

# ‘#DifferenceMakesUs’: Selling Shakespeare Online (and the Commerce Platform Etsy)

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**Abstract** The mission statement of the online creative commerce platform Etsy declares its commitment to “using the power of business to strengthen communities and empower people”. Among the many handmade and vintage items sold on Etsy are 3,811 items quoting Helena’s description of Hermia from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (“and though she be but little, she is fierce”). This journal paper will examine the relationship between Shakespeare and the predominantly female crafts people who operate through platforms such as these as well as Shakespeare’s own depiction of female craft and handcrafted items. It seeks to explore the processes at work in Shakespeare-inspired merchandise and the relationship they claim to the play texts they adapt. The paper will continue by situating ‘female’ oriented creative work within the current political climate and exploring both the possibilities and limitations of craft as a vehicle for political resistance.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 ‘Shakescrafts’. – 3 Women and Craft in Shakespeare’s Plays. – 4 The Precarity of Craft.

**Keywords** Shakespeare. Adaptation. Sewing. Handcraft. Neoliberalism. Women. Feminism.

## 1 Introduction

Maria Grazia Chiuri made history when she launched her Spring 2017 collection of clothing down the runways of Paris Fashion Week. Having spent years working at fashion houses such as Valentino and Fendi, Chiuri had just become the first ever female creative director of the luxury company, Christian Dior. Her debut was already significant on those grounds; however, the fashion journalist Jess Cartner-Morley noted a more significant aspect of this show. The most eye-catching outfit on display was, Cartner-Morley argued, not “a traditional waisted Dior Bar Jacket, or a fairy-tale red-carpet gown” (Cartner-Morley 2016), but a slogan t-shirt bearing the title of an essay and TED talk written by the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: ‘We should all be feminists’. Cartner-Morley continued that the opportunity for a woman to redefine what femininity looks like “could hardly come at a more culturally resonant time” as Hillary Clinton, the first female American presidential candidate was then facing an opposing

campaign from later President Donald Trump “mired in accusations of misogyny” (Cartner-Morley 2016). Indeed, although perhaps ahead of the curve, Dior was not alone in producing politically-inflected and specifically feminist fashion that year. A season later, the clothes on display at New York Fashion Week bought similarly into an aesthetic of protest. Notable graphic prints included Christian Siriano’s ‘People are People’, Creatures of Comfort’s ‘We Are All Human Beings’ and Jonathan Simkhai’s ‘Feminist AF [as fuck]’. Keen to monopolise their earlier success, meanwhile, Dior produced a striped t-shirt bearing the question ‘Why have there been no great women artists’ from Linda Nochlin’s 1971 art history essay of the same name.

The connection between fashion and politics further intensified. Nepalese-American designer Prabal Gurung’s show at the same fashion week concluded with slogans including ‘Revolution Has No Borders’, ‘I Am An Immigrant’ and ‘The Future is Female’. The sentiment of the latter statement, though chiefly optimistic, was bittersweet: only six days prior to Gurung’s show, it had been uttered by Hillary Clinton in her first public statement since the inauguration of Trump to office as President. This phenomenon also has historical precedence, of course. There is a long and well-documented connection between textiles and feminist political activism. Victoria Mitchell writes, for instance, of the women who opposed nuclear war at Greenham Common and with their textiles, banners and hand-knit shelters “literally wove themselves into the site of their protest” (Mitchell 2000, 39). It should be noted, meanwhile, that the ‘The Future is Female’ slogan can be traced back to a t-shirt design made for Labyris Books, the first women’s bookshop in New York, in the mid-seventies. The statement’s ancestry and its connections to a radical feminism has not been explicitly recognised by Gurung who nevertheless claims influence from “what Gloria Steinam was doing in the 70s” (Reed, Moore 2017) but it is acknowledged by the independent retailer Otherwild who sell a version of the same t-shirt with 25% of proceeds donated to the American reproductive health care charity, Planned Parenthood.

