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Tracking the Evolution of the Companionate Marriage Ideal in Early Modern Comedies

Madison L. Pierce

Honors Senior Thesis

Spring 2018

Professor Dennis Britton

Abstract: *This thesis examines the socially constructed ideal of companionate marriage in Elizabethan and Jacobean England through four dramas by Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, John Fletcher, Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton. It probes the question of how these theatrical productions of early modern England fit within or defy the emerging social trends regarding companionate marriage. It uses socioeconomic statuses, religious affiliations, and emerging notions of race as lenses through which to analyze the romantic couples depicted in these plays. The results of this study indicate that, while exact authorial intentions remain unknown, these plays served as proponents of the companionate marriage while dually challenging the persisting restrictive social norms that prevented prospective unions between religiously, socioeconomically, and/or racially divergent individuals.*

Key Terms: *Companionate marriage; Protestant Reformation; race; religious conversion; gender; wealth; early modern England*

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Introduction: Companionate Marriage Across the Ages

The historical persistence of marriage in its various forms and cultural variants indicates its prominent position not only as a core social practice, but additionally as a tool for understanding the greater social trends, priorities, and dominant ideologies of respective populaces. Paul Amato, in his article “Institutional, Companionate, and Individualistic Marriage: A Social Psychological Perspective on Marital Change” concisely outlines this role of marriage, defining it “as a social institution— a fundamental element of social organization” (Amato 76). Dictating a certain level of “social organization,” marriage is unequivocally affected by and affects the larger social dynamics at work in nations across the world. In contemporary society, changing marriage practices mirror the growing preoccupation in society at large regarding establishing equality amongst all genders and individuals of all sexual orientations.

These sweeping reformative movements placing love and companionship as the primary factors in choosing prospective spouses echoes the rapid transformation of ideologies surrounding marriage in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, as the persisting social conventions of the period similarly gave way to the changing religious and social landscape of England. Yet despite these moves towards companionate marriage in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, the companionate marriage ideal has only begun to fully blossom in the current age as enduring social constraints have been further broken down and accompanied by far more explicit campaigns for gender equality and same-sex marriage. These differing social environments, however, both serve as testaments to the persistent nature of companionate marriage as a social ideal and a collective priority of mankind. As marriage practices continue to be reshaped in the

current era, the study of these changes and their social origins becomes a rich site for anthropological analysis, historical inquiry, and literary study.

Specifically within the framework of Elizabethan England, the religious reformations that shook the nation were evident in the ideological amendments to marriage and their subsequent effect upon social dynamics. The period under examination in this thesis, from 1589 to 1611, was audience to the Protestant Reformation and further social upheavals regarding socioeconomic classes that concurrently disrupted prevailing matrimony practices. Thus, in studying marriage practices in early modern England through drama, the greater social and religious anxieties of the era become salient, providing a glimpse into the theological and communal environment of the country. This thesis, in examining early modern English comedies specifically in relation to these marital trends, reads four Elizabethan and Jacobean productions as not merely fictional entertainments, but as active commentaries that utilize the social upheavals of the era to support, deny, and ultimately satirize society's constructed—and reconstructed—ideologies surrounding marriage. Through an investigation of Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize* or *The Tamer Tamed*, Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*, and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* alongside prevailing theological texts of the time, this study highlights the importance of dramatists of the period in exposing and rebelling against the social conformities of the era, furthering the ideal of companionate marriage and pushing it to its limits through their theatrical productions.

Companionate Marriage: Ideologies and Actualities in Early Modern England

In light of marriage's mirroring of social trends, marriage practices in early modern England revealed the growing divergence between Christian sects. This divide was notably encompassed by the question of the sacramental nature of marriage, a query that was introduced by the Protestant Reformation and strengthened the growing animosity between Protestants and Catholics. Upon this matter of the sacramental nature of marriage, the former dissented, believing that marriage should not be considered as a sacrament, while the latter held that marriage had sacramental value (Greaves 116). With Protestantism establishing a prominent position under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the status of marriage consequently shifted from its sacred position. Yet, despite this shift in Protestant ideologies away from marriage holding sacramental value, the practice nonetheless retained a privileged position in society and was largely encouraged and facilitated by the church (Wiesner-Hanks 63). Marriage's central role in binding man and wife in a union with the ultimate purpose of serving God prevailed within Christianity as a whole, solidifying marriage's religious significance irrespective of the shifting ideologies surrounding its sacramental value.

The changing theologies regarding marriage included an alteration to perspectives about the motives and ultimate goals for marriage. Irrespective of the divisions in theologies regarding the sanctity of marriage, within the institution of marriage itself "there was general agreement that [marriage] served a tripartite purpose, which was procreation, avoidance of fornication, and companionship" (Greaves 117). The final "purpose" of marriage, "companionship," is a notion that was experiencing significant reformations in early modern England. While the notion of

companionate marriage did not develop in earnest until the 17th century, by the late 16th century a greater emphasis was being placed on the necessity of camaraderie and friendship between spouses to ensure the health and longevity of their marriage (Stone 325).

Numerous texts played an important role in the development of companionate marriage ideologies. The first and most successful of the three I will discuss was *The Christen State of Matrimonye* by Protestant reformer Henry Bullinger, originally published in 1541 (Tilney 24). It served as a moral guide for couples in navigating through married life. It is regarded “as a source for puritan domestic conduct literature” that supported the ideal of friendship and affection in marriage as essential to its prosperity (Euler 369). The wide circulation of this work served to reinforce the ideologies of companionate marriage amongst the populace. Directly preceding Bullinger’s work was Erasmus’ 1518 theological publication *Encomium Matrimonii*, a controversial piece supporting marriage as more honorable than celibacy, and was widely rejected (and subsequently banned) by Catholics for its overtly sexualized casting of marriage (Tilney 21). However, a particularly influential work for the discussion of the plays I will investigate was Edmund Tilney’s *The Flower of Friendship* in 1586, as Tilney presided as the Master of the Revels in the Elizabethan court (Greaves 127). The work, written in honor of Queen Elizabeth I, engaged a cast of characters that both supported and condemned the institution of marriage while explicating several of the core responsibilities of spouses in daily life with an emphasis on the significance of companionship and trust (Tilney 3). These three works, among others, stood at the forefront of discussions surrounding companionate marriage and laid the foundation for further discussion and debate on the topic.

While these plays worked to introduce the equalizing nature which laid at the basis of the companionate marriage model, ingrained gender hierarchies persisted in influencing the dynamics between husband and wife. Within the home, “The husband was held to be the superior partner, the wife the subordinate and inferior” (Houlbrooke 96). Therefore, while the selection of a partner was more largely based upon personal affections and the friendship between two individuals, there remained a notable difference between the positions of husband and wife within marriage. Henry Bullinger furthered these notions in *The Christian State of Matrimonye*, declaring “marriage as involving mutuality, but not equality” (Euler 373), creating a complex gender dynamic in the home that encouraged friendship while dually forcing the acceptance of inferiority by the wife.

In the midst of these prevailing gender norms, however, the focus on companionship within marital unions drew both partners into an equally extensive process of determining the potential suitability of their prospective partners. According to Richard Greaves, author of *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England*, in order to craft a marriage in which husband and wife were able to achieve a relationship that fulfilled idealisms of companionship, there were several pivotal factors that were widely believed to be integral in the choosing of a companion. Five factors in particular held prominence in the selection of a spouse, namely, “religious agreement” (Greaves 130) “good birth” (132), “wealth” (134), “personal qualities” (137) and “mutual liking or love” (139). The most crucial determinant amongst these five factors within all Christian denominations was “religious agreement” between spouses. Because of the centrality of religion in Elizabethan and Jacobean society, a friendship between husband and wife was believed to be predicated upon their ability to practice their faith together. At the core of this

ideology was also the notion that children could not be adequately brought up and educated in the Christian faith unless their parents held congruous beliefs (130). These leading ideologies on the significance of marriage being a religious as well as a legal union made the proposition of interfaith marriages widely unacceptable due to the theological disagreement of the marital partners. Marriages merely across Christian denominations were not permitted, as Protestants made the claim that, “To marry an infidel infringed the second commandment,” with the label “infidel” subsequently extending to both Catholics and non-Christians (131). Such strict regulations on interfaith unions identified the divisive and stratified environment in England that, while welcoming the pillars of companionate marriage, dually excluded the joining of individuals who held dissimilar religious beliefs.

