superficially resembles a conduct book, there is tension between the text's chaste precepts and its description of a life that implies their flagrant disregard. In spite of her own resolutions on the subject of

early rising, Ri-Melaine sleeps in. With her husband away at court, she finds nothing better to do than go shopping at the Exchange, where she swiftly spends an enormous amount of money, buying among other things ten yards of cloth of gold and a waistcoat that she owes as a gambling debt. At the goldsmith's, in spite of being made to say that a Christian woman does not care for jewels, she orders "as many of the fayrest Pearles as are heere, fitte to make a Carkenet," with complete disregard for their cost: "Here, there is a hundred pounds in golde, if it be not enough, let the Gold smith send his man to our house for the rest."

Returning home, Ri-Melaine and her guests indulge in food and wine at a feast that Erondell offers as the context for a list of rich foods; afterwards there is just time for a brief walk in the garden and some flirtatious conversation before it is time to go out to a dinner party. In the final dialogue, surprised to learn that it is already eleven o'clock, Ri-Melaine explains how she has spent the evening, and incidentally why she finds it hard to get up in the mornings:

We have been long at supper, then afterward we have had dancing, it hath behooved us to dance. Then came a Maske which made a fair shew. They played at cards, at Cent, at Primeroe, at trompe, at dice, at tables. The maidens did play at purposes, at sales, to think, at wonders, at states, so that we could come no sooner, but it is all one, We will sleep the longer tomorrow for amends.

In the literature of the "querelle des femmes," women are described as being either essentially good or irremediably bad, with little attempt made to mediate between the two extremes. This contradiction at the heart of the representation of women leads to a strange instability in the texts that take woman as their subject, as Catherine Belsey has remarked:

A discursive instability in the texts about women has the effect of withholding from women readers any single position which they can identify as theirs. And at the same time a corresponding instability is evident in utterances attributed to women: they speak with equal conviction from incompatible subject-positions, displaying an incontinuity of being, an "inconstancy" which is seen as characteristically feminine.

Belsey considers that the contradictions embedded in Renaissance representations of women functioned to deny them a coherent sense of self, but of course it is also true that it is only in the fissures

in the patriarchal representations of women that women might have glimpsed the possibilities of their own unruly power.²⁵

The discursive instability of *The French Garden* is generated by its reliance both on conduct books and on a particular convention of misogynist satire that represents a group of women getting together for private conversation. The women in these satires are usually shown commiserating among themselves as they air the social and sexual insufficiencies of their husbands, show themselves to be unfaithful, unruly, and self-indulgent, and make extravagant demands for the better treatment of their sex. *The parlament of Women, with the merry Lawes by them newly enacted. To live in more Ease, Pompe, Pride and wantonnesse: but especially that they might have superiority and domineer over their husbands* (1640), concludes with “The chiefe heades of women’s Lawes,” which include the right of each woman to two husbands, permission to “vex, perplex, and in any way torment them,” and the following provisions:

That women may twang it as well as their husbands
That women may feast, banquet, and gossip, when and where
they please.
That women shall have their husbands tenants at will, and that
they shall do the Knight’s service, and have their homage
paid before the Sun’s rising
That that man which promises a pretty mayde a good turn, and
doth not perform it within three moneths, shall loose his
what do you call them.²⁶

These demands are supposed to sound comically absurd, but if implemented they would effectively demolish patriarchy by granting women control of male sexuality. The women include the right of free speech and assembly “when and where they please” as one of the grounds of their power, and of course it is just this subversive potential in women’s speech that provokes texts like *The Parlament of Women* in the first place. However, although they are certainly written for men, and attempt to silence women by representing their speech as being at once dangerous and comical, such texts could surely be read as a subversion of patriarchy. They instruct women in a female solidarity that is defined by its disobedience to patriarchal rules and demonstrate that the attributes of sensuality that men like to pin on women could be seized by women for their own enjoyment.

I suggested in the introduction to this essay that *The French Gar-*

den could be read as a book that celebrates and seeks to augment the anarchic power of women by offering its female readers the vocabulary of sensual indulgence, and the image of an antiheroine who disobeys what she knows to be the rules of proper female behavior. Finally, however, *The French Garden* does not encourage female *jouissance*. For one thing, the women in the text are divided against themselves along class lines. Ri-Melaine employs a wet nurse for her baby son and gives voice to a masculine repulsion at the spectacle of breast feeding: "I pray you take heed to wipe well the nipple of your dugge before you put it in his mouth, for feare that there be any haire or other thing which may hurt him." At the Exchange, Ri-Melaine encourages Sir Love-Worthy in his frankly sexual appraisal of the sempster's maid:

Love-Worthy: Madame, will it please you to enter in this shop? This maid doth invite us to it by her tongue: which she hath as free, as any that ever I heard. *Ri-Melaine*: Yet she is scarce worthy your love, though reasonable fine and pretty, but seeing that you affect her, we will see what she will furnish us for your sake.