The same potential for textiles to articulate resistance (in this case opposition to the Trump administration in America) was articulated outside of high fashion during that same period. Although the 2017 International Women’s March took place officially to protest for women’s rights in a general sense, a large number of protesters attended the day wearing bright pink ‘pussyhats’. The garment was the brainchild of design architect Jayne Zweiman and screenwriter Krista Suh and the designer of the original pattern, Kay Coyle. Zweiman and Suh wanted to craft an object that would show feminist solidarity – not only to the protesters on the day but to others, like Zweiman, who were not able to attend in person. They came up with the ‘pussyhat’ concept, chosen “in part”, they share, “as a protest against vulgar comments Donald Trump made about the freedom he felt

to grab women's genitals" but also to "de-stigmatize the word 'pussy' and transform it into one of empowerment" ("Our Story" s.d.). The same strategy of responding creatively and critically to Trump's misogyny was evident in the popularity of placards (but, later, of memorabilia and clothing) referencing and parodying Trump's description of Clinton as 'such a nasty woman'. As Gabrielle Moss wrote, with each new misogynistic gaffe by Trump, women's rights protesters found new ways to "show not just your hatred of Trump and his policies, but also the joy you took in being the kind of woman he would loath" (Moss 2017).

## 2 'Shakescrafts'

But where does Shakespeare fit into all of this? The answer is that he is not exempt from the same marketisation of feminism that has seen both a top-down commodification of politics by fashion and lifestyle brands and a bottom-up movement capitalising on the current popularity of handcrafted, non-profit or small business version of feminist statements. In fact, Sujatar Iyengar argues that "'Shakespeare' offers a liminal, intermedial space between branded, profit-generating, mass-market industry and independent, financially threatened, idiosyncratic cultural production" (Iyengar 2014, 347). Nowhere is Shakespeare's ability to traverse and occupy the space between both modes more apparent than on e-commerce websites like Etsy. A self-described "global marketplace for unique and creative good" ("About Etsy" n.d.), Etsy helps independent sellers to advertise their wares to a much larger audience and in a more sophisticated way than might otherwise be possible. In return, of course, for a cut of the sellers' profits. At the time of writing, the search term 'Shakespeare' brings up 10,853 results from the retailers who use Etsy's online store fronts to sell the kind of upcycled, handmade, crafted, vintage or vintage-inspired goods with which the website's name is now (often parodically) synonymous.<sup>1</sup> As a point of comparison, a search for the highly popular television series *Game of Thrones* (a shorthand also for the 'A Song Of Ice and Fire' series of fantasy novels by George R.R. Martin which the series is adapted from) brings up 50,000 results on Etsy. *Game of Thrones* is by any standards a significant part of contemporary popular culture and its quasi-medieval setting and fantasy genre supply quite readily the type of audience mem-

<sup>1</sup> The satirical record of popular vernacular, *Urban Dictionary*, defines goods from Etsy as "overpriced junk and cheap, trashy, idiotic or otherwise useless items". The website's entry assesses Etsy cynically, noting (perhaps accurately) that few items are "actually handmade" but are rather inexpensively and inexpertly thrown together and "resold to suckers [...] for a 2700% markup". Vintage items are simply "weathered, rusted, [or] stained with dog or cat urine" (Muscoffo 2015), and Etsy retailers delusional egotists.

ber interested in purchasing a personalised house sigil or a replica weapon. Other transmedia juggernauts like *Harry Potter* offer a not dissimilar amount of results (77,605) that speak to a continued appetite among fans for affiliation through merchandise. Shakespeare's place in all of this and seeming popularity on Etsy (or at the very least the expectation thereof; we cannot be sure how many of these items are ever sold) thus speaks to his ability to be at once a reliable source of income, a recognisable brand and a mass-commodified item and the occasion for individual, handmade, small-scale specialist production in accordance with the website's purpose. This is perhaps all the more remarkable because, unlike the makers of *Game of Thrones* or *Harry Potter*-inspired goods, online Shakespearean sellers do not rely upon a singular or stable intellectual property. Shakespeare's popularity may see peaks and troughs that correspond roughly to high-profile adaptations or performances but, for the most part, interest in the playwright seemingly sustains itself.