Moving from a theological to social domain, the second primary characteristic sought in potential spouses was “good birth,” which suggested that a couple should share a similar social standing in order to achieve compatibility. This characteristic speaks to the importance of lineage and family in marital relations in Elizabethan England, and the strict stratification of society that condemned marriages between individuals from different social spheres. Marriages across classes, however, were “an important avenue for social mobility,” and while often condemned for the risk they posed to the ideal of companionship when a husband and wife had dissimilar backgrounds, were relatively commonplace (Greaves 132). The deeply entrenched social classes in Elizabethan England therefore became malleable in the face of marriages across these premeditated divisions, making “good birth” even more promising in a prospective spouse as a means of elevating oneself to new realm in the social hierarchy.

However, the notion of “good birth” and lineage was increasingly linked to emerging ideologies of race in the era, creating a further divide between potential spouses in otherwise ideal companionate marriages. As Burton and Loomba allude to in their introduction to *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion*, race began to be considered in the early modern period “As a synonym for class. At this time, class was seen as an attribute rooted in the blood, or inherited, rather than a changeable socioeconomic positioning” (Burton 14). This notion that “class” and race were similarly ingrained and irretractable facets of one’s identity made the proposition of marriages across both classes and races identically problematic, with racial ideologies exacerbating the social stratification and prejudice that prevailed in the early modern period (15). As certain races were deemed as inferior and the social construct of race was viewed as an “inherited, rather than...changeable” physical and moral attribute, those belonging to a stigmatized race could consequently not be considered of “good birth,” and marriages crossing racial lines were thus in opposition with the prevailing companionate marriage ideal.

The third factor to be considered in an ideal companion, linked closely with good birth, lineage, and race, was wealth. The issues surrounding wealth’s role in marriage negotiations were controversial, however, and the significance of one’s fortune was not supported in religious circles as a justifiable concern to consider before marrying (Greaves 134). The moral issues surrounding wealth playing a part in the selection of a marriage partner, namely the influence of greed and the lack of affection that would lead to marital discord, did not deter individuals from weighing it equally with other factors (134). Marriages could experience turmoil if spouses accrued debt or were unable to sustain a family and, in turn, negated the hope for a fruitful

friendship between marriage partners. Wealth therefore held a shifting and subjective role in the formation of marriages, but nevertheless continued to be a substantial factor for many individuals considering marriage.

The fourth and fifth characteristics of “personal qualities” and “mutual liking or love” were most closely aligned with the companionate marriage model. These factors grew in significance in the early 17th century as ideologies of companionate marriage became increasingly prominent, yet their intangible nature made their application in society as a determining component of marriage nearly impossible to measure (Greaves 137). However, their existence within theological discourse surrounding marriage emphasize the crucial nature of affection and character traits above material or monetary concerns in determining a prospective husband or wife. Though certain “personal qualities” were highly sought after, such as “virtue” (137), they were a contributing factor that largely remained up to individual interpretation and were thus predicated upon the persona and character of individual persons.

These five elements of companionate marriages that Greaves constructs provide a strong basis for assessing the feasibility and efficacy of marriages while dually highlighting the growing, yet still secondary, prevalence of friendship and love as factors in choosing a spouse. Using these elements as a framework for analysis, the four plays under study provide a commentary on the attributes of a “successful” companionate marriage while revising and reforming the societal prejudices and norms that affirm these tenets of compatibility.

I will be examining four plays in chronological order in an effort to track the evolution of companionate marriage ideals within the context of Greaves’ aforementioned elements of a companionate marriage. I will begin in my first section to examine the role of faith in

companionate marriages through first outlining the theological context of the era, and then analyzing religious agreement within the context of the marriages in Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. In my second section, I will be discussing emerging racial ideologies of the period and their subsequent role in the companionate marriage framework. Under this theme I will be considering William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and its treatment of interracial couples. In my third section, I will investigate the concerns of wealth and social status in early modern England and the subsequent influence on the marriages in Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* as well as John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize* or *The Tamer Tam'd*. Finally, in reflecting upon these four productions and their contributions to discussions of companionate marriage practices, I will situate them within the context of contemporary classroom instruction and consider future research on the topic.

Faith & Marriage in Elizabethan & Jacobean England

In early modern England, "religious agreement," as purported by Greaves, was a fundamental component of companionate marriages. The religiously centered nature of society in England, with the monarchy closely linked to the church, consequently resulted in marital unions being heavily influenced by theological discourse and reconfigurations. In line with this state of affairs, and in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, the idea of marriage subsequently underwent significant modifications in religious and legal spheres that played out on stages throughout England. There occurred in particular the "Development of a distinctively Protestant emphasis on companionate marriage as the basis for mutual spiritual support" (Peters 63). Thus, the union of man and wife became an essential avenue for "spiritual support" to be created, even

as Protestantism declared that such support could not be fostered except within the framework of a “companionate marriage.”

In light of these new imaginings of married life in early modern England, the foundational texts that guided daily religious life began to reflect these revolutionary ideologies. Among these was the 1559 edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*, which, in outlining the pillars of a perfect union between man and wife, informed the priest at the wedding ceremony to declare that the couple’s energies must be put forth “for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity” (“Form” 5). The role of “help” and “comfort” in marriage, while still retaining a secondary position to the requirements of reproduction and service to God, nevertheless became an ordained component of a successful marriage. Furthermore, the focus upon the creation of a “mutual society” in which husband and wife were in a reciprocal union based around their support for one another was a novel shift that highlighted the significance of emotional stability and friendship in the sustainability of marriages through “prosperity and adversity.”

Joining in this discourse were authors such as Dorothy Leigh, who dually helped in defining this novel dynamic between spouses. Her publication, *The Mother’s Blessing*, was published in 1616 and circulated with revisions throughout the seventeenth century, subsequently evolving into a pivotal text for Protestant conceptions of companionate marriage. Leigh’s work acts as the denouement of sorts within the historical confines of this thesis, and its firm assertion of the female voice in discussions of marriage illustrates the considerable reformations that the companionate marriage “movement” instigated. In Joan Larsen Klein’s introduction to *The Mother’s Blessing* in her collection *Daughters, Wives, and Widows: Writings by Men about*

Women and Marriage in England, 1500-1640, she confirms Leigh's revolutionary role in advocating for the female voice within marital discourses, stating that "Dorothy Leigh does quite consciously what...others said women must not do--she meddles in the male domain of religion and theology" (Klein 288). This entrance into the "male domain" marks her rejection of conventional gender hierarchies and the barriers preventing women from openly evaluating "religion and theology" in respect to marriage and child-rearing.

Within *The Mother's Blessing* itself, Leigh directs her commands toward mothers collectively, yet also channels her comments toward men of a marriageable age. She charges young men to "marry with none except you love her; and be not changeable in your love" (Leigh 301). Her insistence upon the importance of "love" and consistency within this affection clarifies her advocacy for emotional compatibility within marriage and the preservation of this "love" throughout the duration of a couple's life together. She goes on to highlight in her final section of *The Mother's Blessing* how her own son will act when he chooses a spouse after living under her instruction, remarking that "if he served God, he would obey God, and then hee would chuse a godly wife, and live lovingly and godlily with her, and not doe as some man, who taketh a woman to make her a companion and fellow, and after hee hath her, he makes her a servant and drudge" (302). Leigh's connection between living "lovingly and godlily" with a spouse while retaining them as "a companion and fellow" makes the existence of companionship between husband and wife not simply an ideal state, but a necessary condition for serving God adequately. Furthermore, Leigh's condemnation of treating women as "servant[s]" and rather as partners in mutual service to God clarifies her stance against inequality between genders in companionate marriages.

