# IDEAL WOMEN AND ABERRANT WOMEN IN EARLY JACOBEAN PLAYS (1603–1610)

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"Men say, let them say what they will: life a woman, they are ignorant of your wants"

(*The Malcontent*, II. iv. p. 168)[1]

## 1. Jacobean ideas of good women

Of numerous portrayals of an ideal woman drawn in the Jacobean period, Sir Thomas Overbury's *A Wife*[2] may be taken as representative in terms of both its enormous popularity at the time and its reflection of popular images of such a woman. In the prose introduction entitled "The Method", Overbury lists, as qualities which constitute "*a Perfect Woman*" (Sig. C2v), "Goodnesse, Knowledge, Discretion" (Sig. B1r), and, as an additional requirement for "*a Perfect Wife*" (Sig. C2v), "Fitnesse" (Sig. B1r). These female virtues are expounded in the rest of the poem.

By "Goodnesse" Overbury means obedience to Christian morality in general, but special emphasis is placed on chastity. His definition of "Knowledge" as a female virtue is characteristically limited in sense. He calls it a "*passiue understanding*" (Sig. C1r), by which he means wisdom, not the state of being "*learned* by much Art" (Sig. C1r). Although the practical advantage of some knowledge in the wife is acknowledged as useful for better communication with her husband, "*Learning* and *pregnant wit*" in women are discouraged on the grounds

1. *The Plays of John Marston*, ed. H. Harvey Wood (1934–39), vol. I. All references to Marston's plays are to this edition.
2. Thomas Overbury, *A Wife Now The Widow of Sir Thomas Overbvrye* (1614).

that they make women frail, not adding " more *ballaste*, but more *saile* " (Sig. C1r). The author shows no hesitation in monopolizing learning for men, saying that " *Bookes* are a part of Mans prerogatiue " (Sig. C1r). The sphere of women's activities is confined to " *Domesticke* Charge " (Sig. C1r), which he thinks befits the sex, since keeping their minds busy protects them from corruption: " Their *Leasure* tis corrupteth *Woman-kind* " (Sig. C1r). By " Discretion " he indicates the behaviour which should protect their reputation: " Their *Carriage*, not their *Chastitie* alone, / Must keep their *Name* chast from suspition." (Sig. C1v). Special emphasis is placed on " *Modestie* ", opposed to the self-asserting presumption of "*Assurance* " (Sig. C2v).[1] By " Fitnesse " he means the wife's submission to her husband's authority, which is equated with her love for him. Overbury's insistence on passivity in women, which runs throughout the poem, culminates in the call at the end for the wife's total self-abnegation:

> My *Wife* is my *Adopted-Selfe*, and Shee
> As Mee, for what I loue, to Loue must frame.
> For when by Mariage both in one concurre,
> Woman converts to Man, not Man to her. (Sig. C3r)

" *Birth, Beauty, Wealth* " (Sig. B3v), which were in the actual choice of a wife important factors in the Jacobean period as much as at any other time, are ranked as subsidiary, mere " *good Additions* " (Sig. B3v) to the vital elements of a good woman.

Sir Thomas Overbury's poem was licensed for the press on 13 December 1613 and published in 1614, after his death in the Tower on 15 September 1613. It became exceptionally popular, going through five editions in 1614. The second impression appeared with the addition of the Characters. The sixth edition of 1615 was greatly expanded; the majority, if not all, of its Thirty-two New Characters are generally attributed to John Webster.[2] The popularity of the poem

1. Although according to the O.E.D., the first date of the use of " assurance " in a bad sense—hardihood, audacity, presumption, impudence—is 1699, Overbury seems to be using the word here in this sense rather than in the more general sense of self-confidence.

2. For the authorship of these Characters, see F. L. Lucas, *The Complete Works of John Webster* (1927), vol. 4, pp. 6–10.

was undoubtedly increased by news of the untimely death of the author, who had held for some years a prominent political position as a secretary and close adviser to Robert Carr, King James' favourite, although no suspicion as to the cause of his death had yet been raised. At the same time, the close similarities of Overbury's portrayal of female virtues to those depicted in contemporary writings, such as sermons, conduct books and plays, suggest that its popularity was also due to its reflection of common assumptions about what constitutes a good woman. The attitudes and actions prescribed as appropriate for women in these writings can be subsmed, in most cases, under the four kinds of female virtues upheld in Overbury's poem.

(A) " Goodnesse "

As Juliet Dusinberre remarks, virtue in women has nearly always been seen in terms of sexual virtue, that is, chastity.[1] As for Elizabethan women, chasity was an absolute moral norm for Jacobean women. Homiletic condemnation of fornication and whoredom, especially of " the outrageous sea of adultery "[2], pervaded Jacobean moral writings with no less vigour than those of earlier times. Since Humanists and Protestants (especially Puritans) promoted the ideal of chaste marriage, condemning the courtly love tradition of the Middle Ages, chastity in women had undergone a change in concept, from virginity to chastity within marriage—that is, from a physical condition to the purity of the soul. Concomitantly, adultery took on more serious implications than before; through adultery, the Homily tells us, " we fall into all kinds of sins and are made bond-slaves to the devil."[3] Especially, murder was considered to be the natural consequence of adultery; many adulteresses in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, such as Alice in *Arden of Feversham* (1591, Unknown),[4] Webster's Vittoria, and Middleton's

1. Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975), p. 32.
2. " The Two Books of Homilies appointed to be read in Churches " (1547: 1599: issued as one book 1623), *Certain Sermons* (1850), p. 118.
3. Ibid., p. 125.
4. The dates of the plays and the names of the companies which first performed these plays are according to *Annals of English Drama 975–1700*, eds. Alfred Harbage and S. Schoenbaum (Philadelphia, 1964).

Bianca and Beatrice-Joanna, are, directly or indirectly, involved in murder. The concept of chaste marriage also greatly affected attitudes toward men's sexual life. The moral double standard was criticized, and, as a condition for the wife's chastity, chastity from the husband was also demanded. Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors* (1592, Strange's(?)) rebukes her husband's infidelity by saying "How dearly would it touch thee to the quick, / Shouldst thou but hear I were licentious"[1] (II. ii. 129–30).

Toward wives' faults Humanists and Protestants took more tolerant attitudes, compared with the absolute condemnation of medieval moralists. In the reality of Jacobean England, however, medieval attitudes seem still to have coexisted with Protestant ones. An interesting example of this is seen in the controversy between William Gager and William Heale. In 1608 Gager publicly defended at Oxford the thesis that it was lawful for husbands to beat their wives. It was answered by William Heale in *An Apologie for Women* (1609), written apparently at the instigation of some lady.[2] Since Gager's pamphlet is not extant, the differences in their arguments cannot be traced in detail, but Heale's objection to beating a wife reflects typical Protestant attitudes toward erring wives. He describes a wife's infidelity, together with the murderous attempt on a husband's life, as an offence of "the first and highest degree" and as "faults altogither vnexcusable, neure committed by anie vertuous or modest wife: never endured by anie loving or honest husbād". However, with regard to the punishment, he denies the husband's power in "the execution", limiting his capacity to "prosequution"; "execution", he says, "must be consummate in lawful manner".[3] Frankford's treatment of his adulterous wife in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603, Worcester's) reflects this orthodox principle, illustrating and praising his Christian virtue of forbearance and forgiveness. This is also the attitude Chapman count-

1. All references to Shakespeare's plays are to *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Peter Alexander (1954).

2. It is dedicated to *the Ladie* M. H., whose "*commaunde*", he says, "*is effected*" (Sig. A2r).

3. William Heale, p. 33.

ed on in his audience when he evoked their sympathy for Tamyra in *Bussy D'Ambois* (1604, Paul's) in the scene where she submits to Montsurry's ruthless "execution" of punishment for her adultery with Bussy.

Moreover, the ideal of chaste marriage invested marriage with the miraculous power to reform any female aberration. This is illustrated in the transformation of an intractable citizen wife, Viola, and a prostitute, Bellafronte, in *The Honest Whore* (1604, 1605, Prince Henry's). Middleton frequently made ironical use of this concept. Rakes in his plays, like Lethe in *Michaelmas Term* (1606, Paul's) or Lactantio in *More Dissemblers Besides Women* (1615, King's), are made to reap as they have sown, by being married off to a "quean". Similarly, the "fallen" women themselves, like the Courtesan in *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605, Paul's), declare that they will be chaste after marriage.

