Gendered Temporalities in the Early Modern World

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Feminist queer temporalities in Aemilia Lanyer and Lucy Hutchinson

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Abstract
The multiple temporalities of Aemilia Lanyer’s ‘The Description of Cookeham’ and Lucy Hutchinson’s Order and Disorder model a mutually galvanizing rather than antagonistic relationship between feminist and queer theory. Lanyer’s and Hutchinson’s texts return to long-standing feminist concerns: female communities, the foundational stories of patriarchy, and a focus on desire both procreative and emphatically not. But the theories the texts themselves manifest do the work of queering—not as an alternative to, but in concert with—these feminist concerns. For Lanyer, this involves not only a focus on the eroticism of all-female communities, but also a lingering in a kiss oddly material and suspended in time. For Hutchinson, it concerns the way that the impossibility of procreative sex shows the needlessness of female harm.

Keywords: feminism; queer; lesbian; temporality; Aemilia Lanyer; Lucy Hutchinson

Our title responds to an adversarial moment in the fields of feminist and queer early modern studies: the long-standing charges that feminism's focus on bodies and the patriarchal family promote essentialism and heteronormativity and that queer theory’s lack of attention to gender and misogyny replicates masculinist norms. Of course, both feminism and queer theory offer more sophisticated theories than these condemnations allow: feminists have long understood both gender and the body as constructed, and queried any stable sense of identity; many queer scholars have undertaken thoroughgoing critiques of gendered systems that acknowledge the

1 Loomba and Sanchez, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.
workings of gendered oppression. But the antagonism remains. Following Lee Edelman’s 2004 rejection of futurity, feminist theory has sometimes seemed, ironically, like the past to the future of queer theory. The fraught theoretical debates around temporality and history (two distinct terms, as Valerie Traub notes) associate queerness with subversion and innovation, while feminism and its emphasis on women writers appear at least outdated if not outright reactionary.²

In the wake of the 2016 election, though, we with feminist and queer commitments have antagonists enough. Accordingly, we join with other scholars in seeking ‘a strategic collectivity that remains conscious of difference and incommensurability’.³ How can we understand the relationship between feminism and queer theory as not adversarial, nor substitutive, but as coexisting and mutually galvanizing? In choosing the terms ‘feminist queer temporalities’ we begin with certain stakes in these questions. First, ‘feminist’ and ‘queer’ modify each other, insisting upon their linked genealogies and intersecting agendas, but ‘feminist’ also precedes ‘queer’, in acknowledgement of the institutional and activist histories of the theories and their practice.⁴ The plural ‘temporalities’ stresses multiple understandings of time—a multiplicity of which history is a vital subcategory. We characterize history as a desire for the past, but also for the past to be past. Coupled with an awareness of historical distance is a desire to encounter that past, but only insofar as that distance exists. History organizes relationships among time, bodies, actions, and texts, but the literary texts—both, importantly, poems—we analyze offer several other ways of organizing those relationships.

The feminist and queer theory debates cluster around the relationship between gender and sexuality, on the one hand, and between history and temporality, on the other. The Attending to Early Modern Women conference itself, and our work here, provide a reminder of gender’s continuing relevance, although its initial importance in works like Traub’s Renaissance of Lesbianism, Jonathan Goldberg’s Sodometries, and Alan Bray’s Homosexuality in Renaissance England seems no longer at stake in queer critical discourse.⁵ As

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² Freeman articulates this: ‘Yet until recently dominant strains of queer theory have tended to privilege the avant-garde. At one point in my life as a scholar of queer culture and theory, I thought the point of queer was to be always ahead of actually existing social possibilities’ (p. xiii).
³ Loomba and Sanchez, ‘Introduction’, p. 7. See also Friedlander on a common approach, though with less emphasis on feminism.
⁴ See Freccero on the ‘queer feminist archive’ of texts (‘Tangents (of Desire)’, p. 91).
Ania Loomba and Melissa E. Sanchez note in their important new collection *Rethinking Feminism in Early Modern Studies: Gender, Race, and Sexuality*, this omission of gender arises from a particular critical standpoint: ‘We might hypothesize that the queer turn from historicism as well as feminism is an attempt to move out of the material and specific that both have (wrongly) come to represent.’ As Loomba and Sanchez reveal, the assignments of the material and the specific to historicism and feminism mean that sexuality (and especially queer studies) become the domain of theory. This not only downplays the theoretical interventions of feminism, but also obscures the knowledge that material forms and specific details can provide theoretical interventions.

The conflicts between history and temporality acquire their starkest forms in the distinction between the history of sexuality and queer theory. The historians of sexuality include Alan Bray, Valerie Traub, and Will Stockton, who emphasize the difference between past and present, stressing that ‘the relations of sex to time are the effects of a historical process, not the preconditions to history’. Queer theorists or ‘unhistoricists’ like Madhavi Menon and Jonathan Goldberg, in contrast, are ‘invested in suspending determinate sexual and chronological differences while expanding the possibilities of the nonhetero, with all its connotations of sameness, similarity, proximity, and anachronism’. One of the primary points of contention concerns teleology: queer theorists characterize history as teleological, and, after Edelman, tie it to a futurity embodied in the child of the patriarchal family. The rejection of child-oriented futurity often leads—though it need not do so—to a concomitant dismissal of feminist critiques oriented around the body and the family, thus reiterating the exclusion of gender.

Investigating multiple models of temporality helps disrupt this equation while showing that history need not be read teleologically. Historians of sexuality and queer theorists share definitions of multiple temporalities: Traub defines temporality as multiple, ‘the various manifestations of time’, and Goldberg incorporates this multiplicity into the term itself, defining ‘multitemporality’, following Michel Serres, as ‘lived time’. While cautioning that multiple temporalities are not wholly liberatory, Carolyn Dinshaw notes that ‘we can use a queer historical awareness of multiplicity to expand

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6  Loomba and Sanchez, ‘Feminism and the Burdens of History’, p. 22.
7  Traub, ‘New Unhistoricism’, p. 31. See also her *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*.
9  Traub, ‘New Unhistoricism’, p. 31; Goldberg, ‘After Thoughts’, p. 505.
our apprehension and experience of bodies in time—their pleasures, their agonies, their limits, their potentials—to contest and enlarge singular narratives of development’. In her discussion of the shared but divergent experiences of multiple temporalities, Dinshaw reanimates a vital emphasis on the ways that bodies experience Serres’s ‘lived time’.