Yet the “godly wife” that Leigh refers to in the aforementioned quote remains an ambiguous term which brings into question the nature of holiness in this era and whether a “godly woman” within a religion outside of Christianity could be considered a feasible spouse according to Leigh’s assessment. Despite the lack of transparency surrounding this reference to the “godly woman,” the social reality of religious divides made the prospect of interreligious unions highly improbable. Outside the animosity betwixt Christian sects, the dissension between Islam, Judaism, and Catholicism were even more prominent in English society, making marital unions between individuals from different religions a rare and strongly discouraged phenomenon. The ability of spouses in disparate religions—or merely within different sects of Christianity—to raise children under their respective religions’ tenants was considered unfeasible (Greaves 131). As decreed with the *Book of Common Prayer*, the primary responsibility of spouses was to ensure “the procreation of children to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and praise of God” (“Form” 5). As this priority of married couples remained within the sphere of Christian theologies alone, the prospect of raising children in interfaith unions was in direct opposition to the foundations of marriage as recognized by the Church of England. In conjunction with this line of thought, the *Homily on the State of Matrimony*, a homily read frequently at mandatory, weekly church services in England from 1563 well into the 17th century (Klein 11), designated that married couples should instruct their children in “the knowledge of God and true religion” (“Homily” 14). This “true religion” to which the homily refers is likely an ode to Christianity and Protestantism in particular as the official religion of the Church of England, reaffirming the necessity of a couple being in religious agreement to instruct their children in “the knowledge of God” as decreed and desired by the church. The issue of

conversion and the beliefs about religion as a component of one's core identity thus made marriage across faiths a particularly fraught site for the tensions and stigmas that had been socially constructed amongst the populace, a topic that will be explored at greater length in discussions of race and faith in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Religious Agreement in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*

Drawing on these reformations in religious theologies as well as on the continued resistance to interfaith marriages, Christopher Marlowe illustrates and satirizes the social boundaries that persist in Elizabeth England through his play, *The Jew of Malta*. Due to extensive, corrosive relations between Jews and Christians extending back to the 13th century, "Jews were still legally forbidden to reside in England during Marlowe's lifetime" (Mabon 413). In addition to these legal restrictions, the controversy surrounding the Lopez affair added further fuel to anti-Semitism amongst England's populace. Roderigo Lopez, a Jewish doctor working in England, was hired to be Queen Elizabeth's "physician in chief" in 1586 (Ro. Cecyll 441). Despite considering himself Christian and being baptized in the English church, Lopez was condemned for his Jewish identity and, in conjunction with his close interactions with the queen, was "accused of plotting to assassinate her" (Bernard 3). This controversial turn of events lent itself to the prevailing anti-Semitic atmosphere of Elizabethan England and the outright rejection of religious dissenters. Marlowe experienced success in the wake of this affair; his play was "acted three times in the three weeks after Lopez's execution" (Hopkins 31), and his success symbolized the growing religious and racial divides that persisted in England. Whether Marlowe's work acts as a reinforcement or rejection of these prevailing ideologies surrounding

followers of Judaism in Elizabethan and Jacobean England remains an unanswerable inquiry. Yet his play opens up the dialogue surrounding these controversies, permitting a greater understanding of religious tensions in the era in light of the reformation and the concurrent emphasis placed on religious agreement within companionate marriages.

Marlowe actively engages with this multi-tiered issue of religious agreement within the context of marriage in *The Jew of Malta*. He casts the persona of Barabas, a wealthy and prominent Jewish merchant, as his main protagonist, detailing the story of this renowned merchant whose fortunes are seized by the governor, Ferneze, to repay the country's debt to the Spaniards. Barabas's daughter, Abigail, becomes a pawn in her father's vengeful acts against Ferneze, with her lover Don Mathias being pitted against Ferneze's son Lodowick, in Barabas's effort to both reject his enemies and Christianity at large. While this Elizabethan drama is set in the island nation of Malta, the religious persecution and power dynamics that Marlowe engages with create a geographical and emblematic mirror of England in the early modern period as it grappled with nearly identical social dilemmas. Malta permits followers of Judaism to be realistically introduced into the setting, yet creates a parallel to the religious hostilities that prevailed in England and Europe during this period. While Marlowe's production has often been analyzed against its "successor"—William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*—due to the latter's comparable popularity, the marital unions Marlowe engages with warrant the analysis of this drama as an isolated endeavor.

The centrality of religion as a significant force in the play is declared at the outset through the use of a prologue. Marlowe begins his play with the figure of Machiavel, a stock character on the early modern stage. Irving Ribner remarks, "this play, perhaps more than any

other, created the model for what was to be one of the most popular stock characters of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, the Machiavellian villain” (351). This “villain” gives a caustic analysis of religion, remarking in his prologue that “I count religion but a childish toy, / And hold there is no sin but ignorance” (1.1. 14-15). The reduction of religion to a mere “childish toy,” while on its own acting as a blasphemous sentiment, gives key insights into the main character of Barbaras and his “childish” acts against his daughter’s Christian suitors, changing religion into a “toy” within his larger pursuits.

Furthermore, the Machiavellian villain’s allusion to the ideology that purportedly supersedes religion’s authority, that “there is no sin but ignorance,” sets the stage for the religious tensions that will dominate the plot. It further identifies how religion casts a veil over the identity and morality of characters, breeding “ignorance” and igniting conflict between potential spouses through the production. While shifting power dynamics amongst figures from diverging religions constitute the primary conflicts within the play, the relationships that form between Abigail and her respective suitors reflect the religious barriers that seemingly prevent companionate marriages to be formed. Yet Marlowe’s construction of a pseudo-companionate marriage through the conversion of Abigail in the aftermath of her beloved’s death to the Christian religion raises the question of the flexibility and malleability of religion in the face of companionship, a notion that will be further explored in this section.

Before being introduced to the two suitors that remain as the sole romantic entanglements throughout the play, we are audience to a father-daughter dynamic that reveals the persistence of submission and ownership within marriages despite the facets of mutual love and support encouraged in emerging companionate marriage ideologies. Barbaras tells his daughter that she

must endure hardships and passivity to entertain a good life, telling her to “Be silent...sufferance breeds ease” (Marlowe 1.2. 244). Barbaras’s opinion that continued “sufferance” engenders greater comfort in life highlights the gender hierarchy that persists which places a woman’s submission to their spouse’s needs as an accepted reality. As *The Christen State of Matrimonye* decreed, Bullinger’s note of “marriage as involving mutuality, but not equality” (Euler 373), highlights the pervasive gender hierarchies to which companionate marriage practices were largely adherent. Lodowick, a man whom Abigail does not wish to marry but who continues to court her, engages in conversation with Barbaras over Abigail, with Barbaras remarking, “...your father had my diamonds. / Yet I have one left that will serve your turn:-- / I mean my daughter” (Marlowe 2.3. 51-53). Barbaras’s acknowledgement that his “daughter” as among the “diamonds” he possesses places a monetary value upon her person that overlooks her merit as a companion in her potential marriages with suitors. However, these references to her suitability for potential suitors through this comparison to a gem illuminates Barbaras’s attempts to play into the interests of Lowodick, knowing that the proposition of an interfaith marriage constituted a large challenge. He admits to this dilemma in acknowledging to Lodowick that,

I know your lordship would disdain

To marry with the daughter of a Jew;

And yet I’ll give her many a golden cross

With Christian posies round about the ring. (Marlowe 2.3. 299-302)

This promise of monetary symbols of conversion, with a “golden cross” possessing “Christian posies,” engenders a mocking tone regarding religious conversion in its ability to be initiated through monetary bribes. Furthermore, Barbaras’s remarks signify that conversion can be

achieved through external means rather than internal shifts in religious beliefs. While this proposal to don Abigail with Christian attire appears frivolous, it highlights the obscure nature of conversion and the social importance of physical markers or characteristics to showcase one's religious identity. These elements further inform the evolution of racial ideologies in the period around one's social value being predicated upon outward appearances, a topic that will be taken up further in discussions of *The Merchant of Venice*.

The interfaith couples that sustain attention throughout the duration of the play bring the issue of religious conversion within the companionate marriage framework to light for audiences. In whispering with Abigail in the presence of Lodowick, Barbaras confesses his religiously-rooted animosity toward this suitor, declaring that

This offspring of Cain, this Jebusite,
 That never tasted of the Passover,
 Nor e'er shall see the land of Canaan,
 Nor our Messiah that is yet to come;
 This gentle maggot, Lodowick, I mean,
 Must be deluded: let him have thy hand,
 But keep thy heart till Don Mathias comes. (Marlowe 2.3. 305-312)

These references to Lodowick's status as an outcast due to his lack of knowledge regarding Jewish beliefs and practices starkly identifies Barbaras's resistance to accept any suitor for Abigail who does not share in their common beliefs. Due to these inherent religious differences, Lodowick becomes a "maggot" worthy of delusion due to his status within Judaism as an infidel. Lodowick's position as the son of the governor, Ferneze, further complicates the issue, as

Ferneze's seizure of Barbaras's fortunes makes the governor a natural adversary of Barbaras. Consequently, despite their social standings being relatively comparable, the Christian beliefs and lineage that Lodowick possesses, combined with the animosity between Barbaras and Ferneze, make Lodowick and Abigail's marriage a seemingly impossible union. The limitation of "good birth" in the face of religious and moral differences thus highlights the potential fallibility of this priority in marital negotiations, bringing into question of the obstructive role of religion in otherwise ideal companionate marriages.