The orthodox attitudes toward errant women were thus somewhat modified, but chastity in women remained as an absolute virtue in Jacobean assumptions about a good woman. It is most forcefully stated by Hippolito, a rigorous moralist, in *The Honest Whore*:

> The soule whose bosome lust did neuer touch,
> Is Gods fair bride, and maidens soules are such:
> The soule that leauing chastities white shore,
> Swims in hot sensuall streames, is the diuels whore.
>
> (Part I., IV. i. 178–81)[1]

(B) "Knowledge"

Although intelligence in women was regarded as necessary, Jacobean attitudes toward women's learning were, generally speaking, unfavourable. Humanists, like More, Vives and Erasmus, refuted medieval illusions about women, reflected both in idolatry and satire, and asserted the individuality of women and their rational capacity.[2] Under the influence of Humanist enthusiasm for learning, there emerged in

1. *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, (Cambridge, 1955), vol. II. All references to Dekker's plays are to this edition.

2. For the Renaissance concept of education for women, see Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana, Illinois, 1956); Carroll Camden, *The Elizabethan Women* (New York, 1952), pp. 37–58.

Tudor times a number of admirably learned ladies, such as Katherine of Aragon, Lady Jane Grey, Catherine Parr, the three daughters of Sir Anthony Cooke, and, most important of all, Queen Elizabeth. However familiar they were with the satirical portrayals of women produced ever since the Middle Ages,[1] the Elizabethans saw a brilliant living example of female intelligence in their queen. Their attitudes toward their woman ruler were, of course, fundamentally different from those toward females in general, but Queen Elizabeth's much admired accomplishments in learning must have encouraged them to appreciate intelligent women and to accept learning in women as a good thing. While some Elizabethan learned ladies, such as Mary Countess of Pembroke, Lady Ann Bacon, and Lady Anne Clifford, survived well into Jacobean times, King James' court gathered, around Queen Anne, more Jacobean types of learned ladies, such as Lady Elizabeth Hatton, Lady Penelope Rich, Lucy Countess of Bedford and Aletheia Countess of Arundel, who partook of the more frivolous and extravagant taste of the queen.[2] Yet King James' notable dislike for female intellectuals discouraged all learning for women, and there was a reaction against mental development for women.[3] Although learning in women was still admired in some seventeenth century writings,[4] Jacobean people in general, as with Sir Thomas Overbury in his poem, showed appreciation of " Knowledge " in women only in its restricted sense of wisdom, regarding learning as unnecessary or dangerous. Thus, Donne preached that "*wit*, *learning*, *eloquence*, *musick*, *memory*, *cunning* " were unnecessary for woman, perhaps even undesirable because they would " make her never fit " for " a Helper ".[5]

1. For these satires on women, see Francis Lee Utley, *The Crooked Rib: An Analytical Index to the Argument about Women in English and Scots Literature to the End of the Year 1568* (Columbus, 1944).

2. For Jacobean learned ladies' activities at Court, see Graham Parry, *The Golden Age restor'd: The Culture of the Stuart Court, 1603–42* (Manchester, 1981).

3. Katherine Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle, 1966), p. 131.

4. For instance, Ben Jonson's *Epistles* to the Countess of Rutland and the Countess of Bedford; Barnaby Rich in *The Excellency of Good Women* (1613), pp. 2–3.

5. John Donne, *Sermons of John Donne*, eds. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1953), vol. II., p. 346.

The Jacobean antagonism to educated women was related to the general revulsion from, and fear of, the social changes that were rapidly taking place at the time, overthrowing traditional human values and the social order. Ben Jonson caricatured learned women in Lady Would-be in *Volpone* (1606, King's) and Mistress Otter and the collegiate ladies in *Epicoene* (1609, Queen's Revels). These women are seen as overreachers who aim to step out of their alloted female sphere by cultivating wit and learning; the collegiate ladies live apart from their husbands, and " crie downe, or vp, what they like, or dislike in a braine, or a fashion, with most masculine, or rather *hermaphroditicall* authoritie " (I. i. 78–80).[1] They are made counterparts of male social climbers, commonly dealt with in Jacobean drama as subversive elements in society.

Furthermore, in Jonson's plays, female intellectual pretension is associated with unchastity. The collegiate ladies are adept in techniques of contraception and abortion (IV. iii. 56–61), and their licentiousness is fully exposed in their aggressive advances to Dauphine. Truewit describes a learned " states-woman " (II. ii. 114), who censures poets and their styles, comparing " Daniel with Spenser, Ionson with the other youth " (117–8) and who is skilful in controversy, being capable of making " demonstration and answere, in religion to one; in state, to another, in baud'ry to a third." (122–3). The association of learning in women with moral failings has always been popular with antifeminists, who would justify it on the grounds that a woman who defies the mental restrictions proper to her sex will discard all other proprieties as well.[2] Jacobean drama evinces this tendency in linking women's aspiration for learning with female passion, which was thought to be unrestricted, dangerous and sinful.

(C) " Discretion "

1. *Ben Jonson*, eds. C.H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford, 1937), vol. V. All references to Jonson's plays are to this edition.

2. Katherine Rogers, p. 128. Angela Ingram in *Changing Attitudes toward Bad Women in Elizabethan, and Jacobean Plays*, Ph. D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1977, explains this association as resulting from men's fear of things " uncontrollable ".

Discretion in women is universally acclaimed as a prime female virtue in Jacobean writings, as in those of earlier times. In most cases, as in Overbury's poem, it is represented as modesty, or qualities equivalent to it, like bashfulness or shamefastness. Whenever some character, either in Elizabethan or Jacobean drama, voices admiration for a woman, this admiration almost always includes praise of her modesty. Jacobean moralists also placed great emphasis on modesty in women. For Barnaby Rich, who wrote several pamphlets exclusively about women, " Sobriety, shamfastedness and modesty " are the indices of female nobility:

> A beautifull woman being robbed and spoyled of those excellent ornamentes of *Modestie*, and *Bashfullnes*, shee remaines naked both in price and honour and is so much the more to be hated and detested . . . . *Bashfulnes* is it that moderates there thoughtes, makes them modest in their speaches, temperate in their actions, and warie in all their deliberations. The blush of womans face, is an approbation of a chaste and honorable minde, and a manifest signe, that shee doth not approoue any intemperate actions, or any other lasciuious speeches, and demeanours that are either offered to herselfe, or to any in her presence.
>
> The woman that hath forgotten to blush, it is an argument, shee is past grace, for *Shamefastnes* is not onely a bridle to sinne, but it is likewise the common treasury of feminine vertue.[1]

Modesty in women includes the wearing of clothes proper to her sex and degree. The attack on women's fondness for fine apparel had been popular throughout the Renaissance, but the criticism became especially strong in the Jacobean period because of increasing extravagance among courtiers and the middle-class. Immodesty in women's conduct is also associated with garrulity and eloquence. William Heale objects to the eloquence of " too too holy womē-gospellers " because of their immodesty; he thinks " silence to be a womās chiefest eloquēnce " and " their part to heare more thē to speake, to learne rather then to teach."[2] Donne also aligns, as prime female virtues, " taciturnity " with " chasity, sobriety " and " verity ".[3]

1. Barnaby Rich, *The Excellency for Good Women*, pp. 21–3.
2. William Heale, pp. 35–6.
3. John Donne, *Sermons*, vol. II., p. 346.

Society's assumption that modesty is an absolute norm deters women from initiating action or expressing their true feelings eloquently. Sophonisba's consciousness of eloquence being immodest, for instance, restrains her from rebuking the Carthaginians' betrayal:

> since affected wisdom in us Women
> Is our sex highest folly: I am silent,
> I cannot speak lesse well, unlesse I were
> More void of goodnesse. (II. i. p. 23)

In order to present the heroines' initiation of action or articulate expression of their emotions as virtuous, Shakespeare resorted to various devices in both his Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. The Romantic heroines' disguise as men enables them to overleap the barrier of the sex without violating conventional views of a good woman;[1] only disguised as men, can Rosalind and Viola express their passion freely to the men they love. Women in Shakespeare's plays who make advances to men in their own selves, like Tamora in *Titus and Andronicus* (1594, 'Pembroke's', Sussex's) and Goneril and Regan in *King Lear* (1605, King's), are mostly unpleasant; the eloquence of Goneril and Regan turns out to be a mask for their hypocrisy, while Cordelia's "silence" is presented as the symbol of the truth. One remarkable exception to this pattern is Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well* (1602, King's). However, her determined action to win Bertram as her husband is presented as virtuous, in spite of her self-assertion, because she is made throughout the play an embodiment of the goodness of a vanishing old order, represented by the Countess of Rousillon, the French King and Lafeu. At the crucial moments, Shakespeare's tragic heroines, such as Ophelia in the nunnery scene or Desdemona in the brothel scene, are remarkably inarticulate[2]; only in madness, freed from the psychological pressure imposed by the norm of modesty, does Ophelia release her true feelings for Hamlet by singing an indecent song. The

1. H. D. Mares, 'Viola and Other Transvestite Heroines in Shakespeare's Comedies,' *Stratford Papers 1965–67*, pp. 96–109.

