

GENDERING THE LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WORLD



Edited by Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks

Gendered Temporalities in the Early Modern World

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Gendered Temporalities in the Early Modern World

Gendering the Late Medieval and Early Modern World

Series editors: James Daybell (Chair), Victoria E. Burke, Svante Norrhem, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks

This series provides a forum for studies that investigate women, gender, and/or sexuality in the late medieval and early modern world. The editors invite proposals for book-length studies of an interdisciplinary nature, including, but not exclusively, from the fields of history, literature, art and architectural history, and visual and material culture. Consideration will be given to both monographs and collections of essays. Chronologically, we welcome studies that look at the period between 1400 and 1700, with a focus on any part of the world, as well as comparative and global works. We invite proposals including, but not limited to, the following broad themes: methodologies, theories and meanings of gender; gender, power and political culture; monarchs, courts and power; constructions of femininity and masculinity; gift-giving, diplomacy and the politics of exchange; gender and the politics of early modern archives; gender and architectural spaces (courts, salons, household); consumption and material culture; objects and gendered power; women's writing; gendered patronage and power; gendered activities, behaviours, rituals and fashions.

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Cover image: Pietro della Vecchia (1608-1678), *The Three Fates*. The Fates, female deities in Greek mythology who determined the length and course of each person's life, often symbolized time's passing in Renaissance and baroque art. Photo Credit: Alinari / Art Resource, NY

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Table of Contents

Introduction	7
--------------	---

Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks

Part I Temporality and materiality

1 Time, gender, and the mystery of English wine	19
---	----

Frances E. Dolan

2 Women in the sea of time	47
----------------------------	----

Domestic dated objects in seventeenth-century England

Sophie Cope

3 Time, gender, and nonhuman worlds	69
-------------------------------------	----

Emily Kuffner, Elizabeth Crachiolo, and Dyani Johns Taff

Part II Frameworks and taxonomy of time

4 Telling time through medicine	95
---------------------------------	----

A gendered perspective

Alisha Rankin

5 Times told	115
--------------	-----

Women narrating the everyday in early modern Rome

Elizabeth S. Cohen

6 Genealogical memory	135
-----------------------	-----

Constructing female rule in seventeenth-century Aceh

Su Fang Ng

7 Feminist queer temporalities in Aemilia Lanyer and Lucy Hutchinson	159
--	-----

Penelope Anderson and Whitney Sperrazza

Part III Embodied time

8 Embodied temporality	187
------------------------	-----

Lucrezia Tornabuoni de' Medici's *sacra storia*, Donatello's *Judith*, and the performance of gendered authority in Palazzo Medici, Florence

Allie Terry-Fritsch

9	Maybe baby	213
	Pregnant possibilities in medieval and early modern literature	
	<i>Holly Barbaccia, Bethany Packard, and Jane Wanninger</i>	
10	Evolving families	235
	Realities and images of stepfamilies, remarriage, and half-siblings in early modern Spain	
	<i>Grace E. Coolidge and Lyndan Warner</i>	

Epilogue

11	Navigating the future of early modern women's writing	261
	Pedagogy, feminism, and literary theory	
	<i>Michelle M. Dowd</i>	
	Index	283

List of figures

Figure 2.1	Tin-glazed earthenware mug, dated 1642, London. Victoria and Albert Museum, London	48
Figure 2.2	Brass and iron spit jack, dated 1670, England. Victoria and Albert Museum, London	53
Figure 2.3	Elm chest, dated 1640, England. Victoria and Albert Museum, London	56
Figure 2.4	Silk, leather, and beadwork bag, dated 1625, England. Collection of John H. Bryan, used by permission	63
Figure 4.1	'Astrological' or 'zodiac' man in a portable folding almanac, 1451–81. Wellcome Library London	100
Figure 4.2	Detail of Peter Slovacius's 1581 almanac with zodiac man and symbols indicating auspicious dates for various procedures. Wellcome Library London	101
Figure 8.1	Donatello (Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi), Judith, c. 1464, bronze, located between mid-1460s and 1495 in the garden of Palazzo Medici, today in the Sala dei Gigli, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Photo: author	188
Figure 8.2	Detail of Figure 8.1. Photo: author	204
Figure 10.1	Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo, <i>The Painter's Family</i> , Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria. Used by permission	246

Introduction

Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks

Is time gendered? This collection of essays addresses this question with a focus on the early modern period, an era that is itself designated by a contested periodization. It examines gendered and embodied temporalities, and the ways that time structured early modern lives and the textual and material commemorations of those lives.