Yet Barbaras's musings have repercussions outside the courtship between Lodowick and Abigail. Barbaras's promise that Don Mathias shall still have Abigail's "heart" becomes a hypocritical statement as we further examine the weight of his accusations against Lodowick. Don Mathias is also a Christian gentleman, making these references to Lodowick's religious affiliation and subsequent unsuitability for marriage in turn applicable to Don Mathias. While Abigail heeds to her father's commands, Barbaras's evident resentment toward Christian men in a general manner foreshadows the inevitable thwarting of Abigail's prospective marriage.

As the deception of Lodowick continues at the orchestration of Barbaras, the importance of religious agreement becomes imbued throughout the exchanges that unfold betwixt Lodowick and Abigail. In conversation with Abigail, Lodowick requests, "Gentle Abigail, plight thy faith to me" (Marlowe 2.3. 320). While this request of Lodowick's could be contrived as a conventional lover's plea for the woman to remain dedicated and loyal to him and him alone, the use of the charged term "faith" dually entails a "plight" of religious "faith" in order for their union to be successful. This necessity brings about the moral question of whether a union, requiring an individual (in many cases the woman because hierarchically they remain below the

position of a man) to convert from the faith of their birth to that of their prospective spouse, is entering a valid and fruitful marriage. Lodowick's insistence upon this "faith" entails that their union relies upon a fundamental change to Abigail's identity and beliefs, making their union not only undesirable due to Abigail's dislike of Lodowick but also objectionable due to the extensive religious transformation with which Abigail would be confronted.

In the wake of Barbaras's pitting of Don Mathias and Lodowick against one another and their subsequent deaths, the transition of Abigail to the convent presents a particularly complex response to the restrictions of "religious agreement" and the social ideologies surrounding it. As Vanessa Rapatz suggests in her article "Abigail's Turn in *The Jew of Malta*," "The notion of turning is especially important with regard to marriage: Abigail is presented not only with Christian suitors but also with the opportunity to enter the convent, an alternative to marriage" (Rapatz 253). The death of these two "Christian suitors" at the hands of Barbaras becomes a seemingly symbolic ode to the plausibility of companionate marriages only within the confines of congruent religions. Yet Abigail, in the absence of her ideal "companionate marriage" with a man who shares "religious agreement" with her, is thus forced into the "convent" to escape a union with any Jewish men despite their eligibility within the companionate marriage framework.

Abigail's choice to enter the convent, while an honorable decision just a few decades earlier, was seen in Protestant England as a rebellious move against Christian values, as "the value of the virginal body shifted its seat within the Church to the marriage market, where its worth became predicated on the knowledge that marriage and motherhood were the ultimate goals for all women" (Reigle 498). Abigail's rejection of marriage, a core part of both social and

religious life, by entering a convent, “a locus of resistance” (Reigle 500), signifies her position of independence despite her ties to the vows of celibacy and her submission to God. This reality is augmented by the remarks of Friar Barnardine upon the death of Abigail, as he laments that she dies “...a virgin too; that grieves me most” (Marlowe 3.4. 41). Despite her new commitment to the church and her presumed conversion to Christianity, Abigail’s status as a “virgin” is a fact to be grieved and regretted. Consequently, her inability to marry her ideal “companion,” Don Mathias, highlights the reality that “religious agreement” drives potential spouses from one another when the alternative, in this extreme case, is a mutually discouraged act. While in England the expulsion of Jews made this predicament appear as an unlikely occurrence, the foreshadowing of the corrosive effects of religious animosities through Abigail’s conversion and entrance into the convent displays the further reforms to social ideologies that are imperative.

Abigail’s newly created Christian identity at the conclusion of the play, however, raises yet another issue of conversion and the debate surrounding its legitimacy in the final moments of one’s life. In looking at this particular juncture in Abigail’s story, James Shapiro explicates that “while there is no reason to doubt her sincerity at this moment, her very need to insist that she is no apostate draws attention to the popular belief that, with death imminent, Jewish converts repudiated the Christianity they had once willingly embraced” (Shapiro 158). While this “popular belief” is rooted in the socially constructed notion of Jewish individuals as outsiders and heretics in the eyes of England’s Christian communities, the final relinquishment of Abigail’s Jewish identity in her final remarks of the play does warrant skepticism regarding her true conversion, and whether her words to Friar Bernardine, “...witness that I die a Christian,” (Marlowe 3.6. 40) retain a validity in the eyes of the church. Furthermore, the controversy

surrounding Abigail's conversion closely mirrors that expressed during the execution of Roderigo Lopez, at which time his pleas that "I love my mistress [Queen Elizabeth] better than Jesus Christ" brought into question the sincerity of his conversion (Bernard 8). Lopez's need, like that of Abigail, to assert his Christian identity before death thus appears as a contrived, false statement of belief meant to merely save his life. This potential allusion to the Lopez affair signifies Marlowe's engagement with relevant issues surrounding religious conversion of the era with a particular focus upon the complex Judeo-Christian relations.

These questions surrounding conversion, religious agreement, and the persistence of gender hierarchies within the companionate marriage framework that Marlowe examines at length contribute to discourse in the religiously divisive and tumultuous environment of early modern England. In addressing these matters through a setting unknown to many English audiences, Marlowe can more easily discuss the potential of these otherwise rare interfaith marriages, yet in doing so concurrently highlights the hypocrisy inherent in the extension of love and mutual support as important facets of language while restricting such emotions to those of the same faith. Abigail's conversion becomes a particularly fraught site for examinations of the process of conversion and the changing values surrounding chastity in the Protestant Reformation, and signifies both the barriers and opportunities for ideological change amongst the populace. While not uniformly presenting an answer to these fundamental questions, *The Jew of Malta* provides audiences with a perspective on the implications of current companionate marriage ideals in a multi-faith society, prompting audiences to examine the corrosive nature of divisive ideologies separating followers of the Abrahamic faiths.

Defining Race in Early Modern England

As considerations of wealth and faith retained a prominent position in discussions of marriage in Elizabethan England, they began to be closely tied with the growing race in marital concerns that proliferated in the nation. Race, prior to the expansion of the British Empire and the evolution of notions surrounding outward appearance, centered upon “family, class, or lineage” (Burton 2). While these factors largely defined racial classifications in early modern Europe, the tumultuous religious environment also gave shape to competing notions of race in this period. Following the Protestant Reformation, the deep divides both amongst Christian denominations and between Christianity and other faiths helped to lay the groundwork for racism and social prejudices in early modern England (10). Despite “religious agreement” between spouses being based around congruent theologies rather than racial similarities, religious beliefs increasingly influenced the definition of race, as “...during the early modern period the tendency to express religious difference in somatic vocabularies endured and sometimes gained strength” (12). Increasingly, the markers of religious devotion were being reduced to physical characteristics as these “somatic vocabularies” began to compose a discourse on religion as an evolving racial designation. Christianity was generally associated with “light and whiteness” while other religious groups were linked with “darkness,” creating a racial hierarchy predicated on the ideology that Christianity intrinsically held a morally higher ground than other belief systems (Hall 69). This consequently resulted in the ideological and physical oppression of non-Christians, and gradually began to form notions of race as an ingrained, physically apparent

marker of difference. While these notions of race were not fully explored through scientific inquiry and present in the manner that they are known today, their emergence and application in literature and theatre highlight their burgeoning influence in mapping out a new hierarchies in society and complicating conceptions of identity for individuals.

Race & Marriage: The (Dis)union of Jessica and Lorenzo in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*

This social transformation in racial theories, converging with alterations in marital practices, made early modern Europe into a transformative era that Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* operates within, casting two marriages that not only key into the companionate marriage discussions taking place but dually address the challenging nature of identity formation amidst racial differentiation and discrimination. Similar to *The Jew of Malta*, and also set outside the confines of Elizabethan England, the marriages Shakespeare presents within this comedic narrative become the platform for the explication of emerging ideas about race, female empowerment, and the preponderance of monetary concerns in dictating marital partners within England.