By emphasizing ‘lived time’, our thinking joins with Diana Henderson, who highlights ‘gendered experiences and events’ rather than identities. ‘Hailing an author’s writings as “female”, “homosexual”, or even “queer”, Henderson argues, ‘does far less to disrupt normative hierarchies than does pursuing with care which particular discursive conventions and departures such an author might perform in a given time and place’. Harkening back to the acts versus identities debates that characterized early thinking about homosexual subjects, Henderson retains a focus on the ‘material and specific’ in ‘particular discursive conventions and departures’. In one way, though, we want to push back against her formulation: for the texts we analyze, ‘time and place’ are not ‘given’, but instead themselves performed out of discursive conventions. As Ari Friedlander notes, ‘just as there is no outside-text, there is no outside-time’. This is precisely what makes Aemilia Lanyer’s and Lucy Hutchinson’s ‘particular discursive conventions and departures’ useful to a reimagining of feminist queer temporality: all three terms are under construction in their texts.

Aemelia [née Bassano] Lanyer (1569–1645) and Lucy [née Apsley] Hutchinson (1620–1681) share certain distinctions as writers, although their biographies diverge significantly. Both wrote landmark religious poetry: Lanyer, Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum (1611), a volume of religious lyrics concluded by ‘The Description of Cooke-ham’, the first country house poem; Hutchinson, Order and Disorder (composed 1660s to 1670s), an epic retelling of Genesis that treats more of the biblical book than Paradise Lost does. Even here, differences begin to emerge: Lanyer published her original poems, the first seventeenth-century woman to do so; for Hutchinson, while the first five cantos of the epic appeared anonymously (often attributed to her brother) in 1679, the rest of the poem stayed in close-kept manuscripts until 2001. Confessional and social markers further distinguish the writers. Lanyer came from an Italian-Jewish family of court musicians, and after a

11 Henderson, ‘Tempestuous Transitions’, p. 64, original emphasis.
12 Ibid.
13 Friedlander, ‘Desiring History’, p. 11.
childhood spent on the margins of Queen Elizabeth’s court and an extended affair with a noble lover became pregnant out of wedlock. An unhappy marriage to another court musician, designed to mitigate the scandal, plunged Lanyer into financial and social difficulties for the rest of her life. Her poetry, with its desire for patronage, emerges from this context. Hutchinson, in contrast, often stands as the paradigm of the virtuous Puritan wife, a characterization that owes much to her biography (first published, to popular acclaim, in 1806) of her husband, the Parliamentary Colonel John Hutchinson. While this depiction downplays the boldness of Hutchinson’s thought—she also completed the first full English translation of the arguably atheist Lucretian epic *De rerum natura*—it does accurately suggest the strength of her happy marriage, which encompasses deep commitments both religious and republican. Amidst two different moments of political upheaval—the end of Elizabeth’s reign and the English Civil Wars—Lanyer and Hutchinson thus offer a diversity of religious and social positions within intersecting poetic genres.

The plural temporalities at work in Lanyer’s ‘Cooke-ham’ and Hutchinson’s *Order and Disorder* articulate what Elizabeth Freeman describes in *Time Binds*: ‘a kind of temporal transitivity that does not leave feminism, femininity, or other so-called anachronisms behind’.¹⁵ From an analysis of twentieth-century literature and art, Freeman argues for the usefulness of ‘outmoded masculinities and femininities from which usable pasts may be extracted’.¹⁶ Her theory of ‘temporal drag’ ‘treat[s] these texts and their formal work as theories of their own, interventions upon both critical theory and historiography’.¹⁷ Looking back to much earlier texts, we find a similar conjunction of self-awareness and critical resource in Lanyer’s and Hutchinson’s texts: each offers alternative models of temporality that critics can take up.

Abandoned modes, strategies, and investments offer a useful caveat to Traub’s characterization of historicist work on gender, race, and sexuality as a way to ‘catch modern formulations in their moment of inception, when their terms are still being worked out’.¹⁸ Traub’s focus on the beginnings of ‘modern formulations’ is important: it helps us to understand the world in which we live more fully. But diverse modes of temporality in early modern texts also enable us to catch formulations that never become modern—and

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¹⁵ Freeman, *Time Binds*, p. 63, original emphasis.
¹⁶ Freeman, *Time Binds*, p. xxiii.
¹⁷ Ibid., p. xvii.
¹⁸ Traub, ‘Afterword,’ p. 244.
these outmoded formulations still have something to teach us. They can help us, in Dinshaw’s words, ‘to contest and enlarge singular narratives of development’.¹⁹ The interpretive frameworks we identify within early modern texts are necessarily shaped by our methodologies, our ‘scholarly pasts’, and our ways of perceiving, but the early modern texts’ frameworks are not the same as our methodologies—and we are much more interested in the former than the latter.²⁰ The disconcerting, anachronistic temporalities in Lanyer’s and Hutchinson’s texts, which align neither with a clear teleology nor with recognizably modern forms, help us to navigate a way through the impasse between feminist and queer theory.

Both in choosing women writers as our subject and in foregrounding gender in their works, we align ourselves methodologically with the long tradition of feminist criticism. Lanyer’s and Hutchinson’s texts, and our readings of them, return to long-standing feminist concerns: female communities, the foundational stories of patriarchy, and a focus on desire both procreative and emphatically not. But the theories the texts themselves manifest do the work of queering—not as an alternative to, but in concert with—those feminist concerns. For Lanyer, this involves not only a focus on the eroticism of all-female communities, but also a lingering in a kiss oddly material and suspended in time. For Hutchinson, it concerns the way that the impossibility of procreative sex shows the needlessness of female harm.