2. For the dramatic significance of their inarticulateness, see Inga-Stina Ewbank, 'Shakespeare's Portrayal of Women: A 1970s View', *Shakespeare's Art of Excelling Nature*, eds. David Bevington and Jay L. Halio (Newark, 1979), pp. 222–9.

Romances do present articulate heroines, like Hermione in the trial scene of *The Winter's Tale* (1610, King's) or Marina in the brothel scene and in that of her reunion with Pericles. Moreover, their language has power to influence the course of the action of the play. Yet the simplicity of their language, while it has its own dramatic function,[1] prevents them from seeming aggresive or immodest.

(D) "Fitnesse"

Modesty in women is also associated with their submission to masculine authority. Jacobean women, like Elizabethan women, were under the control of some man, such as husband, father or guardian, because they were supposed to be tied with

> *the shamefac't band*
> *with which wise nature did strongly binde,*
> *T'obey the bests of mans well-ruling hand....*[2]

In Jacobean writings as a whole, "Fitnesse", derived from the Pauline doctrine of a wife's obedience to her husband, remained as a viable female virtue. But the complicated issues inherent in the Biblical account of the Creation were more frequently highlighted than before. That God created a woman out of the rib of Adam to provide him with a helper bore various interpretations, and generated throughout the Renaissances a controversy over the relative positions of the sexes.[3] Satirists used the Biblical reference as a convenient instrument for insisting on women's inferiority and frowardness on the grounds of the substance of their makeup, the crooked rib.[4] In the main, Jacobean moralists' arguments reflect the orthodox Protestant interpretation that God assigned to the husband dominance of his wife, and to his wife, submission as his helper, though not as a servant.

1. See Inga-Stina Ewbank, '"My name is Marina": The Language of Recognition', *Shakespeare's Styles*, eds. Philip Edwards, Inga-Stina Ewbank, and G. K. Hunter (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 111–130.

2. *Hic Mulier: Or, The Man-Woman* (1620), Sig. C2v.

3. For the controversy over women, see Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca, 1958), pp. 201–27, 465–507; Carroll Camden, pp. 15–36, 217–72; Ruth Kelso, pp. 5–27; Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance* (Urbana and Chicago, 1984).

4. For these satires, see Francis Lee Utley.

However, in the later years of the second decade of the seventeenth century, a number of pamphlets appeared (some of them allegedly written by women) in which the authors insisted on the equality or even the superiority of women. The basis of their argument is their feminist interpretation of the Biblical account of the creation of woman;[1] for instance, in creating a woman out of the rib of Adam, the middle of his body, God meant women to be his equal; a woman is superior because she was created out of the purified body of Adam, while he was moulded out of clay. These feminist attitudes are most explicitly expounded in Ester Sowernam's *Ester Hang'd Haman* (1616), and they developed into more radical arguments for women's right to freedom in *Haec-Vir: Or The Womanish-Man* (1620). Overtly feminist attitudes also began to emerge in the plays written around the turn of the second decade of the century. In *The Roaring Girl* (1608, Prince Henry's) Moll rejects feminine norms, by wearing breeches and vowing to live a single life, because she does not want to be subjected to a husband: "My spirit shall be mistresse of this house, / As long as I have time in't" (III. i. 142–43).[2] In *The Woman's Prize* (1611, Unknown, King's in 1633), Maria, supported by Biancha and all the women in the city, claims the right of wives to a personal freedom equal to that of their husbands, and she presents her new husband, Petruchio, with this proviso as a condition for the consummation of their marriage.[3]

In reality, however, the symbolical meaning attached to the husband's authority made for a serious moral implication of women's flouting of the principle and made it difficult to realize in actuality. The Biblical comparison of the relation of man and wife to that of Christ and the Church, and of the Prince and the State, upheld the concept of the household as a microcosm of the State.[4] In this concept

1. The first defence of women by a woman (allegedly) came from Jane Anger, *Iane Anger her Protection of Women* (1589).
2. *The Works of Thomas Middleton*, ed. A. H. Bullen (1885), vol. 4. All references to Middleton's plays are to this edition.
3. *The Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher*, ed. A. R. Walker (Cambridge, 1910), vol. 8. All references to Beaumont and Fletcher plays are to this edition.
4. 'An Homily of the State of Matrimony', *Certain Sermons*, p. 506.

of the Great Chain of Being, a wife's obedience to her husband symbolized the duties which maintained social stability. In rebuking the intractable wives, the tamed Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1594, Sussex's (?) Chamberlain's (?)) points out this parallel:

> Such duty as the subject owes the prince,
> Even such a woman oweth to her husband;
> And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
> And not obedient to his honest will,
> What is she but a foul contending rebel
> And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
>
> (V. ii. 155–60)

Jacobean moralists and King James repeatedly asserted the analogy between the ideal familial relation and the ideal society, seeing women's deviation from their submissive role as both a cause and a symbol of social disorder.[1]

Humanists and Protestants modified the medieval concept of wifely subjection by emphasizing the shared responsibilities of the two sexes. William Heale asserts the importance of the husband's duty:

> if thou looke truely to be beloved of thy wife, first loue her truely: for els howe canst thou require that for thy selfe of her, which thou affordest not frō thy selfe vnto her.[2]

Some radical Puritan sects, such as the Anabaptists, the Brownists, and the Family of Love, even went so far as to annul a wife's duty to an unbelieving husband.[3] Despite these modifications and occasional radical protests, " Fitnesse " remained an absolute condition for a good wife in Jacobean England, as in Overbury's poem. For instance, in the commendatory verse to Alexander Niccholes' *A Discourse, of Marriage and Wiving*, William Lorte defines a good wife as the one with " Faith and obedience ", and a bad wife, as the one who " Shakes off obedience, tels her husband then / She'le rule, but not be ruled ".[4] The Jacobean ideal of the relation of man and wife is, probably, best

1. For instance, see John Donne, *The Sermon*, vol. V., pp. 113–4; William Heale, p. 66.
2. Ibid., p. 20.
3. Juliet Dussinberre, p. 77, *passim*.
4. Alexander Niccholes, *A Discourse, of Marriage and Wiving* (1620), Sig. B3v.

represented in William Heale's description of it as "a roial protection, and loial subiection."[1]

(E) The image and the reality of the nature of woman

Thus, Overbury's poem envisions the prescriptions which Jacobean women were, in society's opinion, supposed to obey and which Jacobean dramatists had to take into account, in presenting their own visions of the nature of woman. Further, the poem points to the disparity between the image and the reality of the nature of woman. According to Ben Jonson, Overbury seems to have attempted through his poem to ingratiate himself with the Countess of Rutland.[2] If Jonson's account is to be trusted, whatever the Countess' reactions, the author attempted to make her act against the qualities of a good woman which he praised in his poem. On the other hand, Overbury's father is said to have revealed that, when the prospect of Carr's marriage to Lady Essex became imminent, Overbury directed his master's attention to his poem in an attempt to dissuade him from the marriage.[3] Their marriage involved the political interest of the Howard faction as well as Lady Essex's passion, and the reasons for Overbury's objection to it seem to have been more complicated than the simple moral grounds which his poem could have provided.[4] Nevertheless, this incident is significant in that assumptions about womanhood were confronted with the reality embodied in the Countess of Essex; her "*Birth, Beauty, Wealth*" were notable, but her adulterous passion for Carr was already on peoples' tongues at Court in 1612.[5] By May in 1613, she had started legal procedures, with the backing of her influential family, seeking divorce from her husband on the grounds of his alleged physical incapacity.