The marriage of Jessica and Lorenzo, an interracial and interfaith couple, in *The Merchant of Venice* largely challenges the pillars of a companionate marriage and meditates on the issue of religious conversion at a time when the boundaries of religion and race became increasingly blurred. As the primary criterion considered for an ideal marriage, "religious agreement" within their union comprises a central point of contention throughout the play, as Jessica's conversion to Christianity and relinquishment of her Jewish heritage is a necessity for

the validity of their marriage. Their marriage particularly reflects on the way that religion was being described in physical terms, as at the time of *The Merchant of Venice*'s original performance, "the question of religious conversion was a particularly fraught site for the play of anxieties about skin color, and for the development of ideologically charged connections between inner essence and bodily traits" (Burton 13). Jessica and Lorenzo's relationship, through the use of racial demarcations manifested in romanticized language, works to identify the ways in which the emergent ideas of racism were manifesting themselves within the changing discourses of affection and friendship in marriage.

Lorenzo's first words regarding Jessica lay the framework for the discussion of their complex interracial union. In explicating a letter written to him by Jessica, Lorenzo comes to the defense of Jessica's "whiteness" (Adelman 13) when Lancelot delivers a letter to him from Jessica, remarking, "'tis a fair hand, / And whiter than the paper it writ on / Is the fair hand that writ" (Shakespeare 2.4. 11-13). The racial lens through which Lorenzo views Jessica engenders a feeling of his insecurity about her Jewish identity, and the necessity of associating her with as being "whiter" than "paper" links her religious difference with outward, racial connotations. In addition, his repeated use of the word "fair" is a conscious effort to place Jessica within a favorable light, and, "Jessica's fairness becomes the romance confirmation of her innately Christian soul" (Spiller 154), beginning to identify how inward beliefs and qualities were being mapped onto the skin. Lorenzo's confirmation of "her innately Christian soul" thus works to signify his underlying belief that they already possess "religious agreement" in their relationship prior to her conversion, and that her true identity as a Christian has merely been suppressed prior to their union. Lorenzo's meditation on Jessica's hands is also notable in the context of their

marital union as, “The joining of hands is often symbolic of the marriage bond” (Hall 210). This subtle allusion to her whiteness and her hand specifically focuses on the outward characteristics that inform Lorenzo’s perception of Jessica’s internal character, yet his romanticized sentiments force Jessica into a racial framework that raises the question of her true racial status and her subsequent inability to relinquish her Jewish identity.

As “good birth” stood as one of the primary characteristics in a future spouse, Jessica’s birth to a Jewish father further exacerbates the issue of the couple’s incompatibility. In Elizabethan England, the idea of “whiteness” that Lorenzo perpetuates in the aforementioned quote was also an indicator of one’s social rank and familial affluence, as continuous exposure to the sun commonly signified that one was engaged in manual labor (Hall 94). Lorenzo’s comparison to the paper thus removes Jessica from a position amongst the lower classes, elevating her to his status as a gentleman in Venice. Yet Lorenzo’s attempt to shift Jessica’s social standing is made impossible due to her familial ties and her inability to reverse her circumstances and conform to social conceptions of “good birth.” Lancelot alludes to this complicating factor of her “birth” in Jessica’s successful conversion to Christianity, remarking, “...the sins of the father are to be laid upon the children...truly I think you are damned” (Shakespeare 3.5. 1-6). Lancelot draws on the prominent—though metamorphosing—ideas of race as linked to family and lineage, admitting to Jessica that he believes her religious conversion will not free her from “the sins” that her father, connected irreversibly to her by race, has “laid upon” her. Rather than negating her ties to Shylock, Lorenzo negates Lancelot’s claims in stating that his conversion of Jessica “shall answer...better to the commonwealth than you can the getting up of the Negro’s belly” (3.5. 36-38). Lancelot consequently equates Jessica’s conversion

to Lancelot's act of "impregnating the Moor," confirming rather than denying Jessica's racial difference from himself that is derived from her irreconcilable connection to Shylock (Adelman 22). Thus, in the process of degrading Lancelot Lorenzo inadvertently admits how the racial identity of Jessica remains as a distancing mechanism between them due to her Jewish origins.

Despite their marriage working against pillars of companionate marriage, Lorenzo and Jessica remain devoted in their speeches to continuing with their union; yet, within their hopeful sentiments lay indicators of the inevitable collapse of their marriage in light of Jessica's unfulfilled conversion. Within the play, we are never witness to the true conversion of Jessica through her marriage to Lorenzo, but are left to assume such a conversion takes place at the conclusion of the play. In conversation with Lancelot, Jessica claims, "I shall be saved by my husband. He hath made me a Christian" (Shakespeare 3.5. 18-19). The dueling tenses in her statement suggest two dichotomous notions: that Jessica has not yet been "saved" but "shall" be upon her marriage, and that Lorenzo "hath made" her already into "a Christian." The subtle difference in tenses within her remark lends insight into the complex internal transformation Jessica is undergoing, wherein the malleable nature of her racial status is coming under question. Her inability to see the point at which she has been fully converted into her Christian identity and her reliance upon Lorenzo to complete her conversion disables them from achieving a status of equality within the marriage. Though Jessica may view her conversion as a strictly religious refashioning of her identity, the growing connections being established between religion and race makes her transition into Christianity more than merely a religious conversion, but an upending of the racial connotations of her status as a Jewish woman.

While Jessica's successful conversion is placed in the balance throughout the duration of the play, the final act serves to solidify the inextricable religious differences between Jessica and Lorenzo that makes their union inconceivable within the context of Elizabethan England marriage customs. The notion of being "saved" that Jessica explicates earlier on in conversation with Lancelot is replaced by the term "stealing" when Jessica converses with Lorenzo privately:

JESSICA. In such a night

Medea gathered the enchanted herbs

That did renew old Aeson.

LORENZO. In such a night

Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew,

And with an unthrift love did run from Venice

As far as Belmont.

JESSICA. In such a night

Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well,

Stealing her soul with many vows of faith,

And ne'er a true one.

LORENZO. In such a night

Did pretty Jessica, like a little shrow,

Slander her love, and he forgave it her. (Shakespeare 5.1. 12-22)

In noting that during the course of their relationship, Lorenzo was, "Stealing her soul with many vows of faith, / And ne'er a true one," Jessica aligns their relationship with Christian theologies of companionate marriage, alluded to in St. Thomas Aquinas' influential text *Summa*

Theologica, that an ideal marriage, “ ‘ consists in a certain inseparable union of souls, by which husband and wife are pledged by a bond of mutual affection that cannot be sundered’ ” (Houlbrooke 102). However, the term “stealing” engenders the idea that Lorenzo must forcefully and illicitly remove her identity, making the validity of her conversion dubious. Critics have largely remained divided on this scene and the tone that Shakespeare hoped to employ between Lorenzo and Jessica. In “From Imagination to Miscegenation: Race and Romance in Shakespeare's ‘The Merchant of Venice,’ ” for example, Elizabeth Spiller suggests that Lorenzo and Jessica allude to these mythologies and “banter them as sentimental love stories,” situating their own story amidst these narratives as a way to express their deviation from the detrimental ends these couples met (Spiller 155). However, as Jessica indicates that Lorenzo won her over with “vows of faith,” yet alludes to the fact that that there was “ne’er a true one,” she signifies the lack of her soul’s adherence to the invalid and forced “vows of faith” that have been bestowed upon her by Lorenzo.

While Lorenzo does not possess the financial resources that Jessica has retrieved from her father, he is part of a “class” of people due to his Christian upbringing that firmly and definitively separates the couple from achieving mutual friendship in marriage. In reaction to Lorenzo requesting music to be played to welcome back Bassanio and Portia, Jessica reveals, “I am never merry when I hear sweet music” (Shakespeare 5.1. 69). These final words spoken by Jessica, “distance [her] from the merry company at Belmont and returns her to her father’s melancholy and musicless house” (Adelman 9), furthering the notion that she is inexplicably separated from the Christian “class” that, following along in early modern European conceptions

of class as indicative of one's race, signifies Jessica's irreconcilable divorcement from Lorenzo's social realm and their inability to form a companionate marriage.