The feminist and queer configurations of Lanyer and Hutchinson manifest through their poems’ multiple temporalities. Some of the temporalities operating in Lanyer’s ‘Cooke-ham’ and Hutchinson’s Order and Disorder are neither coterminous with their historical moment of composition nor with the historical moments described in the poems. For Lanyer, one of those multiple temporalities is a lingering in an action that cannot be repeated without destruction, a drawing-out of poetic time in order to maintain queer intimacy; for Hutchinson, it concerns a needless repetition of an action that does not take place, only for that non-action to generate queered reproductive time. Each of these temporalities, to a twenty-first-century reader, feels out of time: Lanyer’s female eroticism suspended in memory and the garden; Order and Disorder’s impossible dilation of reproduction resolved through divine intervention. These disturbances to plausible order are also instructive, reminding us to look for a time ‘when normal wasn’t’, as Karma Lochrie puts it.²¹ The anachronisms and recurses of Lanyer’s

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²⁰ Sanchez, ‘This Field,’ p. 142.
²¹ Lochrie, Heterosyncrasies, title.
and Hutchinson's times generate queer temporality, in Annamarie Jagose's formulation: ‘a mode of inhabiting time that is attentive to the recursive eddies and back-to-the-future loops that often pass undetected or uncherished beneath the official narrations of the linear sequence that is taken to structure normative life’. By going back to the past of early modernity but also back to the literary present of poetic texts, our analysis of Lanyer and Hutchinson both detects and cherishes the irruptions of a past that does not understand itself as past, that insists on its own recurrent relevance. The multiple temporalities of Lanyer's and Hutchinson's texts open up feminist and queer possibilities in the past, while offering new models for queer and feminist desires and politics in the current moment.

**The longing touch of the past: Aemilia Lanyer's ‘Description of Cooke-ham’**

Lanyer's 'The Description of Cooke-ham' (1611) marks its relation to time with its very first word: 'Farewell (sweet Cooke-ham) where I first obtain'd/grace from that grace where perfit grace remain'd' (1–2). Beginning with 'farewell', which repeats within the first ten lines, Lanyer frames her poem as an act of leave-taking—a farewell to both the space of Cooke-ham and the intimate female community it harbors. In Lanyer's actual or imagined memories of this country estate, only Lady Margaret (the poem's dedicatee, Countess of Cumberland), Lady Anne (Countess of Dorset), and the poet herself inhabit Cooke-ham's space. Following Barbara Kiefer Lewalski's influential work, scholars often focus on the poem's 'imaginative vision of an enduring female community' and how the three women's relationship forms the basis for Lanyer's 'seventeenth-century feminist voice'. The sense of female intimacy created among these women is bolstered by that between the women and the space itself, such that Cooke-ham's landscape becomes a key figure in the model of female community scholars glean from the poem. As we read about the 'pleasures' and 'delights' these women

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22 Jagose, 'Feminism's Queer Theory', p. 158.
23 All citations of Lanyer's text refer to Susanne Woods's edition and will be noted by line number in the body of the essay.
25 See Coch, 'An Arbor of One's Own?'
experience at Cooke-ham, however, the opening ‘farewell’ lingers, disrupting the poet’s ‘sweet memor[ies]’ with a reminder of their ending.

The leave-taking and dissolution of the female community glimpsed in that first ‘farewell’ occupy much of the poem, inspiring its frequent classification as ‘an elegy for a feminine, Christian paradise’. The first half of ‘Cooke-ham’ focuses on Lady Margaret’s arrival in the spring, and the poet recounts how ‘each plant, each floure, each tree/set forth their beauties’ to welcome her (34). Then, the poem shifts—‘sweet Cooke-ham, whom these Ladies leave,/ I now must tell the griefe you did conceave/ at their departure’ (127–29)—and Lanyer describes Lady Margaret’s farewell and the ‘cold griefe’ that accompanies her absence (194). Critical work on ‘Cooke-ham’ often references this linear temporal trajectory, beginning with spring and Lady Margaret’s arrival, and ending with winter and Lady Margaret’s farewell. According to this linear trajectory, Cooke-ham’s female community is ‘fated to disintegrate from the beginning of the valediction, its harmonies portrayed as joys of a passing season’. Mapping the loss of female community onto the poem’s seasonal arc, however, not only connects both to a linear temporality that ultimately becomes unproductive, but also suggests that the loss of female community is as inevitable as the changing seasons. Such readings echo the teleological impulses we aim to resist and, more detrimentally, fix Lanyer’s complicated model of female intimacy as ‘a phenomenon of the past which can be discussed only in retrospect’. By taking this linear trajectory for granted as the temporal framework of the poem, ‘Cooke-ham’s’ more complicated and nuanced temporal model goes unnoticed. Starting her poem with a glimpse of its ending, Lanyer rejects linear temporality in favor of a model where the ‘farewell’ can linger.

If we look past the seemingly dominant linear trajectory that culminates in ‘sorrow’, ‘cold griefe’, and the ‘desolation’ of female community, what alternative temporality might ‘Cooke-ham’ offer (188; 194; 203)? Rather than finding in Lanyer’s poem what James Holstun finds in early modern male-authored poetry—‘the passage of lesbian desire into an inarticulate silence’—we want to consider how Lanyer’s palpable longing for female

26 Beilin, p. 182. See also Hodgson.
28 Scholars often discuss the poem’s linear trajectory as an analogy to the fall of Eden. See, for instance, Beilin, Redeeming Eve.
30 One notable, recent exception is Bowen, who in ‘Rape of Jesus’ unpacks the political subconscious of Lanyer’s text and argues that ‘the paradox of the liberation in the past that remains in the future [...] is part of the story Salve Deus wants to tell’ (pp. 109–10).
intimacy becomes legible as a temporal structure that insists on the past's recurrent relevance.31 ‘Cooke-ham’ is saturated with and structured by longing, in Freeman's sense that ‘produces modes of both belonging and “being-long,” or persisting over time’.32 Lanyer's longing for ‘an enduring female community’, in Lewalski's influential phrase, suggests a future that looks askance at the barren, unproductive landscape represented by the poem's dominant narrative.33 At the same time as that longing invites us to consider a more vital future, Lanyer's longing for the past and the heightened materiality of her memories insist that we attend to these lapsed experiences. Lanyer's constant turning back demonstrates her desire for a narrative of female community—a feminist herstory—and her desire for the past itself, for the time and space of those earlier moments. Lanyer's longing becomes most palpable in perhaps the most critically well-trodden moment of this poem: Lady Margaret's farewell kiss to the 'stately tree'. The tree kiss has garnered much critical interest, particularly since Elaine Beilin labeled it ‘the single dramatic event of the poem’.34 In an act of scholarly lingering, we return to the kiss in order to consider how longing becomes central to the poetic structure of Lanyer's memories and the desires that emerge within them.