It is true that, at any time in history, theory runs at odds with prac-

1. William Heale, p. 32.
2. *Ben Jonson's Conversation with William Drummond of Hawthornden*, ed., with introduction and notes by R. F. Patterson (1923), pp. 16, 20–21.
3. D.N.B. (1896), vol. 42, p. 379.
4. For the circumstances surrounding the marriage, see William McElwee, *The Murder of Sir Thomas Overbury* (1952); Beatrice White, *Cast of Ravens* (1965).
5. For instance, see *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. Norman Egbert McClure (Philadelphia, 1939), 11 August, 1612, vol. II, p. 377.

tice. Yet the tension arising from the disparity between the society's image of womanhood and women in actuality was particularly intense in the Jacobean period, especially in the second decade of the century. At this time Overbury's poem was produced and Webster's three independent plays were written. This tension can be traced in many dramas of the period, especially in those by Marston, Shakespeare, Webster and Middleton. Seeing the problems which contemporary women were faced with as related to the human problems of their time, they gave their own dramatic visions of what it meant to be a woman in such circumstances. Indeed this tension constituted one of the major factors that enriched Jacobean drama by adding vitality and complexity.

## 2. Montaigne's idea of the nature of woman

While the traditional concept of a good woman permeated Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, a sceptical tone which emerged around 1600, marks the playwrights' handling of female characters mostly in the plays for the private theatres. These plays question the conventional female virtues by considering them in their social context, satirizing them or parodying the dramas intended to promulgate these norms. These sceptical viewpoints developed in the dramas into a new attitude toward women, one which recognized the possible integrity of women who act against orthodoxy or, at least, in ways not necessarily in accordance with orthodoxy. In the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean years, this attitude was explored, though unsuccessfully, by Marston, and the attempt culminated in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607, King's). In the second decade of the century, the plays which reflect this attitude increase in number, but no dramatist pursued the issue as thoroughly as Webster did in his two great tragedies. Apart from the current scepticism, various factors—social, economic, political, moral—contributed to the emergence of this new perspective on the nature of woman, and a full exploration of each factor falls outside the scope of this study. But one of the incidents which worked as a trigger was the introduction of Montaigne's

*Essays* to English soil by John Florio's translation in 1603. Lucy Countess of Bedford instigated his venture, and he dedicated all three Books to the learned ladies of the time; Book I to the Countess of Bedford herself and Lady Anne Harrington, Book II to Elizabeth Countess of Rutland and Lady Penelope Rich, and Book III to Lady Elizabeth Grey and Lady Marie Nevill. Florio's translation was extremely popular, not only among intelligent men, but also among educated women; for instance, Lady Anne Clifford often writes in her diary that she has heard her cousins reading the *Essays*.[1] The list of books which Lady Would-be boasts of having read includes Montaigne (III. iiii. 90). Marston, Shakespeare and Webster, all of whom contributed greatly to the exploration of the new attitudes to women, are all indebted to Montaigne in ideas and expression.

Montaigne's scepticism itself contains various potentials for a new approach to the nature of woman. His anti-rationalism, elaborated in "An Apologie of *Raymond Sebond*", springs from his keen awareness of the limits of man's rational capacity, and points to the senses as the only possible medium for the search for truth. Such an idea inevitably leads to the repudiation of the male superiority which men claimed on the grounds of their excellence in reasoning; since classical times, an assumption had existed that women were inferior, irrational creatures governed by senses and emotion. Montaigne, on the other hand, asserts the essential similarity between the sexes: "*both male and female, are cast in one same moulde: instruction and custome excepted, there is not great difference between them.*"[2] Furthermore, his emphasis on the power of the senses might have stimulated a marked focus on women's emotions; one of the characteristic features of Jacobean drama is the increasing importance given to women's emotions in the dramatic action.

Montaigne greatly contributed to establishing new attitudes toward women, by insisting on a realistic observation of their natural being

1. *The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford*, ed. V. Sackville-West (1923).
2. *The Essays of Michael Lord of Montaigne*, tr. John Florio, Everyman edition (1910), vol. III. p. 128. All references to *The Essays* are to this edition.

and refuting conventional assumptions. His naturalistic concept is presented most explicitly in " Upon Some Verses of *Virgil* ", a chapter on human sexuality. Here he describes sensuality in women as their innate nature and as even stronger than men's: " It is a cunning bred in their vaines and will never out of the flesh " (vol. III. p. 81). He therefore thinks it " ridiculous " for men to impose upon women the norm of chastity: " It lieth not in them . . . to shield themselves from concupiscence and avoid desiring " (vol. III. p. 91). Reminding men of the difficulty with which they fight against their own sensuality, Montaigne criticizes the double standard in society and exposes the absurdity of male egotism in demanding chastity in women: " we on the other side would have them sound, healthy, strong, in good liking, wel-fed, and chaste together, that is to say, both hot and colde " (vol. III., p. 79). Such attitudes in society, he thinks, force women to dissimulation and hypocrisy:

> It is then folly, to go about to bridle women of a desire so fervent and so naturall in them. And when I heare them bragge to have so virgin-like a will and cold mind, I but laugh and mocke at them. They recoile too farre backward. If it be a toothlesse beldame or decrepit grandame, or a young drie pthisicke starveling; if it be not altogether credible, they have at least some colour or apparence to say it. But those which stirre about, and have a little breath left them, marre but their market with such stuffe . . . . (vol. III., p. 92)

Montaigne's criticism is extended to society's arbitrary attitude toward human sexuality itself:

> Oh impious estimation of vices. Both wee and they [women] are capable of a thousand more hurtfull and unnaturall corruptions, then is lust or lasciviousnesse. But we frame vices and waigh sinnes, not according to their nature, but according to our interest; whereby they take so many different unequall formes. (vol. III., p. 85)

In his opinion a lie is worse than lechery. Human existence, he argues, consists of both soul and body, and sexuality is fundamental to the human make-up. It is, therefore, wrong that society's moral codes dictate the annihilation of human physicality; such an act is to " honour their nature, by disnaturing themselves " (vol. III., p. 108). He attacks that social propriety which regards reference to sexual intercourse as indecent:

> Why was the acte of generation made so naturall, so necessary and so just, seeing we feare to speake of it without shame, and exclude it from our serious and regular discourses? we prononce boldly, to rob, to murther, to betray; and this we dare not but between our teeth. Are we to gather by it, that the lesse we breath out in words the more we are allowed to furnish our thoughts with?
> (vol. III., p. 70)

"*Vertue is a pleasant buxom qualitie*", says he, quoting Plato: "*Let us not bee ashamed to speake, what we shame not to thinke*" (vol. III., p. 67). Although his attack on hypocrisy was directed at social manners and customs in general, its impact must have been especially strong on women, for whom the allegiance to these norms was an absolute condition if they were to be accepted in society.

Montaigne's scepticism strips love and marriage of their conventional meanings. While love is considered as "*nothing else but an insatiate thirst of enjoying a greedily desired subject*" (vol. III., p. 105), the object of marriage is defined in equally realistic terms as preservation of posterity. A sharp distinction is drawn between marriage and love, and although the benefits of marriage are recognized as "honour, justice, profit and constancie: a plaine, but more generall delight", it is denied the pleasures of love, "more ticklish; more lively, more quaint, and more sharpe" (vol. III. p. 77). He points out the rarity of happy marriage, comparing marriage to a "cage, the birds without dispaire to get in, and those within dispaire to get out" (vol. III., p. 75) (an expression which Webster borrows in *The White Devil*). What gives his detached attitude toward marriage its particular interest is that he justifies a wife's dissatisfaction with her husband, as well as a husband's discontent with his wife, by offering an utterly realistic understanding of human nature. The evil of a wife's adultery is extenuated, not through the Christian doctrine of forgiveness, but through a naturalistic acceptance of the sexuality inherent in woman's nature. Sympathy is extended to rebellious wives who defy social norms, because he thinks that

> Women are not altogether in the wrong, when they refuse the rules of life prescribed to the World, forsomuch as onely men have established them without their consent. (vol. III., pp. 77–8)

Furthermore, Montaigne's concept of human integrity, based on both naturalism and stoicism, provides a new perspective on abberant women. His vision of life as constant flux debases Renaissance ideals of honour and glory, as well as conventional values of custom and ceremony; they reside solely in others' judgements which "*change uncessantly*" (vol. III., p. 33). For him the only certainty is one's self, and integrity of life exists in absolute honesty to one's self:

> I care not so much what I am with others, as I respect what I am in my selfe. I will bee rich by my selfe, and not by borrowing .... See how all those judgements, that men make of outward apparances, are wonderfully uncertaine and doubtfull, and there is no man so sure a testimony, as every man is to himselfe .... (vol. II., pp. 348–9)

Reducing man's reason to "the chiefest source of all the mischiefs that oppresse him, as sinne, sicknesse, irresolution, trouble and despaire" (vol. II., p. 151), he thinks it better to follow the law of nature in one's self than man-made codes:

> it is safer to leave the reignes of our conduct unto nature, than unto ourselves. ... For, I would prize graces, and value gifts, that were altogether mine owne, and naturall unto me, as much as I would those, I had begged, and with a long prentiship, shifted for. *It lyeth not in our power to obtaine a greater commendation, than to be fauoured both of God and Nature.* (vol. II., p. 152)

In respect of the development of attitudes to women, Montaigne's insistence on self-realization is of great importance. It offered a positive viewpoint toward women's self-assertion, which was, except for the expression of Christian virtues, utterly condemned in Jacobean England. In other words, it served as a kind of sanction for women's defiance of the Jacobean standards such as embodied in Overbury's poem, and for their following the dictates of their own conscience.