Here the attributes of Woman that a subversive female text would freely celebrate are displaced and understood as attributes of class difference. The ladies in the text are made to stand in opposition to their lower-class sisters, and it is only the lower classes who are represented as being in possession of a sensual femininity. Of course, it is one of the strategies of *The French Garden* to show that *all* women are hopelessly sensual and that gender is the primary category of differentiation in society; but by representing women as being aware of class differences, the text functions to prevent them from realizing their potential as a coherent group whose interests may be different from those of most men.²⁷

If *The French Garden* is not interested in celebrating with women the power of female *jouissance*, why does it furnish its student with the vocabulary of sensual indulgence? To some extent, concentration on the surface details of everyday life is a given of phrase books, but in those intended for men the speakers are travelers in unknown surroundings and have an excuse for constant inquiries into the very basic things of life: "where is the chambre pot? where is the draught? where bee the privies?"²⁸ The woman in *The French Garden* has gone nowhere, but there is no other language book from this period that monitors so closely the functions of the human body:

Give me first my combing cloth, otherwise you will fill me ful of haire, the haire will fall on my cloathes. I praye you, Jolye, rub well my head, for it is very full of dandrufe. . . . Do you not see that I want by buske? What is become of the buske-point? Let me see that ruffe. How is it that the supporter is so soyled? . . . Is the close-stooles basin cleane? Put cleare water in it.

Erondell's vocabulary for women forcibly identifies them with their bodies and the trappings of the domestic scene, an identification that cannot be explained by the fact that *The French Garden* is a practical guide: after all, women are not going to be traveling abroad, so why do they need to learn "practical" French? With whom are they expected to talk about their dandruff and their soiled clothes?

In *The Tremulous Private Body*, Francis Barker attempts to isolate the moment at which it became possible to talk about the subject self—that self that defines its authentic inner reality in opposition to an inauthentic exterior. According to Barker, Hamlet is ahead of his time in possessing an embryonic subject self, and so stands as a profound mystery to his peers, who do not yet understand that there is a part of the self that exists unseen and is not comprised within the "trappings and suits" of existence. The development of the subject self depends in part on the mind's triumph over the increasingly despised body whose functions are now kept a well-guarded domestic secret.²⁹ Under these circumstances, a male faction that wished to deny women subject status could not do better than to insist on their physical nature and their incapacity to look beyond the material circumstances of life. It would also not be surprising if the male subject self turned with voyeuristic interest to the materiality of women in order to savor a carnality that it was now expected to be above. Perhaps this in part explains the male delight in naming female things that is characteristic of *The French Garden*.³⁰

Erondell generates vocabulary for his students by making Rimelaine a woman who is vain, peremptory, capricious, and materialistic:

Where laide you last night my garters: take away these slippers, give me my velvet pantosies; send for the shoemaker that he may have againe these turn-over shoos, for they be too high. Put on my white pumpes, let them up I will have none of them: Give me rather my Spanish leather shoos, for I will walk to day. . . . give me my girdle and see that all the furniture be at it: looke if my

Cizers, the pincers, the pen-knife, the knife to close Letters with the bodkin, the ear-picker and my Seale be in the case.

The contents of her purse indicate that Ri-Melaine is a responsible housekeeper, a woman of high rank, and an unattractively functioning body. Because this list is without hierarchical syntax, she appears to hold each of these functions in equal regard; and throughout her day she exhibits the same tendency to turn from abstract thought to the material base. She breaks off a lecture on nobility to inquire if her sons' shirts are clean, switches the topic from the proper submission due to God to criticize her daughter's embroidery, and is interrupted in a diatribe against lying by the arrival of her guests. The effect is a display of shallowness, as if for women all things are of equal importance, and moral philosophy an ornament of which they are incapable of understanding the larger significance.

The fourth dialogue of *The French Garden* describes a French lesson that is hardly the model one might expect in a textbook. The lesson is hampered by the physical presence and incapacity of the women who would learn. Charlotte and Fleurimond spend considerable time arranging the tables and chairs; they have not memorized their lesson, they have mislaid their French book, and Fleurimond needs help to mend her pen! When at last she begins to recite her lesson she is quickly interrupted by the officiousness of her tutor, whose thoughts are obviously not on the text:

Speake somewhat louder, to th'end that I may heare if you pronounce well: say that worde again. . . . doe you not hurt your stomacke against the boord? Holde your booke higher, or els set it on a cushion.