The offerings themselves, meanwhile, are a varied mixture of items that quote from Shakespeare's plays, reference his characters or trade on his name and semblance. They do all of this to a greater or lesser extent, inviting differing levels of participation in Shakespeare-enjoyment for their consumers. One can compare, for instance, a vintage-style pendant with the rather oblique statement, "Shakespeare is sexy",<sup>2</sup> with an embroidery pattern for a sampler with Benedict's call to Beatrice, "Lady Disdain".<sup>3</sup> Clearly both objects appeal to the same Shakespeare fan base, but they invite consumers to mobilise their interest in different ways; the former by wearing the item and the latter through a more time-intensive task of sewing the pattern. In other cases, the reification of one's Shakespearean fandom might come at the point of purchase itself. BardBombsApothecary sells a wide range of bath bombs, each of which is named after either a play or a character within a Shakespeare play. Both the physical design of the bomb (its colour and texture) and its constituent ingredients are intended to match up to the chosen Shakespearean influence, and these intentions are explained by the maker in the copy used to sell the item. The *Richard II* bath bomb, for instance, is based on the "ill fated Richard II": "a beautiful cautionary tale, which eventually sets the groundwork for the War of the Roses".<sup>4</sup> The bomb is thus a pale white colour with rose coloured flecks and a small rose at its centre. It is made from rose fragrant oil, dried roses, powdered milk and kokum butter "so [that] you feel like royalty". Details such as these speak to the perceived personal

2 See BookishGirl. "Shakespeare is Sexy Necklace". URL <https://etsy.me/2DF1gFe> (2019-02-14).

3 See Plasticlittlecovers. "Lady Disdain". URL <https://etsy.me/2Sx4eU4> (2018-11-23).

4 See "The Richard II". URL <https://etsy.me/250qHnd> (2019-02-14).

touch of independent sellers and yet, like the bath bomb itself, they invite an ephemeral form of fan engagement that must exist more at the moment of purchase (the pleasure of selecting your chosen bomb) than of use. Unless, that is, one muses on Richard in the bath.

Regardless of their duration, the result can be Shakespeare-inspired goods that are aesthetically pleasing and playfully and knowingly presented. The Shakespeare aficionados are entertained both by the act of purchasing, and in their subsequent ownership of an item which reifies their fan identification. As Graham Holderness and Brian Loughrey note in their work on 'Shakesbeers', "Capitalism can now produce Shakespearean materials that display a textual richness and diversity that do justice to the dramatic works from which the material originally derives" (2016, 120). The examples, which inspired this paper, are not Holderness and Loughrey's textually rich objects, however. Rather, they represent the broad malleability and adaptability of Shakespeare and allow me to reconnect the opening work of this article on feminist fashion with what Iyengar terms "Shakescrafts" (2014, 348). While searching for representative examples of Shakescrafts on Etsy, one thing came up more than any other: items that bear Helena's description of her friend, Hermia, from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "though she but little, she is fierce" (Shakespeare 1988, III, 2, 335-6). Although it is impossible to ascertain that Etsy's search function only returns unique results, it is still remarkable that searching for this quotation alone produced 2,950 results. This is all the more significant because, unlike many of the other quotations that have made their way onto merchandise, "though she but little" has a largely derogatory tone. It is not superficially romantic ("I would not wish any companion in the world but you", *The Tempest* III, 1, 54-5); inspirational ("it is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves" (Shakespeare 1998, I, 2, 141-2); a frequently mangled version of "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars" from *Julius Caesar*, III, 1, 57); profound or tragic ("To be or not to be", *Hamlet*) or contemplative ("I like this place. And willingly could waste my time in it", *As You Like It*, 2006, II, 4, 90-1). The line is instead uttered in frustration within the play by Helena about her apparent love rival, Hermia. It is the third reference to Hermia's short stature in the scene and all three references needle Hermia's sensitivity about her height. Hermia attacks her friend first with words, describing the taller Helena as a "painted maypole" (Shakespeare 1988, III, 2, 296) and warning her that she is not so small that she cannot reach Helena's eyes with her nails (III, 2, 298). The scene's comic characterisation of the seemingly tall, confused Helena and the furious, small Hermia then reaches its particularly hurtful conclusion when Lysander dismisses his former lover as a "dwarf" (III, 3, 317).