The essays examine aspects of gendered temporality in England, Italy, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, Aceh, and Virginia, thus allowing trans-regional and transnational comparisons. The authors come from different scholarly disciplines, including art history, English, history, Spanish, and women's and gender studies, and several are written by interdisciplinary groups of authors. The collection is divided into three parts—temporality and materiality, frameworks and taxonomies of time, and embodied time—followed by an epilogue that considers how these issues play out in the classroom, and explores the contemporary stakes of this research. The essays draw on a broad array of textual and material primary sources—letters, medicinal recipes, almanacs, scholarly works, poems, plays, court testimonies, biographies and autobiographies, sacred stories, puzzles, wills, petitions, financial records, royal edicts, mirrors for princes, paintings, sculpture, needlework, and household objects. The use of a wide variety of material objects as sources is particularly noteworthy. Material culture is becoming an increasingly important part of the analysis of the past, and the essays in the book that analyze how material objects express, shape, complicate, and extend human concepts of time represent this trend. Among the material objects examined in the book is the human body, as some essays explore somatic experiences of temporality in periods that range from the moment to the family life course. Whether they use material or textual evidence, or both, essays examine categories, definitions, and conceptualizations of time set out by both women and men, and by individuals across the social scale, thus examining elite and popular culture. Taken together, the essays allow an assessment of the ways that gender and other categories of difference condition understandings of time, and note how contemporary

and early modern conceptions of time inform one another and our work as scholars and teachers.

Most of the essays in this volume began as presentations and conversations at the ninth Attending to Early Modern Women conference, held in 2015 at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, for which the title was the rather playful: ‘It’s About Time’. In choosing this focus, we were both responding to and extending the renewed critical attention that is being paid to temporality. As the cultural theorist Emily Apter put it in another playful phrase in a recent forum on feminist theory, ‘It’s Time’s time.’¹ Time and temporality are now featured in handbooks and guides for undergraduate students as ‘critical concepts’ or ‘key terms’ they should understand.² After a decade or so in which some queer theorists rejected periodization, chronology, change over time, and sometimes time itself as teleological, heterosexist, and normalizing metanarratives and advocated ‘unhistoricism’ or ‘new presentism’, literary critics are increasingly calling for approaches that recognize the communal investments of historicist, feminist, and queer methodologies.³ In the same summer that Attending to Women was discussing time in Milwaukee, the International Society of Cultural History was doing so in Bucharest, with a conference focusing on culture and time.⁴ Peter Burke has examined the history of the idea that time is culturally constructed, and in the 2006 Natalie Zemon Davis lectures at Central European University, Lynn Hunt focused on changes in chronological frameworks, past, present, and future.⁵ These considerations assert what

1 Apter, ‘Women’s Time’, p. 1.

2 Handbooks include Adam, *Time*, and West-Pavlov, *Temporalities*. The revised Advanced Placement course for European, world, and US history also includes periodization as one its nine key historical thinking skills, thus extending this concern to secondary school students. (For European history, see: College Board, ‘AP European History’, 2017, <https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/ap/ap-course-overviews/ap-european-history-course-overview.pdf>).

3 Queer theory’s rejection of futurity and of differences between past and present began with Edelman, *No Future*, and Goldberg and Menon, ‘Queering History’. These were critiqued by Valerie Traub, among others, in her ‘New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies’ and *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*. Reviews of this debate, and calls to recognize commonalities as well as differences, can be found in Friedlander, ‘Desiring History and Historicizing Desire’, several of the essays in Loomba and Sanchez, eds., *Rethinking Feminism in Early Modern Studies*, and the essay by Penelope Anderson and Whitney Sperrazza in this volume.

4 Five of the papers from this conference, along with several others, are in Arcangeli and Korhonen, eds., ‘A Time of Their Own’. Some of the articles in this special issue focus on women’s understanding and measurement of time.