With these tidings of the couples' future woes, the growing desire for racial harmony in couples cause the pairings to appear as impossible unions. While the question of Shakespeare's support or condemnation of interracial marriages and marriages between divergent social classes is nearly impossible to address without consulting the playwright himself, the comedic juxtapositions of these individuals within their respective marriages and their negation of normative marital practices indicates that their unions would have likely ended prematurely in Elizabethan society or been fraught with disharmony and conflict. These marriages thus both break with the companionate marriage ideals that Greaves outlines while simultaneously introducing the evolving division of race that emerges from primarily religious origins. This intermingling of social concerns makes the marriages within *The Merchant of Venice* align with its dubbed "comedic" genre, revealing through these satirical marriages the corrosive and dividing social barriers that persist in Elizabethan England.

Wealth & Class Concerns in the Renaissance

The complexity of religious divisions in early modern England, while independently creating a myriad of questions surrounding ideal companionate marriages, were joined by the equally divisive partitioning of society based upon socioeconomic statuses throughout the country. Society was roughly divided, both in terms of occupation and income level, into the following six categories that Lawrence Stone outlines in "Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700":

Within the dual system of gentlemen and non-gentlemen contemporaries recognized a rough sixfold status division: Group 1. The dependents on charity, whether widows, aged, or unemployed; also the apprentices and living-in servants, domestic, agricultural, or industrial, who composed as much as 15% to 25% of the adult male population. Group 2. The living-out labourers, both rural and urban, agricultural and industrial. Group 3. The husbandmen, the lesser yeomen (both tenants and freeholders), and the more substantial yeomen; also the artisans, shopkeepers and small internal traders. Group 4. The lesser, or parish, gentry. Group 5. The county elite: squires, knights and baronets. Group 6. The peers: barons, viscounts, earls, marquises, and dukes. (Stone 18)

These six groups, while discluding many individuals who were situated between these groupings, constituted the primary socioeconomic classes with Elizabethan society.

As an extension of these specific, defined socioeconomic classes, the importance of one's social status became an important concern in various aspects of an individual's life, including marriage, a critical endeavor wherein wealth was a primary consideration in the choosing of a spouse. As Stone mentions in his article on social mobility within the Elizabethan era, "wealth was the most important single consideration in very many early seventeenth century marriages, and...its supremacy seems to have been increasing. Whereas social and political factors had influenced many earlier marriages, the growing fluidity of society inevitably led to a growing emphasis upon more strictly financial considerations" (Stone 194). These social reformations, joined with the religious changes of the era, brought about a discomfort with the idea of "fluidity" and the disintegration of long-held, ingrained social hierarchies. These "financial

considerations” contributed to the stability of these socially-constructed boundaries, with “wealth” retaining a largely objective status amongst other concerns in prospective marriage partners.

Yet, while wealth remained a concern, it did not coincide with religious values and priorities that concurrently held prominence in Elizabethan society. The new focus upon companionship and love within the Protestant companionate marriage framework entailed that “there was a consensus of opinion...that wealth should not be a factor in choosing a marital partner” (Greaves 134). The topic of wealth embodied the discord of the period, with the Protestant “consensus of opinion” deviating from the prevailing social ideologies regarding the importance of wealth in marital negotiations. At the level of the monarchy, governing figures “tended to agree with ministers in preferring marriages within respective social classes, but not so much for religious reasons as to maintain social order and decorum” (Greaves 133). This focus on “social order and decorum” intimates the fears surrounding potential marriage partners and the social practices that they may introduce that do not coincide with a particular social class. Stone discusses this dynamic in Elizabethan and Jacobean England in “Marriage among the English Nobility in the 16th and 17th Centuries,” indicating that concerns about wealth were particularly prominent amongst the upper classes. In this period, “a growing attachment to land and a growing emphasis on family aggrandizement” (Stone 188) contributed to the upper classes wishing to remain within their overall social “group” while ensuring the continuation of their land holdings and prominence.

Money, Marriage, & Mutuality: Thomas Dekker & Thomas Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* and John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize or The Tamer Tamed*

Capitalizing upon this contentious topic of wealth and socioeconomic status, Jacobean dramatists showcased the complex intermingling of companionate marriage ideals with social norms surrounding wealth and privilege. Thomas Dekker, joined by Thomas Middleton and John Fletcher, played upon the social dynamics surrounding wealth and privilege that prevailed in early modern England. Marriage, within the scope of their works, looks beyond the material wealth of individuals to the ideal of companionship and friendship in marriages irrespective of personal or familial wealth. Their contemplation and rejection of social restrictions within *The Roaring Girl* and *The Woman's Prize or The Tamer Tamed* highlights the progression of the companionate marriage ideal in relation to gender equality, demanding in both implicit and explicit manners the existence of respect and the disintegration of gender hierarchies within marriages and within society as a collective. These bold claims surrounding wealth, class, and gender hierarchies situate these Jacobean comedies as revolutionary and vital productions for our understanding of the companionate marriage framework's evolution and its subsequent influence in perpetuating larger debates surrounding corrosive social practices and norms.

Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, in their play *The Roaring Girl*, explicitly take on these issues of socioeconomic stratification with the context of companionate marriages. *The Roaring Girl*, set in an urban landscape, provides a comprehensive look at the various socioeconomic hierarchies that existed. It follows the story of Moll Cutpurse, a woman who is largely an outcast in society due to her position as a vagrant and her unaccepted gender-fluid identity. Yet she becomes an indispensable figure to Sebastian Wengrave, a young gentleman

who is determined to marry Mary Fitzallard despite her small dowry and lower socioeconomic status. Sebastian's father, Sir Alexander Wengrave, resists their prospective union, and in order to alter his perspective, Sebastian contrives with Moll Cutpurse to falsify a marriage between himself and Moll to convince Sir Alexander of the preferable social position that Mary Fitzallard maintains. Sir Alexander attempts to provoke Moll to steal jewels, yet his efforts are a vain and fruitless attempt to keep the suspected union between Moll and Sebastian separated. Sebastian soon reveals his true elopement with Mary Fitzallard to the joy of Sir Alexander, who views her through a revised lens following the prospect of Sebastian's marriage to Moll.

The centrality of wealth in choosing a marital spouse becomes a focal point of contention within the play as the potential of marriages across social classes is clarified. Sebastian, in conversation with Mary, describes his discussions with his father Sir Alexander surrounding their engagement:

He [Sir Alexander] reckoned up what gold
This marriage would draw from him, at which he swore
To lose so much blood could not grieve him more.
He then dissuades me from thee, called thee not fair,
And asked, 'What is she but a beggar's heir?'
He scorned the dowry of five thousand marks.
If such a sum of money could be found,
And I would match with that, he'd not undo it,
Provided his bags might add nothing to it,
But vowed, if I took thee, nay more did swear it,

Save birth from him, I nothing should inherit. (Dekker 1.1. 79-88)

Sebastian's explanation of his father's perspective regarding the union of Sebastian and Mary revolves around monetary concerns specifies that the older generation, which the father seemingly represents, remains within the restrictive mindset of social hierarchies. The likening of "gold" to "blood" illustrates the core role that wealth played in figuratively sustaining one's life and social stature, and Sebastian's decision to pursue a marriage without attention to this priority becomes a personally offensive and problematic choice for Sir Alexander to see his son make. But blood's meaning extends beyond these materialistic concerns surrounding wealth, a concept that Patricia Crawford takes up in *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* in explicating that blood is "both a substance and a symbol, tying together consanguinity, property, honour, social status and parenthood" (Crawford 113). In "inherit[ing]" birth from his father, Sebastian is thus taking on a "social status" and "honour" that wealth does not affect but which is a part of their connection as biological kin. Yet, in light of this conception of blood in early modern England, it becomes evident that biological bloodlines are correlated with these metaphysical, social constructions of "social status" and "honour," and that not only physical but social traits are inherited from an individual's parents. This idea is furthered by Sebastian's quotation of his father, who derogatorily remarked that Mary was a "beggar's heir," and thus below their family in terms of wealth, lineage, and social rank. In this manner, Sir Alexander sees the potential of their union as a loss of "so much blood" through intermingling of this blood with the socially-defined impure blood of Mary.