Yet, the quotation's insulting nature is not explained or advertised when it is incorporated into Shakescrafts. Neither is it part of the roaring trade

in Shakespeare insult-themed goods that sees quotations like Jacques' scathing assessment that the Duke Senior's brain is "as dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage"<sup>5</sup> printed on a glass or "Thine face is not worth sunburning"<sup>6</sup> on a vintage-style locket, a slight misquotation of Henry's wry self-description to Katherine (Shakespeare 1995a, V, 2, 146-8). Here the pleasure seemingly lies in the purchasers' ability to use or wear a scathing insult, and thus incorporate it into their everyday life without the knowledge or awareness of the casual observer. One reviewer of the *As You Like It* glass, for instance, enjoyed using it "real subtle like" while teaching *Macbeth* and "seeing how long it takes for one of the students to notice!" (Etsy Tanya 2018). Instead, 'though she be but little' is put to positive and straight-forward effect on Etsy. It becomes a statement of female power: a reminder that despite sexual dimorphism, women are capable of strength in other ways. In *Hermia's*, the line reminds us of her 'fierceness'. Testament to this reading and the subsequent reproduction of the line is the overwhelming amount of items bearing it, which are targeted at young girls or which indicate children and/or girls as a potential consumer through their metadata. After all, Helena's efforts to belittle her friend lose some of their sting and become an accurate description when applied to the most mundane conclusion: the smallness of a child.

A similar strategy was indeed used by the Royal Shakespeare Company when they released their own range of merchandise featuring the line, entitled 'Fierce'. In stock for a number of years now, the RSC seem to have just pre-empted the vogue for feminist or female-positive statements on household objects and clothes. The line bears similar hallmarks to later Etsy products, however, with its targeting of female Shakespeare through a consistent bright pink and white colour scheme. And although the relatively inexpensive range includes merchandise suitable for any age (including notebooks, badges and bags), the inclusion of a baby bib and baby grow in the line indicates a similar awareness of the pleasure and humour to be gained from ascribing *Hermia's* littleness to an infant.

A contributive factor beyond this, which speaks to the line's potential popularity among makers and consumers, is the different inflection that 'fierce' possesses. Fierceness is not only the ability to be physically violent, frightening or powerful. It has acquired through use in gay culture in the late nineties and early noughties a generally positive quality, bestowing upon the described an exceptionality, whether evident through fashion-

5 See RealPeopleGoods. "Shakespearean Insult Shot Glass - Sarcasm Shakespeare Gift - English Teacher Gift - Thespian Present - Remainder Biscuit After a Voyage". URL <https://etsy.me/2S1TgR3> (2018-11-23).

6 BijouxMalou. "Shakespeare Insult Necklace Insult in Style Thine Face is Not Worth Sunburning Shakespeare Quote Henry V Quote". URL <https://etsy.me/2DBzVkJ> (2018-11-23).

able clothing, self-confidence and ability, or an unapologetic boldness. This newer meaning, like the potential attribution of the description to a small child, works to lessen the line's original insulting quality and to reframe it instead as an admiring statement of female power. Of course, a good deal of the items sold on Etsy bearing this quotation serve no particular or explicit political purpose. But a further search on Etsy for the terms 'Shakespeare' and 'feminist' produced 105 results and, of those, 80 featured the same line again or derivative variants thereof, including 'she is fierce' or 'little but fierce'. In the online world of Shakescraft, 'though she but little, she is fierce' is thus a Trumpian soundbite: a phrase that can be repurposed for feminist use. The association of early modern women with obedience and silence can be reimagined through an example of outspokenness against the odds (that Hermia wields power in spite of her size), just as the fearful and misogynistic rhetoric of Trump's speech can be wielded against him in protest. That this is a strategy that makes a virtue of its unlikelihood is evident in the quasi-surprised tone of the copy used to sell the 'though she but little' medal holder display racks: 'Sometimes big things come in small packages!'