5 Burke, ‘Reflections on the Cultural History of Time’. Hunt’s Davis lectures have been published as Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History*.

many of the essays in this volume do: time is an embodied aspect of human existence, but also mediated by culture; experiences and understandings of time change, and the early modern period may have been an era when they changed significantly, with the introduction of new vocabularies and technologies of time; time is gendered and also structured by other social hierarchies; material objects shape experiences and conceptions of time.⁶

The three essays in Part I, 'Temporality and Materiality', take up this focus on objects. In 'Time, Gender and the Mystery of English Wine', Frances E. Dolan examines what at first appears to be a familiar 'timeless' beverage but was actually unstable and unknowable. Although we often associate the English with beer, ale, and cider, wine was everywhere in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, Dolan notes. More than a beverage, it was invested with all kinds of significance, starting with the communion cup, but those meanings were often contested. This was in part because wine, while highly valued, had often fallen victim to the ravages of time and transport by the time it reached English consumers, and was doctored by those who sold and served it, from coopers and tavern keepers to cooks and housewives. As a consequence, wine was widely distrusted as foreign, spoiled, and adulterated. It was also understood to have its own timeline or life course, moving from 'fresh', 'young', or 'brisk' wines that were prized above older vintages to the spent wines that formed the basis for distilled spirits and medicines. Wine's unpredictability was associated with femininity, as it made women and men alike more disordered and vulnerable, but was particularly dangerous for women, who were warned not to drink in excess and praised for abstinence or moderation. Wine also occasionally provided an opportunity for women, however, who joined experiments in growing grapes and making wine in England. Ranging across a wide variety of sources, from Elizabethan London to colonial Virginia, and from the sixteenth century to popular depictions of that period today, Dolan tells the story of the gendering of wine, its consumption and production. Tackling wine as a work in progress, she argues that wine connects us to the past largely to the extent that it continues to be a mystery or a knowledge problem, a beverage at once familiar and inscrutable.

We may not know what the wine consumed by early modern women and men *was*, but we know it was served in drinking vessels and at all hours of the day, as were other fermented beverages. In 'Women in the Sea of Time: Domestic Dated Objects in Early Modern England', Sophie Cope

6 For a cross-temporal look at how objects we use to 'tell' time, especially calendars and clocks, shape our experiences and conceptions of time, see Birth, *Objects of Time*.

begins with one of those vessels, a tin-glazed earthenware mug inscribed with the name of a woman and a date.⁷ She uses this and other domestic dated objects to analyze the relationship between people and time, both quotidian and eternal, focusing particularly on objects that circulated within women's networks, including cooking wares, chests, and embroideries. She investigates how ideas of personal time were expressed by women through the inscription of objects in their physical surroundings, arguing that such objects demonstrate the significance of dates in marking and extending social connections between women. Dated objects would ideally outlive their owner and reach forward to posterity and beyond. Thus through their inscriptions, women were able to mark out their own place in the much wider sea of time.

In their jointly authored essay, 'Time, Gender, and Nonhuman Worlds', the author team of Emily Kuffner, Elizabeth Crachiolo, and Dyani Johns Taff continue this focus on the material, reaching beyond human temporal realms to examine botanical, nautical, and disease-based perspectives on time that disrupt hierarchies of gender and redefine ontological boundaries. They discuss representations of the plant guaiac, used to combat the spread of the so-called 'French disease' through Europe, that expose temporally contingent definitions of masculinity, texts that portray human characters with plant-like characteristics that contravene human chronologies, and maritime metaphors in Shakespeare that disrupt human attempts to describe masculine erotic desire as everlasting and female erotic desire as having an expiration date. Their investigations reveal that nonhuman realms and agents unsettle early modern writers' attempts to establish essentialized constructs of gender and time, thus revealing the interdependence between human and nonhuman worlds.

The four essays in Part II, 'Frameworks and Taxonomies of Time', examine categories, definitions, and conceptualizations of time set out by early modern women and men of varying social classes in Europe and Southeast Asia. In 'Telling Time through Medicine: A Gendered Perspective', Alisha Rankin analyzes the role of gender in concepts of medical time, where multiple, overlapping systems of time—astrological, seasonal, liturgical, horological—guided medical theory and practice. She first discusses Renaissance medical scholarship by male authors, including learned theories of the four humors, treatises on disease, and almanacs, all of which embedded the microcosm of the human in a macrocosm of time. She then shifts the focus

7 This chapter began as a paper at the Gender, Power, and Materiality in Early Modern Europe 1500–1800 conference held at the University of Plymouth in April 2016.

to women's concepts of medical time. Drawing on letters and medicinal recipes written by German noblewomen, Rankin argues that women both reflected broader reckonings of time and drew their own concepts of medical temporality from the female body, including menstrual cycles, pregnancy, and childbirth. Women thus engaged in deliberate attempts to understand and pin down embodied time.