Yet in the wake of Sebastian's contrived marriage to Moll Cutpurse as a retaliatory measure against his father, the reality of the societal honor that wealth confers and its role in

preserving a strong lineage clarifies its continued presence within the evolving companionate marriage framework. After learning of Sebastian's proposed engagement with Moll, Sir Guy Fitzallard, father to Mary, mocks Sir Alexander on his refusal of Mary as a suitable spouse and Sebastian's subsequent selection of a woman far lower in social rank than his daughter. He remarks to Sir Alexander,

A very abject she [Moll], poor gentlewoman.

Your house had been 'dishonoured'! Give you joy, sir,

Of your son's gaskin-bride. You'll be a grandfather shortly

To a fine crew or roaring sons and daughters,

'Twill help to stock the suburbs passing well, sir. (Dekker 1.11. 22-24)

Sir Guy Fitzallard highlights how Moll, as an "abject...gentlewoman" has "dishonoured" the family, with the "roaring sons and daughters." As marriage remained primarily focused upon "the procreation of children" ("Form" 5) despite its shifted focus toward companionship, the idea of leaving a legacy of "roaring sons and daughters" that would "stock the suburbs" and become vagrants on the streets signals a failure of the union and a rapid demise into the lowest social classes. In this same vein, the term "roaring," defined as, "To behave in a lively and noisy manner, typically whilst in a state of intoxication," ("Roar") implies within this context that "intoxication," being associated with the lower classes, is a trait that is directly passed on to one's "sons and daughters" regardless of their individual moral values and aspirations. In light of these concerns of passing on "roaring sons and daughters" with purportedly inherited immoral tendencies, the union of Sebastian and Moll warrants concern for the livelihood of their children.

Conversely, the marriage of Sebastian to Mary would permit social mobility for the Fitzallard family, and Sir Guy seemingly implies that Sebastian and Mary's difference in socioeconomic standing is not so great as to make their marriage impossible or potentially dangerous as he deems Sebastian and Moll's union. As Jean Howard suggests in her article *Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England*, Moll's gender fluidity and donning of male attire indicate that she is breaking with gender divides, and within the context of early modern England prevailing social ideologies held that "The mannish woman not only produces bastards but is one herself, and she threatens the collapse of the entire class system" (Howard 425). While Sir Guy's condemnations of Moll appear to be rooted in self-fulfilling interests, his declarations clarify the prevalent stigmas surrounding socioeconomic status as indicative of one's moral worth and Moll's presupposed dangerous influence on "the entire class system" in continuing to reproduce "bastards" through her fluid gender identity.

While Dekker and Middleton engage with the initial formation of marriages through Sebastian and Mary's complex courtship, they dually contrast these prospective unions with older married couples, giving insight as to the perspective of partners who married based upon mutual love versus monetary gains. This dynamic is set forth in the union between Gallipot, an old apothecary, and his wife, who are met by the monetary demands of Miss Gallipot's previous suitor, Sebastian, who was believed to be deceased. In discussing these financial matters, Gallipot mentions to his wife that "We venture lives / For wealth, but must do more to keep our wives" (Dekker 1.6. 146-147). As an apothecary, Gallipot represents a wise figure of sorts, curing and providing solutions for ailments both physical and symbolic/social in origin within the play. In declaring that our "lives" are bound up in "wealth," Gallipot places marriage and the

preservation of “our wives” on a higher plane, removed from monetary concerns and requiring more effort from spouses to maintain. This delineation between material and immaterial gains in life provides a new male perspective, rejecting the simple commodification of women through dowries, and begins to introduce the question of what doing “more to keep our wives” must look like in the context of Jacobean society.

This parallel structure of the old and new couples that Middleton and Dekker introduce accentuate the prevailing differences that exist between generations surrounding the framework of marriage. While the happy union that takes place between Sebastian and Mary suggests that the companionate marriage model has taken precedence over monetary issues, “...the conventional marriage ending does not resolve the generational issues the play raises” (Forman 1550). In conjunction with this thought, the play in fact simply places Moll and Mary against one another as potential wives, with Moll’s social reputation and gender fluidity making her an undesired marriage partner in the eyes of Sir Alexander. Moll’s gender fluidity in particular symbolized a threat to social norms and systems, as “The stability of the social order depends as much on maintaining absolute distinctions between male and female as between aristocrat and yeoman” (Howard 422). Howard’s assertion of this role of both gender and class as pillars of “social order” indicates that Moll is bridging the divides of gender hierarchies as well as social classes in her interactions and interference within the marriages of *The Roaring Girl*. Howard goes further in this vein to suggest that in the early modern period “When women took men's clothes, they symbolically left their subordinate positions. They became masterless women” (424). Moll’s independent nature and her status as a “masterless” woman bring into question the necessity and, further, the morality of gender hierarchies in demeaning the potential value of

women within society. As Howard further asserts, “The Roaring Girl uses the image of the crossdressed woman to defy expectations about woman's nature and to protest the injustices caused by the sex-gender system. And if comedy demands a marriage, it gets the marriage of Mary Fitz-Allard and Sebastian, but not the marriage of Moll” (438-439). Thus, due to the persistence of the “sex-gender system” and its prevailing “injustices,” Moll remains single at the conclusion of the play, rejecting the conventional place of the woman in the normative “sex-gender system” and demanding greater recognition of women’s rights.

Yet Dekker and Middleton augment the important role that Moll plays in ensuring the marriage of Sebastian to Mary, and brings into question their union’s posterity given its initial resistance from Sebastian’s father. In the absence of Moll, their marriage would likely have not occurred, highlighting how wealth remains as a dividing factor for prospective couples, particularly when the issues of inheritance and lineage are pertinent. However, by highlighting that desired companionship, as existed between Sebastian and Mary, ultimately prevails over the monetary concerns of the prospective spouses, Dekker and Middleton push the boundaries of reformative ideologies surrounding marriage as an institution that should be centered upon the mutual love and companionship of the spouses alone. While the “generational issues” are not entirely solved through the trickery and deception that occur throughout the play, the play makes a firm statement against the continuation of wealth as a concern in marriage, a stance that places the older generation, and Sir Alexander in particular, in a negative light due to their view of wealth as a determining factor in marital affairs.

Yet, more importantly, the “order” that the government and churches wished to preserve through marriages within the same socioeconomic classes was directly negated by the older

generations hoping to maintain this “order” throughout the play. As alluded to in the introductory remarks to Oxford World Classics’s edition of the play, the “Disorder stems not from the City and its marginalized groups but, rather, from the older, supposedly respectable City gentry” (Knowles xxxviii). This reversal of social norms highlights the higher moral status that is automatically granted to those amongst the “supposedly respectable City gentry,” yet which is not a deserved recognition in light of their disruption of potentially fruitful marriages. The ultimately unsuccessful plot of Sir Alexander to have Moll Cutpurse steal jewels represents the attempted, forced repression of Moll as a representative of lower class women. The concurrent drama surrounding Sebastian’s marriage stems from these “gentry” as well, leading to the question of their overall moral character and stability in comparison with their lower class counterparts. While remaining on the periphery and not entering a marriage herself, Moll is introduced by the Prologue as one who “flies / With wings more lofty” (Dekker 1.1. 25-26) than other women of her same social class, rising morally above her social status despite the resistance and ridicule she experiences from those around her. Yet her willingness to help Mary and Sebastian, with a look towards their prospects of companionship and love in marriage, signals her role as a figure aiding to transition from the older generation’s preoccupation with wealth and the newer generation’s desire to focus marriage upon personal traits and compatibility. This moral corruption and “disorder” amongst the upper classes that Middleton and Dekker explore thus affirms that such divisions in marriage across social classes overlooks the internal, moral character of individuals that may be “more lofty” than their socioeconomic circumstances would suggest. In such a way, Moll’s non-monetary contributions to Sebastian and Mary go largely unrecognized due to the corrosive social prejudices that prevail in society.

Joining in this burgeoning discourse surrounding the changing status of wealth within companionate marriage considerations was John Fletcher, a playwright who composed *The Woman's Prize* or *The Tamer Tamed* in the same year Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* was published. While not taking on the same explicit tone of *The Roaring Girl* regarding the significance of wealth in the marriages he illustrates, Fletcher intertwines the topic of monetary concerns within the greater of issue of gender equality in the play. Considered a "sequel" to William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Woman's Prize* extends to its female personas a position of power and prominence that *The Taming of the Shrew* does not permit (Crocker 409). Fletcher introduces the characters of Maria and Livia, the two daughters of Petronius, Maria's husband Petruchio, and the two potential suitors of Livia, Moroso and Rowland. The cousin of Maria and Livia, Byancha, becomes a central figure in helping the female characters of the play gain authority over their husbands, who subsequently refuse their partners' desires and commands until their own stipulations for a fruitful partnership are met.