When Ri-Melaine complains that her daughters are not learning French as quickly as they might, Erondell assures her that "They take as much paine as any other Gentlewoman that I know," but this is scarcely reassuring. The French lesson within the French lesson demonstrates that the physical inertia of women makes it impossible for them to concentrate on something abstract, and so reinforces the belief that is both assumption and conclusion of *The French Garden*—that finally women would rather concentrate on their bodies than on a text.

In *The French Garden*, the physicality of women is understood as a reason not to take their intellectual aspirations too seriously, but

it is also represented as the condition of the good woman who uses her body in the service of patriarchy:

“My Children, seeing it hath pleased God (the only giver of all good) who might have made me some base creature and of no dignity, to call me to that degree: I am a Lady to all, but mother specifically to my children, therefore the sweetest and most pleasant name that they can give me, is to call me mother.”

Here in her role as good woman, Ri-Melaine remains conscious of class differences between women but sees that they must be subsumed within the category Woman when that identity is understood to be reinforcing, rather than threatening, the patriarchal order. Once again insisting that each sex inhabits a different sphere, the text suggests that women do not care to be included in the complicated power relations of male society, but prefer instead to live outside in a classless place where membership depends solely on the possession of a female body.

The French Garden thus attempts to deny women political and social authority by representing them as bound in a female body that is in its turn circumscribed by the domestic scene. Since a woman's body is also typically the site of male sexual pleasure, the text not only reinforces assumptions that allow male interests to thrive at the expense of women, but also offers its male readers a more immediate erotic pleasure. The text produced by and for men but written in a female voice is a common feature in the pornographic writing available in early modern England, and it enables a man to possess a pleasing version of a woman while he himself remains invisible beyond the margins of the text. The male reader has the voyeuristic pleasure of uninvolved looking as he peeps into a secret place and possesses a woman's body with his look.³¹ The female world of *The French Garden* is offered to the sensual appropriation of the male reader in just this way. Moreover, since *The French Garden* caters to the serious female pupil as well as to the male voyeur, it involves the additional twist—common in modern pornography—of forcing a female reader to enact its fantasies of her. In obedience to their male teacher, Erondell's pupils must rehearse the sensualities of the text as they follow Ri-Melaine in her failure to be chaste.

The twelfth dialogue, “A Walk in the Garden,” plays out some of the tensions that have been generated between the male writer and reader and the female inhabitants and students of *The French Gar-*

den. Here the women walk in the company of men, as in one sense they have been doing all along. The midday garden is a garden of love, with fruit-heavy trees, shady groves, cooling water, and luxurious birdsong. When the company reach “a fayre fountaine compassed with small and great trees,” M. Ouyt-Aigu remarks that “it is the very same place where Diana was wont to bathe herself,” and suggests that if the women want to bathe the men will undertake not to look. In this rewriting of Diana story, the female power that so fearfully punished Actaeon for having penetrated its nakedness has disappeared, displaced by a narrative of male desire. The resulting vignette of female nakedness and male voyeurism, which represents female separatism as being merely an erotic temptation to men, is an image of the male interference in and manipulation of female erotic power that is characteristic of *The French Garden*.

The theme is elaborated when the company comes across a pond, which Lady Beau-Sejour describes as follows:

What a faire Pond there is!—how this little smal winde makes pretily the water to move: one wave foldeth her selef in an other, and the other overturneth an other upon the shore, the which goeth to rojoyen her self to her fellows, as not daring to out goe her limits.

On the surface, the pond is an image of traditional female virtue, the woman safe in her separate sphere, inferior, constrained, and content. But all is not as it seems; beneath the pretty surface of the pond there is a sinister lure—Lady Beau-Sejour is fishing. The image of woman as a pond fished by men recurs in Shakespeare’s plays in the context of adultery; in *Measure for Measure*, Claudio’s offence is “Groping for trout in a peculiar river” (1.2.83). In *The French Garden*, the terms of the metaphor are reversed, and it is the woman who is groping for trout, which is as it should be in a text where women act for the pleasure of men. The fish becomes the male heart and penis, as in Donne’s highly erotic poem “The Bait,” where the poet suggests to a woman that she go bathing while he stands on the river bank and watches the “amorous” fish being irresistibly drawn to her. As in “The Bait,” the men in *The French Garden* identify themselves with the fish and agree that there could be no better way to die than in the “happy hands” of Lady Beau-Sejour. Following male advice as she lands her fish, Beau-Sejour and the female pupil of *The French Garden* become ensnared in a series of instructions on how to bring a male to orgasm:

M. de Vault-L'Amour: I trust that the fishes will not be better able to keepe themselves, then so many brave hearts, whome the sugred-sweet and forcible bate of your good graces and rare vertues, do draw to himself. o happie hand! drawe, Madame, you have caught, but softly for feare the line do breake, for it is bigge. *M. Ouyt-Aigu*: o fish! thou hadst a happie destiny to be taken by so worthy a fisher: thou couldst never have a better end.