In the final movement of this poem, Lanyer recounts how the Countess gives the oak tree a 'chaste, yet loving kisse' as she says farewell to the 'sad creatures' of Cooke-ham's landscape.

Forgetting not to turne and take your leave
Of these sad creatures, powrelesse to receive
Your favour, when with griefe you did depart,
[. . . . . . . . . .]
But specially the love of that faire tree,
The first and last you did vouchsafe to see:
In which it pleas'd you oft to take the ayre,
With noble Dorset, then a virgin faire:
Where many a learned Booke was read and skand
To this faire tree, taking me by the hand,
You did repeat the pleasures which had past,
Seeming to grieve they could no longer last.

32 Freeman, Time Binds, p. 13.
34 Beilin, Redeeming Eve, p. 205.
And with a chaste, yet loving kisse tooke leave,
Of which sweet kisse I did it soone bereave:
Scorning a senseless creature should possesse
So rare a favour, so great happinesse.
No other kisse it could receive from me,
For feare to give backe what it tooke of thee:
So I ingratefull Creature did deceive it,
Of that which you vouchsaft in love to leave it.

((151–53; 157–72))

Lady Margaret’s kiss takes on a heightened materiality in Lanyer’s representation—the ‘chaste, yet loving kiss’ is something the poet can steal from the tree’s surface. In these lines, Lanyer simultaneously offers a material, embodied account of both women kissing the ‘stately oak’ and an immaterial, elusive gesture of desire. Within ‘Cooke-ham’s’ linear narrative, the tree kiss functions as a temporal rupture between the intimacy preceding this moment, and the solitude that permeates its aftermath. Before the tree kiss, Lanyer depicts a vibrant female community, reflecting how Lady Margaret would often ‘take the ayre’ near the tree with ‘noble Dorset’ (159–60). Just before the kiss, Lady Margaret takes the poet ‘by the hand’ and leads her to the tree where they ‘repeat the pleasures which had past’ (162–63). Notably, Lanyer emphasizes that the women’s past pleasures are ‘repeat[ed]’, not merely recounted verbally or remembered fondly. Within the act of leave-taking, and ‘seeming to grieve’ that their pleasures ‘could no longer last’, Lady Margaret and our poet enact a ‘temporal transitivity’ that pulls their past into their present.35 After the tree kiss, these scenes of intimacy shift into scenes of ‘cold griefe’ as the poet and tree are left alone (194). The tree becomes a ‘senseless creature’, the poet an ‘ingratefull creature’ as she deprives the tree of the kiss and leaves it ‘most forlorne’ (175). Coinciding with the end of ‘pleasures past’ and the start of Lady Margaret’s absence from Cooke-ham, the glimpse of homoerotic desire evident in the kiss exchange functions as the fulcrum that shifts the scene of female intimacy and community into one of solitude.

Left unnoted by an account of the tree kiss within ‘Cooke-ham’s’ linear trajectory is the strange temporality of this moment, and how that temporality frames its elusive erotics. As a material intermediary between the touching of lips, the tree necessitates a temporal delay in the bodily workings of desire. Thus, the heightened ‘temporal drag’ of this episode becomes inextricable

from the somatic desire contained within these lines. The somatic desire the poet demonstrates as she steals the kiss queers the poem’s feminist impulses. As we witness the poet’s longing not just for an intimate female sanctuary, but also for bodily contact with Lady Margaret, the tree kiss becomes a poetic rendering of what Carla Freccero calls ‘femininity’s queer relation to touch’. The poet’s kiss is ‘non- but not anti-normative’, both the culmination of her desperate longing to belong within Cooke-ham’s female community, and a glimpse across time at a possible gesture of homoerotic desire. After this briefest glimpse of unfulfilled homoerotic desire, Lanyer describes the solitude that follows as a barrenness: the arbors and trees ‘look bare and desolate’, ‘green tresses’ turn to ‘frosty gray’ (193), and the birds ‘neither sing, nor chirp’, but instead stand on ‘some bare spray’ and ‘warble forth their sorrow’ (186–68). This is, as Beilin observes, ‘an unregenerate world, filled with images of death’.

The bleak future these descriptions outline, though, is constantly tempered by Lanyer’s palpable longing for the past, manifested poetically in her memories of the estate. Throughout ‘Cooke-ham’, the lingering impulse presses back against the linear time of the tree kiss and its function as a rupture between past and present. As the poet moves into her account of Lady Margaret’s farewell to the tree, the recounted memories of a deeper past intrude on the Countess’s farewell: memories of Margaret and Lady Anne reading beneath the tree, of Anne’s days as a ‘virgin faire’, and of the repeated past ‘pleasures’ between Margaret and the poet. Past and present seem to run together as Lanyer presents coterminous scenes from then and now. Lanyer lingers narratively within these memories, unfolding the successive kisses over the course of eleven lines, and dilating the poetic time of the tree kiss episode. In the lines surrounding Lady Margaret’s kiss, we witness both the brutal consequences of this event as it exists within linear time and the poet’s desire to delay that linear momentum, lingering within the pleasures afforded by nonlinear temporality and an ever-present past.

