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978-1-107-03632-1 - Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage

Mary Floyd-Wilson

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## OCCULT KNOWLEDGE, SCIENCE, AND GENDER ON THE SHAKESPEAREAN STAGE

Belief in spirits, demons, and the occult was commonplace in the early modern period, as was the view that these forces could be used to manipulate nature and produce new knowledge. In this groundbreaking study, Mary Floyd-Wilson explores these beliefs in relation to women and scientific knowledge, arguing that the early modern English understood their emotions and behavior to be influenced by hidden sympathies and antipathies in the natural world. Focusing on *Twelfth Night*, *Arden of Faversham*, *A Warning for Fair Women*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Changeling*, and *The Duchess of Malfi*, she demonstrates how these plays stage questions about whether women have privileged access to nature's secrets and whether their bodies possess hidden occult qualities. Discussing the relationship between scientific discourse and the occult, she goes on to argue that, as experiential evidence gained scientific ground, women's presumed intimacy with nature's secrets was either diminished or demonized.

MARY FLOYD-WILSON is Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A recipient of a National Humanities Center Fellowship, she is the author of *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (2003) and the co-editor of *Reading the Early Modern Passions: A Cultural History of Emotions* (with Gail Kern Paster and Katherine Rowe, 2004) and *Embodiment and Environment in Early Modern England* (with Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., 2007). She has published articles in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, *English Literary Renaissance*, *Early Modern Literary Studies*, and *Shakespeare Studies*, and has co-edited a special issue of *Renaissance Drama*.

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Frontispiece Title page woodcut, *De humani corporis fabrica librorum epitome* (Basel, 1543), Wellcome Library, London

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## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

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It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107036321](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107036321)

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First published 2013

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*  
Floyd-Wilson, Mary.

Occult knowledge, science, and gender on the Shakespearean stage / Mary Floyd-Wilson.  
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-03632-1

1. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616 – Criticism and interpretation. 2. Occultism in literature. 3. Literature and spiritualism. 4. Women in literature. I. Title.

PR2965.F56 2013

822.3'3–dc23

2012050275

ISBN 978-1-107-03632-1 Hardback

Additional resources for this publication at [www.cambridge.org/9781107036321](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107036321)

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*To Madeline, my darling daughter and my sympathetic twin*

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## *Acknowledgments*

Initial thoughts about this project began, appropriately enough, in a domestic space, where I wondered how my AS son faltered over interpreting affect but responded so profoundly and viscerally to the circulating emotions around him. My first stab at an argument received magnanimous and magical feedback from Mary E. Fissell. Her exceptional insights on early modern culture inform many of the central themes of this book. I also thank my fellow participants in Mary's colloquium "Vernacular Health and Healing," held at the Folger Institute, especially Bella Mirabella and Rebecca Totaro. For their kind and encouraging support of this project in its preliminary stages, Steven Mullaney, Mary Thomas Crane, and Phebe Jensen have my sincere gratitude. The audiences at Utah State University, Northwestern University, the University of Michigan, the Renaissance Gothic Conference in Cologne, the University of Melbourne, and the University of Warwick all posed crucial questions that sent me in exciting and productive directions. The conversations in Lorraine Daston's faculty seminar "Observation" held at the Folger Institute also helped shape my thinking about early modern science in instrumental ways.

This project would never have reached completion without the support of two important institutions and communities: the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the National Humanities Center in Research Triangle Park. In addition to a fellowship provided by the Institute of Arts and Humanities, which gave me time to frame some early research questions, the University of North Carolina honored me with a W. N. Reynolds Leave as well as a departmental Research and Study Leave at vital stages in the writing process.

My year as the John G. Medlin Fellow at the National Humanities Center was a transformative experience. I am happily indebted to my fellow fellows, especially Elizabeth "Cassie" Mansfield, Colin Bird, Jessica Brantley, John M. Doris, Sarah Farmer, Holly Brewer, and Andrew

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*Acknowledgments*

Escobedo. Particularly warm appreciation goes to Trevor Burnard and Florence Dore. The library staff, Eliza Robertson, Josiah Drewry, and Jean Houston, performed wonders every day. Indeed, I am enormously grateful to the entire NHC community, including (but not limited to) Geoffrey Harpham, Kent Mullikin, Pat Schreiber, James Getkin, Sarah Payne, Don Solomon, Lois Whittington, and Marie Brubaker.

Gail Kern Paster, Garrett Sullivan, and David Baker each read the manuscript in its entirety, and their brilliant and incisive commentary improved the project in more ways than I can measure. I am grateful to a large number of people for their questions, encouragement, assistance, advice, and insights, including Lara Bovilsky, Edmund Campos, Darryl Chalk, Tony Dawson, Lauren Garrett, Brett Hirsch, Laurie Johnson, Rebecca Laroche, Elaine Leong, Jeffrey Masten, Carla Mazzio, Vin Nardizzi, Tommy Nixon, Hillary Nunn, Jennifer Park, Kaara Peterson, Tanya Pollard, Kristen Poole, Beth Quitslund, Emma Smith, Pamela H. Smith, Michael Schoenfeldt, Laurie Shannon, Katie Shrieves, Alan Stewart, Valerie Traub, Katie Walker, Wendy Wall, Jordan Wingate, Paul Yachnin, and Julian Yates. Thanks to Kathryn Burns, Jane Danielewicz, Joy Kasson, and Megan Matchinske for their constructive reading of the initial project proposal. I am grateful to Bill Andrews, Claudia Funke, and Beverly Taylor for the professional opportunities they have made possible. Reid Barbour (who secured necessary library resources for me), David Baker, Gregg Flaxman, Darryl Gless, Shayne Legassie, Megan Matchinske, Jane Thrailkill, and Jessica Wolfe inspire me time and again as supportive colleagues and exemplary teacher-scholars. I am rich in funny, smart, generous friends: Ennis Baker, Dennis Baker, Florence Dore, Katie McKee, Deborah Morgan (KY), Will Rigby, Ann Walker, and Mary Wheeling have lifted my spirits, made me laugh, and helped me parent, making them indispensable to this book's completion.

A portion of Chapter 2 was previously published. See "Tragic Action at a Distance: *Arden of Faversham*," in Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Tragedy* (Cambridge, 2010), 188–99. I owe thanks to the Wellcome Library and to Wilson Library's Rare Book Collection at the University of North Carolina for supplying the book's images.

To Eeyore: I miss our long lunches. Here's hoping you'll move again, close enough to fetch me tea on a regular basis. My dear PM: our alliance has brought me heaps of comfort, joy, and familial care. And your bereavement counseling is inimitable. I owe more than can be repaid to Mary Alice,

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who loves unconditionally, and I am blessed to have Jim, David, and Diana as my kin. My sympathies, secret and manifest, draw me like a magnet to my extraordinary children, Claude and Maddie. And to my partner, Lanis: simply recall what I once announced at a dinner party about my fortunate state. And then magnify the sentiment. Donna Fargo has nothing on me.