The one exception to the male enthusiasts of this scene is M. Cherelie, whose protests serve only to underline its overdetermination: “Good Lord! What business about a fish? God hath created fishes as other thinges, for the use of men, the best use wherein it is fitted is to dresse it well, and to eat it.”

Throughout the twelfth dialogue the men make overt references to the power of love, while the women attempt to remain quietly chaste. In a conversation between M. Ouyt-Aigu and Charlotte, the youngest girl, he asks her to choose her favorite bird from a list that includes the sparrow, symbol of lechery:

What bird would you wish most? . . . The Nightingale, the Lennet, the Turtledove, the Swallowe, the Sparrowe, or any other? *Charlotte*: I love not the Sparrowe, for it hath no pleasant tune. *M. O-A*: Yet so it is, that it is called the bird of Venus, which doth imparte unto you much of her influence, and you can no more be without love then the fire without heat. *Charlotte*: I love that, which virtue ordaineth to love. *M. O-A*: God forbid I should think otherwise!

Charlotte is told that however she may try to hide it, her nature is to be sexually attracted to men. By not accepting her modest reason for her dislike of sparrows, M. Ouyt-Aigu forces Charlotte to acknowledge her sexuality, associating her with lechery and then backing off to enjoy the spectacle. Impropriety thus originates with the man, but he disclaims it and reads it as an attribute of women. *The French Garden* operates the same sleight of hand, for a women who tries to use it finds herself in a world that is everywhere streaked with the traces of male presence and desire, so that anything said will be lewdly misunderstood, and a woman who speaks is already identified as immodest. Here one can trace the process by which male desire constructs its own image of the female voice, a voice that speaks a sexual language and is always saying “yes”; but by betraying his hand so blatantly Erondell does not intend to critique, but rather to implement the process of sexual objectification he describes.

The twelfth dialogue acknowledges the themes of lust that are threaded through the text in the implied presence of a male writer/reader of the female world. They operate even more strongly in the fifth dialogue, though there the tension is undramatized, since the woman is ostensibly alone with her baby boy. Under an educational pretext that “lists the parts of a man’s body,” Ri-Melaine engages in a close scrutiny of the male body, fondling its genitalia and admiring its prowess:

Pull off his shirt. Thou art prety and fat my litle darling . . . o let him pisse ah, little knave, you will shoue that you have a yard: his litle purse is not sluggish, it is a signe that he is in health. . . . His little buttockes are fleshie, he is so well fed that I can see no bones of his, his skin is so white and cleere that the veynes are seene: Oh! what little man’s thighs be these? He will have good legges.

In this reworking of the Freudian primal scene, with the discovery of the fact of sexual difference represented not as a source of fear to a boy, but instead as the source of pleasure to a woman (the oedipal fantasy of a mother’s desire for her son), Ri-Melaine and the female reader of the *The French Garden* plot every inch of the male body on the pretext of learning the equivalent words in French. We might ask why a chaste woman needs to be able to admire a man’s body in two languages, and I suggest that the point of reference is the male writer/reader who can envision the female pupils of the text rehearsing words of admiration for the male genitalia.

The French Garden offers women a separatist place in which to be themselves, but the space it provides them is entirely contained by the male world. By offering up the special needs of women to the voyeuristic appropriation of men it creates a place of sexual difference where every movement a woman makes is understood in terms of male desire. But the particular unkindness of *The French Garden* is that while volunteering (and indeed providing) a textbook for women, it uses their desire to learn as a pretext for the display of female unchastity. The same scene occurs in *Henry V*, which fulfills the promise given by the dancer who speaks the epilogue to 2 *Henry IV* “to make you merry with fair Katharine of France.” In the scene immediately following the French defeat at Harfleur, Princess Katharine asks her female companion for an English lesson. That the lesson is understood as an act of political infidelity is made apparent by the scene that follows it, in which the

French nobility are represented as considering themselves emasculated by their military defeat:

- Dauphin:* By faith and honour,
Our madams mock at us, and plainly say
Our mettle is bred out; and they will give
Their bodies to the lust of English youth
To new store France with bastard warriors.
- Bourbon:* They bid us—to the English dancing-schools—,
And teach lavoltas high and swift courantos;
Saying our grace is only in our heels,
And that we are most lofty runaways.
- (3.5.27–35)

Katharine's language lesson is both a political and a sexual betrayal of the men of France. Perhaps this is why her trust in a quick and practical method of learning English backfires so dramatically. The combination of her native accent, the unreadiness of her tongue to form new, strange words, and her capacity to repeat, parrot-like, sounds that she has not understood, lead her astray. Trying to repeat after her instructress the parts of the body, she produces sounds which are unchaste both to her French ears, and in the delighted recognition of the English audience:

- Katharine:* Je ne doute point d'apprendre par la grace de Dieu, et en peu de temps.
- Alice:* N'avez vous pas déjà oublié ce que je vous ai enseigné?
- Katharine:* Non, je réciterai à vous promptement. D'hand, de fingre, de mails,—
- Alice:* De nails, madame.
- Katharine:* De nails, de arm de ilbow.
- Alice:* Sauf votre honneur, d'elbow.
- Katharine:* Ainsi dis-je; d'elbow, de nick, et de sin. Comment appelez-vous le pied et la robe?
- Alice:* Le foot, madame; et le count.
- Katharine:* Le foot, et le count? O Seigneur Dieu! ils sont les mots de son mauvais, corruptible, gros, et impudique, et non pour les dames d'honneur d'user. Je ne voudrais prononcer ces mots devant les seigneurs de France, pour tout le monde. Foh! le foot et le count! Néanmoins je reciterai une autre fois ma leçon ensemble: d'hand, de fingre, de nails, d'arm, d'elbow, de nick, de sin, de foot, le count.
- Alice:* Excellent, madame!
- Katharine:* C'est assez pour une fois: allons-nous à dîner.
- (3.4.40–62)

It takes some time to unpack all the sexual puns uttered by the inadvertent Katharine. The first two words that she asks her teacher to translate, *le pied* and *la robe*, were used in England to mean respectively one who commits buggery (from *pied*, meaning variegated), and a female prostitute. *Foot* sounds to Katharine like *foutre* (to copulate), while *count* would have been recognized as *cunt* by the audience. *D'elbow* sounds like *dildo*, *neck* and *nick* were synonyms for *vulva*, and *sin* was a euphemism for *fornication*. Finally, *excellent* had lewd connotations, and was especially associated with buggery, as was *assez*, understood to mean ass-y enough.

Although even a word-conscious Elizabethan audience may not have caught every pun, it would certainly have been aware that the French lady's English lesson was actually a lesson in talking dirty. Although she realizes that male words are slippery in the mouth of a woman, Katharine repeats them in her enthusiasm to learn another language. Too chaste to say improper things before the men of France, she repeats them only to a female confidante in the privacy of a castle garden—and there, ironically enough, they are overheard by all England.

Katharine's unchastity, represented as being at once inadvertent and knowing, corresponds to the modern pornographic fantasy of a woman who has somehow been tricked into displaying her sensuality against her own will and without understanding or participating in its pleasures. Thus, although Katharine believes herself in a private place talking to a woman in French, the audience hears her repeating words that she knows are “non pour les dames d'honneur d'user,” and it is perhaps as a punishment for this that she is exposed in a London theater inadvertently confessing her sexuality in English as well.

It is worth comparing Katharine's English lesson with a similar scene in *Henry V*, where Falstaff's page tries to interpret between Pistol and the French nobleman who has surrendered to him at Agincourt:

- Pistol:* Come hither, boy: ask me this slave in French
What is his name.
Boy: Écoutez: comment êtes vous appelé?
Fr. Sol.: Monsieur le Fer.
Boy: He says his name is Master Fer.
Pistol: Master Fer! I'll fer him, and firk him, and ferret him.
Discuss the same in French unto him.
Boy: I do not know the French for fer, and ferret, and firk.
(4.4.23–31)

Here the incapacity to speak a foreign language is proof of the male student's sexual innocence. Of course the difference between Princess Katharine and the page is not simply one of gender; Katharine is humiliated because she is French, as well as because she is a woman. Throughout *Henry V*, misogyny is the enabling conceit that allows patriotism its voice; the charges of effeminacy leveled against the French would be meaningless except in a context in which it is understood that to be womanlike is to be inadequate. In the scene that promises "to make you merry with fair Katharine of France," both sides of the French/female metaphor are given prominence; the woman is discredited because she is French, and French is discredited because it is feminine; but it is the humiliation of women that provides the "merriment" of the language lesson and remains its most memorable message.