Educated noblewomen were not the only women who drew on many languages of time to craft their own, as Elizabeth S. Cohen demonstrates in 'Times Told: Women Narrating the Everyday in Early Modern Rome'. Using the records of the criminal courts of Rome c. 1600, which include the voices of non-elite women, many of them illiterate, from whom we seldom hear, she finds that women's testimony, delivered in intimidating formal settings and recorded verbatim, carried serious legal weight. As complainants, as suspects, and as witnesses, women had to remember, reconstruct, and tell stories about recent and more distant pasts and to situate their accounts within convincing temporal frames. Telling time orally was challenging, and women, like their male counterparts, used varied narrative strategies and temporal rhetorics to lend veracity to their tales. Cohen stresses that the abstractions, precisions, and disciplines of official time—the sort that we moderns take for granted—often gave way in early modern courts, as in life, to less clear and less efficient, but nevertheless functional practices of local time.

In 'Genealogical Memory: Constructing Female Rule in Seventeenth-Century Aceh', Su Fang Ng takes us to Southeast Asia to examine the ways in which a woman at the top of the social scale constructed genealogical time as she memorialized her father. Four queens ruled Aceh, Sumatra (present-day Indonesia), from 1641 to 1699; the first, Şafiyyat al-Dīn Taj al-Alam, for 35 years. Ng analyzes similarities between Taj al-Alam's symbols of royal power and her father Iskandar Muda's, especially their claim to Alexander the Great as a legendary ancestor. Contesting the genealogy her husband crafted, Taj al-Alam reinscribed a continuous genealogy from her father in her elaborate diplomatic letters sent to foreign kings, including one sent to Charles II of England in 1661, and in royal edicts. Continuity in the rhetoric of royal power shows a daughter's appropriation of paternal as well as royal power. By the end of the seventeenth century, the myth of queenship was so prevalent that some English visitors believed Aceh had always been governed by queens, testifying to the power of Taj al-Alam's reworkings of genealogical memory.

With 'Feminist Queer Temporalities in Aemilia Lanyer and Lucy Hutchinson', Penelope Anderson and Whitney Sperrazza explore times embedded in

poems, and from Italy to England. They argue that the multiple temporalities of Aemilia Lanyer's 'The Description of Cooke-ham' 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. Lanyer's and Hutchinson's feminist queer poems, Anderson and Sperrazza assert, 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.

Part III, 'Embodied Time', includes three essays that explore somatic experiences of temporality in periods that range from the brief moment to the generation. In 'Embodied Temporality: Lucrezia Tornabuoni de' Medici's *sacra storia*, Donatello's *Judith*, and the Performance of Gendered Authority in Palazzo Medici, Florence', Allie Terry-Fritsch approaches Donatello's fifteenth-century bronze sculpture of Judith as a dramatic actor in Lucrezia Tornabuoni de' Medici's sacred story, 'The Story of Judith, Hebrew Widow', written in the 1470s. She traces how the performative cues of Lucrezia's words about how and when to look, listen, or imagine functioned to connect an audience sitting in the garden of the Palazzo Medici somaesthetically with the statue, thus prompting the opportunity for an active coproduction of the narrative that bound performers and audience together in their embodied temporality. The essay highlights the strategies by which Lucrezia's narrative enfolds contemporary Florentine attitudes concerning justice, virtue, and political power into Judith's sacred history, and analyzes Lucrezia's self-fashioning in relation to both the textual and sculptural biblical heroine as a strategy to give voice to her critical role within the family and the state.

Gazing at a statue in the Medici Palazzo garden was an experience shared by only a few, but wondering whether you or someone else were pregnant was an experience shared by many, and repeated often across the life course in an era when pregnancy could not really be confirmed until it ended. In 'Maybe Baby: Pregnant Possibilities in Medieval and Early Modern Literature', Holly Barbaccia, Bethany Packard, and Jane Wanninger examine

potentially pregnant women in the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, and John Webster. All three authors write women characters whose status as mothers-to-be they never totally resolve, thus creating periods of uncertainty in the supposedly inevitable advance from one phase of life to the next. Taken together, these authors and their 'maybe maternal' female characters illustrate the extent to which potential pregnancy amplifies the inscrutability of women's bodies and highlights the thwarted efforts of other characters, readers, and audiences to interpret them. By introducing the possibility of these women's pregnancies but leaving their maternal status unverified, Barbaccia, Packard, and Wanninger argue, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Webster create experiences of embodiment infused with epistemological uncertainty and temporal complexity.