## 3. Women in Marston's plays

Theodore Spencer once remarked: "Of all the Elizabethan poets who plundered Montaigne, none plundered so much as Marston."[1] The influence of Montaigne upon Marston is seen not only in his mas-

1. Theodore Spencer, 'John Marston', *The Criterion*, XIII (July, 1934).

sive borrowings of the phrases and ideas from Florio's translation of *the Essays*, but also in his attitude toward women; those of his plays written after the publication of the Florio-Montaigne are marked, as in Montaigne, by the acceptance of women's physical being. In this respect, *The Malcontent* (1604, Queen's Revels) seems to represent his transitional phase. It contains no borrowing from Montaigne, and the date of its original version is unknown, although it has been dated as early as 1600.[1] Yet Marston's naturalistic understanding of women is already present, although his approach is different from that in his later plays. In the Satires and early plays, he portrays women (except for a stereotyped chaste woman like Mellida in *Antony and Mellida*) as a symptom and cause of the evil and folly of the decadent age. Not only is a woman "craftie natures paint" and "Her intellectuall is a fained nicenes / Nothing but clothes, & simpering precisenes"[2], but she also causes human degradation by corrupting men's reason; women are like "Glowe wormes bright / That soile our soules, and dampe our reasons light."[3]

In *The Malcontent*, however, he modifies such a simple condemnation, now viewing the errant women in relation to the nature of the society in which they live. The female characters in the play, with the exception of Maria, who appears only in the last act, embody the typical feminine vanity and disorderliness attacked by moralists and satirists since the Middle Ages. They are sexually aberrant, and, as Mendoza cynically remarks, concerned only with their beauty and sex, fearing "Bad clothes, and old age" (I. vi. p. 158). The court itself is presented in the image of a brothel, with Maquerelle, a bawd, "a very vigorous and ribald old disciple of Nature",[4] presiding over this world of sexual vice.

What separates Marston's bawd from other bawds in Elizabethan

1. E. K. Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage* (1967), vol. III, pp. 431–2.

2. *The Poems of John Marston*, ed. Arnold Davenport (Liverpool, 1961), "The Scourge of Villanie VIII", p. 153: "The Scourge of Villanie VII", p. 146. All references to Marston's poems are to this edition.

3. "The Scourge of Villanie VII", p. 146.

4. Angela Ingram, pp. 51–6.

and Jacobean drama is her naturalistic perception of the situation in which women are placed. Unlike Middleton's bawds, who exploit human sexuality simply for materialistic gains, Maquerelle seduces women into sexual license out of her own awareness of the helplessness of women, as well as for profit. Act II. scene iv. offers a satirical spectacle of her beauty salon, where she invigorates Emilia and Biancha by means of her posset. Maquerelle sensibly teaches them the importance of youth and beauty for women: " youth and beauty once gone, we are like Beehives without honey: out a fashion, apparell that no man will weare, therefore use me your beauty " (p. 168). She advises them to disregard men's criticism of female vanity, saying that they do not understand women's position:[1]

> Men say, let them say what they will: life a woman, they are ignorant of your wants, the more in yeeres the more in perfection they grow: if they loose youth and beauty, they gaine wisdome and discretion: But when our beauty fades, godnight with us, there cannot be an uglier thing to see then an ould woman, from which ô pruning, pinching, and painting, deliver all sweete beauties.
>
> (II. iv. p. 168)

Some of the phrasing, and much of the sentiment, of Maquerelle's traditional advice is taken from the 1602 translation of Guarini's *Il pastor fido*, but Marston constructs the play's world in a way that gives reality to her words.[2]

The Genoese court under the rule of Pietro, the " too soft duke ", is in an amoral state. The courtiers are indulging in hedonistic extravagances, and the only principle that works is the Machiavellian statecraft, which not only the villain Mendozo and the foolish Bilioso, but also the deposed good duke Altofronto, disguised as Malevole, employ to gain power. In this male-dominated world, women are tools either for men's sexual gratification or for their political advancement, being utterly impotent to control their own lives. The chaste Maria, the former Duchess, is locked up in the citadel, and the lustful and defiant Aurelia is also banished from the court, after being sexually

1. Hiram Haydn, *The Counter Renaissance* (New York, 1950), p. 595.
2. See also Bernard Harris, *The Malcontent*, New Mermaid Edition (1967), pp. xxv-xxvii.

and politically exploited by Mendozo. Since the sexual relationship with men is the only way in which women can enjoy, however briefly, security or self-satisfaction, beauty and youth are, as Maquerelle says, of vital importance for them to attract men. Moreover, the transience of youth and the ugliness of age are made real by being spoken of by the old Maquerelle.

While Marston satirizes feminine weakness, he also ridicules conventional male attitudes toward women. Mendozo's demonstration of Petrarchan adoration for women (I. v. p. 154) is made absurd because of the inappropriatness of its object, the adulteress Aurelia. When he later learns of Aurelia's betrayal, he rails against women in a misogynist manner: "these monsters in nature, models of hell, curse of the earth . . . rash in asking, desperate in working, impatient in suffering, extreame in desiring, slaves unto appetite, mistresses in dissembling" (I. vii. p. 157). This conventional invective is also made ridiculous because of the sudden change in Mendozo's attitude and gullibility, for all his former confidence in his ability to manipulate women.

In the ironic use of familiar railings against women, Marston is different from Tourneur in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606, King's). As L. G. Salingar remarks, "Tourneur adheres to the Morality mode" in employing railings for a didactic purpose.[1] For instance, when Vindice, with the skull in his hand, inveighs against "every proud and self-affecting dame" who consumes milk for her baths when many an infant starve (III. v. 84–7),[2] Tourneur's satire is directed simply at the vice of female vanity. Marston's satire, on the other hand, works against the male railer as well as the railed-at women.

Thus, Marston sheds new light on the conventional topic of women's sexual aberration, but it is traditional female virtues, embodied by Maria, that he emphasizes in the play. In *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605, Queen's Revels), however, he overtly challenges these values in the Montaigne fashion. While the two plots of the play are based on

1. L. G. Salingar, '*The Revenger's Tragedy* and The Morality Tradition', *Elizabethan Drama*, ed., R. J. Kaufmann (New York, 1961), p. 212.
2. *The Revenger's Tragedy*, ed., R. A. Foakes (1966).

separate sources,[1] it is saturated with quotations and paraphrases from *the Essays*, approximately half of which are from " Upon some Verses of Virgil ".[2]

Marston's most significant addition to the source is Crispinella. She, like Freevill, claims to be a naturalist, and voices Montaigne's scepticism about conventional views of woman. In questioning their values, Marston even develops Montaigne's criticism of social manners in general into an attack on female manners specifically. For instance, in putting into Crispinella's mouth Montaigne's attack upon hypocrisy regarding human sexuality (see p. 16–17), Marston makes it an attack upon female modesty:

> now bashfulnes seaz you, we pronounce bodly Robbery, Murder, treason, which deedes must needes be far more lothsome then an act which is so naturall, just and necessary, as that of procreation. You shall have an hipocriticall vestall virgin speake that with close teeth publikely, which she will receive with open mouth privately, . . . (III. i. pp. 98–9)

When, rebuked for immodesty by Beatrice, Crispinella denouces the virtue of " Discretion ", Marston makes her express Montaigne's concept of virtue (see p. 17), but with the focus shifted to female virtue:

> Fye, Fye, vertue is a free pleasant buxom qualitie: I love a constant countenance well, but this froward ignorant coynes, sower austere lumpish uncivill privatenes, that promises nothing but rough skins, and hard stooles, . . .
> (III. i. p. 99)

Furthermore, when Crispinella voices Montaigne's scepticism about marriage, it becomes criticism of the wifely virtue of " Fitnessee ". She scoffs at the ideal of chaste marriage, saying that there are few men who can satisfy such an ideal: " husbands are like lotts in the lottery: you may drawe forty blankes before you finde one that has any prise in him " (III. i. pp. 99–100). Saying that once married, a man

1. For the main plot, see John J. O'Connor, ' The Chief Source of Marston's *Dutch Courtesan* ', *Studies of Philology*, 54 (1957) pp. 509–15; for the subplot, see James J. Jackson, ' Sources of the Subplot of Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* ', *Philological Quarterly*, 31 (1952), pp. 223–24.