### 3 Women and Craft in Shakespeare's Plays

It is nonetheless apt that the most popular craft version of Shakespeare on Etsy comes from and relates to the two characters whose previously loving friendship is invoked through a description of embroidery and whose conversation reveals not only the pleasures of craft but the skill of the crafter. Earlier in the same scene (III, 2) where Helena delivers her more famous assessment of Hermia, she laments her friend's apparent betrayal, questioning the loss of their 'sisters' vows' and 'school-days' friendship':

We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,  
Have with our needles created both one flower,  
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,  
Both warbling of one song, both in one key,  
As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds,  
Had been incorporate. So we grow together,  
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,  
But yet an union in partition;  
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem;  
So, with two seeming bodies, but one heart;  
Two of the first, like coats in heraldry,  
Due but to one and crowned with one crest.  
(Shakespeare 1988, III, 2, 203-14)

Helena beseeches her friend to remember the closeness they once had – the time they spent with their heads bowed over a sampler, stitching together one flower; sat on one cushion; singing one song with two voices in the same key. Her speech is a paean to female friendship as the image of jointly-crafted embroidery gives way to the double cherry, “seeming parted, but yet an union in partition” (Shakespeare 1988, III, 2, 209-10) and to two berries hanging off the same stem. The intimacy between the two young women is mapped onto these lush images as an artificial separation of bodies but a unity of heart (a sentiment that can be mapped pleasingly onto the connections forged in joint political protest).

The ability of craft and embroidery in particular to speak for bonds of female friendship, family and community is apparent elsewhere in Shakespeare’s plays. Alison Findlay writes that sewing “showed that woman’s industry, identity and place were in the home rather than in the public sphere of male activity”. In the case of *Coriolanus*, while Martius “fights abroad, his wife and mother sit down on two low stools to sew and to care for the child Martius” (Findlay 2014). But unlike Helena and Hermia who are connected by their shared labour, the sewing in act one, scene three of the play demonstrates the fraught relationship between mother-in-law and daughter. Volumnia protests against her daughter-in-law’s sombre demeanour, sharing blithely her delight at sending Coriolanus off to war even as Virgilia blanches at the mere description of violence. Sewing thus provides the social occasion in which Volumnia can pontificate over her daughter-in-law, but Virgilia sews for a much more desperate reasons. Her refusal to leave the house when invited to by the visiting noblewoman, Valeria, and her frenzied commitment to domestic industry does indeed, as Findlay suggests, emphasise her “wifely modesty” (2014). Yet Valeria’s disappointed likening of Virgilia to Penelope is telling. Virgilia’s Penelope-like fidelity to Coriolanus, sewing endlessly while awaiting his return, is a tedious display of feminine devotion to both Volumnia and Valeria. The latter scolds her, “Come; I; I would your cambric were sensible as your finger, that you might leave pricking it for pity” (Shakespeare 2011, I, 3, 80).

The two sew in the first place, of course, because it is a virtuous, productive and refined way for a noblewoman to spend her time. It is for this reason that Valeria’s invitation for them to put down their needlework is to cast away their initially praised role as “manifest house-keepers” (Shakespeare 2011, I, 3, 48) for one of the “idle huswife” (III, 3, 66). To wit, Bianca is instructed by her father to “ply” (Shakespeare 2010, II, 1, 25) her needle rather than continue to row with her unmannerly sister, in *The Taming of the Shrew*. This association of sewing with a feminine ideal that is restrained and (self)disciplined is echoed in Ophelia’s account of being disrupted by Hamlet while she was sewing in her closet. While her embroidery works to fix, to impose order upon a design, Hamlet both literally and symbolically unravels. His unhinged behaviour and cryptic,



non-verbal utterances are accompanied by unlaced clothing, drooping and fouled stockings.