The present participle verb clauses at the start, middle, and end of the tree kiss sequence formally enact these dual temporal impulses, muddling our sense of linear chronology and drawing out the action occurring in these lines. Lanyer uses this formal technique throughout ‘Cooke-ham’, but the concentration of participle clauses here takes on a heightened significance because they serve as a structuring mechanism for the poem’s most explicit

36 Ibid., p. 62.
38 Ibid., p. 99.
39 Beilin, Redeeming Eve, p. 206.
gesture of desire. For instance, in the line where Margaret leads the poet to the tree—‘to this faire tree, taking me by the hand’—the present participle ‘taking’ seems to function as a verb describing the Countess’s action, but because of its position in the line it acts as an adjective modifying the initial clause. As both verb (driving the action forward) and adjective (looking back to modify a previous utterance) this specific moment of female bodily contact hovers syntactically between then and now. The syntactical transformation of an active verb into a lingering adjective formally enacts the poet’s longing to linger over this moment, and longing emerges as both the desire to belong and the desire to be long. Rather than an easy chronological movement, these lines offer a model of temporal drag, ‘retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present’.  

The dual temporal impulses at work in the tree kiss—the linear momentum of Lady Margaret’s leave-taking and the poet’s palpable desire to linger within the moments before the leave-taking—perform a temporal rupture in the service of temporal lingering. In the midst of the poem’s recounted memories and the constant turning back to past moments, we witness the poet’s abrupt withholding: ‘no other kisse it could receive from me,/ for feare to give backe what it tooke of thee’ (169–70). An abrupt end to the repetition and turning that structure the rest of Lady Margaret’s leave-taking, here the poet withholds her kiss from the tree—she refuses to repeat, to turn back and kiss the tree again—in order to maintain the affective structures of Cooke-ham’s female community. The temporal rupture of the tree kiss becomes a way to linger in the elusive erotics of this memory. The homoerotic impulses of this moment and the temporal lingering the tree kiss enacts in both its content and its form offer a model of feminist queer temporality contingent upon desiring bodies and the desire to hover between past and present.

When scholars argue for a narrative of queer intimacy in Lanyer’s ‘Cooke-ham’, they frequently read the tree kiss as a material locus of queer desire. Read as a lesbian ‘substitute for the phallus’ or, more explicitly, as a ‘dildo’, the poem’s rendering of queer desire consequently remains within this singular moment. 41 Within the strange temporality of the tree kiss episode, we argue in contrast, the tree pulls desire into queer time rather than functioning as an object of queer desire. The temporal structure necessitated by this material intermediary, coupled with Lanyer’s narrative lingering in this moment, refigures bodily desire. Reading the consecutive touch of Lady Margaret’s and the poet’s lips on the tree as a moment of queer intimacy ‘privileg[es]

40 Freeman, Time Binds, p. 62.
41 Goldberg, Desiring Women, p. 40; Greenstadt, p. 77.
presence where no presence is to be found’, as Freccero cautions against.42 Rather, Lanyer’s material memory of the tree kiss figures ‘a non-touching of what is in effect untouchable’.43 Precisely by not touching the tree again, Lanyer preserves desire in a state of longing.

The link between the tree kiss episode and the poem’s articulation of longing gains traction when read alongside a much less explicit moment of desire and tangential bodily contact later in the poem. Well after the Countess seems to have left the space, Lanyer includes two lines that turn back to the moment of leave-taking, again lingering within the specificity of that moment when the embodied, vibrant space becomes empty. ‘Each brier, each bramble, when you went away’, she recounts, ‘caught fast your clothes, thinking to make you stay’ (197–98). As nature catches Lady Margaret’s clothing, Lanyer echoes her highly material rendering of the kiss with a materialization of longing. The fact that this moment comes after the tree kiss, after the moment in the poem most saturated with longing, invites us to think about the erotics of this later instance of bodily contact, particularly the erotics of ‘catching’ or grasping. This is not quite a ‘tangential touch’ as Freccero defines the phrase—‘not a secure conjoining of body parts, not a hand in hand, but a glancing, feather-light’44—but instead a touch more barbed and demanding. In the ‘catching’ grasp of nature on the Countess’s clothes, the past and same-sex desire refuse to relinquish their hold.

Measurably different than the ‘faire greene leaves’ and lush ‘fruits’ of Cooke-ham’s landscape at the poem’s opening, ‘briers’ and ‘brambles’ are the things of a dead landscape. Yet, as they catch and grasp at the Countess, even this barren landscape becomes activated by the poet’s longing. In these final lines, the poet is doubly out of time—out of time because she lingers in this anachronistic past and out of time to keep Lady Margaret in the space in order to maintain their intimacy. Figured as briers and brambles, the clutch of anachronistic temporality here is both stinging and unavoidable. Unlike the oak tree, which holds particular meaning and memories for Lady Margaret and the poet, Cooke-ham’s briers and brambles will catch on anyone brushing past them. Reading this as a universalizing final gesture of longing reveals the possibilities beneath the ‘dust and cobwebs’ of ‘Cooke-ham’s’ closing lines (202). As Lady Margaret takes her final farewell, and the briers and brambles catch fast to her clothes, a piece of Cooke-ham lingers with her.

42 Freccero, ‘Tangents (of Desire)’, p. 94.
43 Ibid., p. 93.
44 Ibid., p. 94.
The endangerment of the matriarch: Lucy Hutchinson's *Order and Disorder*

If the tree kiss of Lanyer’s ‘Cooke-ham’ figures a desire that lingers without action in order not to erase the moment of desire, the Abraham and Sarah episodes of Lucy Hutchinson’s biblical epic *Order and Disorder* (1679) repeat in response to a desire that seems to work to no purpose at all. In two episodes of what biblical scholars call ‘the endangerment of the matriarch’, Genesis 12.10–20 and Genesis 20, Abraham pretends that Sarah is only his sister, not his wife, upon their arrival in a new country, due to his fear that the rulers will kill him in order to possess Sarah. 45 Ironically, neither of these episodes is necessary: the monarchs both desire Sarah but do not claim her, in rare instances of good kingly behavior in Hutchinson’s epic. What purpose do they serve, then, in the larger structure of the biblical poem and its retelling of Genesis?