2. George L. Geckle, *John Marston's Drama: Themes, Images, Sources* (New Jersey, 1980), p. 153.

grows "A stiffe crooked knobby inflexible tyrannous creature" (III. i. p. 100), she sardonically points out to Tysefew the absurdity of the norm of a wife's subjection:

> O I faith, tis a faire thing to be married, and a necessary, To hear this word, *must*; if our husbands be proud, we must bear his contempt, if noysome we must beare with the Gote under his armeholes, if a foole we must beare his bable, and which is worse, If a loose liver, Wee must live uppon unholsome Reversions: Where, on the contraty side, our husbands because they may, and we must. . . . (IV. i. p. 113)

She therefore vows to live a single life: "Ile live my owne woman" (III. i. p. 100). In a way, she is a predecessor of Moll Cutpurse in *The Roaring Girl*. As has often been pointed out, Crispinella seems partly to be modelled on Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and her wit combat with Tysefew does indeed recall the Beatrice-Bendeick battle.[1] Yet it is noteworthy that, while Shakespeare's heroine employs her wit on any subject, Crispinella's wit is directed almost exclusively at assumptions about female virtues and a wife's role in marriage.

Crispinella's naturalistic stance shares the same basis with Maquerelle's; both women reject society's image of a good woman on the grounds of its incongruity with reality. The difference in Marston's handling of them indicates a change in his attitude toward female naturalists, a change for which he probably owed much to his knowledge of Montaigne.[2] While Maquerelle's naturalism points to subversive physical elements in women, Crispinella's naturalistic attitude is presented as complementary to the orthodox morality represented by Beatrice. Its ultimate object is not to invalidate orthodox female virtues, but to establish true virtues by exposing the falsehood underlying conventional assumptions; for all her satirical comments on marriage, she fully endorses the virtue of Beatrice's marriage with Freevill. In terms of dramatic function, however, Marston's positive approach

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1. See, for instance, H. Harvey Wood's note to the play, p. 323; George L. Geckle, pp. 160–66.

2. Philip J. Finkelpearl, in *John Marston of the Middle Temple* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969) pp. 200–201, discusses Montaigne's influence on Marston's attitude toward male sexuality, although his discussion is not concerned with female sexuality.

restricts her action. Although Crispinella is one of the most interesting women in early Jacobean drama, Marston, in order to maintain her goodness, can make her no more than a satiric commentator with Montaigne's ideas. Her unorthodoxy, unlike Maquerelle's, is not transformed into dramatic action, nor does it affect the development of the plot; it has an effect only on Tysefew, who jokingly assures her of financial and spiritual independence after marriage (IV. i. p. 114). Moreover, unlike Moll Cutpurse, despite her former avowal, she accepts his marriage proposal, thus conforming to society's norm of a good woman.

Marston's approach to the naturalism of women contradicts his treatment of the naturalism of men. In contrast to the rigid puritanical stance represented by Malheureux, Freevill's Montaignesque naturalism, which accepts physicality as essential in human existence, is presented as an ideal attitude to cope with the complex realities of life.[1] The ideal image of womanhood, however, is represented not by the " quick and lively " Crispinella, but by the " modest " (p. 78) and " Chast " (p. 92) Beatrice, who believes that " severe modesty is womens vertue " (p. 99). Physicality is utterly absent from her love for Freevill; " my loves not lust " (p. 103), she says. She assures him of her " Fitnesse " by saying, " I am your servant " (p. 81), and through her patience during Francischina's cruel revenge and Freevill's trials, she exhibits passive, Patient Griselda-like female virtues. Even the innovative Marston seems to have agreed, at bottom, with the popular image of " a Perfect woman ".

In the portrayal of Francischina and Mary Faugh, Marston at first offers a potentially interesting view of a Fallen Woman. Freevill's mock encomium of prostitution (pp. 73–4), expressed in paradox, questions society's arbitrary condemnation of prostitutes by pointing

1. Gustav Cross, in ' Marston, Montaigne, and Morality: *The Dutch Courtesan* Reconsidered ', *English Literary History*, 27 (1960) pp. 30–43, calls Freevil " Montaigne's ' natural man ' " and discusses the parallels between Montaigne's naturalism and Marston's characterization of Freevill. However, Freevill departs from Montaigne in his attitude toward marriage and love. See also Philip J. Finkelpearl, pp. 200–201.

out women's economic difficulties in a society which deprives them of any means for livelihood except their bodies. It is paralleled by Cocledemoy's panegyric on the "worshipfull" trade of the bawd (pp. 75–77), which compares its harmless benefit with the ruthless mercenary scheme of their society. Although both men deliver these speeches primarily in order to indulge their wit, their challenge of orthodoxy coheres with the socio-sexual challenge in the play. However, Marston's promise to deal with the whore and the bawd in a social context is never really fulfilled, and Franciscina and Mary Faugh remain stereotypes.

In the plays written after the appearance of Florio's Montaigne, one of Marston's continual preocupations seems to have been the possibility of a woman's asserting her physicality without compromising her virtue. *The Fawne* (1605, Queen's Revels) presents as its heroine Princess Dulcimel, who is described as a woman of "equall mixture both of minde and body" (II., p. 187). She justifies her passion for Prince Tiberio by Montaigne's concept of the naturalness of sexuality in "a well-complectioned young" lady (II. p. 182). And, without endangering her virtue, she wins him for a husband by tricking her father into acting as a mediator, messenger and spokesman for her affection.

In *Sophonisba* (1605, Queen's Revels), his only sustained tragedy, Marston made another attempt to present a heroine of "an equall mixture of both minde and body". On her first appearance, Sophonisba is impatiently waiting for her bridegroom in her bedchamber on her nuptial night. Echoing Montaigne, she complains to her chambermaid of the marriage custome which forces women to be dishonest to their natural impulse:

> why the custome is
> To use such *Ceremonie* such strict shape
> About us women: forsooth the Bride must steale
> Before her Lord to bed: and then delaies,
> Long expectations, all against knowne wishes.
> I hate these figures in locution,
> These about phrases forc'd by *ceremonie*;
> We must still seeme to flie what we most seeke

And hide our selves from that we faine would find us.

(I. ii. p. 11)[1]

Still, her naturalistic acceptance of her own physicality shown here is in no way related to the development of the action in the rest of the play. In respect to its tragic structure, however, the play is significant since it is one of the earliest English plays in which the author tried to produce a heroic tragedy featuring the spirit of a woman. Though she is heroic and an admirable stoic,[2] in terms of characterization, Sophonisba belongs to the old type of a chaste wife who courageously fights to remain faithful to her husband. As with most of the heroines in Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas, it is only through her reactions, such as her resistance to Syphax's approaches to her and her suicide to avoid being delivered to Scipio, that she is allowed to demonstrate her heroic spirit.

*The Insatiate Countesse* (1610, Queen's Revels), Marston's last play and a collaboration with William Barkstead, again centres on a woman who insists on her physicality, but here the heroine's naturalism is reduced to hedonism. In his source, Painter's account of the Countess of Celant in *The Palace of Pleasure*, Marston may have found promising material for the dramatization of Montaigne's concept of uncontrollable female sexuality. Here the conventional seduction pattern is completely reversed; it is Isabella, a woman, who ruins men by seducing and discarding them one after another, " as some rude passenger / Doth plucke the tender Roses in the budde " (IV. i. p. 70). Men's actions, except for her execution as carried out by Duke of Medina, are restricted to reactions to her charm or betrayal in such ways as are usually assigned to female roles.

Although the play exhibits little literary merit to save it from T. S. Eliot's label, " a poor rival of *the White Devil* ",[3] Isabella, "A glorious

1. The idea and some of the phrasing of the speech derive from " Upon Some Verses of *Virgil* ".

2. For the Stoicism in the play, see Peter Ure, ' John Marston's *Sophonisba*: A Reconsideration,' *Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* (Liverpool, 1974), pp. 75–92.