The French Garden undertakes the same eroticizing of female education and gratifies men by humiliating women. It reaffirms a woman's duty to be chaste, while offering the male reader a titillating scrutiny of what the text represents as female sensuality. In the figure of the female reader who may be imagined admiring the male body aloud, women are denied access to their own sexuality and at the same time discredited by a lewd impropriety brought to the text by the male reader. The textual creation of women for the enjoyment of men is of course not unusual, but it is especially cruel in a text that, dressed as if for women, turns out to be a male joke that leads women into an exposure that the male reader/writer may at once censure and enjoy.

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NOTES

Most of the language texts I mention in this essay are available in facsimile reprint as part of the series *English Linguistics 1500–1800*, sel. and ed. by R. C. Alston (Menston: The Scholar Press Ltd.), hereafter cited as "Menston." For a bibliography of early printed French language texts see R. C. Alston, *The French language: grammars, miscellaneous treatises, dictionaries* (Otley, West Yorkshire: Smith Settle, 1985). In quoting from Shakespeare I have used the Arden editions throughout.

¹ Peter Erondell, *The French Garden* (London: Edward White, 1605; Menston, 1969).

² William Biblesworthe, *Le tretyz ke moun sire Gautier de Biblesworthe fist a ma dame Dionisie de Mouchensy pur aprise de langage* (1302). John Barton, *Donait françois pur briefment entroduyer les Anglois en la droit langage de Paris et de pais la d'entour fait aus despenses de Johan Barton par plusieurs bons clerks du langage avandite* (c.1409), cited in Kathleen Lambley, *The Teaching and Cultiva-*

tion of the French Language in England During Tudor and Stuart Times (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1920), 12 and 32.

³ Richard Mulcaster, who held that there was no need to travel in order to learn languages, drew attention to female skill at French and pointed out that women learned at home in spite of “the infirmitie of sexe and sundrie impediments to a free mind” that he assumed to be their lot:

Our ladies at home can do all this, and that with commendation of the verie travelled gentlemen: because it is not that, which they have seene, that makes them of worth, but that which they have brought home in language and learning, which they doe finde here at their return. *Our ladie mistresse*, whom I must needs remember, when excellencies will have hearing, a *woman*, a *ladye*, a *Princesse*, in the midst of many other businesses, in that infirmitie of sexe, and sundrie impediments to a free minde, such as learning requireth, can do all these things to the wonder of all hearers, which I say young *gentlemen* may learne better at home, as her *Majestie* did, and compare themselves with the best, when they have learned so much, as her *Majesty* hath by domesticall discipline.

(Positions: Wherein those Primitive Circumstances be Examined, Which are necessarie for the training up of Children [London: Thomas Chare, 1581], 214).

⁴ John Palsgrave, *Lesclarcissement de la langue francoyse* (London: John Hawkins, 1530; Menston, 1969). Palsgrave began work on the book while he was Mary's tutor, and, he says in the preface, “had conceived some lyttle hope and confidence from his noble charge.” It was on the recommendation of Mary and her second husband the Duke of Suffolk that Palsgrave enlarged his manuscript and published it with a dedication to the king.

⁵ Giles Duwes, *An Introductory for to lerne to rede, to pronounce, and to speke French treuly* (London: Thomas Godfrey, 1533; Menston, 1972). One other text that could claim already to have catered to sexual difference in French is the trilingual edition of Giovanni Bruto's *The Necessarie, fit and convenient Education of a young Gentlewoman, Italian, French, and English* (London: Adam Islip, 1598). Bruto's text was originally written in French and Italian; in 1598 it was “translated into English by W. P. And now printed with the three Languages together in one volume for the better instruction of such as are desirous to studie those Tongues.” The *Education* is in the tradition of conduct books, a genre of advice book intended to help women cultivate domestic moral virtues; it is dedicated “To the wise and vertuous Gentlewoman, Mistresse Marietta Catanea,” though it is really an address to her father, Lord Silvestre Cataneo. Parallel texts such as this one were commonly used for the standard exercise of double translation. Although its topic is female education, however, Bruto's is not a teaching text as such: it has no section on grammar or pronunciation and was used only as a supplemental exercise for advanced students.

⁶ Claudius Holiband (alias Claude de Sainliens), *The French Scholemaister* (London: Abraham Veale, 1573; Menston, 1972); *The French Littleton* (London: Richard Field, 1597). Apart from the works for which he was most famous, Holiband had written two treatises on the declension of verbs (both published for the first time in 1580), a work on pronunciation written in Latin and dedicated to Queen Elizabeth (1580), and *Campo di Fior, or the Flowery Field of four languages, Italian, Latin, English and French* (London, 1593).