Queen Catharine meanwhile mobilises this association when she is visited by the Cardinals who seek her compliance in divorcing King Henry. Catharine, who is suspicious of their motives and will not assist them in their task, noting that “all hoods make not monks” (Shakespeare 2000, III, 1, 23), presents herself deliberately as a model of feminine virtue. She welcomes the men into her chambers with the comment that they interrupt her playing the “part of a housewife” (Shakespeare 2000, III, 1, 24). As their conversation progresses, and the Cardinal’s motives becoming increasingly and upsettingly clear to Catharine, she performs the role of the housewife once more. She exclaims, “I was set at work | among my maids, full little - god knows - looking | either for such men or such business” (Shakespeare 2000, III, 1, 73-5). Catharine presents herself as an unimpeachable royal mistress: the virtuous housewife sewing industriously with her women with no desire or expectation to be involved in matters of high state. Of course, such performances are of limited efficacy when Catharine has already outgrown her role as Henry’s wife. Hers is a case of delaying the inevitable rather than preventing it. Craft’s limitations as a tool of signification are more painfully exposed in both *Cymbeline* and *Othello*; plays where the meaning that the textiles once had is wrested away from its bearer. In the case of *Othello* and the infamous handkerchief “spotted with strawberries” (Shakespeare 2001, III, 3, 431), its fate to be misread as a symbol of adultery was set from its conception. Othello shares that his mother was given the handkerchief by an Egyptian “charmer” who could “almost read | The thoughts of people” (Shakespeare 2001, III, 4, 54-5) and who promised that owning the object would prevent her husband from straying, while losing it would ensure his infidelity. A doubly enchanted item, the handkerchief itself was made by a “sibyl” who “in her prophetic fury sew’d the work” from holy silk (Shakespeare 2001, III, 4, 67-9). Whether it worked for Othello’s mother is never wholly clear but the charmer’s prophecy certainly became true for Othello, even if - most tragically - not for Desdemona.

The skill of the crafter appears in an even more devastating way in *Titus Andronicus*. Lavinia’s skill in sewing is taken away from her so that the potential of craft as a mode of female expression is unfulfilled and unexpressed. On discovering his niece and her mutilated body, Marcus makes a direful comparison to the mythological Athenian princess Philomela, who was raped by her sister’s husband Tereus, who tore out her tongue in order to silence her. Marcus observes that Philomela lost “but” her tongue and “in a tedious sampler sew’d her mind” (Shakespeare 1995b, II, 4, 38-9) in order to reveal her abuser. Lavinia’s attackers, Chiron and Demetrius, were a “craftier Tereus” (Shakespeare 1995b, II, 4, 41), however, removing that option from her by cutting off “those pretty fingers [...] | That

could have better sew'd than Philomel" (Shakespeare 1995b, II, 4, 42-3). Lavinia thus resorts to a much cruder means to reveal the perpetrators of this "heinous, bloody deed" (Shakespeare 1995b, IV, 1, 80).

Susan Frye writes that the dramatic importance of textiles and female craft "impersonate" their centrality to early modern women. The plays "enact" the significance that textiles again as "objects whose production offered to make the lives of women meaningful safe". And yet, because they locate women's worth in household materials and labour, the plays also chart the vulnerability of both textiles and women to "erotic and misogynistic interpretation" (Frye 2010, 190).

