Reply:

I am grateful that Michael McKeon took the time to respond to my essay, and I have profited from reflecting on his comments. I am honored that a scholar of McKeon's stature has taken the publication of my essay as an occasion to steer readers toward his own important work. I agree with McKeon that his work, along with others', has uncovered vital knowledge of historical transformations in the organization of sexuality. Like many people, I have admired and learned from this body of scholarship.

But McKeon takes exception to my essay on the grounds of what I do not discuss rather than the actual positions I take, and his objections entail a mischaracterization of my scope and purpose. I therefore want to start with a brief overview of my argument before responding to what McKeon sees as my delinquency in citing his and others' work.

In my essay I argued that in focusing almost exclusively on nurturing and egalitarian female same-sex relations, early modern studies of female queerness have overlooked a range of alternative sexual fantasies and practices. I further proposed that this limited definition of queerness derives from an unspoken adherence to strains of feminism that see not only heterosexuality but any eroticization of power as incompatible with feminist aims. By tracing the methodological legacy of the sex wars, I hoped to make explicit some of the assumptions that have haunted early modern studies and to reintegrate insights of queer theory into analyses of female sexuality. Taking as examples two sixteenth-century texts, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1594–96), I examined early modern representations of female rivalry, group sex, zoophilia, and masochism to demonstrate that acts and fantasies that have nothing to do with the gender of object choice can contest past and present structures of what we now call normativity.

McKeon is undoubtedly right that my essay did not interest all members of the MLA. But it is a misrepresentation to say that my "implied readership is principally interested in the sex wars of the 1980s and their aftermath"—unless the "aftermath" to which McKeon refers is the past three decades of feminist and queer work, hardly a narrow field. A partial list of theorists I draw on includes Eve Sedgwick, Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler, Leo Bersani, Michael Warner, Laurent Berlant, Lee Edelman, Jonathan Goldberg, and David Halperin, all of whom have had a profound impact on approaches to literature, gender, and sexuality. I think that many scholars would be as surprised as I was to hear the ongoing debates in feminist and queer theory impatiently dismissed as the parochial "aftermath" of decades-old skirmishes.

Even more troubling is McKeon's complaint that "the focus of her project is dictated by the political encounters in which she frames it" and his consequent supposition that my essay has left the "actual readers" of *PMLA* "disappointed" and "hungry for more knowledge about early modern sexualities." In contrasting the insubstantial amuse-bouche of theory and politics with the more nourishing fare of true scholarship, McKeon invokes the fantasy of a scholar who is outside politics, an ideological construct frequently used to elevate "real" intellectual work above crude "identity politics." He thereby shrugs off a key insight developed by studies of gender, sexuality, race, class, colonialism, and globalization: *all* historical and literary studies do political work, whether these studies conserve or contest dominant values—and whether they own up to their politics or not.

In response to McKeon's complaint that I exclude important knowledge about the history of sexuality, I want first to note that the works to which he redirects "disappointed" readers focus on the period (in his own account) "from 1675 to 1725." Normally, I wouldn't quibble over dates: a rigid chronology can obscure both the

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complexity of early modern sexuality and the interplay of dominant, emergent, and residual discourses across traditional period divides. But in this case I think it's fair to observe that the specific history I leave out postdates the texts I discuss by nearly a century.

More to the point, far from making historical research "invisible," as McKeon claims, I include work on the history of sexuality in the medieval and Renaissance periods by Carolyn Dinshaw, James Schultz, Karma Lochrie, Jeffrey Cohen, Valerie Traub, Alan Bray, Bruce Smith, and Jeff Masten, to name just a few. This work complicates the narrative McKeon outlines in his response, one in which nothing much happened "before roughly 1700." But the absence of explicit engagement with scholarly canons of periods outside one's own should not be treated as intellectual parochialism. Rather than fight over what is most interesting and consequential, I hope that readers of a generalist journal like *PMLA* will look to individual essays as imaginative starting points for conversations that cut across period and methodological boundaries, even as they acknowledge the limits imposed by the specializations that organize the academy. No one can write the key to all mythologies.

Finally, McKeon charges that I suggest that "there's nothing more to learn" about early modern sexualities. To the contrary, I ended my essay with the hope that more methodological self-consciousness "can expand not only the scope of queer studies but also the potential for feminist studies to incorporate affects and desires that historically have been seen as a source of female shame and disempowerment" (506). The history of sexuality is essential to this project: the more we learn about past practices, values, and fantasies, the more we are compelled to reconsider present truisms about what is normal or healthy. I agree with McKeon that theoretical work that ignores history may miss vital transformations. I hope he can agree with me that if we don't reflect on our own methodological and political orientations, we might overlook the extent to which those orientations shape our assessments of what counts as worthwhile scholarship in the first place.

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