Within this environment of exclusion and rebellion, the creation and preservation of companionate marriages amongst the women and their spouses evolves into a singular, consistent goal. In discussing their aims together, the women come to the conclusion that they should be friends rather than servants or tradeable items in the eyes of their husbands, with Maria clarifying to her sister and cousin that the

...childish woman

That lives a prisoner to her Husbands pleasure,

Has lost her making, and becomes a beast,

Created for his use, not fellowship. (Fletcher 1.2. 137-140)

Maria declares that to become a servant is akin to being less than human or “a beast,” suggesting that the acceptance of such treatment validates the gender hierarchies imposed by men. Maria’s later allusion to “fellowship” as a key component of a successful union highlights her position as an advocate of companionate marriage ideals, transforming the play through her words into an intermediary between the previous view of marriage as the product of the buying and selling of women into a mutual friendship. Holly Crocker alludes to this particular moment in her article, “The Tamer as Shrewd in John Fletcher’s ‘The Woman's Prize: Or, The Tamer Tam’d’,” arguing that by “Affirming her personal dignity, Maria makes marriage into a bond that necessarily recognizes the power of both partners” (Crocker 411). This “bond” or “fellowship” as Maria terms it becomes the most vital aspect of marriage that must be avoided if a woman is to be a friend, and not “a prisoner,” to her husband.

Within the mode of thought concerning the woman as a commodity to be “used” by her husband, it is essential to consider on a larger scale how the commodification of women coincided with society’s preoccupation with material gains. The female characters that Fletcher casts display an attitude of resentment and resistance toward being “bought” by their husbands, indicating a push against the prevalent language of buying and selling when discussing marital institutions. Fletcher portrays this effort against commodified terms in a conversation that takes place between Livia’s desired husband, Rowland, and Livia as they discuss Livia’s relationship with her current suitor Moroso:

ROWLAND. But his money

If wealth may win you--

LIVIA. If a hog may be

High Priest among the Jews? His money Rowland?

Oh love forgive me, what faith hast thou?

Why, can his money kiss me? (Fletcher 1.2. 25-28)

Livia's explicit rejection of the power of "money" in determining her marital fate is emphasized through her use of a parallel conditional statement that money would sway her only "If a hog may be / High Priest among the Jews?" As followers of Judaism abstain from eating pork products due to their supposedly impure, unclean condition (Goldstein 317), Livia seemingly makes this comparison to highlight the highly immoral and sinful nature of permitting money to "win" her over in marital considerations. Livia's desire for real affection, with the derisive remark "can his money kiss me?" indicates her disillusionment with monetary concerns in choosing a prospective marriage partner and wealth's corrosive, immoral status. Rowland's further use of the term "win" further commodifies Livia as an object that can be secured through material means. Livia's open commentary on these issues highlights the play's position as a platform for discussions of wealth as a detrimental priority rather than an ideal aspect of a true companionate marriage. Livia concludes her remarks to Rowland on the matter by stating firmly, "No Rowland, no man shall make use of me; / My beauty was born free, and free I'll give it / To him that loves, not buys me" (Fletcher 1.2. 37-39). Livia's refusal to be won over and "bought" as a wife by the wealth of her prospective husband openly rejects the influence of wealth in swaying the opinion of a woman when considering a marriage partner.

While Livia and her suitors consider the origin and motivations of their love, the marriage of Maria and Petruchio, having already commenced, becomes a powerful site for examining the evolution of marriage from a divisive, socially stratified monetary endeavor to

one rooted in the moral attributes of one's spouse. While having a conversation with Petruchio and Sophocles, Maria looks to Sophocles and reflects:

Would I had been so happy when I Married,
 But to have met an honest Man like thee,
 For I am sure thou art good, I know thou art honest,
 A handsome hurtless man, a loving man,
 Though never a penny with him. (Fletcher 3.3. 130-134)

Maria declares how Sophocles has the qualities that would make for a successful marriage due to his “loving,” “good,” and “honest” attributes despite his lack of money, indicated in the allusion to his “never [having] a penny with him.” Maria’s wish for Petruchio to emulate such qualities regardless of his wealth signifies the importance of character versus financial affluence. Through her resistance of Petruchio’s demands and threats to leave the country, Maria engages in a counterintuitive exercise of explicitly showing Petruchio the power he claims to yield in their marriage, and thus tries to establish a common ground for their understanding of the necessity of companionship and mutual understanding. In other words, “...by reforming Petruchio, she attempts to make marriage something other than bondage for both. As Petruchio’s anger attests, he is equally in thrall to the expectations of hierarchical marriage” (Crocker 413). Within the scope of their marriage, Maria thus tries to form a companionship by breaking down the “hierarchical” underpinnings of their union through withholding physical relations between them. While her efforts provoke “anger” from Petruchio, her desire for recognition of her concerns and for her establishment of near equal power for both husband and wife highlight the

play's overall message that money should not be a determining factor in the creation of companionate marriages wherein mutual interests, love, and friendship are fostered.

Yet beyond the scope of monetary concerns, it is thematically pertinent to briefly touch upon the conclusory remarks of the play that demonstrate the extent of Fletcher's revolutionary ideas regarding the companionate marriage ideal. The epilogue of the play introduces explicitly the idea of gender equality as the final step in achieving the ideal companionate marriage wherein dispute and hierarchies are largely abolished. The epilogue summarizes the intent of the play, "To teach both Sexes due equality; / And as they stand bound, to love mutually" (Fletcher *Epilogue* 7-8). The mention of "equality" that this play introduces is a revolutionary conception for the period, introducing the notion that husband and wife should treat one another as equals when the framework of companionate marriage itself significantly contrasts "marriage as involving mutuality, but not equality" (Euler 373) as Henry Bullinger introduced in his 1575 publication *The Christian State of Matrimonye*. While mutual love was desired, "equality" between women and men remained as a far-off, intangible notion which Fletcher boldly proclaims as necessary to explore in this epilogue.

The Roaring Girl and *The Woman's Prize* or *The Tamer Tamed*, while engaging with dichotomous forms of resistance and trickery, ultimately serve to undermine the prevailing importance of wealth within companionate marriages, supporting the Protestant view that wealth should be of no concern during the formation of companionate marriages. However, these plays dually note the perpetual nature of wealth as a marker of social standing and repute, with the older generations in particular resisting the marriage of women and men belonging to disparate socioeconomic classes. The extreme measures that these characters take to move away from a

preoccupation with wealth to higher moral grounds in marital considerations highlights the social growth and reformation that must naturally follow the religious reformations surrounding marriage in the period, and which Middleton, Dekker, and Fletcher challenge audiences to begin consciously considering in their own marital ventures.

Conclusion

The notion of companionate marriage in the comedic productions of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, regarded within these aforementioned areas of social concern, highlighted and often challenged the norms of society and religious thought. Yet the gravity of the companionate marriage ideal's impact extends beyond the confines of the period. As these plays continue to be a part of contemporary classrooms and discussions, their reflection of shifting views on gender, class, wealth, and race lend themselves to more extensive historical and literary analyses. The approach of these playwrights in their respective productions to discuss couples that have broken with conventional marriage ideals, though casting them satirically in comedies, has illuminated the potential ramifications of these restrictive criteria for an idealized companionate marriage. Yet, in doing so, they not only condemn social norms but contribute representation of a potential future in which such barriers to potential companionate marriages are eliminated.

While these four studies acted in a representative capacity for their era and genre for the purposes of this thesis, this study is limited in scope, encompassing only a choice selection among many works that took on the issue of companionate marriage and its facets for success. In particular, future studies should continue to probe the issue of companionate marriages and gender equality as Fletcher, Dekker and Middleton began to examine, and use these insights as a way to track the development of companionate marriage within the varying social environments

and movements of England throughout the remainder of the 17th century to the present day. As marriage remains a vital practice in societies around the world, the ramifications of its changing legal and social frameworks make transparent the anxieties, priorities, and values of humanity. The continued study of marriage within these contexts and within other social spheres remains a vital and worthwhile pursuit for improved understandings of mankind and the religious, social, political, racial, economic, and gendered complexities that have and will continue to influence the fulfilment of the final confirmatory phrase “I do.”

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