#### 4 The Precarity of Craft

The potentially expressive value of female craft, be it literal act of making or more figurative uses, is indeed effaced throughout Shakespeare's plays by variously, its removal, acts of male misreading and the generally secondary quality of the female characters. The makers of Shakescraft on Etsy experience a different kind of vulnerability, but one that also demands attention because, like Lavinia's frustrated efforts, female creativity and expression mean nothing in a world that places little literal or symbolic value on women's autonomy. If she could have sewn, Lavinia may well have created a more skilled rendering of her assault than her mythical counterpart. But to complain about the loss of Lavinia's skill at such a time seems only to echo the obscenity of the original crime. In the particular case of Etsy, however, two contextual issues are of importance: the first, is the overwhelmingly female make-up of its crafters, reckoned at 88% in 2014 ("The Art and Craft of Business" 2014), and the second is contemporary employment practices. Under neoliberalism, each subject is "held responsible and account-able for his or her own actions and well-being" and "individual success or failure is interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings [...] rather than being attributed to any systemic property" (Harvey 2007, 64-5). This self-governance maps onto the demands of neoliberal capitalism and a contracting job market place where individuals are increasingly required to freelance, to work short-term or zero-hour contracts; where the ability to monetize different aspects of your professional ability is essential.

Neoliberal capitalism, of course, profits from the reduced cost of workers' benefits and pensions and sells such 'gig' employment as a preferable alternative: you can work from home if you like! You can choose your own hours! You can pursue that artistic side-line you always dreamt of! This narrative is potent for those seeking a type of employment outside of an office-based, 9-to-5 norm. And such a feeling must only be compounded by having the kind of caring responsibilities or conditions that make tra-

ditional full-time work practices impossible and that make precariousness seem like a valid way of regaining control. This is dangerous; precarity does not protect you or make you more dynamic. It exposes you and, of course, those who most need adaptability in work can least afford the costs should it fail, or change (least we should forget, burdens of care fall overwhelmingly on women). The allure of self-employment within a neoliberal economy is particularly treacherous in creative labour, because of what Angela McRobbie calls “the normative expectation of the pain” of precarity. The possibility of self-expressiveness and a “passionate attachment to something called ‘my own work’” becomes a “compelling status justification (and also a disciplinary mechanism)” for tolerating uncertainty and for staying – unprofitably – within the creative sector (McRobbie 2004, 132).

This means, according to Sarah Mosle, that what e-commerce sites like Etsy are peddling are not only handicrafts but “the feminist promise that you can have a family and create hip arts and crafts from home during flexible, reasonable hours while still having a respectable, fulfilling, and remunerative career” (Mosle 2009). This promise, she argues, is an untenable fantasy and one that dooms many makers to below minimum-wage employment and unhealthy, all-hour work practices. And this is the precarity that lies behind so many of the ‘though she but little’ Shakescraft items on Etsy. As it is for Shakespeare’s good housewives, the economically emancipatory or expressive value of female craft is effaced by its vulnerability to exploitation. Of course, this does not negate the feminist potential of such goods but it does complicate it, as does the fact that contemporary craft is, Susan Luckman argues, marked by its whiteness. Luckman writes that the “gatekeeping requirements” of makers fairs and design craft markets are echoed online and indeed, elevate a “particular kind of northern European high design sensibility” (2015, 7).

Returning to the meeting place between craft and the post-Trump political landscape yields a prime example of not only this but the perceived difficulty of feminist protest led by white women (to which the 2017 International Women’s march and later #MeToo movements both belong).<sup>7</sup> As Nicole Dawkins observes, craft offers us a “revealing standpoint” (2011, 275) from which to explore “the ever-changing plurality of positions and issues that constitute feminisms today” (Braithwaite 2002, 342). A phrase that found particular resonance during this period and in protest against

7 The #MeToo movement spread virally in October of 2017, popularised by white stars like Alyssa Milano and Ashley Judd. It sought to raise awareness for the sexual harassment and assault of women and challenge its normalisation and gained particular traction in the wake of the allegations made against Hollywood producer, Harvey Weinstein. The phrase had been used online as early as 2006, however, created by African American social activist Tarana Burke in response to a thirteen-year-old girl’s confession of sexual assault. While Burke has received some acknowledgement for role, including being named as one of *Time* magazine’s ‘silence breakers’, her part has largely been erased in favour of a narrative of celebrity-led activism.