Scholars of Hutchinson identify patterns in her biblical epic that speak to these concerns. Elizabeth Scott-Baumann and Sarah C. E. Ross emphasize the ways that *Order and Disorder*’s transformation of the biblical text and genre, respectively, create alternative temporalities, whether through the exemplary application of glosses or through the use of ‘a meditational mode of biblical verse to enter into digressive, analogic, and emblematic meditations on contemporary British history’. 46 Both Scott-Baumann and Ross stress Hutchinson’s engagement with contemporary politics in her use of biblical history and its applications. As Erin Murphy writes, ‘the unarticulated connection between the marginal text and the main text allows for a simultaneous representation of historically distinct moments in time, which emphasizes the non-linear quality of sacred history.’ 47 Murphy’s foregrounding of the ‘non-linear quality’ of certain kinds of biblical time itself (primarily typology, in Murphy’s analysis) highlights the important point that both biblical time and the use Hutchinson makes of it in her poem model multiple temporalities. 48 Murphy further links Hutchinson’s temporal manipulations to reproduction. 49 Our work builds upon all these

45 The motif repeats, with a few alterations, when Abraham and Sarah’s son Isaac tells the same lie about his wife Rebecca (Gen 26.6–11).
47 Murphy, *Familial Forms*, p. 128.
48 For further discussions of Hutchinson’s relationship to exemplarity and typology, see Anderson, ‘Lucy Hutchinson’s Sodom’, and Shook, ‘Pious Fraud’.
49 Murphy, *Familial Forms*, p. 123. For Hutchinson’s maternity challenging patriarchy, see Miller, *Engendering the Fall*, pp. 107–35. For Hutchinson elevating intellectual concerns above
scholars’ insightful arguments, while considering something they do not: the way that these temporalities and their peculiar reproductive time enable configurations not only feminist but also queer.

What can ‘the endangerment of the matriarch’ tell us about the relationship between feminist and queer theories? The answers to this question speak to some of the central affordances of Hutchinson for feminist queer temporalities: the repetition of the episodes, the introduction of unsettling allusions into the text, and the explicit didactic framing of the poem. In their willingness to risk a woman’s physical safety and bodily integrity in order to preserve a man’s life and avoid confronting male desires, the episodes highlight some of the central patriarchal issues that feminism critiques. At the same time, the episodes introduce both elements critiqued by queer theory and patterns usually taken as queer. The former concerns the reproductive futurity that has shaped much queer theory since Edelman’s *No Future*: Abraham and Sarah offer a peculiar—a queer—take on this, since God delays the conception of their long-promised child past ordinary reproductive time (the 90-year-old Sarah becomes pregnant with Isaac after the second subterfuge). Abraham and Sarah’s disrupted reproduction links them to queer sexuality, as do the repeated haltings of the rulers’ desire for Sarah—desire rendered unproductive, unreproductive. The fact that Abraham and Sarah are half-siblings also contravenes modern reproductive wisdom. Two factors combine to straighten out this queerness, God’s blessing and the temporal distance of the biblical text.

Hutchinson, however, refuses to tidy up the incidents by enfolding them within Abraham’s blessing from God. The first episode, at Canto 11.41–90, frames the subterfuge as a failing of Abraham’s. The narrator begins ‘But there his former resolution failed,/ And fear of death above his faith prevailed.’ Following a long description of Abraham’s steadfast faith in God throughout dire circumstances, these lines clearly present the choice to conceal the marriage as indicating the limits of Abraham’s ability to trust God: his faith flounders on the double test of the ‘lustful men’ and Sarah’s beauty (OD 11.47). Despite the narrator’s criticism, Hutchinson’s

50 Unlike the biblical text, which leaves open the possibility that Abraham lies about Sarah being his sister to excuse his behavior, Hutchinson reiterates their sibling relationship in both episodes (NOAB Gen 20.12, n.; OD 11.44–47, 14.213–17).

51 In contrast, see Wilcher, ‘Lucy Hutchinson and Genesis’ (p. 36), who reads Hutchinson as justifying Abraham’s behavior.

52 OD 11.41–42. All citations of Hutchinson’s text refer to David Norbrook’s edition and hereafter will be noted by canto and line numbers in the body of the essay.
literary emphases at first make Abraham’s choice look correct. The poem describes Sarah’s effect on the pharaoh:

> Upon her looks he feasted his glad sight
> And drunk down love’s infection with delight.
> The more she saw him burn, the more she blazed,
> For blushes which her guilty fear had raised
> The lustre of her beauty did augment
> And more attractions to his eyes present.

*(OD 11.61–66)*

The passage vividly depicts Sarah’s danger at court, with its language of ‘love’s infection’, ‘burn[ing]’, and ‘blaz[ing]’. The echoes of rape narratives, like Lucretia’s, in which chaste beauty spurs desire, further heighten this effect, suggesting that the reader knows how the story will end. Importantly, though, the ‘blushes’ that inflame desire originate not in maidenly chastity (though Sarah is chaste), but rather in ‘her guilty fear’ due to the concealment. The scheme designed to keep Abraham safe—he worries that ‘I shall be killed that they may seize on thee’—threatens Sarah *(OD 11.50)*. The concealment not only creates the opportunity for desire, but also renders the body itself desirable.

While the vividness of the threat to Sarah almost makes Abraham’s actions seem justifiable, the pharaoh’s surprisingly honorable behavior reveals their superfluity. Although ‘with rage as erst with love he burned’, the pharaoh nevertheless contents himself with a sharp verbal rebuke: “What madness,” said he, “did thy thoughts inspire/ To kindle in me this unquenched desire?” *(OD 11.82–84)*. In an epic riddled with corrupt kings (with even Noah chastised for drunkenness), the pharaoh acts ethically, not only releasing the couple without punishment but also letting them retain their wealth.\(^53\) The language shows the traces of desire’s intensity, with ‘kindle’ recalling the burning of the previous passage and the alliterative line “lovely object of my lawless love” heightening the formal parallels to other narratives in which men behave dishonorably *(OD 11.83, 90)*. The pharaoh’s very reasonableness, however, casts the motivation for the entire episode into disarray: more clearly than ever, it seems, this subterfuge arises from Abraham’s fear and lack of faith.

