



Playing Dirty: Sexuality and Waste in Early Modern Comedy

Will Stockton

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Playing Dirty is full of dirty jokes. Arguing that the early modern excremental body is in many ways an erotic body, Will Stockton—with humor and dry wit—reads psychoanalytic theory through early modern comedies, claiming that it is helpful, rather than inimical, to the project of historicizing the body.

Noting that psychoanalysis has traditionally operated in a paranoid framework that relentlessly produces evidence of the same “truths,” Stockton turns to a minority practice in psychoanalysis—associated with Jean Laplanche—to develop a more “playful” analytic for literary studies. This analytic brings together different discourses of sexuality and the body and allows individual writings to reform psychoanalytic wisdom about sexuality, waste, and comedy. Through original explorations of works by William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Sir John Harington, Thomas Nashe, and Geoffrey Chaucer, Stockton further encourages the reconciliation of psychoanalysis and queer historicism. He focuses in large part on the less-often-read texts of the early modern English canon, assessing the ways in which these books have been purged from the canon in the name of generic purity.

Playing Dirty builds on recent calls by Renaissance and medieval queer scholars for a method of literary analysis that is less constrained by the boundaries of periodicity and the supposed exigencies of historicism. To take *Playing Dirty* seriously is to accept its invitation to “play”—to queerly disrupt the modern divide in moving promiscuously between texts past and present.

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