3. T. S. Eliot, *Essays on Elizabethan Drama* (1934), p. 185.

Divell, and the noble whore" (IV. i. p. 56), anticipates in many ways, not only Webster's Vittoria, but also the Duchess of Malfi and Middleton's heroines. Like Vittoria she incites her lover to murder and displays a kind of dignity at her death. Like the Duchess she is determined to follow her passion, wooing a man (II. i. pp. 32–3) with a mixture of coyness and boldness (though, of course, in the case of Isabella, it is part of her dissimulation). In giving full rein to her sexual impulse, she recalls Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling* (1622, Lady Elizabeth's), who justifies her "giddy turning" (I. i. 159) by thinking it dictated by reason. Just as Bianca in *Women Beware Women* (1621, King's) excuses her elopement with Leantio as a reaction to her too strict upbringing (IV. i. 30–5), so does Isabella think that her first repressive marriage justifies her claim to self-indulgence once she has become a widow (I. i. p. 6). Although Marston failed to develop these aspects of the nature of woman in this dramatic context, it should still be noted that he at least showed their dramatic possibilities.

None of Marston's experiments in providing a new perspective on the nature of woman was a success. Nevertheless, it is highly significant that he explored new fields in female roles; they were soon to be taken up and developed by his successors. Since Webster, though still a fairly unknown dramatist at the time, wrote the induction for the revival of *The Malcontent* at the Globe,[1] he must have been especially sensitive to Marston's unique handling of female characters. Webster's characterization of the heroines in his two great tragedies is strongly indicative of the influence of Marston's portrayal of women.

## 4. *Antony and Cleopatra*

As M. C. Bradbrook points out, the boys' theatres, which tended to experiment with new possibilities to meet the sophisticated taste of their audience, prompted the development of female roles. Although the authors' viewpoints are not so innovative as Marston's, the plays for the boys' companies frequently mark a departure, particularly in the

1. Although some scholars have traced Webster's hand in the revision of the play, the evidence is inconclusive. See F. L. Lucas, vol. 3, p. 298.

portrayal of bad women, from the conventional stereotypes.[1] However, it is mostly in terms of traditional female virtues that they defend the worth of women. In this respect, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is unique among the plays written in the early Jacobean years; it is the only play of the period that dramatizes the integrity of a woman who utterly defies orthodox morality. The pagen setting of the play may have allowed Shakespeare an opportunity to extend his exploration of the nature of woman beyond the framework of Christian morality. Cleopatra's " infinite variety ", described by Enobarbus as the essence of her attraction, is a composite of various female characteristics, most of which are attributes of bad women by contemporary standards.

The essence of the unfavourable portrait of Cleopatra, given by Plutarch, is forcefully presented in Philo's opening speech. Each of his three long hyperbolic sentences, describing the heroic Antony of the past, ends with short phrases, " tawny front " (I. i. 6), " gipsy's lust " (I. i. 10) and " strumpet's fool " (I. i. 13), all of which relate Cleopatra to the stereotypes of bad women and effectively convey the soldier's overflowing feelings of disappointment at what he considers his general's dotage.[2] Although the following entrance of the lovers reorganizes our attitudes towards them because of their grand passion they feel for each other, Cleopatra's discreditable features are further brought out. She is a shrewish, wilful, " wrangling queen " (I. i. 48), crossing Antony's feelings in every way. She is also seen deploying all her wiles to detain him in Egypt, harping on his unpleasant ties in Rome with the " shrill-tongu'd Fulvia " (I. i. 32) and " the scarce-bearded Caesar " (I. i. 21).

In the following scenes, Shakespeare continues to endow his queen with characteristics of bad women. Antony's statement that " She is cunning past man's thought " (I. ii. 141), which recalls contemporary

1. M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (2nd Edition, 1980), p. 251. The changes in the portrayals of bad women in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama are studied in Angela Ingram's thesis.

2. G. R. Hibbard, '*Feliciter audax: Antony and Cleopatra*, I, i, 1–24' *Shakespeare's Styles*, op. cit., pp. 96–7.

misogynists' reiterated attack upon women's duplicity, is partly justified, since she is constantly play-acting as a way of controlling situations. In manners and emotion she is extravagant. Worse still, she is a " triple-turned " adulteress; her sexuality is emphasized both in others' descriptions of her (I. ii., 136–140) and in the witty byplay between her and her attendants during Antony's absence in I. v. and II. v. The fatal power of her sexual charm is stressed by the sexual pun of " dying ", which pervades the play, and by the dangerous aspects of the serpents and flies of the Nile, with which she is associated.[1] Cleopatra's Amazonian usurpation of the male role in dominating Antony, presented in the image of Hercule's submission to Omphale (II. v. 21–3),[2] well justifies the moralists' repeated warning of the danger of men's subjection to women's will; here it transforms the " triple pillar of the world " (I. i. 12) into the "noble ruin of her magic" (III. x. 19).[3] Her " infinite variety " of temper and mood itself, is, by Jacobean standards, a sign of female irrationality, often associated with a courtesan.[4] The Roman descriptions of her (including Antony's), such as " witch " (IV. xii. 47), " whore " (III. vi. 67), " a trull " (III. vi. 95), " boggler " (III. xiii. 110), and " ribaudred nag of Egypt " (III. x. 10), characterize her as an antitype of the Jacobean ideal of a woman.[5]

It is indeed Shakespeare's amazing achievement to present Cleopatra

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1. For the function of the images of serpents and flies, see Maurice Charney, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays: The Function of Imagery in the Drama* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), pp. 97–100.

2. For Shakespeare's use of the Hercules-Omphale myth, see Anne Barton, " *Nature's piece ' gainst fancy* ": *the divided catastrophe in Antony and Cleopatra*, An inaugural lecture, University of London, at Bedford College (1973).

3. Contemporary moralists frequently refer to Antony in pointing out the disastrous consequence of women's domination over men. See also Franklin M. Dickey, *Not Wisely But Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies* (San Marino, Calif., p. 1957), pp. 144–160.

4. For instance, Thomas Coryat, *Coryat's Crudities* (1611), (Glasgow, 1950), p. 405; William Davenport, *A City Night Cap*, *Old English Plays*, ed. A. H. Bullen (New Series reissued: N. Y., 1964).

5. Franklin M. Dickey, op. cit., pp. 159–60, after discussing the treatment of Cleopatra by Shakespeare's predecessors concludes that Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* alone gives a sympathetic picture of her as one of love's martyrs.

as transcending the stereotypes of bad women while retaining their qualities.[1] For all the destruction she has inflicted upon Antony and Egypt, one endorses Charmian's last tribute to her mistress, " a lass unparallel'd " (V. ii. 314) and feels, after the lovers' death, that there remains nothing remarkable in the world.

Essential to this effect is the association of Cleopatra with nature in many ways. Because she is identified with the generative power of nature through various images, such as the Nile whose slime quickens by fire, its serpents bred of mud by the operation of the sun, and the goddesses Isis and Venus,[2] her sexuality represents nature's divine fecundity. Her image of fecundity culminates in the image of motherhood, both of her children, " the momemory of my womb " (III. xiii. 163), and of her country as monarch. The excess of her emotion, like the annual overflow of the Nile which brings fertility, embodies the energy and vitality of nature. Like the ever-flowing Nile and its serpents which take various forms, her " infinite variety " becomes part of the constantly changing process of nature. Integrated with a vast, rich nature, the characteristics Cleopatra shares with bad women not only evade Rome's moral judgement, but reveal the limitations of such judgement.

Furthermore, the play is permeated with a Montaignesque sense of the fluidity of life, which transcends the control of human reason advocated by the Romans. Although evidence of the influence of the Florio-Montaigne work on *Antony and Cleopatra* is inconclusive,[3] the

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1. The Countess of Pembroke's *Tragedie of Antonie* and Samuel Daniel's *Tragedie of Cleopatra* give sympathetic portraits of the queen by modifying her discreditable features, as given in Plutarch, and by stressing her remorse and the courage displayed at her death.

2. For the imagery of Isis and Venus, see Michael Lloyd, ' Cleopatra As Isis ', *Shakespeare Survey*, 12 (1959) pp. 88–94; Raymond B. Waddington, ' What Venus did to Mars ', *Shakespeare Studies*, II (1966), pp. 210–227.