\(^{53}\) Norbrook, ‘Order’ (pp. xl–xli), cites Abraham as an exception to Hutchinson’s critique of monarchs.
It is all the more surprising, then, that Abraham repeats his actions in the second endangerment of the matriarch episode. The much longer second episode compresses the development of desire, the primary subject of the first episode: ‘Abimelech the king her beauty fired:/ But not a common love within him burned,/ The excess of this into a fever turned’ (OD 14.32–34). Briefly evoking the earlier episode in the shared language of fire and burning, the second story focuses on two elements: an extended description of the slumber in which Abimelech learns of his error, and an exploration of the two men’s responsibility for their actions (unlike the focus on Sarah’s bodily guilt in the first episode).

The allegory of sleep, like the evocation of rape narratives in the first episode, introduces a literary delay into the biblical narrative. The sleep passage closely parallels and sometimes simply translates Ovid’s Metamorphoses 11.592–625 (OD 14.43–85). Toward the end of the interposition, Hutchinson introduces the idea of desire, which does not occur in this passage in Ovid: sleep, the messenger declares, ‘thy pleasing charms the vexèd senses bind,/ Thou calm’st the rages of unquenched desires’ (OD 14.80–81). Further expanding Ovid, Hutchinson catalogues sleep’s effect upon ‘the student’, ‘industrious matrons’, and ‘the eager gazing lover’, among others (OD 14.109, 114, 118). Hutchinson also incorporates an Ovidian figure from another metamorphosis into this one: ‘Sad Philomel abruptly ceased her songs/ And, sleeping, lost the memory of her wrongs’ (OD 14.97–98). The mention of Philomel’s ‘wrongs’ means that it cannot be solely the nightingale who falls asleep, but must also be the raped woman; this allusion forges an additional connection to the prior incident. By extending her description of sleep with figures both biblical and seventeenth-century, Hutchinson shifts the temporal meaning of the Ovidian interruption: the allusion links back to its classical precedent, but it does not stay there. By drawing in additional figures, Hutchinson emphasizes the continuing force of what does not happen in this story; by evoking contemporary students, matrons, and lovers, she suggests it could happen in her own time. The interposition dilates the biblical text, in an act of lingering over desire not unlike Lanyer’s tree kiss.

Despite its length, the second episode seems to serve no greater purpose than the first, for King Abimelech, like the pharaoh, behaves honorably. He challenges both God, asking “shall then my innocence/ Suffer like guilt?” (OD 14.154–55) and Abraham:

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54 Scholars often attribute this repetition to the combination of Elohistic and Yahwistic sources, but the repetition of request depends on the earlier incident. See NOAB Gen 20.1–18, n.
55 The Ovidian interruption draws out Order and Disorder’s classicism, which its preface rejects.
‘[...] Our fault proceeded from our ignorance,
But thou didst willfully our sins advance;
And sure, though I bear all th' affliction,
Yet thou hast done what ought not to be done.’
Abraham, whom justly thus the king accused, [...]  

(OD 14.197–201)

Abimelech draws a sharp distinction between his own unwitting misdeeds and Abraham's intention to deceive, his ‘willful’ ‘advance’ of their ‘sins’. By labeling Abraham ‘justly’ ‘accused’, the narrator affirms this contrast, and Abraham’s guilt.

Pushed to account for his actions, Abraham first repeats his reasons from the earlier episode and then reframes his behavior in a surprising way:

[...] whensoe'er we came to any place
She would the sister's title only own
Nor let our marriage be to strangers known.
This our concealment, though unlucky here,
Proceeded not from malice but from fear.  

(OD 14.222–26)

These lines take the repetition of the act and convert it to a general principle, at every time (‘whensoe'er’), in ‘any place’. More startlingly still, Abraham extrapolates the general rule for behavior by misrepresenting his earlier actions: when he names the strategy ‘unlucky here’, he overwrites the fact that precisely the same thing happened the first time.56 In Abraham's framing, his pretense that Sarah is not his wife has ‘unlucky’ effects—plagues, widespread infertility—only this once. But Hutchinson refuses this misinterpretation, both through the linguistic and formal parallels between the two episodes already established, and through the continuing of those parallels to the episode’s conclusion, when Abimelech uses much of the pharaoh's language: “hide/ The flames which may beget unlawful fire:/ 'Tis easier to prevent than quench desire./ All would not, as I do, return thee pure” [...] (OD 14.244–47). ‘Flames’ and ‘fire’ evoke the burning of the prior episode, while ‘unlawful’ parallels 'lawless' and ‘quench desire’ recalls ‘unquenched desire’ (OD 14.245

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56 Gen 21.13 includes the generality but not the characterization that only this instance had negative results: ‘And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother.’
and 11.63; 14.245 and 11.90; 14.246 and 11.84). The linguistic insistence on the likeness of the two episodes undercuts Abraham’s use of the first episode as a precedent while rejecting its lesson. The threatened but averted rape returns in “All would not, as I do, return thee pure”—but again, the irony is that both kings do (OD 14.247). The explicit lesson drawn from these events in fact applies to neither.

In the Abraham and Sarah episodes, Hutchinson’s interventions within the biblical text tend to undercut Abraham’s wisdom and authority: both his motivations for his actions and the conclusions he draws from his behavior ring false in the context of the parallels Hutchinson forges between the two episodes and the allusions she introduces to them. Hutchinson’s choices stand out all the more starkly because she rarely valorizes kings like the two who desire Sarah but do not assault her. Notably, too, Hutchinson does not offer here the explicit didactic readings in which she often engages elsewhere, such as the lengthy interpretations of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac.57 There, she stresses that ‘religion changes styles of things,/ Making the same act diverse as it springs/ From man’s own nature, or obedience/ To God’s command to murder innocence’ (OD 15.131–34). The endangerment of the matriarch episodes open themselves to readerly interpretation, without a direct explanation offered; the literary techniques of allusion and repetition thus frame their meaning more strongly.58

And yet a further innovation that Hutchinson appends to the second episode seems to overturn all these meanings. For she makes Isaac’s long-promised birth consequent upon the deception:

This just reproof did their frail fear procure.
Then Abraham prayed to God with fervent zeal,
And, by his prayer moved, the Lord did heal
The king with all his concubines whom he
For Sarah’s sake plagued with sterility.
To comfort their disgrace, now Sarah’s womb
Grew pregnant with the promised fruit in whom
A blessing was designed for the whole earth,
And the ninth moon disclosed the joyful birth.

