

# PMLA

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January 1987

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**Abstract.** As new literatures in English emerge all over the world, literature in English is increasingly multicultural, but the criticism of these literatures has not fully come to terms with this multiculturalism. Specifically, a work read across cultures is likely to be at least partially unintelligible to some of its readers, and critics have seen this as a factor necessarily limiting the readership of these works. But intelligibility and meaningfulness are not synonymous. This essay analyzes moments of difficulty in four such multicultural texts, by Narayan, Kingston, Anaya, and Ihimaera, showing on Gricean lines that meaning can be created precisely by the struggle to make sense of the unintelligible. The work done in that process can lead to a deeper understanding of the text, and the reader who must do that work is therefore not excluded from a full understanding. (RWD)

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**Abstract.** Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* longs to counter the assertion of antifeminist satire that women's authority over men is noxious and undeserved. At first it seems that for her tale she chooses romance as the genre that can imagine a worthy sovereignty of secular women, yet she undermines romantic elevation by frequently returning to satiric stances. The generic mixing in her tale signals that romance is inadequate to her argument and indeed that no conventional discourse sustains women's sovereignty. Alison attempts to reach beyond the discourses available to her by destabilizing gender, genre, and *gentillesse* in her narration, intimating that these categories are flexible and open to new meanings. (SC)

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**Abstract.** Changing conceptions of gender and of theatrical mimesis can be seen in the representations of transvestite heroines on the English Renaissance stage. This paper compares their roles in five comedies: Lyly's *Gallathea*; Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*; and Jonson's *Epicoene*. In each play the plot centers on marriage, the bride-to-be wears transvestite disguise, and the disguise plays a crucial role in the plot. In all five plays, the sexual ambiguity of the boy heroine is associated with the problematic relations between the male actor and the female character he portrays, the dramatic representation and the reality it imitates, the play and the audience that watches it. Increasingly rigid gender definitions and a devaluation of the feminine are associated with a rejection of fantasy, the development of neoclassical mimetic theory, and a deepening anxiety about the process of theatrical representation. (PR)

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<p><b>Abstract.</b> Thomas Thorpe's brief greeting to "Mr. W. H." in the 1609 Quarto of <i>Shakespeare's Sonnets</i> has been one of the great conundrums of modern literary studies. But it is not Thorpe's only such greeting to survive. His remaining epistles, taken together with the dedications in many other English books of the period, suggest that, unless Thorpe was here forsaking the conventions that elsewhere governed his and his contemporaries' practice, scholars have been wrong about "the only begetter of these ensuing sonnets," wrong about "Mr. W. H.," and wrong about "our ever-living poet" and the "eternity" he "promised." But in this they are not alone. The original compositor also got something wrong. If the evidence of other Renaissance epistles is to be trusted, the mysterious and celebrated "Mr. W. H." is a misprint. (DWF)</p>	
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<p><b>Abstract.</b> William Bradford's tableau of the Pilgrims' landing at Cape Cod supplies a conventional point of departure for American literature. Yet, in the customary ordering of literary history, the passage is doubly anomalous. Written in 1630, it presents, at least one hundred years too soon, an example of what Kant later called the dynamical sublime; and it anticipates, some two hundred years too soon, episodes from the canon of nineteenth-century American literature that criticism describes as characteristically American. The essay considers the formal motives and rhetorical coercions behind this double anomaly to show how the sublime, as it emerges in Bradford, signals a withdrawal from empirical fact in a search for satisfactions of meaning that derive from literature. The level of aggression Bradford finds necessary to this withdrawal lends his writing a recognizably American bent. The passage shows us a scene of writing at once singular to Bradford and distinctly American. (DL)</p>	
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