the sexism demonstrated by the Trump administration and the President himself was uttered by Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell in response to the actions of the senior senator from Massachusetts, Elizabeth Warren. Warren had attempted to read a letter written by the civil rights activist, Coretta Scott King, during a debate in the Upper House on the appointment of the Republican senator Jeff Sessions as attorney general. King had written the letter in 1986 in opposition to Sessions' then failed judicial nomination, expressing her view that Sessions would act as federal prosecutor to "chill the free exercise of the vote by black citizens" (Our Foreign Staff 2017). Three decades later, Warren felt that King's warning needed to be heard again. This was regarded as a direct violation of the senate's rules against 'impugning the motives' of a senator and, when she continued after a caution from the House, Warren was barred from speaking for the remainder of the debate. McConnell rebuked Warren saying, "She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted" (Our Foreign Staff 2017). It was the latter part of McConnell's statement that found cachet as a rallying call for female tenacity in the face of masculine conservatism, and this too inevitably found its way onto t-shirts, magnets, mugs and the like, so that just over a year later, there were 3,196 results on Etsy for 'nevertheless she persisted'. King's central part in this story (she is the reason for Warren's persistence, after all) is strikingly absent, however. At the time of searching, Etsy only produced 64 results for 'King' and even fewer results drew any connection between Warren and King (whether in their actual content or the metadata used to advertise their goods). One notable exception to this was a listing from the shop RobotsLoveDinosaurs that sold 'She persisted' on a button in a three pack along with 'Let Liz speak' and 'Hear Coretta's words'.

The issue with this is not with Warren herself or indeed her admirable persistence but the fact that it is a description of Warren, a white woman, by McConnell that becomes a popular shorthand for feminist resistance to Republican politics. Gabrielle Moss shares that reclaiming such phrases no longer inspired her to fight, though, but drowned her "in toxicity" (2017). She questions instead, where are the words from those most marginalized by the "racists, sexists, xenophobes, [and] homophobes" who seek to further reduce their rights:

I wished that I could buy a shirt with Alice Walker's quote "The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any" which was as sharp as the "Pussy Grabs Back" shirts. I wished it was as easy and simple to find out what the people who are putting their well-being - and in many cases, their lives - on the line to fight against the Trump administration were saying as it was to find out what new, terrible, degrading thing a man had said to a woman who didn't deserve it. (Moss 2017)

Moss's imagined Walker t-shirt *does* exist online – and even on Etsy – along with a number of other Walker-based items. But tellingly, these listings were in the hundreds rather than thousands. Browsing for Walker as opposed to Shakespeare or Warren was, moreover, the only time I encountered adverts that featured black models. The hands which are often featured in listings, photographed cradling jewellery or other such handcrafted items, are overwhelmingly white. Such a degree of racial erasure and lack of representation remains uncommented on, however, because craft is “perhaps protected discursively” on account of its links with wider practices with an “ethical or at least progressive sensibility” (Luckman 2015, 7) such as buying organic or up-cycling. Etsy's slogan may be ‘#DifferenceMakesUs’ but the salient difference is, importantly, not one of diversity in class or of race among its makers but of variance from a commercial norm: hand-made versus machine-made; individually sourced and designed versus sweat-shop produced. Even this distinction should be taken with a pinch of salt. This is not to undermine the potential ethical benefit of shopping through small businesses as opposed to transnational corporations, but we need a recognition that, as Luckman argues, the consumption of craft goods is “part of a set of ethical and self-aware middle-class purchasing behaviours”. These are “*niche* lifestyles” [emphasis added], open only to those who can afford them (Luckman 2015, 25). And this is one of the new digital landscapes that Shakespeare has colonised. Shakespeare's presence and popularity on websites such as Etsy appears as an extension of the capital he possesses in ‘TRL’ or, in real life. His commodification in the form of Shakescraft reifies the assumption, whether correct or not, that the enjoyment of Shakespeare is the exclusive preserve of the white, educated middle and upper-middle classes.

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