⁷ Erondell prepared four new editions of *The French Scholemaister* (in 1606, 1612, 1615 and 1619), and recommended any student of *The French Garden* who wanted more detailed grammar instruction “to helpe himselfe by the treatise that M. Holiband made thereof, as being the best (French and English) that I have yet seen.” Erondell and Holiband seem to have moved in the same circles and to have

had friends in common. Holiband dedicated *The French Littleton* to William Herbert, and it is prefaced by a letter from George Gascoigne, who became the stepfather of Nicholas Breton: both Herbert and Breton contributed commendatory poems to *The French Garden*. Similarly, *The French Scholemaister* is dedicated to Robert Sackville, the “sonne and heyre to the honourable the Lorde Buckhurst” who was the part author of *Gorbuduc*, while the “intimate and honoured friend” whom Erondell addresses in *The French Garden* is Thomas Norton, Sackville’s collaborator.

⁸ John Eliot, *Ortho-Epia Gallica: Eliot’s Fruits for the French* (London: John Wolfe, 1593; Menston, 1968). At the end of the first dialogue, which deals with the best way of learning foreign languages, Eliot does include a long praise of Queen Elizabeth (translated from Du Bartas).

⁹ Holiband, *The French Littleton* (note 6).

¹⁰ Bathsua Makin addressed the same problem in her essay on women’s education, recommending that women who wished to read Latin ignore *Lilly’s Rules*, usually used by boys, and turn instead to the more efficient *Janus Linguarium*:

If we should dance that wild-Goose-chase usually led, it would require longer time: ordinarily Boys learn a Leaf or two of the *Pueriles*, twenty pages of *Corderius*, a part of *Esop’s Fables*, a piece of *Tullie*, a little of *Ovid*, a remnant of Terence, Virgil, etc., and when this is done, they have not half so many words as this little *Enchiridion*, the *Janua* supplies them with.

(*An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* [London, 1673], 37. Available as a publication of the Augustan Reprint Society, no. 202 [Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1980].)

¹¹ Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary written by Fynes Moryson* (London: I. Beale, 1617), cited in Lambie (note 2), 239.

¹² N. G. De la Mothe, *The French Alphabet* (London: R. Field, 1592). De la Mothe was also a French refugee, and he dedicated the second part of *The French Alphabet* to the mother of Sir Richard Wenman in gratitude for the protection of the Wenman family from the ruin of his fortunes in France.

¹³ Eliot (note 8).

¹⁴ Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for a Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1956), 17.

¹⁵ Monique Wittig, “The Mark of Gender,” in Nancy Miller, ed., *The Poetics of Gender* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986), 67. See also Dennis Baron, *Grammar and Gender* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1986), 107.

¹⁶ Peter Erondell, *A Declaration and Catholic Exhortation to All Christian Princes to succour the Church of God and the Realm of France* (London: Edward Aggas, 1586). Elizabeth did send some military aid to the Huguenots in the early 1590s, though there is no evidence to suggest that she listened to Erondell in particular, and he seems never to have been accorded royal notice.

¹⁷ Peter Erondell, preface to Marc Lescarbot, *Nova Francia: Or, the Description of that Part of New France, which is one continent with Virginia*, trans. Peter Erondell (London: George Bishop, 1609).

¹⁸ On this point see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985). My argument here is indebted to Sedgwick’s description of the configurations of male “homosocial desire” in a patriarchy—that is, the bonds between men which are articulated through the ideology and practice of the traffic in women.

¹⁹ The French were accused of being foolishly effeminate in clothes, manners, and speech, affectations which were held to infect travelers and other lovers of things French. Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* opens with the English courtiers newly

returned from the Field of the Cloth of Gold; their manners have become so foolishly effeminate that a proclamation has been “clapp’d upon the court-gate . . . for the reformation of our travell’d gallants,” insisting that they return to the “honest” manliness of the English way:

They must either

(For so run the conditions) leave these remnants
 Of fool and feather that they got in France
 With all their honourable points of ignorance
 Pertaining thereunto

 renouncing clean
 The faith they have in tennis and tall stockings,
 Short blister’d breeches, and those types of travel,
 And understand again like honest men,
 Or pack to their old playfellows;

(1.3.23–27, 29–33)