If individual bodies could be changeable and complicated, families were even more so, as Grace E. Coolidge and Lyndan Warner explore in 'Evolving Families: Realities and Images of Stepfamilies, Remarriage, and Half-siblings in Early Modern Spain'. One in three children in early modern Europe experienced the loss of a parent, with the possibility of the surviving parent's remarriage to a stepmother or stepfather bringing stepsiblings or new half-siblings. Coolidge and Warner use advice literature that suggested strategies to cope with the evolution of a family as it moved through death and remarriage, along with archival records of testaments, estate inventories, and guardianship arrangements to reveal the gendered patterns of stepfamilies, in which strong relationships between adult half-siblings suggest a shared family identity even as families evolved over many years of extended fertility, a feature of many stepfamilies. Visual representations of family groups are relatively rare in Spain, but one of the few family portraits of the seventeenth century – *The Painter's Family* by Diego Velázquez's son-in-law Juan Bautista del Mazo – captures the expanded age range as well as emotional connections and disruptions imposed by death and remarriage.

The future figures in many of the essays in this book, from wine made for next year's drinkers to testaments designed to divide inheritance among children not yet born. In the final chapter, which serves as an epilogue, 'Navigating the Future of Early Modern Women's Writing: Pedagogy, Feminism, and Literary Theory', Michelle M. Dowd confronts that future head on. She notes that the gendered nature of temporality takes on a distinct set of meanings in the classroom, as we strive to make the past in which early modern women and men lived and created simultaneously strange and immediate to students who will shape the world in the years ahead. She explores the challenges of teaching premodern women's texts within curricula where they are seen more often as comments on an era's

gender politics than a part of its literature, and where all teaching in the humanities is threatened. Using Elizabeth Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam* as a case study, Dowd proposes that we can engage our students in more meaningful discussions about how and why the fact of female authorship matters by inviting them to consider the complex intersection between gender and form, that is (somewhat paradoxically) to have them read it *as a drama* as well as a female-authored text. The essay concludes by inviting strategic advocacy for premodern women writers in the contemporary classroom, advice that makes explicit what all the essays implicitly promote.

Concerns with the future evinced by so many of the female subjects of this book as they wrote, built, spoke, planted, drew up wills, devised medicines, embroidered, or just went about the business of their lives belie the notion common in the early modern period (and to some degree our own) that women and their ideas and desires were more time-bound, while men and their ideas and desires were (and are) everlasting and timeless. Women shaped the future because of their reproductive capacities, of course, and several essays point out how concerns about childbirth and those about time were connected, so much so that giving birth in German was referred to as 'going on her time'. But women shaped the future even more through the textual and material products they created, ordered, or purchased that allowed them to escape the bounds of human life. Their sense of obligation to the future extended beyond their own families and kin to the less fortunate whose lives they extended through food or medicine, and to imagined readers or viewers for whom their writings or needlework would be interruptions of a time past in the flow of daily life. Sometimes these products crossed normative gender boundaries and allowed women—both real and invented—to challenge or queer patrilineal and patriarchal norms, while at other times they reinforced them, or they did all of these at once, as conservative forms and usages sometimes made radical innovations possible.

How thoughts of the future shaped the actions of past actors is only one of several themes that thread through the essays in the book. Another is how people managed their time. Though men worried about women's idleness, which along with their wine drinking might lead to sexual excess, women worried instead about not having enough time to carry out the various tasks they needed to do. The earliest reference to the broadside ballad 'A Woman's Work Is Never Done', fittingly appears in the 1629 inventory of a widow who sold ballads, no doubt one of many things she did to keep her household going after the death of her husband, a common event, yet one that marked a dramatic break in any family's history.

A third common theme is the complexity of experiences of time. Early modern women and men lived in a number of times at once—planetary, botanical, biblical, seasonal, liturgical, multigenerational, life-course, daily, horological—which overlapped and conflicted. Embodied time was itself multitemporal and nonlinear, experienced as a moment when one might glance at a statue or sip a glass of new wine, an hour whose events one had to later recall to a judge, a day spent writing, several months when one (or a woman who mattered) might or might not be pregnant, or a lifetime of gradual aging punctuated by the type of events that we still call ‘life-changing’ as well as far more mundane ones.

Finally, several of the essays point to the importance of things that did not happen as well as those that did: children who were not born, powerful men who desired but did not rape, lineages that did not continue, vines that did not grow, ideas about time that did not become modern. They encourage us to think about the histories we have not inherited, as well as those we have. The phrase that was the conference theme in 2015, ‘It’s About Time’, was one heard often in the political rhetoric of the United States in 2016, but that feminist future did not come to pass. Why it did not was in part because of the central issue traced in this collection: the power of gender and imaginings of gender in lives past, lives present, and lives feared or dreamed for the future.

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