(OD 14.248–56)

57 On Hutchinson’s use of the biblical text, see Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement*, and Ross, *Women, Poetry, and Politics*.
58 This is a literary version of Scott-Baumann’s argument about marginal biblical glosses (p. 186).
In Genesis, Isaac's conception and birth occur in a separate chapter from the deception of Abimelech; Hutchinson introduces the idea of causality linking the two. But sterility exists throughout the story, both explicitly, as the affliction visited upon the king and his concubines to punish the king's desire for Sarah, and implicitly, as the untold secret that would render other concealment unnecessary. That is, in each endangerment of the matriarch episode the rulers desire Sarah honorably, as a wife; in each case, had they known of her sterility, they would have abandoned her. The lines do not, however, posit Sarah's fertility as a reward for her chastening into greater virtue, instead resolutely insisting upon the wrongness of the deception, ‘their disgrace’.

In the Abraham and Sarah episodes, Hutchinson introduces causality as the outcome of unnecessary, illogical action, but the consequence arises from emotional recompense, ‘to comfort their disgrace.’ Successful conception depends upon the acknowledgment of the endangerment of the matriarch as illogical and unnecessary. In her insistence both on the faultiness of the precedent and the affective dimensions of the causal connection, Hutchinson undermines the principles of teleology: ‘A teleological perspective views the present as a necessary outcome of the past—the point toward which all prior events were trending.’59 Despite the long-awaited promise of Abraham and Sarah's child Isaac, Hutchinson’s innovations within the story manage to present his conception and birth not as a logical fulfillment of a past promise, but rather as an emotional recompense to an arbitrary event. For one of the primary origin stories of the patriarchy, this is a remarkable innovation.

These features also explicitly link Hutchinson’s narrative to other queer forms of sexuality, such as Annamarie Jagose’s influential formulation of lesbian sexuality:

both the reification and the hierarchical valuation of heterosexuality and homosexuality are achieved as if through nothing more than the uninvested narrative mechanisms of numerical order or chronological progression. As second is to first, so the cultural weighting of heterosexuality as first-order and homosexuality as second-order is secured through the self-licensing logic of sequence. These cultural narrativizations of sexual sequence produce the very hierarchies they are taken to describe. In this book I argue that the mechanisms of sexual hierarchisation produce the lesbian as the figure most comprehensively worked over by sequence, secondary and inconsequential in all senses.60

60 Jagose, Inconsequence, p. ix.
Hutchinson’s narrative does not produce what it promises, except by the means of a roundabout emotional recompense predicated upon the failure of the episodes themselves. But this failure is instructive, because it rewrites the patriarchal narrative with a focus on the endangerment of the matriarch (asserting the values of feminism), while—at the same time and consequently—it offers a model of sexuality that has all the markers of lesbianism—inconsequentiality, repetition, undifferentiated figures—except for the simultaneity of two female bodies. Given that last, rather vital, caveat, what use is it to think of the queer networks of desire amongst Abraham, Sarah, and the two rulers as lesbian? Simply, it upends the hierarchy Jagose rightly critiques: this patriarchal origin story starts with a sexuality characterized by repetitions of inconsequential, non-reproductive sexuality. Procreation can only occur, patriarchy can only begin, ‘to comfort their disgrace’, with an emotional recompense that acknowledges, indeed depends upon, the recognition that the patriarch’s willingness to endanger the matriarch is wrong. Hutchinson’s narrative locates a form of lesbian sexuality as the precursor to all of human history.

Conclusion

Lanyer’s tree kiss and Hutchinson’s lesbian potentiality both illuminate ways of living with time but not in it. Lanyer demonstrates the possibility but also the price of a return to memory: the speaker cannot repeat the tree kiss without the risk of losing it. Hutchinson predicates the start of history upon an event that did not happen, that did not need to happen. Both poems model anachronistic temporalities that offer a way out of the deadlocks of the feminist and queer theory debates. By exhibiting temporalities rooted in specifically early modern ways of understanding, the texts locate themselves in historical time; by creating those times as non-linear, repetitive, inconsequential constellations of desire and bodies, the texts reveal their connections to, and their usefulness for, feminist and queer thinking now. The work Lanyer and Hutchinson do is anachronistic in the sense that they both imagine times out of time, pauses and interruptions in a linear time frame. But our analysis of them is not anachronistic in the sense of applying theory that distorts the original investments of the texts, because their multiple temporalities are available and imaginable in their historical moments: they are the theories the texts themselves offer. We have, however, chosen certain self-consciously
anachronistic terms—like lesbian—for Lanyer and Hutchinson’s time, in order to demonstrate the existence and occurrence of patterns given other names in other times.

This combination of early modern ways of imagining time and later vocabulary for some of those imaginings aims to foreground not only the terms themselves but also their accreted histories. This conjunction affords us a new perspective on the task of feminism to ‘examine’ ‘the connection between the histories we inherit and the futures we imagine’, as Loomba and Sanchez compellingly put it. By looking in new configurations at the multiple temporalities of these early modern poems, we hope to uncover the histories we have not inherited—the broken lineages, the averted events—in a way that will let us imagine different futures. As Audre Lorde tells us: ‘But there are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as humans. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations, extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves—along with the renewed courage to try them out.’ Living in the wake, in 2017, of the feminist consummation that did not happen, with all the peril that entails for those left out of both ‘the histories we inherit and the futures we imagine’, it helps to remember that not-happening, too, can have causal force. Lanyer’s and Hutchinson’s feminist queer poems rewrite the sequence of events in order to imagine causality differently: pushing back against received patriarchal narratives, they locate women at the poetic origin not due to their reproductive capacities, but rather through a consequentially queer desire founded upon disparaged affect. Taking up the ‘old and forgotten’ models from Lanyer and Hutchinson in conjunction with both feminist and queer theory affords ‘new combinations, extrapolations, and recognitions from within ourselves’. Now we only need ‘the renewed courage to try them out’.

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