²⁰ In 1614 Richard Carew gave voice to the conventional belief that while English is a manly tongue, French is “nice as a woman, scarce daring to open her lippes for feare of marring her countenance” (“The Excellencie of the English Tongue,” in William Camden, *Remaines of a greater worke concerning Britaine* [London: A. Islip, 1629], 37). The essay can also be found in Richard Carew, *The Survey of Cornwall, and An Epistle concerning the excellencies of the English tongue* (London: Chapman, Browne and Woodman, 1723). It was not only the English who felt that French was a fallen, women’s language: in 1683 the Swedish writer Anders Kempe advanced his theory that God speaks Swedish, whereas Adam spoke Danish and Eve was tempted in French (*Die Sprachen des Paradieses*, cited in Baron [note 15], 58). As the century progressed and attempts to establish and codify English increased, the need to protect the purity of the English tongue from foreign influences was often expressed in misogynist terms. The curious fear that the adoption of foreign words would somehow emasculate English is part of what lies behind Restoration allegations that women were destroying the purity of English (and the English economy) by affecting French phrases and fashions. Beyond this, French itself was sometimes represented as a siren trying to lure masculine English from the straight and narrow: in his introduction to the *Grammar of the English Tongue* (1712), John Brightland expressed the hope that the monosyllabic purity of English might be defended against “the Adulterous Charms of any strange Tongue,” especially from the polysyllabic vocabulary of the romance languages (cited in Baron, 66).

²¹ For example, in *Dr Merrie-man: or Nothing But Mirth* (London: J. Deane, 1609), Samuel Rowlands speaks of

Taffity Queanes, and fine light silken whores
 That have the gift of pox in their own pores,
 And can teach Frenche in half a day by noone
 As lecherous as a Monkey or Baboone.

²² Giovanni Bruto (note 5) also believed that the teaching relationship was hazardous to a female student’s chastity:

I will not yet altogether denie that a strange gentlewoman, unknown to me (yet you must not understand that I would permit the same unto my daughter) may reade in Platos discourses, the impudent actions, loves, and dalliances of Alcibades. They appoint her a master that is learned,

grave, diligent, and of honest behaviour, let it be so, yet may he corrupt nature, and shewe himself a man . . . and the provocations of lust, which are alwaies prompt and ready, by acquaintance and familiaritie with that sexe, at such an age, may bee sufficient matter to give him occasion to attempt such things.

Bruto is finely aware of the possibilities for sexual harassment that are endemic to a teaching relationship, but, predictably, his solution is only to suggest that women be prohibited from learning.

²³ See, for example, Ferdinand's misogynist aspersion in *The Duchess of Malfi* (John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. John Russel Brown [London: Methuen, 1969]):

Women like that part which, like the lamphrey,
Hath ne'er a bone in it
.....
I mean the tongue.

(1.3.54–55, 58).

The idea that the tongue is the female penis, or at least represents a woman's desire for the male penis, can often be seen underlying Renaissance prohibitions against female speech:

Truth is, their tongues are held their defensive armour; but in no particular detract they more from their honour, than by giving too free scope to that glibbery member.

(Richard Brathwaite, *The English Gentlewoman* [London: B. Alsop and T. Fawcett, 1631], 88). For an extended treatment of this theme see Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983), especially chapter 4.

²⁴ If the skilled woman was often considered a better speaker of French than her male counterpart, this was also understood to be a sensual rather than an intellectual achievement: "J'avoue que les Femmes ont les Organes de la Parole plus delicats que les hommes" (Guy Miegé, *Nouvelle Methode pour Apprendre L'Anglois* [Paris, 1685]).

²⁵ Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), 149.

²⁶ *The parliament of Women* (London: J. Oakes, 1640), Short-Title Catalogue 19080–5.

²⁷ Bruto (note 5) advised that the young gentlewoman be carefully segregated from women of a lower class:

Suffer her not in any wise (as a brute and uncomely thing in her) that shee be acquainted (which of many is not shunned) with maides, servants, and other prating women. . . . there is nothing more inconvenient for a young gentlewoman wise and well manered, than to be seene and heard among the maids, staying by the fire to heare their tales and prating speeches, and to delite therein.

The division of women according to class, with the ascription of chastity to the middle or upper classes and sexual availability to the lower classes, is a commonplace in conduct books addressed to women—perhaps because it is a way of ensuring that the expression of misogyny that often motivates such books will not offend those women who can afford to buy them.

²⁸ Eliot (note 8).

²⁹ Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984).

³⁰ Daniel Defoe shows a similar obsession when he uses a female persona to describe a woman's world in *Moll Flanders* and in *Roxana*.

³¹ For example, see Pietro Aretine's *I Ragionamenti* (London: I. Wolfe, 1584 [parts 1 and 2], and 1589 [part 3]). On the pleasures of uninvolved looking—voyeurism or scopophilia—see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16 (Autumn 1975): 6–18.