3. G. L. Taylor in *Shakespeare's Debt to Montaigne* (Cambridge, Mass, 1925), pp. 24–5, cites 7 Montaigne passages echoed in the play and 98 words not used by Shakespeare before the Florio-Montaigne work. But the resemblance between Shakespeare's phrases and Montaigne's passages seems to be too general to prove Shakespeare's borrowing.

play's vision of life as flux recalls Montaigne's concept of the universal stream of nature. It is first felt by Antony, when he is amazed at the changeability of both his own feelings for Fulvia once she is dead and the feelings of "the slippery people" (I. ii. 179), who now support the once hated Sextus Pompeius. He later expresses this idea again, comparing his insubstantial grasp of his own identity to the changing shape of a cloud (IV. xiv. 2ff). Caesar describes the same feeling, referring to the instability of the service of the "common body" (I. iv. 44); moreover, he embodies the fluidity itself when he confers on Antony magnanimous praise once he is gone (V. i. 14–9). The Soothsayer in I. ii. epitomizes the concept of the impotency of human reason before the proceeding of nature, in saying that "nature's infinite book of secrecy" he can "forsee", but can "make not" (I. ii. 9: 14). The melting images and water images, which saturate the play,[1] and the incessant shifting of the short scenes also contribute to the evocation of an atmosphere of constant change.[2] We are made to feel that, whatever men may contrive to shape the human situation, such attemps are eventually frustrated or absorbed by the larger reality of nature, with which Cleopatra is associated.

The limitations of Roman values are effectively shown in the constrast between Octavia and Cleopatra. Octavia is admired by the Romans as an epitome of female virtues; she possesses "beauty, wisdome, modesty" (II. ii. 245), and, unlike Cleopatra's "conversation" rife with sexuality and extravagant passion, hers is said to be "holy, cold, and still" (II. vi. 119). Yet this "gem of women" (III. xiii. 108), a "blessed lottery" (II. ii. 247) to the Romans, is made utterly helpless in the face of reality; she is not only unable to keep Antony in Rome, but also to produce the reconciliation between him and her brother, which the Octavia in Plutarch could achieve.[3]

The disparaging report on Octavia given by Cleopatra's messenger

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1. G. Wilson Knight, *The Imperial Theme* (1931, revd. 1965), pp. 231–238.
2. Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1971), p. 252.
3. Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*' (1964), vol. 5, p. 282.

in III. viii. points out the lack of life in her; he describes her as " a body rather than a life, / A statue than a breather " (III. iii. 20–1). We smile at her womanly rivalry toward Antony's new wife, when Cleopatra endorses the messenger's judgement by saying that he is able to say so because he has seen " some majesty " (III. iii. 41). Yet it remains true that a sense of majesty is given to the human thrust towards spontaneous feelings. This energy is what the lovers admire each other for, an admiration testified by the magnificence of their poetry, and it is just what Antony finds lacking in Octavia. In Rome, human energy is never fulfilled; just as men's impulses are subjected to political calculations, so women's impulses are fettered by the Roman ideal of good women, which, interestingly, corresponds to the Jacobean ideal. But the dictates of reason followed by the Romans are shown as incapable of perceiving the truth of life grasped by the lovers' impulses. Enobarbus follows reason in deserting Antony, yet dies of shame at the generosity of his master. Caesar's fulfillment of imperial ambition looks paltry in the face of the full realization of the lovers' immense energy. Octavia's rational compliance with society's requirements of a good woman fails to match the highest sense of life emanating from Cleopatra; Octavia, " the swan's down feather " (III. ii. 48), like the vagabond flag, can only swing on the tide until it rots with motion.

But the impulses Cleopatra gives rein to are not what L. C. Knights calls " life's untutored energies ".[1] They are tutored by her self-awareness, since she follows them to realize herself. As with Webster's Vittoria and the Duchess, it is the characteristic of Cleopatra's love that her identity is not totally subsumed in her passion. For these self-asserting Jacobean heroines, their love is of vital importance, not simply because of the truth of their feelings, but because their love embodies their own self-realization; they do not see their relation to their lovers in terms of " Fitnesse ". Robert Ornstein rightly insists on Cleopatra's emotional honesty, but fails to notice her

1. L. C. Knights, *Some Shakespearean Themes* (1959), p. 149.

constant assertion of independence.[1] Her sense of independence partly corresponds to her sense of royalty, but even this is unable to comprehend her identity; as John F. Danby remarks, she " always strives to make the political subservient to her ".[2] She desires to fight at Actium, not because, as Robert Ornstein claims, she wishes " to be worthy of this Herculean Roman ",[3] but because she wants to prove her independent self by appearing as a man, " the president of my kingdom " (III. vii. 17).

Her desire to maintain her independence causes her to play-act so as to control her situations. She torments Antony because she knows that " Fitnesse " is the " way to lose him (I. iii. 10). In order to ascertain her circumstances after the disaster at Actium, she pretends to welcome Ceasar's messenger, which infuriates Antony. To beg a kingdom for her children, she acts the role of a submissive loser to the " sole sir " of the world. She also trifles with Seleucus in an attempt to " outpolicy " Caesar. Her role-playing makes her identity illusive, keeping Antony wavering between trust and distrust. Shakespeare maintains detachment throughout the play, and, as with its other elements, he shows the paradoxical qualities of Cleopatra's self-assertion. It destroys Antony's Roman virtues, but just as Venus taught Mars the imperfection of military values[4], her domination makes Antony a fuller man; his poetic sensibility grows, and he comes to see death in her way, that is, as sleep and dream. And as to where they will awake, moral orthodoxy seems irrelevant, for Antony will becomes her " Husband " (V. ii. 285) there.

Her long-delayed suicide, already planned at the end of Act IV, makes it clear that it should not be seen only in terms of her fidelity to Antony; her death must also be an act " noble to myself " (V. ii. 191). Before she " shackles up all accidents," she must express a

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1. Robert Ornstein, ' The Ethic of the Imagination: Love and Art in *Antony and Cleopatra* ', *Later Shakespeare* eds. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (1966), pp. 43–4.
2. John F. Danby, *Elizabethan and Jacobean Poets* (1952), p. 142.
3. Robert Ornstein, op. cit., p. 43.
4. For the Venus-Mars theme in the play, see Raymond B. Waddington.

sense of the integrity of life completely opposed to moral orthodoxy. First, by refusing to be carted through the Roman streets and to be staged in the posture of a whore, she asserts her transcendence over the common image of bad women. Then, by turning her life into art, she makes her values immortal; she raises Antony into an image of a god in her poetic vision, and also fixes her own dignity by staging a tableau of herself in regal costume. Thus, her self-assertion makes her transcend the changing process of nature itself; her death is not a melting into the natural change of the Nile, but a change into changelessness.[1] Significantly, when she finally decides to do " that thing " (V. ii. 5), she disclaims the fleeting moon of Isis, declaring herself to be " marble-constant " (V. ii. 239). And after her death she is addressed as the fixed " Eastern Star " (V. ii. 305). Caesar's final defeat by Cleopatra is thus two-fold. Not only does her suicide frustrate his ambition to make his triumph memorable by her presence in Rome, but also his assumption proves to be wrong that an aberrant woman like Cleopatra can never attain integrity because " Women are not / In their best fortunes strong " (III. xii. 29).

Some critics think that Queen Elizabeth is reflected in various aspects of Shakespeare's portrayal of Cleopatra.[2] Elizabeth's violent temper was as legendary as her display of majesty, and Cleopatra's shrewish outbursts and physical violence done to her servant may have recalled the late queen's occasional rage. Elizabeth's duplicity kept ambassadors and her courtiers in perplexity. Like Cleopatra, she assumed a masculine militancy with her troops at Tilbury in the Armada year.[3] While one thus finds various possible analogies between the two magnificent queens, there is no conclusive evidence that Shakespeare's memories of his queen affected his characterization of his heroine. More significant is the fact that Queen Elizabeth

1. Robert Ornstein, op. cit., p. 44.

2. Geoffrey Bullough, op. cit., pp. 216–7; Kenneth Muir, ' Elizabeth I, Jodelle, and Cleopatra ', *Renaissance Drama*, New Series vol. 2 (1967), pp. 197–206; Helen Morris, Queen Elizabeth I " Shadowed " in Cleopatra ', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 32 (1968–9), pp. 271–8.

3. J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (1934, rept. 1952), p. 302.

embodied various female characteristics, some of which hardly accord with the contemporary image of a good woman. The " infinite variety " of the queen's nature indicates that bad female characteristics, condemned by moralists and presented usually in bad characters in the drama at the time, could in reality coexist with majesty and nobility. The real example of the late queen, together with Montaigne's scepticism, must have increased the Jacobeans' awareness of the complexity of womanhood, a complexity which their ideal, such as described in Overbury's poem, failed to comprehend.